

CONCOURS AGRÉGATION

John Mullen

BRITAIN **in the 1970s** **an Annotated Timeline**



STAR**e**BOOKS

John Mullen

Professeur de civilisation britannique

Université de Rouen

**Britain in the 1970s
- an Annotated Timeline**

The United Kingdom and the Crisis in the 1970s.

Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise 1970-1979.

Publié par STAReBOOKS le 22 décembre 2016.

Couverture : Marie Racz marieracz55@gmail.com

Photo de couverture : John Mullen (cassette des années 1970 avec l'écriture manuscrite : "The song remains the same", en français : "C'est toujours la même chanson") :

Mèl : hassan.berber1917@free.fr

Tel. : 06 60 62 19 35

© John Mullen (tous droits réservés)

Table des matières

Introduction (English)

Introduction (français)

1. Before the 1970s...

2. The nineteen seventies

1970

1971

1972

1973

1974

1975

1976

1977

1978

1979

Conclusion

A few books for further reading.

Introduction (English)

The immediate reason for writing this book was the new programme for the national competitive examination in France which serves to recruit senior high-school teachers (the *agrégation*): Britain and the Crisis 1970-1979.¹

There exists a good selection of books on this subject, and several new publications have been brought out in the few months since the new programme was announced: the present author was involved with two of these.

This book, an annotated chronology of the UK in the 1970s is intended as a complementary resource, a tool for revision or for reference.

For very good reasons, most of the existing publications are structured thematically (one chapter on trade unions, one chapter on Northern Ireland, etc.). Nevertheless, the disposition of events and declarations on a timeline is also tremendously important in building an understanding of the complex interactions of politics, economics and culture that make up the decade.

This is the *raison d'être* of this work.

You will also find a large number of Internet links indicating selected resources on the Internet: there are links to dozens of documentaries and other videos and websites to build up your comprehension of the decade.

Introduction (français)

La raison immédiate de la publication de ce livre est la nouvelle question de civilisation britannique pour l'agrégation d'anglais, publiée le 24 mars 2016 : *Le Royaume-Uni à l'épreuve de la crise 1970-1979*.²

Une abondante bibliographie existe, et plusieurs ouvrages ont été publiés ces derniers mois, y compris avec la collaboration du présent auteur. Ce nouvel ouvrage vise à fournir un outil de révision ou de référence.

L'essentiel des livres existants, pour de très bonnes raisons, traite la décennie par thème (un chapitre sur les syndicats, un autre sur l'Irlande du Nord, etc.). Cependant, la simultanéité et l'ordre des événements doivent également être pris en compte pour comprendre le cours de l'histoire.

D'où l'intérêt de cette chronologie commentée. Elle fournit également de très nombreux liens Internet vers des documentaires, autres vidéos ou sites web qui serviront pour récolter des renseignements complémentaires.

¹ Published on March 24th 2016.

² <http://www.devenirenseignant.gouv.fr/cid100820/les-programmes-des-concours-enseignants-second-degre-session-2017.html>

1. Before the 1970s...

People who lived in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s did not spend their lives preparing the arrival of the 1970s. On the contrary, the long post-war boom appeared to most people to be destined to continue indefinitely. Mass unemployment and widespread poverty in the working class were, it seemed, things of the past. Working-class children wore shoes, working-class families went away on holiday – perhaps not every year, but from time to time. Slum housing was slowly being cleared away. Having outside toilets at the end of the garden became ever rarer; people generally expected their children would live more comfortable lives than their own. Few believed that mass unemployment and large-scale homelessness would come back to Britain.

But if the previous decades cannot be seen only through the eyes of the nineteen seventies, the decade which is at the centre of this book, there are a number of trends, movements, values, changes and events from the decades before which it is best to know about in order to better measure the ruptures and the continuities represented by the 1970s.

1945

Allied victory in the Second World War.

It was estimated that, in addition to the deaths and injuries, the war had cost the UK 28% of its total national wealth. It had also transformed people's lives, in particular women's lives, and provoked a tremendous demand for radical social change, symbolized by the landslide electoral victory of the Labour Party, committed to irrevocably changing the situation regarding social justice and inequality in the country.

US nuclear bombs were dropped on the Japanese towns of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Liberation of the survivors in concentration camps and death camps across Europe.

The Bank of England was nationalized.

The Family Allowances Act provided for financial help for all parents with two or more children. The money was almost always paid to the mother.

Despite the horrific financial situation of the country, the demand for more social equality was so strong that major reforms were immediately implemented. From now on, parents would receive family allowances to help feed and clothe their children.

Publication of George Orwell's book, *Animal Farm*, a fierce parody and parable on the rise and fall of the Russian revolution. Since Russia was still enjoying widespread popularity due to her role in the defeat of Hitler, and since, on the left, the Soviet Union's economic progress was often considered to counterbalance questions of democratic rights, Orwell subtitled his novel "A fairy story".

1946

Nationalization of Civil aviation, and of the coal industry.

The overwhelming victory of the Labour Party in the 1945 election, and the vastly increased role of state planning during the war both contributed to a wave of nationalizations. Nevertheless, these nationalizations had different meanings for the left of the Labour Party and for the right. For the left, they were the first step towards getting rid of capitalism; for the right, a way of making capitalism more efficient. The type of nationalization chosen by the Attlee government – with generous

compensation for the previous owners and without any plans to give workers a larger role in the management of the industries, accorded more with the latter viewpoint.

The National Insurance Act instituted a comprehensive system of social security for all citizens, including provisions for sickness and unemployment benefits, widow's pensions, death grants (to pay for funeral provisions). This was a massive enlargement of previous schemes, which had been restricted to certain parts of the population.

1947

Nationalization of the railways, replacing the four regional private companies with one national service. By 1968, British Railways had replaced all the steam trains by diesel or electric powered vehicles.

Independence of India and of Pakistan.

This was the final outcome of a very long campaign by Indians to take control of their own destiny, in which Mahatma Gandhi and his mass campaigns of civil disobedience had played a tremendously important role. Many sections of politicized Indians might have been satisfied, at the beginning of the 20th century, with autonomy short of independence, as long as the majority could exercise real power. However, extremely violent British repression, symbolized by the massacre at Amritsar in 1919, made this option untenable.

Faced by considerable unrest, the independence of India, and the division between India and Pakistan in 1947, was carried out in more than something of a hurry. It also involved some rather surprising elements. On the day that India and Pakistan celebrated their newfound independence, the border between the two countries was still secret. It had been decided by the British administration, but was only announced some weeks later. The partition of India and Pakistan led to widespread violence, and it is estimated that hundreds of thousands were killed, and millions fled: Muslims to Pakistan, other groups out of Pakistan.

The US implemented the Truman Doctrine by which they demonstrated that their main foreign policy aim was the "containment" of the Soviet Union. This was launched in parallel with the Marshall plan, which saw billions of dollars in loans and in gifts come to European countries including Britain, to help with post-war reconstruction and reinforce loyalties.

1948

Nationalization of the gas supply industry, which provided gas made from coal to households and factories across the country.

Founding of the National Health Service (NHS), around the principle that health care must be "free at the point of use" (that is that no payment is made, not that any payment is refunded).

This principle, in almost all cases, remains in place today, since a reversal of the policy would be extremely unpopular politically. The British are very proud of their NHS, and it was no surprise to see it play a central role in the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games in London in 1912. The NHS was not founded without a great deal of conflict. The Conservative Party was opposed to it, and the main doctors' organization did much to obstruct. Concessions, such as that allowing specialist doctors to use state hospital beds also for their private, paying patients, were needed to calm the British Medical Association (BMA).

Ceylon became independent, as the Republic of Sri Lanka.

Publication of George Orwell's book, *1984*, a dystopian view of a bureaucratic dictatorship where people's minds are controlled by propaganda.

Berlin airlift: Cold War tensions led to the USSR closing the border of East Germany, and Western air forces supplying West Berlin with food and other goods in an airlift which lasted over a year and involved hundreds of flights every day.

1949

Founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (Nato).

Parliament Act reduced somewhat the power of the House of Lords. The Upper house was now only able to veto a law for a period of one year.

1950

General election. The Labour Party won a much-reduced majority.

The stone of Scone, a symbol of Scottish kingship, was stolen from Westminster Abbey in London, presumably by Scottish nationalist activists. symbol of Scottish kingship, from Westminster Abbey in London. It was later found in a Church of Scotland abbey. In 1996, partly in response to growing nationalist sentiment, the stone was moved permanently to Scotland.

Four thousand British troops were sent to fight in Korea. Th experience in Korea is one of the elements which were to persuade British governments never to send troops to help the US in Vietnam.

1951

Most of the Iron and Steel industry was privatized.

Aneurau Bevan and Harold Wilson resigned as ministers when there was a proposal to introduce some charges to the public for health care.

After six years of Labour government, the Conservatives, under Winston Churchill, were returned to office.

However, Churchill chose ministers who accepted that the moves towards a welfare state could not be reversed: a number of his colleagues were known to be "one nation Tories". The construction of public housing, for example, continued apace, with hundreds of thousands of new houses being built every year by local government with finance from taxation.

1952

First test of British nuclear weapons.

Hoping to maintain Britain's status as a major power, and faced with the reluctance of the USA to share nuclear technology and know-how, Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee had approved a secret program to develop Britain's own nuclear weapons. Not even all of the cabinet had been aware of the early stages of the project.

Tea and sugar rationing was ended.

Beginning of the "Mau Mau" revolt against British rule in Kenya. Repression of the anticolonial rebellion would be fierce (compensation was paid much later to prisoners who had been tortured), but independence would be won by Kenya.

1953

Hillary and Tenzing were the first to stand on the summit of Mount Everest. Although Hillary was from New Zealand, this was considered a tremendous feather in the cap of the British Empire.

The presentation of this event has changed over the years and is symbolic of changes in social attitudes. Initially, Hillary alone was celebrated as a hero, his "Sherpa assistant" not even named in many accounts. Hillary seemed to have been aware of the dangers of this colonial attitude and made sure that there was only a photograph of Tenzing on the summit, and not one of himself. Some years later, "Sherpa Tenzing" was mentioned in reports as an important figure, but it was later still that the man was given his own first names and surname (Tenzing Norgay) and (almost) equal status with Hillary.

Elizabeth II was crowned Queen of the United Kingdom and of the states of South Africa, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Ceylon and Pakistan.

The controversial hanging of Derek Bentley brought the question of the abolition of capital punishment to the forefront of public debate.

Bentley had been involved in a robbery where another man (who was too young to be executed) had killed a policeman. Bentley had been arrested and handcuffed before the killing took place, but, involved in the same crime, was found guilty of murder, too.

Francis Crick and his colleagues won a Nobel Prize for medicine for discovering the structure of deoxyribonucleic acid, DNA.

1954

Meat rationing was ended, nine years after the war. The long period required to abolish rationing is a reminder of the economic devastation caused by the war.

The Television Act led to the founding of Independent Television (ITV) and the end of the BBC monopoly. This was a priority of the Conservative government, believers, as Conservatives, in the general superiority of the private sector.

In a famous case, Lord Montagu and others were found guilty and imprisoned for having homosexual relations.³ Public reaction to the case showed a slow but steady increase in sympathy for homosexual rights.

1955

Winston Churchill, in bad health, retired and was replaced by Anthony Eden as Prime Minister.

The Conservative government won the general elections; for the first time, television played an important role in the election campaign.

Ruth Ellis became the last woman to be executed in the UK, for having murdered her lover. Subsequently her father and her son committed suicide.

³ The autobiographical film, *The Naked Civil Servant*, gives some insight into gay culture in Britain before the 1960s: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h82Hbi1-1hM>

The Greek Cypriot organization Eoka began an armed struggle against British rule in the crown colony of Cyprus.⁴

1956

The Suez Crisis⁵. On the proposal of Harold Macmillan, Britain and France secretly organized for Israel to invade Egypt (and then intervened themselves as “peacekeepers”).

One of the aims of this project was to overthrow the Egyptian president, Nasser, and thus guarantee control of the crucial waterway, the Suez Canal. The opposition of the United States to the completion of this adventure meant they put considerable pressure on Britain to withdraw. In the new post-war world, the tremendous economic power of the USA, whose assistance the UK needed, led Britain to respect the American opinion and withdraw. This fiasco accelerated the slow realization by the British elite that the UK was no longer a world superpower.

By now 8 million workers in Britain were receiving company pensions (which were considerably higher than the state minimum pension). In 1936, there had been only 1.8 million.

The Minister of Health rejected proposals for an anti-smoking campaign, claiming that harmful effects had not been proven.

1957

Formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which was to be very active and influential from 1957 to 1963, and would have a second wave of mass activity from 1979-1983.

The core of CND's founders was an alliance of Christians, communists and pacifists, as well as supporters from the Labour Left. It was notable in that from the beginning it had women, such as Pat Arrowsmith, among its leaders.

British colonies Malaysia and Ghana (which had previously been named the Gold Coast) became independent states.

The naming of colonies such as The Gold Coast, after the products which the West hoped to gain from the territories, has been said to be symbolic of the small importance that the people who lived there had in the imperialist worldview.

Harold Macmillan became Conservative Prime Minister.

He is best remembered for having declared "most of our people have never had it so good", underlining the importance of taking into account recent working class affluence when developing political programmes.

1958

Fighting between white racists and young black men in Notting Hill.

There had been racist violence in Notting Hill before, and gangs of teddy boys were known to attack black people, and to target in particular mixed-race couples. What was new in 1958 was the decision of young black men around London to come to Notting Hill to fight back. These fights made the front page of the national press, and

⁴ This 1974 documentary gives some of the history:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9QjnFqqt8BM>

⁵ This BBC documentary tells the story of Suez from a critical point of view:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETOUALw2EIs>

encouraged governments to both limit immigration and to make modest steps to reduce visible racism against immigrants who had already settled in the UK.

Life Peerages Act. This was a major reform of the House of Lords.

Before 1958, only hereditary Lords and bishops could sit in the House. The rise of the democratic spirit made the existence of an upper chamber based on the antidemocratic hereditary principle problematic; in addition, the House was 100% male. The Life Peerages Act made it possible for the monarch, on the advice of the Prime Minister, to create new Barons and Baronesses, who would sit in the House of Lords, but whose children would not inherit their title. Many years later, in 1999, the government of Tony Blair would go much further and radically reduce the power of hereditary Lords in the House, leaving them as a small minority.

Launch of two classic BBC programmes, *Grandstand*, the Saturday afternoon sports programme and *Blue Peter*, a news and chat show for children.

1959

Macmillan and the Conservative Party won the general elections against Hugh Gaitskell's Labour Party.

The UK agreed that Cyprus should become independent. The UK retained (and retains to this day) the two sovereign base areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia.

The first Mini is produced.

1960

Macmillan's "Wind of Change" speech.

While on a tour of Africa, Harold Macmillan gave a speech to the white South African Parliament. With extreme courtesy, he expressed his conviction that African nationalism and the desire for black majority rule was now a permanent part of the political landscape in Africa, and it would be beyond foolish to attempt to block or reverse this change. He also indicated that as long as the white South African elite resisted the establishment of a democratic system where each person had one vote, the British government would be unable to support them. This speech has been seen as a key moment in the realization by important sections of the British elite, that decolonization was inevitable and to resist it, counter-productive. Within the British Conservative Party, a number of people objected strongly to decolonization, and the political association known as The Monday Club was founded as a direct result of Macmillan's speech. The Monday Club later became well known for its support for the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile.

The end of compulsory military service in the UK.

Nigeria and Cyprus became independent.

The Archbishop of Canterbury made an official visit to the pope in Rome, for the first time ever.

The publication in a full, unexpurgated edition by Penguin of D H Lawrence's book, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, written several decades earlier, led to a spectacular trial for obscenity.

Famously, the prosecutor asked the jury whether this was a book "you would wish your wife or servants to read". Penguin won the case and swiftly sold three million copies of the book. This was considered a turning point towards a more relaxed attitude to public discussions about sex.

1961

The Republic of South Africa became independent.

The Beatles performed at the Cavern Club in Liverpool for the first time.

The United Kingdom became a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (the OECD), a grouping of richer countries in the world.

1962

The Commonwealth Immigrants Act made it much more difficult for commonwealth citizens to come to settle in the UK, limiting primary immigration⁶ to those who had been issued with employment vouchers, the number of which was strictly limited. The law was aimed particularly at West Indian immigrants. The leader of the opposition, Labour MP Hugh Gaitskell, denounced the law as “brutal anti-colour legislation”.

Jamaica gained its independence.

The new Coventry Cathedral was opened. The previous one had been mostly destroyed, along with a great part of the town, in Second World War bombing.

1963

Harold Wilson became leader of the Labour Party.⁷

Kenya won its independence.

Charles de Gaulle vetoed the entry of the UK into the European Economic Community (EEC). He was to veto a second attempt four years later.

Creation of a new television channel, BBC2, with the objective of carrying more educational and cultural material than the other two channels.

1964

The last execution, by hanging, took place in the UK.

Election of Harold Wilson’s Labour government, after thirteen years of Conservative rule.

1965

Plans were set in motion for the replacement of the divided Secondary modern/Grammar school model for secondary education by a system of comprehensive schools. The prevailing system had been established based on the 1944 Education Act. It involved pupils taking an examination at the age of eleven (the eleven plus) to decide whether they were “academically inclined” and should go to a grammar school, with, later, a chance of going on to higher education. Those who failed the exam went to a secondary modern school, which

⁶ Primary immigration refers to the arrival of the wage-earner of a family. Once the primary immigrant is settled in the new country, they will often send for their family to come and join them, which is known as secondary immigration.

⁷ This BBC documentary, broadcast when Harold Wilson died in 1994, gives a sympathetic overview of his political life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjTyFeAslpE>

would normally lead to few qualifications and a working-class job. The 1944 Act had also planned a third category, “technical schools”, which, however, rapidly disappeared.

Because education in the UK was very much managed on a regional basis, the changeover from the 1944 system to the comprehensive school system would take over a decade, each region able to choose how fast they wanted reform to happen.

The Race Relations Act made it a civil offence to refuse to serve someone (in a shop or business) or to overcharge him or her, because of his or her colour, ethnic or national origin. Although modest in scope, this was the first antiracist law passed in Britain, and formed the basis for later reforms.

The Trades Disputes Act gave greater legal protection to trade unions when strikes were called.

Edward Heath was elected leader of the Conservative Party.⁸

Edward Heath was, in many ways, an unusual Conservative leader. He came from the middle classes, not from higher up in society, and this was not what the Conservative Party was used to. Many felt he was chosen to lead the Conservative Party partly because of this. Harold Wilson had the image of an avuncular working class man, smoking a pipe and wearing a cheap raincoat, and had much mocked the previous tory leader, the aristocratic Alec Douglas-Home. Heath’s less elitist image was thought to help tory electoral chances, and this fact had helped Heath’s election to the party leadership in 1965.

1966

Re-election of Harold Wilson as Prime Minister.

A strike by the National Union of Seaman (NUS) asked for more money than the government pay policy had planned, and led to Wilson declaring a state of emergency and publicly denouncing a “tightly knit group of politically motivated men” he claimed were behind the strike. He was understood to have been criticizing alleged communist influence.

Introduction of a six-month wage and price freeze by the government.

Because of friendly overtures by the British government towards the regime in Rhodesia, Zambia threatened to leave the Commonwealth.

1967

The Welsh Language Act was passed. This gave some rights to Welsh speakers to use Welsh in court proceedings in Wales. Since the middle of the 16th century, only English had been allowed. A new Welsh Language Act under John Major would take this symbolic move further in 1993.

The Abortion Act made abortion legal up to 24 weeks’ gestation.

The passage of this Act was very much motivated by the large toll of injury and death caused by clandestine illegal abortions among working class women. The Act did not apply in Northern Ireland, where strong religious convictions would no doubt have led to widespread opposition. In 2016, abortion is still illegal in Northern Ireland.

⁸ Edward Heath was generally known as “Ted Heath”. An unsympathetic commentator pointed out that “Ted Heath” is an anagram of “the death”!

The Sexual Offences Act decriminalized homosexual acts between men in private, provided they were over 21 years of age (female homosexuality had never been illegal).

This reform was a symbol of the gradual acceptance that the state should not legislate on people's personal and moral precepts or practices. Note that this act applied only to England and Wales, and it did not apply to the internal regulations of the armed forces. Legislation with similar effect was passed for Scotland in 1980 and for Northern Ireland in 1982.⁹

It is worth remembering that these two laws, on homosexuality and abortion, did not figure in the Labour manifestos of 1964 and 1966, and were not mentioned either as achievements in the 1970 Labour manifesto which defended the government's record. It was no doubt considered that among a significant minority (perhaps particularly working-class Catholics of Irish heritage, who voted solidly Labour), these issues could lose more votes than they could gain.

The iron and steel industry was again nationalized.

Devaluation of the pound.

The first colour televisions went on sale in Britain.

Founding of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.

In this period, the Northern Irish election system involved such aspects as "company votes" where a person who owned a business was allowed more than one vote. Protestants owned the vast majority of businesses. The Civil Rights Association, run by Catholics, hoped to effect change concerning this and other injustices, in particular in housing and in employment.

1968

Enoch Powell gave his infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech, in which he claimed that black people typically mistreated white people in Britain and that the future of a mixed-race society must necessarily be horrific and bloody. As a result of his speech, he lost his job in the Conservative shadow cabinet, but received a high level of popular support. Dockers and immigration officials even went on strike in his support.

The Church of Scotland decided that women may be ordained ministers.

1969

Capital punishment for murder was formally abolished.

Rioting in Northern Ireland. British Troops were sent to Northern Ireland.

Initially welcomed by Catholics under attack from sectarians, they soon came to be seen as allies of the Protestant dominated provincial authorities against the Catholic population.

The Open University was launched, to allow in particular older people who had not had the chance to go to university to gain a university degree through a combination of studying at home and of "summer schools".

