

Opposition causes

One of the curious features of opposition to the government in Parliament is the popularity of taking up causes for people who are not UK voters. Many Opposition MPs seem to think that the UK is either guilty of many of the imperfections of the world, or could take action to remedy everything from civil wars to poverty, and from authoritarian excesses by other governments to mean and violent conduct where ever it occurs. They also often seem to think that the EU is always right and the UK should give in to whatever the EU wants or says. They rarely take up causes that will benefit the millions of UK voters who have jobs, pay the taxes and provide food, clothing and housing for their own families. They ignore or play down the great generosity the UK already shows to economic migrants, overseas causes and the relief of tyranny and poverty worldwide through state payments from taxpayers, charitable giving and an active private sector.

Popular causes with them today include pressing for more overseas aid to be spent, with no analysis of what works. They stand up for EU migrants to the UK who have not taken advantage of the substantial time limits to claim a permit to remain settled here, as if the UK had done something wrong. They stand up for economic migrants coming across the Channel illegally. They want the UK government to intervene in the Arab/Israel dispute as if we could resolve that long running schism. They side with the EU over their deliberate disruption of trade between Northern Ireland and GB. When it comes to fighting carbon dioxide they seem to think the UK is the only country that has to do more, urging us to do things the Chinese, the Germans and the other large generators of the gas would not dream of doing. The UK has shut down practically all its coal power stations whilst China is still building more and Germany intends to keep on with hers for many more years. They have a long list of items the UK should not make and supply, recommending bans on various sales to leave those markets open to overseas competitors.

Everything they want us to do in these fields cost more money. They tell us we collectively are not paying enough tax, and want to put business taxes up. That would mean higher prices for us all to pay the bills and less business and investment here to pay tax. They also want to tax the more successful people more, assuming they will all stay to pay and will all put as much investment and effort in as before. Is it any wonder a lot of UK voters seeing and hearing this decide not to encourage more of it by voting for such perverse policies?

China seeks some of Mao's past

Some time ago before lockdowns I met a group of 6th form Chinese students in

a local school who wanted to ask me about UK democracy and politics. They spoke good English and asked good questions to reveal some of the disputes and cross currents in our national debate. Towards the end of the class session I said it was now my turn to ask a few questions to learn something about China. They agreed. My first question was to ask them to say what they thought of the legacy of Chairman Mao.

None of them wanted to answer and they all looked very worried about the mentioning of the name of the founder and first government leader of their ruling party. So I rephrased the question, in case the problem was my implying they might have their own views of a contentious topic. I asked them to tell me what was the official party or leadership view or line on the Mao years. I assumed they would have been primed as they were abroad as ambassadors for their country to learn more of the western system. There was still a reluctance to say anything and a refusal to endorse possible lines I proposed.

It meant I did learn something. It meant I was reminded why I dislike authoritarian systems where people are terrified to have a view, and where even the establishment cannot always supply a clear line. This is all suddenly very relevant because President Xi has just made China's last hundred years of history a central issue which includes a crucial role for Mao in the first 55 years of communism. President Xi showed that he respects the legacy of Mao by visiting sites connected to that leader and above all by wearing a well tailored version of a Mao jacket to address his party and nation. His words were carefully crafted, pointing to the struggles of early communism where he sided by implication with Mao against the internal and external forces that opposed a communist vision of One China. He avoided directly mentioning Mao and any reference to the more contentious Great Leap Forward and Cultural revolution that Mao unleashed. He also deployed the reformists language of Deng who followed Mao, praising the achievement of creating "a moderately prosperous society in all respects" and using the phrase "socialism with Chinese characteristics". He did however go further by reminding China that its progress is based on Marxism.

The use of Mao was presumably designed to reinforce Xi status as the unchallenged supreme leader who will get more than the customary ten year period in office of his predecessors. The ceremony was designed to reinforce the message of one people, one party, one nation, with strong references to the need to fully integrate Hong Kong and Macao, to tackle Taiwan and to see off any overseas threat to the One China vision. The anniversary celebration came over as a very defensive event lacking in flair and innovation. There were of course no jokes and no licensed criticisms or interesting reflections on China past in Xi's speech. The fly pasts produced well organised formations but the placing had been sorted out well away from the audience and cameras. The pilots merely had to fly on a constant pre set course at a constant speed to stay together. There were to be no spectacular aerobatics or changing of shapes with the audience in view. The Politburo and other powerful supporters nervously sought to clap and look impressed at the right moments. The President looked relieved when the planes flew and the guns went off in good order without incident. The message of the speech was China now

has to become “a great modern socialist country in all respects”, a task for the next 100 years. There was also the usual threats over Taiwan and the need to integrate and control One China more.

