

The need for flexibility in thinking

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The failure of neoliberal thinking is increasingly seen all around us. That thinking is, of course, intensely simplistic. It says, without having any foundation in reality, that if only everyone profit maximised then the world would be a perfect place. That this logic - of putting yourself first always - defies the teaching of all major wisdom traditions should have been warning that it was wrong, but no, despite that fact for more than thirty years economists and those enslaved to them have taught this as the sole truth.

We are now seeing the consequences. It was this logic that ensured G4S and the Home Office got security for the Olympics wrong; signing a 'just in time' agreement to hire and train staff at the last moment when it has, inevitably, proved impossible to do.

This same logic is bankrupting US cities right now, as the Observer recounts today. Public services like fire and the police are collapsing as people refuse to pay more local taxes.

Here we see the blood service in the UK - long based on the principle of volunteering - being put up for sale because the government asked a merchant bank if they thought that would be a good idea. Unsurprisingly they did - just as a car salesman always thinks it's time to trade in for a new model.

And we see the same logic undermining public service - whether it be the police, NHS, education, pensions or the welfare state - throughout the UK as the 'right' of the individual to consume is put above the meeting of collective need, even if we're now all very clearly worse off as a result.

All of these decisions are based on tunnel thinking - which is blind to the true nature of the issue, blind to the alternatives and sees but one answer to all questions that are posed - which in this case is always that public services must be cut to promote private gain, even if private gain very clearly does not follow - as is all too apparently the case.

It is this same tunnel thinking that is also killing the Coalition government in this

country: the Tories are incapable of seeing that there is an alternative to their point of view. Compromise is something beyond their understanding, precisely because they are taught and believe there is only one possible solution to all problems.

That tunnel thinking is killing our economies right now. What we need is some flexibility in public thinking. That recognises that sometimes markets know best, and sometimes not. It also recognises that there are unambiguously occasions when the state has to be a preferred, and even monopoly supplier. But not always. And it has to recognise that caring for yourself is vital - but so too is caring for others. But that seems to be an understanding quite beyond neoliberal thinking.

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