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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Monday 18 May 2015

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 18 MAY 2015]

SIXTY-FOURTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

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FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 2015-2016

House of Commons

Monday 18 May 2015

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

The House met on the first day of this Parliament, pursuant to Proclamation. DAVID NATZLER, Clerk of the House of Commons, JACQY SHARPE, acting Clerk Assistant, and PHILIPPA HELME, Principal Clerk of the Table Office, attended in the House, and the other Clerks attended, according to their duty.

IAN DENYER, *Deputy Clerk of the Crown in Chancery in Great Britain, delivered to the said JACQY SHARPE a book containing a list of the Members returned to serve in this Parliament.*

SIR GERALD KAUFMAN, *the Member for Manchester, Gorton, took the Chair (Standing Order No. 1).*

MESSAGE TO ATTEND THE LORDS COMMISSIONERS

Message to attend the Lords Commissioners delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod.

The House went up to hear the Commission for opening and holding the Parliament, and the Lords Commissioners directed the House to proceed to the Election of a Speaker and to present the Speaker-Elect in the House of Peers for the Royal Approbation.

The House returned.

Election of Speaker

Sir Gerald Kaufman (in the Chair): Under the provisions of Standing Order No. 1A, I am now required to ascertain whether Mr John Bercow is willing to be chosen as Speaker. I call Mr John Bercow.

2.47 pm

John Bercow (Buckingham) (Ind): Thank you, Sir Gerald—and warmest congratulations on your new role as Father of the House. Next month will mark 45 years of your service in this place, and to your constituents. Some of us will record barely half that tenure.

It has been an honour to serve as Speaker for nearly six years, and I should be honoured to do so for a little longer if colleagues kindly agree. I shall strive to ensure that the House remains at the heart of our democratic system. All its Members, newcomers and veterans alike, should be part of the cast, not merely an audience.

If there are five words that I should like to be carved on my political tombstone—assuming that such items are not now for ever unfashionable—they are: “He was the Back-Benchers’ champion.” On that basis, I submit myself to the House.

2.47 pm

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): I beg to move, That the right hon. John Simon Bercow do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

May I add my congratulations to you, Sir Gerald, on becoming Father of the House in succession to the much loved and highly regarded Sir Peter Tapsell? It is indeed a tribute to your long service to this nation that you now take the Chair of our proceedings.

It has been the habit of this House to continue with a Speaker who wishes to continue to serve, and that is for very important constitutional reasons. The Speaker is the champion of the House of Commons against all-comers—the champion of the Commons against the Lords and sometimes against the judges, but perhaps

most particularly against the Executive. The historians here will know that some seven Speakers lost their heads for championing the Commons against the Executive—something that we hope is no longer necessary.

The connection between the Speaker and the Commons protects us and the rights of this House. If we were to be light in changing our Speaker, we would find that the Speaker spent the whole time paying regard to what the Front Bench on one side or the other were thinking as to how he should rule, lest he should not continue in office after a general election. The last time that happened was in 1835, when Charles Manners-Sutton was booted out by the Whigs for being too much of a Tory. I am glad to say that there are not very many Whigs left to behave in that way.

I want to move on from the general constitutional principle to the right hon. Member for Buckingham and why I think he is so well suited to continue as Speaker. A Speaker has to have a good knowledge of “Erskine May”. Some new, show-off Back Benchers may think that they know a bit about “Erskine May”. I occasionally thought that in the previous Parliament and went to the Speaker with some clever procedural strategy. He, with the wise advice of the Clerks, always knew it better, and that is essential to keeping order in this place.

A good Speaker must also be prompt with business. Who has not heard him say, “Short questions and short answers.”? That is the mantra of Question Time—*[Interruption.]* And speeches, though I quite like long speeches. *[Laughter.]* That has got our business through at Question Time and on statements, but the Speaker has also ensured that the Commons debated what it wanted to debate. The rise in the number of urgent questions has been hugely important in holding the Government to account, as has the selection of amendments on Report.

The Speaker also has the most phenomenal knowledge of Members, and the new Members will soon find that Mr Speaker knows not only their names but their date of birth and probably their weight when they were born—and will reveal all this when they rise to speak, for the entertainment of the rest of the House.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham has a reputation as a moderniser—a word that I use with some caution. In spite of my prejudices, it is important that this House looks beyond its own confines to the country at large. What he has done in terms of education has been very important—bringing school-children into this place and making it more available. But there is some hope—I hope that I am not being indiscreet in telling the House—because his son Oliver took one look at a portrait of the Speaker that was being unveiled and asked, “Daddy, why aren’t you wearing a wig?” Mr Speaker gave an answer that had it come from a Minister would not have been deemed satisfactory, so young Oliver said, “I think you should wear a wig, Daddy.” I am with Mr Speaker’s son on this issue, but I think my chances of success are limited.

The key virtue of the right hon. Gentleman is that he is impartial in this House, but he is a partisan for the House of Commons. In here, we are all equal and judged by him equally and fairly, but outside he defends our rights, our traditions and our liberties, and that is how it should be.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 1A). That John Bercow do take the Chair of this House as Speaker.

