

A political commitment to transparency has to be our re...

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To pretend that the world is anything like that we lived in two or so weeks ago. War in Ukraine poses threats that are unprecedented with many now wondering what the risk of nuclear annihilation might be. Some thoughts on this and many other issues that we face in this thread.....

It is the ultimate paradox of life that we must live it based on the assumption that we will live forever knowing full well that we will not. Right now many are questioning how long we have because of the renewed threat of nuclear war.

I can offer no answer to that question. I have no more idea what Putin might do than anyone else. So I carry on with the assumption that life will continue, albeit differently. I can offer no other useful working assumption.

What does interest me instead is how things might change, and most particularly, how we might want them to change. Nothing does, after all, alter our right react to what is happening.

There are many things we can change as a result of this war. One is our attitude to nuclear weapons. As someone old enough to have gone on CND marches 40 years ago my position on these has always been unambiguous. Surely when this is over we have to seek their elimination?

We have too to decide what to do about nuclear power. War involving nuclear power stations is dangerous, as we have now seen. The world is vulnerable whilst we rely on nuclear power. There is a decision to be taken. No more, I suggest, is the minimum requirement.

But there is another decision to be made regarding power, and that comes down to our

dependence on oil and gas. Russia's economy relies upon the sale of them. Without them it would not be a power. Our carbon dependency has to end for that reason too.

If we are to live in a world where we cannot be held to ransom we are learning that there is real merit in putting a focus on local energy. If ever there was a reason for local renewable energy other than tackling climate change, this is it.

The bedrocks on which our economies are built - across Europe and beyond - all have to change as a result. Nuclear power and the burning of carbon cannot be the foundations of our lives in the future if we are also to have security.

Of course, we already knew that. Climate change demanded the change with regard to carbon. It also challenges so many assumptions with regard to nuclear power - most especially when so many nuclear power facilities are in vulnerable locations.

But the changes that are required that this war makes very clear go very much deeper than this. The whole of our political economy - which is term to describe how power relationships influence economics rewards - is now open to question.

Let's start with the politics, and then move to the economics.

First, we now know (beyond reasonable doubt) that Russian influence has been deeply destructive of UK politics. Brexit was funded by Russia. The Tory party has been funded by Russia. It seems very likely that major think tanks are Russian influenced.

The media is heavily Russian influenced, and some of it is oligarch controlled. More may be than we know.

I think it very likely that some policy agendas, e.g. the deeply disruptive No. 10 policy on Northern Ireland that makes no rational sense in isolation does when viewed as an instrument for Russian influenced disruption.

The fight against climate change is, I suspect, as heavily funded by Russia as it is by the US far-right. Indeed, it is hard to spot the difference in interests.

And because of the UK first past the post electoral system and the inclination of some to vote Tory because their parents and grandparents always did at a time when that did not involve voting for agents of Russian policy, Russian influence is deep in our hierarchies of power.

There is corruption at the heart of the UK in other words. For more than twenty years a far-right Russian regime has cooperated with far-right funding from the USA to take control of the Tory right-wing in UK politics and make it an instrument for anti-democratic activity.

The goal of this activity has been very straightforward. It has been to create an

economy whose interests are aligned with those of a global kleptocracy serviced by a state where the supposed rule of law can be used to oppress opposition.

First, they came with the libel writ. Then they bought the politician's silence. Next, they controlled the media. Then they bought the political narrative, and won a referendum. Then they came for us with the demand that we protest no more. This is the creeping takeover of power.

In between all that, they showed their indifference. From austerity, to the bedroom tax, to not caring about Covid deaths, every now and again they showed the reality of their contempt for the rest of us.

This they reinforced by bringing their friends into government, or by transferring their politicians into the media. The web of control was, they thought, theirs to spin.

We now know all this. It is plain to see. The question now is whether this is enough to finally induce the required action from all other political parties to act together to rid us of this corruption for good?

The fighting, so far, is in Ukraine, and our hearts and thoughts are with those who suffer. But this is a war on many fronts. And one is here in the UK, where right-wing, mainstream politicians are at war on us.

They can be beaten, but only by political alliance to rid us of corruption and to create a democracy to withstand any further assaults by being truly representative. Will all our democratic politicians, including the few remaining decent Tories, now cooperate to deliver this?

This is our war that we have to win, or Russia wins, whatever happens in Ukraine.

Then let's look at the economy, because there will be so much to do there too and many issues to resolve.

There will be calls for more spending on defence very soon. Maybe they will be appropriate. Maybe when this is over we could alternatively ask what the remaining threat might be? It will require soul searching to answer that.

What we can say for certain is that defence will be far from the only priority when this war is over. Do not listen to anyone who claims that this will be the issue for a new era: it is not. The causes of war are.

In that case the energy revolution I have already referred to will require as much funding as any defence measures. Energy is the cause of conflict now. That is why it must have priority.

But the economic reforms required go much further. This is an economic war. There's

no real surprise to that. They almost invariably are. The desire is to command resources. In this case it is land. But what drives it is the economic structure of Russia.

Russia is a kleptocracy. It can be claimed that this is an accident. When the Soviet economy collapsed it was claimed that it could transition to capitalism. An ultra-free market logic was introduced into a situation of chaos.

Without the checks and balances that markets require if they are to operate with any degree of fairness that failed attempt to create capitalism delivered kleptocracy, and Putin.

London has been reorientated to serve that kleptocracy. From the libel lawyer, to the corporate lawyer working in cahoots with accountants and bankers to hide the ownership of assets, London has worked to destroy fair markets.

When this war is over we need to call this out. We need to say that markets in the UK are rigged, as is the UK legal system. They are stacked against fair competition, justice and the equality of opportunity that capitalism requires if it is to work.

Only the politicians and think tanks in hock to Russia, but who have never engaged in real business, now suggest that markets work when it is glaringly obvious that as they stand they do not.

This does not mean I am opposed to markets. Far from it. I see no other way that the entrepreneurial spirit of many can be turned to the common good. But the unaccountable market has become our enemy, as much as corrupt politicians are.

So transparency is the requirement. Company law must be heavily regulated. Those who cannot prove their right to limited liability must be denied it. Corruption - including on tax - must become a personal responsibility for all who permit it.

We can deliver markets free from corruption. It just requires political will to do so. That political commitment to transparency has to be our reaction to this war. Our contribution to 'never again', if you like.

And we have to ask what is everything for? The kleptocrats are the personification of a school of economic thinking that says the accumulation of wealth is what the political economy should be about. Note, I said 'should', not 'is'.

The refugees from Ukraine and those dying in shelled apartments are the clearest evidence that this is not true. Most of us are not wealthy. Most of us survive because of networks of families, friends and communities that support us.

The political economy should not be about supporting wealth for its own sake. The political economy should be about supporting our networks of community, wherever and however we find it.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying economic well-being does not matter. It does. But wealth accumulation at cost to others -which is the political economy we have had - is about oppression of most, and can lead to the indifference towards people we are now seeing in Ukraine.

To summarise, this war does change everything. Or at least, it should, or it will continue. And given how key the UK is to the delivery of Russian policy if life here does not change after it then something will be very seriously wrong.

We need to change our defence and energy policies. We need to transform our politics and political systems. Transparency must become normal. Corruption must be treated as the offence it is. And people may be the priority now.

Is that too much to ask for? I hope not, because I cannot see us surviving with anything less.