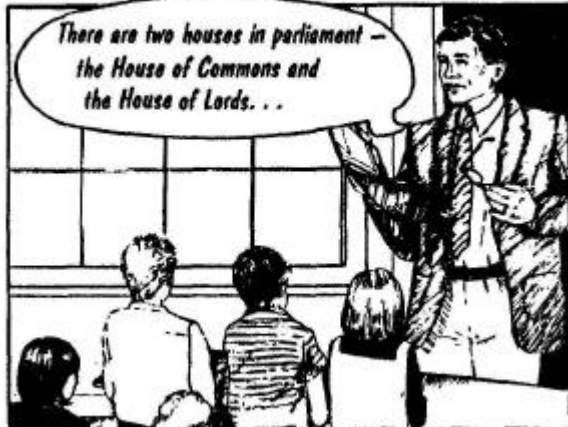


A visit to Westminster

One day in school . . .



Ross enjoyed most lessons at school but he found this one particularly interesting. He had been listening to Grandpa and Robert talking the night before and had only looked as if he was sleeping! When the teacher mentioned the House of Commons, Ross remembered that he would be visiting London soon with the rest of his family as they had won the Glenville Echo's 'Family of the Year' competition. Mum said that each member of the family could choose one place that they would all visit. Grandpa had already chosen Kew Gardens and Rona wanted to go to the Tower of London. Ross decided on the Houses of Parliament.

'In Britain our laws are made by Parliament. It is made up of three parts - the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarchy (the Queen). Each part helps to make our laws but the most important part is the House of Commons. It is in the Commons that MPs discuss ideas for new laws. These MPs are picked by the people in elections. This means that if we do not like the laws which our MPs make then we can choose new MPs at the next election.

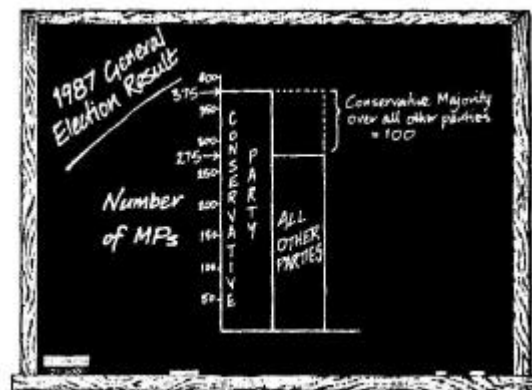
Let's look at how we choose our MPs and government. Britain is divided into 650 areas called constituencies. You can see an example of this on the map of Glasgow.

The people over 18 in each constituency vote to see who their MP will be. The candidate with the most votes in each constituency wins and becomes the new MP. The new MP will represent all the people in the constituency in the House of Commons.

Each MP belongs to a political party - usually the Conservative or Labour party. The political party which gets more than half of the MPs becomes the government. It is the government which runs the country until the next election. Look at the result of the last General Election to see what this means.

The Conservative party had 100 more MPs than all the other parties put together. This is called their overall majority. It means that if all the Conservative MPs vote together then they will win - so their ideas become law. The leader of the winning party becomes the Prime Minister.

One of the ways MPs keep in touch with the people they represent is by having a regular 'surgery'. This is simply a time and a place when MPs are



available for anyone who wishes to speak to them.' ROSS felt very pleased with himself because he knew exactly what Mr Wilson, his teacher, was talking about. That morning he had seen a notice about the Glenville MP's surgery in the local paper.

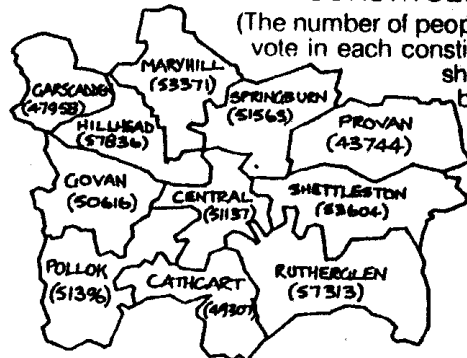
As far as he could remember, it was to be held next Saturday from 10a.m. until noon in Glenville High School. Suddenly, he had a bright idea! He would go along to the surgery on Saturday and ask if it would be possible for his family to be shown round the Houses of Parliament. It would also give him a chance to meet a real live MP.

