



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT– 27 Feb—2 March 2017

Welcome to my *This Week in Parliament*, my weekly newsletter on events and developments in Parliament. **Your feedback is always welcome!**

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This week was dominated by the news that broke on Wednesday morning concerning the Ford plant in Bridgend and the fear of job losses; I took as many opportunities as possible to raise this with Ministers and to urge the Government to convene a roundtable of the automotive industry, Ministers, trade unions and MPs with constituencies with an interest. Elsewhere, the House considered PIP, protection for NHS workers and paid tribute to Sir Gerald Kaufman MP who recently passed away. The EU (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill continued its journey through the House of Lords where the Government suffered its first defeat when the Lords passed an amendment on the status of EU nationals in the UK. More amendments are expected in the coming week before the Bill returns to the House of Commons. Next week, the focus will be on the Budget.

Monday

The week started relatively quietly with a debate on attacks on NHS staff and whether a new offence should be created (much in the same way that there is a specific offence of assaulting a police officer). The debate was the result of a petition which attracted over 100,000 signatures. Any petition receiving over 10,000 signatures receives a Government response, which usually sets the tone for any debate that might follow. You can read the Government’s response to this petition here. Oliver Dowden MP opened the debate with an overview of the problem;



Oliver Dowden MP (Hertsmere, Con): *The raw facts speak for themselves: there were more than 70,000 recorded assaults on NHS staff in England in 2016—an increase from nearly 68,000 in 2015 and 60,000 in 2004. In the NHS trust serving my constituency, there were more than 1,000 recorded assaults last year. A recent RCN members’ survey found that 56% of nurses had experienced physical or verbal abuse from patients, and a further 63% had experienced abuse from relatives of patients or members of the public.*

Those statistics tell only one side of the story. Since I agreed to lead this debate on behalf of the Petitions Committee, I have been inundated with examples of the scale of the problem. I will cite just a few, which were compiled by 38 Degrees. An NHS staff nurse said that in her “20 year nursing career I have been spat at, punched, kicked, verbally abused...and even had a cardiac monitor thrown at my head!”

Another said that she works

“in an A&E department as a staff nurse. On a daily basis I see some sort of aggression whether this is physical or verbal towards staff. I can’t recall a day that has gone by where we’ve not had to have security or the Police in the department.”

While the Minister replying was sympathetic, he would not give an undertaking to create a specific offence;

Sam Gymiah MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice): *Prevention and effective law enforcement, through collaboration between the NHS, the police and the CPS, are the best solutions to the problem of attacks on NHS staff. This debate is about a specific criminal offence. As has been mentioned, there are already comprehensive provisions in criminal law for dealing with a wide range of attacks and assaults. The relevant offences include common assault; assault occasioning actual bodily harm, where the injuries are more than superficial; wounding or inflicting grievous bodily harm; and wounding or causing GBH with intent. All those offences cover every victim, whatever their occupation. Depending on the particular offence and the seriousness of the criminal conduct, the penalties available to the courts range from a maximum of six months’ imprisonment, a fine or both for common assault, through a maximum of five years for ABH or GBH, to a maximum of life imprisonment for wounding or causing GBH with intent.*

Given the current offences framework and sentencing guidance, which make provision for an increase in sentence to be considered where an assault victim is a public sector worker, I am not persuaded that there is a need to create a specific offence for this group of workers.

Tuesday

Personal Independence Payments

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions was required to come to the House of Commons as a result of an [Urgent Question](#) regarding imminent cuts to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) which have replaced Disability Living Allowance. The cuts or rather change in criteria would affect people suffering from mental health problems. The policy was announced in a [Written Ministerial Statement](#) last week.



Stephen Timms MP underscored the concern about this change and who it is likely to affect;

In a written statement published without warning on Thursday, Ministers announced the cuts to which the Secretary of State has just referred, which will take effect in two weeks’ time. Over the weekend, another Member in government said that this was to stop the payment of benefits to people

“taking pills at home, who suffer from anxiety”.

