MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 24 March 2004
(*Afternoon*)

Session 2

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<u>Debates</u>

Scottish Parliament

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[THE DEPUTY PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Father Philip Tartaglia of St Mary's, Duntocher, Clydebank.

Father Philip Tartaglia (St Mary's, Duntocher, Clydebank): Good afternoon. This is the season of Lent, when Christian people throughout Scotland try to prepare for Easter through prayer, self-denial and works of charity, which are the traditional elements of Lenten practice, based on the teaching of Jesus.

This is the fourth week of Lent. In our parishes, the fourth week of Lent has been characterised for years by the annual collection for the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund—or SCIAF. This year, the collection is expected to raise a sum in excess of £570,000 in Scotland and is destined for third world development and for crisis areas throughout the world.

The work of the Scottish Parliament is largely to do with bettering people's lives. I suppose that all politicians must concern themselves with the plight of the poor and the needy; with reversing the fortunes of the homeless and the unemployed; with protecting the vulnerable—particularly children and the elderly—and with safeguarding minorities and those who seek shelter in our country from political or economic oppression.

It may encourage you to know that the Christian people of this land have a time in the year—namely, the season of Lent—when examining their lives and trying to root out selfishness and indifference from their hearts, and making a special effort to correct the injustices and inequalities that, unfortunately, are part of our human experience, is especially central to their faith in God and to their religious practice. In fact, it could be said that it is imprinted in the Christian psyche that religious observance that does not become active concern for those who are most needy is flawed in the eyes of God.

In the spirit of Lent, you as MSPs also could—and perhaps should—take time to review your lives and work. You are people of influence and have real executive power. It cannot be anything but good for people with such a significant position in our society to examine their lives and their work in order to ascertain that what they do is not done for their own advantage and glory, but for the betterment of the lives of the people whom they are elected to serve. Whatever we may call it, we all need a little experience of Lent in our lives.

Thank you for inviting me to be here today. May God bless you and your work.

Local Governance (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The next item of business is a debate on motion S2M-682, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, and one amendment to the motion.

14:35

The Minister for Finance and Public Services (Mr Andy Kerr): This bill is an important part of our modernising agenda and of our partnership agreement. It proposes measures to make council membership more accessible; it introduces new arrangements for determining councillors' remuneration; and it creates provisions to introduce the single transferable vote for council elections.

The key measures in the bill have been subject to extensive consultation over recent years—the McIntosh report, the Kerley report, a white paper, a draft bill and the partnership agreement all generated discussion and debate. Some have opposed parts of the bill; some have supported the bill; some have offered constructive comments; some have offered bogus arguments. However, in consultation, a clear majority of responses favoured change. The Local Government and Transport Committee has produced a comprehensive stage 1 report. I thank Bristow Muldoon, his colleagues and the committee clerks for the work that they have done. I also thank David Green and the STV working group for their work on some of the key issues around the implementation of STV.

Much debate has centred on the Executive's firm commitment to introduce STV. The committee has heard a range of views from top academics in the field, from the people who will be working with the new arrangements—the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers and the Association of Electoral Administrators—and from a variety of other key interests and pressure groups. Some have taken a broad view of what the bill seeks to achieve; some have sought to highlight every challenge that the move to a new electoral system will raise; others have sought to go against the views of McIntosh, Kerley and the majority of responses to our consultation exercises.

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The minister says that a number of academics have given their opinions on the bill. Will the minister listen to academics, such as Professor Curtice, who have pointed out that the bill does not provide an especially proportional form of STV?

Mr Kerr: We have sought to achieve a balance between the two significant McIntosh criteria of proportionality and the member-ward link. I will deal with that point in more detail later.

In examining the evidence that was presented to it, the committee has considered that any disadvantages of the proposed changes are outweighed by the advantages. Those include a wider choice for voters at election time; a wider choice for voters when consulting a councillor; and a higher degree of proportionality between votes cast and seats won. The stage 1 report focuses on the important issues and I will respond to a few of those now, given the short time that is available.

The number of councillors per ward has been addressed by many. The committee has considered the evidence, which included calls for higher numbers and calls for lower numbers. Our partnership agreement is clear. We have opted for three or four to strike a balance between proportionality and the size of the ward and the councillor-ward link. One of the key arguments that is raised frequently is that STV could mean that wards would be too big. We have heard some say that wards could be the size of Switzerland. That is nonsense; however, there is a serious point and the bill seeks to address it clearly.

Wards with three or four councillors strike a balance between proportionality and the councillor-ward link. As the size of a ward is increased, the councillor-ward link is weakened. That moves us closer towards one of the McIntosh criteria but further away from another. No system is perfect, but we have struck the right balance and I am pleased that the committee considers our proposals to represent the most acceptable compromise between the two McIntosh criteria.

The committee also examined potential arrangements for the ward boundary review and has been persuaded by the argument that starting with a blank sheet of paper would be preferable. This is a big change for councils and councillors and we aim to implement STV in a way that minimises fuss and upheaval. It may be simpler to create new multimember wards by combining existing wards and building on what we already have. Starting with a blank sheet may make it difficult for people to see what their new ward would look like and may create more turmoil than is necessary. I do, however, acknowledge the committee's views and want to reflect on them further.

I agree with the committee that it is important to allow proper time for consultation on matters such as ward boundaries, and I want to go further than that. I am aware that there is some unease about how ward boundaries have been reviewed in the past. The Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland has to work within the

law, but the bill gives us an opportunity to make sure that the framework is right. In particular, I want the Local Government Boundary Commission to work with councils in creating new wards—not just by consulting on proposals that have already been drawn up, but by involving councils from the very beginning to strive to get the best possible fit. I want to consider that further and will keep the committee informed as we progress.

The committee has also recommended that the criteria for the ward boundary review should be in the bill, rather than in secondary legislation. Leaving the criteria to secondary legislation would make it much easier to update them in future, but that is a point of detail rather than of policy. I am not averse to the criteria being in the bill and will reflect on whether we can lodge amendments that will respond to the committee's concerns.

The committee has also commented on the administrative arrangements for running an STV election. It is true that an STV count is more complex than a first-past-the-post count, and that if it is done manually it will take longer, but that should not stop us introducing a new system. Candidates might lose sleep and the local media might get excited, but I do not think that that is a major concern to the public, who will still be receiving their council services. We have to trust the professionalism of returning officers and their staff who will do their best to deliver results as quickly as possible.

However, I acknowledge that it is important to maintain momentum. With a new voting system, we will be examining ways of modernising the process. As the committee acknowledged, e-counting would speed up the count. I want to consider that very carefully but, of course, it is not straightforward. We have no experience of e-counting council or parliamentary elections in Scotland, and we have a lot to learn before we can be confident of using an e-counting system at a full council election. There will of course be opportunities for councils to pilot e-counting at by-elections, and we would encourage that.

Mr Monteith: The minister will be aware that the Irish Government is using a form of e-counting for its forthcoming local government elections—throughout Ireland. Does the minister intend to send representatives to monitor the effectiveness of the system and learn any lessons that we could import to Scotland?

Mr Kerr: Extensive evidence was given to the committee on the Irish system. We are interested in those processes and will want to learn from them. However, all electoral systems are unique to individual nations, so the lessons would be only lessons. Nevertheless, I am sure that we will want to take cognisance of what is happening in Ireland.

The committee has asked that we consider those issues and report back, and I am happy to do so. Those are the issues that the STV working group was set up to tackle.

We have also heard evidence that voters will be confused by the new system, and that that will result in a greater number of invalid ballot papers. Some of the evidence reflected the Irish example. However, we should stop prejudging the ability of the voter to understand a new system and to express their preferences in whatever way they choose. Indeed, do voters understand some of the processes that we have in the Scottish Parliament, particularly the d'Hondt system used to elect members to the Parliament? Does that matter? It probably does not.

Voters' experience on polling day is important. They should understand how to register their preferences on the ballot paper, and the broad principles of the transfer process. As the committee has acknowledged, there will have to be a process of raising awareness of the new system and educating the voter, and we will work with local authorities and the Electoral Commission on how best to do that.

Mr John Home Robertson (East Lothian) (Lab): The minister should be aware that many of us are concerned about what the bill might do to local government. In particular, will he concede that it is going to be impossible to retain any kind of local or personal relationship between councillor and voter in city wards that might have as many as 20,000 electors, and in urban areas that might have between 8,000 and 9,000 electors? Will he also concede that the bill might mean transferring more power to political parties and, worse still, to local authority officials? A lot of us are going to take a lot of persuading to support the proposed legislation.

Mr Kerr: I do not concede those points because I consider myself to be a local MSP with a connection to my community and the people I seek to represent. Although we will have different ways of working in local government in future, I do not consider it impossible that the ward-member link will be retained. I am also not sure that wards of that size were envisaged by the Executive when it was working on the bill.

I move on to the subject of councillors' remuneration. There is little doubt about the need to modernise the system of allowances for councillors and to make provision for pension arrangements; that is long overdue. However, it is essential that new arrangements are devised by an independent committee and the bill will establish that. After the remuneration committee has reported, robust proposals for new arrangements can be considered by ministers and the Parliament. For the avoidance of doubt, I

should make it clear that the costs of salaries and pensions will be met by councils, just as basic and special responsibility allowances are at present.

Phil Gallie (South of Scotland) (Con): In response to John Home Robertson's comments, does the minister agree that members of the Scottish Parliament, such as me, who can make contact with constituents across nine constituencies in the south of Scotland, prove that the proposed new system could have some merit?

Mr Kerr: I see the Tory front benchers looking to the back benches with some interest. I simply repeat that, under the new system, it will not be impossible to retain a link between the member and the electorate.

Our widening access agenda will be another important consideration for the remuneration committee. We need to attract a wider cross-section of people to consider standing for election. Candidates should have a clear understanding of what a councillor's role is and of what they would be entitled to receive if they were elected.

Our intention to introduce a severance scheme for councillors who choose to stand down at the next election has featured prominently in the Local Government and Transport Committee report. The committee has recommended that the severance scheme should be extended to councillors who stand for election in 2007 but are defeated. It has recommended a resettlement scheme for councillors who demit office after 2007.

At the moment, I am not minded to change our policy on that. I accept that a one-off severance scheme could be seen as unfair to councillors who choose to stand and are then defeated at the ballot box, given that some of them might have provided long service to their community. However, I am clear that we will offer a one-off severance scheme for those who choose to stand down. The scheme will not apply to those who stand and are defeated and it will not be a resettlement scheme for the future. Our proposals will let councillors choose which is the best option for them. They can choose severance and go or they can choose to stand again and benefit from the salary and pension arrangements if they are successful in being returned.

We propose fundamental changes and we recognise that not all councillors will want to participate under the new arrangements. Working in the new multimember wards will involve a culture change that some councillors may not want to embrace. We respect that. That is why they will have the option of the severance scheme.

I acknowledge that the bill is difficult for some members and difficult for some councillors. However, seats are not lost when we change electoral systems; delivering on promises and improving services are what matter. The challenge to every councillor is to embrace the opportunities that the new arrangements will provide, to fight the next election on their track record and on their ideas for the future and, after the election, to make the new arrangements work in the best interests of their new wards.

The bill is about choice, democracy and fairness. I urge colleagues of all parties to support the motion.

I move,

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

14:48

Tommy Sheridan (Glasgow) (SSP): As a member of the Local Government and Transport Committee, I first want sincerely to thank Eugene Windsor's clerking team, Stephen Herbert, and the rest of the staff who served our committee excellently throughout our consideration of the bill. In my opinion, their work enabled us to analyse and sometimes even change the thrust of the Executive's original recommendations.

The Scottish Socialist Party welcomes the general principles and policy objectives of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill. The overall objective is to strengthen local democracy. The bill has several important strands for that, but voting reform is the absolutely essential strand. In and of itself, voting reform will not regenerate local politics and guarantee improved turnout, but it is an essential plank to achieving such an outcome.

We hear much from the Executive about the need to tackle vested interests. It is unfortunate that we neither hear of nor see enough action being taken to promote income redistribution to tackle the wealth of vested interests in this country, but the bill will at least tackle the vested interests of councils the length and breadth of Scotland which, thanks to an acutely undemocratic electoral system, represent distorted political complexions in the 32 local authority areas.

Elaine Smith (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab): Given that the proposals represent such a huge change to local government, does the member think that it would have been more democratic to have held a referendum on local government voting reform?

Tommy Sheridan: I would gladly have supported a referendum on voting change. Indeed, I am confident that we would have won it.

I hope that this bill will draw to a close the undemocratic reality of a situation in which the Labour Party's 43 per cent share of votes in Midlothian translates into 83 per cent of the seats; its 48 per cent share of votes in South Lanarkshire

turns into 76 per cent of the seats; and its 46.8 per cent share of votes in West Dunbartonshire delivers 77 per cent of the seats. Indeed, in the city of Glasgow, 47 per cent of the citizens who voted chose Labour; however, that share of the vote gave the Glasgow Labour Party 90 per cent of the seats. Although a small party such as the Scottish Socialist Party was able to secure 15 per cent of the vote in Glasgow, it secured only 1 per cent of the seats. Such an electoral system is acutely undemocratic and the bill will end that lack of democracy.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): In his evidence to the Local Government and Transport Committee, Professor Curtice said:

"The main characteristic of the proposed system is that voters will vote for candidates, not for parties."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Transport Committee*, 2 December 2003; c 305.]

Will the member comment on that?

Tommy Sheridan: Absolutely. Professor Curtice's evidence was wide and varied. Indeed, on the point that John Home Robertson raised, it is interesting to note that Professor Curtice provided evidence that only 8 per cent of the local population ever make contact with a councillor over the whole lifetime of a council. As a result, the idea that the bill will demolish the member-ward link and not lead to any contact with councillors is patent and utter nonsense.

We are talking about improving democracy. I know that the single transferable vote system is not perfect; indeed, there is no perfect voting system. However, STV is a better voting system because it allows the electorate's wide and varied opinions to be represented in council chambers across Scotland.

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): It is particularly nauseating to hear Tommy Sheridan talk about democracy. Given his claim to have been so prominent in removing the poll tax, will he not acknowledge the role played by local councillors such as myself and many others in dealing with the casualties of his campaign—those people who were taken by Tommy down the path of non-payment and had to be rescued because of the circumstances in which they found themselves? That is what local councillors do and what they should continue to do.

Tommy Sheridan: I will move on from that characteristically irrelevant contribution from Des McNulty.

In its evidence, the new-Labour-led Convention of Scottish Local Authorities defended the first-past-the-post system and said that it was opposed to voting reform. Of course it is opposed to such reform; it represents a vested interest and wants to defend local councillors who are elected on a minority share of the vote.

That said, the chief of COSLA, Mr Pat Watters, did not simply defend the convention's vested interests when he gave evidence to the Local Government and Transport Committee in January; he also displayed breathtaking hypocrisy in his support for the bill's other strand of delivering a remuneration package for councillors. For example, when I asked him whether less-populated council areas should base any decision about a remuneration package on the level of population, which would mean that their level of remuneration would differ from other local authority areas, the veins burst in his neck. "Absolutely not!" he cried. He argued that because councillors have the same responsibilities and duties, they should have the same basic salary across Scotland. What a pity that Mr Watters does not uphold the same principle for the nursery nurses of Scotland. It was breathtaking hypocrisy.

On that point, I have heard that some Labour members may consider, as Mr Home Robertson indicated, ignoring the whip on the vote on the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill. It would be a display of narrow self-interest to vote against their whip today to defend their chums in local councils. Two weeks ago, the Labour members would not vote to defend the right of nursery nurses to a national pay agreement. Every single one of the Labour members who break the whip should be ashamed of themselves—except my colleague Johann Lamont, who has at least shown a bit of courage, which is not characteristic of those in the new Labour seats.

The truth of the matter is that all the evidence that the committee took on the number of members to a ward overwhelmingly supported having three to five members per ward in an STV system. Even David Mundell, who opposes the bill in principle, admitted that. If we are going to introduce voting reform for local government, let us have a proportional system that requires three to five members to a ward, as the independent STV working group recommended. That group has no political axe to grind and it does not represent anybody; it represents only the proportionality argument. I ask members to support my amendment, the STV working group, Kerley and the academic evidence that was given to the committee and support having three to five members in a ward.

I move amendment S2M-682.2, to insert at end:

"but, in so doing, notes the Interim Report of the Scottish Executive's Single Transferable Vote Working Group and expresses its support for the principle of the recommendation that general ward sizes should be three to five members with the option of two member wards in exceptional circumstances in recognition that this member ward size better reflects the balance being sought between proportionality and the member/ward link."

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Mr Sheridan lodged an amendment to Andy Kerr's motion that refers to ward sizes of three to five members, which Mr Sheridan supports. However, he talked about the bill's general principles and referred only once to his amendment, and by then his time was up. Can you consider for the future, Presiding Officer, the tactic that involves a member lodging an amendment in order to be the first to reply in a debate, and then failing to address that amendment?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will consider that.

I intend to move on. Mr Welsh has nine minutes.

14:57

Mr Andrew Welsh (Angus) (SNP): I add my thanks to the committee clerks and advisers and to all who contributed to the committee's report. I declare an interest, in that my wife is a councillor who has served on Angus Council since 1980.

I welcome the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill's recognition of the role and importance of councillors. In many ways, they have never been given credit or recognised for the work that many of them have done for decades in local councils throughout Scotland. There is little glamour in slogging through endless reams of papers and reports for weekly and monthly committee meetings while being in constant and easy reach of constituents. Good, conscientious local councillors have contributed mightily to Scotland's local communities. Occasional scandals might hit the headlines, but the real work of councils throughout the land consists of councillors and officials dealing with a massive range of essential, daily, local services that affect every man, woman and child in Scotland.

Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab): Will the member give way?

