20 November 2017

More news..................

The Labour Party has designated Sat 25th November as the next National campaign day, as it is the Saturday after the budget. If you have been following the revelations from the ‘Paradise Papers’ you might conclude that the government’s ‘austerity’ agenda has been a response to the fact that so many rich individuals and corporations are avoiding paying tax; while the rest of us on PAYE are supporting the country’s infrastructure.
Everyone's talking about NHS pay

Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said the pay cap has ended. But you have yet to see any more money in your pay packet.

That’s why UNISON’s Pay Up Now! campaign has been putting pressure on government to make more money available in next week’s budget for an immediate pay rise for all NHS staff – whatever job they do.

Because a pat on the back is simply not enough. It’s time for a proper pay rise. We know that, you know that and the public agrees.

You may have seen some speculation that the government will attach strings to any NHS pay rise. UNISON is saying come and talk to us about what this means, and about our proposals for a better NHS pay structure because we are willing to listen.

But we will not accept NHS staff funding their own pay rise through cuts to their terms and conditions.
GRENFELL

We’ve just found out that the Tories in Kensington have been asking residents how important the Grenfell tragedy is on a scale of 0-10.

It is insulting and insensitive.

Preventing another fire like Grenfell couldn't be more important. And Theresa May has the power to do it — she could use next Wednesday's budget to set aside money to fit social housing with sprinklers that would save lives. Let's make sure she hears our message.

Please sign and tell the Tories why Grenfell must not be ignored.

Log on and Sign this and help us make sure that residents of high rise social housing can sleep safely with the knowledge that they are being listened to.

Jeremy Corbyn
Leader of the Labour Party
Revealed: the true cost of the House of Lords

The Electoral Reform Society have released a devastating analysis of the state of the House of Lords in 2017 – revealing the ‘democratic crisis’ at the heart of the Lords.

The Audit coincides with a key Westminster Hall debate calling for reform of the upper house [1] –

It follows a report from the Lord Speaker’s Committee on the Size of the House [2] suggested moving to a still-unelected, 600-member house by 2028. ERS polling found that 88% of people believe the Lords should be smaller than 600 members [3].

The findings have spurred the ERS to call for substantive reform of a ‘crumbling, crony-packed chamber’, with The High Cost of Small Change: The House of Lords Audit revealing:

•Lords-a-claiming: 455 Lords claimed more than the average take home pay of full-time employees during the 2016/17 session – despite the house sitting for just 141 days.
• 33 inactive peers picked up £462,510 in tax-free expenses [4] – claiming an average of £746 per vote

• Daily allowance and travel costs for the 2016-17 session came to over £19 million.

• Couch-potato peers: Nearly 1 in 10 of the peers eligible to vote throughout 2016/17 (9.2% - 72 of the 779) are inactive when it comes to scrutinising the government’s work on committees, in the chamber, or through written questions – vital roles for the revising chamber

• A noisy minority: The top 300 voting peers account for over 64% of all votes in divisions during the 2016/17 session – suggesting much of the work of the Lords is done by a minority of peers

• Not so independent: Despite claims that the Lords is less partisan than the Commons, 78% of Conservative peers failed to vote against the government once in 2016/17, while the average Labour Peer voted against the government in 90% of votes

• Meanwhile, Crossbench peers vote far less than partisan Lords – 41% voted fewer than ten times in 2016/17 (compared to 14% for Labour and 7% for the Conservatives)

• An ageing upper chamber: Nearly one in five peers (18%) are over the age of 80 – compared to just 6.6% of the over-21 population (only over-21s can sit in the upper house)

• House of Has-Beens? The House hosts 184 ex-MPs, 26 ex-MEPs, 11 ex-MSPs, 8 ex-Welsh AMs, 6 ex-London AMs, 11 ex-MLAs and 39 current or ex-council leaders, as of April 2017.

See report on the House of Lords below by the ERS. I do believe in having "checks and balances" on the House of Commons and much good work is done in the Lord's currently but it is currently an undemocratic and expensive mess that needs urgent reform.
"72 peers failed to speak in the chamber, table a written question or serve on a committee at all in the whole of 2016/17. 33 of them claimed a huge £462,510 (an average of £14,015 each).

New analysis shows the 33 expenses-claiming ‘couch potato peers’ took part in just 24% of votes – meaning they claimed an average of £746 per vote.

Recent analysis by the ERS shows 109 peers made no spoken contributions - with 63 of these claiming a total of £1,095,701 in expenses.

The ERS is calling for a proportionally-elected upper house of 300 members.

In 2015, the ERS launched House of Lords: Fact vs Fiction [5], showing that in the 2010-2015, £360,000 was claimed by peers in years they failed to vote once. Yet the problem of inactive peers appears to have worsened significantly.

Darren Hughes, Chief Executive of the Electoral Reform Society, said:

“Despite some minor reforms, the problems of Britain’s broken upper house continue to fester. With nearly one in ten unelected peers failing to contribute in key ways – despite many of them picking up large sums – we have a democratic crisis in our second chamber.

“The vast majority of party-affiliated peers toe the line, while many Crossbench peers simply don’t turn up. The so-called ‘independent’ chamber is packed full of party loyalists.

“The past few years have seen one expenses scandal after another, with peers turning up to claim without substantially contributing. We have seen a barrage of appointments based on patronage. And we’ve seen Peers themselves admit they treat our upper house as a retirement home, a private members’ club.

This is no fit state for the Mother of all Parliaments.

“This report lays bare the rotten state of this unelected second chamber – from couch-potato peers to lobby-fodder lords. We need real reform now – not tinkering around the edges.
“Politicians must now meet the challenge before this crumbling, crony-stuffed house declines even further. Voters want real change. It’s time for both MPs and peers to embrace it.”

The report concludes:

“The second chamber is demonstrably in need of serious reform. Whether it is the thousands claimed by inactive peers or the dominance of defeated politicians, it is clear that until we let the light in, the rot within the Mother of all Parliaments will only get worse.

“We must see parties commit to a far smaller, proportionally-elected upper house. At a time of significant constitutional, economic and political change, the need for an effective House of Peers or Senate is overwhelming.

“Whatever the final details [of an elected upper house], the principle remains: those who vote on our laws should be accountable to those affected by those laws. As we have shown, that is a matter both of principle and pragmatism.

“Now is no time for minor tinkering; the public call for a real overhaul is loud and clear. Let’s get on with meeting our democratic duty - and give voters the revising chamber Britain needs.”

ENDS


Jason Anderson LAS Labour Link