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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
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HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

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The following abbreviations are used to show a Member's party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 27 October 2022

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Exeter.

Public Spaces Protection Orders Question

11.06 am

Asked by **Lord Clement-Jones**

To ask His Majesty's Government, further to reports that (1) at least 48 councils employ private companies to issue penalties for public spaces protection orders, and (2) many councils pay those companies per fine issued which incentivises companies to issue more penalties than may be necessary, what plans they have to introduce statutory guidance prohibiting this practice.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office (Lord Sharpe of Epsom) (Con): My Lords, it is for local authorities to determine how to operate the powers granted to them in legislation. Contracting enforcement to third parties is a common arrangement and it is for the local authority to ensure it is just. Contractors are bound by the same legal obligations and safeguards in legislation as the councils themselves.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, that is a classic dusty reply from the Home Office. What a contrast with Defra: its guidance on littering, which is a criminal offence, says that incentivising enforcement undermines

“the legitimacy of the enforcement regime”.

Wherever it has occurred, fining for profit has been associated with cases of injustice and now Defra is putting that in statutory guidance. Why is the Home Office not going to do this in its own guidance on the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I think it is worth reminding the House about public space protection orders, which are intended to deal with a particular nuisance or problem, in a specific area, that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life by imposing conditions on the use of that area which apply to everyone. So the Home Office did publish statutory guidance to support local areas to make effective use of these powers. The guidance sets out the importance of focusing on the needs of the victim and the local community, as well as ensuring that the relevant legal tests are met. I repeat that it is for local authorities to determine how to enforce PSPOs and that can include the use of private contractors. Local authorities are obliged to follow the rules set out in the Public Contract Regulations 2015 in their appointment of such companies.

The Earl of Clancarty (CB): My Lords, Kingdom Security issued 553 fines on behalf of North East Lincolnshire Council in the last year alone. One of those £100 fines was to a pensioner who was cycling in Grimsby town centre—something he had done for the

last 40 years and there was no clear signage to say that anything had changed. It may be that the cycling ban is a good thing, but surely a warning would have been sufficient—except that the more fines that are issued, the more the company is rewarded. The Government need to take a look at this increasingly common but unnecessarily aggressive approach.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I would obviously not comment on the specific case raised by the noble Earl, but I would say that local authorities are obliged to follow the rules set out in the Public Contract Regulations. Anybody who has been issued with a penalty enforcement notice which they feel is unjust can submit their arguments as to why they should not have been issued with the fixed-penalty notice to a magistrates' court for consideration.

Lord Porter of Spalding (Con): My Lords, I need to declare my interests as in the register; specifically, in relation to this, I am still the leader of a council, South Holland district in Lincolnshire. We are just about to enter into a contract with a private sector company to enforce all of our litter and fly-tipping regulations, and I will be extremely disappointed if they do not attack that with an aggressive attitude rather than a tame one. There will be one or two people who will be unjustly caught out by the system, and they will have the ability to appeal against it.

Every year, councils across this country waste over £650 million of everybody's money on clearing up behind people who do not care about their neighbours and the places where they live. I strongly urge the Government and the Minister, if they have any time to spare, to look at making sure that magistrates enforce more heavily when we catch the serious offenders, as opposed to letting them off with relatively light fines.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I thank my noble friend for that different perspective, and I absolutely commit to looking into it. I think it is worth reminding people what public spaces protection orders are intended to deal with. It is a particular nuisance or problem in a specific area that is detrimental to the local community's quality of life. I do not think these conditions are unreasonable.

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Affl): Sorry, my Lords, but this fining for profit really is a scandal. In north Wales, there is a massive social cost and the North Wales Against Kingdom Security Facebook group has described the effect of local private enforcement on this region. Never mind this idea of people who do not care about the neighbourhood; the group says:

“These operatives terrorised the elderly and vulnerable in my area. One 94-year-old lady was fined when a tissue blew out of the bottom of her wheelchair. Some elderly people stopped taking their dogs out because they were so afraid of being fined”.

Will the Minister at least agree to read the Manifesto Club report that details this? Defra—unless you think it does not understand it—has made a decision, so why does the Home Office not do the same?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): Well, I have read the Manifesto report to which the noble Baroness refers—all 48 pages of it. I am afraid that I did not necessarily

[LORD SHARPE OF EPSOM]
agree with all the conclusions, some of which required—shall we say?—a bout of syllogistic gymnastics to arrive at. I did look at some of the named councils' websites and found limited public outrage—maybe I was looking in the wrong place. However, I do think that no one should be terrorised in the way described by the noble Baroness.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, Members of the House of Commons voted in a free vote last week to provide nationwide protection for medical premises providing abortion from disruptive and harassing protests and behaviour. Rather than requiring each locality to apply for an individual public space protection order, will the Minister work with Members across the House to ensure that the provision is supported as the Public Order Bill makes its way through this House?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I am very happy to commit to the noble Lord to do that. Indeed, such discussions are ongoing.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): My Lords, I thought that the Liberal Democrats stood for local decision-making. Surely, if the Government overrule local councils on matters such as this, localism ceases to mean anything at all.

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): I entirely agree with my noble friend. I would have thought that the voters would be the key factor in determining whether this is an appropriate policy. I am sure some would prefer fining for effect; some might prefer to vote otherwise.

Baroness Wheatcroft (CB): My Lords, would the Minister accept that commission is generally paid to encourage people to sell? In the financial services sector, for instance, it has led to many instances of mis-selling. If the Minister accepts that paying commission does encourage sales—often mis-selling—does he not accept that Defra may be right in its position?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): As I said earlier, the contracts that are awarded to these companies are governed by quite stringent guidance and rules. It is a matter for local authorities and the contracting companies.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, if Defra is able to do this, why can the Home Office not do it? Defra is also very close to local government and clearly regards this as the wrong thing for local councils to be doing. Why does the Home Office not regard it as the wrong thing for councils to be doing?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): Well, the noble Lord has already asked me that and I think I have already answered. The Home Office has provided statutory guidance to support local areas to make effective use of these powers. I go back to my earlier answer: the local areas are obliged to follow the rules set out in the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 before appointing such companies.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, will the Minister help me, for clarity: does the relevant guidance prohibit or advise against incentivising enforcement for profit motives rather than because it is the right application of the law?

Lord Sharpe of Epsom (Con): No, the relevant guidance does not, because, as I say, this is a matter for the local authorities. As I understand it, there is no mention of profit.

Prisoners: Indeterminate Sentences for Public Protection *Question*

11.14 am

Asked by Lord Moylan

To ask His Majesty's Government what plans they have for resentencing prisoners serving indeterminate sentences for public protection.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Justice (Lord Bellamy) (Con): My Lords, the Government's long-held view is that retrospectively altering imprisonment for public protection sentences would lead to an unacceptable risk to public safety. However, the Justice Select Committee of the other place has now published its report on the IPP sentence, which recommends bringing forward legislation to resentence all those offenders who continue to serve an IPP sentence. The Government will consider carefully all the recommendations in the report, including that one, and respond by 28 November.

Lord Moylan (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble and learned friend for that Answer. In addition to having resentencing at the core of its recommendations, the Justice Select Committee also draws attention to the fact that, according to MoJ figures, it is expected that as many as 2,600 IPP prisoners currently on licence in the community will be recalled over the next four years—on present experience, the majority without having committed a further offence. Does my noble and learned friend accept that these numbers will put an unacceptable strain on the prison estate, that everything should be done to avoid that situation eventuating, and that it is incumbent on His Majesty's Government to strengthen the probation service to ensure that it does not come about?

Lord Bellamy (Con): My Lords, first, I make clear that the Government very much welcome the Select Committee report, which is a powerful document and makes for sober reading. On my noble friend's question, the Government's view is that public protection must come first. Secondly, it is not necessarily the case that this number of recalls will actually occur. Thirdly, and importantly, the Select Committee discusses the need for further resources to the probation service, particularly to supervise prisoners released on licence. The Government will look very closely into further resources for the probation service in that regard.

Lord Blunkett (Lab): My Lords, another day, another Justice Secretary—bedevilling any coherence and continuity in policy. Does the noble and learned Lord agree that putting in place the expert panel suggested

by the Justice Select Committee would be a first step, even if the Government do not accept resentencing? It would allow them to look at the action plan and the important issue the noble Lord, Lord Moylan, just raised of those on licence who find themselves back in prison for the most trivial offence.

Lord Bellamy (Con): My Lords, as I just said, the Government will consider all the recommendations in the report. I should like to make clear that recall does not necessarily happen for trivial reasons. There are quite severe tests to be met for a recall. As far as the resentencing exercise and the panel itself are concerned, the Government will consider all the suggestions in the report, including those suggestions, and report back to the Justice Select Committee by the end of November.

Baroness Burt of Solihull (LD): My Lords, MPs and noble Lords from all parts of both Houses have welcomed the excellent Neill report, and we are looking forward to the government response on 28 November with bated breath. I appreciate that the Minister might be unwilling to be drawn on the contents of the Government's response today, but will he at least agree with me that it is high time that this terrible wrong done to these indeterminate sentence prisoners is righted?

Lord Bellamy (Con): As I said, the Government's view is that, despite the intractability of the problem, public protection must come first. That is the position we have taken over the years. Without at all prejudging the Government's position, I shall say a word about the suggested resentencing exercise. The only reason these offenders are detained is the Parole Board's decision that they are unsafe to be released. That is the situation with which we are faced. If we talk about resentencing in that context, many of the prisoners have already exceeded their original tariff. I simply ask your Lordships to reflect that to resentence for the actual offence may not be a particularly fruitful exercise, because the tariff has already expired. Is it that what we are really considering is a reassessment of the risk to public safety? That is an assessment that the Parole Board is already carrying out. So where does all that take one? I simply leave that question rhetorically for your Lordships.

Lord Ponsonby of Shulbrede (Lab): My Lords, it is certainly true that this is a difficult issue and it is difficult for the Government to manage the risk of IPP prisoners. In answer to the noble Lord, Lord Moylan, the Minister talked about extra resources for the probation service. I should like to press him a little on that. Does he accept that with the high recall rates of IPP prisoners out on licence, there should be special training for probation officers dealing with these former prisoners out on licence to prevent them either reoffending or breaking their licence conditions?

Lord Bellamy (Con): The noble Lord, Lord Ponsonby, made a very similar and powerful point in the recent debate on the probation services and the support they can give these prisoners in the community. The Government will look very closely at that, as they will all the issues raised in the report.

The Lord Bishop of Durham: My Lords, as it happens, I was confirming in His Majesty's Prison Holme House on Monday. One of the people I confirmed was an IPP prisoner. We talked about the desperate impact on family and children of the uncertainty that he has faced. He had been recalled, not for having committed an offence but for breaking conditions. It is very complicated. In looking at this, will His Majesty's Government look at the impact on children and family and the support from not just the probation service but other organisations, such as, in the north-east, Nepacs and Junction 42?

Lord Bellamy (Con): My Lords, the Government will of course consider those considerations along with all the others raised in the report.

Lord Brown of Eaton-under-Heywood (CB): My Lords, 10 years ago, the discredited ISPP scheme was abolished—alas, prospectively only. In the previous seven years, 8,711 people had been sentenced to that regime and almost all remain so. Almost exactly one-third of that number are in prison today, half of that third because they have never yet been released and half because they have been recalled. The rest are subject to and under threat of recall, living a nightmare life. How many of the 8,711 have finally managed to be discharged from this regime by having their licences discharged by definition 10 years or more after their initial release?

Lord Bellamy (Con): My Lords, I will provide the noble and learned Lord with the figures shortly. It is quite a complicated question—more complicated than it seems. I simply remind the House that, as a result of the new arrangements introduced in the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act 2022, there is now an automatic annual referral to the Parole Board for consideration for release for these prisoners. The ability to terminate their licence after the 10 years is now baked into the system.

Lord Reid of Cardowan (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the Minister's response today. I thought it was right, proper and considered. I particularly welcome his emphasis on the primary purpose behind this: public protection. On the one hand, there are no doubt many tragic cases of people who have suffered from elongated imprisonment. On the other, there are many terrible cases of victims who have suffered. On the question of the pressure on the estate, could the Minister find a way of looking at why we are still sending people, including women, to prison for minor offences such as petty debts? That was supposed to be the counterbalance to the introduction of IPP in the first place, but it has never been operationally implemented.

Lord Bellamy (Con): I thank the noble Lord for his question. The Government will look at all those aspects. I echo that, in the debate the other day, if I read the transcript correctly, the word "victim" hardly figured. It is the Government's duty to protect victims. We are dealing with very serious violent and sexual offences, so this is a very difficult question.

Zimbabwe Question

11.25 am

Asked by **Lord Oates**

To ask His Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with the Government of Zimbabwe about the continued detention of opposition Members of the Zimbabwean Parliament Job Sikhala and Godfrey Sithole, and other opposition activists.

The Minister of State, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park) (Con): My Lords, the UK is concerned by the trend of lengthy pre-trial detention of government critics in Zimbabwe. We are monitoring the ongoing detention of the MPs Job Sikhala and Godfrey Sithole. As the ambassador publicly stated on 2 October, the UK is committed to the fundamental right to peaceful assembly and association, as enshrined in Zimbabwe's constitution. The former Minister for Africa also raised the issue with the Foreign Minister of Zimbabwe on 30 June.

Lord Oates (LD): My Lords, the Minister will be aware that opposition MPs Job Sikhala and Godfrey Sithole have now been detained without bail for 142 days in Chikurubi maximum security prison and paraded before court in leg irons; that only a week ago, the Bulawayo MP Jasmine Toffa was violently assaulted as part of an attack on CCC activists; and that across Zimbabwe political violence is raging in the lead-up to the 2023 general elections. Will he join me in calling on the Zimbabwe Government to end this political violence now? Will he join me also in making clear to ZANU-PF officials and Ministers, members of the Zimbabwe Republic Police and Zimbabwe prison officers that the world is watching and holds them accountable for the safety and security of all Zimbabwe's citizens?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): I thank the noble Lord for raising this enormously important issue. He is right: the world is watching and of course the UK is deeply concerned by the challenging human rights situation in Zimbabwe. Political parties, journalists and opponents should be able to operate without any form of harassment. We regularly call for the rights of freedom of assembly and association, as well as the rule of law and due process, to be respected in line with Zimbabwe's own constitution. We monitor all individual cases, including those that he mentioned, such as that of Jasmine Toffa MP. All political violence is concerning and violence against women in politics is of particular concern, particularly in Zimbabwe.

Lord St John of Bletso (CB): My Lords, following the continued violence against opposition supporters and candidates at the Matabeleland election last weekend, and the refusal of the electoral commission to release the electoral roll, what chance is there of there being free and fair elections in Zimbabwe in July?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The noble Lord is right to raise this issue as well. The UK is working closely with international partners to encourage the Zimbabwean Government to live up to their own constitution and commitment to electoral reform,

including by implementing the recommendations from the 2018 electoral monitoring reports. We recognise that there has been only very limited progress to date on the electoral reforms recommended in the 2018 paper. Key outstanding areas include a transparent voter registration process, publication of an accurate voters roll, transparent use of state-owned resources and more effort to demonstrate the independence of the electoral commission. This remains a priority in our discussions with not just Zimbabwe but neighbouring countries as well.

The Lord Bishop of Southwark: My Lords, the diocese of Southwark is linked with four of the five Anglican dioceses in Zimbabwe and the neighbouring diocese of Rochester with the fifth, Harare. Does the Minister agree that the systemic corruption and long-standing poor level of governance in Zimbabwe continually undermine civil society and reduce the well-being of the people and all the institutions there, including the Church?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, Zimbabwe is a country with extraordinary potential and an extraordinary history, and of course it is right that the current political approach inhibits that potential. The UK is a long-standing partner of Zimbabwe and we provide significant levels of ODA. However, I want to be clear to the House that we do so in a way that avoids government-to-government bilateral financial aid. In other words, none of the money that we provide is channelled through the Government. Instead, we work through multilateral organisations, and wherever we possibly can we support civil society and NGOs in the private sector.

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, just to pick up on that point, I have raised on numerous occasions with Ministers the continued repression of civil society in Zimbabwe, including of trade unionists. Can the Minister tell us the latest FCDO assessment of the passage of the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill, which Ministers have acknowledged could be used to restrict civil space? Could he tell us also how we are working with allies, global civil society and interfaith groups to ensure that it is their voice that is heard in Zimbabwe and not simply government voices?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The Government very much agree with the opening remarks of the noble Lord. We are concerned that the Private Voluntary Organisations Amendment Bill, if it becomes law and is implemented, could very easily be used to undermine the ability of civil society to operate effectively in Zimbabwe. It also puts at risk its ability to deliver development and humanitarian assistance. We engage very widely, not only with civil society within Zimbabwe and through our overseas development assistance, which I mentioned earlier, but also, importantly, with South Africa. As noble Lords will know, we have deep and long-standing ties with South Africa, recognising the important role that the African Union and the Southern African Development Community have in relation to Zimbabwe. UK officials speak very often on a broad range of issues, including of course on Zimbabwe.

Lord Hayward (Con): My Lords, reference has already been made to the elections in 2018; at that time I was one of the observers from this country on behalf of the Commonwealth, with the noble Baroness, Lady Jay. The report was pretty damning, particularly in relation to the events after the general election in 2018. Can my noble friend ensure that very strong representations are made to the electoral commission, because it has been lamentable in any action? It was before the 2018 election, and there is no sign that it will enforce any form of free and fair elections next year.

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, we will use whatever leverage we have to maximise the chance of free and fair elections. I make a broader point: we know that President Mnangagwa wants more engagement with the UK—that is clear—and in many respects we want him to have that too. However, deeper re-engagement with the UK will require meaningful political and economic reform and respect for human rights and the rule of law in line with the President's own stated commitments when he took office. The former Africa Minister reinforced that message when she met the President last year at COP.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I admire my noble friend's consistency on this issue. I am afraid that this consistency is not reflected in the Ministers for Africa; we will now be on our sixth in just three years. I heard the Minister refer to the welcome involvement of officials with our SADC friends. However, have there been any ministerial meetings with SADC allies on a regional solution to ensure that there is the highest pressure for an end to political violence and the holding of free and fair elections?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): My Lords, I cannot provide details of ministerial meetings; that is not to say that they have not happened—I just do not have the details of specific meetings. However, I know that at numerous international fora the then Africa Minister, as well as other Ministers including myself, have had discussions with neighbouring countries in the region where this and other issues have been raised. However, I will provide details on specific meetings with SADC after this Question.

Baroness Hoey (Non-Afl): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Oates, has outlined the shocking violence perpetrated by ZANU-PF and Mnangagwa on anyone, really, who opposes the regime. The economic situation is dire, and hunger is being used against anyone who opposes the regime. Does not the visit of the South African President—the first state visit under His Majesty the King—give the Government a wonderful opportunity to work with the South African Government and talk to them about how they, and other countries in Africa, can influence together to ensure that there really will be free and fair elections next year in Zimbabwe?

Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park (Con): The noble Baroness has been a champion of Zimbabwe for many years, and I pay tribute to her for that. She is right to identify this upcoming visit as an opportunity. There is no doubt that South Africa, and indeed southern African countries, not least through SADC, have a

particular ability to influence Zimbabwe, far more so than we can. I am sure that the topic we are discussing today will be on the agenda when the visit happens.

COP 27 Question

11.35 am

Asked by **Lord Dubs**

To ask His Majesty's Government who will represent the United Kingdom at the COP 27 conference in Egypt.

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) (Con): My Lords, the UK will have a strong delegation at COP 27, including the Foreign Secretary and several other Ministers, who will engage with international counterparts on the transition to net zero and climate resilience. Alok Sharma MP was reappointed COP president on 25 October, leading the UK's contribution to the successful implementation of the historic Glasgow climate pact. We also expect a significant presence on the part of civil society and business, building on their participation in Glasgow last year.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the Answer from the Minister that the Foreign Secretary and other senior Ministers will be attending, particularly in the light of the comments made yesterday by the Secretary-General of the United Nations about how important it is that we keep climate change in our sights. Can the Minister comment on one further thing? Apparently, according to the media, the previous Government said that they did not want His Majesty King Charles to attend COP. Can she make it clear that if the King wants to attend, he will be welcome to do so?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My Lords, I should start by saying that His Majesty is globally recognised for his foresight and leadership on climate and sustainability over five decades—in fact, well before these issues became mainstream. However, the Government do not comment on communications and advice between our Prime Minister and the monarch.

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, that is entirely understandable, and one would not expect my noble friend to say anything else. Nevertheless, I think it is a widely held view in this country that His Majesty would give great extra prestige to this conference merely by his presence. If that message could be taken on board and communicated to the right quarters, I am sure a service would be done, not just to the nation but to the world.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I thank my noble friend for his message. I know that His Majesty is also looking to arrange a global event in advance of COP to talk to some of the key people involved. However, as I said, I cannot comment on communication and advice between him and the Prime Minister or the Government—that remains confidential.

Baroness Sheehan (LD): My Lords, the ban on King Charles attending the conference imposed by the previous incumbent of No. 10 is, quite frankly, churlish and rather unseemly. The US climate envoy, John Kerry, Alok Sharma himself—the outgoing COP 26 president—and even the *Daily Telegraph* believe he should go. The Egyptian Government have renewed their invitation to the King. Will the Minister urge the Prime Minister to lift the ban?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): Noble Lords will know that this is a matter for His Majesty.

Baroness Boycott (CB): My Lords, I add my voice to agreeing that the King should be going, but to build on what the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, said, yesterday, António Guterres said that this was the catastrophe and that all other catastrophes we are living through will only get worse. Why have the Government downgraded Alok Sharma's post from the Cabinet, and can the Minister assure the House that a new Cabinet post will be created specifically to look at the climate crisis?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): It is the case that Alok Sharma is no longer a Minister nor in the Cabinet. However, the Prime Minister has appointed him as COP president, and that provides continuity and retains his expertise in this important role. I have been struck by his tireless work over the past year, and he is always particularly focused on implementation and the international perspective, as well as other issues. The thing is to get COP 27 done in a brilliant way in Sharm el-Sheikh from 6 to 18 November 2022. I cannot comment on appointments by the Prime Minister.

Baroness Jones of Whitchurch (Lab): My Lords, should we not get our own house in order to earn the respect of all the other countries that will be at COP 27? Just as an example, we already have a commitment to have 30% of land for nature by 2030. So far, the statistics are that we have only 3%, so we have a long way to go before we can hold our heads up at COP 27 and earn the respect globally that we deserve.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I understand from my noble friend that we lead the campaign for 30/30.

Baroness Verma (Con): My Lords, I welcome my noble friend's response to the question of the noble Baroness, Lady Boycott, but I encourage her to have discussions between our Ministers and other Ministers at COP 27 on getting businesses to help the less developed countries be able to respond better by investing in them, and countries helping to support that through business. Will my noble friend comment on that?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I am very glad my noble friend raised that, because the Glasgow climate pact emphasised the importance of collaboration across sectors in all parts of society to deliver on climate change, and business plays an important part. I remember from my experience of net-zero plans when I was in business, many years ago. Business can contribute in some of the poorest countries in the world by helping

the transition, reducing carbon and being more efficient. There is a real win-win there, and what has been encouraging both at Glasgow and in the prospective agendas for Sharm el-Sheikh is how businesses are stepping up to the plate in this important area.

Baroness Ludford (LD): My Lords, a few answers ago the Minister said that the attendance of the King at COP 27 was a matter for the King. Was that an answer to my noble friend Lady Sheehan, who asked whether the new Government have lifted the ban on King Charles III attending the conference in Egypt? A quick yes or no would suffice.

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): There is no ban. This is a matter for the palace, and I really cannot be drawn on communication between the Government and the monarch. This is a matter for them, but I reiterate that we are very fortunate that our King is so globally identified with nature and tackling climate change.

Lord Deben (Con): Can my noble friend help me? Can we now expect that the Cabinet committee chaired by the Prime Minister will continue, that the Prime Minister will chair it and that it will be regular in dealing with climate change, which, after all, is the biggest material threat to ourselves and the world that exists?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I know all that my noble friend has done to help on climate change and his great work chairing the Climate Change Committee. As for the Cabinet committees for the new Government, we will have to wait to find out exactly what they look like.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, I bring the Minister back to her answer to my noble friend, who asked about the 30/30 campaign. The Minister said that we lead the campaign on this; it is all very well leading campaigns, but after 12 years in government, we have not had actually made much progress. We are talking about 3% of land rather than 30%. With COP 27 pending, could she not say a little more about the implementation? Having led the campaign with such vigour—but obviously not great response—when will we get to the 30% required by the campaign?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): On the 30%, there is obviously lots to do. I believe that 100 countries have now signed up. We have been very good at leading other countries and trying to get them involved in these matters. Obviously, it is work in progress. The UK is recognised as a global leader on many aspects of climate change. Our emissions reduced by 47% since 1990, and we have a stretching NDC, but, perhaps most of all, we are the first nation to legislate for net zero by 2050.

Lord Hamilton of Epsom (Con): Does my noble friend accept that COP 27 is unlikely to be a success as long as India and China go on building coal-fired power stations and increasing the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere, whatever we do in this country?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My noble friend is right that carbon and weather do not respect borders, so it is very important that all countries across the world look at these things. I remember doing work with the Indians on climate change in my business days and, in some areas, they do a lot of very good things, but the energy transition is one of the challenges that all countries face and is something that can be discussed constructively at COP 27.

Home Secretary: Resignation and Reappointment

Commons Urgent Question

The following Answer to an Urgent Question was given in the House of Commons on Wednesday 26 October.

“I was disappointed, on leaving my previous Department last night, that I would no longer be seeing the right honourable Lady across the Dispatch Box, and I am so glad that she has put that right for me today. She has a good memory, and I know she will recall that last week the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office—my honourable friend the Member for Bassetlaw, Brendan Clarke-Smith—said, in responding to a Question that she had tabled, that questions relating to ‘breaches of the ministerial code’

or related issues

‘are a matter for the Cabinet Office, not the Home Office’.—[*Official Report, Commons, 22/10/22; col. 834.*]

That is why I, not the Home Secretary, am here answering the question today. My honourable friend the Member for Bassetlaw set out the circumstances regarding the departure of the Home Secretary last week. The Home Secretary made an error of judgment. She recognised her mistake, and she took responsibility for her actions. The Ministerial Code allows for a range of sanctions when mistakes have been made. The Home Secretary recognised her mistake, raised the matter and stepped down. Her resignation was accepted by the then Prime Minister.

The right honourable Lady will be aware that ministerial appointments are a matter solely for the Prime Minister, as the sovereign’s principal adviser on the appointment, dismissal and acceptance of resignations of Ministers. The Prime Minister was very clear in his speech to the nation yesterday when he said:

‘This government will have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level.’

He has said that he will work ‘day in, day out’ to earn the trust of the country and live up to the demands and expectations that the public rightly have of their Prime Minister. The Prime Minister expects all Ministers to uphold the values and standards set by the Ministerial Code, as the public would rightly expect.

As I have said, the Home Secretary made an error of judgment. She recognised her mistake, and she took accountability for her actions in stepping down. After consideration, the Prime Minister has decided, given the apology issued by the Home Secretary, to reappoint her to the Government. They are now focused, together, on working to make our streets safer and to control our borders. However, while we should learn

from mistakes, we should also look to the future, and the Prime Minister has appointed a team of Ministers to lead the country through the issues that it faces.

All Ministers are bound by the Ministerial Code, and the Prime Minister expects his Ministers to uphold the code and hold the highest standards. As I have noted, the code allows for a range of sanctions for breaches, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the code was updated in May to make that clear. On an ongoing basis, we will need—every Minister—through our actions and in how we conduct ourselves, to demonstrate that we can continue to command this Prime Minister’s confidence as we tackle the huge challenges that are to come for the country.”

11.46 am

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, the response in the other place that the sacking or resignation of the Home Secretary in last week’s Government was for “an error of judgment”, and that she recognised her mistake and stood down, is now under scrutiny and it is starting to wilt like a lettuce. A range of sanctions is available for the breach of the Ministerial Code, yet for this particular breach, which the Government now want to play down, apparently resignation was the only option, not the other sanctions available.

