

CEPaLS 16 Coalition of Tyranny

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This text was original posted in my Tumblr blog on April 2017. The blog is now deleted and so I am presenting this text as a CEPaLS paper.

I have just watched the last PMQs before the election. It demonstrates quite clearly a COALITION OF TYRANNY from the government benches and certainly at the dispatch box.

The ordinary way in which PM Theresa May dodged vital issues and did not address important questions (e.g. cuts to school budgets, parental donations to schools in order to fund salaries and teaching resources) is really quite chilling. It is also obvious that at a 'moderated' party leader debate on prime time TV no party leader could get away with this, and so no wonder PM Theresa May is trying to dodge the demands for transparency and accountability that an election campaign usually demands of the incumbent PM.

I intend COALITION OF TYRANNY to be an antidote to the charge that anyone who is not doing as they are told on the government benches is in a 'Coalition of Chaos'. This phrase is the one being used in the election by the Conservatives, and it is replacing the 'Take Back Control' and 'This is our Independence Day' mantras of the EU Leavers in the June 2016 referendum campaign.

What is going on?

It seems that 'Coalition of Chaos' is being used to discredit the idea and reality of debate, exchanging ideas and the opportunity to give recognition to a range of standpoints. Democracy requires the voter to understand and to exercise judgment, and this cannot happen without creating the spaces where ideas and evidence with views and strategies can be made public.

The background to 'Coalition of Chaos' is to create the reality of (and there is no alternative to) one party government. So what is now visible is a COALITION OF TYRANNY, where MPs from 'other' parties are 'othered' as untrustworthy, incompetent and downright dangerous.

There are some clues about this in recent events:

In calling the general election on 18th April, Theresa May stated:

"This is the right approach and it is in the national interest, but the other political parties oppose it. At this moment of enormous national significance there should be unity here in Westminster, but instead there is division. The country is coming together but Westminster is not. In recent weeks Labour have threatened to vote against the final agreement we reach with the European Union, the Liberal Democrats have said they want to grind the business of government to a standstill, the SNP say they will vote against the legislation that formally repeals Britain's membership of the European Union and unelected members of the House of Lords have vowed to fight us every step of the way. Our opponents believe because the Government's majority is so small that our resolve will weaken and that they can force us to change course".

So it seems that our MPs are not allowed to represent the national interest or their constituencies in ways that go against government strategy.

Theresa May went to say about her opponents (as much of the discourse is personal):

“They are wrong, they underestimate our determination to get the job done and I am not prepared to let them endanger the security of millions of working people across the country because what they are doing jeopardises the work we must do to prepare for Brexit at home and it weakens the Government’s negotiating position in Europe. If we do not hold a General Election now their political game playing will continue and the negotiations with the European Union will reach their most difficult stage in the run-up to the next scheduled election. Division in Westminster will risk our ability to make a success of Brexit and it will cause damaging uncertainty and instability to the country”.

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/elections/2017/04/theresa-may-calling-early-election-full-statement>

So it seems that there is a job to be done, and nothing should stand in the way of the person charged with delivering it.

There are many issues to consider here, but it seems to me that the ‘Tyranny’ involved in the ‘Coalition’ of disparate right wingers on the government benches is located in the predisposition of PM Theresa May to see every issue as a management issue. Getting the process right, doing it at the right time, and achieving the right outcome matters more than the substantive matter that is actually being managed. It does not seem to matter that May presented herself as a Remainer in the Referendum campaign.

No one doubts the need to manage Brexit along with other major strategic issues, but Brexit, and the NHS, and Schools, and Pensions and... are all more than something that must be rendered manageable and then managed. It seems to me that there is much to be gained from Fred Inglis’ book, *The Management of Ignorance* (1985, Basil Blackwell), where he states:

“Management indeed turns out to mean persuading others to agree with a more or less good grace on ends which are systemic and unavailable to question. Technique and skills are key words in these training, never judgement or reason, nor admiration nor disgust. Indeed the strange ring of this latter coinage takes the measure of its exclusion from the vocabulary of social (and therefore moral and political) arrangements” (p101).

PM is rendering us ignorant through the management of public policy. And, when the logic and technology of management meets the prerogative powers of Henry VIII, then tyranny is complete. We know that Parliament would not have been involved in the decision to Trigger Article 50 if members of the public had not brought a legal case. And we know how the media collaborates with and enables ignorance through its front pages that attack the judiciary.

None of this is new. Readers of my blog will know that I have been presenting evidence, ideas and arguments that represent different standpoints to those in the current government who are seeking to restore Grammar Schools as modernized segregation. However, this is not wanted, where Justine Greening recently stated:

“I don’t accept the arguments from those who critique grammars and selection whilst simultaneously ignoring the views of parents. On the one hand, they call for no new grammar schools, but on the other, they have nothing to say about the grammars we do have. And they certainly aren’t listening to the choices of parents, when we know how oversubscribed grammars are. We are listening. Many parents - from ordinary backgrounds - believe in the chance to send their children to a grammar school. That’s the kind of school that they think suits their child. So they get a great start. We want parents to make the right choice for their child. So we need a diverse range of schools to cater for the needs and talents of all children. Because you don’t make this country better by taking away opportunities from children that deserve them. You do the opposite. You level up. You extend opportunities to those that haven’t got them. That’s why this government believes it must be parents and communities who have the final say on whether to have a grammar school in their area”.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/justine-greening-education-at-the-heart-of-our-plan-for-britain>

Now if the contribution of the critiques of the government's plans for Grammar schools are examined then it is really quite clear that Justine Greening is misrepresenting the arguments and evidence. That is a neat and well used political trick. Certainly she is being more polite than her predecessor Gove who described us as "enemies of promise", but essentially she is positioning us in the same way as Gove. Those who disagree are 'enemies' because they are against what is good for children and parents, and they are against 'promise' or giving those who deserve to get on to actually get on. Even though the research evidence challenges such assertions. The key phrase in the extract from Greening's speech is: "That's why this government believes..." and so we know it is about the private beliefs of those who hold office rather than the independently funded and peer reviewed research evidence. In reality researchers just get in the way of efficient and effective management, and so ignorance is vital to policy delivery.

Tyranny is about the removal of enemies – whoever are denounced as such. But totalitarianism is when the innocent are removed! So why does the Brexit strategy aim to use UK people in Europe and European people in the UK as bargaining chips? It seems that process matters more than values.

The COALITION OF TYRANNY was so evident today at PMQs and is denying the vitality of politics as human and relational. As Arendt says:

“Politics is based on the fact of human plurality”

(2005, *The Promise of Politics*, p93).

Would someone please tell PM Theresa May and her ministers? (Oops, I should have said her managers).

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