

## UNITED KINGDOM

**Date of Elections:** 11 June 1987

### **Purpose of Elections**

Elections were held for all the seats in the House of Commons, whose members' term of office came prematurely to an end when Parliament was dissolved on 18 May 1987. Previous general elections had been held on 9 June 1983.

### **Characteristics of Parliament**

The bicameral Parliament of the United Kingdom consists of the House of Commons and the House of Lords.

The House of Commons consists of 650 members elected for 5 years. Of the 650 seats, 523 are set aside for England, 72 for Scotland, 38 for Wales and 17 for Northern Ireland.

The House of Lords is indeterminate in size. There were, in early 1987, 1,180 potential members, of whom some were debarred from taking part in the proceedings of the House either because they were not in receipt of a writ of summons or because they were on leave of absence. The membership comprises: 819 hereditary peers and peeresses sitting by virtue of creation or descent, other than those who have disclaimed their titles for life under the provisions of the Peerage Act, 1963; 335 life peers; 2 archbishops and 24 bishops (as long as they hold their sees). About 300 peers attend their House's sessions with any regularity.

### **Electoral System**

All British subjects and citizens of the Republic of Ireland are entitled to vote provided that they have reached the age of 18 on polling day and are resident in a constituency on the "qualifying date" (October 10 of each year)\*. Prisoners and members of the House of Lords cannot vote, while persons convicted of electoral offences may not do so for a period of five years.

Electoral registers are drawn up on the constituency level and revised annually in October to take effect the following February. Voting is not compulsory. Proxy voting is permitted for members of the armed forces, Crown servants and British Council staff employed overseas, persons who are outside the country on polling day because of their employment, and the husbands or wives of any of the people in the above categories. Postal voting is allowed to those people who, although in the United Kingdom, are prevented from voting in person in their constituency because of, *inter alia*, physical disability, religious observance, or inability to reach the polling station without an air or sea journey.

\* For a parliamentary election in any constituency in Northern Ireland, the elector must have been resident in Northern Ireland for three months prior to the qualifying **date**.

Candidates for the House of Commons must be British subjects at least 21 years of age. The insane, undischarged bankrupts and persons serving a prison sentence of more than one year are disqualified from membership of the House, as are members of the armed forces, policemen, civil servants, holders of certain judicial offices, clergymen (except of Non-Conformist churches), peers and members of a large number of public boards and tribunals.

A nomination must be supported by 10 electors and accompanied by a deposit of £500, which sum is returned to the candidate if he obtains at least 5% of the total votes.

Each candidate may spend £2,700 in campaign expenses, plus 3.1 p. per elector in a county constituency or 2.3 p. per election in a borough constituency.

For purposes of elections to the House of Commons, the United Kingdom is divided into 650 constituencies. In each, the candidate who obtains the largest number of votes is declared elected.

By-elections are held to fill Commons seats which become vacant between general elections. In the House of Lords, Bishop's places are filled by the next senior diocesan bishop and seats of Lords of Appeal are filled by appointment.

### **General Considerations and Conduct of the Elections**

The election date was announced on 11 May 1987, four days after a strong showing in local polls by the ruling Conservative Party. Premature dissolution of Parliament one week later also came in a period of economic upsurge in the country. The House of Commons' normal term still had over a year to run.

During the campaign which opened on 18 May, the Conservatives, led by the Prime Minister, Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, defended their record while in power and called for more privatization of industry, promotion of home ownership, restructuring of education and local government. Mrs. Thatcher furthermore reaffirmed her determination to bolster Britain's nuclear force, introduce more curbs on trade unions and pursue tight-spending, anti-inflationary policies. The primary opposition Labour Party, headed by Mr. Neil Kinnock, attacked the Government's record on unemployment while advocating a return to nationalization and promising to create more jobs and raise pensions; it, moreover, favoured unilateral nuclear disarmament. The centrist Alliance of the Liberal Party and the Social Democratic Party for its part pledged to increase employment opportunities, to introduce a tax system that redistributes wealth while keeping down wages and to decentralize government. Nominations for the 650 Commons seats totalled 2,325. An unusually high number of MPs (88) did not stand for re-election.

On polling day, the Conservatives defeated Labour conclusively for the third consecutive time, maintaining a majority of more than 100 seats over the divided opposition. A total of 47 seats changed party hands and there were altogether 130 new members.

The election victory gave Mrs. Thatcher, in power since 1979, a third successive term as Prime Minister - unprecedented in the 20th century. On 13 June, she reorganized her Cabinet. The new Parliament convened on 25 June.

Statistics

1. Results of the Elections and Distribution of Seats  
in the House of Commons

Number of registered electors. . . . .	43,181,321
Voters. . . . .	75.4%
Valid votes. . . . .	32,536,205

Political Group	Number of Candidates	Votes obtained	%	Number of Seats	Number of Seats held at Dissolution
Conservative Party . . . . .	633	13,763,134	42.2	376	393
Labour Party. . . . .	633	10,033,633	30.8	229	207
Liberal/Social Democratic Alliance. . . . .	633*	7,339,912	22.6	22*	27*
Scottish National Party . . . . .	72	416,873	1.3	3	2
<i>Plaid Cymru</i> . . . . .	38	123,589	0.4	3	2
Northern Ireland parties . . . . .	77	731,782	2.2	17	17
Others. . . . .	239	127,282	0.4		
				650	648*

\* Liberals 327, Social Democrats 306.

\*\* Liberals 17, Social Democrats 5.

\*\*\* Liberals 19, Social Democrats 8.

\*\*\*\* Plus two vacancies.

2. Distribution of Members of the House of Commons according to Sex

Men	609
Women	<u>41</u>
	650