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Advantages of abolishing the House of Lords

David Wood (28 August 1978) says it is a 'political certitude' that abolition of the House of Lords must seriously diminish the functions of the House of Commons and its power to control the Executive. That may be true of simple abolition, with no compensating adjustments in the position of the Commons. Mr Wood does not discuss the alternative of abolition plus adjustment, yet that is surely the sensible course. What adjustments are needed? I suggest the clue is given by the geography of the Palace of Westminster. Does any abolitionist imagine that the Lords chamber and other rooms would become empty and unused, its magnificent library dispersed, its skilled and experienced clerks dismissed? Surely not. The obvious course is to make all these excellent services available to the Commons instead. In a letter you published on 18 November 1976¹ I pointed out (as a former parliamentary counsel) that more than 99 per cent of amendments made in the Lords are drafted not by peers but by the Bill's draftsman; and that few are inspired by peers. I suggested that there was no need for further stages of a Bill to be in a second House. By slightly increasing the number of MPs a further revising stage could easily be provided in the Commons itself.

An enlarged House of Commons, using *all* the facilities now available at the Palace of Westminster, would have greater not less power to control the Executive. It would be more democratic than the present system of Lords and Commons. It would avoid the perils of an elected second chamber, whose inevitable conflicts with the Commons would produce unanswerable claims that the opinions of one elected representative were as valid as those of another - it being immaterial that they were elected to different assemblies by different methods. As a draftsman I can assure Mr Wood that there is no inevitable reason why, as he says, 'Lords abolition will be turned into an Executive tool to curb the rights of the Commons'. The opposite result is certainly available to us. The heading of Mr Wood's article was 'Abolish the Lords and lose the Commons'. A treatment on the lines I have indicated might justly be headed 'Abolish the Lords and save the Commons'.²

¹ Letter 10 above.

² *The Times*, 4 September 1978.