

“The privilege of public service” given as the Ditchley Annual Lecture

Writing in his Prison Notebooks, ninety years ago, the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci defined our times. “The crisis consists precisely of the fact that the inherited is dying – and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear”.

Gramsci’s analysis was developed between 1929 and 1935. The stability of the Edwardian Age – of secure crowns, borderless travel, imperial administrative elites and growing economic globalisation – was a memory. The inherited world of aristocratic liberalism had gone.

But a new world of liberal, democratic nation states with welfare systems, social insurance and cross-class solidarity was still a distant prospect. And for those who were charged with leadership there were any number of morbid symptoms affecting their bodies politic at that time.

Economic depression had undermined faith in Western democracy. Traditional political and party structures broke down while protectionist trade barriers went up. Ideological polarisation divided families and societies, competition for resources generated international conflicts, and new technologies offered expanded realms of opportunity but they also unsettled traditional patterns of working, and they threatened new and horrific means of destruction.

Now our age is not the 1930s. But it is an age of morbid symptoms. The model that the current generation of political leaders inherited has been crumbling.

For much of the period since 1945, Western nations have had relatively stable party and political structures. The leaders of those nations, political and business, have justified their positions on the grounds of meritocracy – we’ve proved through our exertions that we’re the best – and also on grounds of efficiency – we’ve shown through the spread of economic growth and greater opportunity that we deliver.

But since the financial crisis of 2008 those foundations and assumptions have been systematically eroded.

Across Western Europe we’ve seen the political system that we inherited fracture. Traditional Social Democratic parties have either been eclipsed or undermined to their left. Syriza in Greece overtook Pasok, Podemos in Spain took huge chunks out of the PSOE, the Dutch Labour Party lost three quarters of its vote in the last general election dropping from the 2nd to the 7th largest grouping in parliament. The French Socialists were left for dust by the radical leftists of La France Insoumise and the German Social Democrats struggle now to appeal to more than a sixth of their electorate, with a number of their former followers supporting the hard left Die Linke leading them to be consistently outpolled by the Greens.

Traditional Christian Democrat or Conservative Parties have tended to fare better. But parties of the radical or populist right have, in many cases, again either undermined their previous dominance or overtaken them entirely. Vox in Spain has chipped away at the PP. The AfD is the first party to the right of the CDU and CSU to sit in the Bundestag since the Federal Republic was established. In the Netherlands the parties of Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet, difficult to pigeonhole, but both certainly to the right of the traditional Dutch consensus, together have the support of almost twice as many voters as the Dutch Christian Democrats. In France, Marine Le Pen, and in Italy, Matteo Salvini, are the principal opposition figures – again, neither traditional Gaullists or Christian Democrats.

And even in countries where the traditional party structures appear to be continuous with the world we inherited, the parties now take positions which would have been unfamiliar, to put it mildly, to their leaders much less than a generation ago. In America, the ruling Republican orthodoxy is to be sceptical of free trade; unattracted by notions of conventional global leadership; unconvinced by the efficacy of alliances such as NATO. All those positions are departures, I'm sure most would agree, from the position of George W. Bush never mind George H.W. Bush.

It would take more time than I have available today, indeed perhaps more time than any of us still have to spend in our working lives, to establish definitively why this has been so.

But, at its root, is – I think – a deep sense of disenchantment on the part of many of our citizens with a political system that they feel has failed them. The compact leaders offered – trust that we are the best, trust that we have your best interests at heart, and trust that we will deliver – was broken in their eyes.

Even before the financial crisis of 2008, economic growth was slowing across the West, as identified by economists from Robert J. Gordon to Fredrik Erixon and Björn Weigel. And just as growth was slowing, so its diminishing benefits were becoming increasingly concentrated in the hands of the already fortunate – as Andy Haldane put it in 2016, the economic pie has not risen rapidly, and the pie has been unevenly sliced. Those with higher level cognitive skills saw an increasing return for their labour, while those working in traditional manufacturing saw more of their jobs undertaken abroad and indeed saw wages undercut at home.

