

It's time for a politics of care

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The list of places where riots took place in France over the weekend feels like the list of places a couture house might boast of hosting its stores, but not right now.

Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, Marseille and many more saw riots over the weekend. French police estimated half a million people took part. If their methods of estimation are similar to those used by the Metropolitan Police in the UK, many more did so.

The rioting went beyond France. It also occurred in Lisbon, Milan, and Tirana in Albania.

I don't condone rioting. Unlawfulness creates opportunities for the far right, and for those who will exploit such situations for straightforward criminality.

But, that said, the issue in this case was not about the minority of protesters who engaged in confrontation with the police. It was about the many more who took to the streets to say neoliberal France was failing them.

The reality is that, despite high levels of government spending as a proportion of GDP, France still cannot meet the expectations of its people. Underlying all of these protests is one simple fact, which is that the governments of the countries where protests are taking place, and those where they might do so, are set up with the deliberate intent of denying people the services that they need, based on claims being made that the government in question cannot afford to supply them.

Neoliberals convince themselves they are right because they claim the funding rules they created to restrict the role of government cannot be complied with and, as a consequence, they say they have no choice but to impose austerity on the people of their countries. They wring their hands in performative despair, and then loudly condemn those who complain through the media channels they control.

The far right embrace the cuts that the neoliberals propose, and suggest that they would go much further, simultaneously suggesting that they would impose draconian penalties on those who might disagree with them, which, if these cuts were to take place, might well include a great many of those they now hope will vote for them.

And the left? It, and the majority of unaligned people, who represent the vast majority in all countries, now ask a simple, straightforward question, which is why is government failing when it is so obvious that people and resources are available to create the better future most people desire?

And why is it apparently impossible to put those people and resources to use in ways that might create the well-being whose availability would provide the answer to the frustrations underpinning the massive disquiet in French society, and societies elsewhere?

These people know that there is a systemic failing in France.

They know that what is claimed to be impossible in terms of government is in fact a situation chosen to perpetuate a status quo that leaves the young without hope, most people in perpetual anxiety, and a few in positions of extreme fortune that decades of neoliberalism have delivered to them without creating underpinning prosperity for the community at large.

This is why, whatever President Macron might say, these riots are not unbridled violence, nor are they outbursts from a disgruntled few on the far left of politics, although the far left in question does very clearly understand the anger of those protesting. Instead, they are expressions of pent-up frustration with a system that has so obviously failed and is in desperate need of replacement.

What is that replacement? I have talked about it very often here. It is a politics of care.

A politics of care would put the well-being of people, society and the planet at the heart of government decision-making.

It would recognise that everyone needs care, everyone provides care, and that the purpose of government is to create the conditions in which we can care for each other.

That means we all need access to decent housing, properly funded healthcare, education that meets people's needs, social security that provides genuine security, and the right to a decent job with fair pay.

It means investing in the infrastructure that makes life work, from transport and energy to the public services on which we all depend.

It means tackling inequality, taxing wealth fairly, and ending the assumption that the interests of the wealthy must always take priority over those of everyone else.

It means confronting the climate crisis because there can be no well-being without a sustainable planet.

And it means recognising that the resources needed to deliver these things are not just

money. They are the people, skills, technology and natural resources that we already possess, but which our current economic system so often leaves unused or misdirected.

Above all, a politics of care would restore the belief that government can make life better, because it would be willing to use the powers that it has to do so.

That is what neoliberalism has denied us. It is what the politics of care could restore.

People are not demanding the impossible. They are demanding that the economy and government work for them.

That should not be a revolutionary demand. The fact that it increasingly appears to be one tells us just how badly our politics has failed.

The time has come to move on from neoliberalism to a politics of care. That is what the people of France are, I think, saying, and if they are, they're right to do so.