

more democratic. They say any success women achieve under our measure will be somehow illegitimate; we say it will be one of the desirable outcomes of a fairer system.¹²⁶

(CHAIR knocks for four minutes.)

So, we on the Government side set true representation against misrepresentation; a wide choice against a narrow choice; a world where women are empowered against a world where they are marginalised and ignored; a world where injustices against women are overcome against a world where they are left untouched. A world, in fact, where women are treated as what they are: one half of the human race.¹²⁷

Sometimes the system is broken, and it needs fixing. Over a hundred years ago, women could not vote. Many defended that system as good enough, and claimed that attempts to interfere with it would make matters worse, much as the Opposition are doing with our measure. The system is still broken, and needs fixing. Our measure will fix it, and will make Britain a better, fairer place.¹²⁸

CHAIR

I thank the Government Whip for his fine speech, and call on the Opposition Whip to conclude the debate by summing up the case for the Opposition.

OPPOSITION WHIP

Thank you, Madam Chair.

We on the Opposition side understand the good intentions with which this measure is put forward. However, we believe that it is fundamentally misguided. It intervenes in the democratic process in a way that undermines that process; it distracts energy from tackling the problem of sexism; it is the wrong solution to a real and deep problem; and, most of all, the use of quotas is a fundamentally flawed approach to addressing inequality.¹²⁹

First, though, I will briefly address the Government Whip's speech. He says that the fact that two thirds of Parliament is male means that two thirds of power is held by males. However, he doesn't mention that one half of the electorate is female; women have equal voting rights, and an equal ability to stand for Parliament. He says that this system is not fair, but it evidently is. What he does not explain is how his side's policy of excluding people from standing for Parliament because of their gender is fair. Justice is not promoted by injustice.¹³⁰

Now, to sum up our case.

126 This is a very good example of how to address the 'points of clash'; set up what your opponents say on one side, and then what you say on the other, making sure that what you say sounds better. It is also very effective because it deals with the points of principle rather than more marginal issues.

127 Using antithesis to contrast the Now that is wrong with the Then that the Government's Action will bring.

128 This is a very effective Whip's speech. It sums up crisply, and also highlights the points of clash. There is no need to be concerned about its apparent repetitiveness; like a good teacher, the Government Whip is reinforcing the Government's arguments in the Judge's mind by repeating them with a slightly different emphasis. The Government Whip also deals very well with the two POIs.

129 This is good signposting of the Opposition's case, but it would be even better if it included some rebuttal.

Democracy is an imperfect system. It may sometimes throw up results we do not like. It does not necessarily result in a perfectly representative Parliament, precisely mirroring the people it is supposed to represent. However, it is fundamentally fair. Anyone can stand for election.

(CHAIR knocks for one minute)

One person (male or female), one vote. Whoever gets the most votes in a constituency, wins. It is clear, it is simple, and (I reiterate) it is fair. No matter how good the intentions, we interfere with this system at our peril. Once the precedent is set, there is scope for other, less savoury, tinkering with our electoral system, of the sort which excluded black people from exercising their voting rights in the South of the United States in the last century.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

On a point of information.

OPPOSITION WHIP

Yes please.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

You cannot equate measures promoting discrimination against people on grounds of their race with a measure promoting gender equality.

OPPOSITION WHIP

I am not doing that; I am not saying your measure is racist. I am simply pointing out the dangers of interfering with a free, open electoral system.¹³¹

The relationship between an MP and their voters is a precious part of our democratic system. We interfere with this, too, at our peril. MPs are held in low enough respect as it is; telling voters what sort of MP they should elect will only make this worse. So, too, will creating constituencies that are large and impersonal.

Yes, we do want more women in public life. That is a very desirable aim, which we share with the Government. But we want them to achieve this aim by encouragement and support, not by an artificial system which distorts and interferes with our democracy. We do want to address the real issues that affect women, such as domestic violence, insecure employment and sexual harassment; but playing a numbers game with MPs - most of whom are already very privileged - will not achieve this aim.¹³²

130 Quite brief rebuttal, but this is appropriate for the Opposition Whip, given that the Government Whip will not have introduced any new ideas.

131 The Opposition Whip puts up a good defence, but the Prime Minister has exposed a flaw in her argument. The analogy is too extreme, and is also tending towards the Slippery Slope fallacy (see Chapter 7, Big Fat Fallacies); it's a long way from all-women voting lists to black people being turned away from polling stations.

132 This doesn't quite hit the spot as she doesn't say why the 'numbers game' won't work.