Globalisation, as practised, seemed to be eroding social solidarity and deepening a gulf between elites and those whom they governed or employed. And that gulf was not simply one of wealth. It was also one of sympathy.

As the British author David Goodhart analysed in his book, *The Road to Somewhere*, the gap between those with connections and credentials who can live and work anywhere, and those with fewer resources who remain rooted to the heartland, has only widened in recent years. His work, preceded by Christopher Lasch, has been supplemented by the writings of Paul Collier and J.D. Vance among others, and they all underline that those in the elite with cognitive skills, qualifications and professional mobility tend to have, or

develop, different social and political values from other citizens.

The views, tastes and concerns of those who write for the New York Times, who run higher education institutions, chair business representative organisations, who advise on ESG responsibilities for corporates and indeed those who run Government departments tend to have become more distant over time from those who build homes, manufacture automobiles, work in logistics, harvest food and dispose of waste. To colour it crudely: the former are more sensitive to the harm caused by alleged micro-aggressions; the latter are less likely to be squeamish about tougher sentences for those guilty of actual physical aggression.

This sense that those who had been in power had presided over a growing gulf in both wealth and attitudes, and were no longer working in solidarity with other citizens, was the backdrop for the crises in authority which started during the first decade of this century.

Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which I supported I should add, were widely seen to have been mismanaged – one suffering from endless revision and ending in retreat; the other perceived to be launched in haste and error; and both revealed faults in policy-making and execution.

Crises of authority in the church consequent upon abuse revelations, in Parliament following the expenses scandal and in the UK media after phone-tapping allegations all unsettled faith in existing leadership.

The migrant crisis on Europe's southern shores raised profound issues about just how humane and civilised our elites were.

And all these discontents were rising as the world faced the terrible fallout from the financial crisis. Those in politics and business who had been trusted to generate increasing prosperity and provide for social security were found more than wanting. For many, they had failed to anticipate the crisis, failed to identify or take responsibility for what had gone wrong, failed to ensure the burden of repair was fairly shared, failed to reform the institutions, especially the finance and business institutions at the heart of the crisis, and overall failed to recognise the scale of change society demanded.

All these factors underlay the revolt against the elites which saw voters desert established parties, withdraw their support for the economic consensus which had underpinned globalisation for at least three decades and, in many cases, opt for polarised identity politics rather than stay with broad-based national political movements.

These morbid symptoms weakened our politics before the terrible global impact of the coronavirus and they have shaped how many have seen the response to that crisis. During the epidemic we have been made more powerfully aware of entrenched inequalities across the globe, seen how fragile the networks of our interconnected world have become and been reminded that confidence in projections about the future trajectory of a complex phenomenon is often undone.

And the Covid epidemic has also, tragically, underlined the racial and ethnic inequalities in many societies, not least our own in the United Kingdom. The disproportionate impact of the virus on BAME communities is both heartbreaking and a reproach. The reasons for this particular tragedy are various and they require further, rigorous, investigation. But there can be no doubt that they reflect structural inequality in our society which has to be addressed.

As we seek to restore our fractured economies and heal our divided societies following the advent of this pandemic, we must also be aware of other, complex and unpredictable, challenges still to be overcome. Science and technology, invaluable tools in tackling this pandemic, will bring other, dramatic, benefits to our world in the near future. Big data, machine learning, artificial intelligence, robotics and further automation, 3D printing, quantum computing and other advances will transform the manufacturing and service economy. Genetic sequencing and screening, gene editing and other life science and biotech advances could enable transformations in healthcare and environmental stewardship.

All these developments have the potential to improve lives and livelihoods across the globe. But they also require us to think carefully about the moral questions they can raise.

We have seen all too recently how progress, enabled by technology, has brought gains but also exposed flaws in how we organise our societies. The development of our global financial systems enabled capital to be more efficiently allocated, risk to be more effectively hedged and innovation to be more powerfully incentivised – but these financial systems also created the conditions for hugely profound economic dislocation.

