

Some Reflections from July 2000



Encouraging The Reflective Citizen

Hypothesis:

The lack of containment within society at this time is resulting in defensive and reactive action at the expense of reflection and thought. Fear and self-interest seem to be the driving forces behind much individual and group behaviour.

The leaked memos written by Tony Blair and his spin doctors reveal a prime minister reacting in a knee jerk way to what he perceives as popular anxieties. The ideas outlined in his private memos do not stand up to close scrutiny and there is plentiful hard research evidence to demonstrate that they would not be workable or effective. There is no evidence of analysis, reflection or thought in the face of complex issues (most obviously anti-social behaviour in public and asylum seekers).

The tragic murder of a child triggers a sensationalist campaign by a national newspaper to "name and shame" paedophiles, despite the warning of knowledgeable professionals that this will not increase the safety of children (indeed may have the opposite effect) and a number of incidents of innocent people being attacked after being wrongly identified.

The by now familiar public ritual of flocking to the scene of the tragedy and leaving flowers, cards and cuddly toys may allow ventilation of emotion but in a self-indulgent and vicarious way - as though we all have to have our own part of the experience.

On the roads, driver behaviour seems to get worse, with increasing incidents of "road rage" and lack of consideration for other people, (though this does seem to be mostly a male trait). Our individual sense of self-worth often seems to have become confused with getting our own way.

This de-valuing of analysis, thoughtfulness and reflection in preference for stridency, false certainty, reaction and mass emotion is a symptom of a society struggling with its identity. The Empire may be long gone, but do we still have a skewed sense of our importance in the world? And who is "we" in this newly devolved UK of 4 nations?

Society seems to be in the grip of paranoid-schizoid behaviour. There's a lot we need to think about - and it seems to be just too difficult.

Any thoughts?

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