

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

First Sitting

Wednesday 9 May 2018

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Adjourned till Monday 14 May at Four o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 13 May 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair:* Ms NADINE DORRIES

† Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Cat (<i>Lancaster and Fleetwood</i>) (Lab)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	† Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 9 May 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind hon. Members to switch all mobile phones and electronic devices off or to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during the sittings. As it is impossible to switch the heating off in this room, hon. Members may remove their jackets.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, if proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill are not completed at this day's sitting, the Committee shall meet on Monday 14 May at 4.00 pm and on Wednesday 16 May at 9.30 am.

I am glad that the Committee is finally meeting this morning, but I am very disappointed to have wasted hon. Members' time, as we cannot discuss a single issue of substance without a money resolution. It has already been five months since the Bill passed Second Reading, with 229 votes to 44. The House sent a strong message that it wants the Bill to be considered in Committee. The Government are defying the will of the House by refusing to bring a money resolution forward, which they have had ample time to do. This is an abuse of just the Executive power that the Bill is trying to keep in check.

At business questions on Thursday, Members from all three major parties raised the money resolution with the Leader of the House. As the hon. Member for Wellingborough said:

"Money resolutions should follow Second Readings as night follows day."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 467.]

The Leader of the House said she would bring forward a money resolution in due course, but who knows what that means in practice?

The Speaker weighed in clearly on the topic, saying that unease on the issue of a money resolution

"should have been heard, and must be heard, on the Treasury Bench."

He also said that

"it would be appreciated if colleagues felt confident that there was a logic and reasonableness to the decision-making process."—[*Official Report*, 3 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 477.]

The Speaker was referring to the extraordinary fact that the Government brought a money resolution for the Prisons (Interference with Wireless Telegraphy) Bill on 1 May but did not bring one for this Bill. The prisons Bill came 13th in the private Member's Bill ballot, as opposed to mine, which came third. The prisons Bill had its Second Reading on the same day as my Bill, and I believe its Committee is meeting down the corridor right now. It would have been entirely possible for both money resolutions to be introduced on the same day, in good time for us to consider my Bill fully today.

Finally, I stress that my Bill is time sensitive. The boundary commissions are due to submit their final recommendations in September 2018. A previous private Member's Bill along the same lines was introduced in the last Parliament, but it ran out of time after the Government failed to bring forward a money resolution before the snap general election last year. If the Government continue to delay my Bill, there is a danger that the House will not have a chance to debate or pass it before the new boundary proposals are before the House.

I do not deny that my Bill is controversial, but it is also reasonable, and such an important constitutional question—how many Members of Parliament should represent the people of this country—should be fully considered by the House, not blocked by the Government using parliamentary procedure. I will press the Government to bring forward a money resolution ahead of our next meeting, and I hope other hon. Members here will join me.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton for his remarks about his Bill. We all recognise that the review is much needed. It presents an opportunity for cross-party agreement on new boundaries.

I share my hon. Friend's disappointment that a money resolution has not been forthcoming from the Government, because in December this House sent a strong message that we wanted the Bill to be considered in Committee. It passed its Second Reading by 229 votes to 44. I am sure that the Government would not want there to be a perception that not providing for a money resolution might be an attempt to sabotage a private Member's Bill and, after all, the will of the House. They would not want it to be presented as an attempt to seek political advantage.

It is widely accepted that the boundary review in its current form would be a disaster for our democracy for various reasons, the most important of which would be the cutting of the number of MPs without a reduction in the number of Ministers. That would only increase the power of the Executive and make it more difficult for Back Benchers such as my hon. Friend to challenge the Government. However, as we have seen, there is no money resolution, and that sends a dangerous message. It concerns the respect that should be accorded to Back Benchers who have had success in the private Member's Bill ballot, and their ability to bring forward measures for us to consider.

Constitutional changes should be dealt with fairly, and everyone should have a voice. Sadly, that is not happening this morning. I urge the Government to see to the matter of a money resolution at the earliest opportunity, so that the Committee can get on with the vital work that we intend to do.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries.

The Scottish National party's perspective on the Bill, in outline, is that we support it. We should like to amend it in one or two areas and, as the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has explained, it is impossible for us to do so until the Government provide a money resolution. The Government regularly talk about Parliament taking back control. The Brexiteers in the Government

talk about it. An hon. Member has now secured, through the ballot, the ability to introduce the Bill; the House voted fairly unanimously for it to go into Committee; and the Government are leaving it in political purgatory by not dealing with the money resolution.

I want to make it clear that the SNP will not accept a 10% cut in the number of Scotland's MPs. We want to amend the Bill, but as we know, we can do that only after a money resolution. I do not want to spend endless weeks in a Committee talking shop. Parliament has spoken and it is up to the Government to respect that. If they do not, I think they will find that the consequences will be quite severe.

The situation brings us back to the fundamental point that Westminster is a place of limited democracy, which is exactly what the Government's behaviour shows. That state of affairs should end immediately. There should be a money resolution, and we should get on with the job.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a pleasure to be here under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I will make an extremely brief contribution to this morning's debate, and say simply that the Boundary Commission for England began the 2018 parliamentary boundary review in 2016. It is due to report its final recommendations later this year. The Government

were elected on a manifesto commitment to continue with the boundary review and it would not, therefore, be appropriate to proceed with the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton at this time by providing it with a money resolution. The Government will keep the Bill under review, but we believe that it is right that the Boundary Commission be allowed to report its recommendations before careful consideration is given to how to proceed.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call on Afzal Khan to move that the Committee now adjourn.

Afzal Khan: I beg to move, that the Committee be now adjourned.

I feel ashamed that no progress has been made today, but I am hopeful that we may be able to make progress when we meet next time.

Question put and agreed to.

9.39 am

Adjourned accordingly till Monday 14 May at Four o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Second Sitting

Monday 14 May 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 May at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Friday 18 May 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chair:* Ms NADINE DORRIES

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Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Cat (<i>Lancaster and Fleetwood</i>) (Lab)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
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† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Monday 14 May 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

4 pm

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind hon. Members that electronic devices should be switched to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during sittings. If any Member would like to take their jacket off, please feel free.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee be now adjourned.

I thank hon. Members and Clerks for assembling again to consider the Bill. I can only apologise that, again, we will not be able to make any progress.

Colleagues will have witnessed the extraordinary urgent question that I asked the Leader of the House on Thursday. It was extraordinary, first, for the onslaught that she was subjected to from Conservative Back Benchers. Members from her own party lined up to attack the Government, accusing them of: behaving undemocratically; committing an abuse of Parliament; denying the democratic rights of Members; breaching undertakings they gave to the Procedure Committee, and sending out the Leader of the House to defend the indefensible. As the hon. Member for Wellingborough put it, she was

“sent to the wicket not only without a bat, but without pads or a helmet.”—[*Official Report*, 10 May 2018; Vol. 640, c. 900.]

Any Leader of the House fulfilling her duty as Parliament’s representative in Cabinet would have relayed this strength of feeling to her colleagues and come back with a money resolution. Clearly, that has not happened.

Conservative Members joined colleagues from Labour, the Scottish National party and the Liberal Democrats to universally condemn the Government. I register my thanks to my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, Southgate and for Nottingham North and to the hon. Member for Wellingborough for their contributions. I know others would have joined in if they could.

The urgent question was extraordinary, secondly, because it exposed how weak the Government’s arguments really are. After a certain point, the Leader of the House stopped attempting to answer questions that Members put to her and resorted to repeating the same two or three sentences over and over again.

First, the Leader of the House pointed to private Members’ Bills that have made progress in this Parliament. All that shows is that the Government will not block Bills that they already agree with. The function of a private Member’s Bill is to raise issues of public interest. At times, that may involve challenging the Government, if they are in opposition to the majority of Members and the public. The Government should not use procedure to block that, but allow an open and honest debate.

Secondly, the Leader of the House pointed to the financial initiative of the Crown, which is the principle that any spending of public funds must be proposed by the Government. I do not think anyone has proposed that we change that sensible, long-standing principle,

but it is deeply disingenuous to claim that the Government are blocking the Bill for financial reasons. The Government do not want to allow the Bill to be debated because it would hurt the Conservative party’s electoral chances. They want to rig the electoral system in their favour and are blocking a Bill that would stop them doing that.

Finally, the Leader of the House tried to defend herself against Members of her own party by arguing that they stood on a manifesto pledging to implement the boundary changes. First, as the hon. Member for Wellingborough made clear, he and others opposed that. Secondly, the Government could show some humility because their manifesto did not actually win them a majority. Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Paula Sherriff) asked, do the continual references to the Conservative party’s manifesto mean that we should expect Bills on foxhunting, grammar schools and the dementia tax soon?

The Government are starting to embarrass themselves over money resolutions. I urge the Minister to report back to her colleagues the anger in the Committee and across the House. The fundamental constitutional question of how many people should represent the country should be debated in the open, among Members and in front of the public, not in the back rooms of Government offices. If the Government are blocking the Bill because they do not think they can get enough of their Members to vote with them on it, they have more problems than just constituency boundaries.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I associate myself with my hon. Friend’s comments. It makes a mockery of the private Member’s Bill system that we are here again with no money resolution and no prospect of moving forward on the Bill. Last time we met, the Minister said that continuing with the boundary review changes had been in the Conservative party manifesto. That is true, but that manifesto did not win a majority at a general election, whereas this private Member’s Bill passed Second Reading in this House by 229 votes to 44. It is therefore clear that the will of the House is to progress with the Bill. By not presenting a money resolution, the Government are frankly making a mockery of the power we give our Back Benchers to pass legislation in this place.

I hope the Minister will take the message back to the rest of the Government that we want a money resolution, because we want to have the arguments out in Committee and on the Floor of the House and allow Members of Parliament—who, sitting in this Session, reflect the outcome of the general election—to make a decision. I hope she will take on board the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and me and find a way of getting a money resolution so that we can make progress with the Bill.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I have nothing to add to what I said at the previous Committee sitting, nor to what the Leader of the House said last week.

Question put and agreed to.

4.7 pm

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 16 May at half-past Nine o’clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Third Sitting

Wednesday 16 May 2018

CONTENTS

Sittings resolution amended.
Adjourned till Wednesday 23 May at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 20 May 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN† Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)† Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)† Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)† Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)† Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)† Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)† Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)† Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)† Smith, Cat (*Lancaster and Fleetwood*) (Lab)† Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)Kenneth Fox, *Committee Clerk*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 16 May 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Order. Before we begin, I remind Members to please switch their electronic devices to silent. Teas and coffees are not allowed during the sitting.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the sittings resolution of 9 May be amended as follows:

That, if proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill are not completed at this day's sitting, the Committee shall meet at 9.30 am on Wednesdays on which the House sits.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: We will now move to the motion to adjourn, as the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution.

Afzal Khan: I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank everyone for gathering here again. I will not make the same speech that I have already made twice. Despite my ongoing efforts since the last time we met, there is still no sign of a money resolution. The Government are making a mockery of the private Member's Bill process, pursuing electoral interests over the interests of democracy.

The Procedure Committee has carried out a number of inquiries into the private Member's Bill process and has consistently argued that the current system is insufficiently transparent, and that it is too easy for a small number of MPs or the Government to stop any Bills that they disagree with. This is a perfect example of such an abuse of process. I will continue to press the Government, and I propose that the Committee continues to meet on Wednesday mornings, to show that we are ready to debate and scrutinise the Bill in the open, as soon as the Government allow us to do so.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. It is of course the case that the Government have refused to table a money resolution, notwithstanding that the House gave the Bill its Second Reading and has delegated us to consider it in Committee. Previous Committee sittings have been rather short, which suggests that the Government have no interest in legislative scrutiny or in the Bill.

Given the contempt that the Government have shown towards the House, it will be helpful to remind them of some of its conventions. Members may wish to bear with me, because I intend to take some time to go through certain aspects of "Erskine May". I hope that the Minister was not planning to leave the room in the next few minutes, because she will not be able to.

Page 535 of "Erskine May", on proceedings on public Bills in the House of Commons, states:

"In the House of Commons, there are three ways in which a bill may be introduced...It may be brought in upon an order of the House...It may be presented without an order under the provisions of Standing Order No 57(1)...It may be brought in from the House of Lords."

On Bills founded upon financial resolutions, it states:

"The procedure for the introduction of bills upon financial resolutions is now most commonly exemplified by Consolidated Fund Bills—"

as explained on pages 740 and 741 of "Erskine May"—"which are founded upon Supply resolutions, and by Finance Bills and other taxing bills, which are founded upon Ways and Means resolutions."

The Chair: Order. I remind the hon. Member that reading from a book is not permitted in Committee proceedings. He may summarise "Erskine May" and advise us of his counsel, but he must not read verbatim.

David Linden: Thank you, Mr Owen. I appreciate that clarification. I will come back to certain aspects of the rules. The substance of the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is to make sure that Parliament has the ability to scrutinise legislation. Obviously, we are leaving the European Union, which means that huge swathes of legislation will be coming back to the House. The idea that we should reduce the number of Members in the House who are able to scrutinise that legislation simply beggars belief. We have not seen proposals from the Government to reduce the number of Members on the payroll vote—that is, Parliamentary Private Secretaries and, indeed, Ministers. The Government are showing contempt for the House. They should seriously consider tabling a money resolution, but I do not know whether the Minister is even paying attention at the moment.

On money resolutions, there certainly is precedent for the way in which the Government have, to be frank, been taking the mickey. I do not know what kind of respect the Government are showing this House by not tabling a money resolution. We regularly talk about Parliament taking back control, the will of Parliament and parliamentary sovereignty, yet even though the House voted for this Bill to proceed to Committee stage, we are not able to discuss it.

We can continue the charade of coming to this Committee twice a week, pretending that we are taking proposed legislation seriously and scrutinising it, but that makes a mockery of this place. If the Minister plans to simply sit there and diddle away on her phone and read her papers for the coming Cabinet Office questions—if that is how she wants to treat this House—that is her prerogative. Those of us who come here to treat Parliament with respect, however, who have been sent here to represent our constituents and the will of the people, will attend this Committee week in, week out, and we can go on for as long as she likes. If the Government do not table a money resolution, I will not hesitate to come back with much longer speeches—they might not be based on "Erskine May"—until such time as they do so.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I just want to make a couple of points. As a new Member, I feel I have much to learn. I was really pleased to hear the hon.

Member for Glasgow East reading from that book, because I found it really useful. I agree with all his comments. This seems a mockery of the process. When I speak to people in my constituency and tell them that, they agree.

Finally—I have made this point a number of times—I find it quite rude when hon. Members do not listen to what others are saying and sit looking at their phones or doing their papers when we should be dealing with the business at hand.

The Chair: On the matter of devices, Mr Speaker's ruling is that they are to be put on silent, but they are allowed. If some Members do not want them here, they can leave them outside.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): As one of the new intake of MPs in 2017, I am still getting to grips with how decisions are made and how futile the attempts of Back Benchers to get things done can be. I was told that Back Benchers could get something to become law by promoting a private Member's Bill. Getting a First Reading is hard enough, but it is not insurmountable. Getting a Second Reading is nigh on impossible, because unless one is lucky enough to get into the top 20 in the private Member's Bill draw, one is unlikely to get sufficient time to debate the issue. Even if sufficient time is granted, at least 100 MPs have to be present on one of the 13 allotted Fridays and then a majority of those voting have to vote for the Bill. To get to a Second Reading is a tall order.

At present there are 58 private Members' Bills scheduled for the next sitting Friday on 15 June; 25 for Friday 6 July; 23 for Friday 26 October; and 18 for Friday 23 November. That is a total of 103 private Member's Bills, the vast majority of which will never get a Second Reading, due to the lack of parliamentary time. When a private Member's Bill does get through its Second Reading with a majority in the House on a Friday, surely the Government should respect the will of Parliament and grant a money resolution to allow the Bill to progress.

Earlier this morning, I looked up "money resolutions" on the Parliament website, which defines it as follows:

"A Money resolution must be agreed to by the House of Commons if a new Bill proposes spending public money on something that hasn't previously been authorised by an Act of Parliament.

Money resolutions, like Ways and Means resolutions, are normally put to the House for agreement immediately after the Bill has passed its Second reading in the Commons."

I ask hon. Members to note the word "immediately".

The Bill passed its Second Reading on 1 December 2017. Five and a half months have passed and the Government are undemocratically disrespecting the will of Parliament, trying to smother this Bill by not granting a money resolution. This is a flagrant abuse of the customs and practices of this Parliament, as the hon. Member for Glasgow East has said. It is an attack on the processes of parliamentary democracy and on the few chances that Back Benchers have to influence and make changes. Parliament is not just the Government. The Government need to think very carefully about their disrespect for parliamentary democracy. Back Benchers need to be heard and respected.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I want to put on the record that the contents of the Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester,

Gorton have yet to be discussed in Committee because of the Government's failure to table a money resolution. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, they have had five and half months to do so and give us the opportunity to discuss the Bill.

The content of the Bill gained wide consensus across the House five and half months ago, passing its Second Reading by 229 votes to 44. I have previously raised this point: this is about the will of Parliament. A lot has happened since the 2018 boundary review, which the Bill seeks to replace. The 2018 review started before we even had the EU referendum, and the number of people on the electoral roll has increased significantly.

The current boundary review, which will come back to the House in October, uses the figures from December 2015, when there were 44.7 million people, compared with the 46.8 million people recorded this year. Those are 2 million people whose voices will not be heard in the current proposed boundary review but which could be heard if my hon. Friend's Bill had a money resolution. We could then discuss the Bill and gain cross-party consensus, because there is huge will across the House to do so.

We want an accurate electoral roll to decide the boundaries for this House. That is incredibly important post the Brexit referendum, which means we will lose Members of the European Parliament. The idea of losing them at the same time as we lose 50 MPs, while maintaining the size of the Government payroll, is a slap in the face to democracy. It hands more power to Government and less power to the people, which is the exact opposite of the wide consensus of what Brexit was about in the first place. We want an accurate electoral roll to draw our boundaries.

We also want power to be given to Parliament. By not tabling a money resolution, the Government have shown contempt and denied us the opportunity to debate the Bill. They have not respected the, to be frank, limited powers of Back Benchers to introduce legislation. I hope the Minister will be able to offer us more today than she managed at our previous sitting.

The Chair: Does the Minister wish to respond?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): No.

Afzal Khan: A number of Members have made their point. The Government need to be much clearer. The will of the House is that we should debate this matter. Whatever arguments there are for the Bill, that is what needs to happen, not the withholding of a money resolution. The Minister does not wish to say anything now but maybe next week she can seek counsel from other senior Ministers and bring more clarity, so that at least we do not waste our time in coming here, and she can show some respect to Members.

David Linden: On a point of order, Mr Owen. This Committee has been set up by the House because a majority of hon. Members voted for it. What provisions and opportunities are available to hon. Members to put on the record that a Government Minister has come to this Committee and said absolutely nothing about a Bill that has been supported by the democratically elected House of Commons?

The Chair: The hon. Gentleman knows that he has already put that on the record by asking that question. It is on the record of this Committee that Members either contributed or did not wish to contribute to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

9.44 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 23 May at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Fourth Sitting

Wednesday 23 May 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 6 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 27 May 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

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† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 23 May 2018

[NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Here we go again. The rules are the same as always. I remind you that electronic devices should be switched to silent mode and that teas and coffees are not allowed during sittings. I am happy for anyone to remove their jacket if they wish.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Once again we are meeting without a money resolution. All there is to do is to adjourn. During Monday's emergency debate, some excellent points were made about the expectation that the Government would bring forward a money resolution for a private Member's Bill that has had a Second Reading. Many Members made the point that even if the Government do not want a money resolution to be passed, they can table one and instruct their MPs to vote against it. Much of the discussion during that debate was on the merits—or not—of passing a money resolution, but the issue at hand was the expectation that the Government would bring one forward.

As was said on Monday, it is disingenuous for the Government to say that boundary changes are a financial issue. For this Government, those changes have always been about electoral maths. That becomes clear when we look at the nine new Conservative peers announced by the Government over the weekend, with all the associated costs. The Prime Minister pays lip service to cutting the cost of politics, but in reality she will do whatever is in the interests of her party.

The House voted unanimously for the Bill to be debated in Committee. Parliamentary procedure clearly dictates that a money resolution should be tabled when a Bill has been given its Second Reading. The Government endorsed that view in 2015 when a Minister said that

“the convention is that the Government, even when they robustly oppose it, always table a money resolution... Doing so is not a signal of Government support; it is absolutely in line with the convention of the House with all private Members' Bills, whether we oppose or support them.”—[*Official Report*, 3 November 2015; Vol. 601, c. 926.]

That was the right approach. The Government should return to tabling money resolutions for private Members' Bills, even when they do not agree with them. I know that the Government object to my private Member's Bill, but if they want to get rid of it they should use arguments and votes, not block it with procedure.

I shall continue trying to get a money resolution for the Bill. I hope that colleagues will agree that I have been doing my best so far. Next time we meet I hope that we shall be able to make some progress.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I shall keep my remarks extremely brief. With regard to the substance of the Committee proceedings, I have nothing to add to what I said at the two previous Committee sittings, or to what was said in response to an urgent question and in the emergency debate. However, I will take this opportunity to wish well the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood, who will not be joining us at future sittings. We wish her much happiness in future.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I had not planned to speak in this Committee, having taken part in the Standing Order No. 24 debate on Monday, but the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has provoked me slightly. One or two of the points he made require a response.

I do not think that the Government have been disingenuous. That accusation is unfair. We gambolled around this territory in the House on Monday, but the Government have set out a principled reason. As I said on Monday, in 2011 Parliament took a decision, when it passed the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, to set up a boundary review process. That was disrupted at the other end of this building by some shenanigans by the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, who inserted an amendment out of the scope of the Bill to divert the boundary changes.

We are now on the second go, and I think it is reasonable to allow the boundary commissions to report—as they have to do by law between September and October of this year—and to allow the House to reflect on their report before we make further progress. I listened carefully to what the Leader of the House said, and she repeated what the Minister said, which was that the Government are not refusing to provide a money resolution forever; they simply do not think that one is appropriate at this time, until the House has had time to reflect on the report.

Afzal Khan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his conclusion, but the point is that Members of this House know what has happened before and the review that is taking place. Despite that, the House voted unanimously. I am sure that he is aware that Parliament is sovereign and that it can change its mind as well, if it wants to.

Mr Harper: It is indeed, but it is also the case that the spending of money is a financial prerogative of the Crown. It is for the Crown to propose spending money and for Parliament to assent to it, as was made very clear by my hon. Friend the Member for North East Somerset (Mr Rees-Mogg) in his excellent speech on Monday, with which I concur.

The hon. Gentleman's Bill involves significant expenditure. It is not just about having another boundary review process; it is also about increasing the number of Members of Parliament by 50, which means quite considerable expenditure. It is for the Government to make decisions about expenditure. His argument would have more force if the Minister had said that the Government were not going to bring forward a money resolution at any point during this Session. That is not what the Government have said; they have said that the boundary commissions should be allowed to report and that the Government will then reflect on the House's

decision making on the boundary commissions' reports. It is entirely possible that decisions may be taken at a later stage that will enable us to make progress in Committee. The Government are not being disingenuous.

It is also not the case that the Government invariably bring forward money resolutions. I remember an interesting case in the 2010-2015 Parliament, when I think my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) had a private Member's Bill on a European Union referendum, which, as we know, commanded majority support in the country, albeit a small majority. The then Prime Minister wanted to bring forward a money resolution, but the Government were unable to do so, for all sorts of complicated, coalition-related reasons that I will not trouble the Committee with. There have been other examples that the Leader of the House set out. It is not an invariable rule; it is a convention.

The Minister has made it very clear that this matter remains under review and that the Government have not ruled out bringing forward a money resolution at some point in future. I do not think that the motives that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has ascribed to the Government are reasonable. That is all I wanted to say in response, recognising that the motion under consideration this morning is a fairly narrow one, as I thought his points needed to be dealt with.

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): I thank the Minister for her kind words and for wishing me well, as I am expecting my first child increasingly soon. It has been a pleasure to shadow her over the past couple of months—there have certainly been some mix-ups with our names. It is certainly one of the more interesting shadow relationships, as our names are so similar.

As this is the last Committee sitting I shall be attending, I want to put on the record some of my thoughts about the Bill. Given that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton intends to keep coming back to the Committee to pursue the Bill, I expect to be substituted in future sittings. The Government's efforts to sabotage the Bill by refusing to grant a money resolution defy the will of the House. That sends a clear message to Members of the House and to our constituents that the Tories care more about their own political advantage than about doing what is in the best interests of the country.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the Standing Order No. 24 debate on Monday, and on persevering in holding the Government to account. I share his concerns that the Government are trampling over parliamentary procedure and making a mockery of the private Member's Bill process. During that debate we witnessed a Government who were unable to put forward a single convincing argument to justify their undemocratic actions. The Leader of the House claimed time and again that

"it is for the Government of the day to initiate financial resolutions."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 595.]

That simply is not true. It is an established parliamentary convention that the Government bring forward money resolutions for private Members' Bills that have received a Second Reading, as this Bill has.

Until recently, the Government largely followed that convention. In 2013 the former Leader of the House, Andrew Lansley, told the Procedure Committee in evidence:

"To my knowledge, Government has provided the money resolutions...whenever we have been asked to do so."

The Procedure Committee's 2013 report therefore concluded:

"Government policy is not to refuse a money or ways and means resolution to a bill which has passed second reading."

The Speaker also made his position extremely clear by saying that the Government should bring forward a money resolution and impose some "logic and reasonableness" on the process.

Mr Harper: Mr Speaker can obviously speak for himself, but I listened carefully to his response to that point of order. He was clear that he was not expressing the view that the Government should bring forward a money resolution—indeed, he made it clear that that was entirely a matter for the Government. He said that he felt it would be helpful if the decision-making processes about whether they brought forward money resolutions had an element of "logic and reasonableness" to them, but he did not express an opinion himself.

Cat Smith: I will leave it to hon. Members to listen to what Mr Speaker said and make their own interpretation, as there are clearly multiple interpretations in the Committee. What is clear is that money resolutions have been brought forward for Bills that received their Second Reading later than this one, which strikes me as entirely unfair.

The Government have argued that their response to the Bill is about timing and that they intend to wait until the Boundary Commission produces its report for Parliament before progressing. They have taken a leisurely approach to considering the Bill, as it has already been five months since it received its Second Reading. I did not expect to have to leave the Committee to have a baby in the time that it has taken the Bill to progress through Parliament—in December I reasonably expected it to have passed by the time I needed to take some time away from the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton raised the issue of granting a money resolution with the Leader of the House in three consecutive business questions, on 3, 10 and 17 May. Numerous points of order have been raised too. In February, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee concluded that the House,

"should be given an early opportunity to debate the options for reform and to decide whether or not to continue the current boundary review",

and that the Bill provided the opportunity to do so. However, the Government chose to ignore the views and expertise of Back Benchers.

It is also completely disingenuous of the Government to claim that they are blocking the Bill for financial reasons. On Monday the Leader of the House told us that the Bill would,

"place a potential financial burden of £8 million on taxpayers."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 600.]

However, waiting for the Boundary Commission to publish its report in the autumn will waste even more money. I am more than confident that the Prime Minister did not consider the "potential financial burden" when she appointed a series of new peers last weekend, which will cost taxpayers more than £1 million a year. Ministers have referred on numerous occasions to the fact that continuing with the boundary review is a Conservative

[Cat Smith]

manifesto pledge. The manifesto also included commitments to repeal the fox hunting ban and to address the size of the House of Lords. Where did those commitments go?

The Conservative party seems to have completely forgotten that it is in a minority Government. A lot has changed since 2011, when the original Boundary Commission process started. We have had two general elections and the Brexit referendum and its consequences. This is a hung Parliament and the Government's mandate is completely different. For a minority Government to defy the will of the House in this way is deeply undemocratic.

The Government's motives are clear: this is not about principles, but electoral maths. This is not the first time the Conservative party has tried to rig our democratic process in its favour. There is the ongoing scandal of the Government refusing to vote and then refusing to act on Opposition day motions. They have stuffed the Standing Committees of this House with a majority of their Members, even though they are a minority Government. There is also the £1 billion that they gave to the Democratic Unionist party in order to get their legislation through. At the local government elections on 3 May, the Government piloted discriminatory ID requirements that denied hundreds of legitimate voters their democratic right to vote.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): The hon. Lady is not persuading me with the comments she is making on the Bill. Part of the Bill—about preserving 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland—was very attractive to me and to my party, but the accusatory claims and allegations that this is anti-democracy are really turning me off supporting the Bill.

9.45 am

Cat Smith: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman takes a look at the impact the Bill would have on the way our Parliament is made up. It strikes me that what the Government are doing is unquestionably about rigging the electoral system in favour of one party, instead of something that is balanced and reflects the view of the majority of the parties in this country.

Mr Harper: I did not try to intervene the first time the hon. Lady said it, but I do not think that having equal-sized constituencies can be described as rigging the system. It is a reasonable argument, and something that the Labour party is in favour of in principle—just not in practice.

Cat Smith: The right hon. Gentleman will be pleased to hear that I will come on to talk about the equalisation of constituencies. I think we will find that there is quite a lot of common agreement that there needs to be a Boundary Commission. The current state of constituencies in this country is not one I am defending. I am arguing for a Boundary Commission in order to have new boundaries, so that our constituencies can be more equally sized—something we would all like to see—but in a way that is fair and represents community ties.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I apologise, Chair, for being late; I have sprained my wrist. One of the issues about the size of constituencies is that one of the proposed constituencies under the new boundary review in Scotland would be the size of Cyprus. That is not practically possible. There is a wider point here, because when we lose all our Members of the European Parliament and Parliament takes back control, we will have fewer MPs to scrutinise all this legislation. Then, when they go back to their constituencies, they will have to try to get around by helicopter, given the size of the constituencies the Government are proposing.