Last night, Sir Jake Berry, who was the Chairman of the Conservative Party until Tuesday, said that there had been “multiple breaches” of the Ministerial Code. Numerous questions are now becoming more evident—it is quite a murky business—but two are really important for Parliament. First, did the Home Secretary immediately refer herself for this security breach, or did it come to light only after being reported by somebody else? Secondly—I was surprised this question was not answered by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons yesterday, when Keir Starmer asked it, so I will ask it again—have officials raised any concerns about Rishi Sunak’s decision to reappoint Suella Braverman as Home Secretary?

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Baroness Neville-Rolfe) (Con): My Lords, I think it is actually very simple. Noble Lords have seen Ms Braverman’s letter. She made a mistake when she was Home Secretary. She acknowledged the mistake; she acknowledged an error of judgment; she apologised. That was dealt with by the previous Prime Minister and Ms Braverman resigned. Separately, the present Prime Minister has decided to appoint Ms Braverman as Home Secretary.

Everyone deserves a second chance. The Prime Minister was clear that this is a Government with integrity, professionalism and accountability, and I believe it was right to bring her back. On the question of advice, noble Lords will know that we do not comment on internal advice; such advice is confidential.

Lord Paddick (LD): My Lords, apparently the Member of Parliament for Fareham, when previously Home Secretary, sent a restricted document to her own personal email address and then forwarded it to a Back-Bench MP and to someone she wrongly thought was the MP’s wife, apparently to get their advice. It was the

[LORD PADDICK]
second recipient of her email who alerted the authorities, not the MP for Fareham. If she is so unsure of her own judgment, and given that she goes to such lengths to circumvent security measures, why is she now Home Secretary?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): My Lords, I can only say again that mistakes were made and that the Home Secretary acknowledged those. It is a good thing to acknowledge when mistakes have been made. She apologised, sanctions were applied under the last Administration and the new Government have put together a united team to deliver for the British people, and that includes Ms Braverman. She needs to be able to focus on illegal immigration, on control of borders and on making our streets safer. She needs to deal with the murderous channel crossings criminal racket, and I hope the party opposite will support that.

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, if the Government are so keen on second chances, if I threw a can of soup at a painting, would the police be prepared to give me a second chance and not imprison me or penalise me in any way?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): It goes beyond the scope of the Question today, but we do have rehabilitation of offenders and we have a court system. As was said in the other place, there is an opportunity for redemption, and we must look forwards, not backwards.

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, can my noble friend the Minister say, having been issued with the Ministerial Code, what training is given to all new Ministers, not only in the other place but in this place?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I am not sure how much I can say, but as a new Minister, I can confirm that extensive security training is given to new Ministers. On taking up office, I was impressed at the security training. Noble Lords will note that there is a confidential annexe to the ministerial code which deals with security issues. This is a very important matter, which we all take very seriously. People can make mistakes—I remember this from being outside government—but there are remedies and they have been served.

Lord Blunkett (Lab): My Lords, I know that the Minister, of all people, will understand the sensitivity of what I am putting to her, but I do so nevertheless. Is it not true that there could be two really unfortunate outcomes to the reappointment of the current Home Secretary? One is the reluctance of the security and intelligence services to provide the briefings and the openness needed, and the second is the reluctance of other international security agencies to share information with us if they are fearful that it will be passed out from government?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): As the noble Lord knows, Ministers receive the security briefing that they need to do their job in an appropriate manner. The Government focus a great deal of effort on this. There is not a great deal to add.

Lord Beith (LD): My Lords, when the previous Prime Minister accepted—perhaps invited—the resignation of the person who is now Home Secretary, did she or the Cabinet Secretary envisage that a period as short as a week would be sufficient expiation for what had been done wrong, or is that judgment now irrelevant?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): Things have moved a little bit faster in recent weeks than perhaps some of us would have foreseen, even the currency markets. These circumstances are very unusual, and it is very important that people are not excluded for ever from opportunities. The Prime Minister felt, in his wisdom, that he needed to bring together a Cabinet with different talents and experience. She brings experience and talents to the job and, as I have said, she apologised and acknowledged her mistake, and that was dealt with by the previous Prime Minister. You have to allow us to look forward.

Baroness Chakrabarti (Lab): My Lords, as a self-identifying tofu-eating person who believes in the rehabilitation of offenders, I am glad to hear that from the Minister and I look forward to hearing it from Ms Braverman in relation to other people. To apply the rehabilitation of offenders, we must look forensically at the nature of the offending and the mitigation. Can the Minister please readdress the question asked by my noble friend about how this offending was detected? Was it detected because the former and current Home Secretary owned up, or because somebody else reported her? What does the Minister say about Mr Berry's suggestions that there were "multiple breaches", not a single breach, of the Ministerial Code?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): I cannot comment further on the detail. I do not know exactly what happened, in any event, but what I am clear about is that Ms Braverman wrote a letter to the Prime Minister setting out why she was resigning, and she resigned in good order and quickly. She deserves another chance. Mistakes were made—I will not go into those mistakes—but the Government have moved on, they have reappointed the Home Secretary and she must now be allowed to get on with her job. We seem to be going round and round in circles. I slightly feel like Boycott today, rather than Bairstow, but we need to give her a chance.

The Lord Bishop of Durham: My Lords, I do not come at this from any party-political angle. The question in my mind is this. Even if all the justifications are correct—and there are big questions about that—was it wise, in seeking to offer integrity and leadership, to appoint someone so rapidly who had raised so many questions about whether she was suitable to hold the office?

Baroness Neville-Rolfe (Con): Ms Braverman apologised. She resigned from a great office of state. She accepted the remedies of the Ministerial Code. Things then moved on at great speed. We have different circumstances. We have a Government who need to deliver for the British people in difficult economic circumstances. She needs to be able to play her part in making our borders safer and better, and she needs the support of this House.

50th Anniversary of the Expulsion of Asians from Uganda

Motion to Take Note

11.58 am

Moved by Lord Popat

That this House takes note of the 50th anniversary of the expulsion of Asians from Uganda.

Lord Popat (Con): My Lords, it is an honour and a privilege to move this Motion. It is with great pride that, 10 years ago, I had the privilege to lead a debate on the 40th anniversary of the expulsion of Ugandan Asians, and now I lead a debate on the 50th anniversary. Debates such as this mean a great deal, not only to me and my fellow Ugandan Asians but to all those who came to the UK and made it their home. I am grateful to the powers that be for granting government time for such an important and historic debate.

During my preparation for this debate, and reflecting on the past 10 years, I noted with great sadness that some of those who spoke in the last debate are no longer with us. Their contribution to this House, and especially to the Ugandan Asians, will not be forgotten. I pay tribute to all those who are no longer with us for everything that they did to help champion this cause over the years, and for their efforts in making us Ugandan Asians feel so special. In particular, I pay tribute to the late Lord Sheikh by sharing with you the words he used on his experience of leaving Uganda and coming to the United Kingdom:

“Idi Amin took everything from us, except what we had in our minds. Because we were doing very well in Uganda, we came here and we were prepared to work hard. What we did in this country was perhaps what we had learned in Uganda, and that is to use our brains, to use our initiative, and we have done very well”.

I remember the contributions made by so many Members of both Houses, but I first pay tribute to the Father of the House of Commons, the right honourable Sir Peter Bottomley, who welcomed Ugandan Asians into his house, as did his wife, then Member of Parliament for South West Surrey, now my noble friend Lady Bottomley of Nettlestone.

I also pay tribute to the then president of the Young Conservatives, David Hunt, now my noble friend Lord Hunt of Wirral. Despite the rhetoric of Enoch Powell at the time, which unfortunately stirred up racism within the party, he took the brave decision to stand up for Ugandan Asians and speak out for them at the party conference. It was a momentous occasion. I am glad that my noble friend sits in this House to remind us of his bravery in standing up to prejudice, and I look forward to listening to his contribution on this subject.

The noble Lord, Lord Dykes, is also with us and is going to speak later. He is the former Conservative Member of Parliament for Harrow East and Parliamentary Private Secretary to the then Prime Minister Edward Heath. Having worked with the noble Lord to support the community, I went on to become the president of his local association, Harrow East—an area that took in the second highest number of Ugandan Asians. They are still thriving there.

One person who was not present at the last debate 10 years ago was my noble friend Lord Gadhia. He was a refugee who came to this country as a toddler, aged two. He is a shining example of the values Ugandan Asians share with Britain. Just last week, he was appointed as a non-executive director at the Court of the Bank of England—one of the most prestigious roles in the UK. Sitting in this House as Lord Gadhia, he is a managing trustee of the British Asian Trust and he works hard to protect the legacy of Ugandan Asians. He is leading the hosting of a high-profile 50th commemorative service in London next week, on Wednesday 2 November, which will be attended by a senior member of the Royal Family.

I also pay tribute to all who have come together this year to celebrate and tell the story of how 28,000 Ugandan Asian refugees fled Uganda from the brutal dictator Idi Amin and made the UK their home. What an amazing success story Ugandan Asians have had in this country, despite some people trying to paint Britain as a hostile and unfriendly place. The reality that I and many people like me have come to know is very different.

During the time of the expulsion, many countries turned their backs on us, including many neighbouring east African countries. However, it was the then Prime Minister Edward Heath who stood up against the rhetoric of people such as Enoch Powell and demonstrated the compassion that I have come to associate with Britain. Britain welcomed us in our time of need, like the welcome we are giving to the Ukrainians as they battle against the Russians.

The Britain we have now looks very different from the one I entered 50 years ago; we have made great progress on many issues, including the integration of immigrants in society. This has allowed them to thrive and to take hold of the opportunities the country has to offer. This has been reflected across society, including in politics, with the most recent Cabinets being the most diverse in history.

This debate would not be complete without mentioning our new Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak—also of east African origin, as his parents came from east Africa. His appointment as the first British Asian Prime Minister is an excellent reflection of the inclusivity of this great country.

This progress would not have been possible if British people had not been willing to open their hearts and homes to groups such as the Ugandan Asians, who were willing to integrate and work towards a cohesive society. The key building blocks lie in the values Ugandan Asians have, including a belief in aspiration, enterprise, the importance of family and, of course, patriotism—four of the values that Britain holds dear. In sharing these values, Ugandan Asians feel part of the community and work hard to contribute to it where they can, whether that be through philanthropy, volunteering or celebrating important events such as the Queen’s Platinum Jubilee. Ugandan Asians do all they can to pay back the kindness they have received since coming to this country.

They have also made their fair share of contributions in all areas, especially economically, as can be seen through the many corner shops that started in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of those who started with a

[LORD POPAT]

corner shop have gone on to run large corporate businesses. In the 1970s, there was a common joke, “What is an Indian without a shop?” The answer is a doctor. Now, we might say the answer is the Prime Minister.

This joke largely manifested into the tremendous success of Ugandan Asians in all walks of life. There are examples in this House, such as the noble Baroness, Lady Vadera, who was the first Ugandan Asian Minister to sit on the Labour Benches. Younger generations diversified into white-collar jobs, particularly in the City of London, where they have distinguished themselves. Other rising stars include Tushar Morzaria, until recently the group finance director of Barclays Bank and now a non-executive director of Legal & General; and Bina Mehta, the UK chair of KPMG, the largest accountancy firm in the world. There have been many success stories in large corporations, legal, accountancy, medicine and engineering. In sports, the military and the Civil Service, one can easily see the strength and depth that Ugandan Asians have brought to Britain over the past half a century. Do you know what? More will transpire.

Looking to Uganda, the economy fell apart under Idi Amin but it is now a thriving country with which we enjoy a great trading relationship. The change that has occurred since the expulsion is truly remarkable. In 2016, I was appointed the Prime Minister’s trade envoy to Uganda, Rwanda and DRC, and bilateral trade with Uganda has since grown from roughly £150 million to more than £5 billion. This growth would not have been possible without President Museveni, who has taken Uganda to new heights. However, while we are talking, we must remember that half a million Ugandans were killed by that brutal dictator Idi Amin. Our thoughts and prayers go to their families today.

Today, the high commissioner from Uganda to the United Kingdom is also a Ugandan Asian, Her Excellency Nimisha Madhvani, who came to the UK as a refugee like me and went back upon President Museveni’s request to call back many Ugandan Asians to their birthplace. The high commissioner has had a successful career in the Diplomatic Service and I am pleased that she is here today by the Bar; she will be instrumental in further strengthening the relationship between the UK and Uganda. Ugandan Asians also play a key role in being a living bridge between the two great countries.

Our relationship with Uganda is a good example of where our focus should be since leaving the EU. We want to be global Britain, which should not just be a slogan but put into action by trading with the great continent of Africa. My noble friend Lady Verma raised an issue at Question Time on COP 27 and how we should help poor countries. I will briefly talk about Africa as a continent—a continent of 30 million square kilometres, larger than China, India, Europe and America put together, with 17% of the world’s population and less than 3% of the global GDP. That population will double in 30 years, so a quarter of the world’s population will be in Africa.

Post Brexit, I do not think our future lies in the South China Sea or Asia; Africa is the continent on which we should focus more to help and support it, and to make sure that our inward investment continues to get people out of poverty. President Museveni recently said:

“Still, today some balk at using the Commonwealth to its full potential because it was born from colonialism. But the past is gone. What remains is our shared inheritance, and it is for all the Commonwealth’s members to rebuild, reshape, and take ownership of our historic club. We should use it trade closer and better, and make it what it should be: the vehicle for our shared futures.”

The sentiments also tie in well with why we celebrate the expulsion. It is not just to remember the tragedy that many faced 50 years ago but, more importantly, to celebrate the welcome we received on arrival in the UK and the contributions made by many since. President Museveni is also very keen that we focus, post Brexit, more on the Commonwealth. As I always say, the Commonwealth is our family.

There are too many individuals to thank them all by name, but I want them to know that their contributions have not gone unnoticed. A few people I do want to thank by name are the chairman of the Uganda Resettlement Board, the late Tom Critchley, and Praful Patel, the only Ugandan Asian to be on that board. I am glad that the late Tom Critchley’s son, Alan, is here to listen to this debate, given the contribution his late father made in helping Ugandan Asians resettle in the UK.

Finally, I thank all those who welcomed us and helped us to develop as a community. A special thanks goes to those volunteers who met us at the airport; to Ted Heath and his Cabinet, who took such a courageous political decision; and to the late Her Majesty the Queen, who has been an inspirational figure and truly represents the best of British.

12.11 pm

Lord Bach (Lab): My Lords, 10 years on, I have even more pleasure in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Popat, on securing this debate. That debate was on 6 December 2012 and it was excellent. It involved 11 speakers. What does that make today’s debate, with more than double that number and, of course, celebrating a 50th anniversary?

I want to speak about Leicester, where it is estimated that one in five refugees from Uganda permanently settled. Certainly, within a few months, at least 10,000 people arrived, not put off by the now-notorious advertisement placed in Ugandan newspapers. Indeed, some of those who came may have been encouraged by that advertisement rather than put off by it. It should be said, and my noble friend Lord Parekh, who is not in his place today, said it 10 years ago, that the advertisement itself referred to advice then given by the Uganda Resettlement Board to the same effect. It was a few months later that the very valuable Section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966, which gave extra money, was introduced. By 1981, however, 44,000 people of Indian origin, following on from the Ugandan refugees, had made Leicester their home. They were, for the most part, welcomed by Leicester people and the city council, who recognised their obvious talents and the values held by these newcomers.

Now, many years later, there can be no argument that Leicester has become a better, more lively, more prosperous, more culturally alive and greater city as a direct result of Amin’s inhuman and cruel actions. I became a councillor in what was then called St Margaret’s ward, part of the Belgrave district, where many refugees

from Uganda and east Africa settled. Indeed, my fellow councillor, Gordhan Parmar, himself from east Africa, became very proudly the first Asian Lord Mayor of Leicester. The increasing diversity of Leicester that makes it the city it is today faced serious and nasty opposition from the hard right, but it failed because the newcomers were obviously good citizens from the start, with a huge amount to offer.

Since our last debate, I have been privileged to be the police and crime commissioner for the city, with a major role in respecting and representing the community in its relationship with the police. This has involved working very closely with many who originally arrived from Uganda and the next generation—their descendants. There have been bad times, including the terrible kidnapping and murder of an elderly jeweller in the Belgrave area absolutely frightened the community—as it should—but the community showed huge good sense and solidarity, allied with support for the police. Thankfully, the serious criminals responsible were brought to justice by a mixture of brilliant policing and community help. Overall, it has been a joy for me to work with this new generation, whose parents and grandparents arrived, penniless and destitute, in a strange country and who, by their hard work, huge talents and great values have made Leicester and the UK a better place. In every conceivable way, this is an anniversary that we should celebrate.

12.16 pm

Lord Dholakia (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Papat, for this very important debate on the expulsion of Asians from Uganda 50 years ago. This comes at a time when we are celebrating, this week, the momentous day of Diwali in the lives of all Indians in India and throughout the Indian diaspora across the world. I wish all your Lordships a happy Diwali and a joyous new year.

This is an event I wish to celebrate for another reason. We have, for the first time in Britain, elected a person of Indian origin as Prime Minister; he now occupies the deserved place in Downing Street. Of course, as I explained to John Pienaar on Times Radio, I would have preferred a general election, not just a coronation arranged by the Conservative Party. It is time we considered proper electoral reforms that would update our democracy.

I wish to draw attention to the contribution of the Indian community in Britain. I make no apology for picking up the statistics produced by Alpesh Patel, chairman of City Hindus Network. He had this to say:

“The British Indian diaspora is one of the largest migrant communities in this country, numbering more than 1.5 million. Many British Indians have contributed to their local communities and the national economy by starting businesses in a range of sectors, including hospitality, energy, healthcare, engineering and property.

Data from 2020 shows that 654 businesses owned by British Indians had an annual turnover in excess of £100,000. Together, these companies generated £36.84 billion and contributed more than £1 billion in corporation tax. The top five businesses owned by British Indians have created more than 100,000 jobs in the UK.

As Britain faces skills gaps, Home Office figures show that Indian nationals account for 46 per cent of all skilled worker visas issued this year. Looking back to 2020, data from Oxford University's Migration Observatory found that almost half (47 per cent) of

Indian nationals who migrated to this country filled high-skilled jobs in sectors including science, engineering, technology, healthcare and education.”

I was born in Tanzania, next door to Uganda. I came to the UK in 1956, before we faced the issues affecting the east African Asians from 1971 onwards. Idi Amin forced thousands of Asians to leave Uganda, which brought panic, heartache and fear to the community there, who regarded Uganda as their particular home. In 1972, there were around 80,000 Ugandans of Indian descent in the country and it is estimated that close to 30,000 were accepted for settlement in the United Kingdom.

Here lies an important story that I hope Suella Braverman takes note of. In my early days in your Lordships' House, I met Lord Carr of Hadley, who had been Home Secretary at that time. He said that it took less than five minutes of Cabinet meeting time to agree to the admission of Uganda Asians to the UK. There is a lesson for all of us to understand about how an important decision can be taken by the Cabinet without referring to all the prejudices that go with it. This was at a time when adverse comments about immigrants were rife in this country.

Many have argued that it is important to articulate a shared sense of national identity in contemporary conditions of flux and change. It is difficult to reconcile this with diversity, openness, and pluralism of belief and practice. What we forget is that those fixed notions of shared identity, even if they could be agreed on, are less necessary now than they were at that time.

Someone who was most effective and a real heavyweight was the then Colonial Secretary, Iain Macleod. He was adamant that we had given a right of British citizenship to Commonwealth citizens, and that we had a duty to honour this pledge. Where are the people of this stature in the Tory party today? Someone should have an open word with Suella Braverman about handling complex matters of asylum and immigration in a purposeful way.

There is another matter that I wish to draw to your Lordships' attention. We did not deal with the settlement of migrants systematically until we set up the Uganda Resettlement Board. Until then, migrants came and relied for settlement on the contacts they had made in this country and the help they had received from a number of colleagues around.

The time allocated is very limited. In conclusion, I thank the thousands of volunteers who gave so much of their time to help in the process of settlement. I support the mention of the names of Sir Peter Bottomley and the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, for the contribution they made in accommodating new arrivals in this country.

Recent events in Leicester clearly indicate the success—

Lord Davies of Gower (Con): Could I ask the noble Lord to bring it to a conclusion now, please?

Lord Dholakia (LD): My Lords, thank you.

12.22 pm

Lord Sentamu (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as a former president of Makerere University Students Association. Together with the then president of Makerere

[LORD SENTAMU]

University Students' Guild, Olara Otunnu, we opposed President Idi Amin Dada's decree of 4 August 1972 to expel within 90 days Asians who were Ugandan citizens and pleaded with him to observe international law and obligations regarding Asian citizens of other nations.

I am grateful to Thomas Brown of the House of Lords Library for his article *Ugandan Asians: 50 Years Since Their Expulsion from Uganda*. He writes that

"Ugandan President Idi Amin, who had seized power in a military coup the previous year, ordered the expulsion"

reportedly following

"a dream in which he had been instructed by God to expel them", because they had been

"sabotaging Uganda's economy, deliberately retarding economic progress, fostering widespread corruption and treacherously refraining from integrating in the Ugandan way of life".

He continues:

"Estimates of the number of Ugandan Asians subject to Amin's announcement vary, ranging from 55,000 to up to 80,000. However, sources such as the Economist, in a recent article marking the anniversary, have put the number of people of Asian descent in Uganda subject to Amin's decision at around 76,000 ... The variation in cited population figures appears to stem in part from an exemption announced shortly after Amin's original announcement for those Ugandan Asians holding Ugandan citizenship, although many of these people were later compelled to leave the country and rendered stateless in the process ... Of the estimated total, around half are thought to have held British passports with another 9,000 holding Indian or Pakistani nationality and the remainder either holding or having applied for Ugandan citizenship."

Any country that renders its citizens stateless by compelling them to leave commits a heinous crime and violates the rule of law, and it breaches international obligations when it expels citizens of other nations from the country of their birth. I am deeply sorry that our opposition and plea to President Idi Amin were not heeded in the end.

Olara Otunnu and I were conscripted to accompany Idi Amin on his trip to Somalia to negotiate a trade and education deal with Siad Barre, the President of that country. Aboard the presidential jet, we reminded Idi Amin that when Uganda became independent on 9 October 1962 it incorporated the common law, statutes and case law of the United Kingdom into Ugandan law, including chapters 39 and 40 of the Magna Carta of 1215:

"39. No ... man shall be seized or imprisoned or stripped of his rights or possessions, or outlawed or exiled, or deprived of his standing in any other way, nor will we proceed with force against him, or send others to do so, except by the lawful judgment of his equals or by the law of the land ... 40. To no one will we sell, to no one deny or delay right or justice."

This is a recent translation from the Latin in Tom Bingham's *The Rule of Law*. We continued our plea that the Republic of Uganda must comply with its international obligations in respect of Asian citizens of other nations.

Sadly, President Idi Amin never observed the rule of law. He saw himself as its embodiment and turned Uganda—"the Pearl of Africa", as described by Winston Churchill—into a predatory state. Neighbourly love and the golden rule,

"in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you",

became, "Do it to others before they do it to you."

The expulsion of all Asians from Uganda was not only inhuman, brutal and racist; it broke the rule of law and international obligations. I salute all Asians expelled from Uganda. As chair of Christian Aid, I am thankful for the block grant of £100,000 it gave every year to the reception centres in Birmingham and Leicester, and to the resettlement programme, and for the sterling co-ordinating work by Jack Arthey, Dennis Massey, Tony Jones, Alan Brash and Alan Booth.

May the United Kingdom continue to observe the rule of law and international obligations to the stranger in our midst. May we all do to them in many ways what we would have them do to us. I salute this country, which gave me refuge. Let us all take note of this debate.

12.27 pm

The Lord Bishop of Southwark: My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Papat, on securing this debate, marking as it does a significant and tragic episode in the history of Uganda, an important event in the history of the United Kingdom and an enduring part of the lived experience of thousands of our fellow citizens, as the noble Lord so eloquently demonstrated.

Many of us are old enough to remember the news footage, the feeling of injustice, the sense of a world out of kilter. After Idi Amin made the fateful speech on 4 August 1972, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Michael Ramsey, denounced what he called the "dreadful racialist policy" in a BBC broadcast. He was to make available a cottage in the grounds of Lambeth Palace to a displaced family. But compared with the dispossession and sometimes violence shown to those to whom Uganda was home, our discomfort was small indeed. It is a testimony to Ugandan Asians what they achieved in the years that followed. I am glad to see that my fellow bishop, the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Sentamu, the former Archbishop of York, spoke in this debate. We have all been edified by his wisdom and direct experience.

I want simply to look over some of the unintended consequences of those years and the then Government's response. It was the Colonial Office's intention in the late 1950s that the territories of east Africa should realise independence in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The watershed speech of Mr Harold Macmillan, known as "Winds of Change", on 3 February 1960 signalled a major change of policy and pace. Tanganyika gained independence in 1961, and Uganda and Kenya each in the next two years.

Each had a colonial legacy of a population from the Indian subcontinent, particularly in Kenya and Uganda. As we have heard, this population was initially recruited largely to build the rail link from the interior of Uganda to Kenya. Those who stayed and those who followed them, particularly from Gujarat and the Punjab, dominated commercial life and prospered. Indeed, those who then settled in the UK have made a magnificent contribution to the economic, political, sporting and societal well-being of this country.

However, the crisis that erupted in 1972 was to some extent exacerbated by decisions in the previous decade. The first restrictions on Commonwealth citizens were imposed in 1962. The rapid shift to independence

in the early 1960s in east Africa allowed white and Indian residents to opt for local passports or to remain citizens of the United Kingdom and colonies, as citizenship was then defined. Most Asians decided on the latter, fuelling further suspicion in newly independent Kenya and Uganda.

Local discrimination needed little encouragement, but fears of British passport holders arriving here en masse—there was film footage of dinner tables where meals had been abandoned by people apparently fleeing to the airport—lead to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1968 securing parliamentary passage in just three days. Unrestricted entry with such a British passport was now limited to those born in the United Kingdom or with a parent or grandparent born in the UK—the so-called patriality requirement. Instead, special vouchers were issued to heads of households among east African Asians to regulate the flow of migrants to the United Kingdom.

The Act was a controversial step, widely condemned as racist, but regrettably popular at that time. Patriality was then defined as right of abode in the Immigration Act 1971. The retention of such passports allowed Amin to dismiss any responsibility for those he had dispossessed and to demand that the British Government take responsibility instead. It is to the credit of the Heath Government that they acted so swiftly and with compassion and good purpose.

We should look at what was achieved. The Uganda Resettlement Board, under a former Permanent Secretary of the Home Office, set up and administered 16 temporary resettlement centres. By 31 March 1973, more than 28,000 people had passed through its hands. It undertook a good deal of liaison with local authorities and the charitable sector, not least with the Uganda Asian Relief Trust. Each family was visited by the Women's Royal Voluntary Service. Those entering the country were given advice on benefits, including on that most valuable provision, exceptional payments.

In our own day, I can plead only that our Government now show the same compassion to those in desperate need of welcome, safety and security, and look to the past as the evidence that they will greatly bless our nation.

12.33 pm

Lord Hunt of Wirral (Con): My Lords, I join the right reverend Prelate in congratulating my noble friend on this debate. When he left Uganda at the age of 17, my noble friend swiftly became an inspiring role model for many Ugandan Asians. Half a century later, we look with pride upon what Ugandan Asians have achieved and brought to our country. I join my noble friend in saying how marvellous it is that we now have Her Excellency Nimisha Madhvani serving as Ugandan high commissioner here, having been expelled with her family at the age of 13—my goodness, she has come on marvellously since, and it is a great opportunity to pay tribute to her.

Let me explain why this 50th anniversary means so much to me personally. In 1968, the debate on immigration changed profoundly. First, the Home Secretary Jim Callaghan introduced the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in response to the possible immigration of 200,000

Kenyan Asians who held British passports. That Act sadly set a benchmark for harsh attitudes to non-white immigrants. Secondly, Enoch Powell delivered the most appalling speech on 20 April 1968. As someone brought up in Toxteth, those two events thrust me into campaigning to counter the influence of the Monday Club within my Conservative Party.

