



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 23 - 27 April 2018

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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A frantic week in Parliament has seen the pressure on the Government increasing. The Windrush Scandal continues to role on and the Home Secretary is hearing louder and louder calls for her to resign. This has been especially so as the debacle and lack of transparency over the handling of the affair, especially over the issue of targets. The Home Secretary told Parliament that there were none, then later evidence emerged that they did in fact exist.

Meanwhile Brexit still looms large over everything we do. The Government's Brexit Bill has suffered a series of defeats in the House of Lords and this week the Commons finally got the chance to debate the Customs Union. Meanwhile, behind the scenes the enormous administrative task of carrying out Brexit is taking up the vast majority of Members time. A snapshot of the amount of time taken by Brexit related issues can be found [here](#).

Monday

Defence Questions

The week started with a timely Defence [Questions](#) Session. Members questioning ranged from the Defence Industry to Recruitment. However, the questions repeatedly returned to the Governments programme of cuts affecting the capabilities of our Armed Forces.



***Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** I remain concerned that the Government have not learnt the lessons of the past when it comes to cutting capabilities, leaving serious gaps in our defences only to have to replace them further down the line. Will the Secretary of State confirm today that the modernising defence programme will not cut our Albion class amphibious warships before their out-of-service dates of 2033 and 2034?*

***The Secretary of State for Defence (Gavin Williamson):** There are many right hon. and hon. Opposition Members who care incredibly passionately about our armed forces and will do all they can to support them: I know that the hon. Lady is very much one of them. But when we talk about the risks and threats that are posed to our armed forces, I sometimes think that we should be worried about the Leader of the Opposition a little more than anything else.*

In the modernising defence programme we are looking at all our capabilities and how we ensure that we are able to adapt to the increasing challenges and threats, but I will not prejudge that programme. We will look at the evidence and the information that comes from the public and the wider defence community.

The House then moved on to hear the answer to an [Urgent Question](#) on Voter ID Pilots.

Windrush

The Government's drawn out handling of the Windrush Scandal led to a [Statement](#) from the Home Secretary being read to the House on Monday. The Government admitted to mistakes and promised a raft of measures to rectify the problems Government policy has caused. However, Members were keen to ensure that these were not just empty words and that genuine action would be taken.

[Mr David Lammy \(Tottenham\) \(Lab\)](#): The Home Secretary will appreciate that everybody in the Caribbean is there because Britain and other European countries brought them from Africa to the Caribbean. That is the whole point of the Caribbean region. I and others are in this country because our parents were born under the British empire. When she says that people can apply for citizenship if they want it, does she understand that that citizenship was theirs all along? We, as West Indian and Caribbean, have given so much, over so many hundreds of years.

I welcome, of course, what the Home Secretary has said today, but I remind her that many others were also born under the empire. They are from countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nigeria, Ghana and Uganda. Many of these people have temporary leave to remain or indefinite leave to remain. It is unfair; they were born under empire; many have been here for generations. So in her review and in looking closely at policy, will she look particularly at all those Commonwealth people? If the Commonwealth is to mean anything, it is to mean common wealth.

[Amber Rudd](#): I thank the right hon. Gentleman, honestly, for the work that he has done on this issue. I welcome that he has brought such clarity and passion and so much to this. It is important to me that he accepts that and works with us on a satisfactory response. I do understand the citizenship point, which is why I tried to make a distinction in my statement between the legal status and the way that people understand their neighbours. As Home Secretary, I must engage with the legal status, and the steps that I have taken out address exactly that point. It is in fact that legal status, and the steps to it, that have so put off some people from applying for it. I hope that we will be able to address that. The Windrush generation have brought this to our attention, but the steps that I have set out today will affect all citizens from the Commonwealth within that timeline.

The House then heard a [Motion](#) for a Second Reading on the Rating (Property in Common Operation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Bill and a [Motion](#) on Higher Education.



The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Patient Transport Volunteer Drivers.