Cat Smith: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I wish him a speedy recovery with his arm, which looks very painful.

I think we are all largely in agreement that the boundary review is needed; that is not something I am arguing against. Updating boundaries is a vital part of the functioning of our electoral system. However, it has to proceed in a way that benefits our democracy and not just one political party. The political case presented by the Government for reducing the number of MPs from 650 to 600 is completely flawed. The Hansard Society found no rationale for the Government's decision, noting that there was a "real concern" that the number had been,

"plucked from thin air—600 simply being a neat number."

Cutting 50 MPs also presents a "crisis of scrutiny", a concern raised by the Electoral Reform Society. The Government's current plan, to reduce the number of MPs in Parliament without reducing the number of Ministers, will only increase the power of the Executive. That will make it more difficult for Back Benchers to challenge the Government, which in turn will reduce Parliament's ability to hold the Government to account. As we are witnessing today, the Government fear challenge, loathe scrutiny and have no respect for Back Benchers.

The need for parliamentary scrutiny has never been greater as our nation prepares to leave the European Union. As the hon. Member for Glasgow East mentioned, to lose 50 MPs at the same time as taking back powers from Brussels risks leaving the UK Government struggling to keep up with the day-to-day requirements of legislation. In short, what seemed like a good idea in 2011 is very different in 2018, because so much has changed. As MPs' workload looks set to rise—

The Chair: Order. I remind the Committee that the question before us is whether we adjourn until next Wednesday. This is not a debate on the merits of the Bill or wider-ranging arguments.

Cat Smith: Thank you, Ms Dorries. I will bring my remarks to a close. I believe that this is my one opportunity to put on the record my thoughts on the Bill, so I thank the Committee for indulging me slightly, and I apologise for any offence that may have been caused to the Chair.

Although this is the last sitting that I will attend, I hope that the Committee will continue to meet, because this is an important Bill and many aspects of it are important to our democracy. I believe that Governments should be held to account and that the power of the Executive should not get so strong that Back Benchers have no power. I hope that the Government are listening

and that they will, at the earliest opportunity, table a money resolution to allow the Bill to progress. We can then argue about the merits of the Bill and debate its contents, and whoever takes my place on the Committee will be able to have the argument. The Committee has met time and again. I am sure that the Minister does not want to sit here every Wednesday morning, but I can assure her that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton will make sure that she is here every Wednesday until the money resolution is brought before the House.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op) *rose*—

The Chair: I remind the hon. Gentleman to remember the question before the Committee.

Alex Norris: Thank you, Ms Dorries. I will endeavour to stay within the parameters you have set. We would not be considering whether to adjourn if we had had a money resolution before Parliament following Second Reading. [*Interruption.*] We talked about this matter on Monday and it is in the context of whether we should adjourn. Arguments can be made about finance and the practicalities of having another boundary review, but the key point is that those things were known when we discussed this on Second Reading, because none of these things is new or revelatory—they have not been on the front pages of *The Sunday Times*, having been discovered by forensic journalists. These things were all known. The House divided and overwhelmingly chose to give the Bill a Second Reading on the reasonable

grounds that a money resolution would follow, in which case we would not be adjourning now. That is the first point.

Secondly, we asked for a money resolution, not support for a money resolution. We can divide again. We can have a replay. We won in the first match and we will have another go next week. I cannot say what the parliamentary maths is. I suspect that the Government know that more than I do, but we should let the House make the decision, in full knowledge of all the facts. That is why people send us here. They do not send us to come here at 9.30 to spend 20 minutes discussing whether to not have a meeting. Of course, that is a little bit silly, so I will conclude by saying that this comes with a stink.

The Government have lost the argument and so are now sticking us on the process, and I do not think that reflects well. It is in the same vein as losing votes in the other place and then creating more peers and being wary of losing votes in the Commons Chamber and then relying on secondary legislation. When hon. Members stay in their offices for this Opposition day debate, rather than contesting it, I hope that they think of the things slowly being whittled away from our Parliament and its functions. I know it is difficult to stay together even to get to the end of each week. There must come a point at which it is not worth it to keep trampling on our Parliament.

Question put and agreed to.

9.52 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 6 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Fifth Sitting

Wednesday 6 June 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 13 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 10 June 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 6 June 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin proceedings, I remind Members to turn their electronic devices to silent mode and not to drink tea or coffee during our sittings. If people wish to go outside and have a break, that is a matter for them.

As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank hon. Members for coming here on this lovely Wednesday morning. I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester, who is now Labour's Front-Bench lead on the Bill. I can only offer my apologies that our time will not be well spent as we are meeting just to adjourn: without a money resolution, we cannot discuss any part of the Bill.

I am determined not to let this rest, as MPs from all parties have made it clear that it is unacceptable that we have not yet had a money resolution. Parliamentary precedent and the will of the House dictate that we should be able to debate the Bill in Committee, and we have only a few weeks before the summer recess.

As the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee said in its report, the Government "cannot be confident" that the House of Commons will support the implementation of the boundary commissions' proposals when they come before us in the autumn. We all agree that we need new boundaries, and the Bill could be a real alternative to the boundary commissions' proposals—it would not mean resorting to current boundaries for a 2022 general election. However, if we are to have that, we need to get a move on.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. As you were not in the Chair for our previous sitting, you have the blessing of not having already heard what I am about to say. I want to respond to a couple of points made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. First, I cannot think of a better way to spend some time on a Wednesday morning than sitting in a Committee Room with such esteemed colleagues from both sides of the House. It is a great pleasure, and I look forward to doing so for many Wednesdays to come, even if it is only for a short time and not for as long as we would hope.

The Government have made their position clear, and it should not come as a surprise to the hon. Gentleman: they have not ruled out bringing forward a money

resolution, but they feel that the House should have the opportunity to consider the boundary commissions' reports, which are under way. I note what he said about the report from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin), but we should not prejudge the House's decision on the boundary commissions' reports. It is reasonable to wait for the House to see those reports—we have not seen them yet—and for it then to make a decision. We can then come back to this issue. That is a reasonable position, and the Committee may then be in a position to consider the significant detail of the Bill.

If the Labour party is really signed up to having more equal-sized constituencies, and boundaries drawn using electorates more recent than 18 years ago, on which current boundaries are based, it should not keep trying to put blockages in the way. The last time there was a boundary review, Labour worked with the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords to disrupt it and put it off for five years. I am afraid that it is difficult to see this as anything other than an attempt to do the same all over again. None the less, I look forward to seeing the boundary commissions' reports and the debate we will then have in the House. We can then come back to this issue.

As the Minister has said on numerous occasions, the Government will then be able to reflect on whether to bring forward a money resolution, and then we may be in a position to debate the Bill. I for one love talking about this subject, as the hon. Gentleman will know from studying *Hansard* when we took the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 through the House. We spent many happy hours on that on the Floor of the House and I look forward to the opportunity to do so again.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton for welcoming me to the Committee. I can inform the Committee that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) has commenced maternity leave. I have no further news than that but it is my great pleasure to substitute for her.

It is also a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, though it is also bitter sweet and rueful, because it seems to me that the pleasure will be denied. Proceedings here will be over all too soon, for no other reason than political manoeuvrings, because the Government have failed to recognise a democratic vote on Second Reading to allow the Bill to proceed to Committee stage. The House made a decision and we should respect that.

The Government have form in talking out private Members' Bills but I venture the possibility that this is the first time a private Member's Bill has been blocked by not being talked about. This is the first time for such a Bill not to be talked out but to be simply knocked into the long grass.

Mr Harper *rose*—

Christian Matheson: The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean is more experienced in the matter and I always love to hear his view.

Mr Harper: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to an example I gave at the previous sitting of the Committee when the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood was serving on the Front Bench. That was the private Member's Bill brought forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) on the European Union referendum, a measure that we now know commanded majority, albeit only a small majority, support in the country.

That Bill did not receive a money resolution, despite the fact that the Prime Minister of the day was in favour of one. There were all sorts of complicated coalition-related reasons for that. This is not the first time that a Bill has not made progress. The Leader of the House, gave several examples in the debate in the House. This is certainly not the first time and probably will not be the last.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for pointing me in the right direction on that. He talked about reasons within the coalition for not bringing forward a money resolution. I cannot see any reasons why a money resolution should not be brought forward now. At least we could make progress in Committee and then take the Bill back to the House for Report and Third Reading to see whether it still commands support.

I respectfully suggest to the Minister that this really is not a good look. It does not look as though the Government are engaging well in the democratic process. There may be reasons not to introduce a money resolution but the impression it gives is of stifling democracy and ignoring a decision made on the Floor of the House on Second Reading. I am reminded of Oscar Wilde's famous aphorism:

"There is only one thing in life worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."

That applies very much in the case of this Bill. It might be problematic for the Government to talk about the Bill but it will be even more problematic if they do not, because they will give the impression of running scared of a democratic decision that might not suit their political position.

The Minister's position seems to be to knock this into the long grass, to see if we can get to recess without a money resolution, and once the House returns after the summer recess, to see if we can get the debate that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean might have been referring to. That is the debate on the current boundary provisions, which we know are based on an out-of-date register lacking 2 million voters, thus distorting representation.

Mr Harper: It is the case that whenever a boundary review is set in train a line has to be drawn somewhere. I would make two points. First, the current boundary review uses electoral registers that are more up to date than existing constituencies, which are 18 years out of date. Secondly, analysis by Matt Singh of the Number Cruncher Politics website, which I have referred to in the House before, shows that the distribution of those 2 million voters across the country was broadly proportionate to the existing electorate. In other words, contrary to the impression the hon. Gentleman was trying to give, that would not have made a significant difference to the distribution of parliamentary constituencies.

Christian Matheson: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we need a boundary review, that the current constituencies are 18 years out of date—that is unacceptable—and that there is a size discrepancy that needs to be addressed. The problem is that when the current boundary review was launched, the Electoral Commission expressed the view that the current electoral registers were deficient. We asked for time to be given to update those registers. The Government did not provide that time, and sure enough, shortly afterwards, as the European referendum came along, those 2 million extra voters suddenly reappeared on the register.

We know that the registers, although they may be less than 18 years out of date, simply are not sufficiently up to date or fit for purpose for the task 18 months or two years ago, so what is going to happen now? It strikes me that the Minister's job is to knock the Bill into the long grass—to knock the ball away as often as she can between now and the summer recess, or between now and when the boundary review comes back. It is a bit like Geoffrey Boycott at the crease—I know you are a cricket lover, Mr Owen—knocking back every ball.

The Chair: Order. Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. I am indeed a sports lover, and I go by the rules. Under the rules of the Committee, we are debating a motion to adjourn rather than the clauses of the Bill. Will he therefore focus on the matter of adjourning the Committee until 13 June, rather than on the details of the Bill, which we are not allowed to discuss?

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful for your guidance, Mr Owen. My point is that the Minister seems to wish to seek an adjournment now and at future sittings in order to knock back, in Boycott fashion, consideration of the detail of the Bill.

I am reminded of my old mate Michael Atherton and his famous 185 not out to save the test in Johannesburg. The rest of the England batting order collapsed, but Mike managed to save the day. I say to the Minister, however, that that test was not won. Mike Atherton did not succeed in winning the test; he managed only to stave off a decision until the next match. My advice to her, therefore, is that consideration of the Bill may be delayed, but the day of reckoning will come. It would be better for her and for the Government's reputation if they allowed us to get round to discussing the detail of the Bill, rather than giving the impression that the Bill is not worth discussing, for political reasons as opposed to anything in it.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): What a pleasure it is to be back in the political purgatory that is the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill Committee. I am disappointed that the other Chair, the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Ms Dorries), is not here, because we could have called it, "I'm in a Public Bill Committee... Get Me Out of Here!" We seem to meet fairly regularly to consider at length the Bill, which the House passed on Second Reading, but of course is being stonewalled in Committee by the Government.

I warmly welcome the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for City of Chester. I am sure that we all wish the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood a very

[David Linden]

safe delivery of her baby. I myself—well, for reasons of biology, clearly I am not expecting a baby, but my wife is expecting one in the autumn. At this rate, I wonder whether we will have a money resolution by then. It seems bizarre that we may go for nine months before we get one. The Bill received its Second Reading last year, and since then a number of Bills that were behind this one in the queue have been expedited, in the sense of having been given money resolutions.

9.45 am

Alarming, not that long ago the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill, which I believe was 92nd in the queue of private Members' Bills, received its money resolution. That Bill was brought forward by the hon. Member for Wellingborough. It seems somewhat bizarre that the Government spend huge amounts of time saying, "We need to be careful about committing public money and bringing forward money resolutions." Surprisingly, I think I was the only Member other than the hon. Gentleman and the Minister to speak in the debate about that resolution. Sometimes the Government say that money resolutions are very important, yet in the case of the Health and Social Care (National Data Guardian) Bill, the money resolution passed in 13 minutes. There seems to be a case of having a cake and eating it here.

I am approaching one year in this House. As one pulls together an annual report and reflects on the first year, people start to ask questions about what has been done. It is embarrassing to say that I came along to this charade on a Wednesday morning to debate a Bill that cannot be debated, and to get to debate a sittings motion. Probably the only thing I can do is stand up and go through my diary and say we could probably meet a bit sooner than next Wednesday.

I am reminded of some of the work I have been doing with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. I had the great honour and privilege of going to Tunisia after the Arab spring as part of a delegation about capacity building there. During that time, I felt I had to stand up

and apologise for that title of "Westminster Foundation for Democracy", because this is a place of limited democracy. We see that today when we have a Bill in front of us that we cannot debate and cannot even consider clause by clause.

I remember the hope in the faces of those young Arab women in Tunisia that democracy was coming. They would say, "You are from the Mother of all Parliaments. Tell us about this great democracy." It was quite embarrassing to tell them that we are the only country other than Lesotho that has hereditary chieftains and the only country other than Iran that has unelected clerics legislating.

The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean talks about boundaries that are 18 years out of date. I do not hear him talk about a private Member's Bill system that is decades upon decades out of date and that is inherently unfair to Back Benchers who want to introduce legislation. The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton brought forward legislation that commanded the support of the House of Commons on Second Reading. We see an arrogant Government blocking that by the most dishonourable means.

As the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean has said, we will come here for many Wednesdays but we are probably reaching a particular point. The elephant in the room is the lack of Democratic Unionist party attendance. We all know that that party holds the key here. They are probably just awaiting the right point to cave in on the Government and I suspect that this Bill might be part of that.

We can come here for Wednesday upon Wednesday. The hon. Member for City of Chester is right. There will come a day of reckoning. I look forward to that day but until then I am happy to stand up and make speeches. However, I do not think that is a great use of my time. This is probably the most embarrassing job I have been asked to do in my first year in this place.

Question put and agreed to.

9.48 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 13 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Sixth Sitting

Wednesday 13 June 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 20 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 17 June 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 13 June 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I have the usual announcements. Anyone who wants to may take off their jacket. Tea and coffee are not allowed. Please switch your phones to silent mode. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to move a money resolution, we cannot discuss the Bill, so I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank all hon. Members for attending this Committee sitting of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. Once again, I must express my extreme frustration at the Government for their refusal to follow basic parliamentary procedures and bring forward a money resolution. For all the talk of concern for parliamentary sovereignty, the Government have shown profound disrespect for the parliamentary process. This is an embarrassment to the UK Government, and their refusal to provide a sensible rationale for their actions shows that their aim in this matter is clearly undemocratic.

I want to make something clear: I disagree firmly with many Conservative policies, but have absolutely no hard feelings towards the Conservative electorate or their parliamentary representatives. I know from public debates and private conversations that the Bill has support from various Conservative Members of Parliament. The Second Reading of the Bill was passed unanimously, which is clear evidence of the broadly based support for sensible electoral updates. The issue is with the Executive and the blatantly undemocratic actions that they have taken.

I wish to have those critical discussions of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. That should be what we are here to do. However, we cannot engage in the discussions until the Government have complied with the basic parliamentary conventions. The Bill has received a Second Reading and requires a money resolution for its further progress.

I am not sympathetic to claims of financial irresponsibility. The Bill is designed to address widely held concerns about the make-up of our parliamentary democracy. Ideally, the Bill would be unnecessary, but unfortunately the previous Boundary Commission set out instructions that do not command support from the House. That said, if the House of Commons deems that the Bill would be an improper use of funds, that would be a valid result, but the Government have refused to table a money resolution and let Members exercise their judgment, as is their duty.

I hope that the Government will respect the will of the people of the UK and respect the parliamentary process, which they claim to hold dear. I will continue to press, through every avenue available to me, for progress

on this matter. I thank everyone for their attention, although I must apologise that these important sittings have become a routine drain on parliamentary time and resources. I thank everyone again for their time. I hope to see everyone next week and that we will have the opportunity to make better use of our privilege to represent the people of the UK.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): What a pleasure it is to be back for the sixth episode of “I’m in a Public Bill Committee...Get Me Out of Here!” Once again, we come here for the charade that we are here to scrutinise legislation—legislation that was passed democratically on the Floor of the House of Commons last year. I have now passed my first-year anniversary in this place, and with every week that goes by, something new comes up to present me with the idea that Westminster is a place of limited democracy. Last night, we met for a whole 19 minutes to debate and scrutinise crucial amendments about devolution. That was one minute longer than the sitting of this Committee last week, when we sat for a whole 18 minutes to scrutinise the Bill. Of course, the absolute nonsense that—

The Chair: Order. Please keep to the motion, Mr Linden.

David Linden: Absolutely, Ms Dorries; thank you for your reminder to do that. I was reminded that Parliament is taking back control by leaving the European Union and that we will have all this parliamentary sovereignty. It led me to wonder what will happen if the Bill does not pass. The number of MPs will be reduced by 50, which will mean fewer MPs to scrutinise Government legislation.

However, I also remembered that there are people in the other House who will be able to hold the Government to account. They are the Bishop of Birmingham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Carlisle, the Bishop of Chelmsford, the Bishop of Chester, the Bishop of Chichester, the Bishop of Coventry, the Bishop of Derby, the Bishop of Durham, the Bishop of Ely, the Bishop of Leeds, the Bishop of Lincoln, the Bishop of Norwich, the Bishop of Oxford, the Bishop of Peterborough, the Bishop of Portsmouth—this looks very much like a stag do with the amount of guys here—the Bishop of Rochester, the Bishop of St Albans, the Bishop of Salisbury, the Bishop of Southwark, the Bishop of Winchester, the Bishop of Worcester, the Archbishop of York, the Bishop of Gloucester and the Bishop of Newcastle.

There is also Lord Agnew of Oulton, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Lord Arbuthnot of Edrom, the Earl of Arran, Lord Ashton of Hyde, Viscount Astor, Lord Astor of Hever, Earl Atlee, Lord Baker of Dorking, Lord Balfe, Lord Bamford, Lord Barker of Battle—

The Chair: Order. It is not appropriate to read from a list in Committee.

David Linden: But these are fine legislators.

The Chair: Please make a substantive contribution. Reading from a list is not allowed.

David Linden: This is not a list. These are some of our fantastic legislators. I could read it in a different order, not necessarily from a list; I could take names at random.

There is a whole 800 or 900 of them—the House of Lords is practically the size of the National People’s Congress in China.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): GCSE maths. This is not about—

David Linden: At least we have heard something from the Minister. I feel gratified that I have managed to move the Minister to say something in Committee after her coming here week after week.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Lord Bishop of Chester. Is he aware that I was with the bishop on Sunday afternoon to open to the new community centre at St Mary’s church in Handbridge in Chester?

David Linden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. Perhaps he might be able to tell us what happened that day and what the bishop said to him?

Christian Matheson: It was a fantastic occasion on which the community came together to dedicate the new church building, which will serve large parts of the community in Handbridge and the southern part of the city of Chester.

David Linden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for enlightening us about that.

The Chair: Mr Linden, as this is now a matter of public record, could you let me know whether those names on the list you are reading from support the Bill.

David Linden: That is a good question. Unfortunately, as a Member of the House of Commons, I have no opportunity to scrutinise lords, because they are, of course, unelected.

Christian Matheson: I suggest to my good friend the hon. Gentleman that we will not know whether their lordships support the Bill until it reaches them. A great way to test that would be for the Bill to complete its passage in this place and to move on to the other place, so that their lordships can have their say.

David Linden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that powerful intervention. He reminds us that, until such a time that the Government have the balls to bring forward a money resolution and allow the Bill to be considered clause by clause, line by line by the Committee, we will not have the opportunity to send it to our comrades in ermine along the corridor for them to scrutinise. It may well be, as the hon. Gentleman said—

The Chair: Order. Are you aware that the motion that we are discussing today is to adjourn?

David Linden: I am. I have seen that motion, I think, five times now, because I have been here for about five weeks in a row. I am very familiar with it.

The Chair: Then perhaps you could explain why you are giving the speech that you are, because it is not to the motion.

David Linden: Because the motion itself, and the proceedings of the Committee, are an absolute charade.

Christian Matheson: What a great pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I will again make the announcement that I made to the Committee last week, which is that I have taken the place of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), who I am very pleased to say is on maternity leave. I am sure that Committee members continue to send her and her husband all the best.

I will not make such a long speech as my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East, but I express my regret that we are in the same position as we have been in for the last five weeks. I have not, of course; I am only a fairly new addition to the Committee so I have not had to go through the proceedings and processes quite as tortuously, but it is a matter of regret that we are not able to debate the Bill in detail, because the Government still refuse to bring forward a money resolution. Indeed, there seems to be a distinct lack of interest on the Government Benches in the Committee. However, it is good to see the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean in his place. I understand he has been an assiduous attender, and I respect that. It is good to see him here taking the Bill seriously.

I do not want to detain the Committee too long on a fruitless exercise. I simply want to ask the Minister whether she will take back—or has already taken back—to ministerial colleagues a sense of Members’ frustration at the lack of progress. Will she explain that after a clear decision on Second Reading there is, certainly among the Opposition, anxiety, disappointment and—dare I say it—something approaching anger? There is a sense of a certain contempt in the way the Bill is not being dealt with.

I respect the Minister for taking one for the team in this respect: she has to go through the process, and this is not about the hon. Lady herself. She is very well thought of. It is about the Government as a whole not taking their responsibility to the House seriously. I ask the Minister to take back to her colleagues the idea that they cannot keep kicking the matter into the long grass forever, and that at some point the Bill will have to be debated.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is good to see you in the Chair this week, Ms Dorries. I shall keep my remarks brief and, I hope, orderly.

I want to correct a factual point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. He said that the House of Commons did not support the instructions given to the boundary commissions for the current review. He is shaking his head, but I think that that is what he said. The House of Commons of course agreed the detailed rules setting out the current boundary review. I think it is important to acknowledge that.

Afzal Khan: What I was trying to say was that the current situation is that there is not support.

Mr Harper: The point is it should not be a surprise to the hon. Gentleman that the Committee cannot make progress on the Bill and that there is a motion to adjourn, because as the Minister explained in an earlier sitting—and I have said on a number of occasions—the Government position is clear. There is a boundary review under way. Under the relevant legislation the boundary commissions must produce reports for this Parliament between September and October. The Government have said that they want the Boundary Commission to be able to complete its work, which it has undertaken at considerable public expense.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): I have heard that point made a number of times by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members. Does he accept that it is a good argument for not supporting a money resolution, but not for not tabling one?

Mr Harper: I think it is a good argument for not proceeding with the Bill at this point. The Government have made it clear that they do not want to proceed with it at this point. They will keep the matter open and both the Minister in Committee and the Leader of the House in the Chamber have made it clear that when the boundary commissions have brought forward their reports and Parliament has had a chance to consider them the Government will reflect on the position and make a decision on whether to bring forward a money resolution.

I think that that is a sensible position. Having listened carefully to what the Minister and the Leader of the House have said previously, I think that it will not change. I will continue to attend the Committee—and I acknowledge what the hon. Member for City of Chester said about that—so that we can debate the motion to adjourn. If at some point we debate the Bill in detail, I look forward to doing that, since it will amend the legislation that I had the pleasure of taking through the House when I was a Minister.

Afzal Khan: I do not understand what we lose if Parliament has a choice. It is clear that even if we were debating the Bill it would not pass tomorrow—there is a long process. If we have the review and the Bill as well, Members will have a choice.

9.45 am

Mr Harper: It is about making a decision. The Government have made a decision that it is sensible to allow the boundary commissions to complete a review, which they have almost done, at considerable public expense. They have consulted not just Members of Parliament and political parties but thousands of members of the public, who have looked at the initial drafts. They listened, responded to that and have made amendments. The Government wish that process, which has taken place at considerable public expense, to conclude before they reflect on whether it is sensible to proceed with the hon. Gentleman's Bill.

That is a perfectly sensible decision. I accept that he and his hon. Friends do not agree with that, but it is perfectly rational and defensible. That is why we have the motion to adjourn before us, and I think we will have such motions for considerable weeks until the boundary commissions have had a chance to report. It is a perfectly sensible decision, set out clearly by the Minister at earlier stages of the Committee.

David Linden: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Harper: No, I will conclude my remarks. Thank you for your indulgence, Ms Dorries.

Question put and agreed to.

9.46 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 20 June 2018 at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Seventh Sitting

Wednesday 20 June 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 20 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 24 June 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 20 June 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: I remind members of the Committee that electronic devices should be switched to silent and there should be no hot drinks in the Committee Room during sittings.

As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank everyone for being here once again. We were all reunited yesterday, albeit in the Chamber rather than in our usual Committee Room. I was disappointed with the result of the motion we debated yesterday, but I will continue to do whatever I can to push the Bill forward. It was very disappointing that the Government would not allow us to make any progress in today's Committee.

We are now somewhat used to the back and forth of these debates. The Government continue to make the argument about the sovereignty of the Crown and the separation of powers. There seems to be some overreaction to what is being proposed. We do not want to rob the Government of their control over the country's finances or to overturn centuries of parliamentary conventions and the separation of powers. We just want to make some progress on the Bill.

The Government argued that, since we are in this position, we may as well wait for the Boundary Commission to report in the autumn. May I remind members that my Bill was passed on Second Reading unanimously on 1 December, and that was 201 days ago? To now say that we may as well wait until the autumn reveals that the Government never intended to follow proper procedure and allow us to consider the Bill in good time. They have delayed until the point at which they can say, "We may as well wait."

As much as we all enjoy meeting on a Wednesday morning, I did not come to Parliament, and my constituents did not elect me, to discuss procedure. I am here to pass legislation. I believe that my Bill is necessary and is worth considering in line-by-line detail, which would allow us to work through any amendments hon. Members might propose. Boundary changes are a fundamental part of our democracy and it is worth considering them carefully. Unfortunately, we are again discussing only an adjournment motion. The Government have decided not even to table a money resolution. Time is running out for us to work on a viable alternative to an inevitable defeat on the boundary changes in the autumn.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I want to put a few remarks on the record on the motion to adjourn because things have changed a little bit from the last time the Committee met. On previous occasions, the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has referred to the decision the House took to pass his Bill on Second Reading. This is and remains entirely true.

The difference today is that the House was explicitly asked a question yesterday about the proceedings in this Committee. The House was asked whether this Committee should have leave to consider the Bill, notwithstanding Standing Orders about money resolutions. Parliament, or rather the House of Commons, explicitly decided that we should not make any progress until there is a money resolution. Following the hon. Gentleman's logic about obeying the wishes of the House of Commons on making progress, as his Bill was passed on Second Reading, I would say that the House has been explicitly asked whether we should make progress, ahead of a money resolution being granted, and the House has said, no, we should not. We had a very wide-ranging debate yesterday and a clear decision was taken.

The hon. Gentleman also alluded to what I said yesterday about the timing of the Boundary Commission report. I presume the other commissions have written to Members in other parts of the country; the Boundary Commission for England has certainly written to hon. Members representing English seats and has pointed out that it will report just before we come back in September. Of course, to anyone outside who is listening to or reading our proceedings, that might seem like a long way in the future, but it is only four full sitting weeks until we are able to consider those reports.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I have experience of the Boundary Commission for Scotland; there is a particular estate in my constituency and the commission was considering changing the boundaries. The problem that I found in that case was that the Boundary Commission for Scotland reported and the Government took a certain amount of time to consider that report.

Is there not a danger here that, although the right hon. Gentleman is technically right that in four sitting weeks the Boundary Commission could publish its findings, we are probably at the mercy of the Government's introducing some sort of resolution to the House that Members can vote down? Forgive me, but I am not necessarily sure that I would trust the Government to bring forward such a resolution timeously.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman makes the perfectly fair point that bringing forward the Orders in Council, and scheduling the debate and the vote on those, are obviously matters for business managers—both Government and Opposition business managers, working in conjunction and having conversations with each other. That is entirely true.

However, I think I am right—I may be wrong, but I think I am right—in saying that there is a legislative weight on Ministers, in the sense that the boundary commissions have to report between the beginning of September and the beginning of October. I think I am also right in saying that the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 puts a weight on Ministers to bring forward the Orders in Council as soon as is

practically possible. Ministers cannot just delay matters forever; there is actually an injunction to move with reasonable pace, allowing for some level of consideration.

Obviously I do not speak for the Government but my sense is that the Government would want to move reasonably quickly, so that we knew what sort of position we will be in. Also, it follows from what Ministers have said already, and the Leader of the House explicitly confirmed yesterday, that the Government are not trying to kill the Bill, but they want the House to have the opportunity to reflect on the boundary commissioners' reports and, as I have said, to debate the Orders in Council. Then we can reflect and take further steps.

It is implicit in that process that the Orders in Council need to be introduced to give the House a chance to consider and debate them while there is still enough of the Session left so that if it was considered appropriate to grant the money resolution and proceed with consideration of the Bill, there would be enough time to see that process through. Effectively, that gives a window of opportunity, which Ministers will obviously reflect on when they make their decisions.

