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## **Press Watch - A sombre and resolute moment ... then it's back to debating incinerators**

**Michael Deacon in the Daily Telegraph's parliamentary sketch describes Westminster's tribute on Thursday following the terror attack.**

They carried on. A wide area around the Palace of Westminster had been cordoned off, the Tube station was shut, and most entrances to the estate were closed. Yet, refusing to be cowed, yesterday Parliament went back to work.

At 9.30am, questions on International Trade. At 10am, questions on Women and Equalities. All exactly as scheduled.

There was even, in the late afternoon, a brief debate about plans to build an incinerator on Rattys Lane in Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire.

A detail heartening in its very dullness, it felt like a perfect symbol of Parliament's resolve to continue with its business: the democratic duties both great and small that its denizens were elected to discharge.

To the order paper there was only a single change. At 10.30am, Theresa May – dressed in black – addressed a packed and sombre House. “Today,” said the Prime Minister, “we meet as normal to deliver a simple message. We are not afraid.”

MPs nodded. Solemn, pallid, silent – but resolute.

The Prime Minister updated them on the police investigation, and the toll the attack had taken.

Among the injured, she reported, were three police officers “returning from an event to recognise their bravery”. She paused.

“Two of those three remain in a serious condition.”

Across the House there were intakes of breath. Paula Sherriff (Lab, Dewsbury) could be seen wiping away tears.

Mrs May then paid tribute to the officer who had been stabbed to death confronting the terrorist. PC Keith Palmer, she said, “was a husband and a father, killed doing a job he loved. He was every inch a hero.”

He wasn't the only one. Standing unobtrusively near the Bar of the House was Tobias Ellwood – the Foreign Office minister and former Army captain, who, less than 24 hours earlier, had rushed to the stricken officer's aid.

“We will remember the extraordinary efforts to save the life of PC Palmer,” added Mrs May, “including those by my right honourable friend, the member for Bournemouth East.” The House turned, and saluted Mr Ellwood with a heartfelt “hear, hear”. He bowed his head.

Scores of MPs stood to offer their own thoughts. None were more personal than those of James Cleverly, the Conservative MP for Braintree since 2015.

To him, the murdered officer hadn't only been a fearless protector. He'd also been a very old friend.

“With your indulgence, Sir,” he told the Speaker, “I'd like to turn for just a moment to PC Keith Palmer, who I first met 25 years ago as Gunner

Keith Palmer at Headquarters Battery 100  
Regiment ...”

Here he gulped.

“...Royal Artillery. He was a strong, professional  
public servant.”

Another gulp. His voice was starting to break. He  
battled on.

“And it was a delight to meet him here again,  
only a few months after being elected.”

Mr Cleverly stopped. He sniffed. He was trying  
so hard not to cry. He looked down, took a deep  
breath, collected himself – and looked  
up again.

“In recognition of the work that he did,” he said,  
“would my right honourable friend the Prime  
Minister consider recognising his gallantry and  
sacrifice formally, with a posthumous  
recognition?”

Mr Cleverly glanced to his left, and, in a small,  
humble voice, mumbled, “Thank you, Mr  
Speaker.”

He sat down. There was a huge “Hear, hear”.

Colleagues on both sides, and along the bench behind, patted him on the back.

Mrs May thanked him, and confirmed that suitable recognition would be considered. Chris Bryant (Lab, Rhondda) proposed a shield: “Because he was our shield.”

Down the corridor, the Lords were meeting. The Archbishop of Canterbury invited peers to reflect on a pair of contrasting images. “The first,” he said, “is of a vehicle being driven across Westminster Bridge by someone who had a perverted, nihilistic, despairing view of what life is about, of what society is about, that could only be fulfilled by death and destruction.

“The second,” he went on, “is of that same person a few minutes later, on a stretcher or on the ground – being treated by the very people he had sought to kill.”

Others, added the Archbishop, had rushed to aid the suffering. “Yesterday afternoon, one of our own security staff at Lambeth Palace, a Muslim,” he said, “arrived at the gate having been missed by the vehicle very narrowly, and spent time helping those who had been injured.”

It was obvious why the Archbishop had chosen this particular example. The point was made more explicitly in the Commons.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Con, Worthing West) recalled the murder in 1979 of Airey Neave, the shadow Northern Ireland secretary, by Irish republican terrorists. “Some of us were present 38 years ago when Airey Neave was martyred,” said Sir Peter.

“The lesson that we learnt then was not to damn a community because of the actions of a single person.”

Other MPs joined him. Michael Tomlinson (Con, Mid Dorset & N Poole) said the attack was “not Islamic”, any more than the murder of Mr Neave had been Christian.

Harriet Harman (Lab, Camberwell & Peckham) vowed that MPs would not “allow the attack to be used as a pretext for division, hatred and Islamophobia”.

The Prime Minister agreed. “We stand together with the Muslim community, and with other communities around this country,” she intoned, “and say that what unites us is greater than what divides us.”

She was quoting Jo Cox, the MP murdered last year by another kind of terrorist: a white supremacist. It was the Prime Minister's final remark.

Mr Ellwood remained standing by the Bar, seemingly lost in his thoughts.

As they left the chamber, MP after MP patted him on the shoulder, and offered their thanks. The doorkeeper shook him by the hand.

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