

Lecture IV

The British Bicameral Parliament: Significance and Challenges

The British bicameral Parliament consists of two houses, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The importance of these two houses lies in their roles and functions within the legislative process.

The House of Commons is the lower house and is composed of Members of Parliament (MPs) elected by the public through general elections. It holds a crucial role in representing the interests and concerns of the people. It is where government policies are introduced, debated, and voted upon. The House of Commons is responsible for scrutinizing and approving legislation, making it a vital institution for democracy and accountability.

On the other hand, the House of Lords is the upper house and is made up of appointed members, including life peers, bishops, and hereditary peers. The House of Lords functions primarily as a revising chamber, reviewing and examining bills passed by the House of Commons. It provides expertise and experience from various fields, ensuring a more thorough evaluation of legislation. The House of Lords also acts as a check on government power, offering an independent perspective on policy decisions.

The significance of having two separate houses within the British Parliament lies in the principle of checks and balances. The bicameral system ensures that laws and policies are thoroughly analyzed, debated, and refined before being implemented. It is a mechanism to avoid hasty or arbitrary decision-making. Overall, the British bicameral Parliament, with its two houses, provides a balanced and inclusive approach to lawmaking, ensuring democratic representation, effective legislation, and robust scrutiny of government actions.

MPs Vs. Peers: Remarkable Differences

Both MPs and Peers play critical roles in shaping legislation and governance, but their roles, responsibilities, and modes of appointment differ significantly. Understanding these distinctions is crucial in comprehending the unique dynamics of the United Kingdom's political landscape. The two houses bring diverse perspectives and expertise to the legislative process. The House of Commons reflects the will of the people, giving voice to different constituencies and representing their interests. The House of Lords provides a space for specialized knowledge, impartial judgment, and long-term considerations.

1. Members of Parliament (MPs):

a) Role and Responsibilities: MPs are elected representatives who serve in the House of Commons, the lower chamber of the British Parliament. They are responsible for representing the interests and concerns of their constituents, debating and voting on legislation, and scrutinizing the government's actions. MPs also engage in committee work, where they examine bills, conduct inquiries, and hold the government accountable.

b) Election and Constituency: MPs are elected through a general election, which takes place every five years or in the event of a snap election. They represent specific geographical constituencies and are accountable to their constituents. The first-past-the-post voting system is employed in most constituencies, wherein the candidate with the highest number of votes wins the seat.

c) Political Affiliation: MPs are typically affiliated with political parties, such as the Conservative Party, Labour Party, or Liberal Democrats. Party affiliation shapes their

ideologies, policy positions, and voting patterns. MPs often align themselves with party positions and contribute to party debates and decision-making processes.

2. Peers:

a) Role and Responsibilities: Peers, also known as Members of the House of Lords, constitute the upper chamber of the British Parliament. They play a distinct role in the legislative process, offering expertise, experience, and independent judgment. Peers review and amend legislation proposed by the House of Commons, contribute to policy debates, and scrutinize government actions. They also serve on committees and engage in lawmaking.

b) Appointment and Composition: Unlike MPs, who are elected, Peers are not elected by the general public. Instead, they are appointed. There are three main types of Peers:

i) Life Peers: Appointed by the monarch on the advice of the Prime Minister or the House of Lords Appointments Commission. Life Peers are appointed for their expertise, achievements, or contributions to society.

ii) Hereditary Peers: Members of the House of Lords who inherit their titles and positions from their ancestors. The number of hereditary Peers has been significantly reduced through legislation, and only a limited number remain.

iii) Bishops: A small number of senior bishops from the Church of England, known as Lords Spiritual, are also members of the House of Lords.

c) Independence and Non-Partisanship: Peers are not bound by political party affiliations and are expected to be independent and non-partisan in their decision-making. They bring diverse perspectives and expertise to the legislative process, contributing to a more comprehensive and balanced debate.