

LISTEN TO THE LEADERS

59% OF THE
PUBLIC

SAY

KEEP HUNTING 


THE BRITISH MEDIA'S VIEW
OF THE HUNTING BILL

Democracy in the dock over hunting

This, the fifth edition in 3 years of 'Listen to the Leaders', pulls together the latest editorial comment from the national and regional press on hunting -- in this case the voting through of the Hunting Bill by the House of Commons on the 30th of June.

This pamphlet highlights the hardening consensus of opposition to this unjust and oppressive Bill amongst authoritative commentators across the political spectrum. The strength of editorial disapproval shows how spectacularly out of step pro-ban MPs are both with informed opinion and with the mood of the electorate. The media message is clear: these MPs are misusing Parliamentary processes to pursue a selfishly "totemic" measure which enjoys no media or public support.

We hope that when the House of Lords comes to consider this Bill it will reflect the moderate and fair-minded mood of these commentators and of the people themselves. As we have said before, the independent press in a liberal democracy are the watchkeepers at the gates of our freedom. We should listen to their warnings if we are to avoid potential tyranny.



Richard Burge

Chief Executive
July 2003

LISTEN TO THE LEADERS



1st July 2003
Circulation: 3,520,000

Brush Off

THERE are a thousand and one big issues worrying Sun readers.

Foxhunting is not among them.

So why is Parliament wasting so much time debating the subject?

Voters want action on schools, hospitals, roads, crime, trains and asylum – things that matter.

Chasing vermin with dogs doesn't even show on the radar.

The Government should leave hunting to the experts who understand it.

People who live in the country.

The Guardian

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 397,000

MPs win the vote but not the argument

.....This week's procedural rail crash has made the passing of a complete ban more likely, but it has not weakened the case for compromise.....

.....The majority should hesitate before it rides roughshod over the minority. The peacefully expressed fears of many in the countryside, who see things differently and feel their way of life is under threat from people whom they think do not understand them, have made a persuasive case for a less absolutist approach. This was the spirit that underpinned Mr Michael's bill, and it will be both legitimate and desirable if the Lords reinstate clauses in a similar (but not in a more permissive) spirit. Thanks to Mr Michael's mishandling, the irreconcilables have won a procedural battle this week. But they have not yet won the broader argument.

THE INDEPENDENT

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 222,000

The anti-hunting lobby have Mr Blair on the run

....Labour backbenchers have hinted, and sometimes openly declared, that they will make life uncomfortable for the Government.....

....Politically tempting as it might be to get him out of some immediate difficulties, Mr Blair should resist the blackmail. It is a poor deal from the British people's point of view. Mr Blair knows the public has many more pressing concerns than fox-hunting. He knows also that his government is faced with wasting far too much legislative and ministerial time on the issue. It is an emotive subject, and one best left alone. As things stand, Mr Blair has months of distraction and debilitation ahead of him when he can ill afford to take his attention away from the vital task of reviving the public services.....

THE TIMES

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 638,000

Ministers will regret conceding defeat on foxhunting

.....The Government has found itself committed, in a fashion worthy of *Alice in Wonderland*, to enacting a Bill that it does not care for, in order to initiate a clash with the House of Lords that it could do without and then impose the Parliament Act in circumstances which, while constitutionally legitimate, are politically ludicrous.....

...There will be those in Downing Street who, while conceding that this ban is mistaken, may consider it a sacrifice worth making in order to achieve political peace within the Parliamentary Labour Party and be better prepared for more important controversies.....This is a dubious assertion. The foxhunting outcome is as likely to embolden certain Labour MPs as to appease them..... Mr Blair might yet discover how difficult it can be for a fox once the hounds have been loosed.

The Daily Telegraph

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 926,000

Stop the wreckers

.....What follows now will be a test of whether we live in a parliamentary system or an elected dictatorship. If past form is anything to go by, members of all parties in the House of Lords will approach the matter in the spirit of serious law-making, rather than class warfare. They will observe that the ban on hunting in Scotland has resulted in a farce that has caused the painful death of many more foxes than before. They will note that the idea of the regulation of hunting has yet to be considered in the dispassionate manner that it deserves. They will weigh the importance of liberty, tradition and the rural way of life. In all of this, their instinct will be to frame laws that will work rather than provoke conflict and impose absurdity. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that they will endorse last night's blanket ban.

What then? We enter the thicket of parliamentary procedure and the mire of the Blair Government's troubles with its own party. But it will show a unique contempt for parliamentary convention if a government whose own Bill has just been wrecked allows the Parliament Act to force through what those wreckers want.....

