

When the House of Commons 'adjourns' every summer, a debate takes place. It is also a day on which Bills are given Royal Assent.

Below is my speech and a link to the Royal Assent: Summer Adjournment debate in 2010

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm100727/debtext/100727-0003.htm#10072741001074>

27 July 2010 Col 930

John Cryer (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): I congratulate the three maiden speakers, the hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) and my hon. Friends the Members for Livingston (Graeme Morrice) and for Hyndburn (Graham Jones). However, I should point out to the hon. Member for Witham that when Napoleon said that Britain was a nation of shopkeepers, he did not mean it strictly as a compliment.

I was very pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Livingston mentioned Robin Cook. I remember, when I was in this place before, hearing Robin Cook's speech when he resigned from the Government. He held the House of Commons in the palm of his hand. I have rarely seen someone make such a powerful speech. Shortly after that, 139 Labour MPs went into the Opposition Lobby and voted against the Iraq war. The suggestion that we are now hearing from the Liberal Democrats that theirs was the only party that opposed the war as a matter of principle is absolutely untrue.

As a matter of fact, I remember occasions on which we went into that Lobby-maybe 30 or 40 of us from the Benches on the Government side of the House-and the Liberal Democrats stayed here, sitting on their hands, because at that point it was not entirely clear in which direction public opinion was going. Only when public opinion was clearly swinging against the war did the Liberal Democrats decide to vote with us in the Opposition Lobby.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): Wrong way round.

John Cryer: No, it is not. That is the right way round.

It is five years since I took part in a pre-recess Adjournment debate. Such debates have become something of an institution. It is a sort of whingeing gits day, enabling us to get a few things off our chests. I am pleased to note that a number of speeches, particularly from Members on the Government Benches, have followed that tradition.

I want to begin by raising an issue which I hope concerns us all, namely unemployment. You might be right-wing, you might be left-wing, you might be a Liberal-you would be a prat, but you might be a Liberal-but I hope that the issue of joblessness concerns Members on both sides of the House.

27 July 2010 : Column 931

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman as I know he is getting into his stride now, but if he could pay attention to some of his language that would be helpful.

John Cryer: I apologise, and I withdraw that comment and will find another way of making my point at another time.

Returning to the subject of unemployment, we have been told by a number of Ministers, and especially the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, that people should be prepared to travel around the country. That goes back to the time of "uncle Norman" telling all of us-and I was one of them-to travel around the country in search of work.

I want to draw attention to a specific example. A constituent of mine lost his job some time ago. He was on jobseeker's allowance for six months, and the local jobcentre in Leytonstone in my constituency was very helpful and provided the resources to allow him to travel to interviews around the country. He therefore found a job at the other end of country, in the north-following the advice of the Secretary of State and other Ministers-but he then found himself in difficulty, because he had to try to find resources for a deposit for accommodation and also living costs for the period between starting work and receiving his first pay packet. He was offered three alternatives. First, there was a crisis loan, but that can only be used for very narrow purposes so it was not available. Secondly, there was the advance to wages scheme, but that would only provide £50, which was not enough. Thirdly, there was the adviser discretion fund. That could have provided £300. The problem, however, is that that has now been cut to £100. Therefore, in circumstances of fairly widespread unemployment and possibly rising deprivation when we have been told that our constituents must travel around the country in search of work, the Government have cut the adviser discretion fund, thus making it more difficult for them to travel around the country-or any distance-in search of work.

The second subject I want to draw attention to is the vexed issue of the Building Schools for the Future programme. I have lost all seven BSF projects in my constituency. Seven schools were going to benefit from BSF projects, but all of them have now been cancelled. I think we all know why the Library keeps receiving inaccurate lists of cancelled projects. When the Tories and Liberals came into government they found that a number of contracts were about to be let so they thought, "We'd better cancel them quickly-put the boot in-to make sure that loads of these potential projects get cancelled." They therefore rushed the list through in an inaccurate form because they did not do the background work-they did not allow the Department to do the research. As a result, we have inaccurate lists placed in the Library and then we get officials scurrying around again trying to revise them and put new lists in the Library.

Sadly, however, in my case it looks as if the list is accurate. I wish it was not. Some of the schools that would have benefited from a BSF project are literally crumbling. Teachers, pupils, governors, the heads and the support staff and others in these schools have been struggling for years under very difficult circumstances. Nobody would argue that we get brilliant teaching if we have great buildings, but the reality is that if teachers are teaching in a crumbling school that inevitably affects the quality of their pupils' education. BSF provided the light at the end of the tunnel, and that light has now been extinguished.

My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Stella Creasy) and I both represent constituencies that fall within the boundaries of the Waltham Forest borough, and since the BSF announcement was made we have been requesting a meeting almost on a daily basis, but the Secretary of State for Education has not yet managed to get back to us to say we can have a meeting about an issue that goes to the very core of why we are Members of Parliament.

I would like the Deputy Leader of the House to consider having a quiet word with the Secretary of State and recommending that he pulls his finger out. I am sorry I made those slighting comments because I have just realised that the Deputy Leader of the House is a Liberal so I did not do myself any good, and I do not regret what I said. Perhaps he could have a quick word with the Secretary of State for Education, telling him to pull his finger out and meet my hon. Friend and I and the leader of the council as soon as possible.

My final subject, which I want to touch on very briefly, follows on from comments made by the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) about the referendum on the voting system. We are in a surreal situation. The only one of the three major parties that went into the election with a commitment to a referendum on the alternative vote versus the first-past-the-post system was the Labour party. Personally, I am a supporter of first past the post. I thought it was absolute nonsense sticking that in our manifesto-but then, I did not write it. The two parties that are now in government went into the election, when in opposition, without any commitment to a referendum on AV or first past the post; yet now they are in government, they propose to have one.

This will not sort out the issue for Liberal MPs, because what they want is proportional representation. Of course, the Deputy Prime Minister would love that, because if we had PR he could go into meetings in back-rooms, ditch all sorts of commitments he has just fought the election on-such as on the replacement of Trident-and go back to the voters and say, "I did stand on all those commitments but sadly I've had to dump them all because I've done a deal with the Tories." He would love such a system, and if we ever have that kind of future in British politics, that really will be a menace.

UK Parliament Disclaimer:

This e-mail is confidential to the intended recipient. If you have received it in error, please notify the sender and delete it from your system. Any unauthorised use, disclosure, or copying is not permitted. This e-mail has been checked for viruses, but no liability is accepted for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this e-mail.