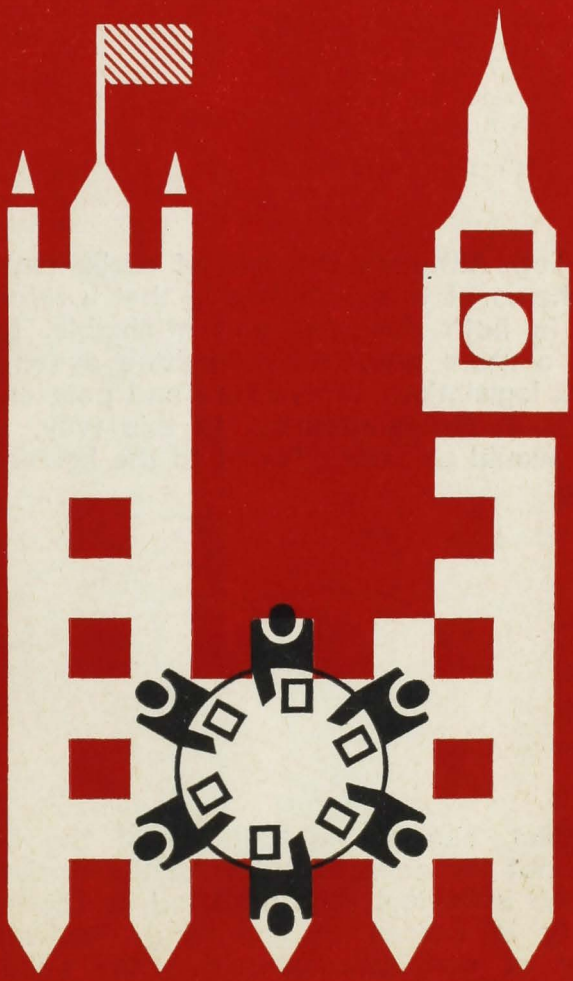
reforming the House of Commons

Lisanne Radice

fabian tract 448

50p



fabian tract 448
reforming the House of Commons

this pamphlet: Although the role of parliament has declined, the main theme of this pamphlet is that a reformed House of Commons is both desirable and attainable. In particular, it argues for a more powerful committee system to scrutinise government legislation, expenditure and policies, and to probe pressure group representatives. In this way, the position of parliament would be strengthened to the benefit of democracy as a whole.

Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SW1H 9BN.
April 1977 ISSN 0307 7535 ISBN 7163 0448 1

1. introduction

Ordered. "That there shall be a Select Committee to consider the practice and procedure of the House in relation to public business and to make recommendation for the more effective performance of its functions."

In the above terms the House of Commons agreed on 9 June 1976 to set up a committee to consider ways of reforming parliament. This was a response not only to new pressures from within parliament (particularly from the intakes of the 1970s, and even from some who formerly could be classified as belonging to that group of diehard MPs who hold that existing parliamentary procedures are sacrosanct) but also to public disquiet about parliamentary ineffectiveness. This pamphlet considers the role of parliament in modern Britain and suggests how its procedures can be improved so that it can more effectively perform that role.

Four main reasons are usually given for the decline of parliament. First, it is argued that the powers of the executive have increased, and are continuing to increase at the expense of the legislature; second, that the influence of party politics, including the party conference and the party central offices as well as the parliamentary whips, has weakened the position of the individual MP; third that governmental dealings with powerful interest groups such as the CBI and the TUC have created new relationships beyond the scope of parliament, and fourth, that a whole range of decisions which affect this country (such as EEC directives, the policies of multi-nationals, or a change in American interest rates) are largely outside our national authority.

In the 20th century, the power of British governments, like governments of other western democracies, has increased dramatically at the expense of the legislature. There has not only been an enormous increase in the resources at its disposal (it controls over 50 per cent of national income), but a vast and influential bureaucracy has also grown up. A still largely amateur parliament has not responded effectively to this new development. In part, this is because of its in-built executive bias. The assumption is that the government of the day is formed from that political party which gained a majority in the last general election, and that the other major party, recently defeated, becomes the official opposition. But the opposition's role is an ambivalent one: it not only believes its task to be that of critic of the executive, but also sees itself as the next government. Both winner and loser, therefore, have a profound respect for government's needs—and less concern for those of Parliament.

The party of government divides itself into those who are in government and those who support the government. The division is not as distinct as it seems, however, because, though backbenchers (particularly in the dreary summer dawns) may bitterly feel themselves to be nothing but lobby fodder whose tramping feet ensure the continued existence of their government, they nevertheless also see themselves as one day joining its ranks. Herein lies the second ambivalence, which again tends to produce a strong pro-executive bias in most members of parliament.

With the advent of democracy and the increase in popular aspirations, governments (particularly Labour ones) see their main parliamentary task as one of pushing through legislation as speedily as possible. They therefore tend to be uninterested in any form of procedural reform which might impede the progress of this legislation. From this it follows that the executive is unlikely to initiate any kind of parliamentary reform unless it gets something out of it; and the only reform which it might encourage is a speedier process of legislation. This will usually be opposed by its own backbenchers (in their role of disgruntled lobby fodder) and by the opposition, in their role of critic of the government. It is thus not surprising that although throughout the years there has been intermittent talk about reform and some limited action, there has usually been tacit agreement to let well alone.

Parliamentary government is also party political government. The Prime Minister

is not only the chief executive; he is also leader of the majority party in Parliament. He owes his advancement to his role as a party politician, and to continue in office he needs the support of his party as well as of the electorate. Hence the importance of the manifesto, drawn up, in the case of the Labour Party, with the help of the representatives of the party activists or, in the case of the Tory Party, with the assistance of Central Office. As far as the party outside parliament is concerned, the modern Prime Minister is judged primarily in terms of how far he has been successful in implementing his party manifesto, while the individual member of parliament is expected to support the party programme throughout parliament. The consequence is that the MP's freedom of action is curtailed both by the pressure of the whips in parliament and the influence of the party outside.

A new phenomenon of the 20th century has been the growth of pressure groups outside parliament. Whereas in previous centuries major groups had either, as in the case of the landed aristocracy, used their influence in the House of Lords or, as in the case of the rising industrial and middle classes, been represented by their own members in the House of Commons, the trend has been for the leaders of the interest groups, like the CBI and the TUC, to put direct pressure on government. This has been due partly to the increased power of government, partly to the trade unions' dislike of mixing politics and union activity, and partly to the growing professionalism in industry and in the trade union movement. The meagre financial rewards for parliamentary service have also ensured that many able figures have turned to other more profitable employment. At the same time the post war phenomena of continuous social welfare legislation have increased social welfare aspirations, which in turn have bred a growing number of "caring" interest groups (such as Shelter or Age Concern) which have largely by-passed parliament. Clearly these groups are here to stay. But discrete Whitehall negotiations give a great deal of power to the executive, to the civil servants and, equally invidiously, as they only represent a section of the nation, to the pressure groups.

No country, not even the United States or the USSR, is totally independent. But the loss of power experienced by Britain in the last fifty years, and particularly since the second world war, has been so great that it has thrown into sharp relief the limited nature of our national and, therefore, of our parliamentary sovereignty. To many, the decision to join the EEC and the consequent acceptance in some spheres of the right of the Community to influence our affairs was a further step in the decline of parliament, a process which will be accentuated, they believe, by direct elections to the European parliament.

