

Thoughts on John Pinder

I cannot find the exact quote but I believe it was Albert Camus who said that humanity needs to believe there is order in the universe so that life can have meaning, whereas in reality our lives are ruled by chaos.

John, to me, represented above all, a man who believed that the best in people could only be revealed if the chaos could be kept within bounds within the context of a universally accepted rule of law. In so many ways, he was the embodiment of western rationalism. Calm, thoughtful, passionate about enabling culture and original thought to flourish in a pluralistic society but profoundly aware that this could only happen in a political environment that was safe and ordered.

In a society which chooses to see idealism and realism as binary opposites – a pseudo rationalism which leads inexorably towards an all-embracing cynicism that undermines any notion of progress – John was the embodiment of both. He was quietly and stolidly rational – always the mathematician – but also carrying a vision of the kind of society that would allow human beings to develop their potential to the maximum.

He believed in progress which, though it may have become a debatable and perhaps outdated concept, is nevertheless a dynamic that remains a highly relevant and a motivational force, even for those who may intellectually question it. Even when things appeared impossible John inspired the belief that progress was possible. That for humanity to survive, it was imperative that the rule of law – just and democratic law – should be the underlying governing principle for an ordered and fair society and that the maintenance of the rule of law requires highly motivated, sensitive and well run institutions.

What made John all the more remarkable was that he spent his life and considerable resources – thanks to Uncle Fred's inheritance – translating his ideas into practical action through his energetic and generous support of organisations from which most of us here have been closely involved: The Federal Trust, Federal Union, The Madison Trust, The UEF, The European Movement and Action for a Global Climate Community.

I would like to talk briefly about the latter two which played a major role in my career. I met John first at an interview I was given for the post of European Movement director in 1986. I still remember being surprised when this man with a military looking moustache and, at a first sight, a rather forbidding

appearance broke into a beaming smile that warmed the whole room. We met again a few days later and from then on, John became one of the most influential people in my life. He made me focus my rather vague ideas about internationalism onto an achievable programme of action, in this particular case, trying to build support for the Single European Market and then the Maastricht Treaty. In every way, John helped me and upheld me in the task of keeping the European Movement alive in the most adverse circumstances. When I moved on to Brussels and found myself confronting a less than transparent International European Movement, John did all he could to back me in trying to push through some reform.

These were interesting times for the Movement. The initial excitement of the negotiations for entry and the referendum had faded and had been followed by what was then defined as 'Eurosclerosis'. As always, the sceptics were trying to reopen the issue of a referendum but, with a degree of historical irony, it was left to Mrs Thatcher to sell the idea of Europe to an apathetic British public if she was to be able to make sure that the UK took advantage of the single market which was the aspect of the European project she most valued.

She certainly didn't have any warm feelings for the European Movement and she moved swiftly to remove the government grant that had enabled the organisation to continue its work following the referendum and she also leant on the London office of the European Commission to discontinue its grant. If it had not been for John and a very few other generous supporters as well as the hard work of Sir David Nicholson in helping me to get some business support for the open market campaign, we probably would not have survived. John was always here, patient, thoughtful and willing to provide practical as well as intellectual support. He was also, as I am sure many people will testify, one of nature's original sub-editors. I don't think John missed a misplaced comma in his entire life. However many times I might have read and re-read something I had written, John's sub-editing pencil marks would cover the page.

If I had to find one fault in this remarkable man it was possibly that on occasion he would allow his optimism to cloud his judgment. But it was this indomitable belief that dreams could be turned into reality that inspired us to see if we could turn John's and, of course, Chris Layton's vision of a Global Climate Community into reality. The essential idea was almost Quixotic in its breadth of vision. The aim was the creation of a coalition of democracies in both developed and emerging economies – beginning with the world's two largest

democracies - India and the EU – and working together through enhanced cooperation in order to tackle global warming. Quite a big ambition.

I have to admit that when John asked me to take on the role of director to drive this project forward, I thought it would be virtually impossible but I found, often to my surprise, that the interweaving of idealism and realism captured the imagination of some of the most prominent scientists and toughest negotiators in both continents.

That we did not succeed in realising John's vision within his lifetime was a great disappointment but I do believe that one day – if the human race survives that long – people will recognise that ideas such as those John promoted are the only real hope for lasting justice and peace.

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