



THIS WEEK IN PARLIAMENT 14 - 18 May 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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As seems to be routine now, Brexit rumbled on in the background of everything we in Parliament do. The chance to debate the Customs Union once again was, however, welcome. It is important that, whatever your view, we have a full and frank debate on the future direction of the Country.

Foreign Affairs dominated my week, hearing evidence of the contribution made by our brave service personnel in confronting ISIS in the middle East with the Defence Committee. I also attended a meeting with the Russian Ambassador who made some frankly frightful claims about the Salisbury attacks. The next day I met representatives from Lithuania and heard of their constant unease with regard to Russia. It is these kinds of experiences which demonstrate that it is more important than ever that the UK sticks close by its allies and presents a united front to anyone who would do us harm.

Monday

Questions to the Secretary of State for Education

The week started with a lively [questions](#) session. The Minister facing questions on a range of issues from increasing access to Higher Education for mature students to social mobility opportunities from education. However, the session opened with inquiries about Apprenticeships.



***Mr Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi (Slough) (Lab):** Employers and providers of apprenticeships, including in my constituency, are concerned that the approvals process for apprenticeship standards is far too slow and bureaucratic. That follows the news that the Institute for Apprenticeships cleared only four standards in April and 10 in March—that is actually down from 21 in February. What extra resources will the Secretary of State give the IFA to address those genuine concerns?*

***The Secretary of State for Education (Damian Hinds):** The hon. Gentleman's constituency has leading apprenticeship employers, including Centrica, Mars and Telefónica-O2, and they play a leading role in showing what it is possible to do with apprenticeships. The IFA has brought forward a programme called "Faster and Better" to make sure that stand-*

ards are approved more quickly, and we have seen the number of apprenticeship starts on standards rising sharply. We continue to monitor that.

Schools That Work for Everyone

After some emotional [tributes](#) to Baroness Jowell, the focus on Education continued with an [Urgent Question](#) seeking the Government's response to a recent consultation on Schools working for everyone.

[Lucy Powell \(Manchester Central\) \(Lab/Co-op\)](#): *It is regrettable that we are having to have this debate yet again. The grammar school the Secretary of State attended, St Ambrose in Trafford, has just 25 children on free school meals. Across the whole of Trafford, less than 2.5% of children are on free school meals. That compares with 25% in Manchester, where the attainment gap is narrower than it is in Trafford. In fact, the attainment gap for those on free school meals in Trafford is twice that in Manchester. The same pattern is true for any selective area. This is not just about the individual, but the systemic impact of these schools. What percentage of free school meals will a school need to have to access funding? What attainment gap adjustment will need to be made to the whole area for schools to receive funding?*



[The Secretary of State for Education \(Damian Hinds\)](#): *I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her questions. I totally acknowledge—I think I have already acknowledged it—the point that not enough children who are eligible for free school meals are able to attend these schools. We are trying to get that number up, which is why to bid into this capital fund schools need to come forward with a proposal for how they are going to make their admissions broader and more accessible. At a minimum, that must include priority for pupil premium recipients, ensuring outreach to specific primary schools and looking again at admissions criteria to make sure they are as broad as possible.*

The House then proceeded to the Second Reading of the Haulage Permits and Trailer Registration [Bill](#). The day in the Chamber ending with an [Adjournment Debate](#) on the Environment Agency: Enforcement Action.

Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts [Committee](#) held an [evidence](#) session looking into the Ministry of Defence contract with Annington Homes. This issue dates back to the 1990s when MoD Houses for Service Personnel were sold to a private company, Annington Homes, and rented back. With the contract due to end in 2021, the MoD may struggle to secure the Housing for personnel in the future.

[Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown \(The Cotswolds\) \(Con\)](#): *You have two important things coming up. You have the rental renegotiation coming up in 2021, but before that you will presumably talk to the MoD about how both of you might potentially be able to benefit from this deal? If you and I were negotiating, we would talk on a site-by-site basis about which houses could be given up, which could be redeveloped and which could be sold. Can you give us a flavour of the discussions you are having with the MoD on those matters?*

[James Hopkins, Chief Executive, Annington Property Limited](#): *To be clear, the site review in 2021 is merely a site review. The original release sets out a review of 511 sites on a site-by-site basis. The 58% discount that the Ministry of Defence currently enjoys for the first 25 years of the deal is renegotiated on a site-by-site basis. That is all that it is. So far as the letter of the lease is concerned, there is nothing else to be negotiated at that particular point in time.*

However, we have a long history of approaches to the MoD about better ways in which we could operate and better ways we could work together on a range of issues, such as voids, which you mentioned. We would hope that other issues were brought into that conversation at the same time.

