

Agrégation externe d'anglais, 2017-2018

Civilisation britannique : « Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise, 1970-1979 »

M. Gillissen, mardi 13h-16h (LI 371)

PROGRAMME

Semaine 1 : Introduction

Semaine 2 : British politics in the 1970s

Richard Crossman on the 1970 electoral campaign

Semaine 3 : The British economy in the 1970s

James Callaghan on public spending, 1976

Semaine 4 : Trade unions and strikes

Daily Telegraph, 1979

Semaine 5 : The British State between devolution and Europe

Edward Heath on the EEC, 1971

Semaine 6 : British society in the 1970s

Margaret Thatcher on immigration, 1978

Semaine 7 : Conclusion

Commentez la citation suivante :

“Britain seemed to be becoming, if not already to have become, ungovernable [...] with an apparent hollowing out of governmental capability and public authority.”

Lawrence Black and Hugh Pemberton, “Introduction: The benighted decade? Reassessing the 1970s”, p. 4, in L. Black, H. Pemberton and P. Thane (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, Manchester University Press, 2013

Indications bibliographiques

BECKETT Andy, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*, London, Faber & Faber, 2010

BLACK Lawrence, PEMBERTON Hugh & THANE Pat (eds), *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2013

DAVIS Richard, *Britain in Crisis (1970-1979)*, Paris, PUF (coll. CNED), 2016

LEYDIER, Gilles (dir.), *Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise*, Paris, Ellipses, 2016

PORION Stéphane (dir.), *Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise, 1970-1979*, Neuilly-sur-Seine, Atlande, 2017

TIRATSOO Nick, “You’ve Never Had It So Bad?”, in N. Tiratsoo (ed.), *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain since 1939*, London, Phoenix, 1998, pp. 173-190

Revue française de civilisation britannique, vol. 23 n° 3 (2016) : « Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise »

THE 1970 ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN

Sunday, June 14th [1970]

Today I took a complete rest. There are just four days to go and so far it has been one of the easiest campaigns I've known. I think I can best sum up the mood by saying that it most reminds me of the 1959 election, the 'You never had it so good' election, when the Tory Government had no real programme. This time we are in a very similar situation, though of course the real resemblance is not between Wilson now and Macmillan then but between Gaitskell then and Heath now. Heath is nicer-looking than Gaitskell was, but they both have that lock-jaw effect, that remoteness and glazed eye. In Hugh it was beginning to rub off as he learnt a bit about being less detached and intellectually superior (and became as a result somewhat dogmatic), but Ted Heath hasn't learnt even after four years. He is still a waxwork, stiff and tense, and, poor man, during this campaign he has been subjected to a most merciless press.

As in 1959, the Opposition are fighting a fine weather mood and a sense of complacency, yet I have to record that we can't say the electorate has never had it so good. Macmillan could point to five years of economic expansion and a tremendous rise in living standards, five years of Tory easy-going. We have given them three years of hell and high taxes. They've seen the failure of devaluation and felt the soaring cost of living. Yet Harold Wilson is running the election in this Macmillan-like way and he has suddenly found that the mood is on our side and that people are good-humouredly willing to accept another six years of Labour Government.

I think this is a result of most unusual circumstances, in which three separate factors have converged. The first, quite simply, was the end of the prices and incomes policy, following on the dropping of the Industrial Relations Bill and our decision to rely on the T.U.C.'s voluntary effort. This has allowed the official trade unions to be friendly with us again and it has permitted Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon to feel it was time to end the animosity which was wrecking local parties. The abandonment of the policy brought about the second factor, that for some months now wages have been rising faster than prices. Everybody knows, of course, that prices will catch up within the next twelve months but at this particular moment, as in the spring of '66, the British elector feels good and, though he knows this won't last long, it changes his attitude to the Government. The third thing which actually crystallised the feeling of lift and the sudden transformation of our chances was the Tories' announcement of their carefully contrived exercise at Selsdon Park. It came as a shock to have this tough, strong picture of Selsdon Man leading a virile, capitalist, anti-trade union revival, and suddenly people thought, 'My God, if that is the alternative, there is something to be said for dear old Harold now that he has learnt his lesson.' I think this is what has given us such an easy election. The country isn't in the mood for Cassandra prophesying doom nor does the electorate want, or have any confidence in the effectiveness of, Heath's reconstructed, reactionary Toryism of free enterprise and anti-trade unionism.

