

fact that many high profile people and celebrities have come out as gay has greatly helped gay people in wider society to be accepted for who they are; similarly, equality in our highest law making body will help the cause of equality everywhere.⁸²

So, what have I shown you?⁸³

I've shown you that an equal Parliament would change the way women are perceived, both by themselves and by men. It would encourage more women to rise higher in society, and would help to make Britain a more civilised, equal society generally. All these benefits are in addition to the benefits an equal Parliament would bring for policy and law making, as outlined by the Prime Minister. Equal democracy is an idea whose time has come.^{84, 85}

CHAIR

I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his fine speech, and now call on the Deputy Leader of the Opposition to second the case for her side.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Government claims to be solving a problem with its measure; it will in fact be creating more problems. It claims to be challenging sexist stereotypes; it will in fact be reinforcing them. It claims to be addressing inequality; it will in fact fail to address inequality, if not worsen it.⁸⁶ I will be showing how the proposed 'mega-constituencies' will not serve democracy, how a quota system is itself inherently sexist, and how the promotion of women MPs will only make matters worse for other minorities.⁸⁷

First, to respond to the Deputy Prime Minister's speech.

He claims that Parliament does not reflect the world as it is, which is 50% female, and that this sends a negative message to young women. But the voting register does reflect the world as it is. Women have an equal right to vote, and an equal right to stand for Parliament, as men do. If they are not standing for Parliament at the moment, not being elected, it is not because the law stands in their way⁸⁸. This is not Alabama in the 1960s, where the law stood in the way of equal rights for African-Americans.⁸⁹ This is Britain in the 21st century. Women can stand for Parliament; women can be Prime Minister, and two already have been. Yes, equal representation is desirable, but the way to achieve it is not through quotas, interfering with the democratic process, it is by encouraging young women to enter politics and to achieve success on their own merits; to reach

82 This keeps with the theme of his speech about image and perception, but doesn't add anything very substantial or new.

83 Hyphophora, asking and answering your own question; a good way to sum up a case.

84 Good to end with a rousing sound bite of a statement like this. Also broadening out the case from just 'equal parliament' to 'equal democracy', making it sound as if the entire system is being changed.

85 This is a well constructed speech by the Deputy Prime Minister. His initial rebuttal of the Leader of the Opposition's speech is very detailed and highly effective, not just dealing with the Opposition's arguments but moving forward and building on his own. However, his response to the two POIs is slight and a little evasive, not getting to grips with them thoroughly enough. Also, the substance of his speech, focusing more on appearance and image, lacks evidential weight.

86 Good use of anithesis, balancing what the Government claim will be achieved with what the actual outcome will be.

87 Good clear signposting of the arguments.

88 This is a central argument for the opposition in any 'quotas' debate; provided the law / system as it stands is fair, there is no reason to change it. In terms of the Now / Action / Then analysis we discussed in Chapter 6, they are saying there is no problem with Now.

89 A good example of using historical knowledge to make an analogy. It works emotionally, by evoking the horrors of racism.

the top in the confident knowledge that they did this for themselves.⁹⁰

(CHAIR gives the knock for one minute.)

Now to my main points.

The Government proposes, as well as interfering with our choice of MPs, interfering with our constituencies. A constituency is a vital link between MPs and voters. Need a safe crossing near your children's school? Write to your MP. Fed up with anti-social behaviour in your local park? Call your MP. Facing eviction because your landlord has put up the rent again? Go and see your MP.⁹¹ MPs have the influence, often at the highest level of government, to help their constituents, and they respond to these concerns and issues because they know, care about and frequently live in their constituency. However, it can be difficult enough already for MPs, particularly in rural constituencies with a wide area, to keep in touch with all the issues their constituency faces. Double the size of the constituency, as the Government proposes with its plan to create 'mega-constituencies',⁹² and you double the size of the task for a conscientious MP. MPs will become even more remote and more detached from voters, leading to even more disillusion with and cynicism about politics.

GOVERNMENT WHIP

On a point of information.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Yes please.

GOVERNMENT WHIP

When we double the size of the constituency, we will also be doubling the size of the representation. Our measure will provide voters with not one MP to represent their interests, but two. A voter who wanted to approach their MP about a domestic violence or sexual harassment issue might prefer to approach the woman MP. Also, if a constituency returned MPs from two different parties, with differing views, a voter would be able to approach the MP who better reflected their own views.⁹³

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Thank you. You have raised an important problem with mega-constituencies, in addition to the extra workload they create for MPs. MPs are elected to represent their constituency. If you have

90 The other key argument for the opposition in a 'quotas' debate; quotas undermine the value of the achievement of those they are supposed to benefit. In other words, the Action makes Then worse than Now.

91 Good use of enargia, telling a selection of mini-stories illustrating the practical ways in which MPs help their constituents.

92 'Mega-constituencies' is the Opposition's own choice of language and, just as 'equal representation' made the Government's proposal seem natural and normal, 'mega-constituencies' makes it sound overwhelming and unwieldy.

93 This POI very cleverly both turns what the Opposition makes out to be a problem in their proposal into an advantage, and also introduces an added advantage to their proposal. It manages to land two blows in one POI.