My speech during the debate on Official Development Assistance and the British Council

I support the Government’s estimate and I look forward to its passage. I also back the Government’s judgment at this very difficult time, when so many economies, including our own, have been badly damaged by responses to the pandemic. But I also understand the mood of the House and I understand that a number of my hon. and right hon. Friends whom I respect have misgivings about all this. I would just like to make a few remarks in the spirit of trying to build some bridges between the Government and their critics, who have been very wide-ranging in this debate.

The first point I make is that I do not trust the figures. I think that the Government understate just how much we already do and how much we already spend. We are much more cautious about what we regard as aid expenditure than some other countries we are compared against, even though we usually spend more than they do as a percentage.

Let us take, for example, an area that colleagues have already mentioned. This country has received a very large number of economic migrants and asylum seekers in recent years. In the year to March 2020, the last for which we have official figures, 715,000 people came to live in our country, and many of them came from poor countries that have qualified for overseas aid. We do not fully account, in the way that one might, for the first-year set-up costs—the housing, the public service provision, the top-up benefits and the other assistance that people are rightfully given when they come to live with us and we wish them to live to a reasonable standard. Surely, helping people who wish to come here because they find their own countries so disadvantageous is a very important part of our overseas aid.

We are also too cautious about all the expenditure we make through the Ministry of Defence. Why were we in Afghanistan? Afghanistan is one of the main recipients of our aid, and in recent years we have been spending considerable sums of money on support through our military and the advice we offer. Those things should also be taken into account to get a realistic picture of just how much the Government are spending on necessary assistance abroad.

The second issue that has been raised in the debate is that colleagues fear a loss of influence. I would like to reassure them that surely this year, of

all years, is when we have seen a major advance in British influence. We have just taken our full seat with a vote on the World Trade Organisation, and we are busily signing off a number of trade agreements around the world that we could not have done in previous years.

The Prime Minister has just very successfully chaired the G7 and has helped to bring together the seven most powerful western democracies in terms of economic strength to reach important agreements to improve the world outlook. We have COP26 coming up, when I trust that British chairmanship will be astute and helpful in order to agree something that many Governments in the world talk a lot about, though not all of them do as much as we do to try and see things through. We are very much the second most important member of NATO in terms of contribution after the United States of America, and we are a force within NATO to make sure that it is used for the good, as a force for peace.

On the 0.7% target, I make no secret of the fact that I do not like targets like that. I did not feel at the time it went through that there was any point in trying to persuade Parliament because Parliament was very hooked on such a target. The difficulty with a target like that is, as we have seen, that national income can change quite rapidly in ways that people did not predict—if something like a pandemic strikes, in particular—and it is not always possible, when we get the recovery, to build up the spending as quickly as the GNI, and it would be silly to have to spend money when we do not have really good projects.

Nor do I like the idea of Governments passing legislation to bind themselves. It seems to me completely pointless. What matters is the word of the Government. If circumstances change, they may have to change, and all the time that the Government control a majority, the fact that it is in legislation does not make any difference. The Government still have to decide whether to keep their word or whether force majeure or force of circumstance requires some temporary or permanent change.

In this debate, I think lots of colleagues have all decided to duplicate and replicate one another's speeches by saying how much they dislike any kind of cut in our immediate aid programme. I would like to have heard, from all those who are understandably enthusiastic about the good that aid could do, rather more discussion of what works best when we have limited money—as we always will, whether the limit is 0.5% or 0.7% of our GDP—so that we can do the most good with it. We have had several years of 0.7% but we still have the same list of main countries needing aid, so we know that this is not a simple fix, that we are one of many and that we need to work with other partners around the world. We need to harness the private sector and the charitable sector; it does not all have to come from British taxpayers.

When we are looking at progress, we first need to establish a peace. Quite a lot of the countries that need a lot of aid still do not have a peace; they have a civil war going on. That means that any particular projects may just be damaged or wasted because of the lack of that fundamental condition. It is best if there is a decent Government who can deliver and who are not corrupt. To what extent are we allowed to try to influence Governments in the right

direction, because we do not wish to become a neo-colonial power?

We need to harness the private sector more so that the money that our taxpayers and other advanced countries' taxpayers put in is multiplied several times by getting that investment in the water systems, the communications systems or the food systems that are needed, which should come more from commercial work. Above all, I think our message should be that trade is often more effective as a means of promoting economic growth and prosperity than aid. We, above all, should believe that, now that we are leading advocates of freer trade around the world and back there in the WTO. Is it not much better that we help to offer contracts to people who can organise economic activity, which creates better-paid jobs and things to do, rather than just having one-off amounts of aid to ease the particular problems of not having a decent economy?

