

House of lords is the
second chamber



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

House of Lords is the Second Chamber in the United Kingdom's parliament. Its main functions are to scrutinize legislation, both domestic and European, and to debate on issues of public policy and public concern. This house is fully appointed. Attempts to change this have been made in the past and obviously we can see now that the government is developing plans for fully or mainly elected House of Lords and present them in very near future. There is much debating in public whereas the fully elected upper chamber would be a good or a bad thing. This essay will show you that fully elected House of Lords would not strengthen British democracy. In fact, it would become much weaker. As the Archbishop of York (2010) states, the elected Upper House " may seemingly be in the interests of democracy but may ultimately fail this nation". That is for many reasons. Firstly, Second Chamber would replicate the First Chamber in its composition and even might challenge the authority of Commons. This leads to a definite change in relationship between two Houses. Secondly, there would be a great loss of expertise if we are to have House of Lords elected, as lifelong experience would be replaced by career ambition. Furthermore, there would be very little or no independent members because election mostly favours party politicians. Lastly, there would be no religious representation in a fully elected Second Chamber. All these arguments are discussed more deeply in this essay.

The main problem of elected House of Lords is that it would become very similar to a House of Commons and therefore this could result in a possible change in relationship between two Houses. Current system works because composition of two Houses is different, but this could be completely changed

if we introduce election to Upper House. Second Chamber could become wholly dominated by the political parties and could end up with the same party winning majority of seats in both Houses. As the result there would be little chance of efficient scrutiny or revision of government work. (A W Bradley and K D Ewing, 2007: 186). By contrast, election could lead to both Houses being dominated by different parties. Upper House could claim they too have a mandate of people and would likely begin to seek more powers and exercise them. There would be no reason for members of elected Second Chamber to see their chamber role as a complementary one (Lord Norton, 2010). In this case, they would challenge the authority of Commons and there would be a potential for conflict between the two. That could result in agreements being struck. Those agreements would probably represent party interests and would not benefit electors. Bogdanor (2010: 12) also supports this view and says that elected upper House would see itself as being more democratic and legitimate, therefore end up conflicting with Commons. He accurately concludes that this would make Britain more difficult to govern.

The second big problem considering elected Second Chamber is that there will be a huge loss of expertise. Today House of Lords is a chamber of expertise and the reality is that it is where legislation is analyzed in more detail, certainly deeper than in House of Commons. In fact, as Edward Pearce (2009: 497-499) states that debates there continue beyond party influence. Having appointed peers also helps to sustain and even increase the level of expertise in the House. Once in the Lords, the way in which the House functions gives opportunities for peers to maintain their professional lives

outside the Lords. By contrast, elected peers would have to devote that spare time to fulfill their constituencies' demands. In addition, all agree that most expertise is provided by life peers. They obtain priceless experience and wisdom in certain fields throughout their life and do not pursue a career to be top politicians. As Paul Vallely (2010) says their life peerage “ offers considerable real life experience to counter the myopia of professional politicians”. But all of that would be taken away if we are to have Second Chamber elected. In any type of election, persons who compete for a political office will be chosen by parties and voted for mainly by admirers of parties. Upper House would just be a House of whipped party politicians, not experienced peers. Expertise would be replaced by ambition. There would no longer be detailed revision of government bills.

Another big disadvantage of elected House of Lords is that there would be a huge reduction in, or even removal of, independent peers. Independence is very important aspect of Second Chamber and it arises from the fact there are many Crossbench members who do not belong to a party. As Philip Norton (2003: 19) says “ peers are able to operate free of the constraints on and incentives available to the party leadership, activists and voters in other countries”. This makes the government think very carefully when dealing with the Lords, because government has no majority and is vulnerable to defeat. But as we discussed before, elections are organized by political parties and therefore it is very unlikely for independent members to win a seat in Upper House. Moreover, as party whipping in House of Lords is very weak and Lords are not afraid to lose their seat due to life peerage, often even party peers tend to think and vote in a different manner than their

party wants them to. This, combined with Crossbenchers voting, adds a huge amount of independence and scrutiny of the government actions. This all would be removed if we introduce elections, because peers would vote as their parties would want them to, because otherwise, they would lose their seat.

Lastly, it would be very difficult to ensure religious representation in parliament as in fully elected House of Lords we would no longer have a voice of Church. Religious belief is an important aspect of many people's lives and it is desirable that there should be some form of religious voice in the Second Chamber. A presence of the Church of England bishops in House of Lords has contributed to legislation in many aspects. It increased quality of debates by providing philosophical, moral and spiritual considerations, not just religious ones. Bishops are better informed and better experienced when it comes to everyday problems of our society than any elected official (The Bishop of Croydon, 2010). Some argue that there should be no representation of the Church of England, as other faiths are excluded from political representation. But they forget that there is "growing co-operation between the faiths", and Archbishop of Canterbury is "ever more likely to raise issues of pressing concern to a number of British spiritual leaders" (Sunday Telegraph, 2008). In addition, removal of bishops not only would eliminate the knowledge mentioned above, but would also raise the whole question of the relationship between State and Church, with unpredictable outcomes. It would end a 900 year tradition.

This essay showed that House of Lords should not be fully elected and that is for four main reasons. First of all, there is a huge chance that fully elected

Second Chamber would mirror House of Commons. The same party could win majorities in both Houses, leading to a pointless existence of Upper House. By contrast, we might have a deadlock government as different parties would be in control of both Houses. Secondly, there would be a huge loss of valuable expertise. Life peer system generated priceless amounts of experience and all of that would be replaced by purely professional politicians without sufficient wisdom. Furthermore, independent peers would not do well in elections and House of Lords would become House of whipped politicians. The two Houses would not act independently, as required. And lastly, Church would not be represented politically, which would lead to a symbolic relationship change between State and Church.