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House of Lords

Some comments by James on an earlier draft by Bill
plus some responses by Bill.

James: 1. I would want everybody who had the vote to be able to vote for House of Lords Reps. No exclusion because they didn't belong to a relevant organisation.

James: 2. I feel strongly there should be direct election. [...]

A fairish point, IMHO. But it seems to say that the idea is stone dead for you. Or would you be happy to have some members directly elected and some through organisations?

Personally, I see no overwhelming problem with having all, or nearly all, members appointed through organisations, on the lines I suggest. The HoL is, after all, just a secondary, moderating chamber. And it's easy enough for everybody to join something, even if it's only the Daily Mail readers' club. In any case, you have to get yourself registered to vote for the Commons. And only half of those who do that then bother to cast a vote.

James: 3. Above anything at the moment, I'd like some sort of proportional representation, though I don't really understand all the connotations. ...

I am strongly opposed to "proportional representation", since that always implies use of party lists, a horrid arrangement which gives even more power to the already over-powerful parties. See my note on Electoral Reform.

I am strongly in favour of the "single transferrable vote" system (STV) and I am strongly opposed to those who advocate STV but describe it as "proportional representation". The politicians will just give them some form of proportional representation instead, as in European Elections (enabling BNP wins) and in GLA elections.

James: ... I was glad you appeared to incorporate some in your proposal.

Not at all: I insist on STV.

James: 4. I feel only organisations which were open to anybody should be included. I can think of problems with this (eg you might want defined special interests to be included – eg racial groups.

Question - who would do the defining?)

I don't think you can quite insist on that, but it depends what you mean by "open to anybody". There are often strings attached to (severe, and possibly unacceptable, qualifying requirements for) membership of organisations we might wish to include. I do not expect to find it easy to become a member of the Roman Catholic Church, the National Union of Teachers, or the Royal College of Surgeons. And I doubt even the Labour Party would have me if they knew I was a member of the BNP. In any case, I would not wish to exclude the Women's Institute.

James: Also problem where the organisation has a membership charge.

What problem?

I was more concerned where the organisation has no membership charge, on the grounds that such an organisation might not be there entirely for the benefit of its members!

James: 5. There would need to be 'organisations' (voting arrangements?) for people who didn't fit into the approved organisations. Or for those who just don't join.

Why?

James: 6. I feel a good solid term would help – eg 10 years. Perhaps organisations could be arranged in batches (each batch to have a range of interested represented. Question – who would decide on the nature of the range?).. Every year one tenth (say) of the Lords resign and the next batch hold their elections to replace them. Making for better continuity, but also a legacy of experience/expertise to be passed on to the newcomers.

James: 7. What I didn't like about your proposal at first was (a) the group of organisations you presented as examples of what people join – Countryside Alliance, AA, Greenpeace, etc. Though there were exceptions, they seemed solid and middle class. 'People who already knew' – I thought. More of the same. The idea of a 'nominated appointments committee' fitted with this (Ugh!). It would have helped me as a punter if, when you were presenting it, you named a wider range of organisation, including some which would be predominantly for working class people. (b) I felt your intro was tricky, manipulative, even. I agreed with parts of what you said, but disagreed with other bits. It was very much a personal point of view. I feel it could be simplified; made more straightforward.