

# Evening Echo

## COMMENT

### Swift action needed in foster crisis

**W**HEN four people are crammed into the same room, sleeping closely confined and in bunk beds, it is not surprising that trouble follows.

When those four people are children with behavioural problems, it is a recipe for disaster.

This unsatisfactory situation has been highlighted by a Southend solicitor after a 12-year-old boy was forced to share with three other teenagers because of a severe shortage of foster parents in Essex.

The youngster, and those he had to share a room with, were all in need of special care and attention so it should come as no great shock to learn that fights and arguments broke out between the four.

This shortage of foster parents has come about because private agencies are creaming off the best carers, offering them higher wages and better employment packages than the local authority.

Yet Essex Social Services spends thousands of pounds a year in taxi fares, getting the 12-year-old from his foster home on Canvey to his school in Southend, and on weekend visits to his mother.

To its credit, social services is planning to compete with the agencies to win back, or keep, the best foster parents. It will be a costly business but the soon it comes about the better for all concerned.

### ON THIS DAY **Aug 11**

**1897:** Children's author Enid Blyton was born  
**1942:** Barnes Wallis patented the bouncing bomb used in the Dambusters raid

**1942:** The new Waterloo Bridge was opened  
**1952:** King Hussein succeeded to the throne of Jordan

**1975:** The Government took ownership of British Leyland

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### NEWSPAPERS SUPPORT RECYCLING

Recycled paper made up 41.2 per cent of the raw material for UK newspapers in the first half of 1996

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# Love her or loathe her Teresa



■ Gorman — "Where are the sexy bits," she was asked by a book publisher



■ Gorman — "Most politicians will bulls\*\*t you they love Jane Austen"



■ Gorman — "Voting for Maastricht is like 651 turkeys voting for Christmas"

# Many changing of Westminster

**I**F MP TERESA Gorman was a Spice Girl, she would definitely be the scary one.

The Billericay firebrand has frightened fellow MPs and terrified timid journalists since she joined the backbenches in 1987.

But does she really deserve her controversial tag? Probably yes. During her first couple of years in parliament Mrs Gorman:

- recommended rapists be given tougher punishments like "cutting their goolies off"

- argued councils should be run like high street chain Marks & Spencer

- praised Wimbledon ticket touts and dismissed the tennis authorities as upper class and twittish.

She even threatened to take up squatters' rights on the Tory front benches when



Chief reporter **LINDA CHRISTIE** talks to maverick MP Teresa Gorman

John Major failed to promote a single woman to the Cabinet in 1988.

She also hit the headlines last year when Thurrock Council took her to court for making unauthorised alterations to her Orsett country retreat.

Mrs Gorman and her husband of 45 years Jim, were each fined £3,000 and ordered to pay £4,000 costs landing the pair a whopping £14,000 bill.

She now dismisses the case, which originally saw her charged with more than 30 different offences, as a

'political vendetta.'

"It was a matter we could have settled but they were determined to pursue it. They were spending other people's money so they had nothing to lose."

But despite her willingness to express what she calls 'refreshing' views, even Mrs Gorman balked at having her name on the front of a racy bestseller.

"Several publishers asked me to write something along the same lines as Edwina (Currie)," she revealed.

"They offered me £35,000 up front but when I gave

them the plotline they said: 'Where are the sexy bits?'

"They gave me a ghost-writer who came up with incidents which made my hair curl. People would have thought 'what's that Teresa Gorman been getting up to?' and my husband would say 'how did you know about that?'"

She is already a published author with the 1993 book *The Bastards* under her belt. It describes how the anti-Europe MP fought to block the passing of the Maastricht Treaty.

But her real dream is to write books to make readers smile, like her literary hero and Wilt author, Tom Sharpe.

She said: "Most politicians will bullshit you they love Jane Austen but they are just posing. I love to tell stories and I'm very good at making people laugh with my anecdotes."

Her quick-thinking and repartee won her an award from an unexpected quarter, Paris. She was honoured as Westminster's wittiest woman by politicians from France's parliament after comments like: "If the House of Commons voted for Maastricht it would be like 651 turkeys voting for Christmas," and her classic description of herself as "Saint Teresa of the Menopause."