At the end of the lesson, he told Mr. Wilson what he was thinking of doing. His teacher thought it was a great idea and suggested that Ross could tell the class all about it at next week's lesson.

Next Saturday morning Ross turned up at the surgery. The school seemed strange without pupils and teachers all moving around and he got a funny

GLASGOW'S 11 CONSTITUENCIES

(The number of people allowed to vote in each constituency is shown in brackets)



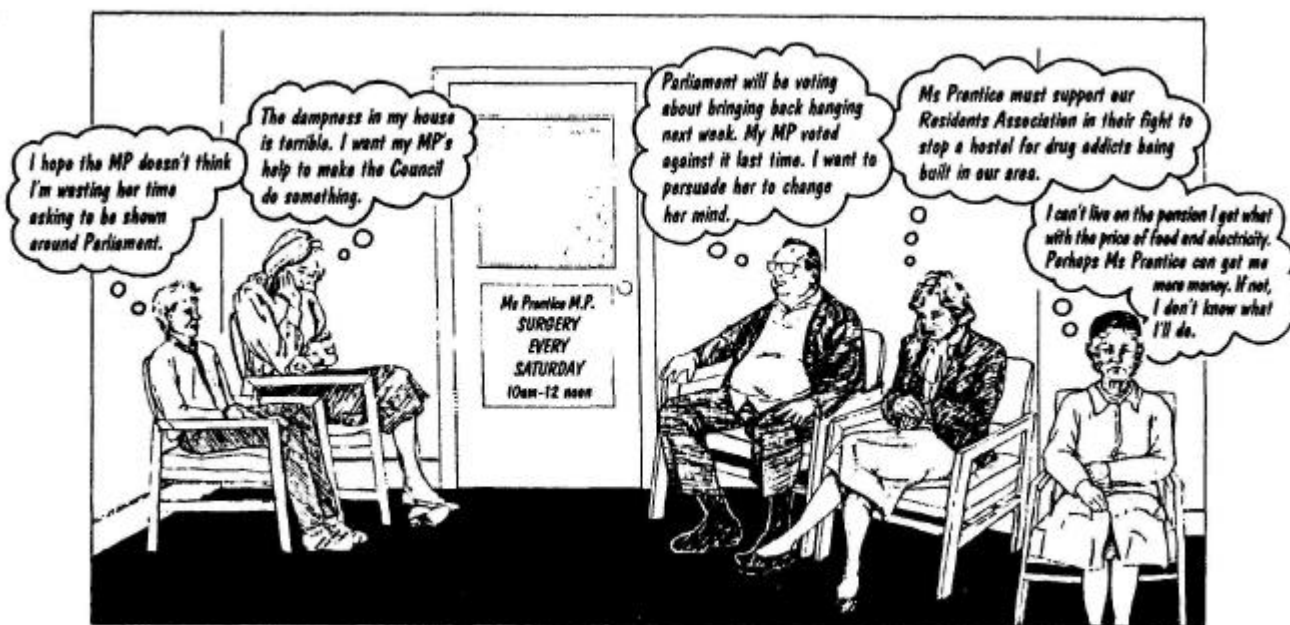
look from the janitor when he came in, but Ross had other things on his mind.

There were only two other people there when Ross arrived but he was quite surprised at the number of people who came in after him. It wasn't long before there was a big queue, so Ross was glad he was one of the first.

Very soon it was his turn to meet the local MP, Ms Prentice. Although she had to spend a lot of time in London, she still had her home in Glenville and got back there as often as she could. She thanked Ross for coming and told him that there was nothing special about her; before being elected she had worked in a local bank and might have to go back to that if she was not successful at the next election. In the meantime, she would do her best to see that the people of Glenville were fairly represented in Parliament.

She explained to him that her constituency had 55000 people in it, so her 'surgery' was always busy with lots of people looking for advice, asking questions, making complaints or letting her know

how they felt about things. Ross was beginning to feel guilty about taking up her time, but she was delighted to hear all about the family's visit to London. She even suggested that she would show them around the Houses of Parliament herself if she had enough time. She looked at her diary....



