



Monday 4th December 2017
The Lion Hotel

Summary

o Introduction

There were 15 members of the Café Society group present at the meeting including two new members. The group decided to alter the date of the next meeting to avoid New Year's Day. The group also decided to discontinue the rotation of compiling summaries of the discussions. Thank you to Phil K for organising the drinks order. A summary of the meeting's discussions follows.

Ken C

o Discussion Topics

Should politicians be judged by events beyond their control?

- Do we attend more to appearance and presentation than substantive policies? (e.g. President of E.U. quoted as saying, "Tony Blair has motorcade potential"; commentator saying, "Michelle Obama should be President because she is a black woman")
- Does a charismatic personality, and/or the desire for a 'strong leader' override expert analysis, facts and statistics? (e.g. Trump elected president, Putin's popularity in Russia, and the adulation by many there for Stalin)
- How much in terms of our judgement is simply due to the luck or otherwise for this or that politician; i.e. what just happens for good or ill? (N.B. Harold MacMillan's "Events, dear boy, events", and e.g. the invasion of the Falklands for Thatcher)
- What actually influences how we vote? Are we influenced more by our emotions (gut feeling) and by unconscious processes which research shows directs our actions considerably. What about the influence of how our parents or our partners vote, and of the papers we read or the radio or TV programmes we chose to listen to and see?

What are the roots of our identity?

- Members mentioned the following as factors affecting the formation of a personal sense of identity: 'tribe' to which you feel you belong, education - school or college attended, family, class, work, and gender
- We recognised that our identity can develop and change through life's experiences and that each generation develops in different ways. The mobility that most of us in the group have undergone inevitably affects how we view our identity, as opposed to those who have only lived in one place all their lives
- Our sense of identity often lies dormant until something threatens it, e.g. one of our members lived in Southall, Middlesex, when a petition was circulated asking people not to sell their house to blacks. Another member has just written a book about London in the First World War when Jews were attacked and many killed in 1914/15

What are British values?

- This discussion ran on from the last one
- The government website defines them as: democracy, rule of law, respect and tolerance, individual liberty. We added: fair play, and queueing (maybe?)
- However, we did not feel that these prescribed values are exclusive to Britain and that whilst democracy and rule of law are an integral part of our system of government, respect and tolerance were learned behaviour
- Should we be so concerned about British values simply because our parents happen to have been living here when we were born?
- There is also the question of British verses English

Should explorers be seen as heroes or villains?

- This topic refers to Benedict Allen who had to be rescued because of illness from the wilds of Papua New Guinea, despite having left his sat/cell phone behind on purpose
- This led to a discussion about the pros and cons of Western explorers contacting remote tribes - they could contract new diseases with devastating results, but they might also be protected from exploitation. Past (David Livingstone) and present (Ranulph Fiennes) explorers were discussed. We agreed that the family of an explorer had to come into the equation somewhere - either they were very understanding and supportive, or they were unwilling victims of a selfish personality

How would you feel if you received a wedding invitation which excused you from attending, but asks for a money gift?

- This had been the experience of a number of our members. We agreed that we were in a period of change regarding British/English wedding customs, and that the above situation was becoming common (N.B. Italian and Indian wedding traditions *expect* a gift of money)
- The change in customs here is linked to the fact that most couples are living together before the wedding and have already set up a home together
- More contentious was the increasing expectation that couples organise expensive stag/hen parties abroad and expensive receptions
- However, we agreed that couples should be respected if they choose not to go along with these trends and opt for something simpler, and some may ask for any money gift to go to charity

Is it impolite to ask a visitor to take their shoes off at the door?

- We felt that one should do what is culturally, or practically, appropriate. By and large in this country we don't have this custom, but it is obviously necessary in farming and country areas
- However, it was also said that maybe hosts should provide slippers, if this is their request, and some facility for people who find putting shoes on and off difficult

○ Future Topics

Below is a list of topics that have been forwarded for future discussion. If you have any additional suggestions, especially last-minute topical issues, please email vivienne.barker@gmail.com

- We are in need of suggestions

○ Next Meeting

The first Café Society meeting of 2018 will be on Monday 8th January at 10.00am at The Lion Hotel (Tudor Bar room). **Please note that this is the second Monday in the month.**