Afzal Khan: This private Member's Bill does not try in any way to stop the review. All it is trying to do is allow a parallel—an alternative—because many of us in the House feel that the review is dead in the water and will not get anywhere. It is also important that we have an alternative because we cannot carry on having elections for another 18 or 20 years based on the figures that we had before. It would help the House overall and help democracy to move forward in this way.

Mr Harper: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, which is perfectly sensible. I just do not agree with matters being conducted "in parallel", for two reasons. First, if we are going to debate the Bill, we should find out the House's view of the boundary proposals. Although he asserts, as he did yesterday, that he knows what the answer is, in my experience—as a Back Bencher, a Minister and Government Chief Whip—it is always quite useful to test the opinion of the House through a Division rather than just assuming what the answer will be, because sometimes the answer will be a pleasant surprise and sometimes it will not be such a pleasant surprise. We should not assume that we know what the answer will be.

Secondly, if the Government are not successful in getting those Orders in Council through, the debate on the Bill would be better informed by the Government's having listened to the concerns that Members express in the debate on the Orders in Council.

I know that it would be a slight tragedy, because I would effectively be arguing for not continuing to debate things in this Committee, but given that the boundary legislation is constitutional in nature and by definition affects every single Member of Parliament, there would be a case, were we to make progress with the Bill at some point, for the debate on it not to take place in Committee. Committee stage should take place on the Floor of the House, as it did for the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill. That is generally what happens to constitutional legislation: all stages are taken on the Floor of the House.

That is another reason why it is better to wait for the House to have the opportunity to consider the boundary proposals. If the Government do not get those proposals

through and want to make progress on the Bill, using it as a vehicle, it would be better if time were found for all its stages to be debated on the Floor of the House because of the nature of the subject matter. Realistically, we cannot do that when we do not know the outcome of the boundary commissions' proposals.

For all those reasons, it is right for the Committee to adjourn. We shall know what the boundary commission reports are in four sitting weeks, and the Government will then reflect on them—I hope, reasonably quickly—before they come up with the Orders in Council. That is why it is right for the Committee to adjourn, so I hope that we agree that motion.

David Linden: It is a pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and to see you back in the Chair.

I shall be brief, because we have had quite a lot of debate this week. It has been a pleasure to spend Monday, Tuesday and today with the Minister and the shadow Minister. It is apparent to me that one of the most pressing and gripping issues is parliamentary and constitutional reform, but perhaps that view is not shared by the wider public.

It is also a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. I was intrigued by what he said about how yesterday the House of Commons made clear its view. If that is indeed the case, perhaps something new is happening: the right hon. Gentleman and the Government are now taking part in Opposition day votes. If they are saying that when the House of Commons votes on an Opposition day, the result should be taken note of, I look forward to future votes on the Women Against State Pension Inequality Campaign and many other issues. So when the House sends a very clear signal, the Government will listen to that.

Mr Harper: It is very clear. Certain motions passed by the House are binding, and motions such as yesterday's, which was to direct the business of the House, are binding, so the vote yesterday was binding. However, some of the other motions that the hon. Gentleman is talking about are not binding, so to do what he suggests would require primary legislation.

David Linden: I have a lot of respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but that is probably just parliamentary gymnastics in action. When the House of Commons divides and the opinion of the 650 or so Members, who are sent here to represent their constituents, is tested, the Government cannot say, "On these particular votes the House of Commons' voice can be heard and somehow respected, but those other votes are a bit inconvenient for us, because we don't have the numbers, so we'll just ignore them." The Government were getting into a difficult position on Opposition day votes and when Government Members take part.

Yesterday, there was some debate about whether the Bill was being killed. I would probably have taken that view, but the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean and indeed the Minister have said no, the Government are not killing the Bill in Committee. They might not be killing the Bill, but it does feel as if it is in Guantanamo Bay at the moment—being held for numerous days without trial. We have not had the opportunity to put the Bill on trial, to scrutinise it line by line.

[David Linden]

My final observation this morning is about something I found very telling last night. When the House divides, it is very unusual for Democratic Unionist party Members not to take part in a vote, and it is curious that, in the five, six or seven sittings of the Committee, the hon. Member for North Antrim has not always been present—he is a larger than life character, so if he is in the room, we tend to notice him. Yesterday I found the comments of the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Nigel Dodds) and the fact that Democratic Unionist party Members chose to abstain very interesting. It is fairly well known that the DUP is not united at the moment on the whole issue of reform of parliamentary constituencies.

I am happy to sit in Committee every Wednesday morning, but yesterday's debate in the House was interesting. Comments such as those of the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) show the direction of travel in the House. He did a very good job of being both a Government loyalist and a rebel—the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, as a former Chief Whip, is aware of how such speeches are made. He said that he was not happy about how the terms of yesterday's motion were framed, and he would therefore go into the Lobby to support the Government. However, he made it absolutely clear that he does not support the reduction of 650 seats to 600.

We can come here and continue to have these debates, but it was clear yesterday that the direction of travel is that the democratically elected House of Commons does not support the number of seats being reduced from 650 to 600. I think we will find that out very clearly when the will of the House is tested on it.

9.45 am

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen. I will follow on from my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East, because the same thought had occurred to me about yesterday's debate.

The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean talks about the will of the House of Commons being expressed yesterday, but the Government have form in this area. Every other Opposition motion in this Parliament has been ignored. That gives the Government a way out,

because they could ignore the vote on yesterday's Opposition day motion and proceed to table a money resolution for the Bill. That would be entirely consistent with their actions during the rest of this Parliament, unless of course, as my very good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East suggests, they want to start taking note of votes in the House of Commons—even those in which Government Members do not bother to take part. We could start by taking the Commons and the votes seriously. I would happily take yesterday's vote more seriously if there were consistency from the Government.

I want to talk about the character of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, who has shown a certain resilience throughout the process. He and I have been friends outside this place for 15 to 20 years. We come from the same region. As far as I know, he came to this country with his parents as a young child, with very little in his pockets. He served as a police officer, studied law in his own time, built up his own successful law practice, was elected to Manchester City Council, became the first Asian lord mayor of Greater Manchester, by which time I had known him for several years, and was elected to the European Parliament.

This is not a gentleman who gives up easily and throws in the towel when faced with adversity. If the Government are looking for somebody who will simply give up on the process because they are stonewalling, I suggest they have the wrong Afzal Khan. They will have to go outside and find another Afzal Khan, who would give up earlier. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his resilience and determination, which is the hallmark of the man I have known for many years.

We can keep playing a straight bat, but straight bats can be played at both ends of the wicket, and a devastating pace attack can be played at one end of the wicket as well. I urge the Minister to keep the bat up, but every innings must come to an end. At some point, this matter will be considered by the House, because I know that my hon. Friend will not give in. With that, for this week at least—looking forward with anticipation to next week—I will resume my seat.

Question put and agreed to.

9.48 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 27 June at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Eighth Sitting

Wednesday 27 June 2018

CONTENTS

Motions to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 4 July at half-past Nine o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 1 July 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 27 June 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin the sitting, I will make the usual announcements: Members who want to take of their jackets, please do; switch off mobile phones; there can be no tea or coffee. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I thank Members and the Clerk for attending this sitting of the Committee on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill. Regrettably there is nothing new to report on its progress. I continue to be inspired by my colleagues' devotion to it and to the larger parliamentary process. In a representative democracy there is nothing more important than to ensure that electoral processes are free and fair.

It is acknowledged on all sides that electoral boundary reform is long overdue, although we disagree about how that must be addressed. I acknowledge the arguments that have been put forward by those who are stalling on a money resolution. First, they argue that a boundary review is going on, and we should allow the process to finish uninterrupted. The argument, in that line of thinking, is that we would endlessly spend money on another boundary review. Secondly, it is argued that according to the separation of powers, tabling a money resolution is the prerogative of the Crown. I do not want to add much on that point. Many of my colleagues have provided sound arguments against it, supported by historical evidence.

It is clear that the Government's refusal to table a money resolution is at best misguided and at worst a disturbing trend towards the obstruction of the parliamentary conventions on which our democracy depends. Will the Minister confirm that the lack of a money resolution is a response to financial concerns? Does she agree that the convention holds that soon after a Bill passes Second Reading the Government table a money resolution?

In relation to the first point that is argued, we all know that there is a boundary review going on, but it is also true that instructions were given to reduce the size of the House of Commons from 650 to 600 Members. That measure has far from unanimous support. The final boundary proposals have not been released, but they are in serious danger of being rejected on those grounds alone. No one can predict the future, but there is a consensus that the boundary review is unlikely to pass. As the Select Committee on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs said in its report, the

Government "cannot be confident" that the House of Commons will approve the suggested changes. Will the Minister clarify whether she agrees about that?

Last week the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean made the point that the Boundary Commission report is only a few weeks away. I welcome that, because it means that now is possibly the best time to go forward with the Bill. The final boundary proposals are due soon. If the House votes for them, the money that the Government are reluctant to commit will not be spent. If it rejects them we have contingency plans to put in motion, but if the money resolution delay continues we shall be unprepared for a rejection of the final boundary proposals, and new boundaries will unnecessarily be delayed further.

That data that our current boundaries are built on is 18 years old—old enough to vote, if it could. We need to prepare responsibly for the vote on the Boundary Commission recommendations and begin line-by-line analysis of the Bill. The facts are clear: the electoral boundaries need to be updated. There is a serious danger that the current boundary review recommendations will be voted down. The Bill is a serious attempt at cross-party compromise and it has received a unanimous Second Reading. If we act responsibly we will move forward with the Bill, to ensure that the people of the UK are represented fairly.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries. I have a few remarks on the motion to adjourn, picking up on the comments made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, whose Bill it is.

First, we have an update on where we were last week, because there are now only three full sitting weeks until the Boundary Commission's report. I agree that there is not consensus or 100% unanimity about Parliament's decision a number of years ago to reduce the size of the House—of course not. It was a hard-fought battle to get it through, but the House agreed to it, as did the House of Lords. It is an Act of Parliament; it is the law. Rather than anticipating what decision the House might make when faced with the Orders in Council suggesting that we implement the reports of the boundary commissions—whose final versions we have not yet seen—we should wait for that decision.

As I said last week, in answer to a point from the hon. Member for Glasgow East, who unusually is not in his place today, there is an injunction on Ministers in the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011, and in the amended legislation on parliamentary boundaries, to bring forward the proposals as soon as is reasonably practicable after the boundary commissions have reported. I do not think that Ministers can just not do anything for ages. We will get a reasonably early chance to make a decision.

The reason that I do not think we should act in parallel—as I also said last week—is that the Bill makes some significant proposals about changing the size of the House, the frequency of boundary reviews going from five to 10 years and the amount of flex in the size of the seat. We will want to debate those issues having listened to the debate on the Boundary Commission's proposals. They will be debated on the Floor of the House, so all Members will get the opportunity to discuss them, and I think that that is what we want.

My final point was also made last week—forgive me for repeating it, Ms Dorries. There is a strong case for saying that if the House were to reject the Boundary Commission's proposals, and therefore the Government wanted to give Parliament an opportunity to look at an alternative strategy, the Government should find time to consider the Bill in all its stages, including Committee, on the Floor of the House. It is a constitutional Bill. All stages of the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 were debated on the Floor of the House. I would argue that it is not right to debate changes that significantly affect Parliament in Committee, with relatively few Members present, so that all Members could debate them only on Report. The Government cannot make the decision about finding time on the Floor of the House until we know the position with the boundaries.

For all those reasons, I think the Government's position is sensible. They have made it clear that they are not trying to kill the Bill: they want to hold it in suspended animation—or whatever other phrase we might choose—until the House has had a chance to consider the Boundary Commission's report. I think that is a sensible way forward. I recognise why the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is frustrated by it, but the period of his frustration is shrinking as time passes; we do not have many sitting weeks until the Boundary Commission's report. I hope that the current approach will eventually meet with his approval.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries. It is always worth restating what a great pleasure it is to follow the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who, week after week, makes considered and relevant comments about the nature of the Bill. We appreciate that he is taking the issue seriously even if we do not necessarily agree with the comments that he is making.

The right hon. Gentleman points out that we have only three sitting weeks left before the recess, and that after the recess the Order in Council is likely to be laid. That is a good reason to crack on with the Bill now and give it detailed consideration in Committee, as it cannot possibly complete its parliamentary passage through both Houses within those three weeks. We could, however, carry on with the detailed consideration of the Bill and get on with the stages that we are able to, before the Order in Council is laid. If the decision is taken not to accept the Boundary Commission's proposals, we would have something waiting in the wings and we could crack on quickly. I remind the Committee that no one—certainly no one in the Opposition and, if I may be so bold as to speak for them, no one on the Conservative Benches either—denies that we need a review of boundaries.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he said in his opening remarks.

I would just add, and I say this gently because I accept that he was not responsible, that the Labour party—including the hon. Gentleman and the Bill's promoter—has now accepted that we need to update the boundaries. That would be a bit more credible if it had not kiboshed the last boundary review that was supposed to have been completed in 2013. We should have done it by now and had it in place for the 2015 election. It was, of course, the Labour party and the

Liberal Democrats who kind of did a slightly dirty deal in the House of Lords, and then in the House of Commons, to kibosh the last review. So his protestations about wanting a rapid conclusion would be a bit more credible if his party had not done that in the past.

Christian Matheson: I cannot perceive that any deal with the Liberal Democrats is ever dirty, but I would take advice from the Conservative party on that matter.

That review was kiboshed—I was not in the House at the time—because it continued with the notion of reducing the number of constituencies from 650 to 600, which does not enjoy Opposition support, particularly at a time when other constitutional changes mean that we need to maintain the strength of the House. We are where we are.

In his speech, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, talked about a “disturbing trend towards the obstruction of the parliamentary conventions on which our democracy depends.” I know the Minister personally and I do not believe that is her intention. It may be the intention of Ministers elsewhere in Government, but I do not believe it to be hers, although she represents the whole of Government in this Committee. I hope she will respond to some of the questions that have been raised.

I would like to consider the position of the Minister at the moment. It is a rather tricky role that she has been asked to play. I could not help but notice that another member of the Committee is not in his place today—the hon. and gallant Member for Beckenham. He is very well thought of in my constituency because of his service in and leadership of the Cheshire Regiment. I do not know if hon. Members have ever been on battlefield tours with him, but they are well known and one of his battlefield tours is of the D-day landings. I recall the D-day landings on the night of 5-6 June 1944. The Orne river bridge and the canal on the eastern flank—

The Chair: Order. Mr Matheson, this is going dangerously off-track.

Christian Matheson: There is method in my madness, Ms Dorries, if you would just bear with me.

The 2nd Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry—the Ox and Bucks—under the command of Major Howard, were tasked with securing the flank and the bridge, now known as the Pegasus bridge, over the canal. Major Howard was given the rather open-ended commission to “hold until relieved”—to hold the bridge and flank until relieved—by Brigadier Lord Lovat. That was one of the key engagements, using the glider force from the Air Assault Brigade for the first time to maintain the eastern flank despite fierce counter-attacks from the Germans throughout the night. Lovat did indeed eventually relieve Howard.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I finally understand where the analogy is going, but does that make the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues the Germans?

Christian Matheson: I would like to think that we are all on the same side in this Committee and all want the finest parliamentary representation possible. What it

[*Christian Matheson*]

does mean is that we have finally managed to get the Minister to contribute to the Committee, which is fantastic. “Hold until relieved” was Major Howard’s injunction and that has been the rather open-ended injunction that the Minister’s colleagues have given her.

There is a potential ending: the appearance of Lord Lovat and the commando brigade coming from Sword beach, in the guise proposed by the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. If the Minister can hold for three more weeks, perhaps we will get to the place she is going, but hold until relieved, when we are talking about parliamentary democracy, is not the ideal scenario. I pay tribute to the Minister for her resilience in all this, but it would be nice if she could respond to some of the questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has posed.

9.45 am

Mr Harper: I am extremely grateful, Ms Dorries, that you bore with the hon. Member for City of Chester, because that was a quite entertaining story. We would have been very disappointed if you had cut him off before we saw where it was going. Although I have never served in uniform, the comparison the hon. Gentleman just made is one of the most complimentary that anyone has ever made about me in the House, for which I am grateful.

Christian Matheson: The right hon. Gentleman deserves it. I go back to my previous point—he has enhanced his personal reputation in this matter. Thank you for bearing with me, Ms Dorries. Open-ended commissions and instructions are not always helpful. At some point, we need to get to a conclusion in this matter. Simply knocking it into the long grass is not the way forward for parliamentary democracy. Debate is always better than closing down debate. With that, for one more week, I resume my seat.

Chloe Smith: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. Out of personal courtesy to the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, I rise to state that there is no more I can or will add to what has already been said on the subject. I do not think the place to answer his questions is under a motion for adjournment.

Question put.

The Committee divided: Ayes 3, Noes 6.

Division No. 1]

AYES

Foster, Kevin
Harper, rh Mr Mark

Smith, Chloe

NOES

Charalambous, Bambos
Fletcher, Colleen
Khan, Afzal

Lee, Karen
Matheson, Christian
Norris, Alex

Question accordingly negated.

The Chair: The Committee has voted not to adjourn. Unless a Committee member can offer a motion for debate, I shall have to ask a Committee member to move another motion to adjourn.

Christian Matheson: I would like to offer clause 1, if that is at all possible, for a general debate, which means that we do not have to enact any money resolutions that have not yet been tabled.

The Chair: Without a money resolution, I cannot accept a motion to consider clauses of the Bill or amendments; I am afraid we are just not charged in this Committee with doing that.

Mr Harper: I will move a motion to adjourn again, to give the Committee a second opportunity.

The Chair: I can accept the motion to adjourn only from Mr Khan. I will suspend the Committee so that we can have an informal discussion.

9.48 am

Sitting suspended.

9.50 am

On resuming—

Afzal Khan: I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to.

9.51 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 4 July at half-past Nine o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Ninth Sitting

Wednesday 4 July 2018

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 11 July at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 8 July 2018

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Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 4 July 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

9.30 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind Members to switch their electronic devices to silent. Teas and coffees are not allowed in the sitting.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, during further proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill, the Committee do meet at 10.00 am on Wednesdays when the House is sitting.

I thank Committee members for being here once again. I have proposed that we amend the sitting motion to give us another half an hour in the morning, so that, instead of starting at 9.30 am, we would start at 10 am, if Members agree to that. At least that will give us something different to discuss from in our previous meetings.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I am interested to hear my hon. Friend's suggestion. The problem is that if the Government were to move a money resolution—as well they should—it would give us half an hour's less debate in the morning. Does he think that might be a problem?

Afzal Khan: That is a valuable question. We can always propose to meet at 9.30 am once the money resolution actually comes through, as I am sure the Minister agrees.

It will come as no surprise to those who have regularly attended the Committee that we are once again unable to consider the text of the Bill, as the Government have obstructed its normal progress. However, I cannot claim that there has been no progress. As I am sure the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean—who is not here today—will point out, we are now one week closer to the boundary review. While the clock has once again gone forward, I would prefer Members of Parliament to be fulfilling their parliamentary duties rather than, annoyingly, waiting for time to run out.

I will briefly recap the course of the Committee's proceedings. We first met on 9 May and have met every Wednesday since, with the exception of 30 May. I calculate that, including our additional meeting on Monday 14 May, the Committee has, over two months, spent two hours and 12 minutes agreeing not to act. That is simply a waste of time.

If the arguments against the money resolution are clear, as the Government claim, they should have no trouble tabling a money resolution and instructing Government Members to vote it down. The refusal to allow the House to vote on a money resolution is a short-sighted and inexcusable obstruction of parliamentary processes. The arguments used to defend the Government's

actions are weak, and the Government have refused to acknowledge that their behaviour has been, at best, unusual.

The Bill can be put off but it cannot be postponed indefinitely. The Government know as well as the Opposition that the boundary review will be voted on sooner or later. Delays will not change the reality that the proposal to reduce the size of the Commons does not have the support needed to be passed. I encourage the Government to abandon this wishful thinking, so that we can ensure that our electoral processes are fair.

I restate the important point I made last week: we are delaying this Bill at the very moment that we should be proceeding with it. We are so close to the Boundary Commission's findings being made public that if they are accepted, the money to be allocated to the Bill will not be spent. From this point on, there is no financial logic to the refusal to table a money resolution. It is evident that, from here on, the Government's goals are purely political. Given the extent of the opposition to reducing the size of the House of Commons, it is only responsible for us to hammer out the details of this Bill, to prepare for the likelihood that the Boundary Commission's proposals will be rejected.

We cannot afford any further delay to boundary reform. The money resolution issue is a manufactured obstacle. By refusing to acknowledge the legislative authority of the House of Commons the Government have thrown a wrench into the wheels of Parliament. The current Government have been alarmingly consistent in their disregard for the will of the House. However, I and my cross-party colleagues who are disturbed by that behaviour will not back down. The downsizing of Parliament does not have support and the Government will have to feel the consequences of that sooner or later.

I thank you, Mr Owen, for your patience in allowing me to make a speech longer than those I have given in the past, and my colleagues on both sides of the Committee for their patience and attention.

Christian Matheson: I welcome the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. In the circumstances, his proposal sounds eminently sensible.

You are a proud Welshman, Mr Owen, and I do not know whether you happened to watch last night's England versus Colombia World cup football match. I have a lot of sympathy for Colombia. It is a country that I have visited. It is varied and beautiful, from the Andean uplands down to the coastline of the Pacific and the Caribbean. It has passed through some difficult times, particularly with organised crime, but it is a beautiful and well-loved country, so I had sympathy for it in the match last night, but hard and persistent work by England still managed to win the day.

That puts me in mind of the Minister's position. If I may say so, she is a popular Member of the House who has undertaken her job diligently and is well thought of. Last night, unfortunately, the Colombia team resorted at times to gamesmanship and to bending the rules. There were a few cheeky tackles, and some simulation—diving, as we used to call it in this country. That is very much a metaphor for the Government's position at the moment: using procedural mechanisms to try to delay and frustrate what is, in a sense, inevitable.

The England team have been putting in the hard work and long hours, just as my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has been doing. What was the result last night? My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham North was watching the match with me and he knows that eventually the right and inevitable result came, which was that England won through, as much by graft and character as flair. Much as the Minister is respected in the House, I must tell her that, as we saw, gamesmanship never wins through in the end and the right result is always reached. Perhaps she will take a note of the match result and move away from the idea of not moving the money resolution, and on to the real match.

I have a serious question for the Minister: I want to probe the Government's exact intentions. We foresee one of two possible outcomes, probably in September. One is that when the Government lay the order for the new boundaries under the final proposals to be issued by the various boundary commissions, they will be accepted by the House. The other outcome is that they will not. So what contingencies is the Minister thinking about? In either situation it would be appropriate to table the money resolution for the Bill and to begin consideration. Does the Minister intend to continue without tabling a money resolution for an indeterminate period, irrespective of either of those two outcomes, or has she considered contingencies where she might—

The Chair: Order. I have been very lenient with the England fan in his interpretation of what is a very narrow sittings motion to change the time to 10 am. If it is agreed, we can pursue other matters in a debate on the Adjournment of the Committee, but the hon. Gentleman should narrow the scope of his remarks. It is not for the Minister to respond to the sittings motion that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has moved.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful for your guidance, Mr Owen. In that case, I will sit down in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. I will leave those thoughts with the Minister to consider for next week's meeting, which may well be at 10 o'clock.

The Chair: I call David Linden, who I am sure will take a different tack.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen, for what I believe is the ninth sitting of "I'm in a Public Bill Committee, Get Me Out of Here". I do not want to detain the Committee for too long; I know there are various World cup fixtures for the rest of the day, so it would be disappointing if I sought to detain the Committee.

I want to reflect on events last night. I was struck that a number of right hon. and hon. Members were disappointed by the idea that votes and scrutiny were taking place during the supply and estimates process. I appreciate there was a football match on last night. I warmly congratulate England on a fantastic victory and wish them well in the quarter finals.

However, it strikes me as strange that right hon. and hon. Members, such as the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, turn up to the Committee and say that bringing forward a money resolution would commit to spending huge amounts of public money, yet we have this bizarre situation in the UK Parliament where we authorise the spending of hundreds of millions of pounds through the supply and estimates process, and the idea is that it goes through on the nod. What we are looking for here a money resolution that amounts to, I believe, somewhere between £8 million and £12 million, and we have the absolute charade that this Committee—

The Chair: Order. That is very wide of the mark. The motion before us is very narrow. The debate is on the Question that we change the time in the sitting motion from 9.30 am to 10 am.

David Linden: Thank you, Mr Owen, I am grateful for your guidance. I have no problems meeting at 10 o'clock. I would be quite happy to meet at 9.30, 9.31, 9.32, 9.33, 9.34, 9.35, 9.36, 9.37, 9.38, 9.39, 9.40, 9.41, 9.42, 9.43, 9.44—

Christian Matheson: Does the hon. Gentleman have a preference for a starting time?

David Linden: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I am an early riser so my preference would be 6 am, 6.01, 6.02, 6.03, 6.04, 6.05, 6.06, 6.07, 6.08—

Afzal Khan: What is the hon. Gentleman's opinion of a 10 o'clock start?

David Linden: Ten o'clock is a serious amount of the way through the day for me. Obviously, if the majority of the Committee wishes to meet at 10 o'clock, I would not seek to hold that back.

As I say, I would be happy to meet earlier in the morning. I am an avid listener of "Good Morning Scotland" on BBC Radio Scotland. As long as I have sufficient time to listen to that, I would be happy to come to this Committee to meet hon. Friends. I do not want to test the patience of the Chair too much this morning, so I will say that I am very happy with 10 o'clock. If other Members wish to take a different tack and meet earlier, I would be amenable to that.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan: I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: The Committee will meet again next Wednesday at 10 am, not 10.01, Mr Linden.

9.44 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 11 June at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Tenth Sitting

Wednesday 11 July 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 18 July at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 15 July 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* † Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)
 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 † Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 † Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 † Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)
 Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 † Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Kenneth Fox, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 11 July 2018

[NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, can I make the usual announcements? If you would like to take your jackets off, please do, and switch off your mobile phones. The Minister, sadly, much to her stress, is stuck on a train, which I believe has broken down. She may run through the door in a second. For the record, she is not here as a result of something that is not her fault. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution I call Afzal Khan to move the Adjournment motion.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): In a week in which there has been nothing normal in Parliament, it is good to meet here on Wednesday morning. It seems that this place is erupting, and that there are only two things we can count on in life: this Committee will meet, and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will probably intervene in the Adjournment debate in the House tonight. It is great to be here, and I look forward to next week's sitting.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will not delay the Committee for long. I wish to put on the record the fact that I am sorry that I could not attend last week. I was heartened to note, however, that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton made the point that I would have made if I had been here. I am grateful to him and thank him for enabling me to be present in spirit, if not in the flesh.

Question put and agreed to.

10.1 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 18 July at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Eleventh Sitting

Wednesday 18 July 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 5 September at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 22 July 2018

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 Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Kenneth Fox, Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerks*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 18 July 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind Members that electronic devices should be switched to silent and there should be no hot refreshments during the sitting.

As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith) on the birth of her baby. It was a pleasure and a great help to have her on the Committee. I wish her and her family health and happiness.

Last week, when the Minister did not turn up, I was a little worried. I thought, “Is it another resignation?” I am pleased to see her here, and I hope that we will be able to work constructively once the money resolution comes forward.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is fair to say that the Minister’s absence was one that frankly could have happened to any of us, and I do not think any blame attaches to her. Does my hon. Friend agree that after Labour wins the next general election and we have a nationalised, unified railway system, all the trains will run on time?

Afzal Khan: I agree with my hon. Friend on both points. I accept that what happened to the Minister could happen to any one of us. I was just expressing my worry about what might have happened. On his second point, of course we want to see the railway system working properly. I get many complaints from constituents about the mess-up of the timetable, so the sooner we get that sorted out, the better.

This is our last meeting before the summer recess. I am also coming to the end of my first year as a Member of Parliament. At that milestone, I have been reflecting on what I have done, what I have not quite achieved and what can be done better next year. One sticking point in my mind was my private Member’s Bill. I am disappointed and more than a bit frustrated that we have not made any progress on it. Despite repeated calls from both sides of the House, we have reached this milestone without a money resolution.

Who knew that I would spend my first year in Parliament arguing over such an obscure, and until now uncontroversial, aspect of parliamentary procedure? When I was first elected as an MP, I thought I would have the chance to make a real difference in this place. I

was under the impression that we have a democratic system of government, where the powers of the Executive are balanced with the powers of Back-Bench and Opposition Members to produce the best legislation we can collectively. Instead, I have been surprised and deeply concerned by the lack of transparency and accountability in the way this Government operate.

Before coming to Parliament, I was a member of Manchester City Council for many years, and served as a Member of the European Parliament. In all my time in those two elected positions, I did not encounter an Executive as overreaching and fuelled by weakness and indecision as this one.

In my first year as an MP, I have been astounded by the lack of Bills and substantial business in the House. We seem to have had endless general debates to fill time while the Government try to work out among themselves what they actually want to get done. As parliamentarians, we would all rather spend our time discussing legislation than adjourn early, as it was proposed the House should do this week and as the Committee will be forced to do today.

Before we adjourn for the final time before the recess, will the Minister tell us when the Government will publish the Boundary Commission’s final recommendations? Are we to expect to resume these time-wasting Committee meetings every Wednesday morning when we come back after the recess? Will the Government stop arguing among themselves long enough to bring forward a money resolution and allow the Committee to discuss the Bill, which has now spent 10 weeks in limbo?

I wish all Committee members a good recess.

The Chair: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I congratulate him on completing his first year as a Member, but we are not really interested in hearing what Members who have served for more than a year have done in Parliament up until today, so I ask them to refrain from telling us about that and concentrate on the motion to adjourn the Committee till 5 September.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful for your guidance, Mr Owen, but Members will be pleased to hear that I did not intend to take them through a 13-year whistle-stop tour of my parliamentary career, tempting though that is.