Daily Mail

7th July 2003
Circulation: 2,419,000

Cynicism and the fate of the fox

THE cynicism is quite sickening. With only days to go before the possibility of a major revolt over foundation hospitals, a beleaguered Mr Blair throws a bone to his yapping MPs – as he so often does when he is in trouble – by promising progress towards a ban on hunting.....

.....The hatred Labour MPs have for hunting owes more to class-war prejudice than any rational concern for the fate of the fox.

For what emerged from the Burns report was that hunting is not necessarily more cruel than any other form of pest-control. Moreover the botched ban that already exists in Scotland should be an object lesson in the perils of ill-considered legislation. But Labour's anti-hunt fanatics don't want to know.

Indeed they almost relish the prospect of a constitutional clash with the Lords, no matter what the damage. They couldn't care less for the deepening resentment in the countryside.

Meanwhile, more important issues such as the inexorable deterioration of this nation go hang. What a sorry way of running a country.

LISTEN TO THE LEADERS

The Economist

4th July 2003
Circulation: 146,400

The Government's weakness shows in its defeat on foxhunting

.....To foxhunting's supporters, Labour's 1997 manifesto commitment to ban it symbolises the party's metropolitan roots and hostility to the countryside. And to everybody watching, the current mess over foxhunting symbolises the government's weakness.....Mr Blair's decision to withdraw the compromise rather than fight for it shows that these days he is more afraid of offending the party than the countryside.

But this issue is still not settled. The new law has to get through the House of Lords, which will probably try to ease the ban.....

...The ban may also contravene European human-rights law. One such challenge is grinding through the Scottish courts and may end up in the European Court of Human Rights. And even if it does get through Parliament and the courts, according to Alastair McWhirter, chief constable of Suffolk, it will be unenforceable. The huntsmen's horns will be ringing in Mr Blair's ears for some time yet.

THE SPECTATOR Est. 1828

5th July 2003
Circulation: 61,000

Break a bad law

.....The Prime Minister deserved credit for handling an emotive issue with some vague regard to the wider issue of liberty. Following Monday night's vote that credit has gone. To pursue a complete ban – invoking the Parliament Act to dismiss opposition from the Lords, as Mr Michael has promised – is to overrule the system of checks and balances to which Westminster legislation has long been subject. It is hard to equate the Mr Blair of Monday night with the Prime Minister who three years ago incorporated the European Charter of Human Rights into British law in a promise to protect British citizens from arbitrary and disproportionate legislation.

Given the chicanery and cowardice that has surrounded the passing of this Bill, it is not surprising that feeling against it is now very inflamed. It was always going to be difficult to criminalise thousands of people engaged in a pursuit that is as old as man. Now, understandably, there is a growing will to revolt, and to continue to hunt in defiance of the law. Under any normal circumstances, such conduct would be unthinkable. But this is no ordinary piece of legislation. Not only is it a nauseating infringement of liberty, but this law is being made with such parliamentary treachery and intellectual bad faith that it frankly deserves to be broken.

newstatesman

7th July 2003
Circulation: 25,000

Why MPs shouldn't care about hunting

.....The abolition of hunting will strike no blow in the class war. The horrors inflicted on the fox are insignificant compared with those inflicted on most of the animals we eat. There is no comparison with bear-baiting or cock-fighting (town sports banned nearly two centuries ago by country people), since there is no call in nature or farming for bears to be baited or for cocks to fight as there is for fox numbers to be kept down.....

..... Be clear. Only one argument matters on hunting: that it doesn't matter. It is supremely unimportant. The voters do not care for hunting, and if required to choose, would ban it, but it is not in their top 20 priorities. MPs, who rarely meet normal people, believe that bulging postbags on the subject signify mass public concern whereas, in reality, they merely signify well-organised lobby groups of fanatics.....

.....To bring the full majesty of the legislative process (including the rarely used Parliament Act) to bear on this distasteful little industry, to engage the services of a former head of the government economic service to lead an inquiry, to use the time of highly paid civil servants to draft legislation, makes British politics look ridiculous..... If politics is the language of priorities, then our politicians have never got it so badly wrong.

THE SCOTSMAN

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 72,000

Scotland's MPs should not have voted

.....Of course, Scottish MPs are technically empowered to vote on English domestic matters. But power brings with it responsibilities, as the Blair government is oft want to remind us. In this regard, the 27 Scottish Labour MPs from mostly urban constituencies who voted on Monday to outlaw the ancient rights of rural England hardly occupy the high moral ground. Their message appears to be that they will use their residual constitutional powers to impose their individual views on England. Yet they will probably be the first to object if the equally constitutional House of Lords votes down the Commons bill, doubtless on the grounds that an unelected chamber should not be allowed to thwart the will of the people.

