

**JULY 2013**

**Lords debate the contribution of atheists and humanists to society**

Thu, 25 July 2013

**Mention**

Lord Maxton:

Today we live in a much better society, not just in this country but throughout Europe and the western world, than we did in the past. We live in a society that looks after the poor and the elderly, and which helps those who are widowed early. I shall tell noble Lords a story. My own father was the director of a research institute at **Oxford University** and was at the professorial level. He died on 6 May 1951, one day after my 15th birthday. My mother received from the university his salary for the first five or six days of May, and that was all. There was no widow's pension, but now all that has changed. It is interesting to note, although I am not making a direct correlation, but as our society has improved, so has religion declined. The number of people who believe has gone down and down as our society gets better and better.

It is an interesting fact that if you look at the countries which all the research shows have the lowest number of people who believe in religion, you will find that they have the lowest crime rates, the lowest levels of infant mortality, the best education systems and the best social security systems. They are, of course, Sweden, Denmark, Canada to some extent, Estonia and countries of that nature. In the United States, the states with the lowest crime rates and the best systems of education and so on are in fact those which have the lowest number of people who believe in religion. I am not making a direct correlation between the two, but it is difficult not to. The fact is that that is what is happening. I am sorry, but I do not believe that somehow we are living in a worse society now than we did; we do not, we live in a much better world than we had in the past. Society has improved as religion has declined.

**Lords debate the contribution of the arts to the nation's education, health and emotional well-being**

Thurs, 25 July 2013

Lord Rea:

My Lords, I, too, thank my noble friend for bringing this important area before the House. I feel somewhat diffident speaking with those of such calibre. Previous speakers have shown that a good story well told can have a very big impact, which probably should be a rule for my future speeches. As a former medical practitioner, I will speak today on the effect that the arts, in the broadest sense, can have on health. Here, I am using the long WHO definition of health, which considers it to be not only the "absence of disease" but also, "complete physical, mental and social well-being"—a condition we aspire to but seldom achieve individually and probably never as a whole society.

This definition is useful because it recognises that health is not only physical but includes emotional and social components, factors which have tended until recently to be neglected in

healthcare. Sir David Weatherall, when the regius professor of medicine at **Oxford University** more than a decade ago, explained how scientific medicine, which dominated the last century, changed the emphasis in healthcare from the whole patient and whole organs to diseases of molecules and cells. This caused many to feel that medicine had become reductionist and dehumanising. Although himself a molecular scientist, Professor Weatherall said that, “we will now start putting the bits ... together again ... The old skills of clinical practice, the ability to interact with people, will be as vital ... as they have been in the past”.

### **Lords debate Part-Time Study**

Wed, 24 July 2013

#### **Mention**

Baroness Brinton:

As others have said, one myth that I often find still needs to be exploded is the public view of a typical university student as being 18 and leaving home to go away and study for three years on a full-time course. As an aide-memoire for the Committee, the seven speakers in this debate all attended Russell Group universities and six went to **Oxbridge**—very much the tradition for our era. I suspect that none of us studied part-time. I was a mature student at Cambridge. The offer for part-time students was very limited and did not fit in with my job at the BBC so I had no choice. I would have loved to study part-time.

We need to celebrate a higher education system that has grown and developed over recent years, recognising the needs of prospective students and creating flexible courses that fit in with work and caring duties, whether for children or other family members. Birkbeck College and the Open University in particular have outstanding records in their provision for part-time students in very different ways—something to which other speakers have already alluded.

### **Lords debate the Apprenticeships (Alternative English Completion Conditions) (Amendment) Regulations 2013**

Mon, 15 July 2013

Lord Young of Norwood Green:

My Lords, I, too, welcome these regulations. I listened carefully to what the noble Lord, Lord Greenway, said. He is an expert in this field, and it seems that this is a seaworthy recommendation from the Government.

