*Café Philo*

*Tuesday 8th January 2019, 7.30 p.m.*

*The topic, chaired by Professor Gerard Kilroy, will be:*

*Who is my neighbour?*

The question that elicited one of the most famous stories in the world, the Good Samaritan, now challenges the society of the fifth richest country in the world. The UN rapporteur, Philip Alston, recently described the poverty of children in the UK as a ‘not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster’, and found one fifth of the population living in poverty, 1.5 million of whom could be described as ‘destitute’. He identified policies which had produced this avoidable rapid rise, and argued that, given the political will, ‘Austerity could easily have spared the poor’; who should stop and help?

The situation abroad is even worse. Our policy on refugees and immigrants has successfully created a hostile environment: detention camps of asylum seekers, keeping refugees on the other side of the Channel and instant deportation for some. 200 lone children are still living in a dangerous camp in Calais. Those who cross the Mediterranean and Aegean have no legitimate route, and search and rescue operations have been restricted, as if that would deter those who have already travelled thousands of miles. Between 1 January and 14 November this year alone 2,054 migrants have drowned in a sea surrounded by rich countries. The Government defends this position as a fall in numbers compared with 2017, when 3,004 drowned. While the Minister responsible, Sir Alan Duncan, admitted that there has been a shocking increase in fatalities on all routes from one in forty to one in five, a level not seen since 2015, he defended the UK’s role in Operation Sophia which attempted to tackle people-smuggling by destroying 452 boats, with the result that unstable and vulnerable rubber dinghies now account for 70% of the boats, with the resulting rise in fatalities. The operation was described by the House of Lords as having failed to disrupt smugglers, even though peers insisted that Sophia’s life-saving role should continue. While government ministers deal in statistics, rising and falling, the terrible truth is that, since 2014, 17,000 people have drowned in seas off the coast of Europe. Who should stop people drowning?

When it comes to wars, the situation is even worse. Fifteen years of interventions in Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, Syria and the Yemen have left a trail of chaos, destruction and anarchy. Into the vacuum left by war, every extreme group known to man has insinuated itself. Our role in supplying weapons to Saudi Arabia, which used them to bomb Yemen, is particularly troubling, and our consciences can hardly be assuaged by the argument that many jobs are at stake. If military intervention is a failure, do we just do nothing? How far should we be involved? Are all these problems outside our control or are we just too comfortable in our armchairs to do something about it? Does globalization just mean that we see the pictures, express regret and, like the priest and the Levite in the story, pass by on the other side?

In order to encourage a convivial atmosphere, wine will be available at a reduced price from 7.00 p.m., and the discussion, open to all, will start at 7.30 p.m. Entrance will be £2 for members of BRLSI, and £5 for non-members. ***BRLSI****:*

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