Why is so little notice being given, with no opportunity at all for parliamentary scrutiny of these substantial cuts? Will the Secretary of State confirm, as stated in the impact assessment published with the regulations, that people suffering from schizophrenia, learning disability, autism and dementia will be among those worst affected by the cuts? The cut is being achieved by taking the benefit away from people whose mobility impairments are the result of “psychological distress”. According to the wording of the regulations, they will no longer be entitled to benefit. Does that not directly contradict the Prime Minister’s commitment to treat mental health on a par with physical health?

Many constituents have come to me having experienced problems with their assessments for PIP and **!**

was able to make a contribution to this debate;

Mind says that the proposed changes will affect about 160,000 people and could prevent people from accessing the financial support they need to get to health or job appointments and from getting out to pay for fuel and heating, take their children to school or see friends and families—things essential for their daily lives and recovery. If the Secretary of State is so confident that he is right and Mind is wrong, will he meet representatives from Mind to discuss who is right and who is wrong, and then come back to the Chamber and give the same assurance?

In response, the Secretary of State, Damian Green gave an undertaking to discuss the issue further with Mind.

**Rare Diseases**

The theme of the difficulties faced by people diagnosed with life changing conditions continued when I attended a reception to mark Rare Disease Day. 3.5 million people in the UK will be affected by a rare disease at some point in their lives and for many it remains a challenge to access treatment and support. The event highlighted that until recently there was no register of people diagnosed with rare diseases, so policy makers did not know the scale of the problem. It was also interesting to discover that Wales has adopted a strategy to help those with rare diseases, while England has yet to do so.

I am pictured here with Alison Railton from MNDA, who provides administrative support to the All Party Parliamentary Group on MND, which I chair. As a Group we have just launched an inquiry into the experience of people with Motor Neurone Disease with Personal Independence Payments. The bulk of the evidence will come from a questionnaire completed by people with the condition. If you or someone you know would like to contribute, the questionnaire is available here and is open until 9 April.

Wednesday

St. David's Day was dominated by one story; a leaked report suggesting that more than 1000 jobs may be lost at Ford in Bridgend over the next 5 years. If such losses did materialise, it would be not only be devastating for those directly affected but also the wider community. Ultimately the decision will rest with Ford, but I am determined to do as much as I can to ensure jobs are not lost. My first port of call on Wednesday morning was therefore the office of Mr. Speaker to request being called in Prime Minister's Questions so

that I could ask the Prime Minister for help. Questions to the Prime Minister operate in the same way as other questions to government departments, an MP tables a question via an electronic system and hopes their name is pulled out of the hat. However, an appeal to Mr. Speaker given an unusual set of circumstances is an option. I was lucky and got called at the very end of the session;

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Along the M4 corridor in south Wales, over 1,000 families woke up this morning deeply worried about potential job losses at Ford in Bridgend. Families in Ogmore and Bridgend are particularly frightened—frightened that Ford is not going to be able to bring new contracts into the factory, with the uncertainty of Brexit ahead. Can I have an assurance from the Prime Minister that she will arrange for her Ministers to meet Ford and Unite the union to see what can be done to support Ford to ensure continuity of engine production in the Bridgend plant?

The Prime Minister: *Can I reassure the hon. Lady that our automotive sector is one of the most productive in the world? We want to see it going from strength to strength. That is why Ministers in this Government have been engaging with various companies within the automotive sector, including Ford and other companies. Ford is an important investor here; it has been established here for over 100 years. We now account for around a third of Ford's global engine production, and Bridgend continues to be an important part of that. We have had, as I said, dialogue with Ford; we will continue to have a regular dialogue with Ford about the ways in which Government can help to make sure that this success continues.*

Rebellion in the Lords

The schedule for the House of Commons is relatively quiet, particularly in terms of Bills being considered. The reason being is the expectation of the EU (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill returning from the House of Lords during the week beginning 13 March. The Bill continued on its journey through the Lords this week with the Committee Stage. As with the Commons, the Lords sat in Committee as the whole house. As predicted, amendments were tabled to the Bill and significantly one of them, which would require the Government to assure the rights of EU citizens living in the UK within 3 months of triggering Article 50, was passed. The Government does not have a majority in the Lords so this was not a great surprise. It is also highly unlikely that the amendment will be approved by the Commons. More detail on the Bill is available [here](#). The Exiting the EU Select Committee has also just published a report on this issue—[here](#).

