

[Solidarity in modern political parties](#)

Those who use the word solidarity loosely to imply a politics based on the acceptance of mutual obligations where the rich contribute more to the common budget and the poor benefit from it can take comfort from modern democratic parties in the West.

In the UK as elsewhere all mainstream parties believe in three central tenets. They believe that the rich should pay more tax, and favour progressive tax systems. They believe that the poor should receive benefits from the state so no one need go without a roof over their head, food on their table and clothes on their back. They believe that all who can should work to provide for themselves and their families.

Although some on the left try to present the centre right and right as against any such system of social insurance, they are wrong. The debates are not about this central framework which all elected politicians of the main parties accept. The arguments are about the balance between the three tenets and how you best implement them.

What rates of taxation maximise an appropriate take from the rich? Or do you wish to tax the rich so hard you drive them out of your country or they cease to be rich?

What level of benefits should you pass to the poor? All agree there has to be a ceiling but there are disagreements about how high it can be, both on grounds of affordability and on grounds of incentive to work.

The third issue raises the same questions. Should low income earners be exempt all tax? At what rate should in work benefit be removed? What are effective as incentives, and what is fair?

Small differences on these matters are often presented as fundamental disagreements, with centre right politicians presented as uncaring as if they wished to remove all support, and centre left politicians presented as wanting to bankrupt the country through inability to see there are limits to what the working population can afford by way of support to others. There is a general drift in democracies to more state spending and more state involvement, with more elected politicians campaigning for government to do things than campaigning for more freedom.

[See Conservative Home for my article](#)

on how the EU is not a Christian institution with an Established Church.

www.conservativehome.com John Redwood on the EU, the Church of England and the Archbishop.

Solidarity

The Archbishop of Canterbury tells us solidarity is at the heart of Christianity. That's not the Word the Bible uses. The origins of solidarity in modern politics is somewhat different to that. I attended a Methodist school with a Christian education in RE classes. I was never introduced to the word solidarity in those sessions, and never saw it appear on the pages of the Bible translations we used. At the heart of Christian teaching was the idea of Christian charity, and the modern political versions of it in Christian Aid. The relevant Bible passages were about the rich and powerful helping the poor and needy as an act of charity. They gave them money, jobs, support without expecting anything in return. They did so because it was morally good to share some of their wealth and power, They should not pass by on the other side without helping those in need. The unreformed Catholic Church of the medieval period sold pardons and the promise of eternal life to the rich to sustain clerical incomes and to pass money to the needy. These practices had their supporters and produced an early limited welfare state with hospitals and some support for the poor, but also bred their critics over clerical use of the money. It led to the huge Protestant revolt and the dissolution of the monasteries in Protestant countries. In England it led to a flowering of charitable giving by the newly prosperous landowners and traders that benefitted from the dissolution, leading to many almshouses, and the Elizabethan poor relief system organised by parishes.

Solidarity is a concept from the Union movement. Most famously it became a well known political movement in Poland in the 1980s, seeking the overthrow of authoritarian communism. The idea of solidarity amongst workers is not the same as Christian charity. It is a mutual insurance and assurance scheme. Each Union member pays Union dues. These are used to promote their shared causes, and some of the money is used to help individual members in need of legal assistance or temporary income support because they have hit hard times. The Union member pledges to obey Union rules, and to withdraw his or her labour should the Union by ballot decide on industrial action. The mutual part is based on clear obligations or responsibilities on the Union member, in return for various benefits and the possibility of joint action in need.

The EU took up the idea of solidarity as an important concept in the Treaty of Lisbon and thereafter. The idea of EU solidarity is to tell member states they have to meet their responsibilities to the economic and political union, in return for possible help in their times of need. There is an implied promise of assistance should their state fall on hard times or suffer some natural disaster. That part is a mutual insurance scheme. There is also a mutual assurance scheme that one state threatened in some way would qualify for the support of all in a just cause under the Treaties. The member state has to promise to keep to the rules of the Union, to pay money into the Union coffers, to accept joint action and be willing to come to the assistance of other members in specified circumstances.

The wealthier EU countries led by Germany do not think solidarity requires them to send large sums on a charitable basis to the poorer parts of the Union. Nor does the concept extend to meeting the internationally agreed target of 0.7% for overseas aid. The offer of mutual support can also be selective, as Greece and Cyprus discovered in the Euro crisis. Solidarity leads to a modest scale of regional and social grants at EU level. It is a frequent demand on recalcitrant member states when the EU is seeking to get to a collective agreement, a reason given to make compromises.

Solidarity in the sense of helping the poor is also hedged and often queried by member states. The EU has struggled over the issue of migration and borders in trying to decide how much of an obligation it owes to the poor of the non EU world. It has ended accepting miles of border fence and efforts to deter illegal settlers. Currently the EU wishes to buy up supplies of vaccine for its own citizens, not to help distribute vaccine to the low income countries of the world as the WHO would like. I am not sure this squares with the Archbishop's view of Christian values.

[EU plays vaccine politics badly](#)

I have tweeted on this fast moving story. I am pressing the government to sort out the GB/NI trade. The EU's ill judged actions strengthen our hand, giving us space to legislate our own solution that would be fair to all sides and ensure smooth flow of trade GB/NI as before.

[The curious case of the car industry](#)

Remain MPs over the last few years have endlessly warned us that were the UK to end up with a 10% tariff on cars into the EU it would mean job losses and

trouble for a crucial industry. They ignored the possibility that had we ended up with a tariff there might have been some compensatory movement in the currency, and failed to rejoice when an Agreement was reached for zero tariffs anyway. Rules of origin mean that the industry will make and supply more components in the UK to comply, which is a force to strengthen the industry.

At the same time these Remain MPs were usually demanding much faster progress to net zero carbon, busily condemning diesel and petrol cars as one of the main causes of the climate threat they highlighted. They saw no obvious contradiction or hypocrisy in these two positions. They failed to note that the UK had been especially successful at attracting substantial investment allied to UK development of diesel engines for cars and enjoyed a strong position in diesel engine manufacture. They gave no credit to the industry for cleaning up the diesel exhaust so there was practically no particulates passing. The policy of zero tolerance of diesel cars will mean the closure of all those factories and the loss of all those jobs, far more than they said were at risk from a 10% tariff. The industry itself lobbied strenuously for tariff free trade in diesel and petrol cars, but did not lobby against the banning of exactly the same vehicles a few years later. The likelihood of a ban of course means a major fall in diesel car sales in the meantime, as people seek to avoid the possible fall in values when new ones are banned and as governments made clear their dislike of such vehicles.

It would be interesting to hear from all those who spoke up for the industry what they think will happen as we move to complete bans on diesel and petrol vehicles. Making an all electric battery car is a very different process from building an internal combustion engine vehicle. Around a third of the value lies with the battery. The UK needs to rush to catch up on battery production. Where it has a strong position in diesel technology and capacity it has no such current strength in batteries. It will need to work with our present motor manufacturers over their designs for popular electric cars, and how the parts, batteries and assemblies can be made in the UK. I wish the government and industry success.

All we can be sure about is there will be many closures and job losses in diesel and petrol car and component manufacture. There will be a commercial and country scramble to design and produce replacements to the electric standard. The government would be wise to relax its rules on hybrids, to allow that technology to act as a bridge and reassurance to vehicle buyers. I have no financial interests in diesels, but do run a diesel car because I like its range, convenience and fuel economy. I worry a lot about the costs to jobs and businesses of banning all petrol and diesel cars.