



POLITICAL PARTIES IN BRITAIN

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Introduction:

- Britain is the home of political parties.
- English government is called as party government.
- The working of government in Britain is very largely conditioned by the presence of political parties.
- The party system in England has strengthened the Prime Minister and weakened the King.

Introduction

- The growth of the Cabinet dictatorship and the consequent decline of Parliament is the inevitable result of the party system there.
- Her Majesty's Opposition is a vital element in the working of the British system of government.
- All aspects of the political life in Britain from the local level to the Cabinet level is greatly influenced by political parties.
- In fact, party system in Britain is the essential feature of its Cabinet System of government.

Features of the Party system in Britain:

1. A two Party system,
2. A High degree of centralization,
3. Disciplined parties,
4. Continuity of operation,
5. Democratic and constitutional means,
6. Ideologically committed,
7. Extra-constitutional growth,
8. Moderation and compromise,
9. Geographical differences, etc.

I. A two party system:

- It is the basic feature of the British party system.
- An ideal party system requires the existence of a strong two party system.
- Britain is fortunate enough to have a two party system throughout its political history after the 17th century.
- Like Cavaliers & Roundheads, Tories and Whigs, Conservatives & Labor.
- Minor political parties existed but they have not succeeded to come to power.

A two party system

- British electorates rarely voted for candidates contesting from other minor political parties.
- The voters select the one which represents their views out of the two.
- Candidates who are not accepted by these two parties have little chance of winning the election & running the government.
- Because of the two party system in UK the government is stable, opposition is strong and people can choose their government directly.

2. A High Degree of Centralization:

- British parties are highly centralized organizations.
- Each party has a strong organization at the national level.
- The real power rests with the central organization of the party.
- There is a direct chain of connection between the central organization and local units.

A high degree of centralization ...

- Every party has a high degree of control over the members of the party both inside and outside the Parliament.
- The final formulation of the policy decisions rests with the central organization of the party.
- British parties have evolved a high degree of leadership at the central level which has its control over local leaders.

3. Disciplined Parties:

- Since parties are highly centralized they are also disciplined
- Party members are dependent on the party for winning the elections and to achieve progress in their political career.
- Independent candidates have no chances of winning the elections in UK.
- Every member must be strictly adhere to party programmes and any rebels may be deprived of party tickets in the next elections.
- Party discipline is such that there is no scope for defections & cross voting.

4. Continuity of Operations:

- Political parties in UK have to be continually in operation.
- After one election is over they start preparation for the next.
- Parties do not go to slumber or doze between the elections
- They continue their publicity and education work throughout.
- They issue literature, hold meetings, conduct week end and summer schools, organize local efforts, participate in local elections, and keep themselves into contact with the MPs and Cabinet.

Continuity operations

- “British parties are always present, everywhere present and vocally present” is the popular saying.
- Though the efforts in between the elections is not so intense as during the 3 weeks preceding the elections but it is incessant(continual).
- Parties must be in a state of readiness to face elections at any time.

5. Parties have firm faith in democratic & constitutional means to achieve their ends:

- British parties never resort to violent means as in France, to mobilize voters.
- They influence the voters by means of publications, speeches & sometimes by strikes.
- Since they are disciplined parties they do not resort to violent and unconstitutional means.
- They do not deviate from democratic means to achieve their ends.

6. Parties have Ideological commitments:

- Both the parties have their own distinct and identifiable political dogmas and ideologies.
- The Conservative party believes in conservatism whereas the Labor party believes in socialistic ideology.
- While the former stands for capitalism, private ownership, the later commits to nationalization of means of production.
- There is no deviation on the part of parties from these fundamentals.

7. Extra-Constitutional growth:

- The party system in UK is said to be an extra-constitutional growth.
- The constitution does not mention anything about the organization and functions of the political parties.

8. Moderation and Compromise:

- British political parties are characterized by the tradition of moderation & compromise.
- The difference between the two political parties are little or less.
- This is due to the principle of moderation which each party adopts.
- Both the parties express their allegiance to the Commonwealth of Nations, support the UNO & recommend International cooperation on important areas.
- The Conservatives often championed reforms which liberals have opposed.

Moderation & compromise.....

- All members of the conservative party do not come from propertied class nor Labor party is the party of only workers.
- The Conservatives have liberalized their conservatism while the Laborites have moderated their socialism.
- This is due to the fact that both the parties compete for the support of the same body of electorate and hence avoid extreme stand on any issue.
- The tradition of moderation and compromise among the parties are visible both inside outside the Parliament.
- In the Parliament opposition makes only constructive criticism and does not make wild promises to turn public opinion against the ruling party.

9. Geographical factor:

- In UK parties marked by geography.
- The strong hold of the Labor party are the industrial areas of Wales, Scotland, North England and the midlands.
- Whereas the Conservative Party controls the large cities like the North Ireland, North Scotland, South and East of England and agricultural farming areas.
- These are generalized areas and there are some exceptions to them as well.

Conclusion:

- In conclusion we may say that Britain is the home of political parties, and the British government is a party government.
- All aspects of political life in Britain from the local level to the cabinet level is greatly influenced by political parties.
- The political parties in Britain arose out of the constitutional struggle between the Stuarts Kings on the one hand and their Parliament on the other.