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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES
(HANSARD)**

Monday 21 October 2024

HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 9 JULY 2024]

THIRD YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HIS MAJESTY KING CHARLES III

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 755

FOURTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2024-2025

House of Commons

Monday 21 October 2024

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Scottish Visa Scheme

1. **Pete Wishart** (Perth and Kinross-shire) (SNP): What discussions she has had with the Scottish Government on the potential merits of devolving the power to introduce a Scottish visa scheme. [900747]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): The hon. Gentleman has raised this issue on a number of occasions. He will be aware that we are not introducing a Scottish visa scheme or devolving control of immigration policy, and this has been made clear to the Scottish Government. Instead, we must together address the underlying causes of skills shortages and overseas recruitment in different parts of the UK, which this Government are doing.

Pete Wishart: I thank the Minister for her tiresome and repetitive response. She will know that Scotland has a whole range of demographic and population difficulties that need to be urgently addressed, with every sector from social care to hospitality, including business leaders,

calling out for drastic action. Even her Scottish Labour colleagues are beginning to understand the enormity of this task. Today we find that Labour's grotesque two-child benefit cap is now having an impact on Scotland's birth rate. Instead of slapping down her Scottish colleagues and rejecting this idea out of hand, why does she not work with us just to see if it might actually work?

Seema Malhotra: The hon. Gentleman knows that net migration must come down. It trebled under the last Government, largely driven by overseas recruitment. Immigration is a reserved matter, working in the interests of the whole UK. Previous schemes along the lines that he has suggested have succeeded only in restricting movement and rights and creating internal UK borders. Adding different rules for different locations would also increase complexity and create frictions when workers move locations.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Scotland is a diverse place. Some areas are seeing depopulation, but areas such as East Lothian, which I represent, are seeing unprecedented population growth. Will the Minister commit to working constructively with the Scottish Government on their woeful population strategy, which in 17 years has comprehensively failed to address Scotland's demographic challenges?

Seema Malhotra: We are committed to working with the Scottish Government on this and all issues. Indeed, many of the levers to address depopulation in Scotland are in powers that the Scottish Government already have at their disposal. The reasons for local workers leaving particular areas must be addressed through investment in jobs, in infrastructure and in public services, and many of these are issues that we must tackle together.

Fraud and Economic Crime

2. **Phil Brickell** (Bolton West) (Lab): What steps her Department is taking to tackle fraud and economic crime. [900748]

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): Fraud accounts for 39% of all crime, according to the England and Wales crime survey, and it was the most common type of crime in the year ending March 2024. It is a crime that destroys lives and we are committed to working with law enforcement and industry to better protect the public and businesses from the fraud threats they face.

Phil Brickell: We know that 39% of all reported crime is fraud, and many of those offences are carried out by serious organised crime gangs. The National Crime Agency is tasked with protecting my constituents from foreign origin fraud and serious organised crime, but a recent report from Spotlight on Corruption found that after 14 years of Conservative government the NCA was “on its knees”, spending millions of pounds on consultants and failing to retain investigators. What steps is the Minister taking to ensure that the NCA is able to protect my constituents from financial crime?

Dan Jarvis: Let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the NCA for its operational leadership and its focus on tackling economic crime. Through collaborating with jurisdictions at risk, we make it harder for organised crime groups to target UK victims. The national fraud squad, run by the NCA's national economic crime centre, and the City of London police, with 400 new officers by next year, have boosted the ability to tackle the highest-harm international offenders. We are working to deliver a workforce strategy to address retention challenges for fraud. This is important work that impacts on all our constituents and it is a priority area for this Government.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): The Minister will know that online harm goes beyond fraud. It can impact people's lives through suicide sites that signpost people to unregulated sites that lead them to a place none of us want to see them go to. He will know that the European Commission is currently investigating Facebook and Instagram. The United States is introducing the kids online safety Act, which, if it is passed by Congress, will make a huge impact. Why is it left to parents in the United Kingdom—in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, wherever they are—to take their own litigation against these big tech companies? Is it not time the Government did more?

Dan Jarvis: We are doing more, and I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that this is a key priority for the Department, not least because 70% of fraud has an international element, particularly online. Approximately one in 18 adults were victims of fraud in the year ending March 2024. The noble Lord Hanson leads on this for the Department, and he and I are working closely with other Government Departments, including the Treasury and the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. This is a priority and we need to do more.

Neighbourhood Policing

3. **Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to improve neighbourhood policing. [900749]

4. **Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps her Department is taking to improve neighbourhood policing. [900750]

8. **Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to improve neighbourhood policing. [900754]

24. **Deirdre Costigan (Ealing Southall) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to improve neighbourhood policing. [900771]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Neighbourhood policing is the bedrock of the British policing model, yet in many areas of the country it has been decimated in recent years. This Government are committed to rebuilding neighbourhood policing by putting officers, police community support officers and special constables back in our communities with new powers to tackle antisocial behaviour and local crime.

Ruth Cadbury: My constituents rightly want to see more neighbourhood policing teams on their streets. I welcome the Government's commitment to bringing in 10,000 more neighbourhood police officers, but can the Secretary of State assure me that west London will get the neighbourhood policing teams we need?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that we now have thousands fewer police officers and PCSOs on the streets than we had a decade ago. This includes the previous Government halving the number of PCSOs and cutting the number of special constables by two thirds. This newly elected Government are working at pace to introduce a new neighbourhood policing guarantee, putting police officers and PCSOs back on the streets. We have also announced funding and support for the College of Policing to begin the national roll-out of specialist training for neighbourhood officers in order to professionalise and strengthen the work they do in every corner of the country.

Chris Vince: I welcome the Home Secretary to her place. My community in Harlow has been let down by the lack of neighbourhood policing. What will the Home Secretary do to address this issue, both through police on the streets and through the resources they have?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This is a challenge we are facing across the country. The proportion of people saying that they barely ever see the police is now nearly half, up from a quarter when the Conservatives came to power in 2010. This has been deeply damaging to public confidence, and we need the police back on the beat, but they also need the powers to act. That is why we will also bring forward new powers to tackle shoplifting and antisocial behaviour, especially in our town centres.

Peter Swallow: Residents in Bracknell are concerned about the increasing numbers of drug users and dealers on our streets. I raised this issue when I recently met our neighbourhood policing team. What more support can be given to local police and other local services to get drug dealers off our streets?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Drug dealing, drug misuse and other forms of antisocial behaviour and crime are a real challenge in

many communities. First, we need to get neighbourhood police back on the beat to address these challenges. Secondly, neighbourhood police need greater powers, and we will introduce respect orders that allow the police to take action against repeat offenders and to make sure that our streets and communities can be kept safe.

Deirdre Costigan: In Ealing Southall, religious organisations are spending their own money protecting worshippers from antisocial behaviour and crime in the early morning. Sri Guru Singh Sabha gurdwara, for example, is spending £3,000 to £4,000 a week on patrols and security measures. I recently called a crime summit and, although the police are trying their best, the community needs more police on the streets and a return to neighbourhood policing. What progress has been made on recruiting the much-needed 13,000 new police and community support officers we need to restore trust in the safety of our communities and town centres?

Mr Speaker: Order. Can Members please speak through the Chair?

Yvette Cooper: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing Southall (Deirdre Costigan) for the leadership she is showing in her community. The point she raises is partly about increasing neighbourhood police numbers, which is part of this Labour Government's plan. It is also about ensuring that we have partnerships between the police and local communities, rather than communities feeling that they have to do this alone. Such partnerships between the police and communities are at the heart of the British model of policing by consent, which is what we need to restore and rebuild after the damage that has been done.

Sarah Dyke (Glastonbury and Somerton) (LD): The cost of rural crime shot up by 41% in the south-west between 2022 and 2023, while 86% of respondents to a recent National Farmers Union survey said that rural crime was negatively affecting farmers' mental health. How is the Department supporting neighbourhood officers and rural beats to adequately deal with the heightened levels of rural crime?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member makes a serious point. We need to increase neighbourhood policing in rural areas and to recognise the additional different challenges that rural areas can face, both because of the geography and the particular kinds of crime that affect farmers and farming equipment. That is why we have set out our intention to draw up a new rural crime action plan, alongside our plans for neighbourhood policing.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Under the last Conservative Government, excluding fraud and computer misuse, crime fell by 50%—[*Interruption.*] I am pleased to say that in Beverley and Holderness, as across the rest of the country, it was community groups, local people and the police working together who helped to do that. Working with the local community, the Cherry Tree Centre helped to reduce antisocial behaviour in the St Nicholas area of Beverley by 43%, year on year, by last summer. What will the Secretary of State do to ensure that such community co-operation leads to further cuts in crime, which was so welcome under the Conservatives?

Yvette Cooper: I caution the right hon. Member against excluding one of the most common crimes in the country from his figures. Some of the crimes that impact town centres at the heart of local communities most heavily, such as shoplifting, street crime and street theft, have soared in recent years, but there was no response at all by the previous Government. We are making those crimes a priority as part of our plans to change some of the laws around shoplifting and assault on shop workers, as well as getting more police back on the beat.

Mr Tom Morrison (Cheadle) (LD): One of the biggest problems faced by the neighbourhood police team in Cheadle is antisocial behaviour and the scourge of off-road bikes. What is the Secretary of State doing to help Greater Manchester police tackle off-road bikes in our communities?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member is right that off-road bikes are a total nightmare in some communities. I have talked to residents who have been driven mad by the scourge of dangerous off-road bikes that are used to harass and intimidate people. We are looking at ways to strengthen the law on off-road biking to give the police the powers they need to tackle that kind of damaging antisocial behaviour.

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): Given the Home Secretary's great concern about shoplifting and antisocial behaviour, will she make an assessment on the "Putting it Right" scheme for young offenders that has been successfully piloted in my constituency?

Yvette Cooper: I welcome the points the hon. Member makes. To tackle shoplifting, we need to ensure that strong enough laws and policing partnerships are in place, and that we do prevention and follow-up work with young people. As she may know, we are setting up a new Young Futures programme, which is all about the greater work we need to do to prevent young people being drawn into crime in the first place. I encourage her to tell us more details about her local work to tackle this issue.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Minister.

Matt Vickers (Stockton West) (Con): The last Conservative Government stood with our brave police officers and emergency service workers. We introduced tougher sentences for those who assaulted them and the Elizabeth medal to recognise those who lost their lives in the line of duty, and we were looking to recognise those who were discharged from service as a result of injuries on the frontline. Will the Secretary of State continue that work? Will she meet with me and former policeman Tom Curry, who has been leading an excellent campaign on this important issue?

Yvette Cooper: I have long been a strong supporter of the Elizabeth medal. I pay tribute to Bryn Hughes and others for their work campaigning for recognition for police officers and other emergency workers who have been lost in the line of duty, and who have given so much to support other people and keep others safe. I have attended the police bravery awards every year for

the last 14 years, exactly because it is so important to support brave officers. I am absolutely determined to ensure that we not only continue with that work, but go further to support brave officers who put their lives at risk. I am very happy to continue cross-party working on this issue.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): In Greater Manchester, the “right care, right person” approach was recently introduced, since a police response to a mental health-related call is not always the right fit. There are growing concerns, though, about unclear lines of responsibility between mental health services and the police, which may cause cases to be mishandled. What steps are the Government taking to ensure that co-ordination between the police and mental health services is as clear and effective as it can be, so that those who most need support do not fall through the cracks?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member raises an important issue. That co-ordination between police and mental health services can be crucial in some of the most serious cases, where people are a danger to the public for reasons perhaps linked to a mental health crisis, but also in many cases where someone is not a danger to the public and mental health professionals may be far better able to respond than police officers. Significant work has been done, but she is right that we need further close working between police and mental health services across the country. That has also been part of the work that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary is doing in the NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care on improving mental health services.

Small Boat Crossings

5. **Amanda Martin (Portsmouth North) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to tackle criminal gangs facilitating small boat crossings. [900751]

16. **Damien Egan (Bristol North East) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to tackle criminal gangs facilitating small boat crossings. [900762]

Mr Speaker: Can I ask the Home Secretary please to look at me occasionally? It would help.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Apologies, Mr Speaker; I always like the chance to be able to look towards you.

The criminal smuggling and trafficking gangs that organise small boat crossings are undermining our border security and putting lives at risk. It is truly tragic that a little baby died in the channel this weekend. Those gangs have been getting away with this for far too long. That is why the Government have set up a new border security command, led by former police chief Martin Hewitt, to work with other countries to go after the gangs.

Amanda Martin: Small boat crossings is an issue raised by residents, but we know that organised crime stretches beyond people smuggling. In my Portsmouth North constituency we recently saw the sentencing of a criminal gang that attempted to smuggle 2.3 tonnes of

cocaine into the city from Colombia. Can the Secretary of State expand on how we are tackling organised crime relating to smuggling drugs and dangerous weapons into our ports, to ensure that those things do not hit our streets?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There are many different threats to our border security, which is why we have set up the border security command to draw together the work of different agencies, including on dangerous drug smuggling and organised crime, bringing together Border Force, the National Crime Agency, the intelligence and security agencies and local police forces. The border security command's first priority will be to deal with the dangerous boat crossings that are undermining security and putting lives at risk, but as part of its work it will be dealing with the wider threats to our borders as well.

Damien Egan: I thank the Home Secretary for her answer about the criminal gangs. People in Bristol North East also ask me about deterrence. What reassurance can I give them that this action is being backed up with measures to stop illegal working by people who do not have a right to work here?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point about how employers have exploited illegal migration. As a result, we set up a major programme through the summer, including raids, pursuing illegal working in different places across the country. We have also substantially increased our work on returns, including redeploying 1,000 additional staff to work on returns and enforcement, to make sure the rules are being properly respected and enforced. That has led to an increase of more than 20% in enforced returns this summer.

Rupert Lowe (Great Yarmouth) (Reform): Given that dangerous foreign criminals have been using the European convention on human rights as a loophole to remain in the UK, does the Home Secretary agree that it is time to leave the ECHR and restore the sovereignty of our own borders?

Yvette Cooper: The purpose of setting up a border security command is to strengthen the security of our borders. We will do that by working with other countries. It is crucial that we do so to tackle the gangs and the boats before they reach the French coast in the first place. We have increased our co-operation, with new agreements in place with the G7, Europol and Italy, and we are working on new agreements with France, Germany and Belgium. Those agreements would not be possible if we were somehow abandoning international law.

Mr Gagan Mohindra (South West Hertfordshire) (Con): As the House will be aware, there have been recent crossings. Is the Home Secretary considering reopening hotels to house asylum seekers, and if so will she commit to keeping the House informed about the methodology for choosing those hotels and ensuring that constituency Members are informed at the appropriate time?

Yvette Cooper: Ensuring that constituency Members are informed is something that I take seriously. It often did not happen in the past, but it is important and it needs to happen. The overall situation that we inherited

included an asylum backlog that was increasing because asylum decision making had totally collapsed. We have now increased that decision making so that we can clear the backlog and end hotel use. Sadly, that will take time—because of the soaring backlog we inherited as a result of the collapse in decision making—but we are determined to ensure that we can clear the backlog and save the taxpayer hundreds of millions, if not billions, of pounds.

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con): Given the Home Secretary's claim that she would smash the gangs, with £540 million to upgrade the Manston centre, asylum hotels reopening rapidly and 14,000 small boat crossings since she took office, is that the plan that she had for her new border commander? Might it be fair to say that it is not going very well?

Yvette Cooper: I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman what we inherited from the previous Government. In the first six months of the year, there were the highest number of boat crossings on record because of the total failure of their programme, including spending £700 million on a scheme to send four people—four volunteers—to Rwanda. As for the contract, he may be interested to learn that the first Manston contract notice was issued on 4 December 2023 under the previous Home Secretary for £700 million for six years with no suggested break clauses. The new contract is not only substantially cheaper because we have made savings, but also includes break clauses so that we can close, change or reduce the contract to save the taxpayer money, which the previous Government failed to do.

Policing

6. **Matt Western (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab):** What steps her Department is taking to increase public trust and confidence in policing. [900752]

11. **Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op):** What steps her Department is taking to increase public trust and confidence in policing. [900757]

14. **Siân Berry (Brighton Pavilion) (Green):** What steps she is taking to monitor and maintain standards of police conduct. [900760]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips): Restoring confidence in policing is one of the core aims of the Government's safer streets mission. That means ensuring robust responses to the crimes that devastate lives and corrode our communities. We are also committed to improving police standards, and will announce steps to strengthen the police misconduct and vetting system shortly.

Matt Western: It is almost two years since Warwickshire police issued a community protection notice against Warwickshire hunt. Eight months later, it was mysteriously replaced by a secret protocol. The police and crime commissioner, who receives financial support from the Countryside Alliance, claims that he knew nothing of the protocol. The chief constable refused to give me a copy and now she has resigned, claiming retirement. Trust in the PCC and the leadership of Warwickshire police has been seriously damaged. Will the Minister

meet me to discuss the need for a truly independent inquiry, as opposed to the sham one being undertaken by the PCC?

Jess Phillips: I thank my hon. Friend and as a local to Warwickshire I take a keen interest in those matters myself. Of course, I will meet him, along with the Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North and Cottingham (Dame Diana Johnson). It is vital that the public can trust that those who police us, and who are in charge of our police, are held to account as everybody else should be.

Jayne Kirkham: Despite town and city councils in Cornwall employing street rangers and antisocial behaviour officers and having ShopWatch radios funded from their precept or business improvement districts, shop managers still struggle with shoplifting and ASB. The record under our Conservative PCC on answering and responding to 101 calls is poor, and those crimes are chronically under-reported. Shop workers feel powerless and there is a desperate need for more neighbourhood police. Can the Minister explain how trust in police and the rule of law will be restored to retail staff and shop managers?

Jess Phillips: As the Home Secretary laid out, extra neighbourhood policing is important not just because we need more police on our streets, but because when our constituents—shop workers and those who own businesses—call the police, if they get no response confidence drops. The neighbourhood police that there will be across the country, including in Cornwall, will help with confidence, not just with crime.

Siân Berry: I thank the Minister for her answers. We have seen a toxic culture in some police services, including WhatsApp messages that are racist, homophobic and sexist, displaying deep prejudice. Will she clarify when the multiple recommendations from the Home Office review into the process of police officer dismissals will be actioned, including changing the law so that those who fail re-vetting can be more simply dismissed?

Jess Phillips: I could not agree more that we need to strengthen this area, with women especially feeling less confidence over the last few years. We will announce in due course—I promise the hon. Lady that we are working on this at pace—how we are going to ensure that police conduct and vetting systems are fit for purpose, to bring back some of the trust that has been lost.

Mr Adnan Hussain (Blackburn) (Ind): Although I welcome the Home Secretary's response on antisocial behaviour involving e-scooters and bikes, I wish to reiterate the concerns of my residents in Blackburn. Will she consider not only additional powers for the police but civil powers for local authorities to combat hotspot areas before somebody is seriously hurt?

Jess Phillips: As the Home Secretary outlined on neighbourhood policing, we will bring in respect orders to ensure that antisocial behaviour in particular areas is targeted in a way that it simply has not been in recent years.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Home Secretary.

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): The operational independence of the police goes to the heart of public confidence in policing. As Foreign Secretary, I saw where political interference in policing is rife, and that is not a direction that the UK should travel in, so does the Home Secretary believe that it is right for Ministers to overrule the threat assessment of the police and security services, does she believe that some free concert tickets are the appropriate price for scrapping police independence, and after the appalling results of recent negotiations with the British Medical Association, the RMT and Mauritius, has she considered recruiting Taylor Swift's mum as a Government negotiator?

Jess Phillips: As it falls to me to answer this, let me say that the right hon. Gentleman knows fine well that operational decisions for policing fall to the police, in this situation and in every other. I would certainly welcome it if Taylor Swift's mother stood for the leadership of the Conservative party; she would really offer something that is not currently available. The substantive question was about confidence. The confidence of women in policing, and its ability to keep women in our country secure, dived under the previous Government, so confidence definitely needs to be restored.

Mr Cleverly: That does not answer the question at all.

Mr Speaker: Order. We do not want squabbles afterwards. I call James Cleverly to ask his second question.

Mr Cleverly: When I was Home Secretary, on numerous occasions I had to deal with foreign VIPs demanding, or requesting, a level of protection that we did not feel was appropriate. Does the Home Secretary recognise the difficult position that she has put her own Foreign Secretary in when such future requests come in and they have to be denied, as those individuals will pray in aid the protection package put in place for a rockstar?

Jess Phillips: I remind the right hon. Gentleman and the House that concerts were cancelled in Vienna because of a terror threat that the CIA identified could harm tens of thousands of people. I sat in this very Chamber last week in front of Figen Murray—the mother of Martyn, who was killed at an event in Manchester. The idea that we should not take that security seriously is, I am afraid, something that I simply do not agree with.

Violent Crime: Young People

7. **Florence Eshalomi** (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): What steps her Department is taking to help prevent young people from becoming involved in violent crime. [900753]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Knife crime takes far too many young lives in this country, so the Government have set a mission—not just for the Government but for policing and local communities right across the country—to halve knife crime over the next decade. As part of that, we have already implemented the ban on zombie knives and zombie-style machetes, and we will now act quickly to ban ninja swords following the campaigning by Pooja Kanda after the death of her son.

Florence Eshalomi: I thank the Home Secretary for that reply on knife crime. I welcome the Government's commitment in the Young Futures programme to preventing young people from being drawn into crime. A number of gang-associated girls are drawn into crime, and although rape and sexual exploitation is such a traumatising experience, many of those young girls do not see themselves as victims. Fantastic organisations such as Abianda and Milk Honey Bees work to support women. Will the Department consider providing tailored support for young women through the Young Futures programme?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I know that she has championed that issue over many years. The Young Futures programme will include youth hubs to draw together services around young people—I used the concept of a teenage Sure Start to bring young people's services together. We also need youth prevention programmes across all areas. She is right to highlight that this must be about young girls as well as young boys to ensure that we tackle the threats to young people's safety from violent crime.

Mims Davies (East Grinstead and Uckfield) (Con): Helping young people to stay safe, and to have somewhere to go and, crucially, someone to talk to, is key to their transition in life, particularly to prevent them from being drawn into antisocial behaviour, retail crime and knife or gang-related crime. Could the Home Secretary confirm that, through devolution, there will be continued support for police and crime commissioners, such as Katie Bourne in Sussex, who can provide a direct link between residents' concerns about their young people and work with local police to take preventive measures?

Yvette Cooper: Police and crime commissioners have a crucial role to play as part of the mission to reduce serious violence, as do local authorities. The hon. Lady is right that local partnerships will best be able to target young people who are at greatest risk, and ensure that proper prevention programmes are in place. As we know, many of those services have been hollowed out over a long period, and it is important that we have partnership working to rebuild them. I hope that we can work cross-party on that—not just with police and crime commissioners but with MPs across the country.

Policing of Protests

9. **Bell Ribeiro-Addy** (Clapham and Brixton Hill) (Lab): If she will commission an independent review into the adequacy of legislation on the policing of protests. [900755]

The Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): Like my hon. Friend, the Government value the role of peaceful protest as part of our proud democratic tradition. The Government regularly review the adequacy of existing legislation.

Bell Ribeiro-Addy: The right to protest, and the courage of people taking to the streets to demand change, have given us many of our cherished social advancements—from the suffragettes demanding votes for women to the Race Relations Act 1965—but the sheer number of powers to restrict protest is resulting in peaceful protesters being

arrested and sentenced to lengthy periods in prison. The previous Government pushed through a range of such laws despite opposition from senior policing figures and from Members across all parties. When will a comprehensive review of the state of protest take place, with a view to repealing powers that unnecessarily restrict the right to peaceful protest?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that important issue. As she knows, there will be post-legislative scrutiny of the legislation passed by the previous Government. As the previous Government agreed, it will be considered in due course.

Mr Richard Holden (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): Recent footage of Metropolitan police officers saying that the description of Hezbollah as a terror group was a matter of “opinion” is alarming. The officers in question were deployed to a march in central London where support for Hezbollah was openly displayed, yet many offenders were only identified by photos on social media after the event. Will the Minister ensure that all officers are fully briefed on the proscribed status of Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist organisations, so that offenders are arrested on the spot, and not allowed to spew antisemitic hate on our streets?

Dame Diana Johnson: We are all clear that Hezbollah are a proscribed organisation. The police take great care when they police protests; there is a great deal of briefing for officers beforehand. However, the way that those protests are policed is operationally independent. I have been to see and talk to officers who are on the frontline at those protests, and I know that it is a difficult job. We should all say a big “thank you” for the work that they do. There have been many protests over the last 12 months that the police have dealt with, and many officers have had rest days cancelled to ensure adequate policing on our streets.

Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (Lab): Southwark police officers recently told Bermondsey safety action group that they struggled to prevent or solve crime due to extraction duties, when they have to police repeat protests elsewhere in London. Does the Minister believe that the Met needs new powers to refuse permission for some repetitive protests in the capital, or should it use existing powers better to resolve and reduce extraction duties and increase safety in my community?

Dame Diana Johnson: Police numbers are an issue, which is why this Government are clear about recruiting more neighbourhood police officers to increase that presence on our streets. I recognise that what my hon. Friend has said about extraction is an issue for the Metropolitan police in particular when dealing with protests. Clearly, we want all criminals to be dealt with by the police, and we need sufficient numbers of police officers to do that.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): Although we respect and would protect the right to peaceful protest, antisemitic and Islamophobic offences have been reported at many recent protests. Those have contributed to an astonishing and shocking 25% increase in religiously aggravated hate crimes in this country, as

was revealed last week. The Community Security Trust reports an almost 500% rise in antisemitic incidents, and Tell MAMA has recorded the highest ever number of anti-Muslim incidents. Can the Minister reassure us on what the Government will do to help the police continue to keep communities safe, and police protests in a way that does that?

Dame Diana Johnson: The figures that the hon. Lady sets out are shocking. This Government are clear that there is no place in our society for antisemitism or Islamophobia. There are already meetings about how we can tackle that rise. It is shocking and it will not be tolerated. In some recent protests, the police have clearly had a difficult job to do, but I commend their work to tackle antisemitism and Islamophobia. We know that the police take their responsibilities seriously and that they do so without fear or favour.

Police Funding: Havering

10. **Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con):** If she will increase funding for policing in the London borough of Havering. [900756]

The Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): The Government are of course committed to ensuring that the police have the resources that they need to tackle crime effectively. As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, funding beyond this year, including for the Metropolitan Police Service, will be confirmed following the upcoming multi-year spending review.

Andrew Rosindell: Given the increasing pressures on the police service, does the Minister accept that officer morale, retention, recruitment and ability to solve crimes are severely compromised, with police officers overworked, underpaid and subjected to unprecedented rises in bureaucratic processes—often dealing with things that police do not traditionally deal with, such as mental health care and social work? [*Interruption.*] Will the Minister explain how the Government plan to address those critical issues, especially in terms of improving officer retention, recruitment, crime-solving capacity and the overwhelming levels of bureaucracy, so that constituents in Romford can feel safe in their own town again? [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Rosindell, you should know better. I did not cough twice for my own benefit—it was meant to be for yours.

Dame Diana Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member of this House. He has supported 14 years of Conservative government that have left us coming into government with a criminal justice system, including policing, that is in grave difficulty. I take the point that he raises, but he needs to recognise the role that he and his party have played in getting us to this point. Our aim now is to recruit more police officers, as the Home Secretary has said, and to increase neighbourhood policing as the bedrock of policing in this country.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): We all want to see more funding for our police in Havering and Hackney and across London,

but a reduction in crime would also help them. What conversations are Ministers having with mobile phone manufacturers to try to drive down phone snatches by people on bikes and reduce such street crime, which is really growing in London?

Dame Diana Johnson: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point. Those conversations are ongoing; later this month, conversations will take place on what more can be done to ensure that the manufacturers take their responsibility seriously and do everything they can to stop the trade in parts, which is a particular issue with mobile phones.

Safe Countries for Removal: LGBT Rights

12. **Nadia Whittome** (Nottingham East) (Lab): If she will make an assessment of the potential merits of removing Georgia from her Department's list of safe countries for removals, in the context of the recent passage of legislation on LGBT rights in that country. [900758]

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (Dame Angela Eagle): Mr Speaker, I suspect I might be coughing almost as much as you, but for a completely different reason.

We constantly update our assessment of LGBT rights and other factors affecting the safety of different countries, working closely with the Foreign Office and informed by regular independent reports from the chief inspector of borders and immigration. The latest update for Georgia was published last month and is available on the gov.uk website.

Nadia Whittome: The safe state designation that the previous Government introduced was intended to allow Georgian and Indian nationals to be returned without any individualised assessment of the safety of the country for each person. In both countries, persecution of certain minorities is on the rise; that makes their inclusion on the list particularly wrong, but also highlights the wider dangers of blanket inadmissibility of asylum claims based on nationality. What steps will the Government take to ensure that individuals' asylum claims are always properly assessed?

Dame Angela Eagle: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this important issue and bringing her concerns—concerns that I share—to the attention of the House. We regularly monitor and review the situation in countries of origin, working closely with the Foreign Office, and our resulting country policy and information notes are published on the gov.uk website. Should we assess that the troubling new law to which my hon. Friend refers, or any other changes, fundamentally affect the justification for Georgia's designation, we will seek to remove it from the list, using the correct parliamentary process.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): In Georgia in particular, but also in other countries, there is an evidential base to prove that the persecution of Christians and ethnic minorities and other human rights abuses are taking place. It is also important that LGBT rights issues are engaged with. Has the Minister had the opportunity to address those issues directly with Georgia's Government?

Dame Angela Eagle: Addressing such issues is more of a Foreign Office responsibility, which is why we liaise closely with the Foreign Office when considering the production of information notes. If laws that are passed and put into effect in other countries lead to persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution for individuals, that is one of the contexts we use to make a decision. That includes LGBT rights, but also other rights.

Topical Questions

T1. [900772] **Katrina Murray** (Cumbernauld and Kirkintilloch) (Lab): If she will make a statement on her departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Yvette Cooper): Organised immigration crime puts lives at risk and threatens our border security. We have agreed a new anti-smuggling action plan with our G7 partners to strengthen collaboration in areas such as intelligence, information exchange and the pursuit of criminal finances. The UK work will be led by the new border security command. As evidence of our closer collaboration with other countries, this weekend, at the request of the French authorities, a Border Force vessel rescued 46 people and returned them to France.

Katrina Murray: According to research by UK Feminista, over a third of female school pupils have been sexually harassed while at school. Much of this can be traced back to misogynistic online influencers and the harmful impacts of pornography. Will the Home Secretary tell the House what she is doing to prioritise women's online safety and how she is engaging with counterparts in the devolved Administrations to ensure that no woman or girl is left behind when it comes to ending sexual harassment and the exploitation of women?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. The mission for safer streets that the Government have set includes a really ambitious mission to halve violence against women and girls in a decade. We know that that is immensely difficult, and I hope that all the devolved Administrations, as well as local communities and organisations, will want to be part of it. My hon. Friend is right to prioritise women's online safety, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology is prioritising action on online deepfake abuse.

Mr Speaker: We now come to the shadow Home Secretary.

Mr James Cleverly (Braintree) (Con): In her statement to the House on 29 July, the Chancellor said that asylum accommodation costs being drawn down from Treasury reserves were “unfunded and undisclosed”—a description that I reject. Can the Home Secretary now confirm to the House that asylum accommodation costs will be disclosed and, more importantly, funded from her departmental budget, and that she will not be drawing down from Treasury reserves to pay for asylum accommodation costs? Will she reject the Chancellor's description and say that she will fund those costs in the same way that I did?

Yvette Cooper: The former Home Secretary—the current shadow Home Secretary—now seems to be admitting to the totally chaotic state of asylum accommodation finances. He had to continually seek last-minute reserve claims, because his Government had underfunded the asylum accommodation problems that they had caused by letting the asylum backlog soar. As a result, the taxpayer ended up footing the bill. This Government will be making savings from asylum accommodation by getting the system back in order. I know that the right hon. Member has been kicked out of the Tory party leadership contest because he cannot count.

Mr Speaker: Order. I say to the Home Secretary that I expect short answers. These are topicals. If there are questions where she wants to go long, she should do so early. Otherwise, it is not fair to the Back Benchers I represent on both sides of the House. We will now be staying here longer than she probably expected. James Cleverly, let us have a good example of a short topical.

Mr Cleverly: Will she be drawing down from Treasury reserves—yes or no?

Yvette Cooper: This Government have already been putting in place the funding to try to make good the total chaos that the right hon. Member's Government left us with. They spent £700 million to send four volunteers to Rwanda—and how much did he spend on a flight?

T2. [900773] **Steve Race** (Exeter) (Lab): Refugee women and girls, who are often already survivors of gender-based violence, are at significant risk of abuse, coercion and worse when housed in hotels pending the processing of their applications, as I know the Home Secretary is aware from her substantial work on the issue. Will she please update the House on what steps the Department is taking to end the use of hotel accommodation for women and girls?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right that we have an extensive challenge with the backlog, which means that very expensive hotels are too often used as asylum accommodation. We need to clear the backlog and ensure that we end hotel use, but that also means addressing the serious challenges around violence against women and girls.

Mr Speaker: I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

Lisa Smart (Hazel Grove) (LD): This is Black History Month, and we honour the Windrush generation, who were let down shamefully by the previous Conservative Government—first by the appalling Windrush scandal itself, but then by their failure to fully implement the Williams review and the compensation scheme. The parliamentary ombudsman has now found that the Home Office is wrongly denying compensation payments, so will the Home Secretary commit to urgently appointing a Windrush commissioner, as she promised back in June, to lead on righting these wrongs?

Yvette Cooper: We will be appointing a Windrush commissioner. This is something I feel strongly about. The hon. Member will know that as the Select Committee Chair, I asked many questions about the Windrush

scandal. It is a stain not just on the Home Office, but on the British state, and it is important we right those wrongs.

T3. [900774] **Alan Strickland** (Newton Aycliffe and Spennymoor) (Lab): In 14 years of Tory government, police numbers were decimated across our country, including in my constituency. Durham constabulary lost 408 officers, a third of its strength. What steps will the Government take to put police officers back on our streets?

The Minister for Policing, Fire and Crime Prevention (Dame Diana Johnson): As has been said a number of times this afternoon, the neighbourhood policing guarantee means 13,000 police officers, PCSOs and specials back on our streets to keep us all safe, after the reduction in police officer numbers of, I think, over 20,000 by the Conservative party.

T5. [900776] **Luke Taylor** (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): The recent London stalking review published by the London victims' commissioner reveals some pretty alarming statistics: in our capital, 45% of stalking victims felt compelled to withdraw from the justice system and 41% said that no action was taken on their complaint by police. What specific measures are being taken to better support victims of stalking? Are there plans to offer specific training to officers to deal with these cases?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Jess Phillips): We are absolutely looking at how we can strengthen stalking protection orders. We will look at our stalking laws in the round, but also at how policing handles all cases of violence against women and girls and at the training that will be needed.

T4. [900775] **Jacob Collier** (Burton and Uttoxeter) (Lab): After 14 years of Conservative government, we hardly see police officers on the beat across my constituency. Night policing cover in Uttoxeter and rural areas is virtually non-existent. What steps will the Minister take to put more officers on the beat, and what is the timeline for that?

Dame Diana Johnson: Again, there is the neighbourhood policing guarantee and, importantly for my hon. Friend, there will be a named police officer in the community so people know who to go to when they need assistance. That work is happening now and we are keen to see the first officers in place in the next few months.

T6. [900777] **Blake Stephenson** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): In Rural Crime Action Week, does the Secretary of State agree that in Bedfordshire, where we have major urban areas such as Bedford and Luton bordered by rural communities, it is important that the funding formula be reviewed so that equal attention can be paid to tackling crime in our rural villages and towns?

Yvette Cooper: I gently remind the hon. Member that his party's Government failed to review the funding formula for very many years. However, he is right that the issues of rural and urban areas are immensely important, which is why we have committed to a rural crime action plan.

T8. [900779] **Jack Abbott** (Ipswich) (Lab/Co-op): I agree with the hon. Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Blake Stephenson). Despite the previous Government's promises to reform funding settlements, as usual they failed to deliver. Does the Secretary of State agree that we must review the current situation, reform the police funding formula and finally deliver fairer funding for local people?

Dame Diana Johnson: As part of the spending review, we want to consider police funding in the round, including how police funding is allocated to forces. The sector, including the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and the National Police Chiefs' Council, is engaged in the process.

T7. [900778] **Mr Richard Holden** (Basildon and Billericay) (Con): The Home Secretary is benefiting from some of the measures on legal routes for migration brought in by my right hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Cleverly) when he was in government, which have caused the number of people able to come to the UK to halve. What further measures has she taken to ensure that legal migration is cut further?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Seema Malhotra): The Government are committed to bringing down legal migration. We will do so by making sure that British workers are upskilled in key sectors, with new requirements for employers to address skills shortages, and by introducing new training and workforce plans so that overseas recruitment does not remain the default for filling skills shortages in the UK.

T9. [900780] **Steve Yemm** (Mansfield) (Lab): I have listened in absolute amazement to the outrage from Opposition Members about the careful consideration of security for Taylor Swift's concerts in London, a week after her Vienna tour was cancelled due to a terror plot. Does the Home Secretary think that is cynical opportunism from Conservative Members, or have they lost all sense of reason?

Yvette Cooper: I think it is a matter for us all to take the security of people immensely seriously, and to ensure that terrorist, extremist and criminal threats do not win in their attempt to pose threats not just to life, but to our way of life.

Mr Speaker: I call the Chair of the Home Affairs Committee.

Dame Karen Bradley (Staffordshire Moorlands) (Con): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the House for putting its confidence in me to chair the Home Affairs Committee. I look forward to working constructively with the Department on home affairs matters. In that vein, may I welcome the news that the Government will recruit 200 new personnel to process modern slavery claims? Can the Secretary of State confirm whether those personnel are new head count, how long the training will take, and whether she is confident that the head count will survive the forthcoming Budget and spending review?

Yvette Cooper: I congratulate the right hon. Lady on her new position. It is a great job, and I look forward to giving evidence to her as she did to me—we will see what price I have to pay as the roles are reversed. She asks an important point about modern slavery numbers. We are recruiting additional members of staff, and I will happily provide her with more information about that crucial policy area.

T10. [900781] **Mr Paul Foster** (South Ribble) (Lab): Part 3 of the Data Protection Act 2018 imposes unnecessary obligations on the police, and requires them to redact personal data for information transferred to the Crown Prosecution Service. Those obligations delay and obstruct the swift progress of the criminal justice system. The Police Federation of England and Wales has proposed a new clause that, if introduced, would facilitate the free flow of personal data between the police and the CPS. Will Ministers urgently look at reforming that unnecessary red tape to allow more police time on the streets in my constituency of South Ribble?

Dame Diana Johnson: That is an important point, and we are actively exploring all ways that we can improve guidance around redaction, streamline current processes, make better use of technology, and ultimately reduce unnecessary burdens on the police and prosecutors, so that they can get on with their primary task of keeping the public safe and putting away criminals.

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): The Home Secretary told the House that by ending the retrospective element of the duty to remove she was saving £7 billion in 10 years. The impact assessment assumes that all those subject to the duty would have remained in Britain at a cost to the Home Office, but in his letter to me her permanent secretary said that the sum included the cost of sending the same migrants to Rwanda. I wrote to the Home Secretary about that on 1 September and I have raised it with the Minister for Immigration in Westminster Hall, but I have not had an answer. Can she explain that double counting, and if she cannot, will she apologise for using that statistic in the House of Commons?

Yvette Cooper: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the impact assessment is provided by the Home Office, and what we inherited from the previous Government was not simply the incredibly costly Rwanda programme, but also the retrospective element of the Illegal Migration Act 2023, which was so damaging that the shadow Home Secretary, when he was in the job, did not implement many of the measures. That retrospective element has cost the Home Office hundreds of millions of pounds, and those costs would go forward into the future.

Tim Roca (Macclesfield) (Lab): We want to support genuine refugees, but will the Home Secretary provide an update on the progress on returns and deportations of illegal migrants, and say how the new command arrangements improve on the arrangements of the previous Government?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point. To tackle the chaos in the asylum system the rules need to be properly respected and enforced. That is why we have increased by more than 20% the enforced returns over the summer of those who have no right to be here. We have also increased the number of charter flights, including the biggest ever charter flight return.

Ben Maguire (North Cornwall) (LD): Given that the turnout for the Devon and Cornwall police and crime commissioner election in May was just 18%, will the Minister look to scrap that role and instead invest that money in proper community policing in rural constituencies such as mine of North Cornwall?

Dame Diana Johnson: The Government have no plans to scrap the role of police and crime commissioner. We think it is a valuable role that can enable the missions that this Government have set out to be enacted locally, including the safer streets mission. We need to work with the PCCs to make sure that mission happens in the different force areas around the country. PCCs also have a role to play with their other partners, local authorities and the voluntary sector.

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): Noisy off-road bikes speed around neighbourhoods such as Chapeltown in my constituency, deliberately disturbing and intimidating residents. Will the Home Secretary commit to properly tackling off-road bikes by giving the police the right powers to crack down on this issue?

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I thank her for standing up for her community. We want to strengthen the law to give the police more powers to tackle the nightmare of dangerous off-road bikes.

Sir David Davis (Goole and Pocklington) (Con): When last year the now Home Secretary called on the then Conservative Government to use counter-terror legislation to proscribe organisations such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, she will remember that I supported her publicly. Since then, Iran and the IRGC have got even more dangerous. Has she changed her mind, and if so, why?

The Minister for Security (Dan Jarvis): I have huge respect for the right hon. Gentleman, but I gently point out that he is asking the Government to do something that the previous Government did not do in 14 years. I can say to him that we are leading work on countering Iranian state threats, making use of the full breadth and expertise of our intelligence services and law enforcement agencies. We keep the list of proscribed organisations under very close review. I can assure him that work continues apace to identify further ways to tackle the threat.

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): UK universities have experienced a fivefold increase in antisemitic incidents since the 7 October terrorist attacks. At a recent meeting of the Union of Jewish Students, I heard distressing examples of the Iranian regime organising on our campuses and stirring up hatred against Jewish students. Can the Minister tell the House what steps the Department is taking to deal with the threat posed by Tehran here on British soil?

Dan Jarvis: We have been clear that the behaviour of the Iranian regime, including the actions of the IRGC, poses a threat to the safety and security of the UK and our allies. The Government continually assess threats to the UK and take the protection of individuals' rights, freedoms and safety incredibly seriously, wherever those threats may originate.

Mike Martin (Tunbridge Wells) (LD): In 2023, the Home Office commissioned the Fairfield review into the Independent Office for Police Conduct. It deemed the delays in the IOPC as "unacceptable". Indeed, one of my constituents has been waiting a year after the death of her daughter to have a case officer assigned. Does the Home Secretary agree with the review, and will she comment on when she will implement its 93 recommendations?

Yvette Cooper: I have met the IOPC chair to talk through the issues facing that body. The hon. Gentleman is right that we need to speed up the decision-making process. He will also recognise that there are considerable challenges in the system that we have inherited.

Dan Tomlinson (Chipping Barnet) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Speaker, for making time for Back Benchers in the questions today. I rise to raise the issue of car theft in my constituency. Many hundreds of residents have had their cars stolen, and the police do not have the capacity to follow up. Next year, I am hosting a car theft summit in Chipping Barnet, and I invite the Minister to attend with me.

Dame Diana Johnson: I would be delighted to.

Dave Doogan (Angus and Perthshire Glens) (SNP): After a bungled fraud investigation by Renault Crédit International, it, together with Renault-Nissan UK Ltd moved to seize the assets of a business in my constituency, Mackie Motors Brechin Ltd. This cost my constituent half a million pounds and 25% of his order book value. Will the Secretary of State meet me to discuss the finer points of this clearly very dubious act by a UK bank?

Dan Jarvis: I am concerned to hear about the case that the hon. Gentleman raises, and I would be happy to meet him to discuss it further.

