

Funding the Future

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People feel politics has nothing to do with them — and they're right to feel ignored. In this video, I explain why our democracy is failing, why so many feel powerless, and how we can put people back in charge. From proportional representation to revived local democracy and citizens' assemblies, this is a practical plan to rebuild trust and participation.

If you believe politics should serve the public, not the powerful, this is the video for you.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pql220L0kqc&si=-MQVZiaUeZOAj2SY>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=49ysr-19e34ca-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

This is the transcript:

Why don't people engage with politics, and how do we change that? This matters to me because politics shapes every life in this country, so why do so many people feel it has nothing to do with them? That's the question I want to address in this video.

I have always been engaged with politics as long as I can remember.

I suspect that amongst those born in 1958, I am unusual for remembering the death of Churchill.

I can certainly recall the 1966 general election, and I remember the Aberfan disaster and all the comments that came out of that, including front pages of newspapers, ministerial statements, and everything else.

I remember the devaluation of the pound in 1968. I can't explain why, but I knew that politically it mattered.

And at the age of 11, I was politicised. I went to grammar school; my twin brother didn't. One policy divided us, saying that one of us was worth more than the other, and that to me was unacceptable. I saw inequality in plain sight, and that shaped me for life. I was always going to be political thereafter, and always have been, and have always fought the consequences of inequality, whether deliberately created or otherwise.

But most people do not feel that politics is for them. Admittedly, they don't see themselves as represented either, and they think that decisions happen elsewhere. They only tune in at most during elections, and even then, not very much. And then, with limited information, if they decide to go to the polling booth, they put their cross on a paper and then disengage.

I want to change that. I think politics is more important than a once-in-every-five-years engagement by a few with a ballot paper that leads to government that does not deliver for the people of this country.

If we're going to change politics, though, we need to be clear what politics does. Politics decides wages, and it decides rents. Politics determines how many hospitals we've got, and how many doctors are in them. It sets the curriculum that schools use and establishes how many schools and teachers there are. It creates our rights and responsibilities. It provides our security and delivers us with opportunity. And to be candid, it's a major factor in whether we thrive or struggle. Looked at like that, politics is really important.

So we need to be clear what politicians should be for in that case, and on this, I am unambiguous. The job of the politician is to help everyone realise their potential. They exist to serve the common good. The politician has no other purpose in being; that's it. They are public servants above all else. They are there to put people before power, to deliver fairness and possibility, and to put themselves second. If they don't do that, they're failing. They have chosen a life of public service.

And that matters because what we see far too often these days is politicians who have chosen politics as a career. Who seek influence or wealth and prestige as a consequence of the choice that they have made to seek public office, and who appeal to donors and not citizens and serve those who are already powerful.

Democracy has been corrupted as a result, and this is now so commonplace that most

people feel totally jaded by the political process and alienated from it, and all of those actions are totally unacceptable. This is politics that has gone off the rails. Of course, people are alienated as a result. Why wouldn't they be? People stop believing change is possible. Government becomes something done to them, not by them, or for them. Trust collapses, and hope goes with it. This is where we are.

So, reform is essential if democracy is to survive, and I think it is vital that it does; it must be renewed. Power must be returned to people. It must not be hoarded in Westminster. It cannot be captured by wealth. It must not be inherited by accident of birth, so we need to reform the processes that we have because all of those things are happening.

So what I now want to suggest are a series of reforms that are essential if we are to re-engage people in this country with the political process that is essential if we are to live well into the future.

My first reform is a very simple one. We must make sure that every vote counts, and that's not true at present in the UK. A lot of people know that in our current first-past-the-post electoral system, whatever they do, their vote will not count, or at least they think so. As a consequence, First-past-the-post blocks proper political representation for millions in the UK. They're ignored as a consequence. And so we need proportional representation to ensure that every vote in the UK counts.

That means that we cannot have the same size constituencies as now; we need multi-member single transferable votes. These are entirely possible. They're used in some elections across the UK now. People do understand how to make the system work, and as a consequence, we would end up with MPs who still represent areas, albeit bigger areas, but you might well have a chance for voting for one of them. In other words, your vote would count, and that matters because legitimacy requires inclusion.

My second reform is to end inherited political power. Democracy cannot rest on birthright, and that means there are two things that have to go. One is the House of Lords, because although now the inherited peers are leaving, those who are appointed stay there for life, and there's no democracy inherent in the process of appointment; and therefore, what we have left is still unacceptable.

But perhaps just as importantly, so does the Monarchy's constitutional role have to come to an end. I am not at this moment saying we need to get rid of kings and queens in this country, and all the paraphernalia that goes with it. Let them have a ceremonial role if we so wish. But their constitutional role must end.

There is no reason why they should be required to sign Acts of Parliament. They should not be opening Parliament. They should not be saying that they have governments. This is eugenic power embedded in our constitution, which gives out the message that some people are superior by birth to others, and in our country, that is not acceptable.

Privilege must not be made law.

My third reform is to renew local democracy. It is scandalous what has happened to local authorities during my lifetime. In 1980, local authorities were real vibrant places where decisions were made on behalf of communities by people who were known within those communities and who were drawn from them. But that now is almost history because local authorities have been gutted by successive governments from Thatcher onwards to the point where now they are merely delivery agents for central power with regard to some parts of education, but mostly with regard to social care. There is very little else apart from bin collection, libraries and parks that they can have any influence over, and even those last things are under threat when the government refuses to provide sufficient funding to let them happen.