First discovery of oil under the North Sea, in UK waters off Aberdeen.

This oil would have a huge effect on the UK economy, although the governments to benefit most from it were those of the 1980s, not those of the 1970s

⁹ This online exhibition gives useful background to the reform:
<http://www.lagna.org.uk/exhibitions/1967-and-all-that>

The Divorce Reform Act was passed. Under the new legislation, the key issue was no longer who had been at fault, but whether one could say that there had been an “irretrievable breakdown” in the marriage.

The age of Majority was reduced to 18, from 21.

The end of official censorship of the theatre by the Lord Chamberlain¹⁰ was announced. The Lord Chamberlain was tasked with banning performances if “it is fitting for the preservation of good manners, decorum or of the public peace so to do”. The last theatrical production censored was the stage musical *Hair*.

The government plans represented in the White Paper “In Place of Strife” had to be abandoned in the face of bitter opposition by trade unionists.

¹⁰ A senior member of the royal household.

2. The nineteen seventies

1970

Some figures

In 1970, life expectancy for UK men was 68.7 years, and for women it was 75 years. By 2010, these figures had risen to 77.8 years for men and 81.9 years for women. More healthy food, fewer cigarettes, better hygiene, better safety regulation and improvements in medicine have all played their part in this improvement.

Infant mortality was falling, and would continue to do so throughout the decade, due to better housing, nutrition and medical care. In 1970, infant mortality for England and Wales stood at 17.7 deaths for every thousand babies born alive. In 1980, the figure was 11.9 and in 1990 it was 7.5. Today it is 4.

In 1970, it was estimated that there were, in the UK, two million houses being lived in which were, in fact, unfit for human habitation, and four and a half million more which were in urgent need of repair. The election campaign, which led up to the vote in June, included much discussion on the necessity of continuing slum clearance.

Of marriages contracted in 1970, 22% had ended in divorce before the 15th wedding anniversary. Of marriages contracted in 1995, 33% had ended in divorce by the 15th anniversary.

These statistics no doubt indicate that divorce became more acceptable (and that women had a little more economic independence). They are, however, not easy to interpret, since the number of couples cohabiting without being married had risen considerably, so marriage did not have exactly the same meaning in 1995 as in 1970.

In 1970, the median earnings of adult women working full time were 54% of those of men. In 1983 they were 66%.

This was due to a number of factors. Sometimes women were paid less for the same job, often men worked more overtime while women did unpaid housework, but the most important factor was that many jobs such as typists, nurses or shop assistants were in their vast majority occupied by women, and were badly paid.

In 1970, 50% of dwellings in the UK were owner-occupied. The availability of mortgages and the rise in the standard of living of working class people had brought this figure up from only 26% in 1945. By 1983, 60% of dwellings were owner-occupied.

In 1970, almost half of all households in the UK had a car; in 2010, 85% would.

In 1970, 65% of households owned a washing machine. By 1980, 79% would and, by 2014, 97%.¹¹

In 1970, 35% of households had a telephone. By 1980, 72% would.

In 1970, 30% of households had central heating. By 1980, 59% would and, by 2014, 96%.

¹¹ This fascinating BBC documentary from 2009 took a 21st century family and got them to live for ten days in the 1970s: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sk2uXN9yaS4>

In 1970, there were 11.1 million trade unionists in the UK.¹²

The UK is and was very much an industrial country. Nevertheless, in 1970, there were a million hectares growing wheat, two and a half million hectares growing barley, and 50,000 hectares of orchards. The area of orchards was already declining rapidly and amounts to less than half that today. There were also fifteen million cows (ten million today), twenty-six million sheep and nine million pigs (only five million today). Then there were a hundred and forty million chickens. There were almost 400 000 agricultural workers, far fewer than in other European countries; there are only 200 000 in the UK today.

January 1970

From the first of this month, one became an adult at the age of eighteen, and no longer at twenty one, for most legal purposes, although the age of consent for homosexual relationships stayed at twenty one.

Annie Nightingale became the first ever female presenter on the popular music radio station, BBC Radio One, beginning with a Sunday evening slot. The gradual opening up for women of this kind of influential role made an important difference to how young women and men viewed gender roles.

The Ulster Volunteer Force began a policy of bombing Catholic-owned businesses in Protestant areas of Belfast.

February 1970

The "Garden House Riot". A demonstration against the Greek dictatorship was organized at the Garden House Hotel in Cambridge, where a banquet was being held. Eight students were subsequently imprisoned for their part in the riot.

The event serves as a reminder that, if Britain had not had a "1968" of the importance of that in France (ten million strikers) or that in Czechoslovakia, student movements had been an important part of the late sixties. The Vietnam Solidarity Campaign, in particular, had been influential, and revolutionary left groups were no longer small groups of hundred, but numbered several thousands.

Black Sabbath's first album, considered to be the first major heavy metal album, was released.

The first ever UK national women's liberation conference was held in Ruskin College Oxford, a college which had been established at the end of the 19th century by groups close to the trade union movement. The conference defined four radical demands: equal pay, equal educational and job opportunities, free contraception and abortion on demand, and free 24-hour nurseries.

Women mostly attended the conference, but there was a minority of men. The decision was made that the crèche would be staffed by the men, facilitating the implication of women in the debates and reversing symbolically traditional divisions of labour. Later in the decade, women's liberation events would often be deliberately women-only, for a number of reasons including the masculine habit of taking up more than their share of speaking time (although sometimes men staffed the crèche, indeed one Liverpool men's network specialized in providing childcare at women's liberation events).

¹² You can find here a short history of the UK trade union movement from 1970-1974:
<http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork/timeline/1970-1974.php>

March 1970

Ian Smith declared Rhodesia a republic, four years after its unilateral declaration of independence, thus cutting all its ties with Britain. The Labour government refused to recognise the new state, because of its racist constitution.

The British elite had, after the Suez fiasco, been obliged to accept that Britain was going to be less and less of a world power. At Suez a (rather dishonest) attempt to overthrow Nasser in Egypt had been thwarted by the United States who had refused to support Britain, and this at a time that American loans seemed essential to the British economy. Part of this realization was the acceptance that the many dozens of British colonies across the world were going to get their independence. Macmillan's famous "Wind of Change" speech had reflected this new attitude. In Rhodesia and South Africa, however, extremely powerful white minorities were determined that independence would not mean one-person-one-vote democracy.

The white Rhodesian government did not want to negotiate with Britain independence with democracy. For a number of years, black forces wanting to overthrow the Smith regime waged a fierce guerrilla war. They were eventually successful. If the British Labour government refused in 1970 to recognize the new Republic, this was partly because it wanted to keep good relations with other black African nations which were now independent and which were furious about the maintenance of political systems based on white superiority in Rhodesia and South Africa.

April 1970

Dr Ian Paisley became an elected representative in the Parliament of Northern Ireland after a by-election.

Ian Paisley had been, for many years, a key leader of Ulster unionist opinion, and a representative of those Protestants who felt threatened by the possibility of a reunited Ireland, and those who simply wanted to defend Protestant privilege and domination in Northern Ireland. His ideology was based on a strong belief in the superiority of Protestant religion, though very much later he would cooperate in a compromise government in Northern Ireland.

In 1951, he had founded his own church: the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster and written anti popery pamphlets on theology. He became well known in 1956 when a 15-year-old Catholic girl who wanted to convert to Protestantism was smuggled out of the country by members of his church. Paisley insisted she should not be returned to her family. By the 1990s his church had 12 000 members.

The B Specials (the Ulster Special Constabulary, or USC) were officially disbanded.

The Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) had replaced the USC on 1 April 1970. The B Specials were a part-time, unpaid adjunct to the police force and had a reputation of systematic discrimination against the Catholic population. Their disbandment was ordered after some had shot Catholics without justification in the 1969 conflicts. An official inquiry into the B Specials noted that, although "recruitment is open to both Protestant and Roman Catholic: in practice, we are in no doubt that it is almost if not wholly impossible for a Roman Catholic recruit to be accepted."

May 1970

With the general election approaching, Labour Party activists were distributing the Labour Party manifesto, published under the title *Now Britain's Strong - Let's Make it Great to Live in*.¹³

The manifesto naturally defended the government's record since 1964. Perhaps the most important aspect of its politics is shown in the fact that the word "planning" occurs twenty times in the manifesto, and this approach is contrasted with that of the Conservatives, who are accused of wanting a "free for all" and of only desiring to defend the interests of a minority of richer people ("They have always defended the power and privileges of the few").

¹³ The full manifesto can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab70.htm>

Declaring that "We reject the Tory view that misfortune is a private, not a social, concern" the manifesto gave details of planned increases in social benefits for disabled people, sick people and in particular Old Age Pensioners.

On Education, the manifesto expressed pride in the establishment of the Open University, which had far more students enrolled than an average university, and in the introduction of comprehensive schooling. It announced the intention of Labour to oblige those Conservative local authorities that were refusing comprehensive schools to follow the rest of the country and institute them.¹⁴

Interestingly, though the desire to combat race and sex discrimination is underlined, the manifesto made no mention of some of the most important Labour government reforms of the 1960s: the legalization of abortion and of homosexuality. No doubt it was felt that significant minorities were still hostile to these reforms, so they were best not mentioned (indeed the ten per cent of the population who were Catholics, many of them working class Labour voters with Irish roots, were generally uneasy about the legalization of abortion).

On foreign policy, Labour expressed its satisfaction in having reduced Britain's military presence East of Suez, and repeated its determination to work with the Commonwealth against the white supremacist regimes in Rhodesia and South Africa, which it presents as friends of the Conservative opposition.

Opposition activists were meanwhile distributing the Conservative Party manifesto, published under the title *A Better Tomorrow*.¹⁵

In the introduction, Edward Heath criticized the Labour government for what he termed "government by gimmick". The manifesto attacked "government interference" (referring to what the Labour Party might call "planning"). It was declared that a Conservative government would abolish wage and price control by the government, and allow the market to regulate such questions. Promises were made to cut income tax and to "concentrate government help where it was most needed", a standard Conservative expression which implied opposition to some forms of universal benefit. It was said that the government would encourage the selling off of council houses to their tenants¹⁶, would recruit civil service leaders from the private sector, would encourage "all forms of saving"; they felt a larger portion of retirement pensions should come from personal savings and they looked forward to a "capital owning democracy" where millions of ordinary people would invest in shares, not just a small elite.

The manifesto did not attack unions as such, but declared its desire to "strengthen unions" by clamping down on unofficial strikes, and by imposing secret ballots and obligatory delays on strikes if the "national interest" was involved.

If the Conservatives were elected, the manifesto insisted, there would be no more "large-scale immigration" and money would be available to help immigrants who choose to return to the countries they had come from. On education, the manifesto speaks positively of the (very popular) turn to comprehensive secondary schooling, but insists that those regional authorities who preferred to retain selective exams at the age of eleven (the "eleven plus") should not be obliged by law to abandon it.

The company Rolls Royce, famous producer of luxury cars and aircraft engines, and an important brand for the image of UK industry around the world, negotiated a twenty million-pound loan from the government.

The question of how much support government should give to ailing businesses, and how much they should leave such questions to the market, was to be a key debate throughout the 1970s.

A cricket tour by the all-white South African team was cancelled because a number of African and Asian countries had threatened to boycott the Commonwealth Games if the

¹⁴ See above, 1965.

¹⁵ The full manifesto can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con70.htm>

¹⁶ The question of selling council houses at cut prices to the tenants was to remain a fierce public debate for decades. On one side of the debate were those, mostly Conservative, who believed that such a sale meant to respect the right of the tenants, who were of modest means, to become owner occupiers just as wealthier people could. On the other were those who saw the selling of council houses a way of reducing the accommodation available for poorer families who could not afford any other type of dwelling.

cricket tour went ahead. This fact, added to the disruption campaign planned by anti-apartheid activists, persuaded the government to request that the cricket authorities cancel the tour. They reluctantly agreed. Such boycott campaigns led to many white South African cricket players leaving the country, and were an important part of the campaign against apartheid.

South African apartheid in the 1970s seemed as if it was going to last a long time. The anti-apartheid movement in Britain was one of a series of movements around the world to call for the boycotting of South African products and sports teams in order to weaken the regime. This movement was supported by a number of governments around the world. In the seventies in the UK, apart from customer boycotts, there were also attempts to deal with the fact that a huge amount of British money was invested in South Africa by banks (in particular Barclays Bank) and other institutions. Students around the country went on rent strike because their universities were either investing in South Africa or banking with Barclays.

A new law abolished court actions for breach of promise (previously women could sue men who had promised to marry them and then gone back on their word) and also abolished the right of a husband to claim damages from his wife's lover in case of adultery. Such laws were not often used in the 1950s or 1960s, but their existence on the statute book symbolized the maintaining of rigid traditionalism in the state's view of marriage.

This reform is part of a long process in which the state reduces very much its intervention in people's personal lives. One of the strongest arguments for the legalization of homosexual relations in 1967 was that whether or not people thought such relations were moral or not was irrelevant, since they were a question of individual decision, not national provision. The legalization of abortion the same year had a similar meaning.

In the USA, at Kent State University, state soldiers killed four students and seriously injured nine others when they fired 67 bullets at a demonstration against the Vietnam War. In the days following, dozens of universities were closed as four million people protested. This was an important stage in finally turning majority opinion against the war.

June 1970

Four people were killed when Cleddau Bridge, in Pembrokeshire, collapsed during building. This led to the introduction of new standards for box girder bridges.

Tonga gained its independence from the UK, but remained a member of the Commonwealth, making it one of the very few Commonwealth states with a monarch who was not the UK monarch.

The vast majority of British colonies had gained their independence between 1947 and 1970, by means of transitions that were sometimes violent but more frequently peaceful. There were still some transitions left in the seventies. Once the seventies were over, there were only a few enclaves left around the world, such as the Falklands Islands, off Argentina.

As the election campaign continued, opinion polls were showing Labour several points ahead, a week before polling day. If Labour were to win the election, Edward Heath would no doubt have to resign as Tory leader.

This general election was the first in which 18-year-olds were allowed to vote. 72% of registered voters turned out. In a surprise result, Edward Heath's Conservative Party came to power with a majority of 30 seats.

Heath named his new cabinet. Alec Douglas-Home became Foreign Secretary, Iain Macleod Chancellor and Reginald Maudling Home Secretary. Enoch Powell was not given a post in cabinet. Heath intended his government to be very different, both in policy and in style, from Wilson's.

The Welsh nationalist party, Plaid Cymru, obtained 11.5% of the vote in Wales, but lost its only Member of Parliament.

Laurence Olivier, the actor, was made a Lord in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. He was the first actor to be made a peer.

The distribution of official honours (knighthoods, OBEs and MBEs for example) had long been reserved to specific sections of the elite, and the theatre and cinema were usually not considered quite respectable enough. From the 1970s, a certain liberalization was in process, and eventually there would even be knighthoods for pop singers.

Women were for the first time allowed to become full ministers in the Methodist Church.

The very slow process of making it possible for women to participate in all aspects of public life began in the 19th century and still continues today.¹⁷ The Church of England allowed women priests after 1994 in the UK and women bishops from 2014.

In Derry/Londonderry,¹⁸ rioters protested at the arrest of Mid-Ulster MP Bernadette Devlin, a civil rights activist.

July 1970

In fighting between British troops and IRA soldiers in Belfast, five civilians were killed and ten British soldiers injured. In the twelve months that followed, the IRA killed ten British soldiers in Belfast.

Over the whole period euphemistically referred to as "the Troubles", 1,250 people would be killed from the Protestant community, 1,525 from the Catholic community, and 691 people from outside Northern Ireland.

Roy Jenkins was elected deputy leader of the Labour Party.

Roy Jenkins was an important leader of the right wing of the Labour Party. Throughout the seventies, he felt that concentration by Labour on values such as nationalization of industries and close cooperation with trade unions was harming the party's electoral chances, and that there was a need to promote a more market-oriented policy. In the eighties, when official Labour Party policy moved Left, he left the Labour Party along with Shirley Williams and several others to form a small breakaway party, the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which lasted for a few years before merging with the Liberal Party.

The election of leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party has been organized in different ways over the last few decades. There has been considerable debate about the question: Who should decide on the leader? Should it be Members of Parliament, who claim legitimacy from their electoral success? Should it be trade union members or leaders, who provide most of the money which allows the Labour Party to exist and campaign, and in whose name the Labour Party was initially established at the beginning of the 20th century? Or should it be local party branches, whose members do the actual campaigning, and especially canvassing at election time, and who are involved in the development of party policy through the debates at national conference? Competing conceptions of democracy have led to changes over the years. In the 1970s, MPs alone decided; today, members and supporters of the Labour Party and of affiliated trade unions choose the leader. The present leader in 2016, Jeremy Corbyn, was chosen by members and by trade unionists, but very much contested by the majority of Labour Members of Parliament.

¹⁷ On the website of the British Library one can find a useful timeline of events connected with the position of women in society and movements attempting to improve that position:

<http://www.bl.uk/sisterhood/timeline>

¹⁸ For centuries, the town was known as Londonderry to the British and the unionists, and Derry to Irish nationalists. Many official bodies such as bus companies now use the double name "Derry/Londonderry" and popular humorous slang calls it "slash city".

Dockers voted to strike, and the government announced a state of emergency. The strike was settled two weeks later.

The British Commonwealth Games were held in Edinburgh; 42 nations took part. This event, held every four years, was known from 1930 to 1950 as the British Empire Games. From 1954 to 1966 it went under the name of British Empire and Commonwealth Games. In 1970 it was the British Commonwealth Games, and the word "British" was to be dropped four years later.

August 1970

Fighting between police and young black men during the Notting Hill Carnival.

The Notting Hill Carnival was first established after the 1958 violence. It gradually became an important annual rendez-vous to celebrate Caribbean carnival music, dance and culture. Occupying the streets colourfully and noisily gave out a tremendous message of "we are at home here" coming from a minority who were often mistreated and discriminated against. In the 1970s, authorities, and in particular the police, were often hostile to the carnival and sometimes attacked it with considerable violence. Forty years later, public bodies generally support the carnival, and carnival artists are often invited into school to present their ideas, music and artwork.

A new political party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), was established in Northern Ireland. It was an attempt to build a party that did not have the nationalist/loyalist divide at the centre of its political ideology.

Jimi Hendrix, The Who, Joan Baez, Jethro Tull, the Moody Blues and The Doors topped the bill at the third Isle of Wight Festival. More than half a million people attended.

September 1970

The first Glastonbury Festival was organized.

Jesus Christ Superstar, by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, was released as an album.

October 1970

British Petroleum discovered an important oilfield in the North Sea.

North Sea oil was to prove a very important economic and political fact of the 1970s. From an economic point of view, it promised to raise a huge amount of money for the government. The exploitation of the oil required specialist technical knowledge, and the multinational oil corporations were given (free!) sections of the North Sea for exploration and exploitation rights. Initially, the preparation of the oilfields meant huge investment, and British trade figures actually suffered for the period before 1978.

Tax policy was extremely favourable to the oil companies in the early years, but slowly the revenue became important. Most of the financial benefit for governments came in the 1980s: by the mid-1980s ten per cent of government revenue came from North Sea oil – a huge amount of money.

Politically North Sea oil would have two major impacts. Firstly, it would slowly undermine the dependence of the country's economy on coal, and therefore very much reduce the power of mining unions. The miners had not had a national strike since 1926, but would have two very powerful strikes in 1972 and 1974. Secondly, the fact that the oil was off the coast of Scotland gave a much-needed boost to the Scottish National Party (SNP), with its projects for full independence and its demands for autonomy.

Pope Paul VI canonized the "forty Catholic martyrs of England and Wales", many of whom had been executed under the reign of Elizabeth 1st in the 16th century.

The Catholic population of the UK stood at around ten per cent and had done for quite a long time. It was far higher in Northern Ireland, and higher in Scotland than in England and Wales. Most Catholics went to separate, Catholic schools, which were not private, in the sense that there were no fees charged for pupils, since the money came from government, but the Catholic dioceses managed the establishments. The diocese had considerable control over what was taught in the schools, but there was in any case no national curriculum in British schools at this time.

November 1970

The Sun newspaper published for the first time a photo of a topless woman on page three of the newspaper, and subsequently did so every day for many years. This reflected on the one hand a less traditionally puritan attitude to nudity, but this practice was also seen as reducing women to the status of sexual objects.

The British were in the 1970s and remain today one of the nations who read the most newspapers. Some of the popular tabloid newspapers were and are notorious for their scandal mongering, and sometimes dishonest reporting. In the 1970s, among the tabloid newspapers, The Sun was on the rise. The Daily Mirror, the only left leaning paper among the tabloids, sold well, while the conservative Daily Mail and Daily Express occupied a space between the tabloids and the "broadsheets". The broadsheets, so called because of their larger page size, carried longer articles, more of them on serious subjects, and made a more careful distinction between articles and editorials. The Times was and is the establishment newspaper of reference. In the 1970s as today, it was flanked on the right by the Daily Telegraph and on the left by The Guardian.

The Gay Liberation Front organized a demonstration in London for the first time.

The move from 1960, when it was illegal for men to have sexual relations with other men, to 2015, when same sex marriages were authorized by a Conservative government, so much were they considered acceptable, was a very long (and altogether unexpected) one. The 1967 Act was based on a private member's bill supported by the government. It had not been mentioned in the Labour Party manifesto for the elections of 1964 and 1966, no doubt because it was expected to be a vote loser. The legalization of homosexual relations for men over 21 did not imply a general acceptance of homosexuality or homosexuals by the elite or by the general public. If one looks at the photos of early gay rights marches in Britain, one notes the absence of almost all political parties or trade unions which today would be present at almost any protest against homophobia. Left organizations were slowly won to taking this cause seriously during the 1970s and 1980s.