So, as we contemplate new technological and scientific breakthroughs we must also consider the ethical and political challenges they bring. Unless they are thoughtfully addressed, we risk further worsening the morbid symptoms of our times.

The changes to the workplace the Fourth Industrial Revolution is likely to bring will see many current jobs and occupations either disappear or alter dramatically. The division between the fortunate and the forgotten could deepen perilously.

Life science and biotech breakthroughs raise old questions about equitable access to healthcare in new, potentially very uncomfortable, ways and they open new territory for ethical concerns about our relationship with the natural world of which we are indivisibly part.

And in speaking of the natural world, the growing loss of biodiversity and the threat of climate change also reinforce how existing inequalities and vulnerabilities risk becoming more pronounced and how we need to understand that complex, adaptive systems demand respectful attention, not glib assertions of mastery.

And what makes these concerns pressing is the knowledge that all these

changes – to technology, industry, employment, healthcare, food production, biodiversity and the climate – are coming at us fast.

If we are to be equal to all these challenges, then – as the Prime Minister knows and feels passionately – we need to both acknowledge the scale of the change and be ready to change ourselves. Those in political leadership most of all.

And just as the challenges of the Thirties inspired change, both good and bad, in the nature of political leadership – in the shape and scope of Government, in our sense of duty to the poorer, the vulnerable and the excluded, in our use of technology, in our sense of national and social solidarity – so we must ensure we follow a similar, constructive, progressive, inclusive path to that the best men and women chose then.

And for me, no one walked that path better, in what W.H Auden called the low, dishonest, decade that was the Thirties, than Franklin Delano Roosevelt. When he assumed office in 1933, faith in free markets and the capitalist economy was ebbing dramatically. Indeed confidence in democracy itself was fragile – with, even in America, the idea of dictatorial executive authority winning surprising support.

FDR managed to save capitalism, restore faith in democracy, indeed extend its dominion, renovate the reputation of Government, he set his country on a course of increasing prosperity and equality of opportunity for decades – and enabled America to emerge from a decade of peril with the system, and society, that the free citizens of the rest of the world most envied.

He succeeded on such a scale, of course, because he was a remarkable leader.

But there were principles underlining his approach which I think we should learn from now, as we seek to overcome our own crises of authority; as we seek to reform capitalism, re-invigorate support for democracy, and get Government working better for all while building more inclusive societies.

First, Roosevelt took it as a given that no society could succeed unless every citizen within it had the chance to succeed. Throughout his political career he had been concerned by the plight of the poor and the vulnerable, and he knew they needed Government on their side if they were to achieve the dignity, status and independence they aspired to. Reform was needed, he argued, 'that builds from the bottom up and not from the top down, that puts faith once more in the forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid'.

There are too many in our time and our society whose economic interests, and whose values, have been forgotten. In our unequal times we must attend increasingly to those who have suffered from neglect and condescension and also to those whose lives have been scarred by racism and prejudice. Our contemporary work of reform must put them first.

Second, Roosevelt recognised that faced with a crisis that had shaken faith in Government, it was not simply a change of personnel and rhetoric that was required but a change in structure, ambition and organisation. The

establishment of new bodies such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, the Public Works Association, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Agricultural Adjustment Administration demonstrated a willingness to break the mould of the past. Of course, not every initiative upon which Roosevelt embarked was successful – but he recognised even before he became President that no one can predict at the start of a policy what its end will be. What is needed is both ambition in scope and honesty in assessment.

Faced with tumultuous and difficult times, Roosevelt knew government had to be flexible, adaptive and empirical. That meant taking risks, but it also meant the humility to know when to change course – as he argued in 1932, ‘The country needs, and unless I mistake its temper, the country demands bold persistent experimentation. It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another’.

And third, Roosevelt empowered reformers. Harold Ickes, Henry Wallace, Harry Hopkins, Frances Perkins, Louis Brandeis, Hugh Johnson and others were drawn from different traditions, backgrounds and disciplines – and they were set missions. Their role was not to administer the existing machine, or proclaim abstract virtues, but to act – to achieve real and concrete change in the lives of others.

