

Truss will usher in the era of the politics of neglect

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The Tory party leadership hustings are over. Only extreme optimists think Sunak has won, and even they know that his doing so would be a disaster. The rest are resigned to Truss. The descent into neoliberal hell continues.

If Truss was going to be a normal prime minister I might at this point be writing about my hopes for her premiership. I would even consider suggesting some priorities, although not with any realistic expectation that they might be read. But Truss is not a normal prime minister.

Let me take that idea a little further: it's more accurate to say that Truss is not normal. To explain that I must suggest that most of us live life in one of two states.

One, which is probably the most commonplace, is denial. In this mode of operation we simply ignore the evidence of what might be happening around us and hope that, despite it, we will get through what is coming our way. It is a remarkably effective technique. It stops us over-worrying. And experience has taught us that, firstly, there is not a lot we can do to prevent most that is going to happen and, secondly, that most of the time we can manage whatever it might be.

The other mode is to plan within the constraints of uncertainty that face us, hoping that what we do now might make a difference in the future. We fret, in other words, seeking to improve outcomes. Most commonly associated with parenting, it's also true of career planning, management in its broadest sense and care about relationships.

There's nothing dismissive about this summary: this is the reality of much of life. We can only deal with so much. We pick our priorities to address and with regard to the rest we have to hope for the best because it's pretty much beyond our ability to control.

There is a third option. It is reserved for those who think that they can change the world. Mostly it is the preserve of politicians, or those who write about such themes. The belief, whether well placed or not, of those pursuing this option is that they can change what is usually considered beyond control. In other words, the rules of the

game are in play, with the aim of altering outcomes.

We are familiar with this third option. A politician suggests that they will use the power given to them to legislate with the aim of effecting a change in the system of government to deliver something that will improve society. This is the standard politician's offering. It is what we expect.

But this is not what Truss does. Her aim seems to be to be threefold. She wants to reduce the power of the state, rather than redirect it. In that sense she does not want to reduce uncertainty, but increase it. That's contrary to a lifetime's experience of what politics is all about.

Second, in the process she denies what the state can do. So she says the UK cannot deliver Brexit, rather than try to do so, meaning she will tear up the Northern Ireland Protocol that the government of which she was a senior member signed. Similarly, she says she can't solve the economic crisis to come, so she will give some tax cuts to the rich instead, with their purpose being to reduce her imagined capacity to act for anyone else. She is defining herself around what she cannot do.

Third, in the process she is seeking to increase the stress of those she governs. Many now realise that the awfulness of the winter to come cannot be denied any longer and requires active management. That is mainly because as a result of Truss's planned inaction she is forcing people to plan for situations beyond their control. What she is demanding is that they face a situation where formulating any reasonable plan is nigh on impossible because the rules of the game are stacked against them and she does not intend to change those rules.

Truss is, by denying that the role of the politician is to at least seek to effect change for the better, planning to make the lives of tens of millions of people immeasurably worse. She is now dragging them out of denial. She is forcing them to face reality. They are realising that reality is unmanageable and she is refusing to help, so far. The consequences of this are deeply worrying.

What cannot be denied is that this is a bold political strategy. It is also utterly reckless. It is the action of a psychopath (appropriately described because of the actual harm that will result from it). It indicates a total lack of empathy on Truss's part. It might also suggest that Truss is no politician, but is instead either mainly in denial, or lacks the ability to manage, let alone imagine what might be better.

Whichever way this is looked at the Truss era could well bring us a type of politics we have not seen before, which is one that denies there is a political realm and that does instead throw problems back at the populace and says it is for them to deal with them as best they can. How might we describe this? The politics of neglect might be appropriate. I think that's what is coming our way.