



**Monday 7<sup>th</sup> December 2015**  
The Lion Hotel

## Minutes

### o Introduction

We welcomed a new member, Dick Lexmond. Helen and Marilyn sent their apologies.

Members present were:

Pam, Ken, Margaret H, Margaret T, Sue, Harold, Mike, Viv S, Viv B, Phil, Dick, Libby, Joy.

We celebrated Christmas early by using £21 in the kitty towards mince pie and mulled wine/coffee/tea. Members remarked that they preferred the method of paying £2 each whatever was ordered as it avoided messing about with small change, so we will adopt this system at all our meetings from now on.

### o Discussion Topics

A short summary of the subjects and discussions follows:

#### **Should we be bombing in Syria?**

- o There has been a lot of discussion in and out of parliament on this subject and members were quite au fait with the bigger/more obvious political arguments. However, less obviously, it was pointed out that in Raqqa, where the bombing is aimed at the moment there are a lot more civilians than we realise so that our bombs are going to cause many innocent deaths
- o Isis have no problem getting arms/oil/money to wage their war – so who is providing it? Harold suspects that the US – in particular the CIA, and Israel – in particular Mossad, have reason to encourage this war in order to profit from it in one way or another. As one member quoted – ‘One of the first casualties of war is truth’
- o Vocabulary is used to persuade us to agree with actions taken by our government i.e.: we are asked to refer to Daesh rather than Isis as Daesh sound more evil; suicide bombings incidents are referred to not as terrorism, but as war, to justify the dropping of our bombs
- o We took a vote on this and only 3 members were for the bombing whilst 10 were against
- o One member, voting for the bombing on Syria, thought nevertheless that the bombing would make little difference
- o In the end, all of us agreed that the long-term answer lies in diplomacy – as Churchill said, ‘Jaw, jaw is better than war, war’

## **Should we be concerned about the transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership?**

- Harold apprised us of the situation: the TTIP is a series of trade negotiations being carried out between the EU and the US. This bi-lateral trade agreement deals with reducing regulatory barriers to big business trade, food safety laws, environmental legislation and the sovereign powers of individual nations. The aim of the talks is to turn the EU and the US into the largest free trade area in the world.
- At first hearing this sounded good – what is wrong with free trade and maximising exports for the EU? The first clue is in the fact that only 6 of us had heard of it and when we heard that the discussions are being held in secret and not by elected representatives, but by bureaucrats representing private corporations. We already know that private corporations will do anything to reduce paying taxes – so how can we be sure that traded products and services will remain safe? A startling example is that, in the EU 1,370 chemicals are not allowed in the fabrication of cosmetics, whereas in the US only 11 are banned. Whose guidelines will be followed and who will decide?
- Furthermore, power is apparently to be given to corporations to sue foreign governments over claims of unfair treatment and to be entitled to compensation. For example, similar provisions in the past have allowed tobacco companies to sue Uruguay and Australia for imposing anti-smoking legislation
- Unions are very concerned that employee and trade union rights could be removed too. Unanimously, members agreed that, even if the GDP of European countries may increase, this would only happen if tax laws were tightened, and if this TTIP is agreed and put into force by unelected bureaucrats who may well be linked to the corporations themselves, tax laws are never likely to be tightened
- We need much more open discussion about this very important matter

## **We should buy things because we like them and not because of the signature in the corner**

- This subject arose out of a Times article on Shaun Greenhalgh, the gifted artist who has fooled experts for decades with his paintings, sculptures and objets d'art, some of which have sold for hundreds of thousands of pounds
- Our first reactions were to smile at the fact that very wealthy people have been duped – especially when we know that they often don't even look at paintings they have bought for a fortune, because they are merely interested in their perceived worth and put the paintings in a bank vault
- On reflection we had to admit that this man, Shaun is certainly guilty of fraud as he passed off his work as someone else's. If he had not done so, his work would have sold at a fraction of the price or not at all. So we soon agreed that the value of a piece of 'art' is what the market thinks it is. Then we had to consider what 'art' is. Margaret T told us that 'Art is what an expert says it is'. So, we either buy a piece of 'art' because we like it, or we buy it because it is already proven to have a value and that value will increase – or will it?

### Is it better to holiday abroad or to stay at home?

- Economically speaking, and for the country, one member said it is certainly better that people go abroad and that foreigners come here as international tourism brings money in
- On a personal level, some members were sure that we British will always seek holidays abroad as long as our climate remains cool and wet. Others admitted that years of going abroad has left us ignorant of many places in our own country. The conclusion here was 'Each to his own'

### What do I want Santa to bring me this Christmas? (Money no object).

- Everyone's feelings were more provoked by the ever-escalating commercialism of Christmas. Thus, members all wanted Christmas to be restricted to maybe a week in December, although Harold wanted Christmas transposed to February 29<sup>th</sup> to reduce its frequency
- Everyone's thoughts about presents for themselves were altruistic and untainted by commerce. 'Peace in our time', 'Time with my family', were the themes – except one sad member who wants a dishwasher

### ○ Future Discussion Topics

- What is the best decision you've ever made? And the worst?
- Religion is harmful
- Does misogyny still exist?
- Should we pay compensation for slavery?

### ○ Date of Next Meeting

The first meeting of 2016 will be held on **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> January at 1000hrs** in The Lion Hotel. The topics for this discussion will be posted on the [Café Society webpage](#) nearer the time.



