

Abstract

The House of Lords today is with its ongoing presence of hereditary peers largely seen as undemocratic and illegitimate. In 1997 the New Labour government introduced a manifesto plan to end the hereditary principle and to carry out a democratic reform of the House. This paper seeks to examine the changes to the second chamber under the New Labour government between 1997 and 2010. It is particularly interested in the more substantial changes to the formal institutional structure, such as composition, membership and the powers of the House. It seeks to provide a contextualised understanding of the nature of the House of Lords and the recent changes to it. Through an analysis of official documents and adopted measures between 1997 and 2010, this paper examines whether the real developments of the second chamber met the official plans of New Labour as stated in their manifestos (1997, 2001, 2005). It then examines the reforms and their institutional impacts more in detail. The paper concludes that the government failed to introduce the majority of its commitments. However, it is argued that there were other significant developments that increased the influence of the second chamber on the political process and brought it closer to the standards of modern democratic second chambers.