I have a couple of comments to make. The Explanatory Memorandum states:

“It is intended that the certifying authority, which will be the Alliance of Sector Skills Councils, will issue guidance from time to time on the administrative arrangements relating to the application and awarding of apprenticeship certificates. This guidance will cover circumstances where the standard completion conditions do not apply. The Secretary of State is not intending to issue guidance”.

I am quite pleased. The Alliance of Sector Skills Councils should have the right experience and occupational awareness, but there ought from time to time to be some check that that

guidance meets the necessary standards and criteria. I would welcome the Minister's views on that.

I am not expecting an answer from the Minister today, but I was somewhat surprised to see that the number of under-19 apprenticeship starts as a proportion of the total for all ages in England shows a decrease in 2010-11 and 2011-12 at the same time as the total annual number of vacancies for apprenticeships increased from around 43,000 to just over 100,000. Furthermore, the proportion of candidate applications for apprenticeships for under-19 year-olds had decreased from 2009-10, while it had been increasing for over-19s. I find it surprising that demand is less than supply. My experience is that it is usually the other way round. I like to quote British Telecom apprenticeships; you can get into **Oxford or Cambridge** more easily than you can get a British Telecom apprenticeship. There are something like 300 apprenticeships and usually about 25,000 applications.

### **MPs debate the Effect of Government Policies on Disabled People**

Wed, 10 July 2013

#### **Mentions**

Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab):

As I have said before, and as I will carry on saying, I am proud of the welfare system we developed. It was born out of the second world war, when we really were all in it together. I want to retain that model, with its principles of inclusion, support and security for all, protecting any one of us should we fall on hard times or become disabled. It ensures that we have the basics and dignity in our lives.

Fortunately, the British public are starting to see through what the Government are doing. As British social attitudes surveys consistently show, they want a fairer and more equal society, not a divided one. Trend analysis that I have undertaken in conjunction with sociologists from **Oxford university** shows that, rather than losing support for social security, the British people are a good barometer of what is right and just. When the myths about what the Government are doing are exposed, most people do not want a further downgrading of social security.

Instead of demonising the poor and the disabled, we need to get the economy moving and tackle the massive private sector debt of our financial institutions, which is 400% of GDP and rising. That is the real issue, not sovereign debt, as the Government like to say, and it is getting worse. We should not be giving tax breaks to the wealthiest in society—£3 billion to over 300,000 people earning more than £150,000 a year—at the expense of the most vulnerable. I think that says it all.

### **Lords debate Immigration Rules (impact on families)**

Thu, 4 July 2013

#### **Mention**

Baroness Hamwee: There is also a block—I use that term advisedly—on applications by adult dependent relatives to join British citizens and permanent residents here. They have to demonstrate a very high level of dependency, one which suggests to me that they would not in fact be able to travel, and that the sponsor's financial support is not sufficient to provide care in their own country. Will the Minister give an example of when an application by

anyone in this group could be successful? If you have the money to meet the requirements to come here, you have the money to be supported in your original country.

The Migration Advisory Committee was asked about the income needed to support applicants,

“without them becoming a burden on the state”.

That is an economic remit, and it gave economic advice, but as the MAC recognised, there are also legal, moral, and social dimensions. Our report calls for an independent review as to these impacts. Noble Lords will be familiar with the work of **Oxford University**'s Centre on Migration, Policy and Society. COMPAS is just the sort of organisation I have in mind to do such a review. It also calls for a review of the income level and how the system is working. I am well aware that the Government have said in recent answers to Parliamentary Questions that the rules are working as intended. They say that they will keep the impact under review without having any proposal to conduct an immediate review.

