

1st June 2022

Discontentment

**“And sigh that one thing only has been lent
To youth and age in common – discontent.”**

Matthew Arnold, *Youth's Agitations*

I've mentioned this before, but it bears repeating in this context ... Some years ago, a friend who was a senior figure in TV production was about to retire. I asked him what his plans were. "To write with a fountain pen," he said. "And ...", after a pause, "to lie in front of the nuclear convoys in and out of the Faslane base on the Clyde as a protest against having nuclear weapons on our soil." Here was a man who was discontented, in the small matter of writing with a biro-pen, and in the much more important matter of the use of nuclear weapons. For too many years, he told me, his anti-nuclear stance had to be put to one side because of his job. But now? He could give full vent to his discontent!

Discontentment, and the protests that go along with it, is not only the province of the youth, as Matthew Arnold points out. It's an attitude that goes across society and up and down the ages. For there is much that we should be discontented about. Of course, there are some who will be discontented over what others might consider "small" things (Is writing with a biro pen a small thing?) who will rant in conversations and in the Press, over *Discontented, Tunbridge Wells*, or *Disgruntled, Pencaitland*. And there are many who will take their discontentment onto the streets, in mass rallies and marches.

Protests, expressions of discontentment, are fundamental to an open and just society. We will all have our litany of discontents, and we will rank them according to our personal priorities. But are there not issues with which we should *all* be discontented? What about the widening poverty gap in our country? What about institutional racism? What about gender discrimination? What about LGBTQ+ rights? What about ...?

We don't have to abandon our personal discontents however trivial others might consider them to be. But let's give our energies to the eradication of society's ills, with a discontent that, as Matthew Arnold suggests, we should all have in common.

A prayer for today

Let me be discontented with my mistakes, and content that I am forgiven. Amen

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