

The Summer Recess

Parliament rose for the Summer Recess on July 28, so this will be my last column until we all meet again, God willing, at the next appearance of In Parliament on 27 October.

The adjournment debate in the Commons took the usual form. Twenty-two backbenchers had their say on a variety of issues, and one humble parliamentary secretary strove to answer all their points on behalf of the Government.

There was the usual petty sniping. Mr. Martin Salter (Reading West, Labour) criticised Sir Richard Body (Boston and Skegness, Conservative) for making "offensive" comments, adding "he did not even have the courtesy to be here at the start of the debate; I caught the 7.40 train". Sir Richard had boosted his own area, a harmless fault surely. Skegness, in my constituency, he carolled, is a marvellous place for a holiday. "Come to Skeggy. I shall be there with my grandchildren, though not with my bucket and spade."

Many people choose Cyprus, rather than Skeggy, for a holiday. The Cyprus problem was again taken up by Tom Cox (Tooting, Labour) and Dr Rudi Vis (Finchley and Golders Green, Labour), supported by Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton, Labour). Mr Cox, who chairs the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Cyprus group, once more complained that Turkey, having occupied Northern Cyprus since 1974, shows no sign of giving it up. Yet another round of talks has begun, but Mr Denktash will not budge. He is undeterred by the fact that Turkey is the only country to have recognised Mr Denktash's Independent Republic of Northern Cyprus. The United Nations and the Council of Europe also refuse recognition, and Famagusta, once one of the most beautiful places in Cyprus, remains a ghost town. Its return was promised by Mr. Denktash. He reneged on his promise, Mr Cox complained, so great opportunities for Greek and Turkish Cypriots to live and work together were sadly lost. Mr Cox urged the British Government to act.

Dr Rudi Vis backed him. He pointed out that there are more than 1,600 missing people. Others live in enclaves, surrounded by occupied territories. The Anatolian settlers from Turkey are not at all the same culturally as the Turkish Cypriots. There are tens of thousands of Turkish troops on the island, and all Christian churches in the occupied territories have been destroyed.

The reply on behalf of the Government by the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping) was anodyne to the point of rudeness. I give his statement in its entirety (which I had not space to do in the case of Mr Cox and Dr Vis):

"We do need to make progress. The Government are committed, as guarantor, to a settlement in Cyprus. We fully back the efforts of the United Nations. We take every opportunity to press human rights issues with the Turkish Government."

Mr Andrew Rowe (Faversham and Mid-Kent, Conservative) disarmingly complained, in relation to teaching, that "the Government, building on the bad example set by us, have so increased the bumf and the controls that professional staff prefer to walk away from the stress". Perhaps even more important was his point that the new forms of electronic communication mean that the age of representative democracy is drawing to a close.

Governments can quickly discover the (uninformed) opinions of the populace on any topic, and then fashion policies accordingly.

Mr David Amess (Southend West, Conservative) announced that the Kennel Club had advised him that the German Government are attempting to pass legislation to ban the breeding and import of bull breeds, including the Staffordshire bull terrier. This he said is causing great distress to dog owners in Britain.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall, Liberal Democrat) said that air passengers are far more likely to suffer serious ill health - even death - from the conditions in the aircraft cabin than they are to be victims of an air crash. Partly this arises because organophosphates are used as lubricants in aircraft engines, and dangerous vapours from these can leak into the cabin.

Mr Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield, Conservative) wound up for the Opposition. He said the key points MPs make in Adjournment debates would have more impact if they were to be met by written replies from the various Departments. He ended with a crack at Mr Blair who, he said, suffers from the Tinkerbell factor:

“When the light starts to go out, or something goes wrong, he needs reassurance so that the light can shine again. As he is not receiving that reassurance at present, I think that he needs a long holiday. I am happy to wish him a good holiday. Indeed, I wish every Member of the House a good holiday.”

I would like to echo that, as regards every reader of this journal.

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