Tuesday

Questions to the Secretary Of State For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

The [Questions](#) to the Secretary of State covered a broad range of issues from Cameroon to our relations with Russia. Perhaps the most pertinent questions this week were, however, those asking about the Iran Nuclear Deal.

Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker; that is very kind. The Iranian Government responded to President Trump's announcement last week by showering Israel with rockets using their own forces inside Syria. What does my right hon. Friend think those forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard are actually doing inside Syria? If the Iran nuclear deal was not the thing to encourage Iran to become a more responsible member of the international community, what does he think will be?

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Boris Johnson): My right hon. Friend is completely right to raise the disgraceful behaviour of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and the missiles that are fired from Syria at Israel and elsewhere. The JCPOA was not designed to constrain that activity; it was specifically designed to stop Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon and it has succeeded in that effort so far. That is why we propose to keep the core of that deal alive, but to work with our friends and partners to constrain the malign activity that my right hon. Friend describes.

Gaza Border Violence

Following a Speakers Statement on General Data Protection Regulation, the Government was back at the Dispatch Box to answer and [Urgent Question](#) on Gaza Border Violence.

Hilary Benn (Leeds Central) (Lab): All countries, Israel included, of course, have the right to defend themselves, but there is no justification—none whatsoever—for the IDF shooting at and killing unarmed protestors inside Gaza. Although I agree with the Minister that the fact that there is currently no peace process at all is the greatest tragedy of all, and that we must continue to strive for one with the courageous political leadership that that will involve, will he not agree in return that the very least we can do in these circumstances is to tell the truth about what is going on? Had it happened anywhere else, I think the condemnation would have been unequivocal.

The Minister for the Middle East (Alistair Burt): It is of course crucial that the truth is both uncovered and spoken about. Any breach of international humanitarian law and any use of live fire in circumstances that would breach it would be wrong. I noticed the right hon. Gentleman's statement yesterday. It is the United Kingdom's job to support an examination of what happened, partly to expose it but partly to remind people of the importance of bringing these circumstances to an end.



Data Protection Bill

The Data Protection [Bill](#) was back in the House as amendments from the House of Lords were considered. The purpose of the amendments were to provide an extra layer of protection to people where the press was involved. The topic was fiercely debated and in the end narrowly defeated by the Government.

Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Last week, colleagues asked, "What is so special about the second part of the Leveson public inquiry?" Leveson part 2 is that rare thing: an inquiry into a national scandal that the newspapers are not calling for. If any other industry were subject to serious allegations of illegality, corruption and corporate governance failure, our national newspapers would be in the vanguard of calls for a public inquiry. That is not happening here. Here, the tabloid press are on the one hand warning about a chilling effect on investigative journalism, and on the other arguing that they should not be subject to any further investigation.

We believe that this new amendment addresses the legitimate concerns of local newspaper editors in specifically excluding local and regional publishers. I accept that it is a concession, and Labour Members respect that. The Sec-

retary of State seemed to become confused earlier when making the case for section 40. Section 40 has gone, and I can clearly state that if the amendment is passed, we will not seek to push it; we recognise that there is no majority in the House for it.

The House then moved on to consider the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) [Bill](#) and a [Motion](#) on Housing and Homes.

The day in Chamber ended with an [Adjournment debate](#) on the contributions to English Football of Arsene Wenger.

Defence Committee

Away from the Chamber, the Defence [Committee](#) took [evidence](#) on the UK's recent military operations in Mosul and Raqqa. The Committee sought to find out the extent and the impact of the UK contribution.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *Did the UK always have the capability and the flexibility to cover the range of missions that we asked to undertake or were there times when we had to pass them on to someone else?*

Air Vice-Marshal Johnny Stringer, Chief of Staff Joint Forces Command, Minister of Defence, and former UK Air Component Commander in the Middle East: *No. I come back to the fact of us being able to field a balanced capability. Did I have the assets, the aircraft and the weapons? Yes, in an unlimited world, you would ask for more, and people always do. In terms of the fight we were in and what we needed to employ against it in very broad handfuls, yes. In terms of ability to carry out the job, I would almost turn it on its head, if I may, and say that we brought capabilities into the fight that some people did not have, whether that was augmenting stuff that may be solely American, because of where it is, or an approach that was almost uniquely British that we could play in which was a combination of aircraft and, as I was saying, with the understanding and some of that interagency fusing of intelligence that allowed us to provide some particular insights that would allow the campaign to be prosecuted.*



Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): *Were there particular targets that we were focused on or were we targeting across the board? Was there a speciality that we were able to provide?*

Air Vice-Marshal Johnny Stringer, Chief of Staff Joint Forces Command, Minister of Defence, and former UK Air Component Commander in the Middle East: *I will just give a UK perspective, because I think that is appropriate. We absolutely went across the breadth of Daesh's organisation, whether that be fighters who were pinning down Iraqi security forces in Mosul, whether it be vehicle-borne IEDs being constructed in rural areas, whether it be understanding, even if we were not going after it kinetically, which is an important point, using our intelligence to build out what Daesh themselves proclaimed a proto-state: "Okay, let's have a look at you, let's look at your finances, at how you're doing your frankly propaganda in command and control and recruiting. Let's see how we can go after and undermine all those elements of you." So bringing in an array of the obvious kinetic stuff but some of the more sophisticated non-kinetics, which might not be so apparent. Sorry, I think I was talking about the coalition, but that was the UK side*

Wednesday

Prime Ministers Questions

The Minister for the Cabinet Office was at the Dispatch Box to answer Members [Questions](#) immediately before the Prime Minister came before the House.

[PMQs](#) saw Brexit as its main focus again this week. The lack of progress in the negotiations was foremost on the agenda.



[Jeremy Corbyn \(Islington North\) \(Lab\)](#): The divisions in the Cabinet mean that there has been no progress in negotiations for five months. The reality is that members of the Cabinet are more interested in negotiating with each other than with the European Union. The Prime Minister's promise of "as little friction as possible"

is in stark contrast with the earlier commitment that this would be "friction-free", so will she explain how much friction she is willing to accept? Businesses and workers in those companies need to know.

[The Prime Minister \(Mrs Theresa May\)](#): We want to ensure that we can continue to trade in as frictionless a way as possible. The suggestion that trade is entirely frictionless at the moment is not actually correct. We have set three very simple objectives for a future customs union. I will say to the House that achieving those objectives, which I have just set out, will not be easy—it will be difficult. Some will say, "Forget about an independent trade policy"—that is not the position of this Government. Some might say, "Don't worry about the Northern Irish border"—that is not the position of this Government. It is absolutely right that we aim to achieve those three objectives. The right hon. Gentleman talks about progress. We will be publishing a White Paper in a few weeks showing how much progress we are making.

The House then heard a [Statement](#) from the Government in which the announcement that the East Coast Main Line would be nationalised. A significant step down from the Governments previous position.

This was followed by the First Reading of the Banking (Cash Machine Charges and Financial Inclusions) [Bill](#).

Opposition Day

Two opposition day debates this week focusing on areas domestic and international where the Government has been judged lacking by Members. The first [debate](#) was on Grenfell Tower.

Leaving the EU: Customs

The continuing confusion in from the Cabinet over the Customs Union prompted Members to hold another [debate](#) on the issue. I took the opportunity to once again raise the issue of how damaging a hard border in Ireland would be and how tariffs could affect local communities.

[Mrs Madeleine Moon \(Bridgend\) \(Lab\)](#): Let us make no mistake: the only way to ensure tariff-free and frictionless trade, as well protecting against a hard border on the island of Ireland, is to remain in the customs union.

The Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union told me in a recent debate that the Canada-United States border was an example of a customs arrangement that the Government may seek to replicate. However, the Irish Prime Minister, having visited that border, said:

"I saw a hard border with physical infrastructure, with customs posts, people in uniforms with arms and dogs."

That is not what we want for the border in Ireland.

[Matt Western \(Warwick and Leamington\) \(Lab\)](#): Having visited Detroit and that border between in the US and Cana-

da in February, I can confirm that it takes an average of eight minutes to get through, and that it is what a hard border looks like, with X-ray machines and so on. There would be serious friction on such a border.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): It is good to hear such first-hand experience in the House. Clearly such an option is unacceptable for peace in Ireland and the efficient customs regime that we seek. Donald Tusk has effectively said that if Ireland does not find the UK's offer on the border acceptable, the EU will not allow negotiations to move on to trade. If we also consider the fact that the Irish Prime Minister has said that it the US-Canada border example

“is definitely not a solution”,

it is clear that the only way forward is to remain in the customs union.

