



Monday 4th May 2015
The Lion Hotel

Minutes

- **Apologies**
There were five apologies for absence this month.
- **Introduction**
Despite this being May Bank Holiday, there were 8 members present. Just for the record, we have in the recent past discussed the size of our group and decided that 16 members is our maximum. However, true to the U3A spirit, we will still welcome people to attend a 'taster' session after which we will direct them to other groups, if they are interested.
- **Discussion Topics**
A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

Does our society insist that you have a computer, access to the internet and a bank account?

Government departments are instructing us to comply online more and more with tax affairs, car tax, and passport applications as also is The National Trust. You are seriously disadvantaged if you haven't got a computer and it's not necessarily the elderly since the internet has been in global use for over 20 years.

A comparison was made with the telephone and cheques; when they were invented, was there the same reluctance to use them and are we not reacting in just the same way? Well, computers do have the disadvantage of not working at times and also all this impersonal communication diminishes the quality of our lives, in that our contact with other humans is so much reduced.

We had to admit that we all now write our business letters on the computer or send email because it is quicker, more professional and costs less! Although sometimes the personal letter can have an effect that a printed one cannot. Similarly, we all use the computer to take, spruce up and save our photos. We do print out a few but the newer method is much more superior. In fact research for just about anything on the computer is instant, copious, convenient and free.

Realising that we are inexorably being driven in this direction, we did feel that every town should have an IT drop-in centre to help with simple problems and that charities should begin to think of providing computers to people who genuinely cannot afford to buy one. There must be enough recyclable models around to be able to do this.

Is current legislation regarding abortion insufficient or too restrictive?

Current UK legislation allows abortion up to 24 weeks of gestation. Although our laws are more lenient than in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, they are still restrictive enough to encourage back-street abortions. Abortion is still unlawful in Eire where only rich women can travel to have their abortions.

Harold provided some startling statistics: worldwide, every year, about 42 million women with unintended pregnancies choose abortion and nearly half of these procedures are unsafe. Some 47,000 women die of unsafe abortion annually and 5 million more will suffer long-term health complications.

Less restrictive abortion laws do not appear to entail more abortions. The world's lowest abortion rates are in Belgium, Germany and The Netherlands – ostensibly because contraceptive use is high.

On this subject there was no division. We all felt that abortion laws should be less restrictive, education should play its part and the stigma of an unwanted pregnancy be erased. The numbers of teenage pregnancies in the UK has reduced, but there is still a lot of work to be done, especially for youngsters with learning difficulties, who are more at risk. There is still a chasm between the effects of an unwanted pregnancy on the woman as opposed to the man.

“There are never any unmarried fathers”, Helen reminded us.

Are honey-traps acceptable in the pursuit of journalism?

There have been plenty of instances where reporters have pretended to be who they are not. Jack Straw and Malcolm Rifkind were both approached by ‘lobbyists’ to put a question in the house and were told it could be done at a price. Malcolm Rifkind had to resign over this. Even the Duchess of York was caught out by reporters by saying that for a considerable amount of money she could introduce them to the Royal Family.

There have been too many cases to remember, but we all admitted that we were satisfied if the ruse exposed the target as a fraudster or thief, so generally, if the honey-trap is set up to expose something in the nation's interest, then yes, they are acceptable. If however, it is simply done at random to sensationalise then we would disapprove.

Spies and even the police have used these methods, but surely, the case where a policeman assumed a false identity and even married an unsuspecting woman to cement that identity, is going too far.

Also a bridge too far have been the instances where the police have pretended to join protest groups in order to 'out' them – after all, protesting per se, is not against the law.

Should Oskar Goening be on trial for being an accomplice to murder?

This man is now aged 93 and on trial for his part as a Nazi soldier who was stationed at Auschwitz during the last war. Immediately, members contrasted his position with that of Lord Jenner, also elderly and who is considered too ill to be brought to justice for historical child abuse.

Oskar Goening was a 19-year old soldier whose job it was to take the luggage and books from Jews arriving at Auschwitz. He apparently tried to leave the camp on one occasion but was brought back. Was he simply a soldier carrying out orders? Or was he a criminal?

Members then mentioned British soldiers carrying out orders in Iraq and Afghanistan – should they be indicted for what, afterwards, was deemed to have been wrong? We all agreed not, except where the Geneva Convention is broken (Guantanamo Bay comes to mind). Our own soldiers have committed atrocities, but should not be brought to account when they were ordered to do so – then it is the responsibility of the officers in charge.

Joy mentioned that all humans have a 'primitive' part of the brain which not only kicks in at moments of danger, but, as we heard, can lead us to act cruelly in certain circumstances, viz. the two famous experiments where, in one, the 'guards' began to like their control too much and behaved cruelly to the 'prisoners', and another experiment in which volunteers were told to give electric shocks of more and more intensity, and they carried on doing so despite the screams of the recipients.

In Oskar Groening's case we all agreed it was right to have the court case to have everything heard in public, but no punishment should be given.

- **Discussion Topics for the Next Meeting**

The subjects up for discussion at our next meeting (June 2015) will be:

- **How should we deal with criminals?**
- **What is pornography and how far should we tolerate it?**
and time permitting...
- **What happens after death?**

- **Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on **Monday 1st June 2015 at 1000hrs at The Lion Hotel**. Helen has kindly agreed to chair the meeting.



Links:

- [Shrewsbury U3A Website](#)
- [Café Discussion Webpage](#)
- [Shrewsbury U3A Facebook Group](#)