

ISLINGTON CENTRE - ERIC, NEGASH AND CLAUDE - 5/12/22 - 3pm

Catch-up

Should the House of Lords be abolished?

This weekend, many newspapers reported that Labour is planning to abolish the House of Lords.

The House of Lords is the upper house of the UK parliament. Its members are not elected. Membership is by heredity, appointment or official function. It has less power than the House of Commons (the lower house), which is made up of elected members.

The House of Lords considers potential new laws (bills) that have been approved by the House of Commons. It can suggest amendments and force the House of Commons to reconsider its decisions. It cannot, however, prevent bills becoming laws. It is there to scrutinise legislation and to debate.

There are currently 786 members of the House of Lords. It is much larger than the House of Commons, which has 650 members and is the second largest legislative chamber in the world.

There are many problems with the House of Lords. It is difficult in the modern age to justify a legislative chamber with members who are there only because of their heredity. There are also many members of the House of Lords who play little active role in their positions and the House is not representative of the nations of the United Kingdom and the regions.

Another perceived problem is that prime ministers may appoint people to sit in the House of Lords. There are no controls on the balance between the political parties. The Conservatives have now been in power since 2010 and, as a result of prime ministerial appointments, the Conservatives now have about 100 more seats than Labour in the House of Lords.

Many people have complained about individuals being appointed to the House of Lords because they are party donors. There is a House of Lords Appointments Commission which exercises some judgment over appointees to the House of Lords but only on limited grounds (propriety) and not on grounds of suitability.

Some doubt whether the House of Lords can really hold the government to account.

A previous Labour prime minister, Tony Blair, succeeded in carrying out some reform to the House of Lords by removing most of the hereditary peers from the chamber.

Any changes are likely to meet with opposition and the process will probably be slow. At most, if Labour get into power at the next election, they may start a process of reform. Abolition of the House of Lords seems less likely.

Comprehension questions

1. What are the names of the two Houses of Parliament in the UK?
2. Which is larger - the House of Commons or the House of Lords?
3. In what way are the two Houses different?
4. What is meant by "heredity"?
5. What is a "debate"?
6. What is a "party donor"?
7. If Labour is successful at the next election, is it likely that it will abolish the House of Lords?

