

# Remembrance

Today we remember the many who died in the two world wars of the last century and later conflicts. I will lay wreaths in Burghfield in the morning and Wokingham in the afternoon.

As this year is part of the centenary remembrance of the Great War, there have been plenty of historical films and books of what happened in that prolonged and devastating conflict.

There have been attempts to defend and explain the actions of those in charge of the armies which suffered such terrible losses in attack after attack. All too often the promised impact of preparatory bombardment did not work, leaving the attacking troops to be killed in their thousands as they stumbled through barbed wire onto machine gun emplacements. There was little understanding and little ability to handle the many medical conditions brought on by the water, mud and disease that spread in the trenches, and even less sympathy for the psychological conditions many soldiers developed after prolonged exposure to shells, mortars and bombs.

The recruitment of massed citizens armies made politicians and Generals more blase about the extent of the losses. Wellington in the Peninsula was careful to protect his troops and avoid battles where losses would be large because he knew he could not easily replace his professional small army. In contrast the Generals in the First War on both sides just assumed they could recruit many more replacements. The French had to face a mutiny when troops protested about their mistreatment, whilst many Russians ended up as revolutionaries appalled by the suffering they had experienced in their army.

The bad political failures included the Peace Treaty at the end. The terms of this seemed to help set up another gruesome conflict twenty years later. A war is only successful if after victory the victors secure a stable and well founded peace.

The two wars have cast a shadow over the lives of those of us who came after the carnage, as we have sought to understand the suffering of our grandparents and parents and the sacrifices of many in their generations. It cast a far worse cloud over those who lived through the violence. Twice liberty was defended and the allies were ultimately victorious, but only after herculean effort.

We should take away from the events of more than one hundred years ago the need to expect more of politics to avoid conflicts becoming so violent. Where armed conflict is unavoidable we should expect those who do lead or direct troops into battles to take more care of them, working out how to concentrate and use force more effectively than either side managed for much of the First World War. That war is infamous for the deployment of chemical weapons on a large scale, for the cruel dominance of the machine gun and shell, and for the many heroic but too often futile attempts by infantry to break through massively strong defensive positions.

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## The EU overplays its hand

It is a bit rich the EU demanding more money or else no talks on trade. There can only be one answer to that bullying – no money.

The UK needs to reverse the argument. If the EU does not start talking about a free trade agreement with the UK before the end of the year then the UK will press ahead with the WTO option as Plan A and work with business to trade without an FTA with the EU.

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## Lets have a budget that helps the UK for a change

Instead of thinking of giving away more of our money to secure talks with the EU the Treasury should be preparing to spend the money we save on our own priorities as soon as possible. That is what we voted for in the referendum. There is no need to pay to talk!

If we could be sure of an extra £12 bn from March 2019 we would be free to get on with spending increases and tax cuts to power faster growth and improve public services. Why is cutting the EU contribution one of the few cuts the Treasury will not contemplate?

The Treasury also needs to avoid doing more harm. Its Stamp duty and Buy to let taxes harmed housing. Its VED and diesel attack harmed new cars. Now there is briefing around the idea of more taxes on diesels which is an odd proposal given the importance of diesel car engines to the UK auto industry. There have been past rumours of tax attacks on the self employed, on pension savers and anyone of enterprise or prudence.

What we want instead is a budget that provides more incentives to save, to invest, to produce, to build homes. We need a budget that rediscovers the truth that lower tax rates and faster growth bring in more revenue. At a time when the Republicans are planning major tax cuts it would be a bad idea to be still putting taxes up to make us less competitive and to encourage people and companies with enterprise to move abroad.

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## **The EU now threatens the Republic of Ireland with a hard border**

A desperate EU now says it will impose a hard border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The UK should carry on with its plans for no hard border controls when we leave the EU and the customs union which it has set out in published papers. We need not impose any new barriers on the UK side of the border. Will the EU really insist on them on the Republic side? They would be wise to work with the UK to ensure good arrangements on both sides of the border.

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## **We will leave the EU on 29 March 2019**

It is good the government is moving an amendment to confirm our exit date. It is two years nine months later than many Leave voters wanted. It means we will have paid the EU an extra £30bn after we decided to leave in extra contributions which gives them a win. Around £8bn of that extra cost came about thanks to Gina Miller and the courts, delaying our exit by a costly nine months. Let's now get on with it and have no more delays.