In addition, there is a growing revolt in parts of the British isles, particularly in Scotland, against the authority of the United Kingdom parliament.

the role of parliament

Given the reasons for parliament's decline outlined above, it is unrealistic to expect that parliament can ever again play the role it used to play in the 19th century. Big governments and bureaucracies are here to stay. And so are political parties. In a modern democracy it is inevitable—and indeed desirable—that government should seek the consent of powerful interest groups. And, while it is quite possible that Britain will make an economic and industrial recovery, her position will remain that of a medium size European power. In addition there is no way in which parliament can escape the loss of sovereignty that membership of the EEC involves, or prevent a separatist Scotland or Wales (if that is what the Scots and the Welsh wish).

But accepting these restrictions on the role of a modern parliament is one thing; to write it off altogether is quite another.

The cynics have only to visit the "so called" parliaments of Eastern Europe to realise the importance of an independent legislative assembly. There is no better

way of ventilating grievances or of preserving and extending individual rights. And, without a parliament which is able to criticise and scrutinise the executive, it is difficult if not impossible to limit the power of government. Certainly, there are other crucial elements in a democratic system—including free elections, a free press, free trade unions, an independent judiciary and democratic local government. But if parliament's role is to some extent limited, it remains central to a healthy democracy.

Professor Crick redefined the purpose of parliament as follows : " Control means *influence,* not direct power : *advice* not command : *criticism,* not obstruction : *scrutiny,* not initiation and *publicity* not secrecy " (*The reform of parliament,* Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).

Another way of looking at parliament is to consider its functions. It has four basic functions : to scrutinise legislation ; to keep a check on the executive ; to oversee public expenditure ; and to act as the forum of the nation and the ventilator of grievances.

The scrutiny of legislation is usually a complex and technical process but crucial for parliamentary democracy. Legislation initiated by the government needs to have a detailed inspection by members of parliament. A close study, clause by clause, of a bill is an essential part of that process.

What is meant by a check on the executive ? It is simply that government should be accountable for its actions. The whys and wherefores, and the results, of government policies must be scrutinised continuously by members of parliament, properly equipped to do the job. Otherwise the executive, sitting behind departmental doors and divorced from the reactions of the voters, will become more firmly entrenched in its belief in its own omnicompetence. Querying the principles which lie behind policies, the way in which the policies are decided (including relationships with pressure groups), and exploring the consequences of these policies, must therefore rank as one of the major tasks of the House of Commons.

It is also important to scrutinise public expenditure plans ; not only how much is to be spent, but where (the allocation of resources) and with what results. This is not only a question of the examination of the annual Expenditure White Paper, but also a detailed study of individual departmental spending. The power of the government lies to a large extent in its ownership of the public purse. One of the most vital functions of parliament is therefore to ensure that the executive accounts for its spending.

Finally, there is parliament as the forum of the nation and the ventilator of grievances, the vital link of communication between the executive and the nation. Parliament must be able to debate speedily the vital issues of the day, and bring to public notice specific wrongs and strongly held grievances.

2. why reform is needed

It is the argument of this pamphlet that reforms are needed if parliament is to carry out its functions effectively. This is no mere technical issue, the exclusive concern of parliamentarians. Parliamentary reform is too vital to our democracy to be left to members of parliament. Without reform, the role of parliament will continue to decline. With reform, parliament could play a part which (though limited in comparison with its predecessors in the 19th century) could be much more important than it is now.

What is needed, above all, is a powerful system of committees which would provide a more effective scrutiny of legislation, expenditure and policies. With the assistance of strong committees, empowered to question witnesses in detail, MPs will be able not only to probe government intentions but also to call pressure group representatives to account. In this way, a reformed parliament would act as a check on both governments and pressure groups, to the benefit of the community as a whole.

As far as legislation is concerned, the executive now get away with a great deal. If threatened by opposition from its own backbenchers (as the Labour government has been, particularly by the Tribune Group) all it has usually to do is point out that defeat in the Chamber may lead to defeat in the country; recalcitrant troops then come to heel. No member of parliament likes to lose his job (and in a bad year about 100 of them might do so) nor, in the final analysis, does he want to earn the stigma of being the cause of his party's downfall. Inevitably, the smaller the majority, the greater the hold of the executive; maverick votes are really only possible when a majority is so large that the government can afford it to be dented.

Even so, on 22 February 1977 the Labour government was defeated by its own backbenchers during the debate on devolution. But this was an exceptional case. The government was defeated not on the principle of the bill but during the committee stage (which because it was a constitutional issue was taken on the floor of the House) and over the question of whether timetabling should be introduced.

In theory, governments are more vulnerable in a clause by clause debate in standing committees than on the floor of the House. Naturally, the whips try to ensure that their own benches are packed with good loyalist troops, but there is always the possibility of opposition. To make it certain that its own members toe the line throughout, the government may be prepared, at this stage, to accept certain amendments, either because it wants to speed the bill through, or because the amendments in question raise no fundamental problems for the executive. Because these are often agreed backstage, it is difficult to trace the course of particular amendments. A good example of this kind of manoeuvering took place in the 1975/76 session at the committee stage of the Dock Work Bill. A number of amendments were made by government in committee, after pressure from backbench trade union MPs on the standing committee. So government backbenchers do have the power to change parts of bills to which they are opposed but, in practice, they need either the support of strong pressure groups with whom the government does not want to fall out (in the case of the Dock Work Bill major unions other than the Transport and General Workers) or the opposition—usually a tricky operation. As a rule, government troops remain loyal, partly because oppositions have different interests, and partly because, even in committee, the fiction is maintained that every vote is a vote of confidence. The result has an element of farce : government backbenchers can spend up to 12 hours a day, four or five weeks on end, never opening their mouths, but meekly voting when told to. If they should speak, government whips accuse them of holding up legislation. As to the opposition, it seldom gets its way. The only power it has, unless there is an unholy alliance between opposition and government backbenchers, is to delay.

Once the standing committee has finished with the bill, it returns to the Chamber for its report stage. Another opportunity,

it would seem, is now provided for those who wish to question the legislation. However, because debating amendments require detailed knowledge, it will normally only be those members who are well versed in the technicalities of the subject who will speak, and these turn out, as often as not, to be those who were members of the standing committee. Almost invariably, the same points which were argued upstairs are now argued through on the floor of the House, and by the same people. It is not surprising that few members attend. After the Third Reading, to which there is usually very little point, the bill is transferred to the Lords.

At the end of the process, what has been achieved ? Troops have been marshalled, votes counted, the opposition defeated and the government gets its legislation.