Monday, June 15th

Today's trade figures show us £31 million in the red and this evening, watching a dusky television set, I saw Iain Macleod spiriting disaster out of Aladdin's cave. Then I watched Harold addressing a huge meeting in Hammersmith and making jokes about half the deficit being due to the purchase of jumbo jets. That sums up the campaign, but still Harold was more effective than spooky Macleod. It is now clear that the only thing which the Tories have to hang on to is the rise in the cost of living and its effects on the pensioner and the housewife. I am not sure whether there will be a large Labour abstention or how many pensioners and housewives will switch to the Tories but it won't win them the elections.

JAMES CALLAGHAN ON PUBLIC SPENDING, 1976

For too long, perhaps ever since the war, we postponed facing up to fundamental choices and fundamental changes in our society and in our economy. That is what I mean when I say we have been living on borrowed time. For too long this country – all of us, yes, this Conference too – has been ready to settle for borrowing money abroad to maintain our standards of life, instead of grappling with the fundamental problems of British industry. Governments of both parties have failed to ignite the fires of industrial growth in the ways that countries with very different political and economic philosophies have done. Take Germany, France, Japan – different countries, different philosophies. We are, as you know, still borrowing money. But this time we are not borrowing – if the Government continues on its present course – to pay for yet another short-lived consumer boom of the kind which used to buy success at the polls – or so we were told – but which never bought success in the world's markets or at the work place. We are borrowing now partly to pay for our huge investment in the North Sea. We are borrowing, too, because other industrial nations volunteer credits, so that our strategy and our proposals for regenerating British industry need not be thwarted by short-term speculative movements of sterling balances – a load we have still been unable to shed. We are determined that this borrowing will be used to act and to press on with the task of rebuilding a regenerated manufacturing industry. This time we are not going for a consumer boom on borrowed money: we are going to invest it in our future.

The cosy world we were told would go on for ever, where full employment would be guaranteed by a stroke of the Chancellor's pen, cutting taxes, deficit spending, that cosy world is gone. Yesterday delegates pointed to the first sorry fruits: a high rate of unemployment. The rate of unemployment today – there is no need for me to say this to you – cannot be justified on any grounds, least of all the human dignity of those involved. But Mr. Chairman and comrades, I did not become a member of our Party, still less did I become the Leader of our Party, to propound shallow analyses and false remedies for fundamental economic and social problems.

When we reject unemployment as an economic instrument – as we do – and when we reject also superficial remedies, as socialists must, then we must ask ourselves unflinchingly what is the cause of high unemployment. Quite simply and unequivocally, it is caused by paying ourselves more than the value of what we produce. There are no scapegoats. This is as true in a mixed economy under a Labour Government as it is under capitalism or under communism. It is an absolute fact of life which no Government, be it left or right, can alter. Of course in Eastern Europe you cannot price yourself out of your job, because you cannot withdraw your labour. So those Governments can at least guarantee the appearance of full employment. But that is not the democratic way.

We used to think that you could spend your way out of a recession, and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting Government spending. I tell you in all candour that that option no longer exists, and that in so far as it ever did exist, it only worked on each occasion since the war by injecting a bigger dose of inflation into the economy, followed by a higher level of unemployment as the next step. Higher inflation followed by higher unemployment. We have just escaped from the highest rate of inflation this country has known; we have not yet escaped from the consequences: high unemployment.

That is the history of the last 20 years. Each time we did this the twin evils of unemployment and inflation have hit hardest those least able to stand them. Not those with the strongest bargaining power, no, it has not hit those. It has hit the poor, the old and the sick. We have struggled, as a Party, to try to maintain their standards, and indeed to improve them, against the strength of the free collective bargaining power that we have seen exerted as some people have tried to maintain their standards against this economic policy.

Now we must get back to fundamentals. First, overcoming unemployment now unambiguously depends on our labour costs being at least comparable with those of our major competitors. Second, we can only become competitive by having the right kind of investment at the right kind of level, and by significantly improving the productivity of both labour and capital. Third, we will fail – and I say this to those who have been pressing about public expenditure, to which I will come back – if we think we can buy our way out by printing what Denis Healey calls 'confetti money' to pay ourselves more than we produce. I do not care what economic system we live in – at least, I do care very much – but the moral I want to draw is this that whatever system we live under these fundamentals are at the heart of the standard of life of the people of the country concerned, and we ignore them at our peril. They are also at the heart of the Social Contract and of our industrial strategy.

Britain is now at a watershed. We have the chance to make real and fundamental choices about priorities which are absolutely necessary to achieve a growing and prosperous manufacturing industry, with all the advantages and easements that can follow.

