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By **John Jewell**
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Thursday last week was, as I'm sure the majority of parents reading this will be aware, **World Book Day**. On the face of it, this is something to be celebrated.

Dressing up as your favourite literary character and going to school! What a wonderful way for children to display the joys and benefits of reading.

The reality of the exercise is a little different. World Book Day, for many parents including myself, is characterised by the frantic scrabbling around to find anything at all suitable to wear.

As far as my wife and I are concerned, awareness of this annual event usually happens about 15 minutes before the kid's bedtime the previous night. Hence nine-year-old daughter once again bearing, at best, only a very loose resemblance to Hermione Granger from the Harry Potter series.

Then on Friday last week we had the especially laudable **International Women's Day** (IWD) - the global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. Interestingly, the day is not (as some detractors would have it) a new-fangled consequence of overly politically correct times. IWD has, in fact, been celebrated for more than a century - the first was in 1911.

Privacy

issues that affect women. And trying to achieve equality.

"But having performed this service for the last few years, I'm assuming that everyone will know when International Men's Day is by now (it's November 19 by the way), so I'm hoping to have a relatively quiet day."

Sadly for Herring he did not have a quiet time. There are still huge numbers of people out there unaware of International Men's Day and apparently affronted by the existence of International Women's Day - by 11am he had broken through his target of **£50,000 in donations** to **Refuge**.

But this day was not about Herring. It was about women, globally, highlighting inequalities faced on a daily basis.

As **the Guardian reported**, in Spain up to six million people took part in a two-hour walk out to campaign for equal pay and rights.

In Portugal, flags were lowered on government buildings in honour of those killed by domestic violence whilst in India there were marches against sexual and domestic violence and pay discrimination.

In the UK, prominent female MPs, including Work and Pensions Secretary **Amber Rudd**, released a video in which they articulated the vile abuse they are subject to each day on social media platforms.

And at King's College in London, the **Duchess of Sussex** led a discussion panel of feminists and international figures including singer Annie Lennox and former Australian PM, (Barry-born) Julie Gillard.

Yet for some, IWD has been slightly corrupted, tainted by the eagerness of various commercial organisations to pin their particular product to a fine and noteworthy cause.

As **journalist Josie Cox** wrote: "[IWD] is in some places it's a day of protest, but it shouldn't be an excuse to try to link your own product or service to the cause in the most creative and tenuous way possible. If what you make or sell has no blindingly obvious link to women's rights or gender equality then please don't try to pretend otherwise."

This seems to be a worthwhile, if a little obvious, point to make. After all, one of the main characteristics of modern life is the commercialisation of everything.

The other point worth making when considering the potency of IWD and World Book day is that they exist in a crowded field of days and months **devoted to particular causes**.

Did you know, for example, that March is National Bed Month and that today is World Sleep Day?

Or that yesterday was World Kidney day? Or that on the 20th of this month it's the United Nations-sponsored International Happiness Day?

I could go on but these are some of the more, if I may say so, worthwhile dates. Indeed, the UN has **a 152 "special days"** and 2019 is actually the International Year of Moderation, International Year of Indigenous Languages and International Year of the Periodic Table of Chemical Elements.

But in the UK over the course of this year we can also choose to celebrate Cornish Pasty Week, National Butchers Week or, in May, International Hummus Day.

The issue is, of course, that the more events and issues there are to commemorate the more likely it is that the more substantial ones will become obscured.

But international organisations and commercial businesses have one thing in common - their dependency on publicity generated in order to be noticed in this 24/7 culture of fleeting images, rolling news and consumer choice.

This week marked the 30th anniversary of the invention of the World Wide Web. And as part of the commemorations, its creator Sir Tim Berners Lee posted **an online letter** in which he called on a "global community" to come together as "the fight for the web is one of the most important causes of our time".

He told **the BBC**: "I'm very concerned about nastiness and misinformation spreading."

It's clear that as the World Wide Web has grown it has drifted away from Berners Lee's **original vision** of a "common information space in which we communicate by sharing information". In his words the web suffers from state-sponsored hacking and attacks, criminal behaviour, and online harassment.

He may, however, noted the research findings of a review conducted by the Treasury into the dominance of the likes of Apple, Facebook, Google and Amazon which found that their dominance was curbing innovation and reducing consumer choice. Alphabet Inc. the holding company for Google and YouTube, has a market value of US\$766.4bn while Amazon's stock market value rose to US\$768bn in March last year.

It's been reported that Chancellor Philip Hammond is committed to challenging this dominance.

Let's hope so, because as Berners Lee told the BBC: "The web is for everyone, and collectively we hold the power to change it. It won't be easy."

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