

On the technology frontiers

As the digital revolution sweeps on we will face more and more dilemmas about personal freedom versus personal empowerment.

In its early days the internet was largely unregulated, allowing a profusion of new communications, spawning an army of citizen journalists with their own take on events and permitted advice on any topic including the assistance of crime.

As the internet grew so governments understandably intervened to stop extreme abuses. The internet should not be a school for terrorists, an on line academy for bomb makers or a means of money laundering large sums from the proceeds of crime.

Some also asked that the internet be subject to the same laws of libel and slander as the regular media. Many asked for protection from false allegations and from messages of hatred. This has opened up a debate about the duties of internet providers, the extent to which censorship is needed and justified, and the role of the internet in causing harm as well as its manifold ways of doing good.

There are contributors to this site who are deeply suspicious of how the state behaves and how it might come to use new digital controls for its own ends. Would the evolution of a cashless economy mean not merely full visibility of all transactions by the state but state controls and limitations on those same transactions? At what point does a better convenience for users become an unwarranted intrusion into privacy? Should we all expect in the emerging world that all our actions, words, purchases are fully available for public scrutiny, or do there remain legitimate reasons for people to be able to keep to themselves what they lawfully do?

Authoritarian societies can deploy digital communications, cashless money, transaction reporting to control their people. They could decline to sell a train ticket to a protest location. They could decline credit to people who join the political opposition. They could intercept on line conversations between friends wishing to share annoyance at government activities.

The challenge for the free West to keep its freedoms is to get the right balance between tackling serious crime conducted in whole or part through digital activities, whilst allowing the usual privacies of people's spending habits, criticisms of government and the rest that constitute a free society.

There is the additional challenge that as the giant corporations of the current digital era emerge with all their power, the western system should allow strong competition and challenge to them. There is a danger in codifying how they behave and laying down in law too much of how their business has to be conducted. These can become barriers to innovation by smaller companies, and can impose expensive barriers to entry to the business.

As we leave the EU the UK should revisit its laws and regulations governing the digital world to strike a good balance between keeping us safe and allowing plenty of competition.

Free enterprise brings us choice and progress

Many of the things we enjoy have come from competition and choice, from free enterprise. Post war living standards rose as tvs, fridges, washing machines and cars became affordable for the many instead of being the luxuries of the few. This century has seen digital technology transform lives. It has placed a mobile phone in most pockets and handbags, equipped the many with an easy to work camera and allowed a whole new world of communication and entertainment to be available instantly any time, any day.

These breakthroughs came from entrepreneurs and private sector companies. Often the challengers had to combat unhelpful regulations and protective old model established companies. In recent years digital business models have dramatically changed advertising, the media, agency businesses and retail, and are going on to change finance and other services.

The successful countries which do most to promote living standards and welfare of their people are the ones who not only understand this but do most to allow free enterprise to flourish. Lower taxes, sensible regulations, a strong rule of law which protects challengers as well as the established businesses, and a climate which encourages talent and enterprise friendly education all help. In future blogs I am going to explore how the UK can provide more opportunity for enterprise to flourish and living standards to rise.

Welcome to the exciting 20s

There is no more important task than restoring our right to self government. By the end of the first year of this decade the UK people and Parliament once again will control their laws, money and borders as they wish.

I have every confidence in the people of the UK to make wise choices and to lobby for better government. It has been the people, not their leaders, that have insisted on the UK becoming again an independent country. It will be the people that hold successive governments to account to use the powers well and

to spend the tax revenues sensibly.

Once we are fully out we will have more of our own money to spend. Money played an important part in the referendum campaign. Remain forces at home and in the EU have been particularly keen to burden us with as much continuing EU spend as possible to limit the obvious gains controlling our own money brings.

Once we are fully out we can make laws that improve our lives and scrap laws that get in the way. An early candidate for reform and repeal are all the fishing rules that have done so much to damage our fishing grounds. We will be able to raise our standards of animal welfare as we wish. We can have regulations for business which set high standards in ways that allow us good trade with the rest of the world as well as with the EU.

