

THE SUNDAY TIMES
ESTABLISHED 1822

Mrs May needs an optimistic vision for Brexit

When Theresa May visits Donald Trump in the next few weeks, the contrasting styles of the two leaders will be clear. The president-elect has shown that he likes to shoot from the hip, usually in 140 characters or fewer on Twitter, leaving few in any doubt about what he is thinking. The prime minister, however, has already developed a reputation as a cautious guardian of her thoughts with a clear preference for generalities over specifics.

Mrs May intends to open up a little. A speech tomorrow on the "shared society" will not only invite contrasts between her and two of her predecessors — David Cameron and Margaret Thatcher — but will also elaborate on some of the themes with which she intends to define her domestic agenda.

It will include promises of better provision for those suffering mental health problems and getting to grips with the housing shortage, partly through measures to encourage a new generation of prefabricated homes. The aim will be to show that her government is not just about Brexit. She cares about these issues and about those left behind by globalisation and intends to do something about it.

Inevitably, though, it will be the prime minister's speech on Brexit, due the following week, that will command greater attention. The resignation of Sir Ivan Rogers as Britain's representative to the European Union, accompanied by his parting shot on "muddled thinking" and a lack of direction within government on Brexit, raised the stakes.

Sir Ivan, who warned privately that Britain and the EU could be heading for "mutually assured destruction" over Brexit, appears to have had his own version of mutually assured destruction in his relationship with his own government. Predictably, his resignation has split opinion, with "remain" supporters warning of the dangerous consequences of the loss of his expertise and backers of "leave" arguing that the departure of an official who was so deeply pessimistic about Britain's chances of securing a good deal is an advantage.

Certainly it is hard to argue with Lord Powell, Mrs Thatcher's foreign policy adviser, who wrote last week that "it is not the role of civil servants to flounce out of their job because they don't like a specific policy, or can't understand the policy, or even think there is no policy". For the prime minister the danger is that he was reflecting a civil service view which is de rigeur in the Foreign Office and all too common elsewhere in Whitehall.

The Foreign Office has shifted to an exclusively European view of the world in recent decades and must be reset. Sir Tim Barrow, Sir Ivan's replacement, needs to demonstrate some of that. The Treasury, traditionally more Eurosceptic, was under political orders not to do preparatory work on how to make a success of Brexit. The new departments for international trade and exiting the EU are only slowly acquiring the necessary talent. They should not leave it too long. "Action this day" was Churchill's advice.

That makes Mrs May's task more difficult but it is not her only difficulty. Before she makes her Brexit speech and before she triggers article 50 she has to square things with her cabinet colleagues and most notably the "three Brexiteers": Boris Johnson, David Davis and Liam Fox.

She also has to avoid Mr Cameron's trap of overpromising and underdelivering on the Brexit deal she can achieve. Having promised thoroughgoing EU reform as the price for continued EU membership, Mr Cameron was forced to fall back on a timid renegotiation. Some of that timidity reflected the advice he was given by Sir Ivan and other officials, which he was too prepared to take. Other EU leaders, notably Angela Merkel, recognised that his heart was never in leaving so they could get by with minor concessions.

Mrs May's approach must be very different. The great fear in the EU is that Britain makes a success of Brexit, encouraging other countries to leave a moribund organisation and break out on their own. The ingredients for that are in our own hands: lower corporate and personal taxes, a better educated workforce, a deregulated and flexible economy and one of the few in Europe which meets the Nato target of spending 2% of GDP on defence.

There is talk of using such a "Singapore of Europe" vision of 21st-century Britain as a bargaining tool in negotiations with the EU. That, to us, is the wrong way round. Low taxes to attract foreign direct investment and improve incentives are worth doing for their own sake, as is deregulation, not just as a bargaining tool. In this respect, so far, Mrs May's approach has disappointed. Talk of workers on company boards, or registers of foreign employees, though since rolled back, have sent out the wrong signals. Lower taxes barely feature.

The impression has been given of a defensive, closed Brexit obsessed with reducing immigration, even if this carries an economic cost. We need an open and optimistic Brexit and the prime minister needs to articulate it.

The doctor won't see you now

This is not, so far, proving to be a particularly harsh winter but the National Health Service is already creaking under the strain. The British Red Cross is surely engaging in hyperbole when it says there is a "humanitarian crisis" in the NHS but this winter looks to be the worst for a long time. In accident and emergency departments, for example, the proportion of patients being seen within the four-hour limit is the lowest for 12 years.