When Idi Amin decided to make Ugandan Asians the scapegoat for his own manifest failures and expelled them from their homes, he irreparably damaged his own nation's prospects for a generation and more. I was so proud when our Prime Minister Ted Heath took the lead in saying that the UK would be a safe haven, and set up the Uganda Resettlement Board. As Ted wrote in his memoir,

"I was determined ... we would ... face up to our responsibilities ... We did what any civilised nation would do".

As the noble Lord, Lord Dholakia, has just reminded us, it took less than five minutes for the entire Cabinet, including the future Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, to agree to this courageous, enlightened and honourable policy.

However, not everyone was pleased. Public support for the admission of the Ugandan Asians fell to 6% in one opinion poll in September 1972, and the Monday Club began a reckless and irresponsible Halt Immigration Now! campaign. Matters came to a head at the Conservative Party conference 50 years ago this month. There was on the agenda a motion on immigration tabled by the Hackney South and Shoreditch Conservative Association. It soon became clear that its president, Enoch Powell, intended to move that motion personally and turn it into an attack on the Government for the admission of the Ugandan Asians. Although Powell was in the wilderness so far as the party leadership was concerned, he still had a considerable following, sadly, among the membership.

I had just become leader of the Young Conservatives and persuaded my YC colleagues that I should move an amendment to the Powell motion welcoming the Ugandan Asians. As I said in that vital debate on 12 October 1972, in a speech drafted by a determined and talented team led by Gerry Wade, "I find it completely morally indefensible, to grant a person a British passport and then, when that person is in trouble, to try to pretend it is a worthless document". After an inspiring speech by the brilliant Home Secretary Robert Carr, alongside Ted Heath on the platform, the conference rejected Powell and accepted the Young Conservatives' amendment.

I hope noble Lords will therefore understand why this debate is such a vital opportunity for me to pay tribute to Ted Heath and his colleagues for choosing the path of honour at a time of social, political and economic strife—a decision which has resulted, as we have heard from my noble friend and others, in the Ugandan Asian community firmly establishing itself as one of the principal driving forces behind building our successful economy.

12.38 pm

Baroness Donaghy (Lab): My Lords, it is a pleasure to follow the noble Lord, Lord Hunt. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Popat, on initiating this debate.

[BARONESS DONAGHY]

He was the first Gujarati to be on the Front Bench for the Conservative Government and was a Minister in BEIS in 2013. He was always courteous and reassured many with his commitment to the statutory national minimum wage. Perhaps he was unduly modest today about his own achievements in his introduction to the debate and in praising everybody else.

It brought back memories when the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark—who is now not in his place—talked about the past immigration Acts. I remember as a student in Durham marching through the streets in 1967 against one of those immigration Acts.

What kind of country were we when the Ugandan Asians arrived? We had 1 million unemployed, two national states of emergencies during the miners' and dockers' strikes, extreme violence in Northern Ireland and the suspension of the Northern Ireland Parliament, with William Whitelaw becoming the first Northern Ireland Secretary. The first episodes of "Mastermind", "Emmerdale Farm" and "I'm Sorry I Haven't a Clue" were broadcast. Leeds United was the FA Cup winner; Derby County won the league's first division and Tottenham Hotspur won the first UEFA Cup, on aggregate over Wolverhampton Wanderers. On the pop scene, number 1 hits included "Amazing Grace", "I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing", "Without You", "Vincent" and Donny Osmond's "Puppy Love".

In November, two months after most of the Ugandan Asians arrived, the Government, following Anthony Barber's massive tax and Budget cuts, introduced freezes on pay, prices, dividends and rents to counter inflation, which was around 8.6%. Although the Ugandan Asian community was only a small minority of its population, estimates made at the time indicated that it paid up to 90% of Ugandan tax revenues.

The cruelty of the policy of expulsion can only be imagined. The worst tragedy affected those Ugandan Asian citizens holding Ugandan passports. First, Idi Amin exempted them from expulsion, but later many were expelled anyway; by then, they had been rendered stateless. Blind ideology impoverishes society and the economy of a country. That happened in Uganda. Perhaps Mr Putin should reflect on that in his assault on Ukraine; he should also read the book of the noble Lord, Lord Popat.

What do we learn from these events? First, Britain kept its word and fulfilled its obligations. Secondly, we could act at speed in an emergency. By the end of 1972-73, there were a total of 38,500 Ugandan Asians in Britain; this was achieved in a few short months. I do not think our record on Ukraine has been quite so glowing. Thirdly, there are dangerous parallels between the economic situations of then and now. Fourthly, this country benefits from and is enriched by the skills and hard work of refugees who arrive with nothing and go on to better themselves and improve our society.

The noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, who was on the Government Front Bench during the 40th anniversary of the expulsion, called it

"one of this country's greatest success stories. Their story is a lesson to us today about the successes of integration".—[*Official Report*, 6/12/12; col. 824.]

We also know, of course, that Priti Patel's family were beneficiaries of the resettlement scheme. I have no doubt that the families faced racism and prejudice during their resettlement and had to overcome huge odds to succeed but succeed they did, displaying amazing resilience.

12.43 pm

Baroness Prashar (CB): My Lords, it is an absolute pleasure to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Donaghy, and to congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Popat, on securing this debate. I was delighted to hear from the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, because what I am going to say will echo some of the points that he made; I was particularly pleased that he mentioned my friend Gerry Wade because, as the noble Lord knows, he did a great deal of work on the ground as a Young Conservative to ensure that the motion was defeated at the Tory party conference.

As we have heard, in August 1972 the Ugandan President, Idi Amin, announced that he was going to ask Britain to take responsibility for all Asians in Uganda who held British passports. He described the Ugandan Asians as economic bloodsuckers, claimed they were sabotaging the country's economy and gave them only 90 days to leave. It is estimated that, prior to their expulsion, Ugandan Asians were responsible for 90% of Uganda's tax revenue, so they were very important to Uganda's economy. The decision to expel Ugandan Asians was intended to give greater economic control to the indigenous population of the country; instead, it contributed to Uganda's economic decline during the 1970s. It is good to see that bilateral relations are now reversing that trend.

In 1972, approximately 29,000 Ugandan Asians held British passports but those did not give them automatic entry to Britain. Whitehall at that time—I was around it and working with the Race Relations Board—was concerned about a potential shuttlecock situation arising, whereby Ugandan Asians with British passports could be refused entry to Britain yet could not return to their country of origin. A further 20,000 or so Ugandan Asians who had become Ugandan citizens after independence suddenly found themselves stateless. If these British passport-holders were denied entry here, that would have been internationally embarrassing for the United Kingdom.

Politically, as we have heard, the issue of immigration was then controversial, as it is today, and only four years earlier Enoch Powell had made his infamous "Rivers of blood" speech. Also in 1968, we passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act, which changed the situation as it affected Kenyan Asians. As the noble Lord, Lord Hunt, said, many in the Conservative Government were ambivalent regarding the Ugandan Asian refugees coming to the UK but, thankfully, Ted Heath and those around him honoured the British Government's commitment to the Ugandan Asians. It is a credit to the Cabinet then and those who worked with him to have ensured that those commitments were honoured.

The setting up of the Uganda Resettlement Board was a very good thing. As the noble Lord, Lord Dholakia, said, it was the first time that a proper settlement

board was set up, but I have to tell the House another interesting anecdote about it. As the conciliation officer with the Race Relations Board, I was working with the then chief conciliation officer, John Lyttle. Inevitably we were having some discussions and, as the noble Lord, Lord Bach, said, there was advertising in the Ugandan papers saying, “Do not come to areas where there are already very many immigrants”. There were those who wanted to label them as white and black areas. Although we tried to dissuade them from doing so, at least we persuaded them that they should be described as green and red areas, as opposed to black and white. You can see the kind of thinking that was around at the time. However, as we heard, the Ugandan Resettlement Board was successful and some excellent work was done in settling people, so its work has to be commended.

As we know, after enduring trauma and hardship the Ugandan Asian community has been highly successful. I want to mention Leicester, because I know that its inner city was in a very bad state. It was a rundown place and the injection of the Ugandan Asians revived that city, so that today it is very vibrant. While it is a credit to this country that people have settled well, and that the foresight of some of the enlightened members of the Tory Government allowed this to happen, it is also a credit to the Ugandan Asian community for the contribution it has made. I reinforce the point that while anniversaries are important in recognising what has been achieved, some lessons need to be learned. We need to look at how we treat refugees and stateless people today.

12.49 pm

Lord Desai (Non-Aff): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Popat, who is a friend, for introducing this debate. I did not speak in any earlier debate; I waited until the 50th anniversary because I knew something good would have happened by then, and it has. Let me say a few things which I do not think anybody else has said. I am not from Uganda; I came as a refugee earlier, but I had a job.

One thing that I noticed in the corner shops that the Patels had started was the extent to which the women were active the active people in the shop. The men would go out and buy goods from the wholesale market. They would do it all in silence, and the women picked up the local lingo. They became experts at knowing who was who and establishing close relations with them. We have to acknowledge the contributions of the Ugandan women, who made their families more a part of the community than people have been aware of.

Secondly, I want to talk about the paradox of imperialism. Most people do not like imperialism, but a fact of it was that all the subjects across the world were regarded as subjects of the Empire. Soon after the East India Company gave up to the British Government and Queen Victoria became Empress, she made a declaration in India. It is a unique document, which said that she would treat all her subjects as equal, regardless of religion or race. This is the first ever human rights document, before human rights documents became popular.

It was that element which, in a sense, meant being part of the British colonial Empire once upon a time—holding a British passport. Obviously, the Government could have disowned that passport, and I am sure there were people at that time who wanted to do that, but the Government acknowledged that it was their obligation to honour that imperial obligation. That is why everybody who was part of the Empire was able to come here as of right, and that is very important.

India had become independent long before I came here, but when I did, I was surprised that I could vote in elections. I was not an alien; I was a member of the Commonwealth. I did not have a British passport then, but I could do it. I joined the Labour Party and I really thought I could become Prime Minister before I became a citizen. Unfortunately, I failed. I think the Ugandans were much smarter, because they got the job.

I said in the debate on the migration Bill that immigration is a success story in this country. It is an outstanding success story, and we must always say that first. I remember holding a tutorial against the speech of Enoch Powell and getting threatened as a consequence by the National Front, which said that it would see to it that I got out of the country. Fortunately, it failed. There was a very different atmosphere at that time in the 1960s.

From the 1970s on, the Government—a Conservative Government, I have to say—confidently achieved the impossible and made immigration a respectable part of our tradition. I also have to say one thing about Prime Minister David Cameron. He saw to it that there were very promising, aspiring people from the immigrant community whom his party could recruit, and look at what has happened. They come here and take away all the jobs.

12.54 pm

Baroness Bottomley of Nettlestone (Con): My Lords, what is more enjoyable than to follow the noble Lord, Lord Desai, with his wisdom and wit?

All that is needed for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing, as Edmund Burke said. This is an extraordinary example of so many people going beyond the call of duty to take action. They could have turned away or not followed through. They did not need to have the motion at the Tory party conference, where my noble friend Lord Hunt and his friends in the Federation of Conservative Students and others won the day with an overwhelming majority. These were the incidents and episodes, frankly, which made me a Conservative. They confirmed my view that I wanted to be a Conservative and a Member of Parliament.

My knowledge of these matters goes back earlier. I am grateful to the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark for talking about the earlier 10 years and the prelude to what happened with Idi Amin. In 1965, my uncle, Roland Hunt, was the high commissioner in Kampala. He was known to my kinsman, the noble Lord, Lord Jay of Ewelme, who stayed with him in Kampala. Only last week I saw my cousin Lord Hunt of Chesterton, who has now withdrawn from this place. He reminded me of the episodes in Uganda of violence, the lawless police, the bullying and what was really developing.

[BARONESS BOTTOMLEY OF NETTLESTONE]

My uncle wrote to the local paper, putting a notice in it warning people that President Milton Obote's army and the police were out of control and that Europeans should be careful going outside Kampala. He was subsequently withdrawn. There was an episode, and I am sorry that Dame Judith Hart did not back him. He was then sent—with great distinction—to Trinidad and Tobago. He was also warning that Idi Amin, far from being an improvement on Obote, was somebody to be feared even more. My uncle was cerebral, cultured and courteous. He had spent many years working in Asia and had a particular respect for the Asian population.

Come 1972 and these appalling events, my husband Peter—not then a Member of Parliament—and I were living in a large, rambling house in Stockwell. My husband's parents had welcomed a Hungarian refugee; his grandmother had welcomed a White Russian many decades back. On the basis that you cannot do everything but you must do something, Peter called the Home Office. We then went in the car to RAF West Malling, and there we met Razia and Roshan Jetha, who lived with us really happily for two years. Our children learned to love samosas and chapatis and have not changed their tastes since.

What struck us, however, was the philosophy, the acceptance. Where was the anger; where was the rage? They had lost everything. Ironically, they had had a factory that made uniforms for Amin's army, in Jinja, at Lake Victoria. It was the sense of grace—accept what has happened and start to work. It has been said very often that Ugandan Asians did not want handouts; they have never had handouts. Immediately, Roshan went out and found a job. Quite soon Razia, who could not speak English, found a job working at the mail order business Freemans. We have remained friends throughout our lives. Roshan has sadly died, but we still see Razia. We have the greatest personal respect and affection for their dignity, their diligence, their hard, hard work.

Of course, it was not a calculated decision; it was an impulse, and one that was so worth while. We have seen how this community has gone from strength to strength. There are so many in this place: the noble Lords, Lord Gadhia and Lord Popat, the noble Baroness, Lady Vadera, and many others.

In this turbulent world where immigration and migration are such complex issues, there are many lessons to be learned from the values of the Asian community: family, faith, hard work, the way in which the British community accepted this needy and important group of people, and, above all, courageous political leadership. There are many issues which are complex, difficult and daunting, but we must have courageous political leadership if we are going to live in the world we all aspire to.

12.59 pm

Baroness Warwick of Undercliffe (Lab): My Lords, it is a privilege to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley of Nettlestone. I thank the noble Lord, Lord Popat, for providing us with an opportunity to reflect on the tremendous contribution to life in the

UK made by those Ugandan Asians expelled by Idi Amin in the autumn of 1972. Listening to the noble Lord's experiences, and those of others in this debate, has been both moving and inspiring.

I wanted to speak in this debate for two reasons. The first was simply to add my voice to the many who have expressed their thanks and admiration for the hard work, determination and entrepreneurial spirit that the noble Lord and so many others demonstrated following their arrival in the UK, bringing such huge benefits to this country. Those of course include the corner shops that stayed open when people needed them, challenging the inflexible nine-to-five shopping culture of the 1970s, and beginning the revolution in opening hours that transformed our high-street shopping. On a personal level, they were a lifeline for me and my husband in Clapham during our first few years of marriage, when we were working out how to juggle busy working lives and get dinner sorted out every night.

Those welcoming shops, run by multigenerational family members, offered more than just a late-night loaf of bread; they gave communities a focal point—even providing a platform for local politics—and became integral to their local neighbourhoods. As the noble Lord has said, it is that integration across the UK that lies at the heart of the British-Ugandan Asian success story. Look at their many successful bigger businesses—which have contributed so much to our economy, bringing jobs, vitality and pride to towns and cities throughout the country—and of course the mighty contribution to our political life, which, 50 years on, is so impressively represented in this House and the other place. That contribution is echoed in academic life, the City and various professions—and indeed is now being shown in the second and third generations of those early arrivals. This debate has touched on all this, and I am delighted that we are able to take this time to celebrate the success that followed what was a seismic and shocking event for all involved.

At this half-century vantage point, the story of the Ugandan Asian expulsion and resettlement can seem the stuff of history: a fit subject for commemorative exhibitions and academic conferences. One might ask what its relevance is to today's febrile politics. This brings me to my second point. Britain did a good and honourable thing 50 years ago, and we have been repaid many times over. While I am not disregarding the racist tensions and struggles that many individuals faced on arrival, the Ugandan Asian story is proof that, given the right conditions and will, people who are suddenly uprooted can be incorporated into a new society and help it to thrive. There are many refugees who cannot count on that tolerance, compassion and welcome today.

In today's turbulent world, where upheaval, uncertainty, migration and misery are still happening, where racism and anti-immigrant nativism are seemingly on the rise, this 50th anniversary gives us much to think about. The story of British-Ugandan Asians shows us how much minority communities have to offer, and how vital diversity is to the strength of the UK. The integration and assimilation of Ugandan Asians is proof that multiple identities can coexist and help people to flourish. It is timely to ask ourselves whether our current immigration policies acknowledge this

sufficiently. I feel that Britain's current plan for immigration carries a very different message from that of our actions in 1972. Will the Minister agree, for example, that further relaxing post-Brexit immigration rules—as has been done to allow more senior care workers to enter the UK by adding them to the shortage occupation list—could be a useful route to addressing severe staff shortages in other key but lower-paid roles, such as in social care?

The legacy of British-Ugandan Asians lies not just in their monetary and professional contribution but in the example that they have set in how they have embraced this country. Their enterprise and determination have played a part in Britain becoming a vibrant, multiracial and multicultural society. The need to integrate new communities successfully remains as important today as it was 50 years ago.

1.05 pm

Lord Bilimoria (CB): My Lords, in 2002 I was privileged to be awarded “Asian of the Year” by the now noble Lord, Lord Blunkett—the then Home Secretary—and, in my acceptance speech, I said that “in my lifetime we will see an Asian as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom”.

Although it took two decades, we now have Rishi Sunak as Prime Minister. In the early 1980s, when I came over from India as a 19 year-old international student, I was told by my family and friends in India, “If you decide to stay on and work in the UK after your studies, you will never get to the top; you will not be allowed. As a foreigner, there will be a glass ceiling for you”. They were absolutely right then, but over the decades I have seen that glass ceiling being absolutely shattered. I believe that this is now a country of aspiration, where anyone can get anywhere regardless of race, religion and background, and Rishi Sunak is a perfect example of that. Today, we have aspiration, we have achievements and we have inspiration, the latter of which creates aspiration in a virtuous circle.

It is difficult to think that on 4 August 1972, the Ugandan President, the dictator Idi Amin, gave 90 days to the Asian population to leave the country. Uganda's Asian community at that time—a tiny proportion of Uganda's population—was responsible for 90% of Uganda's tax revenues. Some 40,000 Asians would then come to the UK over the following months to start their new lives, leaving behind their homes and businesses in their country of birth. Last year, I spent two weeks in Uganda with my family. What a beautiful country and what lovely people. I saw at first hand that the Asians who have now returned to Uganda are running farms, supermarkets and shopping malls—following a mass expulsion five decades ago. This is thanks to President Museveni, who has been in power since 1986. He has welcomed them back, and today—representing less than 1% of the population—they contribute to 65% of Uganda's tax revenues. One of those individuals is reputedly Uganda's richest man, Sudhir Ruparelia.

We have heard from so many speakers that Ugandan Asians are making their name in every part of society. This includes the noble Lord, Lord Popat, himself—who I thank for leading this excellent debate—my right honourable friend Shailesh Vara MP; Priti Patel, the

noble Lords, Lord Gadhia and Lord Verjee; my noble and right reverend friend Lord Sentamu; the late Lord Sheikh; the noble Baroness, Lady Vadera; Tarique Ghaffur, who was in the police; Anuj Chande, my friend who is a senior partner in Grant Thornton; and his cousin Her Excellency the High Commissioner for Uganda, Nimisha Madhvani, who is with us here today. I could go on because there are so many examples. This is tremendous, especially when we think that many of these people went through resettlement plans. Their stories and experiences of fleeing and starting a new life over here are moving. That is thanks to the generosity of the wonderful British people, who to this day welcome refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine. The noble Lord, Lord Popat, started work in a Wimpy bar—and then as an accountant, a successful businessman and a Conservative Party activist—and is now in the House of Lords and a trade envoy. This is phenomenal. In the words of Shailesh Vara, they

“came here frightened, homeless, penniless and with only the clothes on their backs.”—[*Official Report, Commons, 6/12/12; col. 1042.*]

As the noble Lord, Lord Popat, said, Uganda's loss has very much been Britain's gain.

My friend Dr Nik Kotecha wrote an article, “The World Has Changed So Much, Yet So Little, Since the 1972 Ugandan Refugee Crisis”, in which he spoke about leaving with absolutely nothing and knowing what it is “like to go hungry”, which “no child should ever” be. However, despite his sadness—including that about Ukraine—there is still hope. There are 8 million Ukrainian refugees and 25 million displaced people who continue to receive support; look at the support that we have given here, in the way we gave it to the Ugandan Asians. Sadly, he says,

“this won't be the last refugee crisis”.

My own family comes from the smallest minority community in the world, the Zoroastrian Parsis. We fled Persia 1,000 years ago and were given refuge in India. We are only one in a thousand, but per capita I would say that our achievements make us one of the most successful minority communities in the world—thanks to the host country, India, for what they allowed us to do. I have seen with my own business, Cobra Beer, that I sold my first case not to an Indian restaurant but to an east African Asian corner shop. I have seen the hard work taking place there, including children working above the shop doing their homework while also helping out. As Rishi Sunak has said—which I have said for many years and which we have heard in this debate—the Asian values of family, hard work and education are embodied better by nobody than the Ugandan Asian community. They have integrated; as my father, the late General Bilimoria, said, “Wherever you live in the world, my son, integrate to the best of your abilities, but never forget your roots”. They are also sterling examples of entrepreneurship.

The noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, talked about immigration. Why can the Government not have a revamped Migration Advisory Committee that independently sets the shortage occupation list sector by sector, allowing the economy the immigration that it needs? The Ugandan Asian community has shown clearly and brilliantly that good immigration has been, and will always be, great for this country

1.10 pm

Lord Sherbourne of Didsbury (Con): My Lords, I too pay a warm tribute to my noble friend Lord Popat. I am sure that many of our colleagues who looked at the Order Paper earlier in the week and saw that this debate was taking place on a Thursday must have thought that it was of secondary importance, but they could not have been more wrong.

This debate is hugely important—and important for three reasons. First, it reminds us of the decision of the Heath Government in 1972 to admit thousands and thousands of Asians expelled from Uganda after the cruel act of Idi Amin. As my noble friend Lord Hunt reminded us, the decision was taken by the Heath Government in the face of the fiercest opposition and, I am afraid to say, rather ugly prejudice in parts of the Conservative Party at that time, as well as from sections of the press. That decision took great political courage. Mr Heath and the Government took that decision not on the basis of opinion polls or focus groups but because it was morally right—what a change from the way these things sometimes happen today. Lord Goodman wrote to Mr Heath at the time:

“I do not remember an episode of governmental behaviour as being more clear-cut in relation to morality and principle and less self-seeking in terms of popular appeal.”

Mr Heath was often criticised for not being a populist; these days that is rather a compliment.

This debate is important for a second reason. We should always make sure that, when Governments of all parties, as they do, introduce measures and laws to control the numbers entering this country, they should not be presented as anti-immigrant or caricatured as such. This country has been host over centuries to waves of immigration from all over the world and especially in the 20th century. These people have come to our shores and made their homes here; they have built businesses and created thousands of jobs. As we see from the Ministers in today's Government and politicians across the parties, they have made their mark in our public life as well. They have also been some of the greatest philanthropists. If I may say so, my noble friend Lord Popat is a wonderful example of the contributions that these people make to our society.

The third reason this debate is important is that it allows us to take quiet pride in today's United Kingdom, a country rich in diversity and talent thanks to the many people with ancestors from overseas who have built their lives here and are now proud British citizens. I have the honour to be a trustee of the Margaret Thatcher Scholarship Trust at Somerville College, Oxford, chaired by the principal, the noble Baroness, Lady Royall. I was there last week for a meeting of the trustees but, really, I go there not so much to meet the trustees but to meet the students—the Thatcher scholars. They come from all backgrounds and ethnicities and are ferociously bright and energetic. When you meet those people, who want to make their lives and contributions here and give to this country, although we are going through very difficult times, it does not half give you optimism for the future.

1.14 pm

Baroness Hayman (CB): I am delighted to follow the noble Lord and to join others in congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Popat, on instigating this debate and the one 10 years ago and on the quality of his contribution in this House and beyond, as well as thanking him for giving us the opportunity to reflect on the events of 50 years ago.

This week has made me feel very old. Not only do I have two sons older than the Prime Minister, which is quite a thought, but it reminds me of where I was 50 years ago. The noble Lord, Lord Hunt, told of his work as a young Conservative—fighting Enoch Powell, if I may use the shorthand. Fifty years ago I was selected as the prospective parliamentary candidate in my home town, Wolverhampton, for Wolverhampton South West, Enoch Powell's constituency. Thereafter followed a vigorous campaign. The one thing I had to be profoundly grateful for was that there was no social media then, so the abusers had to take the trouble to buy paper, envelopes and stamps and send the abusive mail to you. But it made me profoundly aware of the racism current in the country.

While I was doing that politically, professionally I took on the role of director of the Ugandan Evacuees Co-ordinating Committee for Welfare. It was the group that brought together 75 voluntary organisations to provide support and work in parallel with the Uganda Resettlement Board. I remember going to the West Malling camp referred to by the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, where we supplied the liaison officers supporting the individual families. We did a great deal within the communities, and much of that was done not in the black or white but in the red areas. I absolutely agree with those who say that a principled decision was made and that we should pay tribute to the Prime Minister and Cabinet who took that decision, but we have to recognise that the fears of being seen to be soft on immigration were very strong in the policies of the Uganda Resettlement Board.

The wonderful staff in the Library found the report that I co-authored, a year after the final camp was closed, on the work that was done. The Prime Minister had referred to the co-ordinating committee's work as “a job well done”. We published a report, *A Job Well Done?*—with a question mark—and it went through the difficulties that those people found. They were not entitled to social security if they went into red areas and resettlement was often in areas where there was no employment and no support from communities. People therefore gravitated to where there were communities but they were not entitled to what the Government gave to people who went to green areas. There was a great deal of frustration and indignation in the report. It only goes to show two things: first, how fantastically the community succeeded, despite those early difficulties. The other is how dangerous and wrong-headed it is for Governments to run scared of racism in their immigration policy.

1.19 pm

Lord Gadhia (Non-Aff): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Popat on securing this important debate. Like him, I was born in Uganda, arriving in this country 50 years ago this year as a toddler. So,

today's proceedings are much more than a debate; this is deeply personal. It is the story of my family, our community and my own identity. Discussing this topic in the same week as the appointment of our first British Asian Prime Minister makes it even more poignant.

One of the legacies of the British Empire was to catalyse migration flows which might not otherwise have occurred naturally. The biggest of these flows was from south Asia to sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This explains how my grandfather took the brave decision to travel 3,000 miles across the Indian Ocean from the state of Gujarat, in north-west India, to Uganda. By 1972, we had become a well settled community, in what Winston Churchill described as "the pearl of Africa". But then everything changed. Idi Amin supposedly had a dream from God instructing him to expel the Asian community. His actions reflected a simmering tension and envy of the economic dominance of a tiny minority. When Uganda gained independence in 1962, some felt that the British should have taken the Asians with them. Idi Amin exploited and weaponised this sentiment in the crudest and most brutal form.

Amin's spine-chilling warning that British passport holders who failed to meet the 90-day expulsion deadline would be "sitting on the fire" resulted in growing anxiety and fear about our fate. These events also triggered a contentious debate back in the UK. It was the era of Enoch Powell and the National Front. The Cabinet sent an envoy to meet Amin, hoping to reverse the decision. All sorts of alternatives to bringing Ugandan Asians to Britain were explored; even the Falkland Islands were considered. To his eternal credit, the then Prime Minister, Edward Heath, fulfilled the UK's moral and legal responsibility, providing safe harbour to almost 30,000 of my compatriots. I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Hunt of Wirral for the role which he and others played in supporting that principled decision.

