

not correct all injustices, it does not follow that the one injustice should not be corrected; especially when correcting that injustice, by ensuring that the legislature will now be inherently more sympathetic to the needs of women, is more likely to lead to other injustices being corrected.

Now to sum up our case.

Britain is supposed to be a representative democracy. However, our parliament is not representative; it gives the impression that two thirds of the population are male, and thus reveals the reality that two thirds of power is held by males. Our measure would correct this basic democratic deficit. It would not, as the Opposition claim, weaken the link between MPs and their constituents; it would strengthen that link because constituents would have not one but two MPs, one from each gender.¹²³ It would inspire more women to become involved in public life, not just as politicians, but in so many other fields; it would ensure that the issues that affect women's lives were properly addressed, and that legislation was passed to deal with these issues; and it would change the current noisy boys' playground atmosphere of the House of Commons into a more collaborative, more constructive, less confrontational environment. Fairer government and better government would be the result.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

On a point of information.

GOVERNMENT WHIP

Yes please.

DEPUTY LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

How is a democracy where the voters are told what kind of MPs they can elect fairer?

GOVERNMENT WHIP

They are already told what kind of MPs they can elect by members of their local party, often a small and very unrepresentative group, selecting candidates for their constituency, candidates who will be overwhelmingly male. Our measure will give them more choice by giving them more votes.¹²⁴

Now, to the points of clash.

The Opposition claim - have just claimed - that our measure will reduce choice for voters. In fact, it will increase choice, by ensuring

¹²³ Good to incorporate some rebuttal within the summary like this.

¹²⁴ This is a good response to the POI, as it reiterates the point about having more votes, and also in-troduces an extra benefit of the measure proposed.

that every voter has the opportunity to vote for a man and a woman. They would keep choice narrow, by maintaining the status quo whereby candidates are overwhelmingly male; we will widen choice, by opening up the options for voters. They claim our measure is not necessary, because there are other ways of tackling systemic sexism. Yes, there are, and we support them. This debate is not about those measures. It is about a measure that will tackle an inherent injustice at the heart of power in this country. Just because there are other things that could be done, it does not mean that this thing should not be done. They claim our measure is a distraction from the struggle against sexism; we say it is a part of the struggle against sexism. The Opposition claim that women can, and indeed on occasion should be, just as confrontational as men; we say that if they act like men at their worst it is because they are operating in a world run by men at their worst. When women are released from the need to work on men's terms, it will be better for both men and women.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

On a point of information.

GOVERNMENT WHIP

Yes please.

MEMBER OF THE OPPOSITION

Isn't it rather naive to assume that as soon as you have equal numbers of men and women in an organisation, everyone starts behaving better?

GOVERNMENT WHIP

Not so naive as to assume that a fundamental imbalance of power has no effect on the way that people behave.¹²⁵

The clearest clash of all between our points of view, and where I feel the Opposition are most mistaken, is in their view that our measure is counter-productive, because it will somehow be 'cheating'; women will not deserve, or be seen to deserve, their access to power because they have been 'helped' by our measure. 'Cheating' implies that the current system is fair. It is not. If it was fair, why would there not be the same proportion of women in Parliament as there are in the country? The fact that this is not the case is sufficient evidence, surely, that action needs to be taken. The Opposition say we are interfering with democracy; we say we are making democracy better,

¹²⁵ Another good response to the POI; crisp and focused, and bringing the argument back to the Government's fundamental (and strong) point about the imbalance of power.