

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Nineteenth Sitting

Wednesday 21 November 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 28 November at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 25 November 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)
 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 † Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 † Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 † Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (Ind)
 † Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 21 November 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

This week has been described as one of the most precarious yet for the Prime Minister. It feels as if the same thing is said almost every week, with the level of threat inching up each time. I can see that sorting out parliamentary boundaries is not the Government's top priority now.

The Chair: Order. Mr Khan, can you keep the comments to your motion and not make them party political, or about the leadership. Thank you.

Afzal Khan: The Government have precious little political capital at the moment, and it is all being used for Brexit, leaving none to spare for the boundaries. At the moment we have no idea when the next general election will be. For my part, I think it will be before 2022, and it would be far from satisfactory to have that election on the basis of current boundaries. The Government's current strategy of delay, delay, delay on boundaries makes that almost inevitable.

Luckily an easy solution is already before us. My Bill offers a way out of the mess that the Government have created by trying to reduce the size of the Commons and disfranchise millions of young voters. We are offering to take some of the workload from busy Ministers and civil servants. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester has already drafted the orders that the Minister says we are waiting on. Will the Minister enlighten us about any developments?

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I intend to make this point every time I attend the Committee. Does my hon. Friend agree that, given an MP's salary, coming here week in, week out, and wasting the valuable time of Members and officers in this way is a complete waste of taxpayers' money? We are always being told how tight that is.

Afzal Khan: I thank my hon. Friend and could not agree more.

Will the Minister enlighten us about developments or an updated timetable for the process? Is she in a position to update us on the progress of the drafting of the orders?

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries. Did not I see you in the Chair in the Chamber yesterday? I should like to think that that is a promotion for you, and that I may offer my congratulations as you go to the next level.

The Chair: You guys.

Christian Matheson: Indeed, I congratulate you once again.

I share the indignance of my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln at what is becoming a farce. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton is right that part of the delay is due to the Government being unclear about whether they can get their strategy through, as they cannot be sure of the support of their Back Benchers at the moment. However, strangely enough, the opportunity that my hon. Friend presents would bring the whole House together, I am sure, and overcome some of the divisions it faces. He has demonstrated his willingness to work with Members from across the House, because he amended his original proposals before they were laid before the House, by changing the tolerance around the national electoral average. I think that my hon. Friend originally suggested 5% either side—a total of 10%. He has listened to constructive criticism and changed that to 7.5%, the better to meet the Government's wishes. That demonstrates that there could be a healing process to overcome the divisions in the House.

Karen Lee: My hon. Friend mentioned listening, and I would be more convinced that people were listening if they were not on their phones or looking at their papers.

Christian Matheson: I can only speak for myself on that one and as I am addressing you in the Chair, Ms Dorries, I can confirm I am not on my phone. My hon. Friend makes her own point, in her own inimitable style.

The other development that there has been on the matter in the past weeks was the Leader of the House's announcement of three more sitting Fridays for consideration of Back-Bench business. If we pass the Bill through Committee soon enough, that would give us extra time for the consideration of the remaining stages on the Floor of the House, where, as we have said previously, Conservative Members would have the chance either to further amend the Bill or to vote it down in its entirety.

That is notwithstanding the advice of the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean—he is not in his place today but is normally an assiduous attender of the Committee—that it is very possible that all stages of a constitutional Bill such as this should be considered on the Floor of the House. You might have the honour and responsibility of chairing such a Committee of the whole House, Ms Dorries, now that you hold a more elevated position on the Panel of Chairs. I look forward to serving under your chairmanship in the future.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is an immense pleasure to see you in the Chair, as always, Ms Dorries. We meet for what I believe is the 19th time, and what a

glorious number that is. It is not quite 48, but perhaps we will get there; we might have 48 sittings of this Committee.

Interestingly, this week we saw various members of the extreme Brexiteer wing of the Conservative party bemoaning the fact that we would not have seats in the European Parliament any more. We are, of course, losing those 73 Members of the European Parliament, which in some respects is right if we leave the European Union. However, those powers will come back from Brussels to this House, and it is the job of Members to

scrutinise them. I gently suggest to the Government, through the Chair, that if we reduce our number of MEPs—some people are struggling to get their head around that concept—and those powers come back to the House, we should not reduce the number of legislators in this place.

Question put and agreed to.

10.6 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 28 November at Ten o'clock.

