

The personal isolation of neoliberalism has to be consi...

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I posted this thread on Twitter this lunchtime (other work having got in the way before then):

The Truss government is failing. Extraordinarily it has only been in office a month, with the shutdown resulting from the Queen's death included in that period, and yet the evidence of failure is so compelling that it's indisputable. But what are the consequences? A thread...

After the evidence that the Tories can now impose change on Truss became apparent yesterday, with more threatened for today as Kwarteng is forced to bring forward his budget, it is clear that the Tory coalition has failed. They are at war with each other.

The Tory infighting is now so clear and strong that three things are clear. The first is that Truss cannot govern. Second, nor could any other Tory. Third, that means we have, in effect, a hung parliament. A zombie Tory government might exist but not really govern.

The good news inherent in that might seem to be that the damage Truss and her crew might seek to deliver will be mitigated. As example, Rees-Mogg's plans for employment law reform have been already been abandoned as they are too extreme to get parliamentary approval.

But even if the more extreme measures that members of this government might seek to introduce on behalf of Tufton Street might not happen, the danger will still be real. That there is a government in the UK so out of control will be damaging, in itself.

That the Tory party, which liked to claim it was the most successful political party in the world, has fallen so far is emblematic, in itself, of failure. The certainties that were once thought to exist have gone.

The revelation that this is the case is the most important aspect of the current chaos. It is pure coincidence that this is happening weeks after the Queen died. And yet, at the same time, the coincidence is symbolic. If she was continuity, we now don't have it.

Critically, the erosion of the institutions on which society depended is now the most important issue that any new government will now face, because the UK's national decline is directly related to the failure of those bodies, which can be closely associated to neoliberalism.

Where to start with the chronicling of this decline is hard to decide. It would be easy to begin with privatisation. That undermined the cohesion of the supply of essential public services, almost all of which are natural monopolies. The logic in the process was clear.

First, the aim was to split cohesion so that erosion of standards was less obvious. Second, the aim was to make profit a higher priority than service availability. Third, exploitation was permitted, of people, planet (especially) and communities. The aim was to undermine commonality.

How was this achieved? Largely by offering people a bung when privatisation took place. There was no ideological support for these plans: greed bought sufficient people into them.

In other areas, different mechanisms to undermine cohesion have been used. This is most especially true in the NHS in England (Wales and Scotland have different systems).

In the name of supposed efficiency, the NHS has been 'marketised', with vast amounts of resource wasted in admin to create the appearance of a market. The intention was always to privatise healthcare, and that is happening.

The introduction of academy trusts in education has always had the same goal.

So too has the outsourcing of vast ranges of services.

But the consequence is an economy that is obsessed by contracting, admin and the slicing of profit out of budgets that should be set to deliver social benefit. No wonder productivity has fallen. Effort has been diverted to admin by government choice.

But these obvious issues are just the tip of the problem that we face. The range of other institutions undermined by neoliberalism is staggering.

Parliament has been undermined. The franchise has been limited. Executive powers have been taken without opportunity for scrutiny. Ministers now show contempt for parliament when announcing policy. Prime Minister's questions have become a farce.

The civil service had also been undermined. Permanent secretaries are sacked on

political whims. Special advisers direct civil servants. Advice is obviously ignored.

The Bank of England has been undermined for differing reasons. Its current obsequiousness to the Treasury is part of that. But the purpose of making it independent was to secure wider opinion on policy making, and instead we have pure neoliberalism, which fails us.

The supposedly independent Office for Budget Responsibility has never been any such thing, having always been too optimistic in the government's favour.

Our tax authority has been fleeced of resources so that it hardly functions. Cheats prosper. Honest people suffer undue stress as management of tax takes far too long.

And the rot extends outwards. Charities that ask why the poor are poor are silenced. Those that ask whether it was reasonable to accumulate wealth on the back of slaves are vilified. The message is clear that charity must be neoliberal.

The BBC has largely followed the same line.

Big business has been allowed to fleece the productive capacity of the UK to boost the private wellbeing of directors, at cost to shareholders, those working for those companies, and investment in our national well-being.

During all this, private debt has risen, enslaving millions who face lifetimes where they might never achieve any reasonable degree of financial security as home ownership, decent pensions and being debt-free become near impossible goals for many.

So what is all this, which Truss is intent on exacerbating, all about? This is the politics of isolation. Neoliberalism is all about the destruction of community. It focuses on the individual alone, and their supposed success or failure.

The intention of neoliberalism is to make identification of failure possible. That is one of the most corrosive ways in which it seeks to divide the world. And by creating hierarchies of success or failure it deliberately fails to reward most so that their anxiety remains.

Instead of living in community, where strengths and weaknesses can be compensated for, neoliberalism demands division and attribution of blame. This prevents real risk-taking.

Again, the cost to society is apparent. It is not only evident in the lack of investment in real productivity. It is also apparent in the shift in focus in the private sector.

This used to try to meet customer need, and so make a profit. The aim now is to exploit any contractual arrangement to skim profit out of it. So, we have eventually reached the point where we have companies specialising in shifting contracts between energy

suppliers.

This might make a little sense if the energy suppliers themselves added value, but they only sell energy others produce. And those producers can't sell without profit being skimmed by distributors and many many others.

The very concept of business has been hollowed out to the point where the actual business of meeting customer need is the preserve of a few, mainly lowly paid, people. Far too many other people are employed to game the system.

And this gets worse when this process is imposed on the state sector via the casualisation of teaching, nursing and so much else.

Why make these points? My purpose is to suggest that whatever the next government faces, it will not just be a financial mess that it has to deal with. It will have to face one of them, for sure. But the real problem it has to address is the corrosion of our society.

Neoliberalism has set out to destroy the mechanisms that make society work. They have tried to destroy society, and what made it work. Participation has gone: isolation remains. We are a lonely, sad country as a result.

And we are nearly broken in so many ways. The fact that six million are waiting for NHS appointments is symbolic of that, but those in the NHS are not to blame. Their job has been made nigh on impossible, deliberately.

The NHS, like so much, has been set up to fail so that another state revenue source can be skimmed for private gain, and this is now how much of our supposed state and private sectors now interact.

If any government comes into office in the UK sometime soon failing to recognise this then it too will fail. A bit better management of the existing structures within society cannot save us now from the mess we are in. Restoring a participatory economy is necessary to do that.

The whole ethos of government has to be different in that case. People have to be persuaded that a fundamental change in direction is required, and is possible.

We have to move away from isolation and back to community.

We have to move from privatisation to sharing.

We need to focus on delivery of services, and not value extraction for private gain.

Business needs to invest in people, products and plant and equipment, not share buybacks and directors' bonuses.

The construction of a common good in which we can all partake through our own participation in society is vital.

And communal funding for this has to be found.

Talk in that case of 'making Brexit work' and 'managing better' is of no benefit, because what we have does not work. Doing something well when it is wrong in itself does not make it right. It's still wasted effort.

And all this will cost money, which it will be said we have not got. Except, that as the experience after 1945 showed, we can deliver when we do not apparently have money. We can do so again. But to make that spend worthwhile we need a big idea.

I believe that the time has come to reject the isolation of neoliberalism and to replace that with a participatory, supportive and inclusive society. That is the big idea that should underpin change now.

Unless we start from that point of change, with a new direction that it gives then a replacement government for the one now have would still be doing the work of the far-right think tanks. That will not do.

A new economics for a good society needs a big idea. Sharing is that big idea. Working together is the solution it suggests. Breaking down isolation is the demand it imposes. Focus on delivery for the common good is what is required. This is what we need.

The question is, who will deliver it?