

How can we restore confidence in government?

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One of the questions in a rather dull edition of Question Time last night was, "How can we have confidence in the running of our country?"

A number of aspects of this question were interesting, with the most significant being that it was asked. The BBC do appear to be permitting a more subversive form of question onto this programme at present. Perhaps they know that the Tory stranglehold on power might be over.

The answers were not worth musing on. All that needed to be said in direct response was that we cannot have confidence in the running of our country as things stand.

I have to admit that there have been many periods when this might have just as appropriately been said. At any time until 1939 I am sure that was true. That was because the country was always run in the interests of a wealthy elite until then. There was no pretence otherwise. Everyone but that elite existed in the minds of most of those who ruled as means to serve their interests, whether they be the waged employee in the UK or anyone in the colonies the UK held around the world. This hierarchy was apparent, known about and until the onset of a universal franchise, empowered by their sacrifice in a second world war in far too short a space of time, it was accepted.

And then everything changed. I genuinely believe that the 1945 Labour government was revolutionary. I am not saying that class prejudice has disappeared. Nor am I saying that pettiness, incompetence and just plain error were eliminated from the state. They were not and probably never can be. The maintenance of a privileged power elite in our society virtually guarantees that, and those denying its existence have to be presumed to be doing so because they are a part of it, or want to be.

But, that being said, overall I think that the attitude of the government in the post-war era that lasted until 1979 was to serve the interests of the people of this country. The obligation was one of duty to make change for the collective betterment of all in society, and in a massive number of ways that is what the outcome was. That cannot

have been by accident: at its core it was the result of an attitude that pervaded both Tory and Labour governments of this era.

And then came Thatcher, Hayek, Friedman and Rand and with her and their dogma, the whole neoliberal era.

Society was no more.

Individual, and not collective, well-being was what mattered.

The focus was on shrinking the state to empower individual action.

The idea that the state had a duty was largely abandoned.

And so we got to the point where ministers had no plan for a pandemic.

They might have understood how to get rich in a financial crisis, but they did not understand how to finance the government.

And when it came to it, they wanted to argue over who would make the decision as to who would die rather than remember their duty to save people.

I have picked examples from the last few days, but you can find them almost anywhere you look. If you are not sure, start with how benefits now work, where the imposition of cruel punishment on those already vulnerable would appear to be the primary goal of the system. That attitude arose from somewhere. It came from ministers who loathe those that they are meant to serve and who have never sought to hide the fact. Instead, they delight in vilifying them.

So, to go back to the question, of course we cannot have confidence in the running of the country when those running it - and the attitudes are pervasive amongst those now leading the Tories and Labour - are antagonistic towards the needs of those in the country whilst prioritising the needs of finance instead. The rot starts at the top in this case, and it has spread far and wide.

How can we restore confidence? Not with ease, I admit.

And not with the current leaderships of either of our main parties.

And probably not without changing our whole electoral system so that we are not plagued by people of that mindset - with its inherent belief in the right of some to govern at the very heart of it - ever again.

And not until we have a revolution in political thinking that understands that politics is not about which party wins or loses, but is actually about how we care for people.

Is that too much to hope for? Maybe, but I am going to hope for it anyway.