



Appendix D

Interventions in the UK House of Commons

The extracts from the *House of Commons Debates* on the following pages illustrate the use of the intervention procedure in the UK House of Commons.

The House of Lords Bill was introduced in the House of Commons on 19 January 1999 and the second reading was debated in the House on 1 and 2 February. The bill was neither uncontentious nor uncontroversial. The extracts have been taken from second reading debate on the bill during the evening of 1 February 1999.

Source: H. C. Deb. (1998-99) 324—

Extract 1 cc 609-11

Extract 2 c 615

Extract 3 c 614

Extract 4 c 620

Extract 5 c 649

Extract 1

The Leader of the House, the Rt Hon. Margaret Beckett MP, in moving the second reading, spoke for approximately half an hour. There were frequent interruptions during her speech. The Member speaking may give way after a formal request to do so or may do so informally.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The most important thing about the Bill, and what should be the most important thing about this debate and this issue, is that it is all very simple. What our manifesto said is simple and this legislation is simple--and we can best judge it if we recognise the almost exquisite simplicity of what it proposes. The Bill removes the right presently enjoyed by some 750 people--almost 100 more than the total number of Members elected to the House--to sit and vote in our Parliament solely on the basis of their birth and without any consideration whatever of their personal qualities or achievements. The Bill will modernise the way in which we handle legislation, improve our Parliament and so lead to a better Britain.

Hereditary peers lose the right to an automatic place in Parliament in clause 1. They should then have the right of any citizen to vote, and to stand for and to be a Member of this House without disclaiming their peerages. That is the effect of clause 2. Clause 3 makes consequential repeals to the Peerage Act 1963, and clause 4 brings the main provisions of the Act into force at the end of the Session in which it is passed, cancels the existing writs of summons that otherwise run for a whole Parliament, and provides for a power to ensure that peers can register as parliamentary electors for the first register that comes into force after they leave the Lords.

The proposals follow precisely those in our manifesto: to remove the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in our legislature as

"an initial self-contained reform, not dependent on further reform in the future."

It has been suggested that an amendment may be moved from the Cross Benches in the House of Lords whereby some 90 or so of the 750 might remain in the transitional House until the second stage of reform. The Government have made it clear from the outset that we would prefer to proceed by consensus. However, if such a proposal is made in the Lords and the Government's legislative programme is not being frustrated, we are minded to accept it. Even with such an amendment, the automatic rights of hereditary peers would have been removed and those elected by their peers would serve in a personal capacity--their heirs would not inherit their seats.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can help me regarding the mechanisms of the Bill. If the Lords amendment is moved and accepted by the House and the Government, and peers elect their contemporaries for the purpose of the transitional arrangements, will there be a statutory provision or will they be created peers and life peers again? On what basis will they sit

once their right to sit as hereditary peers is removed by the Bill?

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to my right hon. Friend, they are precisely the matters that will be addressed by the amendment that will, no doubt, be moved in another place. It is the other place's amendment, not ours, and I do not propose to address it today.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the right hon. Lady saying that, if a similar amendment is moved in this place, the Government are not minded to accept it?

Mrs. Beckett: No such proposal appears in the Bill as it stands and nor do the Government intend to insert it.

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose--*

Mrs. Beckett: I am about to answer the hon. Gentleman's question. If an amendment is moved in this place, I shall advise my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against it--and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why. Should the Bill be actually obstructed in the Lords, despite being a clear manifesto pledge, or should it appear that the consensus and good faith for which we hope are lacking, then it is to this simple Bill that we would wish to apply the Parliament Acts so that the legislation can be carried in this Parliament, albeit after a delay.

The Government have provided for a two-day Second Reading debate for two reasons: first, the Bill, although short, is momentous in its effects; and, secondly, we recognise that hon. Members may want to range over matters relating to the White Paper. I intend to focus on the content of the Bill. In tomorrow's debate, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Lord Chancellor's Department, will focus on the transitional House.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Before the right hon. Lady moves on, I should like to return to the matter raised by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). Is the right hon. Lady saying that if an amendment were to be tabled in this House of the type referred to, she would invite her right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against it? She intends, in effect, to put a pistol to the heads of Members of the upper House. If that is the case, the word that would be applied in the courts is blackmail, but as I am sure that that is not a parliamentary expression, shall we simply call it threatening behaviour by the Government?

Mrs. Beckett: Absolute claptrap. The matter is simple and straightforward: this is what the Government said that we intended to do and it is what we propose to do. We are perfectly willing to work with members of the House of Lords if that is what they want, in order to allow some of them to remain on the basis that is being discussed. However,

the Government propose to act as we have set out in the Bill itself.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: There is not much point, but I shall give way to the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell).

