

What might save democracy from our politicians?

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As is apparent from the traffic on this blog, people are taking time off right now. I always think that this last weekend in August, with its bank holiday in England and Wales, represents the last blast of summer, although I know that has already happened in Scotland. It is a final chance to take a break before life returns to something like normal in September. Most certainly, all aspects of my day job will be well and truly on the back burner over the long weekend.

That said, contrary to every expectation that I had, overall blog traffic in August has been very high. The month might well become the fourth largest ever in terms of readership in the blog's history.

It might also be the first where YouTube traffic might actually exceed blog traffic, with YouTube views likely to reach nearly 600,000 during the month, with most of those visitors watching over fifty per cent of each video they look at, which in practical terms means that most of those who made it through the first 15 seconds are getting pretty close to the end.

I mention this for a good reason. Interest in politics does not die during August. It is politicians' interest in the electorate that does.

That, though, raises another question, which is whether politicians are ever really interested in the electorate, except for those few weeks when they are desperately seeking out votes?

There was a time, quite long ago, when I think I believed that this indifference on the part of politicians was due to the pressure on them to get on with the job that I expected them to do, of representing us. I look back on that old self with both mild curiosity and even befuddlement. Was I right back then, or have politicians changed? My reason for asking is, I suspect, apparent: I no longer believe that politicians think it is their duty to represent us.

There is no one I have known who has not been appropriately cynical about the

electoral campaigning techniques introduced into the UK by New Labour, in particular. People have always been bemused by the idea that politicians might form their opinions based on whatever a small group of people might tell them. But, of course, as we now realise, that was never the purpose of these things.

Focus groups always existed to work out ways in which a politician might best tell the electorate to think so that they might agree with the outcome that the politician sought. The mistake so many made was to presume that the politicians were seeking to learn from the electorate. That was never the case. Instead, politicians were trying to find the best way to persuade us to fall into line with them.

As a consequence, the focus group can now be properly and appropriately identified for its particularly pernicious role in the development of the Single Transferable Party from which we now all suffer, with whichever part of the party that is in power being the one that has the best currently developed methods of persuading us to deliver power to a group of politicians whose interests, aspirations and goals might have absolutely nothing in common with those things that we might desire.

The consequence of this is now apparent. After 30 years or more of politicians presenting us with the pretence that they seek to determine our views by consulting with representative samples of the population, what is now clear is that they do nothing of the sort. Instead, they just work out their marketing messages through the use of focus groups. The impact has been toxic.

The politicians have forgotten what they ever knew about representing people. Instead, completely contemptuously, they now think it is for them to work out what needs to be decided, irrespective of whatever opinion we might have, and for us to be persuaded that they are right. The result is an arrogance on their part that is plain for all to see in the likes of Rachel Reeves and Wes Streeting, in particular.

For the rest of us, outside the Single Transferable neoliberal Party that seeks to maintain its control over us at all times, the loss of confidence in our politicians has been equally toxic. I am well aware that politicians have never been held in the highest regard. I equally doubt that public confidence in politicians has ever been as low as it now is.

The chasm that exists between politicians and the electorate is dangerous. Democracy can only survive on the basis of a workable relationship between politicians and the communities that elect them. If that relationship does not really exist, either because the politicians treat the electorate with contempt, or because the electorate realises that this is the case and respond in kind, then democracy is in peril.

Whether politicians realise this is open to doubt. Why would they, after all, want to understand something when comprehension of it would require that they change their behaviour when the current situation would seem to suit them very well? We might live

in decidedly forlorn hope if we think that they are going to change as a result.

Will, in that case, the electorate change by rejecting what neoliberal politicians are seeking to do to them, in the process looking for alternatives beyond most of the current political spectrum, of which Reform (but not the Greens) are decidedly a part? I simply do not know, although I worry that this may not be possible because we've known of marketing for around a century now, and neoliberal politicians of the Single Transferable Party in all its hues have now captured this methodology for their own benefit for a long time.

The consequence is a dispiriting situation where the best that we might hope for is a trigger point that arises for reasons that we cannot as yet know that might precipitate change. Climate change might do that. I also suspect that there might be a limit to the degradation of public services that the public might tolerate. A disaster of some sort might be that trigger for change, but this trigger point might come from something else altogether. But, until it happens, it seems we must to live in the current fraught situation that has been created by politicians who have no interest in listening to or representing those whose votes they seek.

What I am sure of is that this is not sustainable in the long term.