THE WONDER IS THERE AREN'T EVEN MORE STRIKES

For eleven years I was managing director of a medium-sized firm in an industry which is strongly unionised, has a closed shop, and whose workers enjoyed a national reputation for militancy. I am now chairman of two fairly large industrial concerns.

5 What has happened in industry is briefly this: 80 years ago a man worked at his bench in fear of his foreman; as recently as 15 years ago, a workman would usually do what his union boss told him; today, workmen in most large industries fear neither their foremen nor their union officers. Power has shifted.

10 Union leaders at every level have, over the past few decades, lost their power as part of a general weakening of authority – parents, teachers, policemen, politicians have all experienced it. The reasons are, no doubt, complex, but I am concerned only with the reality of what has happened in industry. Power has moved to the shop floor.

15 At this point, a widespread superstition must be knocked on the head. Power has not passed to the shop stewards. They are usually elected annually by their men and are given practically no power of decision. If they don't do what the men want, they are sacked. I know, because I have seen it happen. Over and over again I have talked and "communicated" with shop stewards, and won them over to more reasonable attitudes – only to meet new faces after the elections.

20 Ah! It's the elections, the pundits say. If only the meetings were better attended: then we should have more responsible shop stewards. In my industry, the election meetings are well attended, and the elected shop stewards are renowned for their militancy. Postal ballots? How many postal ballots have stopped a strike in its infancy, before the men had won what they thought they could get without too much discomfort?

25 The unions, shop stewards and professional agitators should not be held responsible for our industrial troubles, because power lies with the workpeople, and they make trouble mainly for one reason. They want more money. This is still regarded in middle-class and upper-class circles as a reasonable objective, and nothing to be ashamed of. So why should the others be different? Also, capitalists and lawyers, to name only a few, have generally sought wealth without over-much regard for other people – or for the national interest, in so far as it was relevant. We cannot reasonably expect workpeople to be more altruistic, though we may have to restrain their greed because the national economy cannot afford to satisfy it.

30 A popular fallacy is that the advantage a powerful group of workers wins by militancy is lost in the general inflation it produces. This is palpable nonsense. The most powerful groups – printers, tanker drivers, miners, dockers, for example – are steadily widening their real differentials against other workers. We shall all become poorer in real terms in that process, but they will grow relatively richer. It is UK relativities that the industrial power struggle is about – not about total real wealth in the United Kingdom compared with Germany.

EDWARD HEATH ON THE EEC, 1971

In the autumn Parliament will be asked to decide whether Britain should join the European Community. It's a big decision, and it's one that goes far beyond party politics. It's a decision that will affect us fundamentally, whether we go in or stay out. Let's be very clear about it: this is a moment of decision that will not occur again for a very long time, if ever. All the Six now want us to join them. If we don't, Europe will move on without us, and so will the rest of the world. This time the decision is ours.

Now we haven't got to this point of decision overnight. It's taken us 10 years. It was in 1961 when the Conservative Government first approached the European Community. It was in 1967 that the Labour Government renewed our application. And it is the negotiations they set in hand that we have now carried to success.

Of course, before taking a decisive step of this kind a lot of important questions have to be settled. Fortunately, they've now been worked out; and very satisfactorily. But underneath all that is the very simple question you've probably been asking yourself: Why should we go in? As Prime Minister, my answer is that we must go in if we want to remain Great Britain, and have the chance of becoming a Greater Britain. Not a guarantee but the chance, the opportunity to take up once again our proper place in the world.

Let's look at the facts. Today we don't occupy the place in the world we once did. All over the world other countries are changing and developing. More and more they're competing with us for trade, in many cases for markets we helped to create. That's the way it has to be in today's world. If you deserve to win, you win. That's how we got to be Great Britain; not only by defending freedom when it was threatened, but also by our skills in making things and selling things. But lately the world has changed faster than we have. Traditional markets are being taken from us and new ones are not automatically opening up in front of us. Yet we must still live by buying and selling. Without that, we have no strength to look after ourselves or help others. The European Community provides us with our chance. It opens up one of the biggest markets in the world to us. It gives us the opportunity to grow again, to become a Greater Britain in a Greater Europe.

The negotiations we have just successfully completed have taken us exactly a year, a year of very hard bargaining by both sides. But then the bargaining was bound to be hard. It affected the lives and futures not only of ourselves and the other European nations but of old friends in the Commonwealth as well. And we weren't going to let them down. In fact, out of the 30 countries that make up the Commonwealth, 28 can now have special links with the new Community. [...]

