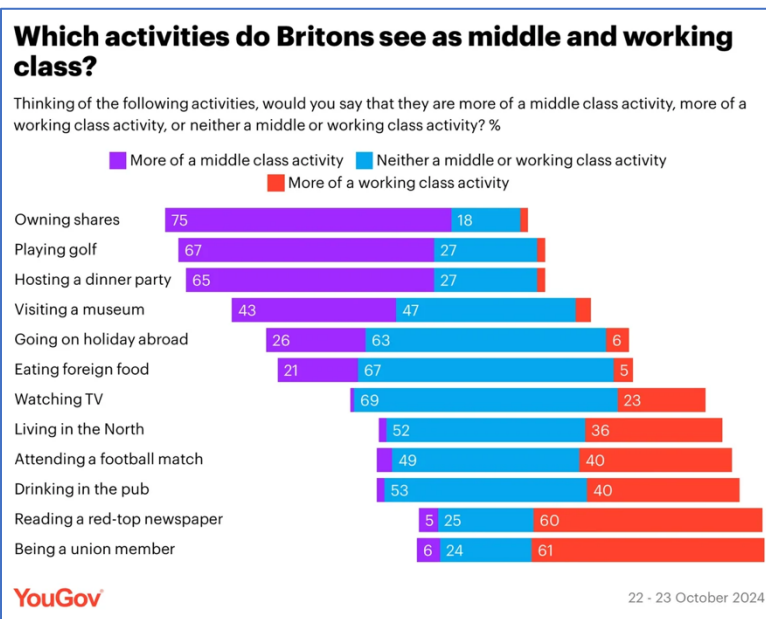
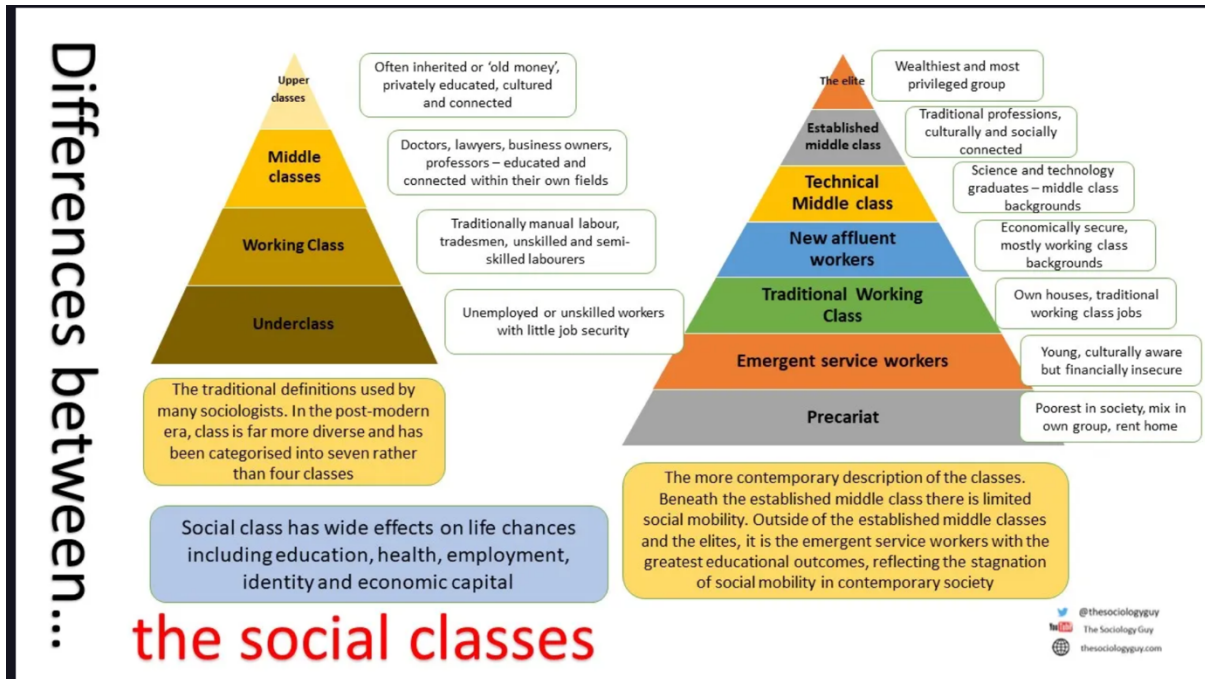


