

Contribution from William Perrin

When a bill is in committee stage it goes through line by line scrutiny (literally each clause). Taking each clause or small group of clauses, the committee scrutinises it in turn making sure that it works in the context of the bill as a whole.

The government at this point also has to introduce a mountain of amendments that it promised at second reading or where it appears that they need to change something to deliver the effect they require (ie correcting mistakes). There can be hundreds of amendments and amendments amending amendments.

It's no secret that many members of the committee get lost in this vast but vital comprehension process. And so do government ministers/whips, despite their best efforts.

It is at this point that the bill is at its most complex and incomprehensible. And at this point that lobbyists and others can exercise the most influence, because only a tiny circle of people outside parliament actually can follow what is going on (the process is rapid fire, amendments published overnight etc.) and can devote the resource to it. This is the best point for them to exercise influence by briefing committee members according to their interest.

The internet of course could help resolve this complexity by marking up the document and amendments on a usable, commentable form. This could be used both by the committee members but more importantly everyone on the web.

Breaking out of the circle of lobbyists and bringing a wider range of views to bear on this vital process.

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