Clive Lewis (Norwich South) (Lab): I put on record my gratitude to the Home Secretary and her team for releasing the Home Office commissioned report, "The Historical Roots of the Windrush Scandal", which concluded that 30 years of racist immigration legislation caused the Windrush scandal. Those now on the Opposition Benches spent three years trying to suppress that report. Will the Home Secretary meet me, other MPs and civil society representatives to discuss its recommendations?

Seema Malhotra: I thank my hon. Friend for raising that issue. It was a shocking report, and one that the previous Government refused to publish. I would be very happy to meet him and other hon. Members to discuss it.

Richard Tice (Boston and Skegness) (Reform): Does the Home Secretary share my deep concerns about two-tier justice, given that some people who say some bad, stupid things on social media can be arrested, charged and jailed within a matter of weeks, but some people who brutally and violently assault police officers have not even been charged many months later?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Member will know that in this country we have operational independence for the police, and independence for the Crown Prosecution

Service and the courts. I strongly support police officers, who have faced cases of the most disgraceful violence and attacks. It is important that we support our police in the face of those attacks and ensure that they have the whole community behind them.

Gregor Poynton (Livingston) (Lab): The Home Secretary may be aware of the data that the Internet Watch Foundation released last week on the increasing amount of AI-generated child sexual abuse content available to everyone on the internet, finding that it has increased in the last six months alone. That is clearly illegal, so what are the UK Government doing to stamp down on that horrific crime?

Jess Phillips: Let me make it clear that the new Government intend very swiftly to set up new taskforces to ensure that across Departments—in this case, with our counterparts in the Department for Science, Innovation

and Technology—we do everything we can to end the scourge of online child abuse, and child abuse not online.

Mr Speaker: I call Jim Shannon—or are you not standing?

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am always standing, Mr Speaker. What efforts have been taken in schools to show the opportunities available in the police force, to enhance career opportunities for young people?

Mr Speaker: I'll be watching you!

Dame Diana Johnson: It is always a pleasure to answer the hon. Gentleman. That work will be ongoing. We want to recruit from the widest possible groups in our communities, and to encourage young people to think about a career in policing.

St Helena: UK Immigration

Paul Holmes (Hamble Valley) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary if he will make a statement on the new immigration arrangements between the UK Government and St Helena.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Stephen Doughty): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I have been asked to reply as the Minister for the Overseas Territories. I know that these are issues of keen interest to you, Mr Speaker.

The House is aware that a political agreement has been reached with Mauritius about the long-term future of the British Indian Ocean Territory. Once any treaty with Mauritius comes into force, following its proper parliamentary scrutiny, Mauritius will be responsible for any migrants who arrive there. However, we needed to find an interim contingency solution for the period before that agreement comes into force. Given that there is no permanent population, BIOT has never been an appropriate long-term location for migrants due to the logistical challenges of providing appropriate care in such a remote place without civilian infrastructure.

On 15 October, a new memorandum of understanding was reached with the Government of St Helena so that any new migrants arriving in the interim period will be transferred to St Helena. The intention is for that agreement to last until the treaty with Mauritius comes into force, recalling that, in practice, no new migrants have arrived on Diego Garcia since 2022.

We are hugely grateful to the St Helena Government for their assistance. Their Chief Minister has said:

“This arrangement presents a unique opportunity for a British Overseas Territory to be in a position to assist the UK, and we are pleased to be able to work in close partnership with the UK Government towards a mutually beneficial solution.”

The UK Government have agreed to provide one-off funding of £6.65 million to St Helena to improve health and education outcomes, and upgrade government infrastructure. This is consistent with our long-term support to the community in St Helena, which is of course crucial. This is a long-term, consistent partnership. We will support St Helena by providing technical support, and funding the transfer and subsistence costs for any migrants affected. Of course, this is not the first time that St Helena has supported the wider UK family. The agreement is testament to its integral place in our family. We thank it for its support.

Paul Holmes: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I must say that I am disappointed that, once again, the Government have chosen to make an important announcement outside this House, not within it, as they should.

Following on from the Government's shameful decision to fast-track and capitulate on negotiations to hand over the British Indian Ocean Territory to Mauritius, it is clear that the policy announced over the weekend is a rushed consequence of a deal that does not serve British taxpayers well. This aspect of the deal has not been properly scrutinised by this House, and there has been no announcement on how we will scrutinise the wider issue of the transfer of sovereignty of the British Indian Ocean Territory to another country.

During the treaty negotiations, was this plan discussed? If the Government were so keen on signing away sovereignty, why was it not part of the deal that Mauritius would take responsibility for illegal migrants and take them to Mauritius from day one? Were Chagossians consulted on the plan? The Foreign Secretary said that they were updated throughout, but parliamentary questions have revealed that not to be the case.

Finally, how much will the deal cost, and what Department will be responsible? Will there be a drawdown of Treasury funds, or will the money come from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office budgets? Will the cost be added to the overall cost estimated for the sovereignty deal with Mauritius? Does this plan signify a change of heart on the policy of offshoring as a whole? Before Labour MPs stand up to espouse the deal and say how good it is, they should remind themselves that in the election campaign, they wrote in their leaflets that the offshoring of British citizens was immoral. Does this plan represent a change of policy from this Government?

Stephen Doughty: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has taken that tone. I set out very clearly in my statement the answer to a number of points that he raised. Matters have also been set out very clearly by the St Helena Government. They have indicated their full agreement. In fact, they were fully part of the process and there was full consultation with them. This is a mutually beneficial win-win for the UK Government and St Helena. As I said, the Chief Minister of St Helena has said that it is in a unique position to help the UK Government, and this will strengthen its reputation and enhance its partnership with the British family.

The hon. Gentleman asked a lot of questions about the arrangements with Mauritius. The Foreign Secretary spoke at great length about the arrangements with BIOT recently. The agreement will go through this House in the proper way, as has been set out, and will face proper parliamentary scrutiny. I am sure that it will attract scrutiny, and that is only right. As I explained, this is a contingency agreement for the period before any agreement with Mauritius comes into place; after that, it will take any migrants. The situation on BIOT is not suitable, long term, for migrants. We have explained that at great length.

I have to say that the Government inherited a mess, and we are taking pragmatic, sensible and proactive measures to address the situation. I am hugely grateful to St Helena for the role it is playing. This is a mutually beneficial win-win. The hon. Gentleman asked where the funds will come from. They will come from the FCDO. We already have a long-term established partnership with St Helena, and it has hugely welcomed this plan. It will help it to deal with a number of ongoing issues. I have set out the details fully. The full details of the agreement are also available from the St Helena Government.

Dame Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): It is welcome to hear St Helena mentioned in the House. The money going there amounts to an increase of about 20% in financial aid from the UK this year, which is sorely needed in a community that is so challenged; but will the Minister explain how he will convey people from BIOT to St Helena, given the travel

[*Dame Meg Hillier*]

difficulties, and tell us what conversations he has had with the Chief Minister and her Ministers about where these people will be accommodated, if they do arrive?

Stephen Doughty: I thank my hon. Friend for her interest in St Helena, which has been long-standing. I understand that she visited the island recently, and I welcome her ongoing engagement with the people and the Government there. We have made it clear that we would support the transfer of anyone who did arrive, but let me reiterate that no one has actually arrived on BIOT since 2022. This is a contingency measure only, and, of course, it is not a safe place for people to attempt to go to. This is about closing that route and ensuring that if anyone did make that attempt, they could go to a safe place and be properly supported. The St Helena Government have made clear how they would accommodate and integrate people in that community.

Mr Speaker: I call the shadow Foreign Secretary.

Mr Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hamble Valley (Paul Holmes) for raising this important matter. The whole House will welcome the Government's sudden conversion to offshoring, even though this plan was not announced in the House in accordance with your specific instructions, Mr Speaker. I may be one of the only Members to have had the privilege of visiting St Helena, along with the hon. Member for Hackney North and Shoreditch—

Mr Speaker: I have.

Mr Mitchell: And you, of course, Mr Speaker. We may have been the only Members to survey the island's new airport, which will in time relieve the British taxpayer of cost and open up the island to a very bright future, with connectivity massively enhanced.

While I was in St Helena, I met the oldest mammal on the planet, born a few years after Napoleon's death: Jonathan the tortoise. I also visited the island's impressive hospital, which provides very good healthcare but is a small facility whose function has been specifically tailored to serve the commensurately small community of St Helena. The cohort of people who might arrive from Diego Garcia are likely to have medical needs—indeed, as experience shows, quite complex medical needs. That will place additional pressure on St Helena's healthcare infrastructure. What will the Minister do to help St Helena with that?

There is some disquiet among residents of St Helena at the thought that an influx of migrants could have an adverse impact on social cohesion and social provision in this very tightly knit community. What is the estimated number of migrants who will be sent there? Bearing in mind that the entire population is less than 5,000, will the Minister impose a limit—admittedly low, but nevertheless a limit? Has he made an assessment of how much this transfer policy will cost the British taxpayer? Of course, Conservative Members do not oppose the principle of offshoring, but we are perplexed by the Government's choice of destination, a small British overseas territory thousands of miles from Diego Garcia,

not least because a number of asylum seekers who landed on the British Indian Ocean Territory have already been transferred to Rwanda. Labour has of course scrapped the Rwanda scheme, so can the Minister tell the House whether the Government's approach has changed, and whether they welcome offshoring as a means of injecting deterrence into the complexities of illegal migration?

Stephen Doughty: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his comments and questions. He has always taken a keen interest in the overseas territories, and St Helena in particular. I am surprised that he is perplexed, because he and his fellow Ministers were grappling with these very decisions and issues in the last Government. We are providing pragmatic and practical solutions to respond to the situation that we inherited. There is no comparison with the Rwanda scheme. He will have just heard the Home Secretary say that spending £700 million of taxpayers' money resulted in four volunteers for that scheme. This is a mutually beneficial win-win agreement between the United Kingdom and one of our overseas territories. I have set out the cost very clearly: £6.65 million for the contingency arrangement, and then the costs for anyone who does arrive. Let me reiterate, however, that no migrants have arrived on BIOT since 2022. This is a contingency arrangement that is absolutely necessary, but of course we hope that no one will choose to take such a dangerous route.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the healthcare position. That is exactly why St Helena is a more suitable location for any theoretical migrants to be relocated to; facilities on that level do not exist on BIOT. He mentioned that there is allegedly disquiet in St Helena, but that is simply not the case. I read out very clearly what the St Helena Government and Chief Minister have said, and there are huge benefits to this plan. St Helena is a wonderful place. I have not had a chance to visit it, but I have had a chance to experience its culture, food and people, and I look forward to welcoming the Chief Minister to the Joint Ministerial Council in due course.

Oliver Ryan (Burnley) (Lab/Co-op): I am interested to hear how offshoring is being rebranded; the Rwanda scheme was a huge failure. Does the Minister agree that any comparison between this plan and the Rwanda scheme is rubbish? The latter cost £700 million and resulted in four volunteers being sent to Rwanda. This is a far better scheme.

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend makes the point himself in his question: this is a mutually beneficial, win-win agreement between us and St Helena, whereas the other scheme cost £700 million and sent four volunteers to Rwanda. There is no comparison.

Mr Speaker: We come to the Liberal Democrat spokesperson.

James MacCleary (Lewes) (LD): The Liberal Democrats have already put on the record our concerns about the deal that was struck with Mauritius and how it excluded the voices of Chagossians. We also have concerns about the terms of the agreement. What will happen to the individuals who have been moved to St Helena after 18 months elapse? We cannot just abandon them. Will the

Minister update the House on what will happen if an agreement with Mauritius has not been reached by the end of the 18-month period?

Can the Minister also update the House on the asylum seekers who have been detained on Diego Garcia, such as the 60 Sri Lankan Tamils? They are not in the scope of the agreement. Will the Government support those individuals in claiming asylum where they need it?

Finally, it has been reported today that there is an investigation under way into a major hack of the British high commission's phones during the Chagos islands talks. What action are the Government taking to address this potentially major security breach?

Stephen Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his questions. As I said, the Foreign Secretary answered questions about the agreement with Mauritius on BIOT earlier, but the hon. Gentleman asks for further details of the arrangement with St Helena. Under the arrangement, if any migrants arrive on BIOT in the future, they will be transferred to St Helena. They will remain free to depart, and to return to their country of origin, but they will not be able to stay on BIOT. St Helena would take responsibility for accommodating those individuals and, if appropriate, processing asylum claims.

The hon. Gentleman mentions existing migrants on the island. They are not included in this arrangement, and we continue to work at pace to find long-term, durable solutions. I will not go into the details; that would be inappropriate, given the legal complexities around the small group of individuals who are there. On his point about the media coverage of alleged hacks, those are subject to an ongoing police investigation in Mauritius, so I do not want to comment, but my understanding is that the allegations are historical, rather than related to the recent negotiation period.

Dr Scott Arthur (Edinburgh South West) (Lab): I really welcome the statement, and the clarity that has come with it. Who will ultimately be responsible for people when they find themselves in St Helena?

Stephen Doughty: I thank my hon. Friend for his question. Fundamentally, as a result of this agreement, St Helena has agreed to take responsibility for any theoretical migrants who arrive, but I draw him back to what I said earlier: Mauritius would take responsibility for any migrants who arrived after the agreement of the treaty, which we will seek to finalise following parliamentary scrutiny.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): The Minister really should understand that the British overseas territories are self-governing democracies, and they must make decisions about their own islands' governance. Has the Legislative Council of St Helena voted in favour of this agreement? Have the people of St Helena been consulted? What impact will the influx of people potentially have on this small island territory of only 4,500 people, and will the agreement have any impact on Tristan da Cunha and Ascension Island, which, as the Minister knows, form part of the overall British overseas territories?

Stephen Doughty: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question; I know he takes a very keen interest in this matter. We have discussed the overseas territories on

many occasions, and he knows how seriously I take their democracy and autonomy. That is why it is important to reiterate to the House that this agreement was freely entered into by the Government of St Helena. They have publicly welcomed it profusely and explained why it is beneficial. Obviously, they are responsible for their internal processes within St Helena. We will continue to work with the Government of St Helena, their representatives and, indeed, their Attorney General as we move forward with the agreement. If I may, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on the point he raises about Tristan da Cunha and Ascension, but the agreement is primarily about St Helena because of the facilities that are available there.

Elaine Stewart (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the UK's new agreement with Mauritius will close a potentially dangerous illegal migrant route?

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is right: BIOT is not a suitable place for migrants to be present. There is no permanent population and there are not the necessary education and health facilities. That is why we needed to put in place that part of our agreement with Mauritius: to ensure that during the interim, contingency period, were any migrants to arrive—as I said, none have arrived since 2022—they could go to a place where there were hospitals, education, and an economy and a community to support them. We thank St Helena for its help in this matter.

Mr Speaker: I call the Father of the House.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): If it is possible legally to deport illegal migrants from Diego Garcia to St Helena, is there any legal reason why we cannot deport illegal migrants landing on these shores to St Helena or any other overseas territory? Is it, as a former Home Secretary told me recently, because after five years they would acquire rights to British citizenship?

Stephen Doughty: We are absolutely confident that this agreement is compliant with international law, and we will be working closely with the Attorney General of St Helena to ensure that it is compliant with our law, with St Helena law and with all our international obligations.

Chris Murray (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (Lab): Does the Minister agree that the Government inherited a deeply troubling and complex situation for any migrants involved that the last Government failed to resolve over a number of years, and that we have now taken the decisive action needed to find a solution to this problem?

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As I have set out, we inherited a mess, quite frankly, on some of these issues and we are taking the pragmatic, practical steps to ensure that we have agreements that meet the needs going forward.

Sir Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I accept what the Minister says—that there have been no immigration arrivals since 2022—but does he accept in turn that there is a danger of creating a pull factor? If that happens,

[Sir Julian Lewis]

and a much larger number arrive than expected, will he put a cap on the number that can be transferred to St Helena?

Stephen Doughty: That is exactly why we have concluded these agreements with Mauritius and St Helena. BIOT is not a suitable place for migrants to be present; there is no permanent population and there are no suitable facilities. We are taking these steps to close down that route and ensure that people do not make that dangerous journey.

Mr Luke Charters (York Outer) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that British sovereignty over the overseas territories is non-negotiable, and that the comments from Conservative Members are not only wrong but deeply irresponsible?

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I have repeatedly made it clear, not least in the Falklands and Gibraltar, that we stand by their sovereignty and self-determination and will defend them. Indeed, that goes for the British overseas territories family, and it is a commitment that I will be making in person when the leaders join me at the Joint Ministerial Council in a few weeks' time.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Since no migrants have arrived in BIOT since 2022, and given that this agreement lapses after 18 months, what is the problem that the Minister is trying to solve? And given that Rwanda was apparently considered immoral and this is not, is he not simply offering an insult to Kigali?

Stephen Doughty: Absolutely not. This is prudent contingency planning. Unfortunately, we inherited a situation from the previous Government where many holes had been left in these very arrangements and where there were significant problems. We are now taking steps to pragmatically address that.

Jonathan Davies (Mid Derbyshire) (Lab): I welcome the Government's commitment to St Helena. Does the Minister agree that the comparisons with the Rwanda scheme that have been made throughout this urgent question are irresponsible and unhelpful, given that it cost £700 million and sent only four volunteers?

Stephen Doughty: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is no comparison with the £700 million of taxpayers' money that was spent on four volunteers, as the Home Secretary just set out. This is a sensible, win-win, beneficial agreement that benefits both the United Kingdom and St Helena and involves potentially very few people.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Ind): Can the Minister explain why the applications for refugee status made by people who have come to the British Indian Ocean Territory, as it is currently called, cannot be processed now? Why is he instead taking them to St Helena? Will he guarantee that St Helena is not going to become an offshore base for Britain to evade its international human rights obligations by simply sending large numbers of refugees there in the future?

Stephen Doughty: I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman's characterisation of St Helena. It is a wonderful place with wonderful people, and its Government have voluntarily entered this agreement. It is obviously a much more suitable place, were people theoretically to arrive, than BIOT, which is not suitable. I am very confident that all our processes comply with international law.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): The opportunities available to any migrant are vastly greater in Rwanda, aren't they?

The Minister for Border Security and Asylum (**Dame Angela Eagle**): Why didn't they go there, then?

Stephen Doughty: As my hon. Friend says, why didn't they go there? I mean, four people for £700 million is an absurd comparison. We are taking pragmatic steps to address the situation we inherited from the previous Government, and there is no comparison to be made between the situation in Rwanda and the situation in St Helena.

Lee Anderson (Ashfield) (Reform): If illegal migrants arriving in St Helena are granted asylum, does that mean they can then apply to come to the UK? If so, does that not create another market for people smugglers?

Stephen Doughty: No, absolutely not. There is no automatic right for them to travel from St Helena to the UK. St Helena will undertake the processing of any cases in a proper way. Of course, anyone who fails to get a positive decision will be removed. St Helena will process them, but there is no automatic right to come to the UK. As with any overseas territory, people will be able to apply for British overseas territory citizenship after a period of time, but it is not automatic.

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (North Cotswolds) (Con): The Minister has repeated several times this afternoon that no migrants have gone to BIOT in the last two years. He studiously avoided answering my right hon. Friend, the shadow Foreign Secretary's important question about how many migrants he is providing contingency for. In order to calculate the £6.5 million, he must know how many migrants are likely to go to St Helena—or not, as the case may be. Will he now tell the House what that number is, and will he publish the full impact assessment?

Stephen Doughty: Like most people, I do not have a crystal ball. Our expectation, based on the evidence, is that hopefully nobody will make that journey because it is dangerous and BIOT is not a suitable place for migrants. However, it is only right that we put contingency arrangements in place were anyone to do so before any treaty is concluded with Mauritius, which will then take responsibility for dealing with any migrant arrivals. The £6.65 million figure is for health and education. As part of the agreement with St Helena, any support for additional costs, were anyone to arrive, would be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): The Minister says this deal will cost taxpayers £6.65 million. Will he now be transparent and tell the House how much UK taxpayers will pay to Mauritius so that we can continue to use Diego Garcia, which he gave away?

Stephen Doughty: The facts relating to the agreement with Mauritius will be set out in due course, following proper parliamentary scrutiny. This is very specifically about the agreement with St Helena, and I have set out the amount of money and what it will be used for.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the Minister outline how the airbase's security will be best served within this new management, considering the importance of vetting anyone seeking to enter a military base under regular circumstances, never mind in this situation? What assurance do military personnel have that their safety is important to this Government?

Stephen Doughty: I think the hon. Gentleman may be referring to Diego Garcia, which is obviously not a suitable place for migrants, for the reasons he sets out. We have ensured that we put the base on a secure, long-term footing, in the interests of the national security of the UK and our allies.

Mr Speaker: That concludes the urgent question. As the House can see on the Order Paper, there are many Bills to be presented today. In order to save time and get on with today's main business, for Members presenting more than one consecutive Bill, I will accept private notice of the Second Reading dates for those Bills. Those dates will be recorded and published accordingly in *Hansard* and in the *Votes and Proceedings*. For Members presenting individual Bills, they will name the date for Second Reading as usual.

BILLS PRESENTED

COMPANY DIRECTORS (DUTIES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Martin Wrigley presented a Bill to amend section 172 of the Companies Act 2006 to require company directors to balance their duty to promote the success of the company with duties in respect of the environment and the company's employees.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 32).

MILITARY ACTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Richard Foord presented a Bill to require parliamentary approval for the deployment of UK armed forces for armed conflict; to provide for exemptions from that requirement in cases of emergency or in respect of compliance with treaty obligations; to make provision for retrospective parliamentary approval in certain circumstances; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 33).

PALESTINE STATEHOOD (RECOGNITION) (No. 2) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Shockat Adam, supported by Jeremy Corbyn, Kim Johnson, Ayoub Khan, Iqbal Mohamed, Mr Adnan Hussain, Brendan O'Hara, Siân Berry, Liz Saville Roberts, Ian Byrne and Stephen Gethins, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with the recognition of the State of Palestine.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 34).

HOSPICES AND HEALTH CARE (REPORT ON FUNDING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Luke Taylor presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish proposals for the funding of hospice clinical services by NHS England; to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the potential merits of including pharmacy, pathology, patient community equipment, palliative consultant costs, clinical nurse specialist services, and advance care planning costs within the NHS funding framework; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 35).

ANIMAL WELFARE

(RESPONSIBILITY FOR DOG ON DOG ATTACKS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Dr Luke Evans presented a Bill to require a person in charge of a dog to take all reasonable steps to ensure that that dog does not fatally injure another dog; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 36).

DEVOLUTION (IMMIGRATION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Stephen Gethins presented a Bill to amend the Scotland Act 1998 to grant legislative competence to the Scottish Parliament in respect of immigration.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 April 2025, and to be printed (Bill 37).

ACCESS TO TELECOMMUNICATIONS NETWORKS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Helen Morgan presented a Bill to require providers of electronic communications networks to grant other such providers access to their apparatus where that is necessary to ensure consistent network coverage; to prevent those providers from charging more than the standard market rate for such access; to require the regulator to impose penalties on providers who unreasonably fail to grant such access; to make provision for the purpose of incentivising providers to allow customers of other providers to use their networks where access cannot be granted to their apparatus; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 38).

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Bob Blackman, supported by Paula Barker, presented a Bill to make provision about the duties of public bodies to prevent homelessness.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 39).

PENSION (SPECIAL RULES FOR END OF LIFE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Greg Smith presented a Bill to change the period of life expectancy relevant to certain pension rules.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 40).

SPECIAL ENVOY FOR FREEDOM OF RELIGION
OR BELIEF BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Jim Shannon presented a Bill to require the continued appointment of a special envoy for freedom of religion or belief and make provision about the special envoy's functions.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 41).

NATIONAL CANCER STRATEGY BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Clive Jones presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish a ten-year cancer strategy for England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 42).

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT
(CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Christine Jardine presented a Bill to require specified organisations and public bodies to inform children and young people of local, national and online support services available to them following a bereavement; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 43).

BATTERY ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS
(FIRE SAFETY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Anna Sabine presented a Bill to make fire and rescue authorities statutory consultees for planning applications relating to Battery Energy Storage Systems; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 April 2025, and to be printed (Bill 44).

BULLYING AND RESPECT AT WORK BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rachael Maskell presented a Bill to provide for a statutory definition of bullying at work; to make provision relating to bullying at work, including to enable claims relating to workplace bullying to be considered by an employment tribunal; to provide for a Respect at Work Code to set minimum standards for positive and respectful work environments; to give powers to the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to investigate workplaces and organisations where there is evidence of a culture of, or multiple incidents of, bullying and to take enforcement action; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 45).

DOMESTIC BUILDING WORKS
(CONSUMER PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mark Garnier presented a Bill to make provision about consumer protection in relation to domestic building works; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 46).

HUNTING TROPHIES (IMPORT PROHIBITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

David Reed presented a Bill to make provision prohibiting the import of hunting trophies into Great Britain.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 47).

SECURE 16 TO 19 ACADEMIES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Emma Foody presented a Bill to make provision about the notice period for termination of funding agreements for secure 16 to 19 Academies; to make provision about the Secretary of State's duty to consider the impact on existing educational institutions when it is proposed to establish or expand a secure 16 to 19 Academy; and to alter the consultation question required when it is proposed to establish or expand a secure 16 to 19 Academy.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 49).

ANIMALS IN MEDICAL RESEARCH (PROHIBITION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Steve Race presented a Bill to prohibit the use of animals in medical research; to require the use of non-animal methods for conducting medical research; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 50).

CHILDREN NOT IN SCHOOL
(REGISTERS, SUPPORT AND ORDERS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Paul Holmes presented a Bill to make provision about the maintenance of registers by local authorities of children in their area who are not full-time pupils at any school; to make provision about support by local authorities to promote the education of such children; to make provision about school attendance orders; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 51).

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS (SPECIAL CONSTABLES) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Ashley Fox presented a Bill to amend Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 to add Special Constables to the list of those granted the right to take time off work to perform their duties.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 53).

AGRICULTURAL LAND (PLANNING) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Helen Whately presented a Bill to prohibit the granting of planning permission in respect of Grade 1 agricultural land; to provide for exemptions from that prohibition in specified circumstances; to place duties on local planning authorities in respect of such land; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 54).

STRATEGIC LITIGATION AGAINST PUBLIC
PARTICIPATION BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Gregory Stafford presented a Bill to make provision about the misuse of litigation to suppress freedom of speech.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 55).

HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK ETC. ACT 1974
(AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Liz Saville Roberts presented a Bill to amend the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 to place a requirement on employers to take proactive measures to prevent violence and harassment in the workplace; to make provision for protections for women and girls in the workplace; and to require the Health and Safety Executive to publish a Health and Safety Framework on violence and harassment in the workplace, including violence against women and girls in the workplace.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 56).

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Sir Jeremy Wright, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to establish an independent review of disablement caused by Covid-19 vaccinations and the adequacy of the compensation offered to persons so disabled; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 58).

COURTS (REMOTE HEARINGS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Oliver Ryan presented a Bill to allow for certain civil and family court hearings to be conducted remotely.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 59).

GREEN SPACES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Caroline Voaden presented a Bill to define the term “green spaces” to include urban parks, neighbourhood areas, and significant natural landscapes; to establish a Government Office for Green Spaces and to make provision about the powers and duties of that Office in relation to local authorities and public bodies; to require that Office to advise the Government on the preservation, enhancement, and accessibility of green spaces; to make provision about the promotion of community involvement in protection of green spaces; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 60).

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (MENTAL HEALTH
POLICY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Helen Maguire presented a Bill to require specified educational institutions to develop and maintain a mental health policy; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 December, and to be printed (Bill 61).

DOGS (PROTECTION OF LIVESTOCK)
(AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Aphra Brandreth presented a Bill to make provision changing the law about the offence of livestock worrying, including changes to what constitutes an offence and increased powers for investigation of suspected offences; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 62).

PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS
(PROHIBITION ON PUBLIC SECTOR USE) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Siân Berry presented a Bill to provide for the prohibition of the use of professional plant protection products by local authorities and other public authorities for amenity purposes; to require the Secretary of State to publish guidance in connection with that prohibition; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 April 2025, and to be printed (Bill 63).

CHALK STREAMS (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sarah Green presented a Bill to provide for a category of protection for chalk streams for the purpose of providing additional protections from pollution, abstraction and other forms of environmental damage; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 65).

PETS (MICROCHIPS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Rebecca Harris presented a Bill to make provision regarding pets with microchips; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 66).

FOOTBALL (GENDER INEQUALITY) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

James MacCleary presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish proposals for measures to address gender inequality in football.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 67).

HERITAGE PUBLIC HOUSES BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Mike Wood, supported by Bob Blackman, Mr Richard Holden, Ben Lake, Mr Toby Perkins and Greg Smith, presented a Bill to require local authorities to maintain a register of heritage public houses in their area and to make provision in connection with the compilation and maintenance of such registers; to make provision relating to planning applications in respect of public houses on such a register; to place restrictions on the sale of heritage public houses; to make provision relating to the nomination of heritage public houses as assets of community value; to make provision about the listing of heritage public houses; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 68).

BUILDING REGULATIONS (MINIMUM STANDARDS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Manuela Perteghella presented a Bill to set minimum standards for the building of new homes in relation to quality and energy efficiency; to place requirements on developers of new homes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 69).

PUBLIC SERVICES (TARGETS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Olly Glover presented a Bill to require the Government to set targets for the provision of public services and amenities, having regard to targets for the building of new homes; to require the Government to publish a report of progress against such targets every three years; to require the Government to consult local authorities to assess requirements for public services; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 70).

**STATE-RELATED DEATHS
(NATIONAL OVERSIGHT MECHANISM) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Carla Denyer presented a Bill to establish an independent body to operate a national oversight mechanism to monitor recommendations arising from investigations into state-related deaths, including inquests, public inquiries and official reviews; to make provision about the powers of that body to require action in relation to such recommendations; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 71).

**NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS
(WATER AND FLOODING) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Adrian Ramsay presented a Bill to require water companies and relevant public bodies to use nature-based solutions as a means to improve water and flood risk management services; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 72).

SOCIAL MEDIA (ACCESS TO ACCOUNTS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Max Wilkinson presented a Bill to require providers of social media accounts to grant parents access to the social media accounts of their child in cases where the child has died; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 73).

**CLIMATE FINANCE FUND
(FOSSIL FUELS AND POLLUTION) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Richard Burgon presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish proposals for a Climate Finance Fund, to be funded via a levy on fossil fuel companies and other organisations that contribute to pollution; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 April 2025, and to be printed (Bill 74).

CARERS AND CARE WORKERS BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Helen Morgan presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to publish and implement a Care Workers Employment Strategy, with the aim of improving the recruitment and retention of care workers; to establish an independent National Care Workers Council with responsibility for setting professional standards for care workers, for establishing a system of professional qualifications and accreditation for care workers, and for advising the Government on those matters; to require the Secretary of State to commission an independent assessment of the support available to unpaid carers, including financial support and employment rights; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 76).

BUS SERVICES BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Helen Morgan presented a Bill to place a duty on the Government to ensure that every town with a population of more than 10,000 people has a regular bus service operating seven days a week, and that local health services, including hospitals and GP surgeries, are served by those buses; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 29 November, and to be printed (Bill 77).

**MEAT (INFORMATION ABOUT
METHOD OF KILLING) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require producers, suppliers and retailers of meat to indicate clearly whether the animal has been killed in accordance with religious rites without prior stunning; to require the Secretary of State to collect and publish specified information relating to meat slaughtered in accordance with such practice; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 April 2025, and to be printed (Bill 78).

BANK OF ENGLAND (INFLATION TARGETS) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for penalties against the Court of Directors of the Bank of England for failure to meet inflation targets.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 79).

CHILD CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to create an offence of child criminal exploitation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 80).

HEALTH INSURANCE (EXEMPTION FROM INSURANCE
PREMIUM TAX) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to provide for exemptions from insurance premium tax in respect of health insurance; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 81).

EXEMPTION FROM VALUE ADDED TAX
(LISTED PLACES OF WORSHIP) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt from Value Added Tax repairs to listed places of worship; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed (Bill 82).

BAILIFFS (WARRANTS OF POSSESSION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to set maximum time limits within which a bailiff's warrant of possession appointment date must be granted; to make provision for alternative methods of executing warrants of possession; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 83).

EXEMPTION FROM VALUE ADDED TAX (PUBLIC
ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING POINTS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt from Value Added Tax the supply of electricity at public electric vehicle charging points; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 84).

VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS ACT (REVIEW) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Sir Jeremy Wright, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to review, and publish a report on, the merits of increasing the relevant statutory sum under the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979 for all claims since 1 January 2020 by an amount representing the amount of inflation since 2007.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 December, and to be printed (Bill 85).

HIGHWAYS ACT 1980 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend section 58 of the Highways Act 1980 to restrict the defences available to highway authorities; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 86).

COVID-19 VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope, supported by Sir Jeremy Wright, presented a Bill to place a duty on the Secretary of State to make provision about financial assistance to persons who have suffered disablement following vaccination against Covid-19 and to the next of kin of persons who have died shortly after vaccination against Covid-19; to require the Secretary of State to report to Parliament on the merits of a no-fault compensation scheme to provide such financial assistance, on whether there should be any upper limit on the financial assistance available, on the criteria for eligibility and on whether payment should be made in all cases where there is no other reasonable cause for the death or disablement suffered; to provide for a special time limit under the Limitation Act 1980 for actions in respect of personal injury or death following a Covid-19 vaccination; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 87).

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS ACT 1946
(AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to provide that a draft statutory instrument which is subject to the affirmative resolution procedure may be amended by either House of Parliament before it is approved; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 88).

DANGEROUS DOGS ACT 1991 (AMENDMENT) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to provide that, before making any order to designate a type of dog for the purposes of section 1 or 2 of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991, the Secretary of State must carry out a public consultation and publish a comparative review of data showing the incidences of fatalities resulting from bites of dogs of that type in the last three years.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 89).

ARM'S-LENGTH BODIES (REVIEW) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require the Government to conduct a review of every Arm's-Length Body in existence on 4 July 2024 and to publish the results of those reviews within four years; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 90).

EXEMPTION FROM VALUE ADDED TAX
(MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt from Value Added Tax goods or services which are beneficial to the environment, to health and safety, to education or for charitable purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 91).

MOBILE HOMES ACT 1983 (AMENDMENT) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the Mobile Homes Act 1983; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 92).

ANONYMITY OF SUSPECTS BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to create an offence of disclosing the identity of a person who is the subject of an investigation in respect of the alleged commission of an offence; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 93).

DOMESTIC ENERGY (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt from VAT supplies of electricity, oil and gas for domestic purposes; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 94).

**PUBLIC HEALTH (CONTROL OF DISEASE) ACT 1984
(AMENDMENT) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to amend the Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984 to make provision about Parliamentary scrutiny of regulations made under that Act; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 95).

**CARAVAN SITE LICENSING
(EXEMPTIONS OF MOTOR HOMES) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to exempt motor homes from caravan site licensing requirements; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 96).

NHS ENGLAND (ALTERNATIVE TREATMENT) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision about arranging alternative non-NHS England treatment for patients who have waited for more than one year for hospital treatment; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 6 December, and to be printed (Bill 97).

**BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION
(PRIVATISATION) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for the privatisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 98).

CHILDREN'S CLOTHING (VALUE ADDED TAX) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to extend the definition of children's clothing for the purposes of exemption from VAT; to extend the VAT exemption to further categories of school uniform; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 24 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 99).

**BBC LICENCE FEE NON-PAYMENT
(DECriminalISATION FOR OVER-75s) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to de-criminalise the non-payment of the BBC licence fee by persons aged over seventy-five; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 100).

REGULATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require a Regulatory Impact Assessment to be published for all primary and secondary legislation introduced by the Government; to make provision for associated sanctions; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 101).

**RULE OF LAW (ENFORCEMENT BY PUBLIC
AUTHORITIES) BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to require public authorities to exercise their statutory powers to investigate and take enforcement action for breaches of the law; to make provision for sanctions for failing to take such action; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 July 2025, and to be printed (Bill 102).

ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION (OFFENCES) BILL*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to create offences in respect of persons who have entered the UK illegally or who have remained in the UK without legal authority; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 17 January 2025, and to be printed (Bill 103).

**NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CO-FUNDING AND
CO-PAYMENT BILL***Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to make provision for co-funding and for the extension of co-payment for NHS services in England; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 16 May 2025, and to be printed (Bill 104).

PUBLIC SECTOR EXIT PAYMENTS (LIMITATION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to limit exit payments made by some public sector organisations to employees; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 13 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 105).

GREEN BELT (PROTECTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Sir Christopher Chope presented a Bill to establish a national register of Green Belt land in England; to restrict the ability of local authorities to de-designate Green Belt land; to make provision about future development of de-designated Green Belt land; and for connected purposes.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 20 June 2025, and to be printed (Bill 106).

WATER (AGRICULTURAL POLLUTION) BILL

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Ellie Chowns presented a Bill to make provision to prevent, reduce and regulate agricultural pollution of water.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March 2025, and to be printed (Bill 108).

Employment Rights Bill

Second Reading

Mr Speaker: The reasoned amendment in the name of Kevin Hollinrake has been selected.

4.22 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Angela Rayner): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I declare that I am a lifelong proud trade union member—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] When the Government took office and I took this job, we promised the biggest upgrade to workers’ rights in a generation, nothing less than a new deal for working people. We said that we would introduce a Bill to deliver that within 100 days, and we have fulfilled the promise we made to the British public. Let us be clear: too many working people have had to wait too long for change.

Over decades, the good, secure jobs that our parents and grandparents could build a life on were replaced by low-paid and insecure work. Wages flatlined, in-work poverty grew, growth was strangled and the Tories left behind a battered economy that served no one. Today, this Labour Government, led by working people for working people, will start to turn the tide.

First, I want to note the reasoned amendment. Our reforms are ambitious—they have to be to bring real change. But we have engaged extensively and will continue to do so. Today we are publishing a package of consultations on strengthening statutory sick pay, zero-hours contracts, industrial relations, collective redundancy and fire and rehire. As the impact assessment we have published today shows, the Bill is a pro-growth Bill.

This landmark Bill—pro-growth, pro-business and pro-worker—will extend the employment protections given by the best British companies to millions more workers.

James Wild (North West Norfolk) (Con): In a discourtesy to the House, the very extensive impact assessment to which the Deputy Prime Minister has referred was published only a couple of hours before the debate, but one thing that it says is that the estimated cost of the measures could be £4.5 billion a year. How does loading costs on to employers help to boost growth and job creation?

Angela Rayner: The impact assessment also makes it clear that the Bill will have a positive impact on growth. More than 10 million workers, in every corner of this country, will benefit from Labour’s plan, and the money in their pockets will go back into the economy and support businesses, in particular those on high streets.

Across the business spectrum, from giants like Sainsbury’s and Octopus Energy to small and medium-sized companies like Richer Sounds, successful firms already know that strong employee rights mean strong growth opportunities. The Secretary of State for Business and Trade and I have just been to the Co-op in County Durham to see how it retains valuable talent, boosts profits, and powers ahead with enlightened policies that support good working lives for its staff. The Bill will bring all businesses on board.

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): The Government's own impact assessment states that "the impact on growth could"—only could—"be positive", and that any such impact "would be small in magnitude."

The negative impacts, not least on small businesses, will be very serious in magnitude, as my hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (James Wild) laid out. Will the Deputy Prime Minister please explain how she will minimise the negative impacts?

Angela Rayner: We have already been working with businesses while bringing forward the Bill, and we will continue to do that through the consultations. We have recognised probation periods, for example, but we do not think that people should not have rights two years into their employment.

We are listening, but I say to Conservative Members, who promised employment Bill after employment Bill and then never delivered them, that the people of this country deserve secure fairness at work, and this Labour Government will deliver it. Almost 9 million employees will benefit from protection against unfair dismissal from day one, 1.7 million will benefit from new policies on flexible working, and up to 2 million will receive a right to bereavement leave. Thousands of pregnant women and mothers will benefit from new maternity protections, and tens of thousands of fathers and partners will be brought into the scope of paternity leave. We will deliver a genuine living wage that matches the cost of living.

In total, more than 10 million people will benefit from Labour's plan in every corner of this country, so if you are in casual work, unable to rely on guaranteed hours, this Labour Government are delivering for you. If you are working hard on low pay and struggling to make ends meet, this Government are delivering for you. This is a Government back in the service of working people.

Dr Luke Evans (Hinckley and Bosworth) (Con): Can the Deputy Prime Minister define "working people"?

Angela Rayner: The Conservatives had 14 years to support the working people of this—[*Interruption.*]

Dr Evans: Will she give way?

Angela Rayner: Will the hon. Member listen to my response? I gave way to him. For 14 years, the Tories promised employment Bills and an industrial strategy, and in 14 years they delivered the highest cost of living for the working people of this country. It will be this Labour Government who deliver for them.

This is a Government back in the service of working people, building an economy fit for the future and making work pay. For the first time ever, we have instructed the Low Pay Commission to take account of the cost of living when setting the minimum wage, because everyone deserves a proper living wage for a proper day's work. We have already moved to protect 4 million self-employed workers from late payments with the new fair payment code, and we have already encouraged employers not to use the ineffective and

failed minimum service laws, which did not stop a single day of industrial action while in force, before we repeal them for good. That is a bold start, but we are going further. The UK labour market is not delivering for workers or businesses, and it holds back the UK economy. We know that things have to change. The Bill marks a momentous opportunity to chart a new route to growth—one built from the bottom up and the middle out—alongside the £63 billion of investment into the UK that was announced last week. Higher growth, higher wages and higher productivity—a new partnership between workers and business.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD) *rose*—

Graham Stuart: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope it is a point of order.

Graham Stuart: I believe it is. The Deputy Prime Minister just talked about the amount of money coming into the economy as a result of the measures. Is it appropriate for her and other Members across the House to speak in the debate without mentioning what they have received in donations from trade unions, given how central the law around trade unions is to the Bill?

Hon. Members: Not a point of order!

Mr Speaker: You are correct: it is not a point of order, even if the right hon. Gentleman thought that it was.

Wera Hobhouse: Sexual harassment in the workplace is absolutely horrendous and has been terrible in demotivating people from staying in their workplaces. Following my Worker Protection Act 2024 becoming law, the Government proposals go even further on third-party harassment in the workplace. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the Bill will encourage people by making our workplaces safer?

Angela Rayner: I agree with the hon. Member and thank her for her work in that area. We must ensure that workplaces have a good culture that does not tolerate any form of harassment, including sexual harassment, because that is bad for business as well.

The major achievement of parts 1 and 2 of the Bill will be to strengthen rights for working people. That is personal for me: I started my working life as a carer on casual terms, not knowing if there would be a pay cheque next month. The fear of not being able to provide for my young family, and of losing everything, stuck with me. Now that I am at the Cabinet table, I am determined to deliver for the millions of people in the position that I was once in, and to bring all companies up to the standard of the best when it comes to workers' rights. The Bill is a recognition and celebration of the many employers that are already implementing such measures and, in many cases, go much further.

Rosie Wrighting (Kettering) (Lab): I welcome the new Labour Government's approach to ensuring that my constituents feel the benefit of economic growth. As my right hon. Friend will know, more than 1 million people on zero-hours contracts will benefit from her guaranteed hours policy. Does she agree that the Bill will raise living standards across the country?

Angela Rayner: I agree, and can confirm to the House that the Bill will finally end the exploitative zero-hours contract. Up to 2.4 million workers will finally have the right to a contract that reflects the number of hours that they work.

For too long, working people have been subject to the shocking practice of fire and rehire. Often, even the threat of fire and rehire means that people voluntarily agree to lower pay and reduced terms and conditions. Our Bill will end those bullying tactics for good, putting an end to fire and rehire and to fire and replace, unless employers can prove that they face financial difficulties that threaten the survival of their business and that changing the employee's contract was unavoidable. After years of campaigning, working people finally have a Government who listen. No longer will working people face the scourge of fire and rehire.

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): A number of our constituents were threatened with fire and rehire during the covid pandemic—shameful acts by their employers. People were fearing for their livelihoods while that crisis was going on. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we have waited far too long and cannot end the scourge of fire and rehire soon enough in order to give workers the protection that they need and deserve?