[Opinion was divided over protecting EU citizens](#) and the situation of British citizens living in the EU;



Viscount Hailsham: *We need to remind ourselves of the central facts, which are these: there are millions of EU citizens—maybe over 3 million—who have come to this country in the legitimate expectation that they will be able to live and work here for as long as they choose. For many of them, that has been a career-changing, maybe even a life-changing, decision, which may be irrevocable.*

Their decision was entirely reasonable and proper, based on their assumptions. It accorded with the law that then exist-

ed. It accords with the law that exists today. For the United Kingdom now to disturb that expectation would involve an act of retrospective legislation and policy that would offend natural justice and, I suspect, the principles of human rights legislation. Indeed, it is probable that if we seek to deny European Union citizens now resident in the UK the right to continue to stay here, we would be challenged in the courts, and that challenge might well succeed.

Lord Tebbit: *That is exactly what the Prime Minister has said: we will look for an equitable solution. That means, in my view, that the rights of those who are currently resident here who, although they are not British subjects, are citizens of the EU, should be kept. But, of course, so should the rights of British citizens*

living within the EU. That is not a difficult matter. Why is everybody here today so excited about an amendment that looks after foreigners and not the British?

Thursday

Thursday presented two opportunities to raise the issue of Ford in Bridgend on the floor of the House, but the day started with tributes being paid to Sir Gerald Kaufman MP, who died over the weekend. Time to do so was set aside in Business Questions. He was the longest serving member of the House, so held the title of **Father of the House**. The title now passes to Kenneth Clark. **Members shared their memories** of Sir Gerald and the influence he had had on them, he will be sorely missed.

Jeff Smith (Manchester Withington, Lab): *Whatever the event, what was quite remarkable was the admiration and extraordinarily high esteem in which Sir Gerald was held by his constituents. I genuinely do not think I have come across another MP who was so widely admired by their constituents. It was largely because he was such a fierce champion of their interests both in Parliament and in Manchester, but also because he was so assiduous in his dealings and communication with them. Residents often told me how they had written to Sir Gerald and received a hand-written reply. Sometimes, the replies would reflect his sharp tongue; a particular favourite of mine was:*

"I agree with your concerns on this issue. Unfortunately there's no point in me writing to the chancellor because he's useless and won't listen to me."

I had **my own story** of Sir Gerald's influence in the first days in Parliament after I was elected;



In May 2005, I was in the Tea Room, and I was rather chuffed to be sitting near Sir Gerald Kaufman, listening to him talk. A Whip came in and said that the queue to take the Oath of Allegiance was short and that any new Member who wished to join it could do so, even though it was ahead of the days allocated. Gerald turned to me and said, "Go! One day, it might help you to be Father of the House." I slightly glazed over at the thought of how old I would have to be, how long I would have to totter on for, to be Father of the House, but I heard this voice say, "Go!", and I did. Yesterday, female MPs were sent a list of where they stood in the ranking of women elected to the House, and I am ashamed to say that I took some pleasure in noting how many women who arrived in the same year as me I was ahead of because of that

advice. I am 264th and the right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller), who is sitting opposite and who went to school in Bridgend, is 265th. I cannot begin to tell the House the pleasure Sir Gerald will always give me thanks to that little piece of advice.

