

Protest is our purpose now

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It is the 'silly season' when serious political debate almost ceases, the Mail prints stupid stories about Welsh people trying to get NHS treatment in England, and most people ignore sites like this to go on holiday.

I reviewed the papers this morning to see if anything might be there off which I could bounce an idea, and came up with nothing. So, instead let me muse for a moment on a fleeting idea I had in the night, which is to ask 'what is the point of us in all this?'

The idea came to me, was appropriately filed in the back of my brain at the time, and as far as I know I returned to sleep. But the question seems to be appropriate.

Having reflected on it this morning, there are at least three dimensions to it.

The first is to ask whether politics is done to us, or are we a part of it?

The second might be similar with regard to the economy, which is do we have any real control at all about this?

The third is to ask what we can do about the answers to the first two questions.

I can recall a time when I thought politics was done to us, but I was quite young, and the sentiment reflected the reality of that moment for me.

By the time I was at university I felt that we could do politics. Of course, our involvement would be incomplete and the influence might be limited, but the same would be true for everyone. But I thought we all had a chance to effect change, either via politics itself or through single issue campaigning.

I knew this was not true for the Tories. They had dictated a line to their membership for decades, but on the left I felt that influence was possible. Occasionally I even felt I was exercising it.

And then along came Keir Starmer. Everyone I talk to says the same thing of him, including those who are quite senior in Labour. They know the requirement is to toe the line or get out. They also know that ideas must now flow from the centre (if there are any ideas, that is) and alternative opinion is not required.

Lobbying, making submissions, preparing submissions to conferences; all these things have become utterly pointless now. Labour HQ has closed its mind, just like the Tories. Politics inside the two party system is no longer a participatory activity.

That's a bit like the economy really. I thought, once upon a time, that by being engaged in the economy I made a difference. And of course that was true. This country would be lost without the jobs small and medium sized enterprises create. But, the reality is that the economy is run by a tiny number of large companies that do not give a damn for competition, entrepreneurship, markets or anything but the crude making of money, most especially by regulatory arbitrage, exploitation and rent extraction if any of these possibilities are available. There is nothing smaller business can do about that. If it threatens the status quo it is bought to end the disruption. That is because large companies do not buy smaller companies to exploit their best ideas; they buy them to kill both the company and the ideas off.

So, back to the question, what is the point of us in all this? I used to think there was still some. Maybe I am so angry with Starmer because he has killed that idea for me, because I am not sure that 'the system' really does have any regard for anyone outside it anymore.

I do not think I am alone. And I also think that there has been a reaction. I am not in the slightest bit surprised by the rise in direct action. I admire those with the courage to do it. I think there will be a great deal more of it. It is necessary. When lines of communication are closed protest inevitably follows. It has to unless violent oppression is in use.

Strikes are another inevitable reaction. Given that profiteering continues, with inflation doing so as a consequence and with people suffering as a result, more strikes are also inevitable.

And so too is tactical voting. Once it was anything but Conservative (ABC) but I now think it's anything but the neoliberal hegemony (ABN) of the Tories and Labour. People have had enough.

So, what is the point of us? I didn't seek to resolve my rhetorical question during the night, but have now. Protest in its varying forms is our purpose now. It is the option left to us that we have no choice but use.

This blog and my tweeting are a part of my protest. We must each make protest in whatever form we can. But make it, we must.