Once fully out we can set our own taxes. We will no longer be subject to losing corporation tax revenues owing to some legal case at the ECJ overturning Parliament's wishes. We will no longer have to impose VAT on green products and female hygiene goods. We will not have to keep our tax rates within specified bands or at required levels.

The bigger gain will be in our standing in the world. We can become a leading force for free trade through our independent membership of the World Trade Organisation. They would like a major economy to work with them to promote an agenda of freer trade worldwide at a time when the USA is using tariffs and other barriers to trade as a major instrument of wider policy. We will have our own voice and vote in many other international bodies where before we had to accept the EU line.

The UK is well placed to grow faster, to promote democratic and peace loving values worldwide, and to win new friends and influence.

Happy New Year

"Pour me another, lets toast the new year
Here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer"

Tonight's not for sorrows, no mulling old wounds
Come banish our troubles, lets sing some new tunes

Caught in the present is a moment to choose
To look forwards or backwards, to win or to lose

If you comfort yourself holding what's past
This precious moment of hope won't last

Grasping the future and its unknown way

Could bring success and many a wonderful day

The past is well trodden where we know the ending
The future is for moulding, for shaping, for bending

As last year expires, with hopes and promises broken
Change things this time , leaving resolutions unspoken

So pour me another, drink to the new year

here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer

If your life is a drama you can change the plot
If your friends are the actors you can recast the lot

If people around you are holding you back
Tell them you're changing, cast aside their rack

Lets hold on to new clichés that drive us to more
Lets venture out from behind that closed door

We can stretch for the stars and strive for the sun
We can soar with the wind making life more fun

You are only out of the game when you give up the play
So write some new words so you have a new say

Aim for something better, embrace the best
You may fall short of target but gain from the quest

So cast off the old
Live a new dream
Grab the future foretold
Mine a new seam

So pour me another, lets toast the new year
Here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer

I know tomorrow can be better than today
Let the future empower us with its new way

The future is only ours, my friend, if we want to race it
Tonight is the night to embrace it

So pour me another, lets toast the new year

Here's to a better, put fizz in our cheer

Good bye to a decade

The 20 teens were hesitant years. There was a cautious economic recovery from the slump of 2008-10, as the deficit was tamed and capacity gently rebuilt.

There was a crisis over the UK's role in the world. The ruling elites saw the UK as part of the EU project to centralise power, with the UK as a covert participant in the mighty task of European political, monetary and economic integration. A majority of the public wanted the UK to return to being an independent country, capable of self government with a confident outward looking view of herself in a global world. Happy to trade with the EU, keen to travel, to promote many exchanges in education, culture and tourism, the majority saw no need to lock us into a political union to allow these things to continue. They will continue anyway when we leave as they do for many other independent countries having dealings with the EU .

The elite's refusal to accept the decision of the people led to undue stresses and strains on most of the institutions of the UK state. The Central Bank, already brought low by its failure to stop excesses in credit prior to 2008 and by its clumsy and damaging over correction, entered the fray against the majority decision. The Courts took up cases against government and Parliament, and made decisions designed to slow down or prevent *Brexit*.

Parliament itself turned against Brexit, despite most MPs being elected in 2017 for Labour or Conservative on promises to see it through. Brexiteers were left with the irony that the very institution they wished to restore to full power did not want that power and spent its time trying to prevent the UK taking control of its own money, laws and borders.

Some large companies turned out endless propaganda against Brexit as if the decision had not been made, repeating the often phoney claims of future economic damage that they had used to try to get people to vote their way in the first place.

The EU itself refused to accept the verdict of the UK people, and worked with the Remain forces in the UK to seek delay or damaging terms for exit that might get the public to change their mind.

Despite all of this the people voted again decisively as the decade ended to get Brexit done. That included many who voted just to leave, and others who voted for the Withdrawal Agreement on offer in anticipation of a Free Trade Agreement to follow. Tomorrow I will look at how and why the next decade can be so much better.