So, the Government and, importantly, the voluntary sector mobilised to airlift and receive British passport holders expelled from Uganda. The Home Office established the Uganda Resettlement Board. Within three weeks of being formed, this body was ready to receive the first evacuation flight from Kampala, and in a matter of six weeks it had set up 16 reception camps across the UK—and even a mini 17th camp courtesy of Peter and Virginia Bottomley, now my noble friend Lady Bottomley. These camps were mostly in rural areas, in former military bases. When local people heard about the plight of those being expelled, they responded in their droves with clothes, food and supplies. Many had never met people of colour before. What they saw were people in need and they wanted to help. The uniformed voluntary services, notably the Women's Royal Voluntary Service, the British Red Cross and St John Ambulance took a lead in organising the camps, working with the Co-ordinating Committee for the Welfare of Evacuees, made up of 63 voluntary organisations and mentioned by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman.

In its final report, the Uganda Resettlement Board concluded:

"It is probably no exaggeration to say that never since the war has this country seen voluntary effort extended willingly, and on such a scale, nor can there be many instances of closer harmony between voluntary and statutory services working together."

This is what motivated the creation of British Ugandan Asians at 50, an initiative supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to capture the oral histories of the last surviving volunteers and camp residents. It is hoped that these stories will serve as an inspiration to current and future generations to celebrate this country's great tradition of volunteering and generosity of spirit in welcoming those who have been displaced.

This 50th anniversary is a moment to express our community's eternal gratitude to all those who supported us in our hour of need. This is what motivated the thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey in 1997 to mark the 25th anniversary, which I was honoured to help organise with late Manubhai Madhvani, widely respected as the elder statesman of the Ugandan Asian community. It will be a moment of immense pride when we have the opportunity to express our thanks again at a national commemoration of the 50th anniversary, graciously hosted by His Majesty the King at Buckingham Palace next week.

This is also a moment to remember that Amin's eight-year reign of terror was both tribal and racial, resulting in the murder of more than 300,000 Ugandan citizens, as well as the expulsion of Asians. By the time the Uganda Resettlement Board was wound up in 1974, it had spent just over £6 million of public money, having assisted nearly 30,000 evacuees with our arrival and resettlement. Not only was this the right thing to do; it is arguably one of the best-returning investments ever made by a UK Government.

1.24 pm

Baroness Verma (Con): My Lords, I declare my interests as set out in the register. I congratulate my noble friend Lord Gadhia on his current appointments and my noble friend Lord Popat for initiating this very important debate today, and all noble Lords for the wonderful speeches we have heard so far. I contribute as the child of an Indian immigrant who settled in the UK in 1938. My grandfather came here, invited to help rebuild the economy on the Empire scheme, but what he taught us was that we have to help each other. As I was growing up and listening to the environment around me of pure racism and far-right attitudes, it was quite difficult to be a child in the city of Leicester.

I mention Leicester because that was where a large number of the Ugandan Asians came. For me, it was a turning point as a 12 year-old, and I am so thrilled to be sitting next to my noble friend Lord Hunt, who, at that time, was a young Conservative and fought hard to change the rhetoric about the immigrant population of Ugandan Asians coming in. I can tell noble Lords that Leicester did not welcome the immigrant population coming in; it was difficult. They were settled in places that were really condemned as slum areas and there was very little help. But the rhetoric turned, when I was a child, from basic racism every single day to intense racism, and it was really quite horrible. I do not know whether many noble Lords remember an advert that Cadbury brought out, "Cadbury take them and they cover them in chocolate": that was the chant we used to hear regularly as we walked down the roads of Leicester.

[BARONESS VERMA]

So I hope that a lot of lessons were learned, because the Ugandan Asians who came to Leicester made Leicester one of the most diverse and economically growing cities in the country. We have the Golden Mile, which every year hosts the largest celebration of Diwali outside India. The people that came then as children are now among the top businesspeople and professionals in this country, not just in Leicester. It is a clear lesson for us all that, as the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, said, and I think my noble friend Lady Bottomley may have said it, it only takes people to remain silent for evil to prevail.

Following the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, who comes from Wolverhampton, I had the pleasure of standing as a candidate for the Conservative Party in Wolverhampton South West in 2005, which demonstrates how much this country had shifted. I really congratulate my party, the Conservative Party, on the work it has done to ensure, not just in the time of my noble friend Lord Hunt and the Prime Minister of the time, Edward Heath, that this country has given us so many opportunities. It is not bad to generate wealth. I constantly hear this discussion about how rich our new Prime Minister is. We should celebrate the fact that he has made that much wealth from this country, that his family has made wealth. His grandparents live in Leicester; we know them well. His grandmother, of course, is no longer with us, but they were stoic, hard-working people. The principle that was instilled in all of us was to make the country you live and work in your home. We should give credit to those who come and have that.

My grandfather was one of the founders of the Indian Workers' Association. He worked hard for the interests of working people from the Indian subcontinent. David Cameron made me the first female of south Asian origin to sit on the Benches of this Parliament in 2006. We have a lot to celebrate. My father became a Conservative because of Edward Heath and the work he did to help the Ugandan Asians. This debate is so poignant because the riots in Leicester in recent days demonstrate that if we allow division to happen and that space, that vacuum, to arise, the far right, more than anyone else, will take advantage of it.

1.30 pm

Lord Dykes (CB): My Lords, I warmly thank the noble Baroness, Lady Verma, for her inspiring speech, as well as other noble Lords for the extremely inspiring and moving speeches we have heard today.

When John Major was Chief Secretary to the Treasury, as we became friends very rapidly, he very kindly agreed to come and speak at one of my routine ward meetings in Stanmore, my biggest and most important ward in Harrow East when I was its MP. I drove him up in my car; we did not talk because he was so tired from work, so I said, "We'll start talking when we get there." The chairman of the ward, who gave the function in his house, was an interesting new man whom we had not really got to know called Mr Dolar Popat. It was a very routine occasion, though more social than others. John Major enjoyed it, they enjoyed it and he made a very good speech.

The following day, I said to John Major, "Thank you for coming; I appreciate it very much indeed. You were a great help. It was nice of Dolar Popat to offer his lovely house for this purpose." He said, "Yes, and by the way, I hope you won't mind me saying so, but ward chairmen in Conservative associations up and down the country are routinely not particularly inspiring. This young man did rather a good job, and I think he will probably go far in life." I said, "That may be prescient, but I don't know; only time will tell."

Going back to 1972 and the events that have been discussed today by so many noble Lords, I had started working for Edward Heath in the 1964 election, I then helped him in the 1966 election—he also helped me, as I was standing—and particularly in 1970 when we came in. At 30, Winston Churchill junior, the noble Lord, Lord Deben, and I were the three youngest to come into the House. Edward Heath was a very gruff and difficult man in many ways, and was known for not being good at socialising, including in his constituency of Bexley. However, I found his compassion coming out when he said, "Hugh, we are going to have settlement zones in Harrow and Leicester to help the Asians who have been expelled by Idi Amin."

I remember one of the people at the function when the noble Lord, Lord Popat, was ward chairman saying, "We don't want Asians coming into this country from anywhere, because there are too many Jews in this constituency already." That was the beginning of the contact. What the noble Lord has achieved in his career has been remarkable. His book was very inspiring indeed.

Edward Heath would not back down. He said, "We're going to do this. We'll take a thousand in Harrow to start with, and in Leicester, and see how that goes. You tell the association that that will happen." Some of the members were very difficult about it; some said some very nasty things, but most did not. When the Asians came—as they did many years later into Harrow, by coincidence—they immediately made the local borough economy dynamic. Just a small number of Asian businesspeople had that effect on the local area, which was prosperous but slow-moving.

That was such a remarkable achievement that the impression it left remained with me for ever, as did my admiration for Edward Heath—not least because we both loved the European Union and he was the architect of our entry into it. Those two things may be among the greatest things he did. Unfortunately, it all went wrong very quickly after 1974, but we have to remember that none the less.

We must thank the Asian communities for what they have done for this country. They have provided a superb example of what can happen when foreign people come to stay, work and live here and become citizens, with or without British passports. They contribute so much to the good of British society. That attitude must now be reinforced, because there are still some dark forces in dark corners of constituencies up and down the country where that view is not held. We must fight that vigorously and make sure we stand up in future for what is just and right for those communities and the whole of the British public.

1.35 pm

Lord Balfe (Con): My Lords, I join the many congratulations to my noble friend Lord Popat on initiating this debate. He was a distinguished Minister when I joined this House and I have always admired the way in which he has conducted his ministerial and other jobs. I thank him very much.

I remember the beginning of 1972 as a very low point in British relations. The Labour Government had passed the 1968 immigration Act, which was a real stain on our community. In the very early 1970s, racism was almost becoming respectable. We tend to forget that. I join all noble Lords in my congratulations for and fond memories of Edward Heath. Had it not been for his determination and single-mindedness, we would probably not have done as well by the Ugandan Asians. Also, he started to turn things around; after this episode, racism was no longer respectable. That was a great tribute to Heath.

At that time, I was working in the Department of Health and Social Security. Our Minister was one Sir Keith Joseph, who later went mad but at the time was a very compassionate Secretary of State. The instructions that came down from him were to do everything we could to help carry the Prime Minister's policy into action. I remember one aside in a meeting at which the Secretary of State was present—it was not a very large meeting, and I was very junior—where he remarked, “You know, you're lucky we're in government. I hate to think what we might have said if we hadn't been.” I have always remembered that. I pay tribute to Edward Heath.

The other person who has done a lot for the Conservative Party and the country, who has not really been mentioned today, is David Cameron. When I started working for him as his trade union envoy, he was not only trying to broaden the base in trade unionism but was absolutely determined to get more representation of British society on to the Conservative Benches. I was the chairman of a Conservative association at that time, in a very safe seat. We had a by-election, caused by the retirement of a Member. We went to CCO, where I was working, but the sift committee in the Conservative Party which takes the names to it took up six white names. The noble Lord, Lord Pickles, who was then the chair, said, “I am sorry, but this is against party policy. You've got to have an ethnic-minority person—it doesn't matter if they are a man or a woman—on your shortlist. Otherwise, we won't approve it.” The determined actions of David Cameron and the way in which he basically gripped the Conservative Party by the throat and got it to modernise—getting more women and a more representative party into Parliament—have been a great contribution to this country. We would probably not have the present Prime Minister were it not for his activities.

I will finish on one more thing. After 1972, racism disappeared in the trade union movement. I noticed, because I have spent my life active in it, that it was suddenly no longer respectable to echo the words of the dockers who had supported Enoch Powell. Suddenly, the thing to do was to embrace all of society. It took some doing—there was some stuttering at the

beginning—but overall it was successful, and the trade union movement has also made its contribution to a more equal and pleasant Britain.

1.40 pm

Lord Alton of Liverpool (CB): My Lords, in the week that a man with east African Asian antecedents became our Prime Minister, the noble Lord, Lord Popat, has provided the House with a timely and admirable Motion, which has enabled us to reflect on the challenges of integration and racism, but also on how far we have come in 50 years.

In 1968, as a sixth-former at school, I put pen to paper to express shock that Kenyan Asians—but not white Kenyans—were having their passports taken away under legislation rushed through Parliament in three days flat. David Steel, who spoke in the debate in this House 10 years ago on the 40th anniversary, courageously opposed that Bill in the House of Commons. At the time it led me to join the Young Liberals, of which I would become national president in due course, and to join the Anti-Apartheid Movement. As we have heard, that shameful Act of Parliament emerged in the context of Enoch Powell's odious “rivers of blood” speech; the founding in 1967 of the far-right fascist party, the National Front; and then, in 1968, the British Movement.

My own attitudes, like those of a number of speakers in the debate so far, were in part shaped by my personal experience. In my case, I was the son of an immigrant whose mother's first language was Irish. As a second-year student in Liverpool looking for accommodation, the casual nature of racism came home to me when I saw advertisements in the tobacconist's shop for rooms for which “no blacks and no Irish” should apply. Elected in 1972 as a third-year student to Liverpool City Council, I argued in favour of accepting Ugandan Asians after Idi Amin gave them just three months in which to leave, with just one suitcase and £50 in their pockets. Amin's terrifying eight-year reign led to the deaths of at least 300,000 Ugandans.

Then, in 1972, the UK did respond, as the noble Lord, Lord Hunt of Wirral, reminded us, with honour and generosity. In 1972-73, a total of 38,500 Ugandan Asians came to Britain with 5,000 British families—such as that of the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, whom we heard from earlier—opening up their own homes, with echoes of Kindertransport and now Ukrainians fleeing Putin's war. Government help was matched by personal generosity, philanthropy and charitable giving via the Asia Relief Trust, chaired by the then Lord Sainsbury. The recent decision to give refuge in this country to BNO passport holders from Hong Kong, over 130,000 of whom now reside here, is equally admirable.

In 2019, I attended the launch of the wonderful memoir, *A British Subject: How to Make It as an Immigrant in the Best Country in the World*, by the noble Lord, Lord Popat. He calls it a love letter to his adopted country—and it is. The noble Lord tells us:

“Our success lies in our values. Ugandan Asians have always believed in aspiration, enterprise, and the importance of family—three of the values that Britain holds most dear ... we have managed to combine the maintaining of elements of our roots and heritage while ensuring that we are British through and through.”

[LORD ALTON OF LIVERPOOL]

He cites the late Lord Sacks's assertion:

"Without shared values and a sense of collective identity, no society can sustain itself for long".

By turns, the noble Lord's memoir is deeply moving and inspiring, and his reflections on integration—which he rightly insists is the key question—and on respect for difference, the role of faith and the call to all to serve the common good, get to the heart of the great challenge of how we learn to live together, peaceably, productively and respectfully. I think the book by the noble Lord, Lord Popat, along with *The Dignity of Difference* and *The Home We Build Together* by Lord Sacks, should sit in every school. They are a road map for integration and co-existence.

What of Uganda itself, the place Winston Churchill once described as "the pearl of Africa"? At university, my daughter signed up to do some voluntary work in Uganda. She has been back many times since as a pro bono trustee of Evolve, a barrister-led not-for-profit, which she helped found in 2016. It aims to improve access to justice and promote integrity, fairness and efficiency in Uganda's criminal justice system by working closely with prisoners, the judiciary and organisations to create a sustainable legacy. I have met some of the outstanding Ugandan lawyers who are part of this initiative. Building a just and fair society that upholds the rule of law is the best antidote to the lawlessness and cruel atrocities bequeathed by Idi Amin. Today, Uganda is overcoming development challenges, including the disturbing recurrence of Ebola. As a trade envoy, I know how hard the noble Lord, Lord Popat, works to help Uganda face those challenges, and I join others in thanking him for that and for securing this timely and very worthwhile debate.

1.45 pm

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, it is always a great pleasure to follow my noble friend Lord Alton. I deliberately call him that. Today I follow everybody else as well and it has been a remarkable debate, with some powerful, moving and wonderful speeches, many peppered with anecdotes—some very amusing, such as that of my noble friend Lady Bottomley.

I sat in Committee Room 14 on Tuesday of this week, where I helped greet our new Prime Minister. I felt a surge of pride such as I have not felt for the last two or three years, a period during which I have been sometimes at the end of my tether, feeling ashamed of my party and ashamed for my country. It was a new dawn on Tuesday, as far as I am concerned.

I began to think of other moments during my 52 years in Parliament when I felt similar pride. I thought of that day when it was decided that we should enter the European Union, and I shall always be sad that that was reversed. I thought of that remarkable Saturday morning when we debated the Falklands, and when the leader of the Opposition, Michael Foot, made it possible for us to send a task force by giving his support in a great speech. Then I thought of those days in 1972 when, like my noble friend Lord Dykes—I am just one day older than he is—I supported the very brave decision of Edward Heath. That has been referred to many times in this debate, and rightly so, because there was a Prime Minister giving true leadership on a

difficult issue and doing what was right. By doing right he not only gave great relief to a remarkable group of people but did great good to our country, because the people who have come over here have attained great office in the professions and have continued the tradition of our nation of shopkeepers by keeping shops on corners where there would not be shops any more today. They have done a remarkable service and made a real contribution.

It is right that we should be saying these things, as we said them 10 years ago in the debate that my noble friend Lord Popat introduced then—again, he did it with distinction but also with prescience, because a lot has happened since then. He himself has done so much since then, becoming a Minister of the Crown and a trade envoy. He was just newly in the House of Lords at that time, and we sat close together and became friends. He has made a remarkable contribution.

We must take hope from what has happened this week. A truly remarkable young man—he is almost exactly half my age—has become our Prime Minister. I believe he will show real leadership and display those qualities of intellectual acuity, industry and love of family which have the possibility of making him a great Prime Minister. I hope for all our sakes that he becomes a great Prime Minister. I certainly hope that he is able to give the leadership that this country has lacked for the last three or four years. He is a breath of fresh air. I will not agree with everything he says or does—nobody ever can—but I believe that he has given real hope. This is a moment of pride, similar to that moment when Ted Heath made his decision, supported as he was by a Cabinet with a wonderful Home Secretary, Robert Carr, who encapsulated all the best qualities of public life in this country.

This is a very special day and a very special debate. We are all deeply in debt to my noble friend Lord Popat.

1.50 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Sherbourne, was absolutely right: this is an important debate, and it has been absolutely fascinating. It has been historical in nature, but I really felt a thread of current feeling—not only about diversity in our political leadership but about some of the challenges that exist within our policy-making. The nuance of the debate has been wonderful. At the outset, I apologise to the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, as I think I am going to irritate her. She said that this debate made her feel old because of the Prime Minister's age. This is the first time that the Prime Minister of my country has been younger than me, so it is not just her feeling old now. Now that I have irked her, I will irk everybody else: I was not alive in 1972 when these issues were being debated.

Now that I have successfully alienated the entire Chamber, can I perhaps recover by congratulating the noble Lord, Lord Popat, on bringing this debate to us? I also read the *Hansard* from a decade ago, and I thoroughly enjoyed reading his book, which he was very kind to send me a copy of, as he has others. I was struck at the start of that book by, to some extent, the trauma of what he had witnessed first hand with his family, the journey of safety and then success. It is a real lesson, so I am grateful to him. I share his passion

for the work he does in Africa. I have been fortunate enough over just the last three months to be in Sudan, Rwanda and Uganda, and to be there again briefly in September. His work and the debate we had in Grand Committee and elsewhere, arguing for an Africa strategy and consistency in our relations, I endorse entirely.

As I indicated before, I was not born at the time of the statement in 1972. I also did not have an opportunity of reading the report that the noble Baroness, Lady Hayman, had written, but I noticed that the final report of the Uganda Resettlement Board was published just a few days after I was born in January 1974. Of the 28,608 of those who had been settled, some came to the UK but many went directly to India. That has not been mentioned in the debate so far, but it was facilitated through the scheme, and I found that interesting.

The Home Secretary Robert Carr made a point in his statement in 1972 that also struck me. He made a point of singling out the other nations which also provided safe refuge and the way that the UK had worked with our friends and allies around the world, including Canada and others. That showed, I think, that the UK was not only leading by example but leading through our relationship with our allies.

I was also struck at the time, and in some of the debate we have heard, by another element of nuance with regards to the Commonwealth Immigrants Act. I was struck by the contribution from the noble Lord, Lord Alton. I checked the voting record and it was the Liberals who put the Second Reading to the vote, as he mentioned. Ten Liberal MPs voted at the time and the vote attracted 62 others in opposition to the Second Reading. It was not necessarily a time of consensus.

In his contribution to the debate a decade ago, my former noble friend Lord Steel spoke about his experience of watching the exodus at Entebbe airport. He said:

“I sat in the airport, accompanied by the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood, who at that time was my assistant. We watched the exodus of the Asians: we watched their baggage being looted and dumped on the tarmac; we watched their jewellery and watches being taken off them. I wrote at the time:

‘I have never witnessed such scenes of unbridled abusive power and virtual anarchy’.

It was a terrible episode.”—[*Official Report*, 6/12/12; col. 809.]

I have been struck today by the comparison between that time, and the experience of the noble Lord, Lord Popat, and others, and the safe refuge that this country has provided.

However, in this debate, we heard from the noble Baronesses, Lady Hayman and Lady Verma, and others that it was not an easy process. Indeed, in reading the letter from the then Lord Sainsbury regarding the experience of the settlement scheme, bemoaning that less than £5 per person was provided for support, and reading the statement in the House of Commons at the time, I was struck that there are perhaps some contemporary parallels in the support that we offer to those who seek refuge.

Robert Carr gave his statement to the House of Commons 50 years and one week ago. In response, Shirley Williams raised the lack of accommodation and the quality of temporary accommodation. Then there was a question from David Steel, who suggested it would be good to have better co-ordination between

the Home Office, the Scottish Office and the Department of Health and Social Security, so that they were all engaged to ensure there was proper co-ordination with local authorities. Again, 50 years on, we see some parallels. What struck me was that the question following David Steel’s was from Enoch Powell. It was a jarring question which asked whether the Home Secretary could cite any legal authority that provided support to the Government for their actions. The struggle against racism, prejudice and obstructions was there and, as the noble Baroness, Lady Verma, said, it carried through and we still have some elements of it.

I have not yet had an opportunity to welcome the Minister to his place. He is probably far smarter than I am and will not mention his age in this debate—I have taken all the flak for that. I hope he might share with the Home Secretary the *Hansard* of this debate, not only so that those in the Conservative Party can perhaps take pride in it but for its contemporary nature. If this country is to be a shelter in the storm for individuals and families, perhaps we have an opportunity to look slightly beyond what the scheme in 1972 had—it applied to just those who had been issued with British passports—to those seeking shelter in the UK who do not have British passports but desperately wish to have them. We see the barriers being put up again and again. Of course, not everybody who risks drowning in the channel—I will come to just one policy point in a moment, if the House will forgive me—has bad motives; many have motives equal to those that we have heard about today.

There is another element which made me think that times have changed since that scheme. When I read the contributions and part of the report, it struck me that, if a husband in a family had a British passport, their wife and children could accompany them; if the wife had a British passport and the husband did not, they could not. The wife had to go wherever the husband was settled, but not here. The Home Secretary was asked about that. He offered a sympathetic response but no change to the policy. It struck me that he said that the family must follow “the head of household”. Perhaps there are some areas where society and government policy have rightly changed.

I will close on a point of principle. I do not want to be controversial in this debate, which is about consensus. However, I wish to put on record that on this Bench we oppose the Rwanda scheme, and will continue to raise our concerns in debates about immigration policy. I do not believe that we should have a scheme where those who are coming to this country for good motives are sent to another country, and that approach should be reviewed by the new Prime Minister. A welcome move by him would be to halt the Rwanda scheme.

In my last 15 seconds I will say that we are marking today a golden anniversary that reflects a golden contribution from a community which, through difficulty and resilience, has made our country the better. I thank them for that.

2 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, this is my first opportunity to welcome the Minister to his position, and I wish him well. I also pay tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Popat, not only for initiating this

[LORD COLLINS OF HIGHBURY]

debate but for his record in business, as a government Minister and certainly as a trade envoy. I have had a few conversations with him about that, and, like him, I think it is right for him to point out the tremendous economic progress that has been made in Uganda. I too welcome the presence of Her Excellency the high commissioner. However, as I have said before to the noble Lord, Lord Papat, I hope that he and Her Excellency will recognise that a successful and inclusive society is one that respects and protects all minorities and marginal groups within it. I hope my comments will be fully understood in that regard.

The 50th anniversary is a time for both reflection and celebration. There should be reflection on what was experienced by Ugandan Asians who were forcibly expelled from their home and arrived in the UK to an uncertain future. There should also be absolute celebration, as we heard in this debate, both of the communities who welcomed their new neighbours in so many different ways and of the contribution that the Ugandan Asian population has made to those communities and to our national life.

It has been good to hear the memories of Members across the House of that period. I welcomed the recollections of the noble Lord, Lord Hunt—for me, he remains a “young Conservative”. As to my own memories, I cannot compete with others, but I was then an active member of the Spelthorne Young Socialists. Sadly, when we as a borough—the Labour group, as well as the Conservative group—tried to ensure that there was a proper housing allocation to welcome the Ugandan Asians, I recall trying to defend my Labour councillors from physical attack during the demonstration that was held outside that town hall, made up of, sadly, hundreds of people in our community. Of course, Spelthorne is now the constituency of Kwasi Kwarteng, which shows how communities and people have obviously changed. We have to reflect on that.

It was a pleasure to hear my noble friend Lord Bach speak of his experience in Leicester, where it was estimated that one in five of those who came to the UK would permanently settle. The Leicester experience shows the complexities of our history; my noble friend referred to that notorious advert that was placed in a newspaper in Kampala.

When we talk about our history, we must also be honest about the darker parts of it: the discrimination which this community was faced with in different parts of the country, and the racist activities of people—we have heard reference to the National Front. The noble Lord, Lord Balfé, referred to the trade union movement. In my own union—the dockers were members of the Transport and General Workers’ Union following the meat porters at Smithfield who marched in support of Enoch Powell—there was change in my union movement, but it was a lot slower than the noble Lord mentioned.

That change is testament to those who stood against racism and have shown determination and bravery to defend those who came here to be part of our community. I pay particular tribute to my noble friend Lord Morris of Handsworth, who was part of that Windrush generation—people who came to this country post war to help us rebuild our communities and build our national health service. Sadly, that generation later

faced a “hostile environment”. We must learn the lessons of that. You cannot turn the clock back; people have memories about that.

We have heard about the immense contribution that the Ugandan Asian community has made to the United Kingdom in particular. Many people were highlighted by the noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and I will not repeat them, but I also reflect on the fact that it is an achievement for a country to have a Prime Minister of south Asian descent. It is important for our society.

I listened intently to the contribution of the noble Baroness, Lady Verma. I am part of that generation in the Labour Party who are determined for our party to remain the party of aspiration and enterprise. We will certainly continue to do that as we face some of the actions of the Government ahead. We must recognise that migrants have enriched our communities. They have built businesses, served our NHS and, as I just mentioned, made a significant contribution to our politics. Britain has some excellent stories to tell of welcoming those people.

More recently, we have had the Hong Kong scheme and the immense generosity of the British public to those fleeing war in Ukraine. I must say that on Ukraine it has been the generosity of the public that we should recognise, while the Government’s handling of visas, for example, has caused delays and real difficulties. A visa scheme that left very young children waiting for months for a visa, despite having a safe British home waiting for them, and families having to travel with young children for hundreds of miles across Europe to get biometrics is not a good example.

It is not enough to tell the tale that we have a proud history of integration and providing a home to those who are forced to leave theirs; it must also be woven into our future. I, too, reflected on the debate 10 years ago, reading in particular the speech of the noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, who quoted somebody that I would not normally, but I will on this occasion: the late Baroness Thatcher. She said:

“a new resilience derived from diversity can only strengthen Britain”.

I completely agree with her. The noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, also said:

“we are in a global race and Britain has a secret weapon: the races from around the globe that make up our diverse nation. These people have ingenuity, resilience, determination and links and networks around the world.”—[*Official Report*, 6/12/12; col. 825.]

These words are even more relevant 10 years on, in our very insecure world. How we treat people domestically is also how we are seen globally. It is very hard to be optimistic about that while the policy of deportations to Rwanda of those seeking asylum, fleeing torture and horrors, still stands.

As well as marking this anniversary and celebrating parts of this history, we must also ask ourselves what lessons we should continue to learn from it and how they can be applied to British life for the next 50 years. My noble friend Lady Donaghy also mentioned elements of the speech made 10 years ago by the noble Baroness, Lady Warsi, who, in her response, spelled out very

concrete actions that the Government were taking for everyone to play a full part in our lives. She said then that

“the things that stop people getting on are the same things that stop people getting on with each other.”—[*Official Report*, 6/12/12; col. 825.]

That is a lesson for us all, but one particularly for this Government in the weeks ahead.

2.10 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Lord Murray of Blidworth) (Con): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Popat for securing this important debate, and all noble Lords for their truly inspiring contributions. As the noble Lord, Lord Bach, noted, the number of noble Lords contributing today itself demonstrates the importance of this topic. I also thank the noble Lords, Lord Purvis and Lord Collins, for welcoming me to my place. I look forward to debating the wider immigration issues, to which they referred, in the weeks and months to come.