Attitudes improved slowly during the seventies, partly due to the fact that fewer gays felt obliged to be absolutely secretive about their relationships. Nevertheless, homophobia was extremely common. When in 1978 the Tom Robinson Band released the song "Sing if you're Glad to be Gay" they were expecting a very hostile reaction indeed, and were surprised to find many crowds of young people would sing along in solidarity. The newspaper Gay News, founded in 1972, reflected for a long time the struggles of this minority.

The trial of the "Mangrove nine" took place¹⁹. Nine black activists were on trial for "inciting to riot" connected with a demonstration against police harassment of black patrons of the Mangrove restaurant. All nine were acquitted of the charge of inciting to riot, and the trial became a symbol of the campaign against police racism.

Left-winger Salvador Allende was elected president of Chile. For three years, his government was very popular among Left wing people across the world, since it seemed to offer hope for radical social change through parliament, without revolutionary conflict.

¹⁹ The National Archives have a page on this event: <http://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/rights-resistance-racism-story-mangrove-nine/>

December 1970

The Beatles split up after 10 years playing together.

Apart from selling millions of records, the Beatles had been responsible, along with Bob Dylan, for establishing the idea that pop music could be taken seriously as an artistic endeavour. They were continually trying to introduce new sounds and new themes in their albums, and this way of looking at themselves (rather than simply as entertainers) became a template for the next generation of rockers. In particular, those groups loosely held together by the label "Progressive Rock" (Yes, Jethro Tull, Genesis, Pink Floyd), with their showcased virtuosity, long tracks and concept albums, followed this lead wholeheartedly.

The Christmas number one record in the UK singles chart was "Hear You Knocking" by Welsh rocker from the Pub rock style, Dave Edmunds.

The record charts were avidly followed by millions of young people in particular, and the Christmas number one was a most coveted position for artistes.²⁰

Undated events of 1970

Union membership now accounted for nearly 50% of workers.

There were a very large number of strikes between 1968 and 1974. Many of them were small, local, unofficial and successful. Although strikes are expensive for workers, they are far less risky for the individual in a situation where unemployment is very low and another job can easily be found if one is sacked. Successful industrial action encouraged workers to join trade unions.

There were 7,499 people killed in UK road accidents in 1970. In 1980, the number was 5,953, and in 2014, it had dropped to 1,775. The fitting of front seat belts was compulsory in all new cars sold in the UK from 1972, but it did not become compulsory to wear them until 1983.

First published in 1970

Brazilian thinker Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was an influential work about education that is considered as the founding text of the critical pedagogy current. Freire insisted on the necessity for education to start from the point of view of the learners and to take into account their oppression. "No pedagogy which is truly liberating", he wrote "can remain distant from the oppressed by treating them as unfortunates and by presenting for their emulation models from among the oppressors. The oppressed must be their own example in the struggle for their redemption". Freire's work inspired reformers across the world, and also radical movements such as the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

Germaine Greer's book *The Female Eunuch* became an international best seller. In this work, Greer insists that the "ideal Western family" has a very negative effect on the vitality of women in it. "Like beasts, for example, who are castrated in farming in order to serve their master's ulterior motives – to be fattened and made docile – women have been cut off from their capacity for action." she said in a newspaper interview. "It is a process which sacrifices vigour for delicacy and succulence, and one that's got to be changed", she continued.

²⁰ All the songs quoted in this chronology are easy to find on YouTube.

The complete *New English Bible* was published (the *New Testament* having been published in 1961). This new translation of the Bible is known as an attempt to produce a thought-for-thought rather than a word-for-word translation. Only twenty years later, however, the *Revised English Bible* generally replaced it.

The Ecologist magazine was founded. It was one of the first regular publications of the environmental movement. Early issues had a small circulation, mostly of scientists, and dealt with questions such as the alleged need for population control in Britain, or the dangers of pesticides. The tone tended to be more catastrophist than later environmental magazines.

The English electric folk group, Mr Fox, released their first album, mostly made up of their own compositions on traditional themes.²¹

²¹ Their best-known track, from their 1971 album, *The Gipsy*, can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGXR0NzN3Hw>

1971

Some figures

In 1971, 47% of babies were born from mothers under the age of 25. In 2008, the number was 25%.

Housing conditions had been improving gradually for twenty years, but 11.4% of people still had no indoor toilet. In 2011, over 99.7% had an indoor toilet.

In 1971, there were 625,000 young people in Higher Education. By 2007, there would be 2.5 million. Modern industry and the modern service sector requires a far more educated workforce, able to handle high technology and adapt to its rapid changes, and this is what is behind this massive increase in numbers of people going to university.

In 1971, British people took, in total 6.7 million holiday trips abroad (this would involve somewhat fewer than 6.7 million people, since a minority would have taken two or more such trips). In 2008, there were 45.5 million such trips. In the 1970s, going on holiday to Spain might be, in working class circles, something to be proud of, a sign of success.

January 1971

The Divorce Reform Act 1969 became law. From now on couples might divorce if they had been separated for two years (five if one of them did not want a divorce). A divorce could also be granted without either partner needing to prove a "fault". The number of divorces in Britain during 1971 exceeded 100,000 for the first time.

This is again part of a movement towards reduced intervention of state legislation and institutions in people's private lives. Many people still disapproved of divorce (and this was reflected in the previous legislation which stipulated that one of the two divorcees must be "at fault"), but this was now ever more considered a private matter between two people. Some people's attitudes changed slowly: in the seventies, few people spoke of "single parent families", more spoke of "broken homes".

Sixty-six people were killed, crushed, in Ibrox stadium in Glasgow during a Rangers versus Celtic football match, and many more were seriously injured. Subsequently a tribunal found that the stadium's owners had been negligent about safety. A new report about football ground safety regulations led to some improvements.

BBC Open University broadcasts started up.

The Open University was a project of Prime Minister Harold Wilson in the 1960s. As universities were gradually opening up to working-class children, since the modern economy required a much higher level of education in the workforce, Wilson wanted there to be a way for older people, in particular housewives, to obtain a university degree if they had been unable to go in for one immediately after their schooling. One followed an Open University degree by correspondence, as well as listening to special radio or television broadcasts and attending "summer schools" of two or three weeks in the holidays. This new kind of university attracted quite a number of left-wing teachers who felt that its mission was important.

A bomb exploded at the house of Robert Carr, Secretary of State for Employment. Nobody was injured. The Angry Brigade said it planted the device.

In the 1970s, Britain had rather fewer problems with bombs from left-wing domestic groups than a number of other European countries. The Red Brigades were active in

Italy, and the Red Army Faction in Germany; most famously Aldo Moro, a right wing political leader in Italy, was kidnapped and executed by the Red Brigades, in 1978, after his bodyguards had been shot during the kidnapping. The Angry Brigade, an extreme left grouping in Britain believed in provoking reaction by spectacular bombings. No one was killed in the different explosions, which generally targeted property. The brigade were eventually captured and imprisoned.

The first ever postal workers' strike was called in an attempt to win a 15 to 20% pay rise. It lasted seven weeks, and the strikers returned to work with a wage increase that was far lower than their demands.

Britain asked permission from the first Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting to sell weapons to South Africa. This permission was granted, to the dismay of anti-apartheid activists.

Opinion polls suggested that fully 66% of British people were in favour of abandoning the negotiations to join the Common Market: only 22% declared a desire that negotiations continue.

February 1971

It was no longer obligatory to buy a licence in order to own a radio.

One still had to pay a television licence fee for a television (at a different rate for black and white and for colour). By the middle of the seventies, the total of colour TVs in the country outnumbered black and white TVs.

Facing the bankruptcy of Rolls Royce, the government decided to nationalize it.

This was interpreted as a major U-turn for a government that had insisted that the market should be allowed to regulate by itself many aspects of industry, and that "lame duck industries" should not expect large amounts of government aid. At this time, even Conservative governments felt that large-scale unemployment must be avoided, even at considerable cost, and this was the reason for the nationalization of Rolls Royce. Another consideration was the damage to national image that might be done if such a well-known British brand should disappear.

An international treaty, the Seabed Arms Control Treaty, signed by the Soviet Union, the USA, the United Kingdom and 91 other countries, banned all siting of nuclear weapons on the seabed, more than 12 miles out from the coastline of the owners' national territory.

This treaty was another sign of the relaxing of international tensions between the superpowers, often referred to as "détente", which began around 1969 and continued until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, an event which would lead to the US boycott of the Moscow Olympics, and, indirectly, to the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency the same year.

Decimalisation: The United Kingdom changed to decimal currency.

Before the 15th February 1971 there had been twenty shillings in a pound and twelve pence in a shilling. The decimalization meant that there were now one hundred new pence in a pound, though the pound itself did not change in value. The introduction of the metric system in other domains, for weights and measures, was gradual, and not always welcome, and many aspects of British life are still measured in imperial units (people weigh "ten stone", buy wood which is "three by four" and drink pints of beer). Imperial units were kept alive internationally in later decades by the electronic and computer industries who continued to use inches.

Right-winger Enoch Powell predicted an "explosion" unless large numbers of immigrants were expelled from the country.

Enoch Powell had been a member of the shadow cabinet until he was sacked in 1968 after his infamous speech on immigration. In this speech, he had implied that black people would soon "have the whip hand over" white people in Britain, and declared that "like the Roman I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood". He accompanied these apocalyptic predictions with anecdotes that alleged that in many

towns, white people lived in fear of the activities of young black people. He obtained vociferous support from a minority (Dockers and immigration officials even went on strike to support him), as well as passive sympathy from a large section of the population, a majority according to several opinion polls. In any case, in the 1970s everyday racism was far more common than today: racist jokes in school playgrounds were an everyday occurrence, and a black person appearing on the television (except perhaps as a sportsperson or musician) was a rare event.

Reginald Maudling, Home Secretary, presented the Immigration Bill, which would take away the automatic right of Commonwealth immigrants to remain in the United Kingdom.

March 1971

More than two million workers went on strike to protest against the 1971 Industrial Relations Act. This law introduced the concept of “unfair industrial action”, and was aimed above all at reducing numbers of sympathy strikes and unofficial strikes.

*In practice, the legislation ran into severe problems. Employers were reluctant to use the law, in case it inflames an already delicate situation in the workplace. The Labour government’s White Paper, *In place of strife*, had been abandoned at the end of the 1960s in the face of union opposition. The Industrial Relations Act went in the same direction, and again was brought down. Almost all trade unions refused to register under the Act. It would be in the 1980s and 1990s that, in very gradual steps, the trade union legislation of the Thatcher and Major governments would weaken trade union action, though it may be that mass unemployment was an even more powerful factor in reducing numbers of strikes.*

April 1971

Unemployment figures reached 815,000, the highest since the war.

It is important to weigh up the immense social and psychological effect of the absence of mass unemployment between 1940 and 1970. Young people assumed they would get a job with ease; millions of workers had confidence in their capacity to demand a little more from their employers, since losing their job would not be a catastrophe, other jobs being rapidly available. We do not have any means to measure the psychological effects on the millions of mass unemployment becoming again the norm, but we can assume they were heavy.

Eight people, members of the Welsh Language Society²², were tried for having destroyed English-language road signs in Wales.

Welsh nationalism is rather different in nature than Scottish nationalism, although both insist on more recognition for national feeling and culture. Wales was conquered militarily many centuries ago, whereas Scotland joined with England due to a compromise agreement, in 1707, with the Scottish elite, which guaranteed separate Scottish legal and education systems that continue to this day. Wales, then, is far more integrated with England: they have the same legal and education system for example. Welsh nationalism has been centred on the issue of the Welsh language. The language was repressed by English authorities for a long period, but since the 1970s has gradually won a right to much more presence in public life. The Welsh Language Act 1967 had given people who wished to the right to use Welsh, not English in legal proceedings, for the first time since this was banned in the 16th century. The 1993, Welsh Language Act would go much further, and give practically equal status to English and Welsh in Wales.

The first episode of the TV sitcom *And Mother Makes Three* was broadcast on ITV. The series followed the adventures of a single mother trying to bring up her children, thus reflecting a social reality that was becoming more common. Very significantly, and reflecting the moralist atmosphere at the top of TV production companies, the heroine is not single

²² This organization still exists and its website can be found here: <http://cymdeithas.cymru/node/2123>

because she is divorced or never married, but because she is widowed, and when she falls in love it is with a widower.

May 1971

The Angry Brigade exploded a bomb in the Biba fashion store in Kensington. In a *communiqué*, the brigade declared: “*the only thing to do with modern slave houses, called boutiques, is wreck them*”.

June 1971

Margaret Thatcher’s proposal, as Secretary of State for Education, to forbid local councils from giving free school milk to children over seven years old was passed in the Commons. Some Labour-led councils threatened to continue providing milk regardless.

The slogan “Thatcher – milk snatcher” became popular. In her autobiography, much later, Thatcher wrote: “I learned a valuable lesson. I had incurred that maximum of political odium for the minimum of political benefit”.

Indeed, the proposal triggered a heated row. Children had been given free milk at break time in all primary schools for many years (so, up to the age of ten or eleven). From 1946 to 1968 free milk had been available to all children under 18. Although in the 1970s there was less malnutrition among children than had been the case when free school milk had been introduced, the problem had not completely disappeared. But mostly, the question had symbolic importance and divided ideologically those who felt it was a good thing that the community provide such service free for everybody from those who felt the state should only intervene in cases of severe need. In a radio interview, Margaret Thatcher pointed out that the Local Education Authorities were now allowed to sell milk to the children, if they wished. Thatcher thought that giving free services led to people not taking responsibility for their own lives, and milk was a small but significant example. This kind of debate would come back again and again up to the present day.

Although this question of free milk in school is much quoted, in many ways Margaret Thatcher was not very different to previous Secretaries of Education. She continued planning the setting-up of comprehensive schools around the country: in fact, more were opened under her ministry than under any previous one.

The Glasgow firm, Upper Clyde Shipbuilders, entered liquidation. The announced redundancies led to a vigorous dispute of historical significance. The employees started a work-in, where sacked workers refused to leave and the unions controlled the work in the shipyard. It became a *cause célèbre* for left-wingers and trade unionists, and was eventually victorious²³ It also inspired workers in other factories around Britain faced with redundancies to occupy their workplace instead of accepting job losses.

Britain once again entered negotiations for EEC membership, and this time terms were agreed.

Just as in 2016, treaty relationships between Britain and groups of countries in Europe were controversial. In the 1970s, Britain would after much debate join the European Economic Community (as it was at the time, a much smaller and more modest endeavour than the later European Union). After some renegotiation of conditions and budgets, the Labour government, divided on the issue, organized a referendum to decide whether the UK should stay in the EEC or leave. The ‘stay’ vote was to win easily.

²³ This BBC documentary presents the history of the UCS dispute in the 1970s, with interviews of some important participants: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gc-nGxITCw>

The Reading Festival of folk and progressive music was held. Towards the end of the decade, Reading would be the first of the music festivals to embrace punk rock, staging such groups as The Jam, Sham 69 and The Stranglers.

July 1971

The government launched a major campaign to persuade the British population of the benefits of membership of the Common Market. A free booklet, *The UK and the European Community*, was distributed.

Two people were shot dead by British troops in Derry, in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland was descending into a low-level civil war. The origins of this were several. When Southern Ireland became independent after the First World War, many Irish people in the South and the North considered the division of Ireland scandalous and the reunification of Ireland a question of natural justice and national destiny. The Northern Irish statelet was designed so as to have a Protestant majority, and also so as to include the main rich industrial towns: Belfast and Derry/Londonderry. Its borders did not correspond, for example, to a historical province. The political division between republicans and loyalists, then, seemed extremely difficult to resolve. For republicans, the existence of Northern Ireland at all was simply illegitimate colonial control over a part of Irish territory; for loyalists, it was an integral part of the United Kingdom, and Northern Irish loyalists felt British before they felt Irish.

The UK government cancelled the Black Arrow launch vehicle, after only four launches, thus accepting that Britain would not have an independent space industry, and choosing instead to use the cheaper US Scout rocket.

Again, this is part of a process that sees British elites gradually accepting that Britain is no longer a superpower.

The work in at Upper Clyde Shipbuilders began, led by Jimmy Reid.

August 1971

A new policy of internment without trial of terrorist suspects in Northern Ireland was put into place.

Hundreds of IRA suspects were arrested and held in Long Kesh prison. In the following urban riots, twenty people were killed, including eleven shot by the British Army in Ballymurphy. In 2016, the Lord Chief Justice of Northern Ireland recommended that an inquest be held to find out the truth about the Ballymurphy killings, but this inquest has not yet taken place. The internment policy continued until the end of 1975. In all, 1,981 people were detained; 1,874 were Catholic/Republican, while 107 were Protestant/Loyalist. Internment without trial was intended to weaken the Irish Republican Army (IRA) but no doubt strengthened it. In Catholic parts of town many of the adult men were taken away in the early hours of the morning, and their houses were often wrecked. In the interrogation quarters, according to prisoners, and to Amnesty International, suspects were tortured. Many Catholics who had previously been uninterested moved towards supporting the IRA. In this period, the IRA had a three pronged strategy: 1) defend the Catholic neighbourhoods against the violent attacks of Protestant paramilitaries, since the police of the province, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, were manifestly unwilling to do so; 2) destroy a large number of British economic targets, in the hope of making the maintenance of the Northern Irish statelet too expensive for the British government to continue; and 3) kill British soldiers, who were seen as a foreign occupying force. IRA leaders were no doubt over-confident in their ability to move the British. One is reported to have said that the killing of 40 British soldiers would be enough to make the British withdraw their troops, particularly seeing that public support in England for withdrawing troops was quite high.

Hugh Mullan became the first Catholic priest to be killed in the Northern Ireland Troubles: he was shot dead by the British Army as he was giving the last rites to a wounded man. Winston Donnell became the first Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) soldier to die, shot by the IRA.

The Who released their new album *Who's Next*, including the well-known track, "Won't get fooled again".

US president Richard Nixon announced the ending of the Gold Standard.

September 1971

The Trade Union Congress conference voted that all its member unions should refuse to register under the Industrial Relations Act, and refuse, then, to cooperate with the new legal measures. A number of small trade unions did not agree and were suspended from TUC membership in 1973.

Qatar gained independence from the United Kingdom, having been, since 1915, a British protectorate.

The death toll in the Troubles of Northern Ireland reached 100 after three years with the death of Annette McGavigan, a young girl killed by crossfire.

The BBC television show, *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, was broadcast for the first time.²⁴

This television show was a watershed in the history of British popular music. It took popular music seriously, concentrated on albums not singles, and produced many live performances, in contrast to the TV program Top of the Pops where stars notoriously mouthed the words as their records were played.

October 1971

In a major television interview, Edward Heath defended his government's record.²⁵

The CAT scan (Computerized Axial Tomography scan, which allows hospitals to produce three-dimensional images of internal organs), invented by British scientist Godfrey Hounsfield, was used for the first time, in Wimbledon hospital. It allows doctors to have a cross-sectional view of different human organs.

In order to fight against the Irish Republican Army more effectively, the British Army began destroying roads between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The border was mostly very rural with a large number of small roads. IRA sympathisers often owned farms near the border and would inform the IRA of exactly what the British were doing. Nevertheless, the capacity of the British state to organize counter-insurgency turned out to be considerably more solid than Provisional IRA leaders had thought.

A Commons vote went in favour of Britain joining the European Economic Community by 356 to 244.

The Rev. Ian Paisley in Northern Ireland founded the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

This party would fiercely oppose attempts to establish any "power-sharing" in the Northern Ireland assembly in the 1970s (that is to say, institutions with a guaranteed voice for both Catholic and Protestant communities). It was also opposed to any institutional cooperation with the Irish Republic, feeling that any such steps (such as those provided for in the Sunningdale Agreement) might be the first move in a slow drift to the reunification of Ireland.

²⁴ This BBC documentary tells the history of this important television show:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=le9TKTe1TVM>

²⁵ This interview, on the BBC programme Panorama, is available online here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SG9rjoc2zkU>

An important rent and rates strike involving 16,000 households was in place in Northern Ireland in protest against the internment policy that had been launched in August. The Social Democratic and Labour Party was organizing it.

An IRA bomber attacked the Post Office tower in London. The device exploded at four thirty in the morning, causing extensive damage but no injuries.

November 1971

Led Zeppelin's fourth album was released, including by far their most famous song, "Stairway to Heaven", featuring virtuoso guitar playing accompanied by philosophical lyrics: "There's a lady who's sure/ all that glitters is gold/ and she's buying a stairway to heaven/ When she gets there she knows/ if the stores are all closed/ With a word she can get what she came for". Over the next forty years, the album sold 37 million copies, making it one of the best-selling albums of all time.

The Minister for the Environment opened the ten-route motorway junction nicknamed "Spaghetti Junction" north of Birmingham. It incorporated the A38 (M) into the M6. Almost 22 kilometres of motorway had to be elevated in order to allow space underneath for the two railway lines, three canals and two rivers which cross this area. One of the project's aims was to showcase British engineering prowess.

December 1971

Fifteen Catholics were killed and seventeen injured when the Ulster Volunteer Force, a unionist paramilitary group, blew up a bar in Belfast, McGurk's Bar. The pub owner, whose wife and 12-year-old daughter were killed in the explosion, called for no retaliation. The British army claimed at the time that the explosion was accidental, caused by IRA members preparing bombs. In 1977, though, UVF member Robert Campbell was sent to prison for the crime, and served fifteen years.

Dennis Gabor won the Nobel Prize in Physics for inventing holograms. Hungarian in origin, he had come to Britain in 1933 as a refugee from Hitler's policies in Germany where he had been living.

Ken Loach released his prize-winning film *Family Life*, his first feature-length film since *Kes* in 1969.

The Christmas number one record in the UK singles charts was a comic, mock-Western song, "Ernie (The Fastest Milkman in The West)", by well-known, if already old-fashioned humourist, Benny Hill.

Undated events of 1971

Inflation stood at 8.6%, its highest for 30 years.

Inflation was a major concern of 1970s governments. It was usually measured with the Retail Price Index, which told how the prices of a "typical" collection of products had changed since the previous year. Such a measure is not entirely objective, since one can obtain a somewhat different figure depending on what is counted as "typical". Regularly, there are political debates as to what items should be included in the Retail Price Index.

