



**Monday 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018**  
The Lion Hotel

## Summary

### o Introduction

There were 14 members of the Café Society group present at this meeting and apologies had been received from Harold B and Caroline.

The group wishes to pass on their best regards to Marilyn C and Phil K who have left the group due to relocation or other commitments. Both Marilyn and Phil were very prominent members of the group and their input into the discussions over the years has been greatly valued. The group also wishes to thank Phil for his enthusiasm and efficiency in taking care of ordering the drinks in recent times.

Margaret H kindly volunteered to step into Phil's boots to become the new drinks coordinator. We are grateful to Margaret for stepping forward and endeavour to make life as easy as we can by ticking her sheets and depositing our £1.50s.

With two members having left, the group was asked if they wished to open the doors for new members but the decision was made to keep the group marked as full and to reassess the situation later in the year.

A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

*Mike S*

### o Discussion Topics

#### **What is the official definition of poverty?**

- Some members had recently read books about poverty. One of the books began with the line, "If you are able to buy and read this book, then you are well-off in world standards", and the other opened with the question, "Have you got a bottle of water in your fridge? Then you are well-off"
- It was pointed out that (unlike a generation ago), many families simply cannot live off one wage
- A group member had done some research into local statistics and had discovered that the average wage in Shropshire is £21,000 (£17,000 after tax) and that the most popular jobs were that of teaching assistants (£10,000 after tax), personal assistants and graphic designers
- The group once again highlighted the division between the rich and the poor and reaffirmed that this is a big problem in any society
- It was explained that poverty is not simply about lack of money but often more about lack of opportunity, for example, having no computer, not having the means or ability to access the internet, not having suitable clothes or transportation to get to work
- Several group members had recently attended a talk by a local food bank charity and quoted examples of how the charity had helped out in many practical ways, for example, paying for repairs to a customer's van

- The knock-on and trapping effect of poverty was mentioned, for example, being unable to afford an electricity bill means that a person might be unable to cook for themselves or have difficulty in proving their residential status to claim entitlements
- Isolation was cited as a major factor of poverty
- A group member highlighted how funding for support workers has diminished to the point of non-existence
- All of the group felt that poverty in a modern society is unnecessary and avoidable, “So why don’t we all protest?”, asked one group member. “Why are we protecting the super-rich when we live in such a polarised political society and system?” It was suggested that misinformation causes people to continue voting for the very things they shouldn’t be voting for
- A number of group members felt that the blame for poverty was being unfairly placed on the individual and that the responsibilities and solutions lie with society and the government
- Community banks / credit unions were mentioned as positive initiatives to help people to be self-sufficient
- There was discussion about whether poverty is more prevalent than 50 or 60 years ago and mixed beliefs were expressed. Unlike previous times, a lot of people now live in debt but not in poverty, as their income allows them to continue. Many people now fall into the poverty trap when this income disappears unexpectedly or when there are hefty unforeseen financial circumstances
- A member felt that mechanisation, industrialism and computerisation is responsible for a reduction in jobs, yet advances in technology often come with claims to improve life like, “Computers will give us a three-day working week”, and, “Nuclear energy will make electricity too cheap”
- Advances in machinery have resulted in fewer laborious jobs but a greater demand for a creative and artistic workforce. Members thought that the education system has failed to adapt to this change and is no longer supplying a workforce suitable for the modern environment. It was also felt that creative and artistic roles within society are not valued to their proper extent. Why, for example, should an orchestra musician have to support their main career with menial jobs?
- A suggestion was made that tax should be administered at a global level in order to make things equal for everyone and to put an end to the practice of large organisations using different countries to avoid tax. A member quoted the charity Christian Aid as stating that, “We could solve all poverty simply by taxing everyone and every company the same”
- It was agreed that poverty can be a very relative term and that it is hard to define it in a nutshell

### **What would be a suitable job for Trump?**

- The introduction of a topic concerning Donald Trump brought the usual mix of laughter and disgust to those present
- One member would love to see Trump forced into becoming an Iman in a mosque in Iran
- “A lion-tamer”, was a forthcoming suggestion
- “A compare in a sleazy nightclub”, was another
- “A floor-sweeper who is never allowed to speak”, was another respectful idea
- “A sewer-cleaner”, was along similar lines
- “A bottom-wiping robot”, was a late suggestion inspired by one of the subsequent topics