Angela Rayner: I agree with my hon. Friend. The previous Government promised to do something about the practice but failed to do anything.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that growth, if it comes, will come from small and medium-sized enterprises, which are the bedrock of industry in this country? Does she accept that although the measures may be capable of being accommodated by large businesses with big human resources departments, they certainly will not be by small and medium-sized enterprises, so the Bill is likely to damage the growth that she insists will come under a Labour Government?

Angela Rayner: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman on the importance of small and medium-sized businesses, which do a fantastic job and contribute widely to our economy. That is why we have engaged with small and medium-sized enterprises. Many of them understand that if there is clarity around what we are doing and if we consult like we did with probation periods, then we are working with them. But many of them also recognise that the scourge of insecure, low-paid work in this country at the moment is holding Britain's economy back. That is what we are going to change.

Paul Waugh (Rochdale) (Lab/Co-op): The Deputy Prime Minister referenced the extra help for working parents that the Bill will introduce. Does she agree that that stands in stark contrast to the suggestion of some on the Conservative Benches that maternity pay has “gone too far”?

Angela Rayner: I agree with my hon. Friend. When the previous Labour Government brought in the national minimum wage they had the same sort of arguments made at them, but what we actually saw was that the minimum wage lifted millions of people out of poverty.

It will be this Labour Government who can stand proudly and say that we stood up for the workers, and for those good employers in our country that are doing the right thing by protecting and looking after their employees.

David Baines (St Helens North) (Lab): We are clearly going to hear a lot of the same arguments that we heard years ago, when Labour introduced the minimum wage. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that good employers have nothing to fear from the Bill, and working people have a lot to celebrate?

Angela Rayner: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Bill is pro-worker and pro-business; that is the context in which the Bill has come to fruition. We have been consulting wide and long on the measures, and we believe they strike the right balance to get our economy working across the board, so that people can contribute and feel that their contribution is valued as part of the UK economy.

The Bill also delivers a once-in-a-generation upgrade of the rights of our proud seafarers. Never again will any company be able to get away scot-free with exploiting a loophole to sack employees without notice. No longer will our seas be the byword for a race to the bottom on standards.

The next step in our package to transform the rights of working people is on unfair dismissal. At present, employees must wait two years for basic protections against unfair dismissal, so it is not surprising that they can be loath to change jobs and restart the clock. That is not right. It deprives people of promotion opportunities and pay rises, and it limits businesses' ability to recruit. Under the Bill, employees will not have to wait years for protection from unfair dismissal. Instead, they will receive it from day one. Those measures alone will benefit close to 9 million people.

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): The Deputy Prime Minister talks about seafarers not being abused, but did she apologise to DP World last week?

Angela Rayner: I do not know what the hon. Member is getting at. Maybe he is getting at the former Conservative Transport Secretary, who referred to them as pirates of the high seas or weasels—I do not know. I have just said clearly to all businesses in the UK that I want to work with them to ensure that we value their employees. Many of them are onboard: they recognise that it is good for business, good for growth and good for their employees.

Kit Malthouse (North West Hampshire) (Con): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

In relation to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Wiltshire (Dr Murrison), I understand that the right hon. Lady believes she is fulfilling a manifesto commitment, and we have to respect that. However, I hope she recognises that while these regulations will apply across the whole of the economy, the dynamics within small businesses and—in particular—microbusinesses are very different from those within large businesses. For example, if a business only has four employees and all four apply for flexible working,

[Kit Malthouse]

as the Bill provides for, it becomes not just a logistical and administrative nightmare but a personal nightmare for the person who is trying to run that business. I hope that as the Bill progresses, the right hon. Lady will look at what has been a customary carve-out for small businesses and consider whether that might be appropriate for specific measures.

Angela Rayner: Some of the measures in the Bill do recognise the difference between large employers and smaller ones, but we also have to ensure fairness and clarity of purpose in this country, and I think this Bill strikes the right balance. As I have said to other hon. Members who have raised issues regarding small and medium businesses, we are working with those businesses. We have already listened regarding probation periods: the Bill now creates a new statutory probation period so that employers and employees can check whether a job is a good fit. If it turns out not to be right, the Bill allows for a new lighter-touch standard of fairness for employers to meet when they dismiss someone, so I think we are striking the right balance. We have worked very hard on this piece of legislation. If workers are dismissed unfairly, everyone deserves the right to protection, however long they have been in post. With Labour, they will have that right.

Turning to statutory sick pay, no one should feel forced to struggle through work when they are not well. Our view is simple: everyone should be entitled to sick pay from the first day that they are sick, regardless of their earnings, yet 1.3 million employees are currently excluded because they do not earn enough. That means that lower earners, including carers, go to work when ill because they cannot afford not to do so, risking infecting the vulnerable, the elderly, and others with whom they come into contact. No one should want that. Under this Bill, all employees will be entitled to sick pay however much they earn, and that sick pay will be paid from their first day of being ill.

Graham Stuart: Will the right hon. Lady give way on that point?

Angela Rayner: I have already given way to the right hon. Member, and there are so many other Members who want to speak.

This Government know that the current system does not support working families. We said that we would make flexible working the default, and the Bill will do just that. Flexible working makes workers happier, and we know that businesses that offer it benefit from bigger, better and more diverse recruitment pools. At the same time, we recognise that not all workplaces can accommodate all flexible working requests, so businesses will be able to negotiate or reject unworkable requests as long as that rejection is reasonable.

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): Who would decide whether a rejection is reasonable or unreasonable?

Angela Rayner: There will be statutory guidance, but of course, it would depend on the various different circumstances. We saw during the covid pandemic that people were able to be incredibly flexible in their work. It is with that mindset that I ask employees and employers

to look at how they deliver services, because far too much talent goes out of our economy because of inflexibility. Employers should think about how much talent they can retain in their business by keeping people in work; many of the good employers already know that, and offer way more flexibility than we are suggesting in our Bill.

The current parental leave system is also outdated, which is not right. Under the Bill, fathers and partners will be able to give notice of their intention to take paternity leave and unpaid parental leave from their first day in a new job. New mums also lack the protection they deserve. We know that the Conservative party's solution is to go back to the dark ages and scrap maternity pay altogether; if the Conservatives had their way, as a single mum, I would have been left with nothing. It was a Labour Government who introduced the maternity allowance as the number of mothers in the workforce grew, and while the Conservative party—out of step with modern Britain—cannot wait to get rid of it, I say that we will never, ever stop defending it.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way—what an incredible legacy she is setting down today!

Adoptive parents clearly need time with their children as they bring them into their family, but self-employed adopters do not have the same privileges. Will my right hon. Friend look at how we can ensure that those parents also have proper statutory rights to take leave and receive pay?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for making that really important point. This is the start of a process. There are a number of consultations, such as for the self-employed and on a single category of worker, and they will continue, because some of these things are more complex than what we can deliver in this Bill. But I say to my hon. Friend and to other Members: please come to this in the spirit of what we want, which is to improve working people's lives. As I have said, many employers already go above and beyond what we are saying in this Bill. I hope we can start to celebrate those employers who do so and to spread that across the economy.

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): May I join others in celebrating this Bill and what it represents? My right hon. Friend talks about employers who are already going above and beyond. Frankly, they get it that, out there in the real world, supporting families is good for the economy and good for growth; that includes dads, who we all recognise have responsibilities. What more can she tell us about that spirit of openness in the Bill and the opportunities to look at parental leave, particularly paternity leave? What more can we do to help more families to take it up and get longer?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. We all agree across the House that families play an important role, that businesses can help to support families, whatever size or shape they are, and that we must go much further to make that happen.

The Bill goes further by making it unlawful to dismiss pregnant women, mothers on maternity leave and mothers who return to work during a six-month period after they return, except in certain specific circumstances.

For women in work, we will not stop there. Eight out of 10 menopausal women are in work. For most, there is no support. When workplaces fail to support women, we fail in our moral duty to treat people equally, and employers lose out on talent and skills. On pay, too, we are failing women. The national gender pay gap still stands at over 14% and is not narrowing fast enough, so we will be requiring action plans for large employers to address the pay gap and support women during the menopause.

It is a sad reality that women often find the workplace uncomfortable and unsafe. Sexual harassment at work can destroy confidence and ruin careers. We will do everything in our power to tackle it. The Bill will strengthen the duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment of employees, and it will strengthen protections for whistleblowers by making it explicit that if they do the right thing and speak up about sexual harassment, the law will protect them.

Through this Bill, the party of maternity pay and of the Equal Pay Act 1970 will introduce the next generation of rights for working women. Central to all these reforms is our belief that all employers should always support their employees. The best ones already do.

Steve Witherden (Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr) (Lab): In early September, over 500 Oscar Mayer workers, organised by Unite the Union, launched strikes against the company's appalling use of fire and rehire. Many of these workers are my constituents and are facing serious threats to their pay and working conditions, with potential losses of up to £3,000 annually. I hugely support this legislation, but immediate action is crucial to protect my constituents and workers across the UK from such exploitative practices. Will my right hon. Friend provide clarity on the timescales for reforms to unfair dismissal?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Before the Deputy Prime Minister responds, may I say that if there are declarations of interest to be made, even in interventions, they should be made on the Floor of the House?

Angela Rayner: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. That is why we have moved at pace. The previous Government promised an employment Bill to protect workers and they did not deliver. Within our first 100 days, we are delivering this employment Bill.

Losing a loved one is among the hardest things for any of us. That is why in this Bill we are setting a clear standard for businesses, giving employees the right to bereavement leave. Taken together, these new rights for working people—sick pay when they need it, an end to exploitative zero-hours contracts and to fire and rehire, bereavement leave, expanded entitlements, paternity leave and new protections for women in work—represent the biggest upgrade for working people in a generation, but we are not stopping there.

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Bill not only represents the biggest uplift in workers' rights in a generation, but strengthens their enforcement through new enforcement measures? That stands in stark contrast to the Conservatives, who brought in unlawful employment tribunal fees.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. We want the culture to change as well. We have had a race to the bottom where workers have not been protected, and we have seen the biggest wave of strike action because of the previous Government.

We want employers and trade unions to come together to grow our economy. The employers and the unions are up for that challenge, because we know that the world of work is fairer and more productive when working people can come together to negotiate fair pay and decent conditions. That is why we are reinstating the school support staff negotiating body in recognition of the vital role that support staff play in the workforce and in young people's education.

As a former carer, I have said from day one that in this place I will champion carers and the complex, high-quality and professional work that they do. I am so proud to say that after 14 years, their extraordinary, life-saving contribution to our community will no longer be devalued by low pay and lack of career progression. For the first time, thanks to this Labour Government, there will be a historic fair pay agreement process in the adult social care sector, with a new body empowered to negotiate pay and conditions and ensure that training and a career structure are in place. At last, care will be rightly regarded as a multi-skilled profession and carers will be confident that they have the respect and income that they deserve for looking after our vulnerable loved ones and helping to manage the pressures on the NHS and in social care.

Paula Barker (Liverpool Wavertree) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Does my right hon. Friend agree that care workers are often the Cinderella service? They are low paid, but certainly not low skilled. It is time we got to grips with hostile employers who do not pay travel time.

Angela Rayner: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The disparity in the terms and conditions for care workers actually impedes recruitment: we are seeing huge numbers of vacancies in the care sector. Through the fair pay agreement, I want to see carers being treated with fairness for the valuable contribution they make. They are also key to tackling the challenges we face in our NHS.

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): I thank the right hon. Lady for raising the issue of care workers and the great contribution that they make by looking after those who need care. Does she agree that the minimum wage for a carer should be increased by £2 an hour, in line with Liberal Democrat policy?

Angela Rayner: We have already written to the Low Pay Commission, as I have set out, and we want to go further through the fair pay agreement to make sure that carers are recognised for the valuable role they play. Care workers are not just people who do the shopping or call in for 15 minutes; they handle complex needs in the community and look after some of our most vulnerable loved ones. They should get the recognition they deserve, and that is why we are taking these measures.

We know the valuable contribution that trade unions make. That is why we are resetting industrial relations. The Conservatives presided over strike Britain with

[Angela Rayner]

their scorched earth approach to strikes. First, we are repealing the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023. Anyone with a brain could see that that legislation would do two things: increase tensions and fail to prevent a single day of industrial action. We said so at the time, and what happened? The rail dispute cost our economy over £1 billion. The law has failed and has no reason to stay on the statute book.

We are also repealing nearly every part of the flawed Trade Union Act 2016, which tried to smother trade unions in form filling and red tape and prevent them from doing their job. We will go further by strengthening the voice of working people by making it easier for trade unions to get recognised, giving them the right of access to workplaces and making sure that they have enough time to represent their members. When the rights of working people are flouted, a new fair work agency will be empowered to investigate. Today we are also launching a consultation on modernising trade union laws so that they are fit for the modern workplace and our modern economy.

In under 100 days, we have put together a transformative package that marks a new era for working people. We know that the Conservatives will oppose this every step of the way. We know because they have history, just as they opposed Labour's minimum wage and now, shamefully, want to take us back to the dark ages when women were denied maternity pay. It is clear that they are out of step with modern Britain.

Our plans mark a new way forward—a new deal for working people, making jobs more secure and family friendly, banning exploitative zero-hours contracts, supporting women in work at every stage in their life, a genuine living wage and sick pay for the lowest earners, further and faster action to close the gender pay gap, ensuring that rights are enforced and that trade unions are strengthened, repealing the anti-worker, anti-union laws, turning the page on industrial relations and ending fire and rehire, while giving working people the basic rights that they deserve from day one in the job. This is a landmark moment, delivered in under 100 days. This is a pro-business, pro-worker, pro-growth Bill and a pro-business, pro-worker, pro-growth Government. Today, after 14 years of failure, we are starting a new chapter and decisively delivering a better Britain for working people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the shadow Secretary of State.

4.57 pm

Kevin Hollinrake (Thirsk and Malton) (Con): I beg to move an amendment, to leave out from “That” to the end of the Question and add:

“this House notes the balanced reforms made by previous Conservative governments to improve workers’ rights, including the National Living Wage, the prohibition of the use of exclusivity clauses or terms in zero hours contracts and the introduction of shared parental leave and pay, and declines to give a Second Reading to the Employment Rights Bill because it has been rushed into Parliament without full consultation to meet an arbitrary 100-day deadline and Monday 21 October 2024 Business Today: Chamber 19 has not been accompanied by an Impact Assessment considering the impact on the Employment Tribunal, especially as a result of the removal of the qualifying period for the right to claim unfair dismissal or the impact of the extra red tape on SMEs or the

impact of establishing the Fair Work Agency; because the repeal of trade union laws will lead to more strikes and intimidation in the workplace, and will force taxpayers to foot the bill for inflation-busting pay hikes without public service reform; because the Bill undermines choice for workers about whether they want to fund political campaigning and forces firms and public bodies to bankroll more trade union facility time, including trade union diversity jobs; and because the Bill is contrary to the Government’s stated goals of improving productivity and economic growth and will increase costs for businesses and consumers.”

The Conservative party will always be the party of business, but we are pro-business and pro-worker, not least because many Conservative Members have been both workers and people who have started and grown their own businesses. Those who have done so are the first to appreciate the symbiotic relationship between the two. We acted during our time in office to improve workers’ rights in several areas: flexible working, parental leave, redundancy protections, ensuring that workers keep the tips left for them by their customers, and significant increases to the national living wage.

I started my first significant business back in 1992. Over three decades, we grew to become a national business employing hundreds of people. We valued every one of those people. We were one of *The Sunday Times*’s best 100 companies to work for and were certified by Investors in People. I believe that business is a force for good and that businesspeople do great service to our communities and the wider economy. As Winston Churchill put it, they are the strong horse that pulls the whole cart.

The question I now ask myself is whether I would start that small business again today if the Bill were in place. Sadly, the answer is probably no—certainly not a business that employed any people. The very high cost of these measures will be borne by all companies and passed on in the form of higher prices, reduced wages and lost jobs. The measures will fall most heavily on small businesses, for which they could be existential.

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): Does the hon. Member remember 1997 and 1998, when the Conservative party said that the social chapter and the national minimum wage would cost half a million jobs? In the late 1990s, half a million jobs were actually created.

Kevin Hollinrake: I was not here at the time, but it is clear nevertheless that the minimum wage and the national living wage have had a positive effect on prosperity in this country, and I would be the first to admit it. I want the hon. Lady, and other Government Members, to understand that those measures fell equally on all businesses across the UK. The measures in this Bill fall disproportionately hard on small businesses.

What the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Angela Rayner) fails to understand is that the implication of these measures, such as a day one right to an employment tribunal, is that even a spurious case of unfair dismissal costs time and money. It is potentially tens of thousands of pounds to defend that case. As one business organisation put it, “You lose when you are accused.” Most small businesses saddled with such a cost would be sunk without trace. It is not just that, but the deterrent effect, which it would have had on me, and which will be felt right across the economy and by every existing and aspirant business person across this entire nation. When the Deputy Prime Minister reflects on what she is

hearing from people who have actually run a business, will she at the very least consider exempting small and medium enterprises from this catastrophic Bill?

Graham Stuart: Like my hon. Friend, I started a business—I started mine a little earlier than him, but that is how much older I am. I followed the Deputy Prime Minister’s speech as carefully as I could. From what I could understand, because of the changes in the Bill, someone can fail to turn up to work on day one claiming that they are sick and then, because they will now have rights against unfair dismissal, they will be able, without ever doing a day’s work, to hold a small business to ransom and put that business at risk.

Kevin Hollinrake: As drafted, that is certainly the case. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Members may not know that small businesses stand the cost of statutory sick pay. It is not reimbursed by the Government, so the Bill would have a significant cost for businesses.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kevin Hollinrake: I am happy to give way to the hon. Member for Leeds East.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): I have listened with interest to what the shadow Minister is saying about people being entitled to go all the way to an employment tribunal hearing from the moment they take up employment. Has he ever heard of pre-hearing reviews for employment tribunals?

Kevin Hollinrake: The point I was making is that the case may go all the way to an employment tribunal, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but there would also be the cost of defending the case even if it does not. That small business will have to bring consultants in and will have to speak to lawyers. That itself costs money, and in many cases that will be thousands of pounds. That is what the hon. Member fails to understand: when you are accused, you lose.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kevin Hollinrake: No, I will make a little progress. The cost of all these measures—in individual opportunities and to the wider economy—is huge. The Government may try to deny that, despite their clear lack of experience of the real world of business. It is extremely alarming that not one of those on the Front Bench today have ever started or run a business that employed anyone. Even worse than that, only one member of the Cabinet has ever done so, and that is the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Shamefully, given what is at stake, the Government cannot deny our case that the Bill will have a huge economic cost, because today—finally, two hours before this debate—they have actually produced the impact assessments. The cost of the Bill is on the very first page: up to £5 billion per annum. The word “uncertain” appears 302 times in those impact assessments, and the word “risk” is used 432 times, so the cost is likely to be much more.

Paula Barker: The shadow Minister has just said that shamefully there is only one person on our Front Bench who has run a business. How many of his Front-Bench team are trade union members?

Kevin Hollinrake: I am not a trade union member, and I would not know about my colleagues, but I started a business, as did my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (James Cartledge), as did the shadow Chancellor and as did many others in our party. We are proud of that fact.

This morning I met business representatives covering all parts of the British economy. Like us, they have serious reservations about this Bill. The Institute of Directors highlighted the fact that 57% of its members will be less likely to hire staff, with only 2% saying that would be more likely. The Confederation of British Industry said that the costs associated with this Bill cannot be afforded by 54% of businesses.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): This legislation applies to England and not Northern Ireland, but I echo the hon. Gentleman’s concerns. I am concerned about small and medium businesses that employ a small workforce. If one or two of them have a long-term illness, they may be off for a while, come back to work and then go off for a while. Is there not a need—I look to the Deputy Prime Minister—for a methodology whereby small businesses can employ someone in the short term for those positions, otherwise they will go to the wall?

Kevin Hollinrake: I agree. I was interested that the Deputy Prime Minister said that her menopause measures would be exclusive to large businesses. I welcome that, and I ask her to look at attaching the same conditions, ideally, to the entire Bill, but if not to certain parts of it. The risks for small businesses are simply catastrophic. Even one or two cases could completely sink a business.

Dr Luke Evans: When it comes to risk, is my hon. Friend concerned about the timing of this legislation if, as reported, the Budget raises national insurance for those businesses? Is that yet another risk in addition to this legislation?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend is right. This morning we met representatives from UKHospitality, who said exactly that: the Bill is coming on the back of a number of changes and some difficult times during covid for industries that employ a lot of people, which will be particularly badly affected by this legislation. The Government should think twice about implementing it at this moment in time.

Sir Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned the 302 mentions of uncertainty. It is hard to know how that can foster growth. Let us be honest: businesses are already more highly taxed and regulated than ever before. We all know the reason—the pandemic—and we have to take responsibility for that. Will he assure me that, as a party, we will use this period of opposition to once again proclaim our values as a low-tax, deregulated economy? Otherwise, how will we foster growth in an increasingly competitive world? If we tax businesses more, we simply lay the foundation of a future Labour Government.

Kevin Hollinrake: I agree. We should be low tax and low regulation. One of the saving graces of this legislation is the detail, although the Bill itself is light on detail: many of the measures will be brought in through secondary legislation, therefore making it easier for a future Government to reverse some of the catastrophic changes.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Kevin Hollinrake: I will make some progress. The Government's own impact assessment acknowledges that the measures will mean price rises for consumers and job losses. In it, 40% of firms surveyed said that prices would go up, and 17% said that they will reduce the number of employees. That is hundreds of thousands of jobs at risk.

The criticism of the Bill does not stop there. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has warned that it risks lower employment rates and lower wages for employees. The *Local Government Chronicle* has warned that the Bill will place financial pressure on councils. The Recruitment and Employment Confederation has said that the Bill will fuel long and complex litigation. The *Financial Times* has warned that the Bill is causing deep unease among business leaders. In short, jobs down, wages down and prices up.

In their failed attempt to allay concerns about the Bill, the Deputy Prime Minister and the shadow Business Secretary have stated that they have consulted businesses—

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): You are the shadow Business Secretary.

Kevin Hollinrake: Sorry, though I think the Prime Minister is guilty of similar; I do apologise. The Deputy Prime Minister and the Business Secretary have stated that they have consulted businesses. Really? The Federation of Small Businesses said not only that the Bill will

“inevitably deter small employers from taking on new people”, but that it is a

“rushed job, clumsy, chaotic and poorly planned”

and that the Government are guilty of shallow engagement. So much for the “strong horse”. Several representatives at this morning's meeting said that they have been talked to but not listened to—including those representing the hospitality and retail sectors some of the most labour-intensive in our economy, which is acknowledged in the impact assessment.

Kit Malthouse: Alongside the many negatives relating to the Bill that my hon. Friend has laid out, does he recognise the strong possibility that, particularly in small and micro businesses, the legislation could inject quite significant resentment among the staff body itself? For example, just to amplify my previous point, if you have six members of staff and three of them apply for flexible working, that has an immediate impact on those who do not have flexible working. The ability of the business to offer flexible working to future workers is also reduced, which turns the whole thing into a massive negotiation between six or seven people. That could have a significant impact on morale and sense of fair play within businesses themselves.

Kevin Hollinrake: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. There speaks somebody who has actually run a business and understands the impact on a small employer. That is why we say there should be a carve-out, certainly for small and micro businesses.

We have to ask ourselves this: if the Government are not listening to businesses who “pull the whole cart”, who are they listening to? I think we all know the

answer to that. A consultation is not five minutes inside No. 10 and a photo opportunity. Proper consultation is working with business, listening, taking your time and not rushing things—the exact opposite of what the Government have done. We know why that is. The Deputy Prime Minister made a misguided promise to Labour's trade union paymasters that legislation would be introduced within 100 days. Despite 100 days of gloom and doom, talking the economy down and wrecking business confidence, they managed it—just.

The Government are not even listening to their own legal experts. Only last week the Attorney General said: “excessive reliance on delegated powers, Henry VIII clauses, or skeleton legislation, upsets the proper balance between Parliament and the executive.”

Because the Bill is such a rushed job, it takes swathes of delegated powers, including Henry VIII powers, meaning the final policy will be decided later at the Secretary of State's whim—not now by Parliament. Legislating that way is causing real concerns for businesses today. The Deputy Prime Minister and her colleagues preach stability, yet in the same breath they are causing instability, uncertainty and falling confidence at a cost of jobs and investment today. There are already 58,000 fewer payroll jobs than when Labour took office. Confidence levels at the Institute of Directors on future investment intentions have dropped from plus 30 in June to minus six today. The Government are planning 30 consultations on the measures in the Bill. They should have taken place before the Bill was introduced, so the legislation could be precise about what it will do.

Saqib Bhatti: I thank the shadow Secretary of State for giving way. He talks about trade unions. I have just seen a news update on the Unite union's Birmingham hotel and conference centre being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office. The total cost was £112 million, but it has now been valued at £29 million. Who will hold the trade unions to account in the Bill?

Kevin Hollinrake: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. That certainly needs looking at very carefully.

As the Government's attempt at business consultation has clearly failed, and as no one on their Front Bench has any business experience, I will draw the right hon. Lady a picture of what the Bill actually means for businesses.

Mr Richard Quigley (Isle of Wight West) (Lab): As the owner of two successful small businesses—*[Interruption.]* I know Opposition Members like to do that—it's pantomime—but they can listen. As the owner of two successful small businesses and an employer of 25 people in the hospitality sector, I welcome the Bill. Do Opposition Members agree that the main reason they are against this groundbreaking employment Bill is because they are embarrassed about their own record over the past 14 years?

Kevin Hollinrake: I welcome the fact that there is at least some business experience on the Government Benches. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman joined the wrong party.

The hon. Gentleman will recognise the picture of what the Bill means for businesses. They will be terrified to take new people on for fear of huge compliance costs and legal action. They will be tied up in red tape,

something that the Prime Minister said he was taking an axe to. They will have to cope with measures such as the need to frequently recalculate all workers' hours for each reference period for each separate employee, each of which will have a unique date as they will be required to proactively offer guaranteed hours. This is not even restricted to those on zero-hours contracts. It will be for anyone on low hours—a bureaucratic nightmare. They will have to deal with a new right to demand flexible working, such as a four-day week. The right hon. Member for Islington North (Jeremy Corbyn) must be proud. Businesses will have to become the free speech police to prevent any of their customers offending their staff. They will have to deal with a new regulator, the fair work agency, which will have the power to enter any business premises, confiscate documents and levy fines—all backed up by new criminal offences with penalties of up to two years in jail.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): As someone who has started and run a business, I should like to know the hon. Gentleman's opinion of the views of the former Business Secretary, the right hon. Member for North West Essex (Mrs Badenoch), that the minimum wage is a burden, that statutory maternity pay is excessive, and that equal pay protection in respect of race and disability is akin to segregation policies in South Africa—or does he want to distance his party from her comments?

Kevin Hollinrake: That is not what my right hon. Friend said at all. I worked with her when she was Business Secretary, and at no point did she ever say that about maternity pay. She was talking about regulation costs. She was simply pointing out that for many businesses, particularly in retail and hospitality, the rise in the national living wage has been very difficult to cope with. She was not talking about abolishing it. Businesses will have to deal with new union powers to gain access to any business premises and contact its staff—wonderful!—in order to recruit and organise members and make it much, much easier for a union to gain recognition. As the impact assessments state—this is great news; this will really cheer everyone up—there will be “increased industrial action” and tax rises to pay for increased pay demands. *[Interruption.]* That is what the Government's impact assessments say. Labour Members should check their impact assessments. 1970s, here we come! There is much more, but in short, it all means that the tail will be wagging the dog.

Nigel Huddleston (Droitwich and Evesham) (Con): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be aware of the history of Labour Governments since the second world war. Every single one of them has left office with employment higher than it was when they started. Is he concerned about the possibility that this Government will repeat the same mistakes, especially given their lack of business awareness and understanding of the private sector?

Kevin Hollinrake: I am very concerned about that. Today there are 4 million more jobs in our economy than there were in 2010, and 1.2 million fewer people are unemployed. I am very worried about the things that my hon. Friend is very worried about.

Making work pay is a laudable aim, but as one stakeholder put it this morning, “work doesn't pay if there's no work”.

Most people recognise that one of the reasons why the UK is the third most popular destination in the world for inward investment, which creates hundreds of thousands of jobs throughout the economy, is the flexible labour market that the Government are now seeking to eliminate. Do the Deputy Prime Minister and her Cabinet colleagues realise that? Perhaps they secretly do, given that nine out of 10 of those Cabinet colleagues recruit on terms that are at odds with these new regulations. Sixteen Cabinet Ministers, including the Chancellor, the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Energy Secretary, have hired people for roles that involve working outside regular hours and at weekends; six Cabinet Ministers have hired people to roles with extended probation periods; and seven Cabinet Ministers, including the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Deputy Prime Minister, have hired on “insecure” fixed-term contracts. Why would they introduce legislation that they do not understand or even comply with themselves? The answer is, of course, their union paymasters.

Much like the more than 200 Labour MPs who have taken trade union cash, the Deputy Prime Minister has her donations to think of. She declared her interests as a union member, but she did not declare her interests as someone who had taken £13,000 from unions in donations. The question of what is orderly is up to your judgment, Madam Deputy Speaker, but it seems to me that that should be declared at the start of any Member's contribution.

This is not an Employment Rights Bill, but a trade union charter—a charter that will bring about no-knock warrants that allow unions to access all business premises, from the local takeaway to the local pub. Clearly, shutting the beer gardens is not enough for this Government; they are now relying on strike action to stop you getting a pint. Under this trade union charter, trade unions will revert to requiring people to opt out of donating to unions' political funds. That will line Labour's pockets with default donations from working people. This trade union charter will abolish the thresholds for strike action, unleashing waves of low-threshold strikes, and crippling public services by putting power in the hands of militant trade unions. This trade union charter will force employers to inform their staff that they can join a union at every turn. This trade union charter will reduce notice periods for strike action, meaning that businesses will be plagued by zero-warning strike action, which will unleash misery on the public at the last minute.

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): We have just had a general election. The Labour party won a historic majority on the basis of a manifesto that was pro-business, pro-worker and pro-growth. Through the Bill, we are bringing forward provisions that were sketched out in our manifesto. Why is the hon. Member choosing not to listen to the result of the election? In choosing to reject the provisions in the Bill, he is not learning from the result of the general election.

Kevin Hollinrake: We deserved to lose the election fair and square, but the hon. Gentleman should look at that result, because it was not a popular vote for Labour. The party's popularity is dropping by the day, and the business confidence that we need to protect in this country is dropping by the day.

[Kevin Hollinrake]

The Bill is a trade union charter. By repealing the Trade Union Act 2016, it will increase the number of strikes by 53%. It is a charter that will take Britain back to the 1970s—a stated goal of the Deputy Prime Minister. The public will pay the price not just through uncollected waste, dysfunctional local government and picket lines outside hospitals, as in the 1970s; they will be forced to pay through higher taxes—a fact that the Government have now admitted in the impact assessment, despite pledging not to increase taxes on working people.

At a time when the Government claim to be scrambling for cash and are taking the winter fuel payment from 9.5 million pensioners, they have the gall to drive up taxes to reward their trade union paymasters. That will be done not just through higher national insurance, a hike in fuel duty or whatever other punishing measures the Government choose, but through council tax. Because of the Government's Corbyn-style collective bargaining for social care, councils will be required to stump up an additional £4.2 billion, or £150 per household.

The path that we took in government was pro-worker and pro-business. Whereas this Government put party first and country second, we worked in partnership with businesses and workers to deliver improvements without risking investment, unemployment and businesses going bust.

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): I just want to double-check: have you actually read the Bill? It talks about a consultation period with businesses, and the provisions will not be rolled out until 2026. There will be a probation period for certain businesses. We are pro-business, and maybe the shadow Minister should read the Bill properly.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. We should not refer to other colleagues in the Chamber as “you”. It is quite simple.

Kevin Hollinrake: I wish the hon. Member for Dudley (Sonia Kumar) was with me for the hour I spent with the representatives of organisations this morning. They do not feel as she does—that there is nothing to see here and nothing to worry about. They are very concerned, and we should all be worried about that.

Through our approach, we doubled the minimum wage, boosted employment by 4 million, cut taxes on working people by £900, cut youth unemployment, slashed the employment rate and rolled out the biggest ever expansion of free childcare. Our approach recognised that by harming business, which is the strong horse that pulls the whole cart, we are harming workers—a fact that this Government have clearly failed to grasp. This Bill puts the cart firmly before the horse. For small businesses particularly, it creates an existential crisis of a magnitude not seen since the pandemic. The future of hundreds of thousands of business people and millions of jobs is in the Deputy Prime Minister's hands. I urge her to think again, withdraw this legislation and listen carefully, not just to the unions but to the voice of business, before it is too late.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. Over 80 Members wish to contribute. To try to accommodate most of them, I will limit Back-Bench

speeches to three minutes and maiden speeches to five minutes. The first Back-Bench contribution is from Mike Amesbury, and I know that he will not want me to cut him off.

5.24 pm

Mike Amesbury (Runcorn and Helsby) (Lab): I stand here not only as the Labour MP for Runcorn and Helsby, but as a former trade union convener and shop steward for the wonderful trade union Unison. I am also a GMB member and a member of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I am proud to have the opportunity to speak in this Parliament with a trade union voice, coming from a working-class background, and as part of a Labour Government. How fantastic is that? I also proudly refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Have a look: it is very clean money—trade union money.

This is an important day for the history of the labour movement and for industrial relations in this country. This Employment Rights Bill is pro-business, pro-worker and pro-growth. This is exactly the change that we were elected to make, just a few weeks ago. The Bill works in partnership with business and trade unions. It is not the work of fiction—I say this respectfully—that the shadow Minister described in his response to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. Labour Members are pro-jobs, but pro good jobs. We are pro-business, but pro good business. The Bill is also good for Britain. We want to turn the page on an economy that has been blighted by insecurity, poor productivity and low pay, and we want growth that leaves nobody behind in our communities.

I pay homage to the architects of this landmark legislation: the trade unions, of course; the former shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald); my good friend the Deputy Prime Minister; and my neighbouring MP and good friend the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders). We were elected on a manifesto for change, and today that change begins—delivered within 100 days, as the Deputy Prime Minister said.

The Bill brings forward 31 employment reforms to help young and not-so-young workers alike. It marks the end of exploitative zero-hours contracts and fire and rehire practices, establishes day one rights to paternity, parental and bereavement leave for millions of workers, improves statutory sickness pay and collective bargaining, and provides for fair pay agreements. It means that 9 million people will have protection from unfair dismissal from day one, and that over 1 million people on zero-hours contracts will benefit from a guaranteed hours policy. This will help many in all our constituencies. An additional 1.5 million parents taking unpaid parental leave will be brought into scope of employment rights from day one. This Bill is a game changer. It is a manifesto commitment that I and everyone on the Labour Benches were proud to be elected on, and I look forward to our labour coming to fruition over the next few months and years.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call the Liberal Democrat spokesperson, Sarah Gibson.

5.27 pm

Sarah Gibson (Chippenham) (LD): Broadly speaking, the Liberal Democrats support the Government's desire to modernise employment rights and make them fit for the modern working world. I hope the Government will appreciate our constructive scrutiny of the Bill today, to ensure that it is as helpful as it can be, for workers and small businesses. In the interests of transparency, I would like to mention that I have been a small business owner for most of my adult life, but I have also been an employee. I will start by outlining the improvements that the Government should make to better support carers, parents and those who fall ill. I will then move on to what adjustments must be made so that small businesses receive adequate support.

Members across this House will know that fixing our social care system and adequately supporting carers is a key issue for the Liberal Democrats. The Bill makes no clear statutory commitment to introducing paid carer's leave. That omission strikes us as a missed opportunity for the Government to adequately support carers' ability to juggle employment with their caring responsibilities. The Government's "Next Steps to Make Work Pay" paper, which accompanies this Bill, commits to reviewing the implementation of paid carer's leave. However, the Liberal Democrats believe that the Government should go a step further. We will be looking to strengthen the legislation in this area, and we hope that the Government will not waste the opportunity to make genuine progress on carer's leave. As ever, I am happy to meet Ministers at any time to discuss this in greater depth.

The Bill could do more to support parents. We welcome the Government's proposal that parents should be able to benefit from support, irrespective of how long they have worked for their employer. We also support the proposal to introduce new rights to bereavement leave, which will allow employees to take much-needed leave from work to grieve the loss of a loved one. This will be especially important to those who lose a close relative or who experience a miscarriage.

The Liberal Democrats have called for measures to support parents through unemployment, and to extend parental pay and leave to self-employed parents, as has been mentioned. We have also called for measures to increase statutory maternity leave and shared parental leave to £350 a week, and to increase pay for paternity leave, with an income cap for high earners.

In addition to improving the Bill's support for carers and parents, we also believe it could do more to support people when they fall ill. At £116.75 a week, statutory sick pay remains far below the minimum wage and is effectively a disincentive to take time off. This has a severe impact on public health, productivity and, ultimately, economic growth. A higher rate of sick pay would enable people to take time to recover without having to worry about making ends meet. Of course, any such measures should go hand in hand with appropriate financial support for small businesses.

That brings me to how this Bill can be improved for the benefit of small business owners, and I have already stated my interest. It is vital that small businesses are actively consulted on how to support them with any additional costs that the Bill may bring. Having spoken to many SMEs in my constituency, I would like to know what consideration the Government have given to the

Bill's proposals on changes to unfair dismissal during probationary periods. How will small businesses, which do not have the resources of HR professionals, be supported through these changes? Unfortunately, much of the crucial detail that would help such businesses to prepare for the impact of the Bill has been left to secondary legislation and further consultation. Although we support as much consultation as possible, the lack of detail in the Bill does not facilitate certainty and stability for businesses or workers.

The Liberal Democrats urge Ministers to ensure that new measures to support workers go hand in hand with support for small businesses, starting with the reform of our broken business rates system. The current system effectively taxes business premises and machinery, which discourages investment and heavily burdens key sectors in my constituency, from retail and manufacturing to renewable energy production. Again, if Ministers are open to meeting me and my Liberal Democrat colleagues, we would be happy to discuss our proposal for reforming this broken system and bolstering our SMEs.

This Bill has the potential to mark a new chapter in how we deliver fairness for both business owners and employees. We believe it will modernise our legislation to reflect the needs of today's workforce.

Mr Will Forster (Woking) (LD): My hon. Friend has said that the Bill does not go far enough to support families. In my Woking constituency, 350 children are unable to join the Scouts because of a lack of volunteers. Does she agree that the Government should consider adding to the Bill a right to ask for statutory volunteer leave?

Sarah Gibson: My hon. Friend makes an important point about volunteering across the country.

But the Government must go further. We must do more to support carers, parents and those who fall sick. The Bill must do more to provide small businesses with certainty, stability and transparency. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches look forward to the Bill's passage and will work with colleagues to ensure it delivers on its full promise, but we hope that our proposals to improve the legislation are fully considered.

5.34 pm

Ms Stella Creasy (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op): As a proud member of the Community and USDAW trade unions, I am delighted with the legislation. In the short time available to me, I will focus on the particular issue of whether we work to live, or we live to work, because so far the debate in this place, particularly in the remarks made by Conservative Members, has sounded like something from the mesozoic era and the dying era of the dinosaurs.

Let us get something straight: tackling sexual harassment in the workforce is not about free speech, but about stopping a crime; flexible working does not mean people work less, just that they work flexibly; and rights do not make people irresponsible employees, any more than it is noticeable that our competitors internationally are ahead of us on this work. The measures in the Bill are about entrenching good practice, so that we have a race to the top, not a flounder to the bottom, as we did under the previous Government.

[Ms Stella Creasy]

That is why I and others hope to push the Government to go further on maternity and paternity rights. It vital that the Bill contains protections for mothers around maternity discrimination, but such measures will only work if we include the other 50% and bring dads into the equation. We do not really have a gender pay gap in this country any more: we have a motherhood pay gap and a motherhood penalty. Women face the discrimination of being made unemployed not only when they have children but because they might have children, and women who have kids find that when they go back to work, they are considered to be less committed, capable and competent. Women who are childless are six times more likely to be recommended for a job and eight times more likely to be recommended for a promotion.

The issue cuts the other way too, because there is a fatherhood premium as fathers are considered to be more reliable employees. We must not entrench these inequalities but overturn them, so that dads can be part of their kids' lives and mums can get a fair crack at being in the workforce. A third of dads in this country take no paternity leave at all; half of them say that is because they feel pressured financially to go back to work early. Modern employers get the problem and are offering more than the statutory minimum. Some 92% of fathers who are job hunting say flexibility makes all the difference when they choose which job to take. After the pandemic, the number of stay-at-home dads increased by a third. Frankly, dads want to step up to the plate, whatever Members on the Conservative Benches may think, and mothers want them to be there too.

Making such changes matters to the economy. The loss of productivity that comes from women caring for their parents or their children means that millions are being cut out of our economy. We have some of the longest working hours for dads in Europe, and some of the shortest working opportunities for mums. Putting in measures to support paternity leave will be good for both sides of the equation. Let us not be the generation in which dads say they never got the chance to know their teenage kids, and mums say they never got the opportunities they wanted. Let us amend the Bill to ensure paternity leave matches maternity—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Sir Alec Shelbrooke.

5.37 pm

Sir Alec Shelbrooke (Wetherby and Easingwold) (Con): I will speak to the amendment, especially about the Bill being rushed through without full consultation.

On 13 May 2014, I tabled a ten-minute rule Bill on the Prohibition of Unpaid Internships, as Members will see in volume 580 of *Hansard*, column 593. On 14 November 2016, I tabled a private Member's Bill, the National Minimum Wage (Workplace Internships)—volume 616 of *Hansard*, column 1156. On 27 October 2017, Lord Holmes of Richmond tabled the Unpaid Work Experience (Prohibition). And on 5 February 2020, I co-sponsored the Unpaid Work Experience (Prohibition) Bill introduced by Alex Cunningham, the former Member for Stockton North, now retired.

Despite unpaid internships being mentioned in the Government's policy documents on work, they are not in the Bill. The Government have said that they will

tighten up the ban, but there is no ban on unpaid internships—they exist, as they did in the last Parliament, not least with many a Member on the opposite side of the House. If there were such a ban, it would not have to be mentioned in policy documents.

A ban should have been brought in alongside the Bill. There will be a lot of hubris on the Government Benches about bringing forward a landmark employment Bill, with Labour Members saying the Conservatives did nothing, despite all the evidence laid out by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) in his excellent opening speech. [Interruption.] It is all very well burying one's head in the sand, but every one of the Bills I brought forward got kicked into the long grass, not least my private Member's Bill, when the only Labour Member present was the shadow Minister. If Labour MPs had turned up, we might have been able to get a closure motion, but they decided not to. That has been the story throughout. If the Deputy Prime Minister does want the Bill to go through, she needs to fight off whatever it was that stopped it each time; I always started out with the commitment that it would happen, and then somehow people were convinced not to do it. I say that in a constructive way to the Deputy Prime Minister, who I know very well.

An intern should be defined as a worker. We were talking about an amendment to the National Minimum Wage Act 1998 that says that work experience is important, but after 20 days or four weeks in work, an intern should be treated as an employee. Work should always pay, and if someone is contributing after that period of time, they are adding something to the business.

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the fundamental approach behind the Bill should be one of pragmatism rather than tribal ideology?

Sir Alec Shelbrooke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend; pragmatism is important when we talk about business. In that spirit, there is a pragmatic reason why the Bill should not be given its Second Reading today—perhaps at some point it should, but I fear it has been rushed through to meet the spin about the first 100 days.

I would wager that few Labour Members today had plans to talk about unpaid internships, which is a very important issue. I could talk for a very long time about unpaid internships, as I have for hours in this Chamber previously. To ensure equal opportunities for young people, the issue of internships is vital, but it is one that is sadly lacking from the Bill. That speaks to the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton: the Bill has to some extent been rushed.

