

IV. The Volume of Parliamentary Workload

1. Introductory Note by Mr. M. A. J. Wheeler-Booth (then Clerk Assistant, House of Lords, United Kingdom) (March 1990)

1. At the last meeting of the ASGP I undertook to prepare a short topical note, based on the proposition that the work of Parliament, and in particular that of the House of Lords, has increased, is increasing and possibly ought to be diminished. This growth has been seen especially in legislation.

2. Recent experience in the House of Lords supports this view. In 1950, when I joined the staff of the House of Lords, it usually sat 3 days a week, for about four hours, and members who rose to speak at 6.00 p.m. would say, apologetically "At this late hour, I will not detain the House...". It was very much a part-time House. Since 1960 the House of Lords has seen a marked increase in activity:

	Number of Sitting Days	Total Number of Hours Sat	Average Length of Sitting	Average Daily Attendance
1959-60	113	465	3 h 59 m	136
1964-65	124	593	4 h 47 m	194
1971-72	141	813	5 h 46 m	250

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	Number of Sitting Days	Total Number of Hours Sat	Average Length of Sitting	Average Daily Attendance
1975-76	155	970	6h 15 m	275
1980-81	143	930	6h 43 m	296
1985-86	165	1213	7h 21 m	317
1988-89	153	1077	7h 02 m	316

3. Thus, the House has been sitting on more days, and for longer each day. In one recent year, 1986, all-time records were set in the hours sat, the number of sitting days, the average length of sitting, the number of Friday sittings and, finally, in the number of late sittings after 10.00 p.m. On no fewer than 84 occasions in that year the House sat after 10.00 p.m. Subject to correction (and it would be of interest to have comparable figures for other Houses) I believe that, with the exception of the House of Commons, the House of Lords now sits longer hours than any other parliamentary assembly, although this is not, I think, a fact of which the House itself would be proud.

Increase in Public Legislation

4. The main explanation for this increase in the workload of the House is that there is more public legislation, especially legislation put forward by the Government. This trend is reflected in the volume of legislation, as measured by pages of enacted legislation in the statute book, and in the proportion of the time of the House devoted to Government public bills:

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Proportion of Time of House Spent on Government Bills

1981-82	43.5%
1984-85	44.9%
1985-86	53.9%
1988-89	56.3%

Pages of Legislation

1946	1050
1951	675
1956	1016
1961	1048
1966	1060
1971	2 107
1976	2 096
1981	2 276
1986	2 780

(After 1986, the volumes of statutes were printed in a different format, and comparisons are therefore not valid.)

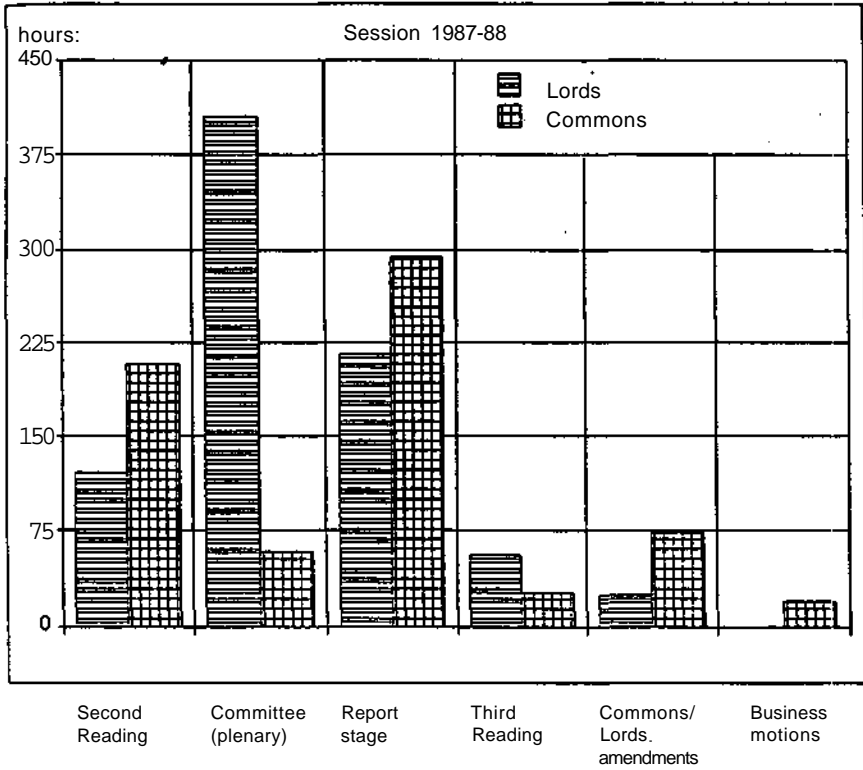
5. A further indication of the increase in legislative activity is suggested by the number of amendments (mostly proposed by the Government) made in the House of Lords:

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1971-72	924
1975-76	549
1979-80	971
1980-81	1465
1981-82	1449
1982-83 (election)	510
1983-84	1 117
1984-85	1506
1985-86	2 432
1986-87 (election)	927
1987-88	3 071
1988-89	2 356

6. The practice in the Lords, unlike in the Commons, is for the Committee stage on public bills to be taken on the Floor of the House. A procedure exists for committing Bills to a Public Bill Committee upstairs, and this is done occasionally; but when tried last in 1986 on the Pilotage Bill, the verdict was that the experiment had not been a success as it did not significantly save time on the Floor of the House. The increase of legislative activity in the Lords is, in part, a reflection of the fact that the House spends longer in Committee of the Whole House on public bills than on any other single item of business; there is also a marked disparity between the two Houses at Westminster:



Source: *The UK Parliamentary System*, by Sainy and Boulton, submitted to the last meeting of the ASGP.

