



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT – 21-25 November, 2016

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Let me know what you think of the new layout!**

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The Parliamentary week was dominated by the Autumn Statement and the analysis that always follows including a debate around the role of the independent Office of Budget Responsibility. The outcome of the US elections were never far from people's minds, particularly the impact on the UK-US relationship. I spent part of the week in Istanbul with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Finally, tribute was paid to Jo Cox following the conclusion of the trial of her murderer.

Monday

The start of the week felt very much like Parliament was waiting for the main event; the Autumn Statement on Wednesday. Questions to Department for Work and Pensions Ministers on Monday afternoon was peppered with suggestions and enquiries for what the Chancellor might say. There was an interesting exchange on [the definition of self-employment](#) and how many people are finding themselves classed as self-employed to save their 'employer' money. The Government has a review under way, The Matthew Taylor Review, about which there is more information [here](#).

Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West, Lab): Ordering presents online is now a normal part of Christmas for many people, but there have been disturbing reports recently of delivery drivers who are classed as self-employed working dangerously long hours for less than the national living wage. Those workers make a vital contribution to the functioning of the digital economy. Will the Minister commit to meeting Labour's five tests for social security for the self-employed?



Damien Hinds (Minister for Employment): I join the hon. Lady in recognising the necessity of looking at these issues. National living wage enforcement is very important. That is why we have raised the budget for it, as well raising the maximum penalty. As for the exact

definition of self-employment, she will know that there are variations in definition for tax purposes and employment law purposes. The Matthew Taylor review is looking at precisely these issues to make sure that the appropriate protections are in place while enabling more and more people to avail themselves of the opportunities in the new economy.

Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse

Monday also saw an issue debated in previous weeks revisited again, the much troubled **Independent Inquiry into Child Sex Abuse**. An urgent question was tabled following reports of further problems, including the withdrawal of one of the groups representing victims.



Lisa Nandy MP, who requested the Urgent Question posed a long list of questions and summed up the scale of the problem. The Minister replying underlined the independence of the inquiry and the need for it to be completely free of Government influence.

I thank the Minister for that statement, but where is the Home Secretary, and why has nobody from the Government sought proactively to come to this House to provide reassurance about the serious events that have unfolded over the past week as this inquiry has unravelled in front of our eyes?

Has the Home Secretary met survivors groups since last Thursday?

What steps has she taken to establish that the chair and the panel have the expertise and the working relationships for this to succeed? Has anybody from the Home Office investigated why so many lawyers have cited concerns about competency and leadership? Does she expect further resignations? Has a new chief legal counsel been appointed? Is the former chief legal counsel, Ben Emmerson QC, still being paid, and if so, why? What action has the Home Office taken to establish that there was a disclosure of sexual assault, and is she satisfied that that disclosure was dealt with properly by the inquiry? Can she give me a personal assurance that the intelligence services are standing by the commitment to hand over all files and that that is not being obstructed? We heard about Professor Jay's internal review for the first time in August—where is it?

This is the second time in recent weeks that I have had to ask Ministers to come to the House and account for these failings. They have lost seven senior lawyers, three chairs and several survivors groups, and it is now impossible to see that this inquiry is still operating effectively. This may be the last chance that the Prime Minister and her Home Secretary have to rescue from collapse the inquiry that the Prime Minister set up. Will the Home Secretary now stop hiding behind the smokescreen of independence, recognise that she has responsibility for this inquiry's success, and get a grip on it?

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Monday for me was spent in a bunker, four floors below ground at a NATO Parliamentary Assembly Conference in Istanbul. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly meets regularly, rotating around NATO members. Given the recent events in Turkey and the US, it was an informative, challenging but rather long few days. One of my aims was to present and steer through to agreement a report on NATO and the future of naval power, which is available via this [link](#).



Naval capability across NATO is in decline, which is of particular concern given the importance of our seas for trade and security. For instance, 95% of global tradeable goods are transported by sea and the Mediterranean has become a focal point for the migration crisis. The report compliments [a report published by the Defence Select Committee](#) on Monday of this week about the UK's naval capability. As a Committee, we were critical of the Government's approach to the navy; we have far too few ships for our needs and our plans to replace them are flawed. The challenge is to persuade NATO members that naval power matters and needs long term support.

