



The Archbishop of Canterbury's final speech on the Illegal Migration Bill amendments.

Read the Archbishop's speech as delivered:

The amendment put forward under Motion J1 aims to ensure that not just now and as the Noble Lord the Minister has said with the current Government's concentration on international co-operation and working, although with some hesitation from them at times, with groups like as the UNHCR and others internationally, that that policy is examined and the strategy and the way they're working and the context in which migration is being considered, is brought in front of both Houses, simply for a debate, with an analysis of the situation by the Government.

The Noble Lord the Minister has said very, very clearly that he does not wish this to happen on the grounds that it's being done, but I say my Lords this Bill is not about today. It will shortly be an Act, and when it is an Act it will last years. It may last many years. Who knows what will happen in elections in the future, next year or in 10 years or whenever it is? And we cannot guarantee what kind of Government there will be at that time. This is why we have Acts of Parliament. This is why we have a system of law which requires changes in the case that people wish to change the way in which this country operates.

The problem with this Bill, it seems to me my Lords, is that it has not started at the right place. Where it needed to start with is on a matter like as this, to have a level of national consensus and agreement on what the aim of our migration policy and immigration policy is in the long term. We know what it is, for instance, with the NHS. It is care, free at the point of delivery, to all who need it. It's not a political matter. At least, not at the moment. That is something that holds us together. And then we argue about how it's done: fair enough.

So this Bill, and this failure to pursue this amendment, seems to me to have four very simple failures. And I won't repeat what Lord Coaker, has said so eloquently just now. First, it does not give space and time on the face of the Bill for the Houses of Parliament—for politics—to generate a consensus on what we do about a problem that the Foreign Secretary himself last week said is one that is global, geopolitical and generational. We have to have time for such threats, my Lords. We put time aside on things like climate change, for such threats. Much of the migration will be generated by climate change and, in being generated, it will move literally hundreds of millions of people across borders.

And we can't put into the Bill that we should set time aside once a year in both Houses to look at that context and discuss it and try and generate a consensus across our nation, where so many communities, including in my own diocese which I serve, where so many communities are divided, depressed, anxious, reasonably, because so much is said to them that does not have a common, united vision for this nation. That is a failure of reconciliation. It's a failure of vision to leave the structures of migration better than they used to be, because heaven alone knows it is more than 25 years since we could last look back and see an immigration policy that was really working. It's not a party-political thing.

Second my Lords, this rejection of this amendment, and much of the Bill as we've heard earlier this evening, diminishes parliamentary

accountability. It does not say that Government must come to the House of Commons and the House of Lords and give reasons for what it says. It does not say that a Minister must stand up, of whichever party, must stand up and face people like the Noble Lord, Lord Dubs. I apologise for embarrassing him I'm sure, but who I would venture to suggest is probably the most respected man in this House, whose own experience of being an unaccompanied, irregular migrant is without parallel, but whose approach was casually dismissed. My Lords, that is not how we should listen to the wisdom of so many years and so much experience.

Accountability is diminished. Parliament exists to hold the Executive to account—not just this Executive but future ones. It diminishes our leadership. I won't repeat what the noble Lord, Lord Coaker, said, but he was right in everything he said about the Modern Slavery Act, as was the former Prime Minister today and as she has spoken over the last weeks, publicly and privately. And it diminishes our flexibility. Because this Bill pins everything down; it does not give grace periods, it does not enable Parliament and Government to say the situation has changed dramatically. Who would have said four years ago that we would have 45,000 people coming across the channel in boats? Of course, we must stop that. I agree entirely with the Noble Lord, the Minister. Of course, we must stop it, but I fail to see how this does it, and I've not heard anything to convince me.

But that is the view of the other place and I agree that, in the end, on most things, except the most essential, that this House must give way to the other place. And therefore, I will not be seeking to divide the House on this Motion.

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