

UNIT VII



THE 20TH CENTURY

THE GREAT WAR, THE GREAT DEPRESSION, THE GENERAL STRIKE, THE PARTITIONING OF IRELAND, WORLD WAR II, THE WELFARE STATE, THE END OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE, THE COMMONWEALTH, BRITAIN AND EUROPE. M. THATCHER, T. BLAIR, MULTICULTURAL BRITAIN IN THE WORLD.

Key words, terms and concepts:

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| 1. <i>The British Expeditionary Force</i> | 9. <i>The Battle of Britain — (1940)</i> |
| 2. <i>To suffer heavy losses</i> | 10. <i>The D-Day — the Operation Overlord (June, 1944)</i> |
| 3. <i>Armistice</i> | 11. <i>Welfare state</i> |
| 4. <i>Sinn Féin, IRA — Irish nationalists</i> | 12. <i>Austerity and food rationing</i> |
| 5. <i>RIC — Royal Irish Constabulary</i> | 13. <i>The EEC, the EU</i> |
| 6. <i>The Trades Union Congress</i> | 14. <i>The Unionists — protestant nationalists</i> |
| 7. <i>George VI, Windsor (1936–1952)</i> | 15. <i>Clause 4</i> |
| 8. <i>Appeasement of the aggressor (Munich)</i> | 16. <i>Devolution</i> |

BRITISH PRIME MINISTERS

James Ramsey MacDonald	(L)	Jan. 1924
Stanley Baldwin	(C)	Nov. 1924
James Ramsey MacDonald	(L)	June 1929
Stanley Baldwin	(C)	June 1935
Neville Chamberlain	(C)	May 1937
Winston Churchill	(C)	May 1940
Clement Attlee	(L)	July 1945
Winston Churchill	(C)	Oct. 1951
Sir Anthony Eden	(C)	Apr. 1955
Harold Macmillan	(C)	Jan. 1957
Sir Alec Douglas-Home	(C)	Oct. 1963
Harold Wilson	(L)	Oct. 1964
Sir Edward Heath	(C)	June 1970
Harold Wilson	(L)	Feb. 1974
James Callaghan	(L)	Apr. 1976
Margaret Thatcher	(C)	May 1979
John Major	(C)	Nov. 1990
Tony Blair	(L)	May 1997

Entering the United Kingdom, the most powerful nation in the world, the British Empire covered one quarter of the world's land surface and included more than a quarter of the world's population. At the end of the 19th century, the United Kingdom was competing with the United States for political potential of the world.

The German military challenge was a dangerous challenge to European security. Defeating Tsarist Russia and France and committing Belgium, the UK declared war on Germany. The Great War in France suffered a major defeat. The British Expeditionary Force in France suffered a major defeat. Young people of the Empire fought and died in the trenches. Britain lost 400,000 soldiers, and other two million were wounded. The course of the war was changed by the Revolution in Russia and the entry of the United States into the European World War. Germany had to sign an Armistice. The British had lost part of their empire. The British imposed on Germany a harsh peace treaty that ruptured the country and created an atmosphere of social unrest. This encouraged nationalist movements.

To Great Britain this was a tremendous shock: a generation of injured and shocked blinded men returned from the trenches. The front could never get

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IN THE WORLD.

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and food rationing

the EU

— protestant

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1997

Entering the 20th century the United Kingdom was the greatest power in the world. The British Empire covered one quarter of the globe land surface and included a quarter of the mankind, its population being scattered all over the world continents. The UK was competing with economic and political potential of the USA and Germany.

The German militarists had become a dangerous challenge and great threat to European security. In 1914, supporting Tsarist Russia and Republican France and committed to protect Belgium, the UK declared war on Germany. The Great War lasted for 4 years. The British Expeditionary Force fighting in France suffered heavy losses. The young people of the European countries fought and died in the trenches at the fronts. Britain lost about a million soldiers, and other two million were wounded. The course of the War and the development of the world history was changed by the Revolution in Russia and the entry of the USA into the European World War. Germany was forced to sign an Armistice. It was a humiliating peace treaty for the Germans as they had lost part of their territory and all their colonies. The heavy reparations imposed on Germany politically bankrupted the country and this developed an atmosphere of social discontent and encouraged nationalist and revanchist movements.

