Tuesday

The start to the new session of Parliament was frantic, not least because the House sits for 7 days in September, rising next Thursday on 14 September for the conference recess. In many senses, this was not a new start, more of continuing where we left off, with many of the issues that were occupying Parliament in July, back on the agenda including the Grenfell Tower fire and North Korea.

Tuesday started with questions to the Ministry of Justice. This included an interesting (and for the Ministers, awkward) exchange over reimbursement of tribunal fees following a decision by the High Court that such fees were unlawful. One exchange had echoes of the debate around the Repeal Bill and how much power should be given to Ministers through delegated legislation;

**Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP):** The Supreme Court ruled that the secondary legislation that brought in the employment tribunal fees interfered with access to justice and employment rights, and that it discriminated unlawfully. Does the Minister accept that the Supreme Court’s judgment illustrates that fundamental rights such as equality and access to justice should not be changed or undermined by secondary legislation that receives little or no parliamentary scrutiny?
Dominic Raab (Minister of State): The hon. and learned Lady makes her point in a typically powerful way. The Supreme Court also recognised that fees can have a role to play. Of course, they do help to secure justice and access to justice by making the necessary resources available. Equally, we recognise that we got the balance wrong. That is why we have taken immediate action to end the fees. We will be coming up with proposals on the practical arrangements for reimbursement shortly.

Burma

Following on from Justice Questions, an Urgent Question was granted on the rapidly deteriorating situation in Burma and the plight of the Rohingya minority. Concern was expressed on all sides about the actions of the Burmese military and how the UK could contribute to resolving the crisis.

Yasmin Qureshi MP (Bolton South East, Lab): Is the Minister aware that because of what has happened recently, many young children have been beheaded and civilians have been burned alive by the military forces? Is he aware that 120,000 Rohingya have fled for their lives to Bangladesh? Will he actually condemn this campaign of ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya Muslims? Is he aware that Human Rights Watch has satellite imagery showing the destruction of entire Rohingya villages, and that there are reports of people there being rounded up into huts and burned alive? Recent reports also show a massive cover-up by the soldiers who have carried out massacres of Rohingya, by gathering their bodies up and burning them.

The Minister replying underlined the complexity of the situation in Burma and the amount of control the military are exerting over the political system, including Aung San Suu Kyi;

Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): May I congratulate the hon. Member for Bolton South East (Yasmin Qureshi) on the tone and manner of her question, associate myself with the direction of her interrogation of the Minister and gently say how disappointed I was with the Minister’s tone, which sounded pretty close to dumping the blame for this ethnic cleansing on the victim community? Will he say a little more about our expectations of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is leading a Government and military forces who are associated with behaviour that is utterly unacceptable by any standard at all?

Mark Field (Minister for Asia and the Pacific): I am sorry that my hon. Friend chooses to use the opportunity to grandstand in the way that he does—[Interruption.] (This is a reference to Crispin Blunt not be elected to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee, of which he had been chair prior to the General Election). The House has voted on that matter already, as we know. The House has voted on that matter already, as we know. As far as this matter is concerned, we have made it very clear that we feel that Aung San Suu Kyi and her Government need to step up to the plate. We are not in any way forgiving or understanding of the terrible violence and its impact. It is worth pointing out that the entrenched security forces, including the army, police and border guard force, are responsible for the security operations that are currently under way in Rakhine state. We have made that absolutely clear. We will support Burma’s ongoing transition from military dictatorship to a civilian-led democracy. This is very much an ongoing process, led by the democratically elected Aung San Suu Kyi.

North Korea

From one international crisis to another, the Foreign Secretary came to the House to give an update on the crisis surrounding North Korea’s nuclear tests. I was able to ask about diplomatic efforts, while my
colleague Paul Flynn MP raised the concern of many; the approach of President Trump.

_Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab)_: The Foreign Secretary may be aware that I am due to visit South Korea in the near future, with NATO allies. Who does he see as having the major responsibility for dealing with the crisis—is it America, the United Nations, or alliances from around the world? Who will spearhead the diplomatic effort, and will he give us a clear idea of where we sit in that?

_Boris Johnson, Foreign Secretary_: I wish the hon. Lady every success in her trip to South Korea. When she goes there, I am sure she will have a clear feeling of the imminence of the threat posed by North Korea, not only with nuclear weapons but with conventional weapons. The answer to her question is simple: the two most important actors outside the Korean peninsula are of course China and the US. But the UK can play an important role in trying to bridge the gap between them and unite the international community around a common position.

_Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab)_: The most likely start of a nuclear war will come by accident, by technical failure or by human error. The danger of that is greatly increased as world tension multiplies. Is it not true that, while there is no equivalence in this and we should pay credit to China for keeping the lid on paranoid regimes in North Korea for 60 years, the new element has been an American President who has managed to inflame every frozen conflict that he has addressed? Should it not be right that we take a British diplomatic, experienced view of this, with cooler heads, rather than follow the example of the apprentice President?

_Boris Johnson, Foreign Secretary_: The new element is the increasing desire of the North Korean regime illegally to test nuclear weapons and threaten its neighbours and those further afield, and the acquisition of what looks like an intercontinental ballistic missile with what could be a hydrogen bomb capability. That is the new element, which requires international co-ordination to defeat.

Adjointment debate

Securing an adjournment debate can often be a long drawn out and frustrating process—MPs make an application which is then entered into a ballot. I have made several attempts to get a debate on incontinence and my name finally came out of the hat for the end of day adjournment on Tuesday. These slots tend to be limited to 30 minutes, but luck was on my side on Tuesday evening as business finished earlier than anticipated, leaving close to an hour for this debate. For reasons of space, I cannot produce the whole debate, but you can read the full transcript [here](#).

_Madeleine Moon MP_: Incontinence is not an issue that is often discussed in the Chamber. Society sees the condition as a taboo, which is hidden from public view while sufferers cope in private. However, an estimated 14 million people in all age groups will, at some point in their lives, experience a problem with bladder dysfunction. A further 6.5 million will have bowel dysfunction.

It is generally assumed that incontinence is a condition that affects older people, but that is only half the story. The National Childbirth Trust estimates that almost half of all women experience urinary incontinence after childbirth; there are around 700,000 births a year, so as many as 350,000 women could face this problem. NHS figures...
suggest as many as 900,000 children and young people experience some form of problem.

An analysis of calls to the Bladder and Bowel Foundation’s helpline in 2015 suggested that half the people with a continence problem had never spoken to a healthcare professional. Another study found that only one in three families seek help for children and young people with a continence problem. Imagine the long-term impact on a child’s health of having to try to manage such a problem at school, with all the stigma of being the smelly kid and all the fear of having an accident during a lesson.

People should have the confidence to talk about the problem to GPs and to seek an early diagnosis and intervention. People should not have to assume that it is something they have to live with. It is estimated that people manage the problem themselves for an average of five years before seeking help. We also need to highlight the detrimental impact that incontinence can have on an individual, and the fact that existing policy responses exacerbate the situation. This is a quality-of-life issue. It affects sleep and mental wellbeing, and it can cause isolation. For a child, it can have a long-term impact on their self-esteem and on family relationships, and it often makes them vulnerable to bullying.

The Minister was sympathetic in his response; but there remains much work to do;

**Steve Brine (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health):** It is important that I reiterate some of the hon. Lady’s points from the Government Dispatch Box. Incontinence is absolutely an issue with which too many suffer in silence, and we all need to learn to speak more openly and honestly about it. Think of the subjects that the House of Commons has discussed today, on its first day back after recess: it is incredible what the House can achieve and bring to public consciousness. The hon. Lady has certainly added to that today. By talking about incontinence, we draw back the veil and encourage others to come forward for assessment. I hope that somebody is watching or listening to this at home and decides that they are going to take the first step and ring their GP tomorrow morning, without shame or embarrassment.

**Wednesday**

The last day of Parliament saw heated exchanges over the cancellation of electrification of the mainline between Cardiff and Swansea, which carried over into Welsh Questions on Wednesday morning.

**Geraint Davies MP (Swansea East, Lab):** Following a delegation I led in 2014 of four councils, two universities, many AMs and MPs, industry and Admiral, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, pledged to extend electrification to Swansea, saying it would have a huge economic impact on developing employment in an area of neglected infrastructure, so will the Secretary of State stand up to the Prime Minister, as the previous Secretary of State did, and deliver the promises of the previous Prime Minister on electrification, which we so urgently need?