The UK - Lesson 4 – Social classes and political parties

Preview – homework => watch this video Royalty To Working Class: The British Social Class System, Explained => <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWrajAtXtVw>



1. Analyse these graph and infographic.
2. Watch these videos and recap :

Video 1 : The SOCIAL CLASS System... EXPLAINED | Easy English 191 (13 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvWyr6SBGnA>

Video 2 : The Telegraph - Suzanne Moore's experience (2 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ws10mBNvKVU>

Video 3 : London School of Economics - Who rules Britain ? (5.30 min)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gcPIp28XkL0>

Video 4 : The New York Times - Michael Caine: an accent that broke class barriers

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XBjp1oEZcwU&pp=ygUQdWsgY2xhc3MgYWNjZW50cw%3D%3D>

DOCUMENT 1 - Read this text and answer the questions.

The British class system

The British class system is a deeply rooted and historically significant **social structure** that continues to shape the lives and opportunities of individuals in the United Kingdom. Despite modern shifts in society, such as the rise of a globalized economy and the expansion of higher education, **class distinctions remain a defining feature of British culture and identity.**

These differences are very present in the British pop culture as a **marker of identity** : see for instance John Lennon's song "Working-class hero", Pulp's album "Different class", when The Clash, The Sex Pistols, the Kinks and other Ska bands such as The Specials sang about working class conditions. **Films** by Mike Leigh "Secrets and Lies" or Ken Loach "Kes", or "This is England" by Shane Meadows, but also the Downton Abbey series about the servant/master relationship...

This **test** "The great British class calculator"

https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/2013/newsspec_5093/index.stm , was made by the BBC to determine which social class you belong to. People are asked not only how much they earn, but also what is their accent (a strong class marker in the UK!), which school they went to (private education is also a strong marker in the UK, as it is very expensive), what jobs the people they socialize with do, what sort of music they listen to, what sort of art they like...

So defining the "social class" to which you belong is not as straightforward as what you might think! If you're from the upper class, you may be deemed "posh" or called a "toff" (derogative), whereas the working class people can be called "proles" (for proletarian) or even, very derogatorily, "plebs".

Traditionally, there were three classes: working-class, middle-class (lower middle-class / upper middle-class) and upper class. But today, some sociologists tend to think there are 7 different classes: Elite, Established Middle Class, Technical Middle Class, New Affluent Workers, Traditional Working Class, Emergent Service Sector, Precariat.

<https://en.uhomes.com/blog/british-class-system> <https://www.vice.com/en/article/british-class-system-today-expert/>

A. True, false, or not given

- The British class system has completely disappeared.
- Accent can indicate someone's social class in the UK.
- All sociologists agree there are seven social classes today.

B. Match the words with definitions

deeply rooted	* insulting
defining feature	* people with insecure employment
globalized economy	* characteristic element
straightforward	* considered
deemed	* firmly established
derogatory	* simple and easy to understand
affluent	* economy connected internationally
precariat	* wealthy

C. Classify vocabulary into categories : Social class - Education - Identity

DOCUMENT 2 – UK's hierarchy of accents : "I thought mine made me sound stupid"

Grace Dean – BBC News – 20th January 2025

Before she started university, Beth Beddall had never really thought about her Black Country accent. But when she started attending seminars during her undergraduate course at Durham University in 2022, she began to feel self conscious, and avoided speaking up in front of the other students. Beth, from

Sandwell in the West Midlands, recalls a privately-educated student once telling her: "You don't sound like you're from a private school." When she replied telling him she went to a state school, he said: "You must be intimidated by us and how we speak."

