

Tribute to James Furlong

I was shocked to learn from the news today that one of the people senselessly murdered in Reading this week-end was James Furlong. I see that James was widely admired as an inspirational teacher at the Holt School. It adds even more poignancy to our grief, thinking of the good he was doing for so many pupils. They too are now directly plunged into deeper sadness by this evil act.

Reading murders

I send my condolences to the families of the three people murdered yesterday evening in a series of senseless stabbings. It is difficult to find words to console in such a dreadful circumstance.

I am glad many others evaded the planned mass slaughter and grateful to the emergency services for their interventions.

Freedom brings opportunity

The civil service seems ever keen to implement every last rule and regulation from the EU before we leave properly at the end of the year. For many years now there has been a large official legislative programme routed from Brussels by eager officials. Some of it may even have been encouraged by UK officials with doubtless some Ministerial sign off. Some officials realised a long time ago they could legislate through Brussels without any effective UK Parliamentary scrutiny, or without objections from any major political party or from most of the media. There was a conspiracy of silence about most wide ranging EU legislation, with successive oppositions unwilling to oppose it.

For officials it was a much more comfortable way of legislating. Some Ministers went along with or welcomed it. Any critical Ministers of either the process or of particular bits of legislation were usually told they had to accept as the UK was unable to stop it.

Some of the lengths they have gone to are absurd. The EU cumbersome data laws were incorporated into UK law by the general legislation continuing all such laws as good UK laws once we left. Nonetheless officials were so keen to keep exactly the same bureaucracy they got Ministers to legislate directly into UK law as well. As someone who values data privacy and sensible controls over data, it seems odd that this particular version should be so revered, with an

obvious effort to try to prevent us seeking something better .

This government was elected to get Brexit done. It was returned with a large Parliamentary majority to take back control of our laws, our borders and our money. Ministers now need to get the civil service working on how we, the UK voters and MPs, wish to use the new freedoms we will gain on 1 January 2021. We have wasted 5 years putting off enjoying the benefits thanks to undemocratic political forces.

We need to revise our tax policy to get rid of some of the VAT and other EU impositions we do not agree with. We need a new fishing policy that is kinder to both our fish and our fishermen and women. We want a new energy policy that ensures national resilience and lower prices. We want proper control of our borders, so we decide who to welcome here, and how to keep ourselves safe. We want our own trade policy, with lower and fewer tariffs on trade with the rest of the world than the EU makes us impose. We want more local and home grown and reared food, with fewer food miles. We want to cut the huge import bill from the rest of the EU, restoring some of the market share in our own market that we lost under EU rules and tariffs.

Leaving the EU is full of opportunity. It is vital the government gives no more ground. The French and others are threatening us with tariffs and the EU Commission is telling us we will suffer if we leave without a deal. It shows how worried they are that we will do better once we have our freedom back. With the huge surplus on trade they enjoy, they would be unwise to impose tariffs on us as it could jump start more domestic production in the affected areas if they do. We could impose tariffs on them, and cut tariffs for the rest of the world through a series of trade deals , offering better terms to those many countries who want to improve their trade with us and who do not threaten us.

[Letter to the Business Secretary](#)

UK energy policy has always had three aims. There is the need to ensure sufficient capacity to keep the lights on at all times. There is the need to keep prices down so energy is affordable for families and competitive for businesses. There are the environmental objectives.

Successive UK governments have achieved a lot in shifting to low or no carbon forms of generating electricity. Success in decarbonising must now shift to the parts of the world where there are still large increases underway in coal, oil and gas extraction and use. China is currently planning an additional 250 GW of coal based electricity capacity, more than 6 times the UK's total electricity output from all sources. India is planning a substantial expansion of her coal industry, and China aims to add another 900m tonnes of annual output, compared to our total use of some 10 million tonnes a year.

Policy has not been so successful in ensuring future self sufficiency in energy. Current plans assume a growing dependence on imported power from the continent, which makes no sense. The continent runs a lot of coal still in its mix, is very dependent on Russian gas, and may not have cheap power available when we need extra supplies. The policy is literally playing Russian roulette with our energy supply.

In order to balance a system which now contains a lot of interruptible renewables the government needs to create conditions for more pump storage flexibility, and for more combined cycle gas stations to provide base load when the wind is not blowing or the sun is not shining. It is an urgent requirement to examine the resilience of our system, to reduce its import dependence, and to ensure sufficient growth of power provision to take account of possible growing demand from transport and home heating.

There is also the question of cost. Some of the marginal power introduced into the system is expensive and requires substantial subsidies to maintain it. The system needs revision to bring down excessive subsidy costs, and to send the right financial incentives to those who can produce more power at low cost on any normal cost attribution and pricing system.

I would be happy to go into more detail of how the UK could rebuild self sufficiency, and offer more cheap power to consumers and businesses. The government has rightly said it wishes to encourage more industry in the UK, so it needs to ensure a plentiful reliable supply of competitively priced power to business. It does not currently do that, encouraging industry to locate in places like China where they keep power costs down by burning plenty of coal. This makes no sense for the environment or for our economy.

[A new approach to overseas aid](#)

Now the government has decided to unite our foreign policy with our overseas aid policy, there is a great opportunity to rethink what we do and what it achieves.

41% of our aid is currently routed through multinational bodies where we have little control over how well it is spent or who receives it. The Department has worked closely with the EU all the time we were a member, allowing them to spend some of our money as well. Surely now we need to unite our efforts behind policies that work and give to countries where we wish to help.

Given the big pressures on public spending brought on by the CV 19 crisis, the government should announce the new budget figure for spending this year, as 0.7% of GDP will now be a lower figure than the Treasury thought a few months ago. We should begin winding down our indirect commitments of aid, and work up a great UK programme which achieves more.

The UK has done some good work on clean water, on medical services and economic development. It should concentrate its efforts in areas where we have special expertise, whilst always being ready to be generous with disaster relief. We have the ships and manpower to make an important contribution when disaster strikes a country.

We know that many countries on our aid list have been poor for any decades, and know that past aid programmes have not succeeded in breaking the evil spell of poverty. We also know that trade is more powerful than aid at raising living standards, and know it is better to teach a person to fish than to send them fish when we remember to.

Over the days ahead I am going to sketch out some ideas on how we can achieve more for countries crying out for help with development with new approaches to the support and the investments we make. I invite your comments as I do this work. One of the ways forward could be to help finance economic development projects and business development that generates sustainable jobs whilst providing returns for investors.