5.41 pm

Ruth Cadbury (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): I draw attention to my membership of the GMB. I support this landmark employment Bill, the biggest expansion of workers' rights for a generation. Today we see the difference that a Labour Government can make for people up and down the country.

Although I support all aspects of the Bill, I will focus specifically on the transport sector. During and following the covid pandemic, transport workers faced the short end of the stick of poor employment practice. I welcome

the end of fire and rehire. That unfair practice was used as a sledgehammer against workers, particularly during the pandemic, by companies such as British Airways, which tried it on more than 35,000 staff members, including many of my constituents in Hounslow. BA staff who had worked for decades faced the prospect of being sacked and rehired on poorer pay and weaker terms and conditions.

After huge pressure from trade unions, Labour MPs and the Transport Committee, BA dropped its plans, but other firms such as P&O have also exploited the weakness in UK employment law that the Bill is intended to address. Those practices are still happening, as my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire and Glyndŵr (Steve Witherden) highlighted in his intervention on the Deputy Prime Minister. When workers were facing fire and rehire, Labour was clear that a Labour Government would ban that practice, and I am pleased the Government are doing that. I welcome clause 22.

On minimum service levels, the Bill will also repeal and scrap the previous Government's Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023—a farcical bit of legislation designed to limit strike action. In Committee, when I pushed the rail operators on the proposed legislation, it was clear that they had not sought it and they appeared to have no plans to use it. The fact that so few rail operators chose to use the powers once they were enacted showed that the companies themselves doubted their value and use.

This Bill also brings in much-needed modernisation of our maritime laws. In the last Parliament, the then Chairs of the Transport Committee and the Business and Trade Committee—one Conservative, one Labour—jointly wrote to the then Government about the need to update our laws to protect maritime workers. I welcome the Bill's closure of the loophole whereby ships registered overseas previously did not have to inform the UK Government of collective redundancies, and the fact that this Government have committed to further strengthen workers' rights at sea.

In conclusion—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Shivani Raja to make her maiden speech.

5.44 pm

Shivani Raja (Leicester East) (Con): It is with great privilege and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I take my place in this historic Chamber, I am acutely aware of the profound trust placed in us by the constituents of our great nation. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people of Leicester East for electing me to represent them in Parliament.

My story, like that of many in Leicester, is one of heritage, resilience and opportunity. My parents arrived in Leicester from Kenya and India in the late 1970s, bringing with them cultural and faith traditions and a remarkable work ethic. They made Rushey Mead their home, and I was born and raised there. From Herrick primary school to Soar Valley college and De Montfort University, Leicester has nurtured me every step of the way and for that I am deeply thankful.

As is customary, I pay tribute to Claudia Webbe, my immediate predecessor, who served the constituency to the very best of her ability. Claudia followed in the

footsteps of Keith Vaz who, alongside Paul Boateng and Bernie Grant, broke new ground in the representation of people of colour in Parliament. In the election, I had the unique experience of standing against both Claudia and Keith—a testament to the vibrant political landscape of Leicester East.

Leicester is a city of remarkable history and diversity. Leicester hosts the largest Diwali festival outside India. It is home to the UK's longest running comedy festival. It is one of England's oldest cities, so much so that we found a king under one of our car parks; for those who do not know, one of our earliest kings, King Richard III, was found under a car park in Leicester. The University of Leicester is the birthplace of DNA fingerprinting. Leicester is also home to the National Space Centre and we are proud of our contributions to the arts, sciences and sports.

We have got it all going on in Leicester, but if Members remain unconvinced that Leicester has influenced their life, because perhaps they are not a former monarch or a scientist in their spare time, Leicester has also given Britain icons like the late Lord Richard Attenborough and—very much living—Sir David Attenborough, Gary Lineker and Peter Shilton. Our city is where Walkers crisps were born and where fashion guru Gok Wan grew up. Leicester's influence even extends to music, with entertainers like Engelbert Humperdinck and Showaddywaddy. So whether you have tucked into a bag of ready salted, gone to the cinema to watch "Jurassic Park" or boogied on down to "Hey Rock and Roll", you've got Leicester to thank.

This is what true diversity looks like. In fact, in 2013 Leicester was described as the most multicultural city in the UK. Today, 59% of people living in Leicester are from ethnic minority groups, and 41% were born outside the UK. But most relevant to today's debate is employment and businesses in my constituency. Leicester is located at the heart of England, and local businesses are the lifeblood of our city. Leicester was recognised as the UK's most entrepreneurial city—a title that reflects the resilience, creativity and determination of its people. Our entrepreneurial scene is not just about numbers; it is about stories, of those who dared to dream big, hustled harder, and turned their ideas into reality.

The Employment Rights Bill threatens to undermine that spirit before those entrepreneurs have even made their first £1. The additional costs and regulations proposed will act as a barrier to entry, discouraging the very innovation and hard work that has earned Leicester that title. We must be cautious not to stifle the ambition of small business owners, who are the backbone of our economy. Our journey is one of innovation and community—a story of people coming together across different sectors and backgrounds to build something truly remarkable.

In a city as diverse as Leicester, many rely on flexible work to balance family commitments, faith observances or second jobs. By imposing blanket regulations that do not consider the unique needs of our communities, the Bill risks alienating the very workforce it aims to protect. We must ensure that employment regulations support businesses and workers alike. Imposing regulations that add costs without first offering support will harm the very people Labour claims to champion. For our small businesses in Leicester, many of which work with razor-thin margins, the burdens imposed by the Bill will be

[Shivani Raja]

overwhelming. It is one thing to champion workers' rights, but quite another to do so in a way that risks the survival of the very businesses that provide the jobs.

Let us not forget that successful businesses are the best way to secure meaningful long-term employment. Our decisions in this House will shape the future of our country for generations to come. It is imperative that we approach these challenges in a spirit of collaboration, transcending partisan divides to serve the best interests of all our constituents. With our nation facing economic challenges, the Bill risks raising costs for consumers and worsening the cost of living crisis, particularly in communities like Leicester East, where many are already struggling to make ends meet. We must find solutions that protect workers without penalising local businesses and their customers.

I am honoured to stand before the House as the Member for Leicester East, and I warmly invite you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all hon. Members to visit our great city. You can join us for our glorious Diwali celebrations, our annual Pride parade or our vibrant Caribbean carnival. Come and experience the city where fish and chips are just as popular as samosas and kebabs, and where Stilton and Red Leicester cheeses sit alongside Italian pizza and French patisserie. The road ahead may be challenging, but it is also filled with possibilities. I firmly believe that not only Leicester's but our country's greatest days are ahead of us, and I am grateful to be able to play my part, championing my constituents in that endeavour.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I had to let that speech run over; I was waiting for my invitation to have samosas.

5.51 pm

Mark Ferguson (Gateshead Central and Wickham) (Lab): I pay tribute to the maiden speech of the hon. Member for Leicester East (Shivani Raja). I enjoyed her reminiscences about her community, and hearing about some of the more lively figures from the recent history of the Labour party. I proudly draw attention to my declarations in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, which include my former role working for Unison, my membership of Unison, my donation from Unison, and being co-chair of its parliamentary group. Unison is Britain's largest union, representing public service workers and in particular the low-paid women who will benefit so much from the Bill.

I pay tribute to all those who have worked tirelessly for years to build consensus around these changes—the biggest changes to rights at work in a generation. In particular, I thank those within Labour's affiliated trade unions, on the Front Bench, and in Labour's policy team for their hard work and dedication. Hon. Friends, including my hon. Friends the Members for Worsley and Eccles (Michael Wheeler), for Halifax (Kate Dearden), for Birmingham Northfield (Laurence Turner), for Tipton and Wednesbury (Antonia Bance) and for Knowsley (Anneliese Midgley), have been engaged in this work throughout. That is not an exhaustive list; many others on the Government Benches have worked tirelessly to help us to reach this day, and deserve immense credit.

This is the kind of Bill that is at the heart of why we are here. The Labour party was founded upon the idea that working people deserved representation in this place, that we were fit to govern, and that those who put in the bulk of the graft deserved to reap the rewards of their labours. Today is a landmark day in our party's history, and in the history of employment rights in this country. The Bill is crammed full of improvements that are each worthy of a lengthy speech; however, I am down to my last minute and twenty seconds, so I will not do that. Let me say this instead: if you work, the Bill will change your working life for the better. We know why these changes are necessary. One in five of us is suffering from the effects of insecure work, with low pay, exploitative zero-hours contracts, and little or no sick pay.

Ms Polly Billington (East Thanet) (Lab): My hon. Friend mentions that the measures in the Bill will be good for employees. Does he agree that they will also be good for business? My constituency's economy is based on the entrepreneurialism of lots of small businesses and individuals creating work for themselves and for others. Does he agree that the Bill will support good employment policies in small businesses, helping with productivity and the retention of staff?

Mark Ferguson: I could not agree more. The people who will benefit from the Bill the most are not those who will buy stocks and shares but those who will spend their money on our thriving high streets, which this Government will build.

The care workers and teaching assistants I was proud to represent while working for Unison deserve pay and conditions that match the task of looking after us when we grow up and grow old. Stronger rights to collective bargaining through the school support staff and adult social care negotiating bodies are essential for recruitment and retention in those overlooked sectors. Could the legislation go further in those areas and in others? Of course—that is the nature of any Bill. The work of change is never done, but we should be in no doubt that this is the biggest, boldest and most welcome set of employment rights changes that all but the most experienced of us in this Chamber have considered. I know that the Government are committed to consulting widely with unions and businesses alike to ensure that.

This is what having a Labour Government means—rights from day one: banning exploitative zero-hours contracts; ending fire and rehire to lift employees from the insecurity felt by those working in the foundations of our economy; taking action on sick pay, and maternity and paternity rights; and holding unscrupulous employers to account through a genuine and comprehensive enforcement body. The Bill is pro-business, pro-worker, and focused on the challenges that millions of us face every day. It is one of the greatest honours in my life to have been involved with it, to speak on its behalf, and to vote for it this evening, mostly because I know the impact that it will have on my community in Gateshead Central and Wickham. The task of rebuilding Britain after 14 years of Tory rule is great, but our ambition for this country is greater still.

5.55 pm

Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and the contribution from small businesses to my election campaign earlier this year.

History is repeating itself. Labour's antipathy and lack of understanding for business, and small business in particular, is rearing its ugly head again. This legislation will have ruinous results for those who desperately need a job and hope. The Federation of Small Businesses says:

"This legislation is a rushed job, clumsy, chaotic and poorly planned."

The federation goes on to say that the Bill will increase economic inactivity. That is a rather sanitised way of referring to the ruined lives, dashed hopes and huge waste of human potential that the Bill will bring about. At the end of the debate, we need to hear from a Minister how the Bill will be changed so that it supports rather than undermines the 4 million additional jobs created since 2010 under the Conservatives.

The economic impact assessment, so rudely provided so late in the day, shows that the costs of the Bill will fall disproportionately on small businesses—something that we have heard no acknowledgment of from Government Members. Five out of nine measures will have that effect. Do Ministers have any plans to change that?

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that provisions that are bad for small business are also bad for workers, bad for taxpayers, and bad for those who rely on welfare payments?

Graham Stuart: I entirely agree, and places like the Isle of Wight, with so many hospitality businesses, will pay a particularly high price. We should celebrate and support our wealth creators, not burden them with excessive taxes and regulations that kill the drive to work, invest and create wealth. Yet that is the destructive path that Labour is taking, with a jobs tax planned for every worker's national insurance contributions in the Budget in a couple of weeks, and this Bill to deter SME employment.

Antonia Bance (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): The impact assessment published earlier was 900 pages long, which compares pretty well with some of the impact assessments published under the last Government, a number of which I had the misfortune to read. It confirms that the cost to business will represent less than 0.4% of total employment costs across the economy, and the majority of that will be transferred directly into the pockets of workers, helping to raise living standards and offset the last 14 years of standstill wages. Has the right hon. Gentleman managed to read the impact assessment yet?

Graham Stuart: Well, the impact assessment was provided rather late, but it is always good to have a spontaneous contribution to any debate.

Removing the lower earnings limit and the waiting period will also disproportionately hurt small businesses and microbusinesses. That is set out in black and white in the economic assessment, so will Ministers make changes? It is with dark comedy that the Government say that their top priority is economic growth. Labour inherited the fastest growing economy in the G7, with 4 million more people in work than in 2010—4 million. In 2010, by comparison, we inherited a note that said that the money was all gone.

Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Graham Stuart: I will not.

History tells us that Labour Governments always end with unemployment higher than when they began. They do not do it because they are evil. As has been said, no one in the Cabinet comes from a business background; they simply do not understand the realities. This Government seem bent on destroying employment even faster than their predecessors.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of our economy. They do enormous social good. As the FSB says, smaller employers are

"the ones most likely to give opportunities to people furthest from the labour market, such as those returning after long-term health issues or caring responsibilities."

Yet under these proposals, the

"Plans to give day one unfair dismissal rights to new employees will add to the risks associated with hiring people."

That increased risk will inevitably deter small employers from taking on new people for fear of facing an employment tribunal simply because a new recruit turns out to be unsuited to the role. How will Ministers ensure that a company selling food at summer festivals is not bankrupted by having to offer a contract to someone who is not needed after that period is over?

The Government have had a disastrous start. It is no wonder that the legislation is chaotic and poorly planned, given that Labour Cabinet Ministers are never early for work but always early for the free buffet at the Emirates or at Taylor Swift concerts. The Deputy Prime Minister is selling out the country's interests in favour of trade union interests—selling out the people who vote Labour for the people who fund Labour. The Bill is a catastrophe, and I hope the House opposes it today.

6.1 pm

Andy McDonald (Middlesbrough and Thornaby East) (Lab): I am proud to refer the House to my membership of Unite and my declarations in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and to advise Members that I have run several of my own businesses.

This is a great day, and I wholeheartedly congratulate my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and colleagues for introducing this landmark legislation, which will transform the lives of millions of workers for the better. We know why it is needed: just look at the fire and replace at P&O, the fire and rehire of British Gas workers, and the denial of rights at Deliveroo and Hermes. The legislation has long been in development, and I was honoured, when I was shadow Secretary of State for Employment Rights, to work with our trade unions and other stakeholders on the new deal for working people. I place on record my thanks to the Institute of Employment Rights—particularly Lord Hendy KC and Professor Keith Ewing—and to my staff Karl Hansen and Eli Machover for their work on that paper.

I am delighted that Labour will give all workers day one rights on the job, ban zero-hours contracts and outlaw fire and rehire. In the Bill, we establish the day one rights to claim unfair dismissal and to paternity, parental and bereavement leave, we create a right to a guaranteed-hours contract and we tighten unfair dismissal protections. Labour will modernise union balloting,

[*Andy McDonald*]

simplify union recognition and improve the right of entry to workplaces. The Bill removes unfair balloting laws on recognition and industrial action, and creates new duties on employers to facilitate unions' access.

I am proud that that is being done, but much of the Bill is about setting up a framework, and there will be significant further steps, consultations and work to craft the detail. In particular, we cannot finally consign insecure work to history until we have resolved a defined single status of worker. I recognise the Government's commitment to consulting on that. On zero hours, I trust that Ministers will provide reassurance that employers will not be able to exploit new rights to guaranteed hours by issuing short-hours contracts. There are many other issues arising from that, but I ask Ministers to consider in particular a statutory right to paid kinship leave on a par with adoption leave.

This is truly a landmark Bill, and it is crucial that we make these changes as soon as possible. This historic Bill will help to deliver the well-paid, secure, dignified, skilled and productive jobs and the prosperous economy that we all wish to see. I am delighted to support it this evening.

6.4 pm

Saqib Bhatti (Meriden and Solihull East) (Con): Many small business in Meriden and Solihull East are rightly concerned about the Bill for a number of reasons. Since the election, I have spoken a number of times demanding that the Government be more ambitious for growth, for our entrepreneurs and for our small businesses. Indeed, it is the moral duty of every Government to unleash the full potential of our businesses and, where possible, to create an environment to embolden entrepreneurs and encourage economic growth.

Instead, the Bill will kill off any ambition and any focus on growth. If we want to focus on inclusive growth, we must nurture our start-ups, scale-ups and small businesses, and let them be nimble in how they operate, rather than shackling them. That is how economic magic will start to happen. The businesses to which I have spoken are worried about the insufficient consultation. The Government's impact assessment, which we received late, shows that small businesses are likely to be hit hardest. The costs, according to the Government's own analysis, will be in the low billions—up to £5 billion. For a Government who keep talking about the alleged black hole, those low billions seem rather reckless. It proves that this is nothing more than an ideological Bill that does not ensure growth.

Andrew Griffith (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that, with just nine days until Halloween, the impact assessment we have seen today is an early horror show?

Saqib Bhatti: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. A lot of people are in a holding pattern for business decisions on investment and employment.

All the Bill will do is leave our businesses at the mercy of the trade unions and take us back to the 1970s. It will merely align us with the growth-gobbling guidelines set by bureaucrats in Brussels and hold our businesses

back. It is not just me who thinks this; I am going by the Government's impact assessment. The CBI claims that employers expect Britain to become the worst place to invest and do business over the next five years—a damning indictment of the Government.

Markus Campbell-Savours (Penrith and Solway) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Saqib Bhatti: I will not.

What businesses want is less government, less regulation and more freedom. When making employment decisions, they require certainty and flexibility so that they can hire more people, but the Bill threatens to undermine the agility of businesses in ensuring that their workers maximise productivity. It does not encourage businesses to take risk, hire a budding new employee and reap the rewards; in fact, it does the complete opposite. The Federation of Small Businesses calls this legislation “clumsy and chaotic” and suggests that it will “increase economic inactivity.”

Let us be clear: the Bill is not really about employment rights or better conditions. Its focus is on repealing the 10-year ballot requirement on political funds, removing the opt-in default for trade union political funds, removing the need for proper consent to form a trade union, and so on. It is not the Employment Rights Bill; it is the trade union appeasement Bill. The Government are not prepared to stand up to the unions. We have seen them cave in to train drivers and give sweetheart deals without any savings for the taxpayer.

Ms Billington: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Saqib Bhatti: I will not.

We have seen the unions hold the Government to ransom at the expense of hard-working taxpayers. That is why the Bill is bad for small and medium-sized businesses—those arguments have been made already. Our SMEs cannot afford dozens of French-style regulations that bolster the power of the trade unions and threaten to increase the cost of employment by over £1,000. I am speaking to raise the concerns of many small and medium-sized businesses in Meriden and Solihull East about this legislation. It is rushed—businesses have not been properly consulted—and it gives more power to the trade unions. It will fail to maximise productivity and will severely weaken the case for businesses to hire new employees. It is a flawed Bill serving a flawed ideology.

6.8 pm

Imran Hussain (Bradford East) (Ind): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

I support and welcome this transformative Bill. I place on the record my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (*Andy McDonald*), the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (*Justin Madders*), and the Deputy Prime Minister, with whom I have had the pleasure of working to play a small part in bringing this transformative legislation to the House.

In reality, the balance of power in our workplaces has been fundamentally set against employees for too long, meaning that the UK has some of the weakest labour protections in Europe, with legislation curbing the rights of working people to organise in defence of their rights, and insecure contracts and poor wage growth leaving one in five people struggling in poverty.

Under the last Tory Government, we saw an explosion in the growth of exploitative zero-hours contracts, unscrupulous fire and rehire practices, and the unforgiving and abusive gig economy. Ordinary working people across the country have experienced the most sustained period of wage stagnation for hundreds of years compared with our counterparts across Europe. Despite that exploitation of working people by bad bosses, the Tories never strayed from their mission of dismantling the power of trade unions to secure better jobs, pay and conditions for the ordinary people they represent, even in the middle of a cost of living crisis.

The Bill that we are discussing today, however, sets us on the road to implementing the transformative new deal for working people and to repealing the last Tory Government's draconian anti-trade union legislation, which restricts people from organising in defence of their pay, terms and conditions. Spanning over 30 different measures, the Bill could give any of us a lot to talk about. However, as time does not permit that, I will concentrate on two or three areas.

With the establishment of a framework for fair pay agreements in the adult social care sector, the Government have acknowledged the immense benefits that collective sectoral bargaining can play. Social care workers are among the most crucial yet worst paid and badly treated groups of workers in our economy. I very much hope that the Government will introduce that framework for further sectors, and I encourage them to do so. Secondly, by ensuring that workplaces offer a guaranteed-hours policy to end the exploitation trap of zero-hours contracts that millions of workers find themselves in, the Bill ensures that we can provide the eight in 10 workers who desire greater stability more certainty over their contracted hours.

Thirdly, the Bill takes an important step towards widening access to statutory sick pay by removing the requirement to earn the lower earnings limit, and by making SSP payable from the first day of sickness. My sincere request to the Government is that, with the rate currently at £116.75 per week, we need in the consultation process—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): Order. I call Alison Griffiths.

6.11 pm

Alison Griffiths (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton) (Con): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I rise today to express my concerns about the impact of the Employment Rights Bill on one of the most vulnerable groups in our workforce: seasonal workers. Those individuals form the backbone of key sectors such as tourism, agriculture and retail, particularly in my constituency of Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, where many depend on seasonal jobs for their livelihoods. I fear that the Bill will put their livelihoods at risk, as well as the viability of the businesses that employ them.

The devil is in the detail, and detail is what the legislation lacks. Labour claims that the Bill will protect workers, but for seasonal employees the increased regulation will likely have the opposite effect. Small and medium-sized businesses that rely on flexible, short-term contracts to meet seasonal demand will face rising costs and greater bureaucracy when trying to bring on staff. Clause 1 on the right to guaranteed hours is so laissez-faire about how that will be implemented in a real-world business environment that it leaves significant ambiguity and doubt in employers' minds.

Graham Stuart: Does my hon. Friend agree that we need more detail from the Minister tonight on that specific provision, before the House can in good conscience give the Bill a Second Reading?

Alison Griffiths: I absolutely agree with my right hon. Friend that detail is precisely what is needed for the Bill to be implemented effectively.

In my constituency, seasonal employers such as theme parks are at the mercy of the British weather and a short season. On a rainy day takings will be minimal, and managing costs accordingly is vital to remain viable. Moreover, the student and retired populations in my constituency value the flexibility that those contracts offer. The Bill will disincentivise employers from offering short-term opportunities and reduce employment options for those who depend on temporary work.

Rebecca Harris (Castle Point) (Con): My constituency also has a lot of seasonal workers and a seaside economy. Does my hon. Friend agree that young people often get their first step on the job ladder through those jobs? They may well not get that opportunity if the legislation is passed.

Alison Griffiths: I thank my hon. Friend for a stellar point. I think most of us, certainly on this side of the Chamber, started our working careers in those jobs—I certainly did. Disincentivising employers from offering short-term opportunities will reduce those employment options.

About 1 million people aged 16 and over reported being employed on a zero-hours contract between April and June 2024. On average, those workers worked fewer hours per week than others, and 60% said that they did not even want more hours. In the hospitality sector, 90% say that it is their desired contract.

In conclusion, we must ensure that protecting workers' rights does not come at the cost of the jobs they rely on. I urge the House to carefully consider the consequences and to amend the Bill to safeguard opportunities for seasonal workers.

6.15 pm

Lola McEvoy (Darlington) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests—I am a proud trade union member. It is with great pride that I rise to speak on the Bill today. I have spent my career championing a better deal for working people at the Living Wage Foundation, the organisation that works tirelessly to champion the plethora of business benefits of being a good employer, as well as at the GMB union, where I was proud to work alongside an army of volunteer trade union reps who have great courage in standing up for their colleagues, day in, day out.

[Lola McEvoy]

The Bill has been warmly received by business because it is not radical. The Bill is reasonable, and it is illustrative of the way that Labour will govern for the time we are given that privilege. It is reasonable that people can earn a minimum wage that meets the cost of living. It is reasonable that people cannot be forced to sign away their current terms and conditions or lose their job. It is reasonable that people are not sexually harassed at work. It is reasonable that people working the same shift pattern, week in, week out, are given contracts that protect and reflect that. The Bill will do all that and more. The Bill will right some of the wrongs that have been pushing working people into wholly unacceptable hardship over the last 14 years.

In the spirit of that mission-led approach to Government, I ask the Minister to consider the following points that will improve physical and mental health outcomes, as well as support more people back to work. Will the Minister consider paid time off for preventive cancer screenings? I met a woman who worked in a hospital as a key worker for a private company. She could not afford to take unpaid leave to get her smear tests, so she missed them and then discovered she had stage 4 cervical cancer. Paid time off for preventive screenings, which good employers already offer, will support our health mission as well as save lives. People must not have to choose between catching cancer early and feeding their families.

On parental rights, I welcome the strengthening of maternity rights in the Bill. For too long women have been penalised for having children, and the hard truth is that mothers are being forced to leave the workforce or take low-paid part-time work to make ends meet. I appreciate that the Bill will make paternity rights a day one right, and I look forward to the review on parental leave, because we need to normalise fathers being able to support their new families and bond with their babies. Protecting fathers to enable them to take paternity leave will help level the playing field and improve men's mental health, as fathers want to be with their babies.

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab): Sixty-one per cent of people in my constituency are in poverty despite being in work. Does my hon. Friend agree with me that it is only when work is made secure that we can truly grow our economy?

Lola McEvoy: I absolutely agree, because people want to work, and they want to work in good-quality jobs that allow them to spend a decent amount of time enjoying the things that matter in life.

The Bill will make thousands of my constituents in Darlington better off, safer and more secure at work. More than that, it will benefit businesses' bottom lines, as they will have a happier, healthier and more productive workforce. That is essential for the growth we need to see, it is good for working people, it is good for business, and it is great for the economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): I call Katie Lam to make her maiden speech.

6.19 pm

Katie Lam (Weald of Kent) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for letting me make not just my first contribution to this House, but the first contribution

from the newly formed constituency of Weald of Kent. My predecessors are illustrious: William Hart Dyke helped invent tennis, Charles Barnett was a first-class cricketer, and Edward Percy Smith was a scriptwriter like me, penning the Hammer Horror hit "The Brides of Dracula". We even have a Prime Minister in our history: Benjamin Disraeli began his parliamentary career representing a patch of Kent that includes the village of Linton, which is now in my constituency. However, only one of my predecessors, Ann Widdecombe, can boast Britain's highest honour: an appearance on "Strictly Come Dancing". [Laughter.]

Two of my most recent predecessors have left this place. Damian Green and Damian Collins both worked doggedly for the area and for the country in government—Damian Collins especially in the field of digital, culture, media and sport, the Select Committee for which he chaired for many years, and Damian Green with senior roles in government, all the way up to First Secretary of State. Both served my constituents with distinction, and on their behalf, I would like to say thank you.

I am not the first politician in my family. My grandmother came to Britain in 1937 at the age of 13 as a refugee from Germany. Her grandfather, Paul Heide, was a state senator and a fierce critic of the Nazis. When Hitler came to power, the whole family were arrested and stripped of their citizenship. After years in prison, Paul jumped out of the window of his second-floor cell and made it to Czechoslovakia despite his broken ankle. There, the family set up a resistance radio station broadcasting back over the border, until one night they were raided by the SS and one of the operators was shot dead. They managed to escape, and fled to England and freedom. My grandfather's family were far less fortunate: Jews from Amsterdam, almost all of them were murdered in Sobibor and Auschwitz. One of them was eight years old.

My grandparents' stories helped make me who I am, so even as a small child, I already knew the power of politics. It is an honour to take my place in Parliament, to serve my constituents and this country—the country that saved my family and saved the free world—but freedom does not come for free: it must be fought for. Every time I come into this Chamber, I see the shields that surround us and think of our country's sacrifice. Colonel Victor Cazalet, whose shield is on the other side of the Chamber, lived in Cranbrook in my constituency. He had already served with distinction in the first world war, receiving the Military Cross for gallantry in 1917. He was killed in an air crash in world war two, as was Commander Rupert Brabner, whose shield is a few places further down. Commander Brabner was the Member for Hythe, a constituency that borders my own, and an ace Royal Navy pilot awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. We will remember them.

The weald of Kent has played its part in our nation's sacrifices. Headcorn aerodrome operated in the second world war as RAF Lashenden, at the same time as Benenden school was converted for use as a military hospital, and Coxheath was once the British Army's largest training ground. The constituency may be new, but the Kentish weald is anything but: Appledore was raided by the Vikings in 893, and the Archbishop of Canterbury had his palace at Charing as far back as the year 900. Enriched by ironmaking in Biddenden and clothmaking in Marden and Staplehurst, today the

weald of Kent boasts hundreds of square miles of the most gorgeous countryside, surrounding two delightful towns—Tenterden and Cranbrook—as well as over 100 of Britain's most charming villages, many 1,000 years old or more. From Aldington to Yalding, every one of the weald of Kent's 56 civil parishes is a rural jewel. The area is awash with medieval churches, cricket clubs, intricate gardens, and a mosaic of farms growing the nation's food—and now, vineyards growing the very finest British wine.

Do not take my word for it: the glory of the weald of Kent has been immortalised in films, books and television shows. H.E. Bates was inspired by his home, Little Chart, to write "The Darling Buds of May", and the TV adaptation was filmed in Pluckley and neighbouring Bethersden. Godmersham Park was the inspiration for Jane Austen's "Mansfield Park", while Agatha Christie fans will know Chilham as the backdrop for episodes of "Poirot" and Smarden as a television stand-in for Miss Marple's home, St Mary Mead. The steam train in the opening shot of "Downton Abbey" is the Kent and East Sussex railway, rolling from Rolvenden to Wittersham Road, and one of my favourite films, "Kind Hearts and Coronets", shot its countryside scenes in Boughton Monchelsea.

Lastly, I should like to give a few personal thanks. First, I thank hon. Members on the Government Benches, for it was while delivering leaflets for their party that Grandma and Grandpa Lam met in the late 1940s. Had the Mill Hill Labour Club never existed, neither would this Conservative. *[Laughter.]* Secondly, I thank Alex, my family and my friends for all they have done for me. Thirdly, I thank the best Conservative association in the country. Finally, I thank the people of Weald of Kent who have sent me here to represent them. I will never look at the responsibility of being the Member of Parliament for Weald of Kent as merely a job; I will always treat it as an honour.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Ms Nusrat Ghani): We now have another maiden speech. I call Sarah Smith.

6.25 pm

Sarah Smith (Hyndburn) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a proud trade union member, I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and congratulate the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam) on her moving maiden speech.

It is with great pride and humility that I rise today for the first time as the elected Member for Hyndburn and Haslingden. I start by paying tribute to my immediate predecessor, Sara Britcliffe, for her commitment to Hyndburn and for leading the way as the first woman to represent the constituency. I cannot make this speech without also paying tribute to the previous Labour Member, Graham Jones, whose selfless support and kindness I am privileged to have received. Graham is the most fierce champion of Lancashire: he has fought tirelessly for the people of Hyndburn, and is a man you always want in your corner. With the north-west of England being scourged with gambling-related suicides, particularly among young men, Graham led the successful campaign to reduce the maximum stake on fixed-odds betting terminals from £100 to just £2. That campaign will undoubtedly have saved and improved many lives.

It may surprise Members when I say that Hyndburn is not a real place. No one really relates to being from Hyndburn; instead, they identify proudly as a resident of Accrington, Great Harwood, Rishton, Altham, Oswaldtwistle, Clayton-le-Moors or Church. Each of those communities has its own rich history, culture and identity. My constituency is the home of the largest Tiffany glass collection in Europe, the Accrington Pals, and the Nori brick, which was used to build the Empire State Building. It is also the home of one of the 12 founder members of the football league, whose legacy is continued by Accrington Stanley football club. I am sure the House will join me in congratulating the boys on their third win on the trot against Barrow at the weekend.

Perhaps most significantly, my constituency was the engine of the industrial revolution during the 19th century. The invention of the spinning jenny, the mechanisation of calico printing, and the creation of turkey red and khaki dyes enabled the globalisation of the textile industry, but the huge wealth that the mill owners made was often at the cost of the workers, whose living and working conditions were terrible. I also represent the magnificent and diverse town of Haslingden, whose coat of arms reads "Nothing without labour". That motto was a statement of solidarity: in 1826, amid loom-breaking riots in east Lancashire, hundreds of people in Haslingden attacked machinery in protest at pay cuts and their awful working conditions. Many perished due to poverty and hardship, but by 1850 and with the support of churches and reformers, a minimum wage was eventually introduced.

We stand in this Chamber almost 200 years later, and although things have of course improved hugely, too many of my constituents are still struggling to make ends meet with zero-hours contracts, low wages and insecure work. While in the 19th century workers had to literally fight for basic rights, we now—thanks to trade unions and the Labour party—have representation of working people in this more civil way. That is why I welcome this Bill, which strengthens employees' rights, stops the exploitative use of zero-hours contracts and, importantly, gives people the right to maternity and paternity pay from day one.

Hyndburn and Haslingden is a magnificent and beautiful constituency that I am proud to call home. It is where my husband James grew up and where we got married, in the beautiful church of St Peter and St Paul's where his dad, Paul, was the vicar for 18 years. As well as showing dedication to his parish, Paul was instrumental in establishing the sixth-form provision at St Christopher's school, which has changed the lives of countless young people. Tragically, we lost Paul within days of my election, so he is not here with us today, but I will continue to fight to break down all the barriers to opportunity that our children and young people face.

Without my family, I would not be standing here. I want to put on record how grateful I am to my parents, Rosemary and Gary, to my brother Mark, and to Margaux, James, Ellie and both the Ruths for believing in me and standing by me every step of the way. As a Christian, I also give thanks to Jesus for giving me this opportunity. As I go on this journey, I will remember always the verse in Micah and aim to carry out justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with God throughout my time here.

[Sarah Smith]

I first got involved in politics because I think it is wrong that, far too often, the postcode where people are born determines so many of their life outcomes. For as long as I am privileged to represent Hyndburn and Haslingden, I will work tirelessly to ensure that children born in Clayton have the same life chances as those born in Chelsea, and I will make it my mission to represent them in the corridors of power, but I will also make it my mission to be present, transparent, and accessible as a local champion for the residents of Hyndburn and Haslingden.

6.31 pm

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): I congratulate the last two speakers on their powerful maiden speeches. Both of them were most moving. As we always discover in this place, there is more that unites us than divides us. What unites me with the hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam) is clearly Jane Austen. I say to the hon. Member for Hyndburn (Sarah Smith) that I lived in east Lancashire for 15 years, and I know the area well. I was sorry to hear about the loss for her family.

I am pleased that many of the measures that we Liberal Democrats have been campaigning for over many years have been included in this Bill. I am most pleased about the reinstatement, in clauses 15 and 16, of the original wording of my Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023. Introduced as a private Member's Bill, my Act amended the Equality Act 2010 to better protect employees from workplace harassment and sexual harassment. In addition to creating a direct preventive duty, it would have created new liabilities for employers in cases of third-party harassment, unless employers took all reasonable steps to prevent it. That would have created protections similar to those that were originally in the Equality Act 2010, but were removed by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. Amendments to my Bill in Committee in the Lords removed that clause, so that no such liability was created. The ridiculous argument was made that it would have prevented free speech. It therefore remains the case that employers have no liability for harassment of staff by third parties. My original Bill would also have created a new legal duty for employers to take "all reasonable steps" to prevent sexual harassment of their employees. As a result of amendments made by the Lords, that was reduced to "reasonable steps".

Since my Bill passed into law, excellent progress has been made. A study by Culture Shift found that 66% of businesses felt that the prevention of sexual harassment is of high importance. However, according to WorkNest, three quarters of employers cited protection from harassment by third parties as a concern. There is clearly an appetite among businesses for including these protections in the Bill. Too many people suffer still from sexual harassment in the workplace. I congratulate the Government on taking further steps to remove that blight on our workplaces.

6.34 pm

Jayne Kirkham (Truro and Falmouth) (Lab/Co-op): As an MP from Cornwall, where we have seasonal workers aplenty, I should say that although the Bill talks

about a suggested reference period of 12 weeks, after which average hours will be offered, employees do not have to accept that if they do not want to. They can choose to stay on zero-hours contracts.

We have a large demand for social care in Truro and Falmouth. Our population tends towards an older demographic. As many people leave friends and family to retire to Cornwall, the availability of care is especially important. Assistance for people who have disabilities, so that they can live independent lives and be supported into work if they choose that path, is crucial. Skilled care workers are chronically underpaid for what they do—they are often on the minimum wage—and good people leak out of the system, as it pays more to work in the local supermarket.

I worked as a teaching assistant at a local secondary school—I declare my interest in the register as a Unison member—and I was also an equity partner in a trade union law firm, so I have some experience of employing people, too. The pay for working in a school in a supporting role can also be very low—sometimes minimum wage. What the care and school sectors have in common, apart from poor rates of pay, is that, as others have said, they involve highly skilled jobs that are incredibly important for our society, and those who work in them are far more likely to be women. The Bill has many provisions that will help with sick pay and parental leave, and will give protection from unfair dismissal from day one. It also improves family-friendly rights, provides for flexible working, and has measures to tackle zero-hours and minimum-hours contracts. However, it also specifically gives respect and recognition to social care workers and school support staff through a fair pay agreement for adult social care, and by reinstating the school support staff negotiating body. This will be a game changer for those low-paid workers, mostly women, who work in care and in schools. It will mean that pay, terms and conditions for care workers and school support staff are negotiated nationally, and that a minimum is set across the country.

I am so pleased that the Government have chosen those two sectors as the first to have the opportunity for fair pay agreements. Women with caring responsibilities are often limited in the hours they can work. Historically, that has meant that, however skilled and important their jobs are, they have not been properly rewarded or looked after. Changing that will be transformational.

Truro and Falmouth has Cornwall's only acute hospital and the seat of Cornwall unitary council within its boundaries. That means that we have a large number of people who work in the public sector. Many of those jobs have been contracted out, and the terms and conditions for those roles have been gradually eroded. This Bill enables Ministers to create a code to prevent the emergence of a two-tier workforce when outsourcing occurs. A new national procurement statement will make sure that the Government use their contracts to raise employment standards, not dilute them. This employment Bill is a huge step forward, and I am proud of it.

6.37 pm

Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst (Solihull West and Shirley) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow several excellent maiden speeches this afternoon.

For an economy to thrive, both employers and employees must feel protected. Protections enable both parties to draw comfort. However, this Bill does not uphold that principle. In its approach and in its drafting, this Bill has fallen off its axis. It has, without doubt, landed in a place where it overwhelmingly favours the employee, to the detriment of any working balance with the employer. This should come as no great surprise. After all, given the paucity of private sector experience in the Cabinet, it was almost inevitable that this Bill would be seen through the prism of trade union bias. Having studied the Bill, one cannot fail to conclude that the Ministers who commissioned it have no understanding of the struggles faced by small and medium-sized businesses up and down the country.

While there is much to be derided in the Bill, there are two points I wish to raise for Ministers' consideration. First, the abolition of the qualifying period for bringing an unfair dismissal claim will inevitably mean a rise in the number of claims presented to the employment tribunal. This will flood an already overwhelmed system. I ask the Minister: what true impact assessment has been made of that?

Under this Bill, bringing a claim for unfair dismissal becomes, to all intents and purposes, a day one right. There is a lack of clarity about the length of any probation period and the obligations on an employer when seeking to dismiss in that period. Inevitably, these obligations will increase the burden on SMEs, which will not have the depth of resources of their larger counterparts. The predictable consequence is that small businesses are likely to sink under the weight and cost of these additional requirements.

My second point relates to the proposed changes in respect of industrial action and trade union relations. By repealing the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, lowering the ballot threshold for union action and requiring employers to direct their staff towards unions, the Government have demonstrated their willingness to bow down to their union paymasters, to the detriment of hard-working businesses and industry. The public will see this for what it is: a cheap effort to curry favour with the unions while lining the pocket of the Labour party.

It is clear from my conversations with small business owners in Solihull West and Shirley that the Government's proposals will only hinder growth and productivity. These measures fail to strike the balance between employer and employee. They will choke our courts, cripple small businesses and stifle employment growth.

6.39 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Ind): I remind the hon. Member for Solihull West and Shirley (Dr Shastri-Hurst) that across those European countries with the highest union density, people have the best wages and working conditions and the greatest productivity, which somewhat undermines his last argument. I refer you to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We are calling this the Employment Rights Bill, but it is not about rights as such; it is about power. When trade unions first discovered the concept of solidarity in the early industrial revolution, they discovered that, through unity, they could exert power to influence, to

improve working conditions and wages, and to secure a better overall quality of life. Since 1979—I started work a few years before then—successive Conservative Governments have understood the distribution of power, and as a result they have used legislation to undermine trade union rights, so as to reduce the power of workers to defend themselves at work and improve their working conditions. All that the Bill does—I welcome it wholeheartedly—is take a small step to rebalance that power. It will not just improve wages and working conditions, but lead to a better economic situation for all concerned—employers and employees—full stop. That is what it is about.

Andy McDonald: Would my right hon. Friend agree with me that the steps outlined in this Bill will help to address insecure work, and will allow people to enjoy decent, secure wages and dignified work, as well as to plan for their future and that of their family?

John McDonnell: Yes, and as a result, people will work better, increase their productivity and improve the profitability of companies, which is beneficial to us all. It is as simple as that. However—there is a “but”—there are a few points on which I would press the Government to go a bit further. The first is sectoral collective bargaining and fair pay agreements. In the early 1970s, 86% of our workforce was covered by collective agreements, but that is now down to 20%. Where collective agreements have operated, they improve productivity, wages and conditions, and increase industrial harmony in the economy. We as a Government are starting off by introducing them for adult social care, which I thoroughly welcome, because there is such low pay and exploitation in the sector. However, I would like to see an enabling clause in the Bill, so that we can move on swiftly to other sectors in which we can get agreement across the trade union movement and engage with employers.

The second point is on single worker status, to which my hon. Friend alluded. Consultation is taking place on that, and it is absolutely critical, because we have seen some of the most exploitative practices in parts of the economy where workers have been forced into bogus self-employed status.

The third point is on insourcing. The Government have promised the biggest reform of insourcing in a generation. There is no mention in the Bill of insourcing, but there is mention of reform to procurement, and it is important that through our reforms to procurement, we bring forward insourcing as rapidly as possible. Outsourcing has produced an insecure, low-paid form of employment that is already resulting in industrial strife. Over the next couple of weeks, we could see strikes in virtually every Government Department because of what is happening on outsourcing.

On fire and rehire, the question is what a company has to do to prove that there is financial stress because of the economy. I also have two final points. One is on the seafarers' charter; it has been mentioned that the second stage of discussions are taking place. That charter is critical if we are to provide basic protections for seafarers. Finally, prison officers have been denied the right to strike since 1994, and even Tony Blair said that he would restore that. I want to see that in this Bill, and I shall table an amendment accordingly.

6.44 pm

Joe Robertson (Isle of Wight East) (Con): I congratulate those who have given their maiden speeches today and spoken with such passion for and about their communities.

There is much in the Bill that I support, and I support the sentiment behind it. I am sure there is common ground in wanting to improve conditions and rights for workers, but there is a balance to be struck, and I have grave concerns about some provisions in the Bill—those that increase burden and red tape on employers and on employees, and those that are a threat to and a drag on economic productivity.

My first concern is the unnecessary introduction of a new concept of statutory probation. As the law currently stands, workers get protections against things like unfair dismissal. Those long-standing principles have survived different Governments, and indeed survive in this Bill. The debate has been about when those rights are accrued—whether it is after two years of employment or one—and there has been a fluctuation. This Bill attempts to introduce those rights from day one, but then to row back on them by introducing a statutory probation period, during which, in the Deputy Prime Minister's own words, there is only a “light touch” approach to unfair dismissal. It creates a new concept that is vague and unclear, and it will increase the glut of litigation in the employment tribunal. Indeed, it will need to do so to create case law so that employees and employers can understand what a “light touch” approach to unfair dismissal means.

My second concern is the increased burden on smaller employers. Indeed, that is contained in the Government's own analysis, and much has been said about that, so I will turn to my third issue: specific burdens in specific sectors, such as social care. The Government's own analysis says that the Bill will increase costs for employers, but employers in social care cannot bear any more cost. The Government have said they will bring forward reform of social care; that must come first, before this law is brought into force.