It also reflects the absence in the Lords of procedures to curtail debate - selection of amendments and timetable motions or "guillotines".

7. In recent years, this increase in legislation has been the subject of adverse comment, both inside and outside Parliament. But the Government have given no indication that they will change the nature of UK public legislation, which is detailed and often technical; nor have they led Parliament to expect less legislation in the future. For their part, the House of Lords have

recently reviewed their practice and procedures, but have declined to make any substantive changes in their procedures.

8. For these reasons, the large increase in the workload of the House has had to be accommodated by longer hours, more Monday and Friday sittings, some limited restrictions on the length of non-legislative debate, and a certain alteration of the proportion of the time of the House spent on legislation, in contrast with other business. There has, so far, been no major increase in staff, although there have been some increases in Hansard, the Library and those concerned with parliamentary papers. Further, although some new accommodation has been made available, it has been achieved mainly by the more efficient use of available space, rather than any major new building project. In other words, the infrastructure of the House has not been subject to major change to reflect the great increase of its workload.

9. Additionally, a number of administrative arrangements have been made, for example, by the introduction of computerisation into the Public Bill Office, which has enabled the legislative work of the House to be processed more quickly. Such developments, in one sense, however, compound to increase the evils, as those concerned are insatiable in their demands for faster and faster processing of legislation.

Conclusion

10. Although figures can be used to prove anything, I hope that colleagues will accept that there has been a large increase in the activity of the House of Lords.

I invite colleagues to say:

- (a) whether their Parliaments are experiencing a similar trend of increased workload; and, if so,
- (b) whether this is occasioned by Government legislation;
- (c) what measures they are taking to handle the extra work;
- (d) whether it is a transient phenomenon, or continuing;
- (e) whether there are any measures which could be taken to reverse the trend.

2. Topical discussion: Extracts from the minutes of the Nicosia session (April 1990)

Volume of Parliamentary Business

The PRESIDENT reported that Mr. WHEELER-BOOTH (UK) had produced an introductory note which had been circulated. He had been unable to attend the current session and his note would be introduced on his behalf by his colleague Mr. POWNALL.

Mr. POWNALL said the workload of the House of Lords had increased dramatically in the twenty years since he had started working there. It was difficult to imagine that twenty years ago the volume of work would have prevented the Clerk Assistant from attending an ASGP meeting, particularly in Cyprus. He acknowledged that the House of Lords was an unusual Chamber in several respects. It did not have a Presiding Officer with significant powers to control debate; it had a very large membership with a daily attendance of 300 but a potential active membership of more than 900; members were largely part-time and party political ties were not as strong as they were in the elected House of Commons; in particular the Committee stage of all public legislation was taken in the Plenary and there was no power to limit amendments for the length of debate.

This all meant that the House was very vulnerable to recent increases in the work. So far it had refused to change the essential features of its procedure. Although that reluctance might be unusual, it would still be interesting to know whether other Parliaments had experienced a significant increase in their workload.

Statistics set out in the introductory note showed that the workload had increased dramatically over the last two decades. The House was now sitting longer and more frequently with most sittings starting at 2.30 or 3.00 p.m. and continuing until 10 p.m. or even later. Furthermore the division of legislative work between the two Houses had meant that the House of Lords was now busy for most of the parliamentary session. Growing daily attendance might indicate that some of the extra workload was self-generated. Also the wider range of issues in which Governments and Parliaments were involved inevitably caused more work. Much recent effort had concerned legislation on environment and embryo research, issues which would hardly have occupied the legislature fifteen years previously. Membership of the European Community had also added about three or four per cent to the workload.

Nonetheless the main cause of the increase in the volume of work was the increase in Government legislation. Much of the recent legislation had been very politically contentious and had required extensive debate in the Plenary over many days. A Government committed to substantial change needed to push much legislation through the House and inevitably some of this was drafted hastily and needed extensive revision. It was significant that the vast majority of amendments tabled in the House of Lords were tabled by the Government to its own legislation.

Secondly, since the Government had a large majority in the House of Commons outsiders tended to look to the House of Lords as the Chamber in which they would have a better chance of amending Government legislation. If a Bill had passed through the House of Commons under a guillotine (time limit) motion many parts of it may not have been fully debated in the Commons and there was greater pressure on the Lords to examine it in detail.

In the light of this increase in the volume of work an informal working group had been established in 1988 which had issued a questionnaire to all Peers to see what they thought about the Lords' procedure. In the end they had rejected any radical alteration to their procedures. In particular they were reluctant to consider referring detailed consideration to legislative committees away from the Plenary.

