

The faulty feedback in British politics – Part Two

‘Not in my name’

The faulty feedback in British Politics – Part Two

In the second of two articles on the current state of British politics, author and analyst Derrick Berthelsen questions the viability of a two-party system where the MPs we send to parliament appear increasingly out of touch with those they are supposed to represent.

The genius of the Tory party, he argues, has been its capacity to act as a pressure valve in times of crisis by responding promptly and pragmatically to any given situation and in so doing stave off the threat of political upheaval or civil unrest.

No such outlet exists today. Instead, a bi-partisan consensus has settled over Westminster on a whole range of issues, stifling debate and leaving voters with little choice but to abstain or look elsewhere. Small wonder they are so angry.

But as the author concludes, this is a development we should all be worried about.

“Because with the new elite now back in control of all mainstream political parties, once again the electorate is left with only a faux electoral choice between parties which all broadly share the same values, beliefs and core policies. Values, beliefs and policies which are increasingly moving further and faster away from those of the majority.”

The article can be read in full below with a link to the

original beneath it.

Dangerously close to midnight

Written by Derrick Berthelsen

Does it matter that the most important pressure valve in British history has been firmly closed? Is it too late for the Tory party to lead the new electoral majority?

Last week Matthew Goodwin, one of the most significant political scientists mapping the rise of the new elite and its ever increasing distance from the electoral majority, tweeted a video outlining what he believes to be the key challenges facing British Society. In that video he called for a “new politics” a “new movement”, “new ideas” and “new leaders”. He added: “*I’ve come to the view that neither the Labour nor the Conservative Party are capable, or even interested in responding to these challenges*”

This week, after the sacking of Suella Braverman as Home Secretary and the return of David Cameron as Foreign Secretary (from the Lords) Goodwin went further, stating that these moves tell the British public that “The Conservative Party’s brief experiment with populism, with moving closer to the people, with prioritising the principle of popular sovereignty over a distant, self-serving, and insular elite, is now completely over.”

That the Labour party is a lost cause is, I think, beyond dispute. Its capture by the new elite is complete, as I explain here. But does that also hold for the Tory party? Is Matthew Goodwin correct that it is too late for the Tory party to change? And if it is too late, does it matter if both major

mainstream parties in the UK are incapable of, or unwilling to, represent and lead the new electoral majority?

The importance of feedback mechanisms

I have written about society as a living organism and the need to achieve homeostasis in a world of constant change. About how societies, like living organisms, require feedback mechanisms to know what, where and how to enact change in order to maintain equilibrium. That in non-democratic systems whether they be Monarchies, Technocracies or various flavours of Authoritarianism and Totalitarianism, the feedback mechanism either doesn't exist or is fundamentally flawed. Usually because the feedback is limited to a very small segment of society and a segment which broadly and increasingly shares the same beliefs and values.

How in democracies it is politics and the political system which provides the (albeit imperfect) feedback mechanism. Which is the reason why "democracy is the worst form of Government except for all those others". But that even in democracies this feedback mechanism can fail if the elite becomes too separated and isolated from the wider public. And when that feedback mechanism either doesn't exist or is fundamentally flawed society moves further and further away from homeostasis, the pressure builds and eventually the system collapses. To quote Britannica "Disaster or death ensues."

Throughout history there have been times when change accelerates, when maintaining homeostasis becomes more difficult. Whether it be technological advances, shifting military or economic balances, natural disasters or new ideologies etc. It is why throughout human history wars and revolutions come in clusters. The system – society – must adapt quickly and if it does not, think of it like a pressure

cooker with the vents blocked. As the pressure builds and there is no way to release the pressure, the system explodes.

Current upheaval

We are currently in such a period. The post-cold war world of a single global superpower; of US economic, military and political hegemony is coming to an end. The last thirty years of economic globalisation is reversing. Throughout the West electorates are re-aligning. The old left/right economic split is being replaced by a more complicated culture/values split. Western societies are dividing between “Somewhere’s” and “Anywhere’s”. Historically the UK has done better than most during these periods of upheaval. Escaped the Revolutions and Civil Wars which plagued much of Europe. And, in my opinion, a key factor in that has been the existence of the Tory party.

Historical context

During the Age of Revolution whilst France and much of the rest of Europe burned, the UK extended its electoral franchise to the middle class (men) and escaped the worst of the civil unrest. And whilst it was the Liberal party which introduced the 1832 Reform bill it was the Tory party which eventually captured the votes of the newly enfranchised middle class when Peel repealed the Corn Laws to allow cheaper food imports and in doing so legged over the landed class which the party had come to represent.

In 1867 as Europe once again became engulfed in revolution and civil unrest throughout the Ottoman Empire and America endured its Civil War, it was the Tory party and Disraeli who widened the electoral franchise to the working class and became the first party to gain majority working class support. Indeed, from the 1870’s to the 1930’s the “one nation Tories”

commanded well over 50% of the working class vote.

As Labour became the party of the working class and replaced the liberals, the Tory party became the party of “everyone who was scared of the working class” and communist revolution. And whilst it is true that it was the Labour party and its offering of social democracy over socialist revolution that helped spare the UK from the fate of much of continental Europe, the Tory Party accepted the social democratic compromise of the welfare state and as a result continued (until the mid-1960s) to attract c40%+ of the working class vote.

Under Thatcher the Tory party not only ended the post second world war political consensus but altered the Tory party's electoral coalition yet again. Between 1974 and 1983 The Tory party gained 14 percentage points in the skilled working class vote (26% to 40%) and 11 percentage points in the semi/unskilled working class vote (22% to 33%). Whilst perceived by many as a middle class “revolution”, the Tories share of the middle class vote actually fell during this period from 56% to 55%.

