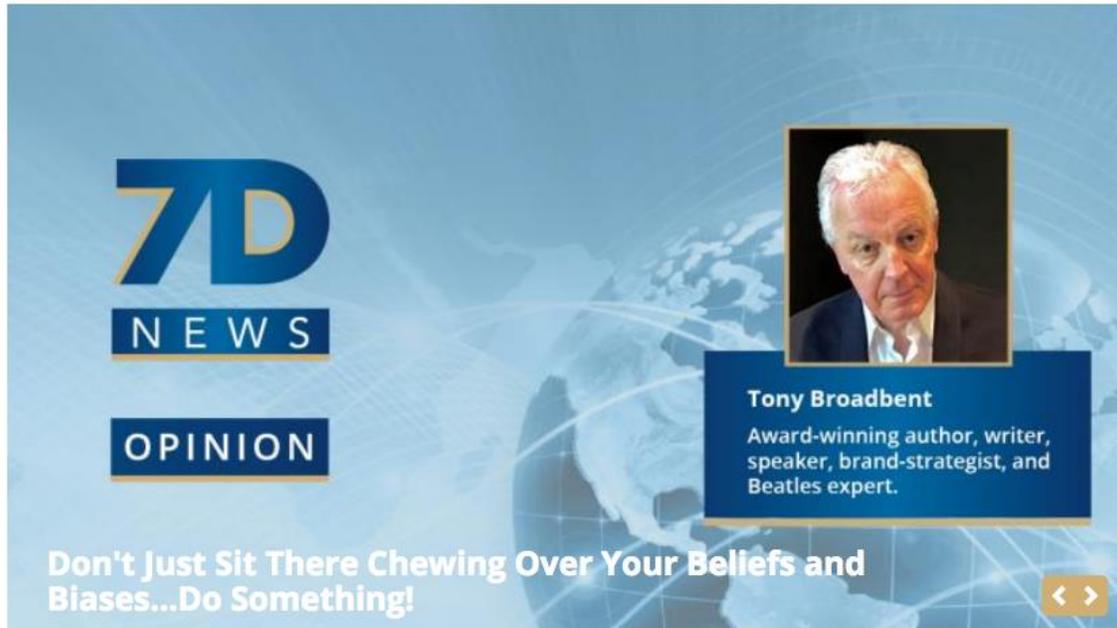


## ► Opinion



The banner features the 7D NEWS logo on the left, with '7D' in large blue letters and 'NEWS' and 'OPINION' in smaller blue boxes below it. On the right, there is a portrait of Tony Broadbent, an older man with white hair, wearing a dark suit and light shirt. Below the portrait is a blue box with white text: 'Tony Broadbent' followed by 'Award-winning author, writer, speaker, brand-strategist, and Beatles expert.' At the bottom of the banner, the headline 'Don't Just Sit There Chewing Over Your Beliefs and Biases...Do Something!' is written in white. A small navigation icon with left and right arrows is in the bottom right corner.

## Don't Just Sit There Chewing Over Your Beliefs and Biases...Do Something!

Politics | Tony Broadbent | 21 Jun 2019

Ah, the genteel savagery of the dinner party. Or as I once heard it described one very memorable, long ago evening in Hampstead: “Never in the field of human conflict has a more purposeful arena been devised for the wholesale slaughter of sacred cows.”

That all but sacrosanct space of the well-considered dinner party table; sharp knives perfectly aligned with well-honed tongues; where expected differences between guests, especially when drawn from different parts of the country or different sides of “the Pond” become more and more pronounced as the Ormolu clock on the mantle piece ticks on into an always uncertain future. And verbal fireworks are apt to erupt, as the pile of empty wine bottles grows larger with every chime of the quarter hour.

'In vino veritas?'

You bet your life and, sometimes, even, long-established friendships, too.

The wonderful thing about a well-conceived dinner party, that myriad differences are brought together and magnified or mollified with a specificity that would rival even the most insightful analysis of the top management teams in the Premier League.

Yet any dinner party, however inviting, still offers the prospect of turning into "the dinner party from hell." And if not exactly scenes from 'Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?' or 'Gosford Park' or 'The Last Supper', hopefully, nothing even remotely resembling Luis Buñuel's classic 'The Exterminating Angel' or 'The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie' in spirit or actuality.

And yet...and yet...who in their right mind can ever refuse a weekend dinner party invitation from a host famed for his or her wit and/or their celebrated culinary skills or wine cellar? Not I, for one, who can always be relied upon to have a contrarian opinion or two ready to impart.

But one should always take care; take stock of who's in town tonight. No one wants to see their sacred cows slaughtered...er...I mean...reduced to dust and ashes...in front of their eyes by some feckless stranger, however well meaning his or her intentions. A sit down dinner between civilised people should never be considered an open invitation to blood sport.