And as we contemplate the scale of the challenges ahead, for this country, and the wider democratic world, the lessons of FDR’s success have much to teach us.

This Government in the UK was elected on the basis that it would be different from its predecessors, as the Prime Minister set out so brilliantly during the election campaign – and events have only made that mission of change more urgent. We have set out plans for reform in technical education, schools, on the environment, in international development, on housing and planning, in science, digital infrastructure, taxation, public procurement, transport and across the field of Government.

But if this Government is to reform so much, it must also reform itself.

As FDR recognised, the structures, ambitions and priorities of the Government machine need to change if real reform is to be implemented and to endure.

It is part of my job in the Cabinet Office to help drive change. To help demonstrate the good that Government can do, to reaffirm the nobility of service to the public, and to strive every day to use the money, and the powers, that people have vested in us to improve their lives.

Public service is a privilege. Not because it brings wealth or ease. Many of those who work alongside me in the civil service could command higher salaries, and indeed face less stress, in other fields.

No, the privilege comes from knowing that those of us in Government have the chance every day to make a difference. The greatest gift that any of us can be given is the opportunity to lead lives of purpose in public service – to know that by our efforts others stand taller. But with that privilege comes a

duty. To ask ourselves if what we are doing is genuinely transformative. Can we prove that we have made a difference? Can we demonstrate the effectiveness of what we have done with other people's money? Can we prove that the regulations and agencies we have established have made clear, demonstrable, measurable, improvements to the lives of others? And can we prove that in a way that our fellow citizens can recognise and appreciate?

I ask, because I am conscious, in line with the starting imperative of FDR's reform mission, just how distant, in so many senses, Government is from the people.

It is not just that all major Government departments are based in London, with the impact that concentration of senior jobs has on our economy. It is also the case that Westminster and Whitehall can become a looking-glass world. Government departments recruit in their own image, are influenced by the think tanks and lobbyists who breathe the same London air and are socially rooted in assumptions which are inescapably metropolitan. There is a tendency, and I am certainly not immune to it, to see success in Government measured by the sound of applause in the village, not the weight we lift from others' distant shoulders. Favourable media commentary, pressure group plaudits, peer group approval, they all drive activity. But what is less often felt is the pressure to show, over time, that programmes have been effective and enduring. Of the 108 major programmes for which Government is responsible, only 8% are actually assessed to judge if they have been delivered effectively and have brought about the desired effects.

Of course we politicians are principally to blame. We go for the sugar rush that comes from announcing radical initiatives, unveiling dramatic overhauls, launching new spending programmes, ramping up this and rolling out that. Done right, such moments can galvanise the system into action. But at times we risk the hunger for new policy announcements becoming insatiable.

And there is also a tendency in Government to applaud the gracefully performative and overlook the boringly transformative. Inclusive lanyards, progressive hashtags and high-sounding declarations from champions of this-and-that good cause are often signals of noble intent, but they are no substitute for improving exam performance for children from under-performing ethnic minorities, enhancing the ability of prisons to rehabilitate prisoners or shifting our economic model to see higher returns to labour and fewer opportunities for rent-seeking.

Tackling these challenges isn't easy. Worthwhile things seldom are. But we can begin by changing important ways in which we work in Government.

We can, literally, reduce the distance between Government and people by relocating Government decision-making centres to different parts of our United Kingdom. And in doing so we should be striving to reflect the full diversity of our United Kingdom. Why shouldn't some of the policymakers intimately involved in reshaping our approach to energy and the decarbonisation of our economy be in Teesside, Humberside and Aberdeen? Shouldn't those thinking about this sector be part of the communities whose jobs depend on getting these decisions right?

And why are so many of those charged with developing our tax and welfare policies still based in London?

Wouldn't it be better for those deciding how taxpayers' money is spent to be living and working alongside those citizens across the country, from Mansfield to Middlesbrough to Merthyr Tydfil, for whom every pound in tax is a significant inroad into their income? Should we not also be better at recruiting our policymakers from those overlooked and hitherto undervalued communities?

