

My intervention in New Clause 20 of Building Safety Bill debate

Sir John Redwood MP (Wokingham) (Con): Is there any right of redress to the regulatory authorities in local government, such as building inspectors and others, who were responsible for signing off on these schemes?

Christopher Pincher (Minister of State) (Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities): We certainly want to ensure through the Bill, that the building control mechanism and the industry are improved. I think that a suite of measures, including the introduction of better building control measures, the retrospection of the Defective Premises Act and further work that we may choose to do, working across parties, will help ensure that a very complicated and detailed set of challenges, which have emerged recently but have been developing over many years, are properly addressed.

We need more Conservative values

Yesterday was a good day. At last we got the announcement that most of the covid 19 restrictions are being lifted. The advice to work at home is being withdrawn. The threat of covid passports recedes. Mask wearing will become a matter for individual judgement.

One of the reasons why I am a Conservative is I believe wherever possible people should be free to make their own decisions about how they spend their lives and how much risk they run. Of course I agree we need a criminal law which provides deterrence and punishment for those who wish to harm others by violence or theft, but not a criminal law that extends into payment of your tv licence or how many people you invited into your home.

The government has done well to lead work on developing a vaccine and making it available so that most people have accepted it. This allows a return to more normal social contact and provides a reason for the government to roll back its extensive regulation of our daily lives. There will be considerable debate and study in the years ahead as we look back on the response to the pandemic. The world figures do not show any easy correlation between length and duration of lockdowns and less infection, intensifying the need for more study and discussion of what responses worked best to contain and overcome the virus.

Anyone worried about the continued presence of the virus can limit their own social contacts and can wear a mask. They can rely more on on line shopping and may be able to negotiate more homeworking with their employer. They can certainly keep their vaccination up to date, which seems to lessen the risks

of catching a serious version of the disease. All this points to lifting all special restrictions, whilst the NHS continues to provide advice and guidance especially to the vulnerable. Those of us who voted for less restriction last time are pleased that numbers of serious cases and hospital admissions did not shoot up dramatically as some predicted.

The politics of gas

Continental Europe is very short of gas. It now needs to secure more of it. It has decided that gas is after all a green fuel. Natural gas is for the transition to net zero, and hydrogen gas is to follow down the pipes in due course.

The UK relies heavily on natural gas for heating homes and buildings, for powering heat processes in factories and for electricity generation. Successive UK governments this century have accelerated the decline of the North Sea and declined to find ways to extract onshore gas, preferring to make us import dependent on Norway and Qatar. It is good they have not committed us to too much continental gas. The overriding priority now must be to increase domestic gas production and to steer clear of links to a gas starved continent becoming increasingly dependent on Mr Putin.

The instability of the continental position has just got worse. Hungary has signed a new contract with Russia to import large quantities of Russian gas which will now be delivered through a pipeline that does not cross Ukraine. This replaces use of the Ukraine pipe system. Mr Putin is keen to reduce his dependence on the Ukraine pipe for export to the EU, as he wants no hostage to his policy freedom over Ukraine. He is keen to sign a deal with Germany to use Nord Stream 2, a new pipe from Russia to Germany across the Baltic, to replace the current flows through the Ukraine pipe. If he could eliminate Russian exports via Ukraine he would weaken Ukraine which has been enjoying substantial transit revenues from the gas.

The USA under Mr Trump warned Germany not to sign up to more Russian gas and not sign up to NordStream2, seeing it as a substantial strategic weakness. Mr Biden cancelled the Trump proposals for sanctions were the piped gas to go ahead, but has now had second thoughts and is unhappy about the impact NordStream 2 gas will have on the strategic balance with Russia.

Yesterday we read that the UK as part of the NATO effort was flying defensive anti tank weapons to Ukraine but deviated away from Germany territory to do so. The UK needs to strengthen our home position and not get drawn into disputes on the far side of the EU's territory. The EU has to get smarter at handling Putin's gas based diplomacy. It needs a workable plan for Ukraine. 7 years after Russia took Crimea the EU still rules out a military solution, given the consequences of such an action. It needs a workable solution for the rest of Ukraine which also avoids a war.

Asking the Culture Secretary about decriminalising non-payment of the BBC licence fee

Sir John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend decriminalise non-payment of the licence fee to take the pressure off magistrates courts? Should this not be a household bill like any other?

Nadine Dorries (The Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport): That is something we are keeping under review. In today's age, should we really continue with a licence fee paid by individuals with the potential threat of bailiffs or criminal prosecution? That is an important question and it will be part of the discussion.

The future of the BBC

A couple of tweets by the Culture Secretary does not create a new policy. It appears for the next few years the Licence Fee remains, though for a couple of years it may not increase. What she has done is invite those interested to debate the future financing of this important national institution.

The Licence fee is becoming increasingly difficult to collect as many people turn to social media and commercial entertainment and news services which they say they can legally access without paying the Licence fee. The Fee is also resented by more people who are paying for access to non BBC service but still have to pay the tax because of the way they watch other services. The BBC continues to antagonise people who legally do not need to pay with their intimidating emails and messages demanding payment.

One of the reasons BBC support is dropping is the attitudes and content of much BBC output. Although the BBC sought to be impartial over the formal period of the EU referendum. for the rest of the time before and after , it is remorselessly pro EU putting the EU case against the UK and refusing to treat the EU to critical pieces on its policies and on its ways of arriving at them in the way it does for any UK government. It campaigns relentlessly for net zero policies, weaving them into the fabric of many of its programmes, and favours the experts of world organisations however wrong they turn out to be. It plays up Scottish and Welsh identity but refuses similar treatment for England.

It also has some great back catalogue material, employs some talented and interesting people and produces some good programmes. If it wishes to re-establish itself as the accepted voices of the UK it needs to become the people's BBC. I suggest that the government should now move to decriminalise the licence fee, making it a bill like other household bills. Enforcement occupies too much time and resource in magistrates courts. The BBC should also be told to offer the same level of support and service to England that it shows to Scotland by having BBC Scotland.