

# **SNP Chief Whip says “entirely unacceptable” pressure put on Speaker to avoid Labour rebellion**

## **The House of Commons Speaker under fire after the SNP debate calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza is overshadowed by procedural rows**

Midlothian MP Owen Thompson spoke of his disappointment at the “disgraceful scenes” at Westminster, after an SNP led debate calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza descended into chaos.

The MP called on the Leader of the House Penny Mordaunt to investigate “very very serious” claims that the Speaker Lindsay Hoyle was bowing to pressure from the Labour party to change parliamentary rules and allow a vote on the Labour amendment, to avoid an expected rebellion in the Labour ranks.

The SNP opposition day is one of three parliamentary days per year that the SNP gets dedicated time to take forward business of their choice, as the third biggest party. The motion they chose to debate had called for an “immediate ceasefire” in Gaza and Israel, along with “the immediate release of all hostages taken by Hamas and an end to the collective punishment of the Palestinian people”. Labour instructed their members to abstain but faced the prospect of a significant rebellion, after 56 Labour MPs had defied the Whip to vote for another SNP motion calling for an immediate ceasefire last

November. Labour's amendment reworded the original motion to call for an "immediate humanitarian ceasefire" while noting "Israel cannot be expected to cease fighting if Hamas continues with violence".

There were widespread reports the Speaker had been pressured to call the amendment. BBC Newsnight's Nicholas Watt tweeted "Senior Labour figures tell me [@CommonsSpeaker](#) was left in no doubt that Labour would bring him down after the general election unless he called Labour's Gaza amendment" While it is acknowledged the Speaker met with party Leader Keir Starmer, Labour strongly deny that there was any undue pressure or threats.

Mr Thompson said if there was any truth in the claims it was "an affront to any democracy".

Amidst furious scenes during the debate on Wednesday night. Business Leader Penny Mordaunt said the decision "undermined" the parliament and the Conservative Party withdrew their support for the vote, while the SNP Leader Stephen Flynn repeatedly called for the Speaker to come to the Chamber and explain the decision, with both groups walking out the Chamber.

The farcical scenes and procedural rows overshadowed the subject of the debate itself. After the government withdrew, the Labour amendment was carried without a formal vote, with no opportunity to vote on the SNP motion.

Speaking during Business questions on Thursday morning, Mr Thompson called for an investigation into what happened and action to protect the debating time of the smaller parties. He said:-

"On our opposition day, our voice was silenced when our vote was not able to be taken, and that was incredibly disappointing for me and for the significant number of my constituents, and I know constituents of colleagues from

across the Chamber, who wanted to support that motion.

“I think it’s critical that all Members of this place, whatever their position or status, are protected from bullying and intimidation. I think it’s entirely unacceptable, if reports across many media outlets are to be believed, that there was significant pressure put on Mr Speaker to come to his decision yesterday. Can I ask the Leader of the House what steps she is going to take to investigate these very very serious claims?

“If there is anything of substance to these, that is an affront to any democracy, where a Party Leader can direct the Chair of this place.

“As Chief Whip I’m involved in a number of conversations on how business comes forward and I had direct assurances that I would have a vote on the words of my motion yesterday. Everybody knew the potential outcome at the end of the debate well in advance so to suggest that nobody knew is utter nonsense.

“The reason we were in the position we were in was because the normal conventions and standing orders of this House were overruled, against the advice of the Clerks and that only happened because the Labour Party wanted to get dug out of a hole, and that is unacceptable.”

In an unusual display of consensus between the SNP and Conservatives, Penny Mordaunt said she was “sympathetic” to the call for further time for another SNP led debate to be scheduled.

Other parties have criticised the SNP’s handling of the debate, accusing the SNP of not seeking consensus and party political game playing. Edinburgh South’s MP Ian Murray said on Twitter the party were “Submitting a motion to deliberately fail” rather than reaching out to win the vote, although in response Owen Thompson says, as Chief Whip, he was not

approached by anyone from the other parties to work together.

Meanwhile the Speaker has accepted he made a mistake, apologised and met with people from all parties, but questions over his future remain. At the time of writing [a motion of no confidence](#) has gathered 67 signatures from SNP and Conservative MPs.



Owen Thompson MP during Business Questions