Noble Lords will know that this debate was postponed from around the 50th anniversary of the first Ugandan Asians arriving in the UK, following the death of Her late Majesty the Queen, but I am glad that we have had chance to recognise this, and it feels just as apt during the week of Diwali.

As my noble friend Lord Popat reflected, I pay tribute to the late Lord Sheik, raised in Uganda before coming to the United Kingdom in 1962, who spoke so movingly in 2012 about his own family’s history in Uganda and of friends who came following the expulsion in 1972. He is a much-missed colleague, and all our thoughts are with his friends and family. I also pay tribute to those who came before me in this and the other place who paved the way for future generations, which has led us to having the UK’s first Prime Minister of not only Indian but east African descent.

My noble friend Lord Popat is right to highlight our positive relationship with Uganda, and I welcome the high commissioner to the House today. The UK and Uganda have a close relationship. We want Uganda to become more democratic, prosperous and resilient, with reduced poverty, and to continue to play a positive international and regional role. That is why UK aid supports the most vulnerable in Uganda, by creating jobs and helping to meet urgent health and education needs.

The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, was right to reference the recent Ugandan successes. As has been raised today, 50 years ago we were in a very different place. In August 1972, 60,000 people of Asian origin were given just 90 days to leave their homes and their businesses in Uganda, after a decree issued by the then President of Uganda, Idi Amin. As has been said, remarkably, the UK Government expressed extreme distress with this course and, as a consequence of the real concern, Edward Heath’s Administration determined to resolve this by taking the steps upon which Your Lordships have commented today.

My noble friends Lord Popat and Lord Hunt both reflected on the inspiring, brilliant and honourable speeches and decisions by Prime Minister Heath and Home Secretary Carr. I was delighted to hear, in his

elegant speech, about my noble friend Lord Hunt’s actions as a young Conservative in 1972. That is an inspiration to all Conservatives.

Preparations began in the UK to receive Ugandan Asians who had British passports. By 18 September 1972, the first 193 British Asians from Uganda had arrived at Stansted Airport. Just two months later, by 17 November, more than 27,000 Ugandan Asians had arrived and, in the first year between 1972 and 1973, a total of 38,500 Ugandan Asians were welcomed by Britain.

The United Kingdom acted swiftly and administered 16 temporary resettlement centres, in which approximately 22,000 people were accommodated for varying periods until they were supported to find permanent accommodation. The centres paid particular attention to the teaching of English and the provision of guidance about the British way of life. Just three months after the refugees had begun arriving, 1,000 employers had offered jobs to the newcomers.

As we mark 50 years since the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians, we reflect on their enormous contribution to this country, whether in politics, business or other aspects of society. We have heard many examples today, from the Golden Mile of Leicester to Clapham, but I am also struck by the challenges faced by those who arrived here, who were subject to disgraceful racist abuse and attacks. I admire the bravery and resilience they have shown.

Ten years ago, my noble friend Baroness Warsi spoke about the Government’s approach to integration following the successful arrival of British Ugandan Asians. In the 10 years since, a number of significant events have led to people seeking refuge in the United Kingdom, including from the conflicts in Syria, Afghanistan and Ukraine. Indeed, I know that the cottage in Lambeth Palace, spoken of by the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark, has been used in more recent years to house Syrian refugees.

The UK has a proud history of providing protection to those who need it. The noble Lord, Lord Desai, is right to refer to that history as a success. Similar to our approach 50 years ago, we are committed to ensuring that anyone arriving through humanitarian routes can take positive steps towards integration as they rebuild their lives in the UK and, in so doing—we hope—emulate the experience of my noble friend Lord Popat and other Ugandan Asians.

Fifty years ago, when Ugandan Asians arrived in the UK, they were given support and advice on housing and employment, as well as access to healthcare, social security and education systems. In the present day, those resettled in the UK via safe and legal routes have access to mainstream benefits and services to enable their integration. We are working across government to ensure that these services meet the needs of refugees. Those arriving under one of the UK’s resettlement schemes have immediate access to the labour market and to benefits. The noble Lord, Lord Purvis, is right to reflect on the parallels in relation to providing accommodation. We continue to seek assistance from local authorities across the UK to provide housing for those we resettle here.

[LORD MURRAY OF BLIDWORTH]

The noble Lord, Lord Bilimoria, and the noble Baroness, Lady Warwick, referred to the labour market and asked about the shortage occupation list. We continue to work closely with the Migration Advisory Council on the occupations on that list.

Those arriving for our schemes for Hong Kongers and Ukrainians—for whom the Government opened schemes as expediently as those the late Lord Carr and his colleagues did in 1972, to which the noble Lord, Lord Dholakia, referred—have also had access across the labour market. I acknowledge the points of the noble Lord, Lord Collins, about the delays in providing visas, but I am proud that over 140,000 Ukrainians have arrived here since we opened the schemes just seven months ago, many being taken into the family homes of generous UK residents, just as the family of the noble Baroness, Lady Bottomley, did 50 years ago.

We recognise that language is key to helping refugees integrate into life in the UK, as well as to breaking down barriers to work and career progression. In 1972, steps were taken to ensure that communications were written in Gujarati and in English. Today, we provide assistance to ensure that mainstream English language provision meets the needs of refugees. Our integration packages have a strong focus on supporting refugees to move more quickly to self-sufficiency.

I pay tribute to my noble friend Lord Harrington, who served the Government with great energy in his time as Minister for Refugees. He understands that collaboration with civil society, businesses and local authorities will continue to be the key to achieving our goals on refugee integration. We will ensure our approach is informed by the experiences of refugees.

In closing, I thank my noble friend Lord Popat, once more for securing this most moving and inspiring debate. It is right that we reflect on what happened 50 years ago and, as we do so, it is also right that we celebrate the huge contribution that the British Ugandan Asian community has made, and continues to make, to our society.

2.21 pm

Lord Popat (Con): My Lords, I thank all noble Lords who took part in this debate. We heard many moving speeches from all of them. Although we were born in Uganda, we were made in Britain. The noble Lord, Lord Alton, mentioned a quote from my book: we are proud to be “British through and through”. We are British, not because we live in Britain but because Britain lives in us.

Motion agreed.

Iran: Demonstrations *Question for Short Debate*

2.22 pm

Asked by The Lord Bishop of St Albans

To ask His Majesty’s Government what representations they have made to the Government of Iran concerning the recent demonstrations in that country.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity that this short debate affords to highlight the plight of many people in Iran, especially young women, who are fighting for their basic human rights and, as a consequence, suffering horrific violence at the hands of the state.

Within a few metres of this Palace of Westminster, we have seen and heard the many protesters over recent weeks who have been chanting—please excuse my pronunciation — “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi”, a slogan which has been taken up by the protesters. It is Kurdish and it means “Woman, Life, Freedom”. The protesters are demonstrating in solidarity with the women in Iran. I hope that this will give us an opportunity for their voices to be heard in this Chamber today.

In recent years, the light of international scrutiny has been shone on the Iranian Government. In addition to the recent demonstrations that we are discussing, Iran’s Government have continued to use the death penalty, to place restrictions on freedom of religion, and to detain British nationals. I commend the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in securing the release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe and Anoosheh Ashoori from their detention in Iran. I hope His Majesty’s Government will show the same vigour in promoting the release of the detained British national Morad Tahbaz and in supporting all those who are unfairly detained by the Iranian Government.

I will give some of the background to the demonstrations that have been taking place, and indeed growing, in Iran over recent weeks. On 13 September, just over six weeks ago, 22 year-old Mahsa Amini was arrested by the Iranian Government’s Guidance Patrol—a section of the Iranian police tasked with upholding Islamic dress code. She was alleged to have worn tight trousers and worn her headscarf improperly. Three days later, Mahsa was dead. The Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran—the Iranian police—reported that Amini suffered from a spontaneous heart attack, fell into a coma and died. However, witnesses, including the women detained alongside her, stated that she was severely beaten by the police prior to her death. This is supported by leaked medical scans that reveal bone fractures and haemorrhaging. Over 800 members of Iran’s medical council have accused the Government of attempting to cover up the real causes of her death.

Since then, as has been widely reported in our media, protests have erupted across the country, with women demanding an end to mandatory hijab laws, justice for the murder of Mahsa Amini, and the protection of women’s rights. Indeed, reports coming out of Iran today, despite the social media close-down, suggest that the largest demonstration so far took place just yesterday. In defiance of the authorities, thousands of women gathered at Mahsa Amini’s grave. Demonstrations also took place in other parts of the country.

What makes these protests unique, and the response of the Iranian Government far more concerning, is the age of the protesters. The second-in-command of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has placed the average age of these protesters at only 16 years-old. Indeed, schoolgirls have been at the spearhead of this struggle for women’s rights. We have heard horrifying reports of the actions of the Iranian state towards children.

On 20 September, 16 year-old Nika Shakarami went missing after attending a protest in central Tehran. Ten days later, her family members, who had briefly been given a chance to identify her body, said that her nose had been completely destroyed and her skull had been

“broken and disintegrated from multiple blows of a hard object”.

On 12 October, Iranian security forces stormed a secondary school and attempted to force the girls to participate in a pro-Government demonstration, supporting oaths of allegiance to the Ayatollah and the leader of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Those girls who refused to sing pro-Government songs were arrested and beaten. Sixteen year-old Asra Panahi was one of 12 students who were taken to hospital following the attack. She died from internal bleeding.

These are not isolated incidents. The Islamic Republic of Iran has cracked down brutally on protests in community after community in every corner of that country. Human rights groups have stated that at least 244 people have been killed, including 32 children, and that over 12,000 have been detained. The Government have shut down internet and mobile phone services in affected areas, arrested journalists and have been accused of threatening the family members of protesters with waterboarding and mock executions.

I have absolutely no doubt as to the gravity and seriousness of the actions of the Iranian regime and wholeheartedly stand with the women who have bravely protested for freedom. The examples I have just provided barely scrape the surface of the horrors of what is going on.

There is little we can do to influence the Iranian Government, but what we can do is to raise our voices, along with the countless voices of women around the world, to show those who are fighting for these basic freedoms that they are not forgotten, that many people are standing in solidarity with them and that we will continue to highlight their plight. I am grateful to noble Lords for the contributions they are going to make to this debate, and I would like to end by asking the Minister about His Majesty’s Government’s response to the protests.

First, a little over a year ago the Islamic Republic of Iran was elected to a four-year term on the UN Commission on the Status of Women. I understand that His Majesty’s Government have a policy of not commenting on UN elections conducted by secret ballot. However, noting the extreme behaviour of the Iranian security forces to women and young girls that I raised earlier, do His Majesty’s Government have any plans to raise this matter with the UN? What is the point of being in the UN if these things are not raised?

Secondly, senior political figures and clerics, such as Ali Larijani and Ayatollah Alavi Boroujerdi, have come out in support of the protesters, criticising their Government’s hard-line stance towards them. What steps will His Majesty’s Government be taking to enter discussions with sympathetic politicians and religious leaders as we try to raise the plight of these women and hopefully, by the grace of God, bring it to a close?

2.32 pm

Lord Polak (Con): My Lords, I pay tribute to my local bishop, the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans, for obtaining this important debate. I wish the new Minister well on his debut.

It is often said that fact is stranger than fiction. To follow the right reverend Prelate’s words, it is hard to believe that on 25 March 2022 Iran began a four-year term on the Commission on the Status of Women, the UN’s top women’s rights body. I want to go one stage further than the right reverend Prelate. Commending the women for their bravery and courage is absolutely right, but it is just words. Talk is not enough, so let us act—and I think we can act. Can the Minister advise me on whether the UK can take a lead at the UN and ensure that Iran is immediately suspended and removed as a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women? It is impossible to understand how it can be on it. I urge the Minister to take that to the department. Let us lead—and this we can do.

In this Chamber, I have been consistently critical of the Iranian regime and have called for the proscription of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps several times. The US State Department designated the IRGC as a terrorist organisation in April 2019, adding it to a list of 67 other terrorist organisations, including Hezbollah and Hamas, both of which the UK has recently proscribed. This past July, the Foreign Affairs Select Committee in the other place named Hossein Taeb, a former head of intelligence in the IRGC, as part of a group of 10 Iranians who played a large role in the arrest and intimidation of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe. Despite this, the IRGC as an entity has been not been proscribed and Taeb has not been designated under our Magnitsky sanctions.

Furthermore, the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry has accused Iran of supplying Russia with weapons to help Putin’s illegal war effort against Ukraine. US reports have suggested that Iranian trainers from the IRGC have been deployed to a base in Crimea to teach Russian personnel how to operate the systems.

Last week, the Iranian Foreign Ministry announced a package of sanctions in retaliation for human rights sanctions that our Government imposed on Iran on 10 October. The Iranians singled out nine individuals in the UK who have been blacklisted—including myself. What an honour: banned from a country that attacks its own people, beating women and children because they dare to protest against backwards and oppressive laws. This is a country where peaceful protesters are dragged and beaten to death; a country that shuts down its own internet so the rest of the world cannot bear witness to the murderous brutality of the IRGC, while providing weapons and training to support Putin’s criminal acts in Ukraine. To be banned from such a country for standing up against its leadership, terrorist actions and treatment of its own people is indeed an honour.

I will continue to speak out against the Iranian regime and specifically its terrorist arm, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, for their inhumane activity on the ground in Iran and their acts of terror internationally. I urge my new noble friend the Minister to persuade those who are shamefully blocking the

[LORD POLAK]

proscription of the IRGC to take immediate action and designate them to proscribe the murderous Iranian revolutionary guard.

2.36 pm

Lord Turnberg (Lab): My Lords, I too thank the right reverend Prelate for bringing this important debate to our attention and for highlighting the terrible catalogue of inhuman activities by the regime. If we are to have any influence at all on the obscene activities of the Iranian regime, now is the time for us to act. The UK will have a major impact if it goes ahead now and proscribes the brutal Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps at a time when those brave women, and men, are taking to the streets in one of the biggest demonstrations the regime has ever faced. Of course, our Government have rightly been quick to sanction the so-called morality police—what a misnomer; they would be better named the mortality police—but that is not enough.

It is the revolutionary guard, that draconian instrument of the regime, that callously murdered Mahsa Amini in custody for simply casting off her hijab. It is now murderously persecuting those hordes of protesting Iranians who have taken to the streets in unprecedented numbers. It represses the population without mercy and kills women and children with impunity, as we have heard. Of course, this latest outrage simply broke the dam of pent-up rage, after years of persecution of any Iranian who dared to challenge the regime. Examples of death by public hanging of so many, often very young, are so common that they are scarcely commented upon in the western media.

That the people of Iran are suffering terribly is no secret, yet we in Europe and America have until recently been willing to turn a blind eye to this unconscionable behaviour to try to do a deal through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, in the vain hope that this would curtail Iran's plan to gain nuclear weapons. It seems to have mattered little that Iran has cynically violated any possible agreement, continuing along the path to a bomb completely undeterred by these never-ending discussions, now mainly defunct. The west's conditions in the JCPOA say nothing about the treatment of Iran's own citizens, nor the revolutionary guard's activities outside Iran; about its sponsorship of terrorism abroad; about its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, where it is completely destabilising that country, and in Gaza, where Hamas is preventing any form of stability. And here in the UK, it is spreading its venomous extremist messages wherever it can.

There are many examples of its influence, from the attempted kidnapping of the Iranian women's activist Masih Alinejad in New York to the IRGC-inspired extremism which led to the attack on Salman Rushdie. That Iran's regime is a danger to the world and its own citizens is beyond dispute, to say nothing of its obvious repeated intentions to wipe Israel off the map. That is always there, but it is perhaps for another debate.

Now is the time for our new Conservative leadership to show some resolve. Proscribe the horrific Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and withdraw completely from the fruitless and moribund JCPOA discussions, or strengthen them by including reference to the IRGC's

terrorist activities at home and abroad. It may not be possible for us to be directly involved in regime change, but we can at least support those brave Iranian citizens who are desperate to do so.

2.40 pm

Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb (GP): My Lords, I congratulate the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans on bringing this debate to the House, particularly as it is the 40th day since the death of Mahsa Amini. Her death has resonated throughout the world. She is an incredible martyr for something that ought never to have taken place, something we perhaps allowed in some small way to happen in Iran. I also welcome the new boy on the block, the noble Lord, Lord Johnson, and hope he enjoys his post; it might be quite demanding.

I suspect that here in this Chamber we all support the women of Iran. We understand that they are morally justified in what they are doing, which is a peaceful but very loud and vigorous protest. They are incredibly brave in the face of a repressive, dangerous and cruel regime. I would like to ask what we can do about it and what the Government have started to do. The right reverend Prelate said that there is not much we can do, but there probably is a lot—including proscribing the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. I have a few more ideas if the Government would like some of them.

I would like to know how this affects the nuclear deal with Iran. The deal is that they do not try for an increase in enriched uranium, and we do not put sanctions in place. However, given the current human rights abuses, will the Government continue to express full support for restoring the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which was mentioned earlier, or will they stand with the women of Iran who are fighting for freedom? Will there be additional targeted sanctions of any kind to show that the UK is a defender of human rights and freedom for all in society? With inflation in Iran of 40%, it is likely that some of the richest Iranians will start to bring their private assets to Britain. Has any thought been given to imposing measures on the assets of the richest, and perhaps those in power, who might be banking with us? While we are at it, could we also demand that Iran stops supplying Russia with drones? That might be a step forward for world peace.

I feel we have missed our moment. We could have led the world in shouting about this and putting in sanctions first. The USA has done it. We could all have been proud of that, if we had led the way. As with all decisions in government, at some point we have to decide if we want to protect economic gain, which in this case would mean abandoning the women, or to protect democracy, which in this case would mean supporting them.

I would like to repeat the shouts of Iran's women: "Women, Life, Freedom"—"Zan, Zendagi, Azadi."

2.44 pm

Viscount Waverley (CB): My Lords, I know Iran. The people of Persia are considered one of the great civilizations, but the world of Iran is a complex world and it is moving into a darker place. The Iranian

people and the free world have been taken hostage—hijacked in effect—for over 40 years. My remarks are for the 80 million Iranians who have been directly affected and are being misled. For how much longer is their leadership's behaviour to be allowed to continue? The corrupt leadership of thugs does not represent its people; it represents an inexcusable form of governance.

In yesteryear, I had been briefed by the appropriate department in Jerusalem and shown evidence of why Iran is a threat. Part of that footage was devoted to the youth. We all know that change can come only from within, and now it is the brave youth who must be supported—how the tables have turned. I suggest that Israel takes note: we know its anxieties and remember that it was not so long ago that Jews and Persians were so close. That world needs to be returned to. Care in doing so, however, must ensure that this is not perceived as pitting Judaism and Christianity against Islam. Nevertheless, it is a form of cowardice not to be supportive of those who are bravely defying this abhorrent regime, believing that it is ostensibly safer for free people not to become directly involved. That is a false illusion.

The leadership in Iran is reliant on the Revolutionary Guard and has consequently become more assertive. But make no mistake that there is one core fundamental: the language of power is all that is understood. When faced with credible condemnation and pressure, the leadership will buckle. The people of Iran need to be given their freedom and to lead their lives in a world free of tyranny. The world will be a safer and better place without the current leadership in Iran. We must support the people of Iran. There is no place in today's world for the mullahs, and those who support them, who lead for self-serving purposes only. My final words are borrowed from a regional analyst friend: "It is about time Iran had a taste of its own medicine".

2.47 pm

Lord Mann (Non-Aff): My Lords, one ongoing issue in Iran that has received virtually no publicity in this country or across the West over the last 20 years is the repeated action by trade unions and trade unionists striking against the regime. For the last 20 years, that has been a continuum. The action by the women and girls of Iran does not come from nowhere; there has been, including increasingly in recent years, major industrial protest—specifically political in nature—directed against the regime. We hear little of it—only bits come out. For example, in the last fortnight, the co-ordinating council of teachers' unions has highlighted what it describes as systematic repression through the entry of military and uniformed forces into schools. We also hear from the writers' union, which explains how the spread of rumours and the distortion of public opinion to thwart its efforts to tell the truth is the current reality.

Intellectuals and the middle class are battling, but it is far deeper and more worrisome to the regime than that. Ongoing in recent weeks is the Mahmoodabad strike; the Teheran truck drivers' strike; the Isfahan stone factory workers' strike of thousands; and repeatedly and consistently, every single time, the bus drivers' strikes, bringing the country to a halt.

There is what the International Trade Union Confederation calls no guarantee of workers' rights in Iran—that is category 5, the lowest category. Yet, as we saw in South Africa and in the communist bloc, not least in Poland, trade unions are at the front of taking on repressive regimes.

There is also the South Pars gas field strike and the Bushehr petrochemical strike, as well as action at the Haft-Tappeh sugar refinery, from the Hengam petrochemicals and Azar water workers, at the Aidin chocolate factory in Tabriz, and from the 3,500 Ahvaz steel workers and the Neyriz Ghadir steel workers. I could go on. Across Iran, now and repeatedly, industrial trade unionists are striking at great risk. At Zahedan in the recent fortnight 200 refinery workers were arrested for daring to strike against the regime. This regime has no support among the working classes; it uses repression and traditional style to hold back the workers of Iran, who are demanding greater rights and greater pay in traditional ways—but specifically they are protesting against this regime.

Yet there are those in this country—I am going to name only one, but there are others—who act as excusers for the Iranian regime, some on a weekly basis. Let me give one example: a professor recently removed from Bristol University, Professor David Miller, supported by around 200 academics from across our universities. He is an apologist and a sycophant to Iran. This is a man who says that Mahsa Amini was not murdered and that it was an Israeli and US-inspired insurrection. Do those 200 or 300 academics across our universities now have the decency to withdraw their support from Miller and support the workers of Iran?

Another example that I want to quickly highlight is that of Elnaz Rekabi, the sports climber. Has she or has she not been stopped from climbing and forced to live in isolation at home, as is reported, because her hair came out when she was climbing for Iran in national competition? Bouldering is an Olympic sport. Will GB Climbing and the British Mountaineering Council, of which I am a member, and the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation join in demanding an Olympic removal of Iran if this potential Olympian is not seen in competitive sport in the next year? Iran should not be in Paris or Los Angeles—if she does not compete, Iran should be thrown out of the Olympics.

2.53 pm

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): My Lords, I thank the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans for bringing this Topical Question to debate for us. As he introduced it so well, it is about a blend of our UK strategic interests and human rights and freedom of speech for the people of Iran.

As the noble Viscount, Lord Waverley, indicated, our debate is less about looking at Iran through the prism of its regime—and therefore there is no question of our solidarity with people within Iran—and more about questioning the tactics and brutality of the regime. It is about highlighting in particular, as has been remarked consistently in this short debate, the bravery of women in Iran, and especially—it is what

[LORD PURVIS OF TWEED]

stands out—the young women in Iran, criticising in schools the president in their presence. There cannot be anything more brave than that. It should be an inspiration to the whole world.

I welcome the Minister to his position again. Since he answered his first Question yesterday on the trade deal, he is a slightly more experienced maiden, but I look forward to his maiden speech. His predecessor was exemplary in reaching out to the Opposition Front Benches and keeping us informed and I welcome the commitment he gave yesterday evening that he would carry that on. Because our time is limited, I shall just ask a number of questions, a couple of which were raised so well by the noble Baroness, Lady Jones, and I welcome her contribution.

First, can the Minister give an update on payments with regard to what Iran had claimed? As the Minister will know from the briefing he will have received, these were part of some of our debates about Nazanin. We very much welcome her return, of course, but it was linked by some to payment of what the UK was claimed to owe Iran. If he can update us on the processing of that, it would be helpful.

Secondly, on the global human rights sanctions regime, these Benches welcome the Government putting financial sanctions in place on 85 individuals, on the cyber police and on the morality police. The cyber police sanctions have not been mentioned so far, but they are critical in this and I welcome them. I know that the Minister will have been briefed to say that the Government do not comment on considerations for future sanctions—so he does not need to spend time saying that; we know that—but I impress on him, to add to the comments of the noble Baroness, Lady Jones, that we now need to be in a position where we are preparing an audit of the property and investments of those within the regime in Iran and whether any UK interests have invested in any of the state-owned enterprises linked to the Iranian Government. That audit needs to be carried out and the City of London needs to be aware of it, because we should not be in a situation where we have delays like those we have seen with other regimes, such as Belarus and Russia, where kleptocrats have used the London laundromat approach. We need clarity that the Government are preparing that with the City of London.

My other point is linked to a question I asked in the Chamber a number of weeks ago about the BBC Persian Radio service. The BBC has been in touch with me and I am grateful for its briefing. It is horrific that the BBC staff and families of staff are being persecuted and harassed by authorities in Iran, and that the BBC itself is now under sanction as a criminal entity. That is unacceptable. Will the Government make sure that there is no platform, radio or online, which can be easily reduced by the Iranian regime? I believe that emergency funding should be made available to BBC World Service so that radio service resilience can be provided.

Finally, as requested, I hope the Minister will be able to give an update on the JCPOA. I see the noble Lord, Lord Lamont, in his place. We have had many debates on the JCPOA. It is timely that the Minister

can give an update on what British policy is in the current context. If the Minister can respond to these points, I would be grateful.

2.59 pm

Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab): My Lords, I too start by saying that I look forward to the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Johnson. It is a big step to enter the House as a Minister and I welcome him to his position. I hope he plays a full role and engages, as the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, reiterated, across the House in the best traditions of the Lords. I also welcome the right reverend Prelate initiating this debate, which is important at this time. I echo his comments about maintaining pressure to release those foreign detainees, including Morad, about whom we have repeatedly asked for more information in this Chamber. I welcome that commitment and I hope the Minister can respond on those specific issues.

The tragic death of Mahsa Amini is both disgraceful and unacceptable, and the UK must continue to support calls for a transparent, impartial investigation into the circumstances that led to it. The situation is increasingly alarming; reports continue of disproportionate force by the Iranian authorities, including as protests spread to universities and border communities, as illustrated by the right reverend Prelate. As the UK is a supporter of human rights, we must continue to maintain calls to protect the people of Iran's fundamental freedom to live as they choose.

Like other noble Lords, I fully support the Government's decision to sanction those responsible for these human rights abuses, using our powers under the human rights sanctions. I am also pleased that the Foreign Secretary summoned the most senior Iranian official in the UK, but I urge the Minister to explore further options to hold the Iranian Government to account.

First, can the Minister update the House on steps taken at the UN to raise the recent violations? What steps has the UK taken with our European partners since the joint statement on 13 October? Secondly, as illustrated by the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, will he explain the Government's decision to cut funding to BBC Persian Radio? At this vital moment, the United Kingdom should be standing by the protesters, not eliminating a vital source of impartial information. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Purvis, that we should be looking at special ways to push that service out into the communities.

Finally, I echo something I have repeated before: the important role of civil society in Iran, which is continually under attack. How are we working with our allies to promote global civil society organisations, including interfaith groups? One thing the community in Iran needs to hear is that there is a tradition of Islam that does not support the Government's actions. There are traditions of faiths working together. We need to ensure that we amplify that. Supporting the BBC World Service is one way, but there are others. I hope the Minister will commit to doing so.

3.03 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office and Department of International Trade (Lord Johnson of Lainston) (Con) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, before I begin, to follow on from yesterday's declaration of interests, I

have interests in financial services groups that have investments in the region, although I do not think there is anything specific relating to this debate.

It is a great honour to close this debate and address this House for my maiden speech—or, as has been pointed out, almost maiden speech. I thank all those who have kindly offered me advice and friendship since I joined this House, in particular my supporters: my father-in-law and, if I may use the term, my noble kinsman Lord Hamilton of Epsom, whom I sadly cannot see here today, who while introducing me tapped me on the shoulder and whispered, “I thought I’d be long dead before you sat in a place like this”—I am not sure if that was a desire or an expectation; and the noble Lord, Lord Benyon, in whose honour I will have to declare the interest that, like so many people of West Berkshire, I am his tenant. Indeed, the noble Lord has already informed me that he is one of the few residents of the county who is not one.