Of course, there are exceptions ; a debate on the Second Reading may have stirred things up, some amendments might have been made, or restless backbenchers promised other carrots. But in most cases the government will not have been effectively challenged nor its legislation particularly well scrutinised. There have been some recent reforms, mainly to speed up the procedure. More use has been made of standing committees, so that the floor of the House of Commons can be freed for more important debates — though in practice this has meant that more time is made available for government legislation. The minimum number on the committees has been reduced from 30 to 16. There are (since 1965) committees for Second Readings of uncontroversial bills which can also have their report stage taken upstairs, though this innovation has not been used as often as it might have been. The most important change, however, has been in the procedure of the Finance Bill. This used to have its committee stage entirely on the floor of the House, where it took up much valuable time and was, in any case, often too technical to be of interest to many MPs. The committee stage is now divided up between the floor of the Chamber and standing committee. A further time saver has been the shortening of the period (three hours as opposed to one day) before a guillotine motion can be moved. This streamlining has brought one benefit to backbenchers—more days have now been allocated for Private Members' Bills. But the overall result has been to strengthen the executive at the expense of the legislature.

How effectively does the legislature check the executive ? The main method by which parliament performs this function is through select committees. These were considerably strengthened by the Crossman reforms in the 60s. Specialist select committees, dealing either with subjects (such as race relations, immigration and science and technology) or with departments (such as agriculture, education, overseas aid) were set up. There have also been *ad hoc* committees—such as the one on Cyprus and on violence in marriage. All these committees have been able to use specialist advisers. They can also hear evidence in public, call civil servants and ministers before them (even though the latter can only be *forced* to appear against their will by order of the whole House) and investigate abroad.

The reasoning behind the growth in select committees was the belief that the Commons needed to be strengthened in their ability to review specific areas of governmental actions. The purpose of most of these specialist committees was not so much to influence or initiate government legislation ; it was rather to examine government policy with a more critical eye.

A new study recently concluded that the impact of select committees on government depended on the extent to which the executive allowed itself to be influenced. Ministers can refuse information, committees can be manipulated (as was the Select Committee on Agriculture, whose membership was suddenly increased and its life expectancy curtailed, because of government displeasure) and terms of reference carefully vetted before inquiries can begin. The authors of the study concluded on a pessimistic note : " Over the past decade there has been a steadily growing disenchantment with the

concept of specialist committees. Their reports have failed to command great attention in the House; they have made little impact on the limited section of the public that takes an interest in parliamentary affairs; . . . yet the central reason why specialist committees have made little impact is that with a few exceptions, they have avoided the main areas of party controversy" (Members of the Study of Parliament Group, *Specialist committees in the British Parliament : the evidence of a decade*, PEP, 1976).

If the concept behind the introduction of specialist subject committees was the revitalisation of the role of parliament, both as a check on the executive and as a means of communication with the nation, then the committees have been only marginally successful. The situation is, however, a more complex one than whether the failure of the specialists committees is due to their avoidance of areas of controversy. It is because specialist select committees are both too weak and too few that their impact has been so limited. It is not because they do their jobs badly, but because their potential is not fully exploited by members of parliament, that they have so far failed in their vital task of revitalising parliament. The corollary to this ineffectiveness must surely be to increase their numbers and powers; they must play a more important part in the parliamentary process.

Parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure is not particularly effective. It is true that the Public Accounts Committee, with its large staff and its tough "candles ends" approach, has thrown up some major anomalies, including North Sea oil tax loopholes and the Ferranti contract profiteering case. But that committee is concerned with money which has already been spent and not with future spending which is the province of the Expenditure Committee set up in 1971 and the subcommittees on particular areas of spending which it has spawned. The General Sub-Committee of the Expenditure Committee has begun to probe the assumptions on which the overall spending decisions are being made and to query control mechanisms—and there are signs that the Treasury is beginning to take its reports seriously.

But even so, the 1970s have seen a very rapid increase in public expenditure at a time of very slow economic growth. Though obviously in a recession public sector deficits are likely to be large, there is little evidence that government has planned the growth in its expenditure—or that parliament itself, either through the Expenditure Committee or elsewhere, has shown any clearer sense of priorities. What is lacking is a mechanism for considering expenditure and taxation proposals together and thus enabling parliament to obtain some indication both of where the money is coming from and of the overall distributional impact of government spending and taxes.

One is left with parliament's function as the forum of the nation and the ventilator of grievances. To take the matter of grievance first. This is conducted mainly through the medium of Question Time. Question Time has two functions : its main one is to operate as a channel of communication for the nation's injustices; its secondary one is to act as a further check on the executive. The latter is rarely accomplished. Any minister worth his weight is quite capable of dealing not only with the main question, but with the sting that is usually attached—the supplementary. Having been briefed by his civil servants as to possible tricky lines of argument that may be used and because he has all the information available, as the backbencher has not, he will inevitably be more knowledgeable and able to parry any awkward question. However, Question Time provides members of parliament, four days a week, with an opportunity to air issues of the moment, and to discuss grievances. It thus fulfills a major role, and makes the executive work for its bread and butter. But at the end of the day, the government, whose accountability is as much on trial as its response to grievances, has been vindicated with a minimum of effort. True, poor quality ministers may have been shown up, but the government's facade is rarely cracked. Members have been allowed to let off a little steam. It might

sometimes be a dramatic and exciting performance but, as an effective check on the executive, its rating is relatively low. Some discontents will certainly have been aired, but the executive will have come out of the encounter more or less unscathed.

Apart from Question Time, other methods of voicing grievances are through Private Members' Bills or Ten Minute Rule Bills and Adjournment Debates. Little need be said about them at this stage, except that potentially they are valuable weapons.

Parliament does not spend enough time on its "forum of the nation" role. This is because of the pressure of legislation on the floor of the House. The tendency of recent governments has been to increase the already steady stream of legislation into a torrent. One has only to note the expansion of *Hansard* (under 1,500 pages of statutes in the early 1960s—well over 2,000 by 1977) to see how all-consuming it has become—and this is not to mention EEC Commission documents and Northern Ireland Orders. So there is not enough time, if any, left over for the great questions of the day which ought to be debated and publicised. Parliament ought to be able to react more quickly to topical issues. At the moment, such debates are provided mainly on Opposition Supply Days. Issues such as our economic performance, the government's relations with industry, the state of industrial relations, public expenditure problems, the effect of inflation on the worse off, these are too seldom debated.

Clearly then, parliament is failing to fulfil its functions adequately. It is no wonder that the cry of reform has once more been raised. In an era where "open government" and "participation" have become less of an ideal and more of a possibility, Westminster is lagging behind. If parliament could set up the Bullock Committee to look into the question of industrial democracy within industry, it must not be surprised that others in turn demand a similar inquiry into the state of parliament.

3. proposals for reform

There are a number of reforms which could improve parliamentary scrutiny of legislation. One of these would allow for a pre-legislative stage at which MPs could ask for information and evidence.

pre-legislative committees

Pre-legislative committees have been set up before but only on controversial issues of taxation and welfare. There are two main uses to which such committees can be put : first, they ought to be able to provide a check on parliamentary drafting. Many bills suffer from hasty work by parliamentary draftsmen who have too tight a schedule. Secondly, and perhaps more important, by involving backbenchers in the actual discussion of legislation at an early stage, such committees would not only enable members to gain legislative experience (useful for those who might one day be ministers themselves) but also give them an opportunity of bringing some influence to bear on the executive.

It is also at the pre-legislative stage that pressure groups should be brought in. We have already seen that the bargaining process between government and pressure groups takes place largely outside the scope of parliament.