Public Accounts Committee

Away from the Chamber, the Public Accounts Committee held an [evidence](#) session on the Financial Settlement of Exiting The EU, taking evidence from the Treasury. The Committee was keen to clarify the apparent discrepancies in the estimated costs of leaving.

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown \(The Cotswolds\) \(Con\)](#): Sir Tom, do you expect that the other costs, such as the UK's contribution to the financing of the European Defence Agency, the European development fund, contingent liabilities, receipts that go directly to the private sector, participation in EU programmes, fines and so on, will exceed the £35 billion to £39 billion already set out as a direct cost to the EU?

[Sir Tom Scholar, Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury](#): I don't know the answer to that now. It depends on what exactly is agreed in each case. It is the decision of the UK Government what objective to set. What we are talking

about here is the settling of obligations between the UK and the EU. If, beyond that, the UK decides to enter into new agreements and new obligations, that is a different question.

Tuesday

The Secretary of State for Justice was at the Dispatch Box to answer Members [Questions](#) to begin the day.

Yemen

The Government then came to the House to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on the humanitarian situation in Yemen.



***Mr Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD):** I am sure I was not the only person who was struck by the Minister saying that we would be a candid friend to the Saudi-led coalition. With one third of the 16,847 air-strikes hitting non-military targets, surely we have now come to the time for a bit more candour and a bit less friendliness. Continuing to sell arms to Saudi Arabia is like giving more booze to an alcoholic; it is something that no proper, true or candid friend should be doing.*

***The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin):** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight the important role that the UK can play in being able to use the strong relationship that we have to raise these difficult decisions and difficult issues more effectively. For example, most recently, in March, during the visit of the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Prime Minister was able to raise exactly these serious UK concerns about Yemen.*

This was followed by a further [Urgent Question](#) on Capita and a [Statement](#) on GKN.

The House then read a [Bill](#) on Unsolicited Calls (Prevention) for the first time and the Third Reading of the Financial Guidance and Claims [Bill](#).

A Motion on the Mental Health Units (Use of Force) [Bill](#) was considered and an [Adjournment Debate](#) on National Bereavement Care Pathway ended the day in the Chamber.

Westminster Hall

Protection Of Welsh Speakers From Deformation

Westminster Hall played host to a debate on the deformation of the Welsh Language. Historically, Welsh has been a language that has been belittled and almost driven to extinction, recent progress has however seen a revival, the use of Welsh in the Welsh Grand Committee in Parliament a mark of its progress. However, the language and its speakers are still sometimes the subject of belittling and prejudice and this debate sort to address that issue.

***Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab):** The hon. Lady is being hugely generous in giving way. Does she agree that one way we could address this issue is by extending the use of the Welsh language in this place? It is currently restricted to the Welsh Grand Committee, but I wrote to the Leader of the House today to ask her to meet me to discuss permitting the use of Welsh in our debates in this Chamber and in the main Chamber. Does the hon. Lady think that that might be one way to raise the profile of the Welsh language and stop the bile of the bigots?*

***Liz Saville Roberts (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC):** Of course. We recently used Welsh for the first time in the Welsh Grand Committee, but allowing its use in the Chamber and here in Westminster Hall would be a clear statement about the status of the language.*

IPSO acknowledges that hate crimes and hate words are connected by exhorting the media to avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, sex, gender identity or sexual orientation, or to any physical or mental illness or disability, but complaints to IPSO are turned down on the ground that the editors' code

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does not apply to groups of people. As I mentioned, the NUJ has long campaigned for the press regulator to accept complaints about how specific groups are represented in the media, rather than confining its remit to comments relating to specific individuals.

The drip feed of mockery undermines the extraordinary success story of one minority language at a time when 97% of the world speaks around 4% of the world's languages—mostly English, Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, Russian, Indonesian, Arabic, Swahili and Hindi—and only 3% speak the roughly 96% remaining languages. Wales's Government have set a target of doubling the number of Welsh speakers to 1 million by 2050. The number of pupils in Welsh medium schools reached an all-time high last year of almost 106,000, and more than 1 million people learn Welsh on the language learning app Duolingo.