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the crux of the issue is that the Bill is lacking in detail? The issues he is discussing have been identified and indeed referenced in the Government's own economic analysis, and we cannot get into the detail of this debate without having that level of information on the face of the Bill.

Joe Robertson: I agree that the Bill lacks detail. It also contains a lot of powers that are intended to come about through secondary legislation. For example, we do not know how long that probation period will be, because it is not set out in the legislation.

Turning to the NHS, we understand that the Chancellor will increase the money to the NHS in the Budget but, as an employer, the NHS will have increased costs through this Bill. If national insurance contributions on employers are to be raised in the Budget, it will have that cost as well. That means there will be less money available to cut waiting lists. I urge the Government to delay this Bill, get the detail right and put some detail into it, and ensure that sectors such as health and social care get the support first so that, as employers, they can deal with the increased costs from this legislation.

6.48 pm

Becky Gittins (Clwyd East) (Lab): Madam Deputy Speaker, I refer you to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, where you will see that I have worked for a trade union that is not affiliated to the Labour party and that did not donate to my campaign. You will also see a number of other trade unions listed, not because of any campaign donations or vested interests—I can see why Opposition Members were led there; that is far more familiar to them—but because of the fantastic trade union representatives who have supported me and, I am sure, many Members on the Labour Benches. For me, that was Jim, my Unite rep in my very first job when training as a finance management trainee, all the way through to Laura, Trudy and Claire, the GMB reps who looked after me and supported me in my job before I was elected to this place.

I rise in support of the Bill, which is a central tenet of the Government's policy to put working people at the heart of our economy and make work pay. As I said, I am a proud trade unionist, and I am proud to stand alongside millions of working people across the country who we depend on to drive our economy and provide the services we all need. I wish to call out some claims that I have heard from Opposition Members throughout this debate—and before; they are quite tired claims—that supporting the advancement of people's rights at work is in some ways a vested interest. When were the working people of this country ever just a vested interest? It is in the interests of the working people of this country that we should be governing.

As a former trade union industrial officer, I know that finding a way forward in collaboration with those on both the employee and employer side is not always the easiest thing to do, but it is always the right and most productive way forward, so I am pleased that within their first 100 days, as promised, this Labour Government have presented this excellent Bill, and in doing so have ripped up many of the provisions in the Trade Union Act 2016. Rather than ameliorate industrial relations, that legislation was symptomatic of an aimlessly combative approach in that area that the previous Government drove forward. The effect, as we sadly know, was some of the worst disruption in decades. The public responded in July; they had had enough of that toxic and self-defeating approach.

I am delighted that measures in the Bill will modernise employment laws, with much of the Trade Union Act 2016 dismantled and, quite rightly, thrown in the bin. This upgrade for workers' rights establishes day one rights for parental and bereavement leave for millions of workers, and statutory sick pay will be strengthened. The Bill is part of the platform for that approach. I welcome its content and the commitment to work with all stakeholders to ensure that it is implemented in such a way that benefits all my hard-working constituents of Clwyd East.

6.51 pm

Chris Law (Dundee Central) (SNP): The SNP broadly welcomes the core elements of the Bill, having long called for many of these changes. We have been clear in our opposition to zero-hours contracts, fire and rehire, and other forms of precarious employment that strip workers of job security. Indeed, former MP Gavin Newlands tried twice to introduce such measures with a private Member's Bill. We have supported the removal

of the lower earnings limit for statutory sick pay and the end of the waiting period, allowing those who are ill to access support from day one. Provisions for unpaid parental leave, paternity leave, and the right to claim unfair dismissal from day one are progressive steps towards workers' rights that we must endorse. Similarly, scrapping anti-trade union laws such as the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, is an important step in restoring the ability of unions to properly represent workers.

Johanna Baxter: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if he is supportive of workers' rights, those Unison members who are currently on strike in Perth and Kinross have a valid claim to a decent pay rise from his Government?

Chris Law: I think the question that the hon. Member refers to is with the Scottish Government, and of course we listen to trade unions in all cases. Indeed, a fair pay settlement was agreed with all unions, until we heard about this one recently. Our former colleague, Chris Stephens, fought tirelessly for trade unions, and spoke passionately in this House about rights for workers.

However, Labour has not gone far enough or acted swiftly enough with this Bill. Gaps remain in its plans, with around half the promised reforms being kicked into the long grass through consultation, meaning that we will not see changes implemented until next year, the year after, or perhaps even 2027. Critical elements—such as the commitment to a single status of worker, the right to switch off, and addressing pay discrimination through mandatory reporting of ethnicity and disability pay gaps—are missing entirely. The Bill was meant to be a defining piece of Labour's first 100 days in office, but what good is meeting that deadline if the meaningful reforms are missing or will not come into effect for years? This Government are looking overly cautious and hesitant, and in the past weeks people have been writing to me, asking whether that is because the Government want to delay and find a convenient way out of implementing the measures.

The SNP Government in Scotland have taken meaningful steps to promote fair work practices, such as supporting collective bargaining, achieving real living wage employer status, and closing the gender pay gap faster than the rest of the UK, which contrasts sharply with the environment created by the previous UK Government. Devolving employment law to the Scottish Parliament would ensure that no worker in Scotland is disadvantaged by Westminster Governments. Indeed, Scottish Labour's 2021 manifesto supported devolving employment rights—that might surprise some MPs present today. I look forward to their support to ensure that employment law is devolved to Scotland during this Parliament, so that workers in Scotland never again have to see their employment rights eroded by any future Tory-led Government.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress general secretary, Roz Foyer, commented that

"the Employment Rights Bill isn't the terminus. It's the first stop. This can be the foundations on which we can build."

I agree. It is imperative that workers' rights are improved by the Bill, but it must go further and faster, and look to devolve those powers so that we can guarantee that the rights of working people in Scotland are protected and strengthened.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Dr Marie Tidball to make her maiden speech.

6.55 pm

Dr Marie Tidball (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a proud member of the GMB, Unison, and Community trade unions.

When I was born, the room in Barnsley hospital was filled with flowers. No one knew how long I would live for or what operations I might need. Our communities in Penistone and Stocksbridge nurtured me growing up, and world-class NHS care at Barnsley and Sheffield children's hospitals enabled me to walk and follow my ambitions. My local state education in Penistone helped me to catch up, and to go on to study law at university and fulfil my potential. My inimitable parents taught me that there was no such word as "can't", as well as the values of fairness, equality and justice—values at the heart of this Bill. I will use my skills and experiences, as the MP for our constituency, to give back to the communities that gave me so much, including incredible teachers and teaching assistants who helped to make education a way to overcome people's assumptions about my disability, and to feel free. Achieving health and education equality is a huge asset to our country and critical to the health of our economy.

I am proud to be the first Member of Parliament for Penistone and Stocksbridge in over 100 years to have grown up there. Our rich agricultural heritage has put food on the country's table, and the grit and determination of local miners, the steelworks in Stocksbridge and ironworks in Thorncliffe powered the industrial revolution, with the latter also producing Churchill tanks, which defended our country in world war two. Those sites remain economically important today, with the specialist LIBERTY Steel now producing steel that powers our UK aerospace industry.

The landscape of our very special constituency has helped to shape our laws before. Poignantly, the day of the general election marked 186 years since the Huskar pit disaster on 4 July 1838, when flooding caused the pit to collapse, killing 26 children. That tragedy led to the Mines and Collieries Act 1842, which banned women and girls, and boys under 10, from being employed in underground work. I learned about that tragedy at school and I knew then, as I know now, that law and politics have the power to improve people's lives. The past we inherit; the future we build. This Bill makes the biggest upgrade to workers' rights in a generation, with the driving purpose to change the lives of people across our country and make them better off. Ensuring that the very special people of the place that made me continue to innovate to change the world will be central to the work I do here.

Like the blooming heather that sweeps down the moors past the crystal waters of our rivers and reservoirs, towards our towns and villages, talent bursts forth in our constituency out of the dramatic landscape, gruelling weather, and lives hard-worked and hard-won. People in my constituency literally shoot for the stars: Grenoside's Helen Sharman was the first British citizen to go into space in 1991; Thurlstone-born Nicholas Saunderson was a blind 17th-century Lucasian professor of mathematics at Cambridge university; and England international

[Dr Marie Tidball]

footballer, John Stones, also hails from that village, and follows a long and proud history of footballers who have gone through Penistone Church FC.

This summer also saw Olympians made in our constituency. Gunthwaite's Becky Moody won bronze in dressage with her horse Jagerbomb. Caden Cunningham, who won silver, was trained in Oxspring at Quest Taekwondo. Musicians abound, too. Alex Turner of the Arctic Monkeys makes sure that High Green is resolutely on the map. We can also boast stellar folk singers like the talented Rachael McShane of Bellowhead and Cawthorne's award-winning Kate Rusby, whose elegiac music of home has healed many a heart and inspired the mind. Ecclesfield produced Barry Hines, the author of "A Kestrel for a Knave", which was turned into the acclaimed film "Kes". He documented working-class lives for more than 40 years. Local author Matt Coyne's "Frank and Red" was the literary comedic mug of hot chocolate that kept me going through the general election.

While our beliefs start from a different place, I share my predecessor Miriam Cates's passion for education; I hope her new role gives her the chance for leadership on changing the safety of social media for young people. Angela Smith's legacy as a good constituency MP is something that I aspire to. Helen Jackson's work on community building in Northern Ireland, as Parliamentary Private Secretary to Mo Mowlam, provides lessons of hope that resonate in the times of hate that we must combat today. I am also grateful for Mick Clapham's support; I know we will see his legacy on the mineworkers' pension scheme continue under this Government.

Love, tolerance and doing things for other people are values knitted across the place I call home like the blankets woven from the yarn of Penistone sheep. To the people across Penistone and Stocksbridge: it is the privilege of my life to serve you. As your MP, I will work hard every day to be a strong voice for our communities and ensure that people growing up and growing old in our constituency can fulfil their potential. I will do what it takes to get things right and to get things done. We are a Government who will restore hope across our communities and bring people together. I cannot wait to work with Members across this House to make that change happen.

7.1 pm

Lewis Cocking (Broxbourne) (Con): I thank hon. Members for making their maiden speeches. As I have said before, I am a geographer, so it is a real pleasure to hear about our great United Kingdom and the different constituencies that we all represent.

Entrepreneurs in the towns and villages I represent across Broxbourne are working hard to take risks day in, day out to get our local economy growing and to create jobs, but I fear that the Bill could put all that at risk. Security in work should be available to everyone, but above all else it is getting the job in the first place that is the first vital step. Regrettably, the Government's plan will only make it harder for businesses to hire new employees. Small business owners in my constituency cannot call on large human resources departments to make sense of these new rules. Increasing the number of day one rights will see them hesitant in making

hiring decisions. As the Federation of Small Businesses has said, plans to give unfair dismissal rights from day one

"will inevitably deter small employers from taking on new people"

by raising the chance that new recruits will take their employer to a tribunal simply because they turn out to be unsuited to the role.

The principle of qualifying periods for workplace rights is sensible and fair. The Government must recognise that, because they have chosen not to include in the Bill a reform of the qualifying period of two years for statutory redundancy pay. A balance must be struck to avoid the burden falling too heavily on either the employer or the employee—especially for small business employees, who need the security and confidence that the qualifying period provides. It is clear that the Government's plans do not strike that balance.

One thing I agree with the Government about is that we must get our economy growing faster, but this Bill, on which the Government have not consulted, is not the right way to achieve that. In this place, we should talk more about how to encourage firms to create growth.

Joe Robertson: My hon. Friend talks about growth. Does he agree that growth for small businesses is good for workers and that what is good for small business is therefore good for workers? Small business needs better protection in this legislation.

Lewis Cocking: I absolutely agree. If we do not create the next generation of entrepreneurs in this country through the education system, which the Government should be focusing on, rather than placing burdens on them—we have yet to hear the Government's new Budget, which could increase taxes and put more burdens on small businesses—there will be fewer jobs in the market and fewer jobs for the people we are trying to represent and protect in this place.

It is Opposition Members who are standing up for small businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of my local economy in Broxbourne and the country at large. If we do not ensure a fair balance between workers and small businesses, small businesses will close and people will lose their jobs. I do not think the Government want that, so will they please reflect on the Bill, have a proper consultation and come back with something more suitable for small and medium-sized businesses across the country?

7.5 pm

Apsana Begum (Poplar and Limehouse) (Ind): I rise to speak as a proud trade unionist. I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

Too many people are in jobs that offer little or no security. My constituency casework has highlighted the reality of insecure work in the UK and has exposed the inadequacy of the law around worker protections. The rise of in-work poverty, workplace precarity, zero-hours contracts, bogus self-employment and contracting out puts workers at risk. We know that women and black, Asian and minority ethnic workers continue to face the disproportionate burden of working in insecure jobs with fewer rights and ongoing pay gaps.

After years of attacks on workers' rights and hostility towards trade unions, it is a pleasure to welcome the Employment Rights Bill, which is without doubt a significant step forward for workers. I am particularly pleased to see the ballot thresholds from the Trade Union Act 2016 done away with, and to see the repeal of the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023, which trade unions have criticised as being undemocratic, unworkable and illegal.

I have long been concerned that current laws are already restricting the rights of workers to join and participate in trade unions and may breach international labour standards. Many of us would have liked to see the Bill completely ending fire and rehire and zero-hours contracts once and for all. I also understand that some unions are concerned about the rules allowing workers to have access to trade unions. They argue that the single best way to ensure that work pays more fairly is by expanding collective bargaining. I remain committed to strengthening trade union rights across the board.

I listened carefully to the Deputy Prime Minister, who rightly raised the plight of carers and parents in relation to employment rights. I would also like to raise the plight of survivors of domestic abuse and violence. The statutory guidance on the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 reminds us how pivotal the role and actions of an employer can be in the life of a survivor, who might only speak to managers and colleagues outside the home, as I know only too well as a survivor of ongoing abuse and harassment and having spoken to countless survivors. Employers should have a duty of care towards employees who are experiencing domestic abuse. I believe that the Bill could be further strengthened by bringing into scope the experiences of survivors of domestic abuse in the workplace. We should look at provisions such as flexible working and paid leave in that regard.

A thriving and just economy cannot be created without the full involvement and empowerment of the workforce. The Bill is an opportunity to lay the groundwork for a future in which workers can defend their pay, dignity and working conditions.

7.8 pm

John Cooper (Dumfries and Galloway) (Con): We have heard some electrifying and remarkable maiden speeches today. I rise to speak as a former member of a trade union. I do not miss the subs going out of my pay packet; it did little for me. This is no mere Bill, but a time machine that could take the whole country back decades. The unions are gonna party like it's 1979. For your benefit, Madam Deputy Speaker—you were not there—1979 was the winter of discontent when the unions bit back, the rubbish piled high in the streets and a Labour PM was soon out with the bins.

With this hastily assembled Employment Rights Bill, Labour is feeding the union alligator that may yet eat it, too. That is because the Bill lacks balance, assuming that all employers are robber barons intent on exploiting workers. The Prime Minister has talked of growing the economy and cutting red tape, yet now we see the reality: proposals that will frighten firms away from taking on new staff and burden them with still more rules and regulations.

My constituent Rory, a forward-thinking dairy farmer, has written to me about Labour's pledge "to make Britain the best place to start and grow a business."

Like me, he sees fine sentiments, but the Bill risks the opposite effect. There is even an expensive new layer of bureaucracy: the fair work agency, whose costs will be borne by business and passed on to the public. The people's tape is deepest red.

The Bill makes it easier for militant unions to infiltrate workplaces, and it strips out sensible curbs on their power. Strikes will hit the public harder without Conservative safeguards such as those that guarantee minimum service levels. An impact assessment of the Trade Union Act 2016 indicated that it would cut strikes by about 35%.

Perran Moon (Camborne and Redruth) (Lab): Will the hon. Member give way?

John Cooper: No, I have waited 40 years for this. Much of the 2016 Act will be tossed into picket line braziers, and as ever it is the public who will suffer. The plan to make union funding of Labour opt-out, not opt-in, is another back-to-the-future move. It is naked opportunism from the Labour party.

The Bill will be hardest on small and medium-sized businesses, the backbone of the economy. We must not forget that they are run by people who are themselves workers and strivers. Napoleon disparagingly called us a nation of shopkeepers. With legislation as skewed as this, Labour risks shutting the shops and turning us into a nation of strikers and their union rep handmaidens. This skimpy Bill is so heavily skewed that it resembles the blade in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Pit and the Pendulum", leaving employers strapped in red tape between the ever-present pit of insolvency and the slice, slice, slice of costly, pro-union, anti-growth legislation.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Lorraine Beavers to make her maiden speech.

7.11 pm

Lorraine Beavers (Blackpool North and Fleetwood) (Lab): I congratulate all Members who have made their maiden speech today. I am a proud member of Unite the Union and the Communication Workers Union.

I would first like to pay tribute to my predecessor Paul Maynard. Paul worked incredibly hard for his constituents and was rightly proud to be the first person with cerebral palsy to become a Government Minister. I want to say thank you to Joan Humble, the first Labour MP to serve in my constituency, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Cat Smith) for all her hard work and commitment to the people of Fleetwood. I also want to pay tribute to my mum and dad, the wonderful Ronnie and Brenda Shewan, who both sadly passed away this year. My dad saw me get selected, and my mum saw me get elected. Oh, how I miss them!

As a lifelong trade unionist and socialist, I am incredibly proud to be making my maiden speech on the Employment Rights Bill, which will be transformative for the working people I represent. The 16-year-old me began her journey in the labour movement at Larkholme high school in Fleetwood. In assembly one day, the headmaster asked if anyone's dad was a lorry driver, and a girl called Susan raised her hand. He asked whether her dad had gone to work that day. When she said no, the head informed the school that the reason they did not get

[Lorraine Beavers]

their cornflakes that morning was that Susan's dad was refusing to go to work. I was incensed. I organised a demonstration outside the school gates that very lunchtime. The head was furious and demanded that we come back in, but we stood united and refused. Eventually we negotiated a deal, agreeing that the head would make a full apology at the next school assembly.

I understand that the Bill might not allow for picket lines inside schools, but without doubt it is the biggest upgrade to workers' rights that we have seen for a generation. The fair pay agreement outlined in it will be transformative for the working people of my constituency, especially in social care, where low pay and poor conditions have led to a recruitment and retention crisis. With an end to fire and rehire, a clampdown on zero-hours contracts and more rights for unions to represent working people, the Bill will not just improve the lives of my constituents, but empower them.

It is an honour and a privilege to be the voice of the residents of Blackpool North and Fleetwood. I am the 15-year-old girl who brought the school out on strike. I am the Army wife. I am the mum who could not afford to buy new shoes for her girls. I am the mum who cycled an extra mile to save 50p because funds were low. I understand what it is like to be poor and struggle between paydays. Sadly, I know that some of my constituents are going through far worse poverty than I could ever imagine. I see the cost of living crisis, the massive rises in rent, food and clothing and the mortgages that young people can only dream of affording, and I want to make it better.

My constituency has the most beautiful coastline, nature reserves and communities. We speak to each other, we care for each other, we smile at each other and we look after each other. That is why so many people move to the Fylde coast. It is where I live with my husband John and where we brought up our two beautiful daughters, who have blessed us with four wonderful grandchildren. I would not live anywhere else but on the beautiful Fylde coast. It is where I am from, where I was born and where I have loved, laughed, worked, cried and grieved. It is my home and my safe space.

My constituency includes the towns, villages and hamlets of Fleetwood, Thornton, Cleveleys, Stanah, Anchorholme, Carleton, Norcross, Norbreck, Bispham, Little Bispham and northern Blackpool. Carleton is listed in the 1086 Domesday book. Bispham is several hundred years older than Blackpool, and Fleetwood is the newest kid on the block, with the first bricks not being laid till 1836. I will serve every corner of my constituency and fight for a better future for all. I am here to fight for investment into my community, to fight for my constituents and to make sure that the funding my constituency so desperately needs is brought back home. That is the job my constituents sent me to do, and I intend to do it.

I am proud to have been elected alongside a Government who will deliver dentists for all, save our NHS and invest in our young and old alike; a Government who will invest in our communities, our armed forces, our police, our firefighters and more; a Government who care and leave no one behind; and a Government who make those with the broadest shoulders carry the heaviest load. This is my Government, this is my party, and we will deliver.

7.17 pm

Steve Darling (Torbay) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Lorraine Beavers) on a powerful maiden speech. I broadly welcome the Bill before us—after all, it is clearing up the mess left by the previous Tory Government. However, I am concerned that the Government are not going far enough in certain areas, particularly on statutory sick pay. Presenteeism may mean that people are turning up to work when they should not be, both for their health and for productivity. It is important to enhance statutory sick pay, and I hope that Ministers will give it serious consideration.

As somebody who was adopted, I am delighted that the Bill talks about adoption, but I am shocked that the Government have not explored how they could support fostering. It is part of the rich tapestry of our families and our society in the United Kingdom, and it also helps our children's services. Why are the Government choosing to be wilfully blind to foster carers in the Bill? It is shameful.

I would also like to reflect on Disability Confident employers. Disability Confident is a really important scheme. We know—I hear it on the news—that the Government are talking about trying to get people with health conditions out of benefits and into work. We applaud that, but why is the Bill silent on Disability Confident employers? This is a real opportunity to do things in a positive way, rather than blaming people with disabilities. I hope the Government will see common sense on that.

7.19 pm

Ian Lavery (Blyth and Ashington) (Lab): I refer the House to my declaration of interests.

The Employment Rights Bill is most welcome. It has been described by some on the Conservative Benches as a horror show. It is definitely not a horror show. It is described as a trade union Bill. I remind Opposition Members that it was the Conservative Government who introduced the Trade Union Act 2016, among many other anti-trade union pieces of legislation. One of the best things in this Bill is the repeal of much of what was in the 2016 anti-trade union legislation. This is the first time in my time as a Member of Parliament that there has been any repeal of anti-trade union legislation. I have to say that, like many other trade unionists and many other people in the workplace, I welcome that fact. Labour recognises that the relentless attacks on the trade union movement—the battering of ordinary working people from pillar to post—cannot and should not continue.

Andy McDonald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels) Act 2023 was a deliberate attempt to undermine people in the workplace? It was completely ignorant of the fact that the unions provide minimum service levels throughout some of the most difficult circumstances. Does that not tell us a lot about the previous Conservative Government?

Ian Lavery: Thanks for that intervention. Of course it says a lot about the previous Conservative Government. We on the Labour Benches should always remember and never forget what the Conservatives do whenever

they are cornered or in difficulty: they revert to type and attack the trade union movement. That is what they do and have always done. You have seen some of the contributions here this evening. *[Interruption.]* Do you want to intervene? *[Interruption.]* Oh, so are you just going to continue to chunter? And when I give the opportunity of saying something responsible—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. The hon. Gentleman can sit. He has been here long enough to know that when he says “you”, he is referring to me. I sometimes let it pass when it is new Members who are not quite used to it, but he should know better.

Ian Lavery: My apologies, Madam Deputy Speaker. Yes, you are right, I should. I was being chuntered at by a Member on the Opposition Front Bench. My deepest apologies.

As I say, we must remember that the Conservatives revert to type.

Suella Braverman (Fareham and Waterlooville) (Con): The hon. Gentleman is doing a very impressive impersonation of Arthur Scargill. The reality is that the Conservative Government left office with 4 million more people in work compared with the Labour inheritance, a growing economy and a smashed deficit. That is something we are proud of on this side of the House.

Ian Lavery: Thanks for the compliment.

I was saying that the Bill simply restores the balance. It seeks to reverse the injustice meted out to the trade unions and working people, and to rebuild the workplace that was ideologically destroyed by the Conservative Government. These are the first steps and they are so, so welcome. I have fought for them all my life. They are the first steps in a long journey, but look at what we have done within the first 100 days. I have only mentioned a few.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) says, we are repealing the minimum service levels laws and most of the Trade Union Act 2016, and ensuring that individuals have employment rights from day one, including sickness pay, although there is an argument that sickness pay is far too low. We are looking at bereavement payments and so on from day one. We are looking to address the scourge of zero-hours contracts. We are looking to address the scourge of fire and rehire. We are looking to introduce flexible working and entitlements to paternity and parental leave. We do this because it is the right thing.

I could spend hours outlining what I think is right in the Bill and perhaps some things we need to focus on in the coming weeks, but I will not do that. The reality is that this is a historic Bill that sets a framework for fairness for generations to come. Remember, the louder the screams from the Conservative party—the screaming, shouting and chuntering—the more we on the Labour Benches know that we are winning the argument. We know we are doing the right thing, so however loud you shout, we welcome it.

7.25 pm

Bradley Thomas (Bromsgrove) (Con): I congratulate those hon. Members who delivered their passionate and authentic maiden speeches today.

I am proud, like so many Members, to represent a constituency that is home to so many small and medium-sized businesses, which comprise the backbone of our local economy. I am deeply concerned that the reforms in the Bill will hurt both businesses and employees, as well as damage the economic growth that the Government claim to be striving for. The previous Government introduced and raised the national living wage, ending low pay and ensuring that work always pays more than benefits. They banned exclusivity clauses in zero-hours contracts, banning businesses from stopping workers on a zero-hours contract having another job, and delivered 800 jobs a day from 2010. The Conservative Government also introduced shared parental leave, giving more choice to families. We introduced new regulations on shared parental leave to give families more choice over how they take parental leave following the birth of a child.

Changes to business regulation need to strike a careful balance, but Labour's Bill gets it wrong and will instead make it harder for businesses, damaging job creation and economic growth in the process. The Labour party has introduced a Bill at pace that does not strike the correct balance. As a result, our economy will be less competitive and growth will be hindered. Those warnings come not just from the Conservative Benches, but from across industry. The Scottish Chambers of Commerce highlighted how

“The proposed new rights to a tribunal access from day one will inevitably lead to more settlement agreements to avoid a lengthy and costly tribunal process, placing more burdens on businesses.”

The changes to employment law risk “fuelling long, complex litigation”, according to the Recruitment and Employment Confederation.

There are a few parts of the new Bill to which I would like to draw attention. The likelihood of drawn-out dismissal processes has already been referred to. There is the question of how poor performance will be proved. There is the unnecessary right that will be given to trade unions to gain access to workplaces. On zero-hours contracts, many employers and employees do not want guaranteed hours and a minimum threshold. On flexible working, there is the material change proposal, a reasonableness test that will make—

Suella Braverman: My hon. Friend is making a very good speech highlighting the fatal flaws in the Bill. Does he agree that the Government's own impact assessment on the economic implications show that it will be a disaster for small businesses, not just in Bromsgrove but in Fareham and Waterlooville? The costs that will be borne by businesses will cripple investment, strangle job creation and further stagnate growth.

Bradley Thomas: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for her intervention and agree wholeheartedly with her points. The Bill will inhibit economic growth and ultimately bear down very heavily on those the Government claim they are trying to protect.

The reforms will prevent businesses from hiring new people and expanding. The Institute of Directors has warned that 57% of businesses are less likely to hire due to measures in the Bill. There are concerns that the Government have not carried out a consultation on collective redundancy, and have failed to outline why they view those proposals as beneficial. Make UK, an important industry body, has warned that the regulations

[Bradley Thomas]

will “significantly increase” red tape for businesses that are forced to make redundancies, and UK Hospitality, which represents thousands of businesses on which many of our constituencies rely for their economic vitality, has said that for 90% of workers on zero-hours contracts, those are the desired contracts for them.

What we see here is a generational shift in employment law that will ramp up grievances and disputes and entrench unproductivity. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Fareham and Waterlooville (Suella Braverman), pointed out, it will make it easier to strike and send us back to the 1970s, supporting militant unions. It will increase the number of strike hours in public service, and, as Unite the Union has pointed out, it is like Swiss cheese: full of holes. I hope that, as the Bill progresses through Parliament, the Government will listen to both the Opposition and industry in order to limit the damage it will cause businesses and working people.

7.30 pm

Catherine Atkinson (Derby North) (Lab): I congratulate the Deputy Prime Minister on introducing this groundbreaking Bill within the Government’s first 100 days. It is a careful product of many years of work and thought. I proudly declare the interests set out in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, including my position as chair of the Society of Labour Lawyers, which has considered and campaigned on these issues for years. The many measures in the Bill create the conditions for jobs around which people can build lives and families, and will prevent legitimate businesses from being undercut by those who avoid their responsibilities. I welcome the provisions to tackle exploitative hiring and employment practices, which will benefit workers and businesses.

I will confine my remarks to enforcement and the fair work agency, because a right is not worth the paper it is written on unless it can be enforced. I was a barrister for 17 years, and for part of my career I had the honour of representing working people. I saw at first hand the race to the bottom on employment that took place under the last Government. Our country is unusual in having no labour rights commissioner, or central or local regulator. Many of the rights that successive Labour Governments have established, and for which the wider Labour movement campaigned, are instead delegated to individuals required to act themselves through the employment tribunal system.

As the Low Pay Commission has found, low-paid and exploited workers can be reluctant to speak out about abuses of their rights. Regulation of the labour market in the UK is fragmented and under-resourced, with an estimated one inspector per 10,000 workers. The creation of a fair work agency will help to enable enforcement of the national minimum wage, statutory sick pay, and a wider range of rights such as holiday pay, so that everyone plays by the same rules. It will help to protect businesses that are undercut by acting as a real deterrent. The current system clearly does not do that: last year 1.1 million employees did not receive any of the paid holiday to which they were entitled, and one in five of those on the minimum wage do not receive the correct pay. It is to the Government’s credit that the fair work agency will help the most vulnerable workers,

including those who are victims of human trafficking. I hope that, as the Bill progresses, we will be able to consider whether the agency will also be able to help with safety and other workplace rights.

We have seen Conservative Governments provoke conflict and disruption in industrial relations, but growth and prosperity are only served by better co-operation and work practices, and that is what the Bill will deliver.

7.33 pm

Wendy Chamberlain (North East Fife) (LD): I rise not to speak about the Bill as a whole, but to focus on the provisions that will have an impact on unpaid carers. I refer to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests as a trustee of the Links Trust. I am to become a member of the board of the Fife Carers Centre, which supports unpaid carers across Fife including my constituency, and that will shortly be published in the register. It should therefore be no surprise to the Government that the first issue that I want to raise is their failure to include paid carer’s leave in the Bill, or even to commit themselves to it in their “Next Steps to Make Work Pay” document. I think that that is a mistake, and also a U-turn from their previous position. I remember that during a debate on my private Member’s Bill that became the Carer’s Leave Act 2023—I double-checked this in *Hansard*—the hon. Member for Bradford East (Imran Hussain), who was then shadow Minister for employment rights and who is no longer in the Chamber, said:

“We of course support the Bill, but it falls short of what unpaid carers really need, which is paid carer’s leave. Under the proposals set out in our new deal for working people, the next Labour Government will legislate to introduce just that”.—[*Official Report*, 21 October 2022; Vol. 720, c. 1004.]

Indeed, he committed himself to doing that at all subsequent stages.

I acknowledge that the “Next Steps” document does make some promises in relation to carer’s leave—both to review the operation of the 2023 Act that I was proud to pass, and to look at the benefits of making that leave paid—but that is it. I looked with excitement at today’s written statement—I do not know what that says about me—only to find four consultations, none of which referred to unpaid carers. My Liberal Democrat colleagues and I are calling on the Government to give certainty to unpaid carers: certainty about when that review will take place, certainty about what it will entail, and certainty that the Government are keeping their pre-election pledges to move forward with paid leave.

Will the Government provide an update on what is being done to inform businesses about carer’s leave as it stands, namely unpaid? It concerns me that there is not enough information out there for employers or workers. What are the Government doing to ensure that companies are passing the information to their employees, and that it is being recorded correctly in systems? That last point is important. If the Government want to review the operation of the current Carer’s Leave Act, presumably they will want to know about take-up, but I am hearing worrying stories that carer’s leave cannot be properly recorded in HR systems, and is therefore recorded as general unpaid leave or something similar. We do not need to wait for a review to ensure that the new leave continues to be rolled out properly and effectively.

There are other elements of the Bill that I welcome, especially those relating to flexible working. We know that for unpaid carers, flexible working can be one of the most important tools for staying in work. My request of the Government is that during the passage of the Bill, they flesh out a bit more what they mean by a reasonable or not reasonable rejection of a request for flexible working. I urge the Minister to use his time today to reassure unpaid carers that the Government are not turning their back on them, now that he is in a position to help them.

7.36 pm

Paul Davies (Colne Valley) (Lab): Let me begin by proudly declaring my membership of Unite, the GMB and the Community trade union, and at some time in the past, a member of the National Union of Mineworkers, like my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth and Ashington (Ian Lavery).

The Bill will transform the lives of workers across the United Kingdom. It is not just a set of reforms; it is a commitment to the hard-working people of this nation, a promise to ensure that their rights are protected and their voices are heard. For far too long, many workers in this country have endured poor working conditions, low pay, and a lack of job security. The previous Conservative Government failed to address these critical issues, leaving millions of workers vulnerable and undervalued. The Bill is the Government's response to these injustices. It is a comprehensive package of reforms designed to upgrade workers' rights, tackle poor working conditions, and benefit both businesses and workers. It is part of the Government's broader effort to deliver economic security and growth to businesses, workers and communities.

One of the key aspects of the Bill is the improvement of pay and productivity. We recognise that fair wages are essential to the wellbeing of workers and their families. The Conservative Government's policies led to stagnating wages and widening income inequality. The Bill aims to rectify that by ensuring that all workers in the UK are paid fairly for their hard work, and that businesses are incentivised to invest in their workforce. From my conversations with businesses and employees in my constituency, it is clear that fostering sustainable businesses and promoting growth are crucial. I have observed numerous businesses forming partnerships with their workforces, grounded in fair treatment that acknowledges employees' dedication and hard work. The Bill supports and strengthens that approach. It also represents a new approach, a pro-business, pro-worker strategy that recognises the connection between economic growth and workers' rights. By addressing issues such as poor working conditions and low pay, this Government aim to create a more balanced and sustainable economy.

The Bill is a testament to the Government's commitment to creating a fairer and more equitable society. I am proud to support it, and to stand up for the rights of workers in my constituency and beyond.

7.39 pm

Ellie Chowns (North Herefordshire) (Green): I begin by welcoming this Bill on behalf of my Green colleagues. I would like to gently comment on the tone of some of this debate. I find myself on the Opposition Benches,

but that is not to say that I share the sentiments expressed by Conservative Members. In particular, it is a shame that we have seen some very polarised debate today. I want to challenge the rhetoric of, "It's workers versus employers and unions versus small businesses." That is both ahistorical and economically illiterate, frankly. It is ahistorical because if we did not have workers organising together to improve their conditions, we would still have children up chimneys and women being paid a small fraction of what men are paid for doing the same work.

Such rhetoric is economically illiterate because inequality is bad for growth. It is not just me and Labour Members who say that; the International Monetary Fund has specified that inequality is bad for growth. Let us try to look for the common ground together, and to welcome measures that will improve work and the security of people who work. Let us recognise that, frankly, this Bill is long overdue, because we have seen the erosion of workers' rights over decades. We are now in a position where work does not pay well enough for far too many people in our country, which is why we have so many people on in-work benefits.

I really welcome the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell), who pointed out that there are much better labour relations in countries where there is a positive recognition that workers' rights go along with improved economic growth. As a country, let us try to move towards that point.

I want to briefly mention a few areas where I would like the Government to go further. The Bill's failure to fully ban fire and rehire practices is inexplicable. It leaves a loophole or get-out clause that effectively condones this practice, and I do not think there can be any grounds for treating workers in purely transactional terms.

Zero-hours contracts are a complex area. I know that some people welcome the opportunity to have zero-hours contracts, but this flies in the face of what the majority of the public wants. The current model leaves far too much power in the hands of employers.

I want to briefly mention other aspects of equality. It is disappointing that this Bill does not uphold previous Labour pledges on mandatory disability and ethnicity pay gap reporting. It will lead to increased inequality between migrant workers and others, because it does not address the risks that migrant workers face when their visas are dependent on employers, and they may exit the country before they have had a chance to pursue their employment claims.

I would like to see kinship care treated in the same way as adoption leave. The hon. Member for Torbay (Steve Darling) talked about foster carers, too.

In summary, I welcome this bill, but there are areas where I would like to see the Government go further to protect workers' rights.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I call Mike Tapp to make his maiden speech.

7.43 pm

Mike Tapp (Dover and Deal) (Lab): It is an immense privilege to be here today as the Member of Parliament for Dover and Deal. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests: I am a proud

[Mike Tapp]

small business owner and a union member, and it is fantastic to see so many Labour Members who are small business owners speaking in support of the Bill.

Over the past two years, I have knocked on thousands of doors, spoken to families, business owners and workers, and listened to their hopes and concerns. Today, I bring their voice to this House, but first I pay tribute to my predecessor, who was and still is an ardent champion on housing issues. Before the general election, she sent a clear message to the country when she crossed the Floor of the House to join the Labour party.

Dover and Deal is the gateway to Britain, with our port bringing £144 billion of trade into the country, but it is also a place rich in history, resilience and community spirit. From the iconic white cliffs to the finest castle in Britain, and from the newly reopened Roman painted house to the proud former mining communities in Aylesham, Snowdon and Betteshanger, we represent the very best of what it means to be British. We also have beautiful coastal paths with some truly great pub stops along the way, as Members have probably seen from my social media; they include the King's Head and the Forresters in Deal, the Zetland Arms in Kingsdown and Cullins Yard in Dover. We have castles in Dover, Walmer and Deal. I wonder whether my constituency has the most castles in the country, but I am open to challenge on that.

My commitment to public service and hard work stems well and truly from my upbringing. One grandad flew the Catalina flying boats that took out Nazi submarines, and then went on to sell Colman's mustard from Cambridge. The other grandad was a lifelong, distinguished Royal Mail worker, and that generation's unwavering spirit of hard work runs through my family. My father, a dedicated police officer, and my mother, a social worker, showed me that real service is about standing strong for others. Their steadfast dedication to helping those in need taught me that strength is found not in titles, but in the service we provide to those around us. That lesson has guided me in my own life—in the Army, in a counter-terror role at the National Crime Agency, and now as the proud Member of Parliament for Dover and Deal.

I do not stand here alone. I pay tribute to my wife—my hero—who came from Estonia at just 18 years of age, 16 years ago. She has always been and will always be my rock, having supported me through a very difficult and long campaign. Linda has shown remarkable resilience and dedication in turning her passion for dogs into her own thriving small business, which will continue to thrive and grow under this new Bill. We have two dogs of our own. Some Members will know Scooby from the campaign trail. He has become so famous that my Wikipedia page simply states:

“Personal life: He has a dog called Scooby.”

I assure the House that I have more of a personal life than that—and a second dog, a puggle called Monki.

It is no secret that I am just a little bit patriotic. When you represent Dover and Deal, how could you not be? For centuries, we have stood strong against invaders and threats, from Napoleon to the Nazis. Dover and Deal has always been at the heart of Britain's story, and I am committed to ensuring that we remain a proud

and prosperous part of the country's future. Dover and Deal is where national challenges meet local reality. We are a community on the frontline of issues such as border security, immigration and trade. We face these challenges with the strength and sense of duty that has always defined us. Under this Government, Dover and Deal will be treated with the respect it deserves. My vision is for a Dover and Deal where our community can thrive, with improved infrastructure, stronger public services and more opportunities for young people to build their futures there. We are more than a point of transit; we are a community of hard-working people who keep our port running, our businesses thriving and our public services going.

As we debate the future of workers' rights, I want to say on record that the P&O Ferries scandal, which affected so many of my constituents, must never be repeated. That is why I fully support this Bill.

7.48 pm

Nick Timothy (West Suffolk) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp) on his maiden speech. I look forward to the best dog in the world, Monty, taking on Scooby in the Westminster dog of the year competition.

Everybody in the House knows that every Labour Government in history have ended with unemployment higher than when they started. Bills like this are part of the reason why, whatever the intention. If the purpose of this Bill really is to improve workers' rights, and it is not just about paying back £40 million of union donations made over the past few years, why is there no provision addressing one of the worst labour market abuses in our country: substitution clauses, which allow delivery drivers to lend their identities to others? These clauses are in contracts from huge firms such as Amazon and Deliveroo, and they fuel worker exploitation and immigration crime. We know that hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom cannot work here legally, trade identities. By undercutting British workers and exploiting those with no right to be here, these companies are privatising profits and socialising the costs that they cause, so why is that issue missing from the Bill?

Why will the Government do nothing about the international trading system? Countries aiming to run trade surpluses, such as China, hold down their labour costs and destroy industry in deficit countries such as ours. Trade wars, as two authors like to say, are class wars, and the Labour party usually likes to fight a class war, yet this Government want to flood Britain with cheap Chinese electric cars because of the Energy Secretary's obsession with net zero. That is just one way in which our economic model needs to change, because while the Government's characterisation of their inheritance is, I am afraid, cynical and wrong, there is a case for economic change, if only the Government were prepared to undertake it. I think the Business Secretary might be one of those capable of doing that, but I am not sure that some of his colleagues are. Today, Ministers could be launching a plan for reindustrialisation, for competitive energy prices, for domestic steel manufacturing and for a strategy taking in better infrastructure, skills and training, planning, regulatory reform and more—[Interruption.] Would the hon. Lady like to intervene?

Antonia Bance: No; I am fine, thank you.

Nick Timothy: The Government could be doing something about the fact that nearly 22% of the workforce is economically inactive and a record number of men is leaving the labour market. They could be backing British business.

Robbie Moore: This again highlights the point that there is so much detail yet to be released into the public domain about this Bill. I highlighted this before. Does my hon. Friend agree that if we had that detail, we could provide more reassurance to the small and larger businesses dealing with the challenges he has mentioned?

Nick Timothy: My hon. Friend is exactly right; I agree.

The Government could be backing British business, not burdening it with all these new regulations. Instead, we have an Energy Secretary driving up energy prices, a Chancellor planning a jobs tax, increases to capital gains tax and the imposition of inheritance tax on small family businesses, and a Deputy Prime Minister reregulating the labour market at a cost to business of £5 billion, to pay back the unions who fund the Labour party. The Prime Minister promised us that his priority was “growth, growth, growth”, but like everything else he said before the election, he did not mean it, because the only three things that this Bill will bring are more costs, less investment and fewer jobs.

7.52 pm

Peter Swallow (Bracknell) (Lab): Let me start by proudly declaring that, like 1.3 million working Brits, I am a member of Unison. Bracknell is a fantastic place to do business, and since my election I have spoken to plenty of businesses in my community, from SMEs to international businesses. In speaking with them, two things have come out time and again. First, there is relief that they finally have a Government who will put economic stability at the heart of everything they do, instead of chaos. Secondly, there is recognition that the Bill will be good not only for their workers but for businesses, because well supported staff who have more control over their lives and more reliable hours will work harder and for longer.

Workers who can adjust their terms, who are free from the threat of dismissal right after starting a family, who are entitled to leave after a loved one’s death, who are given the time to recover when they are sick, who no longer face exploitative zero-hours contracts or fire and rehire, and who are free from harassment are obviously happier and more committed. Indeed, many Bracknell businesses already offer many of the rights in this Bill, because they recognise that doing so makes them more attractive to good, skilled workers.

This Government are pro-business, pro-growth and pro-worker, and this Bill demonstrates that commitment. I note that the chief executive officer of the CBI, Rain Newton-Smith, has said:

“The government deserves credit for its willingness to engage with businesses and unions”.

There is a body of economic research that substantiates what we all feel to be true: workers’ rights are the foundations of a resilient, growing economy.

Nick Timothy: The hon. Gentleman just quoted the CBI approvingly. Can he name the chief executive of a real business who approves of this Bill?

Peter Swallow: I have spoken to many chief executives in my constituency who approve of this Bill. I will not go into private conversations, because I have not warned them that I was about to quote them in the House, but I am sure that we will hear many such examples in contributions from other Members.

