

OUR DILLETANTE GOVERNMENT

Isaiah Berlin was born today.in 1909.

There is a great story about an essay he wrote in his finals. He was supposed to write four essays but he only wrote one. For his last sentence he wrote: "Ostensibly this is an answer to question five (or whatever) but anyone can see that it also answers every other question on the paper."

It would be interesting to hear him talk about Lockdown. I guess that he would have something to say about the clash between what we are not allowed to do and what we are free to do. Dominic Cummings' forthcoming book on that very subject is expected to be enlightening. Order it now.

Our government is very keen to tell us that it is guided by 'the science'. I think they have in mind people in white coats working in laboratories, only pausing to do a lot of difficult sums on an old fashioned blackboard.

The Romans gave us the word and it means knowledge. Keeping that in mind we have to ask questions such as what kind of knowledge, where did it come from, can it be verified, in what circumstances might it be used and many more such. I believe that our rulers have not been especially good at asking questions like these. The groups of experts that they gather together to help formulate policy might benefit from having the odd philosopher present to ask awkward questions.

If there is one question that every politician ought to ask it is WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG?

When a member of the cabinet stands in front of the cameras to say "All will be ready by the first of the month" it is usually only a matter of hours before 'first' turns into 'last'. I hope someone is collecting all of this stuff. I seem to remember once that Gove's thousands quickly became thirty.

But why? Remember BSSG, Big Society, Small Government? This was my description of how the Cameron Gang wanted things to be. The role of government was to give a little nudge here and a little nudge there, accompanied by a couple of winks to any privateer who wanted to grab a piece of the NHS and the Welfare State.

The virus, like all unexpected crises, shows us that doing the business of government demands rather more than that. And, a solid rule of government is that we must always expect the unexpected. Remember what Cameron said to his tutor

at Oxford when asked why he wanted to be Prime Minister: "I think I'd be rather good at it". Was he?

I have lost count of how many jobs George Osborne has but it just goes to show that for him and his pals work does not mean that sleeves have to be rolled up. Our Great Leader's role model is Young Mr. Grace of Grace Brothers who would turn up now and again to say,

"You're all doing very well."

Donald Trump works harder at tweeting than de Piffle does at governing.

"Do I have to read all this stuff?".

As for that degree that all politicians seem to have these days, Politics, Philosophy and Economics (Cameron got a First). Isaiah Berlin did it in one year.

Cliff Jones 6th. June 2020

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