

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Fourth Sitting

Wednesday 9 January 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 January 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 13 January 2019

© Parliamentary Copyright House of Commons 2019

This publication may be reproduced under the terms of the Open Parliament licence, which is published at www.parliament.uk/site-information/copyright/.

The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, † ALBERT OWENAllan, 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*) (DUP)† Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)† Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)Kenneth Fox, Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerks*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 9 January 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: A happy new year to everybody, and for the first time this year, I will say that the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed 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.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this new year, Mr Owen. I welcome back all Members; I hope they had a good Christmas, and I wish them all also a happy new year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hope that with the new year, the Minister has had an opportunity to reflect, and perhaps has a new attitude towards this Committee. In 2018, we had a full year in which no progress was made on this Bill—what a disappointment that is. We are fast running out of time for these changes to come in before the end of this Parliament, and I hope the Minister will feel that we should get on with it.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will speak briefly this morning, to say to Members that as I have not been to the Committee for a while, I thought that as the new year approached it would be good to re-acquaint myself with old friends. I also wanted to say, having read the *Hansard* report of the last Committee meeting, that I am grateful that our good friend the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton got his Christmas present just before Christmas, as the Government did publish the immigration White Paper. I know that he was hoping for that at the last Committee meeting, so I am pleased that that Christmas present was delivered. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Glasgow East got the little note in his stocking from the Minister that he was hoping for; I suspect not.

I am looking forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about whether any progress has been made on drafting the statutory instrument. Obviously, the House's agenda is very full at the moment with debates on European Union matters, and I know that lots of pieces of legislation that are critical to our exit from the European Union need to be dealt with, so I am not hopeful that the House will find the opportunity to consider this matter at an early stage. However, I look forward to hearing whether progress will be made at the earliest opportunity, and I join you, Mr Owen, in wishing everyone a happy new year.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is an immense pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and I extend my best wishes to all members of the Committee for a happy, peaceful and prosperous new year. I spent yesterday afternoon taking part in a debate on democracy in Uganda—an excellent debate, led by the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams).

In that long debate, it struck me a little that we as Members of the British Parliament are busy quite rightly holding Uganda to account for its lack of democracy, but for almost a year, I have been taking part in a Bill Committee that is considering reducing the number of legislators who can scrutinise the Government just as more powers are coming back from the European Union, and, last year, more than 20 new Members of the House of Lords were appointed. We as Members of the British Parliament have the audacity to lecture other countries about how democracy should work when we are trying to shrink the number of people who can scrutinise the Government in this country. I will leave that thought with Members. I look forward to participating in the Committee from now until we prorogue around March, if we get that far, but it has been an absolute pleasure to be part of the Committee in 2018, and I look forward to many more meetings in 2019.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I also say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair and serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen? I echo other Members in giving my best wishes to all members of the Committee for the new year, and it is a particular pleasure to see the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean back in his place. He said that he had not been to several sessions recently; I have to tell him that he has not missed much, although not for want of trying. On a more serious note, I have missed his presence. I have paid tribute to him in the past for his attendance in the Committee, and also for some of his guidance. He made the point that it would not be appropriate—I think I am correctly paraphrasing his argument—for us to proceed with this Bill until the current boundary proposals have been considered and voted on by this House. I do not necessarily agree with him, but he has made that point consistently. I say to the Minister that perhaps a new year is the time for a resolution to bring forward the proposals for the boundaries, so that we can make that decision one way or the other.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct that the House is dealing with a lot of legislation around Brexit at the moment, but that should not be a reason not to proceed with the important task of getting these new boundaries sorted. The credibility of the House depends on that. The delay is frustrating to members of this Committee and to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. It is also frustrating as regards the quality of democracy.

The right hon. Gentleman has made the point at previous sittings that the House is based on boundaries using population figures that are 20 years out of date. We need to move forward and, therefore, I urge the Minister to do her best to bring forward the orders as soon as possible in this term, so that we can get on with the business of renewing this House's mandate.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I would simply like to say happy new year to all on the Committee, Mr Owen. I confirm that work proceeds as expected on the Orders in Council, which I look forward to bringing to the House in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

10.7 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 January at Ten o'clock.