Parliament

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Mr. Gow

I attach:

i. Lord Boyd-Carpenter's letter of 19 October setting out the agenda for tomorrow (Flag A);

ii. Briefing from Lady Young's Office (Flag B);

iii. Biographical notes on Peers (Flag C);

iv. Lady Young's speech at the Party Conference (Flag D).

C.S.

17 November 1982

Conservative Party Conference

NEWS SERVICE

Release time:

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS-HOUSE OF LORDS 645/82

Replying to the debate, BARONESS YOUNG, Lord Privy Seal, said:Let me begin by saying that I personally very much welcome the subject of this morning's debate on the House of Lords. It must, I think, be a record for such a fundamental constitutional issue to be successful in the ballot at two consecutive conferences, and to be debated on a motion only two years ago in this very hall. So it has been discussed three years in a row. This reflects not only traditional Conservative concern for the constitution of our country, but profound anxiety about the future of the House of Lords. I say to Dr Bryan Keefe, who moved the motion so well, your message has certainly got across to those of us who sit in the House of Lords. I know, too, that the same applies to what my colleagues and I in the House of Lords call the other place. Whatever may be the outcome of last week's Labour Party conference, the policy of the Labour Party, should they win the next election, is clear. They have said "It is our intention to abolish the House of Lords in the lifetime of the next Parliament." No new titles would be created, which presumably means that Mr Benn's fantasy of creating a thousand peers to vote for their own extinction is now dead. Instead, the destruction of the Lords will be preceded by its emasculation with almost all its powers being removed as a first step.

It is true that its power to prevent the Commons prolonging its own life would remain, but only for a time. Note that. The way would therefore be open for an elected dictatorship by one party in the House of Commons. It is curious that the party which, under Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, increased the size of the House of Lords by just under 300 new life peers should now be actively seeking its aboliton. It only goes to show that the Labour Party members are either queueing up to get in or to get out.

Issued by the Publicity Department, Conservative Central Office, 32 Smith Square, London SW1P 3HH. Tel. 01-222 9000

From the Social Democrats we have "All change for the constitution." They have put forward a massive package of reform which is baffling in its complexity. Proportional representation for the House of Commons, regional assemblies for local government. It is an interesting concept to the medieval historian, for regional assemblies were last seen in England before King Egbert united the kingdom in the ninth century. And total reform is proposed for the House of Lords. Their new chamber would involve two-tier membership and revised delaying powers. All this does not seem to me to have the ring of practical politics, and, with all respect to some of my colleagues, it does indeed make block grant look positively straightforward.

It does mean, however, that the House of Lords will be on the agenda for the next election, a point well made by Mr Hind. So, first, we must confirm, as the motion says, our commitment to a two-chamber parliamentary system. I do not believe that the people of this country will support single chamber government, but we need to explain and justify our commitment. Let me illustrate the point. First, as I said last year, the House of Lords is an essential safeguard for individual liberty. It is the only guarantee that general elections must be held at intervals of not more than five years. But it is also a safeguard for the independence of the judiciary. Judges can only be dismissed on an address to her majesty from both Houses of Parliament. This is not just an academic point. After all, it was Michael Foot who said on June 3 1972 "How long will it be before the cry goes up: 'Let's kill all the judges'?" In 1974 he referred to "judges who stretch the law to suit reactionary attitudes." I must admit that this was in his more extreme days before he became party leader, but he has not been exactly outspoken in calling for respect for the law in recent weeks.

Secondly, there are those who believe that the legislative role of the Lords could easily be tacked on to the work of the House of Commons. Neither I nore my colleagues in the Lords have actually noticed that the unreformed House of Commons has much spare time or energy for such a role. So I think it is worth asking some questions. What would happen to those Bills which are guillotined? Some have large sections which are not debated at all in the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. So, would whole sections reach the statute book without any discussion? And where would we find the quiet objective analysis by experts which characterises so much of our debate in the Lords? Who, after all, did not appreciate the speech this morning by Lord Boyd-Carpenter, who plays such a valuable role in the workings of the House of Lords?