We need to have local authorities that have power and resources. A better tax system for local government, in other words, as well as the powers to borrow to provide the infrastructure that is needed by communities, when, if we go back a century or so, it was local authorities who built our social housing. It was local authorities who provided our local transport. It was local authorities who built the gasworks, and it was local authorities who provided the electricity that transformed the future of this country. Centralisation has drained life from our local politics in the UK, and we have to bring decision-making back home again.

We also, and this is my fourth reform, need to make the United Kingdom a voluntary association of nations that wish to work together. In other words, consent must be given to be governed by all the nations that are part of this union at present, but that is not true right now. Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are not being given the option to decide their own futures. In other words, they're being held in some cases, most definitely in the case of Scotland, against their will, because there is now a clear majority in Scotland who would like to leave. My point is there has to be a right to exit this voluntary union inside the union agreement, which might, in fact, reinforce it because its very presence means that actually people might choose to commit to it. But until that option is available, the stress that is being created now will exist.

Democracy always requires the right to leave. Coercion breeds resentment, and not solidarity and unity must be voluntary. Westminster doesn't understand that it has to change this because everybody in the countries that represent the United Kingdom must have the power to decide whether their country wants to be a part of this union or not.

My fifth reform is with regard to the public funding of democracy. It should be obvious that political parties should serve voters and not donors. And yet corporate money has been buying policy and access in this country for far too long. Neoliberal thought, promoted by big business and captured economists, has resulted in all our major political parties offering similar policy agendas. That is the consequence of literal corruption of the political process.

So public funding with strict limits is essential. There must not be the opportunity for large donations to political parties to ever happen again. Democracy must not be for sale, and therefore, state funding is essential, but so too is something else. That is the requirement that parties do actually look to their members to raise the funds that they need. That is important because, unless parties represent members, they don't have a legitimate role to play in democracy in any case, so this relationship is fundamental.

We don't just need a proper social contract in the UK. We do also need a contract between our political parties and those who support them, and that has failed for too long, particularly in the Conservatives and Labour, who frankly turn a complete blind eye to what their members want, with that process being entirely replicated now within Reform.

My sixth reform is to teach politics and economics at school. Political education must start at school. We can't leave it too late. We do need to empower people to become proper citizens of the country in which they live. People need the tools to participate. They need to understand what politics is about. They need to understand what government does. They need to understand what economics is all about, at least at basic level and not the of micro theory about how the firm and how the individual works, but to know how government works, because that is what matters most of all. Macroeconomics is the key issue here.

And because this education has been denied, people have been left powerless, and I'm not interested in that. I want knowledge that creates confidence and agency for the people of this country, and as a consequence, I want democracy to be taught, and taught well, with sufficient resources dedicated to ensure that people come out understanding the country they live in. Nothing less will do.

Reform seven is a requirement for radical transparency, both within the government and in politics and in political parties. We always need to know who has influenced policy, who has funded campaigns, and who benefits from decisions. There is nothing less than full disclosure on these issues that will do. We have to know what is going on. Sunlight is the price of power, and legislation should back it up.

Reform eight is that I now think that citizens need to be more directly involved in the processes of government. I used to be very cynical about citizens' assemblies, and then I took part in one, and I thought this process might just work. Citizens' assemblies, bringing together hundreds of people chosen either by polling or by sortition or whatever you wish, could give people a real voice. Present them with the evidence on an issue, let them debate it, let them draw out the conclusions, let them see the opposing viewpoints, and then let them give their opinion. Not the opinion of the experts, but the opinion of the people who have heard the experts, who have sifted the evidence and said, "We think that this is what we would do."

Now, I don't want to make that binding. I don't think it can be binding; that's not

democratic. But I do think that this process of participation is essential because it needs to be seen that ordinary people have a chance to influence government, and nothing will rebuild democracy more than this sense of ownership could impart. So I believe that it is time for citizen involvement in the process of government itself by literally testing its ideas, not in hidden focus groups, but in open and transparent citizens' assemblies.

And what does all this mean? It means that we have to start removing the obstacles to participation in politics. We have to take politics out of the hands of a distant elite. We have to stop blaming people for disengaging. We have to make it clear that the system is rigged as it stands at present to exclude them, and that they are therefore suffering democratic betrayal. And as a consequence, we have to transform our politics to include people again. If we care about people, we have to care about politics, and we have to care about people's participation in politics; it is as simple as that. We have to give people power. We have to give them a voice, and we have to give them a reason to hope. What could be wrong with this as a goal? And those are all the things I've been talking about.

Democracy is not delivering for people now, and the consequence is that people have become apathetic. But that's because it's failing too many, whilst power is preferred by a few to keep an uninformed public quiet.

Our job is to prove that people do care.

Our job is to change the system so that people realise that democracy is worth caring about.

I believe that this is possible, and the programme I've suggested is not hard. It could be delivered by any government if it so wished; everything to deliver it is already available, and the cost is small. All you have to believe is that people matter and their voices need to be heard.

What do you think? Do you think we should be trying to revive democracy? Do you think you'd want to take part? Let us know. There's a poll down below.

Poll

[poll id="269"]

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