### Lords debate preparing young people for the world of work

Thu, 4 July 2013

#### **Mentions**

Baroness Shephard of Northwold:

It might surprise some noble Lords to learn of the progress made by my own university, **Oxford**, so frequently is it demonised by the media—and in the past by some politicians—as being elitist. **Oxford** now offers the most generous financial support of any university in the country to the poorest students. One in 10 of its United Kingdom undergraduates is from the lowest income band: that is, £16,000 a year or less. State school admissions to **Oxford** are in the majority. It holds more than 2,000 outreach events every year. It has appointed outreach staff for every county and city in the UK. Their job is to focus on schools with the smallest numbers of students going to **Oxford**. Interestingly, anecdotal evidence from some schools shows that teachers are sometimes depressing the aspirations of children who wish to go to **Oxford or Cambridge**. That of course is unacceptable, but at least we know about it. The work at **Oxford** extends to successful partnerships with individual schools, down to primary school level, and intensive work with teachers. **Oxford**'s successful summer schools have seen more than two-thirds of all participants applying to **Oxford**, with a success rate of double the average of all applicants.

### Lords Committee stage - Energy Bill (Day One)

Tue, 2 July 2013

#### **Mention**

Lord Oxburgh: My Lords, I shall speak also to Amendments 3, 4, 6, 9 and 14. I begin by declaring my interests as listed in the register, but with a small renewable energy company and a small energy efficiency company. It would also be appropriate to start by thanking the Minister and her team for the way in which they have made themselves available to brief any Member of the Committee who has approached them on the complexities of the Bill. It certainly is a complex Bill and, indeed, that is part of the problem. The complexity of the Bill

arises from the multiplicity of its objectives, which are to achieve decarbonisation, to achieve energy security and to do both of those at the lowest possible cost.

Some of us had the opportunity yesterday, courtesy of the noble Viscount, Lord Ridley, to attend a briefing given by an investment manager on his view of the costs and complexity of the Bill. Although I think that not everyone agreed with everything that the briefer said, the talk was extremely informative in the sense that it emphasised the enormous capital that will have to be raised if the aspirations of the Government, as seen through the climate change committee, are to be achieved over the next 40 or so years. It also emphasised the relative unattractiveness of the UK utilities market compared with those in competitor countries and therefore the difficulty in persuading investors to put money into these proposals.

Of course, one of the problems is that the proposed way forward cannot be regarded as the cheapest way forward. In fact, it is relatively expensive by comparison with ways forward that do not decarbonise and which pay much less attention to security of supply. Given that investments in generation are long-term investments, for 30, 40 or even 50 years, investors have to be absolutely clear that the Government are of firm intent.

It was around 50 years ago that the late Lord Franks, in describing the inability of **Oxford University** to reform itself internally, introduced the expression “infirmity of purpose”, which occurred frequently throughout his reports. Fundamentally, the concerns of the investment community are that there may be a degree of infirmity of purpose between this Government and their successor Governments. Given the overall difficulty of investing in UK utilities, for the reasons that I have just outlined, the least we can do is to do everything possible to indicate that not only the present Government but, as far as possible, across parties, that subsequent Governments will support this approach.

## **Lords Second Reading - Children and Families Bill**

Tue, 2 July 2013

### **Mentions**

Baroness Hamwee: I end with the issue of contact. I was very interested in a report that many noble Lords will have received recently from the **University of Oxford** and the University of Sussex about what is important in contact. I picked up a lot about the child’s voice being heard. I have pretty much unbounded admiration for people who foster or adopt; it is almost beyond my imagining. I also have a lot of admiration for the social workers involved and for the children who cope and contribute to their own success. It was salutary to hear the point from children during our work on the Select Committee, some of whom said, “They don’t listen to me, because I’m a looked-after child and they are professionals”. Another child said, “People listen only to what they want to hear”. In our scrutiny of this Bill, we need to listen to children very carefully.

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Baroness Cumberlege: I am sure that today there are social workers equally committed to their profession but, sadly, they are never short of receiving criticism or being hounded, scrutinised and carrying the can for decisions made or not made. When I chaired social services for East Sussex I was very conscious of those who had turned a family around and who had enabled a child in care, as they were called then, to join the Royal Ballet School, to go to **Oxford University** or to go on to some other achievement. However, they, the social

workers, could never talk about their professional successes because the young person concerned wanted to be considered an equal by his or her peers; they did not want their past to be flaunted or even known. I have great respect for social workers and I am disappointed that they carry such heavy case loads and are not always given the support that they need.