Mr Welsh: Let me proceed, if I may.

I have seen at first hand the massive contribution that can be made by able councillors, working with high-calibre officials, to the economy, welfare and well-being of local communities.

For a long time, Scotland's councils have been big business, with massive budgets and service responsibilities that demand full-time concentration and effort if the work is to be done properly. Therefore, I welcome the recognition in the committee's report that councillors should receive suitable remuneration and the proposal to leave the safeguard of allowing positive, part-time participation. Much will depend on the Executive and the proposed remuneration committee ensuring that the package meets the needs of the situation.

There is no such thing as a perfect electoral system and there never will be. No electoral miracles can be claimed for STV, nor can it be claimed that STV will automatically ensure the election of minorities and independents and spell the end of majority administrations.

Johann Lamont *rose—*

Mr Welsh: What STV will do is reflect more clearly how the people actually vote. The end-product will be what the electorate vote for, in a way that the first-past-the-post system could never do.

Helen Eadie *rose—*

Mr Welsh: Electoral systems can be either for the benefit of the councillors or for the benefit of the electors. The first-past-the-post system certainly suits many existing councillors and many vested interests are gathering to support it, for obvious reasons. However, STV reflects more the wishes of the electorate, which must come first.

Which vested interest wants to intervene?

Johann Lamont: I welcome Mr Welsh's recognition that many local councillors, who are elected under the current system, do a good job. However, does he accept that some people are exercised by the issue of the member-ward link because, no matter how intractable a problem is and how few headlines it attracts, an individual councillor, under the current system, has a responsibility to their constituents and is obliged to take up cases on their behalf? Does he accept that there might be a danger that, in multimember constituencies, with that link gone, that sense of obligation to difficult cases might be lost?

Mr Welsh: I accept that there would be a change. Perhaps Johann Lamont is afraid of change, but the relationship will still be there and the electors will actually have more choice as to which councillor they go to.

Electoral choice is what is important. I therefore support the general thrust of the bill, but I have concerns on some issues that remain, as yet, unanswered. For example, I have concerns about the fairness and appropriateness of the new ward boundaries and councillor numbers, which will be crucial in ensuring that the link between councillors and their local communities—a major objective in the changes—will be continued. For that reason, I support the amendment that has been lodged.

I also have concerns that the Executive is choosing to implement change through the use of secondary legislation and am concerned about crucial aspects of the changes. I seek assurances from the minister, who will be only too well aware of the dangers that may face the electoral system unless we get the changes right. There is nothing

in the bill about how a by-election will operate if a death or resignation produces a vacancy.

Helen Eadie: Will the member give way?

Mr Welsh: I hope that Helen Eadie will forgive me, but I have already taken a long intervention.

How will candidates be listed on ballot papers, how will the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland operate and what fair and democratic criteria will it use? If we are to improve democracy, all those questions must be given suitable, appropriate answers.

Professor Curtice stated:

"there is little precedent in current practice in the United Kingdom for using secondary legislative powers to determine the rules under which boundary commissioners operate."

Having seen the secondary legislation process abused in Westminster, I certainly do not want to see that abuse reiterated here. The fundamental principles and rules guiding the new system should have been in the bill so that they could be known and agreed to by Parliament, because they are crucial to the effectiveness and fairness of the new system.

We are introducing a more complex system, which could well require computerisation and electronic counting and voting systems, all of which will require careful consideration to ensure that fairness prevails and that all can see that our system remains fair, open and accountable. I would like to know what finance the Executive proposes to give to local authorities to implement the new system and who will finance the voter education programmes that will be required to ensure that the system works well. Money will have to be spent to ensure that the new system delivers what we all hope it can and should deliver.

Where will the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland's rules and regulations concerning the new boundaries, the counting systems and the rules for methods of e-counting or e-voting—should they ever be introduced—be set out? How will citizens know that there is fairness and accountability? Although the new system will not be that complicated when it comes to voting—the change will be simple: marking an X will become marking 1, 2 or 3—I believe that voter education will be required, simply because the new system will enter a field in which other systems already exist. The need for voter education will be especially great if elections to the Scottish Parliament and local government take place on the same day. From where will that voter education come? From where will finance be available? I certainly hope that those matters will not be burdens on local authorities.

There is also a problem with the transfer of votes, which was recognised in the committee report. The Gregory method, the inclusive Gregory method and—heaven help us—the weighted inclusive Gregory method have all been discussed. There must be some education to ensure that everybody knows exactly how the system operates. I am sure that the electorate have wisdom enough to know how to play the new system to its own advantage, but I hope that a suitable education system will be provided in the initial stages.

Decoupling of elections must be introduced, because local government mechanisms simply cannot cope with joint elections. I would like the minister to make it clear both who will eventually pay for any introduction of electronic counting or voting systems and what finance central Government will provide to carry out its intentions, as written into the bill. It will be quite clear to the minister from representations made by local government that the whole system would grind to a halt if two elections, operating under two different systems, were to take place on the same day. That practical problem must be addressed.

The bill is a step in the right direction. It will more closely relate votes cast with the intentions of electors. As such, I welcome the bill in principle. The reduction in the age qualification for candidates is also welcome. Personally, I believe that we will get closer to the old Scottish tradition of the age of 16 being the age of adulthood. We live in a changing society.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): Will the member give way?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is in his last minute.

Mr Welsh: I am sorry, as I would like to give way.

The more that we can encourage voting and participation by old and young alike, the stronger our democracy and citizenship in Scotland will become. That is, ultimately, the end-product that all members seek. The widening of access to council membership progress group will have to turn theory into practice if our elected councils are more truly to reflect the make-up and diversity of our population at large.

The report gives us the basis on which to move forward. I hope that some amendments will be made to the bill. We all want to see an electoral system that can engage the public much more and which makes everybody feel that their votes count in the end result. That is the hope; now the reality must be delivered.

15:06

David Mundell (South of Scotland) (Con): It is about time that there was some honesty in the debate. Let us be clear that the debate has nothing to do with proportional representation and everything to do with the survival of the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition.

How more patently ridiculous could the situation be than that, today, Parliament is being invited to back a set of proposals that nobody supports? On the one hand, there are members who have consistently argued for proportional representation in local government and, on the other hand, there are members, such as myself, who believe in the first-past-the-post system. However, can anyone seriously suggest that this political fix satisfies either of those demands? What is being proposed is not a system of proportional representation known anywhere else. As Professor Farrell pointed out to the Local Government and Transport Committee, it would be the least proportional system in the world.

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): Will the member give way?

David Mundell: No—not at the moment.

The bill is a blatant attempt by Labour and Liberal Democrat members to pretend to one another that they have gained something from the coalition discussions. Liberal Democrats are crowing that they have achieved some form of holy grail while, simultaneously, Labour MSPs are telling their supporters that the watered-down proposal will not make any difference.

Helen Eadie: Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I say to Helen Eadie that they are not all right, but I think that Labour members are a lot more right than Liberal Democrat members.

Nobody can deny that the Local Government and Transport Committee has carried out a major piece of work in reaching its conclusions. I congratulate all those involved, including our very fair convener. However, to any objective reader, many of the conclusions in the report do not match up to the evidence presented in the preceding paragraphs. In my view it is impossible, on any logical reading of the report, for the committee to conclude:

"Reform of the voting system is an essential plank in the drive to modernise local government across Scotland."

The evidence shows that the introduction of any form of the single transferable vote system, which Lord Jenkins, in England, described as being opaque and incomprehensible, would not significantly increase turnout at elections or produce a more diverse range of people to stand for election as councillors. The lack of

proportionality in the proposed new system means that there will not be large numbers of new councillors from parties that are currently not represented and that there will still be single-party domination in a number of councils.

Helen Eadie: Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I will come to Helen Eadie in a minute.

Professor Bill Miller stated in his evidence to the committee that the voting system should not be changed unless there are very good reasons for doing so. No good reasons have been presented for changing from the first-past-the-post system. It has a member-ward link, the public and councillors understand it and it delivers the accountability that is at the heart of the democratic process. The likely outcome of the change is voter confusion and further disillusionment with the process of local government.

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Will the member give way?

David Mundell: I say to Iain Smith that I was surprised that those promoting the new system could not find witnesses to come forward to make a case for the proposals. As Sir Jeremy Beecham, the Labour leader of the Local Government Association in England, said:

"To be frank, I do not know of anybody who would support the particular form of PR that we are looking at here."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Transport Committee*, 6 January 2004; c 496.]

Indeed, our only vaguely positive witness, the Liberal Democrat leader of East Renfrewshire Council, conceded that the proposal was not perfect and was only an attempt to balance competing interests. I agree with him. Those interests are the interests of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats; the voters and democracy do not get a look-in. It is important that the reasons for the bill are put on the record today so that in three or four years' time, when the public start to wake up to what has happened, they know who the guilty people are.

I salute Mr Kerr's ability to front out something that he does not believe in. One gets the impression that he would have argued equally convincingly for a voting system in which the votes were distributed by the Gregory method if the Gregory in question had been Pope Gregory, Gregory Peck or Gregory the gorilla.

I am pleased that the committee felt able to support my call for a full redistribution of votes under the weighted inclusive Gregory method, should the proposals be driven through. In that event, the Scottish Parliament and local government elections will have to be decoupled. The overwhelming evidence is that asking voters

to use for the first time a system that involves marking 1, 2, 3 and 4 on one ballot paper and then placing an X on two other ballot papers would lead to chaos and confusion in our polling stations and at the counts. I have seen ballot papers that have been invalidated by multiple Xs in elections in Northern Ireland. Members do not need to take my word on the subject, and they should certainly not take that of the Liberal Democrats; they should take the word of the professional witnesses who told the committee how difficult it would be to operate such a system. Sir Neil McIntosh of the Electoral Commission described the challenge as "formidable".

I turn to Mr Sheridan's amendment. It would be illogical for the Conservative group to support Mr Sheridan's amendment today, given that we wish to make it clear that we do not support the bill's general principles. However, it is already apparent that the key argument around the bill will boil down to the ward sizes that are set out and whether they offer any form of proportionality. During stage 1 of the bill, Iain Smith demonstrated that he does not have the backbone to stand up to the Labour Party. Therefore, there will not be a significant amendment at stage 2. Instead, the issue will be left until stage 3, when it will be for Liberal Democrat MSPs and their consciences to decide whether there will be yet another sell-out to follow on the heels of those on Airborne and genetically modified crops.

Whatever the Liberal Democrats' decision, the one thing that I can assure them is that the Conservative group will not let them off the political hook. If they vote down wards of five or more members at stage 3, the proposal will have failed because of Liberal Democrat votes, not because of those of members of any other party. However, we do not need to get to stage 3. I am sure that Labour members do not want to fight the 2007 elections on an STV system and, like Phil Gallie, become just simple list members, so I urge them to join us. Let us end this farce today by defeating the bill.

15:14

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Dear oh dear—follow that.

I welcome today's debate on the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, because the bill marks an important step forward in the modernisation of local government in Scotland. It also marks a major step towards the enhancement of our councils' status by ensuring that we have a genuine partnership between local government, the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Executive and—most important—the people of Scotland. The people of Scotland cannot have confidence in their elected councils if they continue to be unrepresentative.

The bill is not just about STV; it is about a series of measures that will enhance the status and role of the councillor and will make the job more appealing. By removing some of the barriers that prevent members of the many groups in our society that are under-represented from standing, it will ensure that councils become more representative.

Elaine Smith: Will the member give way?

Iain Smith: No—not at this stage.

It has been a long journey to get to this point. It is important that we bear that journey in mind—the debate is not one that is without support, as Mr Mundell suggested.

The McIntosh commission was set up by the Labour Government in 1997 to consider how to build effective relations between local government, the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive after devolution. The commission also had to look at how councils could best make themselves responsive and democratically accountable to the communities that they serve. McIntosh found

"substantial and widespread support for the view that a move to some form of proportional representation would be beneficial for local government."

The McIntosh commission recommended that PR be introduced for local government elections. It also recommended the following criteria: a more proportionate result; maintenance of the link between councillor and ward; a fair chance for independents to be elected; allowance for geographical diversity; and a close fit between council wards and natural communities.

In order to build on the McIntosh recommendations, the Scottish Executive set up the renewing local democracy working group, under Richard Kerley. The working group examined the various options against the McIntosh criteria and, having done so, considered proportionality and the member-ward link to be the primary criteria. The conclusion was that

"STV best meets the requirements of our remit".

Helen Eadie: A member of the First Minister's negotiation team told me that the First Minister asked for a referendum on the issue. If the member believes in the principles of democracy, why is it that the Liberal Democrats refused the request for a referendum? Will he join me in a call for every council in Scotland to conduct its own referendum on the issue?

Iain Smith: There is no need for a referendum on the issue. There is widespread support for PR. I will say a bit more on that subject in a moment. Members of the Scottish Parliament are elected to make decisions on behalf of the people of Scotland and to represent their interests.

Mr Monteith: Will the member give way?

Iain Smith: No. Brian Monteith should sit down. As his front-bench spokesman did not take any of our interventions, I will not take interventions from members on his benches.

The Scottish Executive's consultation paper, "Renewing Local Democracy", was published in March 2002. It received an overwhelming response in favour of the introduction of STV—the figure was 96 per cent, an overwhelming response even if the postcard campaign is discounted.

Opinion polls in Scotland have consistently shown support for fair voting systems. Proportional representation has wide support in civic Scotland. Supporters include Unison—as members know today—and many other trade unions. In my view, the case for STVPR has been proven time and again. I am pleased that the bill has received cross-party support.

Margo MacDonald: The member referred to the "overwhelming" support for a fair system of STV. Is it possible to have a fair system of STV with such a small number of councillors per ward?

Iain Smith: I will come to that in a moment. I ask Margo MacDonald to bear with me.

In his opening speech, Tommy Sheridan mentioned a number of issues of concern. I ask the opponents of PR: how can they justify an election system in which a party can win 90 per cent of the seats with just 47 per cent of the votes; or 50 per cent of the seats with 34 per cent of the votes, which happened in East Dunbartonshire; or no seats at all with a quarter of the votes, which happened to the Scottish National Party in Midlothian? How can they justify the situation here in Edinburgh in which a party with 48,862 votes got 30 seats, whereas another party with 48,002 votes got only 15 seats? I do not see how the opponents of PR can possibly justify those results or how they can say that the results reflect the wishes of voters.

Those who support the status quo say that the first-past-the-post system holds council executives to account. How can the voters of Edinburgh hold the council's executive to account? Despite 72 per cent of voters voting against Labour, another majority Labour administration was elected in Edinburgh. How does that hold the executive in Edinburgh to account? I believe that that situation is unacceptable: first past the post has to be brought to an end.

I say to the opponents of change that the debate is not about parties or councillors; it is about voters. It is time to give power back to the voter and to allow voters to have real choice about who they want to represent them and who runs their local councils. Giving voters more say in who they want to be their councillors will make councillors more accountable, not to the parties that nominated them, but to those who elected them. That would improve the quality of our councils' decisions and therefore provide better services for communities. First past the post has failed many of our communities, and it is time for it to go.

Karen Gillon (Clydesdale) (Lab): If PR is such a popular measure and there is such a clamour in support of it, why have I not received a single letter of support on the issue?

Iain Smith: I have not had a single letter in support of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. Let us not start—[*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Murray Tosh): Order.

Iain Smith: I want to turn briefly to the amendment. The issue of the number of members per ward is important, and the Local Government and Transport Committee spent a significant amount of time considering it.

Essentially, there is a trade-off between ward size and proportionality, or a trade-off between the member-ward link and proportionality. To those members who selectively quote in this debate the eminent professors who gave evidence to the committee and to those members who pretend that the bill does not deliver proportionality and is therefore flawed, I say that it was never intended to deliver proportionality.

I remind members of the McIntosh criterion of a system that produces a more proportionate result while maintaining the member-ward link. It is self-evident that the larger the ward, the more proportionate the result. If proportionality was the only criterion, we would be introducing a list system with a single list for a whole council area—or even a single STV ward for a whole council area, although even I shudder at the thought of electing all 72 Fife councillors on an STV ballot.

What is proposed in the bill is, in the words of John Curtice, "moderately proportional". That is, it will be more proportionate than the present system, but not as proportionate as, say, a seven or eight-member ward system.

Margo MacDonald: So it is less fair.

Iain Smith: It is fair. It is more proportionate and it is fair, because it has the second important aspect of fairness, which is the member-ward link. I do not believe that the very large wards that would be required to achieve purer proportionality would be acceptable to local voters. Wards with three to four councillors will maintain and enhance the ward-member link and create the right balance. Kerley actually argued for four-member wards:

"Any consideration of size and boundaries has implications for proportionality and the recognition of natural boundaries. We consider that 4 member wards will usually balance these requirements: they will be large enough to achieve proportionality, and also offer a sound link between the electorate and its communities."

I concur with that view and I commend the bill.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: We come now to the open debate. I hope to call everyone, but that will require a degree of discipline on everyone's part to stick to six minutes.

15:21

Bristow Muldoon (Livingston) (Lab): First, as convener of the Local Government and Transport Committee, I thank the committee clerks, particularly Eugene Windsor, and the researchers in the Scottish Parliament information centre, such as Stephen Herbert. Other members have mentioned those people. They were very important in assisting the committee to prepare the excellent report that accompanies our consideration of the bill today.

The rest of my remarks will be made as a Labour member and individual MSP, not in my capacity as committee convener.

I declare an interest, as my wife is a local authority councillor on West Lothian Council. My speech will demonstrate to those who say that Labour members are not prepared to take on powerful vested interests that that is not the case.