Let me make a few remarks very much connected to the motion to adjourn. I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton on securing a private Member’s Bill slot in his first year in Parliament. Some of us have been here quite a long time and have never managed to get one, although, when I was a Minister, I spent a lot of Fridays here, generally explaining why people’s private Members’ Bills were not very well drafted or not a very good idea. However, the process is important, and he has carried the Bill to this point with great skill, so he should be pleased with that.

On the rather unfair contribution of the hon. Member for City of Chester about trains, I think I am right in saying that my hon. Friend the Minister was actually stuck on a tube train, which are of course run by Transport for London—a state-owned transport authority run by the Mayor of London. Therefore, any criticism—of course, Government Members did not criticise—should

sit squarely with the Labour Mayor of London for running a malfunctioning tube system. I would not make that point, but the hon. Gentleman was slightly unfair to the rail system. I say that only because I was provoked.

The more serious and substantive point, which is relevant to timing and therefore to the motion to adjourn, is about what happens next. I think I am right in saying—I have put this on the record previously—that the Boundary Commission for England has made it clear that it intends to send its report to the Leader of the House before we return in September so that she can lay it before Parliament during the September sitting. I confess that I do not know what the other three boundary commissions intend. Perhaps the hon. Member for Glasgow East can inform us.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): I am concerned about waiting on the Leader of the House to schedule this process. I declare an interest: I am expecting a daughter in the autumn. The Leader of the House promised that arrangements for proxy voting would be brought before Parliament, but she failed to do that. Last night, a major furore broke out because a pairing arrangement was broken. I therefore caution the right hon. Gentleman not to take too seriously the promises of the Leader of the House, who has not been great at bringing plans before the House.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman has made that point before. I think I am right in saying that the legislation that sets out how the Boundary Commission process works puts some pressure on the Government to bring forward proposals as soon as is practicable, so there is some legal force for doing that. I confess that I do not know what the other three boundary commissions will do, but certainly the Boundary Commission for England will produce its report in September, when we get back.

We will then know what the boundary commissions all recommend and, as I have said before, the Government have made it clear that they will look at those reports. They can then test the will of the House, and they have said that if Parliament takes the view—I hope it does not—that it does not want to proceed with what is set out in the boundary commissions' reports, they will reflect on whether to bring forward a money resolution for the Bill and on whether the Bill is the right vehicle to deal with that set of circumstances.

I recognise that this process has been frustrating for the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, but in terms of parliamentary weeks we actually do not have much longer to wait until we have the boundary commissions' substantive reports in front of us. Members of the public will think that is a long way off, because they will take into account the summer, but it is actually not many sitting days away, so I counsel him to be a little more patient. I look forward to seeing him when the Committee reconvenes on Wednesday 5 September, and I join him in wishing all Committee members and those here serving Her Majesty's Government a pleasant summer recess. I look forward to seeing everyone in September.

David Linden: It is, as ever, a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I congratulate the hon. Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood on the birth of

her son, Elijah. I commend the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, who has become a genuine friend since we were elected in June last year. The fact that he has had the patience to sit through this process is testament to his character. I very much hope we do not have to wait much longer.

We all saw the shenanigans play out last night, and we have all read in the press today that Government Whips threatened Conservative remainers—the rebels—with an early election, so we know that the Government possibly have an appetite to contest elections with the current boundaries and 650 seats. I therefore suggest that their current position is somewhat weak.

I come back to the idea of the private Member's Bill system being an absolute sham. I have an interest in this Bill because, I must confess, I am interested in parliamentary and constitutional reform. With the greatest respect to the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, one of the greatest difficulties I find about this place is that too often we indulge in navel gazing about it. It is sad that, although this Bill is very important in terms of the number of seats in this House and the wider issue of how we scrutinise legislation, it is not the only Bill for which a money resolution is being withheld. My hon. Friend the Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar (Angus Brendan MacNeil) has a very good Bill—the Refugees (Family Reunion) (No. 2) Bill—which is about how this country treats people who come from some of the most vulnerable parts of the world.

Afzal Khan: I want to ensure we are clear on this point. My position throughout has been that the Government should not withhold a money resolution from any private Member's Bill that has passed Second Reading. We fully support the refugees Bill.

David Linden: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I should clarify that that was definitely not a dig at the Labour party.

We come back to the central issue that we hear regularly, particularly from the Leader of the House, whose job is actually to stand up for the House in the Cabinet—I am not sure she always does that very well—about Parliament taking back control. The fundamental point is that last December, the House voted by a majority for this Bill on Second Reading. It authorised it to go into Committee, and the Committee of Selection set up this Public Bill Committee and commanded us, as Members of the House, to scrutinise the legislation line by line and clause by clause. It is not a very lengthy Bill. I daresay that if we had the money resolution, although some of us in this Room like to talk at length, we could probably consider this Bill clause by clause and line by line in one or two sittings at the most. It seems a waste of time. There are civil servants here, and it strikes me that it is a huge waste of their time, too, for us to go through this charade every single Wednesday morning. We turn up here and know that we are not going to make progress. It is disrespectful to the civil servants.

Mr Harper: I just want to pick up the point about Parliament taking back control and the democratic point. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, on 19 June, the Labour party tabled a motion asking the

[Mr Harper]

House whether we should debate the content of the Bill, notwithstanding the fact that there is not a money resolution. The House gave its clear view that we should not do that until there is a money resolution. The House was asked that question and it gave a very clear answer, by a majority of 15, that we should not proceed until there is a money resolution. That is indeed Parliament taking back control.

David Linden: Well, I recall that, on that day, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) said that he favoured the Bill in principle, but he voted with the Government because of a technicality relating to how the motion was drafted. Although the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean is absolutely correct that the motion was defeated during Labour's Opposition day debate, the main issue is that there is a clear majority in the House to retain 650 seats. I reckon that, if the question was put to hon. Members in a simple motion that says, "This House believes that there should be 650 seats in the House", the right hon. Gentleman would find that there is a majority in the House for that. I would be very happy if that motion was brought forward. I would certainly be able to vote for it myself.

Tempted though I am to talk about my first year in Parliament—I was having a quick look in my diary, and it has been a very busy year indeed—I will spare the Committee this morning. I hope that, by the time we come back in September, the warm Prosecco and all the shenanigans of the Conservative party might have died down, although I do not hold my breath. Perhaps when we come back in September, Her Majesty's Government will treat this Committee and the House with respect.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I start by apologising—I have been to see the parliamentary nurse; I am absolutely deaf in one ear.

As someone who has come from a constituency, I find it incredible that I come here every Wednesday morning and nothing happens. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is absolutely disrespectful. I have told people back in Lincoln about it: I am sorry, but it is wrong and it shows contempt for parliamentary procedure.

10.15 am

David Linden: The hon. Lady makes a very valid point. We have had 11 or 12 sittings of the Committee and, although it has been enjoyable, it is sad. When all the Parliamentary Private Secretaries were resigning, I thought my friend the hon. Member for Torbay would have the courage to do that, but he is hanging on. At this rate, he might end up as Prime Minister, being the only one left in the Government. We will hold out in that hope.

In all seriousness, we have reached a point in this Parliament where things are clearly fractured and the Government are very fragile. We will see what state they come back in after the summer. I would not rule out that we might be going back to the country.

Mr Harper: Without wishing to embarrass my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay, people need to understand that the only thing that keeps him as a Parliamentary

Private Secretary is the thought of being able to come to this Committee every Wednesday. This Committee and the colleagues in Committee keep him serving in Her Majesty's Government. We are all doing our bit to keep him here.

David Linden: The right hon. Gentleman has got that spot on. I made this point last week, but I have to repeat it. Although people generally say only two things in life are certain, death and taxes, in a Parliament where everything is falling about us, in my view the only two things in life that are certain are that the Committee will meet on a Wednesday and that the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will take part in Adjournment debates.

It has been very nice spending this time on a Wednesday morning in Committee, and I have thoroughly enjoyed it, but we are all paid close to £80,000 a year to be legislators and to scrutinise legislation. We can come here to spend three, four, five or six minutes making funny speeches and having a bit of a laugh with each other but, fundamentally, we are all legislators—let us start behaving like them.

The Chair: Does the Minister wish to respond?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): No.

The Chair: Then I call Chris Matheson.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Owen. It is a great pleasure to follow my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East, who taught me something I did not know: the Government have failed to table a money resolution for another private Member's Bill, one in the name of the hon. Member for Na h-Eileanan an Iar.

Will you indulge me a moment, Mr Owen, so that I may make a quick statement to correct the record? It is relevant to the Bill.

The Chair: If you can frame it in the context of the Adjournment debate.

Christian Matheson: Indeed. This being the Adjournment of the last sitting before recess, I want to correct something that I said in the debate on the motion that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean mentioned. I said in that debate that, when the Government introduced individual electoral registration, 2 million voters fell off the register. The Minister suggested that I check the figures. I have done—I am very grateful for her guidance—and 600,000 voters fell off the register according to the figures I used. I got the 2 million figure because in the next year, 2 million extra voters were added to the register for subsequent elections. I am happy to correct the figure that I gave.

That correction amplifies the problem that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, seeks to correct with the Bill, which is that the boundary changes that are currently being considered will be based on seriously flawed electoral data. That is one reason why

we need to crack on with the Bill: to address the very problem that I mentioned, albeit with slightly confused figures.

I pay tribute to the Minister, who has stoically held the Government's line. The Opposition have sometimes found her contributions frustrating, but she has had a job to do and she has done it with tenacity. She has got to where she needed to get to, which was for the Bill to reach the summer recess without being discussed. In the next two or three parliamentary weeks there is the chance, as the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean said, for the House to make a decision on new, revised, and I believe, probably flawed proposals—flawed because the basis on which they were drawn up was flawed.

Notwithstanding that, the Minister still has to indicate what the Government's position on the Bill will be. Whether or not the House accepts the new boundary proposals in September, the Bill will remain on the Order Paper. At some point, the Government will have to table a money resolution. The alternative is that they do not table one and allow us to continue meeting in perpetuity, or at least until the end of this Parliament, in the absurd circumstances described by the hon. Member for Glasgow East.

At some point, a decision will have to be taken on the Bill. I suspect that since the Government cannot kill off the Bill in Committee, they will have to move a money resolution and seek to have the Bill dismissed on Third

Reading. The Government will still have to table a money resolution, irrespective of the results of the vote in the House in September. If the Minister does not wish to contribute today, I hope that she will take away with her on recess the thought that we cannot continue to meet in perpetuity on Wednesday mornings and not make a decision to proceed. At some point, something will have to give, and it will not give simply because we pass—or do not pass—the Boundary Commission's proposals in September.

I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. I think the Committee knows that he and I have been friends outside this place for many years, and it has been a great pleasure to sit with him and other hon. Friends. It has been a pleasure to see other hon. Members, particularly the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who is an esteemed colleague on the Government Benches.

We will be back in September. If I may speak on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, I think it is fair to say that we will be back for as long as it takes to get the Bill through Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

10.22 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 5 September at 10 o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twelfth Sitting

Wednesday 5 September 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 12 September at Ten o'clock.

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† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
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† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 5 September 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: As usual before we begin, I remind hon. Members that electronic devices should be switched off or in silent mode during the sitting. I also note, with sadness, that the husband of the Labour Whip, Colleen Fletcher, passed away last week. I am sure that, as a Committee, we all want Colleen to know that she is in our thoughts at this very difficult time.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I welcome everyone back to the Committee. I hope that we have all had a good recess. We are back to Parliament and back to our regular sitting every Wednesday. Over the summer and in a number of hearings before then, we talked about how we can make things move forward. Ultimately, the key issue coming from the Government side was that they were keen to get the boundary review in, and I believe that that has happened, so perhaps the Minister can tell us now what the Government's plan is. In what way do they want to move forward? Do they wish to have an immediate vote on the Boundary Commission's report or not, and if, as we expect, the Government lose, what is the way forward? Perhaps there can be more clarity.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is very good to see you in the Chair after the summer recess, Ms Dorries, and to see colleagues back to discuss the Bill. I have just been reflecting—just looking at the motion to adjourn—on what we were talking about when we broke up for the summer, and it might be helpful if I update the Committee, having had a look at the information from the Boundary Commission for England. The commission set out—I think I referred to this before Parliament rose for the summer—that it planned to present its report to the Government on or around 5 September, and it confirmed that that would indeed be done today. It has made it clear that, because of what the law says, it is the Government who must lay that report before Parliament, so assuming that it delivers its report today, which it has confirmed it will, and the other boundary commissions do so, the Government will then at least be in a position to lay those reports before Parliament and to lay out an indication of the timetable.

For today's purposes, I think it is a bit unrealistic and a bit unreasonable, given that the reports will have been received only today—they may not yet have actually been received—to expect the Minister to say anything at all today about timing; I therefore have no criticism at all of the Minister. But, clearly, after today the Government will at least be in a position to reflect on the reports and

consider when to bring them forward. Whether or not the Minister sets that out in a future sitting of the Committee, I am sure that colleagues will ask the Leader of the House—I understand that the reports will be sent to her—about the timetable. That will then give us the opportunity to reflect on whether this Committee can make any further progress other than just discussing a motion to adjourn. I hope that that is helpful to the Committee.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman said that the report would go to the Leader of the House. My understanding is that it now goes to the Cabinet Office—that was changed last week—so it might be helpful if the Minister, in her reply, says how quickly the Cabinet Office intends to publish it or whether it intends to sit on it.

Mr Harper: Of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government are indivisible and all Ministers speak for the Government, so wherever the report ends up in Government, the Government collectively will be in a position to reflect on the contents and then set out the next steps. As I said, it would be unreasonable to expect the Minister to be able to do that today, not having had the chance to reflect on the report. She may be in a position to do so next week; I do not know. But even if she does not, the Leader of the House will no doubt be asked about the report, even if it is not specifically the Leader of the House who reflects on it. I think that I am right in saying, if it is indeed going to the Cabinet Office, that the senior Cabinet Office Minister, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, has questions in the House next week, so it will be open to him or one of his team, in which my hon. Friend is a Minister, to answer those questions if they are put before them in the House. Therefore, in the not too distant future, we may have at least a little clarity about timing, which will then enable us to not have to keep coming here every week just to talk about the reports having been laid. We will be in more of a substantive position to go forward. I hope that is helpful to the Committee.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the chair once again, Ms Dorries. I was going to make some comments about it being a great pleasure to see members of the Committee back here, but in the light of your comments about my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North East I will keep my comments more sombre. I was not aware that she had suffered a bereavement; I am very sorry to hear that, and I am grateful for your opening comments.

The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean was reflecting on the handing over today, and the imminent publication, of the current set of boundary proposals, based on the guidance that was given by the House and by this Government in previous years. My response—I wonder whether the Minister might consider this—is that, irrespective of what happens to that set of proposals, this Bill remains on the Order Paper. Irrespective of the fact that the House will either accept or reject the proposals that are to be handed over to the Cabinet Office today and then presented to the House at some point in the imminent future, this Bill still needs to be dealt with; it cannot simply continue to be stonewalled through the Government's failure to introduce the appropriate money resolutions.

Can the Minister indicate in her response, if she chooses to respond to the Committee this morning, what plans the Government have to deal with this Bill? If this Parliament goes the full term, will we still be meeting here on a Wednesday morning three years hence to consider the possibility of this Bill?

Mr Harper: Of course, I also associate myself with the remarks that you made about the hon. Member for Coventry North East and her recent bereavement, Ms Dorries. When the hon. Gentleman says that things will happen “irrespective” of what the House decides about the boundaries, of course it is not irrespective. If the House decided to go with the proposals the boundary commissions are going to bring forward, the House would effectively have made a decision to proceed on that basis. No doubt, therefore, the House would be asked not to proceed with this Bill. If, of course, the House chooses not to proceed with the boundary commission proposals, we are in a different space.

On a point of fact, we would not meet for the rest of this Parliament, because, of course, private Members’ Bills lapse at the end of the Session so, thankfully, we would meet and have the pleasure of each other’s company only until the end of this Session, not for the rest of the Parliament.

Christian Matheson: The right hon. Gentleman is right on the second point; the Bill would lapse at the end of this Session, so we would have to go for only another nine months. He answered his own question in the first part of his intervention, because he talked about the fact that if the imminent set of boundary proposals go through, the House would then be asked to withdraw this Bill. That is entirely my point: the Bill would continue to stand on the Order Paper and would still need some kind of cancellation.

That is where we should be heading with these proposals. The Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has been read a Second time, and my advice to the Government would be simply this: move the money resolution, continue consideration in this Committee, and then kill the Bill off with a majority on Third Reading.

That would seem to be the obvious solution. If Conservative Members are confident that they have the majority—they may well have the majority to take the imminent proposals forward—they should follow the correct and democratic procedure, undertake the Committee stage and then cancel the Bill by voting against it on Third Reading. That is surely the way forward, because it would stop us having to meet every Wednesday at 10 o’clock—much as that is a great pleasure, Ms Dorries—albeit that that would only be to the end of this Session, and I am grateful to the more experienced right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who is a former Chief Whip and obviously knows about procedure, for reminding me of that.

I am an avid reader of the *Daily Mail*, and there is an article in it today about this very issue. The article, which I am sure we can trust, alleges that members of the Government have written to Conservative MPs urging them to back the imminent set of proposals. Since this is absolutely germane to the procedures under consideration by the Committee, may I ask the Minister

whether such a letter has indeed gone out to Conservative Members, and whether she will place a copy of that letter in the Library for us all to see?

Another allegation in the *Daily Mail*, and I see no reason not to trust it, is that an undertaking has been given to Conservative Members that no man will be left behind. This being the 21st century, we might also say “no woman”, or “no hon. Member” shall be left behind. In other words, some kind of grubby deal has been done to persuade Conservative Members to vote in favour of the imminent boundaries, irrespective of whether they consider it right or wrong, on the basis of how it would affect them personally. That is why I use the phrase “grubby deal”.

We cannot allow introspection and self-interest when we are considering parliamentary boundaries that are the basis of the way in which the House is elected and, therefore, the basis of our democracy and democratic procedures for the next 10 or 15 years. If the boundary procedures take as long next time as they did this time, it might even be more than 15 years. Let us hope not, because there is a consensus that parliamentary boundaries need to be reviewed. Will the Minister confirm whether a deal has been done with Conservative Members that no man will be left behind, and that self-interest should be a consideration when they are considering the imminent set of boundaries?

If that is the case, that is yet more reason why my hon. Friend’s Bill, which takes into account not self-interest but the broader interests of the United Kingdom and the basis of our democratic representation, should proceed, as opposed to grubby deals and cajoling based on self-interest, which is the allegation in the newspaper article. If the Minister confirmed or denied whether such a deal has taken place, I would be most grateful.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As always, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I place on the record my condolences to the hon. Member for Coventry North East following her husband’s sad death.

We meet here again—I think this is the 12th sitting of the Committee. I will not go over some of the lines I have used in previous sittings—much, I suspect, to the relief of Committee members—but I was struck by something that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean said. He said it was good to come here to discuss the Bill, but the problem is that we cannot discuss the Bill; we are here to discuss a motion to sit. I am sure he did not want to inadvertently mislead the Committee. We have not been able to consider the Bill line by line or clause by clause, because the Government have not granted a money resolution.

It is, however, good to be back here today. We were promised that we would be coming back. There I was on the train down from Glasgow on Monday night, looking forward to seeing the hon. Member for Torbay and all members of the Committee this morning, and hoping that we would be able to discuss matters of more substance. We know that the report is being handed over to the Government today. We expect that some sort of statement will be made next week.

I would not go as far as saying I am a great reader of the *Daily Mail*—it is not really worth the paper it is written on in my view—but, like the hon. Member for

[David Linden]

City of Chester, I took some interest this morning, in my LexisNexis alerts, in the comments by the hon. Member for Wellingborough, who is of course a member of the Committee, saying that he would lead the charge of Tory rebels against the Bill. In a Parliament that is very divided—in terms of not only parliamentary arithmetic, but the Conservative party—that will be one of the great problems for the Government over the next couple of months.

The right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) has apparently issued a letter to Government Members. You may well have received it, Ms Dorries; I have not. I want to follow up on the point made by the hon. Member for City of Chester about no hon. Member being left behind. We have seen on countless occasions in this Parliament people who have marched the Conservative party up to the top of the hill, leading a rebellion, only for them to come back down the hill rather quickly.

The Chair: Order. Mr Linden, the purpose of this Committee is not to discuss the internal machinations of any political party and how it operates. If you could keep your comments to the Bill, I would be very grateful.

David Linden: I am grateful for that guidance. I do not think the Committee has enough time to talk about the internal machinations of the Conservative party—we would have to sit five or six times a week to have time to do that.

I seek assurances from the Minister that nobody has been made promises along the lines of, “Okay, we are abolishing your seat, but you can go off to the House of Lords.” That would completely contradict the idea that the reason for reducing the number of seats is to cut the cost of politics.

10.15 am

I suspect that the Government will be defeated on this. There is a majority in Parliament for 650 seats, and we will see that when a vote comes. In the event that the Government do a grubby deal and buy off some of their Members, I seek assurances that hon. Members, including the Minister, would not be heading off to the House of Lords after that.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I begin by adding my voice to those who have expressed their condolences to the hon. Member for Coventry North East. It must be a very difficult time for her and we all send our great sympathy.

I will put a few points on the record about the factual position of where we are this morning. As hon. Members will know, the boundary commissions for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are submitting their final proposals for revised constituencies to Ministers today. The Ministers involved are the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Secretary of State for Scotland—that covers the plural reports. Hon. Members may be aware that the House passed an order that transferred the function from the Leader of the House to the Minister for the Cabinet Office. I confirm that that has taken place.

The boundary commissions have, of course, drawn up their proposals in accordance with the legislation passed in the 2010-15 Parliament, to which the Committee has previously referred. The law requires that the Government must lay the four boundary commission reports before Parliament. Each will be laid as an Act Paper and must be laid when both Houses are sitting. We expect therefore that the reports will be laid before Parliament on Monday 10 September. That accommodates both the Lords and the Commons sitting and, crucially, allows for the reports to be printed—these things do not happen instantaneously. That is the explanation for the laying date of Monday. I hope that is clear to the Committee.

After the reports have been laid before Parliament, the Government will bring forward a draft Order in Council to give effect to the recommendations contained in the reports. The order will, as a matter of fact, be a complex and lengthy statutory instrument. It will take months to prepare, because it needs to transcribe the entirety of those four boundary commission reports. Needless to say, we would all wish that work to be accurate.

We have said that we will keep the private Member’s Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton under review. I understand that hon. Members in Committee have asked for the Government’s view of that Bill. As we have said before, we believe that it is right that the boundary commissions have been allowed to complete their work. Parliament agreed in the 2010-15 Parliament to that process for the review of boundaries, so that stands. I add today that it is my view that the House of Commons, sitting in the main Chamber, will play an important role in making the decisions that flow from the boundary review. It is appropriate that those decisions are considered in the main Chamber rather than in Committee. Recently, there has also been debate in the Chamber on whether the Bill should be allowed to proceed in Committee without a money resolution, and the House decided that that should not be permitted.

I hope that that is sufficient to give a clear indication of the process ahead and an explanation of which Ministers are involved, and also accommodates the question as to the Government’s intention with regard to the Bill.

Christian Matheson: The Minister said something very interesting then. Could she clarify? Forgive me, Ms Dorries, if my grasp of procedure is not as great as that of other Committee members. The Minister said the Order in Council would be complicated and take months to prepare. Does that mean that she expects a vote on the order not to take place for several months? My understanding was that, once the order is laid, there is a strict timetable for how long it would take before both Houses were expected to vote on it and that that timetable is short. Is my interpretation right? When can the Committee expect those votes to take place, based on what the Minister has just said?

Chloe Smith: I confirm that I used the word “months” and I deliberately did so. I intend to be realistic with the Committee that those instruments are complex and need to be prepared fully and correctly. I wish to be quite straight about that with the Committee.

The more specific scheduling of a vote after that point is, of course, a matter for the Whips, which I am not in a position to confirm any more specifically today. I add something I think the hon. Member for City of Chester and other Committee members might already be aware of: the governing legislation says that the orders shall be laid “as soon as may be”. That is the technical guidance the hon. Gentleman is looking for in his question.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to the Minister for clarifying that last point. I referred to that in a previous sitting. Ministers cannot unduly delay matters but they clearly have to go through the proper process and ensure that the orders are correct.

I want to ask the Minister a question about what she said on process. In a previous sitting, I brought up the subject of where these issues are debated. There are two points I want her to reflect on: one is what the hon. Member for City of Chester said about whether the House should give us permission to debate the Bill before the House has taken a decision on the boundary reports. I do not think that is sensible because the debate on the order would need to be taken into account if there was a wish to change legislation.

The second point, to which I think the Minister referred, is that these matters affect all Members of Parliament. If we were to debate the substance of the Bill, it should not be done here in Committee. As with the original legislation, it should be debated on the Floor of House in a Committee of the whole House, so that every Member of Parliament had the opportunity to consider it. The Minister has set out a sensible way to proceed.

Chloe Smith: I am grateful for my right hon. Friend’s compelling points. The first, on time, is absolutely correct. I agree that there is little point in this Committee discussing matters that are also before the main Chamber before the main Chamber does so. Secondly, on scope, I also agree, as I said earlier, that it is correct for the main Chamber to look at these matters, first, because they affect all Members and, secondly, because they are constitutionally important. It is the convention of this House that such matters are dealt with in the main Chamber.

Christian Matheson: The Minister is being generous with her time. In that case, will she undertake to speak to the Clerks to establish a procedure whereby this Bill Committee might be moved to a Committee of the whole House, with an attendant money resolution, so that we can move it forward at the time that she chooses?

Chloe Smith: No doubt, Ms Dorries, if I did not say it, you would say that it is not for me to do that. It would be for the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to have such a conversation.

Following your guidance, Ms Dorries, I shall refrain from commenting on the internal machinations of parties, though, if I did, no doubt questions about the unity of both the Labour party and Scottish National party would become very clear given what we have seen in the press over the summer—in the *Daily Mail* or elsewhere.

Notwithstanding that, I can confirm that the party chairman of the Conservative party has written to Conservative colleagues, as is entirely reasonable and expected, but I do not think it is appropriate to lay that correspondence in the Library, as requested by the hon. Member for City of Chester, because those are party documents. The very important documents that we are discussing are of course the boundary commission reports. I hope I have used my comments to lay out the process that the Government intend to use for those documents, which will be before us very shortly.

Mr Harper: Before the Minister sits down, may I press her on one matter that I hope will be helpful to the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton? Picking up the point that the hon. Member for City of Chester made, it would be sensible for the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to consider talking to the Government about a motion to discuss the substance of the Bill on the Floor of the House. That could save us coming here every week to talk about a motion to adjourn.

However, having listened to my hon. Friend the Minister, I anticipate the Government’s response to be—I am only a Back Bencher, so I do not know—that that makes sense, but that it does not make sense for that process to start before the House has had the opportunity to consider the Order in Council. As I have said before, if we are to debate the substance of the Bill, and therefore amend the current process laid down in law, we should want to do so after listening to Members’ concerns about the existing process. To start changing the law about the process before even allowing one process to conclude under the existing legislation is to put the cart before the horse.

To avoid our having an interesting but slightly null debate every week on whether to adjourn, it may be sensible for the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to have that conversation. I anticipate that the Government would perhaps agree to that, but to have the process start once the House has had the opportunity to consider the boundary commissions’ proposals. That might be a constructive and sensible way forward. The Minister will no doubt reflect on my contributions and those of the hon. Gentleman, and the hon. Gentleman may well also reflect on them with purpose.

Chloe Smith: My right hon. Friend is as forensic, logical and authoritative as ever, and I have nothing further to add.

Question put and agreed to.

10.27 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 12 September at Ten o’clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Thirteenth Sitting

Wednesday 12 September 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 10 October at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 16 September 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 12 September 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind Members not to use electronic devices unless they are switched to silent. As the Committee cannot consider the Bill until the House agrees a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

It is a privilege and an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. We will all now have seen the boundary commissions' reports that the Minister had sight of last week. As she admitted in our last meeting, the Government's strategy is to kick the boundary issue into the long grass. What has changed?

We are in a mess because the former Prime Minister, David Cameron, tried his luck at rigging the electoral system in his party's favour. The Conservative party since lost its majority in Parliament and now does not have support for the plans, even among its own Members. Many Conservative MPs refuse to support the proposals—for both self-interested and principled reasons—and the Government are running scared of holding a vote that would make those divisions public.

We all agree that we desperately need new boundaries. I worry that, if we are not careful, we will walk into another election with constituencies based on data that is more than 20 years old. We cannot afford to wait months for the Government to get their house in order. My Bill needs a money resolution so that we can work together on a realistic, practical and cross-party path forward. I hope that the Minister will consider that and see to it that we receive a money resolution, so that, whatever happens with the boundary review, we will at least have a parallel system that could deal with this issue.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will keep my remarks focused, given that we are considering only the motion to adjourn, and respond specifically to a couple of remarks from the Bill's promoter, the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. He said that the purpose of the original boundary proposals brought forward when my former right hon. Friend David Cameron was Prime Minister was to rig the system in favour of the Conservative party. That needs to be put straight. It is simply not true, as he would know if he read the long debate that we had on the Floor of the House.

The proposals were about levelling the playing field so that seats were more equal in size, so that we did not have the ridiculous situation of having seats with very small electorates—there are many in Wales with electorates of around 40,000, for example—and also seats with close to 100,000 electors, meaning that a voter's vote in those constituencies can be worth half as much as in

another seat. That is simply not right. It is about having relatively tight spans so that every voter's vote is of broadly equal value across the country. That is the principle, and I think I am right in saying that it had Labour party support both when the legislation was going through and now, so we can put that party-political accusation aside.

