

POOR LIVES DON'T MATTER (except at election time)

Remember Grenfell? Remember the pledge to remove cladding? Our government certainly does not wish us to remember. It set itself a target. It loudly proclaimed its intention. Why did it do that? We can only conclude that it was to shut us up. It now seems that it shall miss its target by a spectacular distance. That virus has come in handy. We now have government by distraction. Instead of getting ourselves worked up about another governmental broken promise we are expected to occupy our minds with by how much the two metre rule is to be shortened. The cladding removal failure demonstrates, once again, that when it comes to private landlords and big companies Tory politicians simply do not put the boot in.

I think that the failures of our government are due to two major factors. One is sheer incompetence. Autocratic governments of the past could always point to their record of making the trains run on time. Our prime minister wishes to be an autocrat but the more power that comes into his hands the less able he is to deal with it. He wanted the job, very much, but doing the work involved? No thanks!

Another factor is a basic disdain for disadvantaged people. For generations possibly the most devastating question to be asked in the UK, particularly in England, has been "What school did you go to?" If the reply is "Bash Street Comp" do not expect respect from the likes of de Piffle. These days there is only one Bullingdonian in the Cabinet but the rest of them, particularly Patel, are wannabe Bullingdonians. That club would trash a restaurant and turn up with a cheque the next morning to pay for the damage. Today it is the country that is being trashed but the poor people who will pay for it.

GOVERNMENT BY TARGET SETTING

This was the Blair approach. School textbooks on Government and Politics used to devote whole chapters to Accountability. It meant holding governments accountable to the people. Not to Blair it didn't. His government set the targets for the people to hit, or else! I remember that David Miliband was very enthusiastic about target-setting. If, attending a consultation event under New Labour, you questioned the target you would be shut up with, "That is a Government given". Every policy became a mini Afghanistan or Iraq. The decision had been taken and the only remaining questions were about how to implement the policy. Policies were targets, nothing else.

The people? They had to be controlled. So many aspects of life became subject to Ofsted type inspection. Ofsted? The traffic wardens of education. As every teacher in England will tell you, "There is only one F in Ofsted."

Our Prime Minister has a very big target coming up. In the middle of March he said that it would take only twelve weeks to send that virus packing, to knock it on the head, to eliminate it, to expunge it. As we know, Our Great Leader is a man of his word. In a matter of days then we can expect to go back to normal. Barnard Castle here we come!

Can we have some more targets please? How about £350,000,000 extra per week for the NHS? How about re-nationalising the railways? How about an early retirement scheme for prime ministers? How about an ethical foreign policy (yes, I know, it has been tried)? How about using a lie detector during Prime Minister Question time?

THE VERB TO TRUMP, what does it mean?

Gosh the tension is mounting in the USA. Election year. When Greg Palast wrote his fascinating book THE BEST DEMOCRACY THAT MONEY CAN BUY he may have given the impression that the USA is a democracy. It was actually designed not to be. That is why it has an Electoral College. Who won the last Presidential election? Clinton did. She did not, of course, get the job. That reminds me of our 1951 General Election when Labour got most votes and a record score but the Tories became the government. Thirteen years of Tory misrule as Harold Wilson put it.

Right now it seems that Trump is doing his best to lose in November. Utter the words Black Lives Matter and you risk being labelled a terrorist. What a word that is. Thank you George W for declaring war on an abstract noun. The ineptitude of Derilium Donald is causing wide-spread loss of lives and loss of jobs. Who is losing the most? His supporters. What shall he do about it? More of the same. He is like our Great Leader but without the Latin and the semi-colons. Self is all.

If he fails in November possibly the mildest word to describe what will happen is 'unrest'. The UK has a history that includes racism and slavery. You could say that we have celebrated it. Today it seems that while some statues commemorating racists are being removed at least one, that of Churchill, is being protected. In the USA the celebration of genocide, land theft, broken treaties and slavery is a national holiday. It also takes place in November. We used to celebrate Empire Day and tell ourselves that it was something of which we should be proud.

The situation of the the UK and the USA appears to be markedly similar. Point out that Churchill was a racist and you will be attacked at the same time by Tommy Yaxley Robinson and by Benito Johnson. Use the words Black Lives Matter in the USA and you will be attacked simultaneously by its Number One Citizen and by the Ku Klux Klan.

Both countries have painted themselves into an extremist corner. If you want to paint a floor do not start near the door and work away from it. It is now very clear that neo-liberal economic policies come in a package with prejudice and ignorance. Throw a crisis such as a pandemic at these two governments and instead of clear-headed thinking what you get is, first, bluster and, when the incompetence is pointed out, threats of violence from those in authority.

In both countries it would seem that holding up a sign saying I CAN'T BREATHE is regarded as an extremist act provoking the powers-that-be. But it also releases the

vicious energies of some very nasty people. There comes a point in most protests when politicians who have power must decide where to place the emphasis when they are speechifying about the issue, the subject of the protest. Watch and listen closely because so often their speeches contain a 'BUT'. "Of course the prayers and thoughts of Her Majesty's Government are with the family of the bereaved BUT....". Work out for yourselves if the emphasis is before or after the 'BUT'.

The verb To Trump? What does it mean? It means to fart of course. Should he lose in November he is sure to fart. It won't be silent but it is sure to be deadly.

Cliff Jones, 12th. June 2020

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