On the general principles of the bill, we have to accept the fact that the case for change in the local government electoral system has been made. The Labour Party went into the elections last year advocating the retention of the first-past-the-post system, albeit that it is fair to say that even within the Labour Party a significant percentage of members believed that it was right to move towards a change in the electoral system. However, even those who advocated the retention of the first-past-the-post system must recognise that we emerged from the election as the largest party, but without an overall majority. Therefore, we have to listen to the views of the electorate in general and to other political parties in Scotland.

We also have to reflect on the fact that there has been serious debate in Scottish politics around electoral reform for local government for six or seven years, through the McIntosh report, through the Kerley group report, through consultations that the Executive conducted in the first session and through the consultation that took place on the bill. There is a large body of evidence from that period that shows that people support a change to a fairer electoral system that is more proportional.

I say to my colleagues in the Labour Party that the change does not mean that Labour cannot win

majority control in councils. It puts in place a higher democratic test, but if voters want to have a majority Labour council, they can vote for it at the ballot box and get a majority Labour council. In 2007, or whenever the elections will be, I will be campaigning in West Lothian for a majority Labour council to be elected. It is perfectly possible for that to happen if people vote for the Labour Party in the numbers that they have voted for it on many occasions in the past. People need to reflect on the fact that the system that is being introduced does not make it impossible to have majority party control; it simply imposes a higher democratic test that will be met if there is broad support from the electorate.

David Mundell said that he wanted to introduce a degree of honesty into the debate, but the issue that he chose to highlight at the end of his speech illustrated the Conservatives' intellectual dishonesty. On the one hand, they advocate the retention of the first-past-the-post system, but on the other hand they have issued a veiled threat to our colleagues in the Liberal Democrat party that they will vote for a system that has a higher degree of proportionality than the proposed system in the bill has. David Mundell must decide whether he supports a proportional system—he cannot have it both ways.

David Mundell: I hope that the threat was more than veiled. I was making it clear that we should have either a first-past-the-post or a proportional system. We should have one or the other, not a fudge in the middle.

Bristow Muldoon: David Mundell demonstrates a cynical disregard for the system that is being considered. That is not surprising because the Conservatives are well versed in such practices. It is also no surprise that the Conservatives advocate the retention of the first-past-the-post system. One of the reasons why I was converted to supporting a proportional electoral system was that the Conservatives' former leader, Margaret Thatcher, trampled over the views of this country for many years when she was in power. Had there been a proportional electoral system at the UK level, either she would not have been elected in the first place or she would have been gone within 18 months.

The issue of balance in three or four-member wards has been raised. Some members advocate a higher degree of proportionality, but the degree of proportionality that will be introduced under the bill will be considerably higher than the degree of proportionality that exists under the current system. Under the bill, the number of people whose votes will count towards electing a successful candidate will be far higher. We have also recognised that there is an important link between wards and members. If we chose the

type of system that some members advocate, local authorities such as Glasgow City Council would have electoral areas of up to 30,000 people. In those circumstances, the link between communities and councillors would be weakened dramatically. That is why I have no hesitation in supporting the Executive's proposals. In fact, I would like the size of electoral wards in urban areas to be considered more closely so that we do not end up with wards of 24,000 to 30,000 people.

The bill also deals with remuneration, widening access and decoupling. I would have liked to have dealt with those issues in detail, but given that the key contentious part of the bill is the introduction of STV, I have addressed that issue. However, I urge the Executive to reflect before stage 2 on many of the issues that the Local Government and Transport Committee raised in its report.

I encourage all members to recognise that the case has been made for the proposals and to support the bill.

15:28

Tricia Marwick (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): I congratulate the Executive on finally introducing a bill on STVPR for local government elections. If a week is a long time in politics, five years is an eternity. It is five years since McIntosh recommended PR for local government elections and four years since Richard Kerley recommended STVPR. Of course, we could have had STVPR for the local government elections in 2003 if the Executive parties had not conspired to kick my member's bill on the issue into touch. However, that was then and we are now discussing the general principles of the Executive's bill.

I am disappointed that the minister did not respond more positively in his speech to some of the Local Government and Transport Committee's concerns. I want to raise three issues: the number of councillors per ward, the timing of elections and the voting age in the elections. On the first issue, I believe that the more councillors there are per ward, the greater the proportionality. As others have said, the Liberal and Labour proposal for a ward size of three or four councillors will give us the least proportional such system in the world. Most of the evidence that the committee took points to the fact that flexibility needs to be built into the system to give the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland scope. We must ensure not only that we have greater proportionality, but that there is sufficient flexibility to preserve natural communities as wards.

As has been said, the Executive's working party on PR is in favour of wards of three to five councillors, as was Richard Kerley. We now find

out from Iain Smith that, unfortunately, the Liberal Democrats have never been in favour of a fair voting system, but are in favour only of a moderately proportional system. I say to Iain Smith that a moderately proportional system is not a fair voting system.

Iain Smith: Does the member accept that STV is not of itself a proportional system and that it creates proportionality only depending on how large or small the wards are made? The Liberal Democrats have always supported STV for local government.

Tricia Marwick: I was wondering when it would finally strike Iain Smith that the proportionality of STV is determined by the number of councillors per ward. That is the whole point. I cannot believe that, having gone through all the facts, he has only now clicked that that is the case.

I welcome the Local Government and Transport Committee's support for the proposal that the boundary commission should redraw the wards from scratch, rather than just bolting on the existing ward boundaries. The boundary commission is confident that it can complete the work in time. I heard Andy Kerr's speech, but the Executive does not seem to be putting forward a good argument for why we cannot go for a clean-sweep approach to ensure that we get the arrangements right this time.

The Scottish Local Government (Elections) Act 2002 fixed Scottish Parliament and local government elections to fall on the same day. The SNP opposed that measure in 2002 and we oppose that arrangement now. We opposed it then because voters were being asked to use two different electoral systems and three separate ballot papers. If STV is adopted for council elections, voters will be faced with two different kinds of PR and a first-past-the-post system on the same day.

The evidence for the need to decouple the Scottish Parliament elections from the local government elections is overwhelming, as the Local Government and Transport Committee heard from senior officials from Scotland's councils and from Neil McIntosh of the Electoral Commission. Neil McIntosh said:

"When it comes to running elections, voter engagement and voter turnout, combination adds complexity, particularly if STV, the additional member system and the first-past-the-post system are being used."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Transport Committee*, 16 December 2003; c 455.]

The committee supported that view. There was no rationale for bringing the two elections together in the first place and there is even less reason for keeping them together if the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill is enacted.

One of the biggest challenges to face each and every politician is in encouraging young people in particular to participate and exercise their right to vote. I welcome the Executive's proposals to reduce the age at which people may stand for election as a councillor, but we need to go further and to reduce the voting age to 16. That was one of the recommendations of the previous Local Government Committee's inquiry into renewing local democracy. The committee asked ministers for their response to that idea and what actions they would take in discussing lowering the voting age to 16 with their Westminster colleagues. I would be grateful if the minister told us, when summing up, what discussions have been held with his Westminster colleagues and what can be done under the bill not only to reduce the age at which young people can stand as candidates to be councillors, but to address the possibility of lowering the voting age to 16.

The SNP will support the motion and the amendment that Tommy Sheridan lodged but did not speak to. It is important that, as we go through stages 2 and 3 of what is an important bill, the Executive starts to listen to the committee and to the people who really want the STVPR system to work.

15:34

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): I am enormously pleased to speak in this debate. It is no secret that reform of the voting system for Scottish local government is a high priority for the Liberal Democrats. It is no secret either that it is a difficult issue for a number of our Labour colleagues.

There is an oddity about the debate. Not for the first time, Liberal Democrats and Labour, acting together under the partnership programme, are doing something important for Scotland and they are doing so out of high principle and not for party advantage. Labour and the Liberal Democrats, acting together, agreed on and delivered this Parliament and the proportional electoral system that both underpins and represents the new politics in Scotland. Backing the principle that the health of Scotland's new democracy required a fair voting system was an act of high statesmanship. [*Laughter.*] I will take no laughs from the Conservatives on the matter.

Phil Gallie: In that case, will the member take an intervention?

Robert Brown: No. I will not take an intervention either.

The voting system for the Scottish Parliament did not add to my party's strength in it and we were already Scotland's second party at Westminster. The Labour Party made a significant

sacrifice, against its short-term self-interest and in the interests of Scotland. Labour deserves credit for that, as it is favoured at parliamentary and council level by the first-past-the-post system.

Where was the SNP at the time? It was sulking in its tents, boycotting the Scottish constitutional convention and taking the arrogant view that, as Scotland's party, only it knew the true way. Where were the Conservatives? They were virulently and venomously opposed to the Parliament. They were prepared to sell out democracy and fairness in the deluded belief that, in time, Buggins's turn would give them rule at Westminster, with the chance to impose a new poll tax or launch a new attack on public services in Scotland on the basis of a tiny percentage of the Scottish vote. Let them deny that if they will.

Here we are again: Labour and the Liberal Democrats are voting in principle to support a fair voting system for Scotland's councils and to open up Scotland's town halls to the people because that is right and necessary for a modern democratic Scotland. My party has campaigned superbly on local issues throughout Scotland and we have our fair share of councillors across the country. Again, Labour is acting against its short-term interests in backing a fair voting system and it is doing so because that is the right thing to do.

Of course there are those who are opposed to PR in principle, because they believe that it weakens the councillor-ward link—as Tommy Sheridan said, only 8 per cent of people ever contact their councillor. I think that they are wrong, because the experience throughout the United Kingdom is that multimember wards increase people's choice, maintain the local link and involve many more people. That is borne out by the Electoral Commission's study, which shows that most people representing multimember wards in the United Kingdom think that the councillor-ward link in such wards is at least as great as, if not greater than, that under the first-past-the-post system.

Phil Gallie: Will the member take an intervention?

Robert Brown: I am sorry, but I will not. I will take no interventions from the Conservatives, because they have nothing to contribute to the argument.

The STV system will help to re-empower and reinvigorate local democracy. It would be a superior choice for the electoral system for the Scottish Parliament, too, but no system is perfect and I acknowledge that there is a principled argument to be made against it. I draw to members' attention Unison's comments, which were referred to earlier. Unison believes that dominance by one party without a majority of

votes creates fatalism and disillusionment on the part of voters and complacency on the part of the winning party. I agree with that view.

I have much greater difficulty with those people who go down the slippery slope of arguing that the end justifies the means. A section of the Labour Party advances that argument, largely because, under the present system, Labour dominates much of local government. Those people are saying that they are prepared to tolerate and embrace the democratic absurdity whereby Labour can get 71 of 79 seats in Glasgow with only 47 per cent of the vote because that will deliver socialism.

That is the politics of Tammany Hall and the Parliament should have nothing to do with it. Such an argument—I say this to Helen Eadie, whom I admire personally but who has been the leader in that regard—should be an offence to anyone who believes in government by the people, for the people and of the people. The nearest parallel that I can think of is the situation in Poland just before the fall of communism, when Solidarity got an overwhelming percentage of the popular vote but the communists were kept in power because the rigged constitution guaranteed them a majority. The argument delivers not socialism, but another ism—cynicism. It delivers apathy and it rocks the basis of democracy.

The Tories oppose STV for councils. If the Tories want to be the political equivalent of turkeys voting for Christmas, I have no objection, but does anyone doubt that the bill is the only lifeline for the Conservative party, which was once the majority party in this country but has now been rejected roundly and comprehensively, particularly locally?

The bill is a key part of the Parliament's unfinished business. For the Liberal Democrats, it is in the direct tradition of parliamentary and democratic reform, home rule and opening up the corridors of power to the people. It is about liberating real, popular democracy. It is about the Liberal Democrats and Labour working as colleagues in partnership to deliver real reforms. On this issue as on many, the Liberal Democrats are shown to be Scotland's party, delivering for Scotland's people, with real reforms for our real democracy. I am delighted to support the motion that the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

15:40

Sarah Boyack (Edinburgh Central) (Lab): I support the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill because it represents an opportunity to modernise local government in Scotland. It should deliver fairer voting, more representative membership of councils and better support for councillors. We

should grasp the opportunities that it presents us with.

Contrary to what some members have said today, many of us in the Labour Party support the proposals in the bill. Our support goes back to our party's founding democratic principles, which date back 100 years. Our belief in fairer voting was a key issue in our support for the establishment of the Scottish Parliament and for greater democracy in the way in which its members would be elected. One of the opportunities that we should grasp is that which would allow us to ensure that a greater number of women represent their local communities in our councils. We did something similar in relation to the Scottish Parliament.

Elaine Smith: Does Sarah Boyack recognise that research shows that PR does not, in and of itself, deliver diversity in representation, whereas the first-past-the-post system can do that, as long as political parties are so minded? For example, the Labour Party delivered gender balance in its first-past-the-post seats in the Parliament, which is something that the Liberal Democrats did not do.

Sarah Boyack: I agree that PR does not guarantee diversity in representation and that political will is the important factor. However, the bill presents us with an opportunity to ensure that there is fairer voting and fairer representation of communities. I hope that the Labour Party grasps that opportunity. Some 50 per cent of the members of this Parliament are female and both men and women represent our communities. I think that that situation should apply to local government as well. Only a fifth of our councillors are female. That is a disgrace and we need to tackle it.

Voter confusion, which the committee considered, is a hugely important issue. We have a job of work to do in telling people how straightforward the system will be. The system is extremely simple for voters; the difficult bit is in the counting. For those reasons, I strongly support the committee's suggestions for electronic voting. The system must be simple and straightforward. I urge the minister to address issues of procurement to ensure that the right technical equipment is put in place so that the process works smoothly. I do not envy the electoral registration officers' job in that regard. However, I repeat that, as far as the voters are concerned, the system is straightforward. We need to have a national campaign to communicate that if the bill is passed.

The committee got the issue of the size of the wards absolutely right. We have had some debate on that subject. Multimember wards with three to four councillors would deliver greater proportionality than we have at the moment and would still ensure that local communities are, and feel that they are, effectively represented. Larger

wards could begin to undermine local accountability and accessibility. Perfect accountability could be delivered by having a list for each local council, but that would not reflect people's local interests. The line must be drawn somewhere and I think that the committee has done a good job in striking the right balance. Its recommendations will ensure that we have fairer voting and that local communities continue to be represented effectively.

The committee had to consider complex evidence about the boundary commission creating new multimember wards from scratch. It is important that we build on existing community identities. I know that there are concerns about community severance, which is why I think that the principles behind the proposals should be included in the bill so that everybody is aware of them when the new wards are being drawn up. Some thought needs to be given to that issue.

I hope that the Parliament votes to support the bill. I would not pretend for a minute that it is the top issue for my constituents. That is not to say that I have not had letters about it—my constituents are good at getting in touch with me on a range of issues—but the top issues for my constituents are local transport, the new schools that will be built and Edinburgh's housing crisis. However, every opinion poll says that people want fairer voting and more democratic approaches. The proposal in the bill is the right thing to do, which is why we should support it.

Some members have made politically opportunistic claims that their party is the only supporter of democracy and that other members are voting purely for party reasons. However, when the Labour Party supported PR for the Scottish Parliament, we did so not from narrow party interest—we could quite happily have had the bulk of the Parliament made up of Labour Party representatives who were elected under the first-past-the-post system. However, we acknowledged the desire in Scotland for fairer voting. We took the opportunity to get more women and young people elected. I would also like people from ethnic minorities to be represented in greater numbers in our local councils. The bill gives us the opportunity to provide for that, but it will not happen automatically. There are political choices. Similarly, the bill will not automatically ensure that more people vote in local authority elections. It is our job, as politicians, to get people interested and to persuade them to come out to vote.

The bill provides us with opportunities. It will not fix local government, but it provides a framework for better support for the councils that we have elected, so that they can do their jobs properly, for a fairer voting system and for a modernised system of local government in Scotland. It is not everyone's number 1 issue in terms of voter interest, but it represents the right thing to do and that is why the Parliament should vote for it today.

15:46

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): In my remarks, I will address two points: first, the reason why I believe in principle that proportional representation is objectionable; and, secondly, the reason why I believe that the form of PR that is proposed in the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill is doubly objectionable.

On the more general point, there are two fundamental objections to PR. First, proponents of PR fundamentally misunderstand the purpose of elections. The purpose of an election is not necessarily to determine a legislature that exactly replicates people's opinions on the day of the election. The purpose of an election is surely to deliver an Administration that has a programme for government and the authority to put that programme through and to make it law. That is where people who support PR go wrong.

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Welsh: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: Not at the moment, as I want to develop my point. I will give way later.

The other fundamental reason why I object to PR is that it delivers more power to politicians at the expense of the voters. Let me give an example. In the elections to the Scottish Parliament that were held last year, the largest number of votes and the largest number of seats went to the Labour Party. The Labour Party could have done a deal with the party that had the second highest number of votes and seats, which was the SNP, but it did not. It could have done a deal with the Conservatives, who had the third highest number of votes and seats, but it did not. It did a deal with the party with the fourth highest number of votes and seats. What is democratic about that?

Mike Rumbles (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: In a moment.

PR means that parties have to do deals on policy. People might have voted for the Liberal Democrats because they were strong supporters of, for example, the Airborne Initiative. Such people listened to the Liberal Democrats, who said in their manifesto that they supported that initiative. What happens? As the result of a dodgy

deal that was stitched up, those people were betrayed by the Liberal Democrats when that party went into government.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member give way?

Murdo Fraser: In a moment.

People might support the Liberal Democrats because they are opposed to genetically modified crops, but what happens? When the Liberals are in power, they do another dirty deal and ditch their supporters.

Of course, the process might happen the other way round. I believe that we have a proposal from the Liberal Democrats to legalise pornographic pictures of 16-year-old boys and girls. I cannot imagine that many Labour members would support such a proposal. Let us say that that proposal goes into the Liberal Democrat manifesto at the next election, that the outcome of the election is the same as the outcome of the previous one and that the Liberal Democrats insist on that policy in their coalition talks. People who voted Labour to oppose such a policy might end up having it imposed on them. That is what is wrong with PR—it is all about deals stitched up in backrooms. It is not about giving people a say.

