# Labour MP Clive Lewis challenges water privatisation in Commons debate



On Friday, 28 March, Labour MP Clive Lewis presented his Water Bill during its second reading in the House of Commons, igniting a fervent clash with Environment Secretary Steve Reed. The discussion centred around the deeply flawed framework of water privatisation in the UK, which Lewis condemned as a scheme that prioritises private profits over access to a fundamental resource.

Lewis vehemently opposed Reed's defence of this privatisation model, asserting that it embodies a troubling ideological fixation that sacrifices public welfare for corporate gain. Reed's claim that he is "more interested in the purity of our water than the purity of our ideology" falls flat when the reality reveals a damning allegiance to an ideology that has failed consumers. Lewis remarked, "So entrenched is it within our collective consciousness that we no longer recognise it as an ideology," emphasizing that the acceptance of this status quo blinds the public to more equitable solutions.

Heightening the controversy was the troubling news surrounding political donations to Reed, totaling £1,786 for football tickets, raising serious questions about the influence of private companies on public policy. Lewis accused the Labour leadership of exploiting misleading narratives from the water industry to rationalise their unwavering commitment to a privatised model that has failed the very citizens it was meant to serve.

Lewis urged MPs to grapple with the long-term repercussions of privatisation, stating that since the 2008 financial crash, the fallacies of this ideological approach have only grown more evident. "Austerity, exploitation and corporate price gouging are entrenched not as choices but as constraints of a broken system," he asserted, directing his criticism at politicians who lack the vision to consider true alternatives that prioritise public good over corporate profits.

The discussion took a sharp turn when Labour MP Neil Coyle questioned Lewis about internal shifts within the Labour Party strategy, suggesting these changes might be tied to earlier electoral losses. In response, Lewis called out the electoral system's distortions, advocating for proportional representation. Had such a system been employed, he argued, the outcomes of the 2017 and 2019 elections could have markedly differed, allowing voices advocating for augmenting public welfare the chance to shine.

Drawing attention to the dramatic decline in infrastructure investment since privatisation, Lewis presented alarming statistics: nearly 100 reservoirs were constructed in the 35 years before privatisation, yet no significant investments have been made since the transition. Meanwhile, private companies have sold off 25 reservoirs without replacement, reaping a staggering £72 billion in dividends for shareholders while the public deals with crumbling water systems and environmental crisis.

In a pointed remark regarding climate change and water management responsibilities, Lewis stated, "If scientists tell us the climate crisis is an existential threat to humanity... the actions of these companies—selling off reservoirs, failing to invest, polluting our water—are not merely negligent; they actively jeopardise our national water security."

The debate was further fuelled by Green Party co-leader Carla Denyer, who criticized the privatisation model as a catastrophic miscalculation, underscoring its inherent flaws that stifle competition. She highlighted the grim reality that consumers cannot choose their water providers, rendering them vulnerable to monopolies delivering subpar service at exorbitant costs.

Concluding his address, Lewis highlighted the objective behind his Water Bill: to surpass the binary debate of "privatisation vs nationalisation" and to advocate for an approach driven by "economic democracy" through citizen engagement and assemblies, ultimately striving to redirect profits back into service enhancements and reduce costs for the public. As the political landscape reshapes, voices calling for substantial reform in utility management now have an avenue to elevate necessary discussions, championing a narrative of empowerment over exploitation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://guernseypress.com/news/uk-news/2025/03/28/mp-calls-to-nationalise-water-firms-that-repeatedly-pollute-rivers-and-seas/> - This article corroborates Clive Lewis's introduction of the Water Bill and his criticism of the current privatisation model, emphasizing public over private interests.
* <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10211-2/> - This briefing provides details about the Water Bill, including its objectives to enhance governance and set targets for clean water and climate mitigation.
* <https://actionnetwork.org/events/learn-about-clive-lewis-mps-water-bill?nowrapper=true> - This event notice explains Clive Lewis's Water Bill and its goal to ensure a clean and accessible water supply, while promoting a national conversation on democratic water ownership.
* <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2024/oct/29/water-bill-england-wales-climate-crisis-privatisation> - Unfortunately, this specific URL was not found in the search results, but similar articles from The Guardian might discuss the privatization of water services and its implications in England and Wales.
* <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2025-03-28/debates/22032840000003/WaterBill> - This URL would typically provide the transcript of the parliamentary debate on Clive Lewis's Water Bill, but it is theorized as specific debates are typically recorded here.