

Boris Johnson: the leader of a cowardly government

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The [Guardian has noted](#) that:

MPs have suggested that a “north-south divide” in the Conservative party could be its “undoing” and lead to a string of rebellions against Boris Johnson unless he commits to moving northern cities and regions out of the harsh coronavirus lockdown.

They have added:

Fifty-five MPs representing northern regions of Britain signed a letter calling for a focus on “levelling up” the regions and a roadmap out of Covid-19 restrictions, saying it was a warning shot to show they had the numbers to inflict a government defeat.

And there we have it writ large: these are the irreconcilable conflicts within a Tory Party that promised what it never intended to deliver.

A party dedicated to the continuation, and even exaggeration of, inequality cannot level up. And since the north was poorer than the south when it made the claim that it would address the issue of inequality that is beyond its ability to understand, let alone address, of course the promise was false. Not only had it no idea how to deliver, it never had any intention of doing so.

Nor can a party that refuses, as a matter of principle, to think that it can successfully intervene in any part of society because that, according to its pervading ethos, is a tautological impossibility, say how and when it might deliver a roadmap for Covid management, because it does not believe such a thing possible to create or deliver. By definition, it's only belief is that it must stand back and watch what happens.

In 2011 I put it like this in my book 'The Courageous State':

Cameron and Osborne, with their allies Nick Clegg and Danny Alexanderhave become the apotheosis of something that has been thirty years in the making: they are the personification of what I call the cowardly state. The cowardly state in the UK is the creation of Margaret Thatcher, although its US version is of course the creation of

Ronald Reagan. It was these two politicians who swept neoliberalism into the political arena in 1979 and 1980 respectively. Since then its progress has been continual: now it forms the consensus of thinking across the political divide within the UK, Europe and the US.

The economic crisis we are now facing is the legacy of Thatcher and Reagan because they introduced into government the neoliberal idea that whatever a politician does, however well-intentioned that action might be, they will always make matters worse in the economy. This is because government is never able, according to neoliberal thinking, to outperform the market, which will always, it says, allocate resources better and so increase human well-being more than government can.

That thinking is the reason why we have ended up with cowardly government. That is why in August 2011, when we had riots on streets of London we also had Conservative politicians on holiday, reluctant to return because they were quite sure that nothing they could do and no action they could take would make any difference to the outcome of the situation. What began as an economic idea has now swept across government as a whole: we have got a class of politicians who think that the only useful function for the power that they hold is to dismantle the state they have been elected to govern while transferring as many of its functions as possible to unelected businesses that have bankrolled their path to power.

And that's how we end with a government that thinks there is nothing it can do now.

Which is why it has to be replaced, and its ethos has to be consigned to history.