

A Modest Proposal (2.0)

For preventing the poor and old people of the UK from being a burden on the Earth's natural resources and for making them beneficial to the state.

Decades ago the sensible among them thought the Referendum was a forgone conclusion: let them have their vote, we all know it will never actually happen, they told each other. And plenty of politicians felt the same way. Just look how that turned out.

Who knew in the years running up to the vote what a wedge it would drive between the two sides. 33.5 million people with so much in common were persuaded to regard each other as sworn enemies. At that point it all changed. Because we knew we could wield that power to convince them of almost anything. Almost.

I mean, just look at 'Shop a Santa'. A few naughty St Nic's plastered across the tabloids was all it took to convince law abiding, tax paying parents that this jolly old fellow was an outdated custom we no longer needed (much like Captain Pugwash, Ronald McDonald, and Jimmy Saville). Anyone with a white beard had to shave it off or else go into hiding for the duration as the public conducted their own Santa Trials over the socials. Of course the Republicans were up in arms, and who could blame them? Because if the press got behind the #BanishAndrew campaign the whole house of Windsor could have come toppling down. Better to sacrifice one seasonal saint than throw an entire clan of year-round news worthy sinners to the hacks. Besides, those hacks know which side their bread's buttered.

If I'd suggested #FidoOrFelix when I first got the idea, I would have been laughed out of every think tank in Christendom, let alone the One Grand Parent Policy. Back then, my job title was a mere

germ of an idea, planted with the assistance of copious Cognacs at an exclusive Carlton Club gathering I blagged my way into. I'm not sure what our greatest achievement was: getting the opposition to agree to the Department of Divide and Comply (full title: Manage Division and Facilitate Compliance, but let's not quibble over semantics, the two verbs are interchangeable) or getting them to vote for the Pasture Fed Alternatives clause to be written into the Agriculture Act. That was a landmark piece of legislation, because beforehand, Brits had always considered dobbin well and truly off the menu. It was something the French did; so barbaric. After all, it's part of our cultural identity, isn't it? Being a nation of 'animal lovers'. We're also a nation of meat eaters; how do you reconcile these two conflicting values? The first Pandemic restrictions had set a precedent for this phenomenon: on the one hand the fundamental idea of Democracy was being eroded and on the other the institutions of family and health care were being put at risk. When it comes to abstract belief systems verses flesh and blood bonds, we now know which side the rabble will pick. It's always easy enough, in any argument, to find some total nutter amongst your opponents who will serve as the perfect illustration that you are in the right. Enter Lord Jab-Me-Not and his Anti-Vac disciples; we didn't need to construct an actual debate at all. Anyone who didn't wish to be regarded as insane by their friends, family and work colleagues, would take any Anti-vac sympathies to their grave.

As with any radical agenda, a baby steps strategy was the way to adjust thinking – a sort of feeding conversion by increments. For the introduction of nag to the meat aisle, we just had to find a way to turn the masses against the stinking rich *and* the gypsies. Because horse ownership is quite remarkable in its polarised nature. We did dabble with Warm Bloods verses common cobs: let the poshies and plebs fight it out at the polls. But that would have ruled out an awful lot of chow; obviously the Warm Bloods would have been

spared, surely the tenderer, more appetising option. Who really wants to dine on something that's spent its life grazing in a mud patch on the end of a chain? As with all carnivorous options we need choices: stewing steak might suffice for the proles, but Food Insecurity Crisis or no, some of us will settle for nothing less than Sirloin.

In the end it came down to a simple choice: gradual rationing with all meats phased out entirely over a two-year period, or dropping any sentimental pretensions for the Noble Steed. Of course, anything with Papers would be spared in the name of Sport. Managing the climate crisis has always been a fine balancing act with protecting the economy and this was the only way we could keep the Royals on board. Any worries about a Roma Uprising were soon dispelled; the Didicoys applied in their droves for the fast-track Butchery Scheme and soon turned the whole situation to their own advantage. Previously they had to work at finding buyers for the horses they bred; now they had a guaranteed source of income. Sales were slow to begin with, but once the new butchers on the block started to undercut the high street and even supermarkets, things picked up. As with any new product, so much is in the marketing: a cow is a cow when grazing in a field, but once it enters the food chain, it's beef. No grocer worth his salt would try and sell sheep meat or pig meat. Horse meat is loaded with unappetising connotations, from the glue factory to the dog's dinner; we needed a palatable table term for the fodder and herd hit the mark. It took away the individual character of any single beast and reduced the entire species to their practical function. The 'Have You Heard About Herd?' campaign was a stroke of genius; actually convincing consumers they were missing out if they hadn't tried it. This was followed up with 'Herd's The Word', 'You Herd It Here First' and 'Follow The Herd'; the possibilities are endless.

Once this adjustment was made, it paved the way for other domesticated pets to be considered. But kitties and pooches: was it a step too far? Conjures up images of cowering creatures in rusty cages down the dark alley of a back street market someplace south of Russia. The thing was, by this point we'd drummed up a fair bit of resentment towards our favourite four legged friends, based on the unsustainability of their own dietary needs. The pet food industry emits more greenhouse gasses per year than Mozambique; we share the Earth with 471 million dogs and 373 million cats and it takes an area twice the size of this green and pleasant land to produce their dry food supplies for one year; our furry friends consume one fifth of the world's meat and fish.

