

TORIES DID NOT ALWAYS REQUIRE IGNORANCE

We know that John Stuart Mill used the word 'stupid' to label Conservatives (not quite all of them). Mill wanted votes for women. We also know that Nye Bevan once said that Tories were lower than vermin. Bevan created the NHS against all the efforts of the Tory Party to prevent it so this expression of his gut instinct is understandable.

But today I remember a different Tory. Harold Macmillan not only set a record for the building of council houses but in walking into the Parliament of apartheid South Africa to deliver his Wind of Change speech he demonstrated that his political bravery equalled the physical bravery that he had shown on the Somme during the Great War. Not for some time have we had a politician capable of even contemplating delivering such a speech in such a place. Possibly Robin Cook was and Jeremy Corbyn is in that category.

Macmillan was a Conservative. Margaret Thatcher killed them off. Yes, those old Tories wished to conserve a comfortably stratified society but they were not comfortable being nasty to the lower orders. That discomfort is no longer a factor.

At Macmillan's wedding the guests included Thomas Hardy and many other authors. He knew and was influenced by Maynard Keynes. His progress through the ranks of the Tory party was, however, held up by his wish for government to do more for the unemployed.

It was only during the period of the 'post war consensus' that he climbed the Tory Party's greasy pole. That consensus was something else destroyed by Thatcher.

On a left/right spectrum of public values I would place Macmillan mostly well to the left of Tony Blair. Yes, he was fond of shooting grouse and enjoyed the company of the odd duke but his experience of war and of the impact of unemployment set him apart from Blair; and as a working member of a publishing company he read widely and mixed with those that did the same. Ignorance was never the choice of Macmillan.

I have not forgotten the sense of fuddy-duddiness that pervaded the end of his time as Prime Minister nor Establishment attempts to blame Stephen Ward for its own crimes. Nevertheless, I remember his speech on Selling off the Family Silver: his aged, eloquent, witty attack upon Thatcher's urge to privatise (to sell off) publicly owned utilities. This speech now belongs in the Museum of Conservative Decency (closed due to lack of funding).

Margaret Thatcher was the soul mate of Pinochet, the bloody precursor of Thatcher and Reagan who set about the destruction of society in Chile. As she told *Women's Own* in 1980, one year after she came into power,

“..... and who is society? There is no such thing!”

The belief that there could be a benign capitalism in a mixed economy went out of the window. Today we have no reason to pretend otherwise. We now know, or we should know for sure, that today's Tories only obtain votes by rationalising greed and privilege. We may enjoy what we got from Robin Hood and his band but too many of us continue to believe that our votes should go to the Sheriff of Nottingham because he is strong and stable.

We vote to be poor. We vote to hurt the disabled. We vote to frack education. We vote to build an aircraft carrier called HMS No Fly Zone. We vote to build Trident submarines controlled by the USA. We vote to arm Saudi Arabia. We vote to close libraries. We vote to sell off the NHS. We vote to destroy society. The full list is much longer. And when we fail to turn up to vote against the items on that list we are complicit.

As my taxi driver said to me today,

“I don't want to know anything about politics. They are all the same.”

No they are not. But choosing not to know perpetuates inequality, unfairness, shortened life expectancy and poverty.

Ignorance is not bliss.

Cliff Jones, 25th October 2017