

Evening Echo

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Government should make the first move

THE Government should get rid of two senior and two junior Ministers.

That's a proposal which is likely to be made by the chairman of the so called An Bord Snip Nua, Colm McCarthy. The Taoiseach shouldn't wait for the report. He should go ahead and do so straight away.

It is clear that there are several ministries which could be abolished immediately without an adverse affect.

The two that come to mind are the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism and the Department of Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. The business of both could be taken over by other departments.

The fact is that there are too many Government departments, given the size of the country. It might have been okay to have them when we were flush with money.

But that is no longer the case. The country is on its knees. Some 400,000 are out of work. The situation is getting worse by the day, although there are signs that a recovery is under way in the US, a situation which will have a beneficial effect here.

Everyone has to take the pain. It is time the Government gave a lead.

They could do this by showing they plan to provide us with a more efficient and flexible public service.

Clearly the service needs to be reformed.

This would be a first good step to doing this.

Bizarre details

THE stories about Michael Jackson are becoming more bizarre. The claim now is that his best friend fathered his youngest child.

This is all so sad. There are some details of his life which should not be in the public arena. It is not fair on his children.

THE LAST WORD

"The palest ink is better than the best memory."
Chinese Proverb

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The country is in crisis, hardly a good time for a lengthy summer break, says DAVID YOUNG

NO-ONE really knows if Nero fiddled while Rome burned. For a start, there were no fiddles in 64AD; so he would have been strumming his lyre, if anything. But that's not the point. Some accounts say he did all he could when the great fire raged.

However, most say he dithered — which has left old Nero with the unenviable legacy of not having done the needful when the time arose.

Almost two millennia later he's part of everyday speak; trotted out whenever someone neglects their duty.

All of which makes you wonder how TDs can pack their holiday bags in the next few days, and skip out of Leinster House for more than two months.

Last year they took 11 full weeks to recharge their batteries — this year their break has been reduced only slightly, beginning on July 9 and ending in mid-September.

Would it not hearten the weariest of souls to see our TDs remaining in session a little bit longer? Costing €100,000 a seat, without even considering 'expenses' packages, you'd like them to stay put while the nation's fortunes are up for grabs.

Heaven forbid they'd be denied a break, but there's a limit. Our parliamentarians convene on far fewer days than their European counterparts. Last year, TDs clocked 50 days less than MPs in the House of Commons, with a paltry 96 sessions. In a general election year, you can whittle that downwards by another 20 days.

The now almost defunct Green Party had promised to double Dáil time if elected to office. That lofty ambition was going to corral Monday afternoons and Friday mornings into the regular law-making week but this change has never been implemented.

Now, consider that one TD 'looks after' about 30,000 constituents — a mere third of a British MP's workload — and you can begin to do some value-for-money arithmetic. Naturally, you may be wondering why none of this has yet to be changed — well, that would be up to the Dáil and its appetite for reform.

Not so fast. There's a steady tide of TDs who clamour about the necessity of 'constituency work'; and so summertime sees them back on their patches, poaching the territory of county and city councillors. With one eye on Dublin and the other on the next election, the pressure of having to be 'in the know' and sorting people out is immense.

You could say that they're trapped. If we had fewer of them, they'd be free to leave the potholes, lamp posts, and hedgerows for those who know where they are. They could happily desist from blind letter writing on behalf of sons and daughters of those who might have voted for them. And with the grace of God, they could resist the temptation to fix medical cards and fast track passports.

Campaigning for Lisbon is a futile exercise. People have already astutely made up their minds. The pollsters have even measured how we'll take it without much ado — hoping for some certainty in these fuzzy, rhetoric-laden times.

Instead, people want to know about jobs. Within this year the figure of half a million out of work is no longer a worst case scenario. The maligned naysayers, who warned of the collapse, dance no triumphalist jig. Perhaps our Government ought to sit and listen to those who've got more insight and true public interest at heart, instead of being slaves to the voting system.

The National Assets Management Agency (NAMA) may well be on the way to save the finance houses but it's most certainly not the panacea to all our ills. Restructuring the morally bankrupt institutions with taxpayers' billions still leaves intact a craven and avaricious fiscal culture, secure insofar as it prevails unchallenged.

Brian Cowen and company are just about

A nation in crisis, so why is Dáil not sitting?



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HOW IRELAND COMPARES WITH OTHER COUNTRIES

- In **Ireland**, the Dáil summer recess this year will begin on July 9, a week later than normal. It will return in mid-September. The main piece of legislation to be dealt with before the summer recess is the Bill to give effect to the National Asset Management Agency. This will be debated by the Dáil and Seanad during September.
- In the **UK**, parliament normally takes a seven-week summer recess but dates are subject to the progress of business. This year, the Parliament will have an 82-day recess. Parliament will rise on July 21 and return on October 12. Opposition MPs have criticised the length of the recess and are concerned it will further reduce public faith in politicians.
- The **Scottish Parliament** has the power to pass primary legislation for Scotland and will be in recess for summer from June 27 to August 30.
- The **U.S House of Congress** will be in recess from July 31 to September 5 and the Senate from August 4 to September 5. The Congress does not have one single long period of recess in summer but shorter periods of on and off.
- The **EU Parliament** in Brussels usually breaks for five or six weeks during summer and staff are obliged to take a least two successive weeks' annual leave during this period.

hanging on in a Government that has all the signs of spontaneous combustion about it. And the opposition want to fan the sparks and roar on the potential bonfire. Foolishly postponing Dáil debate on the Ryan report quenched the public's regard for all things political; while sadly

dampening a real fire.

Whatever the historians or the 4th estate (the daily scribes) make of this period in the State's history, the sorry truth is we have very little time to contemplate a course of action for our collective futures, let alone consider holiday destinations.