A pre-legislative committee would not only ensure that these interests were heard, but that they were publicly interrogated. In that way, neither Whitehall secrecy, nor the special interest of the pressure group would be able to obscure the issues being debated. Discussion at this level would therefore have the double advantage of exposing the role of the pressure group while, at the same time, allowing public discussion of the issues.

The main arguments against pre-legislative committees come from those who say that such committees would either be too party political and therefore too antagonistic and destructive; or so anodyne that they would merely "whitewash" the government. The critics are too defeatist. Clearly there are always going to be great "principle" bills but these ought to be dealt with separately. Some clauses of even relatively uncontroversial bills will also fall into this category—these too can be taken out of the pre-legislative committee. Departments, we are told, do not like to work like that. They prefer to produce the legislation in their own way and with their own experts. This is tantamount to saying that Whitehall knows best. Nothing but good would come of a reform which made departments examine their assumptions more clearly and, therefore, put forward a legislative programme which had been carefully thought out. In addition, the legislative process would be made more accountable to parliament.

More information will inevitably lead not only to a better and more constructive form of discussion, but also to a more open form of government, including a more vigorous use of Green Papers. If it is true that such committees would slow down the process of legislation, that will be no bad thing if it ensures that hasty and unintelligible drafting becomes a thing of the past.

strengthening standing committees

The main scrutiny of legislation ought to continue to be performed by standing committees. However, these should be given select committee powers. They should also be able to call on the advice of specialist advisers on agreed clauses.

It would increase the authority of the standing committees if report stage was normally taken upstairs (that is, in committee). It would also make more time available in the Chamber for debates on topical issues. So a double advantage would be gained, and two functions of parliament strengthened simultaneously. The effect of this change would be that all bills would normally come in front of a standing committee both at the amendment stage and at report stage.

Clearly, however, if members of the standing committee alone were to participate in the debate on the report stage

of bills, this would be unsatisfactory; too many bills would be subjected to too small a scrutiny. The way round this might be to change the nature of the standing committee at report stage by allowing any MP to attend and speak on any of the proposed amendments or clauses. As there are not usually more than a maximum number of 80 members who want to speak on the technicalities of a bill (and this is putting the number high), they would still be able to do so without taking up time on the floor of the House. There are rooms upstairs in the House of Commons which would house such a number. Two possible voting procedures should be considered.

By the first, the voting would revert to the original number of members of the standing committee; by the second, only those who had spoken would be allowed to vote (though this might encourage speeches inspired by the government and opposition whips).

It might be argued that taking the report stages upstairs would strengthen the hand of the executive, that only loyal members would be asked to serve on the committees (to ensure no maverick voting) and that the process would be as regimented, if not more so, than it is now. However any government faced with unrest can always threaten its backbenchers with a general election—unless it has a large majority in which case it already has the votes in its pocket. This is every executive's trump card. But the standing committees particularly if the second system of voting were to be implemented, would be strengthened because it would be more difficult for government to get its majorities; the "payroll" vote on which it can count on the floor of the House would be less easy to muster upstairs. Not only might a strengthened standing committee system enable the voice of the minority to be heard more often, but the possibilities of upsetting the executive applecart could become greater rather than less.

However, it must be accepted that some of the more controversial clauses would have to be taken on the floor of the House. These would have to be agreed on beforehand and, then, debated in the ordinary way in the Chamber.

departmental select committees—a check on the executive

Insofar as parliament has attempted to strengthen itself in recent years, it has done so by the extension of the select committee system. However, as one MP in a recent debate on procedure of the House of Commons pointed out, the structure of the select committee was a "total hotch potch" and went on to show that some of the committees were subject committees, others functional, and yet others a mixture of functional and policy orientated (*Hansard,* 2 February 1976, col 1019). Though this multiciplicity has its uses, reforms are now needed. There must be an expansion of the role of the select committees and a clearer definition of their objective. This can best be achieved by setting up departmental select committees with increased powers, linked to all the major departments of state. Under this system every large department of government would be answerable to its own select committee. EEC and delegated legislation would also be examined in this way. The present system of lumping all EEC legislation together is unsatisfactory. A more effective method of dealing with the problem would be if each departmental select committee examined the effect of EEC legislation on the work of its own department. The same system should also apply to delegated legislation—the present committee on Statutory Instruments which looks at delegated legislation also suffers from its lack of a specialist approach.

These departmental select committees ought to have the power to question ministers *as of right* about the policies of their departments—there should be no possibility of a Cyprus or Chrysler situation developing when the government was reluctant to allow ministers to come before the relevant committees. At the same time, the committees must be able to draw on full time specialists (instead

of the part timers they have at present) and be able, within reason, to obtain all relevant information. Most government secrecy is simply secrecy imposed by the civil service, much of it unnecessary.

These committees would also be further strengthened if MPS made greater use of their own party political subject committees. These should also be able to demand the attendance of ministers (or, in the case of the opposition, shadow ministers) to discuss future policies and possible lines of legislation. Members who served on both types of committee would have more information at their command and, in the case of government backbenchers, would enjoy two bites of the cherry. So the influence of parliament on the executive would be increased.

The departmental select committees would also be able to call the representatives of the relevant pressure groups as a matter of course, thus enabling MPS to probe their views and assumptions in detail.

Given that the new departmental select committees would now become more powerful, linked as they would be to government departments, with more information and expertise at their command and sitting permanently, the position of their chairmen ought to be reviewed. There is a strong case for remunerating chairmen of these committees. This would introduce an interesting new dimension to parliamentary life. Members of parliament would now have two possible alternatives open to them for advancement. Either they could hope to join the ranks of the government at some stage in their career or, equally prestigious, they could become dedicated committee members in the eventual hope of becoming chairman of one of the major committees. If the criticism of this scheme is that it smacks too much of the American model, it should be said that the British parliamentary system has no division of powers and, therefore, the effect of such a change would be different to that of the United States. It would, however, strengthen the committee system and make it more interesting and worthwhile for members of parliament to become involved in its process.

In addition to linking themselves to departments of state with the right of investigation, it is very tempting to suggest that the departmental select committees should also be given pre-legislative powers as part of their duties. If they took on this task, they would be well suited to it, because of their knowledge of particular departments. As with the previously mentioned pre-legislative committees, those parts of legislation which were considered too controversial would be taken out of their hands and dealt with at ministerial level. Once their task was completed, the committees would then return to their normal job as departmental select committees.

An even more far reaching proposal has been suggested—that standing committees should be abolished and select committees, with the same membership as the departmental committees, set up in their place. These would have the power not only to examine bills, but would then also be able to turn into a standing committee, taking report stage upstairs, with the possibility of any member who wished to do so, being able to attend and speak. This suggestion, in the opinion of the author, is too radical for it to have any chance of being accepted by parliament in the near future. But it is a logical step, particularly if departmental select committees also had pre-legislative powers. And it would also neatly combine the "scrutiny of legislation" function with that of "the check on the executive", while increasing the expertise of the members concerned.

