

Could the Tory leadership election march their party to...

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Long ago I was told to stop reading what anyone said to see what their opinion was. Knowing the issue that they were meant to be addressing it was pointed out to me that what really mattered when reviewing any statement that they made was what they did not say. The truth, it was suggested to me, is always found to be in the gaps and silences because they reveal what a speaker does not wish us to know. The advice has proved to be useful in a very wide range of situations. I call it a 'gap analysis'.

It can most definitely be applied to the Tory party leadership candidates. It's not what they are saying that really matters. It is what is not in the statements that they are making that tells us all we need to know about the Conservative Party as it now is.

I have yet to hear one of them talk about Covid, and yet 10% of all hospital beds are now taken by Covid patients. There is a deafening silence on long Covid as well. And as for hospital waiting lists, has anything been said?

Has anyone said anything positive about benefits, at all?

Or the cost-of-living? Some mentions arise with regard to tax cuts, but beyond that has any one of them anything to say, or is it that none of the candidates knows anyone who is facing this issue?

And what about the climate crisis? I only hear denials that net-zero should have been adopted as a target.

As for defence, a Tory favourite, what is the actual policy anyone is suggesting? Suggesting spending increases is not a policy. Nor are warm words a strategy. This lot seem devoid of any real thinking.

What do these gaps mean? I think we face four crises at present. They are a developing and most certainly continuing health crisis. Meanwhile the climate is collapsing, and nothing is being done about it. Thirdly, neoliberalism has run out of road, and now answers no known question. It is this failure is leading to others, like a world food crisis. And into all this marches Putin with a form of fascism all too recognisable in the antics

of Johnson and Trump, and maybe some of those new seeking the Tory leadership. To each of these issues a genuine leader needs to have an answer. They have to know what their strategy is because policy failures – like the Northern Ireland Protocol issues – cannot be resolved until the strategy (in this case on the failure of neoliberalism) is made clear.

But these things are not being spoken about. The leadership hopefuls people discuss a percentage point or two difference on tax rates. And they argue about the growth that they believe cuts in corporation tax coupled with increased incentives for investment might bring – neither of which indicate that they have any faith in market forces. They also mention fox hunting and the need to oppose equality. They can rival each other on the extent to which they will abuse human rights, and most especially those of refugees. But of the big issues that I mention there is no talk at all. On them these people do not do politics.

Why is that? I could offer many explanations. The best I can offer is that they are all without exception neoliberal to their cores. So, not only do they not recognise that their philosophy is dead, having proved itself unable to address the issues of this world, but they don't even recognise that the remaining issues even exist. They treat them as if they are market externalities of no consequence to them. That is, after all, how neoliberals address all uncomfortable truths they do not wish to address.

The result is we have a leadership election to be prime minister of this country with every single candidate to take on that role refusing to face the reality of the task that they face, preferring to play in the gutter as Johnson did.

We can only hope that one day the electorate do really have the chance to consign them to the dustbin of electoral history. That is possible of course. It happened to the Liberal party by 1918. Could it happen to the Tories given their current trajectory that is taking them so far away from the reality of people's lives? We have to live in hope.