

Are all politicians junkies?

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Looking at the people who now describe themselves as politicians, it's reasonable to ask why they are pursuing that vocation because they don't seem to have a conviction of consequence between the lot of them. Could it be that they're a bunch of dopamine junkies, in it for the short-term fixes politics gives them?

<https://youtu.be/B0osc88WDZ0?si=TQz1JCwWjeoh8mFM>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=kjygu-176f3eb-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Are all politicians junkies?

There are lots of people seeking answers as to why politics has failed in the UK, has failed right across Europe, has failed in the USA, and my suggestion is that it is actually the case that all modern politicians are simply and straightforwardly junkies.

Now, I'm not accusing them of taking illicit substances or even illegal substances. I'm accusing them of being addicted to dopamine hits.

Dopamine is the natural substance that we release within our bodies when we have a high.

That high can come from eating a chocolate. It can come from the greeting from a friend, or being told we've done well, or in my case, it could come if you click the subscribe button and the like button for this video because that would make me happy, which probably is the worst ever link to such a request in the history of YouTube. But the point is that dopamine is the thing that makes us feel happy in the short term. And I have a very strong feeling that most politicians, now serving their countries, are only in the game for a dopamine hit.

That's definitely true of Keir Starmer because when it comes down to it, why did he want to be Prime Minister? The only reason that anyone can offer is that he didn't want Jeremy Corbyn to be Prime Minister, and that is it; a point that he has proven time and again since he became holder of that office.

And in that sense, he's exactly the same as a predecessor in office not so long ago, too. Nobody could ever work out why David Cameron wanted to be Prime Minister. The only goal he had was to get into office, and this I think is true of the vast majority of modern politicians. What they want is the dopamine hit from winning.

And winning is all that matters to them. They are desperate to get into office just to say. I won, but they don't know why they wanted to win and, in that sense, their goal of winning is as hopeless as the goal of making a profit is for a business, or the goal of being happy that many people say that they have in their personal lives.

Each of these is, in effect, an epiphenomenon. An epiphenomenon is a byproduct of something else.

The dopamine hit from winning an election comes on the night that the result is announced.

The dopamine hit from maximising profit comes from when a profit is reported to the press, and happiness, well, what is happiness? You can't actually pick it up, or see it. You can feel it, but it never comes as a package in its own right. It always comes as a consequence of something else.

And it's that something else that really is important, and that's just as true for politics. In politics, it's what delivers the dopamine hit to the politician that matters.

I don't mind them being dopamine junkies, if that's what they are, if they are also seeking to understand what gives them the hit.

If they got their hit from reducing child poverty, I wouldn't mind them being high when they can announce that they've succeeded in that goal.

If they get it, by putting people to work, or by delivering sustainability, or by improving the quality of a child's education - I mean a real education, not just exam results - then again, I wouldn't mind if they had the dopamine hit, because the dopamine hit would

then be the epiphenomenon of something well done.

But the trouble is, our politicians are dedicated to dopamine hits that come from simply stabbing their enemies in the back. Keir Starmer stabbed Labour's left in the back. Now he plays the game where the high point of his week is to have a go at Kemi Badenoch at Prime Minister's Question Time.

Is that all it's really about?

That, plus the little news slot that he might get each night which makes him feel happy that he is supposedly setting the agenda, although what for and why, no one knows.

This is really worrying. There is no substance to create the dopamine. There's just the media hit at the end of the day when it comes to most of these politicians, and media hits don't count.

People don't care about their politicians getting media hits. In fact, they'd rather their politicians didn't get media hits when they've got nothing to say because most people are pretty bored by politicians who do have nothing to say.

What they want to hear is that the politician has something good to report. That is truly justifying their presence on our screens. And that so rarely happens that we have to come down to this idea that the politician is only in this game for the dopamine hit and nothing else. The short-term, easy win that gets them a headline is all it's about now. And that has hollowed out politics to the point where it is simply not delivering for the people of this country or a great many other countries.

The politician has stopped trying to understand what it is - what the real matter of substance is - that will deliver the epiphenomenon of the dopamine hit and simply goes for the hit in itself, which the media provides. And until we can persuade politicians to go back and deliver substance and not just a temporary high for them and no one else, I would stress, then politics is not going to answer any question that our society poses of it.