It was reported in The Daily Telegraph on Saturday 24th November that Jo Swinson, the Business Minister, is planning to abolish the 1871 Pedlars Act which limits the activities of street pedlars. Her idea apparently is that this would encourage entrepreneurship, which could well be the case, but what must be undeniable is that this would also open the gates for the absolutely wrong sort of criminal entrepreneur or scam-merchant. As a former Chairman of the Abberton & Langenhoe Neighbourhood Watch I can state categorically that one of the main concerns of our good citizens was the frequent appearance of unwanted hawkers, often from Europe with a very aggressive approach, and it was a great relief for them to know that our Community Police team always reacted quickly to any report of unwanted salesmongers in the area. The Police would have an impossible task if there is a free for all for any tradesman, whether bogus or not, to be allowed to roam the country at will – who is going to be able to check that they meet the only obligation that it seems there will be on them to move on 50 metres after 10 minutes in one spot? The effect on our well regulated and popular street markets could be disastrous as a criminal element might rapidly try to take advantage of deregulation and force good honest traders out of business. There could also be a serious impact on Charities' fundraising activities if our streets become swamped with not entirely altruistic 'entrepreneurs', some of whom might even be able to get away with purporting to be collecting or selling wares for charities without having to show any authorisation to prove they are genuine. The licence fee for street traders / pedlars must be a useful measure to encourage good faith and a commitment to trade honestly within the law – as well as being a valuable source of revenue.

I gather that consultation on this stupid idea is continuing until 15th February - I wonder how much this whole ridiculous exercise is costing at a time of severe financial restraint - and I hope that wiser counsel will prevail leading to this proposal being dropped as it deserves. There are so many really important things for the Government to be getting on with that there must be more useful matters for the Department to be concerned with, especially since this whole idea seems to be motivated by a misguided belief that there is a need to comply with an unnecessary and unwanted European Directive on freedom to trade.

Valentine West

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