A visit to the House of Commons



At the time agreed, the Goodfellows met their MP outside the Houses of Parliament. Ross felt very important introducing each member of his family to Ms Prentice. She had many interesting little stories to tell about the buildings as a whole - the 'Palace of Westminster' she called it - but eventually they reached the House of Commons.

"---It is called the House of Commons, of course, because it is here that the ordinary or 'common' people of the country are represented. The other House, the House of Lords, looks similar but there is one very important difference - none of its members are elected. Every one of the 650 MPs in Britain has a right to sit in the House of Commons.

It's a bit of a squeeze! Also, they are all entitled to make speeches, ask questions and generally discuss things proposed by the Government before voting on whether or not they should become law. Sometimes it seems as if they all want to speak at the same time and it can get very noisy.

The House is usually at its noisiest during Prime Minister's Question Time, which occurs twice in the week on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. It is this which is usually recorded and played on the tea time television news. The person who has to keep order is the Speaker who acts as a kind of Chairperson and sits in that large chair in the centre. All the MPs of the political party which won the General Election sit on the Speaker's right-hand side. The most important, such as the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, sit on the front benches. The Cabinet is a



group of senior MPs and Lords who help the Prime Minister in running the country. There are usually about 20 people in the Cabinet, each one responsible for a particular government Department such as Defence or Transport. Other MPs of the

same party sit behind them in the "back" benches. MPs belonging to the other political parties sit on the Speaker's left-hand side. The MPs on the Speaker's right-hand side are the "Government" and those on the left are the "Opposition". Above us is the Public Gallery where anyone can sit and watch the

House of Commons in action."

The family found the whole visit most interesting. When they got home to Glenville, Ross decided to write to Ms Prentice to thank her for arranging the visit.

THE HOUSE OF LORDS

The House of Lords is the second or upper House of Parliament. Bills are passed from the House of Commons to the House of Lords for discussion.

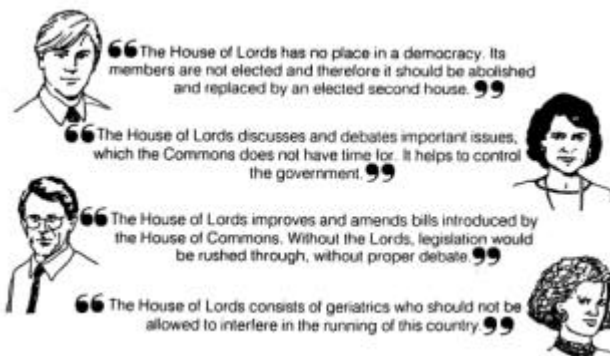
They can alter the Bill but the Commons has to agree with any changes before the Bill is passed to the Queen for her signature.

Members of the House of Lords are not elected. The members are either hereditary peers or life peers.

Hereditary Peers are people who have inherited titles through their family eg The Duke of Kent. The title is passed on from one generation to the next. There are over 700 Hereditary Peers in the

House of Lords.

Life Peers are people who have been awarded titles for services to their country eg George Thomas an ex-Speaker of the House of Commons is now Lord Tonyandy. The title only lasts during the person's lifetime. It cannot be passed on. There are more than 350 Life Peers in the House of Lords. Many life peers were once MPs. There are also a small number of Law Lords



who sit in the House of Lords and twenty six Lords Spiritual who are the leaders of the Church of England.

MAKING THE LAW

The most important job of the House of Commons is to pass laws. This is very important work as these laws will eventually affect the lives of millions of people in the country.

Any MP can bring forward an idea for a new law. It is called a Bill. The Bill is debated very thoroughly by the MPs - some will speak for the Bill and some will speak against it. By arguing in this way they hope to persuade other MPs to vote for or against the Bill.

Sometimes the debates are very heated when MPs strongly disagree with each other. The Speaker controls the debate and no one is allowed to speak

without his/her permission. He/she can suspend MPs from the Commons if he/she thinks they have behaved badly.

