

Working Together to Keep Us All Safe

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Worthing Herald Article

22nd October 2020

We can look with affection to the past, with admiration to the present and with confidence to the future. Some look with horror at our history, with contempt at present problems and without confidence towards the coming years. On balance, I see successive steps forward, albeit after frustrations and delays. It would have been better for India to be granted independence much earlier, for the sense of Irish nationality to have been recognised and for women and men to have had equal status in law, in professions and in politics.

The purposes of politics should be considered as often as discussions of the practices of politics or the personalities of politicians. Reducing disadvantage and increasing well-being brings us together. Avoiding unnecessary international conflict, not creating the conditions for intense lasting civil war, then helping people to live without fearing Beveridge's five giants: Want/poverty, Disease, Squalor/slums, Ignorance and Idleness.

Dictators are notoriously inflexible; too often their oppression exceeds the faults of governments that are vulnerable to the results of popular elections. In democratic societies, profound lack of trust and sustained unpopularity can doom a government, bringing change.

Beveridge was a Liberal, the first health minister to speak of creating the National Health Service was a Conservative in a coalition government, the Conservative policy to make education compulsory until 15, with medical services, was developed by the 1945 Labour government.

I have regrets about some of the things done and not done by my chosen party, and similarly for the other parties. I have doubts or regrets about some of my own actions, including one of my votes this week. It is no excuse to review the initiatives I may get right.

This week the Commons had a major debate on Black History Month. Jeremy Corbyn made the positive proposal for a regular review of progress, not an occasional day when I and others ask for a backbench debate. Jeremy called for a review on progress.

Pub quiz interlude: Was the Labour party the third or the fourth to have a non-white member of parliament? It is accepted, if the earlier contested election in Sudbury is discarded, the first was Liberal, soon followed by a Conservative.

I paid tribute to my friend Bill Morris, Lord Morris, the former general secretary of my Transport & General Union. From the shop floor in a car parts factory, he rose through service to his fellows to election as deputy to Ron Todd before succeeding him and then at re-election overcoming the unexpected challenge by Jack Dromey whose supporters somehow suggested that Tony Blair preferred Jack as Bill was thought too left wing. Oh, really? As a director of the Bank of England? Bill was rightly once described as "probably the most influential black person in Britain."

At the weekend I said it is time Dr John Sentamu, recently retired as Archbishop of York, returned to the House of Lords as a life peer, like his predecessor and like Richard Chartres who had been Bishop of London, still a peer.

As this edition goes to the printers, I am supporting fellow MP Andrew Griffith's Bill to penalise the bad people who use false or obscured registration car plates. Being known, being traceable, makes it easier to reduce risks on the roads.

On COVID restrictions, the positive nature of local lockdowns in high intensity areas allows some freedoms in low areas like ours where most comply with guidelines. People may wish to consider volunteering for the NHS clinical trial. <https://www.nhs.uk/sign-up-to-be-contacted-for-research>