The second part of my contribution returned to Ford;

Sir Gerald also talked about the importance of focusing on the people who send us here, so that is what I shall do. Is the Leader of the House aware that the automotive industry is worth £71.6 billion a year to the economy, and an additional £18.9 billion in added value; that it directly employs 169,000 people and that more than 184,000 are employed in the wider industry? Is he further aware that 12% of the total value of UK exports and goods comes from the 30 manufacturers building 70 models of car and the 2,000 component providers working in the industry—never mind the £4 billion invested in automotive research and development? Given events in Bridgend yesterday, may we have an automotive summit composed of

hon. Members, appropriate Ministers, automotive companies and trade unions involved in this great British industry, the future of which we must work to secure post-Brexit?

David Lidington (Leader of the House): *I completely understand the vital importance of the automotive industry both in the hon. Lady's constituency and in the country as a whole. There will be questions to the Business Secretary on Tuesday 14 March, but I will certainly ensure that he is aware of her concerns before then. I hope she knows that he is committed personally to doing all that is in the power of Government to ensure that the UK automotive industry is competitive and able to deal with the challenges posed by Brexit and with the wider issues of global competition and digital technology, and that the Government are determined to ensure an industrial strategy that delivers jobs and prosperity to every part of this country.*

St. David's Day

Traditionally, time is set aside on or near St. David's Day for a [debate on Welsh affairs](#). It is a general debate where MPs can raise any issue they choose, often it is a chance to talk about specific issues or problems in their constituencies. The tone of the debate is undoubtedly political, but often warm and humorous too. I used the opportunity [to talk about Bridgend and raise the situation at Ford again](#)—below is an extract, the full speech can be found [here](#);

On 8 February, Bridgend College received the Association of Colleges beacon award for the development of transferable skills, in recognition of its amazing initiative: "Be all that you can be". That should almost be the motto of people who live in and around the Bridgend constituency, because Bridgend is a beautiful place. It has beautiful countryside, excellent schools; thriving faith communities; an inventive, creative business community; and wonderful people it is a privilege to live among and represent, and I want to talk about some of them today.



I live on the coast in Porthcawl, protected by our lifeboat station, Coastwatch lookout tower and coastguards, who watch the visitors, who do not know how dangerous the sea can be and who do not know its tides, its moods and its strength. Those visitors include the 31,000 who come for the Porthcawl Elvis festival, which brings in an estimated £6.7 million to our local economy over a weekend. I was never a great Elvis fan, but I must say that I am converting. I urge Members to visit the Porthcawl jazz festival in April and, while there, come along and see the Porthcawl museum, which is thriving thanks to a partnership between the excellent Bridgend Council, the museum, and the arts society. According to "The Source", the museum's regular newsletter written by Ceri, the carnival and Christmas swim committees, the Rotary club of Porthcawl and Porthcawl Town Council have all contributed money to make sure that the museum is a huge success. I know that the Secretary of State knows the museum well.

Drive out of town and come and meet another fantastic local character who, again, the Secretary of State knows well—Gwyneth Poacher at Sandville. This determined, dynamic woman brings love, compassion, care and hope into the lives of people who are very seriously ill, many terminally ill. She and her volunteers, taking no money at all from the state, make life in an impossible world worth living. My communities of Cornelly and Kenfig Hill are not "chocolate box", but if people go to the luncheon clubs in the community centres, go to the churches, and go to KPC Youth & Community, they will see how strong and self-reliant these communities are. Come to Bridgend and see the local market. Meet the very wicked stallholders like Martin Nagell and Tim Wood, and see the quality of their goods.

All those things, one would think, would be central to people's view of Bridgend, instead of which, over the past 24 hours most people have talked about the Ford plant. I do not underestimate the problems with the Bridgend Ford plant. The fear of job losses there is huge. There are issues that need tackling here in Westminster, particularly in relation to the value of the pound. The exchange rate change has cost Ford \$600 million in lost revenue. The issue of tariffs is absolutely essential for Ford. It is vital to make sure that there is tariff-free access into Europe.