Patrick Harvie (Glasgow) (Green): I agree about the importance of parties maintaining their manifesto commitments and I accept that many parties in many Parliaments can be accused of not doing so. However, under the first-past-the-post system, in which one party dominates, the reality is surely informal deals and coalitions within the party. The benefit of a formal coalition is its transparency. Everyone can read the deal and the parties can be held to account when they back out of it.

Murdo Fraser: I accept that political parties are coalitions of interest, but I disagree with Mr Harvie in that I think that, when a party stands on a manifesto, people can see exactly what it believes in and they know that, if it keeps its promises, certain measures will be delivered. The problem with the current system is not only that people get at best half the manifesto, but that they get policies that they did not vote for and that they do not want.

STV, in the form that is being proposed, is not a proportional system, as we heard in evidence to the committee from, for example, John Curtice and Professor David Farrell, who said:

"the proposed system would be the least proportional of all the current STV systems of which I am aware".—[*Official Report, Local Government and Transport Committee*, 9 December 2003; c 387.]

As other members have said, the system would break the ward-member link. I appreciate that that is not a big issue in most cities, but it is a huge issue in rural areas—in many remote and rural areas, the local councillor is a person in the community to whom people across the board can go. I live in an area that is represented by an SNP councillor and I would like to think that, if I went to him with an issue relating to the council, he would represent me and take forward my concerns, regardless of my political views. Such a link is vital and should not be broken.

As we know from Ireland, the other problem with STV is that it gives more power to the political machine.

Mike Rumbles: Will the member take an intervention?

Murdo Fraser: In a moment.

We should want to give more power to the people rather than to the political machines. In the recent elections in Northern Ireland, for example, Sinn Féin was able to maximise its votes through having a disciplined system of running elections. That cannot be in the interests of democracy.

I say to Labour members that the effect of the bill would be simple. Multimember wards with three or four councillors would, in fact, do the Liberal Democrats few favours; indeed, such wards would probably not do us terribly many favours, either. The main beneficiaries would be the Scottish nationalists. By voting for the bill, Labour members would vote for replacing Labour councillors with, in the main, Scottish nationalist councillors. They should examine their consciences. I believe that a majority of members are against the proposal. The Conservatives oppose it and Labour opposes it. I say to Labour members that they should stick to their consciences. They should screw their courage to the sticking post, vote against the proposal and stick up for the people rather than for the politicians.

15:52

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): I ask Tommy Sheridan whether he will join me in questioning the claim in Professor Curtice's report that only 8 per cent of the population make contact with their local councillor. Tommy Sheridan, Bill Butler, Bill Aitken and I have all been members of Glasgow City Council and I do not recall being contacted by as few as 480 electors out of an electorate of 6,000. In my experience, the figure has been much greater than 8 per cent. Similarly, I am sure that, if MSPs reflect on their case loads, they will conclude that the figure is much greater than 8 per cent.

Regardless of whether members are from the partnership parties, they should make no apologies for scrutinising and interrogating

legislation proposals that are before them. I have been part of the scrutiny process as a member of the Local Government and Transport Committee and have been unable to support a number of conclusions that the committee has reached.

First, I do not believe that voting reform is an essential element of modernising local government or that it would improve the way in which local government delivers services in our local communities. All the evidence that we received should be considered. On a number of occasions, I asked people—including the ministerial team—whether we would improve local government as a result of introducing voting reform. Professor Farrell told me that that was a difficult question. Every academic who was asked the question said that it was difficult, so why do we find ourselves proposing voting reform?

We face difficult challenges in our constituencies. Last week, I raised with the First Minister the fact that young people in my constituency face challenges in respect of educational attainment. I ask myself whether we will improve educational opportunities as a result of the introduction of the single transferable vote. Not one iota of evidence has been brought to me or the committee to lead me to conclude that we will.

Margo MacDonald: I think that Paul Martin has made the point that there is no guarantee that the delivery or the quality of services will be improved by the introduction of proportionality in local government, but is there any proof that services will be worsened by it?

Paul Martin: The point that I am making is that we should have an informed debate that is evidence led. I believe that there is no evidence to that effect.

Similarly, there is no evidence in the Kerley report that, in an STV system, independent councillors will find themselves in better circumstances or on a par with councillors who represent the parties. The evidence that we received is that the party machinery would ensure that independent candidates were at a disadvantage.

Robert Brown: Does the member accept that the STV system—which gives the electors a choice not between parties, but between the individuals who stand for election—might give an independent or other person of different views in any particular area a much better opportunity to be elected, if there is adequate support for them, than they would have had under the current system?

Paul Martin: While we are on that point, I should add that various academics drew analogies with the systems in various countries throughout the world that have introduced STV. The Irish example—in particular, the example from the south of Ireland—shows that parties have an effective machinery that influences the opportunities for independent members to be elected. The Kerley report says that we must deliver opportunities for independent councillors, but the bill will not deliver such opportunities. Let us be clear: the party machines will work together to ensure that independents are adversely affected.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Paul Martin: I am sorry, but I have already given way to one of Iain Smith's colleagues.

It is extremely unfair to compare Scotland with Ireland, despite their many magnificent attributes, or to compare Scotland with New South Wales. New South Wales is 10 times the size of Scotland. The academic analogies with all the other countries do not provide us with sufficient evidence to draw effective comparisons.

We have not given serious consideration to the financial implications of the bill. We have heard from the minister on several occasions that it is difficult to quantify the cost of, for example, voter education and the staff cover that will be required to implement the STV system. In the current climate, in which we hear concerns about the council tax increases throughout Scotland, that is an issue that we will have to face up to. The financial implications of the bill will have an effect on council tax throughout Scotland.

Like other members, I respect the fact that others have a different point of view from mine on this matter. I acknowledge that my Liberal Democrat colleagues hold a different point of view and have held it for some time. However, it verges on corruption for some members to support the bill because they see it as providing an electoral advantage for their party.

15:58

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I congratulate Andy Kerr on introducing the bill. The proposed reform of the voting system for local authority elections is sorely needed. Local government must become more democratic, more responsive and more accountable. I believe that introducing the single transferable vote system, together with the other measures in the bill, will be a good starting point for the process of reforming local government. Nonetheless, we must be clear about why we are at the present stage.

The Electoral Reform Society was founded more than 100 years ago, and people have advocated STV for that entire period. What has changed in Scotland, and the rest of the UK, is the fact that we now have a diverse system of multi-party

politics throughout the country. In the 1950s, there were three parties—Labour, the Conservatives and the Liberals—and most competition was between two parties. In that situation, a first-past-the-post system was a valid way of choosing between two contenders. In the 1970s, we saw the rise of the nationalist parties and, in the 1990s and beyond, we have seen the rise of parties such as the Greens, the Scottish Socialist Party and the UK Independence Party.

In the context of multi-party politics, it cannot be fair to have a system in which voters choose, in effect, between only the top two candidates. It cannot be fair to have a first-past-the-post system that delivers 90 per cent of the seats on less than 50 per cent of the vote, as we have heard happened in Glasgow. It cannot be fair that the SNP, which gets the majority of its support in Edinburgh and Midlothian, does not get any council seats to reflect that support. When we have multi-party politics, it cannot be fair to have a first-past-the-post system that is not geared up to reflect the diversity of political views.

The advantages of STV go beyond its proportionality and the fact that it reflects fairly the multi-party political system that we have in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. If there is a team of candidates in an STV election, that gives an opportunity for the parties to have diversity of candidates in terms of their age, gender, ethnicity and the political trends in that party. A diverse range of candidates on the party's slate gives an opportunity for more diverse representation.

David Mundell: I hear what the member is saying, but did he not read the Local Government and Transport Committee's report and all the evidence? The party's selection procedures, not the electoral system, determine the candidates who stand for election. In none of the current STV systems do people vote on the diversity that Mark Ballard is talking about.

Mark Ballard: One candidate, standing in a first-past-the-post election, can be of only one gender. If the party presents a slate of candidates in an STV election, it is patently clear if that slate is not gender balanced and the voter has the opportunity to make a decision and vote for what they want. That is an important aspect of the STV system.

We live in a diverse polity, and our councils and local authorities should reflect that diversity. In the long term, we will get more stable and democratic governance if minority votes are reflected in the politicians who are elected to the local authorities.

Much of what we have heard from the opponents of STV makes me think that no one has ever tried STV. At times, it has made me think that no one has ever operated in a multimember ward.

I grew up in Leeds and was active in the Labour Party there, where we had annual elections to multi-party wards. The system worked in Leeds.

Paul Martin: The multimember wards to which Mark Ballard refers are not the same as those that have been proposed for Scotland. The members are elected under the first-past-the-post system.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Ballard, you have one minute left.

Mark Ballard: They are multimember wards and they work. Members have attacked the idea of multimember wards by saying that they are too big and that voters will get confused between different councillors. There are wards in Leeds, and in other places in the UK, in which voters have different councillors, sometimes from different parties, and they work. I cannot understand the argument that multimember wards will not work, given that they work in other parts of the UK.

I support the bill. It will improve the situation and bring an element of accountability, because electoral systems elect not only the local authority or the Government, but the Opposition. Having good opposition that is provided by a diversity of voices in council chambers will come through STV; it is not coming under the FPTP system.

There are concerns with the current system. As has been mentioned, we need flexibility. The argument is not about whether we should have three, four or five-member wards; we should have a range of wards to suit local communities. Three members might suit some communities, two might suit others, and some communities might require five. On the other hand—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I will have to hurry you.

Mark Ballard: I took several interventions.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: That is your choice. Please go on.

Mark Ballard: The second issue is the rules. I will quote Professor Curtice to remind—

The Deputy Presiding Officer: No. I could not have made it clearer that time was tight and that members had six minutes. I must move on to the next speaker.

16:04

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): Presiding Officer, I will be good and I will be quick.

We have heard much talk about the impact that electoral systems have on politicians, but just as important is their impact on the culture of the councils that deliver public services. That culture has a direct impact on those who pay for the services and elect the representatives.

We have been through the McIntosh and Kerley reports. As Tricia Marwick said, for five years we have spoken about the need to reform Scotland's system of local government. We need reform that goes to the very heart of the system. For that reason, both the long-awaited bill and the Local Government and Transport Committee's stage 1 report on it are very welcome.

The bill deals with some important issues, not least of which is the clear democratic deficit in local government. The ridiculous example of Glasgow has been well quoted, but I should, in fairness, quote Angus Council, on which the SNP has 17 of the 29 seats despite having received only 47 per cent of the vote. In Central Scotland region, which I represent, three of the four local authorities are dominated by Labour in a way that does not begin to reflect the votes that are cast by the electorate.

The result of that, in one local authority in particular, is that senior local government officers shelter complacently behind seemingly immovable majority political groups. I refer to South Lanarkshire Council, which is dominated by a Labour group that has almost 80 per cent of the council seats elected on less than 50 per cent of the votes. Unfortunately, the culture of the local authority appears to be dictated by the chief executive and the other senior officers, who consider it their role to serve the interests of the ruling group rather than the common good.

As an elected member in Central Scotland, it is obvious to me that those executive officers find it difficult to conceive of their decisions ever being subject to scrutiny outwith the confines of the council's majority Labour group. That might explain why the local authority has taken anti-democratic decisions, such as leaving half of East Kilbride without a secondary school and asset-stripping the town's land bank.

Mr Kerr: Rubbish.

Linda Fabiani: The minister may say so if he wishes.

The electoral system might explain why the council's chief officers and chief executive feel able to prevent voters from having an MSP act on their behalf when they believe that the council is failing to respond to their needs. The arrogance and lack of professionalism of the officers' responses can be explained only by their confidence that they will find favour with their current political masters.

The chief executive of South Lanarkshire Council, in his latest letter to me, went as far as to enclose literature that was prepared on behalf of Labour members of this Parliament—it is a nice photograph, Mr McMahon—as if they were some kind of role models for me to follow. Mr Docherty

may well believe that Labour members are good role models, but I do not believe that. The families who asked me to represent them, and whose concerns have been so arrogantly swatted aside, do not believe it either.

When councillors and their acolytes no longer regard their position as a job for life but look for ways of improving the lives of people in their areas, we will perhaps see local government in action. We must end the perverse situation whereby the largest minority in an election grabs all the power for itself and uses it against the interests of the people.

In Renfrewshire, the Labour Party came second in the number of votes cast but ended up with a majority of seats on the council. Every member present must surely recognise the indefensible nature of that situation, which undermines the standing of local government in the eyes of many of the electorate.

I want the message to go out from this Parliament that Scotland's local government is about to be reclaimed by all the people whom it is supposed to represent. That can be done only through a modern electoral system that reflects the diversity of the electorate. I believe that STV can deliver that, so I support the general principles of the bill and the amendment to the motion.

16:09

Maureen Macmillan (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I declare an interest, in that my husband is a Highland councillor.

I was elected by PR, which is a good thing too, as the north of Scotland would otherwise have had Liberal Democrats wall to wall and the thousands who voted for other parties would have been left feeling frustrated with a process that was undemocratic. As a regional list MSP, I feel as much of a total commitment to the people of the region that I represent as a constituency MSP feels to the constituency that she or he represents. I believe that PR is good for democracy, because it delivers a political result that is closer to what people want.

I am not sure that the Liberal Democrats, who are polishing their haloes today, totally embraced the actuality of PR in the previous parliamentary session. I sometimes had the distinct impression that, in regions that included a Liberal Democrat constituency MSP, the Opposition regional MSPs and indeed the coalition partnership regional MSPs were not always welcome on that constituency MSP's patch.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): I wonder who that was.

Maureen Macmillan: Indeed.

Mary Scanlon: Were they from the northern isles?

Maureen Macmillan: The member might say that, but I could not possibly comment.

Robert Brown: Does the member accept that, in that respect, there is a difference between the Parliament's list system and the STV system that we are debating? The STV system provides equality of status, but in a slightly different way.

Maureen Macmillan: I was about to mention that very point. The right of someone who has been elected under a proportional system to be in Parliament would have been clearer if MSPs had been elected under an STV system. The Parliament does not have MSPs of equal status; instead, it has two classes of MSP, which is partly due to the fact that the role of the list MSP has never been properly defined.

As I do not want the voting system for the Parliament to be transferred to local government, I am in favour of introducing STV—flawed as it is—for local government elections to ensure that all councillors are seen to be equal.

Tricia Marwick: Is the member also in favour of introducing STV for Scottish Parliament elections?

Maureen Macmillan: Yes, I am. I know that that is not my party's policy, but I support that measure and have done so for some time.

To say that not many councillors are looking forward to the introduction of PR is an understatement. Members might think that that is the case only for councillors in urban Labour-run councils; however, the majority of independent Highland councillors, too, are totally opposed to PR. Indeed, Liberal Democrat Highland councillors and former Liberal Democrat parliamentary candidates have stated their opposition to the introduction of PR in the Highlands.

Councillors are opposed to PR not because of the stance of their political party, but because they are afraid that they will have to give up power because of it. The issue is not whether a councillor belongs to the Labour Party or the Liberal Democrat Party or is an independent; councillors simply want to hold on to the status quo because they are frightened to lose their personal power.

Johann Lamont: With regard to the issue of power and multimember constituencies, does the member agree that the situation is not a reflection on individuals who are responsible for a regional area or whatever? After all, if an area is too broad, individual constituencies can come into conflict with the regional interest. In such circumstances, people will drive towards the general position and individual interests—for example, those in my Glasgow constituency—might come into conflict with the regional view in Glasgow. However, those

interests have a right to be represented, which is why the link has to be as local as possible.

Maureen Macmillan: I take on board the member's concerns. However, we do not need one councillor per ward; the proposal to amalgamate three or four wards will preserve the link. One excuse that Highland councillors give for their opposition to PR is that their wards would become unmanageable. I do not agree with that view.

I will give members an example of the benefits of having more than one member lobby for an issue in a particular area. When six list and constituency MSPs met the minister in question to discuss the future of Castle Tioram, the fact that we were all on the same side made quite a deep impression on him. That could not have happened if only one person had been able to speak for one particular area.

Highland councillors fear for the future of independent councillors, even though some independents pop up in other elections wearing party labels. A good independent councillor has nothing to fear from PR. However, being a party politician, I believe that Highland Council would have much to gain if more councillors with a coherent political philosophy were elected. Therefore, I welcome the Local Government and Transport Committee's report. The argument about a member's link with a ward is spurious. How many electors know who their councillor is? Indeed, how many know who their MSP or MP is? We delude ourselves if we think that we somehow own a ward, constituency or region. PR is more democratic and would awaken voter interest in local government elections, which is sorely needed. I support the bill's general principles.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I call Bill Aitken. I will reduce his time to five minutes to allow a short spell for Helen Eadie.

16:15

Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con): Every now and then, we have a debate in the chamber in which what is not said is more significant that what is said. It is intriguing and fascinating to watch the body language of those who do not participate in such a debate. It is clear that many in the Labour seats wish that we were not debating this topic. Indeed, many probably wish that they were not here at all. While their reaction may be based to some extent on self-interest, it is also a recognition that we stand a good chance this afternoon of making a pig's breakfast of Scottish local government, which is what we are debating.

