

# A Week at Westminster



On Wednesday the Queen's Speech brought a little pomp and circumstance to Westminster.

Speaking ahead of the Conservative majority government's first Queen's Speech, Labour's Shadow Scottish Secretary, Ian Murray MP, said:

"Today's Queen Speech will confirm the return of the nasty party, who must urgently come clean about where the axe of their £12billion cuts to welfare will fall.

"Just yesterday IFS analysis laid bare the true scale of the brutal Tory cuts planned in this parliament. The £12bn per year of further cuts to welfare, almost entirely from working-age benefits, will make the lives of those who work, and who already struggle to get by, even harder. David Cameron and the Tories may claim that they look out for working people, but these cuts will fall most heavily on the working poor and will push even more children into poverty.

"Today's Queen's Speech will deliver on the Vow made to Scotland during the referendum by tabling a Scotland Bill. This bill is a serious offer of more power to Scotland, and Scottish Labour will work constructively to push the Tories to deliver the power to the Scottish Parliament to defend Scotland against further austerity.

"But the threats to Scots don't end with the Tories. Nicola Sturgeon has committed her party to amending the Scotland Bill to include Full Fiscal Autonomy, which would mean an end to the Barnett Formula and an additional £7.6billion of cuts to the Scottish budget.

"Scottish Labour will stand up for Scotland against Tory or

Nationalist austerity whilst guaranteeing a powerhouse parliament in Holyrood.”

Murray stood down as a director of Heart of Midlothian Football Club and Chairman and Director of the Foundation of Hearts on Wednesday. He said: “Since my re-election I have taken on a number of senior responsibilities that will reduce the spare time I have available to dedicate to other interests.

“I have, after much soul-searching, taken the decision that the FoH requires a new chair and director who can give maximum attention to continuing to grow the membership and preparing the organisation for full supporter ownership.

Edinburgh East MP Tommy Sheppard made his maiden speech on Thursday. When he spoke to us Tommy was busy drafting what he was planning to say and he hoped to talk about the constituency and Home Affairs, immigration, the EU Referendum and poverty, reflecting on the election result and explain to the Labour Party why they lost the election. We are not sure he managed to get everything in otherwise all other new MPs might not have had their chance to speak!

*A fine maiden speech from [@TommySheppard](#) his N Irish lilt underlining multinational nature of UK & SNP's civic nat'm*  
<https://t.co/u7jnH0CMv0>

– David Torrance (@davidtorrance) [May 28, 2015](#)

On his first impressions of the first Queen's Speech he had attended as an MP he told The Edinburgh Reporter: “Well you've seen it on telly so you know what's coming but it is a little surreal when you're there.

“This place runs through customs and traditions set in Georgian times. The costumes were good though! I was one of 200 MPs who weren't allowed into the chamber as there is

simply not enough room there for everyone.

“I was one of the first not to get in so when Black Rod was banging on the door I was standing only about six feet away. It is fine to have a bit of tradition, but some of it is a bit arcane

“In the Lords I actually managed to get in as I was able to join the procession straight away, but not even half of the MPs got in there. The Lords are all sitting in the opulent atrium in their ermine trimmed red robes and the ladies even have tiaras on!

“You can understand why people think the government is a bit out of touch.

“We were told off by the Speaker for applauding as it was not in line with tradition, while the Conservatives across the chamber were braying and guffawing like delinquent teenagers. We are not going out of our way to cause offence, but it is odd as it seems normal behaviour to clap!”

He concluded our chat with practicalities: “I get into my new office on Monday and hopefully I will hear by then that I have a place to live!”

Joanna Cherry QC was an obvious choice to speak on behalf of the SNP about justice and legal affairs. In her maiden speech on Thursday morning she addressed the Government’s plans in relation to the Human Rights Act

She said: “As a lawyer it is appropriate that I should make my first speech in this house in defence of human rights and the rule of law.

“Mr Speaker the tone and tenor of this government’s approach to human rights and civil liberties issues concerns me and my party. Whilst the government appears to have been somewhat blown off course in its zeal to fulfill its manifesto pledge

to repeal the Human Rights Act (HRA) I understand that after consultation the same is still very much on the cards.

“Yesterday the Prime Minister indicated that it is still his intention to bring forward a British Bill of Rights. Are we to understand that this would replace the international Bill of Rights constituted by the European Court of Human Rights to which we are already a signatory and the HRA? It seems so.

In Scotland the HRA is part of a larger picture. The rights in the ECHR are written into the devolution settlement by virtue of the Scotland Act. We have a National Action Plan for human rights and a UN accredited HR Commission. Our commitment to human rights extends beyond the civil and political rights in the HRA to economic, social and cultural human rights.

Human rights are central to the way Scotland is addressing the overall challenge of building a fairer society. Repeal of the HRA is strongly opposed in Scotland. In November 2014 the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly to endorse the HRA.

“Last year during the independence referendum campaign the Prime Minister invited Scots not to leave the UK but to stay and lead the UK. With the overwhelming mandate we have received from the people of Scotland I and my fellow SNP MPs intend to do just that and, in particular, on this issue we shall be proud to lead a progressive alliance of members on all sides of the house who believe in the HRA and the value of participation in international instruments such as the ECHR.”

You can watch Joanna Cherry’s speech here:

Deidre Brock MP for Edinburgh North and Leith has not yet made her own speech but she was listening to others!

*[@islanderinedin](#) Not got a date yet – rarin’ to go tho, inspired by magnificent efforts fr our newer MPs over last couple of days!*

– Deidre Brock (@DeidreBrock) [May 28, 2015](#)

And our final Edinburgh MP Michelle Thomson makes her speech next Wednesday but meantime was in the chamber to watch other debates including one on Thursday about Trident:

[#SNP](#) benches full for debate on Trident safety. Great contributions from colleagues [@AlexSalmond](#) & [@BrendanOHaraSNPpic.twitter.com/2DJx06mTly](#)

– Michelle Thomson MP (@MichelleThomson) [May 28, 2015](#)

Meanwhile the SNP will be pressing the government on their plans for English Votes for English Laws which they believe should be dealt with in a bill not simply a change of the Commons Rules. SNP MPs don't vote on English legislation where it makes no financial difference to Scotland but Pete Wishart MP is incensed that in the Queen's Speech the government appear to try to change the regulations on voting without proper consideration. He said: "This Government seek to restrict the voting rights of only Scottish MPs giving us second class status in the House of Commons. We cannot have this rushed through without proper consideration of all the consequences."