To give you some idea of the scale of this exercise, I can predict that before the current parliamentary session ends in a few weeks' time over 1,200 amendments will have passed between the two Houses in under a year. Indeed, I like to think that the value of the Lords has been amply demonstrated during this past year. We have played an active role in revising Government legislation. I thank all my colleagues on the Government Front Bench in the Lords for their work. Our important select committees on the EEC and on science and technology are as highly regarded as ever. Our debates during the Falklands crisis were constructive, informed and free from party controversy. Where else but in the House of Lords could you find one of the greatest living experts, such as Lord Shackleton who knows not only the Falkland Islands but South Georgia. The Government is now actively considering his latest report.

In what other assembly could you find recognised South American experts, military and diplomatic experts. After all, we even had a peer with a daughter imprisoned on South Georgia. And I am sure that it has not escaped your notice that four out of six members of the committee under Lord Franks are members of the House of Lords. I have been delighted by the great tributes that have been paid today to Lord Carrington.

In the months ahead, as public debate on this matter continues, please put out of your minds the myth of an all-powerful, built-in Conservative majority in the House of Lords. It does not exist, and if you do not believe me just ask the Chief Whip, Lord Denham, who sits near me now, and he will tell you that his lot is not a happy one.

page 6 follows.

I think that the Chief Whip in the House of Commons would be the first to say that his job is in many respects more straightforward.

The Conservative Party must throw down the challenge to the abolitionists. Without a second chamber how will our liberties be guaranteed and how will Parliament function more effectively? But I accept that I have been talking to the converted and I now turn to the second half of the motion. I must begin by telling you quite frankly that there will be no legislation to reform the House of Lords in the current Parliament. I make no apology for this. Such reform can only proceed on the basis of all-party talks which, in turn, depend upon a basis of agreement on the type of reform which might take place.

It would also be a great mistake to believe that constitutional reform - I suspect that some people do think this - will on its own solve our country's economic and industrial problems. Our priorities over the last 3½ years and over the next year or two must lie elsewhere.

Last year I stressed that the lack of agreement within the Conservative Party and with other parties would, as in 1968, be fatal to any attempt at reform. I believe that to be just as true today but I ask the conference to consider three specific points.

First, do not underestimate the value of the current composition and current work of the House of Lords. Watch the House of Lords at work. It is active, it is hardworking, it is politically alive, it is on the radio - and it is sitting next week when the House of Commons is not. I am indeed grateful for the support that is given particularly from Theo Wallace to the House of Lords.

Secondly, do not underestimate the potential dangers of two chambers with competing claims to electoral support, a point well made by Mr. Arnold.

Thirdly, do not underestimate the inherent difficulty of persuading both Houses, but more particularly the House of Commons, to pass legislation providing for a partly elected second chamber.

I also ask you to remember that the House of Lords has been reformed over the last 25 years. The Life Peerages Act 1958 has ensured that it is now a very different and, I believe, more effective, second chamber. If major reform is rejected in the future we shall continue to search for smaller internal improvements. The House of Lords that we have now is infinitely better than no House at all.

I do not believe that the party or the Government are in a position to agree to any specific proposal for reform at the present time. Therefore I hope that the conference will appreciate that I cannot support the motion and must ask conference to reject it. Before accepting such a motion we would need to think through very carefully and in much more detail a number of complicated but extremely important questions such as the following.

To make way for elected members, some of the existing members must leave. How should this be done? Who should leave? What about, for example, the Bishops' Bench and the Law Lords? Would the elected members have more voting rights than the non-electedmembers? Is it desirable to have a two-tier chamber on such lines? At the same time, should the delaying power of a new, reformed second chamber be increased, or would this not lead to conflict with the House of Commons? What constituencies would the new elected members enjoy? Existing parliamentary constituencies, Euro-constituencies, or something new? I sympathise with Roger Persey over the numbers of elections that would be required - indeed, think of the work of the Boundary Commissions.

We need to have answers to all those questions. But I and my colleagues have listened to the debate. We have heard the message,that you want not just a second chamber but a stronger second chamber. We shall give the most careful consideration to proposals for improving the House of Lords and I can assure you that in the crucial months ahead we will, with your help and support, defend and protect our traditional House of Lords and two-chamber system from the virulent attacks being made on it. This is an issue which those of a militant tendency in the Labour Party, who also seek the end of our monarchy, must never be allowed to decide.

end...

BOYD-CARPENTER (Life Baron, U.K.), John Archibald Boyd-Carpenter; cr. 1972, PC 1954.

