

The Absence of Family and Friends is Tough

Sir Peter Bottomley MP

Worthing Herald Article

24th September 2020

“What a remarkable period we are going through. Five plus months of ‘lockdown’ with everyday routine, habits, entertainments, family visits, holidays and celebratory parties missed or curtailed and with no certainty as to when it will all end. We are enduring restrictions post-war generations have never experienced and it would seem finding it rather difficult to deal with. The absence of family and friends being the toughest of all and clearly shows just how much we need each other.”

Those thoughts by the chair of an amenity society are with a good guide for first-time Zoom users. Too often I find Teams, Zoom and other chat connections are the occasional result of blind blundering through what younger users find blindingly easy.

Broadcasters have helped. They reach the isolated and the lonely. I declare myself an active supporter of the British Broadcasting Corporation. If the BBC did not exist, I would argue to create it, with the licence fee. Mixed models of funding public service broadcasters make sense. I doubt the commercial channels really want direct BBC competition for advertising revenues.

Subscription funding would leave out the people and groups to whom the national broadcaster is dedicated to serve. Graham Spry, father of Canadian public broadcasting declared the choice of the state or the United States. My choice is to keep the BBC’s unique public service to all of us and for all of us.

Entertainment comes through a range of modes, including little theatres, large halls and concert rooms. My parliamentary activity in the past days has included making public representations for the Excluded, including those who freelance for major events that now are not taking place. Additionally, I contributed briefly to give support to inclusion of black history in school education. My reminder was that on abolition compensation went to the slaves’ owners, not to fund better lives for those freed from the non-human status of slavery.

This Thursday, I am supporting Jeremy Corbyn in a significant Commons debate on the plight of the Rohingya, the stateless Indo-Aryan ethnic group from Rakhine state who mostly follow Islam. They were expelled by authorities in Burma. Seven years ago the United Nations described the Rohingya as one of the most persecuted minorities. In 1982 they were denied Myanmar nationality. Simon Tisdall reports that attacks against the Muslim minority in Myanmar have gone unchecked. Regional players focus on their own interests.

The once revered Aung San Suu Kyi dismisses accusations of genocidal intent. She defends the Tatmadaw, saying there is an internal conflict between the army, Rohingya ‘militants’ and armed separatists. Eyewitness testimony includes senior officers ordering the killing of everyone, whether children or adults. The military conducted mass executions, dug mass graves, burned villages and sexually attacked women and girls.

Friends and non-friends of former Speaker John Bercow should agree and commend him for his very active interest in violations of human rights in Myanmar / Burma. I commend Jeremy Corbyn for his initiative to bring the issues to our Parliament. I work across the political spectrum and across the world to try to do good and to reduce harm.

As in my involvement in Southern Africa and Central America, I depend on reports by Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and embassy staff. Think about loneliness in our country; also reflect on the utter horrors experienced across our shared planet. Let us strive for environmental and political actions that are compatible with better lives for all.