Certainly, high inflation could make everyday life very stressful: prices were rising and one was never sure of whether one's salary would rise in a similar proportion. Workers who were in trade unions were partially protected by trade union action that could demand wage prices of a similar level to the level of inflation. Governments

considered wage rises as an important cause of inflation, and therefore restricting wage rises (preferably with the cooperation of trade union leaders) was a key priority for them. Those who hated inflation most were the middle classes who had savings: their savings were worth less every year, and they could not, like the very rich, move them around the world to a more profitable heaven.

For the first time ever, more oil than coal was consumed in Britain this year. This process was to continue, as houses around Britain were gradually converted to burn “natural gas” from the North Sea oilfields instead of the “town gas” which had been produced by treating coal.

In 1971, 53% of women aged between 16 and 64 were in full or part-time employment, and 92% of men. In 2014, the figure for women would be 67%.

First published in 1971

Roger Hargreaves' children's book *Mr Tickle*, first of the Mr Men series, was published, part of a move towards more playful and less moralistic children's books.

Keith Thomas published his *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*. This was a landmark study in what religion actually meant to people in these centuries, and on the slow disappearance of many magical superstitions and their partial replacement with Christian theology and tradition.

Ivan Illich's book *Deschooling Society*, of great influence particularly in left-wing circles, was published. It proposed a sharp reduction in the influence of what he considered overly rigid institutions such as schools.

The *Little Red Schoolbook* was released in Britain, was successfully attacked in court under the Obscene Publications Act, and banned until a second, censored edition was brought out. It was written by two Danish schoolteachers, and aimed at encouraging young people not to accept society's norms as given. The frank discussion about sex in the book made it controversial.

1972

Some figures

In 1972, 43% of young people left school with no qualifications at all. In 2016, this was down to 1%, showing the transformation both of the economy and of attitudes to education and diplomas.

In 1972, there were a total of over 20 million strike days.

A strike day is one person on strike for one day: so, if 1 million people go on strike for five days, that's five million strike days. Between 1953 and 1964 there were an average of about a million strike days every year. In 1969 there were around seven million. The number of strike days measures the level of conflict, but does not tell us anything about who is winning or losing the strikes. In the sixties, many strikes were short and quickly won by the strikers. In the seventies, strikes were on average considerably longer, with both sides digging in, determined to win.

In 1972, there were 11.3 million trade union members in Britain.

January 1972

In a ballot, 58.8% of miners voted to strike. The strike was to last for seven weeks, and included the famous picketing of Saltley coke depot in Birmingham. This incident became a symbol of the tremendous power that could occasionally be wielded by organized workers, a symbol both for union activists (who celebrated it) and by right wing politicians (who deplored it).²⁶

New picketing tactics accompanied the first national miners' strike since 1926. Picketing was a very strong tradition in the British trade union movement, and consisted of a group of strikers standing in front of the striking workplace, or occasionally another workplace that was supplying the striking workplace. The strikers would stop people entering the workplace or try to persuade them to not enter, in solidarity with their fellow workers on strike. In return, those who respected the picket felt that if they were ever on strike, they would enjoy similar solidarity. Most pickets were very low key, but the principle of never crossing a picket line was very strong indeed: in the stronger unions like the miners one could lose all one's friends by refusing to respect a picket line. There were still a number of miners killed every year at work, and most miners considered that the important advances in health and safety and living standards had been won through workers' solidarity, which should never be abandoned.

Occasionally (as, we shall see, at Saltley) the tactic of mass picketing was used: that is, crowds of pickets tried to make it physically impossible for people to cross the picket line. The police would then intervene to force a way through for the strikebreakers. The 1972 miners' strike saw the apparition of the tactic of flying pickets, when groups of miners travelled round the country on buses in order to picket places of work in other regions. Such was the respect of picket lines among unionized workers that the tactic was often very effective.

For the first time since the 1930s, unemployment rose above the symbolic figure of one million. This meant that it had almost doubled in the two years since the new government had come to office.

²⁶ This local newspaper article forty years later reflects on the events:

<http://www.birminghampost.co.uk/news/local-news/40-years-miners-battle-saltley-3915377>

In the incident known as “Bloody Sunday” in Northern Ireland, 14 unarmed men were killed when troops from the parachute regiment opened fire on demonstrators in Derry.²⁷

This incident was the single most important one in sharpening the conflict between Republicans and the British state. Hundreds of people watched the young unarmed men shot dead: when the newspapers, then an official enquiry, then the House of Commons and the House of Lords declared that the soldiers were fired at first and that they had acted purely in self-defence, the explosion of anger made recruitment to the IRA rise massively. Shortly after the shootings, when Conservative Home Secretary Reginald Maudling stated in the Commons that the soldiers had been obliged to shoot in self-defence, a young Irish Catholic MP, Bernadette Devlin, who had been elected as an independent, crossed the house and attacked him with her fists, calling him “that murdering hypocrite”.

Many years later, in 1998, after a long campaign by the families of the victims, and as an indispensable part of the “peace process” in Northern Ireland, a new inquiry was set up, under the chairmanship of Lord Saville. There had been so many eyewitnesses to the original events that the inquiry lasted twelve years. Finally, in June 2010, the Saville Report declared that all of the dead were unarmed, and that the killings were “unjustified and unjustifiable”. Shortly afterwards, David Cameron, the Prime Minister, made an official apology on behalf of the country.²⁸

Pakistan decided to leave the Commonwealth (it would re-join in 1989).

February 1972

As a result of the Bloody Sunday killings, a crowd of protesters used petrol bombs to burn down the British Embassy in Dublin, chanting “Burn, baby, burn!” At the same time, Irish airport workers refused to service British planes in protest.

The situation around the miners’ strike led the government to declare a state of emergency, and institute a three-day working week in most industries because of the shortage of coal.

A key moment came at Saltley coke works. After several weeks of the strike, hundreds of lorries every day were still coming in and out of Saltley, and it was becoming clear that if pickets could stop Saltley, they could win the strike. A mass picket was called of miners who came in from around the country. Speeches by miners’ leader Arthur Scargill to mass meetings of industrial workers in Birmingham invoked the importance of class solidarity and persuaded many thousands to join the mass picket. The coke works was closed down. This day has gone down in trade union history as a great victory for the organized working class, as mass solidarity from workers who were not from the mining industry helped the miners win. For many in the Conservative Party it was the sign that deep change was urgent concerning laws about trade union activity.

Six people, mostly civilians who worked for the military, were killed by an Official IRA car bomb in Aldershot barracks. This was presented as a revenge attack for Bloody Sunday.

The miners' strike was victorious after seven weeks, and the miners received a wage increase of around 17%. Some among them even claimed that the victory was great enough to “avenge 1926”.

²⁷ BBC History have a useful web page on the event and its implications:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/bloody_sunday

²⁸ This documentary portrays briefly the events and the campaign which followed:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCg8l7Xa8&t=25s>

The last episode of the sitcom *Please, Sir!* was screened. The programme, which had lasted through four series and a total of 55 episodes, dealt with everyday life in a secondary school.²⁹

March 1972

The Parliament of Northern Ireland at Stormont, established in 1920 and controlled by the unionist majority in the province was suspended by the UK government in London, since they no longer had confidence that Stormont was ready to improve the situation of Catholics in the province.

The London government took over control ("direct rule"), in particular for police and security. Civil servants were sent to Northern Ireland to run the province. In 1973, this parliament was to be abolished, and replaced by a Northern Ireland Assembly devised by the Sunningdale Agreement.

Anthony Barber's new budget was intended to be reflationary. Personal allowances for income tax were substantially increased (meaning one could earn considerably more before paying tax), and it was announced that Old Age Pensions (as they were called at the time) were to be raised in the autumn.

An Industry Bill was proposed by the government, which would establish an Industrial Development Executive to help plan, and subsidize, industrial investment. Its initial budget would be 250 million pounds a year.

This was something of a U turn by Heath, since when he was elected he had denounced excessive planning, (considering that the market should be able to take care of industrial development) and had abolished the Industrial Development Corporation set up by the previous Labour administration.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament held a demonstration that marched to the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston.

They left 27 black coffins at Aldermaston, to symbolize the 27 years since the bombing of Hiroshima. The demonstrators marched the 56 miles, and the choice of such a long demonstration symbolized the strategic choices of the campaign at this time: the most important thing for them was to make a strong moral protest by a minority of people, not to have a mass demonstration. Nuclear weapons and demonstrations against them are an important part of post-war British history. Although the traditional socialist view of such weapons was that they were unacceptable since they could not be used to kill only soldiers, and would necessarily be aimed at millions of innocent civilians, Labour Prime Minister Clement Attlee decided to develop independent British nuclear weapons in the late 1940s. He did this without even informing all his own ministers, and the general public were kept completely in the dark, though it must be admitted that a major outcry would not have been likely in the post-war atmosphere.

April 1972

William Whitelaw became the first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

William Whitelaw was a leading Conservative politician. When Edward Heath resigned, he was considered to be the most likely successor. His defeat by Margaret Thatcher in the subsequent leadership election surprised most commentators.

A report into the Bloody Sunday shootings by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Widgery, exonerated the British troops of blame.

²⁹ One can watch an episode from November 1970 on YouTube here (but the humour may have dated...): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q92FiSIKdug>

This decision reinforced support for Republican organizations, including the IRA, in Northern Ireland, since it appeared that progress through democratic means was not possible. The decision of Lord Widgery would be reversed more than forty years later.

Robert Mark was appointed Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police.

Mark is well known for having set up a wide-ranging scheme to root out corruption in the Metropolitan Police, and particular in the Criminal Investigation Department, where it was known that officers ran protection rackets and were involved with drug-dealing and other crime. He was quoted as saying that a good police force "catches more crooks than it employs". As a result of his efforts to reform the Metropolitan Police, more than 500 officers were dismissed or made to resign. Two high-level chiefs were imprisoned.³⁰

May 1972

Law to replace the Courts of Assize and Quarter Sessions in England and Wales established new Crown Courts. To serve on a jury it was no longer necessary to be a householder.

A further advance in the democratic spirit supposedly behind the legal and legislative system accompanied a modernization of the criminal courts. Although in many ways, the Seventies was a democratic decade, with increasing individual freedom and a continuing slow decline of deference, some undemocratic institutions such as the monarchy and the House of Lords, undertook no reform at all. Indeed, the Civil List Act 1972 established that additional members of the Royal Family would receive an income from the taxpayers. Only after 1997 would the Blair government radically reform the House of Lords, and a few small reforms of the monarchy (such as its income becoming subject to tax) would come about in the 1990s.

The Dominion of Ceylon became the Republic of Sri Lanka, renouncing then links to the British monarchy. Ceylon had won its independence in 1948. The move to a republic cut the final constitutional ties with Britain (for example the highest appeal court for citizens of Ceylon had still been the UK 's "Judicial Committee of the Privy Council").

The Official Irish Republican Army declared a ceasefire in Northern Ireland, but the Provisional IRA continued its military campaigns.

The United States and the Soviet Union signed the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

This treaty led to strict limitations on the building of defensive weapons against incoming nuclear missiles. The intention was in this way to ensure that deterrence would function. Although many critics were sceptical about the theory of deterrence altogether, the signing of this treaty demonstrated ongoing communication between the superpowers and a continuing atmosphere of détente. The SALT I treaty, effectively freezing the number of intercontinental ballistic missile systems, was also signed this month.

June 1972

The first issue of the influential feminist magazine *Spare Rib* was published.

*Initially many newsagents refuse to stock it. It eventually sold around 20 000 copies a month.³¹ Previous feminist periodicals had often been bulletins aimed only at political activists: *Spare Rib* tried to use a visual and editorial style that would allow it to have a much wider readership.*

³⁰ This 15-minute documentary explains the work of Sir Robert Mark against police corruption:

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

³¹ One can find the entire collection of *Spare Rib*, in digital format, along with some explanatory material, on the website of the British Library.

In Stockholm, the first ever United Nations Conference on the Environment was held, under the title “Conference on the Human Environment”. The conference agreed on a declaration of 26 principles, including that “weapons of mass destruction must be eliminated”.

Under a new law, the Fire Precautions Act, all Hotels and boarding houses now had to obtain certification from the Fire Service. The procedure that led to this law had been launched after a fire in a hotel in Saffron Walden had killed eleven people in 1969. In the 1970s, there were in London around 150 deaths in fires every year. Today the figure is around 60 a year.

We often think of the welfare state as only concerning Health, Education, Old Age Pensions and help for the unemployed, but it also includes an interest of the state in many different aspects of improving people's lives: notably health and safety regulation, food hygiene regulation and so on.

A British European Airways Flight crashed near Staines and 118 people were killed, making it Britain's worst air catastrophe at this date.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer Anthony Barber announced a decision to float the Pound, because of the Sterling crisis.

Governments often have to make decisions about the value of their currency compared with other currencies, and particular against the dollar. Such decisions are often not easy to make, or easy for lay people to understand. If the pound is strong, imports are cheaper: this can help British firms buying in raw materials. On the other hand, if the pound is weak, exports are cheap for foreigners to buy, and this can mean more demand for British manufacturers.

July 1972

The first official Gay Pride march in London was held.³²

Special category status was introduced for prisoners in Northern Ireland who had been imprisoned for paramilitary activities. They were treated more like prisoners of war than like criminals and were allowed to meet freely, and not to wear prison uniform.³³

Nine people died and over a hundred were injured in a series of IRA explosions in Belfast city centre.

A dockers' strike against compulsory redundancies led to no cargo being handled by this 42,000-strong group. As a result, the government announced a state of emergency on 4 August.

The “Official Solicitor” released the “Pentonville Five” from prison.

The five were dockers who had been jailed five days earlier since they would not pay fines that resulted from having defied laws about picketing during an industrial dispute. The jailing of the five was supposed to serve as an example to the trade union movement. However, on the contrary, tens of thousands of workers came out on strike to protest. Most national newspapers stopped publication and, when the TUC

³²From a historical point of view as well as a humanist one, one of the most important changes in the last few decades has been that in attitudes towards homosexuality. In 1967, when male homosexuality became legal, absolutely nobody imagined that less than 50 years later, a Conservative government would introduce gay marriage. The changes were very slow, though. This documentary from 1979 shows what happened in the 1970s. Try to read between the lines, to understand the unspoken attitudes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YV_h2FoQJxs

³³ This (sometimes harrowing) documentary traces the history of life in The Maze prison in Northern Ireland for both Unionist and Republican prisoners: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeixMFHtv18>

called a one day general strike for the following Monday, the government gave in and asked the Official Solicitor to intervene, using a very old and very obscure law, so that the dockers could be released immediately before strike action spread further. Trade unionists celebrated this as a stunning victory over the government, and this was one of the episodes that define 1972 as no doubt the time in the 20th century in the UK that the power of union organization was at its highest point.

August 1972

Idi Amin, Ugandan dictator, announced that 50,000 Asians with British passports were to be expelled from Uganda within the following three months, accusing them of “sabotaging the Ugandan economy”.

This community was brought to Uganda by the British Empire administration in order to do the clerical work of the British Empire, in a situation where the racist outlook of the Empire did not allow Africans to be employed in such roles.³⁴ The announcement at short notice of the arrival of these immigrants triggered a wave of activity among racists. The hard right “Monday Club” launched a campaign around the slogan “Halt Immigration Now!”

The innovative musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, based on a creative interpretation of the gospel account of the last week of Jesus’s life, made its West End *début*.

Penned by British duo Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, the musical had been criticized and even banned in some countries for being blasphemous (since the story ends with the crucifixion, and there is no resurrection in this version).

The Heath government established the Civil Contingencies Unit to plan state reaction to possible mass strikes or other acts seen as civil disorder. Plans made included those of using troops to replace striking workers, and this was put into effect in firefighters’ strikes and oil tanker drivers’ strikes under the Callaghan government.

September 1972

The age at which young people were allowed to leave full-time education was raised to sixteen. The age was to be further raised, to eighteen in 2015.

The BBC quiz programme *Mastermind* saw its first broadcast, as did the sitcom *Are You Being Served?*³⁵

The sinking of two British trawlers by an Icelandic gunboat triggered the second Cod War between Britain and Iceland.

A conflict concerning the size of exclusive fishing rights zones off a country’s coastline was behind these events.

Carrefour opens the very first UK hypermarket in Caerphilly in South Wales. The word hypermarket was first coined in French as *hypermarché* in 1968.

Thousands of Ugandan Asians arrived in Britain after being expelled by Idi Amin.

³⁴ A short explanation can be found here: <http://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/twice-migrants-african-asian-migration-uk>

³⁵ The very first, pilot episode can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaxxL4zPceo>

You may find that the comedy has dated somewhat. In particular, some character representations would be considered today as homophobic.

October 1972

The Immigration Act 1971 came into effect, drastically reducing primary immigration. Only people with close connections to Britain by birth or descent could be exempted from immigration restrictions. Primary immigration from India and Pakistan, for example, became very difficult indeed.

Three colleges of the University of Cambridge – Churchill, Clare and Kings' colleges – admitted women students for the first time.

Previously, women students had only been able to attend the very few all-female colleges, which had fought since the last quarter of the 19th century for the same recognition as male colleges.

The lifting of restrictions on broadcasting hours allowed the extension of daytime television.

John Betjeman was appointed Poet Laureate. His best-known poetic works are the autobiographical *Summoned by Bells* (1960) and *A Nip in the Air* (1974).

The first episode of *Emmerdale Farm*, a soap opera set in rural Yorkshire, was aired on ITV.

Three thousand tenants in Kirkby, Liverpool, began a rent strike to protest against having to pay more.

The government's Housing Finance Act 1972 had obliged councils to raise rents of the four million council tenants in the UK, so that payments would be closer to "market value" rents, which were on the rise. The rent strike lasted over a year and was successful.

November 1972

The government introduced price and pay freezes to counter inflation. In particular, they decided on a short-term rent freeze for council properties. In order to reduce problems of homelessness, and to help persuade workers to accept lower wage rises, rents were not allowed to rise, for a period of 150 days.

December 1972

The Nobel Prize for Medicine was awarded to British biochemist Rodney Robert Porter (jointly with a US colleague) for work on antibodies.

The Christmas Number One record in the UK singles charts was by Jimmy Osmond, a child singer from the United States. It was entitled "Long Haired Lover from Liverpool".

Undated events of 1972

Inflation fell during the year to 6.4% from 8.6%.

British car production reached its peak at more than 1.9 million cars produced during the year.

A similar number of cars is produced today in the UK, but with a far smaller workforce, much more mechanized factories, and a domination of Japanese and Korean companies.

The death toll in Northern Ireland for 1972 was the highest for many decades: 103 soldiers, 41 police and UDR, and 323 civilians. At least 5,000 were injured.

First published in 1972

Richard Adams novel *Watership Down*. A children's favourite about a tribe of rabbits, who were presented as having language and culture. This would later be adapted into a cartoon film.

The Ecologist magazine published *A Blueprint for Survival*.

This was, as its title suggests, somewhat apocalyptic in tone, even though it was signed by dozens of leading scientists, and, in this, was not untypical of early ecologist movements. A few years later once the Ecology Party had stabilized as a small political organization, a more sober tone was taken with the publication of Policies for a Sustainable Society.

Michael Rutter published *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, an important work which contradicted previous theses that had insisted that the absence of the mother for small children was always psychologically dangerous.

Rutter found, in a wide empirical study, that family discord, rather than maternal absence, was the key danger. Politically, this was very important, as the previous thesis had been used by those who felt that mothers should stay at home with their children and not go out to work. In the 1970s, it was still not unusual for mothers who went out to work to be criticized for this: the expression "latchkey kid" existed to refer to those (presumably unhappy) children who had their own key to the house because their mother was out when they got home from school.

Ways of Seeing by John Berger was published.

1973

January 1973

The United Kingdom entered the European Economic Community.

At the time, public opinion showed a slight majority in favour of membership, but enthusiasm was generally absent. A special festival, Fanfare for Europe, was launched to celebrate Britain's membership, but this had little echo. Prime Minister Edward Heath was particularly pleased, however. He had been in charge of negotiations to join the EEC, 10 years earlier, and the decision of Charles de Gaulle to veto British membership, had been a hard blow for him, since closer integration with Europe was one of his dearest principles.

The Open University awarded its first degrees to over 800 students. With 40,000 students enrolled, the Open University was by 1973, the biggest university in the country.

Pop group, The Strawbs, released their single "Part of the Union" which reached N° 2 in the charts.

Its lyrics spoke of the power of unionized workers, and the chorus was "Oh you don't get me, I'm part of the union, till the day I die!" It was unofficially adopted by parts of the trade union movement, but was read by other people as wry humour or even as mocking.

February 1973

Rail workers and civil servants went on strike.

March 1973

Virago press, the feminist publishers, was founded. Considering that male-dominated traditional publishers had often ignored women's writings, Virago press undertook to print only books by women, both classics and original works. It had considerable success.

Pink Floyd's eighth album, *The Dark Side of the Moon* was released. It would become the all-time best-selling album by a British group.

Two IRA bombs were planted in the centre of London: one at an army recruitment office and another in front of the Old Bailey. Ten people were arrested hours later at Heathrow Airport on suspicion of being involved in the bombings.

In Northern Ireland, a referendum was held on 8th March, informally known as the "Border Poll". Republican parties had asked their supporters to boycott the referendum, which they considered illegitimate. As a result, only 1% of Catholics went to the polling stations. 98.9% of those voting wanted Northern Ireland to remain within the UK.

After the Northern Ireland referendum, a White Paper on Northern Ireland was published. It proposed a devolved assembly in Northern Ireland with a guaranteed voice for Catholics and for Protestants, as well as a Council of Ireland, which included representatives from Northern Ireland and from the Republic to promote close cooperation with the Republic of Ireland. The unionist parties were generally hostile to the idea of a Council of Ireland, thinking it would pave the way to a united Ireland in the medium or long term.