To Great Britain the war had been a tremendous shock: a shadow of grief hung over all sections of society. The generation of injured, gassed, shell-shocked blinded men who had come back from the trenches of the western front could never get adapted to the

changed conditions in the post-war Britain.

The War had been directed by a Coalition Government, though the Prime Ministers were Liberal leaders. In peace time the pre-war problems came to the top — especially in Ireland. The demands of Irish nationalists-members of the Sinn Féin (“We Ourselves”) organization had hardened. Before the War they had been promised Home Rule, then in 1916 there had been an uprising in Dublin (the Easter Rebellion) which was brutally crushed by the English army, and its leaders were executed according to the laws of wartime. The Sinn Féin extremists were not stopped by the defeat, however, they fought for an independent republic against the pro-government Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) and ex-servicemen “Black and Tans” called this because of their khaki-uniforms and black belts.

The government of Lloyd George was forced to agree to a compromise and a partition of Ireland which was ratified by the Anglo-Irish Treaty in 1921–1922. According to it 26 counties in Southern Ireland out of 32 in the whole country became the Irish Free State while the others in Ulster remained under British control and constituted the Province of Northern Ireland. The two parts of the partitioned Ireland had their respective Parliaments — the Dail in Dublin and the Stormont in Belfast.

The official name of the UK changed into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

The economic situation in Britain was extremely complicated as a great depression was spreading all over the industrial world; the unemployment was high, the housing shortage was bad, the

industrial relations created serious social conflicts. The worst position was that of coal-miners — their employers cut their wages, lengthened their working hours, and the coal-miners went on strike in April 1926. On May 1926, the Trades Union Congress called for the General Strike which lasted nine days. The solidarity of workers was an impressive demonstration of support for the miners cause. But there were strikebreaking actions of the middle class volunteers and university students who kept essential services moving during the strike.

The industrial problems in the country did not disappear but were aggravated by the growth of unemployment during the international economic crisis of 1929–1933. The decline in the traditional British industries — coal-mining, steel manufacture, textiles, ship-building increased industrial stagnation and social decay in the country.

The social and political developments of the 20th century made a great impact on the changes in the lifestyle, involving women into playing a more active role in society. In 1928, all women over twenty-one gained the right to vote.

The Great War inspired poets and writers.

James Joyce, David Herbert Lawrence were a new branch in literature different from the classics — Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Arnold Bennet. They didn't have much in common with the Bloomsbury school headed by Virginia Woolf either.

English classical traditions in music were revived by Sir Edward Elgar.

Entertainment became big business — football matches, the cinema, the radio were increasingly popular and a relief from the dull life.

In 1936 the death of George V, Windsor, the grandson of Queen Victoria, was followed by the abdication of Edward VIII, (previously the Prince of Wales), and George VI, the second son, succeeded his father.

In 1937 Neville Chamberlain replaced Stanley Baldwin as Prime Minister and had to face the growing aggressiveness of Hitler's Germany, Italy and Japan which were occupying territories and countries in Europe and Asia. Neville Chamberlain failed to achieve any positive results in the negotiations with Hitler in Munich and returned to Britain in triumph declaring that it was to be "peace with honour".

This policy of appeasement of the aggressor was denounced by national critics headed by Winston Churchill as dishonourable. British industries were recovering, as the country was rearming.

Hitler seized Chechoslovakia, and on 1 September his troops invaded Poland. On 3 September Britain and France were at war with Germany. In May 1940 Winston Churchill became Prime Minister of the coalition government which included Labour leaders Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin.

The British Expeditionary Force was driven out of Europe, escaping from the French port of Dunkirk in a fleet of small boats, and the British Isles were in danger of invasion. W. Churchill gave the country a new spirited political leadership and his words in the House of Commons that he had nothing to offer "but blood, toil, tears and sweat" encouraged and inspired the people in their stand against the threat of invasion. Between July and September 1940, Britain stood alone resisting the attacks of the German air force.

The Luftwaffe blitz attacks on London, Liverpool, the British pilots Poles, Czechs, etc. who flew for Britain (1940).

The World War II world character was the USSR, and the Japanese Harbor made the the aggressors.

