

Britain - House of Lords

A tizz about fizz

Peers of the realm resist changes to the quality of their champagne

- 1 Even by British standards, it has been a busy few weeks for observers of class warfare. On November 27th a former Conservative minister lost a libel action against a newspaper that said he had called a policeman at 10 Downing Street a "pleb". A few days before, another was recorded calling a taxi-driver a "smart-arsed little git" and telling him to get a better education. But these incidents pale beside the tale of the peers' champagne.
- 2 On December 2nd, at what otherwise might have been a dull committee meeting, Sir Malcolm Jack, a former clerk of the Commons, was asked why the catering services of the House of Lords (the upper house) and the House of Commons could not have been merged to save money. He replied: "The lords feared that the quality of champagne would not be as good if they chose a joint service." The astonished chair of the committee, Jack Straw, spoke for most of the nation as he gasped: "Did you make that up?" Sir Malcolm assured him he did not.
- 3 The fact that their lordships might not want to choose from the same wine list as the plebs in the Commons has raised the question again for some as to why Britain still 39. Tony Blair got rid of most hereditary peers. But attempts to continue the changes by the coalition government were blocked by Tory traditionalists in 2012 and new members continue to be appointed. The Lords can still block and delay government legislation. And all can claim a £ 300 daily allowance just by showing up.
- 4 As for their drinking habits, a columnist in *The Independent* newspaper had a suggestion: just add fizzy lemonade to a bottle of cheap German plonk. "After the first three glasses you can't tell the difference anyway."



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