

Funding the Future

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This post arose out of a conversation between Jacqueline, my wife, and me yesterday, although the idea had been bouncing around for a few days before..

The [allegory of Plato's cave](#) probably needs little retelling.

Plato suggested that the prisoners in the cave he imagined were chained so that they could only face a wall. A fire burned behind those prisoners. Figures passed between the fire and the prisoners, but all the prisoners could see were the shadows of those passing behind them. The prisoners, of course, mistook those shadows for reality because that was all they were permitted to see. Plato's point, for this purpose, was obvious: power controls what counts as "common sense" by fixing where we are allowed to look and what we might, as a result, see.

Let me apply that allegory to British politics as it is now.

First, imagine Nigel Farage as the figure that stands between the fire and the prisoners. He repeatedly parades stories designed to cast large, frightening silhouettes: about migrants, the failure of the NHS, crime, elites, climate action, and the threat from free speech and what he calls the woke agenda. His craft is shadow-making. His aim is not to reveal a complex world but to project a simpler, darker one.

Second, then suppose the so-called Overton Window is not a window at all. Suppose it is, instead, a frame in front of the back wall of the cave. We are told that the political thing to do is to "shift" it a little—left or right—while all the while still staring at shadows. That, though, is the trap. If the window is the means through which we see the wall, moving it a little in any direction changes nothing. That's because what is not permitted is what is required, which is turning round, which is what our media and political gatekeepers actively discourage.

Third, we have to presume that Farage's politics depend on our chains and our inability to see reality. He needs attention, and not accuracy; and heat, but not light. The more we reiterate his perspectives, endlessly debating his claims on his chosen terms, the

tighter the shackles become. The prisoners cannot escape by arguing over the relative sharpness of the shadows.

So what are the shadows, specifically?

Immigration is one. The shadow says migrants are the problem: they suppress wages, cause the housing crisis, create NHS queues, and increase the crime rate. The reality is that low pay, rent extraction, under-investment, and precarious work are the deliberate policy choices that actually drive insecurity. Most crimes are also down. Blaming migrants is a diversion that keeps the neoliberal, rentier economy off the hook.

Then there is the NHS. The shadow says the service is broken because it is public and faces excess demand. The reality is that a decade of austerity, workforce erosion, PFI legacies, and outsourcing have hollowed its capacity. Farage's solution, which is insurance and charges, casts a longer shadow, seeking a two-tier system in which millions will be forced to delay care or go without.

Hanging over this is the echo of Farage's all-time favourite line, of "Taking back control". The shadow insists the enemy is regulation and cooperation. The reality is that state-enforced standards protect workers, consumers and the environment. What we need to control is runaway wealth, corporate tax avoidance, monopoly power and extractive finance. None of that happens by staring at Brussels-shaped silhouettes on a wall and pretending they are the problem.

Climate change creates another shadow. The shadow paints climate policy as an elite imposition on people that cannot be afforded, that is based on a lie, and is not, as a result, needed.. The reality is that a just climate transition, creating sustainable and warm homes, clean transport, and green jobs, would lower bills, raise living standards, and increase resilience. What actually threatens livelihoods is the delay in taking action on climate change, not action.

On crime and disorder, the shadow focuses on punishment but never on the investment that might reduce and prevent crime, or prevent re-offending. The reality is that secure housing, decent incomes, community services and mental health support cut harm far more than performative crackdowns.

And then there is wokeness - the core Farage claim, which suggests that we must not turn around, because if we did, we would be filled with concern for others, for reality, for truth-seeking and the improvement of our position, to all of which Farage is opposed.

In each case, the shadow replaces structural analysis with scapegoats. It turns solidarity into suspicion and substitutes private grievances for public solutions. It is designed to keep us looking backwards.

There are a number of implications of this thinking.

Firstly, we do not need to move the Overton Window. We need to look in a different direction altogether. The window, as currently mounted, guarantees that only shadows enter the frame. Turning around -literally reorienting public conversation - is the act that matters.

Secondly, sunlight is the best disinfectant. By this, I mean that evidence, transparency, and lived reality are what we should be focusing on, rather than the shadows. Talk about the facts on wealth distributions, housing insecurity, energy bills, NHS waiting-time causes, and who profits. By illuminating systems, the opportunity to scapegoats fades.

Thirdly, refuse the frame. Stop repeating Farage's language as if his premises were neutral. If the question is "how tough shall we be on migrants?" you are already in the cave. The right question is "how do we build an economy that delivers secure incomes, homes and services for all?" That is outside it.

Fourthly, accountability must replace outrage as the engine of debate. Outrage points at the shadow and shouts. Accountability requires that we turn to the fire and address the issues of media ownership and influence, money-driven lobbying and political donations and ask who drives those agendas and to what end, and what they cost us all.

Fifthly, the politics of care is not a soft alternative to complex reality; it is reality. Human interdependence is not sentiment. It is the operating system of any society that works. Decent health, education, social care, housing, clean energy, public transport, and livable incomes: these are the sunlight by which people can actually see and act.

Sixthly, we must acknowledge that our media economy keeps the cave furnished. Algorithmic amplification of indignation and a Westminster lobby addicted to theatre mean the wall is always well-lit. Democratic media reform is not an add-on; it is essential to a better society in which we can really see the world beyond the cave.

What, then, follows in practice?

** We need to break the chains. Guaranteeing material security that frees people from manipulation, whether it be by universal basic services, a living income floor, rent controls and social housebuilding, restored local services, and investment in NHS capacity and staff, is essential.*

** Turn to the fire and address the problems created by wealth concentration, money and power. We must tax wealth properly; end corporate secrecy; require country-by-country reporting; close the loopholes that let rent extraction look like entrepreneurship, and rebuild fiscal capacity so that government can plan, invest and care.*

** Walk outside, see the world as it is, and tackle the climate change that is afflicting it*

by delivering clean power, low-energy public transport, and warm homes whilst repairing and retrofitting industry, with all of it based on decent jobs and regional equity.

** Change the viewing angle by delivering electoral reform and local empowerment so that politics is something we do, not something done to us. If people can only watch, they will watch shadows.*

** Reframe migration as what it is: part of a connected world and a modern economy. As a result, we should invest where pressure is felt, in housing, schools, and GP practices, so that communities welcome newcomers because their own needs are met.*

** And we must demand media that serves democracy. Public funding models for independent journalism, rules that put accuracy above engagement bait, and stronger antitrust enforcement in this sector are essential.*

The conclusion from all this is simple. Farage thrives in the cave. He needs the fire behind our backs and the Overton window fixed to the wall. He wants us to argue about silhouettes because the real world, of care, shared prosperity, accountability and climate responsibility, would dissolve his act in daylight.

We do not have to play our politics staring at a screen of shadows. We can turn around. We can see the fire for what it is and walk out into the sun. And when we do, the agenda changes: from blame to repair, from extraction to investment, from grievance to dignity. That is what funding the future requires.

Sunlight is the best disinfectant. Let's open the cave, step outside, and get on with the work of care.