The Game is Up ......
Written by Chris Blyth
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When politicians become items of ridicule and satire, the game is surely over, their weaknesses exposed for all to see, and their authority dissipated with the wind. Such is the case with Tony Brown, our Chief Minister, whose downfall must surely be nigh!

And how ironic that the Chief Minister who didn’t want the job, could end his career in abject failure, as the Chief Minister his colleagues and the electorate didn’t want! Mr Brown wasn’t even a candidate for the position following the last general election – but “emerged” as a compromise candidate when none of the initial entrants achieved the necessary majority to take the position. And as so often with a compromise, the individual who has least upset his colleagues – the least offensive, the man in the dull grey suit, the man least likely to provide leadership– emerged as the eventual winner, the reward for long if undistinguished service.

The sad reality is that, after a long career in the House, Mr Brown fails the “fit for purpose” test of leadership – a prime example of the “Peter Principle” at work, promoted beyond his competence level, and now under-delivering on everything the IOM requires. Having grown used to years of continuous growth, Mr Brown arrived at the position of Chief Minister at the tail end of the golden years of prosperity, with no experience of managing a major downturn, such as that resulting from the “credit crunch” of late 2008, and without the “gravitas” to respond to the UK Government’s VAT grab of late 2009, or the ending of the Reciprocal Health Agreement in 2010.

His epitaph – “he did his best – but his best wasn’t good enough”........

He now finds himself the subject of derision, out-manouvered, unable or unwilling to explain or communicate his intentions with the public sector workforce or the wider public, and unable to provide the vision, clarity of purpose, and leadership absolutely essential if the island is to emerge stronger and successful from our current travails. The latest proposals on the re-structuring of government have all the hallmarks of desperation – of needing to be seen to be doing something, our Chief Minister and his advisors have clutched at a convenient report (which just happens to have been gathering dust on his desk for the past 3 years or more), and only half understanding it, announced a re-structuring of our public sector. But lacking the forethought to work out the implications on headcount, budgets, or departmental structures – and not appreciating the impact on the workforce, their morale and motivation– our Chief Minister has mistaken action for decisiveness, proposals for vision, micro-management for leadership.

At this critical time, our Chief Minister has “wimped” – his weaknesses exposed, his lack of
competence for the position all too apparent. What was needed was courage:

- to look at the major opportunities for a headcount review within the re-structuring of our excessively large public sector
- to address the growing disaster that is the public sector pensions liability
- to provide the leadership necessary to address the serious budget deficit arising from the VAT tax grab (rather than robbing the reserves, obfuscating much of the argument with government “spin”, and putting off the tough but very necessary decisions essential for our long-term prosperity)
- a proper and transparent consideration of the future of our Statutory Boards (corporatisation? privatisation? etc)
- to anticipate the long-term requirements of the manx population, a significant percentage of which is ageing and with specific, growing demands for health, pension and social security services – and ensure their provision within an affordable budget and the objective of a “caring society”

- to plan for the widely expected rise in energy costs (particularly of gas and oil so necessary for the provision of energy services on the island) and introduce measures to maximise energy conservation, and ensure security of supply and affordability long-term

But, lacking the vital ingredients of courage, the ability to plan, and acting in haste, he (and we) will almost certainly repent at leisure for his weaknesses, the lack of considered thought given to his proposals – and the wider taxpaying public will pick up the bill for the mistakes and dysfunction of the government he leads.