Like Beth, many university students have high levels of accent-based anxiety, according to a 2022 report on accents and social mobility by sociolinguists for the Sutton Trust. More than a third of over 1,000 university students surveyed said they felt self-conscious about their accent, and 47% said they'd had their accent mocked, criticised or commented on in a social setting.

The UK has a 'hierarchy of accents'

Experiences like Beth's are down to a prejudice called accent bias, sociolinguists says. People "draw conclusions about everything" based on someone's accent, "and they do it really fast," says Dr Mary Robinson, a research associate in language variation and change at Newcastle University.

Participants in new research by the University of Cambridge University said they thought people with some regional accents were likely to behave a certain way: of the 10 accents studied, Glaswegians were perceived as most likely to stand up for someone who was being harassed, people with Scouse accents were seen as most likely to commit crimes.

In Britain, the biases people have about certain accents largely come down to class, sociolinguists say. Dr Amanda Cole, a lecturer at the University of Essex, says there is a "hierarchy of accents" in the UK, with accents from industrialised urban areas like Glasgow and Birmingham often seen as low status. "For instance, urban accents across the UK are associated with a lack of education," she says. "Which isn't true - there's not a causal link."

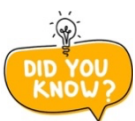
'My accent hampered my career'

Amy Kean, 42, from Thurrock, Essex, says that after she graduated, she was told by a recruitment consultant that she would never be allowed to work with clients because of her "common" accent. Throughout her career in advertising, her accent would "constantly be referenced".

Accent bias can also affect the impression candidates make in job interviews and how believable witnesses are seen as in the dock, says Dr Robinson.

Sociolinguists say there are some signs of improvement, pointing to the wider range of accents now heard on radio and TV news broadcasts. There are also a number of initiatives set up to raise awareness of accent bias by encouraging people to share their experiences - these include the Accentism Project, Speak For Yersel and Accent Bias Britain. Dr Grafmiller says research suggests that raising awareness of accent bias can "significantly reduce" the impact of bias in hiring and other contexts. "We may still have a long way to go, but these findings are encouraging," he says.

- 1. Why did Beth Beddall become reluctant to participate in university seminars, and what does her experience reveal about accent bias?**
- 2. According to the article, why do sociolinguists believe accent prejudice exists in the UK, and what evidence supports this view?**
- 3. What solutions does the article suggest for reducing accent bias, and do you think they are likely to be effective? Explain your opinion.**
- 4. How does the article show that accents are connected to social class in the UK? Give at least two examples from the text.**



Meritocracy is a system where people succeed because of their skills and hard work, not because of their social class, family or wealth. In a true **meritocracy**, everyone would have an equal chance to achieve success, and opportunities would depend on merit rather than privilege. **However, critics argue** that no society is completely meritocratic because people do not all start from the same position. Factors such as family income, quality of education, health, discrimination and social networks can give some individuals significant advantages over others.

GRAMMAR

a) **Relative clauses - Join the two sentences using a relative pronoun.: The BBC created a class calculator. It became very popular.** → The BBC created a cc which became very popular.

1. The British class system is a social structure.
It influences many people's lives.
2. Andy Burnham is the UK Prime Minister.
He comes from a working-class family.
3. Private schools are expensive.
Many wealthy families send their children there.

b) **Passive → active voice - Rewrite the sentences in the active voice.**

1. Social class is often determined by several factors.
2. Certain accents are associated with higher social status.

Essay questions - (250–300 words)

1. *"Social class is still one of the most important factors influencing people's lives." Discuss*
2. *Why might defining social class be more complex than expected?*
3. *Can education help people move between social classes?*
4. *Do you think social class affects opportunities more than individual effort?*

DOCUMENT 3

The class – ceiling and art - King's College London - Florence Wilson BA Social Sciences student, School of Education, Communication and Society – King's Social Journal 23 Oct 2025 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/the-class-ceiling-how-art-galleries-create-the-middle-class>

I love that we have free art galleries in the UK. In today's London, where the decline of third spaces and skyrocketing cost of living makes stepping out the door drain your bank account, the free art gallery seems to herald an inclusive democratisation of the arts.