Son of the late Sir Archibald Boyd-Carpenter, MP. B. June 2, 1908; ed. at Stowe and Balliol Coll. Oxford; Pres. Oxford Union 1930; Harmsworth Law Scholar 1932; Council of Legal Education's Prize for Constitutional Law 1933; m. June 25, 1937, Margaret, d. of the late Lt-Col. G. L. Hall, OBE (1s 2d). Barrister-at-Law, Middle Temple 1934. Served with Scots Guards 1940–45. Major 1943. MP (Con.) for Kingston-upon-Thames, July 1945–March 1972. Financial Secretary to the Treasury, Oct. 1951; Minister of Transport & Civil Aviation, July 1954; of Pension & Nat. Insurance, Dec. 1955. Privy Councillor 1954. Chief Sec. to the Treasury & Paymaster-General, July 1962–Oct. 1964. Principal Opposition Spokesman on Housing, Local Govt. 1964–66. Chrmn Public Accounts Cttee 1964–70. Chrmn Orion Insurance Co. & CLRP Investment Trust 1969–72. Director of other companies. Chrmn Civil Aviation Authority April 1972–March 1977. Chrmn Rugby Portland Cement Co. Dec. 1976–. High Steward of the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames 1973. Deputy Lieutenant for Greater London 1973. Chrmn Assocn of Independent Unionist Peers 1980–. Chrmn Carlton Club 1979–. Recreations: Swimming, tennis, walking. Raised to the peerage as Baron Boyd-Carpenter, of Crux Easton in the County of Southampton 1972. *Address, The Rt Hon. Lord Boyd-Carpenter, DL, 12 Eaton Terrace, SW1* (01-730 7765)*; Rugby Portland Cement Co. Ltd, 106 Park Street, London, W1* (01-493 4272); *Club: Carlton.*

LAUDERDALE (17th Earl of, S.), Patrick Francis Maitland; cr. 1624; Viscount Lauderdale (S.) 1616; Viscount Maitland (S.) 1624; Lord Maitland (S.) 1590; Lord Thirlestane and Boltoun (S.) 1624; 12th Bt of Ravelrig (S.) 1680.

Son of Rev. The Hon. Sydney G. W. Maitland (son of 13th Earl) and brother of the 16th Earl, whom he succeeded Nov. 1968. B. March 17, 1911; ed. at Lancing College and Brasenose College, Oxford (BA Hons. 1933); m. July 20, 1936, Stanka, d. of Prof. Milivoje Lozanitch, Belgrade Univ., Yugoslavia (2s 2d). A newspaper correspondent: *The Times* (Balkans) 1939–41; *News Chronicle* war correspondent, Pacific 1941–43; Foreign Office 1943–45; Editor, *Fleet Street Letter Service*, 1945–59; MP (Con.) for Lanarkshire (Lanark Div.) 1951–59; Contested Caithness & Sutherland in 1964. Industrial and Economic Geography Consultant 1959–. Founder (and Chrmn 1955–61) Expanding Commonwealth Group of Members of Parliament. Chrmn Sub-Cttee F (Energy, Transport, Research) of House of Lords. European Communities Scrutiny Cttee 1974–78. Vice-Chrmn Independent Unionist Peers Cttee 1980–. A Conservative. Recreations: Conversation, travel. Heir, his son, Master of Lauderdale, Viscount Maitland, MA, b. Nov. 4, 1937. *Address, The Earl of Lauderdale, 12 St Vincent Street, Edinburgh* (031-556 5692)*; 10 Ovington Square, London SW3* (01-589 7451) *and House of Lords, SW1A 0PW* (01-219 5452)*; Clubs: New Club* (*Edinburgh*), *RSAC* (*Glasgow*).

ECCLES (1st Visc., U.K.), David McAdam Eccles; cr. 1964; 1st Baron 1962; P.C. 1951; K.C.V.O. 1953.