Nearer home we must have got an agreement which will give our farmers opportunities of expansion they have never had before. We have got the Community to agree that their rules for fishing must be changed to safeguard our fishermen. [...] All in all, we have done our best throughout to make sure that, before we decide one way or the other, nothing and no one is overlooked. And that best is a good best. In fact, I think it's a good deal better than anyone thought it was going to be.

Basically, it's been possible because the other Six countries believe, as we do, that together we can achieve more than we can apart. We can achieve it in terms of sheer prosperity by opening up to ourselves a market which would be larger than the Soviet Union, larger than the United States. Even without us the other Six countries have shown what can be done by acting together. Let me give you one example. In 1958, average earnings of workers in this country were similar to those in France, Germany, and Holland and well above those in Italy. We were top of the league table. Just ten years later, Italy had caught us up and the other three were streets ahead. What's more, the real value of their wages, their buying power, which is what counts, had gone up on average at double the rate of ours. So that gives you some idea of what we can hope to achieve. A higher real standard of living.

At what price? Yes, of course, there's a price. But it's a lot lower than many people thought it would be. If as a country we're as good as we think we are, we shall soon be able to pay that price out of the extra growth we can expect as a result of being able to trade in a bigger market. As far as prices in the shops are concerned, some things will certainly cost more: butter, cheese, beef. But things like milk, fish, tea and coffee will stay about the same, and fruit and vegetables could well come down. Manufactured goods from Europe can become cheaper as tariffs between us and Europe are reduced. And we shall take care to protect those people who rely on a state pension or on social service benefits from whatever increases there may be as a result of our becoming a member of the Community. When you come to add it up, do you know what the bill for joining comes to for one year as far as your cost of living is concerned? Half a new penny in the pound a year over the first six years of our membership while we change over to their system of food prices. Not a high price, I would have thought, to invest in the future.

MARGARET THATCHER ON IMMIGRATION, 1978

Gordon Burns: [...] Considerable controversy and confusion in recent weeks about possible new get-tough Tory policy over immigration; threats that you may well make major cutbacks on the level of immigrants allowed into this country. If you do get to power how severely would you cut the numbers?

5 *Margaret Thatcher:* Well now, look, let us try and start with a few figures as far as we know them, and I am the first to admit it is not easy to get clear figures from the Home Office about immigration, but there was a committee which looked at it and said that if we went on as we are then by the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid
10 that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in.

So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay peoples' fears on numbers. Now,
15 the key to this was not what Keith Speed said just a couple of weeks ago. It really was what Willie Whitelaw said at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton, where he said we must hold out the clear prospect of an end to immigration because at the moment it is about between 45,000 and 50,000 people coming in a year. Now, I was brought up in a small town, 25,000. That would be two new towns a year and that is quite a lot. So, we do have to hold out the prospect of an end to
20 immigration except, of course, for compassionate cases. Therefore, we have got to look at the numbers who have a right to come in. There are a number of United Kingdom passport holders—for example, in East Africa—and what Keith and his committee are trying to do is to find out exactly how we are going to do it; who must come in; how you deal with the compassionate cases, but nevertheless, holding out the prospect of an end to immigration.

25 *Burns:* But if 45 to 50,000 per year is too many, what figure is acceptable?

Thatcher: Well, it must be very much less but you cannot decide the figure until you know those who at present have a right to come in. But what is quite clear is that we cannot go on taking in that number. You see, my great fear is now that if we get them coming in at that rate people will turn round and we shall not have good race relations with those who are here. Every one who is
30 here must be treated equally under the law and that, I think, is why quite a lot of them too are fearful that their position might be put in jeopardy or people might be hostile to them unless we cut down the incoming numbers. [...]

Burns: And it will be a major election issue as far as the Conservatives ...

Thatcher: I shall not make it a major election issue but I think there is a feeling that the big political
35 parties have not been talking about this and sometimes, you know, we are falsely accused of racial prejudice. I say "falsely accused" and that means that we do not talk about it perhaps as much as we should. In my view, that is one thing that is driving some people to the National Front. They do not agree with the objectives of the National Front, but they say that at least they are talking about some of the problems. Now, we are a big political party. If we do not want people to go to
40 extremes, and I do not, we ourselves must talk about this problem and we must show that we are prepared to deal with it. We are a British nation with British characteristics. Every country can take some small minorities and in many ways they add to the richness and variety of this country. The moment the minority threatens to become a big one, people get frightened.