

the wash up when Parliament is dissolved for the election, and the opposition parties will then determine what survives.

After the election the polls suggest a Conservative government, but it is not certain that this will happen, or indeed whether it will have a majority. The Conservatives have distinctive constitutional reforms of their own (see page 7), but they also share a number of important commitments with Labour and the Liberal Democrats. All three parties speak of the need to strengthen the House of Commons. All three parties are committed to a British bill of rights. All three parties will have manifesto commitments to an 80 or 100% elected House of Lords. All are committed to decentralisation and further devolution. And the Conservatives will seek entrenchment of certain reforms, and constitutional laws: not the same as the Liberal Democrats' and Brown's wish for a written constitution, but a step along the way.

reformed by Parliament, the Conservatives are the party most likely to hold the balance of power. It is tempting to suppose that all these reforms might then come to pass: plus electoral reform, the Lib Dems' key demand. But that is reformers' wishful thinking. If the Conservatives form a minority government they are likely to seek a further election within a year or so. The Lib Dems will not get electoral reform. But they may get to prioritise between the other reforms held in common with the Conservatives. If given that choice, they should hold out for further reform of the Commons, and other reforms which help to make a minority parliament work more effectively with a minority government. Minority government is a different political game, as a new report by the Unit shows (see page 7).

This is almost certainly the last Monitor before the 2010 general election. It is an occasion to sum up on Gordon Brown's conf

the war making power; and little progress on e-petitions, or revitalising the House of Commons. No date has yet been set for debating the report of the Wright Committee on Reform of the House of Commons (see pages 1 & 2). Regional grand committees have not proved a success, and publication of the draft legislative programme has been used as a propaganda exercise rather than a consultative one.

From the Ministry of Justice policy papers have been published on an elected House of Lords and a British bill of rights. Implementation must await the next Parliament (such big reforms were never feasible in this one). Reviews have been completed of electoral systems, and the remaining prerogative powers.

The House of Commons Reform Committee chaired by Tony Wright reported on 24 November. The committee was set up in the wake of the MPs' expenses crisis to review three elements of Commons' procedure: the selection of members and chairs of select committees, the scheduling of business in the chamber, and public initiation of parliamentary proceedings. The Unit's Dr Meg Russell was Specialist Adviser to the committee.

Despite being given a very short timetable and having a large membership (18 members) the committee agreed a largely unanimous report giving full consideration to all three areas. On select committees it proposed that chairs should in future be elected in a secret ballot by members of the House as a whole, while members should be elected (afterwards) by secret ballot in party groups (continued overleaf).

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annually to Parliament. In this annual report, the Lord Chancellor will have to describe the Law Commission proposals that have been implemented in the past year, and more importantly give account of those proposals that have not been implemented along with the reasons for non-implementation. Clause 2 provides a statutorily backed protocol governing the working relationship between the Law Commission and government departments. These provisions introduce parliamentary accountability for the Government's response to the Law Commission, a body which over the last forty years has performed the constitutionally imperative task of ensuring our laws are clear and up-to-date through its recommendations for reform.



Reform of executive prerogative powers has been a central theme of the government's reform agenda. The Governance of Britain Green Paper noted that prerogative powers could be exercised without parliamentary approval and that restrictions on Ministers' prerogative powers were limited. Released in 2007, this green paper required the government to conduct a review of UK prerogative powers and questioned whether they should, in the long term, be codified or put on a statutory basis. The recent report by the Ministry of Justice on the matter provides a cautious answer to that question.

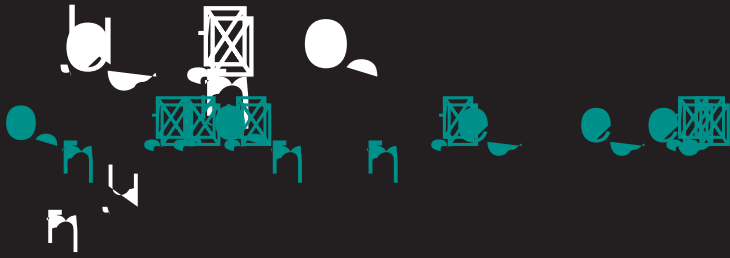
Many of the most controversial prerogative powers - for example the power to deploy troops into armed conflict overseas, the power to make judicial appointments and the power of the Prime Minister to call for Parliament's dissolution - are already the subject of legislative review. According to the power

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Has Devolution Worked? The Verdict from Policy Makers and the Public

The third, and final, book from the Unit's research programme on 'Nations and Regions', funded by the Leverhulme Foundation, has now been published. The book - *Has Devolution Worked? The Verdict from Policy Makers and the Public* - explores how devolution to Scotland and Wales has been received by citizens, politicians and interest groups. Drawing on dedicated surveys of citizens and politicians, along with a wide set of interviews among representatives of civil society, the book shows that devolution has been widely accepted, but that doubts exist over how far the new institutions have delivered improvements in policy and democratic performance. The book represents the most systematic attempt to date to gauge the reception that devolution has enjoyed.

Has Devolution Worked? The Verdict from Policy Makers and the Public Edited by John Curtice and Ben Seyd Manchester University Press, November 2009

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