

The British Empire

WORDS IN ACTION

1 Link each word with its Italian translation.

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------|
| 1 trade | regno |
| 2 empire | potere |
| 3 head of State | commercio |
| 4 reign | insediamento |
| 5 power | impero |
| 6 settlement | capo di Stato |

2 Read this passage about England's colonial expansion.

65 English colonialism

England's colonial expansion started with the maritime explorations of the 15th century and continued until the 20th century. The British colonized essentially because of their need to trade, rather than the need for military conquest.

In 1820, about 200 million people already lived in countries under British control. During the reign of Queen Victoria the British took many French possessions in the West Indies, began to settle in Australia and later competed with other European powers for territory in Africa. At the same time, there was a serious expansion in Asia, with the acquisition of Singapore (1824), Hong Kong (1841) and the South Pacific, particularly the settlement of New Zealand (1840).

Towards the end of the century, Britain's imperialistic policy led to some colonial conflicts. In fact more and more colonies began to demand independence.

In order to justify the domination of other countries, the British advanced the theory that the Empire did not serve Britain for its

economic and strategic benefits. They claimed that the Empire itself needed the British guidance, aimed at civilising and Christianising the people inhabiting the countries.

By 1921 the British Empire counted a population of over 450 million people. It consisted of over 25% of the world's population and 30% of its area. It was the largest empire in history.

Some of the countries were dominions (that's to say semi-independent countries) that were nominally under the Crown. They included Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, Union of South Africa and the Irish Free State. After the Second World War (1948), the word "dominion" was used to indicate independent nations that considered the British monarch as head of State.

Many of them joined the Commonwealth of Nations, a free association of independent States which all recognize the Queen as ruler.



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