



CAN YOU HAVE A SURFEIT OF ANTI-WOKERY?

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Woke is no joke. I despise it, just as my lifelong socialist late father despised PC for its preciousness, pomposity and intolerance. Oliver Stocker felt that there were much more important battles for the left to fight, and I, who still consider myself just a smidgen to the left of centre (what a joke, say the woke!) must agree. I'm just relieved that Dad didn't live to witness some of the nonsense of the last six years in world politics and the rise—from seemingly nowhere—of wokery.

I don't intend to make this a profound analysis, but what should concern us all is the world's growing inequality, with vast salaries and performance bonuses for the undeserving rich at the top of the tree; global warming and other environmental degradation (it saddens me when I return 'Home' to see so few skimming swallows); obscenely high property prices which is fine for those with comfortably-off parents (I'm a beneficiary of this, I confess) but dreadful for most of the rest of us; then there's the police stopping and searching innocent non-whites in the street; and on a micro level in Britain, disgusting school lunches for state-educated kids and continued tax breaks for rich kid schools like Eton or even my own school, Haberdashers' Aske's. It all sucks. If it's considered 'left' to protest about these injustices and constructively frame policies to counteract them, then count me in! You'd have thought that the left would have a bonanza fighting the good fight here. It certainly makes their woke poses over 'slaver' statues and the decolonising the far-from-reactionary curriculum all the more frivolous, idle and, yes Dad, precious.

But at the same time, on the other side of the ideological divide, there's surely a limit to the usefulness of fighting culture wars against the woke. This may be a heresy for me to say as a founder-member of the [History Reclaimed](#) group but it can become an obsession, a preoccupation with the ultimately trivial. By clobbering second-rate people, you risk insidiously becoming second-rate yourself, ironically falling into the same trap as the woke themselves. I feel particularly uncomfortable [when I read about](#) Tory chairman Oliver Dowden giving a recent speech to the overfed bow-tie wearers of the Heritage Foundation in the US, denouncing wokery.

I don't necessarily disagree with the content, so much as the priority he accords it as a likely platform of the Tories' next election campaign. It runs the risk of being an easy and glib attempted vote-winner while Britain burns. It could well backfire, too: common-sensed people will see through the superficialities of Dowden's line of argument before too long—perhaps they already do. Oliver, you should focus on being a good "[One Nation](#)" Tory and attend instead to some of the harder and more serious injustices that I enumerate above. That will earn you my historical Brownie points alongside Disraeli, R.A. Butler and Michael Heseltine.

I'm not for a moment suggesting a suspension of HR's activities, so much as a good-humoured awareness of the fact that there are worse things in the world than a fair bit of what we fight. Moreover, there's a danger of falling into a constant trap of the hard left: being critical and negative, and not positing a constructive alternative. That's why, in the "statues war," I passionately believe in the "explain" part of "retain and explain," consistent with my lifelong commitment to reasonableness! I have offered my services to the [beleaguered Oriel College](#), Oxford and its Rhodes statue accordingly.

Merely banging on about the same theme can get rather boring; but doing something to tip the world just a bit in a positive direction—voluntary gardening in a public park, helping with the City Mission, supporting a "books in homes" charity—is surely time and money better spent than getting worked up into a right lather about a ludicrously woke-looking new Bodleian Library [job description](#).

Apples and oranges, I know, but hey, let's keep a sense of proportion in all of this, and try and do our bit to make the world a slightly less awful place.

Mark Stocker is an art historian whose recent book is [When Britain Went Decimal: The Coinage of 1971](#).

