

THE RECESSION IN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

That phrase came to me the other day. The more I think about it the longer and deeper that recession has been. We looked at Trump and, unavoidably today, we look at Our Great Leader. We can so easily convince ourselves that the recession has only recently come upon us. I am afraid not.

I can remember a committee meeting in the late 60s or very early 70s when a group of us schoolteachers persuaded an Exam Board to adopt the title Government and Politics for CSE instead of Citizenship, which implied obedience to rules rather than participation in deciding any rules. We felt progress was being made. Today we are back to citizenship. Do as you are told. Fit in.

I worked on a project, a most fulfilling project, that sought to turn back on to education teenagers that had turned off. Experimentation went with both fun and fulfilment. I am so glad that I took part.

As an extension of that project came what I still see as my greatest educational achievement. It also might have been my greatest failure. Yes it was.

For 11 years I had worked in an area of very high unemployment. GCSE had just begun. It was possible to design and obtain approval for your own. With help I designed one in Community Studies (yes, I know I have mentioned this before). Local people began what was then the largest Housing Co-operative in Western Europe. My GCSE was the first social science syllabus to be approved under the Education Act of 1988.

Imagine how I felt as teenagers sat round tables discussing demographic trends with architects and others while deciding if 3 or 4 bedroom houses were needed. Afterwards they would write it all up critically and gain credit for it.

The Conservative government stopped all that and the Catholic Church closed that school in an area of great need. Church? Religion? Isn't it supposed to be about forgiveness? They won't get any from me.

Strangely, I remained optimistic. No, not strangely, foolishly. By some accident I became the Director of Continuing Professional Development in Education at the University of Liverpool. So many students. International students as well. I learned so much from them. I should have told them that more often.

About 22 years ago one of them, having carried out research into kids chucked out by Liverpool schools, said the situation was going to get worse. Nonsense! It was going to get better thought I. Me, an expert, knew how to make things better. Guess what, who was right? The student, not the teacher.

But why? Back to THAT recession. Increasingly ordinary people have become receivers of decisions and not participants in making decisions. Increasingly, to be poor has been accompanied by alienation. We have a dysfunctional government but it's members get away with it because they keep their hands on the levers of power.

They place the fulcrum of government and politics. They not only decide the laws but, when it suits them, alter their meaning.

If you are powerless how do you cope? You move into another society. You move into one that takes what scraps it can and commits what crimes it can get away with. Crime? Which is worse, selling a few drugs or cheating the entire country by fraudulently pretending to manufacture face masks?
Aren't we supposed to climb out of recessions. How might we get out of this one?

Cliff Jones, 16th February 2022

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