

The issues over the vote on Gaza

At the heart of the row in the Commons over the Gaza vote was a bitter feud between the SNP and Labour.

For many years the Standing Orders have been followed which state that on an Opposition Day the Opposition party that is given that day can table a motion for debate and require a vote on it. This was done to prevent the government tabling an amendment, voting through the amendment and thereby preventing a vote on the Opposition party motion. Whereas we normally vote on an amendment first then vote on the motion as amended or unamended depending on the outcome of the amendment vote.

Labour gets many more Opposition days than the SNP as allocation depends on number of MPs in the party. They chose not to use recent days to debate and vote a Labour motion on Gaza. The SNP motion went too far in criticising Israel for the Labour leadership. They were worried about Labour MPs voting for the SNP motion, and concerned Front benchers would resign to do so.

Seeing the SNP Motion the government as it is entitled to do tabled its policy as an amendment to the SNP motion expecting Parliament to first vote on the SNP motion followed by a vote on the government amendment when the SNP motion was defeated. Labour also tabled an amendment.

The Speaker wanted all 3 positions to be heard but his decision to allow priority to voting the Labour amendment meant the SNP motion would not be voted if the Labour amendment passed. The government then said they would withdraw their amendment expecting the Speaker to restore Standing Orders by requiring a prior vote on the SNP motion followed by a vote on the Labour amendment. Instead the Speaker determined to continue with priority for the Labour amendment. It also meant in the debate the Shadow Foreign Secretary took priority in responding to the SNP over the government.

Conservative backbenchers used up the remaining time so the Labour amendment had not been put to the vote at 7 pm when following the resolution of the House proceedings should have ended. Instead the chair put the Labour amendment after 7. There were howls of protest against putting it and cries of No against amendment. The chair declared the amendment passed unanimously.

This was a bad day for Parliament. Meanwhile the Israeli Parliament voted against a two state solution for Gaza and Palestine. That was a vote that matters and should remind UK MPs that what matters in Gaza is the views of Hamas and Israel.