

We Will Remember Them

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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The moving lines known as the Kohima epitaph are declared at wreath laying:

'When you go home, Tell them of us and say,

For their tomorrow, We gave our today.'

The words are now associated with the Memorial of the 2nd British Division in the cemetery of Kohima in North-East India. The verse is attributed to John Maxwell Edmonds in the Great War; he may have been inspired by a tribute to Greeks who died at Thermopylae in 480 BC.

The obituary for Dick Jolley in The Times on Monday this week describes the impact of defending a mountain pass in Nagaland and of winning the 1944 battle of the district commissioners' tennis court. Three months of fighting began the recovery after losing the Malay peninsula and Singapore. Burma was retaken.

It would be wrong, I think, to compare the efforts and the need for recovery after WWII with what is now needed as we live through the consequences of Covid and of the Brexit uncertainties, while the consequences of our devaluation continues to work through the economy.

I admired the way the coalition government led by Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee planned for our post-war recovery and for better arrangements for the Germany following the horrors of Mr Hitler who took less than a decade to start the Holocaust, to take over neighbours and to attack other parts of Europe. Europe and the world are better now.

Writing before a possible EU deal, if it comes, and in advance of the Chancellor's Statement, I can give some of my views. Government know my strong support for continuing to meet our national commitment for providing 0.7% of our national income as official aid. I also want poorer countries to have the opportunity to work and to trade their way out of poverty. MPs should not have a pay increase now.

Were I to have a second chance at university, I could study how far a working democracy and the development of sustainable tourism can help to transform the lives of people below the elites. It was not chance that led to acts of terror that undermined the growing prosperity in Tunisia, in Egypt and more recently in Sri Lanka.

Democracy does us good too. This comes wider and deeper than the regular general election and the occasional referendum. I argue that our local borough and district council are best placed to decide on our development of housing and protection of the green fields between the South Downs and the sea.

Turning to a current issue, I ask affected constituents to let me know if the contractor who collects the BBC licence fee is making mistakes and then not correcting them speedily. I resolved one horror; it took far longer than could be justified. Another has come in. I have taken the systemic issue to the top of the BBC. My aim is to get to the contractors too.

Every organisation works best when a person at any level can put forward a problem so customers or clients can be spared repeated distress and difficulty. Constituents act as my eyes and ears. The good I can do is a credit to so many. Every organisation should want to do their work in a way that people can take for granted.

News of effective vaccines brighten the horizon. Families have the prospect of gathering safely. The uneven burden of caring for the most ill and for the most vulnerable may become less unfair.