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A Digest of Current Social Information

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• WE HATE NO.77:
UNBRITISH VALUES

Despite having a break in June, a number of reports caught my eye.

- Child poverty goals said to be “simply unattainable” (9th)
- Food aid soars by 54% (9th)
- Sharp rise in people at risk of getting type 2 diabetes (10th)
- A new vision to tackle poverty (17th)
- Poverty doubled in 30 years (19th)
- Baroness Jenny Jones listed on a police database of domestic extremists!
- Passport chaos
- NHS running out of cash
- Majority left behind in our uneven recovery
- Work programme failing
- Personal Independence Payments scheme “ nothing short of a fiasco” (20th)
- The Wonga case.

And I couldn't resist another 'We Hate'.

WE HATE NO.77: UNBRITISH VALUES

“At least two thirds of our miseries spring from human stupidity, human malice and those great motivators and justifiers of malice and stupidity, idealism, dogmatism and proselytizing zeal on behalf of religious or political idols.”

Aldous Huxley: 'Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow' (1956)

This 'We Hate' is written, of course, as a counterblast to the recent attempts to define British values, and the attempt to foist them upon citizens not brought up in our cultural traditions. To seek to define British values is an exercise at once selective and smug (come to think of it, some may think of smugness as a characteristic British value). It is odd to disqualify governors because they fail to adhere to 'British values', rather than on evidence of misconduct. Even odder to require tolerance of different faiths and religious and other beliefs, and then find conservative Muslim beliefs incompatible with 'British values' and not to be tolerated.

Tolerance is much vaunted as a fundamental British value. But I see it as commendable only if and when its subject is benign. We can tolerate the barmiest of notions if they do no harm. But it is execrable to tolerate evil and injustice. I think it is fair to say that the British, as a nation, were right to give Oswald Mosley and his blackshirts short shrift. And we are justifiably intolerant of practices like female genital mutilation, forced marriage and sharia law. I argue that we must be resolute in speaking out



against things that are unBritish, rather than trying to inculcate values that we traditionally cherish, but which are as yet alien to those who do not share our aesthetics.

By now you will have got my drift. Rather than trying to expect compatibility with essential British values, it is far more relevant, and certain, to identify societal tendencies that we find essentially unBritish, and would like to eradicate. The principal strand of unBritishness is extremism. When the French were guillotining aristocrats at the end of the 18th century, we British avoided a comparable bloody catastrophe, in spite of the fact that our commoners were suffering (and somewhat continue to suffer) very similar oppression.

Top of my hate list of extremism is that related to religious beliefs, so fiercely held as to generate sectarian violence. It is evident that some faiths, both historically and currently, have an unfortunate tendency to spawn characteristics such as narrowness, abuse of power, gender discrimination, severity in punishing wrongdoing and denunciation of opponents. It is very dubious to advocate blanket tolerance of all faiths and beliefs. Currently the Middle East is divided by Sunni and Shia rivalries. Not that all members of these sects are necessarily religious extremists. Fanatical leaders and groups such as Al Qaeda and Isis are no more representative of Islam than the Irish Republican Army is a faithful measure of Catholicism. Jihadist militancy is an aberration contrary to religious principles, just as Adolf Hitler confounded the essence of Christianity. Nevertheless, it is an aberration that is thoroughly unBritish. Whatever may be the veracity of the Islamic faith, we are harbouring among its adherents a nest of vipers whose radical ideas threaten peaceful co-existence.

Terrorism presents a global challenge, but there is another pervasive ideology more quietly pernicious in its effects. I regard the odium of unrestrained privilege as a stain upon our national well-being. The annual jamboree of Royal Ascot is being played out as I write. Few events so overtly parade the pomp of wealth, symbolic of a society that is reverting to a model of ostentatious inequality. We have ceased to make poverty history. Rather our politicians seem hell bent on extending the gap between rich and poor. Our recovery from recession is markedly selective. A recent Poverty and Social Exclusion survey led by the University of Bristol claims that the number of British households falling below minimum living standards has more than doubled in the past 30 years. Current economic policy is dominated by aggressive measures that hit hardest upon those already poor, so that while some sections of society continue to prosper, more and more people have to rely on charitable food aid. The current mantra is that work is the best route to prosperity; thinking that takes no account of the fact that moving from benefits into low-paid jobs, even if possible, merely substitutes one source of penury with another. Absolute equality may be an impossible, even unwanted, goal, but the present state of affairs is surely unBritish.

One last prevailing mindset that I would like to see branded as unBritish is our obsession with sport. Unquestionably, recreation has its place, but should it so dominate our airwaves, preoccupy our interest, cost a fortune and raise such unrealistic expectations? It has become the 'opium of the people', so much so that many of us spend more time discussing the talents of Wayne Rooney and the organisational skills of Roy Hodgson than progressing our lives. The FIFA World Cup is under way. Am I right in thinking that most of the teams involved, qualified from an even larger mix, have no chance of winning, and that the question of their exit from the competition is merely one of when they will experience defeat? So why the fervour of excitement, the banner waving and the intensity of patriotism? But I must stop now. It is time for Italy v Costa Rica!

Derek Kinrade