

Recession, protest, monarchy and renewal: 2023 in prosp...

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When I discussed my post reviewing 2022 in retrospect yesterday with one of my sons I mentioned that I was musing on keywords around which to build a similar post considering 2023 in prospect. I mentioned recession as one theme, and in alliterative mood, he added revolution and regicide. I responded, suggesting I was more reasonable when at the same age. I do, however, get his point: 2023 is going to be littered with flashpoints and few likely signs of immediate prospective hope. So, ignoring some of my son's advice, but not entirely avoiding the sentiments, the following are my words for the year to come.

Recession

This singular word is going to dominate the economy in the coming year, much as inflation did in 2022.

Recession is easy to predict. We do at this moment need five things from government:

- Low-interest rates so that businesses and households can survive 2023
- Lower taxes on the lower paid so that those facing the cost of living crisis have increased hope of doing so
- Higher taxes on the wealthiest to tackle the growing inequality and resulting stresses in our society
- Increased government spending when neither households or business can drive the recovery that the economy needs
- A vision for sustainability, otherwise known as a Green New Deal.

We are getting none of those things right now. Instead, we have high-interest rates and the forecast that these will last for years, even as inflation disappears altogether by late 2023 or early 2024, as even the Office for Budget Responsibility is forecasting. These policy choices will crush businesses and millions of households and spill over into the rental market meaning disposable income is going to be the scarcest known commodity in 2023. Recession follows as a matter of course. The government's tax and austerity policies simply reinforce that likelihood, and in all this there is no economic vision of any sort whatsoever.

Recession in 2023 is unavoidable in that case. The Bank of England and OBR agree:

what is left to debate is how bad it will be. My answer is that it is likely to be very bad indeed unless (and I have to hope) there is a change of policy somewhere along the line as the policy failure to date is both appreciated and reversed. But, with the Opposition calling for the same measures that the government and BoE are delivering it falls to those outside government to deliver that.

Protest

Unlike my son, I am not convinced we will see revolution in 2023. I share his view that we will see a great deal of anger. It's an easy prediction to make when so much anger is already in view. The many strikes now ongoing, and which are going to continue, are sure indication of that. They reflect anger at four things:

- Inadequate pay offers.
- A government that refuses to understand the position of most people who are utterly dependent on their pay to make ends meet.
- Austerity that has destroyed so many public services.
- The desire for a vision of something better.

If there was a vision for a better future then people might be able to withstand the current pressures. But in plain sight people can see that the current crisis has very largely been created to shift wealth upwards within society, away from the majority and towards a tiny minority who have much to gain from it. Interest rate policy is, in itself, indication of that. So too is the refusal to deliver inflation-matching pay rises when it is so obviously necessary to offer these when the public services are failing all around us.

I cannot predict the direction anger will take. No one can. By its very nature anger is unpredictable, which is also why it is so dangerous, which it will be for this government and for society at large. But I think a tipping point has been reached, and the anger that now exists about policy that has been designed to deny people the incomes, services and future they believe to be possible cannot be contained now, and we will see a great deal more anger on display this year.

Monarchy

Regicide may not be on the cards, but in a febrile atmosphere Charles III has demanded a full-blown coronation this year. I think he has seriously misjudged the mood. The nation might have mourned his mother, but that does not mean that it will feel comfortable with his coronation.

Is it really true that eugenics provides him with a right to govern?

What too is the role of a single church in the state, and why when most are not believers in this country is it that a single church can ordain the new monarch?

Is the implication that there is still a God-given right to rule?

And how does that stack when those who seem to hold the belief that they are given a

God-given right to control parliament are wrecking lives?

The coronation may provide an opportunity for early summer celebration and not much else. But I am not sure of that. Whilst protest is not likely, questions will abound and the mood that the constitutional settlement that we have cannot survive will become more prevalent, I think. That may, of course, be wishful thinking on my part, but my sense is that the time for reform is coming. It will not happen overnight, but the disquiet a traditional coronation might create could be a catalyst for change.

Renewal

Sometime soon Labour might realise that having no policies is not a platform for government. They might even appreciate that adopting the austerity agenda is very bad news when it will so clearly fail the country in 2023. And there again, they do neither of these things. It could just be that they think that doing Tory policy better than the Tories is the only way to succeed in this country, and so will carry on as they are.

I have to agree that this approach will likely be enough to deliver them an election victory whether in 2023 (which I consider possible, mark in September as the most likely time as the Tories will want students to be on the move and so unlikely to vote) or 2024 (which I think more likely, but only just). But, if that is the case and the Tories are decimated as expected, and deep buyer's regret about voting Labour rapidly takes hold, then the anger in the country will become very much more obvious.

I am, of course, aware that no incoming political party can deliver miracles, except by changing the mood of the country that is. If Labour is unwilling to do that, and with the Tories on the ropes and likely to be out for some time, an uncomfortable political space will be created, most especially in a first-past-the-post electoral system.

Will the Tories continue their progression to the far-right? I think that is very likely. Labour will have taken over the centre-right by then.

So what of the left? Is there really no appetite in a country hungry for change for left-of-centre politics? That would be an absurd idea. That said, I cannot see any left-of-centre challenge to Labour before the next election. I can after it. Will that come from the Greens, or the LibDems? In Scotland it very obviously comes from the SNP, and in Wales it may be from Plaid, although Labour will take more time to dislodge there.

My point is that for the sake of democracy, freedoms and wellbeing that void will have to be filled and with Labour intent on moving rightward either an existing party might see a quite extraordinary rise in its fortunes (and I cannot see Plaid or the SNP seeking to win seats in England, so this narrows the opportunities) or some movement for renewal has to fill the space.

I have never thought this very likely until now. I do, however, think that the tipping point has been reached where a new channel for anger has to be created to turn it into viable action. Might that happen in 2023 given everything else that is happening? I really don't know: the future is by definition unknowable. But equally, I think it is possible.

Whatever happens, 2023 is going to be interesting, even if it might also be turbulent, deeply uncomfortable and on occasion quite dangerous for many in this country, where the wellbeing of many will be at risk to a greater extent than for a very long time, and all because a few want to exploit most people in the UK for their own gain.