



Monday 6th February 2017
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

15 members were present and apologies were sent from Marilyn, Ken and Margaret T.

Phil K had to do battle with The Lion Hotel staff again regarding the collective drinks charge. We couldn't have picked a better individual to represent us.

o Discussion Topics

Helen T kindly compiled the following short summary of our discussions:

How can we distinguish between real news and fake news?

- Fake news/post truth/alternative facts - all too familiar now. But when did we ever have truth?
- With everything from alleged hacking of the elections by the Russian state to ridiculous reporting of health claims, we are bombarded with misinformation. The important point was made that there is a big difference between a personal take on an issue, and a made up story, particularly if this is intended to deceive. Things seem to be moving in a disturbing direction, particularly with many people now getting their news from social media. There do not appear to be any repercussions when blatant untruths are unearthed.
- How do we decide if a piece of information is genuine? Generally, this boils down to our own opinion and which newspaper or news report we trust the most. We cannot research everything independently. It is probably a good idea to get our information from as many sources as possible.

Should Donald Trump be invited to Britain on a state visit?

- The majority felt Trump should not have been invited so soon, but he cannot now be uninvited.
- It is part of the Queen's job and she has coped with rogues in the past.

- The general feeling was that the invitation was a desperate attempt to curry a favourable trading position and that Theresa May's visit was hasty and undignified.
- The point was made that he might not even be around by the time of the visit!
- A suitable response to someone like Trump who so craves adulation would be a totally silent reception, where he is greeted by empty streets.

Is there a limit to the development of Artificial Intelligence?

- Computerised jobs are becoming more and more common - from the assembly of cars to robot greeters in hotels. There was some disagreement about whether computers/robots can ever become self-aware. We did not vote on this but the general consensus was 'no' as all information must be programmed in by humans.
- One major problem for the future is loss of jobs which led to a re-visiting of the idea of universal benefits. There was also general, but not overall, agreement that it is often desirable to talk to a real human being.
- We were recommended a relevant book by E.M. Forster called 'The Machine Stops', which certainly sounds worth reading.

Are some people paid too much?

- Again, we were not in agreement on this. Many thought that pay differentials are sometimes far too great and some people are paid obscene amounts. Should heads of charities be paid less than their counterparts in private industry? We discussed whether some jobs are more valuable than others and, if so, which.
- A few considered very high pay to be necessary to attract the brightest and the best. Others thought this just attracts the greediest. The point was made that there is more to a job than money - such as interest, stimulus and job satisfaction.
- Many thought our very high earners should pay more taxes but a couple of members thought they already do their share.

Is it ever acceptable to require a woman to wear high-heels for a job?

- Short answer - no.
- Everyone agreed that dress codes can be acceptable but that they should apply to all employees, not just women.
- It is not acceptable that women should be required to wear clothes and make-up in a job in order to make themselves sexually attractive nor to wear such things as high-heels which can be injurious to health.

Would you ever pay to go into a shop?

- A mixed response to this one. Some thought it okay to pay a small entry fee, refundable with a purchase. It can be unfair just to use a shop as shelter from the rain or to kill time. Some charges are exorbitant - for example the high entry fee to Shrewsbury Flower Show, which is in fact akin to a large market.

Is wide consumer choice always a good idea?

- We are constantly badgered to change our suppliers and we are presented with a huge array of goods. Some of the group quite liked a large choice while others found it to be bewildering. Perhaps the 'average' shopper is preferring smaller outlets now and, of course, to have deliveries made.
- Impulse buying can also be a problem.

When do protest movements achieve their aims?

- 'If you don't protest you can't moan afterwards'.
- Many protests do not seem to achieve their aim but it was felt that they can have some effect on our Government anyway, even if not immediately apparent.
- The massive protests against recent invasions (e.g. cruise missiles, the miners' strike) all possibly had some effect on government, although this is not always easy to see.
- If protests are big enough they can sometimes be effective, as with the suffragette movement and opposition to the poll tax.
- 'Save Our NHS' may also have had some effect. Online petitions enable a lot more people to become involved.
- People want to be heard and want to show those in power the strength of their feelings, even if this is ineffective.

o Future Topics

- Should all politicians be obliged to do one year's apprenticeship in the real world of work before sitting in The Commons?
- Is it a good idea for the government to encourage senior citizens to quit their family homes now that they no longer need so much space, so that young families have a chance to buy the homes they need?

If you have any more to suggest, especially last-minute topical issues, please email:

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o Next Meeting

The next Café Society meeting will be on Monday 6th March at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room). Viv S has kindly volunteered to compile the discussion summary at this meeting.

