

Trust in the establishment? We dont believe you...

One of the big themes of my book is the breakdown in trust in Establishment forecasts, remedies and ability to even identify what people think the problems are. In a healthy democracy there are always sceptics, campaigners trying to change the agenda, and differences of expert opinion. In recent years there has been a bigger reduction in trust in establishment analysis and priorities, allied to more concerted attempts by the establishment to crowd out any alternative narrative or policy approach. They have got better at spinning as they have got worse at managing.

In the area I know best, economic forecasts and policy making, the banking crash and its aftermath was a major knock to confidence in official forecasts and their ability to make policy for prosperity. The widespread adoption of austerity policies, especially the extreme ones in the Euro area, added to the disillusion. It is true that the UK Treasury and Bank had a very disappointing record prior to the Great Recession, but that for many was the final straw.

Most of my adult life I have been a critic of successive Treasury policies by the changing governments who usually perish through economic incompetence. In the 1970s I was urging more prudent policies on spending and borrowing, only to see Labour humiliate our country by having to go for a bail out at the IMF and bring on a nasty recession.

In the 1980s I successfully battled against submitting the UK to the boom bust torture of the European Exchange Rate Mechanism, only to lose the battle at the end of the decade. The scheme did even more damage than I imagined, plunged us into recession and threw the Conservative party out of office for 13 years as a result.

In the period from 2005 I was one of many warning of excessive debt and credit building in the system. After 2007 I was a lonely voice urging a less severe approach to sorting out the banking system, watching the authorities break some banks and trigger another large recession. That threw Labour out of office. Today I remain a critic of the over tight money policy and the damaging tax policy of the current government, which is slowing growth too much.

The Referendum campaign was another major blow to expert opinion and trust in government financial institutions. Their stupid pessimism for the economy if we dared to vote to leave the EU was soon disproved by events. It confirmed critics in thinking official forecasts are politically rigged to suit the establishment.

Oxford talk Friday 17 May “We dont believe you” The assault on establishment views

On Friday 17 May at 2 pm I am giving a talk on the collapse of great parties and the rise of scepticism about establishment opinion at All Souls College, High Street Oxford.

All those interested in coming should email myles.larrington@parliament.uk so we can tell the Lodge at All Souls to let you in.

I am happy to take questions on anything from migration to climate change, from Brexit to the trade war.

All change for the trains? Further evidence for the Williams Review

I wrote the minority report on how to introduce private capital into the nationalised railway when I was in government. I proposed keeping track and trains together. The majority went with the idea of splitting the ownership and management of track from trains. This just happened to be the EU view, which became a requirement. My main objection to the split was it created a massive monopoly track and stations provider which would be unresponsive to the ultimate customers, the passengers, and not especially responsive to the smaller and temporary franchise companies running the trains.

It was bound to lead to rows over who was to blame when a train is late. Was it poor track, bad signals, the requirements of the network provider? Or was it poor trains, driver problems or other issues from the operating companies? As I feared there were plenty of delays and plenty of disputes about who was to blame. Poor signalling and network management was often the cause, but so was poor labour relations by the train companies.

It was also likely to push the network provider back into the public sector. Such a large concentration of power invited Ministerial intervention. The perceived need to continue to subsidise the railways meant a stream of cash going from taxpayers to the industry, with the network provider likely to be lobbying. One of the main reasons nationalised monopolies often served their customers badly was the perception of their Boards and senior management that their customer was the government, not the people using the service or buying

the product. They looked upwards for taxpayer cash and Ministerial directives. They did not look down to find out what customers wanted and to treasure their financial contributions.

I recommend that the government examine ways to reconnect track with trains under common management. That way the investment programmes can be compatible and co-ordinated, and passengers know who to blame for poor or insufficient service. The train company can be responsible for the whole experience, on the station, on the train and the train's performance on the track. They would have more incentive to make those smaller but timely investments in better signals, better information systems, short passing places and the like that could revolutionise train service reliability and add to capacity where needed. One of the big constraints on train traffic growth today is the nationalised network providers inability to supply sufficient train slots at busy times for more popular services.

The integrated companies in turn must not be unchallenged monopolies otherwise they too will be less responsive to customers and more minded to play political games around subsidy and government led structural decisions. The main rail company owning a given line or region of track would have to treat the track as a common carrier and be prepared to lease train spaces to rival companies. There will need to be an independent access regulator to ensure this is observed and practised fairly. Challenger companies should also have the right to add track to the existing network, again with suitable regulatory supervision of revenue sharing, safety and other matters. It is possible to design decent sized integrated companies that leave open competition between lines and services. The obvious case of East coast versus West coast mainline is not the only one. These lines should be owned by different companies.

Train companies will need subsidy in some cases. There needs to be clear rules over subsidy allocation. The things to avoid include a subsidy system which protects a fossilised service, keeping routes which would be better replaced by new services. It is also a danger that the maximum subsidy goes to the least used service, providing a perverse incentive to run unpopular services because they have always been services.

(to be continued)

Book launch – how great parties can be destroyed by close association with the EU project

At the launch of “We don't believe you” yesterday I stressed the way most Christian Democrat and Social democrat parties on the continent have ceased

to be serious challengers for power, giving way to new parties that are usually more critical of the EU scheme, of austerity economics, the Euro, migration and benefit policies, dear energy and the rest. I pointed out how Conservative and Labour detached themselves from decline and fall on the continental model in the 2017 General election, achieving 82.4% of the vote between them.

More recently with the Conservative government delaying Brexit and Labour going towards a second referendum and dumping Brexit altogether, they have slumped to just 56% together in the local elections, with worse polls for the European elections so far. The message is clear – leave the EU quickly and popularity is likely to return, stay in and get sucked into the continental turning away from traditional parties.

“We don’t believe you” available on AMAZON

The price is paperback £6.99; kindle £4.99.

The links to the book to buy online:

Paperback version:

ISBN-10: 1095254952

ISBN-13: 978-1095254950

Kindle version:

ASIN: B07QYBK9SZ

On Amazon:

https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dont-Believe-You-Establishment-Differently/dp/1095254952/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=we+don%27t+believe+you&qid=1556687292&s=gateway&sr=8-1

On Bite-Sized Books website:

[We Don’t Believe You](#)

The book has chapters on military intervention, austerity economics, Brexit, the collapse of the Social Democrats and Christian Democrats as governing parties in most of the EU, the clash between social media and conventional media, the way some large businesses side with big government to the annoyance of their customers, political correctness, large scale migration and the difficulties caused by the Euro.

“We don’t believe you Why Populists reject the establishment” Bite-sized books Available through Amazon

Presentation of Post Office petition

I presented the Wokingham petition against Post Office closure to the Minister on Tuesday. She promised to share it with the Post Office management. She plans to meet them next week.

She listened carefully to the case I set out about the growth of Wokingham, the extent of demand for counter services already and the likely increases, and the worries that the WH Smith provision will not be sufficient or easy to access. I stressed that we had both lobbied about the decision in principle to move and about the nature of the replacement service proposed. I explained that opposition is widespread and people do not think the management has been listening to them over their concerns.

I will keep you posted when I hear of what happened in the Minister's meeting with senior management, and will post the Minister's response to my meeting when it is available.