An additional boost would be to televise the proceedings of the committees, as well as the debates on the floor of the House. They would provide an interesting and new picture of parliamentary proceedings, different from that gained from debates in the Chamber, and might win some much needed prestige for the work of the House of Commons. If it is accepted that the new type of departmental select committees should be more powerful, then it follows that the

reports they publish must be debated in the Chamber within a fixed period, and government time allocated accordingly —not as now, when some reports are debated many months after publication. and others not even debated at all. If an early date is agreed on, it would be easier to forge a link between the work of select committees and that of the Chamber. There is, therefore, a case for having a fixed day at least once every three weeks during the session for debating departmental select committee reports. Criticisms of the setting up of these much strengthened departmental select committees with wide ranging powers include the following : that they would take up even more time of members already hard pressed to find a moment, that they would detract from the influence of the floor of the House, and that government and the civil service would not like it. To take the last point first, undoubtedly Whitehall would find it hard to get used to the new procedure (though some departments have already developed a reasonable relationship with the relevant select committee). But, in the longer term, the executive, as with parliament, has something to gain from the extension of select committees. Policies would be tested against the questions of experienced and well briefed backbenchers, whilst government would have the opportunity to put across the reasons behind policies. As to detracting from the quality of the debates in the Chamber, these are already under heavy fire. It is a rare debate, indeed, which attracts more than sixty members simultaneously, and those who do speak very often tend to be the more conscientious who will continue to do so whatever happens. The way to make the Chamber more interesting is to give it more time to discuss major issues. If the more topical departmental select committee reports are debated regularly, they will add to, rather than detract from, the life of the Chamber. As to the amount of time to be spent in the committees—this will be dealt with under the discussion of timetabling and full time members of parliament.

Some members, particularly the more traditionally minded, feel that if the select committees were to be given greater powers, the spirit of controversy and opposition, which is the stuff of politics, would be deadened, and the dreaded spectre of " consensus politics " emerge. However, the two main parties are too divided on too many topics for there ever to be a time when the House of Commons is ruled by a spirit of total agreement. And, given the elections of 1974, the voters have apparently asked for a wider range of views to be represented, and less " gladitorial " politics.

scrutiny of public expenditure

It was argued above that parliamentary scrutiny of public expenditure, especially in ensuring that government spending reflects a clear set of priorities, was not yet adequate. What is needed is a strengthening of the role of the Expenditure Committee.

The Expenditure Committee has not so far worked in the way that parliament originally intended. With the exception of its General Sub-Committee, the sub-committees have largely concentrated on policy issues rather than on expenditure control. In other words, they have developed as embryo subject committees. There is, therefore, a strong case for merging all the sub-committees, with the exception of the General Sub-Committee, with the new departmental select committees.

The enlarged General Sub-Committee ought to become a new " Budget " Committee, covering all aspects of government taxation as well as spending. This Committee should become the most powerful and prestigious in the House. It ought to be able to call on the Treasury to justify the assumptions behind its budget spending plans, reveal a wider range of costed options and discuss priorities in public (thus doing away with the out dated convention of budget secrecy). It will need the support of a full time staff, capable of making a searching investigation into government spending, as well as the power to direct the select committees (assisted by Budget

Committee staff) to examine the spending plans of particular departments. It should also examine, as a matter of course, the main industrial interest groups (the CBI and TUC) and other group on their views again bringing these groups under parliamentary scrutiny.

In the future, there may be a case for amalgamating the Public Accounts Committee with the Budget Committee. The first priority, however, is to build up the Budget Committee into a really effective means of scrutinising public expenditure in its broadest as well as its narrowest sense.

parliament as the forum of the nation

The usual contention of parliamentarians that if the process of legislation is speeded up, it is only the executive which benefits, is erroneous. As has been shown, taking report stage upstairs should improve the scrutiny of legislation. It would also save valuable time, and enable the Chamber to exercise its duties as the forum of the nation. By becoming what it should be (a legislature clearly responsive to the needs and grievances of the moment) its reputation would be considerably enhanced. Debates would become more interesting, more members would attend, and the Chamber would have more *purpose* to it.

However, timetabling of legislation and a new system of parliamentary hours is needed to strengthen the floor of the House of Commons. A business committee should be established on which all parties would be represented. This would have the great advantage of taking timetabling out of the hands of the executive and putting it back into those of the House. It would also strengthen the opposition parties. As it is, when a motion for a guillotine has been voted through the House of Commons, a "business" committee is immediately set up between the government and the opposition to discuss timetabling, so this is not an entirely new concept. The timetabling of bills would have many benefits. Members of parliament would know where they were, rather than have to, as now, hover indecisively round the whips' office wondering if and when they can go home; amendments would be debated more sensibly; more time would be given over to debates on the important issues; and debilitating late nights would be a thing of the past. The use of the guillotine, which is simply a government imposed system of timetabling, would not now be necessary.

Speeches, because of the time factor, might become shorter—an unmitigated blessing. As it is, no other parliament sits for as many days, or as many hours in a year or later than ours. Between 1970-75, the United States House of Representatives sat an average of 164 days—766 hours; the Federal German Bundestag 72 days—313 hours; the French and Australian parliaments, respectively, 149 days and 68 days, 510 and 720 hours. The British parliament, not particularly renowned either for the clarity of its legislation nor for the quality of its government, sat 167 days, 1,528 hours. Many of the sittings were late, more than those of other parliaments. This is not only inefficient but also expensive—it cost Parliament over £75,000 to stay up after midnight in 1975.

The majority of the countries mentioned have a federal system of government. It may be that, with devolution, Britain will at least partially join their ranks. This is not the place for a discussion on the merits or demerits of devolution But it ought to bring one certain advantage. Pressure on the time of the House of Commons will be considerably lessened if Scottish and Welsh business takes place outside Westminster. (It is worth noting that the proposals for the new Scottish Assembly include the setting up of a system of departmental select committees —so far considered too dangerous an innovation for the House of Commons).

There will be those who will argue that timetabling will produce superficial speeches. In fact the opposite may well be the case. At the moment, when a guillotine is announced, the speeches in the Chamber tend very often to be

sharper and more to the point. Some members have suggested that there should be a rigid ten minute speech rule. Although this is done in other countries (in some either a red light goes on, or even more off putting, the microphones are switched off so that recalcitrant members are left looking foolish) there seems little point in so drastic an action.

There is, however, a case for the speaker stating his views of a reasonable length of time for both backbench and frontbench speakers, say 15 and 30 minutes respectively—and then making his displeasure publicly known at too lengthy performances.

There is a more fundamental argument against timetabling. Oppositions have little power against the executive and, by agreeing to a timetable, their one important weapon, the power of delay, would be curtailed. This need not necessarily be so. The business committee would take the process out of the hands of the "usual channels", and if there were no agreement among the members, then the opposition would be entitled, as it does now when the "usual channels" are closed, to act independently. There is also a case for the business committee not only timetabling individual bills, but also allocating a fixed number of days for each session. This would prevent the government "overloading" their parliamentary timetables, as too often happens now, and the opposition would, at least, have the satisfaction of knowing that there were only a certain number of bills that could be processed each session. In these ways, the rights of opposition would be preserved and, in some respects, actually enlarged.

Timetabling should also enable MPs to plan their work more effectively. The fact that members of parliament only know on the previous Thursday what the voting pattern of the coming week will be leads to uncertainty and an unwillingness on their part to commit themselves to future engagements. With the setting up of a business committee it should not be beyond the bounds of the whips' administrative ability to have the whip sent out on a fortnightly, rather than a weekly, basis.

