



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Introduction:

- English Parliament is a Bicameral one.
- House of Commons is the lower House of the English Parliament
- It is the oldest representative House of the world.
- It is the popular and more powerful House in the British Parliament today.
- Sovereignty of the Parliament resides with the House of Commons.

Composition & Organization:

- The total number of members in the House of Commons is raised after every senses.
- In 1983, it was 650, in 1992 it was 651 and in May 1997 the total membership stood at 659.

Election:

- Commoners are directly elected by the people.
- They are elected from single member constituencies.
- 75000 voters constitutes a constituency.
- Elected by Universal adult suffrage on the basis of one man one vote principle.
- All those citizens who have completed 18 years of age are entitled to vote.
- However Peers are not allowed to vote.

Qualifications:

- He must be a citizen of Britain.
- He should have completed 21 years of age.
- He should not hold office of profit under the government.
- No residential qualification i.e. Any member can contest from any constituency in the country.
- Elections takes place on the same day throughout England.
- A limit has been put on election expenditure.
- Any campaigning must be done through an authorized agent of the candidate.

Term of the House:

- The term of the House is 5 years but can be dissolved earlier.
- However during the emergencies the term of the house can be extended.
- For example, during the two world wars times from 1910-1918 & 1935 – 1945.

Privileges of the House:

- It enjoys the following privileges, like –
 1. free from arrest on civil proceedings, 40 days before and after a session of the Parliament.
 2. freedom of speech – cannot be prosecuted on what he said in the Parliament.
 3. each member has the right to access to the Crown which is a collective privilege of the House.
 4. the House has the right to control its own proceedings, upon legal disqualification for membership and to declare a seat vacant on such grounds .
 5. also enjoys the right to penalize those who commit a breach of its privileges.

Officers of the House:

- The Speaker is the spokesman of the House of Commons.
- He is elected by its members and presides over the meetings of the House.
- He is the chairman of Ways and Means Committee & deputy speakers are the officers elected.
- Permanent officers of the House includes those like the Clerk of the House – who keeps records & endorsing bills.

Committees of the House:

- There are 5 kinds of committees in the House – like,
 1. The committee of the whole House,
 2. Select committee on Public Bills,
 3. Seasonal committee on Public Bills,
 4. Standing committee on Public Bills,
 5. Committee on Private Bills, etc.

Powers and Functions:

- It perform the following functions –
 1. Legislative powers,
 2. Financial powers,
 3. Executive powers,
 4. Investigative powers,
 5. Creating public opinion,
 6. Electoral powers,
 7. Ventilation of grievances, etc.

I. Legislative Powers:

- Its primary business is to make laws.
- It can initiate any bill for legislation.
- Its approval is a must for a bill to become a law.
- It can amend and reject those bills proposed by the Lords.
- But the House of Lords can only delay a bill & cannot reject a bill.

2. Financial powers:

- It controls the national finance.
- The money can be spent by the government only with its consent.
- Money bills originate from this house only.
- It can propose to increase taxes or reduce expenditure.
- It has also the power to reject a money bill.

Financial powers

- It is through the control of the national purse that it rose to a position of supremacy.
- Lords cannot reject a money bill.
- It can withhold a money bill only for a period of one month duration.

3. Executive Powers:

- The Ministers are responsible to it.
- It controls the ministers in the following ways –
 1. Power of interpellations
 2. Adjournment Motions are moved by the House to discuss matters of urgent public importance.
- To move such a motion it should have the support of at least 40 members.

Executive powers

- The speaker decides to accept or reject the motion for debate.
- 3. The House debates specific bill introduced by the cabinet
- 4. it debate on the budget & departmental estimates
- 5. The financial committees of the House checks the financial irregularities in administration.

Executive powers

6. The house discuss and criticizes the government s policies after the queen's speech at the opening session.
7. Finally it can move a no confidence motion against the government and if it is passed by a majority the government has to resign.

4. Investigative powers:

- The House through various committees undertakes investigation of various matters.
- The reports of these committees in the field of education, improvement of factory conditions, law reforms & so on have affected the government policies to a large extent.

5. Creating Public opinion:

- Debates of the House of Common are today of an important means of creating public opinion.
- Today Parliamentary debates are being published daily which makes he people to be aware of the deliberations of the Parliament.
- Mass medias give a wide coverage to the public about the happenings in the House.
- This informs, educates & helps in crystallization of public opinion.

6. Electoral powers:

- It has electoral functions like choosing the speaker and also the Prime Ministers.
- It is a convention that the Prime Minister must belong to the House of Commons.
- The House not only chooses the PM but also other ministers.

7. Ventilation of Grievances:

- It performs a number of miscellaneous functions like ventilation grievances.
- If it receives complaints from the citizens against any arbitrary or unjust action of a public official it may be raised in the House by the respective MP.
- The minister concerned has to deal with this issue.

Ventilation of grievances

- Written petitions send to the speaker which are referred to the committee on public petitions and taken to the relevant department.
- In order to deal with excess complaints the government may appoint a royal commission which is impartial and its recommendations are of great importance.

Conclusion:

- Since it is the popular House it wields more share of financial and legislative powers than that of the House of Lords..
- It is said that the will of the House becomes the law. In England.
- In theory it is said that the House controls the government but in reality it is the Cabinet that controls the House of Commons.