This Bill will bring in historic new rights for working people. It will make work pay, and it will be good for boosting our national productivity and supporting businesses and growth in this country, because we all know that when workers feel that the jobs that they do are valued, they contribute more to the economy. That is why this Bill is good not only for workers but for businesses.

7.55 pm

Alison Bennett (Mid Sussex) (LD): I associate myself with the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for North East Fife (Wendy Chamberlain), and commend her for all her work on the Carer’s Leave Act 2023, which came into play in the previous Parliament. I want to build on that, and to emphasise the importance of the interplay of paid and unpaid care in ensuring that we look after the people in society who need our care. The comments of a constituent of mine in Mid Sussex come to mind. She was an unpaid carer for her mother, and told me that having paid carers come in helped her to sustain a normal mother-daughter relationship for that little bit longer.

The care workforce, and looking after the care workforce, are extremely important, and the Liberal Democrats welcome the fair pay proposals in this Bill, but we would like the Bill to go further. As I mentioned when I intervened on the Deputy Prime Minister, we would like the minimum wage for care workers to be £2 higher than the normal minimum wage. We would also like to build the esteem and career path of people who work in paid care—for example, by establishing a royal college of carers. Without that, we have a blocker to our workforce productivity. Caring and working must go hand in hand, but because regulations do not enable unpaid carers to look after their loved ones adequately, 600 people a day give up work to care for a loved one.

One of those people is Amanda, who used to live in Mid Sussex. She and her husband Nick look after their 21-year-old son Archie, who is autistic and learning disabled. Amanda is a modern foreign languages teacher, and there is a shortage of such teachers. As Archie was approaching adulthood, they realised that West Sussex county council would not be able to provide enough care for him, so the best thing that she could do was take her teacher’s pension early and claim the carer’s allowance. Because of the £151 a week limit on earnings for those on the carer’s allowance, Amanda is now excluded from the workforce. She cannot take up offers of supply teaching or exam invigilating that would boost the family income and be good for her mental health. We need to ensure that people can give care while being in the workforce, because this situation is not good for the nation’s productivity, or for the Government’s ambition to deliver growth.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Kenneth Stevenson to make his maiden speech.

7.58 pm

Kenneth Stevenson (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): It is a great pleasure to follow the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp), and the excellent maiden speeches of the hon. Members for Leicester East (Shivani Raja) and for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam), and my hon. Friends the Members for Hyndburn (Sarah Smith), for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball) and for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Lorraine Beavers).

I make my maiden speech with a great deal of pride. Serving the people of Airdrie and Shotts is an immense privilege, and one that I will never take for granted. I hope that my dad, Howard, will be pleased as he watches at home, and that he knows that it is the value of hard work that he and my mum, Millie, instilled in me—along with the assistance of many others, including my wife, Julie, who is watching here today—that has brought me to this place.

The opportunity for me to make my maiden speech today is all the more special because we are debating the Employment Rights Bill. As we chapped doors across the constituency for over a year, our key commitment was to deliver an upgrade to workers' rights the like of which has not been seen for a generation. I am delighted that we are making such rapid progress, and I thank the Minister and the Government for putting this at the forefront of our efforts to give Britain back its future. I look forward to seeing the impact of this Bill on workers in my constituency of Airdrie and Shotts, and across the country.

I pay tribute to my immediate predecessor, Anum Qaisar. I never questioned her commitment to the job she was elected to do, nor to the causes for which she fought so passionately. I wish her well in the future.

Looking back a bit further into the history of the Airdrie and Shotts constituency, and of the seats that came before it, I have to mention some of the giants who have served these communities. From Jennie Lee, a key figure in the creation of the Open University, where I obtained my qualification, to Peggy Herbison, a Shotts woman to her core, who led the way for women in politics and whose impact is still felt in Shotts to this day; and from John Reid, a pivotal figure in the last UK Labour Government, to John Smith, a truly excellent leader of my party, taken before his time, who put the Labour party firmly back on the path towards Government. Although, on reflection, I may be making a rod for my own back by mentioning such influential and consequential figures, it is only right that I recognise their contributions to this place, to the communities I now represent, to the Labour movement and, indeed, to this country.

Members will be surprised to hear this, but I am going to make a comparison between Airdrie and the ancient city of Rome—before Members ask, it is not the weather. Like Airdrie, Rome is also built on seven hills. A popular Airdrie pub quiz question is to name them, but I will not attempt to do so today, because of the risk of missing one out—what a start that would be!

The communities of Airdrie and Shotts, along with the many surrounding villages, are steeped in industrial history. These towns and villages, including Harthill,

Eastfield, Salsburgh, Allanton, Bonkle, Hareshaw, Hartwood, Morningside, Cleland, Holytown, Newarthill, Newmains, Plains, Chapelhall, Gartness, Calderbank, Glenmavis, Caldercruix, Upperton, Longriggend, Wattston and Greengairs, are of great importance to the history of Scotland and the wider UK.

In coalmining, manufacturing, textiles, engineering and pharmaceuticals, the communities of Airdrie and Shotts have been home to skilled employment, and they have been at the centre of the various advances we have witnessed in previous decades. In fact, I completed my apprenticeship at a modern manufacturing facility in Shotts that was sadly closed during the times of rapid deindustrialisation. It was there that I learned my trade as an engineer and grew as a person. The advice of ex-miners, steel workers and foundry workers was invaluable. My second career as a lecturer at Anniesland college was informed by the people of Glasgow. I learned so much from my fellow lecturers and from the area's students.

The Shotts factory humour is not generally something I would repeat in this Chamber, but I can share the first piece of advice I got as an apprentice: "Never argue with anybody stupider than yersel, son." Oscar Wilde, it was not, and having listened to the discourse in this place, I am sure I will not need that advice here. Regardless, I will forever be indebted to the people of the area I was born, raised and worked in. I hope that legislation such as the Bill we are debating today will reignite the industrial and technological potential that exists within these communities.

There are two things I could not go without mentioning in my maiden speech. The first is the groups and organisations at the heart of my constituency. My Scottish colleagues will be well aware of the work and impact of St Andrew's hospice in Airdrie. Many, if not most, people in Lanarkshire will have a relative or a family friend who was cared for by the hospice, and will therefore know its incredible value.

It is an immense honour and privilege to serve these people and communities. In me, they have a Member of Parliament who has lived in the constituency throughout my life, who values its potential and who is determined to overcome the challenges it faces. I will do my best to abide by my Stane primary school motto, "Persevere", and by my Calderhead high school motto, "Facta non verba"—deeds, not words.

Today's debate on the Employment Rights Bill is a critical step towards delivering a long-overdue new deal for working people, and it will be the working people of Airdrie and Shotts who I have in mind throughout my time in this Parliament.

8.4 pm

Robbie Moore (Keighley and Ilkley) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Kenneth Stevenson) on his maiden speech. Knowing his constituency a little, I can guarantee that the weather is not the link between Airdrie and Rome. I congratulate him on taking his place in this House.

Today's debate is deeply important, and it will have huge ramifications for businesses of all sizes across the country. Hiring new staff is a big moment for small businesses, like many in Keighley and Ilkley, and it comes with huge potential but also risk. That is why many

businesses in my constituency have contacted me in advance of the introduction of this Bill to express their concerns about the proposals before us today.

At a time when we need to grow the economy, we do not need a Bill that the Federation of Small Businesses has described as

“rushed...clumsy, chaotic and poorly planned.”

It has to be noted that this Bill will have a disproportionately negative impact on smaller businesses compared with larger companies that have their own HR departments.

Simply put, Labour’s day one rights and other similar measures are worrying for many small businesses across the country. The Government have made this situation worse by adding clause after clause of clarification, exception, regulation and definition, in an attempt to micromanage every possible situation for businesses across the country. This has created a quagmire of regulatory jargon that small businesses will simply have to cope with, and they will not be able to cope. The fear of falling foul of these regulations has been made clear to me by many businesses in Keighley and Ilkley.

The Bill will also prevent the backbone of our economy from hiring staff, expanding and growing our economy. Even the Government’s own economic analysis stipulates that the risks are highest for workers with the weakest attachment to the labour market, such as low-paid workers, disabled workers and the youngest workers, who are still gaining the experience and skills they require.

Rebecca Harris: An SME in my constituency once found someone sleeping rough on its premises and offered them a job. Does my hon. Friend agree that, when this Bill is enacted, it is very unlikely that a business will go to such lengths to give someone that kind of break in future?

Robbie Moore: I absolutely agree. My hon. Friend highlights that this Bill will not give businesses the certainty and confidence to recruit individuals who need that little bit more experience to get into the job market. Indeed, the Government’s own analysis points to an unintended consequence:

“Where businesses cannot absorb the increase in labour costs, they may look to pass them onto workers by reducing expenditures that benefit workers (e.g. staff training) or scaling back future improvements to T&CS (e.g. wage growth).”

This is not a pro-growth Bill, and it is not even a pro-work Bill; it is a pro-union Bill. The Government have even said this themselves. Their plan to make work pay has referred to this Bill as an “Employment Rights Union Bill”. Perhaps that is because the Bill is chock full of changes to union regulation made by our previous Conservative Government—changes that were specifically designed to protect the public from the unscrupulous practices of the unions and their more militant members.

Minimum service provisions were introduced by the last Government specifically to protect the public from being caught in the crossfire between the unions and the Government—yet, by lifting those restrictions with this Bill, Labour is showing that it is more interested in appeasing its union bosses than in ensuring that minimum service is guaranteed throughout any dispute between the public sector and the Government.

Nick Timothy: Earlier, I asked the hon. Member for Bracknell (Peter Swallow) whether there are any business leaders who actually support the Bill. Is my hon. Friend aware of any?

Robbie Moore: I have spoken to and received correspondence from many businesses, both small and large, in my constituency, but not one gave the Bill their full backing. In fact, they raised concerns about the relationship between the employer and employee being tampered with by the Government.

One of the most unsurprising parts of the Bill is clause 48, in which the Government want to force union members to pay into the political fund of the union, unless they explicitly decide to opt out. No matter what views hon. Members may have about unions, this clause is simply not right; working people should not be paying into political funds without giving their prior consent, especially when that money ends up in the pockets of a political party. Having received over £29 million in donations from the unions, we know which political party that money will end up going to—the party in government; and all this from a self-proclaimed Government of supposed transparency. Every employment is different, every job is different and every circumstance is different, but this Bill fails to recognise that.

8.10 pm

Mr James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I will start by offering some home truths to Opposition Members: someone can be both a member of a union and an employer. I am a proud member of GMB, which donated to my campaign, but I am also proud to have started my own business. I have been an employer, taken risk, and understand the balance of risk and reward. Throughout the debate, Conservative Members, who claim to represent the party of business, have made false representations that are out of date and out of kilter with the debate that we are leading, having been elected with the majority that we have. They are keen to talk among themselves, with their plans to end maternity rights and all the progress the Labour party has made sacrosanct in British law and the experience of work in our economy, but I urge them to look at the result of the election and understand the direction of travel: the Labour party is once again making progress in this country.

Today’s leap forward for workers’ rights sits alongside the Government’s No. 1 mission of economic growth—that is, done with the workers not to them. We will be more productive, protective and prosperous, pro-business and pro-worker. The Bill rejects the idea that justice and fairness in the workplace need to come with an arbitrary waiting period. Day one rights will capture headlines, but will not cause alarm for most employers. The hon. Member for West Suffolk (Nick Timothy) asked which chief executives support this provision. I met chief executives on Friday who told me that as leaders in their field, they already do much of what we are advocating—so I say to those on the Opposition Benches: get with the programme.

Labour has a proud record to recall again today, as we advance these new rights. We have a record of raising the floor and the horizon for workers’ rights, whether through securing maternity, paternity or foster care leave, introducing the minimum wage or ensuring bank holidays. Through a principled link with our trade unions,

[Mr James Frith]

the Labour party has fought for and delivered rights that once seemed radical but are now woven into our national life and experiences of work. These very advances, initially opposed by the Tories, have now come to be seen as the very standard of how working life in this country should be, and I am all for it, Madam Deputy Speaker—with time to spare.

8.13 pm

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): As hon. Members may be aware, I am not a career politician. I worked as a pork delivery driver with Henry Denny's, until I opened my own small business as a pork retailer. I worked from early morning, before I did my work for the council and then for the Northern Ireland Assembly. I employed staff members. I did the books as well as I could, then handed them to my accountant. I delivered to local businesses and shopped local. I understand what it is to be a part of small business; indeed, it was a microbusiness. I say respectfully to the Minister that I know I would have struggled to implement some of the things currently under discussion, so I remind hon. Members of the implications of the Bill on small and microbusinesses. The Northern Ireland statistics will show why I hold those concerns.

Microbusinesses in Northern Ireland are no different from those in the United Kingdom mainland. Employment law is mostly devolved, but much of the law in Northern Ireland follows the direction of what is passed in the House of Commons, which is why I want to make my comments in a constructive fashion. The fact is that most employers are not skilled at making changes. The changes made by the Bill and additional obligations on employers must be made clear, be cost-effective and not mean that they need to hire an HR consultant, which is simply out of the question.

For example, I recently heard about a case of a small business that had worked out holiday pay using the online Government calculator. An employee moved to another job and queried the holiday pay. The Labour Relations Agency has said, according to the employees' representation, that the owner owes approximately £800 per annum to each staff member. The owner has told me that they will need to close the business. I gave that example because I want to show what can go wrong—and, my goodness, it can go wrong at an absolute volume—with regulations that the Government put in place. The business is viable, but does not have the capacity to pay £10,000 in back pay to its staff. It used online tools to get it right, and yet has been left in an untenable situation. That makes it clear that when changes are made to employment practices, the advice for employers must be accurate and easy to understand. This is clearly not currently the case.

With great respect to colleagues on the Government Front Bench, the Bill is a curate's egg—it is good in part, but not in every part. I welcome some of the measures, such as the end of zero-hours contracts and the enhanced protections, and look forward to seeing the minutiae of the detail.

Gavin Robinson (Belfast East) (DUP): On Friday, I attended an event hosted by the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry. It offers the Government no ill will and wants to engage positively and pragmatically

on the issues, but it is concerned. Does my hon. Friend agree that it would be useful if, instead of continual hubris and politics from one side to the other throughout this debate, there were a willingness on the part of Front-Bench Members to engage thoughtfully with businesses?

Jim Shannon: My right hon. Friend makes exactly the point that I want to make. Through the Bill, the Government are pushing forward legislation that is necessary and welcome, but they need to work better and more closely alongside small businesses and microbusinesses of the kind I worked with many moons ago, whenever I had hair—that is a thing of the past. We cannot expect almost 80% of small businesses to behave as if they have an HR department, a payroll department and a board when most of them are simply retailers as I was, hiring local people and trying to be a good boss in a world with changing obligations.

Support must be central to any change in legislation. Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast East (Gavin Robinson), I ask the Secretary of State to take that point on board. If he is able to do so, I believe we can move forward constructively and help our businesses to maintain their status as employers.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): I call Imogen Walker to make her maiden speech.

8.17 pm

Imogen Walker (Hamilton and Clyde Valley) (Lab): It is an honour to speak for the first time as the MP for Hamilton and Clyde Valley. I am delighted to have the opportunity to declare that I am a proud member of GMB, which does so much for so many.

My constituency has played an important part in the progress of employment rights, for reasons that I will come to shortly, so it is fitting that it is acknowledged here today. First, I pay tribute to Angela Crawley, who represented a large part of the area that I now cover and who has been so helpful in ensuring a handover; she was a dedicated MP and I am grateful to her. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen (Michael Shanks), who is always a source of good advice and good humour. His historic win in Rutherglen and Hamilton West was the first sign in Scotland that people were prepared to put their trust in us again. We will remember that.

Hamilton and Clyde Valley is an extraordinary place. The ancient woods of the Clyde Valley are the oldest in Scotland. Entering them is like stepping into another world: you are as likely to meet a rabbit or a red deer as another human. You might see glimpses in the undergrowth of walls, buildings or just piles of stones. It is impossible to say how long they have been there, but they serve as a reminder that so many people have made their lives here before us. Most are long forgotten, but not all. The great Roman general Agrippa is thought to have set up camp just outside Lanark, but he did not stay. Opinions vary on how the Romans were ousted from Scotland: some that believe the Caledonians were just too much for them, while others say that the tribes were nowhere near as bloodthirsty as the midges.

Either way, Lanark is a very welcoming place now. People come from around the world to see New Lanark, Robert Owen's vision of decent working and living conditions. He believed that people deserve more than just the means to survive, that men and women are

equal and that how we treat our children matters. Most importantly, he put his principles into practice. That is what we must do here, because the progress we have made is hard won. It takes courage as well as compassion, and it must never be taken for granted.

In South Lanarkshire alone, nearly 5,500 people are paid at or below the national minimum wage. Many more have working conditions that can and will be improved by this Government. Across Hamilton and Clyde Valley, people need a Government who are back in the service of working people—from Hamilton, the fourth largest town in Scotland and home to 55,000 people, to Larkhall, Lesmahagow, ancient Lanark and our many villages, which all have their own character and close-knit communities. From the deep forests to farms, villages and towns, we truly have everything.

From there to Westminster is quite a journey in so many ways. I will not forget that I made that journey to serve and to protect the things that people care about: their homes, their families and their jobs. I have been given the chance to do that because of the support of so many people, starting with my dearly missed mother Isobel. She would have been so happy to see me here. She, too, believed in the power of education, hard work and opportunity to transform lives. Every evening, the television would go off so we could do our homework in peace. I can tell you from the bottom of my heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, that that was incredibly annoying when I could have been watching “Dallas”, but of course she was right.

On my father Jamieson’s side, generations across South Lanarkshire were shopkeepers and metalworkers, the kind of people who keep our country going and whose lives are changed by the decisions we make here—knocked back if we get it wrong and raised up when we get it right. I am the product of generations who sometimes thrived, often struggled and were ultimately given the opportunity to fulfil their potential through hard-won rights. I want that for everyone: the chance to make a good life for themselves and their loved ones. That is why I am here, and that is what this Government will do.

8.22 pm

Graeme Downie (Dunfermline and Dollar) (Lab): It is a privilege to follow the maiden speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and Clyde Valley (Imogen Walker). I visited New Lanark on a school trip when I was younger, as many people in Scotland did, and it was a fantastic portrait of a beautiful part of the country. I pay tribute to other Members who have made a maiden speech today, including my hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Kenneth Stevenson). I, too, know some of the language to which he was referring.

I draw attention to my declaration of interests, including my proud membership of Unison. I will use my short time to emphasise two elements of the Bill. Not only is it the greatest increase in workers’ rights in a generation, but it will ensure that the UK economy adapts to the changed landscape in which we find ourselves and to the businesses that will contribute to it and make us a success.

Melanie Ward (Cowdenbeath and Kirkcaldy) (Lab): I draw attention to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests and to my proud membership of

Community and Unison. My hon. Friend and I are both proud to represent Fife, but in some areas of Fife as many as one child in four still lives in poverty. Does he agree that by giving over 8,000 more workers more money in their pocket, the Bill will mean that more families have more money to spend and will help to make an important contribution to tackling child poverty in Fife?

Graeme Downie: Absolutely. At the core of the Bill is the need to raise wages for people across Fife, across Scotland and across the UK. That will be a key achievement of this Bill, which has been undertaken by this Labour Government within the 100 days that we promised the electorate.

The change in the landscape has been caused by a rapid advancement of technology in our economy, a shift in working patterns, the evolution of the largest contributors to the economy and welcome changes to the nature of family life, with an increase in shared parenting, as we have heard from so many Members across the Chamber. It is nothing but shameful that the previous Government took no action to adapt to those changes or help them to drive forward our economy. As ever, it has fallen to the Labour party to make the radical changes that we need to see. A look at the Opposition Benches tells us how much the Conservatives care not only about workers’ rights, but about the economy for the future.

I welcome clause 7, which will apply the objective test for an employer to refuse a reasonable request for flexible working. Like hon. Friends who have spoken today, I ran and owned a small business for 10 years. I know the benefits that businesses get from welcoming and embracing flexible working patterns. They assist with staff retention and improve and facilitate communication between employers and employees. They lead to more constructive relationships at work and—as I saw at first hand—to more productive teams and a business that is better for everyone involved. A shift to a clear objective test will further aid the process and will help both businesses and employees.

I also welcome clauses 20 and 21, which will provide additional protection for working parents. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Josh Simons), I am delighted to support the Dad Shift campaign, which has been campaigning for better statutory paternity leave to help mums, dads, children and our economy. The benefits of modern and flexible paternity leave would help families to raise their children in the way they see fit, so they can still progress their own careers and contribute to the economy and to society. I would like to see more progress on those issues during the passage of the Bill, as hon. Friends have highlighted, but none the less it is an important first step in making sure that new parents have the right protections.

This is a long overdue Bill that would only ever be brought forward by a Labour Government—a Government who understand the changing nature of business, of society and of our workforce and who realise that only by bringing the three together can we push forward and grow our economy together, creating a more prosperous and fairer society across the UK.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Caroline Nokes): Order. I will give an advisory notice: a lot of Members still want to get in, and interventions are cutting into other speakers' times. The only people who suffer will be you. I am leaving the time limit at three minutes, which could just about get everyone in.

8.27 pm

Florence Eshalomi (Vauxhall and Camberwell Green) (Lab/Co-op): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will keep an eye on the time.

Like many other hon. Members, I refer the House to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests as a proud member of GMB and Unison. We have all just fought a general election; the reality is that general elections can be expensive, so I make no apology for receiving support from the CWU, ASLEF and GMB unions. Without that support, I would not have been re-elected. It is important that we recognise that it is clean money from our hard-working trade union members. We should not be ashamed of that at all.

For many people in my constituency, the nature of the workforce has changed since 2010, yet over the past few years successive Governments have almost rolled back the hard-fought employment rights that we and many trade unions before us have fought for. During the covid pandemic, as I mentioned in an intervention earlier, a number of household-name organisations—multinational business making profits in the multimillions—thought it was okay to fire and rehire their staff. I stood up in this Chamber and raised concerns about constituents who faced the threat of sacking, including many BA workers and many GMB workers who worked for British Gas/Centrica. At a time when we wanted those workers to go out and do their vital jobs, the fact that those jobs could be taken away and they could be re-employed on worse contracts was just wrong.

We should welcome this legislation, which will be a big game-changer for many people across the workforce. In the short time I have, I want to highlight two areas in which we will see a big shift.

Vauxhall and Camberwell Green is home to many young people. TUC stats show that many people in their 30s have been with the employer for less than two years. Young people should be able to go to work, be proud of their work, put their roots down and start a family. Instead, they have insecure work with the threat of dismissal over their head and a lack of security. If young people are planning to start a family or purchase a house, they can be discriminated against by their boss. We want to see rights that will protect the very people we want to contribute to UK plc.

I ask Conservative Members to get with the times and help us to support growth for this country and its workers, including the many workers who are trade union members and who contribute to society. It is about time we supported workers and passed this legislation so that its pro-business and pro-worker measures can support UK plc.

8.30 pm

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I have to start with reflections on some of the speeches from Conservative Members,

although their Benches are now deserted. Those speeches brought back memories from when I was younger of watching my favourite actor, Rik Mayall, in his role as Alan B'Stard MP. Many Conservative Members seemed to be trying to reprise that role today. It was incredible and left me wondering what planet they are living on. It also took me back to Conservative Members objecting to the last Labour Government introducing the national minimum wage. They said it would have a cataclysmic effect on jobs across the country, when in fact it helped to move people towards getting a decent wage. Conservative Members do not seem to understand that many good employers follow such standards already, and we are enabling those good employers to operate on a level playing field with bad, rogue bosses who seek to undercut good employers left, right and centre.

Before I was first elected back in 2015, I was a trade union lawyer for 10 years, and I saw day in, day out how working people are held back by weak protections and anti-trade union laws. I am really proud to be here today to welcome and vote for this significant step forward in employment rights by a Labour Government. There is so much in the Bill to improve workers' rights in a range of areas—parental leave, paternity leave, unfair dismissal, statutory sick pay, collective redundancies, tips, the duty to prevent sexual harassment and the requirement for firms of more than 250 employees to make equality plans. The Conservatives think this is bad news for business, for workers and for our country, but that could not be further from the truth.

As this important Bill makes progress, I hope that the Government will find ways to clarify and strengthen a small number of points. Some loopholes on fire and rehire need to be closed, and it would be great if we could further strengthen the rights of union access to workplaces. I would also welcome improvements in a host of other areas. For example, it is 30 years since the Tories took away prison officers' right to strike, and I would like to see that returned. If people succeed in proving unfair dismissal at an employment tribunal and get a reinstatement order, I would like to see it made much more likely that they will, in fact, be reinstated.

I welcome the Bill, I am proud to vote for it and I think it is shameful that the Tories will vote against it.

8.33 pm

Olivia Blake (Sheffield Hallam) (Lab): I wish to make Members aware that I am a member of the GMB, as many Members on this side of the House seem to be.

It is great to take part in the debate. It is important to recognise the great history of women on these Benches and in our movement, such as Eleanor Marx's role in setting up the GMB, Barbara Castle's in passing the Equal Pay Act 1970 and, today, that of our very own Deputy Prime Minister in setting out another game-changing piece of legislation.

I want to focus on gender, because since the introduction of gender pay reporting in 2017, we have made some progress in making people aware of pay disparities in some of our workplaces, but the facts are still stark. The gender pay gap is stubbornly stuck at 14%. That is horrific enough, but in certain sectors, including care, the gap is even higher. Pay inequality compounds over the course of a woman's life, meaning that she is more

likely to live in poverty as a pensioner, and unable to gain opportunities that her male counterparts have had through their lives.

According to the TUC, the pay gap means that, on average, women effectively work for free for nearly two months of the year compared to men. At the current rate of progress, it could take another 20 years to close the gap. That is 20 years too long. While reporting has become an accepted part of employment practice, we must do much more than just raise awareness of the issue. We need concrete action, which is why I am proud that the Bill introduces much-needed regulations to require employees with more than 250 staff to publish a plan to address their gender pay gap. That will ensure that organisations are not only transparent about pay inequalities, but actively work to close them.

Another critical part of the Bill is the provision to support women experiencing menopause. Women between the ages of 45 and 54 make up 11% of our workforce and 23% of all women in the workforce—around 3.5 million women. Despite the growing number of women in the labour market of that age, the challenges they face from the menopause are often overlooked, leading to discriminatory practices and a lack of adequate workplace support. BUPA estimates that nearly 1 million women have been forced out of the labour market by menopausal symptoms. That is simply not good enough, which is why I am proud that the Bill takes steps to address it. Employers will be required to publish how they will better support women going through the menopause.

8.36 pm

Sonia Kumar (Dudley) (Lab): I declare my interests as a member of the GMB, Unison and the Chartered Society of Physiotherapy.

Dudley is home to thousands of small businesses and gig economy workers. Some 89% of those businesses are microbusinesses, and they will be watching closely to see that the Bill strikes the right balance between being pro-business and pro-worker. I believe that it does so. Alongside the “Next Steps to Make Work Pay” policy, the Bill offers a consultation period for businesses and a probation period, allowing them to shape practical and beneficial reforms, giving a voice to businesses and time to adjust, as it will not be rolled out until 2026. I dismiss the claim from Conservative Members that the Bill is rushed, and I hope that the Business Secretary will reaffirm that and reassure Conservative Members that specific guidance and support will be provided to smaller businesses in places such as Dudley so that they can implement the reforms effectively, without excessive costs.

The Bill includes welcome provisions that will strengthen statutory sick pay and provide financial stability for workers. Currently, 10 million people are not able to access basic health support at work, including up to 12,600 people in Dudley. The changes will ensure that no one is forced out of work due to ill health, helping to create workplaces that protect and promote the health of all employees.

For too long, workers have had to wait months for basic protections such as unfair dismissal rights. The Bill will change that by making them day one rights, so that workers are protected from the start of their employment.

Under successive Conservative Governments, access to justice for workers was weakened. Tribunal fees made it harder for workers to hold bad employers to account. Although those fees were eventually scrapped, the damage remains, and the Bill corrects those failures by giving workers the protection that they deserve from day one.

The Bill is also a significant step forward on gender equality. It makes parental leave a right from day one, allowing parents to access leave as soon as they start their job. That is particularly important in Dudley in sectors such as healthcare, education and the beauty industry, and will ensure that being a parent does not undermine a person’s job security.

At university, I was on a zero-hours contract in one of the biggest industries in Dudley. I remember when my colleagues and I would wait for the supervisors to produce a rota, and the uncertainty of not knowing who would be on the shift next. We were not alone; more than 1 million workers in the UK are stuck on these contracts, with more than 80% of them seeking predictable hours. The Bill reflects the values that we stand for of fairness, equality and dignity.

8.39 pm

Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East) (Lab): I proudly refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests. Bournemouth is blighted by insecurity, and Britain is paralysed by low pay. As somebody who grew up in very significant financial hardship, caring for two disabled parents, work for me was a route out of poverty. By working on several shop floors in Salford, I was able to earn enough money to go to university. Were it not for that opportunity, I would not be here today. Things were hard then, but they are so much harder today, so I welcome the Bill.

The Bill gives workers in Bournemouth the rights that they need, employers in Bournemouth the security that they need, and our economy in Bournemouth the tools that it needs to grow sustainably. I thank people across Bournemouth East, the constituency that I am so proud to represent, who have shared their thoughts and insights, and met with me about the Bill. I have represented their views and been a voice for their arguments, and I believe that the legislation is stronger as a result.

Across Britain, more than 1 million people on zero-hours contracts will benefit from the new guaranteed-hours policy; 1.5 million parents will benefit from unpaid parental leave as a day one right; and 9 million people who have been with their employer for less than two years will benefit from the new day one unfair dismissal policy. An estimated one in 25 employees did not get any of the paid holiday that they were entitled to last year. The new fair work agency will enforce holiday pay for the first time.

The Bill is a crucial, long-overdue step that directly benefits women at work. It will increase protection from sexual harassment. One in two women have been sexually harassed in the workplace, and four out of five do not report it to their employers. The legislation will empower tribunals to raise compensation in cases of sexual harassment where the employer failed to take reasonable steps to prevent it. An estimated 4,000 pregnant women and mothers returning from maternity leave a year will benefit from new protections. The Bill will also introduce gender pay gap action plans, and strengthen protection for workers through the menopause.

[Tom Hayes]

The Labour party made a promise to level the playing field at work by introducing the Bill early in the life of this Government. Promise made, promise kept. I am so proud and excited to be voting for this pro-worker, pro-business, pro-growth, pro-economy measure, and I commend the Deputy Prime Minister for bringing it forward. Bournemouth and Britain have been held back for too long. Together, we take a big step forward, with a measure that has been agreed and negotiated with businesses, trade unions and workers. We are fixing the foundations, and together we are shortening the journey towards the fairer society that so many people elected a Labour Government to bring forward.

8.42 pm

Yuan Yang (Earley and Woodley) (Lab): I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, in particular the perhaps interesting fact that, like the majority of journalists at the *Financial Times*, I am a proud member of the National Union of Journalists. I am able to enjoy that right to membership of a trade union, and the right to assembly and discussion that follows from it, because I am fortunate enough, unlike many of my aunts, cousins and uncles, to be a British citizen living in the UK who enjoys protection of not only my right to vote but my right to collective bargaining and representation in the workplace.

It is fitting that, in this historic debate on this advance in workers' rights, we in the mother of Parliaments defend not just the right to representation in Parliament through our electoral system, but the right to representation in the workplace through collective bargaining and union access, because strong unions are a workplace form of democracy. I have seen what happens when people are denied that right. I have reported on labour abuses and wildcat strikes—the desperate measures that workers across the international supply chains of Amazon and Apple have gone to when their ability to form a union and advocate for their rights has not been protected by the state. That simply pushes problems underground.

Labour Members know that when workers have issues, there needs to be mediation and they need to be represented properly, through legal means. If that does not happen, it stores up long-term structural challenges for the economy. In the British economy, the wage share of our economic output has fallen since the 1980s. Union representation and density has also fallen throughout that time. It is no coincidence that the two things go together, in the UK and many economies across the OECD. There is a correlation between the strength of unions, and union density, and strong wage growth and worker protections in the workplace.

Beyond the costs to the economy, there are costs to individual households. When I vote for the Bill, I will be thinking of residents and households in my constituency of Earley and Woodley. I will be thinking of the parents I have delivered food parcels to with Woodley Lunch Bunch, who, despite working multiple jobs, are still unable to make ends meet and must resort to using food banks. I will be thinking of the supermarket workers in the Lower Earley Asda, who are—like many of their colleagues across the country—concerned about the threat of fire and rehire.

Above all, I will be thinking of frontline NHS workers in the Royal Berkshire hospital in the centre of Reading, who went to work day after day during the pandemic to clean up after people, suffering the threat of contagion. Many of them—especially those outsourced from private companies—were not afforded statutory sick pay because they were below the lower earnings limit. During the pandemic, the sick pay of many outsourced workers in the NHS was less than a quarter of the national living wage. That is a tragedy. Presenteeism caused by the lack of sick pay costs our economy by reducing productivity and increasing the likelihood of chronic health conditions. I am very proud to support the Bill.

8.45 pm

Laurence Turner (Birmingham Northfield) (Lab): I am glad to draw the House's attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and to my membership of the GMB and Unite trade unions.

The Bill is at the start of its parliamentary stages, but today is also the culmination of years of hard work and consultation. It is important to recognise the accomplishment that the Bill's introduction represents, and the Ministers, civil servants and special advisers involved deserve great credit. The Bill was born out of the undermining of the dignity and protection of work over many years, which falls heaviest on those in working-class occupations. We all know the effects that 15 years of wage stagnation has brought, the shameful limits that in-work poverty places on the potential of the people we represent, and the unfairness shouldered by those who are trapped on insecure contracts, including in the security and retail sectors in Birmingham Northfield. The Bill will make a real positive difference to their lives.

In the short time available to me I will focus on three measures. First, the 3,000 school support staff and care workers in my constituency are some of the lowest-paid people in public services. They are predominantly women who work under inadequate and outmoded terms and conditions, and their professionalism has gone unrecognised for far too long. I hope that the creation of a school support staff negotiating body and an adult social care negotiating body will have cross-party support.

Secondly, the condition of outsourced workers in public services has also been neglected. They are the invisible workforce who keep our hospitals running and our nation secure. For more than 100 years, under the fair wages resolution and the initial version of the two-tier code, Governments of all colours recognised the principle that outsourced workers should not be placed at detriment. The reinstatement of that principle is of critical importance.

Finally, I welcome the proposed reforms to trade union recognition and access arrangements. When the system has been shown to be open to abuse, it must be changed. In that sense, there is a direct line of continuity between the Grunwick dispute of the '70s—in which the late Member for Birmingham Erdington, Jack Dromey, played such a prominent role—and the creation of a statutory recognition regime 20 years later. I have heard directly from GMB members about the disgraceful anti-union tactics that they have faced, which were not anticipated when the current law was drafted. They must not wait 20 years for remedy. This Bill is important and necessary, and I am proud to vote for it tonight.

8.48 pm

Josh Simons (Makerfield) (Lab): When Sam Woods, one of my predecessors as the MP for Makerfield, started his working life at just seven years old, he accompanied his father in the pit. By the time he died in 1915, he had become a strong representative for his fellow miners. He played an instrumental part in the formation of the Labour party and championed the legal limit of eight hours for a single mining shift in the Coal Mines Regulation Act 1908. He was, like me—as my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests will attest—a proud trade union member.

Sam Woods's story is partly about the Labour party's moral purpose: to improve through Parliament the conditions, security and pay of working people in the United Kingdom. But his story is also about the transformative power of work itself. At its best, work is how we contribute to our family, our community and the trajectory of our nation. Coalmining powered Britain's industrial revolution, providing industry, warmth and energy. It bound the work of ordinary men and women to the path of our nation. That spirit of production instilled the values of respect and hard work in the communities I represent—values I continue to hold dear. By contrast, the Conservative Benches—sadly, once again so sparsely populated—always sought to resist the change that makes work more secure and better paid. They pit the interests of businesses against workers, of finance against industry, and even sometimes the interests of men against women.

In Sam Woods's time, Conservative Members said that regulations would bankrupt businesses and even increase unemployment. They said that they would harm communities such as mine. That is why I am particularly pleased the Bill introduces day one protections for pregnant women and rights to paternity leave. The impact assessment clearly anticipates the reforms will have a positive economic impact, which is good for mums, for dads and for growth. I look forward to the upcoming review of shared parental leave, which will cover maternity and paternity leave.

Through work, women organise their power to advocate for equality at work and at home. Through work, we build social bonds, relationships and our sense of purpose. Now, Britain once again has a Government who recognise that work is at the heart of how we participate in, and contribute to, our families, community and country. The industry and ingenuity of working people up and down this country is what makes us who we are. A century ago my predecessor Sam Woods changed the law because he understood that. Now, I am proud that this Government are once again restoring respect and dignity to work, as well as ensuring that all work is secure and well paid. That is why it is an honour to support the Bill tonight.

8.51 pm

Darren Paffey (Southampton Itchen) (Lab): As a proud member of Unison, I am delighted to refer to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. It is such a pleasure to be here on the Government Benches and rise to back this pro-growth Bill. I do that proudly on behalf of the people of Southampton Itchen, because I know that it will change my constituents' lives for the better. It is the largest overhaul of working people's rights in decades, and it will truly make work pay. That is what this Government are about.

As things stand, unfortunately too many employers put their profits before their staff, and for 14 years the Tory Government were happy to just sit back and do nothing about that. One of my constituents shared with me their experience of having their contract changed to zero hours behind their back, leaving them without shifts and unable to make ends meet. That has to stop. The Bill rebalances that relationship and puts an end to the underhanded moves used by some employers. Instead it gives over 1 million people on zero-hours contracts those guaranteed hours, and provides all workers with the protections they deserve.

We know that a secure job is about more than just a salary; it is about someone having the peace of mind that they can put food on the table for themselves and their family. The Bill enshrines such basic rights in law. With over 16,000 unfair dismissal cases a year brought to tribunals, and over 200 cases every month in the south-east alone, workers are clearly facing unjust treatment. Removing the qualifying period for unfair dismissal will offer people greater security from day one and promote a fairer workplace.

I want my constituents to have better pay, a better life at work and better parental leave. They are already telling me about their optimism for the Bill. It is a Bill that will benefit employers too, by helping to keep people in work, increasing staff retention and reducing recruitment costs for employers. That is happening because this Labour Government are pro-business and pro-worker. By increasing those protections, levelling the playing field and modernising our working practices, today a new dawn is breaking for working people. I am proud that it is a transformational Labour Government bringing forward the crucial Employment Rights Bill within our first 100 days.

8.53 pm

Kirith Entwistle (Bolton North East) (Lab): I declare that I am a proud member of GMB, Community and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers. I point Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, where I declared donations from those unions. I stress that without that money, as a young mum with a small baby, fresh off maternity leave, I would not be standing in this place today. That is a privilege that I believe many Members on the Opposition Benches, which I note are largely empty, take for granted.

I welcome what is the biggest uplift in workers' rights in a generation, building on the legacy of previous Labour Governments. Bolton North East has over 50% more youth unemployment than the national average. Those workers deserve dignity, stability and to know that their Government are on their side, and for the young people in my constituency, it is about knowing that they have a future. That is why I am incredibly proud to stand in this Chamber today, and I commend the Deputy Prime Minister and my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Benches on bringing this legislation before the House.

Improving the lives of working people is one of the things I came to this place to do, as I am sure many of my colleagues did too. With the Government's "Next Steps" document already published, I sincerely hope Ministers will continue that close collaboration to finalise the practicalities of the Bill with our trade union

[*Kirith Entwistle*]

movement—the fine details that will make all the difference to families in my constituency. Extending workers' rights and protections is a crucial step towards making work pay, and I look forward to seeing further measures to make work pay, such as extending rights and protections for self-employed people so that all working people can benefit from these widespread changes.

This Bill marks a turning point for working families, not just in Bolton but across the UK. As a member of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, I am particularly pleased that among the Bill's 30-plus reforms are increased protection from sexual harassment, the introduction of equality action plans, and strengthened rights for pregnant workers. I commend the Deputy Prime Minister and her ministerial team on bringing this Bill before the House, and I look forward to seeing its progression.

8.56 pm

Mrs Sarah Russell (Congleton) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests and my membership of the Employment Lawyers Association, the Industrial Law Society, Unite the Union, Community and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers.

The treatment of women in Harvey Weinstein's companies, UKFast, and plenty of other organisations across the UK is notoriously horrific. A significant number of women work in workplaces that are basically run like medieval fiefdoms. Corporate governance in the UK appears to largely serve to cover up sexual harassment, and to do very little to prevent it.

As someone who has negotiated settlement agreements for a lot of women who have suffered sexual harassment or maternity discrimination, I do not recognise the descriptions of UK employees that I hear from Conservative Members. They appear to regard employees as desperate to bring employment tribunals at any possible opportunity, but my experience of representing women in those situations is that they are desperate to avoid bringing employment tribunal claims. They think that if they talk about what has happened to them, it will cause them significant reputational damage—that they will be blamed for their experiences, and that they will never work again.

As such, they sign settlement agreements meaning that they cannot talk about what has happened to them. They do so knowingly, and often for really quite small sums of money, because they are terrified of the amount it will cost them in legal fees if they try to pursue a claim to tribunal. That is one of the reasons why I am proud to be a member of trade unions and to have given advice to trade union members, because that enables those women to get the support they need to assert their basic workplace rights.

A 2016 TUC report talked about the fact that young women in particular, as well as women on zero-hours contracts, seem to be reporting higher levels of sexual harassment at work than other, older women. In short, those of us who get to a certain age like to hope that things have got better because we stop personally experiencing sexual harassment at work. Unfortunately,

the reality is that younger workers, who have less access to advice and support and are more economically vulnerable, continue to receive that harassment year after year. Things are not getting better. Employment rights are fantastic, and it is great that we are improving access to them through this Bill, but when Conservative Members oppose our moves to restrict the use of zero-hours contracts, they do not understand—so far as I can tell—that those contracts, which keep women in precarious employment, are one of the mechanisms by which sexual harassment occurs. As such, I commend the Bill to the House.

8.59 pm

Jon Pearce (High Peak) (Lab): I, too, am a proud member of the GMB. I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

This Bill delivers on a key Labour manifesto commitment. It provides a framework for the biggest change in workers' rights in 50 years. We have heard in this debate that it will ban exploitative zero-hours contracts, abolish the scourge of fire and rehire, and modernise trade union laws. I would like to focus my comments, though, on the vital reforms that this Bill will deliver for young families, and particularly women, in my constituency of High Peak and across the country.

As the Conservative leadership debate is shamefully focusing on whether women should have less maternity pay, and whether a woman can be a mother and a leader, let me tell Opposition Members that they can—and they are, in businesses up and down this country. If the Conservatives joined us from wherever they are—perhaps somewhere in the 1950s—they might understand that far better.

Before I entered this House, I was an employment lawyer advising businesses small, medium and large. One of the occupational hazards was friends and families wanting advice about workplace rights. The most depressing aspect of those chats was that new mums wanted and needed those conversations most. The story was always basically the same: they had just returned to work from maternity leave, and their employer had informed them that they were no longer needed, their job no longer existed, or that they were at risk of redundancy. The joys of that first year to 18 months with a new baby were all but tarnished because of worries about the security of the mother's job.

An estimated 4,000 pregnant women and mothers returning from maternity leave are dismissed each year. We have to do better if we are to improve productivity and grow our economy. We have to show young families and young mums that they matter, and that their contribution to society and our economy is valued. This Bill will do that. It will create the power to ban the dismissal of women who are pregnant, on maternity leave, or in the six months following their return from maternity leave.

It is depressing that the Opposition wish to portray protecting mums from dismissal as red tape and a burden on businesses, when good businesses know that this is the right thing to do. When I vote for the Bill, I will do it to show every working family in High Peak and in Britain that we are on their side. We are the party that values families.

