**The Political System of Great Britain**

The U.K. is a constitutional monarchy or a parliamentary democracy. There is a monarch at the head of the State (at present – Queen Elizabeth II) whose powers are limited by the constitution. In practice, the Queen reigns but doesn’t rule. Everything she does is done on the advice of her ministers.

The supreme Legislation Authority in the U.K. belongs to the Queen and Parliament. The British Parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Lords and the House of Commons, together with the Queen in her constitutional role. Today the center of parliamentary power is in the Commons.

The Government is formed by the party, which has majority support in the Commons. The head of the Government is the Prime Minister. He is appointed by the Queen. And he is usually the leader of the party having the majority in the House of Commons. He chooses the number of ministers, including 20 or so in the Cabinet.

The second largest party traditionally forms the official Opposition with its own leader and “shadow cabinet”.

At present there are 5 main political parties in Great Britain: the Conservative Party, the Labour Party, the Liberal, the Social Democratic, the Communist Party. But actually only the Conservative and the Labour Parties take turns at the exercise of power. The two-party system means that if one is dissatisfied with the Government, one votes for the Opposition, and vice versa.

Although the Queen is deprived of actual power, she has retained many important, though formal, functions. She summons and dissolves Parliament, gives approval to Bills passed by both Houses of Parliament; she appoints government ministers, judges, officers in the armed forces, governors, diplomats and bishops of the Church of England. The Queen appoints the Prime Minister (usually the leader of the political party which has a majority in the House of Commons) to form a government. As head of State the Queen has, in international affairs, the power to declare war and make peace, to recognize foreign states and governments, to conclude treaties, etc. She gives audiences to her ministers and other officials at home and overseas, receives accounts of Cabinet decisions. She is informed and consulted on every aspect of national life.