Tuesday

Back in the Chamber, [Foreign Office questions](#) on Tuesday saw a long discussion over the merits of appointing a new Ambassador to Washington on the advice of President-Elect Trump. While the exchanges had an amusing overtone, the more serious issue of how the UK will engage with the Trump administration, which looks unlikely to operate in traditional, predictable ways.



Sir Simon Burns (Chelmsford, Con): *Although there is no vacancy, does not the Foreign Secretary think it is extremely generous of Donald Trump to suggest who should be our ambassador in the United States? In that spirit of fraternity, might he suggest that the best person to fill the vacancy for the ambassador to the United Kingdom next year would be Hillary Rodham Clinton, although I suspect the last thing she would want to do is to be associated with the incoming Administration?*

Mr. Speaker: *I think the right hon. Gentleman might want to be the ambassador to the United States.*

Boris Johnson (Foreign Secretary): *You anticipate what I was about to say, Mr Speaker. Of course, my right hon. Friend would be a very good candidate. On the other hand, as the House knows full well, we have a first-rate ambassador in Washington doing a very good job of relating with the present Administration and the Administration to be. There is no vacancy for that position.*

Wednesday

The main event of the week will not have escaped anyone's notice. The Autumn Statement is one of Parliament's set piece events alongside the Queen's Speech and the Budget. It originates in a 1975 Act of Parliament which requires the Government to publish two economic updates a year. The first was given in 1976. Traditionally Autumn Statements are a smaller version of the Budget. The Chancellor of the Exchequer makes a [statement](#) to the House on the economic outlook and then announces a series of measures partly in response to the report by the [Office for Budget Responsibility](#) (OBR), which is independent of government. There then follows a response from the Shadow Chancellor and a debate on the merits or otherwise on what has been announced. The announcements are then brought forward in legislation.

The headlines of the statement have been widely reported and include; investment in infrastructure, measures to increase availability of affordable housing, investment in research and development and a freeze on fuel duty. The economic outlook is uncertain, the forecasts provided by the OBR were criticised in some quarters for being too pessimistic which led to an interesting exchange between the Chancellor and one of his own backbenchers;

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John Redwood MP (Wokingham, Con): Does the Chancellor agree that the OBR is probably still quite wrong about 2017? Its forecast is too low, its borrowing forecast is far too high, and we will get good access to the single market once we are out of the EU.

Philip Hammond (Chancellor of the Exchequer): I hope that my right hon. Friend is right on that last point, which will of course be our objective. I am grateful to him for his implicit confidence in my stewardship. I am well aware of his views, which are, as always, long standing and utterly consistent. However, it is not my job to opine on the report that the OBR has made by statute to Parliament; it is my job to respond to it. That is what I have done today. Obviously, economic forecasting is not a precise science, and I absolutely recognise, as would the OBR, that individual Members will have their own views on the likely future trajectory of our economy. It is probably worth mentioning that the OBR specifically says in its report that there is an unusually high degree of uncertainty in its forecasts because of the unusual circumstances.

Underlying the exchange is the difficulty the OBR has faced in making predictions during uncertain times;

Helen Goodman MP (Bishop Auckland, Lab): The most alarming number in the OBR forecast is the 13% drop in forecast business investment, and the Chancellor said it himself: the big problem is uncertainty.

The OBR says rather plaintively:



"we asked the Government for 'a formal statement of policy as regard its desired trade regime...as a basis for our projections'" but they left us "little the wiser."

The Chancellor had a real opportunity today to tackle this uncertainty, which is the basic problem, by setting out the objectives for the Brexit negotiations to keep us with access to the single market and in the customs union. Why did he not do so?

Philip Hammond: I did not, because to do so would be to give away our negotiating cards in what will be a very complex negotiation. With respect to the hon. Lady, even if I or the Prime Minister set out precisely our objectives, our tactics and our strategy for the negotiations, that will not remove the uncertainty because the outcome will depend on the negotiation itself. As the Prime Minister has said, a negotiation is a process of give and take between the parties to get to a mutually acceptable outcome, and that is what will be embarked upon.