Seven men were killed when a West Yorkshire coal mine, Lofthouse, flooded. The disaster led to stricter safety regulations.

Six women traders were allowed to begin work in the London Stock Exchange, previously an all-male institution.

April 1973

Value-added tax (VAT) was established in the United Kingdom. First introduced in France, it was a modernization of sales tax, which reduced problems of non-payment.

Phase 2 of the Price and Pay Code came into effect, restricting rises in pay and prices.

May 1973

One and a half million workers went on strike over government pay restraints.

In a parliamentary by-election near Birmingham, the fascist National Front candidate, Martin Webster, polled 4,789 votes (16.2%), a result which made the front pages of the newspapers.

July 1973

The Bahamas became independent from Britain.

Twenty million pounds compensation was paid to victims of Thalidomide following an 11-year court case. Thalidomide was a drug that had been prescribed for pregnant women, but which cause severe malformations in many babies born to these women.

Militant supporters of Ian Paisley disrupted the first sitting of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Markham Colliery disaster: eighteen coal miners were killed at the coal mine near Staveley, Derbyshire, when the brake mechanism on their cage failed.

The passing of the Pakistan Act guaranteed that Pakistanis settled in Britain would retain certain civil rights, despite the fact that Pakistan's leaving the Commonwealth meant they were no longer British subjects. A similar law was passed to deal with the case of Bangladeshi immigrants. Right wing sections of the Conservative Party, around Enoch Powell, were disappointed that the opportunity had not been taken to expel large numbers of Pakistanis from the UK.

August 1973

Breaking with tradition by expressing such an opinion, the coroner in the Bloody Sunday inquest, Hubert O'Neill, accused the British soldiers of "*sheer unadulterated murder*". He said: "*These people may have been taking part in a parade that was banned but I do not think that justifies the firing of live rounds indiscriminately.*"

The right to trial by jury was suspended for some cases in Northern Ireland and Diplock courts were set up. The reason given was the risk of juries being intimidated by paramilitary organizations.

September 1973

Over a period of about a week, the IRA detonated bombs in Manchester and in several locations in London. Warnings were given, but a number of people were injured.

A military *coup d'état*, supported by the CIA, overthrew the left-wing government of Salvador Allende in Chile. Many thousands of activists and trade unionists were killed. Allende himself died in the presidential palace.³⁶

October 1973

The Yom Kippur war between Israel and a coalition of Arab states broke out, and lasted three weeks. Israel won a military victory.

As a result of support for Israel by the USA and some other Western countries, the oil producing Arab countries declared an oil embargo, which would be the main cause of a massive increase in the price of oil over the following year. In Britain, this had important political consequences in the short term, in that coal miners, the producers of the alternative fuel to oil, felt they had more leverage to press for higher wages and better working conditions.

London Broadcasting Company, Britain's first legal commercial Independent local radio station, began broadcasting, followed a week later by Capital Radio.

Prime Minister Edward Heath announced government proposals for its Price and Pay Code Stage Three (which was meant to continue to July 1974). This involved restricting wage rises to seven per cent, holding down some prices, and the government paying a "Christmas bonus" to all Old Age Pensioners, of ten pounds each. This was to be paid for by an increase in employers' National Insurance contributions.

Firefighters in Glasgow staged a one-day strike following a pay dispute. Troops were drafted in to run the fire stations.

The Royal Commission on Scottish devolution, and other constitutional questions (the Kilbrandon commission) reported after four years' work. This would give rise to a White Paper proposing an autonomous parliament for Scotland.

Sir John Donaldson, President of the National Industrial Relations Court, fined the engineering union (AUEW) £75,000 for having refused a court order to stop strike action at a Surrey factory. On 5 November, AUEW members staged a one-day strike in protest at the fine.

At the Labour Party Conference, the Labour shadow cabinet presented a left-wing programme. The shadow chancellor, Denis Healey, declared he was ready for conflict with the rich: "*I warn you that there are going to be howls of anguish from those rich enough to pay over 75% on their last slice of earnings*", he said.

The Conservative Party conference included a fierce debate over immigration. Enoch Powell's motion calling for large-scale expulsion of immigrants was defeated, after emotional scenes. A certain number of right-wingers in the Conservative Party would then leave to join extreme right wing organizations.

November 1973

The Second Cod War between Britain and Iceland ended.

The miners, rejecting the employers' offer of a 13% pay increase, voted not to strike, but began an overtime ban. The refusal to do overtime had as one of its main aims to reduce

³⁶ This award-winning film tells the story of the coup: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d4l5LZbNbZs>

coal stocks at power stations, in order to make a strike more likely to win if it should become necessary.

Ambulance drivers began selective strikes.

The television sitcom *Last of the Summer Wine* began its first series run on BBC One. It would run for 31 series.

Eight members of the Provisional IRA were convicted of the March bombings in London.

The Secretary for Trade and Industry warned that petrol rationing might soon have to be introduced as a result of the oil crisis in the Middle East which, was restricting petrol supplies.

December 1973

The speed limit on motorways was reduced to 50 mph from 70 mph until further notice, in order to save petrol.

Prime Minister Edward Heath, Irish premier Liam Cosgrave, and representatives of the Ulster Unionist Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland finally signed the Sunningdale Agreement in the town of Sunningdale in Berkshire.

The Sunningdale Agreement was an attempt to find a political compromise sufficiently solid that it might stop the armed conflict in Northern Ireland. It included provision for an all-Ireland council, on which representatives of the British government and of the Irish government would sit. The powers of this council were not clearly delineated. Some nationalists hoped it would be the first small step towards a united Ireland. For many unionists, it was unacceptable because it involved recognizing that the Republic of Ireland had a legitimate interest in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

On the key question of Northern Ireland's status – a legitimate part of the UK, or truly a part of Ireland, it proved impossible to draft a statement that all parties to the agreement would sign. De facto, the Irish government was tolerating the existence of a Northern Ireland that was fully a part of the UK. However, the Constitution of the Irish Republic stated clearly that Northern Ireland was rightfully part of Ireland. This tricky situation was temporarily solved by parallel declarations by the different governments. The Irish government declared it was not going to act for a change in the status of Northern Ireland in the immediate future; but their statement did not mention what that status was, so as not to go against the constitution.

UK theoretical physicist Brian Josephson shared the Nobel Prize in Physics “for his theoretical predictions of the properties of a supercurrent through a tunnel barrier”, while Yorkshire-born Geoffrey Wilkinson, author of one of the standard textbooks on inorganic chemistry, won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry jointly for “pioneering work on the chemistry of the organometallic compounds”.

As a result of coal shortages caused by industrial action, the electricity consumption reduction measure - the three-day week, announced on 17 December - came into force on 31st December at midnight.

The government hoped that the three-day week would rally most of the population behind the government. Heath, in a TV statement, openly referred to the spirit of the Second World War. As we shall soon see, this was not effective. The dangerous job of miners, and their solid organizations, commanded respect among much of the population.

The Christmas number one record in the UK singles charts was Merry Xmas Everybody, by the glam rock band, Slade. This song achieved the rare feat of becoming a Christmas classic and can still be heard in the UK every Christmas time.

Undated events of 1973

The Vindolanda tablets, the oldest surviving handwritten documents in Britain, dating from Roman times, were discovered.

Pizza Hut opened its first UK restaurant in Islington.

This was a part of the rise in power of chain restaurants, which went alongside a huge increase in the number of restaurant meals consumed by ordinary people. Before, and even during the 1970s, many working-class people only went to restaurants for weddings, funerals and other very exceptional occasions.

The American Psychiatric Association took homosexuality off its list of mental illnesses. In a political compromise, the much vaguer “sexual orientation disturbance” was put in its place on the list.

The first Rape Crisis Centres were opened in the UK, run by volunteers. These were places women in danger could turn to.

1974

Some figures

In 1974, 26% of men and 13% of women were classed as “heavy smokers”. 51% of men and 41% of women smoked. The decline in numbers had already started, though. By 1982, the figures showed 38% of men and 33% of women smoking, and in 2014, 20% of men and 17% of women smoked. The amount of alcohol consumed per head of population has changed little over the last 40 years, although there are signs that men drink somewhat less and women somewhat more than was the case in the 1970s.

In 1974, there were 11 million trade union members in the UK.³⁷

By 1974, the National Front, which had been founded in 1967 by a small group of fascists, claimed over 15,000 members and had 50 local branches around the country.

January 1974

Two thirds of all secondary school children were now educated in comprehensive schools.

Britain entered its first post-war recession after statistics showed that the economy had contracted during the third and fourth quarters of the previous year.

New Year's Day was celebrated as a public holiday for the first time. Over the next twenty years the number of people taking a whole week off between Christmas and the New Year would grow rapidly.

The Northern Ireland “power-sharing” Executive was set up in Belfast.

This was an attempt to govern the province by bypassing to some extent the built-in Unionist/Protestant majority in Northern Ireland.

1 January-7 March, the three-day week was introduced by the Conservative Government as a measure to conserve electricity during the period of industrial action by coal miners.

The miners’ union held a national ballot on a strike on pay.

81% of miners voted to strike, with a majority in every region in the country. Almost all newspaper editorials opposed the strike, but the Daily Mirror ran a campaign in support of the miners. It featured on its front page an image of all the miners who had been killed in the mines in recent years.

February 1974

Twelve people were killed when a bomb planted by the Provisional IRA exploded on a coach in Yorkshire. Nine of the dead were British soldiers, and two were children. Twelve other people were seriously injured. Judith Ward was arrested and convicted of the crime, but was released in 1992 after she had been proved to be innocent.³⁸

³⁷ You can find here a short history of the UK trade union movement from 1974 to 1979: <http://www.unionhistory.info/britainatwork/timeline/1974-1979.php>

³⁸ This tragic story is reported in this 1991 article, before her successful appeal: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2009/apr/30/ira-coach-bomb>

The Prime Minister, Edward Heath, speaking on February 7th, two days after the beginning of the miners' strike, called a general election for February 28th in an attempt to end the dispute. During the campaign, the Labour Party and Trades Union Congress (TUC) agreed a "social contract" intended to produce wage restraint. Heath appealed to the miners to suspend their national strike while the election campaign lasted; this proposal was rejected.

This election became known as the "Who governs Britain?" election as it was felt that Heath was asking the question "Who should govern? Striking miners or the government?" In any case, the electorate did not follow Heath. It has been said though that his campaign was not aggressively anti-union.³⁹

The Conservative manifesto, entitled *Firm Action for a Fair Britain*, came out, naturally defending the government's record in office.⁴⁰

The manifesto spoke of the economic crisis as having been largely caused by international factors beyond the control of the British state. But it also suggested that those trade unionists who supported strikes were a large part of the problem. In the opinion of the Conservatives, recent strikes were making the weakest parts of society suffer, since workers in active trade unions were seen as gaining an unfair advantage. The manifesto called for "responsible" politics and claimed that the Labour Party was "committed to extremism", intending, for example, they claimed, to nationalize any profit-making manufacturing firm.

The Conservative manifesto defended the Industrial Relations Act and also proposed that trade unions should be obliged by law to elect their leaders by a postal ballot. (Election systems tended to be different in each trade union, but trade unionists generally preferred decisions made in meetings where each might express their opinions and debate, rather than decisions made in isolation, each person at their home).

On public services, the manifesto denounced Labour plans to reduce the possibilities for private medicine to be practised in public hospitals.⁴¹ It also claimed that Labour intended to abolish private schools. Conservatives would put parental choice at the centre of secondary school organization, it insisted, and would also extend free nursery education.

On the question of housing, where Conservative councils often wished to sell council houses at cut prices to the people renting them, whereas Labour councils tended to want to conserve a substantial number of rented council properties, the manifesto stated its intention to oblige councils to sell, if the tenant wanted to buy. They also insisted that more flexible renting contracts, with less security of tenure, should be legalized, since this would, they claimed, make more properties available to rent.

In response, the Labour Party manifesto⁴² accused Edward Heath of having called the election "in a panic" because he was unable to reach an agreement with the miners' union.

Labour suggested the lack of agreement was because Heath was determined to achieve an irresponsible "political victory" over the miners' union without taking into account either the miners' case or the national interest. Labour's manifesto made much of the fact that in contrast with the bitter struggle triggered by the Industrial Relations Act, a serene, cooperative relationship between government and unions was possible under Labour: had they not already negotiated "the social contract" with the Trades Union Congress?

Labour put forward its case for an expanded public sector, with nationalization of certain companies, including partial nationalization of those firms already receiving

³⁹ This university lecture on the February 1974 election, given by Vernon Bogdanor, offers an interesting perspective: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPz-UkFQTBA>

⁴⁰ The full manifesto can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con74feb.htm>

⁴¹ This provision dates back to the beginnings of the NHS, when it had been a concession made by the health minister, Aneurin Bevan, to the doctors' organisations, which were moving reluctantly into the NHS.

⁴² The full document can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab74feb.htm>

government subsidies. They expressed their hostility to "land speculation" and "tax dodging", which they said they would clamp down on. In education, they were determined to abolish, in those few regions where they still existed, selective exams at eleven years of age.

Grenada won its independence from the UK.

Denis Healey continued to declare he would be tough on the rich, if Labour won the election and he became Chancellor, declaring in one speech that he intended to squeeze property speculators "until the pips squeaked". This was generally misquoted as "squeeze the rich until the pips squeak".

Enoch Powell, the controversial Conservative MP who had been dismissed from the shadow cabinet in 1968 for his rivers of blood speech opposing mass immigration, left the tory party, in protest against the pro-common market policies of Edward Heath.

On polling day, 28th February 1974, 78.8% of registered voter turned out to vote at the general election – a high figure. For the first time since 1929, the general election left no party with more than 50% of the Members of Parliament. Labour had 301 seats, the Conservatives 297.

Prime Minister Heath was unsuccessful in his attempt to persuade the Liberals to form a coalition with him. The Liberal leader was more than willing, but his party insisted that, in return, there should be a change in the electoral system to a proportional representation system, far more advantageous to smaller parties. Heath could not accept this condition, so there could be no coalition. The Prime Minister therefore resigned, and was replaced by Harold Wilson, even though Wilson did not have a majority in the House. Rather than attempt to find a coalition agreement, Wilson formed a minority government. Labour would therefore be relying for every vote on persuading a few Liberals, Ulster Unionists, or Welsh or Scottish nationalists, to vote with the government.

The Liberal Party made quite a remarkable comeback, tripling its vote in this election. The electoral system, however, meant they only won 14 seats.

The Scottish National Party, naturally, presenting candidates only in Scotland, made a significant breakthrough by gaining almost 22% of the vote in Scottish constituencies.

Although this only gave them seven MPs, this was an important event in the history of Scotland, and would give the party the influence necessary to insist, a few years later, on a referendum on an autonomous parliament.⁴³

Plaid Cymru gained two MPs in Wales.

March 1974

The new Labour government was able to stop the miners' strike immediately, by making a higher pay offer. It quickly moved, in addition, to abolish the Industrial Relations Act.

April 1974

The Local Government Act 1972 came into effect in England and Wales; it created six new metropolitan counties, including Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire, and

⁴³ This musical play, produced in the 1970s by 7:84, a radical theatre group, gives a fascinating and committed look at Scottish history from a left nationalist point of view. It is entitled *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black Black Oil*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-r_J14n100&t=23s

comprehensively redrew the administrative map. Two counties were legally transferred from England to Wales.

In Portugal, with the support of left wing sections of the Army, millions of people took to the streets in a largely nonviolent insurrection in which the military dictatorship was overthrown. This became known as the "Carnation Revolution" and, after a two-year transitional period, democracy was introduced. The new revolutionary government also decided on the independence of Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia.

May 1974

Asian workers at the Imperial Typewriter Company in Leicester went on strike, protesting about receiving lower bonuses and being treated less well than white workers. The trade union branch and the shop stewards committee did not support the workers. Nevertheless, the strike lasted 14 weeks, active picketing being carried out by men and women workers. After the first week, the company sacked 75 of the strikers. Local branches of far-right organizations organized racist leaflets. Eventually the company preferred to close the factory, and the strikers lost their jobs.

Although the strike was a defeat, it was followed by a union inquiry that attempted to combat racist discrimination by sections of the trade union. It was one of the events that foreshadowed the tremendously important change of attitudes in British trade unions concerning racism.

The fascist National Front, led by John Tyndall, gained more than 10% of the vote in several parts of the capital in local elections, but did not have any of its councillors elected.

Loyalist paramilitaries from the Ulster Volunteer Force carried out bombings in Dublin and in Monaghan. Thirty-three were killed and 300 injured. This was one of the deadliest attacks carried out by Protestant paramilitaries during the Troubles. An Irish parliamentary committee concluded that British soldiers were involved in the bombing, too. No one has ever been charged with the bombings.

In protest at the Sunningdale agreement, the Unionist organization, the Ulster Workers Council, called a strike in Northern Ireland.

The strike lasted for two weeks and was marked by loyalist paramilitary violence and intimidation. The strike succeeded in bringing down the Northern Ireland Assembly, which was suspended the day after the strike and abolished a year later. The Sunningdale Agreement was then, to all intents and purposes, dead and buried.

June 1974

An explosion at a chemical plant in Flixborough, Lincolnshire, killed 28 people and injured 36 more. Management were criticized for insufficient safety procedures.

Members of the fascist National Front fought with counter-demonstrators in London's West End, in incidents known as the Red Lion Square disorders; 21-year-old Kevin Gateley, a mathematics student, was killed, perhaps by the police. He was the first person to be killed in a demonstration in Britain since 1919, when the Army had shot two rioters in Liverpool.

A bomb was set off at the Houses of Parliament in London, damaging Westminster Hall. The Irish Republican Army claimed responsibility for planting the bomb.

July 1974

The provisional IRA planted a bomb at the Tower of London. One person was killed and 41 injured.

After Turkey's invasion of Cyprus, 10,000 Greek-Cypriots protested in London.⁴⁴

The Health and Safety at Work Act was passed, establishing the Health and Safety Executive, and much more thorough government supervision of accidents and dangers in the workplace.

The Act stated "it shall be the duty of every employer to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare at work of all his employees." The measures were part of a process in which the new Labour government hoped to gain greater cooperation with Trade Union leaders by dealing with some of their priorities in legislative terms.

The National Industrial Relations Court was abolished, to the satisfaction of trade unionists, who had felt it was biased against them.

August 1974

Faced with almost certain impeachment after the Watergate revelations, US President Richard Nixon resigned.

The collapse of holiday company Court Line left 100,000 British holidaymakers stranded in other countries.

Court Line had been a pioneer in the provision of "cheap and cheerful" package holidays to Spain. Government intervention allowed many of those who had booked holidays not to lose their money.

Thames Valley Police ordered the Windsor Free Festival to disperse. The festival had begun five days earlier and was cleared at dawn by hundreds of baton-wielding police.⁴⁵

September 1974

Harold Wilson confirmed that a second general election for the year would be held on 10 October.

Ceefax was started up by the BBC, a teletext system which was one of the first public service information systems, and a distant ancestor of the Internet.

The Labour manifesto for the October election was published under the title *Britain Will Win with Labour*.⁴⁶

It claimed that the Labour Party was the party of social justice, whereas the Conservatives represented the party of conflict. According to Labour, effort and sacrifices were necessary due to the international economic crisis and the massive increase in the price of oil, but such a programme could only be accepted if people in Britain felt that all were being fairly treated. ("Why should a coal miner dig extra coal

⁴⁴ One of the places where Britain's imperial past caught up with it in the 1970s, to some extent, was Cyprus. This 1984 documentary is rather long, but explains the situation well:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCXbGq5Ukzw>

⁴⁵ One festivalgoer later wrote about his memories in a conservative daily newspaper:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music/3619773/The-forgotten-festival-I-was-there.html>

⁴⁶ <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab74oct.htm>

for a few pounds more while he has seen property speculators grow wealthy looking at empty office blocks?)

The manifesto rejected the idea of a coalition government as a "cruel farce" since different parties had different philosophies. It defended Harold Wilson's record, expressing pride at a list of achievements made over the last six months – in particular the abolition of the Industrial Relations Act, more taxation on the rich and less on working people, more security of tenure for tenants and the beginnings of a renegotiation of membership terms for the Common Market. It is also mentioned that VAT had been cut from 10% to 8%, that subsidies had kept food prices from rising too quickly, and that more money had been made available for teachers' pay and for student grants.

The manifesto insisted that a broadening of public ownership was key to helping Britons prosper despite the international crisis. Labour intended to extend public ownership by buying shares in profitable manufacturing firms, with the aim of "protecting jobs" and "encouraging investment". Far from an unfortunate last resort (as Conservatives would tend to think of it), nationalization was seen as a way of increasing popular control over the economy. Similarly, their intention of holding a large share in North Sea oil projects was underlined, and their plan to increase taxes on oil profits.

Plans were revealed to create new rights for employees and their representative organizations. Joint control on many issues was planned for industry. There would also be a new wealth tax introduced on wealth over £100,000.

In public services, the most notable proposals were the phasing out of private beds in NHS hospitals. The existence of such private beds was denounced as "queue jumping". Prescription charges were also to be phased out. On housing, it was said that council purchase of development land would be encouraged, and that the "disastrous fall in house building" would be reversed. On education, it was announced that the party had a long-term aim of eliminating fee paying in schools.

In other areas, the manifesto underlined that the Labour government had appointed the first ever minister responsible for the arts, and the first ever minister of sport.

On devolution, the promise was made to set up autonomous assemblies in Scotland and in Wales. The British troops in Northern Ireland would stay there for the time being, although in the long term it was hoped they would be withdrawn. Labour were proud to be able to propose a referendum on remaining in the Common Market, a consultation which they presented as a triumph for democracy. Finally, on nuclear weapons, the manifesto explained that the present nuclear weapons would stay but that there would be no replacement of them by a new generation of long-range nuclear weapons.

