

Hain hit too hard, says Hamilton

Speaking in Monday's debate on the Political Parties and Elections Bill, Fabian Hamilton (Labour, Leeds North West) accused the Electoral Commission of being "very heavy-handed and... incompetent in dealing with certain cases".

The Commission, Hamilton argued, had "destroyed its own credibility" with

its handling of the case of Peter Hain – who was forced to resign from the government last year over the late registration of donations totalling £103,000 – and needed to be subject to greater scrutiny.

In the case of registering donations, Hamilton proposed that non-compliance should be decriminalised, "where it is clear that mistakes have been made".

Speaking for the Conservatives, Jonathan Djanogly worried that Hamilton's proposals might reduce the commission's effectiveness. For the Lib Dems, David Howarth warned that "we must be careful not to make special rules for politics".

Hain joined in, praising the powerful case made by Hamilton, and insisting that it "is not a good thing for the police and the whole panoply of criminal law and prosecutors to invade politics". ■