

A triumph for democracy

LORDS REFORM: End of the line for hereditary peers

THE 600-year-old right of hereditary peers to make the United Kingdom's laws ended yesterday with a whimper...

It could be described as an Irish solution to a British problem, which will leave the Lords represented, at least until after the next election...

It was a fitting, low-key conclusion to a tradition that has long outlived its usefulness. The 21st century is dawning, and the privileges handed out for good and bad reasons to favourites of kings, queens and governments down the years have no place in today's world...

There is a place in practically every developed nation for an upper chamber, where citizens with an expertise gained either in politics, business, trade unions or other walks of life have a chance to monitor legislation from the elected chamber.

Not just the Houses of Parliament, but the whole structure of the nation itself is undergoing a quiet transformation, not before time. Other countries throughout Europe have developed regional institutions, bringing government closer to the people...

Tony Blair has achieved a fundamental reform, by virtue of his huge majority, that has defied the wishes of previous prime ministers dating back to Liberal attempts in 1911. But the removal of the unqualified rights of hereditary peers is only the first stage of his revolution...

At present Northern Ireland is represented by hereditary peers, both interested and disinterested, plus a selection of mostly political appointments, as former politicians or political activists. Almost anything would be better, with a working Assembly, hopefully, nominating its own choices.

EXCLUSIVE: Day two of the poll on the Mitchell review

DO YOU WANT THE REVIEW TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Table showing survey results for 'Do you want the review to be successful?' by political party: All of NI, Protestant, Catholic, DUP, Alliance, SDLP, Sinn Fein.

FIRST of all it should be emphasised that as far as the people of Northern Ireland are concerned failure is not an option.

When asked 'Do you want the review of the Belfast Agreement to be successful?' 85% said Yes. Ninety eight percent of Alliance voters said Yes followed by the SDLP at 96%, Sinn Fein at 94%, the DUP and PUP at 91% and the DUP at 58%.

DO YOU THINK THE REVIEW WILL BE SUCCESSFUL?

Table showing survey results for 'Do you think the review will be successful?' by political party: All of NI, Protestant, Catholic, DUP, Alliance, SDLP, Sinn Fein.

BUT the people of Northern Ireland never like to get their hopes up too much. When asked 'Do you think the review of the Belfast Agreement will be successful?' only 44% said Yes.

The most optimistic were the Alliance voters at 72% followed by the SDLP at 63% then Sinn Fein and the DUP both at 45%, PUP at 41% and DUP at 21%. The people of Northern Ireland are notoriously sceptical about peace processes, they have every reason to be.

Yet 85% of them want the Mitchell Review to be the second exception to prove that rule. But how?

WRITEback

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Principal showed courage

I WANT to praise Jim Digney, principal of Sacred Heart Primary School, Dundrum, for his courage in speaking out about the letter sent to him and other Roman Catholic School principals from Sinn Fein.

Only for his courage in speaking out, myself and other fair-minded people would not have been aware of such devious

ness in trying to get young children brought into their camp to disband the RUC.

It is not surprising that one of their so-called spokesmen stated the letter was "private and shouldn't have been handled in this way". In other words "we didn't want the Protestants/Unionists/Press to find out about our latest dirty source of action against the RUC."

Sinn Fein are telling us to

accept them as democrats who want peace and a better future for all and still they flout their hatred and bitterness in trying to stop young children being taught road safety, personal safety and cross-community building simply because it is being taught to them by a member of the RUC.