I moved here from a small town near Brighton 3 months ago, where free access to world famous galleries was unsurprisingly out of the ordinary. Since then, I've spent many a Saturday walking along Southbank towards the Tate Modern, National Gallery, and Tate Britain's exhibitions.

However, the more I examine my fellow exhibition attendees, and encounter the monoculturally middle and upper-class status of my friends who have gone to art school, the more the idea of the gallery as an inclusive space crumbles. In 2020, The Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport's report on 'Taking Part' found those with typically middle and upper-class professions were almost twice as likely to have visited a gallery in the past year (Great Britain. Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2020). Similarly, in 2015, the Warwick Commission released a report pointing to a stark gap in access to the arts, finding that 87% of museum visitors are from higher socio-economic groups (Neelands et al., 2015). According to the BBC's Great British Class Survey, which surveyed 161,400 people, working classes are the least likely to engage in what they *questionably* refer to as 'highbrow cultural capital' - for example, art galleries (Savage et al., 2013).

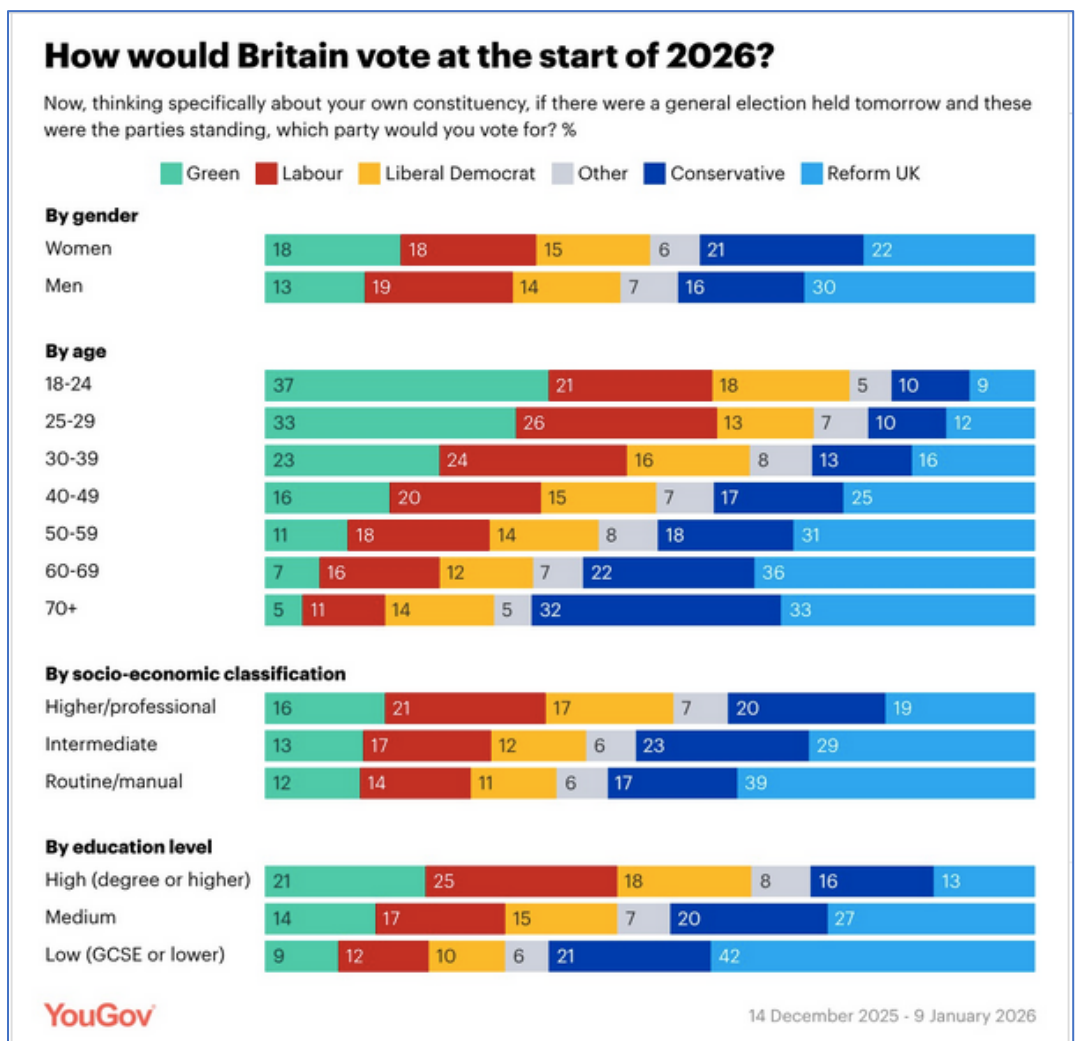
These numbers nod to the arts' deep-rooted wrangling with class inclusion. And it's not just a surface-level mismatch between public taste and the contents of galleries. The art industry perpetuates a vicious cycle of exclusivity: the economic precarity of artistic careers, the systemic pathologisation of working-class tastes in the media, and the chronic failure of the arts sector to face up to its exclusivity perpetuate a sense that these free institutions are made for, and indeed help to create, the middle and upper classes.

