

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 03 February 2013 11:36
To: Alcohol Consultation
Subject: Response to consultation

I have never contributed to a government consultation before but the proposal to set a minimum price per unit for alcohol is just so anti-democratic and such a blatant act of class and generational warfare that its implications for the relationship between individuals and the state, and the degree to which it will reinforce social destabilisation so apparent, that it is incumbent upon a responsible citizen to comment lest we walk blindly into an Orwellian dystopia under the pretence of paternalistic medical intervention and headline grabbing but ineffective social engineering.

The idea that this measure would 'cure' binge drinking and its concomitant disorder is quite farcical. It comes from the knee jerk stable of thought as informed solely by party political and self serving headline grabbing popularism. When an established cultural trait within a social group is demonised, attempting to change that established pattern of behaviour by blocking the social group's access to something – through law or price – simply serves to further alienate that group and drive them to seek access to that thing in other ways. Illicit alcohol production and alcohol smuggling will mushroom (with resultant poisonings and duty falls) and the group(s) in question will reinforce their, in this case already significant, resentment of all manifestations of authority and anger at perceived social inequalities. Here the groups are, crudely, the young and the working class or under class, and to preach to them about health benefits, which for most of them are the last thing they are going to take into consideration, is to utterly fail to understand human nature. If you want to stop young adults using significant alcohol consumption as part of their lifestyle – which they have for millennia across many societies – try making drunkenness look unsexy by all means, but promulgating what they will see as yet another tax on their lifestyle imposed by those who don't share it is downright stupid. To put it in terms a sound bite politician might understand you don't fix a broken society by giving the disenfranchised and economically disadvantaged yet another reason to riot.

The argument that reducing alcohol consumption has health benefits (and concomitant financial savings to the NHS along with dreams of increased tax revenues by increasing price – which is what of course actually drives the political support of it) is not in doubt. However, this is just the most blatant example to date of the employment of such arguments to erode personal freedom and responsibility. That the powerful medical lobby should dictate political policy let alone be allowed to, even paternalistically, effectively make individuals behave in one way or another or spend their money other than as they please is to fundamentally compromise a central tenet of democracy established in the fifth century BCE, the freedom of the individual to make their own decisions. Where do we go next ? If red meat is deemed a health risk factor does the government set a minimum unit price for it ? Do we ration it ? It is long overdue that the pronouncements of members of the medical profession – sometimes conflicting, often based on as yet partial evidence – were remembered to be those of medical advisors not dictators. Enshrining medical opinion on how people should live their lives in law is to make a nonsense of democracy, remove choice from individuals and place an assumption that a certain group 'know what is best' for everyone above the rights of all others, as equal members of a society, to make a choice. The principle being broken, not withstanding a difference in the nature of the evidence they might cite for their belief, is no

different to if a religious sect were allowed to dictate what we might eat on a Friday; and I for one do not want to return to the Middle Ages.

This is a deeply misguided proposal which will be widely resented when people realise, despite government attempts to characterise it otherwise, that it will in fact significantly raise the price not just of certain targeted high alcohol products but of a much wider range of alcoholic drinks purchased in off-licences and shops. It will impact the millionaires of the cabinet not at all, it will impact the average person (and the livelihood of off-licencers), reinforcing the already widely held impression that the rich are punishing the poor. Whilst, like Gladstone, they may be 'borne down in a torrent of gin and beer' more importantly a line will have been crossed between democracy and paternal totalitarianism. No government in a democratic country has the mandate to erode the principle of free choice howsoever it is done; no sensible one would exacerbate social unrest and disunity, in contravention of their own rhetoric, in the process.

