



Recorder Comment

The year ahead

HAS there been a New Year since the end of the Second World War which has offered a more uncertain future for so many inhabitants of this planet? While some years have seemed to present more dangerous prospects, it is hard to recall another first week in January in which any attempt at forecasting the future, politically and economically, is so problematic.

We await the outcome of the Supreme Court's decision regarding the triggering of Brexit with interest, although it has to be said that, even should the Government win the case, we shall be little clearer about what Brexit will really mean. It has become increasingly obvious that Mr Cameron's Government had made no significant assessment of how Brexit, whether "hard" or "soft", might be achieved. Perhaps we shall have to wait a further 30 years for the release of the relevant papers to understand why we are in such a mess.

When we note also the legal arguments that leaving the EU does not remove Britain from the European Economic Area and factor in the complex issues around the devolved powers of Holyrood, then Stan Laurel's most famous complaint springs inescapably to mind.

We fear, also, confusion, division and conflict on an even greater scale in the USA. While Mr Trump's recent high-profile declarations over America's relationship with Russia have undermined hopes of the conventional smooth transfer of power from one President to the next and the possibility of the restart of the global arms race seems a worrying threat, it is for the many minority groups in the USA which Mr Trump attacked in his campaign that the future seems most uncertain.

What will the end of "Obamacare" bring? Will President Trump really seek to deport millions of undocumented immigrants? Will the cutting of taxes hugely reduce Government spending with, as always is the case, the poorest and the marginalised suffering the most?

No one knows what 2017 will bring in Britain, mainland Europe or America.

Freedom

Given those two major concerns, it would be understandable if readers of the *Methodist Recorder* had overlooked a further major issue – the continued freedom of the press in the United Kingdom. Next Tuesday, a consultation period ends, after which the Government will decide whether or not, in the wake of the Leveson Inquiry, to bring to an end 350 years of British press freedom. Implementing section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 would impose heavy court costs on newspapers which had not signed up to state-approved regulation, to the extent that even if, for example, a newspaper was found to be totally innocent of alleged libel, it could have to pay its accuser's costs.

This is, of course, totally contrary to the principle that the Law should treat all parties equally. It would threaten the independence and viability of many local and specialist newspapers, since such a threat would prevent many true stories being published as a newspaper could be financially ruined by the awarding of costs despite being in the right.

The alternative offered, of a Government-appointed regulatory body, is what one would expect from a state such as Turkey or Iran, not a western democracy. Furthermore, the Government's approved regulation body, Impress, is funded by a charitable trust run by Mr Max Mosley and his family.

This consultation comes after almost £50 million is said to have been spent on investigations into phone hacking and the bribery of officials which have led to just 10 convictions and numerous high-profile acquittals. Clearly, the press as a whole is far from being as corrupt as some would have us believe. Moreover, those convictions show that where offences have been committed, the existing law is sufficient.

The *Methodist Recorder* urges its readers to help protect the future freedom of the British press, not least to hold the powerful to account, by reading the information at <https://freethepress.co.uk> and responding accordingly.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters submitted for publication can be sent to: **The Editor, Methodist Recorder, 3-5 Lambeth Road, London SE1 7DQ (email: editorial@methodistrecorder.co.uk)**. Please remember to include a postal address when emailing. The Editor reserves the right to edit letters.

Minimum pricing not the answer

From Tim Mickleburgh:

I'M not convinced about the arguments for introducing a minimum price for alcohol (*Recorder*, December 16). I mean, "Recorder Comment" talks of the problems caused by the night-time economy, but chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance Prof Sir Ian Gilmore says such pricing "will leave pub prices untouched"!

As for further claims that ordinary drinkers will not be penalised, I should inform



readers that it isn't only super-strength beers and ciders which would increase dramatically in price, but wines such as lambrini and lambr-

usco that are enjoyed by those with modest incomes, as well as being weaker than other wines.

Meanwhile, the middle-

class home drinkers, who have the money to be able to be drinking more than ever, won't be affected as their tipple costs well above any proposed minimum price.

To me, the two main measures to deal with excess alcohol consumption ought to be limiting sales outlets to pubs/clubs and traditional off licences and moving away from the open all hours culture that Tony Blair encouraged. – **Tim Mickleburgh**, 11 Boulevard Avenue, Grimsby.

It's more than 'British' values

From Tim James:

WE are really living in concerning times. We now read that Prime Minister Theresa May wants an oath of allegiance to "British" values in a bid to curb extremism and radicalisation. Both laudable and, post our failed backing of Saudi interests in Syria, more than important as young British citizens involved in the conflict return.

However, once we attach the word "British" to values we need to look at what these have meant over the years, like the suppression of Catholic minority rights in the North of Ireland, the subversion of justice at Hillsborough or the BBC's Savile culture.

Britain remains a tolerant and plural society and long

may it remain so – our foreign aid is a real credit, as is our financial aid to Syrian refugees in Lebanon, but we are not perfect. We in the UK live in one of the best democracies in the world and this must be enshrined, but often in the UK we need to be critical friends of the British state. This is our strength,

Surely it is better to make the pledge to uphold justice as enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights.

Also, Minister for Communities and Local Government Sajid Javid is a strange choice to enable this, as he has called for the ending of the recognition and identity of the oldest ethnic group in the UK, the Euro-

pean Council-recognised Cornish community. Javid's speech on this may yet trigger legal action.

Also, of course, I consider myself Cornish and European and British is not a nationality I feel too comfortable with, especially post the Javid speech. I guess many Scots and Welsh may also feel similarly.

Like Brexit this looks populist and ill-informed as a May policy, as was the Grammar school pledge. – **Tim James**, Chy an Botallack, Penzance, Kernow.



Let's all share in the one bread

From Shona Roberts:

I AM grateful to Christine Burrell for making the case for gluten-free bread at Communion (*Recorder*, December 16). As one who has Coeliac disease I have to be very careful not to have even the tiniest amount of a foodstuff containing gluten. This includes a small piece of bread at the Communion table. My needs are usually accommodated by providing a separate piece of bread which I have always thought is a little theologically dubious, a contradiction of the great affirmation that "Though we are many, we are one body, because we all share in the one bread". Just at the moment when we should feel most included, those of us who cannot tolerate gluten feel most excluded.

I hadn't realised how much I felt this until I was at a Communion service at Spring Harvest in which all the bread was gluten-free so that all could be included. I was overwhelmed to the point of tears of joy at being able to share on an equal basis.

So come on Methodist Conference, how about passing a resolution to only use gluten-free bread at services of Holy Communion? After all, we have a policy of only using non-alcoholic wine. And let me assure readers that gluten-free bread has got a whole lot tastier in recent years! – **Shona Roberts**, 4 Cypress Gardens, Kingswinford, West Midlands.

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