

The battle to oppose

Nigel Farage bid for seats in the election by saying he would lead a strong opposition to the likely Labour government. The Conservatives countered by saying only they could win enough seats to form a strong opposition, which is manpower hungry in a Commons full of debates, committees and question sessions that need staffing.

It will be interesting this first week in action for the new Parliament to see who does best oppose. Reform start with many institutional disadvantages that come from having so few MPs. It means if they want to be a more visible and sometimes audible presence they will need to be there all the time, rushing from debate to committee to Westminster Hall to cover the ground.

The Conservative Leader will get 5 questions at every PM Questions, and the Lib Dem's will follow as third party. Reform MPs will get occasional chances of a single question like other backbenchers but will not get a weekly slot. The Conservative lead will get first slot with time for a considered response on Statements and main debates. Conservatives will be represented on all Committees. Reform will only be on a few committees and will be lowly ranked for main debates and Statements.

This week Nigel Farage will have to find a way to make an impact on the King's speech debate, the crucial debate about the new government's plans and legislation for the upcoming year. Will he be able to speak on the first day sometime after the PM, Leader of the Opposition and other senior MPs/ Privy Counsellors? What will be his main thrust? Will he have briefed the press and given interviews in advance, chancing what might be in the speech? If he speaks later it will get less pick up without pre briefing. Will other Reform MPs try to speak on later days of the debate to cover the different topics highlighted, as the official Opposition will do? The government speech appears to have been much briefed or leaked.

The Leader of the Opposition has time, stage and audience to make an important speech in the first response to the PM. It will be in good time for early evening broadcasts and for the Thursday papers. He needs to deal swiftly with the past and the election, moving on to tell us what they agree with and what they will oppose in this government's approach. Today should be an important day of preparation and briefing for both Mr Sunak and Mr Farage.