

UNIVERSITE DE NANTES

ANNEE : 2001.2002

UNITE D'ENSEIGNEMENT ET DE RECHERCHE  
DE LETTRES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES

SESSION : 2-1er semestre

DIPLOME Doug NIVEAU 2 CYCLE 1

DATE : 2002

HEURE :

SECTION Langues Etrangères Appliquées

SALLE :

INTITULE DE L'EPREUVE Civilisation britannique  
UE 311

DUREE : 30'

NOM DU PROFESSEUR RESPONSABLE : E. Zbikowski

OBSERVATION DU PROFESSEUR :

Empty box for observation or additional notes.

# A Changing Nation

18 } The Queen was right to highlight the accelerating pace of Britain's transformation during her 50 years on the throne and there is every sign that it is continuing to accelerate. By the second decade of this century she can expect to join more than 2m of her subjects in the fastest-growing section of the population, the over-85s, twice the number of today. Octogenarian life expectancy will be the norm by then, adding five years to men's average lifespan and nearly four years to women's. We shall be richer as well as older. We are already twice as wealthy in real terms as we were when the Queen celebrated her silver jubilee in 1977. And despite all the problems of our run-down infrastructure and struggling manufacturing, not to mention Northern Ireland's troubles and recurrent crises with the European Union, we have come through intact as a United Kingdom.

28 } The thrust of Tony Blair's five years in power has melded with the sort of Britain that the Queen spoke about. He has not yet come close to making us safe from thugs<sup>(2)</sup>, and the public services remain dreadful, but the British remain a pragmatic people, more comfortable with practice than with theory and able to cope with a shrinking world. Compared with France, whose republican values are being tested in its presidential election today, we are a fortress of stability.

38 } Mr Blair and Gordon Brown are entitled to their share of the credit for that. Their decisions to follow stringent Conservative economic policies for the first two years of government and free the Bank of England to run monetary policy enabled Britain to weather the recession that has hit the rest of the world. Abroad, the country remains America's most reliable ally and our armed forces serve wherever western vital interests are at stake. Closer to home, the granting of devolved powers to Scotland and Wales seems to have killed off separatism; despite the risks, power sharing with Irish republicans has brought new hope of a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

48 } The government will take an important step this week to prepare the ground for regional assemblies in the north of England. Campaigners for English devolution talk about "home rule" but the proposed transfer of planning and transport powers will be modest compared with Scotland's autonomy. But do the 49m people of England really need another layer of government foisted on them? The Tories will say no and they may well be right. Being open-minded about change does not compel us to join every bandwagon that trundles along. Mr Blair says our destiny lies in Europe but weaves and dodges<sup>(4)</sup> about whether that means dumping the pound and joining the euro. He will have to come clean soon if he plans to call a referendum before the next election.

58 } A tougher Tory challenge seems certain next time. Iain Duncan Smith is quietly creating the conditions for a Tory revival, even if the party's showing in Thursday's local elections was weaker than he had hoped. He has rightly put the euro on the back burner<sup>(5)</sup> to concentrate on law and order, poor public services and government gaffes. If he looks implausible as a prime minister now, so did Margaret Thatcher during her first year as opposition leader. If he can persuade the country that it is safe to vote Tory again, he may be able to do for his party what Mr Blair did for Labour in 1992. Despite two Labour landslides, the Tories have not self-destructed, as some predicted. They are edging back into the game and will be well placed if Labour's welfare spending spree collapses.

68 } That is the core issue of the next five years. Britain will have to support a bigger welfare state or find a feasible alternative. We will know soon enough whether billions of pounds have been squandered on health and transport without adequate returns. If that is the case, a new leadership will have to find another way of providing high-quality services without overburdening the country with debilitating taxes.

**Answer the following questions:**

- 1) What official event is the occasion for the article? Explain and develop the link with the title. (3 pts)
- 2) After carefully reading the first two paragraphs, explain why the journalist thinks that the British system of government can be described as “a fortress of stability” (l.20) (3 pts)
- 3) Explain why the journalist says that devolution contributes to the stability of Britain when he writes : “the granting of devolved powers to Scotland and Wales seems to have killed off separatism” (l.28) (3 pts)
- 4) After reading paragraph 4, give a full account of the Labour Party’s and the Conservative Party’s respective positions on Europe today. (3 pts)
- 5) In the light of the 2001 general election, discuss what is said about the Tory Party in paragraph 5. (3 pts)
- 6) question de cours : Explain what the author of the article means when he says that “billions of pounds have been squandered on health and transport without adequate returns” (l.55)  
Comment upon this statement using what you know about the record of the Blair government on public services. (5 pts)

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Notes :

- (1) melded = combined
- (2) thugs = violent youngsters
- (3) Gordon Brown = current Chancellor of the Exchequer
- (4) to dodge = to hesitate
- (5) he has put the euro on the back burner = the euro is not a priority for him now
- (6) a spending spree = spending money without counting and enjoying it!
- (7) squandered = wasted