The allocation of a fixed number of sessional days should enable a sessional programme to be arranged. At the moment no MP can be sure that he or she will be able to get away for the summer recess until the middle of August—this is both unsettling and not conducive to a good relationship between backbenchers and the executive. (Scottish members of Parliament sometimes have only ten days with their families due to the different school holidays in Scotland.) If, as the government is wont to claim, there is a shortage of parliamentary time, then apart from using the measure of timetabling to ensure that more time is available, it would be perfectly possible to cut the summer holidays by at least three weeks, so that they ran parallel either to school or academic vacations.

private members' bills

Private Members' Bills, "Ten Minute Rule" Bills and Adjournment Debates perform a vital parliamentary function—they draw the attention of the executive to a particular grievance and attempt to redress it. It is therefore important that members of parliament should be allocated more time for such measures. With respect to Private Members' Bills, the executive should give MPs more opportunities to present their bills and more time to get them through.

The question of timetabling is also an integral part of any discussion on Private Members' Bills. The 1970-71 Procedure Committee came to the conclusion that not enough time was given over to Private Members' Bills. There was only three weeks between the time a member of parliament won a place in the ballot and the presentation of a bill. Clearly, this is insufficient time in which to produce a competent piece of legislation. It would make more sense if the second proposal of the 1971 Committee were adopted—to hold the ballot before the summer adjournment so that members who had won a place would have a decent interval

in which to prepare their bills. A recommendation from the same Procedure Committee—that the winning members should be helped by parliamentary draftsmen or at least reimbursed if they used outside experts—has recently been adopted. It has gone some way to producing more competent private members legislation.

parliamentary hours

Another move which would make parliament more effective would be to reform the parliamentary day. Late hours, which have become more common (94 days in the 1975 session went on till after midnight) make for inefficiency and an inability to produce coherent work. Night owls do not make good legislation. The main reform that might be considered is that of starting the parliamentary day at 10.30 am rather than at 2.30 pm which is the present tradition. Question Time would begin at 10.30 am and would then be followed by ministerial statements at 11.30 am. The debates would start at 2.30 pm and go on till 8.00 pm. Obviously, the day need not be as rigid as this—but it should be the exception rather than the rule for the pattern to be broken. By starting early, late hours would be avoided, but the same amount of time would still be available for debating.

The premise behind this reform is that more and more members of parliament now consider that they can only do justice to their job if they are full time —that is, that they have no outside secondary interest which keeps them out of the House of Commons in the mornings and early afternoons. They also know that their constituents would prefer them to be full time. And if they are full time, then clearly there is nothing to stop them starting their day in the morning, as the rest of the working population does. A Victorian pattern of hours is inappropriate for a full time professional legislature.

Morning sittings are not an innovation; they were introduced during Crossman's era but were a fiasco. Only non-controversial legislation was debated during the morning sittings. The controversial measures continued to be debated in the evening; indeed, as some members were determined to wreck the experiment, the length of the sittings actually increased. It is essential that important business begins in the mornings.

The main criticisms of such a change have been threefold. In the first place, Cabinets are held on Tuesday and Thursday mornings, and ministers have also said that they need to be at their desks in their departments when not attending other meetings—and that having to come into the House in the morning would disrupt their day. It is, however, possible to suggest an alternative : Cabinets could be held on Monday and Wednesday afternoons, and any Cabinet minister who has to open a debate would be unable to attend for that particular occasion. Apart from the Prime Minister's Questions, ministers never attend any Question Time other than their own, which, in any case, would only occur at the maximum of once a fortnight, one hour in the morning. The second criticism that is levelled is the one that those with second jobs would be unable to attend; this is easier to refute.

Members of parliament should consider that their jobs are full time if they are to be good MPs; if they believe that being an MP is something that they can do as an afterthought then perhaps they ought to start thinking about retirement.

The cry that is often raised, that secondary jobs provide a much needed outside interest for members and so enable them to have a less blinkered approach to the outside world, begs the issue. If a member is full time, and giving full time service to his constituents and to parliament, he will be in constant touch with his constituency (a microcosm of the nation). At the moment, there is an unholy alliance between the executive and the lawyers for the House to sit only in the afternoons and the evenings. It is not an arrangement made for the convenience of the majority of members of parliament who

are full time. A normal working day does of course raise a further point, which always causes embarrassment to members of parliament—the question of finance. This will be dealt with later.

As far as departmental select committees are concerned, they can always arrange their timetable to suit the convenience of the members. There could even be one day set aside each week for committee work. And those who serve on standing committees could make pairing arrangements to enable them to participate in any debate or Question Time that they might be interested in.

Finally, as a further objection, which is often raised by MPs, if parliament ended by 8 o'clock, then many members, especially those from far flung constituencies, would have nowhere to go, given that they often live in bed and breakfast establishments. In that case, members of parliament should be given either a better parliamentary allowance, or a system of "parliamentary flats" might be set up by which MPs were allocated flats which would then revert back to the control of parliament when they retired or lost their seat. Certainly the facilities in the House could remain open for the use of those without a London family home—bars, smoking rooms, library and tea rooms could be kept open until 10.00 p.m.

Apart from providing a more workable day, a change in parliamentary hours will produce a further benefit. Present parliamentary hours preclude most women from becoming members of parliament. Clearly, the House of Commons which has only 29 women members is unrepresentative of the nation as a whole, and fails to provide equality of opportunity for both sexes. The majority of women are mothers and, at the moment, the home is structured round their presence, particularly in the evenings. This means that women entering parliament have to make sacrifices; either they cut down on family commitments or they wait until their families have grown up before going into politics. As parliament has passed the Sex Discrimination Act and set up the Equal Rights Commission, it would not be inappropriate to suggest that the same kind of opportunities should be available at Westminster as they are to those outside.

4. services and facilities

The people who make parliament work are the MPs. If there is to be a more efficient parliament, then adequate resources and facilities must be available for them.

Firstly, the question of salaries. Many MPs feel that £6,000 a year is not enough in the way of remuneration, given the hours and the amount of work that they put in. The recommendations of the Boyle Commission (which supported this view) should be fully implemented—MPs' salaries should be linked to those of the higher ranks of the civil service. Comparing British parliamentary salaries to those of their colleagues from abroad, it is evident that the Mother of parliaments does not do too well by her children.

The Dutch, not a particularly rich nation, give their members £13,230; the Germans £7,820 (but this is tax free) and the Australians £11,236.

The low salaries often mean that members of parliament are not able to bring their families down to London, should they wish to do so. The special system of parliamentary flats already mentioned would help overcome this problem and lessen the strain on parliamentary families. As to those MPs whose families opt to remain in the constituencies, they too should be provided with accommodation which could enable their families to come and visit them.

And if a lack of funds is put forward as a reasonable excuse to do nothing, it is always possible to suggest (though its acceptance by MPs is unlikely) that the number of members of parliament could be cut down and the constituencies, as they are abroad, enlarged. The money which might be saved would go a long way to producing better salaries. In any event, to be a member of parliament should not necessarily mean a life of relative hardship.

