

COMMON CAUSE

Baroness Scotland sees a House divided over the Public Bodies Bill, but united by Armistice Day



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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5

The speed of the cuts will come home to roost soon enough for the coalition, but this is the end of an already tough week for the government in the Lords, with forceful debates on housing and homelessness, as well as an excellent debate proposed by David Puttnam on media ownership and plurality. The Lords constitutional committee on next week's Public Bodies Bill provides a devastating critique, asserting that the bill "strikes at the very heart of our constitutional system" – not easy reading for ministers trying to get it through. The usual *bonhomie* which binds all sides of the House together seems to be wearing a little thin, which is a shame because it's the best thing about the House. Still, I can look forward to the Wycombe Wanderers supporters' bonfire party in our friend David's High Wycombe garden – if I can get out of the House in time and it stops raining, which I doubt.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6

Until we were flooded out in July 2007, we had held the village's Bonfire Night party in our cottage garden in Asthal for 20 years. We reinstated the event this year, and I drive down with my boys – dropping one off *en route*; bigger fish to fry. Masses of food to prepare, so I'm going well armed: virtually everyone is coming, and they are always hungry. Fabulous fireworks, made all the better by the arrival of my sister, over from Trinidad for a family christening next week. I'm a great-aunt again – it's terrific!

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 7

Feeling ropery, with what I think are early flu symptoms, so do not manage to get to church. Instead, read mass to myself, sitting up in bed. I have discovered a new iPhone App, 'Universalis', with readings for the foreseeable future. I'll never miss out again.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8

While I was Attorney General, I promoted multi-disciplinary and multi-faceted approaches to dealing with complex social and legal issues, such as violence against women. So I am delighted to visit Anchor House, a centre for the homeless in Newham, and see this approach be-

ing applied brilliantly. Keith Fernett, who runs it, is truly inspirational and has, in his five years at the centre, improved it beyond recognition. The confidence of the residents is palpable. They want me to become a patron and I'm so tempted, although I'm not sure how I can fit more in. 'The Corporate Alliance Against Domestic Violence' and 'Missio' still need support.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 9

Following a meeting of the shadow cabinet, the Lords debate on the Public Bodies Bill. The bill is shocking in constitutional terms. The constitutional committee's scathing report is much to the fore. We win the arguments convincingly, with significantly Harry Woolf, the former lord chief justice, and every former law officer present in the chamber, including me, being of one accord, against the bill. But the advent of the coalition means that the Lords is in danger of no longer being a revising chamber, but a stacked deck for the government. They win a very late-night vote. There is unease on all sides of the House.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 10

The cuts are already starting to hurt. The fear they have generated can be seen, when a mass student protest against the government's plans for university funding turns to violence. It's painful to watch. How the Lib Dems can go in six months from signing pledges on tuition fees to seeing buildings burnt on their watch on the same issue is, I'm afraid, beyond me. There is disappointment and alarm at the violence and we can only hope the few hotheads who have caused it will come to realise violence is never an acceptable answer. I try to get to a *pro bono* event on Piccadilly but can't find anywhere to park because of the protests.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 11

Armistice Day is immensely moving wherever it is held – whether in Whitehall, in small villages, by people standing still in the street in Westminster. No less so in the Lords: history is resonant enough, but the current dangerous conflicts in which our tremendous armed forces are presently engaged drive home the poignant reality of what this day really means. The House is at one again. 🏰