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Winston Churchill re-elected as Prime Minister in 1940 to face the growing aggression of Germany, Italy and Japan occupying territories in Europe and Asia. The Munich Conference failed to achieve its aims in the negotiations at Munich and returned to Britain declaring that it was "a matter of honour".

The policy of appeasement of the aggressors was denounced by national critics, and Winston Churchill as discredited. British industries were reorganizing and the country was rearming.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia, and the German troops invading Poland in September 1939, led Britain and France to declare war with Germany. In 1940 Winston Churchill became the head of the coalition government, including Labour leaders like Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin.

The evacuation of the Expeditionary Force was completed in Dunkirk, escaping from the continent. The British Isles were safe from invasion. W. Churchill gave a powerful and spirited political leadership in the House of Commons. He had nothing to offer but "blood, tears and sweat" which inspired the people in the face of the threat of invasion.

On September 1940, Britain was resisting the attacks of the German force.

The Luftwaffe launched waves of blitz attacks on London, Coventry, Plymouth, Liverpool, Hull, Swansea, but the British pilots with the help of the Poles, Czechs, Belgians and French, who flew for Britain, won the Battle of Britain (1940).

The World War II acquired a really world character when Hitler invaded the USSR, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor made the USA declare war on the aggressors.

The Russian triumph at Stalingrad and the British victory at El Alamein in 1942 were the turning points in World War II. On 6 June, (the D-Day), 1944 the Allied forces landed in Normandy, France (Operation Overlord), thus opening the Second Front in Europe. On 8 May, 1945 Germany unconditionally surrendered, though the war with Japan was not yet over. The Americans dropped two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Japan capitulated.

The Potsdam Conference of the victorious Allied Powers leaders solved the future of the defeated Germany. But Winston Churchill was not present at the Conference as his political party (the Conservatives) had been defeated in the General Election in June 1945: the Labour Prime Minister C. Attlee represented the United Kingdom in Potsdam.

W. Churchill had enjoyed the admiration and respect of the nation, but the popular desire for social and economic reforms brought the Labour Party into government. Their Programme of Welfare State was put into action. The National Health Service gave free of charge medical assistance to all; the Bank of England, railways, civil aviation, gas, electric, steel and coal mining industries were nationalized. The period was one

of austerity; shortages and food rationing lasted till 1954.

The public opinion shifted in favour of the Conservatives in 1951. Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home — the Prime Ministers during the Tory rule from 1951 to 1964 maintained the policy of national unity; they accepted the major reforms of the Labour Party — the Welfare State, the National Health Service, but the steel industry was denationalized and returned to private enterprise.

The post-war period saw great changes in the status of the British Empire, its disintegration was accompanied by the changes in the status of the former colonies into dominions and then into independent republics and national monarchies. "The winds of change" stripped Britain of its imperial supremacy, and in the second half of the 20th century Britain had to get adjusted to the new position and place in the world.

The relations with Europe and the USA became Britain's first priorities in its foreign policy; important contacts and cooperation were to be further developed through the Commonwealth —



Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill at Teheran

a voluntary association of members of the former British Empire and Colonies. The British Monarch was recognized "titular head of the Commonwealth" though a great number of member states were becoming republics (e.g. India).

The post-World War II period brought the "culture of austerity" into the life of the country. It was based on the rising standards of living. The 50ties saw a great number of works from many novelists of distinction: James Joyce, Graham Green, Angus Wilson, John Boynton Priestley, Charles Percy Snow.

The young writers of the 50ties with their socially realistic novels and plays (John Brain, Kingsley Amis, Alan Sillitoe, Arnold Wesker) gave rise to the ambiguous romantic phenomenon of the "angry young men" (after John Osborn's play "Look back in anger").

In the early 60ties a group of four youths from Liverpool effected a musical breakthrough, a revolution in rock and pop music which made Britain a world centre for youthful fashion and entertainment.

In classical music Benjamin Britten gained a worldwide reputation (e.g. opera "Peter Grimes").

The cinema and television competed and British television was recognized the best in the world. TV serials of literary classics were particularly popular — the television version of the well-known novel "The Forsyte Saga" by John Galsworthy (1867–1933).