Apart from financial questions, there is the equally searching question of support facilities. For MPs to be efficient parliamentarians, and to be of use to their constituents, do they need more help? Some recent reforms have gone some way towards at least providing MPs with additional help. Although full time research assistants are still a thing of the future, most members now have full time secretarial help. The accommodation in the Commons is, however, inadequate. As well as having to share offices, members have nowhere to put either their secretaries, or their research assistants, should they be lucky enough to have one. The spectacle of MPs sitting huddled on benches dictating to their secretaries is a common enough sight in the corridors of Westminster. The level of accommodation would be found totally unacceptable by any self respecting manager or trade unionist.

MPs have mixed feelings about research assistants. Many, on being interviewed, declared that they were well served by the House of Commons Library and needed no further help. Others pointed out that they received minimal help and would have been glad of more. Some said that their own political parties outside Westminster gave them support; others said that this was derisory and that they never asked. Clearly individual research assistants are not yet a top priority but some, particularly the more active members, feel that some more research help would be useful. A possible solution could be for members to group themselves together and share an assistant, and for more specialised staff to be added to the library.

In addition, the civil service should be encouraged to give all MPs any information that they require, not only when they are serving on their various committees, but also as part of their parliamentary business. More information would lead to greater efficiency and a better use of the members' time. A recent pamphlet illustrates the poverty of the British Parliamentary system in its information services, and suggests that a permanent secretariat should be set up in the House of Commons composed of specialist staff for the use of all members (Janet Morgan, *Reinforcing parliament; services and facilities for members of parliament; some interna-*

tional comparisons, PEP, 1976). This is worth consideration. If such a secretariat existed, the departmental select committees could draw on it, as well as backbenchers in the course of their normal functions. The fear and criticism is that it would, as in the United States, become too powerful and autocratic as a body. However, as Dr Morgan states: "It is very important to stress that parliamentary committee staff must be consciously and visibly servants of parliament, like the present library staff and other officers and officials who fall within the establishment of the Clerk of the House. If this attitude can be fostered, the larger their accumulation of contacts, information and skill, the better" (*ibid*).

This proposal, of course, presupposes that members of parliament, anxious to develop their role, to press the executive and to provide a good service for their constituents will, as full time MPs, have both the time and the opportunity to take advantage of such a useful, but also very necessary service, as a specialist secretariat. This is not to say that members of parliament should turn themselves into academics and conduct their life as if it were one long seminar session. Heaven forbid. But what they should be able to do is to discuss topics in an informed way and have the possibility open to them of being able to obtain information in those areas in which they are most interested as quickly as possible.

Reforms such as this cost money and the establishment of a research secretariat would by no means be a cheap undertaking. But those services which enable members to do their work more efficiently should be given top priority. Few constituents would grudge their MP a more efficient service, particularly if they thought they could benefit from it.

Apart from research assistance within Westminster, allocating money to political parties outside parliament has also been advocated. This would enable them to provide a good back up service to their MPs. Parliament is no longer, and has not been for some time, a collection of individuals with an occasional corporate existence. It is now run on party political lines, and a discussion of parliamentary reform must take this into consideration.

Given the importance of the influence of the political parties outside parliament in the formulation of policies, there is much to be said for the idea of giving them state aid to enable them to function more efficiently, and to provide a better service for their members of parliament. The poverty of the British political party scene has recently been ably illustrated in a PEP pamphlet (Dick Leonard, *Paying for party politics : the case for public subsidies,* 1975). In this, the author demonstrates how providing aid to political parties (he quotes ten foreign examples) had clearly increased the quality of the services which they were able to provide. In all cases he found that not only were they able to increase specialist staff, but were also able to improve their research and policy making capacity. He found that smaller parties gained at the expense of larger ones and, an important democratic gain, they were able therefore to flourish more soundly. If a political subsidy resulted in less of a reliance on interest groups, as well as increasing the effectiveness of political parties' policy making functions, then it should be encouraged. A welcome move in this direction has recently been made by the award of the first ever funds to opposition parties in parliament. What is now suggested is an extension of these funds to the parties outside parliament.

As far as parliamentarians are concerned, the effect could be not only to enable party headquarters to give more constructive political help to members, but also provide extra help in the constituency.

It has been argued that, given the "social worker" aspect of an MP's duties, money should also be allocated to him at constituency level. But though members grumble at their "superior post box" role, they are generally reluctant to hand over all their constituency work to an outsider—even though their "surgeries" abound in problems which could have

been dealt with at local council level or are, in any case, insoluble by an MP, such as the length of the housing list. The majority of members interviewed, although they deplored their somewhat negative role, still insisted on the importance of continuing to hold their "surgeries" themselves. Clearly they found "grass rooting" stimulating and considered it a necessary and important part of their job. Their main complaint was not so much the work in the constituency, nor the weight of their post bag, but that these came on top of a 60 hour week. It was the combination of the two which was lethal. The best plan would probably be to give money either through central funds or through their political parties to those members of parliament who could prove they were using it.

a note on the House of Lords

This pamphlet does not set out to deal with the role of the House of Lords. However, if the reforms listed above should be implemented, then arguments for its abolition will be strengthened.

There are those, however, who would like to retain a second but reformed Chamber. One suggestion is that hereditary peers (a complete anomaly) should be phased out and replaced by appointed peers. The weakness of this proposal is that too much power would be placed in the hands of those who dispense the patronage.

An elected second Chamber has also been advocated. Apart from the problem of yet more elections it seems likely that such a Chamber would merely reflect the composition of the House of Commons, without having its authority. And, given that power would be vested in the Commons, it is difficult to envisage suitable candidates willing to face the drudgery of the hustings for the nebulous reward of a seat in the new Chamber.

There is yet a third alternative, and that is that hereditary peers should be phased out, and replaced by members drawn from such major organisations and pressure groups as the CBI, TUC and local government. This is an interesting proposal, but has two inbuilt disadvantages. Firstly, an element of patronage must inevitably be present in the allocation of seats, and secondly, influential men and women may not wish to give up their time to a second Chamber with minimal powers. The argument that such an Upper House would ensure that consultation with pressure groups would be more open and useful is persuasive. But a reformed House of Commons with pre-legislative committees and departmental select committees able to call major organisations before them should provide a more effective system of public accountability.

The main role of the House of Lords is that of a revising chamber. It is however debatable to what extent it fulfils that function satisfactorily. Recent controversies between the lower and the upper house have shown less a spirit of unbiased scrutiny and more a reflection of the built in Tory majority. A reformed House of Commons, which made full use of pre-legislative committees and adopted a more vigorous approach to standing committee procedures, including the use of select committee powers of investigation, would make the need for a revising upper Chamber less necessary.

If revising legislation is one of the main functions of the House of Lords, introducing non-controversial legislation is another. Government bills are often introduced in the second Chamber so as to save the time of the Commons. However, the introduction of a more efficient system of timetabling should provide more time and enable non controversial bills to be slotted into the Parliamentary timetable.

The argument appears to be inescapable; once the House of Commons is reformed, there is less need to retain the House of Lords.

5. conclusion

Parliament should be performing the following functions : scrutinising legislation ; keeping a check on the executive ; overseeing the control of public expenditure ; and acting as the forum of the nation and the ventilator of grievances.