What should the Scottish Labour MPs have done? A better use of their energies might have been dedicated to reminding the already shaky Blair administration that there are more important matters to hand than devoting large amounts of parliamentary time to getting the hunting ban on the statute book - such time-wasting being made necessary by the need to repeat the legislative process in order to invoke the veto of the 1911 Parliament Act over a likely Lords rejection of the hunting ban. Meanwhile, the trains won't run on time till the end of the decade.....

YORKSHIRE POST TODAY

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 65,000

Riding into trouble

.....Labour is in danger of losing touch with many of those who voted for it not because they are desperate for the Government to protect foxes and hares, but because they have grown tired of waiting for positive signs of improvement in health and education and because they are now starting to believe that Mr Blair's word can no longer be trusted. Through using fox hunting as such a cynical ploy and allowing a Government Bill to be wrecked in this way, the Prime Minister is only confirming the suspicions of those who believe that New Labour has hopelessly lost its way. The plight of the fox might have been a useful way of manipulating truculent backbenchers, but Mr Blair will find that the public are not so easily fooled.

Evening Standard

1st July 2003
Circulation: 407,000

Labour's favourite blood sport

.....The Commons is now set for a confrontation with the Lords, which will almost certainly reject the bill. Last night, government ministers were anxiously reassuring Labour backbenchers that the will of the elected chamber would prevail. They are, of course, anxious to placate their own side in advance of the inevitable disputes over issues like foundation hospitals, and foxhunting is a useful means of doing so. But the Government can only ride roughshod over the upper chamber by resorting to the Parliament Act. That act should properly be invoked to ensure that an elected government's manifesto commitments are realised, not to intervene in an issue of conscience on which MPs had a free vote. It will be a grotesque abuse if it is used so that the Government can soften up its backbenchers to get backing for other, politically contentious policies. This measure is illiberal, extreme, intolerant and divisive. It deserves to fail.

YORKSHIRE POST TODAY

7th July 2003
Circulation: 65,000

Hunting the criminal

Crime in parts of rural Britain is on the increase. Yet, if the Government were to impose a blanket ban on hunting with dogs, as its vindictive backbenchers are demanding, police forces in counties with a strong hunting tradition could find their already strained resources stretched to breaking point. This may be why the Chief Constable of North Yorkshire, Della Cannings, yesterday joined the growing ranks of senior police officers around the country who are warning the Government that such a ban would be all but impossible to enforce.....

.....The police in rural Britain have other concerns, too. Chief among these is the fear that a total ban on hunting would make criminals of people who are by instinct among the most supportive of the police.....

.....Rather than creating criminals, the likelihood is that Parliament is about to create a new breed of rural hero: the huntsman as defender of liberty.

FARMERSWEEKLY

11th July 2003
Circulation: 79,000

AMMUNITION TO STOP A PREJUDICED ATTACK ON THE COUNTRYSIDE

Three hundred and sixty two MPs have disgraced their constituencies. In voting for a ban on hunting with hounds, they have sent a double insult to the country.

The first signifies that whatever the support in rural areas for hunting and however indifferent the nation, no argument will deflect them from yielding to blind prejudice.

The second signals that a mere country pursuit is more worthy of parliamentary consideration than our failing health, education and transport systems.

Do people outside Westminster care more about the fate of foxes and a few other animals than their treatment at the hands of our ailing health service than their children's schooling or their frustrations with our crumbling transport system?

Neither would a ban on hunting satisfy the wreckers. Shooting and fishing are next on their hate list.

To help turn the tide of prejudice, we are launching a new campaign Hands off Country Pursuits, Mr Blair. Over the coming weeks, we will arm you with key information to put the case for field sports before politicians and the public. Whether you display one of our free posters or post one of our fact sheets in your local pub or doctor's surgery, please lend your support. We are campaigning not for individual sports but for choice – for the right of individuals to permit or deny such activities on their land free from government interference. We also want to highlight the key role, endorsed by DEFRA, that hunt kennels play in disposing of 400,000 carcasses each year.

It's not too late to help senior ministers find what many would like – a compromise that allowed hunting to continue albeit in a regulated form.

Their ability to find that compromise will be a measure of whether twenty-first century Britain is truly a democracy or an elected dictatorship.