The Conservative Party published the opposing manifesto, under the title *Putting Britain First*.⁴⁷

The Conservative manifesto criticized trade unions for taking on an inappropriate role ("We shall not be dominated by the trade unions. They are not the government of the country"). The situation of the country is presented as a grave one indeed ("The dangers now facing Britain are greater than any we have seen since the last war. These dangers are both economic and political"). Implicitly, the Labour Party is presented as wanting to destroy the existing system:

"We do not believe that the great majority of people want revolutionary change in society, or for that matter that the future happiness of our society depends on completely altering it. There is no majority for a massive extension of nationalisation. There is no majority for the continued harrying of private enterprise."

The manifesto suggested that the country's main problem was that "We must stop paying ourselves more than we produce" and promised that a Conservative government would "rigorously control public spending". Although the Conservatives admit that not much cutting of taxes is feasible for the moment, they maintain that their general objective is to reduce "the burden of taxation".

The priorities of the manifesto reflected the values of the party: it was planned to "develop forms of savings which are protected against inflation", which would help mostly middle-class people who had seen the value of their savings fall quite sharply because of inflation. Taxes on capital would be reviewed. Old Age Pensioners were also to be, it was said, a priority of Conservative policy.

One chapter of the manifesto dealt with the party's attitudes to trade unions. A new Conservative government would not reintroduce the Industrial Relations Act, it was stated, "in view of the hostility which it aroused". The party would like to see lower

⁴⁷ The full manifesto can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con74oct.htm>

wage rises. A voluntary pay policy, they said, would be tried, but, if it did not work, then a statutory (i.e. obligatory) limit on wage rises would be put in place. As a matter of principle, the possibility of the families of those on strike receiving financial help from the government was to be reviewed. The right for trade unions to hold meetings in workplaces would be instituted, and also, trade unions who wished would be able to receive government funding to organize postal ballots for electing union leaders.

Turning then to public services: on the question of housing, the main priority of the Conservatives was to increase the percentage of people owning their own home. To encourage this, they intended to cap mortgage rates, and to provide grants for first time buyers who were saving for a deposit on a house. The party also committed itself to obliging local councils to sell council houses to the people who lived in them at one third below the market price of the house.

On health, the party opposed the abolition of all charges in the health service, which Labour was proposing. On education, the manifesto insisted that the Conservative Party was not opposed to comprehensive schooling in general, but that they defended the right of local councils to refuse comprehensive schooling if they wished, based on the preferences of parents in the area.

October 1974

Five all-male Colleges of Oxford University followed the example of some Cambridge colleges and admitted women students for the very first time. Previously the only women students in the university had gone to one of the five all-women colleges.

The Guildford pub bombings, carried out by the IRA at The Horse and Groom and The Seven Stars, killed five people, four soldiers and a civilian. In an atmosphere of pressure on the police force to find the culprits, four young Irishmen were arrested and forced to confess.

The arrested men, soon known as "the Guildford Four" would spend more than fifteen years in prison before being proved to be innocent. The four were mostly involved in petty theft and wild partying and were just the sort of person the IRA would never recruit, but the judge and jury believed the confessions even though they were later retracted. In 2005, Prime Minister Tony Blair officially apologized to the "Guildford Four", and they received financial compensation.

On polling day, the 10th October 1974, 72.8% of registered voters turned out to vote. The second general election of the year gave a narrow victory for Harold Wilson, giving Labour a majority of three MPs. The Scottish National Party obtained its best ever result with 11 seats, and this would give it weight in future debates on devolution. Ex-Conservative Enoch Powell, campaigning against immigrants and against the European Economic Community, was elected to Parliament in a Northern Irish constituency for the Ulster Unionist Party.

The Liberal Party, just as in February, had an excellent result for them: over 18% of voters voted Liberal. This good score would add legitimacy to the Lib-Lab pact that Callaghan was to set up.

The Scottish National Party obtained an even better result than in February, gaining 30% of the vote in Scotland (five per cent more than the Conservatives), even if the number of their MPs fell to eleven.

Plaid Cymru gained one more seat, bringing their total number of MPs to three.

The first McDonalds restaurant in the country opened in London.

November 1974

Birmingham pub bombings: In Birmingham, bombs planted by a Provisional IRA member exploded, killing 21 people and injuring 182, many losing limbs. Over the next few days in Northern Ireland, five Catholic civilians were shot "in retaliation".

In what was perhaps the biggest miscarriage of justice in 20th century Britain, six Irishmen, the "Birmingham Six" were charged with the Birmingham pub bombings. Just like the Guildford Four and others, they would be found guilty based on forced confessions and would spend sixteen years in prison before courts recognized they were innocent. Much later the government officially apologized. The tremendous anger about the bombings, the pressure on police to catch the guilty ones immediately, and anti-Irish racism, all contributed to this miscarriage of justice.

The Prevention of Terrorism Act was passed. The Home secretary Roy Jenkins had indicated in Parliament that *"the powers are Draconian. In combination, they are unprecedented in peacetime"*.

December 1974

The last episode of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* was shown on BBC2.

*The Monty Python comedy team had begun in comedy shows at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and proposed sophisticated, absurd sketches which were probably ahead of their time (although some of their forgotten sketches contained that homophobia which was very common in 1960s and 1970s Britain). They produced an innovative comedy sketch show entitled *Monty Python's Flying Circus* from 1969 to 1974, and followed this up with a series of films. A number of the sketches, such as *The Dead Parrot Sketch*, *The Cheese Shop Sketch*, *Michelangelo to See the pope*, *The Lion Tamer Sketch*, *Nudge Nudge or Self Defence against Fresh Fruit*⁴⁸ have become classics and will often be quoted by British people of that generation, without warning.*

Martin Ryle and Anthony Hewish, British experts in radio telescropy, won the Nobel Prize in Physics.

New speed limits were introduced on Britain's roads in an attempt to save fuel at a time of oil crisis.

The London home of Conservative Party leader and former Prime Minister, Edward Heath, was bombed in a suspected Provisional IRA attack.

Former Labour government minister John Stonehouse was found in Australia, after having faked his own death by drowning. He was quickly arrested, tried in Britain and sentenced to seven years in prison for fraud. He was found much later to have been a Czech spy!

In the House of Commons, a motion aiming at reintroducing capital punishment for terrorist offences causing death was defeated by 369 votes to 217.⁴⁹

Capital punishment for murder had been suspended in 1964 and abolished in 1969, but this vote reflected the fact that public opinion was very much divided, and that even among MPs, 217 voted in favour.

The Christmas number one record in the UK singles charts was the melancholy romantic ballad *Lonely This Christmas* by the glam rock group Mud. This song gets seasonal airplay in the UK to this day.

Undated events of 1974

Inflation soared to a 34-year high of 17.2%.

⁴⁸ All of these are easy to find on YouTube.

⁴⁹ This television debate from 1969 on the pros and cons of capital punishment gives a clear idea of where public opinion was at the beginning of the 1970s:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtrkFRJTGyk>

Contraceptive pills were now available free on the NHS.

The Health and Safety at Work Act instituted the collection of statistics concerning accidents at work.

In the year 1974, 651 people were killed in work accidents. This number was around 500 in 1981, and by 2014, this had dropped to only 92. The drop was partly due to better health and safety regulations, but also due to a massive shift from industrial sector employment to (generally less dangerous) service sector employment.

First published in 1974

The Campaign for Real Ale's first *Good Beer Guide*.

Linton Kwesi Johnson's first poetry collection *Voices of the Living and the Dead*.

The Jamaican-Brit dub poet had been a member of the Black Panthers in the 1960s, and, in the 1970s, gained recognition for his writing and performance of mostly political poetry, which dealt with issues such as racism and police violence.

1975

Some figures

Between 1963 and 1975 average wages had increased by over 200% (prices had also increased, of course, but considerably less).

January 1975

Donald Coggan was enthroned as the new Archbishop of Canterbury, the highest ranked cleric in the Church of England.

Coggan became known as a firm supporter of the ordination of women, though this would not happen in the Anglican Church till 1994.

February 1975

Margaret Thatcher defeated Edward Heath in the Conservative Party leadership election to become the party's first female leader. Mrs Thatcher, 49 years old, had been Education Secretary in Mr Heath's government from 1970 to 1974.

With hindsight, the defeat of Edward Heath in this leadership election is often seen as the end of "one-nation toryism", an expression used to describe the conservatism of the great post-war boom, when Tory governments were happy to cooperate with trade union leaders, work with a broad nationalized sector of the economy, very low unemployment and relatively high rates of income tax for corporations and for better-off people. This "one-nation" compromise had been relatively stable until the arrival of the deep economic crises of the 1970s. When companies found it much harder to make high profits in the crisis, the pressure to reduce taxes, and therefore reduce public services, was much stronger, and the ideology that would become Thatcherism was encouraged by this development.

The coal miners' union accepted a 35% pay rise.

A major tube train crash at Moorgate station in London killed 43 people.

The rise of the welfare state included increased attention to health and safety in all areas from road safety to food hygiene. If one looks at surface train transport across the UK, for example, the 1950s saw 351 deaths in rail accidents, the 1960s saw 176 deaths and the 1970s only 73 deaths.

March 1975

A rally a few hundred strong, organized in London by the extreme right National Front, protested against European integration. A counter-demonstration of a similar size denounced them as fascists.

Unemployment exceeded 1,000,000.

Negotiations about staying in the EEC were concluded to the satisfaction of Harold Wilson.

Many commentators have claimed that there were only very minor changes to previous conditions, although certain concessions were made to the UK desire to maintain favourable tariffs on food imported from Commonwealth countries.

April 1975

The film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* was released.

The Labour Party membership, at a special one-day conference, voted against continued membership of the European Economic Community, by almost two to one against.

Only seven of the 46 trade unions present at the conference were in favour of EEC membership. Tony Benn proposed that the party should campaign for a "No" vote, but it had been decided previous to the conference that the party would only campaign if the majority was higher than two to one in favour of a particular option. The party machine, therefore, remained neutral during the referendum campaign, though many individual members campaigned for one or the other choice. Harold Wilson decided to allow cabinet ministers to campaign for whichever side they wished, in a rare breach of traditional collective responsibility.

The first episode of the BBC sitcom *The Good Life* was broadcast.

This series explored the world of a middle-class couple who had decided to leave their jobs and become "self-sufficient", growing food, keeping animals and making their own clothes, while still living in their very respectable neighbourhood. In reality of course, such projects were extremely rare, but the series explores some new concerns about ecology, and about escaping from a perceived conformism. Each episode of the first series attracted between six and nine million viewers.

The Viet Cong army took Saigon, and the last US military advisors fled, ending the war in Vietnam. The defeat of the world's greatest superpower by a small peasant people had an inestimable effect on political ideas and movements across the world.

May 1975

Ten countries established the European Space Agency, including the United Kingdom. Its spaceport was to be situated in French Guyana. It participated in the launching of the world's first high-orbit telescope three years later.

June 1975

The government distributed pamphlets to every household in Britain written by the official "Yes" and "No" campaigns, together with its own pamphlet that argued in support of EEC membership. All in all, the "Yes" campaign spent around ten times as much as the "No" campaign, in the weeks leading up to the referendum.

Sixty five per cent of registered voters turned out to vote in the EEC referendum, and 67% of them supported Britain staying inside the European Economic Community.

The Labour Party manifesto in 1974 had promised to renegotiate the terms of Britain's membership of the EEC, and then hold a referendum once the renegotiation had been carried out. The negotiations in fact resulted in only minor changes, but Harold Wilson loudly declared himself satisfied. The Labour Party and its supporters were deeply divided over the EEC: the left wing saw it as a "capitalists' club" with few advantages for workers, many saw the EEC as an infringement on British sovereignty, whereas Wilson and others felt that a higher level of cooperation with Europe would be so beneficial to the British economy that other considerations should be put aside. The Labour Party conference had voted against membership of the EEC. In order to minimize bitter division in the Labour Party, Wilson had declared that individual members of Parliament, and even ministers, could campaign for the result they wished. In total, seven out of 23 cabinet ministers, including left wingers such as Tony Benn, Michael Foot, and Barbara Castle campaigned for a "No" vote.

Notice that, in sharp contrast to the EU referendum campaign in 2016, the "No" campaign in 1975 was dominated by left-wingers.⁵⁰ Scottish and Welsh nationalists, and Ulster Unionists, also supported the "No" campaign. Harold Wilson, Chancellor Denis Healey, Foreign Secretary James Callaghan, and the majority of the Conservative Party, including Margaret Thatcher, supported the "Yes" campaign. One

⁵⁰ You can find online here a university lecture about the 1975 referendum, given by Professor Vernon Bogdanor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BijWSNYPSn8>

And here is a television debate between two Labour ministers, one in favour of remaining in the EEC and the other in favour of withdrawing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zBFh6bpcMo&t=22s

could sometimes see Conservative and Labour opponents to the EEC sharing platforms; this did not always happen, however: for example, Tony Benn always refused to share a platform with Enoch Powell, because of Powell's racist views.

For the first time ever, debates in Parliament were broadcast on the radio so that the public could listen in. A full written record of debates (Hansard) had been published ever since 1909, with partial accounts published long before that.

Ambulance crews in the Birmingham area refused to answer non-emergency calls, in an industrial dispute over pay and over the length of the working week.

Tony Benn, previously Secretary of State for Industry, became Secretary of State for Energy.

Tony Benn, who had become a Lord on the death of his father and had led a long and eventually successful campaign to have the right to renounce his peerage in order to continue being a Member of Parliament, was on the left wing of the Parliamentary Labour Party, and seemed to move further to the left through his experience as a minister. He came to feel that the top civil servants and rich investors had more power than the government, and he came to lay ever more emphasis on extra-parliamentary mass movements to bring about social change.⁵¹ While he was Secretary of State for Industry, he received frequent death threats, and was also targeted by a mass media campaign. "Sack Benn!" was the headline in The Sun, shortly before his transfer from the Department of Industry, while the Sunday Mirror headlined "Bye Bye Benn". Benn felt that, in moving him from Industry to Energy, Wilson was capitulating to the right-wing media, since it was in the Department of Industry that Benn's radical ideas about nationalization and about worker participation in industrial decision-making would have most traction.

July 1975

The Government and trade union leaders agreed a one-year cash limit on pay rises.

August 1975

The government's anti-inflation policy came into full effect. A summary of the White Paper Attack on Inflation was delivered to all households. The organization "the Low Pay Unit", funded by trade unions, published a reply to the White Paper, written by Chris Pond.

Unemployment hit 1.25 million.

September 1975

Two people were killed and 63 were injured when the IRA planted a bomb at the Hilton hotel in London. A telephone warning was received only a few minutes before the explosion.

The first episode of the popular sitcom *Fawlty Towers* was on BBC2 television.

The National Railway Museum was opened in York, becoming the first national museum outside London.

An influential report on ethnic minorities and housing showed that although there had been something of a decrease in overt discrimination by estate agents against black people, citizens from ethnic minorities still occupied housing which was on average very much inferior to that occupied by white people. There were fewer accusations of direct

⁵¹ This podcast, made after his death in 2014, presents him "in his own words":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmqzoEqK6x0&t=183s>

discrimination than in previous years, but this was largely because many black people did not even try to rent from white landlords any more.

October 1975

An IRA bomb explosion outside Green Park tube station near Piccadilly in London killed 1 person and injured 20.

Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody* was released.

November 1975

Punk rock band, the Sex Pistols, gave their first concert.

Punk was to be an aesthetic rebellion against upbeat national unity in the crisis. Where the narrator of the rock and roll song had often been a confident young man about town, sure of his success with the girls, and that of "progressive rock" a deep, poetic dreamer, the typical narrator of a punk song was a sarcastic loser. Such refrains as "We're so pretty vacant, and we don't care" or "There's no future in England's dreaming" became massively popular among young people in a society of stress and unemployment where the optimism of the post-war boom no longer seemed appropriate. Punk widened considerably the range of themes which popular music dealt with, and also, with its do-it-yourself aesthetic, encouraged the setting up of thousands of punk rock bands, hundreds of local magazines (fanzines) and a series of small, independent record labels which together would have a huge influence on British popular music.

The Employment Protection Act established ACAS (the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) to arbitrate industrial disputes. The same law legislated against unfair dismissal, and gave more influence to workers' health and safety representatives in a wider range of workplaces.

The establishment of ACAS was an attempt to reduce conflict between employers and workers by a process of mediation.

British and Icelandic ships clashed, marking the beginning of the third Cod War.

Ross McWhirter, a TV personality and conservative political activist, was shot dead by the Provisional Irish Republican Army after he had offered reward money to IRA informers.

The government White Paper *Our Changing Democracy: Devolution to Scotland and Wales* was published.

December 1975

The government ended its policy of internment without trial of suspected terrorists in the North of Ireland.

Balcombe Street Siege: IRA members on the run from police broke into a London flat taking two people hostage. They demanded a plane to fly them to the Irish Republic, but the authorities refused this. The siege ended after 6 days with the men giving themselves up to the police.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 came into effect, although it did not apply to Northern Ireland. Discrimination on the grounds of sex or marital status was now illegal.

The Equal Pay Act 1970, aiming to end unequal treatment inside the workplace, also came into effect. The principle of equal pay for women had originally been proposed in the 1959 election manifesto of the Labour Party and had been supported since 1965 by the Trades Union Congress.

The 1975 Christmas number one record in the UK singles charts was “Bohemian Rhapsody” sung by Freddie Mercury and the group Queen. It was an innovative song musically, much longer than pop songs normally are, and was one of the first to put forward a specially made video to help sell the song, rather than simply footage of the band singing.⁵²

Undated events of 1975

The British National Oil Corporation was set up.

For the first time a woman, Jackie Tabick, is qualified as a rabbi in Britain. She was born in Dublin and moved to Britain to study rabbinical law.

In 1975, social spending amounted to 19.4% of Gross National Product. In 1960, the figure had stood at 12.4% (of a far smaller GDP).

The first meetings of the Gay Labour Group were held, lobbying inside the Labour Party for gay liberation to be taken more seriously.

The Campaign for Homosexual Equality declared that it had 6 000 members around the country.

Angela Rippon became the first ever regular woman newsreader on television, working for the BBC. It would be three years before ITV followed suit, employing Anna Ford to read the news.

Such a visible and symbolically authoritative position was a small but important step towards women's equality.

First published in 1975

Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man*, a sarcastic attack on left wing university types and their supposedly doubtful sense of ethics, was published.

Agatha Christie's final Hercule Poirot novel, *Curtain*.

Barry Hines's novel, *The Gamekeeper*.

Richard Crossman's *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister* was published after his death, in spite of a legal battle with the government that wished to suppress publication.

⁵² The video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ9rUzIMcZQ>

1976

In 1976, there were 12.1 million trade union members in Britain.

January 1976

The first commercial Concorde flight took place.

Twelve Provisional Irish Republican Army bombs exploded in London.⁵³

The House of Commons rejected, by 181 votes against 120, a proposal to end corporal punishment in state schools.

Such punishment was still fairly common and would finally be banned by law only in 1987.

February 1976

Iceland broke off diplomatic relations with Britain over the Cod War.

March 1976

Merlyn Rees ended Special Category Status for those sentenced for crimes relating to the civil violence in Northern Ireland.

This means that what had been more or less considered as Prisoners of War, many of them kept in a prison which resembled a PoW camp, with huts and compounds rather than cells, were now to be considered as common criminals. A new high security prison was built, with traditional cells, and prisoners were ordered to wear prison uniforms. Republican prisoners, who considered themselves political prisoners, refused to wear uniform, and were therefore confined to their cells naked, and wore only the prison blanket from their bed. Since they would not wear uniforms, prison officers refused to allow them out for exercise, and they were confined to their cells 24 hours a day.

The Maguire Seven (friends and family of the Guildford Four) were found guilty of the offence of possessing explosives and subsequently jailed for 14 years before being found innocent on appeal.

Harold Wilson announced his resignation as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to take effect on April 5th.

The announcement took almost everyone by surprise, although some of his closest allies had been told some time before. The reasons for his resignation have been much discussed, and it has been suggested that he was already suffering from early symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, which later in his life became quite serious. A number of rumours about unsavoury scandals about to break circulated, but they were all untrue, and it soon became clear that the resignation had been planned for a number of years. An election was quickly held to replace Wilson as leader of the Parliamentary Labour Party and therefore as Prime Minister.

As is tradition, Wilson drew up a "resignation honours list" which recommended people for knighthoods, the Order of the British Empire (OBE) and Member of the

⁵³ Wikipedia gives a list of bombings during the Troubles here:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bombings_during_the_Northern_Ireland_Trouble_and_peace_process.

British Empire (MBE)⁵⁴ awards, all of which carry much prestige in the British establishment. The presence of some of the names on the list caused considerable controversy, as the names appeared to be there as personal favours to personal friends. Wilson was much attacked in the media for this list, nicknamed "the lavender list". Anecdotally, the best-known comic impressionist in Britain, Mike Yarwood, also received an OBE on the list.

April 1976

The first ever female British ambassador took up her post, to Denmark.

The United Kingdom won the Eurovision Song Contest with the song "Save All Your Kisses for Me", sung by Brotherhood of Man, a sentimental piece about parental love.

James Callaghan defeated right-winger Roy Jenkins and left-winger Michael Foot in the Labour Party leadership contest, thus becoming Prime Minister.

James Callaghan, son of a naval officer, was from an ordinary family and had left school at 14 years of age, so he was particularly proud of defeating several Oxford graduates in the leadership contest. He had become, in 1945, Member of Parliament for a Cardiff constituency. He was Home Secretary in the late 1960s, and took the decision to send British troops to Northern Ireland to try to deal with the crisis there. After the Labour victory of 1974, Callaghan had been responsible for renegotiating the terms of Britain's membership of the European Economic Community. When Wilson resigned in 1976, Callaghan was the oldest of the candidates to replace him; indeed, at 64, he was older than Wilson, and some commentators held this against him. No doubt not the most popular of the candidates, he was the least divisive, and this led the Parliamentary Labour Party to elect him. At this time, unlike in later decades, only Labour Members of Parliament took part in the election of the Labour leader: neither trade unionists nor Labour Party activists had a say.