The British theatre prospered, new theatres were opening in many provincial cities. In 1976, the National Theatre Company got finally established in its own building. Its first director was Laurence Olivier, one of Britain's best known actors.

The Royal Shakespeare Company also got two homes — the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon (since 1879) and the Barbican Arts Centre in London (since 1982).

Generally speaking, the post World War II historical period can be viewed as three stages — 1) 1945–1979; 2) 1979–1997; 3) the period since 1997.

In the first period the Conservative Party respected and observed the post-war consensus concerning fundamental economic and social issues and the reforms initiated by the Labour Government of 1945. The British economy were doing comparatively well, though the manufacturing industries were in decline.

The 60ties showed that the European countries enjoyed economic benefits as a result of their membership in the European Economic Community. The first British attempt to join the EEC in 1963 was rejected by President Charles de Gaulle of France.

But Britain managed to enter EEC in 1973. The entrance was confirmed by the National Referendum, and the Anti-Europeanism in British society was di-minishing.

Since 1975 economic difficulties were growing worse and worse, and the number of the unemployed exceeded one million. The trade unions refused to give support to the Labour Government in 1978–1979, thus destroying the "Social Contract" which was nicknamed the "Social Conctrick".

The 1979 Election was the worst defeat for the Labour Party since 1931, as the conflict in the Party ranks had weakened the ability of the party to govern itself, to say nothing about governing the whole country.

The victorious Conservative Government headed by the first lady of the first woman Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher offered a new path to Britain. The government set out a plan of the economic decline in the 1970s and the state enterprises in industry and British Airways into private ownership. The Conservative Government reduced unemployment and inflation by the state in the economy. The North Sea oil exploration came self-sufficient in its own right.

The political prestige of the Conservative Government and the Prime Minister personally rose immensely due to the successful outcome of the Falkland Islands. Britain displayed great power in the military, naval and technological superiority over the fascist regime of the Argentine republic.

Throughout the 70s ethnic tensions aggravated in the UK. Northern Ireland was the most painful and disturbing area. The animosities between the Protestant and Republican communities were so explosive that British troops were patrolling the towns. The Parliament of Northern Ireland (the Stormont) was suspended in 1972, and direct rule from London was imposed by the British Government. The period of the Troubles (rather a mild form used in the decades of violence) ended with the killings in Northern Ireland in the 80ties: the IRA hunger strike, the terrorist attacks by the Unionist forces and the British troops in Northern Ireland and the IRA treated the successive governments.

The victorious Conservative Party headed by the first lady leader and the first woman Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher offered a new policy for Britain. The government saw the way out of the economic decline in privatisation, and the state enterprises like the gas industry and British Airways were sold off into private ownership. To conquer unemployment and inflation the Conservative Government restricted money spending which reduced the role played by the state in the economy. Due to the North Sea oil exploration Britain became self-sufficient in its energy base.

The political prestige of the Thatcher Government and the Prime Minister personally rose immensely due to the successful outcome of the Falklands War in which Britain displayed great power status and the military, naval and technological superiority over the fascist government of the Argentine republic (1982).

Throughout the 70ties social and ethnic tensions aggravated the situation in the UK. Northern Ireland was the most painful and disturbing case where animosities between the Unionist Protestant and Republican Catholic communities were so explosive that the troops were patrolling the streets of the towns. The Parliament of Northern Ireland (the Stormont) was dissolved in 1972, and direct rule from Westminster was imposed by the British Government. The period of the "troubles" (rather a mild form used for denoting the decades of violence and sectarian killings in Northern Ireland.) lasted well into the 80ties: the IRA prisoners hunger strike, the terrorist actions of the Unionist forces and the IRA. Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland and England frustrated the successive government's at-



Margaret Thatcher

tempts to achieve any settlement let alone reconciliation.

The social and economic picture of Britain in the 80ties combined elements of dissolution and stability. The troubles in Northern Ireland, in the industrial world (the miners strike), in the inner areas of the cities (in the black ghettos) were going parallel to a fundamental social divide between a prosperous South and a declining North.

