

The outrageous costs of public sector disasters

This week we read taxpayers will be slapped with a bill for £10 bn for the NHS using contaminated blood when treating patients. It has taken years to enquire into what went wrong, and to offer people compensation.

We await the full bills to compensate sub postmasters which the nationalised Post Office put into prison on made up charges of misconduct. It was covering up its own gross management mistakes with an expensive computer system. Despite wrongly taking large sums from its employees it also sent taxpayers a ballooning bill to pay its trading losses.

We are paying billions for nationalised HS 2. Vastly overpaid bosses have presided over a tripling of the costs of the scheme. The full railway will never now be built thanks to the out of this world cost overruns and timetable delays by years.

The Bank of England is the worst and dearest of them all. It has already been paid £50 bn to cover unacceptably large losses on its bond dealing, with much more to come over the next few years according to the OBR.

These disasters were organised by senior managers paid large six figure salaries and often paid bonuses to celebrate their incompetence.

So who do so many MPs think nationalisation a good idea? How much more money do they want to grab from taxpayers to pay to incompetent public sector managers who assume they can rely on taxpayers to pay for their grotesque mistakes?

NATO and Ukraine

The forces of Ukraine face a larger enemy and need plenty of help from NATO with weapons, ammunition and financial support.

So far the leading money donors, the EU and US, and the leading provider of military items, the USA have given enough to Ukraine to be able to largely halt and in some places reverse Russian advances, but not enough to give them victory. There are strict controls and rules over use, stopping Ukraine using NATO weapons outside Ukraine. A lot of the weapons given have been older ones from stocks.

I have no wish to see a NATO/Russia war. NATO has a large superiority to win a conventional war against Russia but victory could impose a high price in

losses before achieved. NATO rightly claims to be a defensive alliance so it should continue to avoid provoking war with Russia. Russia has not invaded a NATO country which is the trigger wire. War would of course follow were Russia to attack a NATO member.

NATO led by the dominant US power needs to be clearer about its plans for Ukraine. It is not good for Ukraine to be able to largely hold the line but be unable to win. Clearly if the EU and US do will a Ukrainian victory as they say they do they need to expand weapons supplies greatly to show Russia the West can win any battle of ammunition and weapons production. Putin has turned to a new Defence Minister said to be good at cranking up Russian war production. This is no time for the EU and USA to be reducing their commitments if they both want a Ukraine win. The Ukraine war has shown NATO weapons stocks were low and has led to more investment in weapons manufacture and more orders for the armourers.

At some point there will need to be negotiations and a ceasefire. It is strange how current debates and US policy are dominated by the imperative of a ceasefire in Gaza to end civilian deaths whilst preoccupied with continuing and intensifying the war in Ukraine where civilians and reluctant conscripts are also being killed.

Wokingham Council gets a substantial uplift in money this year

I keep hearing from the Lib Dem Council that Wokingham gets little money from central government. I will use a few blogs to set out again what Wokingham Council is receiving from government. These are often areas where I have put the case for more funding to government.

The biggest sum of money the Borough never mentions is the £167,979,385 of grant to run our schools. Education represents around a half of the Council's spending and all the main costs are covered by government grant. Why do they forget this? The current year money is up by more than 7% on the previous year.

In addition this year there is an additional £4,555,857 of Additional grant , £1,480,767 to cover extra pay rises this year for teachers and an extra £552,039 to cover additional pension contributions.

Wokingham will also receive a general pupil premium of £3,982,757. There is an extra £1,048,340 for sports.

There is a grant of £2,386,368 to cover the costs of free meals for infants.

There is £510,885 for the National Tutoring programme. There are payments for the Coronavirus recovery programme of £816,058. There will be additional money later this year under these last two headings.

There is also £10,823,438 of capital money for schools. to improve and expand buildings.

It would be good to hear a bit more from the Council about how this money is being spent and some recognition of these substantial national grant sums.

Wars in Europe

The UK has fought all too many wars in Europe. Often we were fighting to defend the right of another country to govern itself, or to support political and religious freedoms. We had to fight Philip II of Spain, Napoleon and Hitler for our very national survival as we fought for Europe's liberties and saw off invasion threats.

After the world war ended in 1945 there was an uneasy peace in much of Europe, with an iron curtain between an enforced Union of the USSR, and the increasing number of democracies in the West as Spain and Greece threw off dictators and military government.

Following the break up of the USSR a series of nasty wars broke out . Slovenia and Croatia detached from Serbia. Bosnia partially left Serbia after an intense civil war. Kosovo wants to leave Serbia.

This century Putin's Russia pushes to recreate part of the old USSR. There is a scramble for influence between an expansion minded EU wishing to grow by arguments, votes and treaties, and Russia prepared to use force as well as persuasion and diplomacy. The EU has pushed its borders up to Russia in Finland, Poland and the Baltic Republics.

The obvious current centre of this battle is Ukraine. The Kosovo/Serbia split, the Transnistria /Moldova split, the Georgia arguments and others are all part of this clash with a subjugating Russia. In Ukraine the EU backed the protests to remove an elected pro Russian President in 2014, only to see Russia seize Crimea. In Georgia today an anti EU majority in Parliament has passed a media control bill which the EU and its supporters condemn. Serbia, and Moldova are both candidate countries to join the EU, though Serbia is out of favour. Kosovo could become a candidate. The range of candidate countries will give the EU closer exposure and longer borders with Russia.

I will look tomorrow at NATO and UK options

My Intervention on the Agriculture Motion – homegrown food

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

I am pleased that the Minister and the Prime Minister are keen on promoting more home-grown food. As the transition occurs, what proportion of total subsidies paid will be for promoting food? It still seems to be too small.

My right hon. Friend will understand that the basic payment scheme did not motivate food production at all, as it was not linked to it. As we move to the new regime, we are promoting better productivity through grants for better equipment. We are investing in new technology. Alongside that, we are pushing to improve gene editing and gene technology, to try to make agriculture more sustainable and more productive at the same time. As we go through this transition, we are certainly keen to increase the productivity of our agricultural sector.