The hon. Gentleman's second point, about timing, is relevant to the motion to adjourn. The Minister's remarks last week—I do not know whether she will add anything today; I do not think there is anything to add—made it clear that the Government and officials are getting on with drafting the Orders in Council, and she made the point that it is a lengthy process. Ministers cannot be dilatory about it, because in the legislation there is a legal injunction on Ministers to bring forward proposals "as soon as practicable", so they have to get this work done.

We are talking about detailed specifications for 600 parliamentary constituencies. There are only so many skilled draftsmen in Parliament, and they have other important legislation to draft—such as Brexit legislation and the thousands of statutory instruments that will have to go through the European sifting committee—so there are capacity constraints.

However, the Minister made it clear that that work is already under way, and said that it would take months. Opposition Members pressed her on that last week, and she said that she had chosen her words with great care and it would take that length of time, so she has set out the process. She made it clear which Ministers were responsible, and our right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office has ultimate ministerial responsibility. I just remind colleagues of what I said yesterday: he is answering questions in the House today at 11.30 am, so those who wish to press him on that will have the opportunity to do so, if there are appropriate questions on the Order Paper. This Minister has therefore set out a sensible process.

My final point on proceeding with debating the Bill is that I still hold to what I said last time. If the House decides not to proceed with the boundary proposals as delivered by the four commissions, and if we are going to debate the Bill and the Government decide that they will bring forward a money resolution and proceed, two things are true. First, the Bill would need to be debated; the Government would clearly have to find time for that on the Floor of the House—as was the case with the original boundary proposals and legislation—so that all hon. Members, not just the select few in this Committee, could participate in the debate. Secondly, one would not want to have that debate without its being informed by the debate and the responses from individual Members on the commission proposals, which would by that point have been rejected, because one would want to take into account the reasons why Parliament had not supported the boundary proposals if one were then going to alter the rules. Unless we were going to alter the rules, while listening to that feedback, in a way that we thought would lead to more acceptable proposals, it would be a rather pointless and otiose exercise.

Afzal Khan: The right hon. Gentleman's contributions have always been very reasoned, throughout the process in which we have been engaged. The one thing that I am

struggling with is this: we have been meeting here every week since May and this time is being wasted. If there were a money resolution, we could discuss the Bill line by line, and then, when the matter got to the House, we could discuss it both ways. What is the loss for us, not having a money resolution? By having a money resolution, we could iron out all the detail that needs to be dealt with. We meet every week in any case.

Mr Harper: If I follow the hon. Gentleman's logic through, that does not really work, because of course if we had a money resolution—I know we do not—we would be debating the Committee stage of the Bill here, but that would just then be repeated all over again, because the Committee stage would be done on the Floor of the House too, so the time would be wasted.

I suggested to the hon. Gentleman last week that, if he is concerned about the 30 minutes or so that we spend together on a Wednesday and the time it takes for the House, a potential way forward might be for him to engage with the usual channels and have a discussion about whether some arrangement can be reached whereby the Government might agree—I do not know, because I do not speak for the Government; I am a Back Bencher—to bring forward the boundary proposals as soon as is practicable, as the Minister set out, and if the House chose not to proceed with those, they might be prepared to make some of the commitments that I have suggested, about this being debated on the Floor of the House. In those circumstances, it may be that it is agreed that we then do not meet every Wednesday for a debate on the motion to adjourn, but with a commitment about what might happen if the House chooses not to proceed with the existing proposals.

I am sure that the Government would entertain having the conversation. I do not know what they would want to agree. They might not be prepared to agree to that—I do not speak for them. However, it seems to me that that might be a productive set of conversations to have, and then we would not spend the House's time in this Committee, pleasant though it is, and we would know where we were. There would be a two-stage process. The House would have the opportunity to take a view on the existing proposals, which have been introduced and are now being turned into legislation. If that were not to go through, there would be a fall-back, a plan B—that seems to be the terminology that people like today. That might be a sensible way forward.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): The right hon. Gentleman has made an intriguing proposal about taking the Bill back on to the Floor of the House, but could he clarify something? Why would the Government's attitude on the Floor of the House be any different from the stonewalling we see in this Committee?

Mr Harper: Again, I speak just for myself. My point is that the Government would not agree to take the Bill back on to the Floor of the House now. It would be a two-stage process. The Government have made the commitment already; the Minister made that last week. I do not know whether she will speak today—I am not sure she would have much to add, so I, for one, would not be disappointed if she did not, apart from being generally disappointed when we do not hear from the

Minister. I do not think she has a lot to add, so I do not think there is any requirement for her to speak today if she does not wish to.

As I said, there would be a two-stage process because I do not think it would be appropriate to debate new rules and new ways of achieving boundaries without being informed by the feedback on the existing ones. When the boundary commissions' proposals are brought forward as Orders in Council, there will be a debate in Parliament and Members of Parliament who do not support the proposals—and there will be some, on the Opposition Benches at least—will be able to put on the record the reasons why they do not support them and the rules that led to their drawing up.

Not having that information to hand and debating in detail would not work. For all we know, the House might agree to the proposals, in which case there will be no point in changing the law in the first place. We would simply waste a huge amount of time on the Floor of the House of Commons. It seems to me that the most sensible approach is to park the Bill formally. It is parked in an informal way at the moment. There may be some benefit in having that conversation with the Government and getting an agreement.

As I said, I do not know if that agreement could be reached, but it seems not unreasonable to try. That would avoid the minor inconvenience—it is only a minor inconvenience—of our meeting every week but not being able to make substantial progress.

Afzal Khan: The right hon. Gentleman's proposal is sensible. Last week, we had an informal discussion and I offered to meet the Minister to see if some sort of resolution could be found as a way forward that was acceptable for both things that are trying to run in parallel here.

Mr Harper: As I said, I do not speak for the Government but it seems to me that that might be a sensible way forward. We are now in the short return in September and have almost run into the conference recess. There is obviously a period before we return on 9 October—we would reconvene on 10 October—to talk again. There is a little bit of time before we rise.

It is sometimes difficult to have usual channels conversations outside sitting times but I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he kicks those off. It is his Bill so he needs to initiate those conversations. We will see where we get to. We might be able to make considerable progress. That is just an idea; I do not speak for the Government, but it seems a perfectly constructive way forward and I commend it to the hon. Gentleman.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you back in the Chair, Mr Owen, for our proceedings. What a pleasure it is, as always, to follow the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. I come to the Committee this morning to offer a couple of observations on what happened on Monday. I was at an event in Scotland with a number of my hon. Friends from the Scottish National party. We were all at a table and all of a sudden around 10 o'clock they all went on to their phones. It was like watching pupils get their report card from school. Everybody was frantically looking through what was happening to their seats, whether their seat would be abolished and what the proposals looked like.

[David Linden]

I tend to take the view, as a Scottish nationalist, that at the next general election, I hope that we can have 59 fewer seats, by way of Scotland becoming independent. I accept that is perhaps not an immediate prospect. My view is that it is absolutely unacceptable for Scotland to lose the six or seven seats under the current proposals.

Last week, the hon. Member for City of Chester and I talked about our not-so-favourite newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. I confess I am not avid reader of the *Financial Times* but it was sitting in the Members' Tea Room yesterday. I noticed a small article in it that suggested that the Government are now considering the possibility of delaying the votes on the boundary changes until after Brexit.

That presents several difficulties for the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton because we are in a two-year Session. The problem is, if we wait until Brexit at the end of March, we will probably be heading for prorogation before a new Queen's Speech within a month of that.

10.15 am

I am sure my view is increasingly shared across the House. The Democratic Unionist party has since changed its mind and is not minded to support the Government's proposals to reduce the number of seats to 600, which gives the Government a clear mathematical problem, and that is without the intervention of the hon. Members for Wellingborough, for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and for countless other Conservative constituencies.

We will have the problem, as the Government realise, for reasons of internal Conservative party politics, that they are petrified of putting the proposals to the vote. We all know that that is the case. If the Government were so confident that there was a majority in the House for 600 seats, they would schedule that vote straightaway. It will not have escaped the House's notice that we have endless general debates—on Monday afternoon, we had one on the EU withdrawal. It is not as if that has not been debated—in the European Research Group, but not least on the Floor of the House of Commons—and I would argue it is not the best use of the House's time. If the Government are confident that there is a majority in the House for 600 seats, they should put it to the vote and test the will of the House.

It comes back to the fundamental issue of parliamentary democracy—of the House of Commons taking back control. In December 2017, the House of Commons gave a Second Reading to the Bill of the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, and said that it should be taken into Committee. The Committee of Selection met. All of us, whether we are serving a penance or fresh-faced Members looking to cut our teeth in a Public Bill Committee, were sent to this Committee to consider the Bill line by line and clause by clause, but the Government have thrown it into parliamentary purgatory.

We will still be meeting here in March. I predict that the Government will eventually put the proposals to a vote in the House, because they have to, as the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean said. They will be defeated. The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton will probably run out of time and the Bill will die. The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean talked about not

wasting time, but in reality, some innocent young Conservative MP from the Back Benches—perhaps even the hon. Member for Torbay—will have to bring this very measure back as a private Member's Bill. It will leave some poor Conservative with egg all over their face. Let us give up the charade.

Mr Harper: I want to pick up on the hon. Gentleman's point about democracy, because more recently than Second Reading, a motion was put to the House on 19 June. The House was given a clear choice about whether to allow this Committee to make progress on the Bill without a money resolution. Notwithstanding predictions about what the House might do in future when it is given the Orders in Council, it made a clear majority decision for us not to proceed, so the Government are actually following the will of the House.

David Linden: I am very grateful as always to the right hon. Gentleman, who participated in that debate, as I did. Several hon. Members were very clear when they stood up on the Back Benches. As a Government Back Bencher, the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay did very well when he suggested that, although he did not support the reduction to 600 seats, he would not vote on the motion based on a technicality, because he did not think that it was appropriate for the House to take that route.

We are all big enough and ugly enough to have conversations with hon. Members across the aisle, and it is clear that there is not a majority in the House. That is precisely why the Government will not have that vote on the Floor of the House, because frankly, they have enough ongoing division within themselves, let alone with the other side of the House. If the Government are serious about respecting the will of the House—if the Leader of the House in particular, who is one of those great people who believe in parliamentary sovereignty—and genuinely want to take back control, they should schedule the vote. We will have the vote.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

The Chair: Order. I am keen to hear from Back Benchers, starting with Alex Norris.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Mr Owen. Over the weekend and on Monday, I read coverage relating to this vote. One national newspaper quoted the Minister from our meeting last week, and the Committee was characterised as obscure. I am not sure whether it is a promotion or a demotion, after 13 or so weeks, to have reached the ranks of obscure. When we are still here in March, as the hon. Member for Glasgow East said, I wonder whether we will become veterans. I have not been here very long, but I wanted to become a veteran, so that will be very exciting.

What is at the nub of this and what saddens me about it is that our politics should never seek to emulate American politics. I do not think that the Americanisation of British culture in general is a great thing. However, if anyone watches American politics now, as I know lots of people in this building do with great interest and sometimes horror, they see is that everything—whether it is the colour of the napkins or the electoral system—

becomes a partisan arm wrestle. Everything, whether it is appointing judges or whatever it is, becomes an exercise in narrow advantage.

I am willing to take much of what the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean says at face value. The intentions at the outset, many years ago now, were very honourable. However, this has now become—without doubt—an exercise in political advantage: “the Government want this process to happen; it would help them. We do not want it to happen; it would not help us.”

If someone is a student of British politics, as I know lots of people in this room are, they will know that that has never been the way in which we have done our boundaries. Our boundaries and the way in which we have dealt with this system has been characterised by fair play and equity. Of course, I understand that we do not want to have ballooned constituencies in some parts of the country and tiny ones in others, but at the same time we want conversations about how to set a fair system—one that gives people as equal a voice as is physically possible—without tilting the scales one way or the other, because that goes against British values and our democracy. And whether we like it or not, we are in that territory now. Nothing could make that clearer than the fact that the vote on this issue is now being kicked further down the road, because the Government are not sure that they will win it.

Mr Harper: I am reflecting on this from memory, so I hope the Committee will forgive me if I have not got it quite right, but I think the hon. Gentleman is putting a gloss on the way that this process perhaps worked in the past. I seem to remember that in 1968 the then Prime Minister, Lord Wilson, brought forward to the House a set of boundary proposals that were not advantageous to the Labour party and he asked the House to vote them down. As it happened, it did not work because he lost the 1970 general election. Nevertheless, the idea that this process has somehow always been conducted in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests is perhaps not an accurate reading of the historical record.

Alex Norris: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention; his recollection of 1968 may well be stronger than mine, for obvious reasons. Perhaps I am putting a gloss on things and maybe we are looking back, as we tend to do, through sepia or whatever, but the point is that we have never been more partisan and red state/blue state than we are today, and this process is the perfect example of that.

So for goodness’ sake, let us kill this process off. We have got complete recognition that something needs to change—the boundaries need to change—but we have got this zombie hangover from the last Parliament in front of us; well, it is not in front of us today, but it will be in many months’ time. Of course I do not mean my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, but the boundary review.

Let us put this boundary review to bed. Let us get down to discussing what I think are pretty good first principles in this Bill and let us get to where we all want to be. It will reflect on all of us better; it will also be better for our mental wellbeing, I suspect. Ideally—this is my major goal—we might have an outcome before the baby of my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Cat Smith), who has been born during these proceedings, goes to university.

David Linden: I forgot to say in my remarks that the first week back I will not be here, because I will have a second child by that point. In the course of this Bill Committee, two children will have been born and the money resolution has not been granted. I give advance notice and my apologies.

Alex Norris: I am sure that we all want to pass on our congratulations to the hon. Gentleman. Yes, let us at least get this done before those children are at university, if not at school.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen.

What we see here is an anti-democratic process. It was 1 December 2017 when this Bill passed its Second Reading, so we are now more than nine months down the line and we have been meeting ever since, because the Government will not grant us a money resolution.

We have been given various reasons why we have not been given a money resolution. We were told that the boundary commissions’ proposals were coming and that it was best to wait for them to arrive, so that both matters could be considered together. Now we are being told that there are some complex resolutions and instruments that need to be prepared for that to happen. Surely the Government should have been ready for that. They knew when the boundary commissions would report. The proposals are the same as they were a year ago. The Government must have known what was coming—what landed on their desk cannot have been a big surprise—so it is no excuse for them to say they need more time to prepare and introduce those instruments.

Mr Harper: With the greatest respect, the boundary commissions gave their final proposals to the Government only on Monday. The Government could not have drafted the Orders in Council until they received those proposals. They could not have anticipated that the draft proposals would remain unchanged, and I do not think they remain completely unchanged. Drafting legislation is a complex process. Only certain people in Parliament can do it, and it is detailed, technical work, so it takes time. To be fair, I do not think the Minister is making that up.

Bambos Charalambous: If nothing has changed since the previous proposals were presented about a year ago, draft instruments should be ready to go now. Certainly, nothing whatsoever has changed in my constituency, and I am not sure what has changed in other areas. The majority of things have remained the same since last year.

This is an attempt to run down the clock on the Bill. There are only two more sitting Fridays this year. We are told there may be more coming next year, but we do not know when they will be announced or on what dates they will be. Even if the Bill got out of Committee, we would need another sitting Friday for it to get its Third Reading, and a number of other Bills would be ahead of it in any event. This is purely an attempt by the Government to run down the clock on the Bill.

If the Government are so confident about the proposals, why will they not put them to a vote? I know why—because they would lose. I heard the hon. Member for

[*Bambos Charalambous*]

Wellingborough say openly in business questions last Thursday that he would vote against the proposals if they were brought to the Floor of the House. I understand that a number of his colleagues share that view. Certainly, Labour would oppose the proposals were they put to the House—that is my opinion—so the Government would lose.

We need clarity. People say a boundary review has not taken place for a substantial period, so we all agree what the issue is and that it needs to be resolved, but we have a log jam with respect to how that should be done. The way to get out of it is to ensure that the Bill gets a money resolution, progresses out of Committee and has its Report stage soon.

Christian Matheson: It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I know hon. Members find these proceedings rather frustrating, but I do not. I have learned stuff today. My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate makes an intriguing point about the Government running down the clock given the limited number of sitting Fridays. That had not occurred to me.

One of the problems the Minister faces is that she is running out of time, excuses and patches of long grass into which to kick the Bill. We kicked it into recess, but recess ended. We kicked it again when we were given the excuse that we had to wait for the drafting, which I will return to in a moment. The long grass of the conference recess will put matters off again, but time and room will continue to run out.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who talked about some of the procedures that might be used. He mentioned that he does not speak for the Government. The Minister does not speak for the Government in Committee, either—she hardly speaks at all. It was nice to hear from her last week. I am hoping, perhaps against hope, that she contributes today. We shall see.

The right hon. Gentleman also suggested that we should wait and see what the House's response is to the proposals published this week, but my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East and my hon. Friends have already pointed out that the House has pretty much made its decision. How do we know? Because the Government are kicking the proposals into the long grass. They know they cannot win a vote—that is the sticking point.

I see from the Order Paper that this is not the only Public Bill Committee meeting today. The Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill will meet just down the corridor this afternoon. I am pleased to see that on the Order Paper, but I cannot help but wonder whether the money resolution has been moved for that—I suspect it has.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Last night.

Christian Matheson: The Minister often points me in the right direction—not always, but sometimes.

10.30 am

I want to return to the Minister's point, which was reflected in the contribution of the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, about the delay that we face in the Government's tabling the necessary orders. The Minister said that they are complicated to draft. The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean talked about the lack of capacity in Government. If that is true—I have no reason not to believe it—it shows, once again, the chaos and catastrophe of Brexit sucking the life out of Government, and taking up huge amounts of public resources, when we should be dealing with more relevant things.

I took the liberty, however, of digging out the last set of orders. There are four of them: for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The last one was from 2007, which reminds us—as other hon. Members have done—of the need for an updated set of constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton talked about being almost 20 years out of date. I want to put on record the Opposition's desire to get a set of constituencies that reflects matters.

On the face of it, the previous order is a weighty document of 74 pages in the PDF version. I am not sure whether PDFs were invented in 2007—they certainly were not in 1997. It is a hefty volume, but 70-odd pages simply list the constituencies and the wards that would make them up. As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate mentioned, that is simply a matter of transposition from the Boundary Commission's final report.

Let us look at the rest of the order. It is four articles long with an introductory preamble, which I am sure I could just cut and paste from the previous report. Article 1, "Citation and commencement," reads:

This Order may be cited as the Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007... This Order shall come into force on the fourteenth day after the day on which it is made."

That is not complicated drafting.

Article 2, "Parliamentary constituencies in England," reads:

"England shall be divided into the parliamentary constituencies... which are named in column 1 of the Table in the Schedule to this Order".

In other words, it simply refers to the schedule, which is simply a reproduction of the report that the Boundary Commission presented to the Government and the Government presented to the House. Article 3—

The Chair: Order. I tell the hon. Gentleman that we do not need to hear the whole order. However, he is responding to remarks made in the debate. In general, he can make reference to it, but not quote it verbatim.

Christian Matheson: I am most grateful for your guidance, Mr Owen. As you will know, I always accept the guidance of the Chair. If it gives you any comfort, it would not delay matters long, because the order is extremely short and simple. There are two extra articles, one about electoral registers and one about revoking previous orders.

I will make an offer to the Minister, who I think may have not understood the full complexity—or lack thereof—of the orders. If it will help, between now and next Wednesday, I will draft the order for her, based on

this. I am sure the Clerks would also be helpful and then she can give it to the parliamentary draftsmen, and we can get the work done. It might take a week or so longer for me to type up the orders for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but that is only because I am slow at typing.

David Linden: I am happy to take Scotland for the hon. Gentleman.

Christian Matheson: What a generous offer! There is a serious point. With the greatest respect—I moderate the tone of my language—the Minister’s excuse does not hold water and is not acceptable. The orders are simple—they simply reproduce what the boundary commissions gave us. They are not a reason to delay the vote in the House.

What is the reason? We know what it is: the Government do not have a majority. Some hon. Members in the extremist Brexiteer wing of the Conservative party are agitating about Brexit and looking to make trouble wherever they go, and others simply do not approve of reducing the size of the House while the size of the Executive—the Government—is not reduced, so the House cannot perform its scrutiny.

We have talked about party advantage this and party advantage that, but many hon. Members on both sides of the House are dedicated to the House, its service and its stature in being able to undertake its role of scrutinising the Government. They do not like the Government’s proposals, not because of self-interest, but because they damage the standing of the House. That needs to be put on the record as well as the suggestions of party advantage.

My offer stands. If the Minister picks up the phone and asks me to help her to draft the order, I will do so, but I suspect that the parliamentary draftsmen will do a better and quicker job, if they are given the nod. I wonder if the delay is not because the drafting is complicated, but because the Government are looking for yet another patch of long grass into which to kick it. Those patches are running out.

Chloe Smith: I am only sorry for the slightly imaginary world in which some Opposition Members seem increasingly to live. The factual position is as I set out last week, and I have nothing further to add this week.

Question put and agreed to.

10.37 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 10 October at Ten o’clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Fourteenth Sitting

Wednesday 10 October 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 17 October at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 14 October 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Kenneth Fox, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 10 October 2018

[NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: The usual before we begin: everybody please switch off mobile phones, which includes me; no coffees or teas allowed but, if anyone wants to remove a jacket, please feel free to do so.

As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton to move that the Committee adjourns.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn. Thanks to everyone for coming. I hope we all had a good break.

The energy after the Labour party conference was quite a contrast to the tumbleweed blowing around the hall in Birmingham.

The Chair: Order. Mr Khan, I would not ordinarily allow comments about party political conferences, so please keep them to the Bill.

Afzal Khan: Thank you, Ms Dorries. Perhaps it is that lack of energy that is to blame for our stagnation in this Committee. The Minister has told us that it is a very long and complicated process to translate the boundary review recommendations into a motion to put to Parliament. I do not believe it would be so complicated in fact. I am sure that an efficient Government could get anything done if they had the energy and focus. Clearly, this Government are more interested in kicking the can down the road than in bringing the issue of boundaries to a head.

The Government already face threats of rebellion from 80 MPs over the Prime Minister's Brexit deal. Why would they anger even more of their Members by pushing through an unpopular boundary review that is doomed to be voted down? The answer, of course, is because that is what would be best for our democracy.

We cannot continue with boundaries based on 20-year-old data. The current review excludes a million voters and will reduce democratic accountability just when we need it most. For the sake of our democracy, we must abandon the arbitrary and harmful attempt to reduce MPs, and my Bill would do just that. But, as we know, the Government have no problem with putting the interests of their party above the interests of the country.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, Ms Dorries, to be back in Committee and to serve under your chairmanship. I see our numbers are dwindling once again. The right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who is normally assiduous about attending and has been very helpful in pointing out intricacies of procedure that I have not yet got my head around, is not

here. Let us hope that is only a temporary absence. I would like to think he is made of sterner stuff and has not been worn down.

I see that our friend from the Scottish National party, the hon. Member for Glasgow East, is not with us this morning. I again assure the Minister, the Committee and you, Ms Dorries, that we shall not be worn down. The reasons we will not be worn down are very much those just stated eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, who has been a personal friend for many years, long before either of us was privileged and honoured to be elected a Member of this place.

There is a clear, pressing and dire need for a boundary review, but one that is fair. The Government's basis for the current boundary review is to equalise the number of constituencies, but my hon. Friend makes the point that even that aim will not be achieved because there are a million voters missing from the register. Therefore, we will get constituencies that vary hugely in size, simply because the registers on which they are based are inaccurate.

I am looking at *Hansard* from our sitting on 5 September. We learned that the new boundaries—as opposed to the current boundaries—as published on 5 September will not be brought before the House any time soon because of the complicated drafting of the orders. The Minister was pressed by me on the point that it might take several months. She said:

“I confirm that I used the word ‘months’ and I deliberately did so. I intend to be realistic with the Committee that those instruments are complex and need to be prepared fully and correctly.”

She was, as she promised,

“quite straight about that with the Committee.”—[*Official Report, Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Public Bill Committee, 5 September 2018; c. 88.*]

I then looked at the previous instruments that the House had agreed and they did not seem that complicated to me. I am not a parliamentary draftsman and I have never been a Minister.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): Yet.

Christian Matheson: Yet. I have never given instructions to civil servants to brief parliamentary draftsmen on.

However, it is not that complicated an order. I have gone so far as to assist the Minister by drafting the order myself. I know that we do not name staff here, so I will not mention them. I have not checked it with the Clerks in the Public Bill Office, but I am sure that they will be fairly satisfied, because all that needed changing was the dates, the parent Acts of Parliament from which the order would be derived and a few of the numbers. It then required taking volume 1 of the report, and the list of constituencies and the wards of which those constituencies are comprised.

I did not photocopy it because I wish to save paper, but if the Minister and her staff wish to pull it off the internet, that would be an easy way forward. They can then staple that to the draft order, ensure that the Clerk is happy with it and we can introduce this new order—I am trying to be helpful here—in a matter of a couple of weeks, I believe. It is not complicated.

The one thing I confess is that I have done only the England version. There are versions for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. My good friend the hon. Member

for Glasgow East offered to do the Scotland version. I think I could turn my hand to those three as well. They are slightly more complicated because the previous versions included Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly constituencies, but I think we can easily get over that.

I offer a helping hand to the Minister. The order is easy. I have drafted it. If it is not perfect now—it might be; I might have surprised myself with my ability to draft an order—it is near as damn it. I believe, therefore, that we can move this matter forward.

The alternative is that the delay is not about drafting the order, but the fact that the Government think that they cannot get a majority of their Members to vote in favour of these new proposals any time soon. The Government are being sucked ever further into the morass of Brexit, with a whole section of Government Members acting akin to unguided missiles, firing off all over the House.

There is an element of wild disunity on the Government Benches, which means that any vote on the boundaries is not likely to get through. Subsequently, the Government are frit and do not have the courage to bring forward the proposal that they themselves generated. The complexity of the drafting is nothing more than an excuse. Today, that excuse has been eradicated, because I am quite happy to hand this proposal over to the Minister. We

can get over the problems of delay and move to vote on the new 5 September boundary proposals as soon as possible.

As I have said previously, those proposals will either be accepted or rejected by the House, but the Bill will remain on the Order Paper and will need to be dealt with one way or the other. The best way for the Government to deal with it is to vote against it on Third Reading. I urge them to show their hand, have the courage of their convictions—this was their idea, after all—and bring this matter to a vote, on both the proposed 5 September boundaries, which the boundary commissions have just produced, and the proposed guidance to the boundary commissions on a new set of proposals, which is enshrined in the Bill.

Let us see the colour of the Government's money and the strength of their conviction. Let us see the support they have in the House and stop kicking this down the road. I make a genuine offer to pass over this order to the Minister, so that she can share it with her civil servants and we can move forward apace.

Question put and agreed to.

10.10 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 17 October at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Fifteenth Sitting

Wednesday 17 October 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 24 October at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 21 October 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	David Weir, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 17 October 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Order. I welcome you all back and remind you that electronic devices should be switched to silent. We now move to the motion to adjourn, as the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed the money resolution.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester presented the Committee with a draft order that the Government could easily use to lay the boundary reports before the House. I do not believe it is necessary to copy the offer. The Minister had claimed that preparing the order would take many months, but it is quite clear that it could be done much quicker than that. I would like to ask the Minister how many civil servants are currently working on drafting the order. Is anybody actually doing that?

Whitehall might sometimes seem an obscure place but it is accountable to Parliament and, ultimately, to the public. Has the Minister instructed any parliamentary draftsmen to draw up the order? If so, how far have they got? I would be grateful if we could get an update, seeing as the boundary review was released a month ago.

Even quicker than an order for the boundary review would be a money resolution for my Bill. The Government had no trouble tabling multiple money resolutions for Bills behind mine in the private Member's Bill ballot. In fact, just yesterday the Minister tabled and spoke to the money resolution for the Overseas Electors Bill, making it crystal clear that money resolutions are being used for party political reasons, to further private Members' Bills that the Government support and block those they oppose. We can continue to meet every Wednesday morning and I am glad that colleagues continue to attend, but it would be better if we could actually discuss something.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I am grateful that you have called me, Mr Owen. I want to put a few remarks on the record that are pertinent to those raised by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. First, I should apologise that I was not here last week; I was unavoidably elsewhere. I notice, having assiduously read the fantastic *Hansard* report, which we are so blessed with in these Committees, that I was mentioned in dispatches, as it were, so I thank the hon. Member for City of Chester who speaks for the Opposition for noticing that I was not here. It is always good when people actually notice that one is not at Committee and that it does not just pass people by.

I want to say a couple of things about the drafting points. First, I am slightly disappointed that the hon. Member for City of Chester appears to be so despondent in his role as a Member of Parliament that he has decided to audition for the job of parliamentary counsel. Having acquainted myself with that, I can tell him that being a parliamentary draftsman is rather better paid than being a Member of Parliament. They are very senior lawyers and it is a very specialist job. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the pay scales, he will see they are rather better remunerated than even Cabinet Ministers. I should say that he would be very sadly missed, so I hope his application to be a parliamentary draftsman is declined.

I notice he offered his services to the Minister, but I think she probably has the services of parliamentary counsel to hand. As she said, it is a complicated process. I know the hon. Gentleman has not had the chance, but I have been able, in a number of roles, to ask civil servants to instruct parliamentary draftsmen. It is actually more complicated than the hon. Gentleman thinks and it needs to be right. What the Minister said last time about the complexity of the task is very necessary.

