

John Problem at Westminster.

The Reshuffle.

There are mutterings in corners and behind pillars that there is an 'inner, inner cabinet' comprised of Ministers who attended Harvard. 'The Harvard Gang' are said to shoot first and ask questions later, and it is believed their favourite film is 'The Magnificent Seven'.

The Chancellor.

The Chancellor has come in for a lot of back-biting since Northern Rock. Some wit from the Tory benches unkindly compared him to an 18th. Century chancellor of whom it was said that his knowledge of accounts 'was confined to the reckoning of tavern bills' and that a sum of five figures was to him 'an impenetrable mystery'.

Cause to Rejoice - directgov.uk

The government has cause to rejoice - one of its initiatives has proved a huge success. Directgov.uk is the government's web-site for all public services. The citizen can find information about all the areas in which he/she interfaces with the government - education, councils, benefits, motoring, health, crime, environmental matters and so on. The site gets 5.5 million hits a month. Second only to the weather-forecast site.

MPs Miss their Carols.

Many MPs observed that when they were doing their Christmas shopping, there was precious little carol music being played. Normally carols start being heard in shops early in November, but not this year. One MP asked at his Waitrose why there was no carol music. The answer seemed vague and referred to various people's tastes. There is much suspicion that political correctness has triumphed over Santa Claus.

Mr. Miliband's Rhetoric.

Some of the older MPs are following, with interest, Mr. Miliband's debating style. Modest on foreign shores, he tends to be more forceful back home. There is a hope that he will provide enough material for a small booklet of his best phrases to be published before the recess. 'Demands for popular votes are based on scare stories and myths'. 'Referenda are the last refuge of dictators and demagogues' are much more stirring than most of the words heard in the House.

Prize Winner.

This year's prize for the MP with the most forceful constituency circular goes to Peter Lilley. The voters of Hitchin and Harpenden have been treated to a Winter Issue in which the front page has a large portrait of him, a second photo, an article headlined 'Local MP' (himself, of course) and a letter by him written on House of Commons paper. Page 2 has three articles featuring his name in the headlines and one article referring to the 'local MP'. Page 3 has three 'Lilleys' and two 'MPs'. Page 4 has more of the same. Nobody else gets a look-in, not even the constituency workers. MPs were overwhelmed by the single-mindedness of this publication and awarded it first prize. However, the newsletters of all the other MPs were also admired and were awarded a collective second

place.

PR Folk and other Helpers.

There is some concern, again amongst the older Members, that there are too many Press Attaches and PR. types in government. Apparently the number has risen from 300 in 1997 to 1800 today. Small in comparison with the 3000 supporting the US President alone, but still, say the older Members, enough to warrant a small Select Committee to decide if they offer value for the tax-payers' money.