All of which is to say, that at a dinner party I was recently invited to, what could all too easily have flared up into a rancorous clash of mind-sets...or at the very least a comedy of errors where a very unquiet meal would have made for very ill digestion...turned out to be very much the opposite: an altogether congenial meeting of minds. All courtesy of a very wily host, whose brilliantly stage-managed menu of topics to be chewed over was sufficiently enlarged to include every guest's known political and social beliefs and biases; i.e. their preferred taste in "red meat."

Broaden the tent far enough and it's surprising how people even on opposite sides of the political divide can find common ground. And if people don't always end up agreeing on the same mechanism of change, it can at least get most everyone going in roughly the same direction. "Herding cats," it's called.

The main course of food for thought, later served up to the by now suitably expectant dinner table: "If bad things happen when good men and women stand aside and do nothing, is now the right time to stand for something? Is now the right time...in the words of Spike Lee...to 'Do The Right Thing'? And, if so, what is 'The Right Thing' that each of us should be doing?"

Me, for my sins as author-writer, appointed as amanuensis. Hastily, scribbling down everyone's suggestions for worthy causes to adopt. The final list edited to 'possibles' as opposed to 'improbables'. The US-UK divide accounted for: all relevant boxes check-marked and/or ticked. Not as a check on each other's ideas, but as a simple sign of group agreement.

Recycle. Check. Mostly. (US) | Tick the box. (UK)

Addendum: Forgo using single use plastic bags and straws. Ensure all recyclables are clean enough to be re-cycled and not added to a trash pile further down stream. Check. (US) | Tick the box. (UK)

Climate change. (Lengthy discussion this.) Check which side of the aisle you're on to determine who or what you believe. (US) | Tick the box. (UK)

Vote for regenerative politicians. Not degenerate populist would-be dictators. Check back again in 2020. (US) | Ditto (UK)

Institute greater gun controls. Addendum: Institute background checks. Always checked at the door to the Senate Floor citing protection of Second Amendment Rights. (US) | Tick the box. (UK)

Begin the move to plant based protein: i.e. eat less red meat. Addendum: Reduce the carbon footprint of the meat and processed food industries. Check back again in 2024. (US) | Ditto (UK)

Subjects that won general consensus: Save the US from itself. Save the UK from itself. Save the Middle East from itself. Save the World Wide Web. Save the Coral Reefs. Save the Rain Forests. Save any or all of species in danger of extinction. Save the Ozone Layer. Save The Oceans. Save The Whales...even the Prince of Wales as he has any number of good causes that could do with supporting.

“Give peace a chance.” “War is over if you want it.” (I can’t remember now if it was me who suggested these replays of John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s memorable exhortations to sanity, but if it wasn’t it should have been.)

Everyone had their “say” and their “gainsay” and we ended up with a relatively lengthy list, which we all then whittled down to something more manageable. Then each and everyone, there present, made solemn oath; consecrated in bread, salt, and wine; to fully embrace one or more of the nominated good causes...in perpetuity.

A well-planned, well-staged, truly transcendent bit of dinner theatre, all played out one recent balmy evening in San Francisco. Made truly memorable because of its generous servings of food for thought.

Made even more memorable for me when, as we were all air-kissing and saying our after dinner goodbyes, the wife of one of the other guests gently pulled me aside and uttered ‘sotto voce’: “We read your piece on Doris Day so we knew you couldn’t be all that bad.”

The lesson for us all made clear by our clever and charming host that night: “Don't just sit there chewing over your beliefs and biases...life’s far too short. So just decide to do something. Anything at all, however large or

small, that will help make the planet a better place to live for all its inhabitants.”

And all of it, not so much about each one of us being a ‘do-gooder’ much, much more about every one of us having a ‘can do’ spirit and “doing the right thing” right now, so as to help tip the balance in the right direction

Because, if not you, who? If not now, when?

And I know all this might be dismissed as yet another example of the already all too blithe spirit of the San Francisco Bay Area; once so memorably described by one of the member’s of the Grateful Dead as being: “Forty-nine square miles entirely surrounded by reality.”

And yet even if it’s only making sure yogurt pots are clean before they get thrown in the trash. Or you eschew plastic drinking straws. Every little bit, however small, will help; especially, if everyone then keeps on doing it and makes it a lifetime habit.

“Be the very change that you wish to see in the world,” as one of the great minds of the Twentieth Century once advised all those who would listen.

The undoubted message for our times; whatever your political or religious beliefs or biases; or now I come to think of it, whatever brand of sneakers you choose to wear: Just Do It!

**Disclaimer: Views expressed by writers in this section are their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of 7Dnews.**