

Opposition's speech. She claims that the larger constituencies we propose will create extra workload for MPs, and that they will make MPs less representative. On the first point, while the workload will be doubled, so will the number of MPs, so there is no increase in workload; on the second, voters will in fact be better represented, as it is possible, even likely, that MPs will represent a wider range of views.¹⁰² She claims that a quota for MPs patronises women by 'helping' them. However, she overlooks the fact that women might actually need help, because they are the victims of an institutionalised sexism which has marginalised them and kept them from positions of power for centuries. Quotas based on gender aren't new.

(CHAIR gives the knock for one minute.)

For hundreds of years there has been a *de facto* quota system, allocating 100% (or very nearly) of positions of power to men. We aren't introducing a quota system; we're simply altering the existing quota system in the direction of justice.¹⁰³ She rightly raises the issue of the underrepresentation of women and black and ethnic minority people in Parliament. Rightly, but irrelevantly. As I have already pointed out, the motion we are discussing is about a quota for women MPs, and we need to focus only on this issue.¹⁰⁴

Now to the benefits our measure will bring. First, the benefits of each constituency being represented by both a man and a woman. As my colleague the Government Whip¹⁰⁵ has already pointed out, it will mean that, finally, every woman in the country will have a woman representing her in Parliament. She might want to approach this woman MP about a personal matter, for example an issue of domestic violence, or discrimination or sexual harassment in the workplace, and would be able to do so in the knowledge that she would have an ally, someone who would understand her predicament - who might have been, or still be, in the same situation herself - and would therefore be better able to support and advise her. Or, she might want to lobby her MP about a wider, social issue affecting women, such as the gender pay gap or the tampon tax; again, she can be sure of having a sympathetic and supportive hearing. In this way, women will finally be properly represented, and Britain will finally be a truly representative democracy.¹⁰⁶

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

On a point of information.

MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT

Yes please.

¹⁰² This is slightly repetitive of the rebuttal offered by the Government Whip, but it is no bad thing to reinforce the point in more detail. Don't be afraid of repetition.

¹⁰³ This is one of the central arguments in 'quota' debates; that the current system appears fair but isn't, so intervention is needed to make it fair. In terms of Now / Action / Then, Now is wrong, our Action will take us to a better Then.

¹⁰⁴ This is reiterating the POI the Member of the Government herself made. Again, don't be afraid of repetition; it reminds the judge of the value of your POI.

¹⁰⁵ Sensible to name check your partner, to remind the judge about his excellent point.

¹⁰⁶ Moving from specific examples to the general goal of a better Then.

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

Are you suggesting that men are incapable of representing women's interests?

MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT

I am not saying that. I am saying that women are more likely to represent women's interests better.¹⁰⁷ However, if a woman constituent felt that her interests were better represented by her male MP, there would of course be nothing to stop her from approaching her male MP; she would have the choice.¹⁰⁸

Now, to the national benefits. My colleagues have already outlined how our measure would promote the involvement of women in politics by encouraging them to become MPs. I would go further.¹⁰⁹ It will not only increase the number of women who represent voters in Parliament. It will also, ultimately, increase the number of women who become ministers and Prime Ministers, the people in real positions of power, the people who make the decisions that determine what kind of country we live in. Ministers and Prime Ministers are chosen from MPs. It is therefore hardly surprising that, historically, there have been far fewer women Ministers and Prime Ministers, given that, historically, there have been far fewer women MPs. A Prime Minister choosing her or his ministers - even one who genuinely wants to lead an equal government, with equal numbers of women - will find it harder to do so, faced, as she or he would be now, with a parliament in which there are twice as many male MPs as women MPs, to achieve equality. Equalise the number of women MPs, and you equalise the chances of women achieving power.¹¹⁰

OPPOSITION WHIP

On a point of information.

MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT

Yes please.

OPPOSITION WHIP

Equal numbers in the workforce do not guarantee equal numbers in leadership. For example, primary school teachers are predominantly female, but head teachers in the primary sector are predominantly male.

¹⁰⁷ Qualifying what she said to accept the point made in the POI, but without undermining her initial point.

¹⁰⁸ Cleverly reminding us of another benefit of the dual-member constituency.

¹⁰⁹ 'I would go further' sums up very well the task of the Member of the Government / Member of the Opposition; accept and support what the first two speakers on your side have said, and then go on to make it better by adding something with an extension.

¹¹⁰ This anaphora neatly summarises how the Action will lead to the Then.