I also give my warmest thanks, love and appreciation to my wife Alice and my children Eliza, Alexander and Victor—so-called because he was born on 6 May 2010, the day the Conservatives won their historic first victory of many. I also thank my friends and colleagues who have supported me all my life, at least up until this point. Finally, I owe immense thanks to our doorkeepers, clerks, police officers and all the staff, who have been unbelievably kind to me since I arrived earlier this week. This is a very special place, made so by all noble Lords and the people who support us in our efforts.

As an investor and entrepreneur, I am incredibly fortunate to be speaking from the Front Bench as Minister for Investment at the magnificent Department for International Trade. I have put my heart and soul into building businesses across the UK, Asia and America. I want to bring my understanding of just how hard it is being a business partner to this House and to this Government. I will effectively be the UK’s chief salesman, telling everyone about our fabulous firms, people and institutions, and doing my utmost to deliver investment to allow our creatives and risk-takers to flourish.

This job also allows me to pursue my other life’s mission: promoting global free trade. For me, two parties coming together to voluntarily trade goods and services for their mutual benefit is the most magical of exchanges. I believe this kind of trade—free from coercion or corruption—is the greatest force of progress that mankind has ever known. To quote Libanius, the fourth-century philosopher:

“And He created commerce so that all may enjoy the fruits of the earth, no matter where produced”.

It was my ancestor the first Baron Somers who wrote our Bill of Rights in 1689. It is my firm belief that today, with globalisation in retreat and autocracy on the rise, the tenets he espoused could not be more relevant. The freedom from government interference, the protection of private property and the rule of law—these are values that underpin free trade, free enterprise and free societies, and these are the values I will make it my mission to champion here as I fight for our freedoms against protectionism and autocracy.

This fight for freedom brings me now to the subject of today’s debate: the United Kingdom’s response to the Iranian regime’s brutal repression of peaceful protest.

I thank the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of St Albans for tabling this Question and his dedication to seeking the betterment of peoples’ lives around the world. I thank all noble Lords for their contributions to this incredibly informed debate, and I will try to answer as many of their questions as I can in my comments.

We are gathered today in this House just 41 days after the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini following her arrest by Iran’s so-called morality police. These are 41 days in which the Iranian people have sent their strongest message yet that their human rights must be respected by the Iranian authorities. The violence levelled at protestors in Iran by the security forces is truly shocking. It is abhorrent that Iran has responded with such unconscionable violence, as well as mass arrests, internet shutdowns and media blackouts. This is no way for any Government to treat its own people. The international community must shine a light on the situation in Iran and hold the Iranian Government to account for the serious human rights violations they are committing. I think we are all agreed on that.

In relation to the question from the noble Lord, Lord Collins, I say that Iran has yesterday returned British citizen Morad Tahbaz to Evin prison. Mr Tahbaz’s horrendous ordeal has gone on long enough. As my noble friend the Minister for the Middle East, South Asia and the United Nations said in a statement yesterday:

“We call on Iran to release Morad back to his family in Tehran immediately. Iran must stop unfairly detaining British and other nationals, and we will continue to work closely with our US partners to hold Iran to account”.

The noble Lord, Lord Mann, raised a question relating Elnaz Rekabi. Forgive me, but it would be unreasonable to go into specific details about some of the other individuals raised. However, we are certainly concerned to hear the reports that she has been put under house arrest. I am sure there will be follow-up comments on that—I appreciate them.

Since Mahsa Amini’s death, protests have continued across Iran on a daily basis. The longevity alone of the protests marks them out as the most significant we have seen in Iran for decades and I note the comments from the noble Lord, Lord Mann, about the bravery of the trade union movement in standing up to this repressive regime. What we are seeing now is exceptional, but I am grateful for his comments.

The protests are an authentic expression of the wishes of ordinary Iranians to enjoy fundamental freedoms. It is too soon to predict their long-term impact, but some facts are clear: Iran must stop blaming external actors for the unrest, listen to its people and stop committing violence against them. Let us be under no illusion: the Iranian authorities’ response to these peaceful protests and the people’s legitimate desires for fundamental freedoms, such as the right to peaceful assembly and freedom of expression, have been completely indefensible. NGOs have estimated over 200 deaths, at least 23 of which were children, but I gather from some of the comments today that that figure may tragically be higher. The Iranian authorities’ use of live ammunition against demonstrators is truly barbaric. The mass arrest of protestors and the restriction of internet access are sadly typical of this oppressive

[LORD JOHNSON OF LAINSTON]
regime and its flagrant disregard for human rights. These are not the actions of a Government listening to their people. Iran's leaders can and must now choose a more peaceful path.

Noble Lords raised a number of points relating to the UN commission on women and other actions that the Government can take, so I will now go through what we have been doing, to reassure your Lordships that we have been responding with the utmost vigour. The UK has joined the international community in swift and robust condemnation of Iran's actions. We have, as the right reverend Prelate said, raised our voice. At the 51st session of the Human Rights Council, His Majesty's Ambassador Simon Manley called on Iran to carry out independent, transparent investigations into the circumstances of Mahsa Amini's death. Our global human rights ambassador, Rita French, condemned the repression of women in Iran and the violence faced by Iranians who stand up for their fundamental right to freedom of expression. I take note of the various comments made about Iran sitting on the commission for women's rights. While we do not comment on the election processes in the United Nations, clearly we are working with our international partners to seek a resolution there.

In his statement on the death of Mahsa Amini, my noble friend Lord Ahmad urged the Iranian Government to undertake a transparent and accountable investigation and to respect the right of peaceful assembly. On 3 October, the Foreign Secretary summoned Iran's most senior diplomat in the UK to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office to condemn the Iranian authorities' violent crackdown on protest. We urged Iran to respect the right to peaceful assembly, exercise restraint in policing and release unfairly detained protesters.

On 10 October, the UK sanctioned the morality police—this is important, because a number of noble Lords commented on various sanctions and the options therein—and some of its leaders, as well as five other leading political and security officials responsible for serious human rights violations in Iran. All are now subject to asset freezes and travel bans. In total, the UK now maintains close to 300 sanctions designations against Iran in relation to human rights, nuclear proliferation and terrorism. The IRGC is a sanctioned organisation, and a number of the individuals involved in that grouping are also sanctioned. We will not comment on potential sanctions or other actions taken, because, clearly, it would allow those people to avoid them in advance. Noble Lords will understand the discretion I have to employ there. Our sanctions will ensure that the individuals designated cannot travel to the UK and that all their assets held in the UK will be frozen. As the Foreign Secretary has stated on many occasions, the UK has sent a clear message that we stand with the brave Iranian people in their struggle for fundamental rights.

Lastly, the JCPOA and our determination to try to reduce nuclear weapons proliferation in Iran and its development of a nuclear weapon were raised continually. Clearly, the JCPOA has not developed in the way we intended it to. Our view is that we are addressing our options with our international partners, and I hope

that noble Lords will support the Government in trying to come to a conclusion on this, and certainly continue to work towards a sensible solution.

In conclusion, the demonstrations following the death of Mahsa Amini have left the world in awe. The courage of the Iranian people is striking. They have for too long lived under the threat of detention, violence or harassment for what they wear or how they express themselves. The people are speaking their truth to power, encapsulated in three powerful words: women, life and freedom. Universal human rights know not of geographical boundaries, so it is our hope that these demonstrations will lead to the advancement of human rights in Iran and safer, freer lives for the Iranian people. The UK's position is clear: through our words, sanctions and work with international partners, we will hold Iran to account and defend the rights of its people.

Freedom of Expression (Communications and Digital Committee Report)

Motion to Take Note

3.16 pm

Moved by Lord Gilbert of Panteg

To move that this House takes note of the report from the Communications and Digital Committee *Free for All? Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age* (1st Report, Session 2021-22, HL Paper 54).

Lord Gilbert of Panteg (Con): My Lords, I am pleased to introduce this debate on the report of the Communications and Digital Committee, *Free for All? Freedom of Expression in the Digital Age*. I am very grateful to our outstanding committee staff. Our clerk was Alasdair Love and our policy analyst was Theo Demolder. Rita Cohen once again provided them and us with invaluable support and Dr Ella McPherson provided expert advice throughout the inquiry.

I am grateful too to noble Lords on the committee, many of whom are speaking today and all of whom brought great experience and expertise to this report. The committee is thriving under the fine leadership of my noble friend Lady Stowell of Beeston; I am very much looking forward to her contribution today.

This report was published under my chairmanship in July last year, since when there have been many significant developments and changes in digital regulation and more widely. I was privileged to sit on the Joint Scrutiny Committee for the Online Safety Bill which reported at the end of last year.

Having heard the debate on the demonstrations in Iran, we have to reflect that free speech is still something to be cherished and something that brave people are dying for today. Freedom of expression is about not being prevented from speaking one's own mind. It is the bedrock of free societies. Although it is subject to important legal limits, including against the incitement of violence and defamation, we must remember what Lord Justice Warby referred to in one judgment as "the well-established proposition that free speech encompasses the right to offend, and indeed to abuse another."

It was evidence taken during our previous inquiry on the future of journalism that led us to turn to freedom of expression. We had heard about how the market power of Google and Facebook was threatening media freedom. I am very pleased that the committee is continuing to champion the media and pursue our recommendation for an Australian-style mandatory bargaining code to ensure that publishers receive fair compensation for the use of their content.

It was clear from the outset of this inquiry that there are two major problems online. The first is the dissemination by platforms of the worst kind of content: that which is either illegal or harmful to children. The other problem is the opposite: platforms removing legitimate content or treating some political viewpoints more favourably than others. Among many examples we heard about were Twitter banning Donald Trump while still allowing Ayatollah Khamenei to incite violence against Israel and praise jihadi groups; and Facebook choosing to treat a *New York Post* story as misinformation, with no evidence, at the same time as taking no action against Chinese state media when they spread lies about the genocide in Xinjiang.

At the core of these twin problems of aggressive promotion of harmful content on the one hand and overremoval of posts on the other is the dominance of the big platforms. Their monopoly of power means that they do not have to respond to users' concerns about safety or free speech. These companies have monopolised the digital public square, shutting out new entrants that might be able to provide better services.

Tough competition regulation would unleash the power of the market to raise standards. It is a central part of the approach that we recommend in our report and we concluded that it was urgent. The delay in bringing forward legislation on the Digital Markets Unit is disappointing. I hope the Minister will agree that swiftly fixing broken markets to increase competition is the right and indeed Conservative thing to do.

There are two other pillars to the holistic approach we recommend which have not received enough attention. One is digital citizenship initiatives. Schools and public information campaigns both have a role to play in improving online behaviour. One person's abuse of their right to freedom of expression can have a chilling effect on others, leaving them less able to express themselves freely. There is now much evidence that women and girls most often are being silenced by others online. However, regulation is not the only answer here. Alongside really joined-up, consistent citizen initiatives, an improvement in our public discourse would be a good start. Lord Williams of Oystermouth told us that "abrasive and confrontational styles" of discussion

"do not come from nowhere."

Indeed. Politicians and other public figures should be setting a better example, showing that we can disagree while respecting those we are arguing with and not condemning as extremists those who have different viewpoints from our own.

The other pillar is regulation of the design of the biggest platforms. Freedom of expression is the right to speak out, but there is no corresponding obligation

on others to listen. We called for users to be empowered with tools to filter the type of content they are shown. Everyone has their own individual sensitivities and preferences and only they, if they are an adult, can really decide what they want to see. I am glad that the Government have gone some way in implementing this with new clauses in the Online Safety Bill, which I will come to a moment.

It is not the existence of individual pieces of content which in some circumstances and to some people can be harmful that is the problem, but the way in which algorithms serve up that content in unrelenting barrages. The devastating impact of these business models was laid bare in the astonishing evidence at the inquest into the death of Molly Russell, which we would never have seen were it not for the persistence and courage of her father, Ian Russell. The horrendous material that was targeted, promoted and recommended to Molly changed her perception of herself and her options. Seeing the systemic nature of her abuse in the coroners' court will help us to take action to save lives, and I hope that Ian and his family find some comfort in that.

Design regulation means ensuring that the largest platforms' content-creation algorithms, choice architecture and reward mechanisms are not set up to encourage users' worst instincts and to spread the most unpleasant content the most quickly. Such measures would get to the heart of those business models, which centre on keeping users logged in and viewing adverts for as long as possible—even if that means stoking outrage.

We should be taking different approaches to protect children and adults. For adults, we want a space where they do not find manifestly illegal material but can control their own online environment by insisting that platforms put power in their hands, as I have described, which means an approach that allows adults to in effect create their own algorithms through approaches such as interoperability.

When it comes to children, we want to protect them from content that is not appropriate for their age, but surely we want more than that. We should be aspiring to an online environment that is positive and enriching, and which helps them to grow and learn safely: a space where their privacy is respected and where every stage of the design process puts these objectives ahead of the financial interests of the platform.

It is obvious, then, that platforms and other online services need to know the age of their users. The way in which they do this and the degree of certainty they would need will depend on the risk of children using the service and the risk of children encountering harmful material or design features if they do. That is why, while I will passionately champion free speech when we come to the Online Safety Bill, I will also support the call led by the noble Baroness, Lady Kidron, for a set of standards for age-assurance technology and approaches that preserve privacy. Well-designed and proportionately regulated age assurance is the friend, not the enemy, of free speech.

I have outlined the approach favoured by the committee in its report, and now I turn to the Bill's approach. We have been told repeatedly by officials and Ministers that the Online Safety Bill is simply about platforms,

[LORD GILBERT OF PANTEG]

systems and processes, rather than content. This is incorrect. These are systems and processes to remove content. Their compliance with the legislation will be judged according to the presence of content, even if a single piece of content would not be enough for a platform to be deemed non-complaint.

The “legal but harmful” duty has been the subject of so much debate. Its supporters are right that it is not straightforwardly a duty to remove content; it is about platforms choosing a policy on a given type of legal but harmful content and applying it consistently. However, this is not nearly as simple or as innocuous as it sounds. The vagueness of the concept of harm gives Ofcom significant definitional power. For example, a statutory instrument might designate information which has an adverse physical or psychological impact as a priority category which platforms must include in their terms and conditions. A platform that said that it would not allow such information could be penalised by Ofcom for not removing content which the regulator feels meets this standard but which the platform does not, because the platform either does not believe it is untrue or does not believe it is harmful.

When we asked why it would not be simpler to criminalise given harms, part of the response was that many of those legal harms are so vague as to be impossible to define in law. It is not clear why that would not also make them impossible to regulate. As a committee, we have always felt it a crucial point of principle to focus on the evidence in front of us, and when we did, on this issue, a consensus quickly emerged that the “legal but harmful” provisions are unworkable and would present a serious threat to freedom of expression. They should be removed from the Bill.

We also raised concern about the duty to remove illegal content as currently drafted. The problems with this duty have not received nearly as much attention as the “legal but harmful” duty, but might, I fear, be significantly more dangerous. Unlike with “legal but harmful”, this is straightforwardly a duty to remove content. Of course no one wants illegal content online. If it really is illegal, it should be removed, but we are asking platforms to make decisions which would otherwise be left to the courts. Prosecuting authorities have the time and resource to investigate and examine cases in great detail, understanding the intent, context and effect of posts. Platforms do not. Neither platforms’ content moderation algorithms nor their human moderators are remotely qualified to judge the legality of speech in ambiguous cases.

The new communications offences in Part 10 of the Bill, which have their merit, show the problem most clearly. A platform will have to remove posts which it has reasonable grounds to believe are intended and likely to cause serious distress to a likely audience, having considered whether there might be a reasonable public interest defence. Even courts would struggle with this.

If we oblige platforms to remove posts that they have “reasonable grounds to believe” might be illegal, there is a real danger, surely, that they will simply remove swathes of content to be on the safe side, taking it down if there is the slightest chance it may be

prohibited. There is no incentive for them to consider freedom of expression, other than some duties to “have regard for” its importance, which are currently much too weak. Legitimate speech will become collateral damage.

I do not pretend that we have all the answers to these concerns of how to ensure proportionality and accuracy in removing potentially illegal content, but I know that this is something the Government have been looking at. Can my noble friend tell us whether the Government acknowledge the concern about overremoval of legal content and whether consideration has been given to solutions which could include a clear and specific duty on Ofcom to have regard for freedom of expression in designing codes and guidance and using enforcement powers, or more fundamentally, a change in the standard from “reasonable grounds to believe” to “manifestly illegal”?

The committee in its report found drafting of the Bill to be vague in parts, perhaps because it is born of a desire to find some way of getting rid of all the bad things on the internet while avoiding unintended consequences. As Susie Alegre, a leading human rights lawyer at Doughty Street Chambers put it, the Bill is so unclear that

“it is impossible to assess what it will mean in practice, its proportionality in relation to interference with human rights, or the potential role of the Online Safety Bill in the prevention of online harms.”

Ofcom will be left to try to make sense of and implement it. Ofcom is rightly a very well-respected regulator, but it is wrong to hand any regulator such sweeping powers over something so fundamental as what citizens are allowed to say online. There is no analogy in the offline world.

Think of how contested BBC impartiality is. Imagine how much more furiously the debate about Ofcom impartiality will be when both sides of a highly contested debate claim that platforms are wrongly taking their posts down and leaving their opponents’ posts up, demanding Ofcom take action to tackle what they see as harm.

The only winners from all this will be the likes of Facebook and Google. Having left their business models fundamentally unscathed, the Online Safety Bill will create obligations which only they can afford to deal with. New entrants to the market will be crushed under the compliance burden.

Before I conclude, on enforcement, it is sometimes said that the internet is a Wild West. It is not. We are right to put in place regulatory regimes across the digital landscape and, for all its flaws, this Bill is an important step. However, the report identified 12 existing criminal offences and a number of civil law protections that are already in place, and which are especially relevant to the online world. These offences already cover many of the behaviours online that we most worry about. The problem is not a lack of laws but a failure to enforce existing legislation. We called on the Government to ensure that existing laws are enforced and to explore mechanisms for platforms to fund this, and to require platforms to preserve deleted posts for a fixed period.

It will soon be time for this House to turn its attention to detailed scrutiny of the Online Safety Bill. I hope that noble Lords will find the committee's report and today's debate a useful preparation. I firmly believe that the approach that we suggest would make the internet safer and freer than would the current proposal. I would like to see an Online Safety Bill that focuses on platform design and content which is manifestly illegal, and which goes much further to protect children. It must also contain strong incentives for platforms not to take down legal content, including a prohibition on removing content from legitimate news publishers.

Parliament must provide ongoing scrutiny on the online safety regime, competition, and all areas of digital regulation, to help regulators do their jobs effectively and show that their powers are never again so completely overtaken by changes in the digital world.

I look forward to hearing from my noble friend the Minister, and warmly congratulate him on his appointment. I am sure that he will approach this debate and the online safety Bill with characteristic depth of thought. I beg to move.

3.31 pm

Lord McNally (LD): My Lords, I rise not because there is even more power in having “early” next to my name on the speakers’ list, but because the noble Lord, Lord Bassam, has had to withdraw—I hope for non-serious reasons. We will miss his contribution.

I sincerely congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, and the committee, for an excellent report and, as he has indicated, a timely one, as we move to the Online Safety Bill in the very near future, hopefully. I also look forward to the noble Baroness, Lady O’Neill, following me. My mother, who was born in 1900 and left school at 13, was something of a philosopher herself, and used to tell me, “Sticks and stones will break your bones, but names can never hurt you.” That provided me with a certain resilience for my chosen profession of politics, but it is only partly true. Misinformation, fake news, and plain old-fashioned lies have been the prelude to tyranny, torture and murder throughout history.

Liberal democracies are particularly susceptible to such attacks. I am not talking about the Liberal Democrats but about that wave of parties in all free societies who believe in the freedom of speech that the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert referred to, to free Parliament and the rule of law by an independent judiciary. They are particularly susceptible because they have built into their DNA a certain tendency towards tolerance and freedom of speech, and a reluctance to claim absolute certainties. I miss from these Benches today the late Lord Russell. Conrad would say, in response to a particularly dogmatic colleague, “I wish I could be as sure about one thing as the noble Lord is about everything.”

I have time to make only three short points. First, I commend the four regulators—Ofcom, the ICO, the CMA and the FSA—for the work they do to consult and co-ordinate, and I urge them to extend this to further protect the rights of citizens and consumers. I associate myself with the call from the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, for the early establishment of the digital markets unit.

Secondly, digital citizenship should be a central part of the government media literacy strategy and be properly funded. I served on the Puttnam committee, which gave pre-legislative scrutiny to the 2003 Communications Act. We recommended that Ofcom give priority to digital literacy as a way of equipping the citizen and democratic structures for the new digital age. I am afraid that this is still work in progress, and I support the report’s recommendation that Ofcom assist in co-ordinating digital citizenship education between civil society organisations and industry.

Thirdly, the Government’s response contains lots of good intentions and box-ticking, but big tech will be judged, rather like the big energy companies on climate change, not by its ability to tick boxes or do its equivalent of greenwashing, but by what it actually does to address these very real problems. That is why I strongly support the report’s recommendation that a Joint Committee of both Houses be established to consider the ongoing regulation of the digital environment.

My old mentor, Jim Callaghan, was fond of saying, “A lie can be halfway round the world before truth has got its boots on”. This is truer than ever today, and liberal democracies must equip themselves and their citizens to protect their institutions and values from a real and present danger. This report and debate are an important contribution to us getting right how we protect our freedom and values in the years ahead.

3.36 pm

Baroness O’Neill of Bengarve (CB): My Lords, this is a rich, detailed and informative report, yet one underlying issue has perhaps gone to the margins: the focus on freedom of expression. Nowadays, we often use the term “freedom of expression” as though it were a synonym for freedom of speech. I note that communication involves two parties—not merely those who express themselves, the originators, but the recipients. This shift has been a feature of 20th-century discussions. When we shifted human rights documents to focus on freedom of expression rather than free speech, perhaps we did not notice that this marginalises the position of recipients and privileges originators. In short, there is a difference between expression and communication. Freedom of expression is not enough for a democratic culture in which free communication is respected and required.

As we well know, new communications technologies have often fundamentally disrupted communication. We can think all the way back to what Plato tells us of Socrates writing about writing, to realise how old this is. Similar things happened with the advent of printing and then, of course, of broadcasting. The remedies were often extremely slow, which is a salutary lesson for us in contemplating the recommendations of this report. How fast could it be done? How much of a change would it achieve?

This time, as I mentioned, we have new technologies that privilege the originators and expand their freedom of expression—at least in theory. That is no bad thing, but it might leave the recipients in a problematic position, receiving content from they know not where or whom. That is where the problem begins: we do not know who the originators of this communication are. Very often, this is a source of difficulty.

[BARONESS O'NEILL OF BENGARVE]

Unsurprisingly, some norms and standards that have mattered greatly for communication will be ignored if we are thinking mainly about freedom of expression. Norms that can be ignored might include—this is just a smattering; there are many others—honesty, accuracy, civility, reliability and respect for evidence. I could go on. Noble Lords will note that they are not only ethical but epistemic norms. These are the bedrock of good communication.

So, stressing the rights of originators too much is likely to land us with some difficulty. Digital communication empowers originators, and this can be at the expense of recipients. Let us remember that some of the originators are not you, me and our fellow citizens seeking to express ourselves, but tech companies, data brokers and other actors in the digital space who relish the thought that they have freedom of expression, because it enables them to do things they perhaps ought not to do.

It follows that remedying the situation will be multiply difficult and probably slow, but the one thing it must not be is a set of remedies that protect originators at the expense of recipients. Remedies must concentrate on removing the cloak of anonymity that currently protects so many originators and ensuring that what they do can be seen to be something they did. That means removing anonymity from the tech companies, the data brokers and indeed the many other sources that are polluting communication at present.

I suppose that this empowers some originators, but I doubt whether concentrating on those will get us there. The important thing is to regulate data brokers, tech companies, Governments and cartels: those who pollute the online space.

3.41 pm

Baroness Stowell of Beeston (Con): It is an honour to follow such a respected philosopher as the noble Baroness. Indeed, it was a privilege to join the committee under my noble friend Lord Gilbert's excellent chairmanship, but that was not until after the inquiry was completed, so I cannot claim any input into this excellent report.

In January this year, I took on the daunting challenge of succeeding my noble friend as chair and maintaining the committee's reputation for undertaking inquiries of relevance and impact. Clearly, I endorse the conclusions and recommendations of the committee's report. I believe in freedom of speech—online or in the real world—and welcome the Government's decision to look again at the most contentious element of the Online Safety Bill—which my noble friend has already referred to—which threatens to undermine that. But, like everyone else, I also care deeply about the protection of children from harm, and my concerns have only been reinforced by the recent inquest into the tragic death of Molly Russell.

Doing nothing when it comes to regulating the internet is not an option I would consider acceptable. The Communications and Digital Committee will reconsider the Online Safety Bill once the Government have announced how they plan to change it before it reaches your Lordships' House. I am not going to

comment further on the freedom of speech aspects of the committee's report today. Instead, I want to emphasise the importance of the other half of the regulatory equation to which the Government, frustratingly, have not so far attached equal priority, even though, as my noble friend has said, it is just as important if we are to have a safe as well as economically healthy online world: legislating to tackle the dominance and overwhelming power of the big tech firms by allowing much-needed competition to them.

Chapter 4 of the committee's report sets out most powerfully the case and urgent need for the Digital Markets Unit, which is part of the Competition and Markets Authority, to be put on a statutory footing and given ex-ante powers to intervene more effectively in these markets. My noble friend already referred to one of the key conclusions in chapter 4, which is about these platforms not being allowed to monopolise the digital public square. The report also recommends that the DMU should, where necessary,

“block mergers and acquisitions which would undermine competition.”

Earlier this year, determined to continue the good work started by my noble friend, the committee held accountability sessions with the Government and the CMA to maintain the pressure for action, including calling on the CMA to use its existing powers to their very limit while waiting for these long-promised and much-needed new powers. Since then, and to its credit, the CMA has been doing that, as evidenced by its recent ruling against Meta's acquisition of Giphy—the GIFs that are used in tweets and different forms of social messaging. Noble Lords and others might shrug their shoulders and wonder, “So what? What's the benefit of that?” Well, let me explain.

Had this acquisition been allowed to continue, Meta would have been able to increase its market power by denying or limiting other social media platforms' access to these GIFs, thereby pushing people to Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, which already make up 73% of user time spent on social media in the UK—or it would have been able to change the terms of access to Giphy GIFs, requiring Twitter, TikTok and Snapchat to provide Meta with more data from UK users in return for their access. Disentangling Giphy from Meta will now be a slow and costly operation and a lot of the anti-competition damage will already have been done, but if the DMU had had ex-ante powers it would have been able to prevent the acquisition, or at least the integration, of the business until it had carried out its work.

The internet and the big tech firms have revolutionised our world, and they deserve huge credit for their innovation and the risks they have taken to make a success of their businesses and create opportunities for so many others. But we cannot ignore the damage they cause socially and economically because of the control and power they hold. This threat will only grow if there are no limits to their dominance and everyone else is forced to rely on them, whether as individuals, businesses or even nation states.

It cannot be right that a handful of powerful individuals or corporate entities with no democratic mandate can influence and shape our society and affect our social norms. We need to ensure that the Online Safety Bill

does not inadvertently exacerbate that threat, and we need to accept that we will need to keep evolving regulation in this area. But the Government also need to recognise that, on their own, online safety legislation is not enough, and they must bring forward with equal if not more urgency the digital competition Bill. When my noble friend comes to wind up, could he explain why the Government have, so far, failed to recognise this? Could he also tell us what plans the Government have to bring forward this necessary legislation as soon as possible?

3.47 pm

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate, and to pay my thanks to the outgoing chair and, indeed, my obeisance to the incoming chair, as I seek to behave appropriately as a member of the committee.

My first point is an observation on how long it takes for a committee report to get its day in the Chamber. It is two years since we did this work. I think of our work on the future funding of the BBC, the future of Channel 4, the position of regulators and now our report on the creative industries and wonder just how old I will be by the time we get to the end of that list.

