

We need the return of the state

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Neoliberalism is built on lies. For decades the deceit at its core has been ignored because it appeared to deliver prosperity. It does not any more. That is why everything is unravelling.

The biggest lie that neoliberalism promotes is that all value is created by private sector business, which claim is contrasted with a claim that government destroys value. So, apparently, a teacher working for a private school adds value. The same teacher in front of the same children in a state school would, apparently, not do so. The idea is obviously absurd, and yet is key to understanding neoliberal's approach to public services, which is built on this lie.

This neoliberal lie has corrupted public services. Based on this claim it has come to be believed that there is no answer to any question that the state can supply. Instead, it is the private sector that must provide the solution to problems because that sector supposedly knows best.

The PPE scandal provided evidence of that. The civil service did know how to procure PPE legally. There were channels for doing so. But ministers chose to ignore those skills and available options: naked greed would, they claimed, motivate the delivery of the supplies they claimed the country desperately needed. They clearly did not. They just led to waste, abuse and outright corruption.

But the scandal is in many ways much more pervasive than that. This weekend government minister James Cleverly was telling the media that pay talks between the government and nurses were not possible because the nurses needed to talk to their employers instead - and they were the supposedly independent NHS trusts. These, as we all know, could be swept away on a whim by the government, but we are apparently required to believe in their substance, independence, and credibility despite the obvious sham implicit in their status, whose sole justification is to eventually be the vehicles for profit-motivated privatisation.

Likewise, Steve Barclay argued yesterday he could discuss pay with nurses' leaders

because this issue had been resolved by the independent pay review body. That this body was appointed by the government, works within parameters set by the government, and respects government budgets is all ignored in that comment: we are told instead we must accept the independence of those working for it when there is no real evidence that this exists.

To those who know about the workings of offshore tax havens all this is terribly familiar. The skills of wilful lying now in evidence daily from the government were developed there when so many supposedly professional people became used to making persistent false claims that the supposed operations of multinational companies in these locations had real substance when this was complete nonsense, when the whole control of the corporate operation was very clearly located elsewhere, and seemingly remarkably close to the chief executive's office.

That is also the case in the current pay disputes. All the sham trust, academy and franchises statuses of many of the bodies involved cannot disguise the fact that, firstly, these structures are incredibly expensive to operate fig leaf entities that ministers use to deny responsibility for their actions, and secondly, have only been created to pursue the neoliberal desire to claim that nothing is efficient unless removed from the sphere of government.

As is readily apparent now, neither of those claims are true. What is more, they have been seen through. No one believes ministers' claims that pay issues in the public sector are beyond their remit.

Nor, come to that, does anyone now really believe the claim that value is not created by the public sector when its failings as a result of continual underfunding are imposing massive cost on society.

And people do not believe in a private sector alternative when that appears to be more expensive, corrupt or just worse due to the failure to integrate planning.

The reality is that the lies do not work any more. All the cover put in on place for greed, cronyism, profiteering and denial are now seen for what they are. They have leeches the public sector of already scarce resources, leaving them incapable of delivery from structures wholly unfit to meet need.

Public sector employees need inflation matching pay rises to provide any chance for these services to survive, because unless those rises happen essential employees will walk away.

But more than that, the neoliberal lies, into which most political parties have bought, need to be called out, with the constructs that have resulted from them being swept away.

We need an integrated NHS, run by regional health authorities responsible for integrated care across regions.

We need local education authorities to coordinate all education in an area.

We need nationalised railways, working as an integrated service.

And we need nationalised utilities to underpin well-being with energy, water, post, broadband and buses back in state control to make sure, once again, that service comes first.

Then the lies will have been swept away.

And they need to be. The lies have failed us, as have the liars. We need to move on from the edifices of corruption they have built. We need the honesty to do that. We need politicians willing to say so.