Question agreed to.

SIR GERALD KAUFMAN *left the Chair, and* JOHN BERCOW *was conducted to the Chair by* SIR PETER BOTTOMLEY *and* VALERIE VAZ.

Mr Speaker-Elect (*standing on the upper step*): May I begin by thanking the Father of the House for the supremely efficient manner in which he conducted our opening proceedings, and express the hope that new hon. Members, especially, will enjoy the company and benefit from the wisdom of Sir Gerald in the course of their first Parliament?

I thank the House for again bestowing upon me the greatest honour that it can confer upon any Member. I am intensely conscious of the responsibilities into which I again enter, and I shall do my best to discharge those responsibilities efficiently, effectively and fairly. Above all, I am conscious of the rights of Back Benchers and the need to facilitate Members in championing the causes dear to them and, from whichever side of the House they come, holding the Government of the day properly to account. Thank you.

The Speaker-Elect sat down in the Chair and the Mace was placed upon the Table.

2.57 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): On behalf of the whole House, let me congratulate you, Mr Speaker-Elect, on your re-election. It is of course your second re-election this month. I noticed during the first that there was some confusion in the media about whether my party had won 330 or 331 seats in the general election. It seems the media were unsure about whether you are a Conservative. I am sure you find this as baffling as I did. It is a tribute to the inclusive way in which you have upheld this office always, as you have just said, putting Back Benchers first. I am sure you will do that in this Parliament, just as you did in the last.

I am sure the House will also want to join me in congratulating the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) on becoming the Father of the House. Those looking to benefit from his vast experience may wish to consider reading his book, “How to be a Minister”, copies of which have been known to disappear mysteriously from the House of Commons Library. It has chapters on how to work with No. 10 and how to work with the trade unions, so there is something in there for everybody. There is even some advice for a party leader who did not make it to this Chamber. The Father of the House writes in this book:

“If you are contemplating resigning...be entirely sure you want to go.”

Let me also welcome the right hon. and learned Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman). We faced each other just like this five years ago. I think it is fair to say that since then I have lost a coalition partner but gained a number of new friends. In terms of her position, there seems to be a common pattern: a man comes along, does the job and makes a terrible mess of it, and she comes along and sorts it all out. She, like me, might be wondering why she is not given the job on a permanent basis.

I would also like to use this opportunity to welcome all the newly elected Members of Parliament on both sides of the House. I am particularly pleased to be able to say that the House is now more diverse and more representative than ever before. We have the largest number of women MPs and the largest number of MPs from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. We have the first MP of Chinese origin—my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Alan Mak). Women Ministers now make up a third of those around the Cabinet Table, including for the first time a woman of Indian descent, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel).

Mr Speaker-Elect, there is still further to go, and we must strive in the years ahead to do more to make our parties and our politics more representative, but I am pleased that my party has played its part in the progress we see today.

Mr Speaker-Elect, I have that said this will be a one nation Government. I know we have our differences across the House, but I hope this will also be a one nation Parliament. The task before us is to unite in making sure that our economy works for everyone in every part of our United Kingdom, and to unite in bringing our society together and strengthening the understanding between different faiths and communities so that we stand as one in defending our values and fighting prejudice, intolerance and extremism in all its forms.

I hope and believe that we can bring the countries of our United Kingdom together, implementing the devolution agreed for Wales and Northern Ireland; creating in Scotland the strongest devolved Government anywhere in the world; and delivering a constitutional settlement that offers real fairness to England, too.

Mr Speaker-Elect, whatever our disagreements across this House, we are here to serve the people of the whole of the United Kingdom—and that is exactly what we shall do.

3.1 pm

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) on becoming Father of the House, but to prevent us all from falling headlong into patriarchy, perhaps I may remind everyone that there is a mother of the House—and it is me! Together, we are going to do good parenting. As the Prime Minister said, my right hon. Friend has had a long and distinguished career, including writing that book, “How to be a Minister”, which we were all hoping we would be poring over right now—but it seems that was not to be and that Conservative Ministers will have the benefit of my right hon. Friend’s wisdom.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) on returning to the House as Prime Minister. We applied for the job but we did not get it, and he did. However, we have the very important job of being the official Opposition, and we will be fearless and effective in carrying it out. That is what people in this country expect of us and that is what we will do.

Members from all parties have been elected for the first time, and I warmly welcome them all. One in five of our own 232 Labour Members has been elected for the first time. As the Prime Minister said, there are now

many more women MPs in all parts of the House. When I was first elected to Parliament in 1982, only 3% of MPs were women; today, we are nearly 30%. We still have a long way to go, but we have made real progress.

To all those entering the House for the first time, I want to say that we are all on an equal footing. You are not trainee MPs or apprentice or junior MPs: you are the real thing. You, along with all of us, have been elected by constituents to stand up and be a fierce champion for them. When you get the inevitable advice in the coming days telling you to learn the ropes and keep your head down—possibly for five or 10 years—I would say, ignore it! You did not get elected to keep your head down; you were elected to stand up for your constituents.