June 1976

UK and Iceland finally ended the Cod War.

It might be considered surprising that Iceland, a much weaker country from an economic and military point of view, achieved its most important aims by the end of the conflict, and was allowed to have exclusive rights to fishing for a 200-mile limit off its shores. This result was a very severe blow indeed to the British fishing industry, and many fishermen lost their jobs. The explanation of Iceland's "victory" was its strategic geographical position, from a military point of view. Indeed, by implying that it was willing to leave Nato if the fishing dispute was not terminated on advantageous terms for Iceland, the country was able to impose its will.

The Seychelles, a British colony since 1814, gained its independence.

August 1976

The government and the Trades Union Congress agreed to a more severe Stage II one-year limit on pay rises.

A hundred police officers and 60 carnival-goers were hurt during fighting at the Notting Hill Caribbean carnival.

September 1976

The Peace People organized a march in Derry (Northern Ireland) "against violence".

⁵⁴ The Order of the British Empire and Member of the British Empire are prestigious honours awarded by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister for outstanding service to the nation, whether in arts, sciences or in the civil service.

The Northern Ireland Peace People was set up in 1976 on a programme of denouncing violence, and had, for a short time, considerable popularity: at least one of its marches attracted tens of thousands of people, and Joan Baez came to sing at the rally afterwards. The political position of the Peace People, finally much harder on IRA violence than on Army or RUC violence, stopped it from playing a deeper role in the later peace process, as it was often considered to have a naïve attitude to the British state. The Peace People campaigned in the United States, for example, against fundraising for the IRA. The two co-founders of the Peace People received a Nobel Peace prize, but the agreements in 1998 and after, which led to a suspension of the military conflict in Northern Ireland, came from political choices by groups which had been involved in the military conflict, not from those who denounced violence.⁵⁵

James Callaghan made a much-commented on speech that appeared to firmly reject the Keynesian policies that had been so influential in previous decades. “We used to think you could just spend your way out of a recession and increase employment by cutting taxes and boosting government spendings (...) that option no longer exists”, he declared.

This was the prologue to an intensification of budget limitations and even to cuts in public services. Critics at the time noted that the shortage of money did not seem to affect such expensive policies as the choice of a nuclear defence.

October 1976

British Rail introduced fast trains – InterCity 125 – with a top speed of 125 miles per hour, on main routes, for the first time.

Two members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, a section of the British Army whose members were sometimes directly involved in sectarian violence, were jailed for 35 years for having murdered three members of the famous Irish musical ensemble, the Miami Showband.

The Damned released “New Rose”, which was the first ever single to be marketed as “punk rock”.

A Conservative Party document, *The Right Approach*, emphasized the importance to the party of the selling off of council houses.

November 1976

Race Relations Act: this law introduced for the first time the concept of “indirect discrimination”. From now on policies with discriminatory effects were illegal, whether or not there was discriminatory intent. So, for example, a company having a policy of identical uniforms would not be allowed to use such a regulation to sack a Sikh man who wore a turban. At the same time, the Commission for Racial Equality was established.

Some commentators have seen the Race Relations Act as an essentially symbolic move, pointing out that the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) had little power and that successful prosecutions for discrimination were extremely rare. Others insist that nevertheless this legislation was the most comprehensive in Europe at the time, and that it laid the basis for later policy innovations, such as the institution, in 2002, of the duty of public organizations to “promote racial equality”, and the measures against islamophobia and other religious discrimination, passed in 2003. Participation in public life by non-white citizens advanced slowly. By 1982, there were 76 borough councillors (from around 2 000) of Asian or West Indian origin on London’s borough councils; it was during the 1980s and 1990s that local government began to include significant numbers of Asian or West Indian representatives. The election in 2016 of Sadiq Khan as Mayor of London is the most recent sign of progress in this domain.

⁵⁵ Thirty years later, this well-balanced BBC article looked back on the Peace People: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/4781091.stm

December 1976

Members of the punk rock band the Sex Pistols were encouraged by the presenter to pronounce a number of swear words live on Bill Grundy's TV show, following the release of their first single *Anarchy in the UK*. Media uproar followed.⁵⁶

The chancellor declared in Parliament that he had successfully negotiated a £2.3 billion loan for the UK from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF made the loan conditional on £2.5 billion being cut from public expenditure.

It later transpired that the situation of the economy was not as bad as had been feared. It was even suggested by some that treasury officials had deliberately blackened the picture so as to pressure the Labour government into neoliberal cuts in social budgets.

The Christmas number one record in the UK singles charts was a religiously themed ballad "When a Child Is Born" by US singer, Johnny Mathis.

Undated events of 1976

Inflation stood at 16.5% - lower than last year's level, but still one of the highest since records began. However, at one stage during this year, inflation had exceeded 24%.

The Sun became the best-selling tabloid in Britain, overtaking the *Daily Mirror*.

First published in 1976

Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*.

⁵⁶ This slightly bizarre episode is recounted in this short documentary:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R0IAYFh0CaI>

1977

The Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations in 1977 gave trade unions the right to appoint representatives to safety committees in workplaces.

January 1977

Record company EMI dismissed the controversial British punk rock group, the Sex Pistols, because of their behaviour on ITV's *Today Show*, whose presenter Bill Grundy was also dismissed by his employers for inciting them.

Seven Provisional Irish Republican Army bombs exploded in the West End of London, but there were, this time, no fatalities or serious injuries.

February 1977

Fleetwood Mac's best-selling album *Rumours* is released, including songs "The Chain", and "Go Your Own Way".

The three IRA terrorists involved in the 1975 Balcombe Street Siege in London were sentenced to life imprisonment on 6 charges of murder.

After 3 years of deliberation, the Annan committee on the future of broadcasting made its report to the government. It recommended that a new commercial channel be authorized (this would be Channel Four, operating from 1980). It also wanted the BBC to rely more on buying in privately produced programmes rather than making its own, and it favoured the authorization of more private local radio stations. The general trend, as in other areas of society, was moving very much away from state moral guidance.

March 1977

James Callaghan threatened to withdraw state aid to British Leyland unless it put an end to strikes. Shortly afterwards, British Leyland managers announced their intention to dismiss 40,000 toolmakers who had gone on strike at the company's plant in Birmingham.

The government won a vote of confidence after Mr Callaghan made a deal with the Liberal group of 13 MPs in the House of Commons. This agreement came to be known as "the Lib-Lab pact".

At this point the majority of 3 MPs, which the Labour Party had won in the October 1974 elections, had disappeared.⁵⁷ In order to keep governing, Callaghan had to pay great attention to the interests and priorities of MPs from smaller parties, and also to maintain tight discipline, with the help of the whips (members of Parliament specially tasked with persuading or cajoling Members of Parliament to be present and to vote every single time with their party leadership). This could sometimes involve whips touring nearby pubs to pick up Labour MPs who had left the House of Commons for a beer break!

Ken Loach, who would become one of the UK's most celebrated film directors in the 1990s, released his two-part TV play, *The Price of Coal*, about the events at a colliery where everything is being prepared for a royal visit.

⁵⁷ There are over 600 MPs, and few of them are young: this means that there are deaths every year.

In a much-noticed speech in Zurich, Margaret Thatcher declared: "*the tide is beginning to turn against collectivism, socialism, statism, dirigisme, whatever you call it. And this turn is rooted in a revulsion against the sour fruit of socialist experience*".

April 1977

Mike Leigh's comedy of manners *Abigail's Party* opened at the Hampstead Theatre, starring Alison Steadman. After working in television for many years, Mike Leigh was to become, by the beginning of the 21st century, one of the most appreciated of British film directors, along with Ken Loach and Stephen Frears.

Punk band The Clash released their debut album, *The Clash*, in the UK through CBS Records. Sarcastic, energetic and aggressive, the record included tracks such as "I'm so bored with the USA", "Career Opportunities" which decries youth unemployment and "White Riot" which expresses admiration of rioting black youth in Britain's inner cities. The album won critical acclaim and reached number 12 in the UK album charts.

National Front⁵⁸ marchers clashed with anti-Nazi protesters in London.

May 1977

The third G7 summit was held in London. This was to become an annual event where the leaders of the seven richest countries in the world could discuss policy.

Prime Minister James Callaghan officially opened the M5 motorway, the building of which had taken 15 years.

A gala performance for the Queen's Silver Jubilee was held at the Royal Opera House, London.

June 1977

Jubilee celebrations were held across the United Kingdom to celebrate 25 years of Queen Elizabeth II's reign, with a public holiday on June 7th. In a large number of towns, popular street parties were organized.

The Grunwick dispute was by now well known internationally. Seventeen people were arrested in one day during clashes between police and demonstrators.

Exodus, one of the most influential of Bob Marley's LPs, and his ninth, was issued. It included the tracks "Jamming" and "One Love". In 1999, *Time* magazine would name this record "best album of the 20th century".

July 1977

The Homeless Persons Act, 1977, reorganized and reinforced the responsibilities of local government for helping the homeless.

⁵⁸ This documentary, made in 1978 by the award winning *World in Action* team, goes into detail about the activity and ideas of the National Front and the British National Party:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNalu0pSL2A>

The newspaper *Gay News* was found guilty of blasphemous libel in a case (*Whitehouse v. Lemon*) brought by Mary Whitehouse's National Viewers and Listeners Association. The magazine had published a poem about a centurion having sex with Jesus. Much of the Left protested that the real reason for the case was anti-homosexual prejudice.

August 1977

The government introduced a voluntary Stage III one-year pay restraint.

An attempt by the far-right National Front to march from New Cross to Lewisham in multi-ethnic South-east London led to counter-demonstrations and violent clashes. Fighting also broke out in Birmingham during demonstrations against the National Front.

September 1977

Statistics showed that, for the first time in the UK, foreign-built cars were selling more than British cars.

Steve Biko, an activist and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement, which fought against apartheid in South Africa, was killed in a police station in Pretoria.

His death caused an international outrage, and a memorial service in St Paul's Cathedral in London was even attended by the Foreign Secretary. His murder reinforced the determination of anti-apartheid movements in South Africa and in many other countries, including Britain, where important movements for disinvestment and boycott grew up in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁹

October 1977

Former Liberal leader Jeremy Thorpe denied allegations concerning the attempted murder of male model Norman Scott.

Punk band, the Sex Pistols, released *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols* on the Virgin Records label. Despite the refusal by major retailers to stock it, it went straight to number one in the UK album charts. In a promotional stunt the group performed on a boat on the River Thames shortly afterwards, only for the police to wait for them and make several arrests, including that of Malcolm McLaren, the band's manager.

Rock band Queen released the album *News of the World*, including tracks such as "We Will Rock You" and "We Are the Champions". It reached number four in the UK album charts, and had much success internationally.

November 1977

Firefighters went on their first ever national strike, in hope of getting a 30% wage increase. There was almost a 100% participation rate. Troops were brought in to provide emergency cover.⁶⁰

British Airways began a regular London to New York City supersonic Concorde service.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This half an hour documentary by the renowned *World in Action* team was broadcast shortly after his murder: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MoNGCSgWQEQ>

⁶⁰ The BBC website reports the strike here: http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/14/newsid_3154000/3154632.stm

December 1977

Box office cinema success *Saturday Night Fever* was released, starring John Travolta as a working-class man who was king of the dance floor at weekends, and featuring the songs of the Bee Gees, in homage to disco music and dancing. The plot tells of racial tension and religious influence in working class America.

Nevill Francis Mott won the Nobel prize in Physics jointly with Philip Warren Anderson and John Hasbrouck van Vleck “*for their fundamental theoretical investigations of the electronic structure of magnetic and disordered systems*”.

The Queen opened a £71 million extension to the London Underground that runs as far as Heathrow Airport.

The Morecambe & Wise Christmas Show on BBC 1 television attracted an audience of more than 28 million viewers, one of the highest ever in U.K. television history.⁶²

Star Wars was shown in British cinemas for the first time.

Undated events of 1977

Golden Wonder launched Pot Noodles. They still produce in 2016, in their factory in Wales, 175 million pots a year. In the 1970s, it was considered as symbolic of a new era of eating habits, and felt to be “typical” of a student population living a high speed and non-traditional lifestyle.

Inflation had fallen slightly this year to 15.8%, but it was the fourth successive year that had seen inflation above 10%.

Colour television licences outnumbered black and white licences for the first time in the U.K.

First published in 1977

Marilyn French *The Women’s Room* was published.

This influential feminist novel by a US author (whose first book had been a thesis on James Joyce) followed the lives of a group of housewives in 1950s and 1960s America, who were gradually realizing how limited their lives were, because of the rigid expectations imposed on women. It eventually sold over twenty million copies.

⁶¹ This 1973 article says more about Concorde:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/26/newsid_2539000/2539049.stm

⁶² You can actually watch the entire show on YouTube here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE_1RnrYUFg

1978

Some figures

In 1978, 28.5% of all jobs were in manufacturing industry; in 2009, the figure was just 10%.

The average house price in Britain (at 2014 prices) was £83,000.

In 1978 there were 13 million trade union members in the United Kingdom.

January 1978

Firefighters agreed to end their three-month strike, and accepted an offer of 10% wage rise and a shorter working week.

The European Court of Human Rights found the United Kingdom government guilty of mistreating prisoners in Northern Ireland. In particular the use of sensory deprivation and “white noise” were denounced.

Margaret Thatcher, the leader of the opposition, said in a television interview that, because of immigration, many Britons feared being “swamped by people with a different culture”.

This speech sparked much controversy. With the exception of Enoch Powell, mainstream politicians, while supporting immigration control, had never denounced immigration. Thatcher's speech came in a context in which neo-fascist organizations such as the National Front were gaining support and receiving, for small parties, high votes in local elections: it was thus seen by many as an opportunistic attempt to “play the race card” in order to gain support. It is difficult to evaluate the effect of the speech: some have said it helped explain a rise in Conservative support, and this was certainly true in the immediate short term, as polls showed. In the medium term, many other elements come into play: the successful antifascist campaigns weakened the National Front and may have persuaded NF voters to move (back) to the Conservatives. In any case, Thatcher did not make such statements again.

The “Cunningham amendment” to the Scotland bill was passed in Parliament. This stipulated that a simple majority of voters at the planned referendum would not be sufficient to validate any decision to establish an autonomous Scottish assembly. It would, in addition, be necessary to gain the support of more than 40% of the entire electorate; that is to say, if there was too high a level of abstention, a “Yes” vote would not be valid.

February 1978

The first episode of the BBC1 drama series *Grange Hill*, about everyday life in a secondary school, was broadcast, to some controversy. It was to continue broadcasting new series until 2008.

Anna Ford became the first female newsreader on Independent Television News.

March 1978

BBC Radio 4 first broadcast the comic science fiction series, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*.

Starring a confused suburban man and a manic-depressive robot, the series broke new ground in absurd humour. One of its more memorable dialogues: “What's it like going through this machine?” “It's a bit like being drunk.” “That doesn't sound so bad!” “You ask a glass of water!”

Saatchi and Saatchi, the advertising agency, were hired by the Conservative party to upgrade their public image.

This decision was part of a long process that saw the increase in the importance of modern media in politics. Where the centre of party political activities had been speeches, door to door canvassing and local meetings, it became perceived as ever more a matter of television image. The effectiveness of modern advertising methods in politics remains however controversial: on matters that are really important to them, people often distrust advertisers.

April 1978

The first official naturist beach in Britain was inaugurated in Brighton, after a debate in the Conservative-dominated local council. One of its opponents was quoted as saying: “*What distresses me is that people naively think that what is good for the continent is good for Britain.*”

Radio broadcasts of all debates in the House of Commons began.

People had slowly insisted on more openness within political processes. One might even consider the broadcasting of Commons debates as part of a process that will be continued with the Freedom of Information Act under Tony Blair.

A new way of calculating retirement pensions was introduced: the State Earnings-Related Pension Scheme. It provided, for the majority of workers, a supplementary pension that would be added to the minimum state pension. This supplementary pension was to be of 25% of the person’s average salary. Companies could only opt out of the scheme if they proposed a more favourable (for example final-salary-based) company pension.

The Anti-Nazi League (ANL)⁶³ and Rock against Racism (RAR) organized an anti-racist march followed by a series of concerts in Victoria Park, the only park they could get permission to use. The organizers claimed 100,000 people came. The concert included The Clash, Steel Pulse, X-Ray Spex, The Ruts, Sham 69, Generation X and the Tom Robinson Band.⁶⁴

One particularly innovative and large-scale musical and political phenomenon of the 1970s was the emergence of the Rock against Racism campaign. The link between popular music and anti-racism might not seem immediately apparent, but the importance of music for young people as a collective experience and generational marker, and the fact that far right organizations were making particular efforts to recruit young people to racist ideas and policies, led a group of left activists to come up with the idea of a national network of concerts, fanzines, leafletters and other initiatives to rally a mass, visible, anti-racist, youth voice.

The spark, which led to the rise of Rock against Racism, was the reaction by a group of left-wingers to Eric Clapton’s drunken racist tirade at a concert in Birmingham. A letter to the music press brought hundreds of replies, and the network became much more powerful than its initiators had thought possible. In the following months, dozens of local concerts were organized following the RAR recipe: black reggae groups and white punk groups playing on the same bill, the black group always top of the bill. The result was both the mixing of musics, as different influences met each other, and the mixing of different audiences which up to then had been subject to de

⁶³ Thames Television produced in 1978 a short documentary about the Anti-Nazi League. You can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvmUVE05XRQ>

⁶⁴ This documentary explains the rise of Rock against Racism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJXwvLY_-p8

*facto unthinking racial segregation: reggae music had been for Blacks and punk music for Whites.*⁶⁵

A national women's liberation conference was held in Birmingham. This was the eighth and last time a national conference was held, because political divisions led to the collapse of Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) as a national movement, though locally and on specific issues, much activity continued.

*Divisions at the conference were particularly sharp between two competing analyses, those of Marxist feminism and of radical feminism. Marxist feminists insisted that capitalism was at the root of the supposed need for unpaid domestic work and of the division between men and women, and that a united working class could potentially be the best fighter against women's oppression. Radical feminists thought that patriarchy was the central dynamic of society, and that working class men benefited from women's oppression and would not play a significant role in combating it. It is impossible to point to a "typical" 1970s activist for women's liberation, such was the richness and variety of the activity involved. Some worked in trade unions organizing women workers (See Grunwick above), others organized inside the Labour Party for policy change; some concentrated on "consciousness raising groups", underlining the fact that "the personal is political", others were in revolutionary anticapitalist organizations like the International Socialists; some concentrated on publishing books or newspapers like Spare Rib, others on "Reclaim the Night" marches or pressuring for funding for Rape Crisis Centres; some raised the slogan "wages for housework"; others tried to reduce the influence of body image on women's perceptions of themselves, and to encourage clothing and shoes which respected women more than the high heels and skirts which were often being imposed.*⁶⁶

May 1978

Liberal Party leader David Steel revealed that the Lib-Lab pact was to be dissolved at the end of the parliamentary session, leaving Mr Callaghan without a majority in the House of Commons.

The Lib-Lab pact involved an agreement by Liberal MPs not to vote against the government on key issues, in return for the right to be consulted on laws before they were presented to the Commons.

June 1978

Media commentators appeared convinced that a general election would be held in the autumn, as the minority government led by James Callaghan and Labour was only surviving with some difficulty. Callaghan's chances of an election success looked considerably better than they had some months previously, according to opinion polls.

A gunfight between the Provisional IRA and British soldiers left 1 civilian and 3 IRA men dead.

The Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, *Evita*, a biographical story about the Argentinian politician, opened in London. It ran for 7 years and ushered in the golden age of London musical comedy: for 10 years London shows were the most popular in the world.

⁶⁵ With a small number of notable exceptions such as mixed race woman singer Poly Styrene from the punk group X ray Spex.

⁶⁶ If one remembers that this BBC documentary is not about a typical group of 1970s feminists, but about one kind of feminism among many, it is a useful programme to understand some of the debates that were around: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sCRohDqWDcw&t=98s>

July 1978

In the Taunton train fire, a sleeping car caught fire from an electric heater, and 12 people were killed. The subsequent inquiry showed that doors which should have been open were in fact locked.

The Solomon Islands gained their independence from the United Kingdom.

Louise Brown became the world's first ever human being born from in vitro fertilisation, in Oldham, Lancashire.

September 1978

Prime Minister James Callaghan announced that he would not call a general election for the autumn.

This decision was a controversial one, and was taken in spite of many opinion polls showing that Labour (currently a minority government) could win an election at that point, safeguarding its place in government until 1983. It seems that, although Callaghan felt he could win, he did not want to find himself again in the exhausting position of leading a minority government. The end of the Lib-Lab pact was also announced.

72 000 workers at Ford came out on strike; after more than a fortnight on strike, a wage rise of 17% was obtained. The trade union leadership only agreed to support the strike after it had been going on unofficially for 2 weeks.

This conflict has often been seen as the beginning of the Winter of Discontent, even though it was in the private sector, and the public-sector workers have generally been seen as being at the heart of the discontent.

October 1978

The government announced plans for a new single exam to replace GCE O Levels and CSEs.

Previously GCE O levels (for General Certificate of Education Ordinary Levels) had been more prestigious and higher-level exams taken by "more academic" students, whereas CSEs (for Certificate of Secondary Education) had been their less stringent counterparts. In both these types of diploma, as in the new GCSEs, each subject was taken separately. That is, unlike a baccalauréat system such as exists in France, a student might take any number of O levels or CSEs (typically between 3 and 10). Now that the vast majority of students were in comprehensive schools, there was a certain practical logic in merging the two types of exams, which had 20 years earlier been typically taken, respectively, in grammar and secondary modern schools.

Liverpool Anglican cathedral was completed (having been begun in 1904!). It is the 5th largest cathedral in the world.

