

# Flowers and Dancing or Guns and Bombs

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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This Wednesday and last week, Lucy Winkett, Rector at St James' church Piccadilly, has given the Thought for Today on BBC Radio Four. One theme was the change since 2021's celebration with flowers and dancing for 30 years of independence for Ukraine. Another was pilgrimage.

When at St Pauls Cathedral, she kindly agreed also to be chaplain to the Drapers' Livery Company. Her theme of interdependence was helpful then and it matters now.

It was the need for cooperation that led Mikhail Gorbachev to engage with Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Regan. He reduced tension. His reforms of openness and restructuring, glasnost and perestroika, ended the closed Communist economic system.

In the words of The Times' Catherine Philp, it was the unclenching of its constituent republics that led to his downfall. After Ukraine voted for independence in the 1991 referendum, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left Gorbachev jobless, overtaken by Boris Yeltsin who led the Russian Federation.

"My conscience is clean" said Gorbachev: "I defended the USSR until the end, acting through political means." It was by talking that security and cooperation grew between east and west.

An important agent for greater mutual understanding came through the efforts and dedication of Oleg Gordievsky. His bravery and thrilling life are well known. Importantly, he resolved potential nuclear confrontation in 1983 when the Soviet Union misread a NATO exercise as a potential first nuclear strike. He was one of the first to suggest Gorbachev was a rising leader.

Over the summer, people have told me of approval that during the Boris Johnson leadership crisis I raised with him at prime minister's questions the threats to the Goring Gap - more than if I had spoken then on foreign affairs.

Constituents see MPs most at local events and hear us as we promote local interests in parliament, defending the character of our countryside, villages and communities. If dedicated to watching or hearing the news several times a day, they will know all kinds of ideas for tackling very real problems that matter.

Woman's Hour's Emma Barnett this week led a sensible and penetrating discussion about strikes, why some think them inevitable and perhaps effective, and why others fear their impact, especially on the vulnerable.

With obvious exceptions and while accepting overlap, our main opposing political parties may be seen as representing mainly the interests of people at work or of household responsibilities.

I looked up my letter published in a newspaper in November 1972 when teachers at our son's primary school walked out over their allowances.

One teacher said it was a democratic decision; nothing could be done about it. Parents doubted the demonstration was inevitable or necessary, sure they could have given more notice.

It caused little hardship to my household; it made life very difficult to low-income families with working parents. It gave little leadership or example to children with bad attendance records.

We have to cooperate when trying to help people left behind in any way, without stepping towards the kind of centralised economics that throttled enterprise, hindered the old nationalised industries, starved them of necessary investment, leading to seemingly endless industrial disputes, hindering the lives of ordinary families.

Ukrainians and Russians dream of returning to flowers and dancing. In the west and around the world, everyone would prefer not to face reports of guns and bombs. We have to cooperate on the biggest issues of climate change, moving to zero net carbon, while being able to respond fully to disasters like the flooding in Pakistan.