

parliamentary democracy is that people can elect whomsoever they choose to represent them. For the government to give instructions to voters, telling them what gender their MPs must be, undermines this principle. It is likely to make voters even more disenchanted with democracy, and to make them even more disengaged from it. It also sets a dangerous precedent for further intervention by the government in the democratic process,⁵⁷ once having broken with the basic principle of the freedom of voters to choose their own MPs.

This is not to say that the lack of equal representation for women in Parliament is not a problem. It is.⁵⁸ But a system of compulsory quotas is not the way to deal with it. There are better ways to encourage women into politics: educating girls in citizenship at school; celebrating the successes of women politicians; a policy of zero tolerance for sexism and sexual harassment across Parliament and across all political parties;⁵⁹ changing the absurd working hours of Parliament to make it more family-friendly, and more like a normal workplace.⁶⁰

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

On a point of information.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Yes please.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

All the measures you propose are excellent, and we fully support them⁶¹. They do not, however, do away with the need to make equal representation for women in Parliament mandatory.⁶²

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

The mandatory nature of your proposed intervention undermines democracy; the measures we propose do not.⁶³

To my last point. The Government claims their measure will tackle sexism in politics. In fact, it will make it worse. Why? To return to my earlier example of those women who, inspirationally, have recently reached positions of leadership as the heads of the Northern Irish, Scottish and British governments. No one can suggest for one moment that they only achieved this success because they are women. However, once we introduce a quota system for MPs, this accusation can be made against successful women politicians.

(CHAIR gives the four minute knock.)

57 This is hovering close to the 'slippery slope' fallacy, but the Leader of the Opposition, having been caught out once already, avoids it by making the threat of future difficulties vague and unspecific.

58 Accepting the Prime Minister's diagnosis of what is wrong with 'Now' is a subtle way of undermining her case; if you agree that there is a problem, she cannot gain credit for pointing out the problem. The Leader of the Opposition has, however, accepted the Government's language of 'equal representation.'

59 This identifies a problem arising from a male-dominated Parliament which the Prime Minister failed to spot. As the Leader of the Opposition has raised it first, no one on the Government side can take credit for raising it.

60 Line of attack #10 (see Chapter 6); there is a different, better solution to the problem.

61 Defusing the attempt to propose an alternative solution to the problem by accepting that solution, thereby taking away ownership of that solution from the Leader of the Opposition.

62 This POI brings the centre of gravity of the debate back to the proposal supported by the Government.

63 This swings the debate back to the main plank of the Opposition's argument. The Opposition has won this exchange. The response also uses antithesis (see Chapter 11), making the Opposition's approach seem better by comparison.

Their achievements will not be respected, because they will be seen as having been given to them because of their gender, not earned on account of their merit.⁶⁴ This lack of recognition for their having achieved their success through their own talents and efforts will undermine the careers of existing women politicians, and will deter aspirant women politicians.

So, because this measure undermines democracy, it will make a career in politics less rather than more attractive to women, and will create problems rather than solve them, it must not be passed.⁶⁵ Real success for women, achieved through real democratic processes, is the way to achieve real equality.^{66, 67}

CHAIR

I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his fine speech, and call on the Deputy Prime Minister to reply on behalf of the Government.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Parliament isn't just a body for passing laws. It is a mirror held up to society, where the people we elect to represent us reflect us back. And what do we see in this mirror? A world still dominated by men. Change what this body looks like, and we will change the way we see ourselves.⁶⁸ We believe that the measure we propose is no more than restoring Parliament to normality, by making it reflect the world as it actually is. I will be arguing for the benefits of this change. It will change the way women are perceived in society; it will encourage young women to achieve more highly; and it will help Britain to progress towards being a more civilised society.⁶⁹

First, though, to respond to the Leader of the Opposition's speech.

He claims that the measure interferes with the right of voters to choose their own MPs. Yes, our measure will change the relationship between voters and their representatives; but it will change it for the better. How? Voters will now have the chance to vote not for one MP, but for two. They will have more choice. They could split their votes, for example voting for a Labour woman and a Conservative man; or they could vote for one candidate on the grounds of who will be the best representative for their constituency, and for the other on party grounds.

(CHAIR gives the knock for one minute)

Currently, local parties have an enormous amount of power. If you wish to vote Conservative, you have to accept the Conservative

64 This is one of the most commonly used (and most effective) arguments for the opposition in 'quotas' debates.

65 Returning to the initial signposting of the main arguments, expressed in a slightly different way. Don't be afraid of repetition; this kind of reinforcing helps to fix the argument in the judge's mind (see 'Signposting' in Chapter 3, The Basic Skills)

66 Anaphora and tricolon, repeating 'real' (implying that the Government's proposal is therefore false). Also, ending on a positive note. Opposition is by its very nature negative, so to be able to make your counter-proposal seem more positive than what is proposed by the Government is particularly clever.

67 This is a well structured speech by the Leader of the Opposition, not afraid of some repetition to reinforce points. Rebuttal is very thorough and precise, with the exception of the use of the 'slippery slope' fallacy. He uses classic 'anti-quota' arguments (interference with appropriate means of selection, undermining of success achieved by the group targeted by the measure) concisely and clearly. Like the Prime Minister, he wins one POI and loses the other. Like the Prime Minister, he has one weak argument. As the weak point is in his rebuttal rather than in his main argument, he has a slight edge over the Prime Minister.

68 In one sentence (using anaphora - 'change ... change ...') the Deputy Prime Minister encapsulates both the Action and the Then of the motion.

69 Crisp signposting of his arguments. The Prime Minister has already outlined these, but repetition is nothing to be afraid of.