

People know that the politicians they are now being presented with, most especially by Labour and the Tories, are, by and large, useless, without an iota of talent for the tasks they take on in the absence of anyone with a scrap of ability to do them. So why is that? Why do we have such poor-quality politicians now?

My thesis is simple: these parties, dedicated as they are to hopeless ideologies that are so obviously contradictory to the best interests of people in this country, have no hope of recruiting anyone of talent to promote them, let alone implement them in practice.

For example, Brexit drained the Tories of talent. It is almost impossible now to believe that any intelligent, thoughtful person could still claim that leaving the EU was a good idea. To do so requires an act of denial so complete that it should automatically disqualify anyone from serious public office.

But the problem of political decay goes far beyond the Conservatives. Labour, too, is suffering a similar collapse. They, too, suffer the Brexit problem because they will not distance themselves from it, but in their case, the problem arises from attachment to other ideas that are equally indefensible. The difference is that where the Tories have clung to a fantasy about sovereignty, Labour has betrayed the values it once held.

If the Conservatives' problem is delusion, Labour's is denial.

The Conservative delusion

The Tory Party has built its post-Brexit identity on the basis of the falsehood that Britain can "take back control" and prosper by isolating itself. What it took back instead was responsibility for its own decline.

Brexit revealed what had been true for years: that the party's purpose had shrunk from stewardship of the nation to protection of property and privilege. There are no longer any bright young people who can believe that Britain's problems will be solved by tax cuts, deregulation, or trade deals written in desperation. The marketisation of everything has failed. Those who stay in the Conservative Party now do so because they cannot imagine another world — and that is the surest sign of mediocrity.

The Labour denial

Labour's failure is different. It has not been deluded so much as ashamed because it is in denial of all that it once knew to be true.

To believe in public purpose, collective provision, and a caring state was once to be Labour. Yet its current leadership has decided that the route to power lies in pretending those convictions were youthful mistakes. So it clings to the language of fiscal rules, sound money, and market discipline as if moral authority flows from deference to the Treasury.

But intelligent people know this makes no sense. They know that governments spend before they tax. They know that austerity shrinks economies, that privatisation fails, and that the planet cannot bear another century of growth-at-any-cost. To demand that party members deny such realities is to drain Labour of precisely the people it needs most, which are those who think, question, and care.

Repelling talent

The result is that both major parties now repel talent. The Tories exclude intelligence by insisting on belief in the impossible. Labour excludes integrity by requiring disbelief in the obvious.

One asks for loyalty to fantasy; the other demands silence about truth. Neither can nurture the kind of people who might renew public life. Both reward obedience over curiosity, conformity over courage.

In both cases, and right across Westminster, certain dogmas still define the limits of what might be called serious politics, as these parties define it:

- * That government must balance its books like a household.
- * That markets are efficient and state intervention is wasteful.
- * That growth is always good, however destructive.
- * That private ownership is superior to public provision.
- * That fiscal rules are a measure of virtue.

These ideas repel bright people for the same reason that Brexit repels them: they require disbelief in reality. They deny what any honest observer can see, which is that our infrastructure is broken, our economy unbalanced, and our planet is on the edge of collapse.

Managing on autopilot

In the absence of real conviction, both parties now run on managerial autopilot. Labour's rhetoric about "growth" and "stability" sounds different from Tory talk of "discipline" and "responsibility," but the substance is the same and is that the government must act as a caretaker, and not as a creator, and for bright people, there

is no reward in that.

There is no vision for what an economy is for, only a determination not to frighten the markets. And the people who might offer such a vision, wherever they might be found, are treated as heretics.

The result is a slow but visible exodus. The most capable, imaginative and compassionate people no longer see politics as a home. They are building movements outside the parties because that is where ideas still matter and reality still counts.

They have not abandoned politics. Politics has abandoned them.

What next?

In that case, if talent is to return, then belief must return first. What is required is a belief in truth, care, and possibility. Politics will only renew itself when it once again admits that government creates the conditions for prosperity, that markets need boundaries, that people matter more than balance sheets, and that the purpose of the economy is to sustain life, and not exploit it.

Until then, the Tories will keep their fantasists and Labour will keep its deniers, and Britain will remain a country led by people who no longer believe in anything that is true.