Defence Committee

The Committee held two evidence sessions this week. In the morning the Committee heard evidence in regard to the [enquiry](#) into Armed Forces and Veterans Mental Health. Specifically looking at the devolved administrations, the witnesses provided insightful and interesting [evidence](#).

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Dr Kitchiner, can I go back to a statement you made about Combat Stress and in-patient services? My understanding is that the Welsh Government no longer fund those, but if it is felt by a clinician that in-patient care is needed, it is down to the health board to fund it. Are you aware of that, and do you know how many times that has been funded? If not, could you write to us and let us have the figures? My understanding is that it is down to individual health boards to decide whether or not they will fund the six weeks' residential course.

Dr Neil Kitchiner, Director & Consultant Clinical Lead, Veterans NHS Wales: I have no data today. I am sure that Dr Busuttill will later qualify this, but my understanding is that if Welsh veterans want to access the six-week in-patient programme, we can make a referral to Combat Stress and they will be able to access that.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): My experience as a local MP is that they cannot because Combat Stress does not have funding from the Welsh Government. The Welsh Government direct them back to the local health board and the health board decides on an individual basis.

Dr Neil Kitchiner, Director & Consultant Clinical Lead, Veterans NHS Wales: I am aware of the case you refer to but I think that as of 1 April that situation has now changed. Dr Busuttill will certainly clarify that later. My understanding is that as of 1 April that will not be an issue and we can refer to Combat Stress. You are right that the funding has stopped and was diverted from BCU health board into Audley Court. That funding stopped in the past couple of years and has been diverted to peer mentoring and charity support through Change Step.

The afternoon session focused on the Government's recent announcement that the UK would be rejoining the Boxer programme. The Committee heard [evidence](#) from industry officials on the scope and range of the programme and what this would mean for the future of the UK's Armoured vehicles.

Treasury Committee

The Treasury Committee took [evidence](#) from the National Audit Office on the UK's Economic Relationship with the EU. The Committee, like the Public Accounts Committee, attempted to clarify the conflicting reports of the final Financial Settlement.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee East) (SNP): *Sir Amyas, the Treasury public estimate of the final settlement will not be the same as the payments and receipts recorded in the government accounts. The NAO has said the Treasury's withdrawal settlement includes payments directly from the EU to the UK private sector. Is it the case, then, that the cost to the public's finances of withdrawal should be around £7 billion higher, between £42 billion and £46 billion, rather than the £35 billion to £39 billion published, to accommodate those direct payments?*

Sir Amyas Morse, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office: *The Treasury argues with our view on that, but that is our view, yes.*

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

The Prime Minister was [preceded](#) this week by the Secretary of State for Scotland. [Questions](#) were then put to the Prime Minister. The Windrush Scandal engulfing the Government once again dominated proceedings.



Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): *What I am talking about is the Windrush generation of people who came here completely legally. The Prime Minister herself was warned directly about these policies in 2014 by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott), who is now the shadow Home Secretary. And when the Immigration Act 2014 was going through Parliament, the then Communities Secretary, Eric Pickles, wrote to her warning:*

"The costs and risks considerably outweigh the benefits".

Why did the Prime Minister ignore his advice as well as the request from my right hon. Friend?

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): *In relation to the Windrush generation, we have made it absolutely clear that those people who came here from the Commonwealth before 1 January 1973 have a right to be here: they are British, they are part of us. The problem at the time was that they were not documented with that right, and that is what we are now putting right. He talks about action that the Government have taken in relation to those who are here illegally. The Windrush generation are here legally. Action against those who are here illegally has been taken by successive Governments. Checks on someone's right to work here came in in 1997, measures on access to benefits in 1999 and civil penalties for employing illegal migrants in 2008—both under a Labour Government. Why have these actions been taken? Because people up and down this country want to ensure that the Government are taking action on those people who are here illegally. It is not fair to those people who work hard, who have a right to be here and who have contributed to this country if they see people who are here illegally being given the same access to rights and services.*

The House then moved on to consider the First Reading of a [Bill](#) on Health Impacts (Public Sector Duty).

