

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

First Sitting

Wednesday 9 May 2018

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Monday 14 May at Four 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 13 May 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair: Ms NADINE DORRIES*

† Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Cat (<i>Lancaster and Fleetwood</i>) (Lab)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	† Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 9 May 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind hon. Members to switch all mobile phones and electronic devices off or to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during the sittings. As it is impossible to switch the heating off in this room, hon. Members may remove their jackets.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, if proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill are not completed at this day's sitting, the Committee shall meet on Monday 14 May at 4.00 pm and on Wednesday 16 May at 9.30 am.

I am glad that the Committee is finally meeting this morning, but I am very disappointed to have wasted hon. Members' time, as we cannot discuss a single issue of substance without a money resolution. It has already been five months since the Bill passed Second Reading, with 229 votes to 44. The House sent a strong message that it wants the Bill to be considered in Committee. The Government are defying the will of the House by refusing to bring a money resolution forward, which they have had ample time to do. This is an abuse of just the Executive power that the Bill is trying to keep in check.

At business questions on Thursday, Members from all three major parties raised the money resolution with the Leader of the House. As the hon. Member for Wellingborough said:

"Money resolutions should follow Second Readings as night follows day."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 467.]

The Leader of the House said she would bring forward a money resolution in due course, but who knows what that means in practice?

The Speaker weighed in clearly on the topic, saying that unease on the issue of a money resolution

"should have been heard, and must be heard, on the Treasury Bench."

He also said that

"it would be appreciated if colleagues felt confident that there was a logic and reasonableness to the decision-making process."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 477.]

The Speaker was referring to the extraordinary fact that the Government brought a money resolution for the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Bill on 1 May but did not bring one for this Bill. The prisons Bill came 13th in the private Member's Bill ballot, as opposed to mine, which came third. The prisons Bill had its Second Reading on the same day as my Bill, and I believe its Committee is meeting down the corridor right now. It would have been entirely possible for both money resolutions to be introduced on the same day, in good time for us to consider my Bill fully today.

Finally, I stress that my Bill is time sensitive. The boundary commissions are due to submit their final recommendations in September 2018. A previous private Member's Bill along the same lines was introduced in the last Parliament, but it ran out of time after the Government failed to bring forward a money resolution before the snap general election last year. If the Government continue to delay my Bill, there is a danger that the House will not have a chance to debate or pass it before the new boundary proposals are before the House.

I do not deny that my Bill is controversial, but it is also reasonable, and such an important constitutional question—how many Members of Parliament should represent the people of this country—should be fully considered by the House, not blocked by the Government using parliamentary procedure. I will press the Government to bring forward a money resolution ahead of our next meeting, and I hope other hon. Members here will join me.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton for his remarks about his Bill. We all recognise that the review is much needed. It presents an opportunity for cross-party agreement on new boundaries.

I share my hon. Friend's disappointment that a money resolution has not been forthcoming from the Government, because in December this House sent a strong message that we wanted the Bill to be considered in Committee. It passed its Second Reading by 229 votes to 44. I am sure that the Government would not want there to be a perception that not providing for a money resolution might be an attempt to sabotage a private Member's Bill and, after all, the will of the House. They would not want it to be presented as an attempt to seek political advantage.

It is widely accepted that the boundary review in its current form would be a disaster for our democracy for various reasons, the most important of which would be the cutting of the number of MPs without a reduction in the number of Ministers. That would only increase the power of the Executive and make it more difficult for Back Benchers such as my hon. Friend to challenge the Government. However, as we have seen, there is no money resolution, and that sends a dangerous message. It concerns the respect that should be accorded to Back Benchers who have had success in the private Member's Bill ballot, and their ability to bring forward measures for us to consider.

Constitutional changes should be dealt with fairly, and everyone should have a voice. Sadly, that is not happening this morning. I urge the Government to see to the matter of a money resolution at the earliest opportunity so that the Committee can get on with the vital work that we intend to do.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

The Scottish National party's perspective on the Bill, in outline, is that we support it. We should like to amend it in one or two areas and, as the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has explained, it is impossible for us to do so until the Government provide a money resolution. The Government regularly talk about Parliament taking back control. The Brexiteers in the Government

talk about it. An hon. Member has now secured, through the ballot, the ability to introduce the Bill; the House voted fairly unanimously for it to go into Committee; and the Government are leaving it in political purgatory by not dealing with the money resolution.

I want to make it clear that the SNP will not accept a 10% cut in the number of Scotland's MPs. We want to amend the Bill, but as we know, we can do that only after a money resolution. I do not want to spend endless weeks in a Committee talking shop. Parliament has spoken and it is up to the Government to respect that. If they do not, I think they will find that the consequences will be quite severe.

The situation brings us back to the fundamental point that Westminster is a place of limited democracy, which is exactly what the Government's behaviour shows. That state of affairs should end immediately. There should be a money resolution, and we should get on with the job.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I will make an extremely brief contribution to this morning's debate, and say simply that the Boundary Commission for England began the 2018 parliamentary boundary review in 2016. It is due to report its final recommendations later this year. The Government

were elected on a manifesto commitment to continue with the boundary review and it would not, therefore, be appropriate to proceed with the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton at this time by providing it with a money resolution. The Government will keep the Bill under review, but we believe that it is right that the Boundary Commission be allowed to report its recommendations before careful consideration is given to how to proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

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

Afzal Khan: I beg to move, that the Committee do now adjourn.

I feel ashamed that no progress has been made today, but I am hopeful that we may be able to make progress when we meet next time.

Question put and agreed to.

9.39 am

Adjourned accordingly till Monday 14 May at Four o'clock.