The contention of this pamphlet is that it is failing on all four counts. The following are therefore proposed :

1. *The scrutiny of legislation* (a) A pre-legislative stage be introduced. (b) Standing committees be given select committee powers and (c) Report stage be taken upstairs by the standing committee, with members of parliament other than those on the committees allowed to speak at report stage.

2. *A check on the executive* (a) Departmental select committees be set up to cover all government departments (b) Select committees should have pre-legislative powers (c) Chairmen of subject committees be remunerated (d) Committees be broadcast and televised (e) Reports be debated in the Chamber soon after publication.

3. *The control of public expenditure* (a) A budget committee based on the general sub-committee of the expenditure committee to cover taxation as well as spending be established (b) Expenditure sub-committees be merged with departmental subject committees (c) The amalgamation of the public accounts committee with the budget committee be considered.

4. *Parliament as the forum of the nation and ventilator of grievances* (a) More debates on " issues of the day " be made possible and that proceedings be broadcast and televised (b) Shorter speeches from the front benches as well as back benches be encouraged (c) A business committee be set up, with all party membership and with powers to timetable bills and allocate a fixed number of days for each session (d) Time for private members bills, " 10 minute rule " bills and adjournment debates be increased (e) Question time be moved to 10.30 am and the parliamentary day to end normally at 8.00 pm.

services and facilities

Parliament is ineffective not only because it fails to perform its four basic functions adequately, but also because the services and facilities at its disposal are inadequate. It is therefore proposed that : (a) The Boyle Commission's recommendations on MPs' salaries be implemented (b) More suitable accommodation be provided (c) A permanent research secretariat and group research facilities be considered (d) Funds allocated to political parties outside parliament be used to help MPs (e) MPs be given assistance at constituency level.

By enabling it to carry out its functions more effectively, these proposals will strengthen parliament in relation to the executive, pressure groups and political parties alike, at a time when the idea of representative democracy is under criticism from many directions. It is no exaggeration to say that the reform of the House of Commons is vital for the health of our democracy.

appendix: duration of parliamentary sittings

DAYS AND HOURS OF SITTING, 1969-1973

country	number of members		average number of days of plenary in each of last five years		average number of hours of meeting in each of last five years	
Australia	House	127	House	68	House	720
	Senate	60	Senate	68	Senate	629
Canada	House	264	House	171	House	942
	Senate	102				
France	Assembly	490	Assembly	149	Assembly	510
	Senate	283	Senate	121	Senate	376
Federal Republic of Germany	Bundestag	500	Bundestag	72	Bundestag	313
	Bundesrat	45				
United Kingdom	Commons	635	Commons	167	Commons	1528
	Lords	1075	Lords	112	Lords	730
United States of America	House of Representatives	435	House of Representatives	164	House of Representatives	766
	Senate	100	Senate	183	Senate	1146

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (editor), *Parliaments of the World,* Macmillan, 1976.
Note: In Canada, the House had four sessions 1968-72.

fabian society

The Fabian Society exists to further socialist education and research. It is affiliated to the Labour Party, both nationally and locally, and embraces all shades of Socialist opinion within its ranks—left, right and centre.

Since 1884 the Fabian Society has enrolled thoughtful socialists who are prepared to discuss the essential questions of democratic socialism and relate them to practical plans for building socialism in a changing world.

Beyond this the Society has no collective policy. It puts forward no resolutions of a political character. The Society's members are active in their Labour Parties, Trade Unions and Co-operatives. They are representative of the labour movement, practical people concerned to study and discuss problems that matter.

The Society is organised nationally and locally. The national Society, directed by an elected Executive Committee, publishes pamphlets, and holds schools and conferences of many kinds. Local Societies—there are one hundred of them—are self governing and are lively centres of discussion and also undertake research.

Enquiries about membership should be sent to the General Secretary, Fabian Society, 11 Dartmouth Street, London SWIH 9BN; telephone 01-930 3077.

the author

Lisanne Radice lectures in the Department of Government at Brunel University. She is a member of the International Committee of the Fabian Society, and co-author of *Will Thorne: Constructive Militant*. Dr Radice would like to thank all those members of Parliament who gave up valuable time to discuss the question of parliamentary reform.

Cover design by Dick Leadbetter. Printed by Civic Press Limited (TU), Civic Street, Glasgow, G4 9RH.

ISBN 7163 0448 1 ISBN 0307 7535

recent fabian pamphlets

research series

297	Della Adam Nevitt	Fair deal for householders	25p
312	Bruce Douglas-Mann	The end of the private landlord	20p
314	H. Glennerster, S. Hatch	Positive discrimination and inequality	40p
317	Lawrence Whitehead	The lesson of Chile	40p
319	Rupert Greer	Building societies ?	30p
320	Nicholas Falk, Haris Martinos	Inner city	45p
321	David Eversley	Planning without growth	45p
322	Paul Lewis and others	Inflation and low incomes	50p
325	John Hughes	Funds for investment	50p
326	Howard Wagstaff	World food : a political task	40p
327	Howard Glennerster (ed)	Labour's social priorities	55p
328	Anne Corbett	Whose schools ?	40p
329	Rosalind Brooke	Advice services in welfare rights	60p
330	Tony Klug	Middle East impasse : the only way out	75p

tracts

399	R. H. S. Crossman	Paying for social services	20p
427	Julian Fulbrook and others	Tribunals : a social court ?	20p
430	Jeremy Bray, Nicholas Falk	Towards a worker managed economy	30p
431	Giles Radice (ed)	Working power	25p
435	Nicholas Bosanquet	New deal for the elderly	40p
436	Brian Bolton	An end to homeworking ?	40p
437	Elizabeth Young, Peter Fricke	Sea use planning	55p
439	Jim Callaghan	Challenges for British foreign policy	30p
440	Barbara Castle	NHS revisited	30p
442	William Brown, Keith Sisson	A positive incomes policy	40p
443	Barbara Wootton	In pursuit of equality	30p
444	Sue Ashtiany	Britain's migrant workers	50p
445	John Tilley	Changing prospects for direct labour	40p
446	John Gyford, Richard Baker	Labour and local politics	50p
447	Muir Gray and others	A policy for warmth	55p

young fabian pamphlets

36	Stewart Lansley, Guy Fiegehen	Housing allowances and equality	25p
37	David R. Allan	Socialising the company	50p
38	Young Fabian steel group	Crisis in steel	30p
41	A study group	Improving the dental health service	20p
42	Martin Smith	Gypsies : where now ?	40p
43	David Heald	Making devolution work	70p
44	Melvyn Westlake	World poverty : thegrowing conflict	70p
45	Geoff Harris	A wider Europe	50p

books

R. H.S. Crossman and others	New Fabian Essays	cased	£1.75
Brian Abel-Smith and others	Socialism and affluence	paper	£0.60
Peter Townsend and others	The fifth social service	paper	£2.50
Peter Townsend and others	Social services for all ?	paper	£1.00
George Cunningham (ed)	Britain and the world in the 1970s	cased	£3.00
P. Townsend and N. Bosanquet (eds)	Labour and inequality	paper	£2.20