No major changes had been made in the support staff of the House but improvements had to be made in the accommodation, catering etc. Good staff management became even more important under such pressures. A computer had been introduced to speed up the processing of amendments and printing of Bills. Longer sittings also required more shorthand writers for the Official Report and this was not easy.

Responding to the questions in the introductory note, Mr. POWNALL said that he did not envisage in the foreseeable future that there would be any reduction in the levels of work. It was unlikely, however, that the fairly relaxed procedure of the House of Lords could survive much more pressure. Concern about the amount of legislation being passed had fuelled criticism inside and outside Parliament about the way legislation was prepared and debated. No immediate changes were likely but this was a matter for further discussion.

The PRESIDENT said that, in response to the questions posed by the paper, (a) there had been an increase in the workload in the House of Representatives of Cyprus; (b) this was not caused by increased Government legislation; (c) additional staff had been taken on; (d) the increase was likely

to continue for the foreseeable future, and (e) no immediate measures were being taken to reverse the trend.

He said the reason for the increases were:

Firstly, since 1985 the number of MPs had been increased from 50 to 80 in the House as a whole. In practice it meant that there were now 56 instead of 35 Greek-Cypriot MPs;

Secondly, before 1985 not all secondary legislation was considered by the House but it now had to be put to the House of Representatives. Originally it had to be passed within 21 days but this had now been extended to 60 days to give more time for considering such secondary legislation;

Thirdly, following a recent change, the budgets of all semi-state organisations had to be approved by the House;

Fourthly, the recruitment of temporary staff in Government Departments or semi-state organisations had to receive the specific approval of the House;

Fifthly, under the new Civil Service law the House had to approve all conditions of service for Civil Servants.

Mr. KAITOUNI (Morocco) wondered whether the increase in the workload in the House of Lords was caused by the examination of new subjects or whether new problems had arisen.

Mr. POWNALL replied that one factor in the increased attendance was the existence of life Peers, a category created in 1958. The Government was, apparently, involved in a much wider range of issues than would have been the responsibility of the Government some decades previously. •

Mr. MBOZO'O (Cameroon) enquired about how the procedure for considering the committee stage of legislation in the Plenary operated.

The PRESIDENT indicated that it would be best for the topical discussion if a number of members made contributions on the practice in their own Parliaments rather than hold a question and answer session with the rapporteur.

Mr. WAN ZAHIR (Malaysia) said that (a) there had been an increase in the workload over the last ten years; (b) it had been caused by Government legislation; (c) increasing the number of staff and greater use of information technology had been the main ways of coping with the increase; (d) it was a political judgement whether this increase was transient; and (e) no measures had yet been taken to reverse the trend. The Second Chamber which was a revising Chamber was obviously vulnerable to an increase in the amount of legislation introduced into the lower Chamber.

Mr. CASTIGLIA (Italy) said that two years ago the Italian Senate had reformed its procedures to cope with the general increase in workload. It now arranged its sittings so that in each three-month period four weeks were devoted to Committee meetings, three weeks to the Plenary and one to the activities of political groups. This meant that Committee meetings were no longer held during the Plenary meeting and a specific time was set aside for party political activity. He wondered whether a major revision of the parliamentary timetable had been considered in the House of Lords. Under this new system for organising a parliamentary timetable the quantity of work had not grown but the quality and the productivity of the Senate had increased.

Mr. GREEN (Canada) said that as in the House of Lords, Canadian Senators were appointed not elected. There had been an increase in the workload over the last five years but there had been a decrease in the actual volume of legislation because much of the legislative activity in the House of Commons of Canada had concentrated on a small number of highly controversial Bills. Senators now had research budgets which enabled them to employ staff. This had enabled them to contribute more to the debate and increase the volume of work. Apparently in the Senate the Opposition had a majority and this led to the rejection of amendments to Government Bills passed through the House of Commons. Considerable extra work had flowed from this. The workload on staff had increased and there had been particular problems about the official report of Committee meetings.

Mr. CHARPIN (France) said that the general burden of work on Parliament seemed to have grown in most countries, partly because of the increase in governmental activity: the wide areas covered by Government legislation meant not only new legislation was introduced but that existing legislation had frequently to be updated and amended. The staff of Members themselves generated a considerable amount of work and this might be the subject of a topical discussion at another session. There was a case for limiting the length of Plenary sittings and dealing with more business in Committee. For constitutional reasons there had been a reluctance in France to curb the right of Members to press their amendments in the Plenary.

Mr. MAHRAN (Egypt) said that the increase in the work in the Egyptian Parliament had been caused by giving the Parliament responsibility for the budget in the five-year economic plan, greater demands from Members for information to be supplied speedily for Ministers and the incentive of television to longer speeches, particularly on local matters. He wondered what effect television had had on the House of Lords.

Mr. KIRBY (Canada) said the Canadian House of Commons had similar problems. Professor John Stewart had written a book in the 1970s which pointed out that because a fixed number of days were allocated to certain items of business any increase in other business tended to extend the length of the session. He did not think the number of pages of legislation was really a key test because different countries had different arrangements for a division between primary and secondary legislation. One problem in the House of Commons was that although the Government was keen to get its legislation through, Committees were reluctant to change their own agendas and this caused delay. The Procedure Committee had recently recommended the establishment of ad hoc legislative Committees on the Westminster model. There was certainly a tendency towards self-generated business as, for instance, in the greater use of constituency offices by Members which promoted their role as a general problem solver for their constituents. Greater use of information technology was one obvious way of trying to cope with the increased volume of work.