Son of the late William McAdam Eccles, F.R.C.S., M.S., and Anna, d. of the late E. B. Anstie of Devizes. B. Sept. 18, 1904; ed. at Winchester and at New Coll. Oxford; m. Oct. 10, 1929, Hon. Sybil Frances Dawson (d. June 1977) d. of the late Viscount Dawson of Penn (2s. 1d.). Joined Ministry of Economic Warfare Sept. 1939; Economic Adviser to H.M. Ambassadors at Madrid and Lisbon 1940–42; transferred to Ministry of Production 1942. Minister of Works 1951. Minister of Education 1954–57; Pres. of the Board of Trade Jan. 1957; Minister of Education 1959 to July 1962; Paymaster-General 1970–73. Chrmn. of the British Library 1973–78. Hon. F.R.I.B.A. 1955. P.C. 1951. K.C.V.O. 1953. Gran Cordon of the Liberator (Venezuela) 1974. Memb. for Chippenham from 1943 to July 1962. A Conservative. Heir, his son, Hon. John Dawson Eccles, b. 1931. *Address, The Rt. Hon. Viscount Eccles, 6 Barton Street, SW1* (01-222 1387)*; Dean Farm, Chute, Andover* (*Chute Standen* 210); *Clubs: Brooks's, Roxburghe.*

ORR-EWING (Life Baron, UK), Charles Ian Orr-Ewing; cr. 1971; 1st Bt 1963; OBE.

Son of Archibald Ian Orr-Ewing. B. Feb. 10, 1912; ed. at Harrow and Trinity Coll. Oxford, MA (Physics); m. Sept. 2, 1939, Joan, d. of W. G. McMinnies of Cheltenham (4s). Chartered Engineer and Company Director. Fellow Inst. of Electrical Engineers. BBC TV Service 1938–39 and 1946–49. RAFVR 1939–46. Chief Radar Officer SHAEF 1945. Pres. and Chrmn of Electronic Eng. Assn 1969–70. Parl. Priv. Sec. to Rt Hon. Sir Walter Monckton, Min. of Labour & National Service 1951–55. Gov. Imperial Coll. of Science 1951–57. Joint Sec. 1922 Cttee 1956. Parl. Under-Sec. of State for Air 1957–59. Parl. and Financial Sec. to Admiralty 1959. Civil Lord of the Admiralty 1959–63. 1922 Executive 1964–. Vice-Chrmn from 1966–70. Member Select Cttee on Science and Technology 1967–69. MP (Con.) for Hendon North 1950–70. Chrmn of Metrication Board 1972–77, Vice-Pres. & Founder Lords & Commons Ski Club. Chrmn Harrow Wanderers Cricket Club 1979–. Vice-Chrmn Independent Unionist Peers 1978–. A Conservative. Recreations: Cricket, skiing, tennis. Created a Baronet 1963. Raised to the peerage as Baron Orr-Ewing, of Little Berkhamsted in the County of Hertfordshire 1971. Heir to baronetcy, his son, Hon. Alistair Simon Orr-Ewing, b. June 10, 1940. *Address, The Lord Orr-Ewing, OBE, 9 Cheyne Gardens, London SW3* (01-730 3728)*; Clubs: Boodle's, MCC.*

FROM THE PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE LEADER OF THE HOUSE
AND THE CHIEF WHIP

16th November, 1982.

Dear Caroline,

MEETING WITH CONSERVATIVE PEERS -
Thursday, 18th November, at 3.45 p.m.

In your letter to the Lord Privy Seal's Private Secretary of 19th October you requested briefing for this meeting.

The Lord Privy Seal has suggested that the briefing material should be divided into the following sections:

(1) A brief summary of the Government's current public position on House of Lords reform.

FLAG B (2) The three specific points which the Conservative Peers will raise.

(3) Some brief background material on the Government's consideration of the future of the House of Lords.

FLAG C (4) Some biographical notes on the Peers who will attend the meeting.

I am sure you will let me or Michael Townley in the Cabinet Office, to whom I am copying this brief, know if any further briefing is required.

Yours ever
Michael Pownall

(M.POWNALL)

Miss Caroline Stephens.

I. A Brief Summary of the Government's current public position on House of Lords Reform

I attach a copy of the Lord Privy Seal's speech at the Conservative Party Conference in October. This expresses the latest Government view on the House of Lords. It can be summarised as follows:

(1) full defence of the principle of a Second Chamber both on constitutional and practical grounds. The Lords play an invaluable role in the legislative process and their debates are of a high quality. Rejection of Labour's proposals for abolition and Social Democrat complicated plan for wholesale constitutional reform.

(2) confirmation that there will be no legislation in this Parliament to reform or entrench the House of Lords. No apology for this because reform can only proceed on the basis of all-Party talks which in turn depend upon a measure of agreement on the type of reform which might take place. Constitutional reform will not on its own solve our problems. The Party should reflect on three key points:

(i) do not under-estimate the value of the current House of Lords;

(ii) do not under-estimate the dangers of two Chambers with competing claims to electoral support;

(iii) do not under-estimate the difficulties inherent in trying to pass major constitutional legislation.