So it is good to have the report here. In a sense, rereading it with the advantage of two years' space makes me aware of just how good a report it is. It makes as good reading now as it did then. The noble Baroness, Lady O'Neill, subtly made a point that I will take home and think about. Yes, we had the age-old debate about the need to wed ourselves to the idea of freedom of expression as a human right, but we also had impeccable debates about the misuse of people's data.

They were two debates that were truly impeccable, each adumbrating a principle which we should stand by with every fibre of our being. It seems to me that, since one seems like an unstoppable force and the other an immovable object, it would need the wisdom of Solomon to decide in particular instances how to favour the rights of those who feel their privacy has been invaded over the advocates—of whom I am one—of freedom of speech. But originators and recipients will go home with me, and I shall think seriously about it.

The digital equivalent of the public square is how social media platforms have been described, and indeed they are, yet the irony is that they are controlled by private companies. Out of that paradox come all the difficulties that we are wrestling with as we seek to get legislation that deals with this complicated world.

The protection of children has been adequately mentioned, and so it should be. I heard the Minister at Question Time yesterday talk again and again about the fact that looking after the interests of children is the predominant feature of the Government's mind as they take legislation forward in this area. So I hope that the 5Rights work done by the noble Baroness, Lady Kidron, will be incorporated in that thinking and play a major part. Age verification is what she is very concerned about. I believe that her foundation

has made significant progress towards getting something that we could work with, and I hope she has assurance on that point.

Early in this report, we were pointing the way forward, presciently I think, towards the Online Safety Bill that will soon be before us—or will it be soon? It has been put off so many times. I have no idea when it will finally be taken on the Floor of the House of Commons. Looking towards such a Bill, we emphasise the need for three aspects of consideration that we should take very seriously: the design of legislation, the nature of competition and the need for improved education in what the phenomenon of the internet and its applications means, not just in terms of helping children and adults to press the right buttons and to activate the machinery to do their will, but to understand outcomes and the essential nature of what anonymous contributions to conversations—or are they conversations if the contributors are anonymous?—can lead to. Well, I am very glad that this is before us.

I walk quite regularly under the statue of George Orwell at the BBC. I have almost memorised and thought a lot about the inscription from *Animal Farm* that is written on the wall behind the statue:

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

That is fair enough. I have stood at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park many a time and have had a fair few things hurled at me. However, I want to add as a corollary, “If liberty means anything at all, it means the right of people to tell me what I don't want to hear”. I think that that might be a complementary way of looking at a very important principle.

Baroness Bloomfield of Hinton Waldrist (Con): Before we go any further, perhaps I may remind noble Lords that there is a speaking limit and that this is a time-limited debate, so we will be squeezing Minister's summing-up at the end. With the exception of the noble Lord, Lord McNally, everybody has gone over today.

3.54 pm

Lord Allan of Hallam (LD): My Lords, I shall seek not to go over. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, and the committee on the report. It is very timely to debate it today—the day on which the EU's Digital Services Act comes into law, and as we ourselves eagerly anticipate the Online Safety Bill. I want to make a short contribution on the basis of having spent a decade inside one of the platforms, making decisions about how to manage content.

We are here with the Online Safety Bill and the Digital Services Act because we, the politicians, do not trust private companies to make decisions about their platforms. The noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, outlined some of the reasons why that trust has evaporated. The position now is that we are taking power to ourselves to tell platforms how to manage content, as a condition of operating in the UK market, and we will delegate the day-to-day enforcement of those rules to our chosen regulator, Ofcom.

An important question that arises from this, which the report rightly focuses on, is whether we should instruct Ofcom to consider only illegal speech or to

[LORD ALLAN OF HALLAM]

bring in a wide range of other types of harmful speech. Because of the concerns about whether the regulator should enforce against only legal speech, there is now an interest in whether the definitions of “legal” and “harmful” could be more closely aligned. Today, I want to make a necessarily condensed argument for why this would be a mistake, both as a matter of principle and as a practical matter.

Turning first to the principle, we often hear calls to align online and offline standards. In our real-world interactions, we do not rely solely on the law to manage speech behaviour; this is to build on some of the arguments made by the noble Baroness, Lady O’Neill. To take an example, I could cover myself in swastikas and hand out copies of *Mein Kampf* entirely legally in the United Kingdom. There is no law that prohibits me. Yet were I to try to do that in most public spaces, such as by going to a football ground, I would be stopped on the basis that the speech norms prohibit my doing that, rather than because I had broken the law. We have a gap between what is unacceptable speech and what is illegal speech. This is not a bug but a feature of our speech norms in the United Kingdom.

It would be a mistake to try to make all unacceptable speech illegal or, equally, to deem all legal speech acceptable and try to force platforms to carry it. We are left with a sustained situation where there will be a gap between what we as a population believe is acceptable and what the law outlines, and that is right. We want to keep the legal prohibitions—the criminalisation of speech—as minimal as possible.

Turning to the practical considerations, which the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, again talked about, it is sometimes assumed that there is a bright line between legal and illegal content. My experience over many years is that there is no such bright line but many shades of grey. Again, to illustrate this with a specific example, many people would post on social media pictures of Abdullah Öcalan, the leader of the PKK, a proscribed terrorist organisation in the UK. Now, when someone posts that picture, are they supporting the peace process he is engaged in in Turkey? Are they supporting him as a terrorist? Are they supporting his socialist ideals or the YPG in Syria, which also looks to Abdullah Öcalan? There is no way to understand the purpose and intent from that photo, so you have to make a judgment. At one end of the spectrum, you could say, “Look, I am so worried about terrorist content that I am going to take down every picture of Abdullah Öcalan”, knowing that you will be taking down many forms of legal expression. At the other end, you could say, “I will leave them all up, and if I do so I know that I will be permitting some expressions of support for terrorism, or some illegality to take place.” There are of course many points in between.

We have an opportunity now to shift where those judgments are made in the new structure outlined in the Online Safety Bill. Platforms will have to respond to guidance and codes of conduct precisely on these issues of how they make judgment and we, as Parliament, will have a role in setting that guidance and those codes and of conduct, as Ofcom will bring them to us. We are moving into a world where decisions will not necessarily get any easier but will no longer be the sole

preserve of the platforms. It is a benefit for public accountability that there will be an official government or parliamentary view expressed through Ofcom’s codes of conduct. Equally, we as Parliament—or the British establishment—will be responsible in future for the decisions made around content moderation. I fear that I may have jumped out of the platform frying pan into the regulatory fire by engaging from this side of the argument, but the Online Safety Bill will be a significant improvement.

4 pm

Viscount Colville of Culross (CB): My Lords, I declare an interest as a freelance TV producer. I had the honour of serving on the Communications Committee when this report was published. I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, for his very able chairing of this inquiry.

The noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, suggested that the Government should amend the Online Safety Bill clauses on content that is legal but harmful to adults. I agree with the fears that these clauses will have an extremely deleterious effect on free speech. It is not just that the definition for this material is so vague, but that the Bill gives such dangerous powers to the Secretary of State to specify what is harmful by regulations. I support the recommendation in this report, which were then taken further by the Joint Committee on the Bill, to set up a parliamentary committee that will have the power to interrogate these changes further. I understand that the last Government were minded to drop these clauses. I would be grateful if the Minister would share with your Lordships’ House the new Government’s thinking on this issue.

I want to concentrate my speech on the later recommendations in the report. Recommendations 33 and 34 call for the Digital Markets Unit to be given statutory powers. It has been established for over a year and a half but still has not been given these. This could not be a more urgent issue. The big tech companies are still shockingly dominant. Your Lordships have heard this week of the falls in their share prices, but they still have enormous power in the markets.

In the tech ad market, this power is supreme. The CMA’s report into online platforms and digital marketing space found that Google and Facebook, as it was then called, make up 80% of digital advertising spend. It declared that the market is “no longer ... contestable”. Such dominance is an obvious threat to innovative start-ups. Even if they manage to get a share of the advertising revenue, they face the ever-present threat of being bought up before they have grown to scale by the big players, whose dominance is therefore enhanced.

The problem is that the CMA’s monopoly rules concentrate on consumer price benefit. Obviously, when so many of the services offered by the platforms are free, that does not apply. Instead, different metrics must be introduced which take into account how the platforms use data, consumers’ privacy and freedom of expression.

The Government’s response to the committee’s recommendation is to acknowledge that competition is central to unlocking the full potential of the digital economy. They promise to deliver reforms that will bring more vibrant markets, innovation and increase productivity. Who in this House does not agree with that?

I echo the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, who asked why the Government have been so slow to enact these pledges. The Queen's Speech dangled before your Lordships the hope of a draft digital markets and competition Bill, which promised to give the DMU statutory powers so that it can tackle tech companies' abuse of their dominant positions. As the Government delay on this matter, regular businesses and consumers are losing out. The CMA suggests that they are losing £2.4 billion annually from the overpricing of the big platforms on ad sales alone.

Instead, the Government have used valuable legislative time to bring forward a media Bill which, although containing useful elements, promises to privatise Channel 4, which is driven by blind ideology rather than any business case. Can the Minister give the House an indication of when the digital markets Bill will come before it? I hope he will give us an assurance that goes beyond "when parliamentary time allows".

I should also like to draw your Lordships' attention to recommendation 42 of the report, which calls for a mandatory bargaining code to be set up to ensure fair negotiations between platforms and news publishers. Since 2010, over 265 regional newspapers in the UK have closed. Those that remain have seen their circulations collapse and this lost revenue is not being replaced by digital subscriptions. The industry faces an existential threat.

The big hope is that it can be resurrected digitally, as 38% of visits to news publishers' websites came from links on Google or Facebook. However, at the moment the platforms get the content free or at very little cost, even though news content is one of the biggest drivers of traffic. The tech companies have made contracts with some newspaper publishers to pay for their content, but many say that the power imbalance is so great in the platforms' favour that they are not being paid the true cost for using the content.

A bargaining code has already been introduced in Australia. It is not perfect because it is not sufficiently inclusive of regional players, and some people are worried about a mandatory contract for news content being imposed on the platforms. However, Rod Sims, the ex-head of Australia's competition commission, told me that this has not happened and he had not been forced to use his powers. The threat of the imposition of a contract has changed the dynamic in the market enough to bring the platforms to agree an equitable price with news publishers for use of their content.

The report needs to see more of its recommendations taken up by the Government. There is still important work to be done if this country is to become a digital world leader. I urge the Minister to do all he can to ensure that there is legislation which allows freedom of expression and for a competitive digital market to allow a plurality of platforms in which those voices can be heard.

4.04 pm

Baroness Fox of Buckley (Non-Affl): My Lords, I thank the committee for this report. Even though I do not agree with many of its recommendations, it was a real treat to read—like a great primer or literature

review. There is so much of the Online Safety Bill to worry about in terms of free speech that it is hard to know where to focus, so I will just make a few points.

I was especially grateful to see a refreshingly nuanced approach in the report to misinformation, which I focused on the last time we discussed these issues. As research from Ofcom notes, many believe that the term "misinformation" is being

"weaponised for censorship of valid alternative perspectives."

The report's examples from the lockdown and Covid era are pertinent: for example, expert medical opinion—albeit a minority—that challenged either the Government or the World Health Organization were labelled misinformation, deemed so by big tech fact-checkers with no scientific qualifications but

"certified by the International Fact-Checking Network"—

whatever that is. It is all the more important to note, as the report does, that even Will Moy, the CEO of Full Fact, has said:

"There is a moral panic about 'fake news'", leading to "frightening overreactions" by Governments and big tech.

I was also glad that the report noted the broader context of what I think is in danger of being a potential moral panic about online safety. Concerns from free-speakers are based on the offline problems of cancel culture and the ever-growing attacks on, for example, academic freedom in universities—such that the Government are attempting to legislate to enhance free expression on campus at the same time as undermining free expression online.

I will add another offline context: there is a contemporary therapeutic ethos that posits safety—especially psychological safety—as trumping freedoms of any sort. I hope that the committee will look at this at some stage. We cannot discuss online harms without understanding that the concept of harm is an ever-expanding category.

Before I look at that, I will make one clarification: whenever I raise problems with the Bill, the justifications that come back at me always centre on children's safety. I note that I would be happy if the Online Safety Bill confined its focus on the young and children. Instead, the Government use adult worries about children's access to porn, self-harm and suicides—all right worries—to introduce huge legislative changes that will affect adult freedoms, effectively infantilising citizens and treating us as dependent children in need of protection from each other's speech.

The report tells us:

"Civilised societies have legal safeguards to protect those who may be vulnerable."

The problem is when vulnerability gets discussed in relation to adults. In a therapeutic culture, vulnerability and victimhood are valorised and often incentivised because, if we present ourselves as fragile and vulnerable, we have a cultural currency and power not only to gain attention and support but to silence others. For example, the report is extremely helpful in deconstructing the whole concept of harm: the committee rightly rails against the illiberal notion of censoring "legal but harmful" material, and hopefully the Government will indeed drop that egregious clause. The whole premise of the Bill is based on the idea that speech online can be, and often is, harmful. The elastic use of the term

[BARONESS FOX OF BUCKLEY]

“harm” makes it ill-defined and subjective, fudging physical harm with psychological harm—and it is no wonder that many now see words as violence.

The committee helpfully asked the Government whether the

“Bill’s definition of psychological impact has any clinical basis”.

The reply came back saying, “No”; it would be up to “platforms ... to make judgements” about speech causing anxiety or fear. This is potentially disastrous, as terms such as “offensive”, “hate”, and “misinformation”—with all their subjectivity—can be said by individuals to mean that something should be banned.

The report notes that, a few years ago,

“the Christian Union at Balliol College ... was banned from its freshers’ fair”,

on the basis that

“its presence could ‘harm’ some attendees.”

Goodness knows what they would make of the harm of having Bishops in this place. Only this week, Cambridge University faculty heads apologised to students for “distressing” them by sending an email promotion for a “potentially harmful” talk. What caused such alarm? A talk by Sex Matters’ Helen Joyce entitled, “Criticising gender-identity ideology: what happens when speech is silenced”—oh the irony. Actually, much speech is silenced, online and offline, by deploying the language of psychology to suggest that speech, books and ideas are dangerous. Trigger warnings are put on lectures and literature to prevent post-traumatic stress disorder. PTSD is now not clinically diagnosed post war or after a disaster, but by the potential harms caused by upsetting speech or words. So even if “harm” in the Bill is medically diagnosed, it will not help because psychological language is now frequently used to silence us.

4.10 pm

Lord Vaizey of Didcot (Con): My Lords, I join in paying tribute to the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, for steering this excellent report through the committee. It was very much his idea; he was ahead of his time in alighting on this as a big gap in terms of how we debate online safety regulation. Let it not be forgotten that now I have a new leader—my noble friend Lady Stowell—and I duly genuflect to her for the few months that I have remaining to serve on this excellent committee, which does some excellent work. It has been a wonderful way in which to be introduced to your Lordships’ House.

I echo a lot of the points made already by people who are extremely well informed in this arena. First, on the point made by the noble Baroness and the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, about the Digital Markets Unit, it is obviously very important that we update competition regulation. It is interesting that the analogue Competition and Markets Authority still managed to take a swipe at Meta/Facebook and forced it to divest itself of Giphy, which is a site that produces lots of memes. No doubt the decision produced its own memes—but it has been a very bad week for Mark Zuckerberg, and I gather that he is now down to \$38 billion in net worth. He has lost \$100 billion and is now merely worth his age, 38, so we hope that it does not go any lower. I am not generally in favour of the competition authorities getting involved in these kinds of issues,

but it is a good reflection that the acquisition of small companies, such as Instagram, can sometimes shut off competition at an early stage.

I also want to get off my chest this issue about digital citizenship. By the way, as mentioned in the register of interests, I work with Common Sense Media, a US not-for-profit organisation that promotes digital citizenship, as well as NewsGuard, which combats fake news sites. I find the phrase “digital citizenship” intensely annoying, because it has become completely meaningless. That is not to be rude about Common Sense Media, the organisation that I work for, which provides very useful videos and training for young people on how to handle online bullying, and so on. It also means that we miss the point about how still clunky technology is. For me, the biggest change that we could make in digital citizenship would be to take the 120 pages of terms and conditions that you sign up to when you buy a new phone and turn them into five principles, so you know exactly, in effect, what you are signing up for.

I would like to see the Government—and, indeed, this Minister, in the few hours he remains in his current post, although I am sure he will be moved to an equally good department—

Noble Lords: Oh!

Lord Vaizey of Didcot (Con): I am only teasing about the endless reshuffle. My jokes do not always work in this place. I would love the Minister to say what the Government are doing to encourage technology companies to be more user-friendly. That may involve digital citizenship training for the Home Secretary, who I gather finds it difficult even to use email. Clearly, there are issues here for people of every level of experience.

At the heart of this debate is, of course, what we mean by “legal but harmful”. I completely agree with the noble Baroness, Lady Fox. I was hoping to disagree with her, because she is very provocative, but she is right to a certain extent about moral panic. The rise of Trump was actually aided by CNN more than anybody else. We sometimes load too much on to the platforms in terms of what they do. Nevertheless, I strongly support internet regulation of some kind. We need to make platforms accountable. The best example is, when you have a Twitter pile-on and you have the most vile abuse—particularly as a politician—there is simply no way in which to get redress. There has to be a regulatory backstop for you to be able to do that. But let us be clear: this is not broadcast regulation and it is not going to take every tweet and adjudicate; it is systems regulation and it is long overdue.

The final point that I would make to the Minister—and I shall not make another joke about him moving—is that I would love to hear what more the Government are doing on age verification and identity. It is such an important issue, and we simply cannot seem to get to a clear answer. It is about dealing with the issue of adult content, which the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, raised—and it seems unbelievable that we still do not have proper age verification procedures in place for this kind of thing.

Finally, as a committed remainer, I celebrate, along with the noble Lord, Lord Allan, the fact that these terrible EU bureaucrats who can barely tie their own

shoelaces have managed to pass much more quickly than us sensible regulations on internet and competition regulation, while we see the Online Safety Bill tortuously stuck in the other place.

4.15 pm

Lord Davies of Brixton (Lab): My Lords, like previous speakers I thank the committee for its excellent report. As someone said, it makes good reading and is a clear exposition of the issues. The obvious question is, where are we with the Online Safety Bill, which was mentioned in the Queen's Speech but has since disappeared from sight? We were told it would be "as soon as possible" and clearly, the emphasis is on "possible" rather than "soon". Much of the discussion, rightly, has been on the issues set out in the report, with a focus on protection of children, which I feel strongly about. I think back to my childhood and that of my children, who grew up in a pre-internet age, and I fear for my grandchildren, faced with the issues they now see on the internet. Legislation in that area is crucial.

However, I want to expand the discussion to reflect the expansion of the scope of the Online Safety Bill, because various other priority offences have been added to it, including fraud and financial crime. This is an important aspect of online safety: clearly, protection against financial crime should be a crucial part of the Bill, and I am glad the Government have accepted that. It is not clear to me exactly how it is going to work, because there is a particular problem. They have defined it as "fraud and financial crime", but a lot of the harm that happens on the internet might not, strictly speaking, be found to be fraud or other another form of financial crime. People can be harmed financially through reading material on the internet which, unless there is prosecution through the courts, might not be counted as criminal. I hope the Minister will say something about how such things will be defined.

The issue of a duty of care has been mentioned, and a duty of care to protect people against financial harm would be an essential pillar of the Bill. In the phrase that is used, there should be safety by design, so that people are not misled into reading material that will cause them suffering.

4.18 pm

Baroness Featherstone (LD): My Lords, I too sat on the committee under the excellent chairmanship of the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, and now under the excellent chairmanship of the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell.

The power to amplify, together with the volume and speed of the internet, have put power in the hands of individuals, organisations and tech companies, for better or worse. Now, we are seeking to control the worse, but as we do so I counsel that we remember that the internet has given us the most extraordinary communication tool for ideas, for gathering others to our cause and for getting information around the world quickly, as well as avenues for those in countries that do not have the miracle of free speech, because their media are state-controlled, to contact the outside world. So, getting the balance right between freedom of speech and the need to qualify it is a very important

task. Of course, what is illegal offline is illegal online: that is the easy bit and I guess that is where my preference lies, with very few exceptions.

As the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, said, I want maximum controls in my own home. Put power in my hands—if I do not want to receive anonymous messages, I should be able to tap my screen and they should never bother me again. However, primarily, I want companies to be responsible for policing their content and Ofcom to regulate and act when companies do not comply with their codes. I would hope that that would be enough, as it has worked pretty successfully in broadcast and publication to date, but clearly the world has changed and we are in different territory. If something is likely to cause real, serious harm online, then, as the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, said, it should be made illegal.

However, as we are to legislate against less obviously harmful content, let us have a very short list of what will qualify. I saw the list on priority content that was published. The list is not unreasonable; the unreasonable part is putting any such power into the hands of the Secretary of State and not Parliament as a whole. We cannot give the state control over our media.

Overarchingly, we must leave room for adults to make their own decisions. We do not have to view what we do not want to see. We need to be careful in any legislative fervour to guard against authoritarian creep, where the prohibition against what is truly harmful oversteps into a world where we are to be protected from absolutely anything we do not like or agree with—or worse, that the Government do not like or agree with. That is really dangerous territory.

Free speech is one of the most precious of all human rights. It is the foundation of a democratic, open society. I am concerned that we are already seeing authoritarian creep in things we have taken for granted for years, such as some curtailments on the right to protest. It has always been recognised that the right of people to criticise Governments, laws and social conditions is fundamental to democracy. Of course, free speech presents great challenges—that is the point—but from Socrates on, the very best way to challenge ideas you disagree with has been to confront them by marshalling better ethics, reasoning and evidence. I worry that we have become risk-averse to a degree where we are disabling ourselves.

When we bring in the Online Safety Bill, we must guard against disabling future generations by overprotecting them from the realities of our existence. Civilisation is only skin deep; we need to be able to think, counter arguments and fight back with strength of mind. Life is dangerous and ideas can be challenging. With too much protection, we will create an inability to build resilience. Jonathan Haidt, the American social psychologist, cites the immune system: if you do not expose a human to various viruses or allergens, their immune system will not develop. We require a degree of exposure to stress to enable us to develop strength.

If we spend time only with people who agree with us, are like us or think like us—this is happening, as society is disaggregating into groups of the like-minded—we will be on a very dangerous road. Continuing to divide ourselves and narrow our circles to people,

[BARONESS FEATHERSTONE]

media or groups who agree with us is reductionist. It leaves us weak, suspicious and scared of the different. I am not fond of the term “snowflake”, because I think being sensitive to peoples’ feelings and sensitivities is a good thing. I disagree with the noble Baroness, Lady Fox; I think trigger warnings are fine—they are just putting the power in your hands.

Anthony Kapel “Van” Jones, an American news and political commentator, author and lawyer said:

“I don’t want you to be safe, ideologically ... I want you to be strong.”

If we eradicate words, ideas and subjects that cause discomfort or give offence, we weaken ourselves. I am worried that power will be held too close to the state. We must sort out the chaff from the wheat but, more than that, we must not submit our intellect and freedoms to the mob.

4.23 pm

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl): My Lords, with the blurring of edges between physical, digital and virtual as technology advances into the metaverse and Web3, the committee is right to demand an immediate setting of standards. To commend the members of the committee would be an understatement; I express my admiration for what is a thorough examination of this plethora of subjects.

Freedom of speech in any context is a valiant aspiration. The fact is that each aspect of our freedom has consequences and impact. None of us should be entitled to a set of freedoms that disregards the well-being of others, or that is detrimental to others and predicated on harms to others. In the absence of defining a set of boundaries and values for that freedom, we will certainly need to consider guidance, although exploring the parameters of what common values can be regulated and safeguarded without defining them is a problem.

I am chair of the APPG on the Metaverse and Web 3.0. We have recently conducted meetings with the leading innovators and entrepreneurs in this space, those who are transitioning from Web2 to Web3 within the emerging technologies. Their overall view is that it is vast and fast in this decentralised space, and that we may be running late to regulate the industry. It is important to prevent conglomerates, elite one-man bandwagons like Facebook, Google and Twitter, becoming the key holders of our data and the future of our young, without including them as stakeholders and entrepreneurs within the sector, and we are already at an advanced stage of building systems without any recourse to accountability and transparency. The concerns are well laid out in the report on page 19, with the evidence presented to the committee. Our APPG wishes to add to the committee’s work by bringing together practitioners, academics and NGOs who are cognisant of the impact on young people playing Roblox, or vulnerable young people stuck in virtual reality.

The possibility of innovation being a common good for society is immense, as I experienced this week with a WPP event where I stepped into a virtual world of Singapore and South Africa. It was a powerful experience, but nothing can replace experiencing the countries’ air, beauty and interactions with people.

Even in this new, decentralised arena, inclusion is not a reality for those who may most benefit from, and need, support, virtual or otherwise. The report eloquently emphasises the issues of content, but without an acceptable definition of false or harmful content it would be difficult for Ofcom or other regulatory bodies to take any actions. Use of Facebook by the Burmese extremists to spread hate against the Rohingyas may have assisted the brutal murder, torture and rape of hundreds of thousands of people. The Rohingyas have filed a suit against Facebook; no one knows what the outcome will be. Closer to home, the dirty tactics of Cambridge Analytica remind us that the world is an advertiser’s oyster when the selling of our data goes without adequate public knowledge and education.

I recently tried to buy a photobook for my grandchildren on Google, and when it came for the time to pay, suddenly a pop-up said, “All your data, including email contact, will be available”. I was rather disturbed; I was flabbergasted. It seems that anything is acceptable in this space. I find the intrusion from one purchasing one item rather unnerving, to say the least, and members of the public may be unwittingly agreeing to things without informed consent, with data often being sold onwards.

I have much to add on the social impact of this matter. Suffice it to say that, as a child protection officer, my antennae are permanently engaged on exploitation of children and vulnerable adults. I have witnessed too many times the devastating effect of child sexual abuse and exposure to pornography. The digital space is open for paedophiles to go beyond current imagination, allowing them to create a virtual reality of children raping children and of extreme violence against women, not to mention the demonisation of certain religious groups and women—these are alarmingly rampant. A witness to the committee has highlighted many of these.

It is refreshing that young developers and innovators are all too keenly aware of the issues, and I am confident that their work is a good example. They are very keen to work in partnership with institutions and government, as well as NGOs, and many are acutely aware of their responsibility.

Lord Davies of Gower (Con): I remind the noble Baroness of the time limit on speeches.

Baroness Uddin (Non-Afl): I just want to ask a question and then I am done. I appreciate the leniency of the House.

Where the devices are becoming more accessible, how can we ensure freedom of speech for our citizens, considering the potential for hacking and stolen data? If much of our social activities move to the metaverse, how can we safeguard users against cyberbullying and sexual exploitation, particularly of children? How will the pornography industry be regulated and monitored, as experiences in this space become more immersive?

4.29 pm

Lord Londesborough (CB): My Lords, I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, and members of the committee on producing such a thorough and thought-provoking report. I refer to my interests as set

out in the register and declare that I spent some 20 years building a digital information company where freedom of expression—in our case, views and analysis on Governments around the world—was our lifeblood.

That said, my focus today is online safety, particularly for the young, among whom evidence shows that mobile access to digital media has led to deeply disturbing patterns of behaviour—not just in the well-documented areas of online hate, abuse and bullying but in the unintended contributions to increasing obesity, falling levels of physical activity and, in certain areas, declining levels of academic performance. This also raises a key question: has social media led to a decline in workplace productivity? It is debatable, but many employers, like me, believe that it has.

I believe we must go further and much faster than the draft Online Safety Bill suggests in providing stronger and more effective levels of protection to children. Yes, some of these measures will cause friction, a pet hate of digital platforms; some will restrict freedom of speech; some will impact revenues and profits; and some will depress usage, which is no bad thing in my view. However, the damage to both the mental and physical health of the young is the absolute priority.