The campaigning MP is an ardent fan of Hormone Replacement Therapy and launched the Amarant Trust to make the drug more readily available to women reaching the change of life.

The treatment has certainly revolutionised her own. Sitting next to her it is hard to believe she is 65, as her skin is fabulously clear and she exudes enthusiasm. She confides: "My husband calls me a hyperactive geriatric —



■ Orsett home — involved the Gormans in a planning battle

## Saddled with

**W**HEN a motorbiker suggested she appear leather-clad on the front of a magazine for bike fans, Teresa Gorman responded 'where's the helmet?'

The Billericay MP admits: "He thought it would win me their vote and I was willing to give it a try."

But she added: "I told him he might as well have a rubber dolly in that helmet — you couldn't tell who I was."

In fact, in her bid to keep her whopping 20,000 plus majority, Mrs Gorman launched a determined campaign to win new followers, particularly in Pitsea which joined her constituency for the

first time this year.

She said: "I deliberately went on several popular shows like the Mrs Merton Show and Have I Got News For You — after all, most people don't watch Question Time."

"Suddenly I was in the same category as Joanna Lumley and Boy George."

She was certainly recognised on the doorstep: "It was going so well I thought the election would be a pushover." In fact she became well known all over the world.

"I was on an aeroplane travelling back from some obscure part of the globe and an air hostess bent over me to ask what Angus Deayton was really like. I thought he was very



# Gorman will never stay quiet

## MY VIEW



JIM WORSDALE

## These women drive me mad

Driving our local streets of late has been almost a pleasure. It suddenly occurred to me why: schools are out and few young mums are about. It is a well-known fact that women are rotten drivers. Well, it must be a fact because generations of men have said so and continue to say so. And, anyway, my own observations, as a perfect driver, have confirmed the allegation. Young mums are particularly awful. Young mums stop without warning to deliver or collect their darlings at school gates. It doesn't matter if there are double-yellow lines or zigzag warning lines or if they double-park. Young mums are aware that they are a nuisance and a menace because they fail to use their driving mirrors and haven't a clue how to handle big and powerful and lethal motor cars. So I have reached an instant decision. Immediately I am elected to high office, as will be the overwhelming case when I put myself forward as a candidate, I will introduce a new law. Young mums will be banned from driving on our public roads. Indeed, once I can find sufficient reasons to ban as many other drivers as possible, I will do so. And then I will introduce another ban. Its urgent need became obvious to me the other morning as I drove to Wakering tip, where all kinds of interesting people and all kinds of interesting other people's rubbish can be found. I was delayed behind a very big, open-backed truck announcing itself as highways maintenance. The driver was maintaining a conversation on a mobile phone held in his right hand while, with his left, he endeavoured to deal with gears and steering wheel. I suppose he was talking to his missus or mistress, bookie or broker. These phones must go. I keep coming across posing women chatting on them in the supermarket aisles. I once was even woken by a ringing mobile as I snoozed in the cinema. I have many other plans for banning many things. More later. Must go now. There's a man in a white coat banging at my front door.

# I will fight to split Billericay from Basildon, pledges MP



■ Gorman — "Major could never make up his mind. We needed strong leadership"



■ Teresa Gorman and husband Jim — married for 45 years

# faces firebrand

always telling me to sit still."

Her daredevil streak has now prompted her to take up jet skiing: "I want to learn how to do a 90 degree turn."

"I'm quite bright intellectually you know, but there's another side of me that likes to be active, scraping walls and digging holes."

When she and Jim bought their Westminster listed home and their historic Orsett farmhouse, both were in dire need of attention.

"I find doing up a house as creative as painting pictures. I can make my own clothes and I certainly wasn't worried about getting down on my knees and scrubbing floors."

She is also, bizarrely, a dab hand at Swiss rolls. She worked as a jam

spreader in a factory before graduating from university with a double first in geology, zoology and botany.

She then went into teaching and passed a spell as tutor to Jackie Kennedy's daughter Caroline. But she admits: "In my bones I'm a businesswoman" and she soon set up BANTA — Biological and Nursing Teaching Aids — with Jim. It proved a hugely successful company.

"At least half a million, probably a million children, are using my products each day."