UK POLITICS in 2026

Quiz :

1. Which party was in power during Brexit?
2. Which party advocates for Scottish independence?
3. Which leader said, "*There is no such thing as society*"?
4. Which party is known for its environmental commitment?
5. Which party won the 2019 UK general election?
6. Which two political parties have traditionally dominated UK politics?
7. Which political party is generally considered to be centre-left?
8. Who is the leader of the British party Reform ?
9. Which political party is generally associated with lower taxes and free-market policies?
10. Which political party mainly represents Wales and supports greater Welsh autonomy or independence?
11. Which UK political party has made reducing immigration one of its main priorities?
12. Which political party has been in government since the 2024 general election?
13. Who is the current Prime Minister of the United Kingdom?
14. Which political party achieved its best-ever result in the 2024 general election by winning more than 70 seats in the House of Commons?
15. Which political party has recently gained significant support by challenging both Labour and the Conservatives on issues such as immigration and dissatisfaction with the political establishment?

DOCUMENT 4



DOCUMENT 5 - Watch this video and recap – Is UK politics broken ?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTrsRGaWnIU> - TLDR (Too Long, Didn't Read) news

DOCUMENT 6

How Britain's new political divide delivers voters to Reform and the Greens

John Curtice – *The Conversation* – June 2026

The outcome of last year's general election left an important question hanging in the air. Could the UK's traditional system of two-party politics continue to survive?

True, power did change hands in a familiar fashion. A majority Conservative government was replaced by a majority Labour one. However, the new government was elected with a lower share of the vote than that secured by any previous majority government. At the same time, the Conservatives won by far their lowest share of the vote ever.

Over the past 12 months, the foundations of Britain's two-party system have come to look even shakier. Nigel Farage's Reform UK party tops the polls. Only just over two in five of those who express a party preference say they would vote Labour or Conservative – a record low.

The traditional anchor of Conservative and Labour support – social class – has weakened. The ideological underpinning of the battle between them, the division between left and right, has been replaced by a division between social conservatives and social liberals. This second division draws people towards Reform and the Greens. At the same time, low levels of trust and confidence in how they are being governed is also encouraging voters to back these two challenger parties.

Historically, middle-class voters voted Conservative, while their working-class counterparts were more likely to support Labour. In decline ever since the advent of New Labour, that pattern disappeared entirely in 2019 in the wake of a Brexit debate that drew pro-Leave working-class voters towards the Conservatives and pro-Remain middle-class supporters towards Labour.

