

'Once more unto the breach'



We now know what Labour intends to achieve in outline, the detail of which will emerge in due course. Whilst this might be seen as a time to take a concerted stand against the continued prejudice directed at the minority who hunt and a 'back to the wall' moment, it might instead be seen as a new phase of the war, rather than a blindly led, last-ditch scuffle.

In order to identify credible immediate and short-term actions, there must be a longer view. This must be based around a well-considered strategy that is deliverable, achievable and has 'buy in'. Currently, even that eludes us.

We also have to admit where we are. And importantly, why we are where we are. If we are going to succeed, there has to be an appraisal of our failure to get our aims achieved since the Hunting Act 2004 became law. Have we got the right model and the right people to achieve this?

The Hunting Act 2004 and Hunting with Dogs (Scotland) Act 2023 are widely regarded as being discriminatory and bad law which should be challenged and replaced. A more general review of UK Wildlife Law should be the aim.

A strategy to deliver a replacement of these Acts requires a convincing case to be made, underpinned by third party peer reviewed scientific research (why on earth has that never been commissioned?). The case for protected beliefs and characteristics of a minority group under the Equality Act 2010 must be progressed. Hunting Kind has delivered (October 2023) the submission towards a Legal Opinion that indicates undoubtedly that we have a strong case. We have also demonstrated that it is achievable in the current political climate, namely in Northern Ireland in November 2021.

We can then see how those objectives, working in parallel, affect the future of natural hunting with hounds/dogs and what shape it might take as a fundamental part of UK wildlife management?

It is time to recalibrate and focus on protecting our bloodlines. The bloodlines of our hunting hounds and dogs, the bloodlines of our quarry species and our own bloodlines as hunters.

It needs a dedicated team of competent and effective people, co-ordinating and directing specialist objectives. It will need first class marketing and media support. It will need considerable financial resource. It will need the 'buy in' of us all and the injection of positivity based around a sound strategy. Hunting Kind aims to deliver that mission.

Not that many years ago the following words formed part of a rousing speech in Hyde Park at a countryside rally. Twenty-seven years to be precise. Many of you were there. It focussed on how much hunting was a central thread of our community and cultural heritage. It was about freedom, the freedom of people to choose how they live their own lives. There was fire in the belly then.



Does that flame still burn I wonder?

"We cannot and will not stand by in silence and watch our countryside, our communities and our way of life destroyed forever by misguided urban political correctness."

Which is in fact, precisely what we have done since 2004.

It pains me to say that recent headlines outlining Steve Reed's Labour intentions starkly point out that the paper waiving 'Peace for Our Time' appeasement strategy hasn't delivered anything other than the unconvincing management of a failing outcome.

There has never been any case made for hunting based on welfare, conservation or cultural heritage. There has been no research, no evidence provided and no conviction in the delivery of our message. There have just been the dull witted and dead eyed sighs of our representatives as they trade hunting off as 'impossible' in favour of deals around other rural activities and 'Right to Roam'.

What a waste of our money. What a waste of our opportunity.

Peter Mandelson and all that cabal have just 'stuffed' us, despite the hopes of the vanity project of wannabe politicians at Hatfield House.

If you think the Scottish model and its Government licensing is the way forward, please just ask our friends across the border. It isn't.

Our countryside organisations have not represented the interests of hunting, despite the incessant pretence. Hunting now needs to represent itself from a hunting perspective, in a similar fashion to shooting. And be backed up by research similar to that of GWCT. That is tangible work that does and has made a difference.

And so for hunting to be sneered at as a 'single issue' lobby is to undersell hunting's importance and is just a bit rich frankly. I strongly disagree. If that 'single issue lobby' represents such themes as our cultural heritage, community cohesion, liberty and freedoms, then that'll do for me.

A good friend whose father took the reins and led the Cotswold and Worcestershire farmer and hunters' march through Piccadilly in 1949 to successfully protest the hunting bill wrote to me recently:

“Twenty years ago, the hunting community faced an overwhelming enemy with our backs to the wall. Tested again like never before, except in 1949 when Farmers from the Cotswolds and the Vale of Severn helped overcome a proposed ban, we just about survived the test. The spirit of hunting supporters, resolute, and dedicated burned like a bright flame, lit surely from those unseen fires which nothing can quench. Once again, a more supreme test has to be faced. This time the challenge is not to survive but to FIGHT to win the final victory for the good cause. Once again, what is demanded from us all is something more than courage and endurance; we need a revival of spirit, a new unconquerable resolve. Who will lead us to that ‘no appeasement’ spirit with the WILL to fight and a Churchillian cry of “never surrender”. Not the paper waiving “Peace for our time” current mob.”

As one of hundreds of thousands of us who constitute a rural minority with protected beliefs and characteristics, we now deserve, expect and demand fresh thinking, a new effective model and sound strategy that, if nothing else, will fight our corner with conviction, instil a revival of spirit and that unconquerable resolve.

‘Hunting Kind’, in collaboration with good allies, will aim to deliver that model and strategy and I think we can do it. We need your support.

As Winston Churchill said ‘You cannot reason with a tiger when your head is in its mouth’.

I’ll leave this with some Shakespeare:

‘...now attest
That those whom you called fathers did beget you.
Be copy now to men of grosser blood,
And teach them how to war. And you, good yeomen,
Whose limbs were made in England, show us here
The mettle of your pasture: let us swear
That you are worth your breeding, which I doubt not,

For there is none of you so mean and base,
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,
Straining upon the start. The game’s afoot...’

It is time for political pain. It is time to fight. This new phase of the war directs that it is time to put the right framework in place and deliver the right outcome. This is our cultural heritage and our legacy and we must not allow ourselves to fail.

Happy Hunting
ED SWALES

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