Opposition Day

School Funding

The first of two Opposition Day [Debates](#) focused on the issue of School Funding. The Opposition Motion called on the Government to fulfil the School funding pledges made in its manifesto.

Wes Streeting (Ilford North) (Lab): *The Secretary of State talks about flexibility within local authority budgets. I have to say, as someone who is about to leave the London Borough of Redbridge this May, that he is in cloud cuckoo land. There is no flexibility in children's services departments; there is just consistent need and insufficient funding. Parents do not need the UK Statistics Authority to show that some schools face budget cuts. They have seen it for themselves in cuts to the curriculum, a lack of adequate support for children with special educational needs and demands for money from parents to fund basics and materials. Does he understand that, when he stands at that Dispatch Box and talks about the figures as if everything is rosy, the parents know it is a load of rubbish because they are seeing it for themselves in their and their children's lived experience?*

The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds): *The funding formula is what it is and has its guaranteed allo-*



cations of money from central funding to local authorities in respect of each school, along the lines I have outlined. I recognise, however, that schools have faced significant cost pressures over recent years—the hon. Gentleman alluded to some of those and their effects—in respect of national insurance and pension contributions, for example. There are new costs as well. For example, spending on technology exceeded £500 million across the system in 2016.

I also realise that there can be particular pressures on high needs budgets, as schools and local authorities work as hard as they can to provide an excellent education for every child, including those facing the greatest challenges. As I was saying, funding for high needs has benefited from the same protections we have been able to provide for mainstream schools, but I recognise that schools now do more to support pupils with a complex range of social, emotional and behavioural needs.

We are redoubling our efforts to help schools to get the best value from their resources, through free procurement advice via our pilot buying hubs in the north-west and south-west, which provide face-to-face and phone advice to schools on complex procurement and on how to get the best value for money; through nationally negotiated purchasing deals; and through school resource management advisers—business management experts from within the sector providing hands-on support to the schools that most need our help.

The second [Debate](#) focused on the Governments record on Social Care. I took the chance to make an important point about the inadequacy of aftercare.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon \(Bridgend\) \(Lab\)](#): The hon. Lady's dedication and work in the NHS knows no bounds. One of the things that no one has touched on is the absolutely vital importance of aids and adaptations that allow people to go home and have social care, or even have their family provide care. Often one of the major problems with delayed discharge is the lack of access to those adaptations—the commodes, the hoists, the hospital beds and the walk-in showers that people need in their home. Does she recognise that that is one of things that nobody is talking about that we must get right, and that money must be put in to make it possible?

[Dr Philippa Whitford \(Central Ayrshire\) \(SNP\)](#): I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention. In my years of working particularly as a breast cancer surgeon, where I was involved in the palliative care of my own patients, we often met that as a barrier. We started to have the fast response teams who could get hold of hospital beds and commodes and get the changes done, particularly for somebody who actually might not have very long to live.

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Digital Images and Consent.

Exiting the European Union Committee

This week the Committee took evidence from the [Secretary of State](#) on the [progress](#) of the negotiations. The Secretary of State was unable to offer any further information on the plans for the Irish Border which led many Committee Members to express deep concern.

Thursday

The day began with [Questions](#) to a range of Ministers and Commissioners, beginning with the Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs.

Home Office Removal Targets

The Home Secretary then came to the Dispatch Box to answer an [Urgent Question](#) on the Home Office's removal targets following the debacle which has unfolded around the Windrush Scandal.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): I asked the Home Secretary at the last urgent question how many people had been deported. She said she did not know. I asked her how many people had been imprisoned in their own country. She said she did not know. There are impact statements that have been ignored. There are letters from MPs, and she said she was not aware of a pattern. We now understand that people have been removed because of targets, and she said she did not know. I say with all conscience: is she really the right person to lead this office of state?