As in the EU referendum, what now shapes how people vote is their age and education, not the job they do. Younger voters and graduates are more likely to vote Labour, while older people and those with less in the way of educational qualifications are more inclined to vote Conservative.

The problem is that the two parties now face competition for these demographic groups from the Greens and Reform. Last year the Greens won as much as 21% of the vote among under-25s. Reform secured 25% among those who do not have an A-level or its equivalent, nearly matching the Tories.

Equally, Brexit was not a divide between "left" and "right" – that is, between those who think the government should do more to reduce inequality and those who are more concerned about growing the whole economic pie. It was a battle between social liberals and social conservatives – between those who value living in a diverse society and those who believe that too much diversity undermines social cohesion.

This, of course, is not the first time that Britain's two-party system has been under challenge. In the early 1980s the Liberal/SDP Alliance threatened to "break the mould of British politics". In spring 2019, at the height of the Brexit impasse, the Brexit Party and the Liberal Democrats appeared poised to upset the traditional order. This time, however, the challenge to the Conservative/Labour duopoly seems more profound.

<https://theconversation.com/how-britains-new-political-divide-delivers-voters-to-reform-and-the-greens-259613>

Question : read and draw a diagram of the political situation

DOCUMENT 7 – Class no longer main dividing line in UK politics, survey shows

Jessica Murray – *The Guardian* – June 2026

Age and education have displaced class as the main demographic dividing line in British politics, according to a leading study on trends in public views. The British Social Attitudes survey found that traditional class-based support for parties had diminished. “The underpinnings of the system have disappeared. So class no longer equals vote.” said Prof Sir John Curtice, from the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). “Trust in government, trust in politicians, is at an all-time low. This creates an environment more difficult for the traditional two parties, the Conservatives and Labour.”

The analysis found that in the 2024 general election, Labour did not reconnect with its traditional base of working-class voters, whose support dropped substantially in 2019. Among those in semi-routine and routine occupations, 30% voted Labour, compared with 42% of people in professional and managerial jobs. “London is now the most pro-Labour part of the country and actually the core Labour voter is a young, often first-generation, middle-class professional living in London,” Curtice said.

The survey found that age and education were more often determining factors in voting intention. It said only 6% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted Conservative, compared with 36% of those aged 65 and over. Across age groups, just 5% of graduates voted for Reform UK, it found, compared with 25% of those with qualifications less than an A-level.

The survey found record levels of support for electoral reform. For the first time, a majority of supporters of all parties favour electoral reform – 55% of Labour supporters, 52% of Conservatives and 56% of Liberal Democrats, as well as 90% of Greens and 78% of Reform voters. In total, a record 60% of survey respondents said there should be a change in the electoral system “to allow smaller political parties to get a fairer share of MPs”.

Alex Scholes, the research director at NatCen, said the “political landscape is poised for potential transformation”. He added: “The 2024 election highlighted significant challenges to Britain’s traditional two-party system and the result has yet to restore public trust and confidence.”

The survey found plummeting levels of satisfaction with public services. A record 59% of people are now dissatisfied with the NHS, compared with 25% in 2019. It also found that 53% are dissatisfied with the provision of social care, compared with 37% in 2019. A record 26% said they were struggling to live on their current income. The proportion who said they were living comfortably fell over the same period from 50% to a record low of 35%. Curtice said: “People who say they’re struggling on their income are less likely to be trusting politicians. Those who think the health service is not doing very well are less likely to be trusting politicians and governments.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/jun/25/class-age-education-dividing-lines-uk-politics-electoral-reform>

Exercise 1 – Past Simple or Present Perfect? - Choose the correct tense of the verb in brackets.

1. Britain's two-party system _____ (become) increasingly fragile over the past 12 months.
2. Labour _____ (win) a large parliamentary majority in last year's election.
3. The traditional link between class and voting _____ (disappear) in 2019.
4. Reform UK _____ (top) the opinion polls since the election.
5. Trust in government _____ (remain) low for several years.
6. Brexit _____ (change) the way many people voted.

