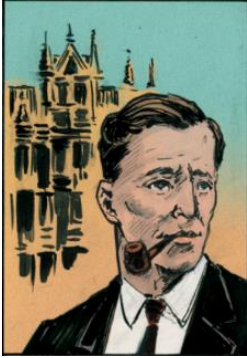


A Lifetime for Justice



Tony Benn and the Peerage Act 1963

Learning resource

This pack accompanies the **Lifetime for Justice timeline booklet** and focuses on the Peerage Act 1963.

Illustration by Willem Hampson

This pack

This pack contains background information and questions to develop students' knowledge of Tony Benn and the Peerage Act 1963.

Includes:

- An exercise with primary and secondary resources
- Questions to consider
- Glossary of legislation

Key learning points

- Key individuals
- What the Peerage Act 1963 did
- Definitions of key glossary terms

Scholarly rationale

The Peerage Act 1963 became law in July 1963. Tony Benn, who became MP for Bristol South East in 1950, first introduced a bill to allow him to renounce his peerage in 1955.

Curricular rationale

This lesson is an opportunity for students to understand and debate views on the British Peerage system – and for Bristol area schools explore a nationally significant moment that took place locally.

KS3 History (AQA BB Britain Power and People)

KS4 Politics (AQA 3.1 Government and Politics of the UK; 3.3 Political Ideas; Pearson 1. UK Politics and Core Political Ideas)

The Peerage Act received Royal Assent and came into force on 31 July 1963, enabling people who inherited peers to renounce their titles for life if they wished. This meant that people who inherited a title and entered the House of Lords could reject their titles and be elected again into the House of Commons.

Tony Benn had been MP for Bristol South East since 1950. From 1955 he spent eight years working to getting the Peerage Act passed. He knew that one day he would inherit the title of Viscount Stansgate from his father and would at that point be disqualified from standing in the House of Commons – this happened in 1960. He renounced his peerage 22 minutes after the Act came into force in 1963, declaring 'I am the first man in history who, by Act of Parliament, is prevented from receiving a hereditary peerage. I am statutorily immunised.' Three weeks later he regained his seat in the Commons.

The 1963 Peerage Act also admitted all Scottish peers into the House of Lords. They had previously been excluded. The former system of Scottish 'representative peers' was abolished.

Women who inherited peerages in their own right were also allowed to sit in the House of Lords. This had always been the case for men.

Exercise



[Watch Tony Benn](#) speak in 2011 about the Peerage Act as part of the BBC's Daily Politics Change Makers series.

Questions

- When does Tony Benn believe big change happens?
- Who did Tony Benn receive a letter of support from? Why was this unusual?
- What's the example that Tony Benn uses for not believing in hereditary legislators?
- What might be some of the reasons for disagreeing with Tony Benn?
- Can you think of other examples where public opinion has been ahead of changes in the law? What might the examples from our lives today be?
- Who is the MP where you live? How easy is it to find out what they stand for and what their voting record is?

Glossary of words and terms

Bill of Parliament: Bills are proposals for new laws.

Act of Parliament: If they pass every stage of scrutiny in the House of Commons and House of Lords, and receive Royal Assent, bills become Acts of Parliament and Law.

House of Commons: The democratically elected house of the UK Parliament, responsible for making laws and checking the work of Government. The UK public elects Members of Parliament (MPs) to the House of commons.

House of Lords: The House of Lords is the second chamber of the UK parliament. Their role has been to review, make and amend the laws of the United Kingdom.

Hereditary Peers: Hereditary peers are people with titles such as Duke, Earl, Viscount and Baron. They are eligible to sit in the House of Lords is due to their title being inherited from their fathers (or, much less frequently, their mothers). Currently, there are 814 hereditary peers although only 92 can sit in the Lords at any one time.

Peerage: A peerage is a legal system of titles and assorted noble ranks. They exist in the Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Japan, Portugal, Spain and the UK. Different countries have their own variations.

Royal Assent: Royal assent is the final step of a bill becoming law. A bill must be passed by both the Houses of Commons and Lord and is then given Royal Assent by the monarch. It will then become an Act.

Further information and links

Use <https://bills.parliament.uk/> to explore current Bills that are being discussed in Parliament.

Find vote results from the House of Commons and the House of Lords

<https://votes.parliament.uk/>

Find your MP

<https://members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP>



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