Given that we can discuss only the adjournment, I will repeat what I said on the final point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton about a money resolution. As I have said, the House now has the chance to take a decision on the boundary commission reports that have been laid before it. If we were to actually consider this Bill, it should not be considered in Committee. All the previous legislation on boundaries, because they are constitutional in nature, were considered in a Committee of the whole House. If the Bill were to make progress, the Government ought to find time for it so that all Members—because this issue affects all Members—could discuss it on the Floor of the House.

I think that the right approach is to allow the House to take a decision on the boundary commission orders. Obviously, in my current life as a Back-Bench Member of Parliament, I have no influence over that; it is a matter for the usual channels to discuss. However, if we were to discuss it in detail, it should be done in the House.

Afzal Khan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his conclusion and for his efforts in the Committee. The question is ultimately whether he believes that we should resolve this issue. After all, we have used the current figures for 20 years. Do we want to end up using them for 25 years? If we do not get on with this, there is a real risk that that will happen.

Mr Harper: One generally welcomes sinners who repent, and I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is seized of the urgency of dealing with the boundaries. I reflect on how disappointing it is that his party and the Liberal Democrats did not think so when they combined to block the boundary review that was supposed to take place off the back of the legislation passed in the House in 2011.

Had they not conspired to block that review, new boundaries would already have been put before the House and we would already have fought a general election on them. I am pleased—I will be grateful if the hon. Member for City of Chester will confirm this—that

the Labour party's position is that we need new boundaries, because that was not its position when they were blocked last time. That is welcome. We obviously want this process to continue.

I have one final point. As I have said previously, consideration of the Bill is slightly putting the cart before the horse because, first, we would be considering it without knowing the House's decision on the new boundaries laid before it. If the House accepts those, the decision has been taken. Secondly, even if the House were to reject the boundary commission proposals, as in the scenario set out by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, we should want to understand why the proposals brought forward under the existing legislation were rejected before we were to amend the Bill. Those reasons would obviously come up in the full debate that would take place in the House, and we should want that knowledge to inform the debate on the Bill.

That is why the sequence of this process that the Minister has set out in previous sittings is right, and I recommend that the Committee accepts it when it considers the motion to adjourn shortly.

The Chair: I am keen to hear from Back-Bench Members, so I call Karen Lee.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I am sorry that I was not here last week; I had something on. I made it a point to be here this week. I actually went to a meeting of the all-party parliamentary group on motor neurone disease at 9.30 am this morning. One of my constituents has motor neurone disease and he really wanted me to attend. I had to leave that meeting to come here. I have to say, as someone who is new here, that the delaying tactics being engaged here are appalling. I am shocked by them. I would like that to be noted, for the record. It is disgusting.

As Members, we are paid an awful lot of money, compared with people on universal credit or who go to food banks. We hear a lot about the proper spending of taxpayers' money, and that meeting is a resource that could be properly used. I could be down there now, learning more about motor neurone disease, but I am here instead. If I was here being productive, that would be something, but I am not. I am absolutely appalled, and Government Members should be ashamed of themselves.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is, as ever, a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen. I also apologise for not being here last Wednesday; I think Members will know my situation at home. I take this opportunity to place on the record my thanks and gratitude to NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, and particularly to the neonatal intensive care unit at the south Glasgow university hospital.

I do not intend to speak at any length today. I will make only one observation, to follow on from the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. I yesterday sat through the debate in the main Chamber on the Overseas Electors Bill, which was introduced by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Glyn Davies). I now find myself taking a rather unusual interest in money resolutions for private Members' Bills. I was rather surprised to hear the Minister say yesterday that the proposals would

cost £1 million a year for 10 years. One of the arguments that we hear at this Committee is that we have to be careful with how we use public money, so I am not sure how those two arguments match up.

I heard numerous Members, particularly Conservative Members, talking about "votes for life." I happen to disagree with the Bill that was before the House yesterday, none the less, I respect the fact that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire managed to get a Second Reading for it. I respected the democratic vote of the House yesterday when it gave that Bill a money resolution. I respect the fact that next door, at 2 o'clock this afternoon, a Committee will meet to consider it clause by clause and line by line. The fundamental issue is that the House of Commons has commanded that that Bill be able to progress, but the Government are using delaying tactics by not granting a money resolution to the Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, which is an abuse of Executive power. The Overseas Electors Bill will come back to the House at some point for its remaining stages, and I will vote against it on Third Reading, but I respect the fact that it will go to Committee this afternoon and that members of that Public Bill Committee will be able to scrutinise it line by line. That is exactly what we should be able to do here.

Mr Harper: On the hon. Gentleman's point about the wishes of the House of Commons, it is worth putting on record that on 19 June, Opposition Front Benchers moved a motion to ask the House whether this Committee could consider the clauses of the Bill, notwithstanding the fact that no money resolution had been tabled. The House was asked for its opinion about whether we should proceed. It divided, and made a clear decision with a majority of 15 that we should not make any progress on the Bill. We can debate whether that was the right or wrong decision—obviously, the hon. Member for Lincoln believes that it was the wrong decision—but the point is that the House made that decision, not the Government, and that is why we are not making further progress.

David Linden: We have had that debate before, and we know that on the day, several Conservative Members said that they supported the principle of the Bill, but were voting against the motion on the basis of a technicality. As the parliamentary term continues, I think that more and more Conservatives will come out and say that they do not support the reduction of seats from 650 to 600. We will see what happens when that comes before the House.

I want to pick up on a point that the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean made about how long it takes to draft legislation. I am sorry, but I cannot buy that. Numerous times in this House, I have seen emergency legislation brought forward in respect of Northern Ireland, which is fast-tracked at all stages—done in one day—and drafted in a matter of days. If the Government can draft legislation for Northern Ireland very quickly and get it through all its stages in the House of Commons, they can do it with this Bill.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow my good friend the hon. Member for Glasgow East. It is great to see him back in Committee.

[*Christian Matheson*]

I will pick up on two points that were queried by the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. First, I confirm to the Committee that I am not at all dissatisfied with my lot; I might be a little bit dissatisfied with the Minister's, but I am certainly not dissatisfied with mine. I consider it a privilege to be here, and I am fortunate to enjoy the work that I undertake. That work does, from time to time, include drafting, and I will come back to that in a moment, but I confirm that that Her Majesty's Opposition support a review of boundaries. We are long overdue one.

I was not in the House at the time, but I am pretty sure that the Opposition voted against the last set of boundaries for the same reason we are unhappy with the current ones: the obsession with reducing seats from 650 to 600, and the tight margin around the national average that restricts local factors and puts numbers above everything. The equalisation of seats is probably a fair idea in itself, but there has to be a level of tolerance, and we know about the problem with people having fallen off the register and come back on, but we are still using out-of-date registers. Those three points would have been considered in this Committee, but we are not allowed to discuss the Bill. The Opposition are absolutely in favour of a new set of boundaries, and we want to see the review moved forward quickly, but I say to the right hon. Gentleman that the Opposition are not preventing it from happening. The Government are preventing it from happening, because they do not have the courage of their convictions and have not brought forward the new set of boundaries to be considered.

The right hon. Gentleman has considerably more experience in Government than me, although that is not hard, for now. Nevertheless, the order would be simple to draft. It is not primary legislation. When I drafted my proposed order last week, I based it on the previous order. A framework is already there that can be used. Once again, I do not accept that it is a complicated piece of drafting, not least because most of the order simply reproduces the boundary commissions' proposals. That work has already been done, and there will not be very much need to amend those proposals.

10.15 am

Other Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, have spoken about the Overseas Electors Bill, which perhaps puts the Minister in a further bind when trying to defend the situation with this Bill. The Overseas Electors Bill is similar to this one. It is a Back-Bench Bill, it has received its Second Reading and it has now leapfrogged this Bill. It is not a very British way of doing things. In this country, we do not push in. We do things fairly, in a decent order and with respect for each other.

My hon. Friend's Bill was first in the queue, and the Government have allowed another Bill to push in and be given consideration first. That in itself might be discourteous, in parliamentary terms, but unfortunately it exposes the Government politically. It exposes the absurdity and the political considerations of failing to give this Bill a money resolution. One by one, every single excuse that the Government throw up to delay the Bill is falling by the wayside. Much as I have sympathy with the Minister—in the past, I have used

the phrase “taking one for the team”, and we have heard the anger of my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln—things are becoming more absurd and more damaging by the week. The situation cannot continue. There are no more excuses for delaying the procedure.

In closing, I want to ask the Minister a question, because there has been some suggestion that in the legislation underpinning the new 5 September boundaries there is a time limit within which an order has to be brought before the House. We have heard the reasons as to why the Government do not want to do that, but I would be interested to know whether they have had any legal advice about whether the time limit exists and can be ignored and on what basis it can be ignored. Otherwise, we may find that there is more legal pressure for them to introduce the order, which has apparently not yet been drafted, within the time limit specified by the parent legislation. If the Minister makes a contribution, perhaps she might address that point.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I will make a few comments this week. The first is to extend my sympathy and my very best wishes to the hon. Member for Glasgow East. I, too, am a relatively new parent, and I entirely understand how very difficult things must be for him and his family. We all wish his family well.

On the point that the hon. Member for Lincoln made, I am afraid her anger is misplaced in being directed at me. It is not for me to answer as to why we gather here every Wednesday to discuss adjourning. That is for you, Mr Owen, or the Member whose Bill this is. All arguments have been made about the status of the Bill. There are few arguments to add that would be fresh to this Committee, so I will not try to do so. Nor will I bring to this place arguments that relate to the Overseas Electors Bill, which will rightly be discussed in another Committee.

I am none the less happy to account to Parliament for the progress of the order. I can confirm that the legislation requires it to be prepared as soon as may be; that is the legal position, as set out in legislation. There need be no further secret advice of any kind; it is there for all to see. Therefore, the order is being prepared and the House will absolutely have its chance to examine it in line with the legislative process that we are following. I should note that it was of course this House—Parliament—that agreed and set out that process.

In closing, I will just offer a little further information to the Committee, which I hope might be of interest and which is slightly in response to the hon. Member for City of Chester, who chose this morning to talk of politics and absurdity. However, he may like to reflect on what happened in the fifth boundary review, which, Mr Owen, you may recall was carried out under a Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman may like to know about the reports and the orders at that time. I am talking about a period from 2004 to 2007—it took a little time to do the work—when the reports and orders were done separately for each nation of the United Kingdom. He may already know that the report for England was handed to the Government in October 2006 and the order was laid in Parliament four months later. He may like to know that the report for Northern Ireland was handed to the

Government in September 2007 and the order was laid in Parliament six and a half months later; and that the report for Wales was handed to the Government in January 2005 and the order was laid in Parliament a whole 10 and a half months later. The hon. Member for Glasgow East may be delighted to know that the report and order for Scotland were done a little quicker—inside 2004—but a maximum time of 10 and a half months is

something that members of the Committee may like to reflect upon when they talk party politics, because it was the Labour party that achieved that.

Question put and agreed to.

10.21 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 24 October at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Sixteenth Sitting

Wednesday 24 October 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 31 October at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 28 October 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	David Weir, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 24 October 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: With all electronic devices now switched to silent, we move to the motion to adjourn. I remind the Committee that we cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed the money resolution.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

The way that we draw our boundaries in this country has until recently inhabited a sacred space in our politics. We have four independent boundary commissions that independently consider the population and community ties across the UK and produce proposals for how many MPs there should be and where the boundaries of those constituencies should lie.

It is essential that that process remains independent. We need only look to the United States to see the danger of their approach. Extreme gerrymandering has eroded public faith in the political system. Debate around boundaries has been poisoned by party-political fighting, and lengthy lawsuits have recently reached the Supreme Court.

I believe strongly that we must keep our process independent. The current proposed boundaries have been expressly designed to benefit the Conservative party, and 2 million people have been disfranchised from the process. The Government have cut the number of MPs to an arbitrary 600 and equalising electorate size has been given priority over community ties.

My Bill has cross-party support. It is nonsense that we are in these endless Committee sittings, wasting time instead of pressing ahead with my Bill to produce the new boundaries our democracy needs.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will speak briefly. I did not intend to speak—I know everyone says that—but the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton said a number of things that cannot land on the record without correction.

First, I agree with him completely that the process covered in his Bill and the process under way absolutely have to be independent. I agree that the way other countries draw their boundaries, for example, the United States, is not one that I wish to follow. There, elected politicians sit with a map drawing boundaries.

My challenge to the hon. Gentleman is that that is exactly not what happens in this country. The boundaries that are now with Parliament, and with the Government for converting into orders, have not been drawn by party politicians. They have been carefully drawn by independent judicial office holders. They have obviously listened to evidence from the political parties, as one would expect, but all political parties have been able to give evidence. They have heard evidence from other people and produced independent proposals.

Of course, those proposals are shaped by the rules set by Parliament. Those rules are about equalising the size of constituencies, and I think there is general agreement that constituencies should be of equal size, not for our interest, but so that votes across the country are of equal weight wherever voters live.

I do not know whether it is still true, or whether someone has polled it, but I think it would be the case that reducing the number of Members of Parliament remains the most popular policy of the coalition Government. With 600, we would still have more politicians in the country at that level than many other comparable democracies.

Afzal Khan: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could enlighten us as to where the number of 600 comes from.

Mr Harper: It is not scientific. I think I set it out when I took through the original legislation. We made a decision to reduce the size of the House. There is nothing magic about 600. The current number is 650 and we decided to reduce that by about 10%, because that was about the amount we were shrinking of the rest of the public sector, and 600 is a round number. Rather than saying it was 587.5 or 592, it is 600. There was a conspiracy theory at the time about this special number that was specially designed to have some specific effect, but it is just a round number—600 seems a more sensible number than 604. There is nothing magic about it, but there was a general sense that it would be better to have slightly fewer Members. By comparison with similar western democracies, we actually have quite a lot of Members of Parliament at our level of government, and it seems sensible to make a modest reduction.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is quite right to say that we have a lot of Members of Parliament, but there are even more Members of the House of Lords. What will the Government do to reduce that number?

Mr Harper: I do not want to go too far into that or you will pull me up, Mr Owen, but I brought forward an ill-fated attempt both to radically reduce the size of the House of Lords and to make it more democratic. If we had received support from the Labour party for the programme motion so that we did not spend the whole of the 2010-15 Parliament talking about it, we might have made some progress. Sadly, that was not to be, and now it is not at the top of this Government's priorities because we have other important matters to deal with.

I just want to put on record that I think it is incredibly important that we have an independent process for drawing boundaries, but that is indeed what we have in this country. I would like the Government and Parliament to be able to consider the boundaries that are drawn up by that independent process before we make progress with the Bill.

David Linden: It is, as ever, a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen. I looked at the Order Paper and saw that this is the sixteenth meeting of the Committee—my goodness, I am sure there will be a Netflix documentary about us soon.

I want to pick up on one or two points made by the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. As I was not a Member of this place during his time as Chief Whip and when he was a member of the Government, I was not aware that he was a great reformer who sought to abolish our cronies in ermine. I am none the less disappointed that he was not successful at that—I am sure he would have had the support of the Scottish National party, and he certainly would have had my personal support. He is absolutely right to make it clear that the boundary commissions are entirely independent; none of the members of this esteemed Committee is questioning the impartiality of the fine civil servants who serve on the boundary commissions.

It comes back to the principle that has been directed to civil servants by Government, which is to reduce the number of seats from 650 to 600. The noise of a reversing JCB digger could almost be heard as the right hon. Gentleman talked about how they arrived at this magical number of 600. The technical way of saying how they found it is that they put a wet finger up in the air, and that is how they came up with the figure of 600—I have other feelings about that.

I wanted to make a brief contribution today because, having looked at the Order Paper for the main Chamber, we are of course considering some very important legislation for Northern Ireland. One point that I made in Committee last week was that before my time as a Member in this House, when I was a researcher, and now as an MP, I have seen the Government countless times bring forward legislation for Northern Ireland very quickly. The Minister is a former Northern Ireland Minister herself, so she will know how quickly legislation for across the water can be drafted. I find it a little bit bizarre that legislation for Northern Ireland can be drafted so quickly and, indeed, passed so quickly—in one day—yet Orders in Council take months to be brought to the House.

Mr Harper: I may be wrong, but I think the reason why Northern Ireland legislation tends to be dealt with differently is because there is generally a consensus between Front Benchers on the proposals that are brought forward. It is only because there is agreement on the process that it can be done like that. If what is being proposed for Northern Ireland is politically contentious between the parties, it simply would not be possible to bring it forward on an emergency basis. We have established in our relatively limited debates in Committee on Adjournment motions that there is no consensus across the parties on the subject of parliamentary constituencies. I do not think that the process would work in the way that the hon. Gentleman suggests.

David Linden: I caution the right hon. Gentleman—if he wants to talk about contentious issues in Northern Ireland, I do not think that the Government are on their finest form with some of their proposals for how they will treat Northern Ireland over the backstop. It is fine if he wants to lecture me on that—I dare him to do so.

I ask the Minister: how many civil servants in the Cabinet Office are working on the preparation for this? The final number I would like to find out from the Minister—I would be grateful if she gave it to me sooner rather than later—is this. We are talking about cutting the cost of politics, but we are approaching that

wonderful time of year again when the turkeys are stuffed—when people put on ermine robes and become new Members of the House of Lords. It is around this time of year when we find out the long list of new Members of the House of Lords. How many new lords can we expect next year?

The Chair: Before I call the hon. Member for City of Chester, I just want to put on the record the fact that I understood every word that the hon. Member for Glasgow East said.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): And of course, Mr Owen, we understand and follow every word you say as you direct us. It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, but that pleasure is tempered by the disappointment that, once again, we have failed to receive the money resolution that would have allowed us to proceed.

It is genuinely always a pleasure to listen to the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean. I have said previously that his experience is invaluable in this Committee. Let me put on record the Opposition's view that there is absolutely no question about the Boundary Commission's integrity—none whatever. There is an issue, of course, about the guidance, which the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, that the House gives to the Boundary Commission when it makes its decisions and proposals.

The Bill would not reduce the number of constituencies, but it would allow an ever-so-slightly greater tolerance about the national average than the boundaries currently awaiting the House's decision. It would allow for an equalisation of the size of constituencies, and a greater recognition of communities of interest around them, which make up an important part of the identity that electors feel with their parliamentary constituency. We absolutely want to progress to greater consistency across the numbers in parliamentary constituencies, because it is not helpful to have too great a divergence from the national average and constituencies of too great a size.

Hundreds of thousands of voters were not on the register on which the existent boundary proposals were based, so there will inevitably be a great variation in the number of voters. It has been suggested to me that some of the inner-city seats in London might have well in excess of 100,000 residents—150,000 in two cases—but not voters, because people have fallen off the register.

Mr Harper: On that point, of course whenever we draw a cut-off line and start a process, we cannot possibly be completely up to date. A big change happened with the general election and the referendum, and the analysis that was carried out by Number Cruncher Politics and the Library shows that the distribution of those voters is broadly equal across the country. If they were all on the register, it would not make a material difference to the distribution of seats across the country, so the hon. Gentleman's fear is unwarranted.

Christian Matheson: I am grateful for that intervention, and I take the right hon. Gentleman's point. I shall look up that report, but that still does not negate the problem that there are hundreds of thousands of people who are not actually on the register.

[*Christian Matheson*]

I do not intend to detain the Committee for much longer, save to say that we need progress, and we are being prevented from making progress by the Government's failure to bring forward the money resolution or the alternative to it, which is the orders for decision by this House. I believe they are doing that because it suits the internal dynamics and politics of the Conservative party. Those considerations are overriding the national need for a decision on this matter. The longer this goes on, the more unhelpful the Government's position is.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I will respond to the two questions that the hon. Member for Glasgow East asked me. I will not touch the second, because it is absolutely nothing to do with the scope of the Bill. On the first, I will simply say for clarity—

The Chair: Order. May I just say to the Minister that what is discussed is a matter for me? It was not out of order, and if the Minister wishes to respond, she may do so.

10.15 am

Chloe Smith: I beg your pardon, Mr Owen. I spoke too strongly, and of course I respect your decision.

In any case, let me deal with the question about the number of civil servants working on the orders, which, as I confirmed last week, are being brought to Parliament, quite correctly and in line with the expected process. I am not able to give a number, because my civil servants, whom I have the greatest respect for and gratitude to, work on a number of things at any one time. There is simply no way to say how many are working on one thing and how many on another. However, I confirm again to the Committee that that work is being done to a speed I am satisfied with, and that the orders will come back to Parliament as soon as can be.

Afzal Khan: If the Minister is not able to give us those numbers, will she give us an idea of the timescale for the work and when it is likely to make progress?

Chloe Smith: Forgive me, Mr Owen, I am a little confused. Am I continuing my remarks now?

The Chair: No, you have finished your remarks. However, Mr Khan asked a question in his winding-up speech. Whether you wish to answer it is a matter for you.

Chloe Smith: I believe I answered that question last week.

Question put and agreed to.

10.16 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 31 October at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Seventeenth Sitting

Wednesday 31 October 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 14 November at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 4 November 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 31 October 2018

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, I remind the Committee that electronic devices should be switched to silent. Tea and coffee are not allowed during sittings. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I hope that all colleagues saw the success of the private Members' Bills on Friday. By my count, three Bills successfully cleared all their Commons stages: the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill; the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration Etc.) Bill; and the Organ Donation (Deemed Consent) Bill. I commend the Members who worked on those Bills and brought them forward, but I cannot help but feel frustrated that so many Bills that were supposedly behind mine in the queue have leapfrogged, almost becoming law, while we are still in Committee. It shows that the hold-up with my Bill is an intentional delaying tactic by the Government. There is no reason why we could not have been granted a money resolution and have finished the Commons stages by now.

The Government are abusing the parliamentary process. Private Members' Bills were designed as a way for Back Benchers and Opposition MPs to change the law. The point of them is that a measure might not have the support of the Government, but it might have the support of the House and the public, and so it should become law. I believe this is the case with my Bill, and I hope the Government will respect the will of Parliament and let my Bill progress. If the Government do not agree with my Bill, they should vote it down on the Floor of the House—that is the right way of dealing with business in the House.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you back in the Chair, Ms Dorries, and I will not detain you or the Committee for very long this morning, save to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton about private Members' Bills, which were considered after Second Reading of his Bill, jumping the queue.

I have to say that this is not a British way of doing things. We queue in this country, and we take our fair turn. We take our fair turn even in Torbay, and we do things in the right order. It is discourteous not to follow a fair order and not to treat things fairly. It is discourteous not just to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, but to every hon. Member in this House who would seek to use the private Member's Bill system to

change the law or to have an effect on the democracy of our country. It is therefore discourteous to the whole House.

I say once again to the Minister that the absurdity of the situation will damage the reputation of the Government, but it will also damage the reputation of this House. At some point, when the House's reputation is brought into disrepute, I hope that the House itself will make its own judgment on the Government's actions in failing to bring forward the money resolution in fair time. It is clear to me now, and I think it is becoming even clearer—to hon. Members of all parties—that the delay is entirely politically motivated and flies in the face of the democratic decision taken on Second Reading. The longer it goes on, the greater the damage will be to the reputation of Parliament. I urge the Minister to bear that in mind as she considers whether to speak to colleagues about introducing a money resolution, so that we can get on with what the House asked us to get on with.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries, for what I believe is now our 17th episode of "I'm in a Public Bill Committee...Get Me Out Of Here!" I had quite a number of people from Glasgow visiting Parliament over the last couple of weeks, including some people earlier in the week. I took them round, gave them a tour and explained how Parliament works or, as is so often the case, does not work.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton said, it was great to see the three private Members' Bills progress on Friday. I found myself being lobbied by some constituents to speak in the Representation of the People (Young People's Enfranchisement and Education) Bill debate last Friday, and I had to break it to them rather gently that that Bill would not be voted on, and that it would not even be debated. I am now having a conversation with constituents about how private Members' Bills actually work.

I refer hon. Members to page 23 of today's Order Paper—we know that the next Friday sitting will be on 23 November, when we will debate the Stalking Protection Bill and the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill, which is almost certainly as far as we will get. However, because of the absolute nonsense that is the private Member's Bill system, there is also the Voter Registration Bill, the Student Loans (Debt Interest) Bill, the Border Control Bill, the Green Belt (Protection) Bill, the Local Audit (Public Access to Documents) Bill, and I could go on for several pages and mention the 150 or so Bills listed on the Order Paper—it is amazing—none of which will see the light of day.

The Chair: Please do not, Mr Linden.

David Linden: The point is that the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, was a lot further up the queue than that lot and is being held back. The House voted to give the Bill a Second Reading, and it commanded that the Bill come into Committee. We have now met on 17 occasions and got no further. Some of the Bills on the Order Paper have not even been printed yet. My hon. Friend has had the good grace to draft his Bill, and the House has commanded that it come to Committee for line-by-line scrutiny.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend is right: my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton had the good grace to draft the Bill. We must bear in mind that he also had the good grace to listen to representations from hon. Members from across the House and temper the Bill's original proposals, so he has a record of listening to hon. Members and taking their suggestions on board.

David Linden: My hon. Friend is spot on. I remember speaking—in the distant past—on Second Reading in December 2017, as a young, fresh-faced MP. I will leave it to the Committee to judge how I have fared since. I remember making it clear during that debate—back when we could talk about the substance of the Bill—that I wanted to see the Bill amended in certain areas. I wanted the number of constituencies to be protected, as is the case in Northern Ireland, and I wanted us to consider the electoral quota again, but we have come so far down the path of parliamentary procedure and game playing from the Government, that we are unable to talk about the substance of the Bill.

I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, is reasonable and wants to listen to colleagues. If the Government gave the Bill a money resolution, they would not necessarily need to allow it to progress. All we ask them to do is give it a money resolution so that we can discuss its contents. My hon. Friend is an entirely reasonable individual who will take on board the opinions of Committee members, who are dwindling. The number of Conservative Members on the Committee who have shown up either just once or not at all is a gross discourtesy to the House.

With that, I will leave my comments for this week. Hopefully, when we return for the 18th episode of this charade, we might make some progress.

Question put and agreed to.

10.8 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 14 November at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Eighteenth Sitting

Wednesday 14 November 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 21 November at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 18 November 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (Ind)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Gail Poulton, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 14 November 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: The usual rules apply to hot drinks and electronic devices. I remind the Committee that it cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution. I therefore call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. Last week saw the United States mid-term elections and what I believe should serve as a dark warning about the path on which the UK Government are currently embarking. I was shocked to watch the campaign and the results unfold as the extent of political meddling and voter suppression came to light. That was clearest in Georgia, where the Republican candidate, Brian Kemp, was also the Secretary of State, overseeing the election. He pulled out all the stops to suppress the votes for his opponent, including purging the voter rolls, putting 53,000 voters—

The Chair: Order. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman to come to the subject of the adjournment of this Bill Committee and not give a history lesson about the US mid-term elections. I appreciate that there is interest in that subject, but it is not one for this Bill Committee.

Afzal Khan: Thank you, Mr Owen. I am trying to make a link to the adjournment of this Committee. The sort of behaviour that I have described also went on in a number of other states in America. Why is that important? Because I believe that the actions of the UK Government are taking place in the shadow of the abhorrent moves to suppress the vote in the USA. It is widely accepted that the UK is influenced by the rhetoric and policy shifts in America. The UK Government are rolling out voter ID laws and, now, a boundary review that disfranchises 2 million voters. Our democracy has a proud tradition of fairness and independence, which must be protected. We could make real progress in these sittings with a cross-party approach to a fundamental part of our democracy.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that, given the amount of talk about how short of money and resources this country is and everything being cut, the fact that hon. Members' time, which is a valuable resource, is being wasted in this way is absolutely scandalous?

Afzal Khan: I could not agree more. This is a waste of our time and the public's money. We could make real progress by taking a cross-party approach to a fundamental part of our democracy, but instead we are left debating procedure.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I found myself coming here on a morning when, although

this place is obviously very volatile at the best of times, in the past 24 hours, it has been even more volatile. The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is right, and his point was backed up by the hon. Member for Lincoln: this whole exercise is entirely futile. When considering the amount of pressure that will exist in this place over the next 24 hours, few people would conclude that having another general election on the current boundaries before Parliament prorogues in April was unlikely; I think that it is probably very likely. We therefore come back to the central question about the boundaries that we want and what they should reflect. The boundaries of my constituency were put in place when I was 11 years old. I do not think that anyone here believes that constituency boundaries do not need to be looked at again. However, the fundamental question is whether to reduce the number of constituencies from 650 to 600, and I rather suspect that very soon we will be going to the country on the basis of 650.

The Chair: I just remind the Committee that the boundaries of my constituency were set in 1546.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and it is always a great pleasure to receive historical instruction from you, notwithstanding that you are here today in your capacity as Chair and not as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn, although I am reminded of many happy childhood holidays in your beautiful constituency.

I rise to speak once again in support of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln talked about a waste of time. Of course, it is a waste of time not just for the Committee, but for the Minister and her officials. Obviously, we do not talk directly about officials, but it would be better if the Minister and her team spent their time drafting the orders, which we have been told are particularly complicated, rather than wasting time in this Committee.

Of course, among all the noise, the heat, the clamour and the frenzy of Brexit—it is getting more frenzied by the hour, it would seem—the main development this week was the announcement by the Leader of the House that there would be some extra sitting Fridays. That gives the Back Benchers whose Bills are in the process an extra opportunity to secure their passage through this House—notwithstanding the advice, which I always welcome, from the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, who is not in his place today, that Bills such as this one might ordinarily be taken on the Floor of the Chamber in a Committee of the whole House.

The interesting thing in relation to the Bill about the Leader of the House's announcement is that it throws a spotlight on the fact that originally, when the Government decided that this Session would be not one year, but two, and thus extended its length, they did not at the same time double the number of sitting Fridays, when private Members' Bills are considered. That essentially meant we would have only half the number of sitting Fridays.