Of course, there are injustices in the present system and members were correct to highlight the problems in the city of Glasgow, as two of them

did. Under the existing system, Labour, with something like 49 per cent of the vote in Glasgow—not 47 per cent, as was stated earlier—has 74 councillors out of a total of 79. Clearly, that is wrong and unjust. However, I suggest strongly that the problem in that situation is not the electoral system. The problem began when the Electoral Commission was persuaded—and was convinced—that it should ignore natural constituency boundaries and communities in order to have parity of numbers. At that stage, local democracy was, at best, impeded and, at worst, totally handicapped. There was an unseemly state of affairs in which planning officers were asked to construct artificial constituencies to perpetuate the Labour majority. That was the entire problem.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Mr Aitken agree that it is difficult for us to accept the hypocrisy of a Tory member whose party tried to gerrymander local government boundaries in 1996 to suit itself, but failed miserably to do so?

Bill Aitken: I have never attempted to gerrymander a local or national electoral boundary in my life.

What arguments are advanced in favour of the proposed new system? It is said that the system is fair, but it is not particularly so. The Liberals believe in a system of proportionality, and I accept that that is a principled position, which they have held for long and weary. However, they should say honestly that they want a proportional and fair system to be imposed rather than the one that they will vote for this afternoon. That is the crux of the matter and that is why the Liberals' argument holds little credence.

Iain Smith: Does Mr Aitken accept that the Liberal Democrats have always been in favour of STV—which is not proportional, but delivers proportionality—and that we are not in favour of a proportional system such as the list system? We have never argued in favour of a proportional system or a list system, but we have argued for a system that improves proportionality—STV.

Bill Aitken: The Liberals' position, again, is to see what particular system benefits them. [*Interruption.*] They cannot express the cant and hypocrisy that we have to listen to in the chamber week in and week out and pretend that they support STV for the better governance of Scotland. They do so simply to gain better electoral results for the Liberal party.

David Mundell: Will the member give way?

Bill Aitken: I must proceed. [*Interruption.*]

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Order.

Bill Aitken: The arguments that were advanced in favour of the status quo are, to my mind, supportable and coherent.

Robert Brown: On a point of order, Presiding Officer.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Are you sure that it is a point of order, Mr Brown?

Robert Brown: When a member misrepresents a matter of fact, which is what Mr Aitken did, I am certain that it is a point of order. The STV system will not benefit the Liberal Democrats.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am afraid that that is a debating point and not a point of order. Mr Aitken may continue.

Bill Aitken: Paul Martin raised a valid issue. The constituency-member link is extremely important. There are members present in the chamber today who have been councillors, and very effective councillors, in Glasgow and elsewhere. They built up a level of support because they believed in serving their communities well. Under the new system, that link would be lost. When such a system was tried before—prior to the 1974 reforms, when there were multimember wards, sometimes including members of different parties—the system failed. Mark Ballard said that the system worked in Leeds. I used to spend some time in Leeds for work and I can tell members that the system certainly did not work.

The proposed system will result inevitably in total confusion and a loss of the service ethic, in so far as the constituency member is concerned, in relation to the elector. We should end the bill today. It should go no further.

16:21

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I speak to the people of Scotland today from the perspective that the issue is really about whether they want to have officials or elected members running councils. It is for the political anoraks to concern themselves with whether they want Labour to control a council or with what political fixes go on; the public at large should not be confused by the debate that is taking place today.

I challenge every council across Scotland—this is a clarion call—to have a referendum. If the Executive will not have a referendum, every council in Scotland should do so if it possibly can, to decide whether the proposal should proceed. That is vital.

Tricia Marwick: Will Helen Eadie give way?

Helen Eadie: I have only three minutes, so I shall not give way.

A referendum was held in New Zealand and only 54 per cent of the population wanted to have proportional representation. After the system had been in place for a period of eight years, all the

opinion polls showed that the proportion of the population that was in favour of any system of proportionality had reduced to 32 per cent. The Isle of Man changed to an STV system and then reverted to first past the post, because people found the PR system absolutely intolerable.

If any political observers have doubts about what I am saying about the political control of councils, they should read a piece of research in the "First Past the Post Campaign Newsletter", which I helped to produce. That research shows clearly that, under STV, only seven local authorities in Scotland would be left with any form of political control, so there would not be one Liberal-controlled authority. All the councils in which there was clear control would be independent, apart from one Labour council. Do people want the buck to stop with politicians, or do they want unelected officials to run their councils? The buck has to stop with the elected representatives.

I want to correct some perceptions about the unions that support the broad-based campaign for first past the post. I think that it was Murdo Fraser who mentioned Unison. He should know that GMB Scotland, the Transport and General Workers Union, Amicus and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, as well as Unison at national level, support the first-past-the-post campaign. However, Unison at Scottish level does not support the campaign; it supports PR.

Tommy Sheridan made a point about the percentage of the vote. Professor Curtice said in his evidence that, under the proposed new system, 45 per cent of the vote "would probably be enough" for a party to get control of a council. That is to be lamented.

I urge people across Scotland to take my message on board and to lobby ministers and the Parliament mercilessly. One of the opinion polls that the minister talked about received only 1,075 responses, 700 of which were part of a postcard campaign, which we could easily have organised in the first-past-the-post campaign. The other poll was organised by the Fairshare campaign. It is easy to do postcard campaigns.

16:24

Tommy Sheridan: Helen Eadie mentioned holding a referendum—I am open-minded about referenda, which I think should be used as part of the democratic process. However, I hope that Labour members will agree that, if we are to have a referendum about changing our voting system, it would also be worth our while having a referendum about free school meals in Scotland. I wish that we could also have a referendum about whether we want to scrap the council tax in

Scotland. It seems that Labour members are very keen to have referenda on issues that are of narrow party-political interest to them, but are not interested in referenda on the serious issues that affect ordinary working-class people's lives.

Elaine Smith: I obviously agree with Tommy Sheridan about free school meals and some of the council tax stuff. However, does he agree that the bill represents a change that is being imposed on a tier of government, which is why we should have a referendum? Tommy Sheridan mentioned what the Tories did to local government; they imposed their changes without paying heed to what local government thought.

Tommy Sheridan: It is acceptable that we should improve the democratic systems that operate throughout our country. If members feel that an undemocratic system is being imposed on local government, by all means they should vote against it. However, those of us who support a more democratic electoral system see the change not as a threat to democracy but as a development and an expansion of democracy. It is unfortunate—I hope to address the point later in my speech—that the proposed system is limited, but it is better than the one that we have.

I will address the red herring that was introduced into the debate by Murdo Fraser. He raised good legitimate debating points about the Lib Dems. The Lib Dems are involved in an agreement with another party as a result of the PR arrangement that has been delivered for the Scottish Parliament. Because of that agreement, they have ditched their commitment to the Airborne initiative and their commitment to opposing genetically modified crops. Murdo Fraser did not mention that they ditched another commitment two weeks ago when they had the chance to vote to scrap the council tax.

Murdo Fraser was right to make his point, but I draw his attention to the new Labour Government at Westminster, which—when it was voted in—had a commitment against the introduction of student fees, a commitment to restore the earnings link with pensions and a commitment to opposition to privatisation of air-traffic control. I say to Murdo Fraser that the Government has ditched all those commitments, but that Government is not elected by PR. The ditching of electoral commitments has nothing to do with electoral systems and everything to do with lack of political integrity. That is what has to be taken on board.

Mr Monteith: Tommy Sheridan makes a salient point. However, surely the difference between proportional systems and first past the post is that under first past the post it is clear when the election comes who has ditched what and it is possible to remove the Government. When there is a deal, it is not always possible to remove both partners.

Tommy Sheridan: That is patent nonsense. If more than 50 per cent of the electorate vote for a particular party under a PR system, that party runs the Government. That is very simple and it gives power back to the people. That is what the system is about.

In relation to the example that was used by Brian Monteith, if the electorate decide at the next election not to vote for the Lib Dems because they dropped the commitments that have been mentioned, the Lib Dems will have less influence as far as any future agreements are concerned. If the Labour Party is delivering on its commitments, as Labour MSPs say it is, perhaps Labour will win 50 per cent of the vote and it will not need to enter into any arrangement. At least a party is required to have the majority of the people voting for it before it has the full say over government. That is democratic.

The situation in Renfrewshire is ridiculous. It is not my political party but the SNP that gains a greater percentage of votes than the Labour Party in Renfrewshire, but the Labour Party runs the council. That is unacceptable, but that happens under the first-past-the-post voting system.

Let us remind ourselves of what Mr David Farrell, the foremost expert on STV in the world, said in his evidence on the size of the wards. He stated:

"The proposal to have districts of 3-4 members will make the Scottish STV system one of the least proportional variants of STV in the world. At present, the Irish Republic holds this accolade with its districts averaging 3-5 members; compare this with New South Wales, for instance, which elects its 21 members in one district."

In other words, the proposal from the STV working group and the proposal that was produced in the Kerley report—it was not fair of Iain Smith to try to avoid that recommendation, which was clear in the Kerley report—that there should be three to five members does not represent the most proportional system. It would allow us to join the Irish Republic in having the least proportional STV systems in the world. As far as STV is concerned, the Liberal Democrats seem to be in favour of getting us to the bottom of the table on proportionality. That is something that members should be willing to challenge.

The issue is not about breaking the member-ward link, about which a lot of nonsense is talked. In relation to Paul Martin's example, if a councillor had five constituents coming to their surgery once a week, that would be 240 constituents in a year and 480 in two years. Over a four-year period, the number of constituents that the member came into contact with would be double that, which would still represent only 16 per cent of the electorate. It is not always new individuals who come to a surgery—the likelihood is that some people come back.

I urge Parliament not only to support the bill's general principles but to expand them and to increase proportionality while maintaining the link between member and ward. That will ensure that we have a fairer voting system. I appeal to the Lib Dems in particular to vote according to their principles on my amendment.

16:31

Michael McMahon (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab): As a member of the Local Government and Transport Committee, I thank the committee clerks and those who gave evidence to us. Like Bristow Muldoon, I am speaking as a Labour back bencher.

In this Parliament, we are often presented with bills which, although worthy, are highly technical and lack any great political intrigue. Some, on the other hand, are fairly straightforward in detail but are intrinsically political. In my view, the bill that is before us—especially part 1, which deals with changing the electoral system—combines elements of both types. The proposed system is complex and the reasons for its introduction are simply political. David Mundell and Murdo Fraser discussed that issue with a degree of cynicism, it must be said. Their speeches were examples of politics through the looking glass, but at least they were better than Linda Fabiani's, which I found to be bitter; indeed, it was patently unworthy of her and she has done better than that.

Linda Fabiani: Does Michael McMahon not agree that it is unworthy of a local council to refuse to meet an elected representative who has been asked to represent about a dozen and a half families in the council area concerned?

Michael McMahon: I agree entirely with that. What I want to know is how Linda Fabiani managed to get a picture of me that was quite good.

In relation to what Murdo Fraser and David Mundell said, Patrick Harvie made a couple of points about the transparency of the system. We must accept that we are here because the electorate made Parliament the way it is; we must deal with that reality.

The bill is not big, but it encompasses a huge array of issues. We have heard various views on the case for change and the case against it. We have debated power—who has it, how they got it and how it is used. We have assessed the way in which those who serve in local government are rewarded and how we can widen access for under-represented groups and increase eligibility for membership of councils. Trish Marwick and Mark Ballard made points about that.

I think that the bill achieves a good balance in many of those respects. To attempt to reform local

government alone will be difficult, but to attempt to do it by dealing with electoral reform as well makes the attempt much more contentious. We will not achieve perfection through the bill, but we can aim for merit; I think that the bill has that.

The prospect of the introduction of STV elections does not sit comfortably with the Labour Party in particular. That that is no secret was exemplified by the speeches of Elaine Smith, John Home Robertson, Helen Eadie and others. However, I have always believed in electoral reform and in the pragmatism of the Labour Party. We have a programme for making the lives of Scotland's people better; our part in the partnership agreement with the Liberal Democrats is about furthering our programme in the political context in which we find ourselves in Parliament.

Scottish Labour stands for a number of things, each of which will have a different priority at any given time. One thing that holds true regardless of political circumstances is our desire that there be redistribution of power from the few to the many. As Aneurin Bevan said:

"The purpose of getting power is to be able to give it away."

Whatever else is debated in relation to the bill, the PR debate is not about a sell-out of any Labour principle.

In the context of the mass-industrialised society, which was polarised between two great ideologies and parties, first past the post was the logical system by which to distribute power. Labour was founded to break that system and we have won that battle. The universal franchise was achieved and it has been put to good use for the improvement of material welfare. Society has moved on and the Labour Party has made that happen. As a result, the construction of a working coalition in the Scottish Parliament has become both necessary and necessarily difficult. That said, it opens up more exciting prospects for representation, for engaging with the electorate and, especially, for fairness. The same could happen in local government.

In today's pluralist society, we require to reconcile the needs and desires of different sectors of society. The voting system, the way in which representatives are elected and the structures under which they work can enhance the process of managing those different needs and can aid the finding of a balance for those desires. We have to realise that what might be fairer for the electorate might not be in the interests of any one party. For many years, the Labour Party has enjoyed a comfortable hegemony in Scotland, but we cannot afford to sit comfortably any longer. In this age of modernisation and institutional change, we cannot afford simply to hold tight to the status quo.

From the time of its foundation, Labour has been a party of democratic reform. It is a party that was built on the knowledge that social justice and democratic fairness go hand in hand. We are now in a position to return to our roots—to the commitments of James Keir Hardy, as Sarah Boyack said. As the MSP for the constituency in which James Keir Hardy was born, I am proud to share his conviction in and support for electoral reform. I am equally comfortable in subscribing to the words of the Independent Labour Party, which in 1913 stated:

"no system of election can be satisfactory which does not give opportunity to all parties to obtain representation in proportion to their strength."

The proposals for electoral reform that are set out in the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill are a compromise. Although the aim of the compromise was to achieve stability in the Scottish Parliament, it is a good compromise. The proposal for three to four-member wards will allow us to maintain a strong ward-councillor link. It will allow, as McIntosh and Kerley demanded, geographical diversity and the potential for a close fit between council wards and natural communities.

David Mundell spoke about electoral reform being delivered as part of the new constitutional devolution settlement. A consequence of the settlement is that it must also come at local level—a reality with which I have no difficulty in engaging. It places Labour in a position to reclaim the mantle as the champion of our own ideals.

Robert Brown spoke about the bill giving us an opportunity to do what is best for Scotland. The bill will allow those who serve their local communities to be rewarded properly for their service. A by-product is that the electorate might be encouraged to turn out and vote, as Tommy Sheridan said. In the end, it is up to us: the challenge is before each and every political party.

Whether or not it transpires that the electorate are encouraged to turn out and vote, the bill will certainly give those who cast their vote a political system that facilitates fairer representation. That is worth achieving in itself and it is why Parliament should support the bill.

16:37

Mr Brian Monteith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): The bill has many flaws. The Conservatives will not concede our principal belief that first past the post should be the preferred system for local government elections and we shall seek to improve the bill so that it becomes more proportional. Although we will not vote for Mr Sheridan's amendment today, the subject of the amendment is one that we will treat more favourably at stage 2 and stage 3.

It is clear from the tenor of the debate that there is no moral high ground when it comes to choosing electoral systems—there is no perfect system. First past the post has its advantages and its disadvantages. It ensures that the most popular candidate is elected and, in turn, that the most popular party is generally elected to power. It therefore provides strong local or national government. It is more accountable in that it allows the electorate to remove the ruling party if it falls out of favour. Indeed, it was first past the post that removed the Tories from control of the City of Edinburgh Council after many years of Tory rule. It is first past the post that is now on the way to removing Labour from control of that council, again after many years.

Iain Smith: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: No, I must carry on.

Iain Smith: Will the member take an intervention on that point?

Mr Monteith: No. I shall be taking no interventions from Iain Smith.

It was first past the post that removed the Liberals from the Borders and that has reduced Labour from its once-dominant position in Fife. Clearly, there can be change under first past the post.

Helen Eadie: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr Monteith: Certainly.

Members: Aah!

Helen Eadie: Does Brian Monteith agree that one of the comments that was made in the Local Government and Transport Committee report points to the fact that Northern Ireland is no longer run by elected councillors but by quangos of appointed officials?

Mr Monteith: That is an important point. It is one that we will have to tease out further when we come to our amendments at stage 2.

Proportional systems have their advantages and disadvantages. There are, of course, many different proportional systems, which have their pluses and minuses. What is clear is that the system that is being accepted by the Labour Party is being accepted because it is the least proportional.

Claims that have been made for PR include that it is fairer—we have heard the word "fairer" so often today—but fairness is a matter of opinion. It is not empirical. Is it fair that a party that comes fourth can hold the most popular party to ransom? Is it fair that the public can find new laws being created because of a power-broking deal, when the majority voted against the policy? Is it fair that the most popular party can find itself in opposition? That actually happens in other countries, and I say to the Labour Party that it could happen here.

We could debate the merits of systems all day but, as David Mundell said, today's debate is not about a genuinely proportional system. The debate is all about power—it is about clinging to power by the swapping of policies that neither Executive party wanted or had in its manifesto. Labour traded away its opposition to STV and the Liberals traded away their principled opposition to the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Bill. Having struck the deal, the Liberals are laughing behind the backs of their Labour partners. All that matters is getting the bill through. Are Labour members aware that as soon as the bill receives royal assent, the next day a Liberal member can bring forward a bill to amend the voting system to have between three and five or three and six councillors per ward? So much for their partnership agreements.

What is next on the Liberal shopping list? Is it local income tax, by any chance? Is it a new coalition with a different partner? We will find that Labour members will waken up and recognise the ambition of the Liberals and what they actually want, which is to stay in the seats that they have and change the people on the Labour benches to ensure that the Liberals have power.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the member give way?

Mr Monteith: No, I must make progress. I acknowledge that Tommy Sheridan gave way to me, so I will try to give way to him later.

