

A proper democracy might work better than the nasty mes..

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It was not a good weekend for English politics.

There was a neo-fascist, racist inspired riot near Liverpool.

The Mail blamed the headteacher who was murdered recently, along with her daughter, for her own death because she had overshadowed her husband's achievements.

Meanwhile, Lee Anderson, the former Labour councillor who had been Tory MP for Ashfield since 2019 and who became a Tory party vice-chair last week, continues to grab headlines by promoting the death penalty as well as by cavorting with known members of the far-right according to the Daily Mirror.

The politics of hate was out in force, in other words.

I had to spend quite a lot of time thinking what I might have to say on this and other topical issues over the weekend for reasons that will become clear quite soon. It struck me, quite forcibly, that these and other authoritarian and oppressive narratives survive and are amplified so strongly precisely because it is thought that they should not be said.

What I am suggesting is that a part of the reason for the problem of extremism that we face in the UK is that we have a political system that for a very long time sought to suppress the extremes, and succeeded in doing so. That is precisely what first-past-the-post two party politics is meant to do.

This system worked when the trigger for authoritarianism did not exist. That trigger is inequality, both actual and perceived. And we have since 2010 had a political party in office that has deliberately promoted inequality in the UK.

Those in the Tory party who did this must regret doing so, simply because as a result they have lost control of that party. I had no liking of the neoliberal party of Cameron and Osborne, but they now appear moderate compared to the far-right coterie that now populates the Tory front bench, from Braverman onwards.

How did that change happen? I have little doubt it was by entryism in reaction to the extremism that the Tories promoted in the first place.

The problem is that now we have a very much more extreme Tory party. Admittedly it is being rejected by the population at large. It is also true that its leadership still (sometimes) condemns the extremists in its ranks, although I cannot help but note that the leadership in question also seems much noisier about protests about climate change and police violence to women than it is about the racially motivated riots near Liverpool.

That said, those from the extremes are angry for the same reason that those who supported Brexit were: they feel under-represented in a system biased against them. As a result they hang on to people like Anderson and Braverman when they get them precisely because they are rare.

And that may be the problem. Maybe they are just too rare. Maybe we need proportional representation so that the objectionable can be said and heard, and then be drowned out by the voices of reason that appear at present to have nothing to say in response at present to this anger precisely because both Tories and Labour are committed to the policy of austerity that triggers authoritarianism in the first place.

If a wider diversity of views was encouraged within our political system then I think we would have sense prevail, because the number of votes extremists could win would be substantially reduced overall, and the more mainstream parties (whoever they might then be) would be free to ignore and disown them when at present it is too obvious that both are willing to move far too much to the right to win the supposed swing voter in red wall seats.

I see proportional representation - and the fact that it gives a voice to the extremist whilst allowing the majority to very clearly reject them (and austerity) - as the way out of the mess that we are in that is triggered by a wholly unnecessary austerity that triggers authoritarian appeal.

A proper democracy might work better than the nasty mess we have got. We should give it a try.