

Address to Memorial Service for John Pinder, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2015

Richard Laming, Chairman, Federal Union

I have been asked to speak on behalf of young people, which I haven't had to do for 20 years, but I was indeed a young federalist once, and John Pinder was very important to me and shaping my way of thinking.

And not only me, of course. I look around and see a number of faces of a similar vintage to mine. There were a lot of us who held John in a lot of affection.

I first got to know John when I was an undergraduate, at meetings held at Ota Adler's house in Chester Square. I felt terribly privileged to get on the bus from Oxford and come to London to talk politics with some very wise and experienced people.

When leaving university, I was interviewed by John for a job – you like maths, he said, what do people like us who like maths also see in federalism?

I was rather taken aback, and groped for an answer. I think I said something rather clumsy about how there's an order, a structure, a principle in federalism. Things have got to be done in the right way. If you don't get the small things right now, the bigger things will go wrong later.

And that notion of things needing to be done in the right way has grown with me since then, as did my talking with John about it.

By the way, I didn't get the job. Gary Miller did, which was undoubtedly a much better appointment. We can ask him what he said about maths later.

John was always interested in and insisted on the importance of doing things properly. Angus Sladen said in his remarks he had never seen John roused to anger: I have. Insincerity infuriated him, whether regarding simple matters of organisation or the invasion of Middle Eastern countries. The Suez Canal still flowed through his living room.

When news of his passing started to go round amongst my acquaintances, I was struck by the number of people who remarked on his generosity. Not just meaning in the usual way, but in terms of his attention, of his time.

He was always interested in people and their ideas, he was always willing to give a new argument a hearing. Even bad new arguments, even my bad new arguments.

In some forms of politics, that kind of generosity probably amounts to a weakness, but John's principles were different and better than that.

He tolerated people's honest failings – I am speaking from strong personal experience here – and he was always interested in new things. He was always encouraging and he'd find a way of ensuring that you worked out for yourself when an idea was a bad one.

John and Pauline were very kind to Fleur and I when we got married, and I was very happy to take my daughter Rosa to meet them when she was very small.

John couldn't help but be principled. He would offer a cup of tea – democratic or autocratic? He would ask – and I would always choose Indian rather than Chinese.

That a democratic Europe is now within touching distance of a federal system of government is a tribute to John and his ideas, and the tenacity of a whole generation. It never stopped mattering to him, and if you knew John, it mattered to you, too.

However, the sad truth is that the ideas and values of European federalism might not themselves apply in the end here in Britain. I suppose that's a mark of the failure of my generation.

It is ridiculous that the great work of the 50s and 60s and 70s, of Britain losing an empire and finding a role, that that work could now be undone and unwound. Ridiculous but not impossible.

But the opposite is also true. Britain and the British people could play their proper role in running and improving the world, if they chose.

John once said to me, "I'm an optimist. If you're a federalist, you have to be."

Like John, I still believe that anything can be done, that nothing is impossible, if you do the right thing and you go about doing it in the right way.