Mr. SOELAKSONO (Indonesia) said the increased workload was a natural consequence of greater democratic activity which generated new requirements for legislation. In Indonesia not only had the staff to work harder but the need for a more developed legislative research service had been shown.

Mr. LIMON (UK) said there was a difference of culture between the UK House of Commons and the House of Lords. The same number of pages of legislation had been dealt with by both but the Lords had sat longer and had declined to refer Bills to legislative committees. The Commons' hours of sitting had not changed greatly although they had always been longer than those of the Lords. The Commons had made more intensive use of legislative committees and therefore had spent considerably less time in the Plenary on detailed consideration of Bills.

The real question of the Commons was whether the legislative committees spent their time effectively. Often they would spend fifty to sixty hours debating the early parts of a Bill and then a timetable (guillotine) would be imposed so that the later clauses of the Bill were rushed through and not properly considered. This caused more revising work for the Lords. The Procedure Committee has recommended that Bills be timetabled throughout but this was opposed by the Government and by the Opposition Front Bench (spokesmen) who liked to concentrate on the political aspects of legislation. Greater use might have to be made of committees in order to protect the time available for debate in the Plenary.

In reply to the topical discussion Mr. POWNALL said that he was most interested in the variety of procedures described. He was interested that in Cyprus an increase in secondary legislation had imposed greater burdens on the House of Representatives. Secondary legislation had increased in the UK but this had not had an effect on the parliamentary workload. There was a general criticism that more and more primary legislation was merely enabling or umbrella provisions and all the details would be contained in secondary legislation.

In response to Mr. MBOZO'O's point he said that there were no legislative committees other than the Committee of the Whole House. He was interested to hear about the way the Italian Senate had reorganised its timetable but the House of Lords had decided against any radical change in its procedures. Unlike the Canadian Senate he did not think the increased workload could be attributed to greater use of research assistants by Members. There were no pay or research allowances but some research costs could be recovered. Very few Peers had any assistance. A similarity with the Canadian Senate, however, was in the consequences of confrontation with the other Chamber over legislation. Even though the Government had a majority in both Houses the Lords had rejected some parts of Bills and this had led to the prolonging of proceedings although the Lords usually backed down in the end.

The House of Lords had been televised since 1985 but he did not think this had a major impact on the volume of work. In the Committee of the Whole House the Ministers were responsible for the Bill they had introduced and the Houses would go through each Bill, clause by clause, taking the amendments at the appropriate point. Occasionally there were major debates of principle on specifically chosen issues. Peers preferred to have a Committee of the Whole House where everyone could take part than a Committee where only a few would be involved. The non-legislative Committees of Enquiry were completely separate. He accepted that the absolute number of pages of legislation was not necessarily a perfect test but it was an indication of the general trend over a period of years.

The PRESIDENT thanked Mr. POWNALL for introducing the topical discussion and took the sense of the meeting that there was general wish that a questionnaire be prepared on this subject. He suggested the questionnaire should concentrate on the general trend in the volume of parliamentary work rather than on narrow distinctions about different procedures in different Houses.

3. Report on the Volume of Parliamentary Workload prepared by Mr. M. A. J. Wheeler-Booth, Clerk of the Parliaments, United Kingdom House of Lords (adopted at the Santiago session, October 1991)

1. The Questionnaire concerned the changing volume of workload in Parliaments over the last twenty years. Information was also requested on how any increase is being managed, both procedurally and in administration.

2. Replies were received from the following 29 Parliaments', representing 38 Chambers:

Australia (both Houses)	Japan (both Houses)
Austria	Jordan
Belgium (both Houses) (F)	Republic of Korea
Canada (both Houses)	New Zealand
Cameroon (F)	Norway
Central Africa (F)	Pakistan (Senate)
Cyprus	Portugal (F)
Denmark	Rwanda (F)
Egypt	Spain (Senate)
Finland	Surinam
France (both Houses) (F)	Sweden
Germany (both Houses)	Switzerland (both Houses)
Greece (F)	United Kingdom (both Houses)
Israel	Zaire (F)
Italy (both Houses; Chamber of Deputies (F))	

Those marked (F) replied in French

¹ The European Parliament replied too late for inclusion, but its response in no way invalidated the trends disclosed in this report; Luxembourg made an oral response, which also was in accord with the majority response and in particular reported an increase in committee work and in documentation.

Type and Size of Parliaments

Question 1 asked whether Parliaments were bicameral or unicameral; whether states were unitary or federal; and how many members each Chamber had. The following information was received:

Structure of Parliaments

Bicameral Parliaments: 14

Unicameral Parliaments: 15

The Norwegian Parliament (the Storting) is included as a unicameral Parliament although it does have some bicameral features.²

Structure of States

Unitary States: 18

Federal States: 6

Three countries gave other replies. Belgium is a unitary state but is in the process of evolution towards federalism. According to the reply from its Senate, Italy is a regional state and regions have some of the power usually held by state Governments in federal states. Spain is a "tertium genus" and its constitution "designs an 'Estado Autonómico' very similar to the federal state".