In doing that, you will all have a strong ally in the Speaker, whom I congratulate on his reappointment. He may be small in stature, but make no mistake: in this office, he is a giant. Of all the Speakers who have sat in the Speaker’s Chair since I was elected, he is the best. Whether you be a Government Back Bencher or on the Opposition Benches, when you want to speak up for your constituents, Mr Speaker will make sure that your voice and your case are heard. This Speaker is the fifth since I was elected, and this Prime Minister is the fifth since I was elected, too. Of the two of them, I will leave Members to guess which is my favourite!

3.4 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Benches of the Scottish National party, I extend congratulations to the Father of the House and to you, Mr Speaker, on your reappointment by the whole House. Before you assumed the role of Speaker, you committed yourself to fairness across the House—to Back Benchers and to all political parties. In the previous Parliament, that was particularly important to the SNP, which then had only six Members, or 1% of the membership of the House. With colleagues from the Welsh and Northern Irish parties, we were regularly called with fairness in questions, debates and statements and during the other business of the House.

As you can see, Mr Speaker, the SNP has returned with a great many more Members than in the previous Parliament. We represent 56 of Scotland’s 59 constituencies. We are now the third party in this House and we look forward to making Scotland’s voice heard. We look forward to opposing austerity and we will resolutely oppose the renewal of Trident weapons of mass destruction. We will have our voice heard and we will play our full and fair part in the proceedings of the House of Commons.

We still, however, support the fair treatment of smaller parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Green party and the other really small parties that only have one Member, such as the Scottish Conservative party, the Scottish Labour party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats. We wish you well, Mr Speaker. We wish your Deputies well. We wish the members of the Speaker’s Panel well. We wish all members of the House, regardless of their party affiliation, well in the years ahead.

3.6 pm

Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP): On behalf of my right hon. and hon. Friends on these Unionist Benches—who are, by the way, here in stronger numbers

than previously—I too congratulate the new Father of the House, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman), on elevation to his new position and you, Sir, on being returned to your most distinguished role as Speaker of the House of Commons. You are not only the guarantor of fairness between individual Members of Parliament and political parties here, but you have the important role of ensuring that the Government of the day are held properly to account, that the role and duties of Back Benchers are defended and upheld and that, as has just been said, the voice of smaller parties and the parties of the different countries of the United Kingdom is heard loud and clear at all stages and in all proceedings of this Parliament of the United Kingdom.

I too say that, given our experience in the previous Parliament, I have no doubt, and new Members will have every confidence, that you, Mr Speaker, will carry out your role impeccably and will fulfil all the criteria of a modern Speaker enthusiastically, with vigour and robustness. That is more important than ever in this House of Commons, as each of the constituent countries of the United Kingdom has chosen a different party to be its leading representative in the House. That is a significant and unique development. Therefore, it is more important than ever that the House should hear from all parts of the House and that all parties should have their voice.

I congratulate you again, Sir, and wish you every success during your term in office. To all new Members, likewise. I extend best wishes to those colleagues who have retired and to the many good friends and colleagues who, sadly for them, lost their seats at the election. We wish them all very well indeed.

3.9 pm

Dr Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast South) (SDLP): Mr Speaker, in the context of the comments by the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), I am not sure whether the SDLP constitutes a small party or a large one, but we are here and we want to congratulate you on what you have achieved. We may be small in number but we are big in ambition and in aspiration. We want to thank you for the sterling job you did in the previous Parliament and look forward to the good work you will do in this Parliament. You have always treated those of us in the smaller parties generously and well, and it has been a privilege to work with you. Like those who have spoken before me, I want to congratulate all the new Members here and wish them well; equally, I wish to

commiserate with many of our friends and colleagues from all parties who lost their seats in the election. Many friendships were made by me and by others in the last Parliament, and I have no doubt they will be sustained.

Congratulations, Mr Speaker, and thank you very much for what you have done, and thank you very much in anticipation of what you are going to do.

3.10 pm

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): On behalf of my Plaid Cymru colleagues and myself, may I congratulate you on your re-election, Mr Speaker? I have always found you to be an excellent Speaker, as many have mentioned in their contributions, and fair to the minor parties. On that basis, I look forward to serving under your leadership for the duration of this Parliament.

3.11 pm

Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I confess this is an honour I had not anticipated when I came to the Chamber today, but on behalf of the elite cadre of Liberal Democrats who have been returned, I should like to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, as others have done, on your most thoroughly well deserved re-election. I confess that when I served as Government deputy Chief Whip in the last Parliament, the relationship with the Speaker was, obviously, not always an easy one, but it was always professional and courteous, and, if I may say so, as an Opposition Back Bencher I find the qualities that you exhibited which occasionally caused me difficulty on the Treasury Bench much more attractive now.

I should also accord my congratulations and those of my hon. and right hon. colleagues to the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Sir Gerald Kaufman) on assuming the position of Father of the House. He has long and distinguished service and I am sure that, as others have said, he will serve us well in the new role he has undertaken.

ADJOURNMENT

Resolved, That this House do now adjourn until tomorrow at twenty minutes to Three o'clock.—(*Gavin Barwell.*)

3.13 pm

House Adjourned.

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