If the Liberal party were an animal, it could be described as having the disposition of a mouse but the political morals of a weasel. It is timorous, but not to be trusted. However, the Liberal party is no mouse that roared. It will do anything to gain what it wants—remember the Airborne initiative and genetically modified crops. Iain Smith and his like will lie prostrate before Jack McConnell to gain STV. However, if the Liberals are a mouse, the Labour Party is an elephant. It is a gigantic but petrified elephant, petrified of the furry little mammal before it. It is said that elephants never forget, but this elephant has forgotten its manifesto commitment to leave local council voting alone.

Tommy Sheridan: Does Brian Monteith recognise that if the Lib Dems get a bit of backbone and propose to scrap council tax, they will articulate the wishes of 77 per cent of the people of Scotland, and will therefore be very democratic?

The Deputy Presiding Officer: Mr Monteith, you must wind up now.

Mr Monteith: I will wind up by moving on.

It is time for Labour to waken up, to form a minority Government and to stand up for what it believes in. Only that way will it regain the trust of the Scottish people.

16:44

Mr Bruce McFee (West of Scotland) (SNP): It has been interesting today to see the coalition of vested interests speaking against the bill's proposals. The common thread among the unionists—without exception, those who spoke against the bill are unionists—is their instinct for personal survival, the survival of their cronies in local government and the preservation of their power bases.

Helen Eadie made a few interventions. She asked us to say whether we wanted councils to be run by councillors or officials. The fact is that officials already run Labour-led councils up and down the country because of the poor quality of Labour Party members in the administrations, who use officials as crutches. Unfortunately, the situation that Helen Eadie described already exists. STV allows voters to choose not just between different political parties but between the candidates of those parties. In essence, STV replaces the power of the party and puts control in the hands of the voter.

I want to deal with a number of serious issues that have been raised. The three or four-member ward size has nothing to do with balancing proportionality and the member-ward link, as members of the coalition would have us believe; rather, it has everything to do with accommodating strains within the coalition in the Parliament.

Michael McMahon: Is not that the same thing?

Mr McFee: That comment exemplifies the attitude of the Labour Party in Scotland. Labour Party members equate Labour with councils and with Parliament; they do not recognise that there are other people and voters with different views. I thank Michael McMahon for making that point.

Michael McMahon: Will the member take an intervention?

Mr McFee: Have a seat just now. I will accept an intervention later, if Michael McMahon wants to make one.

Like Kerley and the STV working group, we are convinced that the best system would be to have three to five-member wards with the potential for two-member wards in exceptional circumstances, particularly in extremely remote areas. All the evidence is that three to five-member wards would be better, but we know why that system is not now being considered. It has been alleged that the

member-ward link will be lost, but it will not; it will be changed. Perhaps some members who oppose the bill simply cannot accept that somebody else in their patch may be able to offer a better service to the electorate than they do at present.

It is perfectly correct that the Local Government Boundary Commission for Scotland should be charged with the task of producing the initial draft proposal for the new wards. It would be wrong simply to bolt together existing wards because that would take no account of existing differences in the number of electors in wards or of new settlements or demolitions of existing areas, and it would provide no opportunity to unite previously divided towns and villages. We need a close fit between council wards and local communities and there will be no problem doing that in the timescale that has been set out. The chairman of the commission, John Marjoribanks, said in evidence:

"The technology that is available to the commission has improved so dramatically over the past decade that we are now capable of carrying out a review from scratch more quickly than if we used the bolting-together option because the likelihood of rejection would be reduced if we were building wards from scratch on that basis. Therefore, the overall process is likely to be faster than it would be if we used the bolting-together procedure."—[*Official Report, Local Government and Transport Committee*, 15 January 2004; c 570.]

There is no point in our ensuring proportional election results if we stitch up the system afterwards. It is clear that one problem that adds to the alienation of many voters is the Stalinist practice in many local authorities in Scotland—[*Interruption.*] Andy Kerr is laughing; he might know the practice. Under that practice, the Labour Party, with a minority of the votes, and in some circumstances with not even the largest minority, weights the committee structure very much in its favour and delegates powers to committees so that decisions are taken that are not open to proper scrutiny. A good case can be made for ensuring that sections 15 and 17 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, which would have ensured proportionality in Scotland's councils' committees, should be enacted to stop that kind of abuse.

I will deal now with the question of decoupling elections. Although we agree with what is in the committee's report, it is not just the SNP that says that we should decouple the elections; the Association of Electoral Administrators says that we should do that; the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers—SOLACE—says that we should do that; and the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators in Scotland—SOLAR—says that we should do that. SOLAR's written submission to the committee stated:

"The firm and unanimous view of the Society in its submission to the Scottish Executive … was that … these elections should be decoupled from the Scottish Parliament Elections."

All the evidence that has been led on that subject has pointed to decoupling.

I will deal now with the Tories' position, particularly in relation to the amendment. A couple of weeks ago, David Mundell supported the option of three to five councillors per ward. Two weeks ago, that was a Tory option; today, the Tories will not vote for it, although they might do some time in the future. To be honest, that is the grand old Duke of York approach to the bill. The Tories are half way up the hill, and half way down.

Alex Neil (Central Scotland) (SNP): Are they over the hill?

Mr McFee: Robert Brown used the words "Liberal" and "principle". The experience of the6994

past few weeks suggests that we should caution the Liberals against using those words in the same sentence, and that we should take them with a very large pinch of salt when they are offered.

Members: Hear, hear.

Mr McFee: I thank members for that vote of confidence.

In conclusion, the SNP is in favour of the principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill. The bill itself should not be overstated—there is a danger that that will happen. We are also happy to support the amendment. Let us put Scotland's local government on a modern footing and let us challenge the vested interests of those who are ruining it.

Elaine Smith: On a point of order. Is it in order for that member to cast aspersions on the integrity of Labour councillors in the way he has?

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): Mr McFee was taking the opportunity to respond to the debate. I now call Tavish Scott to respond for the Executive.

16:52

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): At the top of the piece of paper in front of me are the words "wind up". I will do my best not to do that over the next few minutes.

This afternoon's debate has been laced with passion, and rightly so. These matters are important and it is important that they get a good airing in the Parliament, both at the Local Government and Transport Committee, to which I pay tribute for the role that it has played so far,

and here in the debating chamber. As Andy Kerr said, the key measures of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill have attracted considerable interest and debate since they were first aired in the McIntosh report. Our consultation paper on the issues involved also encouraged debate and showed a majority in favour of change.

The bill's measures are an important commitment under the partnership agreement. Our role in the devolved Administration, as well as in Parliament, is about making a difference and that is what the people of Scotland expect of us. However, outside the chamber, people feel that they cannot make a difference and the bill seeks to change that.

We recognise that the introduction of the single transferable vote for council elections is not popular with everyone, but it is a key plank of our agenda to renew local democracy. STV is about making every vote count; it is about ensuring that Scotland's councils are more representative of the communities that they serve; and it is about widening access and encouraging more people to consider standing, because they will be able to see that they have more chance of being elected.

I very much appreciate the words of such colleagues as Bristow Muldoon, Sarah Boyack and Maureen Macmillan about the thinking that has gone on in their party, the Labour Party. I would say to Maureen Macmillan that I am honestly always happy to see list MSPs in my constituency. That is a subject that I discuss a great deal with Labour colleagues in relation to their constituencies. Maureen Macmillan made a serious point about the Scottish Parliament list system through which we are elected, and it was a point well made.

Michael McMahon made a brave speech and Bruce McFee got it very wrong in criticising him for it. Michael McMahon gave a proper speech—the same kind of speech that Robert Brown made for my party, giving an historical and political analysis of the issues that face this country today. Those two members deserve credit for that, and not the cynicism that we heard from Mr McFee. [*Laughter.*] And then they all laugh—it is pathetic.

Andrew Welsh made a serious speech and I agree with the point that he made at the outset about acknowledging the roles of councillors of all political persuasions and none, which others echoed.

Mike Rumbles: I have a technical point to raise about the worth of councillors. I support giving our councillors the correct level of remuneration for the hard work that they do, but if they are going to do almost full-time work, how can we prevent candidates from standing in two council wards when they really should be focusing on one? Will the minister consider that at stage 2?

Tavish Scott: Andy Kerr and I have not given that issue any thought, but we will reflect on the points that Mr Rumbles made and come back to him on them.

Andrew Welsh made a point about secondary legislation. He will be aware from the evidence that the committee took that Ireland introduced the principle of STV in a seven-line bill, leaving all the detail to secondary legislation. We have concluded that that is not the right approach. We seek to strike a balance between primary and secondary legislation and we will reflect on the committee's thoughts on that.

Mr Monteith: On the Irish use of the single transferable vote, is the minister aware that when the committee visited Dublin, the local government minister there said that we would be mad to adopt such a system because, given the rivalry that it would cause between members of political parties, there would be blood on the walls?

Tavish Scott: We have blood on the walls every day in politics. I am surprised that a real red-meat eater such as Brian Monteith would be worried about that, as it is just the nature of all our political institutions, no matter how people are elected to them.

Tricia Marwick, Sarah Boyack and others made points about decombining elections and about voter education. We will listen to what the committee says about that, although we noted from its report that it had not reached a view on the decombining issue. It is our intention to retain the current position of combined elections, but we will certainly reflect on the debate today and the arguments that will be made on the issue. There are important arguments against decombining, particularly in relation to voter fatigue and asking the voter to go to the polls twice in a short period of time, and there are practical issues that have to be dealt with. However, we do not believe that the practical difficulties of holding local government elections using STV on the same day as elections for the Parliament are insurmountable.

We share the concerns that have been raised on voter education. We will ensure that people understand the mechanisms of voting under STV and the fact that there will be three ballot papers on which they will express their views and preferences in different ways. It is also important to acknowledge that when the Parliament was established similar concerns were raised about the system that elects us, but voters have responded by showing that they understand the system and know how to use their votes.

Tommy Sheridan: Will the minister consider seriously the committee's recommendation that the Executive reconsider the issue of decoupling? He said that different electoral systems are used

on the same day for elections to the Parliament, but under the new system we will have the use of the cross and the use of figures. If the proposed system is introduced, voters will have to use three different electoral systems in one day. Does he think that that is worth reconsidering?

Tavish Scott: As I said a moment ago, we will reflect on that. At the moment, we do not wish to decombine elections, but we will listen carefully to the arguments that are made by the committee and representations that we receive from other areas.

Mr Welsh: Will the minister clarify exactly how and by whom the system of voter education will be funded?

Tavish Scott: The financial memorandum makes it clear that £1.5 million is allocated to voter education, which includes training and formal voter education. We will consider how to develop that in conjunction with local government, which obviously has an important role to play in that regard.

Tricia Marwick made points about voter age, on which she will be aware that the Electoral Commission is consulting and is due to make a recommendation to the UK Government in early course, which we will consider carefully.

Sarah Boyack made points about e-voting and other members raised concerns about e-counting, which we will consider carefully. She was right to say that we should not consider only e-voting and how people vote, as the issue is about politicians, policies, political parties and the arguments that determine why people vote, not just how they vote.

Paul Martin made an extremely passionate speech, as I would expect him to do on this issue. He made a point about the financial consequences of the proposals. We will deal with that through the financial memorandum and we will work with local authorities in relation to the points that he made.

As the McIntosh report said, having a three or four-member ward is undoubtedly the best compromise between proportionality and size of ward, with regard to the councillor-ward link. That is what we have sought to achieve. The direct comparisons with other countries are, in many ways, pointless. STV has been adapted to meet the needs of every country where it is used and I have no doubt that it was called a political fix in those countries as well. We are only doing what has happened in every other country that has introduced STV and has adapted its proposals. There were arguments on both sides of this issue in the chamber and those arguments will continue to be made. It is our job to get the balance right, which we strongly believe that we have done.

A number of members made points about the issue of contact with constituents. Those are

serious points, which is why the STV working group will examine that issue in particular to try to ensure that some of the difficulties can be overcome. However, as we see in our work day in, day out, it is impossible to overcome all the difficulties. Nevertheless, we will seek to consult and make progress on that issue as well.

A number of members, including Andrew Welsh, Bruce McFee and Bristow Muldoon, raised the issue of the ward boundary review. We will reflect on the committee's recommendation in relation to the criteria that should be set in primary legislation and the points that Bristow Muldoon made on that matter. I share the view of others that we should take no lectures from Mr Aitken or anyone else in the Conservative party on gerrymandering local government, which is what the Tories did when they were last in power.

Giving every voter a choice of candidate is an important principle of a lively and dynamic democracy. The bill is not only about a proportional voting system, which has dominated our thoughts today; it is about encouraging more people to stand, especially women, people in full-time jobs who can manage council activities in combination with their work, self-employed people and so on, to ensure that councils more accurately represent all strands of local life.

The Tories advocate a first-past-the-post system and then ask us to vote for amendments on proportionality. In his single transferable speech, which he used to attack my party—not that I mind that—David "two jobs" Mundell displayed a cynical disregard for the fact that there is no party advantage for either Labour or the Liberal Democrats in the proposals. That serious point was made by Robert Brown and Michael McMahon. The proposals are, in many ways, against Labour's short-term interests. That should demand some respect in this chamber, not the cynical attitude that we got from the Tories earlier on.

This is a challenging bill. Some members find it difficult but creating a modern Scotland means introducing modern processes. The bill is about strengthening democracy, increasing fairness and providing choice. As a chamber elected using a PR system, we should vote in favour of a PR system for local government. We should vote in favour of renewing local democracy and strengthening our councils. I invite the Scottish Parliament to support the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

Point of Order

17:03

George Lyon (Argyll and Bute) (LD): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. Tomorrow, the Scottish Green Party will be asking members to support its motion on a legal opinion about genetically modified crops. Could you advise members on how they are to get a copy of the legal opinion that they are to be asked to vote on tomorrow, given that the Greens have not made it available so far?

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): You should first ask the Greens nicely. Then, in the interests of transparency—the Greens being a party devoted to transparency—the Greens might like to reflect on that request.

Business Motion

17:04

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S2M-1085, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 31 March 2004

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party Business
followed by	Business Motion
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 1 April 2004

9.30 am	Ministerial Statement
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Stage 3 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill
12 noon	First Minister's Question Time
2.00 pm	Question Time –
	Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning;
	Justice and Law Officers
	General Questions
3.00 pm	Continuation of Stage 3 of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Bill
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Wednesday 21 April 2004

2.30 pm	Time for Reflection
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
followed by	Committee Business
followed by	Business Motion
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business

Thursday 22 April 2004

9.30 am	Executive Business
12 noon	First Minister's Question Time
2.00 pm	Question Time –
	Education and Young People, Tourism, Culture and Sport;
	Finance and Communities;
	General Questions
3.00 pm	Executive Business
followed by	Parliamentary Bureau Motions
5.00 pm	Decision Time
followed by	Members' Business—[*Tavish Scott.*]

Motion agreed to.

Local Governance (Scotland) Bill: Financial Resolution

17:05

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): We are a little back to front, as I forgot to take the financial resolution. I ask Tavish Scott to move motion S2M-777, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the financial resolution in respect of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any increase in expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund in consequence of the Act.—[*Tavish Scott.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Parliamentary Bureau Motions

17:06

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid): The next item of business is consideration of four Parliamentary Bureau motions. I ask Tavish Scott to move motions S2M-1080 and S2M-1081, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of lead committees, and motions S2M-1082 and S2M-1083, also in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of Scottish statutory instruments.

Motions moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the draft Community Right to Buy (Definition of Excluded Land) (Scotland) Order 2004.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the draft Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Travel Notification Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2004.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2004 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2004 be approved.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2004 be approved.—[*Tavish Scott.*]

The Presiding Officer: The question on those motions will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:07

The Presiding Officer (Mr George Reid):
There are seven questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S2M-682.2, in the name of Tommy Sheridan, which seeks to amend motion S2M-682, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)

Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 36, Against 83, Abstentions 0.

Amendment disagreed to.

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): Presiding Officer, I do not know whether the button worked correctly for me, so could you check? The light kept on flashing after I pressed the button.

The Presiding Officer: As usual in such circumstances, the vote is clear. We will check it, and there will be an opportunity for you to make a small intervention, if required, to put your views on the record.

The next question is, that motion S2M-682, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
MacAskill, Mr Kenny (Lothians) (SNP)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)

Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

ABSTENTIONS

Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 95, Against 19, Abstentions 6.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees to the general principles of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill.