Two countries did not say whether their state was federal or unitary.

² More details are given in "Parliaments of the World" by the IPU, 2nd edition, table 30.

Size of Assemblies

The number of members in the Chambers of the Parliaments is as follows³

Members	Chambers
1-100	11
101-200	10
201-300	10
301-400	4
over 400	6

In Cyprus, only 56 of the 80 eligible members "are attending the sittings of the House". Over 1,000 Peers are entitled to attend the UK House of Lords but in practice some 700 attend and the average daily attendance during 1990 was 321.

Silting Time

Question 2 sought to ascertain how many hours and days each Chamber sat during the last year; and to compare this information with the last ten and twenty years. The statistics are somewhat difficult to compare, as they are not always recorded in a similar form. Sometimes the figures are complicated by the calling of an election, which in some countries dramatically reduce the length of parliamentary sittings. The following tables compare like information as far as possible.

³ The number of Chambers recorded is greater than the number of replies received because in some cases where a reply was received from only one Chamber of a bicameral Parliament the reply included information about the other Chamber.

Not all Parliaments were able to give quantitative data on how their workload had changed over the last ten and twenty years. Some had experienced constitutional changes during that period which made comparison impossible. But the following information was obtained about how many Chambers increased or decreased the number of sitting hours and days.

Change from 1980 to 1990

	Hours Sat	Days Sat
Increased	14	12
Decreased	7	11

Change from 1970 to 1990

	Hours Sat	Days Sat
Increased	14	14
Decreased	7	9

The Italian Chamber of Deputies gave no detailed statistics, but reported a 10-15% increase in sitting time from 1980 to 1990. The Norwegian Parliament reported no significant change since detailed records began in 1977-8 and assumed that the position was similar 20 years ago. The Spanish Senate sat more days and hours in 1990 than the average since its establishment in 1978. Surinam reported a substantial increase in days and hours sat but had no detailed information. The sitting hours of the Egyptian Parliament (included in the tables above) had dropped since 1980 and increased since 1970. But the average number of sitting hours in the years 1971-80 and in the years 1981-90 was almost identical.

The Balance of Business

Question three sought to ascertain how far the balance of business had shifted over the last ten and twenty years between legislative and non-legislative business. Respondents were asked to give figures, where available, for primary and secondary legislation; Government and private members' legislation; and legislation flowing from supra-national institutions such as the European Community.

The responses received were very diverse and it has not been possible to tabulate the information. Most Chambers were, however, able to give some indication of the shift.

A Drop in Legislative Business

Ten Chambers reported a drop in the proportion of time spent on legislation. The Belgian House of Representatives reported a drop from 62% to 56% between 1979-80 and 1989-90 and there had been a very small increase in time spent on "propositions de loi (initiatives parlementaires)". Canada's House of Commons had spent less time on legislation in 1989-90 than in 1984-5 (down from 73% to 70%) but this was "not considered to represent a lightening of the legislative load". The Canadian Senate said there had been "considerable fluctuation" because of the length of sessions and the extent of the Government's programme. In Cyprus, the respondent had "the impression that the proportion of time had changed in favour of non-legislative business, but figures are not available". In Denmark, 'A of time was being spent on non-legislative business such as questions, accounts and interpellations, which represented an increase. In Finland, the Parliament now spent more time debating public accounts. In Germany's Bundesrat, "the proportion of topics belonging to... non-legislative business... [had been] considerably rising in relation to the quantity of bills" between 1969 and 1989. But there had not necessarily been a similar shift in the proportion of time spent and the Chamber was now, as twenty years ago, spending most of its time on "controversial matters" which were mainly bills. In Israel, there had been a significant drop in the time spent on bills: motions for the agenda and no confidence motions had increased. There had been a similar drop in Pakistan: 74% of time was spent on legislation in the first senate (1973-75) but only

7.75% in the second Senate since its foundation in 1985.⁴ In the UK House of Commons the time spent on Government bills had dropped considerably between 1968-9 and 1989-90, but the proportion of time spent on legislation had only fluctuated a little (52% in 1968-9; 53% in 1977-8 and 48% in 1989-90).

An Increase in Legislative Business

Five Chambers recorded an increase in legislative business. The French Senate (and Assembly) reported dramatic increases in the time spent on legislative debates: questions and budgetary debates had declined. In Jordan too there had been an increase but figures were complicated by the suspension of the Parliament ten years ago. In Egypt, there had been a slight drop in non-legislative business over the last twenty years, but accurate figures were hard to compile. In the UK House of Lords there had been an increase in the proportion of time spent on legislation, with the greatest increase in the time spent on Government bills (58% in 1989-90, as opposed to 45% in 1977-8 and 50.5% in 1974-5). In Cameroon, legislation had increased so much that there was little time left for other business.