**Alun Cairns (Secretary of State for Wales):** I hope the hon. Gentleman will recognise that the new, most modern trains will be available and in service in Swansea within a few weeks’ time. Swansea will benefit from the latest, most modern trains and from 15 minutes of saved journey time when the project is complete. There would be no time saving—in fact, there would be significant disruption to Swansea—if we continued with the electric-only model he seems to be advocating.

The cap on public sector pay featured heavily in **Prime Minister’s Questions**, driven in part by a protest by nurses outside Parliament and suggestions that the Government may be considering lifting the cap;
The Prime Minister: It might be helpful if I remind the House of where we are on the issue of the pay review bodies and public sector pay. There are two pay review body reports for 2017-18 still to be published and for the Government to respond to—for police and prison officers—and that will happen shortly. Then later in the autumn, as happens every year, we will publish the framework for 2018-19. We will continue to balance the need to protect jobs and public sector workers with the need to ensure that we are also protecting and being fair to those who are paying for it, including public sector workers.

We have seen the right hon. Gentleman, in this House and outside it, consistently standing up and asking for more money to be spent on this, that and the other. He can do that in opposition—[Interruption.] He asks consistently for more money to be spent, and he can do that in opposition because he knows that he does not have to pay for it. The problem with Labour is that it does that in government as well. As a result of the decisions that the Labour party took in government, we now have to pay more in debt interest than on NHS pay. That is the result of Labour.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Prime Minister had no problems finding £1 billion to please the Democratic Unionist party—no problems whatsoever. NHS staff are 14% worse off than they were seven years ago. Is she really happy that NHS staff use food banks? Warm words do not pay food bills; pay rises will help to do that. She must end the public sector pay cap. The reality for working people is lower wages and less job security, with in-work poverty now at record levels. So will the Prime Minister clarify something she evaded during the election campaign? For those struggling to get by, whether employed, self-employed, permanent or temporary, can the Prime Minister categorically state today that they will not see rises in the basic rate of income tax, national insurance contributions or value added tax?

Mr. Speaker

In a fairly rare intervention, Mr. Speaker made an impassioned plea for the formation of Select Committees to be speeded up. Prior to the summer recess, the opposition parties had elected their members and chairs had also been elected. The delay seemed to being caused by the Conservatives which led to concerns on all sides that the Select Committees, who play a vital role in scrutinising government, not being able to start work until October.

Let me say with all the force at my command that it is absolutely imperative, under any Government, that the Government are subject to scrutiny; and rigorous scrutiny is undertaken not least, and often best, by the Select Committees. Delaying at their composition is not clever. It is not my job to do the Whips’ work for them, but all that they will do if they delay is to build up ill will, and that would be profoundly misconceived. My simple message, in a non-partisan spirit on behalf of Back Benchers in all parts of the House, is: for goodness’ sake, stop faffing around and get on with it.

The message clearly hit the mark as the Select Committees will be formally confirmed on Monday and can start work.

Thursday

The main business on Thursday was the 2nd Reading of the EU (Withdrawal) Bill, which as I said in my introductory paragraph is the first stage in what will be a long and complicated process. Before the House turned its attention to that, I was able to highlight Organ Donation Awareness Week in Business Questions;
**Mrs Madeleine Moon:** In 2015, Wales introduced the opt-out system for organ donation. In the following year, there was a 19% increase in kidney donations. Scotland is about to introduce a similar system. Is it not about time that those awaiting organ donations in England were also given a right to live?

**Andrea Leadsom (Leader of the House):** The hon. Lady raises a really important point, and I am very sympathetic to it. Last year, we saw the highest ever rates of organ donation, but we want that number to rise further so that everyone who needs a transplant has the best chance of receiving one. This is organ donation week, and the campaign is focusing on the importance of people talking about this and telling their family about their wishes. We are committed to continuing with campaigns that raise awareness, but we will also be looking closely at how the situation in Scotland and Wales affects donation rates. I also want to highlight the need to encourage black, Asian and minority ethnic donors, and we are looking at more ways of doing that.

**Standing Committees**

A further problem with the House’s committees came to light on Thursday. Standing Committees are formed to consider Bills—they carry out the scrutiny of Bills at the Committee Stage. Membership of these committees is determined according to the strength of the parties in the House. It appears that the Government has made an attempt to ensure it will have a majority in each committee, even though they do not enjoy a majority in the House of Commons. It is likely to be a subject that the House will return to next week;

**Valerie Vaz MP, Shadow Leader of the House:** As if that is not enough, the Government want to fix the Standing Committees. They do not have a majority in Parliament, but they want a majority on Standing Committees. Can the Leader of the House confirm that the Government will not insult the British people, who did not give them a majority, and that they will ensure that the result of the election is reflected in the Standing Committees?

