

Homegrown principles to re-humanise government and politics

Introductory note

Below are just a few of the reasons that prompted me to begin to write on this subject. I shall keep working on it and am always ready to pinch the good ideas of other people.

Police officers dressed as science fiction robocops

Multiplication of legislation to deal with terrorism (an abstract shape shifting noun applied to whatever a government wishes at any given time)

Growing gaps between rich and poor, powerful and powerless

Inhuman governmental policies, domestic and international

Shortsighted governmental incompetence

Disregard of the environment

In 1829 Sir Robert Peel gave us a set of principles for policing. He probably did not write them himself but as the then Home Secretary he endorsed them. The Conservative Party of that time had little in common with the party of today. It wished to preserve privilege but with the exception of the 'Great Reform Act' of 1832 that pretended more than it delivered it did not always try to pass off *deform* as *reform*, a word that in our history lessons at school we learned to respect.

Might we try to devise a set of principles for governing? It would have to be government *and* politics, especially as recent governments have not only reduced politics to the art of manipulation but have also disconnected so much of government from public participation. The people are now accountable to government. Old textbooks on the subject would devote chapters to how government was accountable to the people.

In many countries it seems that governments have chosen to prioritise the interests of global corporations and what Eisenhower referred to as the military industrial complex. There is an extensive range of decisions being taken affecting the people of which the people are either unaware or unable to influence. Too many of those decisions appear to reflect what has been called 'selfish capitalism'.

While our country and much of the world is being socially fracked it might be important to have a go at devising some principles. And to do this I feel little need at this stage to quote from the works of Aristotle, Plato, Montesquier, Beatrice Webb, Millicent Fawcett and many others, even Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair who did so much damage to government and politics. This is not a thesis. It is a piece of work that draws upon personal experience, observation and growing concern. We could all have a go at this. I think we should.

Of Peel's nine I have singled out Principle Seven, ***the police are the public and the public are the police*** as a starting point. We might also sum up his principles as ***policing by consent***.

But to say and agree that ***the government are the public*** and the ***public are the government*** is hardly enough and neither is the notion of ***governing by consent***. We not only need some flesh on these bones but we need to remain aware that solutions also bring problems. Unsupported assertion won't do, not even if we like and agree with it.

In order to move government and public closer to each other we shall, I believe, need the following.

1. A system of voting that comes much nearer to reflecting and representing the views of all.
2. A participatory democracy that allows dissent, difference, disagreement and understands that politics is about the open, inclusive, honest and consensual discussion of public values *prior* to policy making.

Let us look more closely at these needs and ask some questions.

In 1951 the Labour Party polled more votes than the opposition from a turnout of 82% but, failing to win enough seats, lost the General Election and the power to implement the policies for which the majority had voted. In 2015 although the Conservative Party polled more of the votes cast it was supported by merely 24.6% of the electorate from a turnout of 66.1%; and yet it won more seats at the General Election and so gained the power to implement policies supported by very few.

How legitimate can policies be when endorsed by so small a percentage of the electorate?

Tory Party leadership elections are currently designed to ensure that the person elected represents the largest proportion of those party members that have voted. However, during the 2011 referendum campaign on the issue of introducing an element of proportionality into our voting system for general elections David Cameron campaigned vigorously against the change. If the Tory Party had not changed its method of electing a leader David Davis would have won.

Is the public goose not entitled to the same sauce as the party political gander?

Could it be the case that our political parties prefer to obtain power no matter how small might be their support rather than to encourage participation and take the risk of losing arguments?

What do we need to do and what are we able to do to create a much more representative democracy?

Is, however, overwhelming support for government a guarantee of the wisdom of government? Mussolini and Hitler had overwhelming support.

Our second need relates to the second question above. We need a participatory democracy. Instead it is being taken from us. When Brown and Jacobs wrote *The Private Abuse of the Public Need* (2009) they revealed the cost of needing more regulations and regulators to keep an eye on what had, prior to privatisation, been regulated within the normal and open democratic procedures of public service. Privatisation means, as they pointed out, a growing disconnect between public service and democracy. They were specifically examining the administrations of George W Bush whose drive for privatisation and small government perversely increased the size of government.

As things stand, if you or journalists wish to know what lies behind the decision making of a private company delivering a public service, you and they will be denied access to board meetings and commercial confidentiality will be deployed as a silencing trump card. Our Freedom of Information Act does not empower us with the same rights as shareholders. This is quite different from attending a local government committee meeting, observing the decision making of people you and your neighbours have voted for or against and obtaining the minutes of previous meetings in order to construct informed judgments.

Privatisation has reduced democratic representation and transparency is a mere memory: we have opaque government. We also have a growing oligarchy as even Ferdinand Mount, a member of Thatcher's government and cousin to Cameron's mother, pointed out.

Further factors and questions for consideration

Subjects or citizens, what are we?

Public values received from government but implemented by the public: accountability stood on its head

Is education a social activity or a commodity?

Is a unified state a unitary state?

Is social fracking taking place? If so, what might be the consequences?

What might be our first steps?

Note

What follows are just a few of the links that may be incorporated into endnotes.

https://www.durham.police.uk/About-Us/Documents/Peels_Principles_Of_Law_Enforcement.pdf

<http://www.criticalprofessionallearning.co.uk/assets/SEARReviewBrownJacobs.pdf>

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/25/the-new-few-ferdinand-mount-review>