My constituency of Bridgend has the largest Ford engine factory in Europe. The automotive sector is critical to the wellbeing of many families throughout my constituency—on average, around 12,000 families are linked to work with that factory. According to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the introduction of tariffs on trade with the EU because of our leaving the customs union would significantly increase costs. A 10% tariff on finished vehicles would cost the industry £4.5 billion, increasing the price of cars imported to the UK from the EU by an average of around £1,500. Tariff costs and custom burdens on such a highly integrated supply chain would undoubtedly disrupt and undermine the competitiveness of UK manufacturing, and that is without the common standards and rules mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South East (Mr McFadden).

The Government have said that one of their strategic objectives is

“ensuring UK-EU trade is as frictionless as possible”.

Automotive experts have made it crystal clear that customs barriers and tariffs would be crippling for their industry. As frictionless as possible is just not good enough. It is no secret that the single market and customs union have been vital for the competitiveness of the sector. In the UK, it has made more than £71 billion in turnover and supports more than 800,000 jobs. That is not something that we can toss away lightly.

To protect jobs and to protect the automotive industry, the Government should be actively seeking to avoid any customs tariffs whatsoever. The only way to do that is in the customs union. My constituents deserve to know what future the Government are taking them towards. They have the right to make the ultimate decision, based on the facts—facts that were denied to them at the time of the referendum. Let them have those facts now, and let us know what the Government know about the risks we are taking as a result of their line of taking us out of the customs union.

Thursday

International Trade Questions

The Secretary of State for International Trade was in the Chamber to answer Members [Questions](#). I was selected to speak first and pressed the Minister for clarification on what protections would be in place for British Steel after Brexit, the Minister couldn't provide any detail.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Steel tariff exemptions are vital for Tata Steel. Many of my constituents work at Tata in Port Talbot in the next constituency along from mine. The exemption is welcome, but there are concerns about the US placing quotas on steel imports, which will have a major impact on the exports going not just from Britain but from Europe. How does the Secretary of State see himself protecting our export trade once we leave the



European Union and do not have its negotiating power behind us?

***The Secretary of State for International Trade and President of the Board of Trade (Dr Liam Fox):** When it comes to protection post EU, we will have our own trade remedies measures. But of course the hon. Lady and her Labour colleagues voted against our being able to establish those when the legislation came to the House.*



The Minister for Women and Equalities then stepped up to the Dispatch Box. This time I took the opportunity to ask the Minister about STEM subjects and Armed Forces recruitment.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** Of all Ministers, this Minister will be the one who understands the opportunities for girls, particularly those following STEM subjects, in joining the armed forces. The RAF presentation team is coming to my constituency, and I have particularly focused on asking primary schools if they would like to see the opportunity that STEM subjects offer for careers in our armed forces: does she agree?*

***The Minister for Women and Equalities (Penny Mordaunt):** I agree so much that I signed up myself. I pay tribute to the armed forces for the work they have done in recent years, in particular the RAF, some of whose initiatives have been pioneering. I would like to see more women serving in our armed forces; our armed forces will be operationally better if that is the case.*

Business of the House

Business Questions this week gave me the chance to raise the issue of the ship construction in the UK. Specifically the support ships need for the Navy's new aircraft carriers.

***Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab):** France, Germany, Italy and Spain have built their auxiliary tanker and support ships in domestic yards. May we have a debate on the value of the Ministry of Defence commissioning our three new fleet solid support ships using British yards, British steel and British jobs, which would bring tax and national insurance contributions in excess of £350 million into the Treasury?*

***The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The hon. Lady raises the important matter of how we spend our defence budget, and she is right to ask what more could be done to ensure that British firms benefit from those contracts. She will be aware that the Ministry of Defence seeks wherever possible to ensure that UK companies get the best chance to bid for that business, but that it will nevertheless seek the best value for the taxpayer at the same time as committing to a thriving UK defence industry.*

The House then heard a **Statement** from the Government on Gaming Machines and a further **Statement** on Building Regulations and Fire Safety.

The Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Committee then made a **Statement** on the Pharmaceutical Sector, before a **Motion** was heard on Private Members' Bills: Money Resolutions.

Backbench Business

Backbench Business saw a **debate** on Plastic Bottles and Coffee Cups following the recent announcement that Parliament would be aiming to eliminate its use of disposable plastics in the near future.

A second **debate** was then held marking the International Day against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia.

The day in the Chamber ended with an **Adjournment Debate** on Heathrow Expansion.