I am mindful of the fact that you are keen that we stay on topic, Mr Owen, but I make this point because it shines a light on the Government's tactics in closing down, using not argument or debate, but procedural

chicanery, any opportunities that hon. Members of all parties and particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton might have to progress a private Member's Bill.

By closing down the number of sitting Fridays, the Government are halving the opportunities for hon. Members to take forward debate. If it was a one-off that the Government had not moved the financial resolution for this particular Bill, that would be bad enough. However, because it is part of a pattern that includes halving the number of sitting Fridays and then realising later that in order to get some of their more favoured Bills through they have to add a couple extra, it puts the Government in an unfortunate light, as one who use procedural chicanery rather than debate, discussion and a democratic vote to close down proposed legislation that they do not like.

It is becoming more apparent by the week that this Government do not have confidence in their ability to see their legislative programme through the House and are using whatever procedural means necessary to prevent legislation they do not like. As I say, this is unfortunately part of a pattern, and that is why it is with regret that we must now move to the adjournment of this Committee yet again; but we shall be here again at the same time next week.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): Once again we find ourselves here, adjourning for what I think is the 17th or 18th time—I cannot remember how many. We will soon reach the one-year anniversary of this Bill's Second Reading. I know that because it passed on the day before my birthday.

In that time, very little has happened to progress this Bill. We were told initially to wait for the Boundary Commission to report. It has reported. We are now told that we are waiting for the civil servants to draft the orders required for the vote to happen in the House, and again that has not been forthcoming. I have had my private Member's Bill drafted from scratch in that time,

so if Ministers and civil servants need help, I suggest they ask the Public Bill Office or other parts of the House to assist them, if that is what is causing the delay.

My constituents are aware that the Boundary Commission has reported. They are in great uncertainty. They ask me what is going on, and all I can say to them is that once again we are adjourning and we have no idea when the Bill will progress, whether there will be a vote and whether it will progress at all. This morning, I had a conversation with a former Cabinet Minister of this Government; she seemed quite surprised that we were still adjourning and had not resolved the matter.

All I ask is that the Minister does whatever she can to progress this Bill. There is great uncertainty; people are concerned about the fact that it is not making progress. My council is doing a boundary review of its wards now, so all that is changing and pushing it further away. It makes nonsense of our voting—or not voting—on legislation that looked at the electorate in 2015 and at boundaries that may no longer exist. For that reason, great speed is needed to progress this. I urge the Minister to do all she can to make sure that the Bill progresses, otherwise we could vote on what came forward previously from the Boundary Commission.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I simply want to pass comment on the starting point of the Bill's promoter, the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton. I make no comment on the United States's politics or conduct, but in relation to the United Kingdom he made some quite unfounded insinuations about gerrymandering and voter suppression, which is, frankly, quite offensive, let alone ridiculous. That has nothing to do with the way that we conduct either our elections here, nor our independent boundary reviews, which are the subject of the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

10.11 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 21 November at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Nineteenth Sitting

Wednesday 21 November 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 28 November at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 25 November 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)
 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 † Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 † Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 † Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (Ind)
 † Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 21 November 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

This week has been described as one of the most precarious yet for the Prime Minister. It feels as if the same thing is said almost every week, with the level of threat inching up each time. I can see that sorting out parliamentary boundaries is not the Government's top priority now.

The Chair: Order. Mr Khan, can you keep the comments to your motion and not make them party political, or about the leadership. Thank you.

Afzal Khan: The Government have precious little political capital at the moment, and it is all being used for Brexit, leaving none to spare for the boundaries. At the moment we have no idea when the next general election will be. For my part, I think it will be before 2022, and it would be far from satisfactory to have that election on the basis of current boundaries. The Government's current strategy of delay, delay, delay on boundaries makes that almost inevitable.

Luckily an easy solution is already before us. My Bill offers a way out of the mess that the Government have created by trying to reduce the size of the Commons and disfranchise millions of young voters. We are offering to take some of the workload from busy Ministers and civil servants. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester has already drafted the orders that the Minister says we are waiting on. Will the Minister enlighten us about any developments?

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I intend to make this point every time I attend the Committee. Does my hon. Friend agree that, given an MP's salary, coming here week in, week out, and wasting the valuable time of Members and officers in this way is a complete waste of taxpayers' money? We are always being told how tight that is.

Afzal Khan: I thank my hon. Friend and could not agree more.

Will the Minister enlighten us about developments or an updated timetable for the process? Is she in a position to update us on the progress of the drafting of the orders?

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair, Ms Dorries. Did not I see you in the Chair in the Chamber yesterday? I should like to think that that is a promotion for you, and that I may offer my congratulations as you go to the next level.

The Chair: You guys.

Christian Matheson: Indeed, I congratulate you once again.

I share the indignance of my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln at what is becoming a farce. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton is right that part of the delay is due to the Government being unclear about whether they can get their strategy through, as they cannot be sure of the support of their Back Benchers at the moment. However, strangely enough, the opportunity that my hon. Friend presents would bring the whole House together, I am sure, and overcome some of the divisions it faces. He has demonstrated his willingness to work with Members from across the House, because he amended his original proposals before they were laid before the House, by changing the tolerance around the national electoral average. I think that my hon. Friend originally suggested 5% either side—a total of 10%. He has listened to constructive criticism and changed that to 7.5%, the better to meet the Government's wishes. That demonstrates that there could be a healing process to overcome the divisions in the House.

Karen Lee: My hon. Friend mentioned listening, and I would be more convinced that people were listening if they were not on their phones or looking at their papers.

Christian Matheson: I can only speak for myself on that one and as I am addressing you in the Chair, Ms Dorries, I can confirm I am not on my phone. My hon. Friend makes her own point, in her own inimitable style.

The other development that there has been on the matter in the past weeks was the Leader of the House's announcement of three more sitting Fridays for consideration of Back-Bench business. If we pass the Bill through Committee soon enough, that would give us extra time for the consideration of the remaining stages on the Floor of the House, where, as we have said previously, Conservative Members would have the chance either to further amend the Bill or to vote it down in its entirety.

That is notwithstanding the advice of the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean—he is not in his place today but is normally an assiduous attender of the Committee—that it is very possible that all stages of a constitutional Bill such as this should be considered on the Floor of the House. You might have the honour and responsibility of chairing such a Committee of the whole House, Ms Dorries, now that you hold a more elevated position on the Panel of Chairs. I look forward to serving under your chairmanship in the future.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is an immense pleasure to see you in the Chair, as always, Ms Dorries. We meet for what I believe is the 19th time, and what a

glorious number that is. It is not quite 48, but perhaps we will get there; we might have 48 sittings of this Committee.

Interestingly, this week we saw various members of the extreme Brexiteer wing of the Conservative party bemoaning the fact that we would not have seats in the European Parliament any more. We are, of course, losing those 73 Members of the European Parliament, which in some respects is right if we leave the European Union. However, those powers will come back from Brussels to this House, and it is the job of Members to

scrutinise them. I gently suggest to the Government, through the Chair, that if we reduce our number of MEPs—some people are struggling to get their head around that concept—and those powers come back to the House, we should not reduce the number of legislators in this place.

Question put and agreed to.

10.6 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 28 November at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twentieth Sitting

Wednesday 28 November 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 5 December at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 2 December 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 28 November 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Please ensure that all electronic devices are now switched to silent. I remind the Committee that we cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to the money resolution.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I congratulate the Minister on the good news of her pregnancy. A shadow Minister who received the same good news went on leave. Before the Minister takes leave, I hope we will be able to make some progress on the Bill.

I understand that the Refugees (Family Reunion) Bill is also waiting for a money resolution. It seems as though it will start its Committee stage without one and so will join us in meeting every week only to adjourn. It is truly a sorry state of affairs that the Government are so afraid of challenge on such a broad range of issues, including boundaries and refugees, that they use procedure to block the Bills they cannot defeat. This is Executive overreach in its clearest and most damaging form. It is also an enormous waste of taxpayers' money and of our time as elected representatives.

The Chair: I add my congratulations to the Minister. I call David Linden.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I echo the congratulations to the Minister. I note that, during this Bill's Committee stage, three Members have either had children or announced that they have children on the way. That in itself probably sends a message that we seem to be doing a better job at procreation than at legislating. In all seriousness, I send my very best wishes to the Minister on behalf of myself and my party. I wish her and wee Alastair all the very best of luck.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and an even greater pleasure to echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and the hon. Member for Glasgow East. This is a frustrating process but the Minister is very well thought of, not

only in the Committee but in the wider House. I wish her and her family a successful and easy next few months as they prepare for the new addition to their family.

The Prime Minister is currently away selling her Brexit deal. She has talked about the need to unify the House and the country, and I have to say that I think she is right. We need something to bring the House back together. I suggest that making progress with this Bill would be a way of unifying hon. Members from right across the House. The current boundary proposal, which lies on the table awaiting the drafting of the orders, does not, I believe, have the support of the House, but we could put that to the test. Putting those proposals to the test might bring a certain sense of unity across the House when hon. Members are given the chance to vote against them.

Hon. Members could then unify behind the proposal made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and bring the House back together again. Making progress with the Bill might have some advantages for the Government, who obviously have their own problems with disunity at the moment. It would bring them back together and give them focus. I commend to the Minister that that might be a really good way forward.

Bambos Charalambous (Enfield, Southgate) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister and wish her all the very best. I hope that she has a very safe delivery.

I echo colleagues' comments. There is a great deal of uncertainty at the moment. We want to try to move things forward. We are approaching the birthday of the Bill passing its Second Reading—it is nearly a year since we voted for it. There has been a fair bit of delay. Is there any way in which we can help to progress the drafting of the orders? Is there any way in which we can put pressure on the Government? We need to make a decision. It is unfair to keep meeting every Wednesday; it is not the best use of our time or that of staff. I wonder whether there is anything we can do about that. The Boundary Commission produce proposals in September and we need to get a move on. If there is anything that we as a Committee can do to help, I want to push this forward, if possible. In conclusion, I again congratulate the Minister.

The Chair: Does the Minister wish to respond?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): Only to thank everybody, extremely briefly, for their kind wishes and to say what a pleasure it is to serve in such good company with such good humour.

Question put and agreed to.

10.5 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 5 December at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty First Sitting

Wednesday 5 December 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 12 December at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 9 December 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:

Chairs: † Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)
 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 † Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 † Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)
 † Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 5 December 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: I remind the Committee that electronic devices should be switched to silent mode. As we know—by now, I can say this without reading the notes—the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to the money resolution.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Once again, Ms Dorries, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. This week has seen some unprecedented debates about parliamentary procedure, setting a collision course towards a constitutional crisis. At best, it is a dispute over the rights of Parliament versus the rights of the Government. These are the same issues that are at the heart of my private Member's Bill and the same issues of the Government stalling progress.

My Bill would protect the balance between paid-up Government Ministers and Back-Bench MPs by retaining 650 as the total number of MPs. That is what makes it so ironic that the Government are overreaching their Executive powers: by refusing to grant a money resolution, they are exactly proving my point. Perhaps the Minister will consider granting us all an early Christmas present by allowing the Bill to progress.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton in saying that in a week when the House has passed a motion saying that Ministers in this Government have held Parliament in contempt, it sends a message about the sorry state we are in when Opposition day votes are not being adhered to and money resolutions are not coming forward for Bills that have been given a Second Reading in the House.

My only observation for the Committee this morning is about the feeling in this place. There is clearly a very volatile atmosphere, and it feels like the last days of a dying Government. The irony is that we will probably be going back to the electorate fairly soon for a general election, and it will be based on the old boundaries. There is a consensus in this House to look at the boundaries again, but not to reduce the seats from 650. We are in a very sorry state of affairs just now.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What a great pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship once again, Ms Dorries! That pleasure continues, even if the pleasure of turning up unproductively to this Committee week after week also continues. It is always good to see you in the Chair.

I must echo my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton and the hon. Member for Glasgow East. The Government are descending into a slough of obloquy and quite frankly things have every hallmark of chaos. Will the Minister do the Committee a favour and show a little of the respect that the Government have not shown to the House this week by giving us an update on the orders whose publication we have been waiting for? She told us a couple of months ago that the problem was that they were very complicated. Will she update us on any conversations that she or her officials have had with the parliamentary draftsman? Does she feel that we are any closer today to seeing those orders published so that we can test the will of the House?

I look forward to seeing you again next week or the week after, Ms Dorries.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): I add to the comments of my fellow MPs. Yesterday, the Government were found to be in contempt of Parliament; I would say that having us come here week after week is a pretty contemptuous procedure as well, because there is a cost to Members' time and officers' time. It is pretty contemptuous of the taxpayer, who is ultimately paying the bill. I would like those comments noted for the record, please.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I can confirm that work continues on the order.

Question put and agreed to.

10.4 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 12 December at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Second Sitting

Wednesday 12 December 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 19 December at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 16 December 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, † ALBERT OWENAllan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)† Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)† Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)† Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)† Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)† Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)† Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)† Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)† Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 12 December 2018

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: Before we begin, although I am sure Committee Members are interested in what is on their electronic devices, I remind them to switch those devices to silent. As we know, the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

This week has been—what can I say? For one thing, the Prime Minister delayed the crucial Brexit vote at the eleventh hour. As we have seen with my Bill, the Government's strategy on every major issue is delay, delay, delay. More than a year since my Bill passed Second Reading, we are still waiting for a money resolution. Just as with Brexit, the Government are afraid of going to a vote that they know they will lose, so they are using procedural tricks to delay. The threat of a general election looms larger and larger every day. We in this Committee cannot be sitting ducks, waiting for some signal that events are turning for the Government in order to make progress.

Question put and agreed to.

10.1 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 19 December at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Third Sitting

Wednesday 19 December 2018

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 9 January 2019 at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 23 December 2018

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
† Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 19 December 2018

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. This may be the last sitting before the Christmas recess. Let me apologise to you, Ms Dorries. Last week, we had the shortest meeting—it was 1 minute 20 seconds.

The Chair: You didn't break my record though, Mr Khan.

Afzal Khan: I was thinking there is also time to do the longest meeting—but not today. We may well have broken a record by the time we finish—this may be the Committee that goes the longest without making any progress. At least we are making some records, if not progress.

I am a new MP, but I am not new to politics. Before coming to Parliament, I was a councillor, a lord mayor and a Member of the European Parliament. I have seen how things get done in politics, and I have to say I have been a bit disappointed by how the Government are operating. I will not say much about Brexit; we all know what is happening with that. Some Members will know that I am Labour's shadow Immigration Minister. For the past year, we have been promised the White Paper. Perhaps today we will get it.

I was lucky to be drawn quite high up in the private Members' Bill ballot. I chose this Bill because I thought there was a need for it. I believe the Bill will help strengthen our democracy, but more than a year on from passing Second Reading unanimously, we have made no progress. It seems the Government are expert at kicking the can down the road. We come here every week basically to give a message to the Government and the Minister that we are ready to make progress. I hope everyone has a good Christmas and a well-deserved break. I hope the Minister will use the time to reflect and bring us a money resolution when we come back.

10.2 am

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. As the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton did, I wish every

member of the Committee a very happy Christmas when it comes. This is not the first time I have been in a Committee Room this week. I was here on Monday night taking part in the Tenth Delegated Legislation Committee to pass the relevant statutory instrument to reduce the stake on fixed-odds betting terminals. While I was there, I reflected on the fact that we had been asking the Government to make that change for some time. Eventually, they brought forward that legislation, which I wholeheartedly welcome.

My only plea as we head into the Christmas recess is that on the morning of 25 December, when I go to my stocking, I find a little note from the Minister saying, "The money resolution will be coming. Happy Christmas." I look forward to spending Wednesday mornings in 2019 with this Committee, because nothing fills my heart more than to spend a Wednesday morning with you in the Chair, Ms Dorries, and with members of the Committee. With that, I wish you all a very happy Christmas.

10.3 am

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship once again, Ms Dorries. I look forward to doing so into the new year. I do not wish to detain the Committee very much longer, save to express sadness at the fact that the Committee has lost its place at the top of the charts of the most ludicrous events happening in Parliament. We have been knocked off top spot by the chaos that the Government have found themselves in with the meaningful vote and the, "Will they, won't they? No, they probably won't."

The Chair: Mr Matheson, keep it to this Bill, please.

Christian Matheson: Indeed. I am merely expressing regret that we seem to have made no further progress in this Committee, but we will return.

With the festive spirit in mind, I have to say that the hon. Member for Glasgow East is right. Let us hope that Santa brings us a money resolution down the chimney on Christmas night. I send my very best wishes to all of the Committee and particularly the Minister, who I hope has a restful Christmas. We all hope we see her again in the new year fit and ready to go. These proceedings will continue one way or another.

The Chair: I wish all Members, the officials and the Clerk a merry Christmas, and I look forward to seeing you all in your places again in the new year.

Question put and agreed to.

10.5 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 9 January at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Fourth Sitting

Wednesday 9 January 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 January at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 13 January 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* MS NADINE DORRIES, † ALBERT OWENAllan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)† Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)† Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)† Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)† Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)† Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)† Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)† Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)† Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)† Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)† Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)Kenneth Fox, Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerks*† **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 9 January 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: A happy new year to everybody, and for the first time this year, I will say that the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution. I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship in this new year, Mr Owen. I welcome back all Members; I hope they had a good Christmas, and I wish them all also a happy new year. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hope that with the new year, the Minister has had an opportunity to reflect, and perhaps has a new attitude towards this Committee. In 2018, we had a full year in which no progress was made on this Bill—what a disappointment that is. We are fast running out of time for these changes to come in before the end of this Parliament, and I hope the Minister will feel that we should get on with it.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will speak briefly this morning, to say to Members that as I have not been to the Committee for a while, I thought that as the new year approached it would be good to re-acquaint myself with old friends. I also wanted to say, having read the *Hansard* report of the last Committee meeting, that I am grateful that our good friend the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton got his Christmas present just before Christmas, as the Government did publish the immigration White Paper. I know that he was hoping for that at the last Committee meeting, so I am pleased that that Christmas present was delivered. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Glasgow East got the little note in his stocking from the Minister that he was hoping for; I suspect not.

I am looking forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about whether any progress has been made on drafting the statutory instrument. Obviously, the House's agenda is very full at the moment with debates on European Union matters, and I know that lots of pieces of legislation that are critical to our exit from the European Union need to be dealt with, so I am not hopeful that the House will find the opportunity to consider this matter at an early stage. However, I look forward to hearing whether progress will be made at the earliest opportunity, and I join you, Mr Owen, in wishing everyone a happy new year.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is an immense pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen, and I extend my best wishes to all members of the Committee for a happy, peaceful and prosperous new year. I spent yesterday afternoon taking part in a debate on democracy in Uganda—an excellent debate, led by the hon. Member for Stockton South (Dr Williams).

In that long debate, it struck me a little that we as Members of the British Parliament are busy quite rightly holding Uganda to account for its lack of democracy, but for almost a year, I have been taking part in a Bill Committee that is considering reducing the number of legislators who can scrutinise the Government just as more powers are coming back from the European Union, and, last year, more than 20 new Members of the House of Lords were appointed. We as Members of the British Parliament have the audacity to lecture other countries about how democracy should work when we are trying to shrink the number of people who can scrutinise the Government in this country. I will leave that thought with Members. I look forward to participating in the Committee from now until we prorogue around March, if we get that far, but it has been an absolute pleasure to be part of the Committee in 2018, and I look forward to many more meetings in 2019.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): May I also say what a pleasure it is to see you in the Chair and serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen? I echo other Members in giving my best wishes to all members of the Committee for the new year, and it is a particular pleasure to see the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean back in his place. He said that he had not been to several sessions recently; I have to tell him that he has not missed much, although not for want of trying. On a more serious note, I have missed his presence. I have paid tribute to him in the past for his attendance in the Committee, and also for some of his guidance. He made the point that it would not be appropriate—I think I am correctly paraphrasing his argument—for us to proceed with this Bill until the current boundary proposals have been considered and voted on by this House. I do not necessarily agree with him, but he has made that point consistently. I say to the Minister that perhaps a new year is the time for a resolution to bring forward the proposals for the boundaries, so that we can make that decision one way or the other.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct that the House is dealing with a lot of legislation around Brexit at the moment, but that should not be a reason not to proceed with the important task of getting these new boundaries sorted. The credibility of the House depends on that. The delay is frustrating to members of this Committee and to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. It is also frustrating as regards the quality of democracy.

The right hon. Gentleman has made the point at previous sittings that the House is based on boundaries using population figures that are 20 years out of date. We need to move forward and, therefore, I urge the Minister to do her best to bring forward the orders as soon as possible in this term, so that we can get on with the business of renewing this House's mandate.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I would simply like to say happy new year to all on the Committee, Mr Owen. I confirm that work proceeds as expected on the Orders in Council, which I look forward to bringing to the House in due course.

Question put and agreed to.

10.7 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 January at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Fifth Sitting

Wednesday 16 January 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 23 January at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 20 January 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* † Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
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 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 † Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 † Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)
 † Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 † Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Kenneth Fox, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 16 January 2019

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

The Chair: I make the usual announcement about switching off electronic devices. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

10 am

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

What a week this has been! The meaningful vote has resulted in a crushing defeat. The Government have failed to deliver an effective Brexit. In a similar fashion, they have failed to make any progress with this Bill. Sadly, the chaos surrounding Brexit has overshadowed my Bill since its inception. Following the events of yesterday, it is clear that the Government lack serious authority. During this uncertain period, it seems more and more likely that a general election could be called at any moment.

My Bill aims to strengthen democracy in these uncertain times, and I seriously suggest that we make some development with it and push for a money resolution. This week will go down in the history books—I would very much like my Bill to be part of that. Can the Minister enlighten us on any further developments?

10.1 am

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to see you in the Chair once again, Ms Dorries. I do not wish to detain the Committee for very long at all; suffice it to say that I am very supportive of the position of my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton. The absurdity and chaos of this week has rather bumped the Committee down the order of absurdity, as I predicted a couple of weeks ago. There is an opportunity now for the Minister to bring a bit of order back by presenting the current boundary proposals orders for the House to decide on; if she did, we could then move forward one way or the other. I hope that at some point in the near future we will make some progress in Committee or on the current orders before the House.

The Chair: Does the Minister wish to speak?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith) *indicated dissent.*

Question put and agreed to.

10.2 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 23 January at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Sixth Sitting

Wednesday 23 January 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 30 January at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 27 January 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* † Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	† Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	† Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 23 January 2019

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: I give the usual reminder about electronic devices: switch them to silent. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Another week and another statement by the Prime Minister on Brexit. Following the crushing defeat last week, the highly anticipated statement made by the Prime Minister on Monday revealed that plan B is just sticking to plan A. Disappointingly, the Government are now experts in delaying and running down the clock. Evidently, nothing has changed.

In contrast, we could make some meaningful change by progressing with this Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for City of Chester highlighted last week, the Minister now has an opportunity to restore some order by presenting the current boundary proposal orders for the House to decide on. I wonder whether the Minister can enlighten us any further.

10.1 am

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Ms Dorries. My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton makes an interesting point: he says that the Government are now experts in running down the clock. We have long feared that that is the status of this Committee, as well as—obviously—wider events in relation to the Brexit deal or no-deal scenario.

However, my concern this week is about the capacity of Departments to deal with matters such as the one before the Committee. The Minister has told us that we are waiting for the orders to be drafted on the current proposals in relation to the boundary review—those that were published in, I think, September or October, which are based on 600 constituencies—and until they have gone through and been decided on by the House, it would not be appropriate further to consider my hon. Friend's Bill.

My concern is that Brexit, the preparations for Brexit and, indeed, the preparations for a no-deal Brexit are sucking the life out of Departments. Right across Government, we see Departments in this position. I believe that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has 70 statutory instruments to be considered; the Treasury has 200 to 300. The Minister's own Department, the Cabinet Office, which I shadow, is starting to see statutory instruments rack up. My concern is that much as the Minister was certain before Christmas that the drafting of the orders was on time, it is no longer on time, because resources are being diverted to

other affairs to deal with the possibility of a no-deal Brexit. I press it upon the Minister that the matters before the Committee need to be considered.

We are hearing now that the February recess might be cancelled. That would have one benefit: the Committee would meet for one extra week in February, which I look forward to. I would miss the time to be with my constituents and family in Chester, but the benefit would be that I got to spend the time with hon. Members on the Committee. Can the Minister give an assurance that work is continuing to progress on the orders for the current boundary proposals, so that the House may dispose of them one way or the other, and that the life is not being sucked out of the regular work of the Department as it appears to be being sucked out of every other Department of State by Brexit?

10.4 am

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries. I very much echo what was said by the hon. Member for City of Chester. This is a great day to be one of those folk who get obsessed about the procedures of the House, because we have a debate this afternoon on private Members' Bills. Hon. Members will have seen, on page 6 of the Order Paper, the motion standing in the name of the Leader of the House to provide extra days for consideration of private Members' Bills. That consideration will take place on 1 February, 8 February, 1 March, 8 March and 15 March. I think that that is rather hopeful for those of us who serve on this Committee, because I was rather of the view that we were about to approach a point in the parliamentary calendar at which, even if the Government had served up a money resolution and we managed to complete consideration in Committee of the Bill, there would be no further days for us to consider it in the main Chamber.

However, the Leader of the House has helpfully tabled a motion, which I expect will pass later today, that means that, if the Government table the money resolution now, I have complete confidence that the Committee will be able to whiz through the Bill and make any necessary amendments. We could then take it back to the Floor of the House on the dates set out by the Leader of the House.

Finally, has the Minister had any conversations with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, who is also chairman of the Conservative party, about this issue? We know, as it has been briefed to the press today, that Conservative campaign HQ has been preparing for the possibility of a snap general election, so I am interested to know whether the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster has had discussions with his colleagues about expediting plans for 600 seats.

If the Conservative party is serious about going back to the country, I suspect that such considerations will have taken place in the Department, perhaps amplifying my view that this Government are more interested in their own party affairs than those of the country.

The Chair: Ms Lee, do you want to speak?

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): Yes.

The Chair: The process is that, when Mr Khan sits down after his speech, you rise at that point to indicate that you want to speak, not later.

10.5 am

Karen Lee: I just want some guidance, please, Ms Dorries. We are on our 26th sitting and there are 16 people in a room that costs money to heat and light. On other weeks, we have perhaps had 10 or a dozen people. There is a cost to that. I would like to submit a freedom of information request to find out what the cost, on average, might have been of all those 26 sittings. Can you or anyone advise me to whom I might submit that freedom of information request, please?

The Chair: Obviously, you cannot do that through me. I suggest you go through the Speaker's Office to make that request. Minister do you wish to respond?

10.6 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): I have no further update to offer the Committee, other than that the order is in progress.

Question put and agreed to.

10.7 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 30 January at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Seventh Sitting

Wednesday 30 January 2019

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Adjourned till Wednesday 27 February at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 3 February 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* †Ms NADINE DORRIES, ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	† Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
† Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 30 January 2019

[Ms NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: As usual, I ask Members to turn electronic devices off. I call Afzal Khan, the Member in charge of the Bill, to move the sittings motion that stands in his name on the amendment paper.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, notwithstanding the Order of the Committee of Wednesday 4 July 2018, during further proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill the Committee do next meet at 10.00 am on Wednesday 27 February and thereafter at 10.00 am on Wednesday 27 March and Wednesday 24 April.

It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Ms Dorries, and I thank Committee members for being here once again as I amend the sittings motion. I have proposed that the Committee meets once a month. Disappointingly, this Committee has been meeting every week for over a year and yet we still have not drawn any closer to a money resolution. I have pressed the Minister time and time again for an update, but have received no indication of any development. It is clear that the Government have no desire to prioritise this Bill.

Yesterday's vote reinforces that Brexit continues to dominate the parliamentary agenda. As such, I have moved a motion that will ensure that the Committee meets regularly enough to maintain emphasis on this important issue, but also ensure that we do not waste time unnecessarily. Although the Government wish to use delaying tactics, rest assured that I will not stop championing my Bill. I am fully aware that it has cross-party support, and therefore I will continue to encourage the Minister to seriously consider pressing ahead with it in order to produce the new boundaries that our democracy needs.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What a great pleasure it is to see you again in the Chair, Ms Dorries. Before I start, the Minister is obviously not in her place this morning. She has written to the Member in charge explaining why, and those reasons are entirely routine. Opposition Members send our best wishes to her given the entirely understandable reasons why she is not here, and perhaps the hon. Member for Torbay will convey those best wishes to the Minister and send her our continued support.

My hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton has been stoic in his determination to maintain a presence in this Committee. Having had discussions through the usual channels, he has now decided that we should meet less frequently. I will make two points in addressing the

Committee this morning: first, that the Committee will be meeting less frequently does not mean in any sense that the urgency or importance of the Bill is diminished or has gone away. We will maintain pressure on the Government to bring forward the orders on the existing proposed boundaries so that they can be agreed or disagreed to by the House as soon as possible. That urgency has not gone away, and we will continue to press for that.

My other point is that, as we head towards Brexit, the Government and the House are considering all the legislation, including secondary legislation, required for either a Brexit shaped by a deal or—dare I say it?—no-deal. The amount of work that the House is being asked to undertake is increasingly clear, particularly work on secondary and delegated legislation. It will continue for a good while after we leave the European Union. The management and consideration of delegated legislation is putting a lot of pressure on colleagues across the House.

I simply say to the Committee that such pressure once again emphasises the folly of reducing the capacity of the House by reducing the number of hon. Members in this place from 650 to 600, which is why it is important that my hon. Friend's Bill is given consideration. We are reducing the capacity of the House at a time when we should not be, and the legislature not being able to properly scrutinise the Government would be a bad thing for this House and for democratic scrutiny. Ms Dorries, I look forward to seeing you in the Chair again in a few weeks when this Committee sits again.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): I want to reinforce the points made by the hon. Member for City of Chester. A substantial number of hon. Members in my party entirely agree with both points. First, we should keep pressure on the Government to get this sorted and get back to 650 and, secondly, with the amount of legislation we must deal with puts pressure on Back Benchers much more than normal. Let us get it done and get back to 650.