November 1978

Dominica gained its independence from the United Kingdom.

The British Embassy in Tehran was attacked. Widespread revolt against the government of the Shah of Iran, dictator, spilled over into attacks on the embassies of the countries that most actively supported the Shah.

A twelve-month investigation by the Commission for Racial Equality ended in a Birmingham nightclub, Pollyanna, being obliged to lift its ban on black and Chinese partygoers.

Viv Anderson became, at 22 years of age, England's first black international footballer, appearing in a friendly match against Czechoslovakia at Wembley.

December 1978

Peter D. Mitchell, a British biochemist born in Surrey, won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry *“for his contribution to the understanding of biological energy transfer through the formulation of the chemiosmotic theory.”*

The Labour minority government survived a vote of confidence, by 300 votes to 290.

Undated events of 1978

Inflation fell, to reach a 6-year low of 8.3%, although unemployment was at a post-war record of 1,500,000.

Partly under pressure from his own party, and a conference vote against such a system, Prime Minister James Callaghan refused to allow the Pound to join the European Monetary System (EMS), a scheme of fixed exchange rates that prefigured the Euro. However, governments were careful not to allow exchange rates to change much, so the practical effect was almost the same as having joined the monetary system

West midlands motorcycle manufacturer, Norton Villiers Triumph, was liquidated.

Financially troubled, car manufacturer Chrysler sold its European operations, including the former Rootes Group factories in Britain, to French carmaker Peugeot.

1979

January 1979

Lorry drivers went on strike, causing new shortages of heating oil and fresh food. They initially demanded a wage rise of 40%. After a month on strike, they accepted somewhat less, but still a substantial increase.

Prime Minister James Callaghan returned from an international summit to a Britain in a state of industrial unrest. *The Sun* newspaper reported his comments with a famous headline: "Crisis? What Crisis?". Although Callaghan never uttered these words, the headline was effective.

Tens of thousands of public-sector workers went on strike in what was to become known as the "winter of discontent".

February 1979

Gravediggers called off a strike in Liverpool which had delayed dozens of burials, and attracted many front-page headlines.

Sid Vicious, the former Sex Pistols guitarist, was found dead in New York as a result of a heroin overdose. Sid Vicious, whose real name was John Ritchie, was at the time on bail, accused of the murder of his girlfriend Nancy Spungen, who was found stabbed to death in a hotel room on 12 October the previous year.

The Saint Valentine's Day Agreement" between the Trades Union Congress and government, marked an end to the "winter of discontent".

Opinion polls about voter intent showed the Conservatives up to 20 points ahead of Labour, whose popularity had slumped.

Saint Lucia gained independence from the United Kingdom.

March 1979

The Scottish devolution referendum was held: Scotland voted by a majority of 77,437 for a Scottish Assembly, but this decision was not implemented due to a condition that at least 40% of the electorate must support the proposal. In short, too many people stayed at home for the devolutionists to win an effective victory.

Welsh devolution referendum: Wales voted against a devolved assembly by an overwhelming margin: 80% to 20%.

These referendums obviously implied a huge setback for nationalists both in Scotland and in Wales. Many commentators felt that there was no future now either for the SNP or for Plaid Cymru. Twenty years later, however, the revival of nationalism would lead to the establishment of autonomous assemblies in Edinburgh and Cardiff, and, in the case of Scotland, to a bright future for the nationalist organization.

National Health Service workers in the West Midlands threatened industrial action in their attempt to win a 9% pay rise.

A methane explosion, at the Golborne colliery in Greater Manchester, killed several men.

A Provisional Irish Republican Army member in The Hague shot dead Sir Richard Sykes, ambassador to the Netherlands, along with his manservant.

James Callaghan's government lost a motion of confidence by one vote, forcing a general election.⁶⁷ The fact that this was the fourth general election in 9 years was a sign of the relative instability of 1970s UK politics.

James Callaghan announced that the general election would be held on May 3rd. All of the major opinion polls pointed towards a Conservative win which would make Margaret Thatcher the first female Prime Minister of Britain.

A Republican bomb in the House of Commons car park killed Airey Neave, Conservative Northern Ireland spokesman.

The Royal Navy withdrew from Malta.

April 1979

The Labour Party manifesto⁶⁸ was published under the title *The Labour Way is the Better Way*.

The manifesto began with this paragraph:

"Now, more than ever, we need Labour's traditional values of cooperation, social justice, and fairness. This manifesto restates these Labour principles in an action programme with a strong sense of the future. They appeal to all our people - young and old. The world is changing rapidly. New industrial nations are rising to challenge our key industries, on which British jobs and living standards depend. The Labour Government is taking firm action to equip Britain to adapt to these changes and to seize new opportunities. And we will take great care to protect working people and their families from the hardships of change."

The manifesto expressed pride that inflation had been lowered over the 5 years of the Labour government, and set the objective, if Labour won the election, to reduce inflation to 5% within 3 years. Working for industrial democracy, and for world disarmament were put forward as specific Labour priorities. A wealth tax on people with over £100,000 was announced, and increases in old age pensions. In education, the manifesto boasted of having much expanded nursery provision and presents plans for a universal training and education initiative for all 16 to 19 year olds. In housing, satisfaction was expressed about the 1,5 million homes built and 1 million substandard homes improved with government money over 5 years. On the controversial question of selling off council houses, the manifesto tried to defend a middle way: "Labour does not oppose the sale of council houses to sitting tenants of two years' standing who want to buy" it declared, "so long as such sales are at a fair price and do not damage a local authority's ability to meet the demands for decent homes to rent. But Labour will continue to oppose the sales of council housing in areas of serious housing need."

In its conclusion, the document warned against Conservative priorities, which, it claimed, would lead to *"confrontation not cooperation"*.

The Conservative Party published their manifesto in response.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ This fascinating documentary shows the situation on the night when Margaret Thatcher, leader of the opposition in 1979, finally defeated the government. It was very close, and so parliamentary tactics were all used to the last possible minute, raising many questions about what is acceptable ethically in politics and what is not. Although in my opinion the start of the documentary repeats some worn old *clichés* about the "winter of discontent", the rest of the programme is very useful: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WRVVdGQcN0&list=PLbcpJyKOigUdAeDuhLdHGTYrc9HgiaZAB>

⁶⁸ The full document can be found here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/lab79.htm>

⁶⁹ You can find the full manifesto here: <http://www.politicsresources.net/area/uk/man/con79.htm>

It began with a very short introduction in a personal style by Margaret Thatcher. The first words went as follows:

"For me, the heart of politics is not political theory, it is people and how they want to live their lives. No one who has lived in this country during the last 5 years can fail to be aware of how the balance of our society has been increasingly tilted in favour of the State at the expense of individual freedom. This election may be the last chance we have to reverse that process, to restore the balance of power in favour of the people. It is therefore the most crucial election since the war. Together with the threat to freedom there has been a feeling of helplessness, that we are a once great nation that has somehow fallen behind and that it is too late now to turn things round. I don't accept that. I believe we not only can, we must. This manifesto points the way."

The manifesto, published at a time when opinion polls very much favoured the Conservatives, had a confident, even at times aggressive, tone. A long section spoke of proposed reforms to trade unions to make strikes more difficult. A second section, entitled "The Rule of Law" dealt with both crime and immigration. On tax, it was declared that income tax rates would be cut both at the top and at the bottom end of existing scales. More tax would be raised from VAT than was previously the case, though food and some other basic necessities would not be subject to VAT.

On housing, it was made clear that obliging local councils to sell council houses to their tenants was a major policy priority: helping people, it was claimed, to have "homes of their own". In order to allow this, the Conservatives proposed that council houses be sold for a third to a half less than market prices.

On the question of the European Economic Community, the manifesto presented Conservatives as more pro-Europe than Labour were. Tory policy would be that "We shall work for a common-sense Community which resists excessive bureaucracy and unnecessary harmonisation proposals, holding to the principles of free enterprise which inspired its original founders."

Josephine Whitaker, a 19-year-old bank worker, was murdered in Halifax; police believed that she was the eleventh victim of the infamous "Yorkshire ripper". Peter Sutcliffe, known by this nickname, murdered a number of women over a period of several years before being finally caught in 1981.

Teacher and Anti-Nazi League protestor Blair Peach died after being struck on the head probably by a member of the police – the Special Patrol Group – during an antifascist demonstration.

Blair Peach was a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and had been organizing a campaign against a pub that refused to serve black people. The fact that a white protestor should be killed trying to fight against racism had a great effect on the black and Asian anti-racist organizations who had sometimes been sceptical about winning white people to the combat against racism. Linton Kwesi Johnson was to write in his honour the piece "Reggae fi Peach". Although the 5 members of the Special Patrol Group involved were known, none of them were prosecuted, despite the fact that an internal enquiry showed that SPG members were in possession of unauthorized weapons including crowbars and baseball bats. A primary school in Southall is named after Blair Peach.

May 1979

London Underground opens a new underground line: the Jubilee Line.

76% of registered voters turned out to vote on polling day. The Conservative Party obtained a 43-seat majority in the House of Commons and Margaret Thatcher became the first woman Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe lost his seat. Future Prime Minister John Major became a Member of Parliament for the first time, at the age of 36.

The Liberal Party obtained in 1979 a lower percentage of the vote than in 1974: its vote was just below 14%. Its fortunes in following decades would be filled with vicissitudes. Allying with other “centre” parties, it was to enjoy a record vote of 25% in 1983. Subsequently its fortunes would be on the wane, though it was to have a spell in government in the 21st century in coalition with the Conservatives.

Former Liberal Party leader Jeremy Thorpe went on trial charged with attempted murder of his alleged lover. The media coverage tended to be homophobic. In any event, Thorpe was acquitted but was never again a leading member of the Liberal Party.

It is a measure of the changes that have come about since that all gay Members of Parliament in 1970s Britain tried to keep their sexuality a secret. The first Member of Parliament to publicly declare his homosexuality was Labour MP Chris Smith, in 1984. The first Conservative MP to come out was Alan Duncan, in 2002, whereas the first member of the House of Lords to be public about being gay was Labour Lord Waheed Alli, in 1998.

The new government abolished the Prices Commission, which had been established in 1973, in a move that was symbolic of the government’s commitment to allowing the market to regulate wages and prices, in contradiction with the Wilson/Heath/Callaghan belief in government intervention on wages and prices.

Elton John gave a concert in the Soviet Union, the first Western artiste to do so.

Margaret Thatcher proposed to privatize important parts of nationalised industries.

The Government would soon begin to sell its share in British Petroleum. British Gas and British Telecom were to follow during the 1980s. Very conscious of the importance of persuading the population of the justice of privatization, the government presented it as taking the nationalized industries away from “the bureaucracy” and giving them back to the people. In this spirit, the British Gas shares would be sold off mostly to individual small shareholders (who often soon sold them again to bigger shareholders).

June 1979

The first ever direct election to the European Parliament only motivated 32% of registered voters to go to the polls (61% in France, 66% in West Germany).

The relative lack of enthusiasm for the European Parliament was clear. The results gave 60 MEPs to the Conservatives, and only 17 to Labour. The Scottish National Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Social Democratic and Labour Party and Official Ulster Unionist Party, each won one seat. The election was held under the traditional British “First past the post” system, after Parliament had rejected a proposal to use a proportional representation scheme.

The new Conservative government announced its first budget.

Chancellor Geoffrey Howe reduced the standard Income Tax rate by 3% in the pound and made a drastic cut in the top rate, which wealthier people paid on the last slice of their income, changing it from 83% to 60%. Howe would continue with neoliberal policies in the following months and years, establishing tax-free “enterprise zones” and switching taxation as much as possible to indirect taxes (taxes on spending) rather than direct (taxes on income). His critics at the time pointed out the social repercussions of such a switch in taxes: poorer people do not pay income tax, whereas everyone pays VAT on goods which they buy, so a switch to indirect taxation favours the wealthier levels of society. Geoffrey Howe responded by claiming that world economic conditions meant there was no alternative, and underlining his belief

*that less tax for companies and for potential investors would make the economy more dynamic and lead, in the longer term to less unemployment and more prosperity.*⁷⁰

Neil Kinnock, a 37-year-old Labour MP, became shadow education spokesman.

July 1979

Kiribati (formerly Gilbert Islands) became independent of the United Kingdom.

Sebastian Coe set a new record for running a mile, 3 minutes 48:95 seconds.

The government announced £4 billion worth of public spending cuts.

August 1979

The ITV technicians strike began. Almost the entire commercial TV network in the UK was closed down for several weeks. This was the longest strike in the history of British television, and ended in a victory for the technicians.

Lord Mountbatten, his nephew, an elderly female relative, and Paul Maxwell, a crew member, were killed by a Provisional Irish Republican Army bomb on a boat in the Republic of Ireland.

Warrenpoint ambush: two roadside fertilizer bombs planted by the IRA killed eighteen British soldiers from the parachute regiment. This was the largest number of soldiers killed in a single attack during the Troubles. One civilian was killed by crossfire.

September 1979

The Gang of Four,⁷¹ a post-punk band, released their debut album *Entertainment!* including songs about alienation, sexism, and the situation of Republican prisoners in Northern Ireland, and, perhaps most notably, a series of “anti-love songs” such as “Love’ll get you like a dose of Anthrax”.

The record reached number 45 in the album charts. The band was invited to appear on Top of the Pops with one of their songs. The TV Company, however, insisted that the word “rubbers” (i.e. condoms) appearing in the lyrics be changed to “rubbish” so as to avoid offending people. The group refused and the TV appearance was cancelled.

Police discovered a woman's body in an alleyway near Bradford city centre. The woman, 20-year-old student Barbara Leach, was believed to be the 12th victim of the Yorkshire Ripper murderer.

British Leyland announced that they would no longer produce MG cars after the following year, and that their factory in Abingdon would be closed down.

⁷⁰ This 30-minute TV interview from 1980, available on YouTube, shows Geoffrey Howe defending the record of the first Thatcher government, around a year after it came to office. Naturally, in order to defend the Conservative record, he criticizes choices that were made by the Labour government of 1974-79, but also some of the policies of Edward Heath in the previous Conservative government, thus showing the contrasting priorities of Heath’s conservatism and that of Margaret Thatcher and her team: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1etyQv0R_ug

⁷¹ Official site here: <http://gangoffour.co.uk/>

The government announced new plans to regenerate the rundown London Docklands with housing and commercial developments.

Margaret Thatcher opened the new central Milton Keynes shopping centre, the largest indoor shopping centre in Britain, after its final phase was completed.

October 1979

Statistics showed a 2.3% contraction in the UK economy for the third quarter of the year.

Godfrey Hounsfield won the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine jointly with Allan McLeod Cormack for the development of the CAT scan.

November 1979

Pink Floyd released their 11th album, *The Wall*.

The album is a rock opera following the troubled life of a young boy. Most famously it included a song, sung by the band along with a choir of schoolchildren, attacking education as simply a source of alienation and oppression. The chorus intoned: "We don't need no education/ We don't need no thought control/ No dark sarcasm in the classroom/ Teacher, leave those kids alone!"

23.95 million viewers watched the last episode of the first series of the sitcom *To the Manor Born* on BBC1, the all-time highest figure for a recorded programme in the UK.

Six months after winning the general election, the Conservatives were 5 points behind Labour (who had a 45% share of the vote) in a Mori opinion poll.

December 1979

The Clash released their album *London Calling*. The album showed evidence of influences from reggae, jazz and hard rock, blended with the punk aesthetic The Clash were known for.

The government published the Housing Bill that would oblige local councils to sell homes to tenants who wished to buy them, from the following year. At this time, there were more than 5 million council houses in the UK.

The obligation imposed on local councils to allow the selling of council houses to their tenants (often at low prices) would become a symbolic measure of Thatcherism. From the point of view of her supporters, buying the house one rents is a right (the "right to buy") that will increase the number of property owners in the country. Conservatives believed (and there was some evidence) that property owners would become more conservative in their outlook. They also believed that living in social housing encouraged "a dependency culture". On the other side of this debate, defenders of a robust welfare state saw council housing as a public service to help the less well-off live in reasonable conditions. If tenants became a little more prosperous and wanted to own their own house, they could move out, into the private sector, and leave an empty council house for some young family who needed it.

Undated events of 1979

Inflation rose to 13.4%.

1979 saw the largest number of strike days since the general strike of 1926.

Dame Josephine Barnes became the first woman president of the British Medical Association. She had been the first woman to be a consultant obstetrician at Charing Cross hospital in 1954.

The band Spandau Ballet began to play under this name.

A record of more than 1.7 million new cars were sold in the United Kingdom this year, with the best-selling car, the Ford Cortina, selling more than 190,000 units. Ford Motor Company enjoyed the largest share of the new car market, followed in second place by British Leyland.

First published in 1979

Douglas Adams' novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, a madcap fusion of humour and Science Fiction, was published.

The first issue of *Viz* comic published in Newcastle upon Tyne.

This comic specialized in very bawdy humour little present in British publishing previously. Ten years later, it was selling 1 million copies every issue, making it for a few years one of the top 5 best-selling magazines in the country.⁷² As well as much rude content and toilet humour, the magazine mocked the mass media and celebrity culture.

⁷² This BBC report was produced on the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the magazine. Bad taste warning!: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whME9SxuVfs>

Conclusion

The 1970s are no longer so recent: only half of UK inhabitants were old enough at the time to have any memory of them at all today. From a certain point of view, the decade belongs to another world, before Internet, cable television, restaurant chains and rap music. Life expectancy for men was 68.7 years, and for women 75 years. Half of all households had a car, only a third had a phone, and there were eleven million trade union members in the country.

At the same time, the political debates of the 1970s remain present today: cuts in public services, racism and integration, treaties with the rest of Europe, and the linked but separate destinies of England, Scotland, Wales and the two Irelands.

And there are other continuities, too. The isolated activists who organized the first Gay Pride marches in the early 1970s did not, in their wildest dreams, imagine that, in 2015, a Conservative government would legalize gay marriage. The recent strikes of junior doctors and train drivers were opposed by the same type of media campaigns as those of the 1970s. And the decision of hundreds of thousands of people to join or re-join a Labour Party led by left-winger Jeremy Corbyn suggests that political conflicts which many had claimed were outdated and no longer relevant were, in fact, bubbling under the surface of society.

An important part of the historian's job is to choose which questions to ask about the past. These questions, however, are rarely neutral, and the many commentators who ask "Did the British people become ungovernable in the 1970s?" should remember that this is a question which implies a point of view. They would do well to balance that question with another one: "Did elite policies become unbearable for British people in the 1970s?"

It is commonplace for the decade to be described as one of national decline. For some, the decline was stopped when Margaret Thatcher arrived, like Joan of Arc, to save the country. For others, the decline was not of nation but of values such as class solidarity and union organization, unable to survive faced with popular weariness and Thatcherite determination. Besides this decline, many historians highlight a supposed atmosphere of morosity, and it is certainly true that the return of mass unemployment caused dreadful social and psychological damage on the working classes, while inflation of 15 or 20% demoralized the middle classes by eating away at their savings.

But not everyone sees the decade as morose. Those who were mobilizing for women's liberation, or against fascism, those whose priority was building trade unions or organizing a vibrant popular music scene, might all see the 1970s, on the contrary, as something of a golden age. It was also the decade which saw the almost complete abolition of selection in schools at 11 years old, the continuing fall of infant mortality and the improvement of working class housing. Central heating, by 1980, was no longer reserved to the elite.

In other domains, too - the string of Nobel science prizes for British researchers, the flourishing of alternative theatre, the rise of multicultural popular music events, or the beginnings of public awareness about environmental damage - different people might find

“reasons to be cheerful”, in the words of the popular 1979 song by Ian Dury and the Blockheads.⁷³

As with many other historical periods, perhaps what we should most clearly retain are the contradictory processes at work, and the contradictory ideas in people’s minds at the time. I hope that the present book, a modest contribution to a growing body of literature on the decade, has opened up some original perspectives, as well as serving to help those preparing exams to revise the main currents of the historical story, while maintaining a broad overview of its simultaneous rhythms.

John Mullen, December 2016

⁷³ The song can be heard here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIMNXogXnvE>

A few books for further reading.

Beckett, Andy, *When the Lights Went Out: Britain in the Seventies*, London, Faber & Faber, 2010 (592 pages).

Heath, Edward, *The Course of My Life*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1998 (790 pages).

Wilson, Harold, *Final Term, the Labour Government 1974-1976*, London, Michael Joseph, 1979 (322 pages).

Callaghan, James, *Time and Chance*, London, Politico's, 2006 (600 pages).

Huddle Roger and Saunders, Red, *Reminiscences of Rock against Racism*, London, Redwords, 2016 (144 pages).

McIlroy, John et al., eds., *The High Tide of British Trade Unionism: Trade Unions and Industrial Politics, 1964-1979*, London, The Merlin Press, 2007 (436 pages).

Pugh, Martin, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1999*, (2nd edition), London, Macmillan, 2000 (360 pages).

Rowbotham, Sheila, Wainwright, Hilary and Segal, Lynn (Eds.) *Beyond the Fragments: Feminism and the Making of Socialism*, London, Merlin Press, 1979 (253 pages).

You can find on this site a comprehensive bibliography, established by Stéphane Porion for the agrégation exam course:

<http://saesfrance.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Biblio-agreg-civi-brit-the-UK-in-the-1970s-SAES.pdf>



Britain in the 1970s - an Annotated Timeline

John Mullen

From Callaghan to the Clash, from Grunwick to Rock against Racism, from Edward Heath to Britain's string of Nobel science prizes, this annotated timeline of the 1970s recounts the key events and the key statistics of the decade of feminism, the 3 day week and Monty Python.

Ideal as a reference or revision tool, the book covers well-known and forgotten-but-symbolic features of a period torn between continuing social progress and mass unemployment, a time which produces no consensus among those who study it, but which inspires respect and even awe.

Dozens of links to online resources- BBC videos, articles or sitcoms- make the work even more useful to help get to the truths behind the headlines.