This year, above all, surely is the year when Britain can be truly proud of its achievements in this area, because, thanks to our scientists, the NHS and the Government, we are giving to the world the cheapest vaccine, the one non-profit vaccine—often a free vaccine, because our taxpayers are standing behind that offer. This surely sums up the generosity of spirit of the British people, and the success of the British economy and our world influence: that it will be a British vaccine that is so often deployed, and that it was a British vaccine at the heart of the Prime Minister's successful negotiations at the G7 to get other rich countries to get on with the task of vaccinating the world.

Open letter to Mrs Merkel

Dear Mrs Merkel

I read that your visit to the UK is to improve relations between our two countries. You will find the UK willing to be a good friend and ally. You will also discover that many UK people feel the EU has behaved badly, petulantly and against its own interests over Northern Ireland, fishing, vaccines and other matters which it has decided to turn into disputes. All the time the EU does not grasp that we have taken back control and intend to make our own laws and decisions there will be pointless friction.

The EU's attempt to control and prevent trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland is particularly provocative given the acceptance by both sides to the Protocol that the integrity of the UK internal market was as important as the integrity of the EU single market. Our substantial trade between GB and NI is no threat to trade between NI and the EU, as it is properly controlled and regulated to be internal trade only. The continuing wish to treat UK fish as if it were still a common EU resource is also an unfortunate aggression. The permanent pressure to get the UK to conform with all EU rules and regulations is a silly attempt to thwart one of the aims of

Brexit.

You will have noted that the UK has seen a sharp improvement in its balance of trade since we left, as we do not need to rely so heavily on imports as we came to do during our period in the EU. The UK will have more options both to make and grow more for ourselves and to source imports from outside the EU as we open better trade deals with non EU countries and regions. The UK has been much more the customer than the supplier in our trade with the EU, so we expect to be treated well to keep our custom. The EU's wish instead to treat us some naughty errant colony is a good way to hasten the search for substitutes for EU food and goods.

The EU is no longer able to control us through its Treaties and law codes, and we no longer answer to the European Court of Justice. Our two countries still have disagreements about the withdrawal details, where neither side can claim it is uniquely right in its own interpretation given the vagueness and contradictions in the texts. The truth is anything that requires enforcement and compliance in the EU is clearly under EU control, and anything needing it in the UK including Northern Ireland is under UK control. I trust you will understand the realities and wish to heal a bruised relationship. If Germany and the EU understand our intent to govern ourselves there is plenty of scope for trade, friendship and joint venture.

Yours sincerely

John Redwood

One hundred years of the Chinese communist party – how do you think it has done?

Tomorrow China will celebrate 100 years from the formation of the Communist party, and reflect a little on its history. I am inviting you to tell me what you think about how this party has governed over the last 72 years of uninterrupted power over the Chinese state. It has been a long time, meaning that modern China is the creature of the work and thoughts of its ruling party.

The first 30 years of the party were years of struggle, as it recruited mass support, fashioned the Red army, fought a civil war and helped the nation dismiss the Japanese invasion. The era of Mao in government or influencing government from 1949 to 1976 saw the experiment of the Great Leap forward from 1958-62 as they sought to nationalise everything and organise work in communes. This led to falls in farm output and many millions dying of famine. This was followed by the Cultural revolution, when young recruits turned

against experts and denounced those who did not support the party sufficiently. This too proved disruptive to economic progress. These two movements are now seen as mistakes by many Chinese.

The 30 years from 1978 saw the Chinese economy make rapid progress from a low base, thanks to the Deng reforms. He decided that China needed small independent farms, small businesses, more competition and some privatisation to inject life and growth. The economy sustained growth of almost 10% per annum. More recently the growth rate has slowed, though the policy is still portrayed as Deng's "socialism with Chinese characteristics". There is some ambivalence today about how much further if at all the pro market and free enterprise reforms will be allowed to go.

China today has a per capita income and GDP of \$10,000. This is one quarter the level of Japan, which decided to rebuild its gravely damaged wartime economy with more of the west's free enterprise and democratic system. The Chinese level is less than one sixth of the US, adopting an alternative government and economic strategy. Those who want the state to control more of our lives should pause to ask why so far after 72 years in office Chinese communism has delivered so much less per capita income than the advanced democracies.