The Guardian

2nd July 2003
Circulation: 397,000

Jackie Ashley

The hunting ban is Blair's attempt to buy off a restive Labour party

.....Fox-hunting inflames a relatively small number of people and leaves many more underwhelmed. As people turn away from politics in their millions because they feel there is no great ideological battle, and because they don't see much evidence of improved public services, the vacuum is filled by noisier, angrier people with a narrower agenda. When politicians then respond to that at the expense of the rest, even more people shrug and turn away.....

.....This government remains brilliant at the art of eye-catching diversions. What would be tragic, nothing less, is to find that the party had been bought off with a ban on fox-hunting, and a few similarly marginal issues, and that there had been no shift where it really matters. Foxhounds aren't the only beasts who can find themselves following false scents.

THE TIMES

5th July 2003
Circulation: 638,000

Mick Hume

● So there I was, on a relaxing break in Blackpool, trying to avoid the news (reading the papers away from the office being my idea of a busman's holiday), when I overheard a quote from a senior Labour MP on a hotel television. "Today is the day", he declared to a raucous House of Commons. "If we don't seize this moment, it will never come back". Had they started the revolution without me, storming Windsor Castle dressed in pink ballgowns and false beards? Hardly. It turned out to be creepy Gerald Kaufman demanding a ban on fox-hunting, for which Labour MPs duly voted to give the finger to Tony Blair. Thirty-odd years ago, Labour MPS were also frustrated by their Government's lack of radicalism and by its support for an American war (in Vietnam). They too responded by taking up causes of their own – helping to liberalise the law on taboo issues like divorce, homosexuality and abortion. For today's backbenchers, the nearest equivalent is an authoritarian little ban on a form of pest control, one that the police say they cannot even enforce. That is a sure sign of how far radical politics has disappeared down a hole. Anti-hunters such as Kaufman, Tony Banks and Ann Widdecombe chasing Blair around the Commons really does look like the unspeakable in pursuit of the uneatable.

THE EXPRESS

4th July 2003
Circulation: 1,000,000

Mitchell Symons

□ So MPs have exercised their consciences (please fill in your own joke here) and voted to abolish hunting. They'd like you to think that they were motivated by their love for animals but the truth is they're riddled with hatred for the people who hunt. Fox hunting won't be banned, of course – not because of the House of Lords but because Tony Blair can't afford a confrontation with the countryside. This week's vote won't mean anything to him: he didn't get where he is today by caring about democratic procedure. Besides, why should a leader of sheep worry about protecting foxes?



3rd July 2003
Circulation: 856,000

Dawn Neesom

For fox sake, sort the NHS

The Mother of all Parliaments has spent most of this week discussing the one subject we've all been desperate for them to get around to sorting out. The NHS? Transport? Education? Immigration? Er, no. Foxhunting. Obviously this is the burning issue we're all talking about at work, in the pub, on the bus and in the supermarket. Personally I don't think I'd have got through another day, weighed down as I was, with the sheer worry about whether a bunch of toffs had the right to hunt overgrown, red rats. In fact, I was so concerned that it completely obliterated any thoughts of my 95-year-old grandad in a hospital bed being cared for by a nurse who spoke so little English he couldn't make his need to go to the loo understood until it was too late.....This Government seems to care more about the lives of foxes than hospital patients. Tally-bloody-ho.



3rd July 2003
Circulation: 2,419,000

Keith Waterlane

Foxed

Any foreign student of politics wishing to see the British system of democracy at work would have done well to take the week off and spend it at Wimbledon. Either that or finish up with a swimming head.

So the Parliamentary Labour Party wants a complete ban on fox-hunting. In exchange for which they're expected to vote in favour of foundation hospitals, if you get the connection. Or at least to subdue the expected revolt against NHS reforms.

Meanwhile Tony Blair has to think of some way of screwing the anti-hunt lobby in order to stop the anti-hunt faction from screwing the countryside. Has he thought of starting another war?



6th July 2003
Circulation: 1,594,796

Richard Stott

● The attempt to ban fox-hunting has already taken up more Parliamentary time in the past six years than any other legislation. Yet mention it to Tony Blair's aides in Downing Street and they raise their eyes to the skies. If anybody in the Prime Minister's inner circle cares, then they have gone to ground.

Why then has the Government become so embroiled in this divisive and, in the greater scheme of things, irrelevant issue? The official reason is that it is a cause close to the heart of Labour MPs – something for which most of the country don't give a toss, much like House of Lords reform.

There is, however, a more pressing and practical reason. Before the 1997 election, Labour was given a donation of £1.1million by the Political Animal Lobby – and for that kind of bung you want results.

The Countryside Alliance acknowledges the following publications:

*The***Guardian**

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