

The reign of experts and the “post democratic”age

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I like good experts. Modern science and technology has delivered some great advances which improve our lives. If I fell ill I would of course consult a doctor and seek expertise.

The problem is the present age is cursed with some experts especially in economics and government who keep getting it wrong yet they still expect the rest of us to accept their verdicts however damaging or daft they may be.

Lord Mandelson summed up the direction of travel when he talked about transition to a post democratic age. Modern governments try to give away their powers and responsibilities to international and national so called independent bodies full of alleged experts. They seek to prevent elected governments changing things by locking future governments into the system by binding International treaties. For years our budgets and economic policy were first dictated by the European Exchange Rate Mechanism and then by the Maastricht debt and deficit requirements. Our energy policy is governed by Climate Change Treaties.

Some people want us to be democratic so they oppose locking ourselves into the rules and decisions of national and international bodies in principle. Other people would not mind if those bodies made wise decisions and did well, but understandably get cross when they lead us to disaster.

The truth is you cannot say you live in a democracy if crucial parts of government are under independent expert control with no democratic accountability. In practice in a democracy like the UK Parliament and government are held responsible for big decisions even if they are taken by so called independent experts. In a later post I will look again at how the Bank of England is not in fact independent and how wrong it has been on major issues of economic and financial policy over my adult lifetime. It is crucial that fallible expertise is subject to criticism and influence by elected officials and can be overturned if necessary by the votes of the people. The EU has threatened this important part of our democratic settlement with its rigid legal structure. Those in the Eurozone suffer even more from its

defects.