(3) confirmation that the message from the Party on the need for a stronger Second Chamber has been heard by the Government. In the crucial months ahead the Government will carefully consider proposals. Above all the House of Lords must be supported and defended.

II. The three specific points which the Conservative Peers will raise.

The Conservative Peers have already suggested in correspondence two draft passages on the House of Lords for the Manifesto.

/The

The first of these passages is a strong defence of the continued existence and effectiveness of the Second Chamber. This is fully in line with Government policy. The Peers may stress that both Labour and Alliance Manifestos will contain important references to the House of Lords. They may suggest that the Government must respond in kind.

The second proposed passage for the Manifesto would commit the Government to convene an all-Party conference after the election to consider the role of the Second Chamber and whether any changes in the House of Lords are desirable. This is not, at least at the moment, Government policy. The Conservative Peers may describe it as not only electorally advantageous, but also the minimum commitment which the Government should put forward at this stage. In any event the Conservative Peers will express the hope that they should be consulted before any passage for the Manifesto is finally agreed. This would seem unexceptionable and the Peers would certainly welcome an assurance along these lines.

The Conservative Peers are likely to raise two further points as follows:-

(a) the possibility of action in this Parliament to entrench the House of Lords by preventing the "swamping" of the House by a massive creation of Peers.

The Government have publicly announced their decision not to come forward with "entrenchment" legislation this Parliament. The main reasons for this decision were: that it would bring the Lords to the front of the political stage and suggest that the Lords was in need of a legislative defence; that it was not clear that any entrenchment proposals could be fullproof; and that any proposal to entrench the unreformed House of Lords might be misunderstood.

(b) the Peers may stress the need for as many Ministers in the Lords as possible to maintain the effectiveness of the House. They may point out that, although Parliament is constantly busy, the following key Departments have no Ministers in the Lords:

Education
Employment
Energy
Industry
Treasury

/The

The absence of Employment and Energy Ministers has been particularly commented upon.

III. Some brief background material of the Government's consideration of the future of the House of Lords.

Following the Second Reading of Lord Alport's Constitutional Referendum Bill in 1980, which sought to provide for a referendum in the event of a Bill to abolish or diminish the powers of the Lords, a sub-Committee of the Home and Social Affairs Committee was set up to consider the whole question of entrenchment. This sub-Committee rejected any immediate legislation to entrench the existing House of Lords. But, following the Home Secretary's report to the Prime Minister last year, the sub-Committee was reconstituted to consider and report on possible options for reforming the composition and powers of the House of Lords. Its conclusions can be expected shortly.

In the meantime in a letter to me of 14th October, 1982, Robin Butler confirmed that at a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Lord Privy Seal in Brighton on 5th October, it was agreed that a paper should be prepared on possible reforms of the House of Lords for consideration by H Committee.

IV. Some biographical notes on the Peers who will attend the meeting

I understand that the following Officers of the Association of Conservative Peers will attend:

Viscount Eccles (President)
Lord Boyd-Carpenter (Chairman)
Earl of Lauderdale (Deputy Chairman)
Lord Orr-Ewing (Deputy Chairman)

I understand that Lord Cathcart will not be present.

Biographical notes are attached.

It is probably true to say that the Association of Conservative Peers (formerly the Independent Unionist Peers) is now a more influential and effective body than before. This is due in part to Lord Boyd-Carpenter's robust and active Chairmanship.

/None

None of the four Peers are known to favour full reform of the powers and composition of the House. But they are all anxious to improve the image and effectiveness of the House, even if this means a commitment in the Manifesto to all-Party talks.

FROM
LORD BOYD-CARPENTER

106 PARK STREET
LONDON
W1Y 4JL

TELEPHONE: 01-493 4272

19th October 1982

Dear Miss Stephens,

I was very glad to get your telephone message this morning to the effect that the Prime Minister would be good enough to see representatives of the Association of Conservative Peers in her room at the House of Commons at 3.45 on Thursday 18th November.

As my earlier letter to the Prime Minister I think made clear, our wish is to discuss with her the question of what should be said about the House of Lords in the Party's Election Manifesto and/or in public speeches.