Other Responses

Seven Chambers reported no significant change in the proportion of time spent on legislative and non-legislative business; and in four Chambers the fluctuation was very irregular. An increase in parliamentary activity off the floor of the House was widespread, whether in political groups, or through the activities of lobbyists or by means of new procedures.

Very few Chambers were able to give information on primary and secondary legislation, on private members bills and on legislation flowing from supra-national institutions. The Belgian Senate believed that its work on matters resulting from international bodies such as the EEC had probably grown. In the French Senate, a slightly higher percentage of time was being spent on legislation arising from parliamentary initiatives than in 1970, although the figure had dropped since 1980. The work of the German

⁴ It emerged in discussion of the first draft of this report that there was an expectation in Pakistan that the volume of parliamentary work would increase as members of the new Parliament became more experienced and more aware of their rights and opportunities.

Bundestag on EC business, questions, interpellations and topical debates had increased since the 1969-72 electoral term. In Greece, Parliament had adopted 1883 Government bills between 1974 and 1989, but only one private member's bill. In Rwanda between 1982 and 1990, 340 laws had been adopted, of which only 3 were private members' bills. But in the Swiss Federal Assembly, there had been a sharp increase in private members' bills. In the UK House of Lords, the time spent on private members' bills, secondary legislation, EC documents and private bills remained very low as a percentage of the whole. In the House of Commons, the figures were similar, although it appeared that more time was being spent on secondary legislation and less on private members' bills. In the Canadian Senate, for at least the last 20 years the vast majority of legislation considered had been Government legislation.

Committees on Legislation

Question 4 sought to ascertain whether there had been a change in the time spent in consideration of legislation by committees off the floor of the House. For convenience, - these will be called public bill committees. Not all Chambers have them. The House of Lords and some other Chambers normally use a "Committee of the Whole House", where the Committee stage of a bill is taken in the plenary session.

Cyprus saw an increase in the use of public bill committees but had no figures. The French Senate reported more committee meetings, as did the Greek Parliament, where the shift was ascribed to procedural changes. The Italian Chamber of Deputies, Jordan, New Zealand, Pakistan and Portugal all reported a similar increase. Sweden and the Belgian Senate reported a slight drop since 1970, Finland and the Italian Senate little or no change. In Zaire and the UK House of Commons the position fluctuated widely.

In Australia, the Senate had just introduced (in 1990) a new system of public bill committees. Such a system was available to the Australian House of Representatives but was unpopular and rarely used. A Committee of the Whole House was the norm. Canada's House of Commons had no quantitative data but two rule changes had had a major impact on committee activity on legislation and had led to the creation of expert groups.

Figures from the Canadian Senate indicated a number of changes between 1980 and 1990. There were more committees looking at more bills and

hearing more witnesses. But there were fewer issues to consider and the number and length of meetings was less.

Volume of Legislation

Question 5 asked whether Chambers had any measure of the trend in the volume of legislation over the last ten or twenty years. Chambers used a number of different measures such as the number of bills; the number of laws adopted; pages of legislation; documents deposited; and the number of pages of "Hansard".

Some Chambers record information in more than one form and the results can often be complex: in the Belgian Senate for example the number of bills is less than it was in both 1969-70 and 1979-80, but the pages of parliamentary annals have gone up since 1969-70 and down again since 1979-80. In several cases, there had been a drop between 1970 and 1980. In Canada, the Senate's work had fluctuated while that of the House of Commons had increased. Thus it is not possible to state objectively and quantitatively for all chambers whether the volume of legislation had gone up or down. The following table only includes those Chambers which gave one standard indicator, or where all indicators pointed the same way.⁵

	1970-1990	1980-1990
Increase	11	9
Decrease	2	2
No real change	6	8

More informative answers were received to question 6 where respondents were asked to give reasons for any increase in workload. The underlying

⁵ The table includes an increase in bills in Poland over both periods. The Polish Parliament was unable to submit a response to the questionnaire, due to the circumstances in their country, but this information emerged during discussion of the first draft of this report.

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reasons are as follows (the groups have been made as general as possible for ease of reference).

Greater democracy/a new role for Parliament	Austria; Cameroon; Egypt; German Bundestag; Greece; Jordan; Portugal; Surinam; Spanish Senate.
More international activity:	Austria; Egypt; German Bundestag; German Bundesrat; Jordan; Spanish Senate; Sweden; UK House of Commons.
More active members/emergence of new active groups	Australian Senate; Austria; French Senate; German Bundestag; Italian Chamber of Deputies; Jordan; Pakistan; Surinam; Spanish Senate; Sweden; Switzerland; UK House of Commons.
More State apparatus, requiring scrutiny	Egypt; Italian Senate; South Korea.
Fluctuations in the balance of power	French Assembly; Israel.
Social/economic change	German Bundestag; Jordan; Rwanda; Sweden; Switzerland.

A number of other reasons were given for an increase. Three Chambers reported an increase in work on delegated legislation (Australian Senate, Cyprus, UK House of Commons) and the same number on increase in budgetary control of government accounts (Cyprus, Denmark, Finland). In South Korea, Sweden and the Australian Senate, the greater activity of members was reflected in an increase in private members' bills. Canada's House of Commons and the French Senate said that legislation was becoming more complicated and technical.