The ONS reports that 75% of our children spend three or more hours online a day at the weekend, with 22% spending more than seven hours a day. On school days, almost half spend more than three hours a day online. Allied to that, just 23% of boys and 20% of girls in this country meet the national recommended level of physical activity. One in five children starts primary school overweight or obese, rising to more than a third by the time they leave. More time online, less physical activity—what an unhealthy start to life.

As we know, anxiety and depression among both boys and girls has risen sharply over the last 20 years, as have self-harm and suicide rates. The young and vulnerable continue to have almost unfettered access to menacing websites promoting self-harm or “taking control of your life”, and this is not just reserved to the dark web. The need to protect our children is beyond question. How you do so is complex and challenging, and it ultimately requires a global set of principles for digital safety, because this is very much a multinational issue.

I will finish by touching on two further points raised in this report. First is the urgent need for age assurance and age verification technologies, as others have flagged up today, which the draft Bill should address much more forcefully. Responding to a Question in this place yesterday, the Minister suggested that we should not rush in because these technologies are developing so rapidly. With respect, I find that a defeatist excuse for inertia. We should have acted in this area five years ago. TikTok is a prime example: it has a minimum age requirement of 13, which is laughably unenforced. Ofcom reports that it is used by 42% of our eight to 12 year-olds, which is almost certainly an underestimate. The British Board of Film Classification found that a deeply disturbing 51% of 11 to 13 year-olds have accessed pornography online.

Secondly, I wholeheartedly agree with noble Lords that digital citizenship, annoying though that term is, should be a central part of the Government’s media

literacy strategy, but it requires structure and funding, as indeed does the equally important related need for health education. Teaching appropriate behaviour online—focusing on civility, inclusion and respect—has become a critical life skill, not just at primary and secondary school but at university and in the workplace. Let us embark on a joined-up and properly financed strategy to address this.

4.35 pm

Lord Strathcarron (Con): My Lords, as I am the last of the Back-Bench speakers, in the interests of catching up on time and because so many other noble Lords have expressed more eloquently than I could my own concerns about the unworkability of the “legal but harmful” duties and the need to protect children with proper age verification, I will make just one point that the report did not make.

As is well known, the Online Safety Bill has been five years in the making, during which time the tech world has moved on considerably. The report makes no mention of virtual private networks, yet with just two clicks on a VPN app, any user who wants to post to other adults freely outside of UK Government-censured social media can easily post to the rest of the world. That is, the rest of the world except China, whose outsourcing censorship methodology the Government are proposing to copy. In other words, those of us who value freedom of speech between adults over hurt feelings are reassured that technology has made whole sections of the Online Safety Bill redundant and irrelevant. However, we must improve age verification, as has already been mentioned, to protect children.

4.36 pm

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, I congratulate the Select Committee on yet another excellent report relating to digital issues and the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, on his masterly introduction. It really has stimulated some profound and thoughtful speeches from all around the House. This is an overdue debate, as the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, put it.

As someone who sat on the Joint Committee on the draft Online Safety Bill, I very much see the committee’s recommendations in the frame of the discussions we had in our Joint Committee. It is no coincidence that many of the Select Committee’s recommendations are so closely aligned with those of the Joint Committee, because the Joint Committee took a great deal of inspiration from this very report—I shall mention some of that as we go along.

By way of preface, as both a liberal and a Liberal, I still take inspiration from JS Mill and his harm principle, set out in *On Liberty* in 1859. I believe that it is still valid and that it is a concept which helps us to understand and qualify freedom of speech and expression. I was very interested in the speech of the noble Baroness, Lady O’Neill; like the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, I think I need to take it away and think about the difference between freedom of speech and freedom of expression. Clearly, it is something of considerable importance conceptually. Of course, we see Article 10

[LORD CLEMENT-JONES]
of the ECHR enshrining and giving the legal underpinning for freedom of expression, which is not unqualified, as I hope we all understand.

There are many common recommendations in both reports which relate, in the main, to the Online Safety Bill—we can talk about competition in a moment. One absolutely key point made during the debate was the need for much greater clarity on age assurance and age verification, a point made by the noble Lords, Lord Griffiths, Lord Vaizey, Lord Gilbert and Lord Londesborough. It is the friend, not the enemy, of free speech.

The reports described the need for co-operation between regulators in order to protect users. On safety by design, both reports acknowledged that the online safety regime is not essentially about content moderation; the key is for platforms to consider the impact of platform design and their business models. Both reports emphasised the importance of platform transparency. Law enforcement was very heavily underlined as well, particularly by the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, in his introduction. Both reports stressed the need for an independent complaints appeals system. Of course, we heard from all around the House today the importance of media literacy, digital literacy and digital resilience, from my noble friend Lord McNally and the noble Lords, Lord Griffiths and Lord Vaizey. Digital citizenship is a useful concept which encapsulates a great deal of what has been discussed today.

The bottom line of both committees was that the Secretary of State's powers in the Bill are too broad, with too much intrusion by the Executive and Parliament into the work of the independent regulator and, of course, as I shall discuss in a minute, the “legal but harmful” aspects of the Bill. The Secretary of State's powers to direct Ofcom on the detail of its work should be removed for all reasons except national security.

A crucial aspect addressed by both committees related to providing an alternative to the Secretary of State for future-proofing the legislation. I agreed with the noble Viscount, Lord Colville, and the noble Baroness, Lady Uddin, who talked about the metaverse, but the digital landscape is changing at a rapid pace—even in 2025 it may look entirely different. The recommendation—initially by the Communications and Digital Committee—for a Joint Committee to scrutinise the work of the digital regulators and statutory instruments on digital regulation, and generally to look at the digital landscape, were enthusiastically taken up by the Joint Committee.

The committee had a wider remit in many respects in terms of media plurality. I was interested to hear around the House—not only from the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, but from the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, in her intervention, and the noble Viscount, Lord Colville—support for this and a desire to see the DMU in place as soon as possible and for it to be given those ex-ante powers.

Crucially, both committees raised fundamental issues about the regulation of legal but harmful content, which has taken up some of the debate today, and the potential impact on freedom of expression. However,

both committees agreed that the criminal law should be the starting point for regulation of potentially harmful online activity. Both agreed that sufficiently harmful content should be criminalised along the lines, for instance, suggested by the Law Commission for communication and hate crimes, especially given that there is now a requirement of intent to harm. I was not very clear from the intervention of the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, as to whether she even accepted that that could be regulated online.

Under the new Bill, category 1 services have to consider harm to adults when applying the regime. Clause 54, which is essentially the successor to Clause 11 of the draft Bill, defines content that is harmful to adults as that

“of a kind which presents a material risk of significant harm to an appreciable number of adults in the United Kingdom.”

Crucially, Clause 54 leaves it to the Secretary of State to set in regulations what is actually considered priority content that is harmful to adults.

The Communications and Digital Committee thought that legal but harmful content should be addressed through regulation of platform design, digital citizenship and education. However, many organisations argue—I take quite a degree of comfort from my noble friend Lord Allan's points, made as someone with experience within the industry—especially in the light of the Molly Russell inquest and the need to protect vulnerable adults, that we should retain Clause 54 but that the description of harms covered should be set out in the Bill.

Our Joint Committee said, and I still believe that this is the way forward:

“We recommend that it is replaced by a statutory requirement on providers to have in place proportionate systems and processes to identify and mitigate reasonably foreseeable risks of harm arising from regulated activities defined under the Bill”,

but that

“These definitions should reference specific areas of law that are recognised in the offline world, or are specifically recognised as legitimate grounds for interference in freedom of expression.”

We set out a list which is a great deal more detailed than that provided on 7 July by the Secretary of State. I believe that this could form the basis of a new clause. As my noble friend Lord Allan said, this would mean that content moderation would not be at the sole discretion of the platforms. The noble Lord, Lord Vaizey, stressed that we need regulation.

We also diverged from the committee over the definition of journalistic content and over the recognised news publisher exemption, and so on, which I do not have time to go into but which will be relevant when the Bill comes to the House. But we are absolutely agreed that regulation of social media must respect the rights to privacy and freedom of expression of people who use it legally and responsibly. That does not mean a laissez-faire approach. Bullying and abuse prevent people expressing themselves freely and must be stamped out. But the Government's proposals are still far too broad and vague about legal content that may be harmful to adults. We must get it right. I hope the Government will change their approach: we do not quite know. I have not trawled through every amendment that they are proposing in the Commons, but I very

much hope that they will adopt this approach, which will get many more people behind the legal but harmful aspects.

That said, it is crucial that the Bill comes forward to this House. The noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, pointed to the Molly Russell inquest and the evidence of Ian Russell, which was very moving about the damage being wrought by the operation of algorithms on social media pushing self-harm and suicide content. I echo what the noble Lord said: that the internet experience should be positive and enriching. I very much hope the Minister will come up with a timetable today for the introduction of the Online Safety Bill.

4.46 pm

Baroness Merron (Lab): My Lords, I, too, am most grateful to the Communications and Digital Committee for its work in this area, and particularly thank its chair, the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, for his work in that role. I also wish the noble Baroness, Lady Stowell, well in taking up the role. It seems an appropriate moment to call on the words of my noble friend Lord Griffiths, who talked about the need for the wisdom of Solomon in this report. I hope the noble Baroness finds that she too has the wisdom of Solomon, because this debate has shown us the need for that.

The contributions to this thoughtful debate today have shown the considerable tensions between protection from harms and privacy on the one hand, but also the great need to embrace the ever-developing and changing opportunities that the digital age brings us. This report has given your Lordships' House a great opportunity today—albeit some time after the event—to consider a very important matter of our time, which is so deeply affecting so many different aspects of our lives. I am minded to recall that, in the course of a previous debate which I know a number of noble Lords present today took part in, the most reverend Primate the Archbishop of Canterbury wisely observed, when we were looking at the contemporary challenges to freedom of speech, that it is not just about having frank speech, it is about having fitting speech. As we discussed today, we are speaking about freedom of expression, and that, too, must be fitting.

The right to freedom of expression is absolutely balanced by the responsibilities held by government, media, technology and citizens. It is not an unrestricted right, and it is subject to legal limits. For example, while the UN General Assembly recognised all the way back in December 1948 that freedom of expression was a fundamental right to be universally protected, subsequent international agreements have recognised that there can and should be limits to this right.

Of course, the right to freedom of expression is already subject to a range of restrictions in law in this country, but, as noble Lords have said, we must align the legislation, the regulation, with the reality, and we must keep pace. As the noble Baroness, Lady O'Neill, said, the question of the balance of consideration between originators and recipients is a very important one. In particular, the cloak of anonymity worn by some originators cannot be used as a way to damage recipients.

This report highlights the very difficult balancing act which is faced by policymakers, and there is a significant body of evidence which demonstrates the

types of harm witnessed online—but we must ensure that freedom of expression is not unfairly curtailed. In addition, as the noble Viscount, Lord Colville, said, we must also remember that it is important that we retain and develop a position as a digital world leader.

This report helpfully acknowledges that various regulators have roles in relation to different forms of online activity, but it also identifies concerns about the lack of overarching regulation covering social media and search services in the UK. Of course, unsurprisingly, many noble Lords have referred to the Online Safety Bill and the various delays to its progress through Parliament, and to the Government's recent attempts to rewrite parts of it. Of course, it has been some time since the committee's report and the Government's response, and since the Joint Committee published its various recommendations for changing the draft legislation.

In the intervening period—and I say this with a certain concern that it may change—at the current tally we have seen three Prime Ministers, three Secretaries of State and three Lords Ministers, plus an assortment of junior Ministers in the Commons. The Bill has changed a lot, but the fundamental tension highlighted by this report remains that, for some, regulation on big tech firms cannot ever be strong enough, while for others any regulation is seen as anti-business, anti-free speech wokism.

So we look forward to welcoming the Bill to the Lords—I hope it will be soon. I hope that the Minister can give that assurance today, because I have no doubt that we will consider many of the issues raised by the committee during our deliberations, which I am sure will take a considerable amount of time.

We support the agenda to tackle online harms and much of what is in the Online Safety Bill. It is by no means perfect, but it would represent a significant step forward for the majority of internet users. The repeated delays to bring in important new safeguards have undoubtedly been disappointing. We are keen to get the legislation on to the statute book, but, as noble Lords today have again said, and as we said in the Chamber this week, the continued failure to act on age verification, which goes back many years, is really something that the Government should have put right. As the noble Lord, Lord Londesborough, rightly said, the Government have indeed failed to act when they could have. The tragic death of Molly Russell stands as a reminder to us all of the need to act, and to act swiftly.

Given the recent change in Administration, can the Minister confirm whether the Government intend to introduce any further changes to the Bill beyond those already published? Might some of the changes be welcomed by the committee? When might we see the Bill?

As other noble Lords have chosen to focus on specific recommendations, I will refer to the importance of improving users' media literacy skills. One of the recommendations of the committee is that platforms should not be arbiters of the truth. The noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, spoke of putting the power in our hands, but the ability to question and to interrogate is a crucial weapon in this.

[BARONESS MERRON]

The previous Minister and I had a number of exchanges on this important issue, but I remain unconvinced by the Government's argument that the current duties on Ofcom are sufficient. There is indeed a strategy, but it is hard to see how that and the various education campaigns run by platforms are having the desired effect. We have seen the harms of disinformation and misinformation in recent years, particularly in regard to Covid vaccines. If the current approach to media literacy was working, those conspiracy theories would not have been as prevalent as they were.

Improving media literacy undermines those who spread misinformation—and that is what we need to do, because the best way to combat fake news is to teach people how to identify it. So could the Minister offer some comment on his view of the effectiveness of the various steps that have been taken or identified to be taken? Are they working and what still needs to be done?

We are of course this afternoon not going to solve all the issues the committee has raised, but this has been an extremely helpful holding debate as we wait for the Bill's arrival. Once again, my thanks are due to members of the committee and to the chair for giving us that opportunity. I hope the Minister addresses many of the serious questions that were raised during the debate. I am sure we all agree that there is much work to do.

4.56 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Kamall) (Con): My Lords, I begin by thanking my noble friend Lord Gilbert for moving this debate on the committee's report. I also thank noble Lords who are members of that committee for having the foresight to place digital regulation at the centre of public debate, especially in their report. Let me also thank all noble Lords, whether or not they are on the committee, for their contributions.

Before I turn to the specific recommendations made in the report, as noble Lords asked about one fundamental issue that lies at the heart of this debate—freedom of expression—I think it is worth looking at that. Your Lordships' committee highlighted the importance of protecting freedom of expression online and, as was said by the noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, this is an age in which the internet has brought huge opportunities for freedom of expression. It allows people from all over the world to exchange ideas at a speed and scale never seen before. We should not throw that out.

When I was lecturing on international business courses, we used to talk about this concept in academic terms as space-time compression leading to globalisation. This has been of huge benefit to mankind, and one of the challenges for countries where we have reasonably good internet access is how to spread that to the rest of the world. Sometimes that is via mobile devices, if the landlines are not good enough, but we should not forget the important progress we have made. We should also remember how we can harness the good side of that technology.

As a result, as my noble friend Lord Gilbert said, the largest tech platforms exercise great influence over public discourse. They determine what content people encounter online and can arbitrarily remove content, with no accountability and few routes for users to appeal. One of the interesting questions around this debate is that there are always tensions. We are talking about freedom of expression against security or safety, and also how we behave towards other people and who has the right to remove content or to be an arbiter. Sometimes we see a tension between property rights and freedom of expression, and we have to address how much we give those platforms, which can argue, "Well, it's our space, we have a right to arbitrate on who can have that debate here". We see that in the physical world as well, where certain schools and campuses ban speakers. There is a tension between freedom of expression and property rights. The number of issues just shows how difficult this is.

This is why the Online Safety Bill is so important. We will bring it back soon—as soon as possible. By that I mean sooner than possible, and "possible" is not "probable", if that makes sense. I wish I could say more, but I am always warned by my officials to be very careful what I say, because of various processes. Noble Lords who have been in government will understand this.

For the first time, tech companies are going to be accountable to an independent regulator for the protection of children and tackling of illegal content, while also protecting freedom of expression. I am very grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Allan, for his points on the challenges and difficult issues that companies will have to overcome. It is not as simple as it sounds: we all want children to be protected, but it brings up lots of tensions and debate about how you do that and what the trade-offs are. But I am confident, having taken one Bill through this House, that we can rely on the wisdom of noble Lords to find an appropriate balance and address that tension. There is almost universal consensus on protecting children online but, as I said to the House yesterday, for adults we have to straddle that difficult tension between freedom of expression and protecting the vulnerable.

I hope that noble Lords will allow me to summarise some key changes to the Bill since the committee's report. The noble Lord, Lord Davies, talked about fraud. That is covered under illegal content. I know that the committee made recommendations on content, and most noble Lords agree on the need to ensure that the Online Safety Bill includes strong protections against illegal content and criminal activity, while avoiding the removal of legal speech.

The Government have added provisions in the other place to establish how providers should determine whether content is illegal. We clarified how companies should determine whether content is illegal, protecting against both under-removal and over-removal of content, as the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, alluded to. The Bill also includes strong protections for freedom of expression. Companies must have regard to freedom of expression when discharging their illegal content duties. I have no doubt that the noble Lord, Lord Allan, and I will have debates about what "due regard" means. Again, that is

one of the issues we must address, and the largest platforms must set out what they are going to do to safeguard free speech.

The Government also welcome the committee's endorsement of the importance of child safety. The strongest protections in the Bill remain those for children, but as the noble Lord, Lord Lonsdale, said, how do we achieve that? How do we get there?

We have also addressed the committee's concern that pornographic services were not captured in the Bill. We have made changes to require all websites which publish or host pornography to put robust checks in place to ensure that users are 18 years old or over. Again, as with many of these things, the question is how we deal with determined teenagers, who are often more tech-savvy than their parents and can run rings around them. We can put the best protections in place, but even the world's best cybersecurity experts cannot stop hackers. So, we have to reduce this as much as possible, but I have to be honest: are we going to prevent the most determined and tech-savvy teenager from accessing content that we do not want them to access? That is a challenge, but we have to be honest about what we can and cannot do: what we can do through regulation, what companies themselves can do, but also what we can all do as society, as parents, as neighbours.

Let me turn to the committee's recommendations on adult safety. We agree that platforms' moderation decisions are inconsistent and opaque. That is why the duties in the Bill require major platforms to be transparent about and accountable for how they treat users' content. We will continue to ensure that the Bill strikes the appropriate balance between safety and freedom of expression, but that will move in this House. We have also added measures to give adults more control over who can contact them. Adult users will be given options to verify their identity—the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, asked about this—and to decide whether to interact with unverified users. We hope that this will empower adults to manage their personal online experience, while protecting the anonymity of those who may need it, such as victims of abuse. Again, there is a very difficult balance to strike: we must make sure that we can tackle those who are anonymous and malicious, but we also have to protect those who have to remain anonymous for fear of abuse turning into something worse.

A number of noble Lords, including the noble Lord, Lord Griffiths, mentioned a point that the committee rightly highlighted: the importance of platform design in keeping users safe online. We hope that the Bill will ensure that companies design their services to mitigate the risk of harm from illegal content, and to protect children. This has always been the policy intent. We clarified this in the other place by amending the Bill to include an explicit duty on companies to take measures relating to the design of their services. These changes will ensure that companies build in safety by design, managing the risk of illegal content and activity on their services, rather than mostly focusing on content moderation.

My noble friend Lady Stowell, the noble Viscount, Lord Colville, and others talked about digital markets regulation. The committee made a number of

recommendations. The Government remain committed to establishing a pro-competition regime to boost competition in digital markets. We want to introduce new, faster, more effective tools to address the unique barriers to competition in digital markets. The Government will set out their plans for the new regime in a draft Bill during this legislative Session. As set out in the *Plan for Digital Regulation*, the Government are committed to ensuring that our regulators have the capacity and expertise to regulate effectively and proportionately.

The committee also recommended the creation of a new parliamentary Joint Committee to scrutinise the work of digital regulators. I am afraid I have to refer noble Lords back to the position the Government adopted in their response. The Government believe that such a permanent Joint Committee is unnecessary when we already have rigorous scrutiny provided by established committees, such as your Lordships' committee and the DCMS Select Committee in the other place. However, the Government intend to work with Parliament to support scrutiny of the Online Safety Bill in a way that captures the skills and expertise in both Houses. We welcome further views during the passage of this Bill.

I turn to a number of the points raised specifically by noble Lords. I will start with my noble friend Lord Vaizey. I would like to ask him: what does he know that others do not know about the reshuffle? I hope this is not fake news to drive traffic to his podcast.

Lord Vaizey of Didcot (Con): On a slightly serious point, I know that the Minister in the Commons, Damian Collins, has left his post, which is a very sad reflection on how seriously the Government are taking the progress of the Online Safety Bill.

Lord Kamall (Con): I should take this opportunity to pay tribute to my honourable friend Damian Collins for his expertise. I sat in on a fascinating meeting that the noble Baroness, Lady Kidron, organised last week with children's groups. It was clear that he was on top of his brief. I have to admit that there will be a gap to fill, but I hope we will be able to fill it.

On that, I thank the noble Baroness, Lady Kidron, in her absence, for organising that round table, and the noble Lord, Lord McNally, others who attended for their comments. It was touching, moving and gave me lots to think about. When I met Ian Russell, the father of Molly Russell, I said to him that we will do all we can to try to ensure this does not happen again. That is something I am sure noble Lords across the House agree on. We might disagree on how we do that, but let us keep that in mind as we go through the Online Safety Bill.

The noble Baroness, Lady Featherstone, was absolutely right: we have to equip our children to be robust enough to stand up to difficult arguments. I teach international politics. In my academic job, which I am on leave of absence from, my boss is a Marxist and I am a libertarian-minded Conservative, so we are at two different ends of the political spectrum. But we both agree that it is important to try not to indoctrinate our children but to expose them to arguments from across the political spectrum, and to let them decide

[LORD KAMALL]

and to argue and debate with each other. That gives them robustness, but it also allows them to think intellectually and develop. I agreed with the noble Baroness when she said that this is really important. We have to be very careful about mollicoddling our children and overprotecting them. We should expose them to arguments but also to tools to argue back against people. I know that some noble Lords will disagree. Once again, the noble Baroness, Lady Fox, made those remarks.

The noble Baroness, Lady O'Neill, made some fascinating points about respect and civility—I can tell why she is a philosopher. We also need to understand the issue of subjectivity. If someone says something and you are harmed, does that give you cause for redress? There is also an awful lot of hypocrisy in discussing freedom of speech. People often say that they are in favour of freedom of expression until they are offended, and then they are suddenly against it. I remember when I was in the European Parliament and there were the Danish cartoons of Muhammad. I am a practising Muslim. I was offended by some of the cartoons and I actually found some of them funny, but I did not think that they should be banned. I was happy to see the debate around them in a free society.

Then I took part in a debate and talked about the whiteness of the European political space, the lack of racial and ethnic diversity, some of the imperial ambitions of the EU and racism across the spectrum, including on the left, and I was asked to apologise because I had offended some people. The same people who extolled the virtues of freedom of expression were suddenly asking me to apologise because they did not like what I said. We have to be clear when we are concerned about something or are harmed or offended. We talk about freedom of expression: let us make sure we are consistent. Let us make sure that not only do we think we should feel free to say things, so long as they are not encouraging violence against others, for example, but at the same time are willing to be open to criticism in our own right. That makes for a stronger, more robust and more intellectually challenging society. From discourse comes liberty. That is an important point that we should not forget.

I can try to beat the clock. The noble Lord, Lord McNally, and the noble Baroness, Lady Uddin, talked about media literacy. It is a crucial skill for everyone in the digital age. Key media literacy skills are taught through a number of compulsory subjects in the national curriculum, but we need to be careful about it. We have to make sure that it is always up to date. There are new challenges. We have to make sure that these curricula are updated. We have the computing national curriculum, which builds digital literacy and citizenship education—some noble Lords do not like the idea of that. We want to make sure that there is critical thinking in debates in relation to the proper functioning of democracy. The Department for Education is reviewing its *Teaching Online Safety in Schools* guidance and its non-statutory guidance, which provide advice and support on how to teach children to stay safe online. The DCMS and the Department for Education work closely to create a holistic, whole-of-government approach to supporting media literacy.

The noble Viscount, Lord Colville, asked about an Australian-style bargaining code. We are committed to defending media freedom and enhancing the sustainability of the press sector, and we hope that the pro-competition regime conduct requirements will improve transparency and allow large platforms to provide the businesses that rely on them with fair and reasonable terms. This will make an important contribution to the sustainability of the press. In addition, we are minded to pursue the use of a binding final-offer mechanism as a backstop to resolve challenging price-related disputes where needed. We will design the mechanism to boost competition in all digital markets and have been engaging with the Australian Government to understand the impact of their news media bargaining code on platforms and publishers. This regime presents just one aspect of the Government's wider support for news publishers, and we will continue to consider all possible options in the interests of promoting and sustaining the sector. Once again, we are open to the wisdom and knowledge of noble Lords in this House on how we do that.

A number of noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Strathcarron, Lord Vaizey and Lord Londesborough, asked about age verification. There will be clear requirements for companies to prevent children accessing harmful content, such as online pornography. Companies that are likely to be accessed by children will need to use a range of technology, including age verification, to comply with the new requirement. Age assurance and age verification have now been referenced in the Bill, which provides clear direction to Ofcom and companies about the measures we expect may be used where proportionate. The Bill will not mandate that companies use specific technologies to comply with their new duties. It is important the Bill is future-proofed as much as possible, and what is most effective today may not be effective in the future. Once again noble Lords talked about issues such as VPNs, and there are ways around them, and there are other technologies that will challenge people's safety. For example, I was told about face-scanning technologies and iris recognition for age verification, but is there something eerie about using that sort of technology? Do people feel concerned about that technology and the way the data is stored? Does it feel like a Big Brother society or is it useful to society? There will be different views among noble Lords in this Chamber, but we have to understand the spectrum of views. We know that age-assurance technologies are developing rapidly and there is growing usage.

The noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, talked about JS Mill. He knows that I am classically liberal-minded, so it is worth quoting Mill, who said that

“the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others”.

But there is disagreement over what is harmful, and JS Mill acknowledged that. When I was reading about this, I remember one paper saying that Mill does not say that the Government must always intervene to prevent one person harming another. Clearly, that is a philosophical discussion and there are a number of interpretations of JS Mill, but it is important that we recognise some of those issues. I also thank the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones, for bringing that up so that I could digress into political philosophy.

This has been a fascinating debate. It has highlighted the arguments and tensions between online safety and freedom of expression, which I know we will return to during debates on the Online Safety Bill very soon. Let me once again thank all noble Lords for their wise contributions today and for exposing some of the challenges that we are going to face as we take that Bill through the Lords. I end by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Gilbert, for moving this debate. I look forward to continuing the debate and to working constructively with noble Lords as we chart our course through these new challenges.

5.15 pm

Lord Gilbert of Panteg (Con): I will be very brief. The internet, let us be clear, has given voice to many marginalised people and in so many ways has transformed our lives for the better. What we have seen today is a really serious and constructive debate about what we need to do to deal with the societal issues that have come with the digitalisation of the world that we live in.

I thank all noble Lords who gave such insightful contributions today, in particular my noble friend the Minister for his response, and especially the noble Baroness, Lady Merron, and the noble Lord, Lord Clement-Jones. What they demonstrated was that the

House really wants to come together to fix these issues and I hope that my noble friend will seek a cross-party approach to this legislation and engage the whole House in coming up with the solutions that we need to resolve these problems. Would he thank his officials and the succession of Ministers who came to see us? His officials were very generous with their time.

I will also take this opportunity, on behalf of the committee, to thank Ofcom for engaging with us. I am confident its people are the right people for this job; they will do an excellent job and we need to hand them a seriously workable piece of legislation, while not forgetting our role as Parliament in asserting societal priorities as Ofcom moves forward with this task.

Motion agreed.

Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Bill [HL]

Returned from the Commons

The Bill was returned from the Commons with a privilege amendment. The amendment was considered and agreed to.

House adjourned at 5.16 pm.

