

STRANGE NOTION OF HONOR



DON'T know what your New Year's resolutions were, but one of mine was not to receive a knighthood. I find them much overrated and decidedly embarrassing. My agent, Ron Stevenson, must have made the same resolution. For when the dawn broke on December 31 and the honors list was released, no one's voice shouted through his letter box: "Arise Sir Ronald!" No cry went out to summon Lord Ron of Radford. Like most of us he came into 1993 in much the same way he left 1992 — a mere mortal.

I make this point because I noted in the Post that his equivalent, the Tory agent, had picked up an MBE for "services to politics". This gave me plenty of food for thought, particularly since my sister had been suggesting it might be better to send all politicians to prison for the mess we've got this country into.

Fundamentally, though, I don't begrudge this particular award. Anyone who has had to preside over the loss of the county council, the loss of the Euro seat, the loss of the key marginal which gave the city council back to Labour, the loss of two key parliamentary marginal and imminent defeat again in the county, elections, deserves some form of pick-me-up.

BUT it does question whether the honors system now rewards services to the party rather than to the public. I can think of many who have spoken out against corruption or injustice in areas of public or industrial life. For their principles, they usually get fired rather than knighted.

In contrast, the most senior officials who help conceal information from the public are the ones who seem to end up in the Lords. It is a strange notion of "honour" which the honors list incorporates.

No less strange is the honorable contrast we witnessed over Christmas between a noble lord and the director of education in Notts. Baroness Blatch, the Government education spokeswoman, had accused Peter Housden of being a "schools bully". Parents, she claimed, had complained about being intimidated by him in the ballots over school opt-out proposals.

Knowing Peter Housden as a kind, generous and extremely courteous person, it came as no surprise when it emerged that no complaints against him had ever been made.

THERE used to be a time when ministers caught telling blatant porkies would automatically "do the decent thing" and offer their resignation.

Perhaps today an open apology to the director would have sufficed. But the minister offered nothing.

But nowadays, it seems, ministers have different standards.

Apparently you can help yourself from the public purse, break the law of the land (that you-yourself

have written), disregard international arms embargoes you have agreed to, and still not be expected to resign.

These must be confusing times indeed to find yourself in amongst the "honourables".

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