

Defeating the "food-industrial" and "medical-industrial..."

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A long time ago (in 1961, to be precise), President Dwight D Eisenhower of the USA [warned that](#):

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex.

The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes. We should take nothing for granted. Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge industrial and military machinery of defense with our peaceful methods and goals, so that security and liberty may prosper together.

Those were wise words from a person who knew more about this issue than most, as he was also the former army officer who led the liberation of Europe from the Nazis. Few in power seem to have noted what he said since then. State capture by private interests detrimental to our well-being has become considerably more commonplace in the last 63 years.

I thought of this when reading Roy Lilley's email on the NHS this morning. In it he noted:

Wherever you are on the debate about the NHS, whatever line you take, everyone will probably agree, stopping people getting sick in the first place is a good idea.

It might be more important than you think. Most of what we turn-up with, to get fixed-up, is up to us.

* WHO estimate 80% of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and 40% of cancer cases could be prevented by addressing lifestyle risk-factors.

* Obesity, often influenced by diet and physical activity, is a major risk-factor for type 2

diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

- * *Smoking is a leading cause of preventable death worldwide. About 80-90% of lung cancer cases are linked to smoking, as are the risk of heart disease and stroke.*
- * *Excessive alcohol consumption risks liver disease, cancers and injuries.*
- * *Lack of physical activity, associated with heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancers.*
- * *Poor sleep, a compounding factor in poor health.*

While it's difficult to pinpoint an exact percentage across all illnesses, [studies](#) suggest that lifestyle choices could be responsible for anywhere between 50 and 70% of all healthcare costs and a similar proportion of chronic diseases.

I am hoping he will forgive the extensive quote. [You can subscribe to his mail here](#). It is free.

There is no doubt that Roy and the studies that he refers to are right. A great deal of the time, people in the UK are sick because:

- * They eat to excess
- * They eat too many ultra-processed foods
- * They drink too much alcohol
- * They smoke
- * They don't walk enough (nothing more is needed, although it can help)

They do not do this by chance: there is a food-industrial complex (to use Eisenhower's terminology) that aims to make them sick as a result of the production of these items.

And then there is a medical-industrial complex called big pharma that is only too pleased to prescribe as many drugs as possible to deal with the effects of this.

So the question is, what can be done about this? Roy's answer is to build an awareness of 'wellness'. Mine is to regulate.

Of course, we can't regulate so that people walk.

However, we could remove all marketing material from products like alcohol and ultra-processed food, just as we did with tobacco. And we should. The savings to life and cost would be enormous.

We could also regulate food available for sale when cooked: the sugar content of many is wildly excessive, and artificial sweeteners should not be allowed as an alternative.

It is entirely possible to massively improve well-being, cut the cost of the NHS and extend lives by tackling the addiction to ultra-processed food and alcohol in our societies, which is much more problematic than any issue we might have with illicit drugs.

So why don't we do it? Let's go back to Eisenhower. Let me update his quote for this situation:

Only an alert and knowledgeable citizenry can compel the proper meshing of the huge food, alcohol and pharmaceutical machineries of addiction with our health goals, so that well-being and longevity may flourish together.

So what chance is there that Wes Streeting will do that? Very little I fear: he is in hock to the very industries that threaten our well-being. But we should never forget in that case that he is part of the problem and not part of the solution.