



Monday 2nd April 2018
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 14 members of the Café Society group present at this bank holiday meeting. Apologies had been received from Graham K. Group coordinator Vivienne B thanked members for providing topics in response to an email that had been distributed. Thank you to Phil K for organising the drinks order. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

How will Russia react to the expulsion of intelligence officers by more than 20 countries?

- Most members of the group felt that Russia was behind the recent poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal (despite only circumstantial evidence being cited). A few members of the group thought that assassination was common-practice in the world of international espionage and any government, company or individual could be to blame
- It was pointed out that security services typically operate independently of governments and that the decision for this assassination attempt may not have been political nor ordered by an individual
- The general role of diplomats was brought into question and it was suggested that diplomats could be regarded as politically-acceptable spies
- The method of this attempted assassination was repeatedly raised. Why does the media consider the use of (a nerve agent) poison to be more unacceptable than executing a citizen with a gun, bomb or drone?
- Despite the circumstances of the events, the group generally believed that Russia had scored political points or popularity by the outcome and uncertainty

What would you do if you saw someone picking daffodils from the river bank?

- *This topic had been suggested by a group member who had witnessed (and challenged) a member of the public picking council-planted flowers to take home for personal use*
- A group member clarified that it is not permissible to pick flowers from planted public areas, parks, roundabouts, etc, although it is acceptable from less formal areas
- Many members of the group considered this type of act to be highly unacceptable and likened it to obtaining unnecessary medication on prescription and handing it out to friends and family
- Members were asked whether they would actually challenge any such flora-pinchers or turn a blind-eye
- The act of brambling, in comparison, was not generally objected to by the group (although members had reported that farmers would often advise them not to do so due to chemical spraying)

A recent study has predicted 850 000 UK deaths in the event of a new flu pandemic. Given that most experts think such an event is inevitable, are we giving this risk enough strategic priority and how should we prepare?

- As background to this topic, a group member explained that contingency plans for a flu epidemic were at the top of the government list for major catastrophes
- It was noted however, that previous large-scale scares like bird-flu and avian-flu were over-hyped
- Some members had watched a recent BBC television programme (www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p059y0p1/contagion-the-bbc-four-pandemic) which had suggested that simple actions like more frequently washing ones hands can thwart the spread of pandemics
- There was a side-discussion about antibiotics, their over-prescription and the human body's rapid adaptation to such medication
- At least one member of the group strongly believed that a virus would be responsible for wiping out the human race

What measures should we take to stop children (and adults) consuming junk food?

- This topic was introduced by members who were dismayed at being bombarded with chocolate, crisps and snacks at shop counters, tills and garages
- Many group members believed that all chain retail stores no longer have any healthy food for consumption
- It was suggested that the decline of set meal times might be responsible for the modern junk food culture (or vice versa)
- A group member proposed that free school meals for all children would be a great step-forward in combatting junk food culture
- Another group member explained that a human's craving for sugar and fat as a quick source of energy is biologically unnecessary with modern lifestyles and that evolution is lagging behind
- It was agreed that a person's diet, food choice and eating habits have a great deal to do with class. The group wondered how many families habitually sit down for meals and possibly blamed working parents for approaching the fridge when hungry at home
- Scandinavian countries were quoted as demonstrating healthier attitudes towards food and the cultural importance of meals and eating properly - particularly with respect to children
- From a commercial perspective, the group could clearly see why it is more attractive for profit-hungry manufacturers to lace their products with sugar, preservatives and artificial ingredients
- There was a proposal that greengrocers could be given tax-free status to encourage the distribution and consumption of natural food
- The presence of vending machines selling junk food items in hospitals was seriously frowned upon
- It was pointed out that food should always remain a choice, that there is nothing to be criticised about having a bar of chocolate and that there has to be some element of pleasure in what we eat

What do we mean by democracy?

- A short [definition of democracy from Wikipedia](#) was read to the group
- Several members of the group felt that we are told we live in a democracy but that this is simply an illusion or manipulation
- As an example of the power of organisations, a group member stated that the Samsung corporation had "the fourth biggest economy in the world"
- The level of control and manipulation through advertising was described as overwhelming yet often unnoticeable. A group member reported that the first thing to become apparent about British culture after returning from a long period abroad is the obtrusive advertising
- George Bernard Shaw was quoted with stating that, "Democracy is a form of government that substitutes election by the incompetent many for appointment by the corrupt few", and, "If

Despotism failed only for want of a capable benevolent despot, what chance has Democracy, which requires a whole population of capable voters”

- Variations on democratic voting systems were briefly discussed with reference to the Swiss-style referenda system and it was agreed that decision-making should always take place at the lowest possible level
- References were made to the Covenanters of the Scottish Presbyterian movement and their track record of enforcing democracy by standing together
- The concept of consensus decision-making was raised, in which group members develop and agree to support a decision in the best interest of the whole. But the group couldn't agree whether this was the best idea
- The discussion on democracy concluded with a mention of the film '12 Angry Men' in which a unanimous jury gradually changes its mind

○ Future Topics

Below is a list of topics that have been forwarded for future discussion. If you have any additional suggestions, especially last-minute topical issues, please email vivienne.barker@gmail.com

- Do we have 'unreal' expectations of ourselves?
- Can men be nursery teachers too?

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 4th May 2018 at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