Exercise 3 – Complete the sentences (draw – trust – divide – challenge)

1. Reform continues to _____ support from former Conservative voters.
2. The cultural _____ now shapes political behaviour.
3. Low levels of _____ benefit challenger parties.
4. Britain's two-party system now faces a serious _____.

Questions : *Why might younger people vote differently from older people?*

Should the British FPTP electoral system better represent smaller political parties?

Des réformes, mais pour plus tard. Dans son discours au congrès annuel du Parti travailliste, mardi 29 septembre, à Liverpool, le premier ministre britannique, Andy Burnham, a développé une vision pour la décennie à venir, un plan, plus qu'un programme de gouvernement pour les deux prochaines années de son mandat.

Des élections sont prévues en 2029, et le dirigeant travailliste, régulièrement interrompu par des salves d'applaudissements, a insisté sur cette échéance pour dessiner le programme que son parti pourrait alors proposer dans son manifeste de campagne. En dépit d'appels à des élections anticipées de la part de l'opposition, qui met en cause la légitimité d'Andy Burnham, arrivé à son poste après l'éviction brutale de son prédécesseur, Keir Starmer, le premier ministre a exclu un scrutin avant cette date.

Il a donc donné le cap qu'il entend tenir pour doter le pays d'un « *nouveau contrat social pour le XXI^e siècle* » : revenir sur les dommages infligés, selon lui, par les politiques « *de privatisation, de désindustrialisation, de dérégulation* » engagées à partir des années 1980 par le gouvernement conservateur de Margaret Thatcher (1925-2013), et les effets délétères du Brexit depuis dix ans. La sortie de l'Union européenne (UE) a fait « *plus de mal que de bien au pays* », a-t-il insisté.

Emailant son discours d'évocations émues de son père, mort en septembre, de sa famille issue de la « *classe ouvrière* » et de l'ascenseur social dont lui et ses frères ont pu bénéficier, il a plaidé pour un réengagement de l'Etat dans les secteurs essentiels comme l'eau, l'énergie, le logement, et a promis de s'atteler à une vaste réforme du système de protection sociale pour les plus âgés. « *Il faut reprendre le contrôle* », a-t-il déclaré, promettant la création d'une entité publique pour gérer le réseau électrique et une loi pour redonner aux pouvoirs publics la main sur les services d'eau, privatisés dans les années 1980 et dont le coût et les fréquents dysfonctionnements sont régulièrement critiqués.

Le premier ministre a aussi annoncé une réforme de l'éducation visant à promouvoir l'apprentissage, alors que 16,4 % des jeunes de 16 à 24 ans sont au chômage, le taux le plus élevé depuis 2014. La cheffe de l'opposition conservatrice, Kemi Badenoch, a vu dans l'ensemble de ces promesses un « *retour aux années 1970* ».

Sur le rapprochement avec l'Europe, Andy Burnham semble vouloir aller plus loin que Keir Starmer. Sans toutefois exprimer sa volonté de rejoindre les Vingt-Sept, le premier ministre a souhaité une redéfinition « *à long terme* » des relations avec ses voisins européens. Il a évoqué « *plusieurs options* », estimant que toute décision nécessitera un « *consensus* », sans plus de détails sur un retour au marché commun ou à l'union douanière. Ce flou a laissé sur leur faim les partisans d'un « *reset* » concret avec Bruxelles.

Enfin, pour compléter sa vision d'un « *nouveau contrat* » avec ses concitoyens, Andy Burnham s'est engagé à réformer la loi électorale, en instituant la représentation proportionnelle afin que « *chaque voix compte* ». Le système actuel a particulièrement profité au Labour, lors du scrutin de 2024, qui lui a assuré une large majorité avec seulement 33 % des voix au niveau national. La réforme entrerait en vigueur après 2029.

https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2026/09/30/au-royaume-uni-andy-burnham-lance-sa-campagne-pour-2029_6786020_3210.html

Translation challenge : translate in English the last two paragraphs of the article