



Monday 6th April 2015
The Lion Hotel

Minutes

- **Apologies**
Ken, Phil and Bridie sent their apologies.
- **Matters Arising**
Despite being Easter Monday, there were 10 members present. There was no news from the new members who are setting up a second café society group.
- **Discussion Topics**
A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

What privacies would we be prepared to give up in return for safety?

- The topic was opened by stating what privacies have already been given up: CCTV is everywhere, Ed Snowden has shown us that the USA and British Security services have personal details on all of their citizens. It seems therefore, that it is not a matter of us, the citizens, being willing or not to give up our personal details, those details are already in the hands of the security services.
- There was the intriguing example given of the House of Commons, where the whips have a 'Dirt Book', listing any wrong-doings or rumours of wrong-doings of the MPs, in order to keep them in line.
- Perhaps it is a matter of what sort of details are known. One member felt that medical records should not be held by anyone other than the medics involved in our care. This was questioned by another member who thought it quite legitimate for employers or prospective employers to have them.
- We considered what all this information should legitimately be used for. No doubt it is useful for the detection of crime and no-one can object to that. One example given was when a member was phoned by her bank reporting several unusual withdrawals. In these instances, we would be glad our bank was watchful.
- We were all happy with some surveillance to protect ourselves against crime. Apparently, over 90% of British CCTV cameras are privately-owned and on private property, but what are we protecting ourselves against? This secrecy and

information-gathering can lead to invented crimes. Last week a group was charged with 'trying to enter Syria'. In another case, a man received a custodial sentence for possessing a book (on the subject of bomb-making). Are these really crimes?

- One member did not feel threatened by 'terrorism' as portrayed in the media and believed that the British and American governments were "...going around hitting wasp nests with sticks, then telling everyone to live in fear of wasps". As another member succinctly put it, when George Orwell wrote '1984', he portrayed a very accurate description of our government – only the date was wrong.

Should we reintroduce grammar schools?

- Despite most of the members present having benefited from grammar schools, many facts were given about the 11-plus exam that its intrinsic unfairness soon became apparent.
- The group felt that the age of eleven was too young for selection and segregation as many people develop in their teenage years. It was noted that the true 'top 10%' chosen for grammar schools would have consisted of far more girls than boys and that the selection was always adjusted to an equal ratio. Many members of the group highlighted the sense of failure and lack of self-esteem felt by those who were sent to secondary modern schools and the equally damaging belief of superiority bestowed on those at grammar schools.
- The group generally accepted that comprehensive schools are far and away the best solution but in order to get the best out of students the schools should be small enough to allow the head teacher to know all the students' names. The use of 'sets' or 'ability streams' was regarded as a good idea especially when applied to individual or related subjects.
- The discussion moved on to understanding the pitfalls of 'free' schools' which can employ unqualified teachers and seem free to imbue specific faith and culture into the students. No doubt the 'academies' will be harbouring problems too.

Is positive discrimination ever a good thing?

- We began by identifying different types of discrimination like race, gender and the notion of universities discriminating in favour of applicants from public-schools.
- An instance of unbalanced representation of gender was mentioned with respect to the television quiz 'University Challenge'. Very quickly everyone concluded that it would be senseless to have positive discrimination to rebalance the teams as women students are less interested in appearing on the show. In cases where employers are obliged to take on women when they are not the best candidates, our group was unanimous in expressing distaste.
- In pointing out that 'positive' discrimination still discriminates against a given section of society, it was proposed that positive discrimination should always be a temporary measure. The intent should be to address the critical imbalance, then to remove the positive discrimination policy as soon as possible.

- When accepted as a permanent rule, positive discrimination can provoke justified resentment, as in the case of female firefighters who undergo reduced physical tests (when compared to male colleagues) for a job that might require intense physical duties. The same objection could apply to women soldiers being stationed on the front line of battle.
- Perhaps only the disabled need positive discrimination, although it would be quite unreasonable if positive discrimination meant the disabled had to take precedence when they clearly are incapable of fulfilling a particular role.
- An example was raised where positive discrimination was in force to the advantage of the majority rather than the minority. A member of the group who had lived in South Africa explained a noticeable absence in society of white people in the 30-40 age range due to legislation where black people have to be given priority in the job market even though white people are a huge minority in that country.
- There was a unanimous feeling of unfairness about positive discrimination and we concluded that it would be much fairer to crack down on the 'negative' discrimination which had occurred in the first place.

Should we abolish cash now?

This was an extra topic as we had ten minutes to spare.

- Firstly, one member pointed out that there are millions of pounds in cash hidden under mattresses and in safe places throughout the country. It was pointed out that the removal of cash would effectively make all business transactions recordable and generate a more reliable accountability for tax.
 - Then, with a bang, we realised that as individuals, we too would not be able to pay or receive in cash. So the window cleaner who exists on a pittance, and that extra £20 some of us earn by giving a tutorial just to keep our brains sharp, would also be caught in the net.
 - In fact, this subject added to the loss of privacy we discussed in our first topic, until Judith saved the day by suggesting that we humans would always find a way round the system – in this case bartering came to mind.
- **Discussion Topics for the Next Meeting**
The subjects up for discussion at our next meeting (May 2015) will be:
 - **Does our society insist that you have a computer, access to the internet and a bank account?**
 - **Is current legislation regarding abortion, insufficient or too restrictive?**
and time permitting...
 - **Are 'honey-traps' acceptable in the pursuit of journalism?**
 - **Date of Next Meeting**
The next meeting will be held on **Monday 4th May 2015 at 1000hrs** at **The Lion Hotel**. It was noted that this date is another bank holiday and, as such, there is unlikely to be a bus service.



Links:

[Shrewsbury U3A Website](#)

[Café Discussion Webpage](#)

[Shrewsbury U3A Facebook Group](#)

['Citizenfour' \(2014\) – a film about the Ed Snowden affair](#)