From Toby, Lord Harris

Rumours have been sweeping the House of Lords for the last few weeks that Number Ten is about to announce the appointment of another sixty life peers: forty Tories; fifteen LibDems and five Labour. This would be a net gain for the coalition of fifty votes – enough to swamp two of the three defeats that the Government suffered on the Welfare Reform Bill last week.

The current membership of the House of Lords is a whopping 787 (excluding 22 peers who are on leave of absence and 17 who are disqualified or suspended for one reason or another). The new additions (which would mean approaching two hundred – yes, two hundred – new peers since the General Election) will bring the size of the House of Lords to 847. (Contrast this with the plans to cut the elected House of Commons by fifty members.)

The extra members will make the Tories the largest grouping in the House of Lords and give the combined coalition 364 members against Labour's 244 – an effective majority of 120. (Although there are 186 cross-benchers they tend to split on votes with some supporting the Government and some opposing and their rates of participation tend to be lower as well.)

Anywhere else in the world this would be regarded as packing the legislature, termed as gerrymandering or deemed to be crony politics of the worst sort. The scale of increase of membership far exceeds that at any previous time in the House of Lords' history.

In the two years since the General Election, the Government has been defeated 28 times in the House of Lords – in all but a handful of instances the margins of defeat have been less than fifty. So had the new peers been in place most of those defeats would not have happened. Twenty-eight defeats over two years