Sir Nicholas Lyell: Will the right hon. Lady explain to the House whether she thinks it right and desirable that existing hereditary peers, who play a substantial part in the present role of the House of Lords, should continue to be able to play such a part during the transitional period? If she agrees that it is right and that that is why the Government would accept the amendment, why are they not prepared to include such a provision in a Bill to which they could apply the Parliament Acts?

Mrs. Beckett: I have just given the right hon. and learned Gentleman the reason. What he is discussing is not the Government's proposal; the Government's proposal was in our manifesto and it is before the

House today. We are prepared to take, on advisement, other proposals that might come from another place. We are prepared to consider them not unsympathetically, but we are not prepared to run the risk of the Bill before us today not being the same Bill, in essence, when it leaves this House.

Mr. Cash: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I will, but then I must get on.

Mr. Cash: Given the drastic treatment that the Government propose for the House of Lords and the peremptory manner in which they are introducing it, will the right hon. Lady be good enough to tell us whether she proposes to use the guillotine at some point during the proceedings?

Hon. Members: On the peers.

Mrs. Beckett: Neither on the peers, nor on the Bill. As I hope to show later in my speech, to call the measure drastic is to put it a little high; it is certainly long overdue.

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Extract 2

Whether to give way is the Member's decision.

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Mr. Bercow: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am sorry.

The Prime Minister is to forgo his right of veto over the names nominated by leaders of other parties. He is to give up to an independent appointments commission his right to nominate Cross-Bench peers. The Government have also made it plain that we shall not seek more than parity in numbers with the Conservative party in the transitional House, and that we do not believe that any party should seek a majority in the House of Lords. I look forward to hearing the Conservative party spokesman say the same.

There remains one further major argument about the nature of the Government's proposals: that stages 1 and 2 of reform should go together, that it is too soon to get rid of hereditary peers, and that they should not go until we have decided just what should replace them.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: No, I am awfully sorry. I must get on. I feel confident that I could answer the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Grieve: The right hon. Lady does not know what it is yet.

Mrs. Beckett: I do.

There is a flaw in that, at first sight, reasonable argument, and it is really a rather large flaw. It is that the Conservative party has been deploying that argument, with every appearance of sincerity, for 88 years.

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Extract 3

Interventions may lead to greater involvement by Members on both sides of the debate.

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Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: This will be the last time that I give way because I know how many hon. Members want to speak, and I want to get on.

Mr. Robathan: I find the right hon. Lady's revelling in many years of class warfare both interesting and amusing. I agree with much of what she says, but will she state categorically that she believes that the present Leader of the House of Lords would be there even if it were not a fact that her father was a Labour Prime Minister?

Mrs. Beckett: That is an insufferably insulting assertion, which the hon. Gentleman repeatedly makes. My right hon. and noble Friend the Leader of the House of Lords is in that position because of her own abilities, qualities and achievements; she is not there in the place of her father, as everyone in the country is perfectly well aware.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I am happy to give way to one of my hon. Friends, but it must be for the last time.

Dr. Starkey: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that a considerable number of hon. Members of this House are the daughters or sons of Members of Parliament, which does not imply that they are here only because of their birth, but that they have been elected on their own merits? Is not that precisely the point that my right hon. Friend was attempting to make about the current Leader of the House of Lords?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right. As I said, should the Bill pass into law, it will remain the case that all those entitled to serve in the House of Lords will be there as a result of their own achievements.

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Extract 4

The Chair may allocate the call when more than one Member requests to intervene.

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Mr. Bercow: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I call Mr. Hope.

Dr. Fox: I will give way to my hon. Friend first, and then to the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Hope).

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend--

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Dr. Fox: I said that I would give way first to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That was not very clear, if I may say so. I had already called the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Hope).

Mr. Hope: I have listened to the hon. Gentleman for about 10 minutes and I am still confused. I should be grateful if he would clarify the position: do the Opposition support, or not support, the hereditary principle--yes or no?

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Extract 5

The Chair occasionally adjudicates.

...

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) rose--

Mr. Grieve: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wareing: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, as I think that she asked first.

Mrs. Laing: Is not the hon. Gentleman arguing, most eloquently, for a total reform of Parliament itself? As

he just said, we now have devolution and the opportunity--although Opposition Members do not want it--for regional assemblies. Does he therefore agree that, rather than debating the short Bill before us, which deals with only one aspect--

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael J. Martin): Order. As I have said before, an intervention is not an opportunity to make a speech.

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