

The below article features in The Express.

Published 09:57, Fri, Apr 2, 2021 | updated: 11:32, Fri Apr 2, 2021

By Tim Martin, founder and chair of Wetherspoon



Ridiculous Government decisions are sounding death knell for Britain's pubs

Sam Walton built the world's largest retailer, Walmart, from scratch in a few decades by following a simple principle - customers and frontline staff know best.



Pub culture part of fabric of Britain but could now be under threat (Image: Getty)

Last year, 28 years after Sam died, Walmart made more profits even than the mighty Amazon. According to Sam, Walmart directors were required to spend most of the week visiting stores, before meeting on a Saturday at the company headquarters, along with store managers and staff, to debate and distil ideas, large and small, for improving the business. Wetherspoon has taken a leaf from Sam - and mirrored Walmart's principle of prioritising visits to pubs and inviting pub staff to the most important decision-making meetings on a weekly basis.

From the beers sold, to the glasses they're served in, to the tills on the bar, everything is approved and reviewed by those who know best - frontline staff.

Most good businesses are built, consciously or not, on hundreds of small, weekly decisions, reflecting the views of customers and the shop floor, rather than on brainwaves from the CEO - although someone like Steve Jobs will, even so, dream up an idea for a new phone, once in a lifetime.

What applies to businesses also applies to nations. In the last couple of centuries democracies, in which citizens reflect their views at the ballot box, have hugely outperformed their autocratic predecessors and neighbours.

Countries like Japan, Singapore and East Germany emerged from dire circumstances in a few decades, once democracy became established.

Yet even mature democracies like the UK are vulnerable to surreptitious autocracy, whereby an elite, convinced of its own superiority, usurps political power.

This has indeed happened in the UK - emergency powers have been granted to the Government during the pandemic and the consequent absence of democratic scrutiny is leading to catastrophically poor decision-making, and vast national debt.

The pub trade, among other industries, has been devastated by patently absurd decisions, dreamt up by a small gang in Downing St, none of which stand up to a moment's proper scrutiny.

When pubs reopened last July, after the long first lockdown, social distancing and hygiene measures, including reduced customer numbers, screens between tables and hand sanitisers, were agreed with the health authorities.

Wetherspoon had over 50 million customer visits in the second half of the year, with no reported outbreaks of the virus, as defined by the health authorities. There were no examples of transmission of the virus from staff to customers or vice versa.

In spite of this good record, broadly matched across the hospitality industry, a curfew was arbitrarily instigated last September. It was universally panned as expensive, useless and counterproductive - but, unfortunately, there was no really effective political opposition.

The result was severe economic loss to pubs and inconvenience to customers, with zero compensating health gains - the worst of all worlds.

A further requirement for table service followed shortly afterwards - pushing up pub costs enormously and confusing customers.

In November a second lockdown, or "circuit breaker" was prescribed, followed by a temporary reopening in December.

The reopening was coupled with a baffling tier system, which soon ended up closing two thirds of pubs - and a "substantial meal" requirement for those seeking a pint was thrown in for good measure.

Christmas ended with a third lockdown, which is still in effect today, three months later.

These Government actions have no serious scientific credibility. Even lockdowns are highly controversial, with many scientists and health professionals openly querying their efficacy.

Sweden, for example, which didn't lockdown, has had a better outcome than the UK, which did. Florida, which didn't lock down, has at least matched California, which did. Anti-lockdown South Dakota had a similar outcome to pro-lockdown North Dakota - and so on.

The most worrying aspect of these random Government policies is the absence of scrutiny and debate - partly due to a supine opposition and partly due to emergency powers.

The upshot is that money is being frittered away by the Government on absurd policies, and debts are accumulating at an unprecedented rate for peacetime.

Indeed, Government debt has risen by around £400 billion during the pandemic, much of it wasted on counterproductive policies.

There are a number of precedents in the not-too-distant past in which UK governments have run out of money - so Boris Johnson and co had better be careful.

The market, unlike the Lord, as investor Warren Buffett has said, does not forgive those who know not what they do.

Unlike Sam Walton, the Government seems not to recognise the importance of making good decisions based on debate and ideas from the front line.

MPs like Neil O'Brien vilify and cajole honest medics and others who refuse to toe the Government line.

George Arbuthnott at The Sunday Times recently told the BBC, on the record, that the Government is employing "bloggers" who are undermining press investigations with information that is, at best, highly selective.

Something is deeply amiss in the heart of the UK state - but who will take up the cudgels?

Click [here](#) to see the article on The Express website.