



Monday 7th January 2019
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 15 members of the Café Society group present at this meeting.

The mandatory contribution scheme of £1.50 per attending member is running smoothly and the money and drinks order were kindly collected and organised by Margaret H.

Group coordinator Viv B thanked members for submitting discussion topics by email prior to the meeting and commented that this had produced some exciting and relevant subjects. Group members will be asked to submit topics again at a similar time next month.

Group members agreed that it would be pleasant to go for a meal out together sometime around the Easter period. Arrangements are being made to organise a visit to The Orchard (the café at The Cathedral) immediately after our meeting on either Monday 1st April or Monday 6th May.

A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

Mike S

o Discussion Topics

Wouldn't the world be a better place without borders?

- This topic was introduced by Harold B who proposed that it should be a fundamental human right that an individual can choose to live, work or travel where they wish. Harold further stated that:
 - o Borders are imaginary and privilege the rich at the expense of the poor
 - o Borders create chaos and war
- One group member felt that borders gave them personal security, reassurance, protection and a sense of identity
- Another group member pointed out that borders constantly change and are only meaningful if they are recognised
- A world without borders was loosely described as anarchical and it was questioned whether such a world could be practical
- The historic development of borders was discussed and the existence of geological features like rivers and mountains was believed to be one of the main reasons for the natural formation of boundaries
- The line "Good fences make good neighbours" from Robert Frost's poem *Mending Wall* was cited as an explanation why borders might be productive

- Although there is a general perception that the world is unifying and that states and countries are merging, a group member highlighted the fact that there are now more sovereign state members of the UN (i.e. recognised countries) than there were at the time we were born. Several attempts to establish pan-African states have failed, The United Kingdom is on the brink of leaving the European Union and there are calls for the independence of regions like Scotland and Northern Ireland
- It was difficult to discuss the topic without straying into related subjects like cultural identity and immigration but members were asked “What gives anyone the right to tell another where they cannot live, work or travel?”
- Some members of the group thought that a borderless society could be brought about simply by changing people’s attitudes
- There was some disagreement about the distribution of wealth around the world with some members believing that there is enough at the very top to support the entire population whilst others believed this is not to be the case
- This topic generated so much enthusiasm and peripheral discussion that the group agreed to return to the subject again in the future

How can we best meet the needs of the country for social housing?

- This topic was introduced by Denise M who was concerned that there have been constant pleas for more social housing yet promising development plans are repeatedly adjusted to remove such provisions at the last minute
- The distinction between affordable housing and social housing was explained
- It was noted that the BBC Radio 4 programme The Archers had recently featured a storyline concerning a development where the social housing provision disappeared
- The town of Stoke was mentioned for its policy of insisting that university students live in halls of residence in order to free up town housing and the group regarded this as a sensible idea
- The population growth in Shrewsbury was noted as being quite significant (around 40,000 to 80,000) during our lifetime
- Group members recalled that it used to be regarded as a wonderful thing to have a council house (as social housing was previously known). Members also felt that the existence of council houses created a good mix in population and diversity
- In order to create more social housing, the only suggestion tabled was to impose charges to make it more expensive or less profitable to build bigger properties and offer reductions or incentives to build rent-only properties

Do we agree with the Home Secretary that migrants crossing the channel to England is "a major incident"?

- This topic was introduced by Irene B who questioned whether there had indeed been a significant surge in the number of people seeking refuge by crossing the English Channel
- One group member felt appalled that the focus of such media articles was about keeping people out rather than helping them
- Most group members thought that the recent media stories were exaggerated and likely to be fuelled by hysteria about Brexit and political propaganda

What was the best thing about your Christmas?

- “My forty-five-year-old son finding a partner that I approve of”
- “Spending Christmas with my new grandchild”
- “Receiving a note from my grandchild which said ‘*Looking forward to visiting*’”
- “Finally, not being in charge of the hospitality”
- “Playing games with family members”
- One group member recommended escaping the Christmas madness by going on holiday. They had thoroughly enjoyed a cruise down The Danube with walking excursions and visits to castles and picturesque market towns
- Several members had been delighted by the Christmas atmosphere of Shrewsbury and praised the decorative lights, carol concert, pantomime and other community events

Should grandparents stop buying Christmas presents for grandchildren when they reach a certain age?

- The general answer was “no”. Members of the group appeared to have special relationships with their grandchildren and were determined to treat them at Christmas no matter how old they became
- It was acknowledged that actual presents turn into a financial gift as grandchildren become young adults or adults

What can you do if you have no family around to spend Christmas Day with?

- Going on holiday had previously been mentioned as an alternative to a family Christmas and taking a trip on a clipper boat from Phuket to Singapore was particularly recommended
- Two members of the group had attended community Christmas lunches at venues in Shrewsbury and thoroughly recommended the experience and fun

Wouldn't the world be a better place if we all refused to go to war?

- This topic was introduced by Pam P who found it incredible that people are willing to kill and be killed on behalf of modern governments
- Members of the group recognised that the persuasion and propaganda presented by governments can be compelling
- There was concern that modern warfare involving missiles, air-strikes and drones detaches the reality of what is taking place
- Glamorous recruitment campaigns for the armed forces were criticised by the group. Soldiers were believed to be poorly paid, misinformed about their duties and unsupported upon leaving service
- One group member felt that wars are usually created by just one man and thus wondered why so many people follow
- Other group members thought that more modern wars revolve purely around the ferment conditions of selling armaments and profiting from war
- In general, the group felt that governments don't listen to the people when it comes to war. Public pressure against The United Kingdom's attacks on Iraq and The United States' involvement in Vietnam were given as examples

Is it acceptable to kill and eat other animals?

- This topic was introduced by Helen T who questioned the necessity to kill animals for food
- A recent local news item was mentioned in which Shropshire Council had objected to a pro-vegan advertisement
- A group member pointed out that humans are omnivores and have evolved to eat both animals and plants
- The production of meat (particularly red meat) was believed to be extremely inefficient and it was generally agreed that more food could be produced if the focus was on crops and vegetables. Some members further believed that meat production played a particularly detrimental contribution towards global warming
- One group member hadn't eaten meat (except fish) for over forty years and another member had become a vegetarian after seeing photographs of animal concentration camps
- The group had observed significant advancements in vegetarianism over the past few decades in terms of both availability and general acceptance and understanding

○ Future Topics

The group did not have time to agree upon questions for discussion at the next meeting. Below is the list of topics that are still available. Please be willing to suggest some topical issues when you are reminded about the next Café Society meeting by the [group coordinator](#).

- Is the UK's Advertising Standards Authority strict enough regarding the content of television adverts? (Mike S)
- Has capitalism run its course? (Ken C)

○ Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on **Monday 4th February 2019** at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room).

