

786 Lords A-Leaping

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“... Parliament, finding by too long experience, that the House of Lords is useless and dangerous to the people of England ... have thought fit to Ordain and Enact ... That from henceforth the House of Lords in Parliament, shall be and is hereby wholly abolished and taken away ...”

MARCH 1649: AN ACT FOR THE ABOLISHING THE HOUSE OF PEERS

The United Kingdom, mother of all parliaments, is toying, once again, with disowning one of her troublesome offspring – namely the House of Lords, which is the upper chamber of the UK’s legislature. For readers who may be less familiar with the eccentricities of the UK’s system, this article seeks to offer some insight into what the House of Lords is and why it is so problematic.

As the epigraph shows, dissatisfaction with the House of Lords is hardly a new phenomenon. 373 years ago, during the Interregnum following the English Civil War, parliament, under the control of Oliver Cromwell, briefly abolished the “*useless and dangerous*” House of Lords, only for it to be promptly resurrected eleven years later upon the restoration of Charles II, and Cromwell’s head placed on a spike over Westminster Hall.

Composition

Parliament comprises two bodies, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Both meet at the Palace of Westminster in London.

The House of Commons comprises 650 Members of Parliament (MPs). Each is elected to represent a geographical constituency using a ‘first past the post’ voting system (each voter in that constituency casts one vote for one candidate, whichever candidate gets the most votes wins). These elections occur at least every five years, though the government can call a general election at any time.

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