The One-Pet Policy was, in principle, the fairest way to share food sources among humans and non-humans. It had the additional benefit of producing a surplus meat source (in the excess pets taken for culling). At first this was offered as an alternative to the insect-based pet foods that were by this point starting to compete with traditional varieties. And of course, this was another highly effective means of leverage because none but the very most extreme of the Insulate Insane brigade could stomach a diet of grubs for themselves (watching has-been celebs forced to eat creepy crawlies might make an entertaining feast for the eyes, but few would contemplate it as a civilised dietary selection). The main grounds of resistance to mutts and moggies was disease, of course. After the first two pandemics, there was still relatively little data on transmission through pets. Opinion was divided between those who believed eating contaminated meat would actually strengthen their immunity (since no animal that died of any natural causes was allowed to be sold as meat, it followed that these animals, if infected, had fought it off; thus their meat was imbued with Super-Anti-Bodies) while others were convinced it would kill them (citing the BSE crisis of the nineties and a certain fast food chain's boycott

of British beef after burger sales plummeted). No amount of Public Health messaging could combat these theories; yet more proof that the Department of Divide and Conquer was functioning effectively on at least half its obligations.

We were more than happy to let the electorate manage their own risk on this one. We didn't need to convert everyone. Eventually a three-tier feeding system naturally established itself: with the very poorest forced to eat Grade C 'unlabelled' (the meat that dare not speak its name); Grade B, Herd, proving a firm favourite with the hoi polloi; and only the most well off able to afford Grade A 'Bone Fide' cuts and joints, bringing a whole new meaning to the term Kosher.

From the start records were collected on infection rates among the three food groups, after all, at some point we might all need to decarnivorise. It was always a win-win situation because if the underclass were slowly being poisoned en masse, well that would go some way towards reducing the surplus population; if they thrived, well we would have a tested alternative to Herd to offer the JAM's.

As I write this, the scientists are still scrutinising the granular data; no conclusions can yet be drawn, but things look hopeful. I cannot pretend though that this entire process has been plain sailing. Recently a clash has broken out between the panivores (or 'new Neanderthals', who believe anything is fair game: if you can hunt and kill it – it's dinner) and the Plantvangelists. Pressure is mounting for the fox hunting ban to be reversed as the food hypocrisy argument gains support. But it wouldn't end there, would it? Decriminalisation is a slippery slope. The Lynx was only reintroduced five years ago; the population is growing slowly, but we're hardly over run. Yet the poachers have it firmly in the sights

of their pellet guns. Encroaching on wildlife is what got us into this mess in the first place; if anything the laws need to be tightened.

My next proposal speaks to this very issue: The One-Grandparent Policy. We've been skirting around it for too long, focusing on greener ways to sustain ourselves, when the real problem is the aging population. They were my masterplan from the beginning, but folk are so very precious about OAPs aren't they? In the nation's imagination their beatific fragility is surpassed only by their dignified resolve. The fact is they are a burden we can ill-afford to lavish limited resources on.

What's that? Life is sacred? Maybe – depending on geography. The lives of the Kiribatians were of little concern to the Western world when their island became the first casualty of rising sea levels; proving that one man's disaster is another man's bucket list. There was the minor inconvenience of bluewashing the region from maps, but it barely made the evening news, other than to demonstrate our magnanimity – we ensured the £40 million given in aid was broadcast. What wasn't reported were the strings attached to this gift: we insisted a large chunk of the money went into eco-tourism. The challenge? To create a Drowned Island Divers' Paradise along the lines of Atlantis, where scuba fanatics and travel vloggers could really get their money's worth out of the latest waterproof digital devices (we managed to negotiate a nice deal with GoPro into the bargain). All this with a view to building a Britlantis once the rising tide swallows up our beatific isle.

I seem to have allowed myself to be washed away further into the future than I had intended. Forgive me. While we may have been willing to benefit from the experiments of a benign Mexican outpost, we were less inclined to learn from Asian micro-biologists. Lab grown meat should have been the answer to all our prayers,

but the anti-commie narrative bit us on the behind there. If only we could have swallowed our pride and just said, 'Yes, they're onto something with this.' But the endless jabs really shut down this option: vaccine fatigue led to a more suspicious attitude to cloned nuggets and a dogged insistence on knowing what was passing the lips.

As for Earth 2.0, that most elusive of billionaire playgrounds; if a superhabitable planet is out there, I can assure you that even for the super-rich, this is a race they just can't win because the last runner crossed the line hours ago, the course has been dismantled and the marshals have all gone home.

No, I'm afraid if we hope to sustain ourselves there really is only one option and it is as ancient a concept as the Ouroboros and as modern as pop will eat itself. Those who missed the opportunity to die for Great Britain the first two times around can have their chance now. They can be heroes. And that's what we'll call it – this tough as old boots meat! Hero Steak. And why stop there? I am also calling for the immediate enacting of The Assisted Dying Bill. And not just for the terminally ill. If some poor wretch wants out and they need a bit of a push to get the job done – let's not deny them their dying wish. I can see the slogan now, '*their* sacrifice on *your* plate.' What could be more patriotic than that?