The Presiding Officer: The next question is, that motion S2M-777, in the name of Andy Kerr, on the financial resolution in respect of the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
Baird, Shiona (North East Scotland) (Green)
Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Ballance, Chris (South of Scotland) (Green)
Ballard, Mark (Lothians) (Green)
Barrie, Scott (Dunfermline West) (Lab)
Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
Byrne, Ms Rosemary (South of Scotland) (SSP)
Canavan, Dennis (Falkirk West) (Ind)
Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
Crawford, Bruce (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
Curran, Ms Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
Deacon, Susan (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab)
Ewing, Fergus (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber) (SNP)
Ewing, Mrs Margaret (Moray) (SNP)
Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
Fox, Colin (Lothians) (SSP)
Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
Gorrie, Donald (Central Scotland) (LD)
Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
Home Robertson, Mr John (East Lothian) (Lab)
Hughes, Janis (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
Ingram, Mr Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Jackson, Gordon (Glasgow Govan) (Lab)
Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
Jamieson, Margaret (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab)
Kane, Rosie (Glasgow) (SSP)
Kerr, Mr Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)

Livingstone, Marilyn (Kirkcaldy) (Lab)
Lochhead, Richard (North East Scotland) (SNP)
Lyon, George (Argyll and Bute) (LD)
Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
Macintosh, Mr Kenneth (Eastwood) (Lab)
Maclean, Kate (Dundee West) (Lab)
Macmillan, Maureen (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Martin, Campbell (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
Marwick, Tricia (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
Mather, Jim (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
May, Christine (Central Fife) (Lab)
McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
McCabe, Mr Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
McConnell, Mr Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
McFee, Mr Bruce (West of Scotland) (SNP)
McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
McNeil, Mr Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Morrison, Mr Alasdair (Western Isles) (Lab)
Muldoon, Bristow (Livingston) (Lab)
Mulligan, Mrs Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
Murray, Dr Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
Radcliffe, Nora (Gordon) (LD)
Raffan, Mr Keith (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD)
Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
Robson, Euan (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (LD)
Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
Ruskell, Mr Mark (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Green)
Scott, Eleanor (Highlands and Islands) (Green)
Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
Sheridan, Tommy (Glasgow) (SSP)
Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
Stone, Mr Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow) (SNP)
Swinney, Mr John (North Tayside) (SNP)
Turner, Dr Jean (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Ind)
Wallace, Mr Jim (Orkney) (LD)
Watson, Mike (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
Welsh, Mr Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
White, Ms Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
Wilson, Allan (Cunninghame North) (Lab)

Against

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
Brocklebank, Mr Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Davidson, Mr David (North East Scotland) (Con)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Lothians) (Con)
Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Gallie, Phil (South of Scotland) (Con)
Goldie, Miss Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
McGrigor, Mr Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)

Milne, Mrs Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
Monteith, Mr Brian (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
Mundell, David (South of Scotland) (Con)
Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
Tosh, Murray (West of Scotland) (Con)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 101, Against 18, Abstentions 0.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament, for the purposes of any Act of the Scottish Parliament resulting from the Local Governance (Scotland) Bill, agrees to any increase in expenditure payable out of the Scottish Consolidated Fund in consequence of the Act.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S2M-1080, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the draft Community Right to Buy (Definition of Excluded Land) (Scotland) Order 2004.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S2M-1081, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the designation of a lead committee, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the Justice 1 Committee be designated as lead committee in consideration of the draft Sexual Offences Act 2003 (Travel Notification Requirements) (Scotland) Regulations 2004.

The Presiding Officer: The sixth question is, that motion S2M-1082, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act 2004 (Modification of Enactments) Order 2004 be approved.

The Presiding Officer: The seventh and final question is, that motion S2M-1083, in the name of Patricia Ferguson, on the approval of an SSI, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Housing Support Grant (Scotland) Order 2004 be approved.

Millennium Development Goals

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S2M-972, in the name of Des McNulty, on millennium development goals. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament notes the 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda and continuing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa; recognises the extreme urgency of international efforts in making progress towards achieving the eight millennium development goals by 2015 including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability and developing a global partnership for development; further recognises the role that churches and other civic society organisations in Scotland have played in reminding us of our responsibilities to people in the poorest countries, and looks forward to a timetable being set by Her Majesty's Government for meeting its commitment to increase the UK aid budget to 0.7% of gross national product.

17:11

Des McNulty (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab): The main purpose of the debate is to promote understanding of two highly significant international issues. The 10th anniversary of the genocide in Rwanda is on 7 April and this debate is an appropriate way to commemorate and reflect on what happened during 100 terrible days in 1994. The second part of my motion refers to the millennium development goals, to which 189 members of the United Nations signed up at the millennium summit in 2000. The two matters are linked, in that achievement of the goals by 2015 is crucial if we are to ensure that the events in Rwanda are never repeated there or elsewhere in the world.

What happened in Rwanda makes chilling reading. The death in a plane crash of the Rwandan President precipitated 100 days of mass murder during which 1 million people, mainly from the Tutsi ethnic group, were slaughtered. Many of them were hacked to death. Two million refugees fled to Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zaire—which is now known as the Democratic Republic of Congo—and spread violence and destitution in those countries.

Even before the violence, Rwanda was one of the poorest places on earth. In the aftermath of the genocide, 35 per cent of all families are headed by widows and many young people are traumatised. Some are traumatised as victims, some as observers and some—sadly—as active participants in dreadful acts of savagery.

The tragedy could have been averted. The international community could have intervened to reduce or stop the slaughter at any time during those 100 days, but it failed to do so. The view of the United Nations commander in Kigali, Romeo Dallaire, was that the failure to act means that the

"international community has blood on its hands".

Genocide is

"the intentional destruction of a nation or an ethnic group".

It implies the existence of a co-ordinated plan aimed at total extermination, which is put into effect against individuals who are chosen as victims purely, simply and exclusively because they are members of the target group.

In the first five days, the Rwandan army and the militias—mainly the interahamwe, or "those who attack together"—killed 20,000 people. Then, the country's new leaders sent out the message that there was only one enemy—the Tutsi. State-controlled radio broadcasts labelled all Tutsi as inyenzi—cockroaches—which incited the Hutu majority to kill Tutsi to secure supremacy.

On 9 December 1948, the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide was approved. It was intended to prevent future holocausts but, 50 years later, a blind eye was turned in respect of Rwanda. Was that because the key players in the international community had few economic or political interests at stake? How else can we explain the very different responses to ethnic cleansing when it took place in Kosovo, on the fringes of Europe?

We cannot pick or choose when responding to human suffering on such a scale. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, has recently spoken about the 10th anniversary of the Rwandan genocide. He said:

"When, on 7 April, people around the world commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Rwandan genocide, that observance should be filled not only with remorse, but with resolve. We must remember the victims—the hundreds of thousands of men, women and children abandoned to systematic slaughter while the world, which had the capacity to save most of them, failed to save more than a handful, forever sullying the collective conscience."

Genocide is a crime so evil that it cannot be tolerated anywhere in the world, but I believe that we have other moral responsibilities—a duty of common humanity to those people throughout sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the world who are so poor that their lives are blighted. Since 1990, the proportion of people in sub-Saharan Africa and western Asia who live in extreme poverty has increased while, in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is unchanged. Among the poorer countries of 15 years ago, only those in eastern and south-eastern Asia have succeeded in

meeting the target of halving the proportion of people who live on less than $1 a day.

The target of $1 a day is not huge, given what $1 would buy in Scotland; however, in Bangladesh, it could pay for a meal for a family of four. It would provide three meals for a child in Albania or Ethiopia: not high living—a slice of bread, sprinkled with sugar and oil for breakfast; a slice of bread with a small amount of boiled potatoes for lunch; and flour-and-water pancakes for dinner—but enough to live on.

The millennium goals are important because they commit the international community to the vigorous promotion of human development as the key to sustaining social and economic progress in all countries and because they recognise the importance of creating a global partnership for development. The eight goals are set out in the motion. The World Bank estimates that it would cost in the region of $35 billion to $76 billion to achieve the millennium development goals worldwide: roughly $10 billion to $30 billion for education-related goals; $20 billion to $25 billion for health; and $5 billion to $21 billion for the environment. The maximum level of $76 billion to tackle global poverty can be compared with the level of European Community agricultural subsidies, which amount to $327 billion each year, and the $800 billion annually in military expenditure.

In March 2002, heads of Government from developing and high-income countries met in Monterrey, Mexico, and made commitments that would increase official development assistance in real terms by about $16 billion a year by 2006. European Union member states agreed to increase the EU average to 0.4 per cent or more of their gross national product and, in July 2002, the Chancellor of the Exchequer committed the United Kingdom Government to achieving that target by 2006. We are on track to achieve that target, but we must aim higher.

In 2002, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor challenged our Government to set a timetable to achieve 0.7 per cent for overseas aid—the target that was set by the United Nations in 1970. He hoped that

"we can set a target date by which Britain's aid will reach 0.7% … surely within ten years."

I hope that, in the context of the 2004 comprehensive spending review, the UK Government will announce a timetable for reaching the 0.7 per cent target. The events that took place in Rwanda 10 years ago, along with the suffering and misery that we have seen in sub-Saharan Africa, remind us of the urgency and necessity of achieving the cardinal's ambition.

I return to the situation in Rwanda. The UK Government has done a lot in providing assistance for reconstruction in Africa, but we are greatly indebted to churches and other organisations in Scotland and abroad for their stridency on behalf of the people of Rwanda and other poor countries. I pay tribute to Cardinal Keith O'Brien, to the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, and to the hundreds of other people who have worked extremely hard to keep Rwanda at the forefront of our consciousness and our conscience. Rwanda is doing well in recovering from what has happened. It is diversifying its exports and has conducted its first free and democratic elections, achieving the highest proportion of women parliamentarians in the world—a record 49 per cent. The Rwandan ambassador is coming to speak to the Parliament's cross-party international development group on 1 April. I hope that as many people as possible can come along to that.

We cannot afford to stand aside from these issues. I am grateful that I have had the opportunity to raise awareness in the Parliament of their significance. I hope that as many people as possible will do what they can to assist Rwanda. We must remember its lessons and our obligations to the rest of the world.

17:19

Linda Fabiani (Central Scotland) (SNP): I apologise for the fact that I will have to leave the chamber right after my speech. I thank Des McNulty for securing the debate. The speech that he just gave was marvellous and well worth listening to.

Des McNulty spoke eloquently about the genocide in Rwanda, which is mentioned in the motion. When I read and signed the motion, I was surprised that the atrocities happened only 10 years ago. It seemed to me that they were a lot further away, although rationally I knew that they were not. I wonder whether that is because we try to bury such horrendous things in the recesses of our minds, as we do not want to acknowledge how recently in our history we allowed something like that to happen. We in the developed countries have a collective responsibility for allowing it to happen. We should take the opportunity to remind ourselves of such things over and over again, so that it is always at the forefront of our minds that we must force those with the power to do so to stop such things before they happen or before they get to the horrendous levels reached in Rwanda and in so many other places over the years.

The second part of Des McNulty's motion is about the millennium development goals. I lodged a fairly similar motion that was given a lot of support. We are all looking the same way; we want to see an end to poverty because we know that it is wrong that most of us live fairly comfortably when there are people living in abject poverty throughout the world. It is not acceptable.

Although my motion welcomed the commitment of Gordon Brown and the UK Government to increase its aid budget to 0.4 per cent of GDP by 2006, it is not enough. The World Bank and the United Nations have already said that the millennium development goals to reduce by 50 per cent the number of people in the world who live in absolute poverty by 2015—would it not be great if we were chasing the goal of 100 per cent?—will not be met without a significant increase in development assistance.

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): Do Linda Fabiani and her party support the chancellor's proposal for an international financing facility, which is a way of levering in extra money for aid and which could double the amount of aid from $50 billion per year to $100 billion per year overnight? The proposal is remarkably broad and deserves all-party support.

Linda Fabiani: I will speak on a personal level because the detail of the IFF has not yet come to our party and we make policy at our party conferences. I will support anything that alleviates poverty in any way. We in the UK, Europe and the rest of the developed world must acknowledge that so much more can be done. The debate is huge and is not just about millennium development goals; it is about tackling arms sales, for example, and all the different issues that adversely affect the lives of people in parts of the world that are less fortunate than our own.

Other small countries, such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands and Luxembourg have already achieved the UN recommended level of 0.7 per cent of their GDP. Indeed, Denmark and Norway exceed it. There is nothing to stop our country meeting that goal, or exceeding it.

Keith Raffan raised the issue of party policy. My party's policy is that 1 per cent of GDP should go on overseas aid. Ireland, Belgium and France have already set clear timetables for reaching the UN target by 2007, 2010 and 2012 respectively. They are ahead of the UK.

SCIAF recommended that the Parliament should have regular debates about international aid issues and about this issue in particular, in order to track the millennium development goals. If we do that, we might be able to start exerting pressure, instead of putting the horrible things to the backs of our minds and forgetting that they are current.

17:24

Donald Gorrie (Central Scotland) (LD): I congratulate Des McNulty on securing the debate. I know of his great personal commitment to this sphere of work, which is admirable. He has covered the situation in Rwanda, so I will concentrate on the millennium development goals.

We want to develop more intelligent ways of linking aid and fair trade, which are often seen as opposites. If aid was concentrated not on big, grandiose projects but on helping small communities, first to produce water and things that they can live on and then to start growing or manufacturing things that they can sell, that would help them to develop their economies from the bottom up. By creating a train of thought that it is good to buy fair trade coffee and so on—but not chocolate, which makes people fat, although that is another issue—we could link together the ideas of fair trade and aid.

We need to bring to bear pressure on the various Governments throughout the world. If we stopped having these ridiculous and immoral wars, we could generate enough support for everyone in the world to have clean drinking water very quickly indeed.

Debt must also be addressed. Although we should perhaps not simply scrub the debts of countries that continue misgoverning themselves—as some of them have done—we should, without being too neo-colonialist, give countries a certain amount of help to organise their affairs better in return for scrubbing their debts. That would be a great step forward.

We should put pressure on the Government to reach the 0.7 per cent target. The idea that Gordon Brown has promoted, which Keith Raffan mentioned, is very interesting. If we can find better ways of funding such things, that is all to the good.

We need to campaign about the many wrong things that are done by multinationals, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. Those organisations are not all filled with bad people, and some of the things that they do are good, but they do many bad things that are harmful to the poorest communities. We need a campaign to show that general public opinion in developed countries is very much for change; interest is not limited to a few enthusiasts who break windows and demonstrate forcibly. The great weight of solid public opinion believes that these capitalist organisations must sort themselves out. There can be good capitalism and bad capitalism. At present, we have far too much bad capitalism.

People such as myself who are enthusiasts for the European Union need to examine the EU's protectionism, which has been mentioned. It is difficult to get some of the farmers on the continent

to give up their privileges, but we must work hard at that.

The paper from SCIAF suggests that we should work with MPs and development organisations. In my experience, it is difficult for MPs and MSPs of any party to work together consistently towards a particular goal. Perhaps the structure does not help that, but we should certainly try to work together, and in particular we should try to co-operate with the development organisations, of which there are a large number. The Scots like that sort of thing. They like Christian Aid and all the other similar organisations.

In May, people can patronise the biggest book sale in the world at St Andrew's and St George's church in George Street, where they can buy books that will make money for Christian Aid.

17:28

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I congratulate Des McNulty on securing tonight's debate on this important topic. I also underline the urgency of the international efforts to achieve the eight millennium development goals.

I am loth to introduce a negative note, but I must add some caveats about the millennium development goals. The goals are absolutely commendable, but if we are being realistic, we must take certain steps first. Let me quote Kofi Annan, whose words are reproduced in the annual review of Interact Worldwide, which is the organisation that used to be called Population Concern. He states:

"The Millennium Development Goals, particularly the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, cannot be achieved if questions of population and reproductive health are not squarely addressed. And that means stronger efforts to promote women's rights, and greater investment in education and health, including reproductive health and family planning."

In the Cairo programme of action, it was agreed that meeting people's needs for education and health, including reproductive health, is a prerequisite of sustainable development. The programme was agreed in 1994, when 179 Governments came together to discuss population, development and reproductive health, and recognised that we cannot have one without the others. Although the goals of the Cairo conference are similar to the millennium development goals, the goal of universal access to quality reproductive health services is missing from the MDGs.

In Scotland, with its declining population, we complain about the demographic time bomb and worry about our pension rights. However, worries in the developing world are far more basic. For example, reproductive ill health undermines

development by diminishing the quality of poor women's lives, weakening them and, in extreme cases, killing them. That places heavy burdens on families and communities. One woman dies every minute as a result of pregnancy and childbirth problems. However, the fact that a vast majority of those deaths are avoidable represents a widespread and systematic violation of human rights. To contrast the situation in the developing world with our own worries and statistics, I point out that the lifetime risk of maternal death in the UK is 1 in 5,800 while in Ethiopia it is 1 in 14.

Moreover, in the 10 years since the Cairo programme of action was agreed, there has been no reduction in maternal mortality and in the prevalence of sexually transmitted infections and HIV. Those stark statistics cannot be separated from the facts about the unmet need for contraception and the estimated shortfall of 8 billion condoms. We also cannot shy away from the Cairo goal of improving access to safe abortion in countries where the practice is legal. After all, maternal complications from unsafe abortions account for 68,000 maternal deaths a year.

To promote gender equality and empower women, we need to provide them with opportunities in educational, economic and civil life. However, first of all, women must be given the means to make informed choices about their fertility. Although Governments must support their MDG pledges with the finances to achieve them, they must also acknowledge that meeting the fundamental need for sexual and reproductive health will underpin any progress towards achieving those goals.

17:32

Mark Ballard (Lothians) (Green): I thank Des McNulty for securing the debate and for raising Parliament's awareness of the millennium development goals. The goals set out a superb vision of a future in which we eradicate poverty and environmental destruction and spread education, health, access to water and equality around the globe. Those are all basic democratic rights; the key feature of the goals is that they were agreed by 189 countries around the world and signed up to by 147 heads of state. They represent a key vision of future partnership in which the world works together to secure those democratic rights for everyone.

However, the vision that is presented by the millennium development goals stands in stark contrast to another future in which the people are not in charge and in which multinationals under the guise of the World Trade Organisation and through the multilateral agreement on investment and the general agreement on trade in services benefit from the world's resources.

One of the key elements of the millennium development goals is to halve by 2015 the proportion of people who do not have sustainable access to safe drinking water. We should all support that goal because safe drinking water is a fundamental human right. However, under the general agreement on trade in services, water services might be opened up and liberalised, which would be in direct contradiction to the aim that is set out in the millennium development goals. Water should not be moved from state provision to companies that profit from it. Water is increasingly big business; after all, a billion people around the globe do not have access to it. European countries dominate the water market and are demanding access to third-world countries so that they can take over the provision of water for profit, but not for environmental or social benefit.

Rosie Kane (Glasgow) (SSP): Does Mr Ballard agree that it is vile and inhumane that capital can travel the globe while people who are fleeing danger and poverty cannot do so?

Mark Ballard: I very much agree with that sentiment. What Rosie Kane described is a good example of how the rules that are set in the WTO through measures such as GATS go against the interests of people and operate in the interests of profit and capital. We need a fair system of rules and trade, rather than a system that benefits only multinationals.

