

## Bishops in the Lords

1. We make this submission on behalf of members of Labour Humanists.
2. The UK is the only democratic country to give seats in its legislature to religious representatives as of right. It does this through the Lords Spiritual where 26 Church of England Bishops sit as of right in the House of Lords. In addition to the same speaking and voting rights as other peers, the Bishops in the Lords enjoy other privileges which unduly increase their influence over proceedings.
3. There are many good reasons to want a reformed chamber with no reserved seats for representatives of the Church or of other religions, solely on the basis of their position in the religion, rather than on merit.
4. No other Western country has reserved seats for clerics in its legislature and we strongly believe that has no place in modern, liberal, democratic and diverse Britain. It is also clearly at odds with the aspiration of a more legitimate and representative second chamber.
5. The continued existence of the Lords Spiritual privileges one particular branch of one particular religion. This is clearly anachronistic in a diverse, multi-faith and increasingly non-religious country. While Labour Humanists does support a separation of religion and the state, it is worth being clear that getting rid of the reserved parliamentary seats for Church of England Bishops would not disestablish the Church – legally there is a no link between the Lords Spiritual and establishment.
6. The repeated refusal of the Church of England to comply with basic gender equality law and its maintaining a sexist approach to women in employment means that, in effect, reserving seats for Church of England Bishops means reserving seats in the House of Lords for heterosexual men, or celibate gay men, of the same denomination. This discrimination surely has no place in a modern Parliament. Yet even if the Church did allow women to be Bishops that would be no reason for the Church to retain its reserved seats in the Lords.
7. **In fact, Labour's existing policy to have a 100% elected Lords would, in practice, mean abolishing the Lords Spiritual.** However, Labour has not made explicit the need to end the practice of reserving seats in Parliament for 26 Church of England Bishops, in any reformed chamber.
8. It is logical that if Labour holds a clear policy towards Lords Reform which would abolish the Lords Spiritual, as it does now, it should be happy to maintain that position even in a chamber which is not 100% elected. It would not make sense for Labour to do otherwise and we are convinced that many in the Party, religious and non-religious, would fully support such a policy.
9. **Suggested policy**
  - A. **Labour should have a clear and principled policy against religious privilege in our Parliament:**
  - B. **End the undemocratic 'right' for the Church of England to sit in our parliament**
  - C. **No reserved seats for any religious representatives**
  - D. **Allow Church of England bishops, and any other clergy or religious representatives, to stand for election or be eligible for appointment to a reformed Lords but let that be on the same basis as everyone else**
  - E. **Promote equality and campaign against privilege in our democratic arrangements**



10. It is vital that a commitment to a reformed House of Lords with no reserved seats or other privileges for clergy is in Labour's 2015 manifesto.

## **Labour Humanists**

### **About us**

Labour Humanists is affiliated to the British Humanist Association (BHA) and we aim to become an affiliated society of the Labour Party.

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