9.2 pm

Douglas McAllister (West Dunbartonshire) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the privilege of speaking in this debate on the Government's historic legislation. This really is the moment that all Labour Members fought so hard for. This is what I promised my community, the people of West Dunbartonshire, that my Labour Government and our Prime Minister would deliver. Some whom I spoke to on the doorstep had given up hope that anyone could change their life for the better. We promised them that we would deliver change—that we would make work pay, and make work fair.

This Bill will bring an end to years of low-paid, insecure employment, which not only failed our people but failed the economy. As a solicitor in private practice, I grew tired and demoralised from regularly having to advise my clients that there was nothing they could do to save their job or improve their working conditions because they had not worked for their employer for two years or more. We will establish day one rights, but please let us also take on board the Law Society's advice. We must properly resource employment tribunals and fully fund legal aid to allow access to this justice that we seek to introduce.

I received a thank-you card from my constituent Sharon from Clydebank. She said to me:

"I wanted to tell you how the New Deal for Working People will make a difference to me. I am employed in social work. My wages have not increased in line with inflation, meaning a loss of income. I do a difficult, stressful job in public service and all staff are at breaking point. From banning exploitative zero hour contracts to ensuring we have access to workers' rights from day one—thank you for supporting a New Deal for Working People." That is the change we promised.

This Bill signals the largest rights upgrade for workers in my constituency of West Dunbartonshire in a generation by ending exploitative zero-hours contracts and fire and rehire, and by establishing day one rights. Some 7% of the overall workforce in West Dunbartonshire is paid at or below national minimum wage rates. This Labour Government will make work pay for the lowest-paid in West Dunbartonshire, and assist employers in my constituency by helping them to retain their hard-working staff.

In Scotland, we had two bad Governments, and our job in Scotland is only half complete, because it has taken the SNP 15 years just to attach conditions to the Scottish Government's grants on living wages—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order.

9.5 pm

Antonia Bance (Tipton and Wednesbury) (Lab): As a proud member of Unite and a former TUC staffer, I draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. In addition, I think ASLEF and the GMB for their kind support of my election campaign.

During the election, I met a young man in Great Bridge in my constituency who was living in a caravan on his parents' drive, working in a warehouse on a zero-hours contract and not knowing what his pay packet would be from one week to the next. I say to him, to the one in eight black and Asian workers trapped in insecure jobs,

and to the 1 million fellow citizens denied the security and the dignity of secure work: "We get it. We know you didn't choose a zero-hours contract." Eight in 10 workers on zero-hours contracts want regular hours. We will ban those disgraceful contracts and—listen up, colleagues—we will do so with the support of reputable businesses, such as Julian Richer's Richer Sounds.

Raising of collective bargaining is indispensable if we want to drive down poverty and inequality, and that is what this Bill will do. This Bill will allow unions to get into more workplaces and tell more workers why they should join a union. No employer needs to fear unions if they are confident that they act fairly towards their workers, and that their sites are safe, so we will legislate to make sure that unions can get into every workplace. After all, do we really think that ambulances would have been at those Sports Direct warehouses 76 times in two years, including for a woman who gave birth in the toilets, if there had been unions checking safety on that site? That is why unions need the right to go into workplaces. As a side note, the rules on access have to be practical, so I gently say to my right hon. Friends that the access agreements as drafted in the Bill give rogue employers just a few too many ways to keep unions out, and I hope we can sort that. This is not just about getting unions into workplaces; it is about getting unions recognised, and having the right to negotiate as equals at the table with the boss on wages, conditions and more. The changes on recognition are fantastic, and are to be celebrated. I hope we can go just a little further and end the three-year lockout, following a failed recognition ballot, that has kept unions out of the workplace, just as GMB workers are kept out of Amazon.

The working class are the backbone of this country. Contrary to what Opposition Front Benchers say, workers are the dog, not the tail. We all deserve security at work and a decent wage. I will be so proud to vote for this Bill—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

9.8 pm

Steve Yemm (Mansfield) (Lab): I, too, draw the House's attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, and my membership of Unite and the GMB.

I welcome the Bill, and I know that my constituents in Mansfield will, too. There are two key aspects of it that they will be particularly keen to see. First, it offers the right to collective bargaining on pay for those in social care. People in that sector do incredible work, with long shifts and unsociable hours. I am sure that the whole House will join me in thanking the more than 1.5 million people who work in social care across the UK. It is a scandal that, despite the importance of their work, many are paid the minimum wage and struggle to provide for their family. I recall a particularly striking encounter on the doorstep in Mansfield during the recent general election campaign; I spoke to a former adult care worker, who told me that they had become a dog walker because the pay was better. We are a nation of dog lovers, but that is not acceptable to me.

The second aspect relates to sick pay. Millions of workers in the UK are entitled to minimum statutory sick pay only, which stands at £116 a week, and they are

[Steve Yemm]

not eligible for any sick pay for the first three days of sickness. Opposition Members clearly feel that that is perfectly acceptable, because they took no action on it over the past 14 years, but I wonder how many of them could feed their family and pay their bills on £116 a week. Only recently, almost 300 workers in my constituency have been on strike, including porters, cleaners and cooks employed by Medirest, a private contractor in my local NHS trust in Mansfield. Supported by my union, the GMB, they took a stand, because Medirest company bosses refused to keep their terms and conditions, including on sickness pay, in line with those of colleagues employed directly by the NHS. All those workers wanted was the right to reasonable sick pay. The Bill will help to strengthen statutory sick pay, and for that reason my constituents and I support it, and I commend it to the House.

9.11 pm

Nadia Whittome (Nottingham East) (Lab): I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a proud GMB member; I am told that there are now more of us here than there are Conservative MPs.

Our economy is fundamentally rigged against millions of workers. How else could we describe an economy where many people's pay does not cover the essentials, where there are people in work who are reliant on food banks, and where the state has to top up poverty wages through universal credit? Nottingham has some of the lowest average incomes in the country, and my constituents are tired. They are tired of living from pay cheque to pay cheque, tired of being unable to save, and tired of having to choose between going to work sick or falling into debt. People's mental health is suffering as they work multiple jobs to make ends meet, or worry that they will not be given enough hours to pay the bills. That cannot go on, which is why the Bill is so important.

The Bill is about making work pay and creating a better work-life balance, and a more family-friendly economy. It is about fixing the problems that previous Conservative Governments allowed to fester, or even encouraged. The 1 million people on zero-hours contracts deserve security, and the Bill will give them the option of guaranteed hours. Those who miss work because they are sick deserve to be paid, and the Bill will entitle them to statutory sick pay from day one. Every worker deserves to earn enough to afford the essentials, and the Bill will mean that the cost of living is accounted for when setting the minimum wage, and remove discriminatory age bands.

The Bill is an investment in our future. Making work pay will give people more money to spend in the local economy, and improve people's health, easing the pressure on public services. We have heard scare stories from Conservative Members before. They told us that the minimum wage would cause an unemployment crisis; it was not true. They want the public to fear trade unions, but trade unionists are not the bogeymen that the Conservative party presents them as. They are our postmen, our child's teacher, and the nurse who cared for our sick parents. Trade unions are the combined power of millions of ordinary working people. From health and safety improvements to holding bad bosses to account and advancing gender equality, trade unions

are a force for good in all our lives. I welcome their strengthening through the Bill, but I would like us to go further and scrap every anti-union law introduced since the Thatcher Government came to power. We must not stop here. The Bill is a vital first step to delivering the new deal for working people and resetting our rigged economy, but it is just that—a first step. We must also close all fire and rehire loopholes, create a single status of worker, and extend collective bargaining.

9.14 pm

Andrew Cooper (Mid Cheshire) (Lab): Like many of us today, I proudly say that I am a member of the GMB and of USDAW. Alas, I cannot declare any donations from either of those organisations, but we do still have a good stock of USDAW carrier bags, which everybody knows are the cornerstone of any Labour campaign centre. I was also recently the director of a mid-sized technology firm. The attitude from those on the shadow Front Bench towards flexible working is frankly out of date and divorced from where the labour market is currently in that sector and many others. Perhaps they might like to reflect on that.

I welcome the Employment Rights Bill and its potential to reshape the landscape of employment in our country to help deliver economic growth and to make work pay. For too long, British workers have endured the burdens of insecure contracts, low pay and inadequate protection in the workplace. That cannot and must not continue, and it is exactly what the Bill will fix. It will enhance the rights and wellbeing of workers and restore dignity, fairness and respect to the workplace, while fostering a robust environment for businesses and contributing to the overall health of the economy. Whether it is ending exploitative zero-hours contracts and fire and rehire practices, establishing day one rights for paternity, parental and bereavement leave for millions of workers, or strengthening statutory sick pay, this Bill is a pivotal step towards achieving fairer and more equitable workplaces.

In the limited time I have, I want to consider the Bill's provisions on collective bargaining in two sectors. The return of the school support staff negotiating body is an important and welcome first step in improving the pay and conditions of teaching assistants, technicians and others who do vital work keeping our schools running. Their work often requires specialist technical knowledge. They are providing essential support for children with special educational needs, and they are also disproportionately women, and their pay has not kept pace with teachers because of wider pay freezes in local government. I hope that this step will precipitate a broader reassessment of the value of school support staff and ultimately bring about the demise of unfair "term-time only" contracts that see staff lose around £4,000 a year.

The Bill's provision to establish an adult social care negotiating body is also incredibly welcome, but I urge the Minister to go further and provide a framework to provide for a negotiating body in any sector, with the sectoral specific definitions implemented in secondary legislation. That would allow the Secretary of State to roll out collective bargaining more quickly and easily to other similar sectors. I urge Ministers to give that consideration, as the Department brings amendments to the Bill in its passage through the House.

Taken as a whole, the measures in this Bill, along with our wider plan to make work pay, promise to create a future where every worker can thrive, businesses can flourish and our economy can prosper. That is why I am proud to support it.

9.17 pm

Alex McIntyre (Gloucester) (Lab): I must declare that I am a proud member of the Community and GMB unions, and—this may be of interest to the Opposition—in my previous role I was an employment lawyer to organisations from FTSE 100 companies to our NHS. The shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake) might like to reflect on and apologise for his patronising comments to Government Members.

The Bill will provide the most substantial upgrade to workers' rights in a generation and greatly benefit many in my constituency of Gloucester. Secure, well-paid work for all my constituents is the best way to tackle the legacy of the Tory cost of living crisis. The Bill will take action on zero-hours contracts, which leave workers vulnerable to financial instability and uncertainty. I support the Government in ending that exploitative practice, so that my constituents can benefit from guaranteed hours.

The Bill will strengthen the right to flexible working, which is essential not only for enhancing work-life balance, but for reducing pay gaps in our workplaces. I support measures by the Government to support people in Gloucester to enter back into work in an inclusive and supportive way. The Conservatives doubled the qualifying period for unfair dismissal, leaving 8.5 million workers without protection. The Government will establish an unfair dismissal policy from day one, which will directly support many of my constituents, particularly those on lower incomes.

The Bill will strengthen paternity leave and champion the rights of women in the workplace through enhanced menopause support and protection from sexual harassment. It will improve the pay and conditions of school support staff and social care workers. We all rely on those vital services, and I am pleased to support the Government in valuing the vital work of our social care workers, particularly those in my constituency.

Let us not forget the consequences of Conservative policies, which have led to chaotic industrial relations, leaving many of my constituents worse off amid a cost of living crisis. After 14 years of stagnating wages, millions of lives has been disrupted and our economy has suffered immensely. Industrial action in the NHS alone cost taxpayers £1.7 billion—a staggering sum that could have been invested in the public services that we all rely on. The Conservatives have consistently opposed workers' rights, but we will always champion them. I have been shocked by the vitriol from the Opposition towards hard-working people getting basic rights like not being sexually harassed at work; they are out of touch.

This Government will deliver a stronger, fairer and brighter future by making work pay, growing the economy, raising living standards and creating opportunities for all. The Bill marks the beginning of a new deal for working people and a brighter future for Gloucester.

9.20 pm

Lee Barron (Corby and East Northamptonshire) (Lab): I declare my proud membership of the Communication Workers Union and that, by virtue of my last name, I am the only legitimate union Barron in this House—I am proud of that fact.

The Bill is a step change and a new deal for working people. It is transformational for so many in my constituency of Corby and East Northants because, for too long, the world of work has not paid. Let's make no bones about it: this is about growth. We do not believe that the economy can grow based on insecure jobs, zero-hours contracts and bogus self-employment. People need more than that to feed their families. That is why the Bill is so essential. This legislation will give working people a sense of fairness in the world of work, where they can play their part in building our economy and be treated as they should be in our society—with the security, dignity and respect that a job should bring. Our values should not stop at the front door of our workplace; they are an essential part of it.

In this debate, Opposition Members have turned around and said that we are doing this to them: "Businesses don't want this; no one wants it apart from you lot." Well, if they had a look at the poll conducted by the Institute for Public Policy Research along with the TUC, they would see that 60% of employers said that employees should have more security at work; 74% believed that strengthening employment rights would improve workforce retention; 73% said that strengthening employment rights would boost productivity; 61% thought that stronger employment rights would have a positive impact on business profitability; and 73% said that they would be prepared to support giving employees protection from unfair dismissal from the first day. This is not being done to anybody. It is being done with them, and we should be proud of that.

Here is my final point: we pay millions to people who look after our money, but we pay peanuts to those who look after our people. That needs to change. That is why I am so pleased to support the improvements to pay and conditions through fair pay agreements, starting in the care sector. They are the ones who need it. We need to deal with the recruitment and retention of the people who look after our loved ones, so that they know from one day to the next who will be coming around and washing their bodies. It needs to be done; it cannot stay as it is. That is why we should support the Bill.

9.23 pm

Mr Jonathan Brash (Hartlepool) (Lab): As many Members have done, I proudly register my membership of the GMB and Unison, and that I am a co-owner of a small business.

One of the consequences of the last 14 years is insecurity in every part of British life. Hartlepool people, who I represent, are insecure in their communities, in their homes and in their jobs. That is why I welcome the Bill, which has security at its heart, banning exploitative zero-hours contracts, ending fire and rehire, and providing day one rights. Listening to Opposition Members—maybe the shadow Minister could reflect on this in his wind-up speech—I would like to know on what day the Conservative party believes it suddenly becomes not okay to unfairly

[Mr Jonathan Brash]

dismiss somebody. What is that time? If it is anything other than day one, then quite frankly they are abandoning the workers of this country.

The Bill does more than give security to workers. It gives people dignity: the dignity to grieve without having to ask permission; the dignity to choose to become a parent without having to worry if it will affect their opportunities in the workplace; the dignity of knowing that they can afford to be ill; and the dignity of knowing that they can turn up to work and be safe. Security and dignity are what British workers, including in Hartlepool, deserve. When people have security and dignity in the workplace, they get opportunity: the opportunity to grow, to develop, to train, to become better at what they do and to become more productive.

In recent days, I have heard people on the right of politics suggest that the Bill is somehow an attack on the “wealth creators” of our country. What nonsense. Let us be absolutely clear: the wealth of this country is created by its workers. Through the dignity, security and opportunity that the Bill provides, we will grow our economy and give respect to every worker in my constituency and beyond.

9.26 pm

Kirsteen Sullivan (Bathgate and Linlithgow) (Lab/Co-op): I draw the attention of the House to my entry in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests.

As a GMB member, it is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. I feel, and my hon. Friends feel, that a substantial uplift to employment rights is long overdue. For far too long, it has been too difficult to get ahead, and too many working people—people who have worked hard—have seen their finances deteriorate, pushing them into hardship. They have done the right thing that society expects of them and they are getting very little in return: they have cut back on the essentials; they have sought extra hours at work; they have had to find second jobs; they have sold furnishings and accessed food pantries just to keep their heads above water—and they find that there is still too much month at the end of their money.

In 2022, the Low Pay Commission estimated that 20% of minimum wage workers and 20% of living wage workers did not receive what they had earned in wages, sick pay and holiday. The great pay robbery will not be left to continue anymore. That is why it is crucial that the Bill establishes the fair work agency, making sure that everyone is playing by the same rules—and those rules are simple: dignity in work and fair pay. The Bill is long overdue and far too many are missing out on what they are owed.

In the groundbreaking first days of this Labour Government, they mandated that the minimum wage must reflect the cost of living not just this year but every year, matching the earnings of hard-working people to the bills they face for food, energy and transport. Across Scotland, that means a direct pay boost to over 100,000 people, including to over 2,500 people in the West Lothian area and 3,000 people in the Falkirk area. I am proud that this Labour Government are leading business and trade unions to work together to get the economy fired up and to make sure that the people of this country are paid fairly.

The Bill is starting where we left off, with a plan to make work pay, and with fair sick pay, real holiday pay, a clampdown on precarious employment, an end to fire and rehire, and proper hours of work and proper earnings to match. The Bill makes it clear that it is time to go for growth: a stronger, fairer, brighter future for work in the UK.

9.29 pm

Brian Leishman (Alloa and Grangemouth) (Lab): Let me declare first that I am a proud member of both Unite the Union and the Community trade union, and secondly that I am even prouder that the Bill will positively transform thousands of lives across the Clackmannanshire and Falkirk council areas that I serve in this place.

I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds East (Richard Burgon) for their comments about prison officers. Under section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, prison officers were banned from taking industrial action. Correctly, the Scottish Parliament restored the right to strike in 2015, but today prison officers in the rest of the United Kingdom find themselves in a poorer position than their Scottish counterparts, in that they are not allowed to withdraw their labour.

Section 127 has also limited trade unions’ ability to protect prison officers from wage stagnation and attacks on their terms and conditions, which has led to a recruitment and retention crisis and, naturally, to low morale. As in professions such as nursing, the police, the fire brigades and teaching, it is often the camaraderie of colleagues on the shift that keeps things going in a job that provides a vital public service that has been disgracefully underfunded.

The state of our prisons is well documented. Ruthless Conservative austerity has hammered the service. More than a quarter of prison officers have left since 2012. Prison officers were not exempted from the Conservative Government’s raising of the public sector pension age to 68, which, given the physical nature of the day-to-day work, is obviously unfair, unrealistic and, of course, incredibly dangerous. Since that wealth of experience has left, violence directed at both officers and prisoners has escalated.

The prison system is another mess that this Government have inherited and must now sort. Prison officers should have the right to retire at 60 or after 30 years’ service: it is just the right thing to do for employees. No one should feel like a disposable commodity that is there to be exploited and then discarded when every last ounce of work has been wrung out of them. It is also right that prison officers in the rest of the UK achieve parity with Scottish prison officers: they too should have a fundamental right to withdraw their labour.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. There will now be an immediate two-minute speaking limit.

9.32 pm

Mary Kelly Foy (City of Durham) (Lab): I declare my interest as a member of Unison and Unite. In May last year, I condemned the Strikes (Minimum Service Levels)

Act 2023 for the consequences that it would have for trade unions. I welcome the fact that this Bill will repeal that Act, and I pay tribute to trade unions and their members for their tireless campaigning. I am keen to hear from the Minister whether the protections for pregnant workers, specifically the right to maternity pay, will be a day one right, and whether there is scope to circumscribe redundancy during pregnancy and maternity leave. If so, will he consider adding those changes to the Bill at a later stage?

There is no doubt that the Bill is hugely positive. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for Alloa and Grangemouth (Brian Leishman), I want to say something about prison officers, who cannot strike because of section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, that Tory-era legislation. There are three prisons in my constituency and I know about the hardships that prison officers face, which are pushing many of them to the brink. I hope that the Minister will be able to meet representatives from the POA and work to repeal section 127 so that its members can have real equality with their fellow trade unionists in other unions.

What we have here is a series of policies that will drastically improve the lives of workers across the country. The Bill is an important first step towards ensuring that all workers can realise their own dignity and worth through their work. The fact that we have it before us today is a testament to the strength of organised labour and the resolve of trade unionists throughout the country.

9.34 pm

Zarah Sultana (Coventry South) (Ind): I am a member of Unite the Union and am the parliamentary chair of the Fire Brigades Union. I refer Members to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests.

After years of Tory attacks on trade unions and workers' rights, the Bill will begin to reverse decades of Thatcherite anti-union laws, marking a real shift in the balance of power at work. The repeal of minimum service levels for strikes is a major victory: those laws were tools of class warfare that were designed to break the unions and silence workers. Scrapping them restores the right to strike, a win for every worker.

Equally important is the removal of the undemocratic ballot thresholds imposed by the Tories in 2016. Those barriers undermined collective action. By removing them, we reclaim the power taken from us. Permitting electronic and workplace balloting is another welcome move that will expand democratic participation, but it is not enough. We must go further and repeal every single anti-trade union law since Thatcher.

In its current form, the Bill retains the six-month mandate on strike ballots. Strikes are not battles of a few days or weeks; they are drawn-out struggles for justice and dignity. Workers in Coventry South who are fighting union-busting corporate giants such as Amazon know that these fights can last years. They need mandates that match the reality. We should abolish them entirely and repeal the Trade Union Act 2016 in its entirety, as the Government committed to doing.

Sectoral collective bargaining for social care and support staff is a good start, but all workers across all industries deserve that protection. Voluntary agreements on union access are not enough. Union organisers need

guaranteed automatic access. We should also guarantee automatic union recognition when a majority of members join.

Workers have already waited for a decade under Tory rule while their rights have been stripped away, their wages have stagnated and they have been subjected to rogue operators such as P&O. We cannot afford more delays while powerful interests water down reforms. This legislation is a victory for the trade union movement, but the fight is far from over. We need radical change, and that is what I will keep fighting for.

9.36 pm

Johanna Baxter (Paisley and Renfrewshire South) (Lab): I draw hon. Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I am a proud member of the Communication Workers Union and the GMB and am a former official of Unison.

It is a huge source of personal pride to me as a former trade union official that our Government have introduced a Bill that will deliver the greatest uplift in workers' rights in a generation. While the Conservatives have focused on scaremongering during this debate, it is important to remember the facts. Hard-working people are the trade union movement of this country. No one on the Government Benches will deny our pride in that.

The TUC estimates that 1.1 million employees did not receive any of the holiday pay to which they were entitled last year. This Bill supports those ordinary hard-working people. Last year, 4,000 pregnant women and mothers returning from maternity leave were dismissed. This Bill supports those hard-working people. Some 1.7 million people are out of the labour market because they have to look after their family. This Bill supports those hard-working people. There are 3,800 workers across my constituency of Paisley and Renfrewshire South who earn the minimum wage. This Bill supports those hard-working people. I commend it to the House and am pleased that our Government have strengthened its enforcement measures.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. The Front-Bench speeches will start at 9.40 pm, so the final Back-Bench speaker will be Michael Wheeler.

9.38 pm

Michael Wheeler (Worsley and Eccles) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests, to my membership of USDAW and the GMB and to the fact that I chair USDAW's parliamentary group.

I spent my career as a trade unionist working to better the lives of people in low-paid and insecure work. They are exactly the sort of people who will benefit from the measures in the Bill, but the Bill goes so much further. I am proud to have stood on an election platform that put improving the conditions of all workers at the heart of the change that was promised. I am even prouder to be stood here today supporting the Government who are delivering that.

I will focus on one element of the Bill: the right to a contract that reflects the hours that someone regularly works. Too many people are contracted for pitifully few

[Michael Wheeler]

hours and are utterly reliant on additional hours that can fluctuate too wildly to provide financial security, with no guarantee that they will not be taken away at the whim of an employer. Measures in the Bill will take steps to rebalance that. If the hours are regularly needed by the employer and worked by the worker, it is only fair that they are guaranteed in the contract.

While hugely welcoming the Bill, I urge the Minister to consider the use of the word “low” in its drafting, as it might unfortunately limit the benefits and lead to unintended consequences. I ask the Minister to work with trade unions, as the organised representatives of workers, to ensure that the maximum number of working people benefit from this new right. I will be proud to vote for this Bill tonight. I commend it to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): I call the shadow Minister.

9.40 pm

Gareth Bacon (Orpington) (Con): We are approaching the end of a long and robust debate, with a total of 71 speeches so far and no fewer than seven maiden speeches. The hon. Member for Hyndburn (Sarah Smith) spoke powerfully and very impressively. The hon. Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball) spoke memorably of overcoming considerable adversity and of her considerable achievements, culminating in her arrival in this House. The hon. Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Lorraine Beavers) gave a moving tribute to her late parents. The hon. Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp) laid down an ambitious claim to have the highest number of castles in his constituency and talked of his grandfather serving on flying boats in world war two, which is something that he and I share. The hon. Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Kenneth Stevenson) spoke of his and his family’s great pride in his taking his seat here in Parliament. The hon. Member for Hamilton and Clyde Valley (Imogen Walker) spoke fluently about the history of her constituency, in a deeply impressive speech.

On the Opposition side, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Shivani Raja) talked about the entrepreneurial spirit of Leicestershire and about her fears that it could be eroded by the Bill. She also, I suspect, achieved a first for Parliament by managing to shoehorn a reference to Showaddywaddy into *Hansard*. My hon. Friend the Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam) spoke movingly of her grandparents’ escape from Nazi Germany and amusingly of the Labour party’s contribution to introducing her parents, ultimately leading to the creation of a future Conservative MP. I commend all hon. Members who made their first mark in this House in a debate on so important a subject. I am sure that they will serve their constituents diligently in the coming years; I wish them all well.

There is much that the Opposition believe is wrong with the Bill, but I have limited time, so I will focus primarily on one element—the role of the trade unions, because their influence runs right through it. If, as expected, the House declines to support the amendment in the name of the shadow Business Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Thirsk and Malton

(Kevin Hollinrake), and grants the Bill a Second Reading, there will be time to explore the Bill’s many other problems in Committee.

A running theme throughout the debate was hon. Members’ enthusiastic declarations of membership of trade unions, but for some reason they forgot to mention how much they have received in financial donations from them. I remind them and the House that, according to the LabourList website, the Government MPs who have spoken today have accumulated a total of £371,974 in donations from the trade unions. Those donations are no surprise. The public are quickly becoming acclimatised to the idea that this Labour party is in the pocket of the highest bidder, whether that be Taylor Swift, Lord Alli or indeed the trade unions.

I was, however, pleasantly surprised by the number of hon. Members on the Government Benches who have spoken in today’s debate. When I attended the Bill briefing kindly organised by the Under-Secretary of State for Business and Trade, the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Bromborough (Justin Madders), just a handful of Labour Members were in attendance, but today they have turned up in great numbers to sing the Bill’s praises. It is to their credit that they are here. Perhaps they have read or watched news of the harm that this Bill will bring and are quietly apprehensive, but have put their heads above the parapet regardless. However, when push comes to shove, they remember that they will be up for re-election in four or five years’ time, and they have to think about their trade union donors.

Very early in this debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden and Solihull East (Saqib Bhatti) said that the Bill is about not growth, but ideology. He is right. This is a trade union charter that will send Britain back to the 1970s. Of course, we know that that is a goal of the Deputy Prime Minister, who has said that she wants to repeal union legislation dating back as far as the 1980s. I appreciate that neither the Secretary of State for Business and Trade nor the Deputy Prime Minister was born until the 1980s, so they will not remember the time when Britain was brought to a grinding halt by the trade unions. The lights were switched off, bodies were left unburied and rubbish piled up all over the place. It is at this point that I remind Members that their constituents will see how they vote today.

I understand that the inboxes of Labour Members are already full, following the freebie scandal, the cash-for-access scandal, the political choice to take away the winter fuel payment and the concerns about tax rises in the Budget. They have my sympathy, but I warn them that their inboxes are about to get even busier. When the junior doctors strike, meaning that their constituents cannot access important medical treatment, they will know that it was facilitated by this legislation. When local councils strike, meaning that their constituents cannot get their bins collected, they will know that it was facilitated by this legislation. When the train drivers strike, meaning that their constituents cannot see their loved ones, they will know that it was facilitated by this legislation. And when small businesses fail because they cannot cope with the massive extra bureaucracy and costs, they will know that it was facilitated by this legislation. As the letters pile high from constituents who are unable to access the services they expect, Labour Members might want to hire more staff, or ask their

current staff to work late, but they will be prevented from doing so by the very regulations brought in by this legislation, which they support.

Labour's misunderstanding of labour relations goes right to the top. When the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care announced that a deal had been reached with the British Medical Association, he said that he was making a real difference. However, we now know that the deal has failed and the BMA is already beginning preparations for further strike action just weeks after accepting the pay deal.

I represent a Greater London constituency and I, of course, remember the Mayor of London's promise that there would be no Transport for London strikes under his regime, but that is not going very well either. We now learn, thanks to the latest copy of *Civil Service World*, that there are set to be strikes in the Secretary of State's own Department. All of that was before this Bill was introduced.

It is clear that, despite being in the pocket of its trade union paymasters, Labour's approach to industrial relations has failed and will continue to fail. Much of the reason for that future failure will be the rushed job that is this Bill. It has been rushed to the House so quickly that it contains fewer than half of the measures included in the plan to make work pay—a fact recognised by the Government's "Next Steps to Make Work Pay" document. A vast amount of it will require secondary legislation to take effect.

The Prime Minister has talked incessantly of the Government's mission to pursue growth, which is an entirely laudable aim, but growth does not just happen. Sometimes, the Government have to do things to facilitate it, and sometimes the Government must not do things that would jeopardise it. The measures in this rushed Bill threaten to destroy any prospect of economic growth.

I am sure the Secretary of State will deny it, but the fact remains that the trade unions will always win out against the Labour party. The unions have donated almost £30 million to the Labour party since 2020. According to LabourList, 16 Cabinet Ministers and more than 200 Labour MPs have received training and donations, averaging £9,500 each. This rushed Bill is the first part of what the trade unions have bought with their money: the chance to massively increase their power base, not just in the public sector but in the private sector, especially in small businesses. This will not lead to growth, unless the Prime Minister is talking about growth in red tape and growth in the trade unions' ability to choke the economy.

This rushed Bill is not a charter for economic growth; it is a charter for industrial strife, plunging productivity, rising unemployment, inflation and economic ruin. This rushed Bill is not fit for purpose, and the Government should withdraw it and think again.

9.49 pm

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): I thank right hon. and hon. Members across the House for an informed debate on the Employment Rights Bill and the Government's plan to make work pay. In closing, I declare to the House that I am a proud member of the Unite and USDAW trade unions. Even

more proudly, I declare that I come from exactly the kind of working-class family that stands to gain from the measures.

As this is Second Reading, let us remember the history and context leading up to the debate. In recent times, work has changed a great deal. We have seen the impact of technology and the gig economy, and we have had working from home in the pandemic. Many things have changed what work is for many people. That has created a need to consider whether our employment laws are up to date.

Indeed, it was the Conservatives, under Boris Johnson, who first promised an employment Bill in their 2019 manifesto, but they did not deliver. The subsequent Queen's Speech, after the 2019 election, included an employment Bill, but again the Conservatives did not deliver. In contrast, this Labour Government not only promised an employment Bill; we have delivered one, and in just 100 days. Meanwhile, it appears that some Conservative Members do not even support the existing provision of things like maternity pay, so there have been some differences in opinion between Members on opposite sides of the House today.

It is a proud day for the new Government, but it is a prouder day for Britain's workers, many of whom can now look forward to a future with far greater security and stability than they have at present. Quite simply, good work and good wages are what this Labour Government were sent to this place to deliver, and that is exactly what this Bill is about.

I take pride in the fact that the new Government have worked closely with all parties in drawing up this legislation, acting pragmatically and listening at all times. The result is a Bill that will make a huge difference to the lives of millions of working people, while being proportionate, fair and reasonable in the asks it makes of business, recognising that the majority of businesses operating in the UK already do so to a higher standard than even this Bill would introduce.

We would not have known that from listening to the depressing speeches made by Conservative Members today. People would not know that Sainsbury's already pays a living wage; that instead of zero-hours contracts, McDonald's already offers contracts that provide guaranteed hours; that the Mace Group offers full trade union access to workers on construction sites; that Mars Wrigley offers equal parental leave; and that BT Group already has carer's leave. Frankly, what we heard from the Conservatives today was binary, outdated and extremely depressing, but I was delighted to hear such significant support for the Bill from the Government Benches, and from all around the House.

Some Members raised specific points. I wish I had time to respond to all of them, but I want to acknowledge the tremendous maiden speeches we heard. The hon. Member for Leicester East (Shivani Raja) gave an incredibly gracious speech about her predecessors, in a very skilful way, which is not easy when she had to defeat several of them to get her place in the House. The hon. Member for Weald of Kent (Katie Lam) told an incredibly powerful family story, woven into a wonderful description of her constituency, and she extolled the romantic benefits of campaigning for the Labour party, which is something we can all get behind.

[Jonathan Reynolds]

My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Sarah Smith) captured the glorious industrial heritage of her area in a way that was extremely relevant to today's debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Penistone and Stocksbridge (Dr Tidball) gave a speech that testified to the fact that politics can be a force for good, and it was wonderful to hear. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool North and Fleetwood (Lorraine Beavers) showed passion and commitment in every word she spoke; I cannot wait to hear more from her. My hon. Friend the Member for Dover and Deal (Mike Tapp) showed his commitment to public service, which has run throughout his entire life; again, it was a wonderful speech to listen to. My hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Kenneth Stevenson) managed to draw a comparison between his constituency and ancient Rome, which was particularly skilful. His speech was funny, warm, authentic and passionate. Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton and Clyde Valley (Imogen Walker), the MP for the area known for Robert Owen, made a wonderful and apt contribution to the debate, with a tribute to hard work and the rewards it can bring—again, it was wonderful to listen to.

Unfortunately, I must give the House some negative advice: to reject the reasoned amendment in the name of the new shadow Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Thirsk and Malton (Kevin Hollinrake). Quite frankly, lads, it is a bit of a mess, isn't it, as motions go? It claims credit for measures the Conservatives once opposed, such as the minimum wage. It opposes the fair work agency, which they used to support. It claims that there will be more strikes, when they presided over a record number of days lost to strike action, and it shows even less self-awareness when it comes to the burdens on small businesses. Let us not forget who called the referendum on leaving the European Union, with no preparation for either result.

The serious point is this: the Conservative record was one of stagnant wages, low business investment and low productivity. Frankly, it was a record of failure. That is why we must act differently. The shadow Secretary of State claims that the Bill is rushed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The fact that the Bill is ready in 100 days is testament to the brilliance of the civil service and the resilience of the British model of government.

The impact assessment we have published shows that these measures will increase total employment costs by 0.4%, but we know that smaller businesses face proportionately greater up-front costs from regulatory changes. That is why we are working with them closely to make sure that these reforms, and the speed at which they are implemented, work for them. However, I want to be clear that we will not allow for the creation of a two-tier market where someone's protection as a worker depends on the size of their employer. That would create an uneven playing field and exactly the kind of disincentive to grow that we saw too many of under the last Conservative Government.

The shadow Secretary of State also raised the question of vexatious claims under day one rights. The point he missed was that there are already some day one rights. Protection for whistleblowers is a day one right. Disability discrimination protection is a day one right. If his

worry is vexatious claims, those could be brought under the existing system. I thought that was a major weakness in his argument.

We heard speeches paying tribute to what this Bill will do on parental leave. On fire and rehire, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough and Thornaby East (Andy McDonald) for his work preparing these measures.

I will also say one more thing on impact assessments to set that 0.4% impact on the UK's total pay bill in context. Last year, the UK's total wage costs were £1.3 trillion. To draft a Bill that will have such an impact for so many workers, with a direct benefit transferred to low-paid workers, and to keep it as proportionate as that is, I believe, an achievement.

Finally, on zero-hours contracts, we are not taking away flexibility, but making flexibility two-way. We are ensuring that workers have the right to a contract that reflects the number of hours they regularly work, while allowing them to remain on a zero-hours contract if that is what they want. We are making sure that flexibility works in both directions. There is no reason why that should in any way adversely affect seasonal work compared with what we have at present.

To close, this is a proud day for this Labour Government. This is a change of direction. It is a change to a better and more productive culture of industrial relations in this country. In the case we are making as a new Government, we are not alone. Study after study shows the benefits of investing in the workforce, in better productivity, better resilience and more market dynamism. This Bill makes good on our promise to the British people to change their lives for the better, to deliver an economy that works for them, and to end the poor pay, poor working conditions and poor job security that have held too many people back for too long. For all those reasons, I proudly commend this Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The House divided: Ayes 105, Noes 386.

Division No. 22]

[9.59 pm]

AYES

Allister, Jim
Anderson, Lee
Anderson, Stuart
Andrew, rh Stuart
Argar, rh Edward
Atkins, rh Victoria
Bacon, Gareth
Bedford, Mr Peter
Bhatti, Saqib
Blackman, Bob
Bool, Sarah
Bowie, Andrew
Bradley, rh Dame Karen
Brandreth, Aphra
Braverman, rh Suella
Burghart, Alex
Cartlidge, James
Chope, Sir Christopher
Cleverly, rh Mr James
Clifton-Brown, Sir Geoffrey
Cocking, Lewis
Cooper, John
Costa, Alberto
Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
Cross, Harriet

Davies, Mims
Davis, rh Sir David
Dewhurst, Charlie
Dinenage, Dame Caroline
Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
Evans, Dr Luke
Farage, Nigel
Fortune, Peter
Fox, Sir Ashley
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
French, Mr Louie
Fuller, Richard
Gale, rh Sir Roger
Garnier, Mark
Glen, rh John
Griffith, Andrew
Griffiths, Alison
Harris, Rebecca
Hayes, rh Sir John
Hinds, rh Damian
Hoare, Simon
Holden, rh Mr Richard
Hollinrake, Kevin

Holmes, Paul
Hudson, Dr Neil
Hunt, rh Jeremy
Jenkin, Sir Bernard
Johnson, Dr Caroline
Jopp, Lincoln
Kearns, Alicia
Lam, Katie
Lamont, John
Leigh, rh Sir Edward
Lewis, rh Sir Julian
Lowe, Rupert
Mak, Alan
Malthouse, rh Kit
Mayhew, Jerome
McMurdock, James
McVey, rh Esther
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Mohindra, Mr Gagan
Moore, Robbie
Mullan, Dr Kieran
Mundell, rh David
Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
Norman, rh Jesse
Obese-Jecty, Ben
O'Brien, Neil
Paul, Rebecca
Philp, rh Chris
Raja, Shivani

Rankin, Jack
Reed, David
Robertson, Joe
Rosindell, Andrew
Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
Simmonds, David
Smith, Rebecca
Snowden, Mr Andrew
Spencer, Dr Ben
Spencer, Patrick
Stafford, Gregory
Stephenson, Blake
Stuart, rh Graham
Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
Thomas, Bradley
Tice, Richard
Timothy, Nick
Trott, rh Laura
Vickers, Martin
Vickers, Matt
Whately, Helen
Whittingdale, rh Sir John
Wild, James
Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Ayes:

**Mike Wood and
Greg Smith**

NOES

Abbott, Jack
Abrahams, Debbie
Adam, Shockat
Ahmed, Dr Zubir
Akehurst, Luke
Alaba, Mr Bayo
Aldridge, Dan
Al-Hassan, Sadik
Ali, Rushanara
Ali, Tahir
Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
Amesbury, Mike
Anderson, Callum
Anderson, Fleur
Arthur, Dr Scott
Asato, Jess
Asser, James
Athwal, Jas
Atkinson, Catherine
Atkinson, Lewis
Bailey, Mr Calvin
Bailey, Olivia
Baines, David
Baker, Alex
Baker, Richard
Ballinger, Alex
Bance, Antonia
Barker, Paula
Barron, Lee
Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
Baxter, Johanna
Beales, Danny
Beavers, Lorraine
Begum, Apsana
Bell, Torsten
Benn, rh Hilary
Berry, Siân
Betts, Mr Clive
Billington, Ms Polly
Bishop, Matt

Blackman, Kirsty
Blake, Olivia
Blake, Rachel
Bloore, Chris
Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy
vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
Bonavia, Kevin
Botterill, Jade
Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
Brash, Mr Jonathan
Brickell, Phil
Bryant, Chris
Buckley, Julia
Burgon, Richard
Burke, Maureen
Burton-Sampson, David
Butler, Dawn
Cadbury, Ruth
Campbell, rh Sir Alan
Campbell, Juliet
Campbell-Savours, Markus
Carden, Dan
Carling, Sam
Carns, Al
Champion, Sarah
Charalambous, Bambos
Charters, Mr Luke
Chowns, Ellie
Clark, Feryal
Coleman, Ben
Collier, Jacob
Collinge, Lizzi
Collins, Tom
Conlon, Liam
Coombes, Sarah
Cooper, Andrew
Cooper, Dr Beccy
Corbyn, rh Jeremy
Costigan, Deirdre
Cox, Pam

Coyle, Neil
Craft, Jen
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Ms Stella
Crichton, Torcuil
Curtis, Chris
Dakin, Sir Nicholas
Darlington, Emily
Davies, Jonathan
Davies, Paul
Davies, Shaun
Davies-Jones, Alex
De Cordova, Marsha
Dean, Josh
Denyer, Carla
Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
Dickson, Jim
Dixon, Anna
Dodds, rh Anneliese
Dollimore, Helena
Doogan, Dave
Doughty, Stephen
Downie, Graeme
Duffield, Rosie
Duncan-Jordan, Neil
Eagle, Dame Angela
Eagle, rh Maria
Eastwood, Colum
Eccles, Cat
Edwards, Lauren
Edwards, Sarah
Egan, Damien
Elmore, Chris
Entwistle, Kirith
Eshalomi, Florence
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Fahnbulleh, Miatta
Falconer, Hamish
Farnsworth, Linsey
Fenton-Glynn, Josh
Ferguson, Mark
Ferguson, Patricia
Fleet, Natalie
Flynn, rh Stephen
Foody, Emma
Fookes, Catherine
Foster, Mr Paul
Foxcroft, Vicky
Foy, Mary Kelly
Francis, Daniel
Frith, Mr James
Furniss, Gill
Gardner, Dr Allison
Gemmell, Alan
German, Gill
Gethins, Stephen
Gill, Preet Kaur
Gittins, Becky
Glindon, Mary
Goldsborough, Ben
Gosling, Jodie
Gould, Georgia
Grady, John
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Dame Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hack, Amanda
Haigh, rh Louise
Hall, Sarah
Hamilton, Fabian
Hamilton, Paulette

Hanna, Claire
Hardy, Emma
Harris, Carolyn
Hatton, Lloyd
Hayes, Helen
Hayes, Tom
Hazelgrove, Claire
Healey, rh John
Hendrick, Sir Mark
Hillier, Dame Meg
Hinchliff, Chris
Hinder, Jonathan
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hopkins, Rachel
Hughes, Claire
Hume, Alison
Huq, Dr Rupa
Hurley, Patrick
Hussain, Mr Adnan
Hussain, Imran
Ingham, Leigh
Irons, Natasha
Jameson, Sally
Jermy, Terry
Jogee, Adam
Johnson, rh Dame Diana
Johnson, Kim
Jones, rh Darren
Jones, Gerald
Jones, Lillian
Jones, Louise
Jones, Ruth
Jones, Sarah
Josan, Gurinder Singh
Joseph, Sojan
Juss, Warinder
Kane, Mike
Kaur, Satvir
Kendall, rh Liz
Khan, Afzal
Khan, Ayoub
Khan, Naushabab
Kinnock, Stephen
Kirkham, Jayne
Kitchen, Gen
Kumar, Sonia
Kyle, rh Peter
Kyrke-Smith, Laura
Lake, Ben
Lamb, Peter
Lavery, Ian
Law, Chris
Law, Noah
Leadbeater, Kim
Leadbitter, Graham
Leishman, Brian
Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
Lewin, Andrew
Lewis, Clive
Lightwood, Simon
Logan, Seamus
Long Bailey, Rebecca
MacAlister, Josh
Macdonald, Alice
MacNae, Andy
Madders, Justin
Malhotra, Seema
Martin, Amanda
Maskell, Rachael
Mather, Keir
Mayer, Alex
McAllister, Douglas

McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahan, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Medi, Llinos
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica
 Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve

Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Scrogg, Michelle
 Sowards, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael
 Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen

Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia

Williams, David
 Wishart, Pete
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Noes:
 Anna McMorrin and
 Kate Dearden

Question accordingly negated.

Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 62(2)).
 That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The House divided: Ayes 386, Noes 105.

