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Government

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The British Government

On July 4 1776, the United States of America won the revolution and freed themselves from British rule. Ever since, Great Britain and the United States have gone their own ways in constructing a strong, long lasting government. Although these two countries once shared the same type of government, they quite differ now. The United States has a federal government which means the government’s power is divided between different branches, has a president, and a vice president. Great Britain has a constitutional monarchy which is a government in where the power of the king/queen is restraint by parliament, has a queen/king, and a prime minister. Although both of these countries seem to differ, they are alike in the construction of their government which is the constitution, executive, Legislative, and judicial.

On September July 17 1787 the United States created the Constitution. The constitution is the ultimate and supreme law of the US and originally consisted of 7 articles. As time passed more was added on and it now has 27 amendments. The constitution lists what rights are given rather than listing what rights you don’t have. Britain has no specific constitution and instead is scattered between other doctrines such as the Magna Carta, The Bill of Rights, and the Parliament Acts. Rather than listing what rights they do have it lists what rights they don’t have. Nowhere in those documents does it also state a separation in powers like the US constitution does, for the powers are not really divided.

The first branch in government is the executive branch. In the United States this consists of the president, vice president, and the president’s cabinet but obviously the president holds most of the power out of the three. Head of government commands the armed forces, foreign policy, and power to veto laws created by congress are some of the many powers the president holds. In the United Kingdom, there is no separation in powers. So the executive branch (if there were any) consists of the king/queen, prime minister, and his cabinet. Unlike the United States, Britain’s prime minister holds most of the power meanwhile the queen/king’s power is limited. The prime minister has more powers than a president given that there is no official constitution to limit it, such powers include: appoint/reshuffle/dismiss cabinet ministers, create new peers to the house of lords, give out honours, determine government business and cabinet discussions/agendas, withhold information from the house of parliament, terminate the life of a government, and call a general election.

The second branch is the legislative branch. In the United States the legislative branch is congress which made up of the House of Representatives and Senate. The senate is made up of 100 members with 2 representatives from each state; each senator receives a 6 year term. In the House of Representatives, there are a total of 435 members. The amount of representatives differs by the population of each state and only serves a 2 year term. Congress has the power to create laws, declare war, levy/collect taxes, coin money, and impeach the president. In the United Kingdom, Parliament also has the power to create laws. Parliament is made up of two houses: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. The House of Lords is made up of all the royals or in other words, the relatives of the king/queen. The house of commons is made up of elected officials. Parliament has the power to make laws, check/challenge the actions of the government, and veto. It is obvious that US congress and Parliament are very similar.

The final branch of government is the judicial branch. In the US the judicial branch is the Supreme Court. It led by the Chief Justice and there is 8 other justices along with him. The judicial branch has the power to interpret laws in the constitution and is able to overturn old laws that are declared unconstitutional. Since the UK has no constitution the judiciary branch and the legislative were quite mixed. For years the UK’s “supreme court” was made up of members from parliament which was mostly members of the House of Lords which were known as the Lords of Appeal which had the basic fundamentals of a supreme court. Recently, the United Kingdom has worked towards creating a new supreme court that consisted of judges separate from Parliament which started in October of the year 2009.

In closing, many believe that Britain’s and the United States’ government would differ a lot because of the fact that Britain has a queen and the US does not. In reality, both of these countries have the same basic government structure. The only main difference is the limits of powers each branch has and the extent of the divisions between the 3 branches of government.

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