She became, perhaps unsurprisingly, chairman of the Alliance for Small Firms and her thoughts soon turned to politics. Following a stint on Westminster Council — she won what had been a

safe Labour seat — she set her sights on a seat in the House of Commons.

"I thought I would go into Parliament and change the world — a delusion we all share."

"Anyway I don't think people should become MPs until they are 45, there are too many kids in the House."

She was a supporter of Margaret Thatcher but says of John Major: "He could never make up his mind. We needed strong leadership."

But she wasn't too pleased about his replacement — the diminutive William Hague — dismissing him as a political marshmallow.

"He believes in nothing, stands for nothing and looks as if he hasn't grown up yet," she says quite unrepentantly.

A HIT list of problems Teresa Gorman plans to tackle is resting on her Westminster desk.

It is topped by her desire for Billericay to break from Basildon Council and join Brentwood.

The bid has already been turned down by the Government but is due to be examined again.

"I did my best last time and I will push for it again. Whatever I think, it is what people in this area want."

She is also battling for a Billericay bypass to ease congestion.

As a former teacher, education is very close to her heart and she is in favour of grant maintained schools: "Parents want a good start for their children. I think we should also return to the old-fashioned teaching methods. Children like sitting in rows and chanting tables."

She added: "But young people are often their own worst enemy. My hairdresser told me she couldn't get an apprentice — they all wanted better paid jobs."

She is also concerned about the future of healthcare. "Basildon Hospital is responsible for such a huge area. I'm concerned major hospitals lose touch with the people they are serving."

"There is a lot of unhappiness about the closure of St Andrew's Hospital and even more about Orsett Hospital. So often we close institutions down. The problem is if you destroy something it's hard

to recreate it.

"If I was Prime Minister for the day I would decree all the funds from the lottery go to healthcare."

One thing she and the new Government do see eye to eye on is the influx of women into Parliament.

"I'm very pleased and would like to see the Conservatives following suit. It is no good saying you have to do it on merit, men don't get in on merit."

"Most have been in the military or foreign affairs, yet two thirds of Government expenditure is on issues which women have first hand experience of — education, cost of living, raising families."

"A lot of men in the Commons have no idea of the cost of a loaf of bread or a pint of milk."

Every year come Budget time she bends the Chancellor's ear about the cost of childcare for women and claims they need more help in the home.

"I employ domestic help on a large scale. I work full time so when am I supposed to do the ironing, push the vacuum cleaner around and all that jazz?"

She admits her outspoken views may have held back her career: "People who talk common sense like me are written off as politicians."

But she's quite resigned to life as a backbencher. "We make sure the Government doesn't step over the mark and I see that as a worthwhile job."

### GORMAN ON TORY LEADER WILLIAM HAGUE

**'He believes in nothing, stands for nothing and looks as if he hasn't grown up yet'**

# life on backbenches

nice — a bit of a thinking woman's crumpet."

But come election night the plan backfired. As the Billericay boxes were opened and the votes fell tumbling to the table, eager supporters gave Mrs Gorman the thumbs up.

As the Pitsea seals were broken the thumbs slowly travelled downwards.

The TV appearances also led to a bitter feud in the local party, with former Tory party member Brian Hughes announcing he was to stand against her as the Loyal Conservative candidate.

She said: "He thought I shouldn't be supported

because I was too busy pursuing a showbusiness career."

"When I first heard he was standing I didn't take it seriously. If you are a strong-minded woman like me you are bound to upset people."

"But the problem was people got confused. There were a lot of spoilt papers."

In the end her hefty lead was slashed to a paltry majority of only 1,356.

It's not the first time the chameleon-like Gorman has been prepared to pawn her image in exchange for votes.

In 1987 she swapped her trademark, bright pinks, blues and reds for

a more 'conservative' image as she battled to win the Billericay seat.

Gone were her loud range of earrings, fit to rival Coronation Street favourite Bet Lynch.

In came tie-neck blouses, calf length A-line skirts and a pair of 'granny' shoes.

She said at the time: "Some people wanted me to project a blonde and bubbly image, but I thought middle-aged and mumsy was better."

The calculated move, which also saw her lop several years of her age, was not without reason.

The Chelmsford selection committee felt her high heeled yellow shoes were not quite right!