Division No. 23]

[10.15 pm

AYES

Abbott, Jack
 Abrahams, Debbie
 Adam, Shockat
 Ahmed, Dr Zubir
 Akehurst, Luke
 Alaba, Mr Bayo
 Aldridge, Dan
 Al-Hassan, Sadik
 Ali, Rushanara
 Ali, Tahir
 Allin-Khan, Dr Rosena
 Amesbury, Mike
 Anderson, Callum
 Anderson, Fleur
 Arthur, Dr Scott
 Asato, Jess
 Asser, James
 Athwal, Jas
 Atkinson, Catherine
 Atkinson, Lewis
 Bailey, Mr Calvin
 Bailey, Olivia
 Baines, David
 Baker, Alex
 Baker, Richard
 Ballinger, Alex
 Bance, Antonia
 Barker, Paula
 Barron, Lee
 Barros-Curtis, Mr Alex
 Baxter, Johanna
 Beales, Danny
 Beavers, Lorraine
 Begum, Apsana
 Bell, Torsten
 Benn, rh Hilary
 Berry, Siân
 Betts, Mr Clive
 Billington, Ms Polly
 Bishop, Matt
 Blackman, Kirsty
 Blake, Olivia
 Blake, Rachel
 Bloore, Chris
 Blundell, Mrs Elsie (*Proxy vote cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Bonavia, Kevin
 Botterill, Jade
 Brackenridge, Mrs Sureena
 Brash, Mr Jonathan
 Brickell, Phil
 Bryant, Chris

Buckley, Julia
 Burgon, Richard
 Burke, Maureen
 Burton-Sampson, David
 Butler, Dawn
 Cadbury, Ruth
 Campbell, rh Sir Alan
 Campbell, Juliet
 Campbell-Savours, Markus
 Carden, Dan
 Carling, Sam
 Carns, Al
 Champion, Sarah
 Charalambous, Bambos
 Charters, Mr Luke
 Chownes, Ellie
 Clark, Feryal
 Coleman, Ben
 Collier, Jacob
 Collinge, Lizzi
 Collins, Tom
 Conlon, Liam
 Coombes, Sarah
 Cooper, Andrew
 Cooper, Dr Beccy
 Corbyn, rh Jeremy
 Costigan, Deirdre
 Cox, Pam
 Coyle, Neil
 Craft, Jen
 Creagh, Mary
 Creasy, Ms Stella
 Crichton, Torcuil
 Curtis, Chris
 Dakin, Sir Nicholas
 Darlington, Emily
 Davies, Jonathan
 Davies, Paul
 Davies, Shaun
 Davies-Jones, Alex
 De Cordova, Marsha
 Dean, Josh
 Denyer, Carla
 Dhesi, Mr Tanmanjeet Singh
 Dickson, Jim
 Dixon, Anna
 Dodds, rh Anneliese
 Dollimore, Helena
 Doogan, Dave
 Doughty, Stephen
 Downie, Graeme
 Duffield, Rosie

Duncan-Jordan, Neil
 Eagle, Dame Angela
 Eagle, rh Maria
 Eastwood, Colum
 Eccles, Cat
 Edwards, Lauren
 Edwards, Sarah
 Egan, Damien
 Elmore, Chris
 Entwistle, Kirith
 Eshalomi, Florence
 Esterson, Bill
 Evans, Chris
 Fahnbulleh, Miatta
 Falconer, Hamish
 Farnsworth, Linsey
 Fenton-Glynn, Josh
 Ferguson, Mark
 Ferguson, Patricia
 Fleet, Natalie
 Flynn, rh Stephen
 Foody, Emma
 Fookes, Catherine
 Foster, Mr Paul
 Foxcroft, Vicky
 Foy, Mary Kelly
 Francis, Daniel
 Frith, Mr James
 Furniss, Gill
 Gardner, Dr Allison
 Gemmell, Alan
 German, Gill
 Gethins, Stephen
 Gill, Preet Kaur
 Gittins, Becky
 Glindon, Mary
 Goldsborough, Ben
 Gosling, Jodie
 Gould, Georgia
 Grady, John
 Greenwood, Lilian
 Griffith, Dame Nia
 Gwynne, Andrew
 Hack, Amanda
 Haigh, rh Louise
 Hall, Sarah
 Hamilton, Fabian
 Hamilton, Paulette
 Hanna, Claire
 Hardy, Emma
 Harris, Carolyn
 Hatton, Lloyd
 Hayes, Helen
 Hayes, Tom
 Hazelgrove, Claire
 Healey, rh John
 Hendrick, Sir Mark
 Hillier, Dame Meg
 Hinchliff, Chris
 Hinder, Jonathan
 Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
 Hopkins, Rachel
 Hughes, Claire
 Hume, Alison
 Huq, Dr Rupa
 Hurley, Patrick
 Hussain, Mr Adnan
 Hussain, Imran
 Ingham, Leigh
 Irons, Natasha
 Jameson, Sally
 Jermy, Terry

Jogee, Adam
 Johnson, rh Dame Diana
 Johnson, Kim
 Jones, rh Darren
 Jones, Gerald
 Jones, Lillian
 Jones, Louise
 Jones, Ruth
 Jones, Sarah
 Josan, Gurinder Singh
 Joseph, Sojan
 Juss, Warinder
 Kane, Mike
 Kaur, Satvir
 Kendall, rh Liz
 Khan, Afzal
 Khan, Ayoub
 Khan, Naushabab
 Kinnock, Stephen
 Kirkham, Jayne
 Kitchen, Gen
 Kumar, Sonia
 Kyle, rh Peter
 Kyrke-Smith, Laura
 Lake, Ben
 Lamb, Peter
 Lavery, Ian
 Law, Chris
 Law, Noah
 Leadbeater, Kim
 Leadbitter, Graham
 Leishman, Brian
 Lewell-Buck, Mrs Emma
 Lewin, Andrew
 Lewis, Clive
 Lightwood, Simon
 Logan, Seamus
 Long Bailey, Rebecca
 MacAlister, Josh
 Macdonald, Alice
 MacNae, Andy
 Madders, Justin
 Malhotra, Seema
 Martin, Amanda
 Maskell, Rachael
 Mather, Keir
 Mayer, Alex
 McAllister, Douglas
 McCarthy, Kerry
 McCluskey, Martin
 McDonald, Andy
 McDonald, Chris
 McDonnell, rh John
 McDougall, Blair
 McEvoy, Lola
 McFadden, rh Pat
 McGovern, Alison
 McIntyre, Alex
 McKee, Gordon
 McKenna, Kevin
 McKinnell, Catherine
 McMahon, Jim
 McNally, Frank
 McNeill, Kirsty (*Proxy vote
 cast by Chris Elmore*)
 Medi, Llinos
 Midgley, Anneliese
 Minns, Ms Julie
 Mishra, Navendu
 Mohamed, Iqbal
 Moon, Perran
 Morden, Jessica

Morgan, Stephen
 Morris, Grahame
 Morris, Joe
 Mullane, Margaret
 Murphy, Luke
 Murray, Chris
 Murray, James
 Murray, Katrina
 Myer, Luke
 Naish, James
 Naismith, Connor
 Narayan, Kanishka
 Nash, Pamela
 Newbury, Josh
 Niblett, Samantha
 Nichols, Charlotte
 Norris, Alex
 O'Hara, Brendan
 Onwurah, Chi
 Opher, Dr Simon
 Oppong-Asare, Ms Abena
 Osamor, Kate
 Osborne, Kate
 Osborne, Tristan
 Owen, Sarah
 Paffey, Darren
 Pakes, Andrew
 Patrick, Matthew
 Payne, Michael
 Peacock, Stephanie
 Pearce, Jon
 Pennycook, Matthew
 Pinto-Duschinsky, David
 Pitcher, Lee
 Platt, Jo
 Powell, Joe
 Powell, rh Lucy
 Poynton, Gregor
 Prinsley, Peter
 Quigley, Mr Richard
 Qureshi, Yasmin
 Race, Steve
 Ramsay, Adrian
 Rand, Mr Connor
 Ranger, Andrew
 Rayner, rh Angela
 Reader, Mike
 Reed, rh Steve
 Reeves, Ellie
 Reid, Joani
 Reynolds, rh Jonathan
 Rhodes, Martin
 Ribeiro-Addy, Bell
 Richards, Jake
 Riddell-Carpenter, Jenny
 Rigby, Lucy
 Rimmer, Ms Marie
 Robertson, Dave
 Roca, Tim
 Rodda, Matt
 Rushworth, Sam
 Russell, Mrs Sarah
 Rutland, Tom
 Ryan, Oliver
 Sackman, Sarah
 Sandher, Dr Jeevun
 Saville Roberts, rh Liz
 Scrogham, Michelle
 Sowards, Mr Mark
 Shah, Naz
 Shanker, Baggy
 Shanks, Michael

Siddiq, Tulip
 Simons, Josh
 Slaughter, Andy
 Slinger, John
 Smith, Cat
 Smith, David
 Smith, Jeff
 Smith, Nick
 Smith, Sarah
 Smyth, Karin
 Snell, Gareth
 Stainbank, Euan
 Stevens, rh Jo
 Stevenson, Kenneth
 Stewart, Elaine
 Stone, Will
 Strathern, Alistair
 Streeting, rh Wes
 Strickland, Alan
 Stringer, Graham
 Sullivan, Kirsteen
 Sullivan, Dr Lauren
 Sultana, Zarah
 Swallow, Peter
 Tami, rh Mark
 Tapp, Mike
 Taylor, Alison
 Taylor, David
 Taylor, Rachel
 Thomas, Fred
 Thomas, Gareth
 Thompson, Adam
 Tidball, Dr Marie
 Timms, rh Sir Stephen
 Toale, Jessica
 Tomlinson, Dan
 Trickett, Jon
 Tufnell, Henry
 Turley, Anna
 Turmaine, Matt
 Turner, Karl
 Turner, Laurence
 Twigg, Derek
 Twist, Liz
 Uppal, Harpreet
 Vaughan, Tony
 Vince, Chris
 Wakeford, Christian
 Walker, Imogen
 Ward, Chris
 Ward, Melanie
 Waugh, Paul
 Webb, Chris
 Welsh, Michelle
 Western, Andrew
 Wheeler, Michael
 Whitby, John
 White, Jo
 White, Katie
 Whittome, Nadia
 Williams, David
 Wishart, Pete
 Witherden, Steve
 Woodcock, Sean
 Wrighting, Rosie
 Yang, Yuan
 Yemm, Steve
 Zeichner, Daniel

Tellers for the Ayes:
 Anna McMorrin and
 Kate Dearden

NOES

Allister, Jim
 Anderson, Lee
 Anderson, Stuart
 Andrew, rh Stuart
 Argar, rh Edward
 Atkins, rh Victoria
 Bacon, Gareth
 Bedford, Mr Peter
 Bhatti, Saqib
 Blackman, Bob
 Bool, Sarah
 Bowie, Andrew
 Bradley, rh Dame Karen
 Brandreth, Aphra
 Braverman, rh Suella
 Burghart, Alex
 Cartlidge, James
 Chope, Sir Christopher
 Cleverly, rh Mr James
 Cocking, Lewis
 Cooper, John
 Costa, Alberto
 Cox, rh Sir Geoffrey
 Cross, Harriet
 Davies, Mims
 Davis, rh Sir David
 Dewhurst, Charlie
 Dinage, Dame Caroline
 Dowden, rh Sir Oliver
 Duncan Smith, rh Sir Iain
 Evans, Dr Luke
 Farage, Nigel
 Fortune, Peter
 Fox, Sir Ashley
 Francois, rh Mr Mark
 Freeman, George
 French, Mr Louie
 Fuller, Richard
 Gale, rh Sir Roger
 Garnier, Mark
 Glen, rh John
 Griffith, Andrew
 Griffiths, Alison
 Hayes, rh Sir John
 Hinds, rh Damian
 Hoare, Simon
 Holden, rh Mr Richard
 Hollinrake, Kevin
 Holmes, Paul
 Hudson, Dr Neil
 Hunt, rh Jeremy
 Johnson, Dr Caroline
 Jopp, Lincoln

Kearns, Alicia
 Lam, Katie
 Lamont, John
 Leigh, rh Sir Edward
 Lewis, rh Sir Julian
 Lowe, Rupert
 Mak, Alan
 Malthouse, rh Kit
 Mayhew, Jerome
 McMurdoch, James
 McVey, rh Esther
 Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
 Mohindra, Mr Gagan
 Moore, Robbie
 Mullan, Dr Kieran
 Mundell, rh David
 Murrison, rh Dr Andrew
 Norman, rh Jesse
 Obese-Jecty, Ben
 O'Brien, Neil
 Paul, Rebecca
 Philp, rh Chris
 Raja, Shivani
 Rankin, Jack
 Reed, David
 Robertson, Joe
 Rosindell, Andrew
 Shastri-Hurst, Dr Neil
 Shelbrooke, rh Sir Alec
 Simmonds, David
 Smith, Rebecca
 Snowden, Mr Andrew
 Spencer, Dr Ben
 Spencer, Patrick
 Stafford, Gregory
 Stephenson, Blake
 Stuart, rh Graham
 Swayne, rh Sir Desmond
 Thomas, Bradley
 Tice, Richard
 Timothy, Nick
 Trott, rh Laura
 Vickers, Martin
 Vickers, Matt
 Whately, Helen
 Whittingdale, rh Sir John
 Wild, James
 Williamson, rh Sir Gavin
 Wright, rh Sir Jeremy

Tellers for the Noes:

Mike Wood and
 Greg Smith

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Employment Rights (Programme) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Public Bill Committee.

Proceedings in Public Bill Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Public Bill Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 21 January 2025.

(3) The Public Bill Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

(6) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(Chris Elmore.)

Question agreed to.

EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS BILL (MONEY)

King's recommendation signified.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 52(1)(a)),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Employment Rights Bill, it is expedient to authorise:

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of:

(a) any expenditure incurred under or by virtue of the Act by a person holding office under His Majesty or by a government department, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable under any other Act out of money so provided, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—
(Chris Elmore.)

Question agreed to.

Business without Debate**DELEGATED LEGISLATION**

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

ENERGY

That the draft Carbon Dioxide Transport and Storage (Determination of Turnover for Penalties) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 30 July, be approved.—
(Kate Dearden.)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

DANGEROUS DRUGS

That the draft Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2024, which was laid before this House on 2 September, be approved.—
(Kate Dearden.)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND MARKETS

That the draft Insurance and Reinsurance Undertakings (Prudential Requirements) (Amendment and Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2024, which were laid before this House on 5 September, be approved.—
(Kate Dearden.)

Question agreed to.

BACKBENCH BUSINESS

Ordered,

That Wendy Morton be a member of the Backbench Business Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Ordered,

That Antonia Bance, John Cooper, Sarah Edwards, Sonia Kumar, Alison Griffiths, Gregor Poynton, Matt Western and Rosie Wrighting be members of the Business and Trade Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Ordered,

That Mr Bayo Alaba, Mims Davies, Mr James Frith, Dr Rupa Huq, Natasha Irons, Jo Platt, Tom Rutland and Paul Waugh be members of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

DEFENCE

Ordered,

That Mr Calvin Bailey, Alex Baker, Lincoln Jopp, Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck, Jesse Norman, Michelle Scroggham, Fred Thomas and Derek Twigg be members of the Defence Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

EDUCATION

Ordered,

That Jess Asato, Mrs Sureena Brackenridge, Dr Caroline Johnson, Amanda Martin, Darren Paffey, Mark Sowards, Patrick Spencer and Dr Marie Tidball be members of the Education Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

ENERGY SECURITY AND NET ZERO

Ordered,

That Sir Christopher Chope, Torcuil Crichton, Josh MacAlister, Luke Murphy, Ms Polly Billington, Annaliese Midgley, Ms Julie Minns and Bradley Thomas be members of the Energy Security and Net Zero Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Sarah Bool and Charlie Dewhirst be members of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Aphra Brandreth, Dan Carden, Blair McDougall, Matthew Patrick, Claire Hazelgrove, Uma Kumaran, Abtisam Mohamed and Sir John Whittingdale be members of the Foreign Affairs Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Ordered,

That Danny Beales, Ben Coleman, Dr Beccy Cooper, Deirdre Costigan, Jen Craft, Josh Fenton-Glynn, Paulette Hamilton, Gregory Stafford and Joe Robertson be members of the Health and Social Care Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

HOME AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Shaun Davies, Robbie Moore, Chris Murray, Mr Connor Rand, Jake Richards, Margaret Mullane, Joani Reid and Bell Ribeiro-Addy be members of the Home Affairs Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Ordered,

That Mike Amesbury, Lewis Cocking, Chris Curtis, Maya Ellis, Naushabah Khan, Mr Gagan Mohindra, Joe Powell and Sarah Smith be members of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ordered,

That Noah Law, Gordon McKee, Sam Rushworth, David Taylor, Laura Kyrke-Smith, Alice Macdonald, David Mundell and David Reed be members of the International Development Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

JUSTICE

Ordered,

That Mr Alex Barros-Curtis, Pam Cox, Linsey Farnsworth, Sir Ashley Fox, Warinder Juss, Mrs Sarah Russell, Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst and Mike Tapp be members of the Justice Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

NORTHERN IRELAND AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Alicia Kearns and Jerome Mayhew be members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Ordered,

That Peter Fortune and Rebecca Paul be members of the Committee of Public Accounts.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

SCIENCE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Ordered,

That Emily Darlington, George Freeman, Dr Allison Gardner, Kit Malthouse, Steve Race, Josh Simons, Dr Lauren Sullivan and Adam Thompson be members of the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS

Ordered,

That Harriet Cross and Jack Rankin be members of the Scottish Affairs Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

TRANSPORT

Ordered,

That Katie Lam and Rebecca Smith be members of the Transport Committee.—(*Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.*)

TREASURY

Ordered,

That Dame Harriett Baldwin, Rachel Blake, John Glen, Dame Siobhain McDonagh, Lola McEvoy, Lucy Rigby, Dr Jeevun Sandher and Yuan Yang be members of the Treasury Committee.—*(Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)*

WORK AND PENSIONS

Ordered,

That Johanna Baxter, Neil Coyle, Damien Egan, Gill German, Amanda Hack and David Pinto-Duschinsky be members of the Work and Pensions Committee.—*(Jessica Morden, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.)*

Taxi Licensing: Deregulation Act 2015

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*(Kate Dearden.)*

10.38 pm

Chris Vince (Harlow) (Lab/Co-op): I give my sincere thanks to the Minister for taking time to engage in this crucial debate. Taxi licensing is not merely a technical matter; it strikes at the heart of issues of fairness and safety, and affects the livelihoods of hard-working taxi drivers in my constituency, in Harlow and surrounding villages such as Lower Nazeing. Although this issue is of nationwide concern, as I hope is evidenced by the many MPs who will speak tonight, I will focus primarily on experiences in Harlow. I am not here to rehash arguments surrounding the Deregulation Act 2015, which was introduced with the best intentions, but we cannot ignore reality and the unintended consequences of that legislation, which have left taxi drivers vulnerable, passengers at risk, and the integrity of local oversight severely compromised.

Shaun Davies (Telford) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the points he is making in his excellent speech. In 2022, the independent inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Telford published its report. It highlighted concern that:

“So far as national policy is concerned...aspects of taxi licensing...undermine rather than promote best practice”

in respect of tackling child sexual exploitation. Does he agree that those concerns should be addressed by the Minister?

Chris Vince: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am sure that the Minister will address those concerns in his closing remarks.

I have sought this debate to bring attention to the growing dangers fostered under the current system. The 2015 Act has opened a loophole, allowing private hire drivers to license their vehicle in district authorities far from where they operate. In practice, this means that drivers are no longer bound by local standards. Instead, they can shop around for the cheapest licence anywhere in the country, then return to work wherever they choose. Harlow has long had the gold standard for its taxi services—standards that our local drivers proudly meet. Why is that? It is because they know, as I do, that nothing is more important than the safety of their passengers.

Amanda Hack (North West Leicestershire) (Lab): Taxi licensing enforcement is funded by licence fees. However, with the ongoing race to the bottom for licence issuing standards, local authorities are unable to enforce externally issued licences. Any measure to allow local authorities to enforce would simply stretch enforcement budgets beyond sustainability. Does my hon. Friend agree that the solution has to be guided by the principle that drivers should operate in the areas in which they are licensed?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Judith Cummins): Order. I remind Members that interventions should be short.

Chris Vince: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend that the principle should be that drivers should be licensed by the local authority for the area in which they are operating.

Cross-border hiring is undermining high standards, and it strips councils like Harlow of the power to oversee and enforce proper regulations. A driver who loses their licence in one district can simply apply for a licence elsewhere and continue operating with little or no scrutiny. Local authorities lack the enforcement powers to police out-of-town drivers, and that leaves a gaping hole in our public safety framework. How can we claim to protect our constituents, when such fundamental weaknesses exist in our system?

Gill Furniss (Sheffield Brightside and Hillsborough) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate. Does my hon. Friend agree that the lack of scrutiny may pose a risk to members of the public, particularly in safeguarding and the safety of vehicles? In Sheffield, where I am from, the licensing team is unable to check the vehicles on the road and whether they are being driven by properly licensed drivers.

Chris Vince: My hon. Friend is right; this is not just a bureaucratic oversight, but a public safety crisis waiting to happen. Vehicles are not being inspected regularly enough and drivers are not being vetted thoroughly enough. Passengers, who trust that any taxi they step into is safe, are the ones left exposed. Taxis often serve the most vulnerable members of our community. Can we truly say that we are doing our duty to protect them under these conditions?

The inconsistency in signage requirements across different districts only deepens the confusion. In Harlow, we enforce clear and visible signage—a rooftop box for taxis and door signs for private hire vehicles. Not every district requires that and, as a result, passengers are left guessing whether the vehicle they are entering is legitimate and safe, and local councils are forced to battle through bureaucratic layers just to verify the safety and legality of those vehicles. That is unacceptable. This deregulation has not just lowered standards but put lives at risk. We cannot wait for an accident or tragedy to spur us into action. We must be proactive, not reactive. We need legislation that reflects the pace of modern life and the demands of today's safety standards. We cannot fall behind.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member on securing this debate. Does he agree that the safety of users and the experience of knowing that an officially licensed taxi driver has been thoroughly vetted is something that many people take for granted, and that urgent changes must take place to ensure that vetting is as stringent as checks for insurance and a clean licence?

Chris Vince: I agree. We are talking about passenger safety. If somehow we could set aside the issue of safety—I believe we cannot—there are other grave consequences of the legislation. It is undermining the livelihood of our taxi drivers. Drivers operating under cross-border licences often lack the local knowledge necessary to provide the level of service that passengers expect.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Vince: I will carry on with this bit of my speech.

This situation erodes trust in industry at a time when we should champion local businesses. Instead, we are creating obstacles for them. How can I or anyone in this Chamber look our local taxi drivers in the eye and tell them that we are truly on their side? Right now, I cannot, but by addressing these issues head on, we can change that narrative.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. Does he agree that the Deregulation Act 2015 needs to be repealed? It is deeply damaging in a place like York, where we have a tourism industry, so we need it to be repealed.

Chris Vince: I agree—that is part of what I am talking about. We want to support our local taxi drivers.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Chris Vince: I am going to make some progress.

I have heard first-hand accounts from Harlow's taxi drivers. Will the Minister commit to take action? Will he consider reforming the law to introduce national minimum standards, empower councils to enforce regulations across borders and ensure that private hire journeys either start or finish within the licensed area? These steps are critical not just to restore fairness in the industry but to safeguard the public.

Emily Darlington (Milton Keynes Central) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for securing this debate, which is so important not only for taxi drivers but for safety, particularly for the safety of women and girls at the end of the night, when too often things happen. Does he agree that deregulation has led to a decrease in their safety—especially for councils such as Milton Keynes, a white ribbon city—and that the white ribbon should be part of the taxi licensing regime?

Chris Vince: My hon. Friend is right to say that different authorities have different standards. One issue is not being licensed in the authority where that taxi operates.

Richard Burgon (Leeds East) (Ind): I thank my hon. Friend for allowing so many interventions and for securing this important debate. Taxi drivers in my constituency and elsewhere in West Yorkshire really suffered during the covid pandemic. Is it not the case that the current regulatory framework for cross-border licensing is enabling some of the bigger operators to rip off hard-working taxi drivers by making sure that they do not get the income that they need and deserve, especially after covid?

Chris Vince: My hon. Friend is right; covid hit tax drivers in my constituency very hard, and we should do what we can to support them. Repealing some of the legislation would help to do that.

I am on my final paragraph, you will be pleased to know, Madam Deputy Speaker. This is not just about needless red tape but—

Dr Zubir Ahmed (Glasgow South West) (Lab): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Chris Vince: No, I am going to finish. This is about essential regulation that protects lives and livelihoods. The hard-working taxi drivers, on whom so many of us depend, deserve a level playing field. Above all, passengers deserve to know that when they step into a taxi, they are safe. I urge the Minister to consider these proposals so that we can create a safer, fairer and more consistent taxi trade for all.

10.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Simon Lightwood): I do not know about you, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I feel a Westminster Hall debate may be coming soon.

First, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Chris Vince) for securing this debate. The taxi and private hire vehicle—or PHV—sectors provide a vital service to our communities. Whether that is taking elderly people to their hospital appointments or making sure that children get their education, every day our hard-working taxi and PHV drivers show up and deliver an excellent service. The benefits of having a thriving taxi and PHV sector should not be underestimated. These services play a crucial role in our leisure and tourism industries, taking passengers to and from airports and railway stations, and in our night-time economy, making sure that everyone—particularly young women and girls—can get home safely after a night out when other modes of transport might not be available. That is why I am so pleased to see this great industry being debated in the House tonight. I am sure that Members will recognise and applaud the work of our taxi and PHV drivers and operators.

Turning to my hon. Friend's point about the Deregulation Act 2015, I would like to take this opportunity to share what I have learned about this issue since I became the Minister with responsibility for local transport. The 2015 Act did not enable PHVs to work anywhere; PHVs and taxis have always been able to fulfil bookings anywhere. Evidence submitted to the Transport Committee in 2011 shows that out-of-area working was an issue long before the Act. The Act enabled the subcontracting of bookings to operators licensed by other authorities, as was already allowed under the legislation that applies in London. That was introduced to enable an operator to more easily meet customer requests.

Dr Ahmed: I must declare an interest as the son of a long-standing taxi driver. Does the Minister agree that taxi drivers are, as they proved in covid, key workers and key to our economy, and furthermore, that in recent years their business costs, specifically their insurance costs, have risen to a prohibitively high level? Will he undertake to investigate the root causes of those rising business costs, which are stifling individual taxi drivers from maintaining their businesses?

Simon Lightwood: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. I agree that our taxi trade played a vital role during the covid pandemic. I will, of course, take his comments away with me.

Rather than decline or cancel a booking, if an operator did not have a driver and vehicle available, the ability to subcontract to another operator, often within the same company, meant passengers would be better served, as they would not have to find an alternative. The operator

could do that for them. Ending the subcontracting of bookings to operators licensed by another authority would not stop out-of-area working. Under the current legislation, it would remain possible for a PHV or a taxi licensed by any licensing authority to carry passengers anywhere. If subcontracting was banned again, and banned in London for the first time, operators would be able to choose to license with a single authority or to have regional hubs and direct all bookings through those.

I turn now to cross-border hiring or out-of-area working, which I believe more accurately reflects the real issue. The difference—I hope we can all accept this—is that people naturally travel across local authority borders, and that some flexibility in the licensing system is beneficial to both passengers and the sector. Out-of-area working is the practice whereby the PHV driver licenses with one authority but intends to work predominantly or exclusively in other areas. PHVs provide a wide range of services, such as home-to-school transport, executive hire and other specialised services. We need to ensure that our regulation of the sector provides the necessary flexibility, while ensuring that local authorities have the tools they need to deliver on their objectives for the industry.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): I am extremely grateful to the Minister for giving way. He will not necessarily be aware—I would not expect him to be, nor the hon. Member for Harlow (Chris Vince), whom I congratulate on securing the debate—that as a Transport Minister, I commissioned a major piece of work on taxi licensing. The report was conducted by Professor Mohammed Abdel-Haq and all its recommendations were accepted by the then Government. They were focused on safety, and the relationship between the protection of passengers and licensing. I invite the Minister to take a look at that report. It is not partisan and I am sure there is much in it that might inform the debate and service some of the requirements that have been so admirably cited by the hon. Member for Harlow.

Simon Lightwood: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his intervention, and I will certainly take a look at the report.

I understand that there are concerns about authorities' ability to carry out effective enforcement in their areas, especially against drivers and vehicles that they have not licensed. We are considering numerous options to address that, but I would also urge caution. Certain options could have negative consequences, both for the sector and for passengers. Restricting operations could reduce the availability of services, increasing fares and waiting times for passengers, and bringing more dead miles for drivers. I am sure the last thing any of us would want to do is to drive members of the public into the cars of those who are unlicensed and unvetted, waiting at the roadside or offering rides on social media.

We also need to consider the context within which we are working. In England, there are 263 licensing authorities. A high number of authorities are, in some cases, responsible for licensing a very small number of drivers and vehicles which serve a small area.

Tom Gordon (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): Will the Minister give way?

Simon Lightwood: I will not give way; I mean to make some progress.

There is a balance to be struck here and the Government are committed to working with all stakeholders to get it right. Most if not all Members will, like me, have more than one licensing authority in their constituency. Our constituents do not live their lives within the boundaries of a local authority area. Their lives will take them across borders frequently. They may live in one area, work in another and socialise in a third, but they might still prefer to use their tried, tested and trusted local operator. It is therefore important for whatever actions the Government take to be examined in detail, so that all the possible benefits and consequences are fully understood.

Our taxi and PHV industry is, on the whole, very well regulated in terms of safety. We are all too aware of failings in the past and their awful consequences for the most vulnerable in society, and that cannot and must not ever happen again. Since those failings were identified, much has changed. Anyone who wishes to become a driver must be considered fit and proper to do so before any licence is granted. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Shaun Davies) for his contribution; he has been a passionate and effective campaigner on this issue for many years. I am aware of the report, and I am happy to meet him to discuss it in more detail.

All authorities in England now require drivers to undergo enhanced DBS checks as part of the “fit and proper” assessment. A national database must be used to record all instances in which a driver’s licence is refused, revoked or suspended on safeguarding, road safety or unlawful discrimination grounds. In short, regardless of where in the country a driver is licensed, passengers can feel reassured that that driver has undergone extensive vetting.

Overall, our regulation is increasingly effective, but it is far from perfect, and a conversation still needs to be had about how we can ensure consistent standards for passengers across the country, and how we can put their safety at the heart of the sector. After all, some legislation

harks back to the days when a taxi was a horse-drawn carriage. Some solutions may create more problems than they solve, which is why I need Members’ support. I ask them to work with the local authorities in their constituencies to ensure that authorities are using their existing powers appropriately. Safety must always come first, but putting up unnecessary, costly barriers to obtaining a licence, or making those who want to obtain a licence for where they intend to work wait months before they can start to earn a living to support themselves and their families, helps no one.

Overwhelmingly, those in the sector and those who seek to enter it want to do the right thing, and they need to be helped to do just that. We will continue to help authorities to make the best possible use of their existing powers. That must include authorities working together across boundaries in co-authorisation agreements, so that one authority’s enforcement officers can take action against drivers and vehicles licensed by the other authority. They can work with their local police forces in joint enforcement operations, or use the community safety accreditation scheme to equip their enforcement officers with targeted powers—such as the power to pull over taxis and PHVs at the roadside—so that they can do their jobs more effectively.

Out-of-area working is not, should not and need not be the norm, but we need licensing authorities to ask themselves if they are doing what is best for passengers. Just as we are asking local authorities to see what they can do, we are looking at what we can do to help the better regulation of the sector. A range of options is being considered, and I welcome the debate and the ideas of my parliamentary colleagues. I hope that we can work together to find a solution and continue to support a successful taxi and PHV trade, one that is safe, accessible and affordable, and one that continues to serve the wide range of needs of our diverse communities.

Question put and agreed to.

10.58 pm

House adjourned.

Written Statements

Monday 21 October 2024

BUSINESS AND TRADE

Making Work Pay

The Secretary of State for Business and Trade (Jonathan Reynolds): The Government's plan to make work pay is a core part of our mission to grow the economy, raise living standards across the country and create opportunities for all. It will tackle the low pay, the poor working conditions and the poor job security that have been holding our economy back. The landmark Employment Rights Bill will benefit more than 10 million workers in every corner of the country.

We have committed to working with all stakeholders on how best to put these measures into practice. As trailed in the Government's "Next Steps to Make Work Pay" document, published on 10 October, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Work and Pensions secretary and I are today launching four six-week consultations. Subject to the outcome of these consultations, we will consider whether there is a need for any Government amendments to the Employment Rights Bill.

Consultation 1: The application of zero-hours contracts measures to agency workers

The Employment Rights Bill includes measures to deliver our commitments to end exploitative zero-hours contracts by introducing:

- A right to a contract with guaranteed hours that reflects the number of hours regularly worked, based on a 12-week reference period; and
- a right to reasonable notice of shifts, and proportionate payment for short-notice shift cancellations and curtailment.

The Government believe that all workers, including agency workers, should have the right to guaranteed hours that reflect the hours they regularly work. The Government's intention is that agency workers should also have a right to reasonable notice of shifts and receive payment for shifts that are cancelled or curtailed at short notice. The unique tripartite relationship between agency workers, employment agencies and hirers makes the application of these measures to them particularly complex. The zero-hours contract measures create new responsibilities for employers. For agency workers we need to decide whether these responsibilities sit with the employment agency, the end hirer or both. The first consultation being launched today seeks to understand how these measures can best apply to agency workers.

Consultation 2: Creating a modern framework for industrial relations

The Government are committed to a new partnership approach of co-operation and negotiation that sees employers and trade unions working with Government to tackle the challenges affecting our economy. Workplaces and working practices have changed significantly over the last decade and the trade union legislation that underpins industrial relations is in need of modernisation.

Poor industrial relations have held the UK back from reaching its potential. In 2022, 2.5 million working days were lost due to strikes in the UK. In 2023 it was close to 2.7 million—the most in any year since 1989.

We are committed to developing a framework for industrial relations that will stand the test of time. This consultation is taking those first steps forward, to help us build a positive, modern framework for our industrial relations.

The Government are seeking views on a number of changes to modernise and hardwire negotiation, engagement and dispute resolution into industrial relations. The consultation includes proposals on: simplifying the amount of information that unions are required to provide in industrial action notices; strengthening provisions to prevent unfair practices during the trade union recognition process; securing a mandate for negotiation and dispute resolution; requirements on political funds; extending the expiry of the strike mandate; reducing the industrial action notice period; updating the law on repudiation and prior call; and seeking views on the enforcement mechanism for right of access.

Consultation 3: Strengthening remedies against abuse of rules on collective redundancy and fire and rehire

The Employment Rights Bill expands protections for employees in fire and rehire and collective redundancy scenarios. It does this by banning fire and rehire practices other than when the employer genuinely has no alternative and by ensuring that the right to collective consultation is determined by the number of people impacted across the entire business, rather than in one workplace.

The Government are also committed to reforming the law to provide effective remedies against abuse of the rules on fire and rehire and collective redundancy. The third consultation being launched today seeks views on doing that by increasing the maximum period for the protective award for scenarios where employers have not complied with their collective redundancy obligations, and adding interim relief to collective redundancies and unfair dismissals in fire and rehire scenarios.

Consultation 4: Strengthening statutory sick pay

The Employment Rights Bill includes measures to strengthen statutory sick pay for those who need it most, by removing the existing requirements to serve waiting days and extending eligibility to those earning below the lower earnings limit. The Department for Work and Pensions is therefore launching a consultation to support this ambition, and to ensure that the safety net of sick pay is available for those who need it most.

The changes introduced within the Bill will mean that for some lower earners, including those earning below the lower earnings limit, their rate of statutory sick pay will be calculated as a percentage of their earnings instead of the flat weekly rate. This consultation is seeking views on what this percentage should be, to ensure that it provides a fair earnings replacement when these employees need to take time off work. A copy of the relevant equality impact assessment will be deposited in the Library of the House once available.

Next steps for consultation

This package represents the first phase of formal consultations on how best to put our plans into practice.

As is typical with employment legislation, further detail on many of the policies in the Employment Rights Bill will be provided through regulations, and in some cases codes of practice, after Royal Assent. We expect to begin further consultations on these reforms in 2025, seeking significant input from all stakeholders, and anticipate that most reforms will take effect no earlier than 2026.

As outlined in “Next Steps to Make Work Pay”, there are also commitments in the plan to make work pay that we will deliver via existing powers and non-legislative routes, as well as those which will take longer to undertake and implement. We will begin consulting on some of these measures before the end of the year, including launching a call for evidence on tightening the ban on unpaid internships. The Government continue to work closely with stakeholders to ensure that they can plan their contributions to calls for evidence and consultations as they arise.

[HCWS146]

TREASURY

Buy-Now, Pay-Later Products

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Tulip Siddiq): Buy-now, pay-later (BNPL) products have seen increasing use among many UK consumers, helping some to manage unexpected costs. In the six months to January 2023, the Financial Conduct Authority’s (FCA) financial lives survey reported that 14 million consumers used BNPL products.

When provided in a responsible manner, BNPL can provide a useful and affordable source of credit. However, as identified by the 2021 Woolard review, it also has risks. For example, BNPL firms are not required to comply with the provisions of the Consumer Credit Act 1974, and BNPL firms solely offering these types of agreements do not need to adhere to the FCA rules that apply to other consumer credit products. The Government are therefore concerned that consumers using BNPL do not have access to key protections.

On 17 October, the Government published a consultation setting out their plans to fix this by bringing the sector into regulation. The consultation will be open for six weeks until 29 November.

The Government’s approach has been informed by five key principles:

- Consumers must have access to simple, clear, understandable and accessible information;
- consumers should have protection when things go wrong;
- consumers should only be lent to if it is affordable;
- regulation should be proportionate so that consumers have continued access and choice; and
- regulation must be introduced urgently to ensure consumers are protected and the sector has certainty. Once implemented, the Government’s proposals will deliver on these principles.

Under the proposals, BNPL firms will need to be authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority and will be subject to ongoing supervision. The FCA will be able to set appropriate rules on assessing affordability and creditworthiness, reducing the risk that borrowing

is unaffordable. They will also be to set rules on how firms should resolve complaints, including allowing consumers to take complaints to the independent Financial Ombudsman Service.

Consumers will have access to key legal rights, such as section 75, which will make it quicker and easier for consumers to get refunds.

The Government are also proposing to disapply certain information requirements in the Consumer Credit Act 1974 that, if applied to BNPL, could lead to poor consumer outcomes. Instead, the FCA will be able to utilise their powers to apply more appropriate disclosure requirements in its rulebook. This will ensure that consumers can actively engage with the information that firms provide, allowing them to make informed decisions before entering into a BNPL agreement, throughout the duration of the agreement, and especially when they encounter financial difficulty.

Given the need to act urgently—and because HM Treasury has already undertaken previous consultations on this topic—this consultation will be shortened to six weeks. After reviewing feedback, the Government will bring forward legislation as soon as possible. The new regime will come into force 12 months after the legislation is made, once the FCA has finalised its detailed rules. The consultation is available on

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulation-of-buy-now-pay-later-consultation-on-draft-legislation-october-2024>.

[HCWS145]

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Ten-year Health Plan

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Wes Streeting): Our NHS is broken, but not beaten, and we have made it our mission to fix the NHS. But we cannot do it without the help of the people who use it, and so today I am launching *Change NHS: A health service fit for the future*—a national conversation to develop the 10-year Health Plan. This is the next chapter of the NHS’s story and how we will make it fit for the future.

One of my first acts as Secretary of State was to commission an immediate investigation into the performance of the NHS in England, to start an open and honest conversation about the state of our health service and the reforms needed to ensure its longevity, and that it is fit for the future.

On 12 September, Lord Darzi published his independent review, which revealed the scale of the challenge we face. Our NHS is under rising pressure; we are diagnosing ill health too late and not doing enough to prevent it in the first place. It is too hard for people to get an appointment, hospitals are overcrowded, NHS workers are overstretched and costs are escalating.

I am determined to reverse record levels of public dissatisfaction with the NHS and deliver a health service that is there for everyone who needs it. We have already taken important steps, starting with plans to fix the front door of the NHS by providing funding to support

the recruitment of an additional 1,000 GPs by the end of the financial year and settling the pay dispute with resident doctors.

For decades, there has been broad consensus that to overcome the challenges facing the NHS, we must focus on providing more care in the community, so hospitals are able to treat the sickest patients, make better use of technology, and do more to prevent ill health. Despite this consensus, successive Governments have failed to deliver.

We need a different approach to make these crucial shifts and deliver an NHS fit for the future. I want the public and staff to be at the centre of reimagining the NHS, as well as experts from across the health and care landscape. The best ideas are not going to come from above. They have to come from all of us. So, from today, everyone can provide their experience and views at www.change.nhs.uk to help us fix our broken NHS.

[HCWS147]

Petition

Monday 21 October 2024

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Helme Chase Maternity Unit

The petition of residents of the United Kingdom,

Declares that Helme Chase Maternity Unit has been underfunded by the Morecambe Bay NHS Hospitals Trust; further declares that responsibility for this falls upon previous Conservative Government's cuts to rural health services; further notes that sufficient money and resources from the government to fully staff Helme Chase would stop the threat of permanent closure to this local maternity unit from closure.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to consider Helme Chase Maternity Unit's resource needs when providing funding to Morecambe Bay NHS Hospitals Trust.

And the petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Tim Farron, *Official Report*, 9 September 2024; Vol. 753, c. 662.]

[P003006]

Observations from the Minister for Secondary Care (Karin Smyth):

This Government recognise that there are serious issues within maternity services, and we are determined to ensure all women receive safe, personalised and compassionate care. It is our mission to train more midwives and health visitors, incentivise continuity of care and make sure the NHS is squarely focused on tackling the shocking inequalities.

The Government are aware of University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS foundation trust's decision to temporarily suspend birth services at Helme Chase from 10 May 2024 for a period of six months, due to staffing issues. While birth services are temporarily suspended, antenatal and post-natal care plus outpatient appointments at Helme Chase continue as normal. The trust's home birth service and consultant-led birth services at Furness general hospital and the Royal Lancaster infirmary remain unchanged.

The NHS is facing chronic workforce shortages, including in maternity services. Bringing in the staff we need will take time, but this is an absolute priority for this Government. We are committed to growing workforce capacity as quickly as possible to meet local needs and achieve safe staffing levels.

NHS England is responsible for allocating funding to integrated care boards to support them in commissioning services for their local population. The formula for allocating funding reflects the aim of ensuring equal opportunity of access for equal need and must also reflect the duty on NHS England to reduce inequalities between patients with respect to their ability to access services and with respect to the outcomes they achieve.

This formula determines a target allocation or "fair share" for each area, based on a complex assessment of factors such as demography, morbidity, deprivation and the unavoidable cost of providing services in different areas. It is based on independent academic research and is overseen by an independent external group, the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, which provides advice to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the chief executive of NHS England.

Allocations will therefore differ depending on the exact combinations of these factors in each area, as well as how quickly an area can be moved towards its target allocation each year, determined by our convergence—previously "pace-of-change"—rules. This process aims to be transparent and to ensure that changes in allocations do not result in the destabilising of local health economies.

We are aware of the challenges in terms of providing access to healthcare, including maternity services, in rural areas across England due to infrastructure and transport links. As a result, targeted adjustment is made to target funding at integrated care boards to meet the unavoidably higher costs of remote hospital sites, where the costs are higher because the level of activity is too low for the hospital to operate at full efficiency.

Allocations for maternity services are included within integrated care boards' core services allocations, and it is therefore for local systems to determine how this is apportioned across core services, including on maternity. Local commissioners are responsible for ensuring services are designed to meet the needs of their local population, in line with objectives and priorities outlined in the three-year delivery plan for maternity and neonatal services.

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Monday 21 October 2024

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**not later than
Monday 28 October 2024**

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