I attach a copy of a form of words which some of us have worked out and which will form the basis of our suggestions when we meet the Prime Minister. We may also seek to raise the question as to whether any "entrenchment" of the House against the possibility of "swamping" by the creation of large numbers of peers should not be the subject of early legislation.

In the light of my telephone conversation with Mr. Ian Gow, who suggested that a fairly small party could have a more useful discussion than a larger one, I am proposing to bring with me only the Officers of the ACP.

...

These are :

Viscount Eccles (President)
The Earl of Lauderdale (Deputy Chairman)
The Lord Orr-Ewing (Deputy Chairman)
The Earl Cathcart (Treasurer)

I hope this will be agreeable to the Prime Minister.

Yours ever

Ian Ryder-Cathcart

Miss Caroline Stephens,
Private Secretary to the Prime Minister,
10 Downing Street,
LONDON S.W.1.

The Conservative Party believes in the continued existence and effectiveness of a Second Chamber both from the point of view of the efficient working of Parliament and as a protection against the dangers of tyranny under a Single Chamber system.

It is the intention of the Conservative Party to convene an All-Party Conference to consider the role of a Second Chamber in the Constitution and to consider whether any changes in the House of Lords are desirable to assist in its efficient fulfillment of this role.

CONFIDENTIAL

cc CO

Parliament

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

14 October 1982

I understand that the Lord Privy Seal had a meeting with the Prime Minister in Brighton on 5 October, at which it was agreed that a paper should be prepared on possible reforms of the House of Lords for consideration by H Committee.

I gather that H(HL), a sub-Committee of H Committee, has been considering this question, and preparing a report. Unless you tell me to the contrary, I will assume that the Lord Privy Seal will take the initiative in arranging for a report based on the deliberations of H(HL) to be submitted to H Committee.

I am copying this letter to Sir Robert Armstrong.

F. E. R. BUTLER

Michael Pownall, Esq.,
Lord Privy Seal's Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

Robin Butler

POSSIBLE REFORM OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS

1. The Lord Privy Seal had a meeting with the Prime Minister in Brighton on 5th October.

2. The Prime Minister agreed that a paper should be prepared (by whom?) on possible reform of the House of Lords, for subsequent consideration by "H" Committee.

3. The Lord Privy Seal was very pleased with the Prime Minister's decision about this. In that connection I attach a copy of the Lord Privy Seal's speech delivered to the Party Conference on 7th October.

4. May I leave it to you, please, to activate this?

13.10.82

IAN GOW

Conservative Party Conference

NEWS SERVICE

Release time:

CONSTITUTIONAL MATTERS-HOUSE OF LORDS 645/82

Replying to the debate, BARONESS YOUNG, Lord Privy Seal, said:Let me begin by saying that I personally very much welcome the subject of this morning's debate on the House of Lords. It must, I think, be a record for such a fundamental constitutional issue to be successful in the ballot at two consecutive conferences, and to be debated on a motion only two years ago in this very hall. So it has been discussed three years in a row. This reflects not only traditional Conservative concern for the constitution of our country, but profound anxiety about the future of the House of Lords. I say to Dr Bryan Keefe, who moved the motion so well, your message has certainly got across to those of us who sit in the House of Lords. I know, too, that the same applies to what my colleagues and I in the House of Lords call the other place. Whatever may be the outcome of last week's Labour Party conference, the policy of the Labour Party, should they win the next election, is clear. They have said "It is our intention to abolish the House of Lords in the lifetime of the next Parliament." No new titles would be created, which presumably means that Mr Benn's fantasy of creating a thousand peers to vote for their own extinction is now dead. Instead, the destruction of the Lords will be preceded by its emasculation with almost all its powers being removed as a first step.

It is true that its power to prevent the Commons prolonging its own life would remain, but only for a time. Note that. The way would therefore be open for an elected dictatorship by one party in the House of Commons. It is curious that the party which, under Harold Wilson and Jim Callaghan, increased the size of the House of Lords by just under 300 new life peers should now be actively seeking its aboliton. It only goes to show that the Labour Party members are either queueing up to get in or to get out.