The split in the Labour Party resulting in the appearance of the Social Democratic Party weakened the opposition. The domineering Thatcherism of the government with its privatisation, monetarism, European policy and special relationship with the USA, the Prime Minister's authoritarian style of leadership was facing severe difficulties. Mrs Thatcher herself became increasingly unpopular. She was challenged for leadership in her own Conservative Party and was forced to resign in November 1990.

Mrs Thatcher was succeeded by her supporter John Major who was a man of more moderate views. The Conservative Party, unable to stop the recession in economy, was torn by disagreements, es-



Elizabeth II

pecially in British commitment to the European Union. In May 1997, the Conservatives were heavily defeated by the Labour Party.

The landslide victory of Tony Blair's Labour Party, proclaimed New Labour, was achieved mainly due to a greater attractiveness of the Party's modernized Programme. The revision of Clause 4 of the Party's Constitution where the commitment to nationalisation was substituted by the concept of "social ownership and stake holder economy" which were declared to be the target economic ideas.

The reform of the House of Lords, the devolution of the legislative branch of power establishing assemblies in Wales and Northern Ireland and reestablishing Scottish Parliament — were major political aims.

Education was pronounced to be of the highest priority in the plans of the new Labour Government. The agenda of the two terms of Tony Blair's Government was centered on five pledges — education, crime, health, jobs and economic stability. The second successive

victory in the General Election of 2001 gave Labour a majority of 167. On the steps of Downing Street, 10 Tony Blair described the victory as a "mandate for investment and reform".

In 2002 the British Monarch Queen Elizabeth II of the House of Windsor celebrated the Golden Jubilee of her accession to the throne. She had succeeded her father, the highly respected King George VI, when she was a very young woman (1952). The Queen has contributed to the ideas of national identity and historical cultural values being the public symbol of national unity. Elizabeth II describes her reign as a lifetime job in the service of the nation; assuring the continuity of Monarchy, the most ancient institution in the UK, and confirming rather a controversial idea that monarchy can be a successful integral part of democracy.

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has been playing an important leading role as a member of the international community. It is a founding member of the UNO, a permanent member of the UN Security



Tony Blair

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Council. The British Monarch, the head of the Commonwealth and the UK, remains committed to the work at the global problems facing the countries of that voluntary association. Britain's national interests are described by the Labour Government as best served by closer international cooperation. Britain is playing an active role in developing NATO and the European Union. The modern Government was and is committed to maintaining continuity of the UK tradition of special relationship with the USA, giving every support to the actions and policy of the US President "being at America's side", which is not unanimously approved of by the British public.

In scientific research and technology Britain kept some pre-eminence. There were great achievements in radio-physics, biology, medicine and engineering. The country contributed to the world science and technology: the jet-

engine, the hovercraft, nuclear power stations, discoveries in electronics. In the field of Nobel Prizes Britain came second only to the USA in physics, physiology, medicine.

Britain produced such outstanding leaders of human thought and action as Ernest Rutherford and Alexander Fleming, Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell, John Keynes, Winston Churchill and ... Margaret Thatcher.

Great Britain of the 21st century is a multicultural and a multiracial country. The British is a collective name for the citizens of the UK who benefit from the great advantages of the country's cultural and historical values and traditions, technological achievements and social freedoms.

The international role of English as a global language is the greatest contribution of the British people to the treasury of the world cultural heritage.

Questions:

1. *What were the consequences of the Great War for the United Kingdom?*
2. *What were the problems of Ireland and what solution was found by the British Government?*
3. *How serious were the conflicts in the industrial relations in Great Britain?*
4. *What changes took place in the British Royal family in 1936?*
5. *What were the circumstances that preceded World War II?*
6. *What was the role of Britain at the beginning of World War II?*
7. *What was the British contribution to the defeat of fascist Germany?*
8. *What unexpected turn of events prevented W. Churchill from participating in the Potsdam Conference?*
9. *Describe the main reforms of the Welfare State Programme.*
10. *How did the British Empire change its status?*
11. *What were the foreign policy priorities of the UK in the 80ties?*
12. *How can you explain the reasons for the Thatcher Government success?*
13. *How did the events in Northern Ireland develop?*
14. *What changes in the Labour Party Programme caused the victory of New Labour?*
15. *Describe the major reforms of Tony Blair's Government and the situation in modern Britain.*