Bills can take many months to become laws as they have many stages to go through. At the end of each debate a vote is taken to see if the MPs support the Bill or not. If a majority of MPs vote for the Bill it is passed, it will then be sent to the House of Lords and they will debate it. If they pass the Bill it is sent to the Queen for her signature (the Royal Assent) and then the Bill becomes a law which everyone is expected to obey.

REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

(Figures Based on 1987 General Election Result)

EMPLOYMENT

Being an MP is a full-time job. Most MPs have to give up their jobs so that they can concentrate on their work in Parliament.

Of all the MPs elected in 1987. ...

38% came from four professions

- The Law
- Teaching
- Journalism
- Accountancy

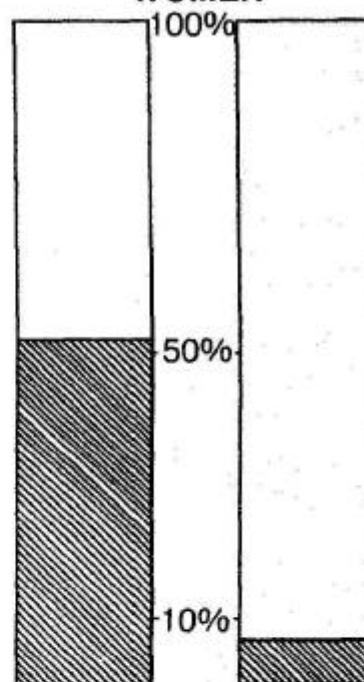
27% were Company Directors or Managers

17% were Manual Workers

4% were Trade Union Officials

14% were from other occupations

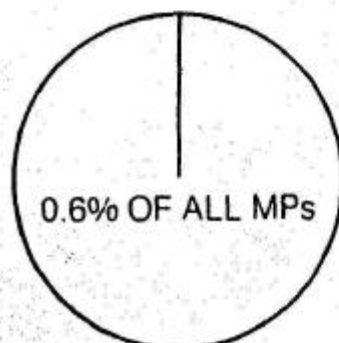
WOMEN



Women as %
of UK
Population

Women MPs
as % of all
MPs in House of
Commons

ETHNIC MINORITIES

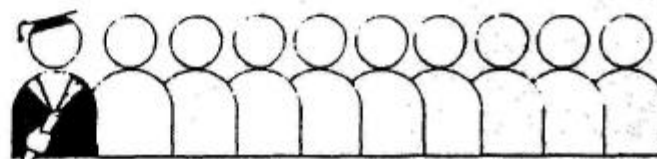


EDUCATION

6 out of every 10 MPs went to University



Less than 1 out of every 10 people
in the UK went to University



Activities

1. What is an MP's surgery?
2. MPs are very busy people. Write a few sentences about what they do. (Look at Jean Prentice's diary if you need help).
3. What is the difference between a hereditary peer and a life peer?
4. Look at the comments about the House of Lords and answer the following questions.
 - (a) Which comment is exaggerated?
 - (b) Give two reasons for keeping the House of Lords.
 - (c) Give two reasons for abolishing the House of Lords.
5. Use the Factfile to answer the following questions.
 - (a) What are the 4 most common types of jobs which MPs worked at before they were elected?
 - (b) Why might women feel that they are unfairly represented in Parliament?
 - (c) What proof is there that black people are not fairly represented in Parliament?
6. Below is the result of the 1983 General Election

Party	Number of MPs	Number of Votes
Conservative	397	1 3012 602
Labour	209	8 463 255
Liberal / SDP	23	7 780 569
SNP	2	331 975
Other	19	890 000

- (a) Which party formed the government after this election?
 - (b) What was their overall majority in the House of Commons?
 - (c) Which party was called the Opposition after this election?
 - (d) Which party could say that the election treated them unfairly? Explain why they might say this.
7. **Investigation exercise**
 Try to find out the following information about your MP and the government.
- (a) What is the name of your MP and Constituency which you live in?
 - (b) What is the name of the present Prime Minister and what party does he or she lead?
 - (c) What is the name of the Chancellor of the Exchequer; the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Wordfile

CABINET: a group of the most senior members of the government party.

CONSTITUENCY: an area of the country represented in Parliament by one MP.

GENERAL ELECTION: when MPs are elected for all 650 constituencies in Britain.

