



Cherish democracy, abolish House of Lords

by Mark Iddon

The House of Lords voted on Wednesday, 1st March, to add an amendment to the Government's bill for triggering Article 50, initiating Britain's exit from the European Union. The amendment was to protect the rights of EU nationals to allow them to remain in the UK after Brexit no matter what the fate of British nationals living in Europe. It is thought that the Government intended to use the EU nationals as bargaining chips to protect the rights of British citizens living in Europe.

Leaving the using people as bargaining chips rather than debating points of principle aside, we should be mindful of the interference in the democratic process by the unelected chamber. The protection of EU nationals to remain in the UK, I would suggest, is a positive step, in itself, which I would have expected the Government to take and I would be an angry protestor against the Government if the 3 million EU nationals were to be expelled. Although I might be protesting alongside the lady on BBC Question Time last week, whose main concern was "who would serve her coffer in Pret?", the fact remains that an unelected body interfered in the democratic process and this was seen by some as an act of rebellion on behalf of the British people rather than a transgression of the democratic process.

No doubt the Lords are a bit fearful of their position at present, with the questioning of a reform of the second chamber. It has been noted that many of the Lords contribute little yet still collect their £300.00 a day attendance fee. The vote this week gave them an opportunity to make a point that they are the watchers holding the ruling party to account and scrutinising the laws as an extra check in the system. This is to miss the point of how democracy is compromised by the existence of the unelected and unaccountable chamber.

Most people when asked would say they uphold democracy and that it is a positive ideal for society, and not many would counter that to say that democracy is bad or even questionable. However, we have seen in recent months, since the EU referendum in the UK and with the election of Donald Trump in the USA, a questioning of the intelligence of voters with terms like 'low information' etc. There have also been claims that 'the voters were mis-led' and also have a tendency to vote based on emotions rather than on factual information. This is how democracy is being eroded and undermined by the implication that there are some issues that are too complicated with great consequences and that decisions instead need to be made by the great and the good rather than ordinary people who may be a little confused by the issues.

The House of Lords has existed since the 14th and was initially entirely a hereditary position but in recent years the government of the day have appointed Lords which has now bloated to a staggering 798 of them. Whatever the issues of the present, they can have no progressive democratic purpose in politics today. They are there to maintain the existing power relations and resist any form of change and to ensure the continued status of the privileged elite. I would rather put my trust in the populous with whom I can reason and engage with, even if I disagree with them on many issues, rather than an out of touch unaccountable throwback chamber from the middle ages.

My ideal is for greater democracy, individual autonomy, progress and prosperity for all and those ermin clad misfits are standing in the way of democracy and the possibility of change.