

## My Lords

While preparing this response to the Gracious Speech I found myself thinking how different my speech today would have been if my Party's calls for the devolution of policing to Wales had been heeded and granted. And how, if we'd had full powers over elections, there would have been no threat to the ease with which we've cast our votes for generations in Wales.

But, with the confirmation of the intention of the UK government to progress the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill beyond Committee stage in the Commons and the introduction of the Electoral Integrity Bill we see this government moving further and further away from the progressive politics and country we on these benches aspire to.

The intention to introduce new powers for the police to control protests is, above all, unnecessary and draconian. Police already have the powers to limit protests in order to ensure safety. Protesters have the right to protest and express themselves under the Human Rights Act - and it's a right I, and many others in this house, have used to protest peacefully for causes we believe in.

The right to peaceful assembly has always been a crucial part of our democratic society and these new laws undermine that right. Their prime purpose is to silence opposition to government policies and the Liberal Democrats will oppose and resist them.

Like many others I watched the Presidential elections in America and was appalled at the reports of voter suppression but the reality is that the UK is already emulating our transatlantic cousins - in the run-up to the 2019 general election it was estimated that 17% of the UK population weren't registered to vote. Individual voter registration has made the process far less easy than it was and has been the Tory party's first step towards the UK version of voter suppression.

The Electoral Integrity Bill - was there ever such a misnomer - continues that process with its emphasis on the introduction of voter ID cards, such as a passport or driving licence, for future elections. There is, however, very little evidence of voter fraud in the UK with only one person convicted of personation and one person cautioned in 2019.

Figures from the RAC Foundation show that in 2018, 80 per cent of men and 71 per cent of women held a driving licence and ONS analysis of the 2011 Census shows that 76% of people resident in the UK held a UK passport - but what about the remainder? I wonder how many of the 700,000 people living in poverty in Wales, about a quarter of our population, have access to either?

Whatever gloss the government tries to put on this decision, it is a blatant and cynical attempt at making it harder for people to exercise their right to vote - and is aimed at those it perceives as not being 'their voters'. Welcome to voter suppression, UK style!

As ever, this Gracious Speech is significant for what it does not contain and, for those of us who live in Wales, the disappointment, although expected, is in the fact that it says nothing about our devolution settlements. Indeed, by their actions, this government are bypassing and undermining the position of our devolved government - and there can be no better example of this than the way the Shared Prosperity Fund is being allocated.

My local Town Council, (and I refer the House to my membership of the Council noted in my register of interests) was given details of the Levelling Up fund and the Community Renewal Fund when our local MP visited.

The Shared Prosperity Fund is yet to begin but is to be billed, I believe, as a Brexit Bonus using money that would have gone to Europe and will replace the European Social Fund. I note that there is no reference to replacing all the money that would have come from the EU.

Delivery of all these will be to and through Councils, bypassing the Senedd and cynically leaving it without the finances to plan and implement projects on a nation-wide basis other than those funded through the basic Barnett formula.

I have a number of questions on the issue which I will submit as written questions and hope for full responses.

## **My Lords**

A week ago today, the people of Wales returned a new Senedd where 44 of the Senedd's 60 seats were taken by parties which supported either federalism or independence and they saw off the negative influence of UKIP, Abolish the Welsh Assembly party and Reform.

These now have no seats in our Senedd, thankfully, although I suspect that their voters turned to the Welsh Conservatives who increased their numbers. Some Conservative candidates ran on an Abolish the Welsh Assembly ticket and I would ask the Minister to confirm that this isn't Welsh Conservative policy or indeed UK Conservative policy.

What is clear is that there is increased appreciation of the role of our devolved administration and there is no mandate in Wales for anything other than increased autonomy for the nation.