We must overcome two key debts to achieve the millennium development goals. The first is the financial debt that third-world countries owe the west, to which Donald Gorrie referred. That debt cannot be paid and now comprises largely interest on the original loans. Until we get rid of that debt, we cannot move towards the millennium development goals. I welcome what Gordon Brown has done to move towards writing off some of the debt, but he does not go nearly far enough.

The second key debt is the ecological debt that we owe the third world for exploitation of its resources, which continues. We owe the third world big time and we must start repaying our debt. Unless we do so and agree to the millennium development goals as the WTO's key priority, we will end up with more Rwandas, which none of us wants.

I thank Des McNulty for bringing the issue to the chamber and for sharing and spreading the vision of the millennium development goals.

17:36

Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) (Ind): As I listened to Des McNulty's opening speech, I was reminded of my visit to Rwanda, as a member of the International Development Committee of the

House of Commons, not long after the genocide in Rwanda. It was an unforgettable and harrowing experience. We saw with our own eyes the evidence of the genocide: heaps of skulls and other human remains of people who had been savagely butchered. Here we are, 10 years later, and death by genocide may be over, but death by starvation and disease in Rwanda is, sadly, still prevalent. In Rwanda today, life expectancy is only 38 years; back in the 1970s, it was 45 years. Therefore, the situation in Rwanda is in some respects getting worse rather than better.

It is four years since the United Nations set the millennium goals, but much more international effort is required if the goals are to be achieved by the target date of 2015. There has been some progress in some parts of the world, but the situation in sub-Saharan Africa is desperate. At the present rate, it will take until 2129 to achieve universal primary education, it will take until 2147 to halve extreme poverty and it will take until 2165 to reduce under-five mortality by two thirds. If there is to be any chance of reaching the millennium development goals by 2015, international development assistance will have to be doubled.

The motion refers to the 0.7 per cent target that was endorsed by a UN resolution away back in 1970. The nearest that Britain has come to reaching that target was 25 years ago, in 1979, when the figure was 0.51 per cent of Britain's gross national income; the figure is now 0.31 per cent. Again, we seem to be getting worse instead of better.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I agree that nothing will ever be good enough in terms of international development aid and that we have a long way to go. However, it is worth pointing out that, despite the dreadful situation that we are in, when a team of us—four in number—from the Scottish Parliament visited the Pope in 2000, he singled out the United Kingdom and Italy for having done the most in the world in the effort towards wiping out third-world debt.

Dennis Canavan: I am not saying that we are completely lacking in generosity. When it comes to international aid and assistance, we are the fifth largest in terms of the amount given. However, the UN picked the percentage of gross national income as a measure so that, as the GNI grew year by year, there would be a proportionate increase in what countries gave. It is quite clear that our economy has grown a lot since the 1970s, but the amount that we give in international aid has not increased proportionately. I accept that it is difficult to double payments overnight, but surely it would be reasonable and affordable for Britain to set a date of, say, 2010, for delivering an international commitment that was made 40 years previously.

I had intended to say more, but I know that other members want to take part in the debate. However, I would like to finish on this note: although this Parliament does not have direct responsibility for international development, there are things that fall within our remit that are highly relevant, and I would like to make brief mention of the encouragement of development education in our schools, where there is surely a receptive audience. Children and young people are rightly appalled when they hear about the plight of children and young people in developing countries and they rightly demand urgent action to eradicate poverty, hunger and disease. The millennium development goals will help to do that; they will help, in short, to build a better and fairer world.

17:41

Murdo Fraser (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): I commend Des McNulty for his motion and congratulate him on securing the debate. I was attracted to participate in the debate because, like Dennis Canavan, I have visited Rwanda, albeit much more recently than he did. I was there last summer and although the physical evidences of the genocide have now gone, there is clearly still a shadow hanging over the country.

I must say that I found Rwanda to be a scary and depressing place to visit. The people are manifestly poor, few have enough to eat, they are ill clothed, many are without jobs and there is still an overweening military presence on the streets. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the presence of as many AK-47s in one place as there are on the streets in Rwanda. There is a fundamentally gloomy and depressing atmosphere across the country. As I walked down the street, people would not meet my eye, but shuffled on by—there is a general sense of depression.

It was singular to see working at the roadsides doing jobs such as clearing the verges groups of people who were dressed in what appeared to be pink pyjamas. We asked our guide who those people were—most were youngish middle-aged men—and we were told that they were prisoners, some of whom had been convicted but many of whom were still awaiting trial nine and a half years on from the genocide. It seemed to me that they were poorly guarded, with perhaps one or two guards for 30 or 40 men, so we asked our guide why that was. He explained that, if they tried to escape, the chances were that they would be caught and lynched by the mob, such was the strength of feeling nine and a half years after what happened.

It was notable that we had crossed into Rwanda from Uganda, coming overland across the border. The contrast between the two countries was absolutely striking. Uganda has not been without

its share of problems over the past 20 years or so, but it has been fortunate in that for the past 10 years it has had stable government and political stability, it has enjoyed the rule of law and—comparatively speaking—it has seen economic growth, which has provided jobs. The people in Uganda were generally well fed, well housed and well clothed and appeared to be happy. When we met them in the street and spoke to them, they would be happy, smiling and self-confident. The contrast between Uganda and Rwanda was most depressing. The countries are similar in geography, but because of the different experiences that they have had and because of different political systems, one is so much better than the other.

We have to address the contradiction between aid policy and trade policy. Everything that we give in foreign aid is taken away by unfair trade. For every dollar that western taxpayers give to poor countries, we take away two dollars through unfair trade practices. The injustice that is being suffered by the third world is not a result of ill fortune, bad weather, defective infrastructure or national disasters. It is not an accident, but a direct result of the deliberate policy of many Governments in the west—a shameless and shameful policy—that directly causes oppression in those countries. It is in our own hands—in our country and in other countries in the west—to address the problem of unfair trade. That is exactly what we should be doing within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

I will address briefly one final point. Des McNulty rightly refers in his motion to the Government. However, let us not forget that we as citizens also have a duty to give personally. It is right to set targets for Government giving, but many voluntary organisations that give aid to the third world welcome donations from private citizens. We should encourage people to fulfil their duty to their fellow citizens by giving generously from our own pockets. Many charities that work well in the third world will benefit from such donations. I hope that, if we can do that, we will see more countries that are like Uganda and fewer that are like Rwanda.

17:45

Mr Keith Raffan (Mid Scotland and Fife) (LD): I congratulate Des McNulty on securing the debate. I certainly agree with his opening remarks about Rwanda and about the failure of the international community to stop the genocide, which is something that we must ensure never happens again.

Murdo Fraser is right to point out that over the border in Uganda there is, partially at least, a success story. Extreme poverty in Uganda has been reduced by 20 per cent since 1992—it has come down from 55 per cent of the population—and there has been a doubling of the enrolment of primary school children in three years. That is a lesson in what can be achieved, although in north-east Uganda there is still the horrendous problem of the Lord's Resistance Army and the kidnapping of children.

The stark facts are—and I will give only three of them—that more than 1 billion people in the world currently live on less than $1 a day, 115 million children worldwide do not go to school and 7 million of them die each year from avoidable diseases.

As the chancellor has said, we are already seriously at risk of not fully meeting the millennium development goals by the deadline of 2015. Three years after the goals were set we are not on course to halve extreme poverty by 2015 outside east and south Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, north Africa, the middle east, the Caribbean, Latin America and, indeed, in the transitional economies of eastern Europe and central Asia, the number of people living on less than $1 a day actually increased by 100 million between 1990 and 1999.

We are not on course to meet the goal of primary education for all either. In total, 100 million children—80 million of them in Africa—will still be denied schooling in 2015. Eighty-one countries will not meet the goal of reducing infant mortality by two thirds and 47 of the 48 sub-Saharan African countries will fail to meet the goal of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters.

All the goals are interrelated. Investing in teacher training will be undermined if we do not effectively tackle HIV/AIDS, which is killing so many teachers, particularly in southern Africa. In Malawi, many class sizes are now reaching 300 because of the deaths of teachers from AIDS. Investing in schooling will be undermined if there is not sufficient investment in providing access to a safe water supply, so that children do not have to take hours off school to collect water for their families. Investing in health clinics will be undermined if there is not sufficient investment in roads that give access to them.

We need something as bold as the 21st century equivalent of the Marshall plan, which led to an unprecedented transfer of 1 per cent of national income from the United States to rebuild Europe after the second world war. I mentioned the chancellor's proposal of an international financing facility, which would do just that. It would lead to a substantial transfer of additional resources from the richest to the poorest—doubling aid annually from $50 billion to $100 billion for a 15-year period.

Leveraging resources for aid—I disagree politically and philosophically with the Greens on

this—means that for every $1 of aid, one can leverage $2 from the private sector. Leveraging resources for aid, which is what the international financing facility would do by issuing bonds in the international capital markets, would provide a predictable and stable flow of aid and would enable the 0.7 per cent target to be met sooner.

We must target aid more effectively. That might sound like an obvious thing to say, but in 2000 only 38 per cent of the EU's aid went to what are defined as low-income countries. I support the UK Government's aim to ensure that 90 per cent of aid is spent in low-income countries by 2006. We must give to those who have the greatest need and who can also absorb the aid that we give effectively.

It is important that we move the Doha round forward. We must improve trade regimes so that developing countries can participate on fair terms in the world economy. Full trade liberalisation could lift 300 million people out of poverty by 2015. Trade subsidies in the developed world total $350 billion a year—that sum is seven times greater than the aid that is provided to developing countries.

To meet the millennium goals by the 2015 deadline will require greatly enhanced understanding and co-operation between developed and developing countries. It will mean reviving the commitment, enthusiasm, drive and energy of the Brandt commission and report and realising—not least at Government level—that, in the global village in which we now live, we all have a responsibility, one to another.

17:50

Robin Harper (Lothians) (Green): I want to pick up a few of the threads in the debate so far. First, I will respond to some of the points that Keith Raffan made.

Where aid was concerned, my experience in Kenya was that an enormous amount of excellent work was done by voluntary organisations. The great thing about our giving support to voluntary organisations on the ground is that it makes certain that the money that is provided goes where it will be used most effectively. That is the most important point to bear in mind in relation to aid and voluntary organisations.

Like other members, Mr Raffan made an observation about finding money for third-world countries. An idea that has been in the back of my mind for many years—it is not just academic—is that one way of helping to support the United Nations and to pay for the damage that we do to our environment by air travel would be to have aviation fuel taxed in every country in the world. That way, every country would pay its fair dues for

the damage that air travel does to the environment. Economically, such a tax would bear down hardest on the richest countries and would affect the poorest countries least.

Our leaders are Janus-like in the sense that, in trading and turning to the WTO, they attend talks in places such as Johannesburg and Cancun. I want to give members a picture of something that struck me when I was at the Johannesburg summit a year and a half ago. The Sandton Convention Centre, where everything took place, is in one of the richest enclaves in South Africa, just north of Johannesburg. The people from the small cities and towns all over the world were put in an exhibition centre nearly 20km away; the real people were kept well away from the politicians. There were buses between the two venues, but it took most of a morning to get from one place to the other.

Friends of the Earth wanted to put a lovely set of sculptures that illustrated the poor of the world and the rich of the world in the middle of the Sandton centre. Its request was refused, because—I suppose—a statue referring to poverty would have been too much in the face of the politicians. The assemblage was moved to the outside of the centre and in its place was put an enormous stand for BMW cars, which told us how good they were going to be for the environment. That told me what Johannesburg was about. I realised that things were still not being taken as seriously as they should have been. We must keep up the pressure on politicians and Governments around the world in every way that we can. The streams of identical white Mercedes that brought the politicians into the Sandton centre told their own story.

I want to pick up a point that Marlyn Glen made. While I was in South Africa, I visited Soweto, where I met AIDS campaigners. I found out that 40 per cent of the country's armed forces and 15 per cent of its teachers have AIDS. It is forecast that, by 2020, 50 per cent of the half of the population who are under 15 might have AIDS, either inherited or contracted. Southern Africa certainly needs 8 billion condoms and education, and we can provide such things.

I will finish by suggesting that we remind ourselves that Edinburgh is a fair trade city and that the University of Edinburgh is a fair trade university. To pick up on the points that Mark Ballard made, there are small things that we can do that will become big things if we do enough of them.

17:55

The Deputy Minister for Finance and Public Services (Tavish Scott): Two of my closest friends work for Médecins Sans Frontières. One of

them is a nurse who is involved in exactly the kind of programmes that Marlyn Glen talked eloquently about a moment or so ago. My admiration for my two friends knows no bounds. Sometimes we wonder what we do in this place, especially when we think of the friends who show such determination and ability in incredibly difficult circumstances. At the moment, my two friends work in Uganda, which is a country that Murdo Fraser mentioned a moment ago. I can only metaphorically take my hat off to people who have such dedication.

I have thought carefully about the debate and have been highly influenced by it. A number of thoughts come to mind. I assume that I was not the only member who saw on television this morning a little bit of the intensely moving memorial service in Madrid. International events such as that bring home to us the importance of reflecting now and again on what is happening internationally.

On that basis, Des McNulty deserves an immense amount of credit. As Donald Gorrie said, he deserves credit not only for his personal commitment to the issues that we are debating but for giving the other members who have spoken knowledgably this evening the opportunity to debate the issue and, I suspect, give vent to their frustrations.

The person who has influenced me more than any other in this regard is the BBC journalist Fergal Keane. He reported from Rwanda at the time of its immense difficulties and, in January last year, he lectured in Edinburgh on the subject of "Justice, war crimes, genocide and the new world order". His book, "Rwanda, the Sorrow and the Pity", is an intensely powerful account of the genocide. I am sure that many members who are interested in and concerned about the subject have read it. Last night, I read a good review of the book, but I will not go into detail on it other than to say that, if members have not read the book, they should do so. It illustrates the power of an account by someone who observed those happenings closely and gives a perspective on the matters that we are discussing.

As Des McNulty said, the debate is not just about the 1994 genocide in Rwanda but about progress on achieving the eight United Nations millennium development goals. His motion brings those issues to the Parliament's attention. I will deal first with the issues that concern Rwanda. As he said, commemorative events will take place to remember those terrible events. We must not forget what happened in 1994. Indeed, on the basis of this evening's discussions, I suspect that we will not forget them. This will be a time not only for the people of Rwanda to reflect but, as many colleagues have said, for the international

community to look at the role that it played in 1994. As colleagues also said, we must ensure that we do not let such events happen again.

As members said, since the events of 1994, the people of Rwanda have made progress. The country is fundamentally at peace, which must be progress in itself. That said, sometimes we talk too glibly about peace. Although the economy is stable and growing and the incidence of poverty is declining, I take the points that Dennis Canavan made in relation to statistics and facts. I also acknowledge Murdo Fraser's important observation about the tone, spirit and colour that are to be found among the people.

However, the genocide has left a legacy that the people of Rwanda have to deal with on a day-to-day basis. The country has been left with very low human capacity resources at all levels throughout the country. Keith Raffan illustrated that that problem exists not only in Rwanda but in other countries. Many professionals and qualified people were killed or fled the country. I understand that there are only 274 qualified doctors in the entire country, which is one doctor for every 14,599 people.

The United Kingdom Government has engaged with Rwanda for the past 10 years and is Rwanda's major bilateral development partner. Its engagement with the Government of Rwanda is based on a memorandum of understanding that was signed in January. The memorandum describes the Government of Rwanda's commitments to its people on poverty reduction, promoting regional stability, creating a democratic and inclusive state, and progressively securing human rights. It also confirms that the UK's engagement depends on political developments.

The Government of Rwanda is also supporting survivors of the genocide through a number of organisations representing the widows and survivors. The Department for International Development's current budget for Rwanda is £37 million, and that will rise to £47 million next year. A new Department for International Development office opened in January, signalling the UK's long-term commitment to Rwanda.

Many members commented on the UN's millennium development goals. They represent a shared global ambition—that is an important feature—to improve the well-being and life chances of the world's poorest citizens. For the first time there is international agreement on the importance of eliminating poverty and a consensus on a key set of goals. Those goals are highly ambitious and the targets that the international community has set itself will take a considerable amount of work and effort to achieve, but surely that is right. The whole international community has a responsibility for meeting those

goals, which recognise the need for everyone to take action if poverty is to be reduced. As members have mentioned, 190 developed and developing countries have signed up to those goals and associated targets.

There is no one way to achieve those goals. The international community must work together to produce a fairer global trading system, to take action on HIV/AIDS and to resolve conflict.

Mr Raffan: Does the minister agree that the news last week from the American Administration, about the action that the so-called AIDS tsar seems to be taking on behalf of the pharmaceutical companies, is not at all hopeful? The companies are going back on their original pledge and in fact want to sell AIDS drugs at a higher price, which will mean that far fewer people and countries in sub-Saharan Africa will be able to afford antiretroviral drugs.

Tavish Scott: That is an important point, which I am sure is being made—dare I say it—at Westminster, where direct contact can be made. I suspect that in the year of the American presidential election, nothing is fixed without an eye to that election. I imagine that the situation is developing.

I will mention briefly the WTO talks, which Mark Ballard, Murdo Fraser and Keith Raffan talked about, and the importance of reaching an agreement in the Doha round to create a fairer set of rules to govern international trade. That must produce real benefits for developing countries.

Many members mentioned the overall development aid budget. I noticed that the subject was raised today at Prime Minister's question time in the House of Commons by, I think, a Labour member in a question to John Prescott, who was standing in for the Prime Minister. That was the entirely appropriate manner in which to pursue the matter. Clearly, considerable attention is being paid to the issue at this time.

Meeting closed at 18:03.

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Wednesday 31 March 2004

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