

# BRITISH POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

GL 399-02 (SPRING 2009)

EXAM #1



**DIRECTIONS:** You must answer TWO of the questions below. In answering these questions, you should draw on all of the material presented in this course to date, including all lectures and Andrew Marr's *History of Modern Britain*. You are also welcomed and encouraged (although it is not required) to consult and cite additional sources in your essays, including the other textbooks for the class. Please make sure to provide proper citations if you do so. All of the questions below require critical thinking, asking you to make an assessment of the underlying causes of events. Yet as we have focused on the history of the period, you should also make sure to review and explain the major historical events relevant to the question. In short, you need to both demonstrate your historical knowledge and show your analytical skills.

**DUE DATE:** Your exams should be typed, double-spaced, use normal margins and fonts, include a cover page, and stapled. ***Exams must be turned in to the HSS main office (Moench A208) no later than 4:00pm on Friday, April 10.*** I will leave a clearly labeled drop box for them. Late exams will receive an appropriate letter grade reduction. DO NOT e-mail me your paper unless you have some extraordinarily good reason for having to do so.

## **QUESTIONS:**

1. Clement Attlee's Labour Party won a landslide victory in 1945, ousting a popular wartime leader on the promise to build a 'New Jerusalem'. What was Labour's vision for the postwar world – the policies that would come to be known collectively as the 'postwar consensus' – and why were they so popular? Despite sweeping in on a wave of optimism, the Attlee Government ended in disappointment. Why was this? Decades later the Thatcherites would argue that it was the policies of the postwar consensus that were destroying Britain. Was this critique valid? If so, then were the leaders of the 1940s just utterly foolish or were there faults in this system that could not have been foreseen?
2. Britain emerged victorious from the Second World War, yet rather quickly declined in status as a Great Power, a reality punctuated by the Suez debacle. Was Britain's decline as a world power inevitable or were there viable avenues of policy open to them that could have altered their course? Was Britain being realistic in (largely) walking away from its colonies or deluding themselves that this would not produce decline? What can or should Britain have done differently in order to play a more significant world role? Does it even really matter that they are no longer a Great Power?

3. Margaret Thatcher entered office in 1979 determined to transform Britain, to reverse the 'British disease' of relative economic decline and restore the authority of government. Did it work? What were the major policies of 'Thatcherism'? How did they seek to alter Britain? What were the costs of these policies? Was the 'cure' worse than the 'disease'? Overall, was Britain a better place when she left office (make sure to define what you mean by 'better')?

4. Britain in the Seventies was seen as a disaster – the economic 'sick man of Europe' and a political system described as 'ungovernable'. What went so horribly wrong in Britain then? Review the major events of the decade. Why was their economic position so dire? What made Britain such a difficult place to govern? Why were the political leaders of the time so seemingly incapable of doing anything about all of these problems? What should have been done instead? Where these politically viable policies at the time?

5. Edward Heath, James Callaghan, and John Major – all three of these Prime Ministers are generally considered to be failures, unable to master the trials and tribulations of their era, ignominiously seen off by the voters. Yet all three leaders governed in tumultuous times, beset by economic crises and/or fractious parties. Review the key challenges each had to face. Were these leaders failures or did they manage as best as could be expected given their difficult circumstances? In other words, would other leaders have fared any better given the same challenges?

6. From the very beginning Great Britain had an uncomfortable relationship with the European Union, initially rejecting participation in the ECSC and EEC, then being rejected by Europe, then finally coming in and causing trouble on a regular basis. Why has Britain been such an awkward partner in the EU? Why have they been so hesitant to fully commit to European integration? Would Britain's political and economic history since the Fifties have been fundamentally different if they had participated in European integration from the start? Moreover, would Britain be better off if they more fully integrated into the EU now, adopting the euro and supporting moves toward a more federal Europe?

7. Tony Blair swept into office in 1997 on a tide of overwhelming support and popularity. He led the Labour Party out of the political wilderness and did something that no other Labour leader had managed – winning three consecutive general elections, two of them landslides. He presided over one of the longest and strongest periods of economic growth and prosperity in the nation's history. He oversaw a massive increase in spending in Britain's dilapidated public services. Yet, when he finally left office in 2007, he was reviled by Labour Party activists and his approval ratings with the general public were at their lowest ebb. Why was this? Review the major events of the Blair years. What happened that led Britons to take such a negative view of such an otherwise successful leader?