

What is politics for?

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Trump, Badenoch, and even Starmer and Reeves, are all making me ask the same question this morning. That is, what is politics for?

All of them give me, albeit in slightly differing ways, one answer. That is that politics is an exercise in manipulating people to provide support for the agenda that the politician wants for the sake of that politician's advancement at cost to society at large.

With Trump and Badenoch it is apparent that there is no real desire for the culture wars to which they are so obviously wedded as the mechanism to divide society to advance their own cause.

In the case of Starmer and Reeves the interests of the electorate are very obviously subordinate, most especially after the recent budget, to the interests of the City and big business.

Neither pairing is in politics to serve. They are there to take advantage.

The alternative view of politics is that it might be about service and advancing the interests of communities as a whole, to which the politician should be dedicated. There might, of course, be different views as to how to achieve this, but a number of characteristics should stand out.

First, the aim will be to find common ground despite differences. Whilst accepting that no policy will ever be universally acceptable, the aim will be to win acceptance from as many people as possible for the chosen policy because it obviously advances their well-being.

Secondly, that means no policy will be chosen because of its ability to divide and so create dissent.

Thirdly, politicians should see themselves as tellers of the truth. In other words, what they should seek to present are realistic choices within the constraints that currently exist whilst also explaining how and why, if necessary, those constraints might be

changed by chosen political action. Realism about the present is, therefore, mixed with realistic debate about the future that seeks to educate, inform and persuade. This contrasts with the current situation that seeks to impose a view without ever explaining the influences behind that imposition.

I think we have had politics of the second sort I describe in my lifetime. Far too many politicians, most especially at the national level, are now of the first sort. And that, I suggest, is why we face almost continual political crises. When politics seeks to use the people of a jurisdiction to advance their own interests we inevitably end up with a conflict between politicians and the people. The result is that politicians then use this situation to incite conflict between people when their job should be to create unity.

No wonder we are in trouble.