

Shinfield lunch

It was good to join the Shinfield Conservatives branch for a garden lunch on Sunday at the Elm Tree in Beech Hill. The roast beef Sunday lunch was great, with members enjoying getting out and seeing each other again after lockdown. There was much discussion of how to handle the virus from here, as well as talk about the football final.

The Northern Ireland Protocol

The Protocol was cobbled together at speed to get Brexit done, on the understanding that it would need clarifying and improving and was temporary. The EU is now seeking to take the agreed proposition that the UK would work to ensure no goods that failed to conform to EU rules would find their way to the Republic from NI and turn it into the EU's wish to make NI a full and permanent member of the EU single market to the exclusion of parts of its GB/NI trade. This was not agreed, and the loose language of the Protocol allows different interpretations. Some at the time said NI would "get the best of both worlds" being both a member of the UK's internal market and of the EU's single market.

Let us take this to a practical level. It is for example about the sausage. Let us suppose the UK comes to have different rules about sausages from EU rules, though for the time being the UK is still using the EU rules it has rolled over into UK law anyway. A British standard banger should be able to move freely from GB to NI to be sold in an NI shop to an NI customer without hindrance. Similarly the UK would be happy for an EU standard sausage to be imported from the Republic and sold in an NI shop.

If a reseller of sausages started to buy sausages from the NI shop with a view to reselling them in a Republic of Ireland shop, the UK authorities would take action to stop such a movement, as that would be a violation of the EU's single market rules. Were any to get through the UK authorities would notify the EU authorities to take action at the second retailer in the Republic. One way or another the EU's single market would be safeguarded against the wandering sausage. The way the EU is wanting to act, it is seeking to stop a UK supermarket chain simply routing high quality UK food from GB to NI for sale in an NI shop. The EU always said it accepted that the UK had every right to its own internal market and understood that included NI.

The UK government has been all too tolerant of the extreme interpretations the EU is trying to impose on the situation. The UK has put various ways of proceeding by agreement to the EU, always offering complete support for their stated aim of keeping certain non EU produce out of the EU. The EU has also

said it is concerned about relations between the communities of NI, yet its actions are designed to antagonise the Unionists by seeking to break some of their legitimate links to GB. It is time for the UK to make a further move to resolve the impasse by enforcing our internal market movements.

What a difference winning makes

Well done the England men's football team for getting further than past teams in the European competition. England have never won the European Cup for national teams, and has only won the World Cup once, 55 years ago.

In contrast the English men's rugby team were world champions in 2003 and runners up in 2007. The English cricket team won the World cup in 2019. England have also been the No 1 Test team in the world.

England expects a lot of our teams. Years of disappointment about the football has led to plenty of criticism of past managers over the years, and of some of the players. It seemed at times that the players felt cursed to play for England and keen to get back to their successful clubs where they are paid a fortune and are respected by a loyal fan base. Club managers often did not welcome the absence of their players on England duty with the threat of injury and different manager and coaching routines to learn.

This England team have done better and have at times played some inspirational football. They have expanded their fan base and reduced the critical noise from the press. They need to use this to become a serious challenger at the next World Cup.

Getting to the final lifted the team and the country. The manager's choice of specialist penalty takers backfired badly and cost them a victory.

The Union of the UK

The government's decision to unbalance our constitution further by removing English votes for English laws shows a lack of understanding of the politics of the Union. They seem to accept Gordon Brown's view that the Union is only threatened in Scotland, and that it can be preserved in Scotland by giving in to SNP demands for more devolution. Any observation of the history of the Union since 1997 should tell you how wrong that was.

In my book *The Death of Britain?* in 1999 I argued that Brown's devolution would provide a platform and more causes for the SNP. There is no amount of

devolution which will satisfy them, as they wish to split from England. I also argued that the EU's wish to strengthen the devolution of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland and to wipe England off the map, balkanising it in a set of unloved regions would further undermine the UK. As I expected the English regions failed to win popular support, so Labour in office lost the only referendum on having elected regional government they dared to table. The EU nonetheless persisted in demanding regional plans and grant schemes whilst refusing England the place at the table it offered to Scotland and Wales. As we proceeded with Brexit it also became clear the EU wanted to detach Northern Ireland from Great Britain and wished to assist the Republican cause and support the Irish Republic.

The government should grasp that Brexit helps our Union. The first threat to it arises not in Scotland but in Northern Ireland, given the EU's wish to distort the Agreement with a view to disrupting GB/Northern Ireland trade and wider relations. The UK government needs to push back firmly, and assert its rights under the Agreement to ensure our internal market runs smoothly and well. By taking back control of fishing, farming, trade, internal market and the subsidy and transfer schemes the UK Union can do good, working with the many Unionists in all parts of the country.

The problem of Scotland has to be tackled by winning the arguments against the SNP and demonstrating continuing support for the clear view expressed in the recent referendum. Every time the UK government gives in to the SNP it provides an argument for floating voters to back the SNP to demand more. You cannot compromise and reach agreement with people who fundamentally disagree. The SNP treats almost every debate in the UK Parliament as an opportunity to play up its case for secession. The SNP needs to be reminded that they claim to speak for the people yet they have lost two important referendums designed to settle our constitutional issues. As they do not accept the result of either referendum they appear in Parliament as an anti democratic force permanently complaining about the very country Scotland voted to stay in in 2014.

[The government of England](#)

When I took the unfairness of UK devolution to David Cameron as Prime Minister he agreed something needed to be done. The original idea of EVEN, English votes for English needs, was watered down by William Hague and called English votes for English laws. I always assumed choosing EVEL not EVEN as the shorthand was deliberate to portray a good cause in a not so good light. Instead of England emerging with the right to initiate our own laws in devolved areas of activity, and to veto any move by the Union Parliament to override English decisions on devolved matters, we only kept the right to a veto.

I always argued that English devolution could best be done at Westminster, with a Grand Committee of all English MPs elected to the Commons debating and deciding on English laws where they were needed for devolved matters like Health and Education, and supervising the English budgets. I saw no need for a separate and expensive English Parliament to mirror the Scottish one, though some in England wrote to me requesting one.

This week-end I call on the government to preserve our right of veto, not to strike it down. Surely on this week-end of all week=ends, when English people are united and purposeful behind our football team and proud of their achievement so far, we do not deserve negative treatment. I urge the government to adopt EVEN, a very modest proposal to give to England some of the devolved power the Scottish Parliament enjoys. I would welcome your views.