

Competition and Regulators

Yesterday I attended a meeting with John Penrose MP who updated us on his Report into reforms of our competition policy and approach to regulating industries. He is rightly critical of the complexity and ineffectiveness of much contemporary regulation of business. He thinks it combines high cost with poor outcomes. One of its worst features is the high cost and difficulty it imposes which reduces competition, putting off challenger companies and reinforcing the position of industry giants that can handle the expense and time consuming detail of the regulations.

John thinks there should be a general duty on all business regulators to promote competition, and to seek to reduce the amount of detailed regulation they need to do as competition takes the strain. Competition can keep businesses honest, can fuel innovation, can offer consumers real choice, can show established companies how quality and price can be improved as competitors raise standards and improve ways of delivering.

In the case of the railways a few challenger companies have been allowed to run lower cost better services over parts of the network in popular ways. It is now very difficult for a company to gain permission to do this, with a more protectionist approach by the Regulator and defensive tactics by the incumbent regional monopoly providers. Government has controlled more and more features of railway contracts, expanding their cost and complexity and removing the scope to innovate, to flex services in popular ways and to cut costs in safe ways. As a result we have far fewer passengers paying good fares for travel, larger deficits and an explosion of subsidy paid for by taxpayers.

The government is planning new competition legislation which could make some of the necessary changes. It has said its recent legislation on public procurement will open up more public contracts to UK challenger companies. There is plenty of scope for improvement. I raised the tangled web of rules, price controls, windfall taxes, carbon taxes, subsidies and double increased corporation tax that now bestrides our energy sector. It is likely these interventions will deter new investment and stand in the way of the government's proclaimed aim of greater self sufficiency. They also get in the way of delivering more reliable and affordable power.

My Intervention on the Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response:

[International Agreement](#)

John Redwood (Wok) (Con):

I am glad the hon. Gentleman agrees that we needed better parliamentary scrutiny and more options for the handling of the pandemic but, given that that is the case, how on earth does it make sense to give away powers to an international quango, which will then instruct future Ministers to do these things, with Parliament being told that it has no right to talk about it or to vote on it?

Justin Madders:

If that was how it was going to proceed, I would agree with the right hon. Gentleman, but I do not believe that is the case. Any Government Member concerned about parliamentary sovereignty and scrutiny would not have voted for the Retained EU Law (Revocation and Reform) Bill, which has put thousands of laws into the hands of Ministers without any parliamentary accountability.

[My Intervention on the Pandemic Prevention, Preparedness and Response: International Agreement](#)

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

To colleagues who like this treaty, is the easy answer not that we will, of course, remain members of the WHO, read its advice and accept that advice where we wish? Why should we have to accept advice when the WHO may get it wrong, and we can do nothing about it because it decides, not us?

Danny Kruger (Devizes) (Con):

That is absolutely right. We have the opportunity to say no, and it is an opportunity we need to take. Once we have said yes, we are then under the obligation to introduce, potentially, terrible infringements on liberty. I will make some more progress and then let Members intervene.

[My Contribution to the NHS Junior](#)

Doctor strike Urgent Question

John Redwood (Wokingham) (Con):

What actions are senior NHS managers taking to resolve non-pay issues for which they could offer better work experiences to doctors? What use can they make of flexibilities over pay increments, promotions and gradings so that good staff can be better rewarded?

Steve Barclay, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care:

As ever, my right hon. Friend raises an extremely important point. As part of the negotiation with the AfC staff council, a number of non-pay issues were discussed. Job evaluation is one such issue. Likewise, for junior doctors, areas such as e-rostering are extremely important. I share his desire for investment in technology, and to look at the time spent by clinicians that could be spent by others in the skills mix or through better use of artificial intelligence technology and a better estates programme. That is why it is important that we continue to have that funding, as well as reaching the offer that we have with the AfC staff council.

The NHS

Yesterday I joined in the Parliamentary discussion of an Urgent Question on pay talks and strikes in the NHS. There was nothing new and nothing the two sides have regarded as particularly urgent in what was talked about. The Labour front bench was controlled in its demands, just wanting a resumption of talks but not backing the junior doctors' demands for 35% and understanding that several of the Unions favour accepting the current offers made to NHS staff by the government. A few on the Labour left intervened to demand higher taxes to pay for bigger pay rises but were out of tune with their front bench and the government.

I asked about the role and work of the senior managers in the Trusts and NHS England. The Secretary of State confirmed that the junior doctors have raised a number of issues about rosters, work practices, technology and staff support for their roles. I asked what the managers were doing to improve the rosters, work packages and support for the doctors. I pointed out again that senior managers have considerable powers to change the work of doctors, to reward good ones with promotions, salary increments and revised gradings of jobs. Should more of these flexibilities be used to improve the mood of the workforce and to achieve more with the people the NHS does employ?

I find it very strange that Ministers take all the burden of the pay negotiations with the staff. Senior managers rarely come onto the tv or radio to talk about the NHS though they claim considerable independence in running the service. When they do if asked about the strikes they always say it is a

dispute between Ministers and Unions. Surely they must have strong views on what is affordable, what is needed to recruit and retain, and what should happen going forward to make it easier for them to run a good service?

The establishment of NHS England was designed to distance Ministers from day to day management of the service and to leave most of the decisions in the hands of professional managers and with the clinicians they employ. So why when the service is being damaged by strikes and when employee relations are so strained is there this silence from highly paid senior managers? Why will they only talk about trying to offset the worst impact of the strikes and not have ideas on how to end them? Why are we still waiting for the manpower plan, which should be a basic evergreen necessity in a service that relies so heavily on what employees do for patients?