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It does mean, however, that the House of Lords will be on the agenda for the next election, a point well made by Mr Hind. So, first, we must donfirm, as the motion says, our commitment to a two-chamber parliamentary system. I do not believe that the people of this country will support single chamber government, but we need to explain and justify our commitment. Let me illustrate the point. First, as I said last year, the House of Lords is an essential safeguard for individual liberty. It is the only guarantee that general elections must be held at intervals of not more than five years. But it is also a safeguard for the independence of the judiciary. Judges can only be dismissed on an address to her majesty from both Houses of Parliament. This is not just an academic point. After all, it was Michael Foot who said on June 3 1972 "How long will it be before the cry goes up: 'Let's kill all the judges'?" In 1974 he referred to "judges who stretch the law to suit reactionary attitudes." I must admit that this was in his more extreme days before he became party leader, but he has not been exactly outspoken in calling for respect for the law in recent weeks.

Secondly, there are those who believe that the legislative role of the Lords could easily be tacked on to the work of the House of Commons. Neither I nore my colleagues in the Lords have actually noticed that the unreformed House of Commons has much spare time or energy for such a role. So I think it is worth asking some questions. What would h ppen to those Bills which are guillotined? Some have large sections which are not debated at all in the Committee Stage in the House of Commons. So, would whole sections reach the statute book without any discussion? And where would we find the quiet objective analysis by experts which characterises so much of our debate in the Lords? Who, after all, did not appreciate the speech this morning by Lord Boyd-Carpenter, who plays such a valuable role in the workings of the House of Lords?

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In what other assembly could you find recognised South American experts, military and diplomatic experts. After all, we even had a peer with a daughter imprisoned on South Georgia. And I am sure that it has not escaped your notice that four out of six members of the committee under Lord Franks are members of the House of Lords. I have been delighted by the great tributes that have been paid today to Lord Carrington.

In the months ahead, as public debate on this matter continues, please put out of your minds the myth of an all-powerful, built-in Conservative majority in the House of Lords. It does not exist, and if you do not believe me just ask the Chief Whip, Lord Denham, who sits near me now, and he will tell you that his lot is not a happy one.

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It would also be a great mistake to believe that constitutional reform - I suspect that some people do think this - will on its own solve our country's economic and industrial problems. Our priorities over the last 3½ years and over the next year or two must lie elsewhere.

Last year I stressed that the lack of agreement within the Conservative Party and with other parties would, as in 1968, be fatal to any attempt at reform. I believe that to be just as true today but I ask the conference to consider three specific points.

First, do not underestimate the value of the current composition and current work of the House of Lords. Watch the House of Lords at work. It is active, it is hardworking, it is politically alive, it is on the radio - and it is sitting next week when the House of Commons is not. I am indeed grateful for the support that is given particularly from Theo Wallace to the House of Lords.

Secondly, do not underestimate the potential dangers of two chambers with competing claims to electoral support, a point well made by Mr. Arnold.

Thirdly, do not underestmate the inherent difficulty of persuading both Houses, but more particularly the House of Commons, to pass legislation providing for a partly elected second chamber.

I also ask you to remember that the House of Lords has been reformed over the last 25 years. The Life Peerages Act 1958 has ensured that it is now a very different and, I believe, more effective, second chamber. If major reform is rejected in the future we shall continue to search for smaller internal improvements. The House of Lords that we have now is infinitely better than no House at all.

I do not believe that the party or the Government are in a position to agree to any specific proposal for reform at the present time. Therefore I hope that the conference will appreciate that I cannot support the motion and must ask conference to reject it. Before accepting such a motion we would need to think through very carefully and in much more detail a number of complicated but extremely important questions such as the following.

To make way for elected members, some of the existing members must leave. How should this be done? Who should leave? What about, for example, the Bishops' Bench and the Law Lords? Would the elected members have more voting rights than the non-electedmembers? Is it desirable to have a two-tier chamber on such lines? At the same time, should the delaying power of a new, reformed second chamber be increased, or would this not lead to conflict with the House of Commons? What constituencies would the new elected members enjoy? Existing parliamentary constituencies, Euro-constituencies, or something new? I sympathise with Roger Persey over the numbers of elections that would be required - indeed, think of the work of the Boundary Commissions.

We need to have answers to all those questions. But I and my colleagues have listened to the debate. We have heard the message,that you want not just a second chamber but a stronger second chamber. We shall give the most careful consideration to proposals for improving the House of Lords and I can assure you that in the crucial months ahead we will, with your help and support, defend and protect our traditional House of Lords and two-chamber system from the virulent attacks being made on it. This is an issue which those of a militant tendency in the Labour Party, who also seek the end of our monarchy, must never be allowed to decide.

end...