

We All Do Better Working Together

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

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At the start of the week there were examples of the benefits of talking together, deciding together and acting together when we can.

On a range of issues, at the weekend there seemed only to be choices between ways of being in conflict, whether demonstrating in Parliament Square around the statue of Sir Winston Churchill or considering whether Robert Baden-Powell's image can stay facing Brownsea Island where scouts first went camping.

It was illustrated by an opinion article in the London Evening Standard: the writer declared that some schools taught about Mansa Musa the 14th century Malian king. I doubt she recalled that when he went on pilgrimage he travelled with over ten thousand slaves, long before Westerners commercialised the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The antidote to hatred is love. We honour the Black Lives Matter protester Patrick Hutchinson who was photographed carrying an injured white man to safety while other black men provided protection.

I am conscious that an additional casualty of the lockdown has been the regular gatherings that carry forward the values of Jo Cox, the Labour MP murderously attacked during the Brexit referendum when feeling rang high.

The Jo Cox Foundation is helping to create the Connection Coalition with Mind, the British Red Cross, Facebook, Age UK, Nesta, Nationbuilder and the Cares Family. They say that longer-term we are going to be living in a different kind of country as the crises subside. We can build a better future for everyone by building strong relationships and connected communities now.

One of the connections should be to help police fulfil their roles in protecting public safety, saving lives, reducing crime and investigating offences. That demands something from each of us. If we join a demonstration, we must be guided by instructions from organisers who should have engaged positively with police authorities.

The dangers of crushing are great as I know well, having witnessed multiple deaths at the funeral of Oscar Romero and at the Heysel stadium in Brussels. Who is on the front line when those at the back of a demonstration press forward? The men and women of our police should have our understanding - we should make their task easier and more effective by separating ourselves from troublemakers of all types.

If I knew that a friend had been drinking all night, I could give firm advice that a time in bed is better than taking the risk of behaving improperly in public. Years back, together we helped each other to reduce the death toll of over-the-limit drink driving. We offered alcohol free drink to drivers, to alcoholics and to teetotallers. We arranged to be passengers with drivers who were not affected significantly by drink and if we drove and drank, we tried to decide in advance whether it would be drinking or driving that evening.

During the C-19 crisis, my caring team and I have tried to assist head teachers in the provision of vouchers for children in families entitled to them. I was able to respond to campaign messages from people supporting Marcus Rashford's plea for support for the needy across the coming summer holiday: I had already put the issue to government with the confident expectation that the answer would be positive.

Marcus Rashford with the food charity FareShare has raised tens of millions of pounds: we have been told that the charity has reached three million children. If he can achieve so much before he is 23, let us hope he keeps going. Let us work together too.