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Amber Rudd): The right hon. Gentleman asked early on about the issue of removals, and I have addressed it in the action that I have taken and in the report that I gave to the Select Committee yesterday. We have established that there were 8,000 people within the cohort who might have had Windrush characteristics—the indication that he has put in his social media—and we have gone through them and found that of the 7,000 we have looked at by hand, none qualify in terms of removal. He quite rightly continues to ask questions about what might have happened in different situations, but I must respond by saying that until we have looked, we cannot have a definitive answer. It has come as some element of surprise to have this particular shape as a number of cases that came to the Home Office over a period. As we discussed yesterday in the Select Committee, there were indications, but they were not put together as the systemic failure that clearly took place.



The Leader of the House then came to the Chamber to lay out the **Business** of the House. Two Statements were then put to the House, the **first** in regard to the Artificial Intelligence Sector Deal and the **second** on Stamp Duty Land Tax.

Backbench Business

Customs and Borders

Backbench Business this week finally allowed Members to **debate** the issue of whether Britain should remain in the Customs Union with the EU after leaving. The debate was as ever lively, but disappointingly the Government refused to engage with the issue in any meaningful way. Member's frustration with this lack of engagement and competing and often contradictory claims was evident.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): I see that a Treasury Minister is responding to this debate, not a Trade Minister. This is a new phenomenon: when the Government are in trouble, they no longer uncork the Gauke; they un-shell the Mel.

I do not know about the emperor's new clothes, but I feel I am living in an Alice in Wonderland world. I am learning more and more about Brexit every day. I have learned that we can be out of the EU but in the single market; that we can be out of the EU but in the customs union; that we can be in the EU and have a blue passport made by a British company; that we can be out of the EU and have a blue passport made by a French company; that the Windrush scandal is the Europeans' fault because they are in favour of people presenting papers, and that Brexiteers are very pro-immigration; that there will no longer be a bonfire of EU regulations—but it's all right because we are going to adopt them all; that we are not trading enough with the EU so we are going to make it more difficult to trade with the EU; and that the Good Friday agreement is a waste of time and we are to have a hard border with Northern Ireland because of Brexit; and I have heard that anything I do to contradict anyone who supports Brexit is undermining the will of the people, even though during the referendum, as far as I am aware, there was a clear question—"Do you want to leave the EU?"—but no clear proposition about what that meant, which has left it to Parliament to decide what leaving means, or at least to guide and engage with the Government.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): In Mid Norfolk, where my constituents voted to leave, the majority opinion on the doorstep was: "Mr Freeman, I wanted to be in the single market, not in a political union. It was Mrs Thatcher who took us into the single market. I want to be in the single market, not in the political union." Does my right hon. Friend agree with my constituents?

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): *That is absolutely right. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Sir Oliver Letwin), in his excellent memoirs, says he parted company with the Brexiteers, having been a Eurosceptic, because he supported a free trade arrangement with the EU but did not want to leave the EU in order to cause damage to our economy—I have not put that very well, but the key point is that, if we are to leave the EU, which we are, and we are a free and sovereign nation, we can then make decisions in the interests of our economy; and if it is in the interests of our economy to be a member of a customs union, it should be possible for Parliament to debate that and make that decision without being accused of betraying the will of the British people. The people who are passionate about Brexit have tipped over into an ideological fervour where anything that involves Europe in any shape or form is wrong.*

I have come here to ask un-shelled Mel some questions to educate myself, because I want to make the decision that is best for my country. I am one of the Prime Minister's trade envoys to Vietnam, so I know a tiny bit about trade. If it is best to leave the customs union and make up for the economic impact of doing so by means of free trade deals, can my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury tell me when we are planning to sign these new trade deals, who we are planning to sign them with, what their value to our economy will be and what the related issues will be? For example, I have read in the newspapers that one aspect of trade deals with countries such as India and Australia—they are both countries that I love—will be more relaxed immigration and visa rules. I do not have a particular problem with that, but is my right hon. Friend aware of that issue, and how does he think it will go down with the public?