As should be clear by now, the Tory party has survived so long and been so successful because it regularly changes its electoral coalition. Even if it first resisted change (as in 1832), it has always had an uncanny knack of spotting where the electoral majority was coalescing and moving to meet it (discarding any unfortunate dead weight on the way).

The Tory party hasn't just been successful and long lasting as a result. It has been the most significant political force keeping the system – society – in equilibrium. Of ensuring homeostasis. Delivering (sufficient) change to prevent the revolutions and civil disruptions which plagued other countries as they too struggled to achieve homeostasis in a changing world. Or as I like to put it, the Tory party has been the most important pressure release valve in British

politics.

Current scenario

With the vote to leave the European Union it should not come as a surprise, therefore, that the Tory party was the first to spot and react to the current electoral realignment. The 2019 General Election appeared to represent (tentative) first steps by the Tory party to try to lead this new electoral majority. Boris Johnson won an 80 seat majority on a platform of delivering Brexit and economic rebalancing with an electoral coalition vastly different to previous Tory administrations.

Constituencies that had voted Labour for 100 years, some since creation, voted Tory for the first time. Millions of multi-generational Labour voters and people who had not voted in a General Election for decades, lent Boris Johnson their vote to deliver change. Yet just four short years later the Tory party is back in the control of the new elite. The change people voted for, not delivered. Support for the Tory party in the “red wall seats” captured in 2019 decimated (polling suggests all 42 red wall seats could be lost at the next election).

As Patrick O’Flynn (@oflynnsocial) writes in the Spectator, the appointment of Sunak as PM makes the Tory party just another metropolitan progressive party. And whilst metropolitan progressives would rather vote for Starmer and Labour, 2019 Conservative voters aren’t scared enough to vote for a metropolitan progressive Tory Party.

‘A plague on all your houses’

Polling shows that these Tory losses aren’t being driven by a ground swell of joy and enthusiasm at the idea of a Labour Government. Only one in ten 2019 Tory voters have switched

their support to Labour. The winner here is not the Labour party but “none of the above”. What we are witnessing is a veritable cacophony of voices crying “a pox on all your houses”.

Why? Because with the new elite now back in control of all mainstream political parties, once again the electorate is left with only a faux electoral choice between parties which all broadly share the same values, beliefs and core policies. Values, beliefs and policies which are increasingly moving further and faster away from those of the majority.

It is this capture of all mainstream political parties by the metropolitan elite that Matthew Goodwin refers to when he states that “neither the Labour nor the Conservative Party are capable, or even interested in responding to these challenges”. It is the Tory party’s refusal/prevention by the elite to make the shift to the new electoral majority -as they have done so many times before – that convinces him that a new movement, a new politics, new leaders have to emerge.

UK in uncharted territory

But does it matter that the elite has firmly closed the most important pressure release valve in British politics? Well, it certainly leaves the UK in uncharted territory. For centuries in times of rapid change, when homeostasis was threatened, the Tory party has been there to maintain stability and balance and prevent revolution and civil unrest.

Not always leading it, sometimes dragged their kicking and screaming, but ensuring continuity and stability nevertheless.

Because Matthew Goodwin is right. The facts on the ground will not change. The electoral re-alignment will continue. If not the Tories then someone else will put this new electoral coalition together; meet the demands of the new electoral

majority. History tells us that when mainstream parties refuse to deliver the change the public demands one of two things happens. Either a “new force” emerges to claim the Crown (as Matthew Goodwin is calling for), or society falls out of equilibrium.

The trouble is history also tells us that these “new forces” are not always entirely salubrious. It is these same conditions, this same widening disconnect between the elite and the electorate that brought the world actual Nazis (not the faux ones our elite label any and all opposition). That brought the world Franco, Mussolini, the Russian Revolution and eventually Soviet communism.

Don’t’ get me wrong, new movements, new politics, do not have to be unsavoury and undemocratic. There are plenty of examples in history where existing parties have been replaced without civil unrest or revolution. The Reform Party in Canada replacing the Conservative Party for one. In the UK, the Labour party replacing the Liberals. However, the point is you simply don’t know for certain what you will get when mainstream parties refuse to change and new forces come through. And in the UK, we have never had to chart such waters without the most important pressure release valve in British Politics.

Is Matthew Goodwin right that it is too late for the Tory party to once again change its offering, to meet the demands of the new electoral majority? To re-open the valve? Well, I certainly agree that time is running out. And I certainly believe it to be impossible without a rapprochement between the non-metropolitan progressive sections of the party and (as the events of the past four years have clearly demonstrated) a purge of the metropolitan progressive members who simply refuse to accept the electorate’s demand for change.

Still awaiting change

Am I seeing any signs of that? Sadly, no. I have yet to see any signs of an end to the in-fighting between the “social democrat” and “Trussite” wings of the party (for want of better terms) who simply have no choice but to work together if they want their party to survive. Who have no choice but to work together if they don’t want their country to attempt to maintain homeostasis for the first time in modern history without its most important pressure release valve.

Who have no choice but to work together if they don’t want to leave the way clear for a new force, a new movement to grab this new electoral majority – in the full knowledge that nobody can predict what type of movement that might be. Who have no choice but to work together if they don’t want to risk society falling out of equilibrium. An event, which- as the Britannica explains – inevitably means “disaster or death” will ensue.

Is it too late? Not quite. But I fear the hands are hovering dangerously close to midnight.

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About the author: Derrick Berthelsen is an author and analyst who has worked for a number of Investment Banks and Investment Managers and currently runs his own research, business and strategic consultancy firm.

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