### **Am I my brother's keeper (with regards to refugees)?**

- This topic was raised in connection with Europe’s refugee problem and why many countries seem to have a mentality or goal about how *few* people they can help rather than how *many*
- The discussion frequently deviated to the topic of immigrants rather than refugees
- It was suggested that ignorance and prejudice is borne out of a lack of understanding and appreciation of other cultures
- It was noted that refugee and immigration status become a novelty to be proud of when viewed in the historic context of family trees. On television programmes like ‘Who Do You Think You Are’, celebrities are normally thrilled when ancestors are traced to other countries or had difficult circumstances
- A group member quoted Enoch Powell as saying, “We welcome them when we need them”

### **Should mobile phones be banned in schools?**

- The retired teachers in the group were of the opinion that mobile phones were already banned in schools and that the problem revolves around the enforcing of the rules, particularly with regards to attitudes of parents
- The practical logistics of confiscating mobile phones was discussed but no simple solution was suggested. The French government is about impose a ban on the use of mobile phones by students in the country's primary, junior and middle schools:  
[www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/11/france-to-ban-mobile-phones-in-schools-from-september](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/11/france-to-ban-mobile-phones-in-schools-from-september)
- The group did not suggest that the UK government impose a ban similar to the French one but thought that schools needed greater cooperation from parents to enforce existing rules

### **Should skirts be banned in schools so that all students wear trousers?**

- Some group members expressed their dismay at a recent report that a school was considering banning the wearing of skirts (by female pupils) because of inappropriate reactions of male members of staff
- One group member thought it was unacceptable to allow boys to wear skirts but acceptable for girls to wear trousers
- Some group members thought it was unacceptable for boys and girls to have differing uniform requirements and that schools should have a gender-free uniform policy

### **Water shortage in India is spreading. Will this be the most important worldwide concern?**

- The group agreed that this is an important worldwide concern but that the solutions revolved around water management

### **Should we be actively reducing the world's population?**

- It was noted that The Pope had recently condemned capital punishment, which wouldn't help to reduce the world's population
- China's child birth restrictions were mentioned and it was understood that their policy has since been relaxed
- It was understood that the highest child-birth rates are in the most poverty-stricken countries and that when the standard of living improves, the child-birth rate decreases
- The group was not in favour of child-birth restrictions in general, although it was suggested that there could be financial incentives against having lots of children. It was pointed out that child benefits in the UK now only apply for up to two children
- "Let people die", was a suggestion for reducing world population. This comment was in reference to ageing populations and the obsession of healthcare services to keep people alive at any cost
- Many members of the group thought that the NHS should not pay for IVF treatment, although it was accepted that this would have little effect on over-population
- It was agreed that over-population has become a major world concern which is an indirect cause of many other issues

### What is your most embarrassing moment?

- The group members were not forthcoming in relating any embarrassing moments
- The group agreed that they are less likely to find an experience embarrassing as they get older whereas when they were a teenager, embarrassment could have been devastating or even life-changing

### Is mindfulness useful or abusive?

- Mindfulness was described by a group member experienced in the field as, "About being present in the moment, with no judgement"
- It was further described as, "Avoiding thinking about the things we don't want to think about"
- Mindfulness was explained as being a Buddhist concept which reduces stress, quietens the mind and cheers you up by learning to notice and question your own rules and expectations
- Shrewsbury U3A has its own group Exploring Mindfulness which meets on the second Monday in the month

### ○ Future Topics

The group spent the last 10 minutes of the session agreeing upon questions for discussion at the next meeting. Below is the list of topics that have been chosen. Hot topical issues should be emailed to the [group coordinator](#) prior to the next meeting.

- Should the NHS stop using homeopathy and other so-called alternative treatments?
- Is it morally right for Israelis to shoot unarmed Palestinian protesters?
- Where is our nation now, politically speaking?
- Are all religions hard on women?
- What can persuade people to act altruistically?
- Is it ever acceptable to be compliant in capital punishment?
- Should there be a maximum salary?
- Universal basic income - how is it doing in Finland?
- What is the alternative to capitalism?
- If there was one thing you could change in your life, what would it be?
- Is it a good thing to anthropomorphise your pet?
- Should car-use be rationed (e.g. to a family/house size) and should it be forbidden in the town centre?

### ○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on **Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2018** at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