Today we report on another manifestation of the NHS's problems. As a result of funding pressures and a shortage of GPs, patients will be restricted to discussing only one ailment per visit to their doctor. This restriction, already in force in many practices, will become general. After a long wait for an appointment, anybody unfortunate enough to have two or more afflictions will have to undergo an equally long wait for another.

That this seems irrational and short-sighted appears to have escaped those who run the NHS. Often illnesses are interconnected. Is the patient meant to have the knowledge to prioritise one over others?

All this is a far cry from the promise of a new and highly responsive GP service of a few years

ago. In the era of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown everybody was meant to be able to get a GP appointment within 48 hours. That target was dropped by the coalition government in 2010. As for the idea that patients should be able to see their GP outside normal working hours and at weekends, most cannot do so. An NHS England survey of more than 7,000 surgeries found that fewer than one in five offers "full extended access", defined as offering appointments up to 8pm and at weekends.

There is a deeper problem with GP services uncovered by our own, much-missed AA Gill when he wrote last year about his cancer diagnosis. He asked his oncologist, Conrad Lewanski, why our cancer survival rates were so poor compared with other countries. Much of the problem, Dr Lewanski said, was due to the nature of the NHS and the separation of GPs from hospitals. Good cancer outcomes, which depend on the speed of diagnosis and treatment, are often thwarted by the delays inherent in the GP appointment process.

Successful health secretaries, in trying to reform the NHS, have come up against the roadblock of that 1948 structure. If the gatekeepers, the GPs, are difficult to see, then patient care will suffer. And sadly the problem appears to be getting worse.

Rocking them in the aisles

If Dame Vera Lynn had announced that she was forming a punk rock band, the news could scarcely have been more surprising. Tony Iommi, the guitarist with Black Sabbath, has recorded a choral work which had its premiere last week at Birmingham Cathedral.

At the height of the band's fame in the 1970s, Black Sabbath's music was associated with Satanism and the gothic. The clue is in the name. Yet the guitarist's latest work was inspired by Psalm 133: "How good and pleasant it is, when God's people live together in unity".

He is not the first rocker or pop star to have found inspiration in the church. Richard Coles, a parish priest in Northamptonshire and a broadcaster, was in the Communards. Oddly, though, no famous members of the clergy have been tempted to make the opposite journey.

If Black Sabbath can embrace the church, surely it would be in the spirit of unity for the Archbishop of Canterbury to headline at Glastonbury this year, crooning some of the church's big hits and, if not actually dancing, then moving in a mysterious way.

Slapped down, but still Friends of the Earth mixes frack and fiction

DOMINIC LAWSON



Increased risk of cancer and plummeting house prices are the primordial terrors of the middle classes. This horrific combination of physical and financial ruin just happens to be the grim future facing households if fracking for natural gas is allowed in their vicinity ... or that is what Friends of the Earth (FoE) claimed in leaflets soliciting money from the public in its campaign against this form of gas exploration and production.

But last week the environmental group agreed not to repeat, in any future promotional material, its assertions that such drilling would cause cancer to rise and house prices to slump. That, at least, was the impression of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA).

After two members of the public (one a retired vicar) and the gas exploration company Cuadrilla complained about the FoE leaflet in October 2015, the advertising regulator spent 14 months investigating the claims, before concluding they could not be substantiated and therefore should be withdrawn.

Not only that, but "future ads [must] not include claims that imply the fluid used in fracking contains chemicals dangerous to human health ... that there is an established risk of the chemicals concerned causing cancer and other conditions among the local population, when used in fracking in the UK ... that fracking will cause plummeting house prices".

Imagine then the consternation at the regulator when an FoE spokeswoman, Rose Dickinson, insisted on both the BBC and Channel 4 News that the ASA had in fact "dropped the case" and that all FoE had agreed was "that particular old leaflet produced around a year and a half ago will not be distributed any more". She went on to say that FoE "stand by absolutely everything we have said [about fracking]".

On Thursday night, therefore, the ASA summoned Craig Bennett, chief executive of FoE, to a meeting in which he was asked to reassure the authority that he accepted the terms of the agreement and was reminded that it was only because of this agreement that the ASA had not moved to a formal ruling censuring the anti-fracking campaign.

Apparently Bennett gave the assurances sought. But when I spoke to the FoE chief executive on Friday he seemed anything but contrite — indeed, I am sure he sees no reason why he should be. He continued to insist he had evidence that fracking would cause house prices to "plummet".