**EU (Withdrawal) Bill**

Onto the main event of the week. This was the first day of the Second Reading of the Bill. The second day of debate will be concluded late on Monday evening. The Second Reading is all about agreeing with the Bill in principle, not amending specific parts of the Bill, something which happens at Committee Stage. The core concern at this stage, which has received substantial media coverage, is the powers the Bill would give Ministers to transfer EU legislation into UK law via statutory instrument, otherwise known as Henry VIII powers. Something which was alluded to in Justice Questions on Monday. This issue dominated the debate and in particular underlined the shades of opinion in the Conservative Party. All opposition parties have put on record their intention to vote against the Bill at this stage, primarily because of the powers it will hand Ministers. There are clearly Conservative MPs who have doubts as some of the contributions demonstrate, but many of them may decide not to risk defeating the Government at this stage, but rather save their threat for later stages.

The Shadow Secretary of State set out Labour's position;

**Keir Starmer (Shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the EU):** The combined effect of the Bill’s provisions would be to reduce MPs to spectators as power pours into the hands of Ministers and the Executive. This is an unprecedented power-grab—“rule by decree” is not a mis-description—and an affront to Parliament and
to accountability. The name of the Bill was changed from the great repeal Bill to the European Union (Withdrawal) Bill. The word “great” should have been preserved, however. The title should have been changed to the great power grab Bill. Labour voted for the article 50 legislation, because we accept the referendum result. As a result, the UK is leaving the EU. That we are leaving is settled. How we leave is not. This Bill invites us to surrender all power and influence over that question to the Government and to Ministers. That would betray everything that we are sent here to do. Unless the Government make very significant concessions before we vote on Monday, Labour has tabled a reasoned amendment and will vote against the Bill.

Kenneth Clarke MP (Rushcliffe, Con): However, minded as I am to contemplate voting for Second Reading, I will need some assurances before we get there, in particular that there will be sufficient movement on some of the unanswerable points being made about parliamentary democracy and a smooth transition to whatever the alternative is, so that the Bill becomes something other than wrecking legislation if it proceeds. I have not decided yet—I am actually going to listen to the debate, which is a rare feature in this House, because if we were to defeat the Second Reading, the Government would be obliged to bring back another Bill to try to achieve the same purpose. If the Government will not move in the next two days of debate, we may have to force them to go back to the drawing board and try again to produce a Bill that is consistent with our parliamentary traditions and that gives this House the control that leaders of the leave campaign kept telling the British public during the referendum campaign they were anxious to see.

Dominic Grieve MP QC (Beaconsfield, Con): I shall support the Government in the vote on Second Reading. The Bill is vital: we cannot leave the European Union sensibly without such a Bill on the statute book. The Government need support, and they will have it from me. Nevertheless, I regret to have to say to my right hon. and hon. Friends that unless the Bill is substantially improved in Committee, I will be in no position to support it in its current form on Third Reading.

In many respects, it is an astonishing monstrosity of a Bill. Its first failing is its entreatment of EU law itself. I do not much care for EU law—I did not much enjoy practising it, although I had outings to the European Court of Justice when I was Attorney General—but it is a different form of law from our own, which we imported, and which, in many ways, has filled vast areas that otherwise we would have developed in our own domestic law. So we need to nurture it, because we cannot get rid of it overnight without leaving enormous gaps. In addition, there are safeguards within EU law that do not exist within our law and need to be retained, because otherwise EU law will act unfairly. Again, they are different from our own.

Sir William Cash MP (Stone, Con): As for the Henry VIII procedures in the Bill, I hear what my right hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry) said about what I said in 2013, but I am talking about the EU-specific legal jurisdiction and the context in which we are discussing the subject, which is the 1972 Act. Yes, we could have reservations about elements of Henry VIII procedures, but the biggest power grab of all time in British constitutional history has been the 1972 Act itself. It incorporated all the EU laws made and accumulated from 1956 right through to 1972, and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke) was running around as a young Whip cajoling people to move down the route of subverting our entire history and constitutional arrangements through these new arrangements. They subverted the constitutional supremacy of this House.