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Opinion & Analysis

Shrewd Cherie only too happy to cast discretion aside

CHERIE has been a shrewd lawyer, but she has not always been a shrewd politician. Her decision to cast discretion aside in the case of the late Senator John Hume was a mistake.

The over-zealous member of the public, including the late Senator Hume, is a mistake.

Lack of information on house prices will hurt consumers

THE lack of information on house prices will hurt consumers. The government should do more to help consumers make informed decisions.



A better approach would be to provide more information on house prices and the impact of the financial crisis on the housing market.

Heat gives way of worst

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Putting an end to ageism and compulsory retirement in Ireland

IT is time to put an end to ageism and compulsory retirement in Ireland. The government should do more to help consumers make informed decisions.

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Putting an end to ageism and compulsory retirement in Ireland

Getting older is, for most people, a happy experience

HOW LONG should Charlie Munger (84), number two in the world's most successful company, Berkshire Hathaway, wait for his boss Warren Buffet (78) to call it a day? Should Philip Roth (75) unplug his PC and stop mining the rich seam that has yielded some of his best work ever?

How did Rupert Murdoch (77) end up on the *Time* magazine list of the world's 100 most influential people, along with fellow oldies the Dalai Lama (72), George Mitchell (74), Karl Lagerfeld (69) and 25 other wrinklies? And closer to home, why are Irish football fans so excited about pensioner Giovanni Trapattoni (69) taking over at the top?

Ageism is endemic in our culture, and our system of compulsory retirement at the arbitrary age of just 65 (and sometimes only 60) robs society of valuable, experienced and productive members.

When Count Otto von Bismarck introduced the first comprehensive old-age pension program, financed by a tax on workers, it was to provide monetary support for those decrepit few who reached the unthinkable advanced age of 70 years. At the time the life expectancy for the average Prussian was 45, and it was customary to die on the job. I know most of us dream of quitting the rat race as soon as we have the wherewithal, but it was never intended that vital, capable and talented employees be removed against their will.

Anyway, it's demographic suicide. Ireland has a young population relative to our European neighbours (11 per cent aged 65-plus compared to a European average of 17 per cent) - a function of high emigration in the 1950s. But we're catching up fast. By 2050 it's projected that one in four of us will be aged over 65, reducing the current ratio of four working people to one retired to an unsustainable 1½ to one - just when those of us now in our 20s and 30s are thinking of taking to the golf course.

It seems that older people are often discriminated against and let down by society and the State.

We even struggle with the

terminology. Elderly? Aged? In a Europe-wide survey, people aged 65-plus favoured the terms older people and senior citizen. The UN, the EU and most other European and international organisations adopted "older people", and so should we.

Preventing older people, particularly older women, from working leaves them vulnerable to poverty and deprivation.

In a recent Eurostat study examining the risk of poverty to the over 65s, Ireland came out second worst with 20 per cent exposed to future penury.

The European Commission report on healthy ageing concluded that substantial funding is needed to deal with future challenges. Many older people depend solely on the State pension for their income, yet almost 90 per cent of respondents to a Pensions Board Consumer Research survey believe this won't meet their needs.

The Older and Bolder campaign, conducted before the last election, looked for index linking of pensions to the industrial wage – an eminently reasonable request. Surely older people should share in the economic wealth they helped create rather than be treated as charity cases.

Niall Crowley, chief executive of the Equality Authority, confirms that age-related complaints from older people have increased, particularly concerning retirement age.

Age Action Ireland spokesman Eamon Timmins warns that compulsory retirement can be damaging for active, capable and vastly experienced older people.

There are signs that finally we are seeing the light. The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (Tilda), undertaken by a cross-institutional, multidisciplinary team of experts, aims to enhance our understanding of ageing significantly and to challenge the stereotypical attitudes endemic in Irish society. Research conducted by the Changing Ageing Partnership indicates that, contrary to popular belief, getting older is a happy experience and that older people feel little envy for their younger counterparts.

This is Say No to Ageism Week. Let's resolve to make life as comfortable and fulfilling as possible for older people among us – it won't be long before we'll be there ourselves. And let's keep these considerations in mind for the other 51 weeks as well.

ELEANOR FITZSIMONS

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writer