Three Chambers drew attention to checks on the workload: in the Australian House of Representatives the Government had acted to curb public bills; and greater regionalism in Belgium had cut down of the work of both Houses.

Television

Question 7 asked whether Chambers were televised: and if so whether this had lengthened proceedings. 29 Chambers are televised to at least some extent. Almost all respondents saw no appreciable effect of the length of proceedings: only Jordan suggested television had lengthened proceedings. The UK House of Lords suggested that televising the House had perhaps increased public awareness of its work; and the House of Commons thought television has perhaps had an effect on the behaviour of members. Sweden pointed out that the mass media had influenced the way its Parliament worked and its procedures had adapted more to public taste: speeches were now shorter in general debates and there had been changes to question time.

The impact on Resources

Question 8 asked how Chambers had changed their staffing and administration to cope with any increase in workload. Responses indicated a widespread increase in staff, costs, new technology and office space. 27 Chambers reported an increase in staff; 26 had occupied or required new accommodation; 23 were expanding into new technology and 19 reported increases in costs over the last 20 years. But the reasons for these changes were diverse, and they were often manifested in very different ways.

Staff

Most Chambers reported an increase in both support staff and in executive staff recruited at graduate level. In New Zealand there had been a considerable increase in the number of security staff employed.

Buildings

The Australian Parliament had moved to new premises in 1988. The South Korean Parliament building was designed to accommodate a possible bicameral Parliament. Several Chambers had spread to buildings near to their main chamber and in some cases (such as the German Bundestag) this was causing problems of dislocation. In the UK, Parliament is housed in a Victorian building on the site of a medieval palace and there is great pressure on

office space, particularly for members of the House of Commons, although more space is becoming available in adjacent buildings.

New Technology

Many Chambers gave interesting accounts of expansion into new technology, principally computers and information technology systems (IT). This is a summary of some of the facilities available.

Australian Senate	TV monitors; audio feed from chamber in offices; PCs for staff with access to databases.
Australian House of Representatives	PCs; in-house printing.
Canadian House of Commons	Electronic mail; video and other communication links; information databases.
Canadian Senate	Networked computers.
Cameroon	Document search and some in-house printing.
Denmark	Office automation.
Finland	PCs for all members and most staff.
French Senate	PCs with access to internal and external databases.
German Bundestag	PCs with access to databases; development of common information/communication network.
Italian Senate	PCs with access to internal/external databases.
Israel	Electronic voting; some data on computer.
Japan (both Houses)	Some PCs available.
South Korea	PCs for all members.
New Zealand	Large networked computer.
Norway	Electronic voting; and full computerization.
Spanish Senate	Open network system being introduced.
Sweden	Fully computerised between 1985 and 1990 (800 PC terminals).

UK House of Lords	General expansion about to begin; powerful computer to proof read bills and marshal amendments.
UK House of Commons	General expansion underway; on-line information service.

Costs

It is very hard to assess how much costs of Parliaments have increased since 1970 because some respondents gave figures adjusted to take account of inflation and others did not. But it is clear that those Parliaments which record cost data have generally experienced an increase in costs; and in some cases this has been very marked indeed.

Procedural Change

Question 9 asked how Chambers had altered procedures to cope with any increase in workload. Several respondents pointed out that cause and effect in this area were interwoven: as business was made more efficient, more business was conducted. A number of Chambers had made such changes and those introduced to cope with an increased workload can be grouped as follows. Several Chambers had not changed procedure because of an increase in work.

Greater use of Committees	Australian Senate Belgian House of Representatives French Senate Canadian House of Commons German Bundesrat Greece Italian Senate Israel Jordan Luxembourg Sweden UK House of Commons
Expedition of public bill procedure	Australian Senate

General tendency to compress business or time limit or restrict debates	Australian House of Representatives Austria Belgian House of Representatives Cameroon German Bundestag Italian Chamber of Deputies New Zealand Sweden UK House of Commons
More extraordinary sessions	French Assembly

The French Senate pointed out that the greater volume of parliamentary work had led to increased respect for the rules of procedure designed to inhibit obstruction. In the German Bundestag, strict enforcement of a quorum had been effective in limiting the workload. The German Bundesrat allowed some speeches to be published without being delivered. It emerged during the discussion of the first draft that the German Bundestag, the Italian Chamber of Deputies and the Cyprus Parliament all allowed this to some extent. In the UK House of Lords, some Government statements made in the House of Commons are not also delivered orally in the Lords in the usual way but are printed in the written Hansard. In Switzerland, business is divided into five categories, at the discretion of the plenary session. Type 1 is a free debate and type 5 is a procedure for written publication of views, without debate. But there had been little overall gain in time. Rwanda, Portugal and the Spanish Senate had revised procedures but did not spell out what the effect had been.

