



# HISTORY & POLICY

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## **Reform the House of Lords and elect the monarch - or risk revolution, warns Professor**

Friday 27<sup>th</sup> November, 2009

In the latest History & Policy paper, published today, Professor Iain McLean from Oxford University argues that the centenary, on Monday 30<sup>th</sup> November, of the House of Lords' rejection of the 'People's Budget' should serve as a wake-up call for politicians of all parties that urgent reform is needed to prevent a future constitutional crisis. Professor McLean's paper, [The 1909 budget and the destruction of the unwritten British Constitution](#), is available at [www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org).

On 30<sup>th</sup> November 1909 the House of Lords - infuriated by Chancellor, David Lloyd George's proposed land tax, and politically opposed to the Liberal government - rejected the 'People's Budget'. This was the first time since the 17<sup>th</sup> Century that the Lords had challenged the House of Commons' monopoly of supply. Five years of deadlock between King, Lords and Commons ensued, in which parliamentary sovereignty did not function and, Professor McLean argues, the unwritten British constitution was destroyed.

Iain McLean, Professor of Politics and Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, said: "To embody the sovereignty of the people, or even to reconstruct Parliamentary sovereignty on to morally defensible grounds, it is necessary for the Lords and the monarchy to be elected. Otherwise the risk remains, however remote, of a constitutional crisis as severe as that of 1914."

Despite a landslide Liberal victory in 1906, the Lords' rejection of the 'People's Budget' forced the government to fight, and win, two more general elections in January and December 1910. They then introduced the 1911 Parliament Act to restrict the Lords' ability to veto Commons bills. Home Rule for Ireland was the next

bill to be pushed through via this process, a move which had short as well as long term impacts. By 1914, Ulster Protestants backed by the Unionist (Conservative) Opposition were engaged in paramilitary resistance. The outbreak of the First World War that year may well have prevented the outbreak of civil war in the UK.

Professor McLean continued:

“For policymakers today, reform of the House of Lords and the monarchy is crucial. The crisis of 1909-1914 demonstrated that the British constitution cannot withstand an opposition coup d’état and also shows that an unelected Lords and unelected monarch cannot represent ‘us, the people.’”

**Timeline:**

Jan-Feb 1906	General Election: Liberals win with a landslide majority
April 1909	Lloyd George presents ‘People’s Budget to Commons
November 1909	Lords reject ‘People’s Budget’ by 350 votes to 75
Jan-Feb 1910	General Election: Won by Liberals with support of Irish Nationalists
May 1910	Death of Edward VII and accession of George V
Dec 1910	General Election: Won by Liberals with support of Irish Nationalists
Aug 1911	Parliament Act restricts the Lords’ veto on Commons bills
April 1912	Home Rule Bill presented by the Liberals; no opt-out for Protestant Ulster
May 1914	Home Rule Act passed by Commons and forced on Lords
Spring 1914	Curragh mutiny and Larne gunrunning; paramilitary activity in Ireland
Summer 1914	Outbreak of First World War interrupts plans for Home Rule

Notes to editors:

1. Professor McLean’s History & Policy paper, [The 1909 budget and the destruction of the unwritten British Constitution](#), is published today and is available at [www.historyandpolicy.org](http://www.historyandpolicy.org).

2. Iain McLean is Professor of Politics, Oxford University and a Fellow of Nuffield College. His most recent publication, *What's wrong with the British Constitution?* (Oxford: OUP 2009) will be launched on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2009 at Nuffield College, Oxford. For further information about the launch, please contact [jennifer.clark@oup.com](mailto:jennifer.clark@oup.com).
3. [History & Policy](#) is an independent initiative working for better public policy through an understanding of history. The initiative was founded by historians at the Universities of Cambridge and London and is based in the [Centre for Contemporary British History](#), at the [Institute of Historical Research](#), University of London. History & Policy's current work is funded with charitable grants from [Arcadia](#) and [The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#).
4. To keep up to date with the latest History & Policy news, you can [sign up](#) for our monthly newsletter online or [follow us on Twitter](#).
5. History & Policy has a network of over 200 historians and academics willing to engage with policymakers and media. To request an interview with Professor McLean or another History & Policy contributor, please contact:

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