It is true the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs commissioned a review in 2014 of the effect of fracking on local house prices in America that suggested there could "potentially be a range of 0% to 7% reductions in property values within one mile of an extraction site", but noted the evidence was "quite thin".

Last week, in fact, the most recent examination of this matter in America concluded: "On average, counties with more [shale gas] production have household wages that are 8% higher and house prices that are 6% higher than in areas with less activity."

This, perhaps, is why the Rev Michael Roberts, one of those who complained about the FoE leaflets, told the BBC how angry he had been at what he termed its "scaremongering".

Not only was it causing unnecessary fears among parishioners in Lancashire, a county attractive to the frackers, but he doubtless saw that in a relatively deprived region a return of some industry would be a boon, not a blight.

Anyway, I pointed out to the FoE boss, even the most pessimistic projection of a seven-point fall in house prices within a one-mile radius was nothing like "plummeting" — the word for which accepted synonyms include "nose-dive", "crash" and "plunge".

He just repeated: "I believe there is evidence that house prices will plummet."

I could only respond that I was sure he did believe this evidence existed, but that the issue for the ASA was whether he could produce it. That was met with a long silence. I didn't then have the will to discuss the cancer scare.

FoE lawyers had spent 14 long months failing to convince the ASA they had evidence of this allegedly mortal risk — not an experience I wanted to endure.

But the FoE chief executive did introduce one fresh point. He told me the chairman of the ASA, Lord Smith, "had led a taskforce to examine fracking which was funded by the industry itself".

I was amazed by this unsubtle attempt to insinuate that the ASA's integrity had in some way been corrupted in favour of fracking — and by Chris Smith, of all people, who had previously been chairman of the Environment Agency.

But I should not have been. It is the style of the green lobbying organisations to claim that anyone opposed to them must be motivated by purely financial interests. Of course they are right as far as the oil and gas companies themselves are concerned; they are in business to make profits.

But this tactic becomes base when directed even at those who disagree on scientific or moral grounds — along the lines that this can only be because they are "in the pay" of someone.

If I were to use the same tactic, I could point out that FoE is an entity that relies on fundraising to pay its many salaries and that the terrifying leaflet warning of the risks of cancer and plummeting house prices was accompanied by donation forms.

I COULD SAY THE GROUP RELIES ON FUNDRAISING. THE MORE SUCCESSFULLY IT SCAREMONGERS, THE MORE MONEY IT CAN MAKE

"Your money could help us use the media to expose the truth about the dangers of fracking." So the more successfully it scaremongers, the more money it can make.

I raised this point with the Charity Commission — since the Friends of the Earth Trust is a registered charity and FoE had used this charitable wing in its anti-fracking campaign.

And this is what the commission, after a day's cogitation, emailed me by reply: "Friends of the Earth is an environmental charity. It is therefore within its charitable purposes to campaign on environmental issues so long as it complies with charity law. The commission is clear in its guidance that the materials all charities use must be factually accurate and have a well-founded evidence base. Misleading campaigning damages not just confidence in the charity that perpetrates it but also the whole sector."

It's quite impressive that FoE has managed to provoke two regulators in the same week. I doubt, however, that it is bothered by the concern at either of those organisations.

FoE in this country is morphing into an anti-fracking organisation with a few other things tacked on the end (bees, mostly). It is seeking brand leadership on this issue: a bit of argy-bargy with regulators helps with that, if anything. And there is no sign that either the ASA or the Charity Commission will actually take condign action against it.

What interests me most is the mindset at FoE. It reminds me of the British police force in days gone by, when it was routine to "fit up villains" for crimes they hadn't committed.

The police even had a phrase for it: noble cause corruption. It meant that while the process might be dishonest, it was for the greater good of society.

FoE is corrupt in a noble cause. Which, unfortunately, means you cannot trust a word it says. Friends of the earth, but not of the truth.

Geriatricists to fight fracking very, very slowly. News Review, page 27 dominic.lawson@sunday-times.co.uk

You have two days to help save press freedom from ghosts in black shirts

The day of reckoning for the free press will soon be upon us. This Tuesday marks the end of the government's consultation period on the regulation of newspapers. We've heard a lot of lofty arguments, all absolutely justified, about why national and local papers should not be bullied into joining the state-approved regulator, Impress, under threat of punitive legal costs for all those, including The Sunday Times, that refuse its cold embrace.