I hope all decent right-thinking parents involved who want a better future for their children will not allow them to be used as

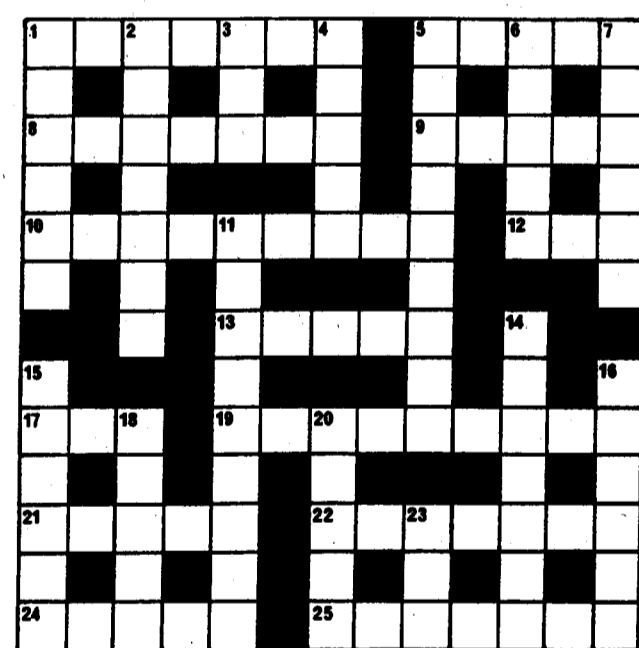
political footballs and to be brainwashed by Sinn Fein.

If a child was knocked down in a road accident or molested, or an attempt made to abduct him, who would get the blame for not warning these children about road safety awareness or the dangers of paedophiles - why the RUC of course! As usual they are in a no-win situation, damned if they do and damned if they don't.

I hope that other principals will also have the courage of their convictions to stand up to this blatant intimidation and to support and back their colleague Jim Digney. I fervently hope they outrightly condemn this latest insidious attempt to further undermine and alienate the RUC by using the children in their care.

STAND UP AND BE COUNTED, Co Down.

TONIGHT'S CROSSWORD



No 1841

CRYPTIC CLUES

- Across: 1 Was reconciled with self-multiplication (7); 5 Voter's mark will go to the other side (5); 8 Shelf behind altar can later be moved (7); 9 Billy's mate is a nurse to the children (5); 10 Give Mrs a green sort of diving bird (9); 12 How long it's shown to manage (3); 13 Lead tenor and alto may show what it amounts to (5); 17 A demon must simply be contained (3); 19 Settling of the debt

QUICK CLUES

- Across: 1 Multiplied by itself (7); 5 Angry (5); 8 Ornamental setting for panels behind altar (7); 9 Children's nurse (5); 10 Bird such as smew, gosander (9); 12 Move fast (3); 13 Complete; to add to (5); 17 Mischievous child (3)

Answers to No 1840

- Across: 1 Whist, 4 Conform, 8 Onset, Bedtimes, 10 Gel, 11 Hold forth, 12 Tare, 13 Clue, 18 Elaborate, 20 Ohm, 21 Intrude, 22 Track, 23 Garment, 24 Rider.

TO THE POINT

CITIZEN SEEKING ADVICE: I recently had cause to turn to the Citizens' Advice Bureau in a quest for information. I am no further on in my quest for the information I sought, but I now have another query. Does any human actually work at the CAB?

I spent a frustrating day telephoning several branches of CAB and being answered by a machine on each occasion. This friendly machine directed me to another telephone number "if you need help on the day".

I did need help - the number did not provide it.

I still have not managed to get an appointment. Will the CAB be changing its name to the Citizens' Advice Answering Machines, due to the apparent lack of human contact at their offices?

PUZZLED Belfast 5

MILLENNIUM MEETINGS: BBC1 is currently planning "2000 Today", a live programme to be broadcast over 27 hours on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. This unique television event will involve broadcasters across the world and will be covering celebrations the length and breadth of Britain.

A number of reunions worldwide and nationwide are planned during the broadcast and we would be interested to hear from any individuals or groups who are planning on meeting up again with people from their distant past over this period. Stories will be dealt with in strictest confidence.

LESLEY PAINE,

Reunions, Millennium Events, Room EB16C, BBC TV Centre, London W12 7RJ

SECRET PLANS: Your correspondent Evelyn Mullally is correct in her comments on the Planning Service. They operate virtually as a dictatorship.