Suggestions for Action

Question 10 asked what action could be taken to stem any increase in workload. A number of Chambers did not think this was a matter for Parliaments, arguing that it was for the executive to set the timetable for legislation. But several nevertheless saw a need to streamline procedures. Belgium felt unable to respond, given the changes to its state structure. Others made suggestions that tied in with the procedure already adopted by some Chambers. Suggestions included:

Longer or reformed sitting hours	Australian House of Representatives Cameroon French Senate
Greater use of committees	Australian House of Representatives French Senate
Administrative measures	Central African Republic Egypt French Assembly French Senate Portugal Rwanda Spanish Senate Sweden UK House of Lords
Regulation and streamlining of debates	Canadian Senate Cyprus Finland French Senate Italian Chamber of Deputies Surinam Spanish Senate Sweden
Delegation of powers to Government	Cyprus Italian Senate
Allow bills to pass only one house	Italian Senate

Cameroon rejected limitations on debate as this would restrict the freedom of parliamentarians at a time of growing democracy. The French Assembly was conducting a general review of such matters and the Canadian, French and Spanish Senates' suggestions for reform were designed not to limit their Chamber's work but to improve efficiency. In Switzerland a Parliamentary Committee had been set up to look at a number of questions including improvements to the conciliation procedure between the two Houses in case of dispute.

Conclusions

The nature of the material sought in the questionnaire is such that it has mostly been possible only to present an objective, factual account of the position in the various member assemblies of the Association. This has in itself been a valuable exercise. Those colleagues in whose Parliament workload has increased will be able to take comfort from the knowledge that others face similar problems. We will all be able to learn from each others' experiences in streamlining procedures.

It is clear from the information on sitting days and sitting hours that in those Parliaments where there has been an increase in work there has been a tendency to lengthen the sitting day rather than to increase the number of days sat in each session. In the United Kingdom this reflects the fact that members of both Houses are not devoted full time to parliamentary business in the Chamber but have other work and responsibilities to undertake. Other assemblies may be in a similar position.

There is an enormous variation in the sitting time of Assemblies. It appears that the two Chambers of the United Kingdom Parliament are among those that sit most days and most hours. It is a matter of speculation whether this is due to the long history of Parliament in the United Kingdom or whether, in spite of our experience in parliamentary affairs, we are not able to control the time we spend in parliamentary debate.

There is also no clear trend in whether the volume of Government legislation coming before Parliaments is increasing. That is certainly the position in the United Kingdom. This was one reason why it seemed useful to undertake this report. It was however interesting to note that in those Parliaments where the workload was increasing this was not always due to an increase in the Government business Parliament was being expected to conduct. It was being generated by the increased activities of the political parties, often outside the Chamber. This tendency also reflects the increased complexity of modern Government activities, and a widespread desire by others to make an input into decision-making. This is also reflected in a growth in lobbying. And it was most refreshing to see that in some countries Parliaments are working harder because of either the introduction of a multi-party system or of a spreading desire for democracy.

In response to question 4, it emerged that many Chambers use committees to consider bills off the floor of the House. The House of Lords is now once again considering whether such a system should be established. It is becoming clear that such committees face the problem of how to ensure that

those members of the House not members of the committee can exercise their rights to discuss bills without completely reduplicating the committee's proceedings on the floor. It would be interesting to learn how other Assemblies deal with the problem, although this is perhaps a matter for separate consideration.

The answers given about the impact of workload on the resources available to Assemblies were very interesting. It has not been possible to draw detailed conclusions about the costs of Assemblies because the information was not always available in comparable form. In many cases there have been marked increases in costs. And there appears to be a general tendency to increase the numbers of staff employed and the accommodation available. It might be helpful to discuss how far Assemblies are perceived as providing "value for money". In the United Kingdom, measures are underway to improve the financial accountability of both Houses. When these are in place, the two Houses will have to account separately for the money they spend. Individual members of staff will have greater responsibility for accounting for the money their committees or departments spend.

Many Chambers are increasing their use of computer technology. Indeed in some cases the increases in workload and productivity have been made possible only by an expansion into new technology. It would perhaps be of value to consider this question again in a few years time, to see how far the use of new technology has improved the efficiency and effective conduct of parliamentary business. But this is an area where developments happen every day.

Finally, the answers to questions 9 and 10 revealed the measures being taken, or suggested, to streamline business. Some Assemblies have restricted debate; others have introduced administrative measures or are making greater use of Committees. Different Assemblies are responding in different ways. But a number of replies did suggest that the responsibility for the level of workload facing Parliaments falls not on Parliament itself but on the executive. It is not easy to see how Parliaments can resist such pressures. But there is no reason why Chambers should not make the executive aware of these problems and work with the executive to find solutions.

Other political factors of course contribute to parliamentary workload. For example, a Government with a solid majority may try to push through a large amount of legislation. On the other hand, a large majority may act to curtail debate. A Government with no overall majority may constantly need to adapt policy to ensure support; or may have to legislate less. These factors could have a considerable effect on how much legislation Parliaments are

expected to process and with what ease it can be carried through. It may also be generally true that Parliaments' work is reduced during election periods. Perhaps this points to the general conclusion to be drawn from this study: Parliaments must always be ready to respond, if necessary by internal changes, to changes in the pressures on them from the wider society in which they exist.

ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES GENERAL

OF PARLIAMENTS

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It is the task of the Association to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different Parliaments and to propose measures for improving those methods and for securing co-operation between the services of different Parliaments.

The Association also assists the Inter-Parliamentary Union, when asked to do so, on subjects within the scope of the Association.

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