You may have read about how our revelations about Fifa corruption, the cyclist Lance Armstrong's drug-taking or the criminal activities of the gangland boss David Hunt might never have come to light if section 40 of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 had already been on the statute book.

I'd like to take a different tack. How on earth could such a crackpot organisation as Impress ever have been approved as a suitable regulator for something as precious as a free press?

I make no apology for basing my distaste for Impress on its unsavoury backer, the former Formula One boss Max Mosley, whose family trust has funded it to the tune of £4m — and not because I disapprove of his penchant for S&M orgies, although frankly I do. I simply fail to see how a free society could possibly hand oversight of the press to a body whose very existence depends on the son of a fascist, Oswald Mosley. (The son of two fascists, if you count Max's mother, Diana Mitford.)

It's considered impolite to mention this because the sins of the father should never be visited on the son, etc. Up to a point, Lord Copper. If, like the young Mosley, you have openly spoken of your admiration for your father, the black-shirted leader of the British Union of Fascists in the 1930s, and share at least some of his dislike of the press, then I think it is entirely



SARAH BAXTER

appropriate to raise the matter. To recap, Max Mosley is the son of Oswald Mosley and Diana Mitford, who were married in 1936 at the home of Joseph Goebbels, the chief propagandist of the Third Reich, in the presence of Adolf Hitler. If you don't consider this relevant, fine. Let's put our press freedom in the hands of Impress. But it sends a chill up my spine. Mosley is understandably unembarrassed by his parents. From a young age he developed a tough hide, which undoubtedly helped him to brzen out the exposure of his unorthodox sex life in the News of the World. He won a legal case against the now defunct paper that wrongly described the S&M orgy as "Nazi" in theme, when it was merely the case that German was spoken. What if Mosley's motivation for curbing press freedom is based on more than fury at the tabloids? His father, as you might expect, also had strong views on the free press. Put simply, he didn't believe in it. In a prewar pamphlet, *Fascism: 100 Questions Asked and Answered*, Oswald Mosley makes that very plain. He begins by suggesting he is interested only in the "truth". Under a fascist government, he writes: "The press will not be free to tell lies." There are echoes here of the phrase the alt-right in America has revived: the *Lügenpresse*, or lying press. Newspapers don't serve the "many", Mosley suggested, but the "vested interests of the few" (he was a former Labour minister and bitterly hostile to newspaper proprietors). As such "they will stoop to any lie or any debauch of the public mind. This must be stopped and the freedom of the press ... must be curtailed." He went on to argue that the best way to achieve this was to give the state — "the Nation" — the right to sue for libel and to exact even more severe punishments for transgressions against the government than against individuals. Attacks on the crown

and the royals would also be seen as an "extremely serious offence". In short, under Oswald Mosley newspapers could never dare to hold the powerful to account because of the threat of punitive legal actions. Sound familiar? Which brings me back to his son, Max, who came across as a reasonable man on Radio 4's Today programme last week. All he wanted, he purred, was "access to justice" for the ordinary man or woman. But Impress is not a reasonable body, even at arm's length from the piper who is paying for it. Like Mosley, its leading personnel are staunch opponents of the newspapers they are so eager to regulate.

Impress's chief executive, Jonathan Heawood, has supported tweets calling for advertisers to boycott the Daily Mail and for readers to boycott The Sun. He has retweeted comments such as: "The UK media in the round is a barrier to truth, a mockery to freedom of expression, a division of security and a danger to our tolerance." Heawood is no fascist, but one can easily imagine Oswald Mosley making the very same point.

Another director of Impress has called for a boycott of The Sun and "liked" a tweet calling for the closure of the "toxic #MailScum". Quite rightly, newspapers are concerned enough about the prospect of sacrificing 300 years of independence from the state without being supervised by these self-appointed opponents of the press. Yet if we refuse, the very sinews of investigative journalism will be threatened by having to pay all the (very considerable) costs of potential libel actions against us, whether we win or lose a case.

It's a law Oswald Mosley would relish. We mustn't fall for it. There are two days left to tell the government how you feel about the implementation of section 40 and the suitability of Impress as a regulator at www.freepress.co.uk @sarahbaxterSTM

OSWALD MOSLEY, MAX'S FATHER, ALSO HAD STRONG VIEWS ON THE FREE PRESS. PUT SIMPLY, HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IN IT