Towards the end of this statement, the Chancellor made an announcement which for one tiny moment led everyone to think he might be about to hand in his resignation, which turned out to be an announcement about future Autumn Statements.

I have one further announcement to make. This is my first autumn statement as Chancellor. After careful consideration and detailed discussion with the Prime Minister, I have decided that it will also be my last. I am abolishing the autumn statement. No other major economy makes hundreds of tax changes twice a year, and neither should we, so the spring Budget in a few months will be the final spring Budget. Starting in autumn 2017, Britain will have an autumn Budget announcing tax changes well in advance of the start of the tax year. From 2018, there will be a spring statement responding to the forecast.

For Wales, much of what was contained in the Statement specifically related in England; announcements on education and the NHS for instance will not apply. When it comes to debating those measures, it is unlikely that Welsh MPs will be able to vote due to a process known as English Votes for English Laws (EVEL). A detailed explanation of this will follow in a future edition). The Statement did confirm the settlement for Wales but no other details;

The major increase in infrastructure spending I have announced today will represent a significant increase in funding through the Barnett formula, of more than £250 million to the Northern Ireland Executive, £400 million to the Welsh Government and £800 million to the Scottish Government.

Ahead of the Statement, I received some depressing data about the level of child poverty in the UK broken down by constituency. It sheds light on what has been apparent for some time; that rising inflation, couple with wage stagnation, is causing real financial pain. The measure used to define children in poverty is being from a household where income is less than 60% of the national average. For the Bridgend constituency, this means 4670 children are defined as living in poverty. You can read more about the study [here](#).

Nazanin

Several constituents have contacted me about the plight of British-Iranian, Nazanin Ratcliffe, who was arrested early this year while travelling to visit family in Iran. She has since been sentenced to 5 years in prison on what are described as secret charges. Her case was raised in Prime Minister's Questions this week and I leant my support to the campaign being led by Amnesty;



Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn): My constituent Nazanin Ratcliffe, a British national, is in prison in Iran. She has been separated from her husband and her two-year-old daughter for eight months. She has been on hunger strike and is now suicidal. The Prime Minister needs to reunite this mother, this daughter and this wife with her family. Will it take Nazanin's death for the Government to start taking her seriously?

The Prime Minister: Obviously, this is a very difficult time for the whole family. I am sure that we are all concerned about the reports of the impact that detention in Iran is having on Nazanin Ratcliffe's health. This is an issue that has repeatedly been raised with the Iranian Government by the UK Government—by both the previous Foreign Secretary and the current Foreign Secretary. I personally raised it with President Rouhani on 20 September in New York, and I stressed the importance of finding a resolution as soon as possible. I have since written to President Rouhani requesting confirmation of the charges, the sentence and the appeals process, and I have asked for assurances that Mrs Zaghami-Ratcliffe will be allowed full legal representation and regular contact with her family. We will continue to do everything that we can for the family and that includes the British Government remaining ready to help to bring back Mrs. Zaghami-Ratcliffe's daughter to Britain if that is the request.

Thursday

Before Business Questions on Thursday, the Leader of the House, David Lidington MP, made a [statement](#) following the conviction of the murderer of Jo Cox;

In view of yesterday's conclusion of the trial of the man who murdered our late colleague Jo Cox, I hope that you will allow me, Mr Speaker, to say that I believe that the entire House would wish, first, to express our thanks to the police and the Crown Prosecution Service for the work that they did in bringing this man to trial and securing his conviction, and, secondly, to send our solidarity and our love to Jo's family, who have shown unbelievable grace, dignity and courage in the months just past. Thirdly, I hope that we can all agree that perhaps the best tribute that we here, whatever our party politics, can pay to Jo and her memory is to recommit ourselves, whether as constituency Members or as holders of various offices, to do all that lies within our power to ensure that this country remains a place where people of different ethnic origins and faiths can live together in mutual respect, goodwill and harmony, and celebrate together our common citizenship and our shared institutions, values and traditions. We will also continue unflinchingly to stand for the truth that it is through parliamentary democracy that we can seek to secure change and find a better future for those who sent us here, rather than through violence or extremism.