Kevin Foster (Torbay) (Con): I will briefly reply to thank hon. Members for understanding why the my hon. Friend the Minister is not here. I will certainly ensure that the good wishes of the hon. Members for City of Chester and for Manchester, Gorton are passed on to her. Other than that, I have no further update to offer the Committee.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the clause of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do adjourn.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That further consideration be now adjourned.—(Afzal Khan.)

10.6 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 27 February at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Eighth Sitting

Wednesday 27 February 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 27 March at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 3 March 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (*Telford*) (Con)
 Bone, Mr Peter (*Wellingborough*) (Con)
 Charalambous, Bambos (*Enfield, Southgate*) (Lab)
 † Fletcher, Colleen (*Coventry North East*) (Lab)
 Foster, Kevin (*Torbay*) (Con)
 Harper, Mr Mark (*Forest of Dean*) (Con)
 † Khan, Afzal (*Manchester, Gorton*) (Lab)
 † Lee, Karen (*Lincoln*) (Lab)
 † Linden, David (*Glasgow East*) (SNP)
 Matheson, Christian (*City of Chester*) (Lab)

Mills, Nigel (*Amber Valley*) (Con)
 Norris, Alex (*Nottingham North*) (Lab/Co-op)
 Paisley, Ian (*North Antrim*) (DUP)
 † Smith, Chloe (*Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office*)
 Stewart, Bob (*Beckenham*) (Con)
 Wiggin, Bill (*North Herefordshire*) (Con)
 Adam Mellows-Facer, *Committee Clerk*
 † **attended the Committee**

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 27 February 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: May I welcome you all back to our monthly gathering and remind you that electronic devices should be switched to silent? As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed the money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

I, too, welcome Members back after a month's break. I do not know where all the Minister's Back Benchers are, but I am sure she can hold the fort.

This week has shown that the Prime Minister is insistent on recklessly running down the clock, in a desperate attempt to force MPs to choose between her deal and no deal. I cannot help but feel that the same irresponsible tactics are being deployed to prevent progress on this Bill. Although it is evident that delaying strategies are the favoured approach of the Government, that does not mean that they would solve any problems.

As I highlighted in our last sitting, the urgency of the Bill has not diminished. In fact, against the backdrop of Brexit, the need for the Bill should be even more apparent, so will the Minister enlighten us as to any developments?

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): As ever, it is an immense pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen, and to be back in this esteemed Public Bill Committee, which is making rapid progress through the legislative agenda—not. Having missed the Committee for a month, I have been reflecting on some of the other things that I have been able to do on a Wednesday morning. Of course, it has been a great sadness not to be here every Wednesday morning, which is why I am particularly pleased to be back.

I am incredibly busy today. I served on a Delegated Legislation Committee at 8.55 am, and now I am serving on this very heavy Committee. In all seriousness, this afternoon I am serving on the Committee considering the Holocaust (Return of Cultural Objects) (Amendment) Bill, which was brought forward by the right hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Theresa Villiers). I have been reflecting on how quickly we have managed to make progress on that Bill but not this one. Although I fully support the right hon. Lady in trying to take that

legislation through, it sticks in my craw somewhat that, in the course of one afternoon, we will consider that private Member's Bill, take it through its process and quite rightly ensure that it lands on the statute book, whereas the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is forced to come here—no longer weekly, but monthly—and sit through this complete charade.

That is symptomatic of what is happening in this place. Whether it is Brexit or this Bill, the Government are running down the clock until Parliament prorogues for a new Session, when, as we know, this Bill will unfortunately die. Of course, it is never too late. The Minister could go back to her Chief Whip and say, "We need to take this Bill through and ensure that the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton gets it on the statute book." I think that is very unlikely, but I will still come here every month and make those points.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith): It is a great pleasure to see you again this morning, Mr Owen. I have missed the Committee's various interpretations of proceedings before today, but I can confirm, contrary to all such interpretations, that the order is in hand, as it was before, and that work proceeds to bring it back to Parliament as expected.

Afzal Khan: I am sad that, throughout this whole history, the Minister has been unable to enlighten us as to any progress. Even now, the word "progress" means nothing. Can the Minister give us some dates or a timescale?

David Linden *rose*—

The Chair: As we are not overcrowded, you may come in, Mr Linden.

David Linden: I am grateful to you for calling me, Mr Owen; I know that many hundreds of colleagues wish to contribute, so I will be brief. Perhaps the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton and I can make our way to the Table Office after this sitting and table some named day questions to pin down the Minister specifically on how she and her civil servants are getting on with those Orders in Council. The hon. Gentleman is right that we should nail down those dates. I look forward to joining him in the Table Office once we have finished with the hundreds of other speeches that we are about to hear.

The Chair: Would Mr Khan like the last word?

Afzal Khan: I would be absolutely delighted to join my colleague in that endeavour.

Question put and agreed to.

10.4 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 27 March at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Twenty Ninth Sitting

Wednesday 27 March 2019

CONTENTS

Motion to adjourn considered.

Adjourned till Wednesday 24 April at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 31 March 2019

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Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
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Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 27 March 2019

[MS NADINE DORRIES *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: As the Committee cannot consider the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

Events have taken an interesting turn this week, notably with the Government's defeat on Monday, which gave Parliament control of the Order Paper. The Government have officially lost control. Interestingly,

throughout the Brexit process, I have seen the Prime Minister raise the importance of respecting and upholding democracy.

I will remind the Committee of what my Bill sets out to do. It would fix the number of MPs at 650 and ensure that boundary changes include the 2 million people who have registered to vote since 2015. Maintaining the number of MPs and ensuring that boundaries have equal numbers of voters in each seat would guarantee free and fair elections, which are essential to the democratic process. At a time when democracy is thought to be under threat, achieving those objectives has never been more important. On that note, would the Minister care to provide an update, please?

The Chair: Does anyone wish to speak? Minister?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Chloe Smith) *indicated dissent.*

Question put and agreed to.

10.1 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 24 April at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Thirtieth Sitting

Wednesday 24 April 2019

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Adjourned till Wednesday 5 June at 10 o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor’s Room, House of Commons,

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Sunday 28 April 2019

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Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
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† Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
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† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 24 April 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

The Chair: I welcome Members to the 30th sitting of the Bill Committee. I hope you all had a good Easter break.

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That, notwithstanding the Order of the Committee of Wednesday 4 July 2018, during further proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill the Committee do next meet at 10.00 am on Wednesday 5 June.—(*Afzal Khan.*)

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I will endeavour to speak briefly. It is a great pleasure to be here at our 30th meeting. I have been to many of them—not all of them. I will happily support the motion moved by the hon. Gentleman when the Committee comes to decide on it.

The only other two things I have to say, if you will indulge me, Mr Owen, are that I wish the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North, all good luck on her maternity leave. The Committee has had a number of maternity and paternity considerations, which perhaps indicates how long it has been going for. Finally, I welcome the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay. He has served a long apprenticeship—perhaps too long—as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, which he has conducted with some considerable skill, and I was incredibly pleased to see the Prime Minister recognise his talents. He has been rewarded—if indeed reward is the word—by taking over from my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North in sitting in the ministerial chair. On that note, having wished him well, I am happy to support the motion.

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is, as always, a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. You reminded us that this is the 30th sitting of the Committee. It is a sad indictment that there have been more Committee sittings than I have had birthdays on this Earth, but that is another story.

I also welcome the Minister to his position and once again wish the hon. Member for Norwich North all the best as she goes through the last part of her pregnancy. As the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean said, the Minister had been a PPS on the Bill Committee for some time. In that role, he was often restricted from speaking, so I am sure we are all excited to hear what he has to say, not just about the Bill but about any potential money resolution to it. We will reserve judgment on whether a new Minister means a new approach. I know it is not a fashionable thing to do, but I remind the Committee that the House voted for the Bill at Second Reading and wanted to see it proceed. I hope he will bear that in mind.

If we are to take the Committee seriously—whether we will be here in June is a different story—it is still not too late to bring forward a money resolution. The Government can magic up Fridays, as we have seen in recent months, and if they could do that for a couple of extra Fridays and there is the will in the House to bring forward the money resolution, we could get the Bill expedited. I am sure that the Minister, a reforming Member of this House who will want to honour the House's will, will stand up in a few minutes to say exactly that.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): What a great pleasure it is to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Glasgow East and the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean in welcoming the Minister and congratulating him on his appointment to the Government. I also wish him well for what I believe will be his first oral questions later today. On behalf of the Opposition, I send our very best wishes to the hon. Member for Norwich North—the Minister on maternity leave. Perhaps the Minister will pass on our best wishes to her and her family. We reckon, as has been suggested, this will be the third baby—God willing—born during the Committee's proceedings. That was a subtle dig by the hon. Member for Glasgow East, as some of us have had a lot more birthdays than 30 sittings. I promise the hon. Gentleman that it will come to him eventually; another young whippersnapper will be snapping at his heels before long and if this Committee goes on long enough, who knows if it might be his own child doing the chattering?

The Opposition fully supports the proposal, made by the Member in charge, for an additional sitting. A cloud on the horizon is the uncertainty over the date of the next state opening of Parliament, the Prorogation of Parliament and the start of the next parliamentary year. We are still waiting to hear from the Government when that date might be. As the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean has reminded me in the past—and I am always grateful for his counsel, as he is an experienced Member—once the new parliamentary year starts, this Bill will fall.

As long as the current parliamentary Session continues, the Opposition will support the endeavours of the Member in charge in pushing the Bill forward. The bottom line is that the need for the Bill has not gone away. To have had 30 sittings of the Committee without a money resolution is an affront to the House. Whether or not we have a state opening of Parliament and the Government sort out their own internal difficulties, bite the bullet and have the courage to put a new parliamentary Session's legislative programme to the House for approval, the need for the Bill and for a new, modern, fair and up-to-date set of boundaries will still be present. Whatever happens on 5 June, if we go into July or if the parliamentary Session spills over into the autumn, we will still be here pressing the case for up-to-date boundaries.

The Minister has been a PPS, which is almost like taking a vow of silence, but this is his opportunity to stand up and give us an understanding about progress in the drafting of the orders for the Bill, and about any discussion, through the usual channels and the office of the Leader of the House, about when time might be made available to debate the current boundary proposals, so that if they are rejected—or indeed if they are

passed—we can move on with consideration of the Bill. I shall be here to support my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton on 5 June, because we need to move forward and get some certainty about these boundaries. I wish the Minister well and ask him to take our best wishes to the hon. Member for Norwich North, and I hope he will now be able to illuminate the Committee about progress on these matters.

The Chair: Before the Minister speaks, I add my congratulations to him on being appointed to the Government. We talked about age and anniversaries, but over the years since I have been here the Wales Office Ministers have all got younger and younger. I welcome the hon. Member for Torbay to the role and to the other duties he has, and I look forward to hearing him address the motion.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Kevin Foster): Thank you, Mr Owen. I look forward to working with you in the spirit of co-operation and positive engagement, so that we can do the best for those we seek to represent and serve.

I thank Members for their best wishes to me on taking on this new role and I will ensure that their best wishes are passed on to my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North, who starts her maternity leave this week. It is a sign of a modern, inclusive Parliament that we have arrangements in place to ensure that taking on the role of Government Minister does not require a choice between having a family and pursuing a ministerial career.

I am happy to support the motion and the proposal to sit on 5 June. Having been at the other sittings on the Benches behind, it would be disappointing if I were now to find that this was the last sitting, and that I would no longer see my friends the hon. Members for Glasgow East and for Manchester, Gorton at 10am on Wednesdays. As they are aware, the House has considered since Second Reading whether the Bill should proceed and be considered in this Committee without a money resolution, and it has decided that that should not be the case. The Government have made clear, through the usual channels, their view on a money resolution.

That said, reports have been laid before the House from the independent boundary commission, and the work on the order that will be necessary to bring before Parliament continues although, as Hon. Members will appreciate, it is a lengthy and complex document, which will require significant preparation before being presented.

David Linden: Can the Minister update the House on the progress of that document? Is it 25%, 50% or 75% done? Surely the Minister will have some idea from the civil servants what kind of progress they are making. Can he give the Committee an indication of the percentage of progress in that respect?

Kevin Foster: The hon. Gentleman will realise that statutory instruments are not completed by a third, a half or a quarter, but once orders are prepared, they are ready to come before the House. It is a complex motion, given that it covers every street and house in the United Kingdom, in terms of ensuring that they are appropriately represented in this place. It will be submitted in due course.

Christian Matheson: May I ask the Minister a technical question? Is it the Government's intention to bring forward all four boundary orders in one, or will they be brought forward as and when each individual one is ready?

Kevin Foster: I will briefly respond. Work continues on the orders, and we will bring them forward in the appropriate manner, as determined by the nature of the legislation to be considered by the House. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that it will need to be an Order in Council presented to the House for its approval. It is a complex document, which will take some time to produce.

Afzal Khan: I have nothing to add other than my best wishes to the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Norwich North, and congratulations to our new Minister, the hon. Member for Torbay.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: We now move to the motion to adjourn. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed to the money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan: I beg to move,

That the Committee do now adjourn.

Thank you, Mr Owen. Happy 30th sitting of the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill Committee. Traditionally the 30th is the pearl anniversary, but unfortunately MPs' expenses would not allow me to buy each member of the Committee a pearl. Perhaps I might offer some pearls of wisdom instead.

Hon. Members might notice that the next proposed meeting is not in a month's time, as has become our tradition, but in five weeks. That is to take account of the possibility of a recess at the end of May. After the chaos of the Easter recess, we will see whether MPs ever get a break again. I hope that after our week off last week, the new Minister has come back rested, refreshed and ready to take on the issue of parliamentary boundaries.

The Tories' mishandling of Brexit means that we will have to fight the European elections, the local elections next month and a possible general election. There is reason enough there to look at the building blocks of our democracy—constituency boundaries. These elections will no doubt mean more electors, as people register to vote this year, making the proposed 2015 cut-off date for the boundary review even more ridiculous.

Last month, in my role as the shadow Immigration Minister, I took the Immigration Bill through Committee stage. Though it was not a massive Bill, it was longer than this one, and we got through it in two weeks. We should have been done with this Bill a year ago, but we will keep on meeting until we can make some progress. I hope the Minister can assist us further in this progress.

Mr Harper: I had not intended to speak, but, as ever, the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton has provoked me.

On the point that the hon. Member for Glasgow East mentioned about how long it will take to do the statutory instruments, looking at historical precedent, I think I am

[Mr Harper]

right in saying—I am sure the Minister will correct me if I am not—that the last Labour Government took around 10 months to get orders drafted on the boundaries issue. It can take a considerable period of time to get these things done. That would take us right through to the autumn of this year. It would be difficult for anybody from the Labour party—or the hon. Member for Glasgow East—to say that anything less than 10 months was unreasonable, since that was the length of time that their own party took when they were in government.

Finally, I want to address the point made by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton about the distribution of electors. It is not the number of electors who are on the register at any particular time that is relevant here, but their distribution across the country. The argument about cut-off points, which we have had before, is that even if more electors are registered, if those electors are broadly similarly distributed as at a previous cut-off point, they do not make a material difference in the distribution of constituencies.

As the House of Commons Library analysis showed when we looked at this before, there was no significant material difference in the electors who were added post 2015 for the European referendum or for the 2017 general election. They did not make a material difference in the distribution of seats, so I do not think that the passage of time makes the original cut-off period null and void.

I still think that the Government's process is the right one—to finalise the Orders in Council, bring them before the House and allow the House to debate and vote on them. If the House passes them, we have our new boundaries. If the House fails to support those Orders in Council, at that point the House and the Government can reflect on the appropriate way forward, the House having taken a decision on the process that has already been under way and is nearing its completion. That is the sensible way for this Committee to consider the matter as it decides whether it wishes to adjourn.

Question put and agreed to.

10.16 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 5 June at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Thirty First Sitting

Wednesday 5 June 2019

CONTENTS

Sittings motion agreed to.
Motion to adjourn considered.
Adjourned till Wednesday 10 July at Ten o'clock.

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Sunday 9 June 2019

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The Committee consisted of the following Members:*Chairs:* Ms NADINE DORRIES, †ALBERT OWEN

Allan, Lucy (<i>Telford</i>) (Con)	Mills, Nigel (<i>Amber Valley</i>) (Con)
Bone, Mr Peter (<i>Wellingborough</i>) (Con)	† Norris, Alex (<i>Nottingham North</i>) (Lab/Co-op)
Charalambous, Bambos (<i>Enfield, Southgate</i>) (Lab)	Paisley, Ian (<i>North Antrim</i>) (DUP)
† Fletcher, Colleen (<i>Coventry North East</i>) (Lab)	Smith, Chloe (<i>Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office</i>)
† Foster, Kevin (<i>Torbay</i>) (Con)	Stewart, Bob (<i>Beckenham</i>) (Con)
Harper, Mr Mark (<i>Forest of Dean</i>) (Con)	Wiggin, Bill (<i>North Herefordshire</i>) (Con)
† Khan, Afzal (<i>Manchester, Gorton</i>) (Lab)	
Lee, Karen (<i>Lincoln</i>) (Lab)	Adam Mellows-Facer, <i>Committee Clerk</i>
† Linden, David (<i>Glasgow East</i>) (SNP)	
† Matheson, Christian (<i>City of Chester</i>) (Lab)	† attended the Committee

Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 5 June 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10 am

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move,

That, notwithstanding the Order of the Committee of Wednesday 4 July 2018, during further proceedings on the Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill the Committee do next meet at 10.00 am on Wednesday 10 July and thereafter at 10.00 am on Wednesday 16 October.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. Thanks to everyone for coming.

The Government are in meltdown, but as ever our Committee meets like clockwork. Soon the Conservative party will have a new leader, and our country will have a new Prime Minister. It would be a democratic outrage if that person did not call a general election to let the British people decide whether they want them as Prime Minister. Unfortunately, the Government's foot-dragging on boundary changes and on my Bill will most likely mean that we end up fighting another election with antiquated boundaries.

Who the next leader of the Conservative party is may well determine, more than any other factor, what happens with boundaries. There are at least two leadership contenders who, based on the 2017 general election results, would either find their seat abolished or lose their seat. The right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) is seen as the front-runner, but his seat is set to be too close to call if the boundary changes go ahead; I wonder whether he would be willing to come to some sensible compromise with the Opposition, if only for his own sake. The right hon. Member for Tatton (Ms McVey) is also running for the leadership, but her seat is set to be abolished under the new boundaries. Of course, a member of our Committee—

The Chair: Order. May I ask the hon. Gentleman to pause for a second? We are actually considering the sittings motion, which sets out the new dates for our meetings. We will then come on to the motion to adjourn, which will give him a greater opportunity to elaborate on what he has to say.

Afzal Khan: I was almost finished, Mr Owen.

The Chair: Will you be making only one speech? That would be helpful to know.

Afzal Khan: Yes.

The Chair: I am grateful.

Afzal Khan: A member of our Committee, the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean, has thrown his hat in the ring. He is not in his place, but I wish him well; I hope at least that he will understand the issues, because

he has been an active contributor to our meetings. I wonder whether the Minister can shed any light on the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

The Chair: We now come to the motion to adjourn, as the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed a money resolution.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Committee do now adjourn.—(Afzal Khan.)

David Linden (Glasgow East) (SNP): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Owen. I am grateful for your permission to remove our jackets, because it is very hot.

The hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is absolutely right that the Government are completely in meltdown. In many respects, it is good to attend this Committee, because it is the one thing that can be guaranteed to run like clockwork. At a time when many bizarre things are happening in this country—whether it is that complete and utter moron President Trump coming to visit and having the red carpet rolled out for him, or the fact that almost half the Conservative party seems to be running for leader—it is just fantastic to be here to focus on what I think is called getting on with the day job. But of course we cannot get on with the day job, because a money resolution has not been provided for the Bill.

As the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton said, a member of our Committee is running for leader of the Conservative party. The hon. Gentleman is right that whenever this circus leaves town and we finally have a new Prime Minister, it will be interesting to see what they will do about parliamentary boundaries. Will they push ahead with the democratically unjust proposal to reduce the number of seats from 650 to 600, or will they recognise—as the Procedure Committee has done—that Parliament has a lot more legislation coming forward? The Procedure Committee, which is probably the weightiest in this Parliament, is looking at whether there should be a budgetary Committee, given how much pressure and scrutiny is on us.

On the one hand, Ministers are saying, “There is so much for MPs to do at the moment,” and on the other hand I suspect that the Minister will tell us, “It is very important to cut the cost of politics and reduce the number of seats to 600.” Someone is wrong somewhere along the line. I think the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton is right to try to protect the number of seats at 650.

We shall see what happens over the next few weeks, and whether we face the prospect of people backing Boris and having Boris Johnson as Prime Minister. We would then have two blonde-haired eejits running a country, one here and one on the other side of the pond.

The Chair: Order. We do not refer to our colleagues by their first name in Committee and it is unparliamentary to call anybody an idiot.

David Linden: I used the word eejit. They are very different in terms of their interpretation. However, I apologise—I should of course have referred to the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip.

Before I get myself into any more trouble I will sit down. I wish the Minister well. I suspect that he will tell us that while work continues apace, the Government are

frightfully busy, when we all know that that is not the case, given that the Secretary of State is spending most of his day walking around the park filming selfie videos.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): It is a great pleasure, as always, to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. My hon. Friends the Members for Glasgow East and for Manchester, Gorton raised an intriguing prospect. As with so much else in the country at the moment, the fate of this Bill may well depend on the outcome of the Conservative leadership contest. However, as we have said previously, the question of how our democracy is founded and operates should not be a matter for party politics or internal party politics. Its credibility and honesty are corroded when the main driver behind the boundary proposals is anything other than what is best for the United Kingdom.

This week is of course the 75th anniversary of D-day, when we celebrate the heroism of the many thousands of men and women who launched the liberation of western Europe, and eventually freed it from the yoke of fascism, leading to the end of hostilities in Europe in the second world war. I make that point to remind the Committee that one year ago almost to the week—the Minister was not the Minister then, but he was present in the Committee—I made exactly the same point.

I make no apology for paying tribute at the start of June every year to the men and women who fought and in many cases died for our freedom. However, the relevant point to this Committee is that I made the same

point a year ago, yet here we are one year later, and there has been no progress. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow East talked about proceedings continuing apace, but they are not. If they had been continuing apace, we would not be here now. One year later I am making a similar speech and we are no further forward.

I therefore say with great respect to the Minister, suggestions that work is continuing no longer have any credibility. It is time to put up or shut up, if I may be so blunt with the Government. Bring these proposals forward, let the House make a decision and then we can move forward, one way or the other. There is no logical reason why the orders should not have been drafted, and the Government have run out of excuses.

The Chair: Does the Minister wish to respond?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): No.

The Chair: Mr Khan, do you wish to wind up the debate?

Afzal Khan: No.

Question put and agreed to.

10.9 am

Adjourned till Wednesday 10 July at Ten o'clock.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT
GENERAL COMMITTEES

Public Bill Committee

PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES (AMENDMENT) BILL

Thirty Second Sitting
Wednesday 10 July 2019

CONTENTS

Adjourned till Wednesday 16 October at Ten o'clock.

No proofs can be supplied. Corrections that Members suggest for the final version of the report should be clearly marked in a copy of the report—not telephoned—and must be received in the Editor's Room, House of Commons,

not later than

Sunday 14 July 2019

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Public Bill Committee

Wednesday 10 July 2019

[ALBERT OWEN *in the Chair*]

Parliamentary Constituencies (Amendment) Bill

10.1 am

The Chair: I remind hon. Members to switch their mobile devices to silent mode. As the Committee cannot consider the clauses of the Bill until the House has agreed the money resolution, I call Afzal Khan to move that the Committee do now adjourn.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): I beg to move, That the Committee do now adjourn.

It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. I thank Committee members for being here once again. They may be interested to know that this is the 32nd sitting of our Committee; it is also our last meeting before the summer recess.

I will not go into detail about the sheer disappointment that I have felt at the lack of progress over the past two years. However, I think it is important at this stage to reflect and review. It has been my aim from the outset to enhance our democratic process. By maintaining the number of MPs at 650 and ensuring that boundaries have a more equal number of voters in each seat, we will guarantee free and fair elections—and given the current political climate, an election could be imminent.

As it stands, the boundary review is completely undemocratic and seeks to reinforce the power of the Executive at the expense of Back Benchers. With a new Prime Minister on the horizon, I urge the Government to bring these proposals forward, so that the House can make a decision and we can finally make much-needed progress.

After 32 sittings, it is evident that the Government have run out of excuses. There is simply no reason why the necessary orders should not have been drafted. I am fully aware that my Bill has cross-party support, and I hope that the summer recess will provide an opportunity for the Minister and the Government to seriously consider the Bill's proposals. On that note, does the Minister care to provide any updates?

I wish hon. Members a great recess and look forward to seeing them all in October.

Mr Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton on persevering with his Bill through our Committee sittings. I reinforce what I have said previously, which is that I think that there will be a time to consider his Bill, but it is not now; it will be when the House has had a chance to consider the orders.

I join the hon. Gentleman in asking the Minister for an update, although I am a little more cautious about the timetable. I remember that in an earlier sitting the Minister—I cannot remember whether it was the present Minister or his predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North—set out some historical precedents for how long previous Governments, of other parties,

had taken to get some orders drafted. I seem to remember that when Labour was in power, a set of orders took up to 10 months to be drafted. It would be interesting to know what progress we have made, but even if we were proceeding apace, it would not be unreasonable not to have concluded the process. When the orders are drafted and put before the House, that will be the time for the Government to consider whether they wish to bring forward a money resolution, so that we will have a chance to consider the Bill.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton on his perseverance, and look forward to hearing from the hon. Member for City of Chester as Opposition spokesman, and from the Minister.

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton, whose resilience and persistence in this matter is an object lesson to us all.

This could well be the Committee's final sitting. My hon. Friend reminded us that this is our last meeting before the summer recess; the memory of the last meeting before last year's summer recess only enhances our frustration on the Opposition Benches. If certain hon. Members—not on the Committee, I hasten to add, but in the Government party—get their way and Parliament is prorogued, this will indeed be our last sitting, and my hon. Friend's Bill will fall. However, that will not take away the need to bring the proposals before the House, as the right hon. Member for Forest of Dean notes. The sooner we get those, so that the House can make a decision, the better. It is not acceptable that the Committee has taken this long to achieve absolutely nothing; the sooner we get this matter dealt with, the better.

I will leave it at that. I wish all Committee members a pleasant recess. As always, I shall be working in my constituency, and I am sure that they will be doing the same.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Owen. The Committee may find it helpful, in deciding whether to adjourn, if I update it on the judicial review against the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland. I am sure that Committee members are aware of those proceedings, but I stress that the BCNI is independent of the Government, and that the Cabinet Office was not party to the original proceedings.

The High Court of Northern Ireland has now issued its judgment in relation to the judicial review. It has concluded that the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland erred in law procedurally, and fettered its discretion by setting a high threshold for making changes at the last of the three statutory stages of consultation that it had followed. The Court had indicated that it was considering ordering the Minister for the Cabinet Office to attach a declaration to the boundary order, when it is brought forward, stating that the Boundary Commission's consultation contained an error of law. To be clear, the Court has not struck down the order; it has merely made that statement.

We made submissions to the Court to argue that that was not an appropriate remedy, given the separation of powers between the Court and Parliament. The Court listened to our concerns, and its final order states that it

has accepted our position, and has agreed not to order the declaration to be attached to the boundary order. The Court has made it absolutely clear that the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland took all the steps that it was required to take by statute; it has not quashed the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland's report.

As Committee members would expect, the Government have closely followed the judicial review. We are also conscious that both the applicant and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland have six weeks to decide whether to appeal the Court's judgment, which will obviously have implications for the timetable of the boundary order.

I wished to update the Committee on the matter. I hope that hon. Members will be content with that explanation.

Mr Harper: Before the Minister sits down, I have two questions. First, am I right in thinking that until the appeal period is concluded, the Government cannot continue drafting the orders, or bring them before the House? Secondly, once the appeal period has concluded, or an appeal is heard and decided on, assuming that the Court does not quash and overturn the work of the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland, will the Government be in a position to make further progress, albeit with the constraints set out by the hon. Member for City of Chester about the potential end of the parliamentary Session?

Kevin Foster *rose*—

The Chair: If the Minister is unable to give a full response, he can write to the Committee.

Kevin Foster: That is possible, but I can briefly respond to my right hon. Friend's points. To be clear, the Court has not quashed the order, so we would be able to bring

it forward, but I think that most hon. Members would feel it more appropriate for the judicial proceedings to reach their conclusion before Parliament is invited to take its decision. Even if the judgment stands, the order will not have been quashed, so it could be brought forward, but when the House is making its decision, hon. Members can debate the Court's judgment.

On what happens at the conclusion of the judicial process, I do not think that it is right for me to get into what-iffery about what might happen in particular circumstances, but clearly the Government will then take a view on what implications it has had, if any, and on what any final judgment states, in line with our legal obligations in relation to the wider order and the process of bringing it forward for a decision by the House. As I say, I do not want to get into speculation about where that process may end, particularly given the sensitivity of some of the issues involved.

The Chair: I appreciate the Minister giving us that information. If he feels that he needs to give us more information, he can do so in written form.

Kevin Foster: On a point of order, Mr Owen. I have already written to the Chairs of the Select Committees on Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs, and on Northern Ireland Affairs, to confirm that information, for their interest.

The Chair: I am grateful. If copies could be made available to the Committee, it would be very useful.

Question put and agreed to.

10.11 am

Adjourned accordingly till Wednesday 16 October at Ten o'clock.