GOVERNMENT: the political party which wins more constituencies than any other party in a general election.

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT: the candidate who wins more votes than any other candidate in a constituency.

NATIONALISED INDUSTRIES: industries owned

and run by the Government eg British Rail.

OPPOSITION: the second largest party in the House of Commons.

POLITICAL PARTY: a group of people who have similar ideas about the way the country should be run eg Labour, Conservative.

PRIME MINISTER: the most senior MP in the cabinet.

THE SPEAKER: chairperson of the House of Commons who is responsible for keeping order.

SURGERY: a place where MPs may meet people from their constituencies.

Wordfile Activities

1. Using the words and phrases from the wordfile and the chapter, copy and complete the following passage.
 In Britain our _____ are made by Parliament. It has 2 Houses, the House of _____ and the House of _____. People aged over _____ vote to elect an _____ to represent their local area in the House of _____.
 This local area is called a _____ and the _____ who gets the most votes becomes the Member of Parliament. Members of the House of Lords are not _____. Most of them are _____ or _____ peers. The person who keeps order in the _____ Commons is called the _____.

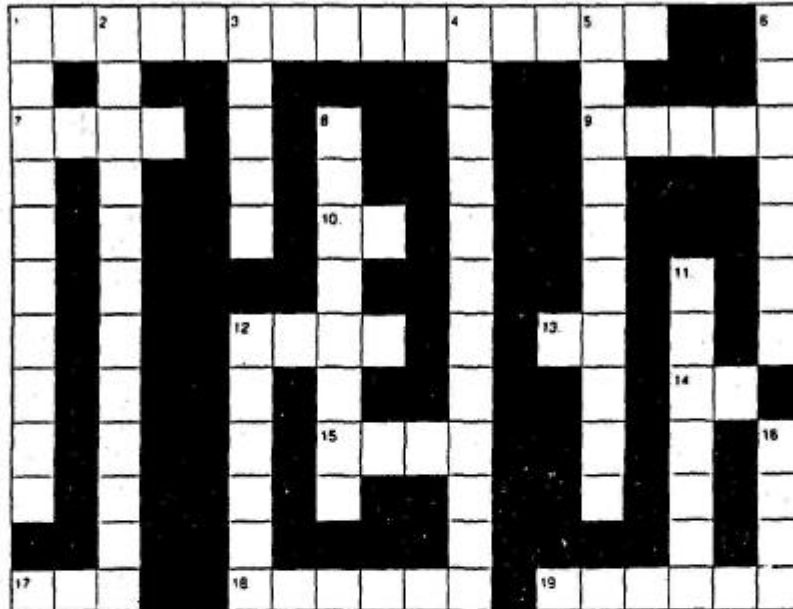
The government sits on his/her _____ hand side and the _____ on his/her left. The government is the party which wins the most _____ at the _____.

2. Unscramble the words below taken from the wordfile and write a sentence explaining what or who it is.

ACIBTEN; REPSAKE; YREURSG

3. Write a paragraph about Parliament. You must use the following words:

Government, Opposition, Prime Minister, Political Party, Constituency, MP



A C R O S S

- 1. When the whole country votes for its MPs (7,8)
- 7. Select a candidate by doing this (4)
- 9. The government has the to pass laws (5)
- 10. Member of parliament (2)
- 12. Newspapers may show this, but TV may not (4)
- 13. Initials of first female Prime Minister (2)
- 14. Type of election held when an MP dies or resigns (2)

- 15. Might be used to stick up the answer to 18 across! (4)
- 17. At the count, they up all the votes (3)
- 18. A suitable number of people to serve in the Cabinet (6)
- 19. Way of advertising election candidates (6)

D O W N

- 1. The political party with the most MPs (10)
- 2. Industry owned and run by the government (12)
- 3. Worker who helps candidate in an election (5)
- 4. An MP is elected to represent one of these (12)
- 5. MPs who are not in the governing party form this (10)
- 6. Regular meeting place for MPs and constituents (7)
- 8. Word used to describe candidate's activities before an election (8)
- 11. Senior ministers (7)
- 12. Name given to paper on which you cast your vote (6)
- 16. A member of the House of Lords (4)