

We cannot thrive in a society led by Tories

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In praise of rules

I am a chartered accountant. Perhaps it is unsurprising that I like rules. On the basis of the simple rules of double entry (assets, costs and losses are debits and income, liabilities, capital and profits are credits) I, and millions of others, can communicate complex financial information. Break the rules and the system fails. That's one way of looking at life.

I stress though, it's only one way. Double entry works at an elemental level because of its neutrality. The system is independent of the messenger, the subject of the message and the message communicated. Most rules are not like that. They are actually heuristics intended to simplify complex situations so that mere mortals can manage them without having to expend too much time processing them.

We all drive on the same side of the road.

We have a single legal tender.

We have official languages.

Such rules make living a lot easier to negotiate.

At a slightly more complex level, we comply with security requirements, whether of our workplace or the places we are, recognising the mutual need to do so.

We abide by the law as best we are able.

And when all is said and done, and when there might be no other rule to guide us, we rely upon ethics to inform our judgement. The instruction that we love our neighbour as we do ourselves works pretty well most of the time, and is almost universal in faith and wisdom traditions.

On the basis of all this we, firstly, integrate into our society. Second, we respect others.

Thirdly, we lay the groundwork for mutual survival, and hopefully more. Fourth, we protect ourselves and others from harm.

Good rules are not in that case burdens. They are the conditions for life to work. We reject them at our peril.

And that is why the Tories and their approach to rules is so wrong.

Truss broke security rules. So has Braverman. Both did so persistently. They well have prejudiced others as a result.

Braverman has also shown contempt for rules relating to migrants. And when ethics demanded that she intervene, she did not. The primary duty of the elected minister, to protect those for whom she is responsible, was a task she appears to have consciously refused to fulfil.

These are not minor breaches of rules. They are catastrophic failures to comply with the rules on which good government are built. Nor were the breaches accidental. Most especially in Braverman's case it is apparent that they were deliberate. There would seem to have been deliberate intention to breach security based on currently available evidence. And there would seem to have been callous indifference to human suffering at Manston, suggesting Braverman thought that those there were not worthy of treatment as her neighbour, which they undoubtedly are.

What does this contempt suggest? First, there is an assumption of superiority.

Second, that sense of superiority is used to justify rule breaking because it is assumed that rules do not apply to them.

Third, there is in that action contempt for the risk implicit in their conduct for others, about whose fate they are indifferent.

Fourth, there is an absence of both ethics and empathy, which are the basic building blocks for a decent human being.

Truss has gone. Braverman is unlikely to survive this, and that would be appropriate. But the culture remains. This is the culture of the far-right, which assumes society is hierarchical and those who are the true believers are the most worthy of all, and for them the rules do not apply.

This is a profoundly sick culture, antithetical to the prospect of us all living well in society.

This is the Tory culture.

It is why ethics, and not party politics, demands that we be rid of it. We cannot thrive in

a society led by Tories. It is not possible. They must go.