When it comes to regulatory standards, I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr Clarke), although I do not have a problem with food standards in America or Australia; we do not see a lot of Australians or Americans dropping down with food poisoning. Given that food standards in those countries are different from ours, are the Government content to sign up to them? Let us face it; one of the reasons we have tariffs is that there is an element of protectionism in every economy. What will be the reaction of sectors of our economy, such as agriculture, when we sign these trade deals?

I would like to know the Government's view on the cost of leaving the customs union, and the impact of doing so on sectors that are important to our economy, such as cars, agriculture, pharmaceuticals and chemicals. The hon. Member for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves)—the excellent Chair of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee—has done a lot of this work for the Government. Perhaps the Minister could help me, as a bear of little brain, with something else. As far as I am aware, staying in the customs union will allow us to export goods to the European Union without tariffs, but it should leave us free to negotiate free trade deals outside of those goods. It should, indeed—this is particularly important given that services now account for 80% of our economy—allow global Britain to negotiate service agreements with the US, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe pointed out.



The Minister could perhaps help to explain the paradox of how Germany, which is a member of the customs union, has managed to increase its exports to China so significantly while it has been anchored and shackled to this protectionist racket. Why is Germany exporting five times as much to China as Britain is doing? Is it simply that Germany makes a hell of a lot of effort to export goods? If we made a hell of a lot of effort while we were still in the customs union, perhaps we could continue to increase our exports to China.

The non-binding question was put to the House and agreed to.

Friday

Assaults on Emergency Workers (Offences) Bill

Another sitting Friday began with the Third Reading of the Assaults on Emergency Workers [Bill](#). The Bill is seeking to make the punishment for an assault on an emergency worker stronger and has broad support from across the House. The debate largely came down to the degree of punishment an assault should warrant.

[The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice \(Rory Stewart\)](#): I am interested in this fascinating speech. Perhaps to prefigure some of the arguments that will be made from the Dispatch Box, let me say that one issue about increasing the sentence to 24 months is that we would, in effect, be saying that somebody who assaults an emergency worker or police officer receives not twice but four times the maximum sentence that would be received were the attack to be on an “ordinary” victim. Is there not a question of proportionality in terms of the relationship between the equality of citizens in general and their right to be protected as victims, and the special status of a uniformed officer, if it is suggested that an increment of four is better than that of two?

[Philip Davies \(Shipley\) \(Con\)](#): The Minister makes a reasonable point, but he is working on the basis that the existing general sentencing for assault is right and should be the benchmark by which we judge everything else. My argument is that most people would consider that maximum sentence to be derisory, so we would at least be making this one appropriate. If the Minister wants to follow through on his point, he could then increase the maximum sentence for assaults on everybody else. He would be happy, because the approach would be proportionate, and I would be happy because we would have some tougher sentences on the statute book—everyone would be a winner. I hope that he is moving in the right direction. If we passed my new clauses and amendment today and then changed the other sentences, I would be doing cartwheels.

The Bill passed its Third Reading.

Employment and Workers’ Rights Bill

The House then moved on to the Second Reading of the Employment and Workers’ Rights [Bill](#). Unfortunately, the debate had to be postponed due to the lack of time available after the previous debate.

[Jo Stevens \(Cardiff Central\) \(Lab\)](#): One of the great disappointments of the Taylor review—there were many—was that it could have referred to the use of the ministerial power in section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999, meaning that we would not need the excellent Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East (Stephanie Peacock). Why will the Government not support the implementation of that section?

[Victoria Prentis \(Banbury\) \(Con\)](#): Of course I do not speak for the Government, but they are keen to gather further information before they take the necessary steps to implement the “Good Work” plan, about which they feel so strongly.

The day in the Chamber ended with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on Dagenham Diesel Engine Production.

