

The Western rules based system

The best features of the western system are the bases in democracy, free speech and limited government. In recent years there has been a big rise in international quangos, international law, and Treaties seeking to constrain the actions of individual nationally elected governments. There has been a parallel move to create more and more powerful so called independent bodies within each state and the EU to do much of the work of government without reference to the elected Ministers.

These moves have often been welcomed or even designed by the elected governments themselves. Elected Ministers seemed to think if more was decided and performed by independent bodies at international or national level they would escape the blame if things went wrong. They believed that you could find a range of talented independent experts who would solve problems and manage things well. Elected Ministers would be free to travel around feeling important and taking the credit.

This is of course nonsense. It is also dangerous because it creates a growing gap between the elected party representatives and many of the electors. The quangos often get it wrong, but leave the blame to Ministers who had no power to change things short of changing the constitution of the bodies concerned and taking back control. In the UK there have been spectacular failures. We have an independent Bank of England charged with keeping inflation to 2%, presiding over a rate which soared to 11%. We have an Environment Agency and water regulator presiding over sewage dumping into rivers and threatening us with water rationing in a country which gets plenty of rain much of the time. We have an independent NHS England management charged with getting waiting lists down and given record funding, only to see the waiting lists surge. I could go on.

EU laws and quangos have destroyed most of the Social Democrat and Christian Democrat major centre left and centre right parties by associating them in office with over bureaucratic, high tax ,low growth policies for years. EU politics is defined by challenger parties emerging, sometimes taking national control, but then failing to change policy owing to EU constraints. Syriza, Vox, Forza, En Marche and others have risen and fallen in their turn.

What many of the public expect is for elected Ministers to consider expert opinion but to come to good decisions based on examination and balance of the various opinions on offer. Leaving the pandemic to pandemic scientists would not have been a good idea, as government needed to balance the needs of the many who would not get a serious version of covid against the wish to protect the vulnerable. The whole point of having a PM or President was to ensure priorities other than hitting covid were reflected in decisions. It is also a strange idea that there is one strand of expert opinion which is bound to be right.

I will have more to say on this in future postings.