

## There are three types of politicians. Our problem is th...

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There are three types of politician.

The first type is only in politics for what they can get out of it. They are far too commonplace, but they are not the subject of concern here.

The second is a local politician. They are concerned with the well-being of a place. They do not worry about bigger pictures. Their duty and desire is to improve their locale. They do so within the constraints of the nation-state in which they operate, presuming there is little or nothing that they can do to change such limitations.

Third, there is the national politician. They too are ultimately concerned with the well-being of a place, but the manner and way in which they must operate fundamentally differs to that the local politician. There are, of course, international constraints on the way in which a national politician must operate, but they are quite different in nature to the constraints on the local politician. Mostly that is for three reasons.

Firstly, the national politician has responsibility for a population as a whole, and not a part of it. They cannot pretend that they can remove a problem by pretending it will go away. The unemployed, the sick and the elderly do not, for example, very often leave any country in sufficient numbers to solve the policy issues that they create. The national politician cannot ignore such issues by pretending they will just go away in that case.

Second, the national politician has many more tools in their armoury than the local politician. The national politician can, for example, create money, change the general level of taxation, and heavily influence interest rate policy even if they will go along with the pretence that they are not directly responsible for it, and that can also try to control migration with various national consequences. None of these options are within the control of the local politician.

Third, the national politician can change the law, most especially if they are in

government. The local politician can, at best, only tinker on the periphery of this issue.

These differences create profoundly different requirements of the national politician when compared to the local politician. The local politician can be small-minded, and might even best succeed if they are. Perforce, the national politician cannot share that trait.

Similarly, whilst the local politician can ignore the externalities of their decision-making, presuming that any unfortunate consequence of what they might decide might conveniently fall 'elsewhere', the national politician can do no such thing, largely because 'elsewhere' is, more likely than not, still going to be in their domain. The consequence is that whilst the local politician need only think about the primary consequence of their actions, the national politician has to think about the second, third and maybe more tiers of consequence of what they decide.

The ultimate difference is, however, on the scale of responsibility that the politician must accept. The local politician always has an excuse for their failure: events, they can say, always turned out to be beyond their control. For the national politician, that is not a possibility. Even if something like Covid was not within a politician's control, the power to react to it in an appropriate fashion clearly was, and that responsibility cannot be ducked.

Why say all this? Again, I have three reasons.

First, we need to be rid of the self-interested politician. This remains by far the best reason for wishing the Tories out of office. Far too many of them are only in politics to feather their own nests. An anti-corruption stance is enough in itself to justify the desire to be rid of them.

Second, and more importantly, we have too few good local politicians now. Many areas need champions. They do not get them.

Third, and most important, is the fact that it seems that the politicians we now get at national level simply have not graduated from the level of local politics. They have no clue that it is their job to look at the big picture. The idea that they have responsibility for more than balancing the budget (a very real responsibility for the local politician when local authorities cannot create their own money or tax at will) appears to be beyond their understanding. In addition, second, third and further consequences of their actions appear to never feature in their decision-making, or we would hear so much more about multiplier effects when economic decision-making is discussed. And the idea that many of the supposed constraints of which they complain ("There is no money left") are in fact matters entirely within their control if only they understood how the economy really works is beyond their apparent imagination, let alone knowledge.

It is that lack of knowledge that is what is most worrying of all. In its place there is a

willingness, and even a desire, to accept constraints on their actions imposed by banks, the City, the mainstream media and their own belief that all they can do is dependent upon the goodwill of markets when if they were truly up to the job of being a national politician they would know none of this is true.

In an age where we need politicians of stature we are getting adequate local politicians in charge of national affairs. So widespread is the problem that they themselves appear unaware of this.

What is to blame? Most obviously it is an education system that (via the Oxford politics, philosophy and economics degree above all else) teaches that markets dominate economies, governments should back away from interfering to the greatest extent possible, and there are no externalities (i.e., those second and third tier consequences of decisions that very obviously do exist) because markets can always price them.

All of those assumptions, implicit in almost all economic teaching now, are profoundly wrong. We are living with the consequences. The failure of Starmer to understand the significance of the two-child benefit cap and the need to remove it is a perfect example of that.

Can we break from this poverty of thinking? Our survival depends on us doing so. For that reason, I hope that we can. But on this occasion, I am not an optimist. Hayek and Friedman are winning and there is no obvious sign of change on the horizon right now.