

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL LABOUR CLUB

Policy forum: House of Lords reform

19th February 2007, Café Zuma.

Present were: David, Darren, Matt, Ryan, Alasdair, Alex, Dan, Kate.

i. To begin with David outlined the latest government proposals.

ii. Alasdair then outlined the basic pros and cons of some possible options: Abolition, fully appointed, fully elected, indirectly elected, a hybrid system.

iii. Discussions revolved around these schemes, and debate began with Matt arguing for a hybrid system including an elected element, Ryan arguing for use of indirect election, Darren arguing for a fully appointed house, and various points/questions about all the options being made by others.

iv. A need for a second chamber was generally felt, although Darren outlined some arguments for abolition.

v. There were several suggestions made that the house should be partially or fully depoliticised, and that perhaps the government could be represented merely by allowing ministers to address the House of Lords. Ryan was enthusiastic about the idea of depoliticisation and argued the case for a House of experts and representatives of broad areas. Dan agreed with this, feeling a chamber of experts would prove more capable of producing better amendments on legislation. David argued for the need for some political element to be retained inside the House, for both government and opposition proposals to be put forward strongly and coherently. He pointed out that whilst various non-politicians may sympathise with particular parties, they would lack both the responsibility and commitment to parties of political members.

vi. Darren argued against elections in general, and specifically against the list system, which he said would mean no real change would take place, as party leaderships could choose the list order and hence effectively appoint people. He felt the chamber needed to be depoliticised and felt a democratic deficit was more felt in terms of the House of Commons and in terms of the lack of power of local government. He was worried that the chamber might become a refuge of 'second rate' politicians.

vii. David, Matt and Alasdair backed some elected element--although not necessarily a large one--but did accept that the list system was not necessarily the best. David did argue that some form of election or appointment based on direct-proportionality would be favourable. Matt contested the suggestion that second rate politicians would end up in the Lords. He and David argued that elections might attract a different sort of politician. Alasdair agreed with this, saying the role of the chamber would be distinct and people would run for it on that basis.

viii. It was then agreed to have a vote on the following four options:

(1)

Abolish hereditary peers.

Have a fully appointed house.

Have appointments made by a fully Independent Commission, with a remit to create a chamber more reflective of British society.

Have peers (who will still be called Lords) appointed for 15 years, and only allowed to serve a single term.

Have 1/3 of the house appointed every 5 years.

Have only a small role for political parties, keep the non-politicians, community representatives, experts &c.

(2)

A hybrid system.

Partially elected, partially appointed.

Get rid of hereditary peers.

Have a party political element, and have this elected.

At least 20% elected, perhaps not on a list system however.

(3)

Abolish the House of Lords altogether.

Have a stronger committee system to scrutinise legislation instead, with more powers to hold the government to account.

(4)

Leave the House of Lords as it is to-day.

ix. (1) and (2) received 4 votes each, (3) and (4) none, so there was a tie.