Complain to them about buildings being erected without permission and you are ignored. If you press them they will side with the offender or clam up and refuse to discuss the matter.

They will refuse an application from one person for a development and a short time later grant planning consent to someone else for the same development. They boasted in the paper recently about taking action against estate agents displaying billboards, yet they have done nothing about the huge monument which has been erected on DoE ground at Poleglass roundabout on the Stewartstown Road in Belfast.

Taxpayers are paying the quite substantial salaries of these public servants but would appear to be receiving a poor return for their money.

PLANNING BLUES, Dunmurry.

Taxpayers funding fraud

YOUR article on NHS fraud (Oct 21) will gladden the hearts of many who resent the extra tax burden that NHS fraud imposes upon the honest citizens of this welfare state.

However, I wonder how many feel the despair which I and many like me experience when we read articles such as that contained in this month's Reader's Digest entitled "Welfare Reform" by ex-government minister Frank Field.

Mr Field was appointed in 1997 by Tony Blair to sort out Britain's fraudulent welfare system and many of us were elated at the prospect that at least action was pending that would heal this "festering sore" which is crippling a system that should be our pride and joy!

What shocked me was the scale of fraud that Mr Field revealed. Apparently we are being taxed to compensate for losses amounting to not just millions, but tens of billions, and the reluctance of Government to bear down on welfare cheats because of the possible reaction of certain of the electorate.

Mr Field resigned from ministerial office when he realised as he said "instead of targeting the fraudsters, Government was penalising the genuinely sick and disabled" or in other words, rather than incur displeasure, the taxpayer can shoulder the burden!

JOHN FINLAY, Belfast 14.

Stock just keeps rolling along...

IT was with a sense of wonderment, that I read an article recently in the Belfast Telegraph, where Translink alluded to the fact that trains, whilst old and prone to mechanical failure, are still safe.

Could someone please tell me how if a train is gushing diesel from the engine out over the water tank onto the ground and smoke pouring out of the engine, as witnessed on the London derry line by myself and others last week, it can be deemed safe?

In light of the Padstow rail disaster, where train where it is suspected that an anti-sludge additive in the diesel fuel exploded causing the fuel due to leaks, or fireball which claimed most of the lives lost, can Translink honestly say that this specific train was safe? I would also like to know if the



Let's get back on track

I WAS most interested in recent letters regarding our railways. As a regular commuter between Bangor and Lisburn, I pity the platform staff who bear the brunt of complaints regarding mechanical failures, punctuality etc. They appear to be getting more and more frustrated.

I note that last week only 20 trains - I

understand about 60pc of the fleet - are fit for service. The week before, NIR had apparently no train to operate the Portrush line on several occasions.

I feel for the train staff and indeed the railway management who appear to be totally at the mercy of those who hold the pursestrings. FRUSTRATED COMMUTER, Bangor.

Turned off by NIE service

I AM angry at the treatment of customers by NIE.

On Sunday last (Oct 25) we lost supply from 9.40pm. We were off for 40 minutes, but the supply was off again two more times up until midnight.

On our first attempt to telephone NIE we were told by an automated voice that they were too busy to take our call.

trast to Friday October 15, when we lost supply for one and a half hours after teatime. On that occasion we rang NIE and, surprise, surprise, nobody even answered the telephone.

I am informed by an insider that someone forgot to switch the answering machine on!

NIE have just launched a new advertising campaign using their own staff - great idea to keep costs

down and promote staff well-being.

The advertisement says that they have spend millions of pounds upgrading their telephone system and are interested in the customer.

Really? When is Dr Patrick Haren going to put the consumer before the shareholder? When will he realise that emergency repair does not constitute good practice

and undertake preventative maintenance on older lines like the supply to Ballyblack?

Judging by the profit figures, Viridian shareholders must feel they are getting good value from Dr Haren.

I fear, however, that the consumer may have a different view. RAYMOND WATSON Ballyblack Newtownards