

A democratic House of Lords

We have moved from having membership of the House of Lords being inherited to members being (largely) appointed by government. We are now hearing increasingly loud proposals that the Lords be elected, on the grounds that the current system is undemocratic. It is not easy to see how it is significantly less democratic than having the Prime Minister chosen by the majority party in the Commons, and all ministerial appointments made by the Prime Minister, an arrangement to which objections are almost inaudible. Nor does it feel like a major advance in democracy to have the Lords elected in the same undemocratic way as the Commons, with the process dominated by the same political parties with which most people are so fed up, and with candidates who are possibly even less able than those who go for the Commons, and with voter turnout possibly even lower than for Commons elections.

So why is election turnout so low? People are just not interested in politics, it is said. But they are! It is true that they are slow to participate in electoral processes as currently constituted, for all sorts of reasons. It is true that they are not interested in political parties, for which they have little respect, and which they join in ever decreasing numbers. But they are much more deeply and passionately interested in the way the country is run than any recent election might indicate.

What we need for the House of Lords is something fresh and truly democratic, something which will revive the interest and involvement of the population in the supervision of the government which preumes to rule over them.

Note that, although people are not joining political parties, they are joining other things, and in greater numbers than ever. They join and subscribe to organisations which, unlike political parties, represent their concerns and interests: Automobile Association, National Trust, Greenpeace, Oxfam, Red Cross, NSPCC, Ramblers, RSPB, ... the list goes on and on. If we want a House of Lords which truly represents the interests of the nation, why not let the members of all substantial organisations of this kind appoint a representative? Then you really might have a chamber which people care about, while at the same time bringing all sorts of sectional interests and special knowledge to bear on all prospective legislation.

This is not a new idea, but has been raised many times in recent years. However, it never seems possible to get political parties, and thus the government, to take it seriously. But how could they? It would clearly loosen their stranglehold on UK politics, and let the people in. How could they possibly want that?

See the paper "[Reform of the House of Lords](#)" for a fuller presentation of the proposition.