There have been relocations of Government in the past but they have generally been to cities such as Bristol and Sheffield, with a particular socio-economic profile and a particularly large proportion of existing university graduates. We need to be more ambitious for Newcastle, for Teesside and Teesdale, for North Wales, for the North-East of Scotland, for East Lancashire, for West Bromwich.

I also think we need to look at how we can develop an even more thoughtful approach to devolution, to urban leadership and to allowing communities to take back more control of the policies that matter to them. One of the glories of the United States is that there are fifty Governors, all of whom can be public policy innovators. As so often, diversity is strength.

And an important part of bringing Government closer to people is making sure we have not just a wider spread of decision-making across the country but a broader and deeper pool of decision-makers.

Groupthink can affect any organisation – the tendency to coalesce around a cosy consensus, to resist change, look for information to confirm existing biases and to reject rigorous testing of delivery. It is the opposite of the bold, restless experimentation FDR called for. And it is particularly likely to occur when people are drawn from similar backgrounds. Indeed, as the academic Jonathan Haidt has pointed out, when you get a critical mass of people in any organisation who have got similar outlooks, biases and preferences the minority who may dissent become progressively more uncomfortable about doing so.

The more that fluent, intelligent, kind and sensitive people explain that the Emperor's New Clothes are a thoughtful co-creation blending public and private sector expertise from the textile and non-textile communities, and these have been benchmarked against international norms and sensitive to both body positivity feedback and non-judgemental protocols concerning the tone-policing of issues around personal space, the less likely someone is to say the guy is naked.

Which is why, as we strive to diversify the Government's presence across the United Kingdom, we should also seek to diversify the talent pool from which we draw. How can we in Government be less southern, less middle class, less reliant on those with social science qualifications and more welcoming to those with physical science and mathematical qualifications – how can we be less anywhere and more somewhere – closer to the 52% who voted to Leave, and more understanding of why?

Almost every arm of Government, and those with powerful voices within it, seemed estranged from the majority in 2016. That is not to say their views were not honest, principled and public-spirited. It is just to observe that a view, a perspective, a set of beliefs, which the majority, albeit slight, held in this country were rarely heard within Government. FDR asked his Government to remember the Forgotten Man. In the 2016 referendum those who had been too often forgotten asked to be remembered.

And as well as valuing a diversity of views we should also, as I implied earlier, value a diversity of skills. The manner in which Government has rewarded its workers for many years now has, understandably, prized cognitive skills – the analytical, evaluative and, perhaps, above all, the presentational. I believe that should change. Delivery on the ground; making a difference in the community; practicable, measurable improvements in the lives of others should matter more.

Public servants, including those who work for private sector organisations delivering public goods, such as those in the care sector, waste and refuse disposal, and the people who keep our hospitals hygienic and safe, should be at the centre of our policy-making. They are the people who have given so much in the recent crisis and represent the best in every community.

Now of course we need to promote economic growth in everything we do. But the purpose of economic growth is to build a more civilised society. As the Prime Minister has consistently argued, we should be a pro-worker, pro-public servant People's Government.

The second Rooseveltian challenge is to change how Government itself works, to reorganise its institutions to become better at reform. The need for reform in so many areas is obvious. And this Government is determined to deliver it in a way that is consistent with our moral values.

We know that we need to make opportunity more equal. We need to make productivity gains across our country more equitable. We need a just transition to a lower carbon world. We need to confront and stamp out racism wherever we find it. We need to heal and unite our country in the face of division and polarisation around identity. We need to make the twin virtues of earning and belonging work for others, and we need to ensure that solidarity across communities defeats the forces of division and dependence which dissolve the ties that bind.

At the heart of our programme must be a focus on what works – what actually helps our fellow citizens to flourish.

And that means, as I have emphasised, rigorous evaluation of Government programmes. What value do they add? What incentives do they provide for better performance and better service to others? The Treasury in the UK has been, historically, very good at questioning the cost of projects, but not their broader social value. Asking that question is not an evasion of Government responsibility but an embrace of it. And politicians like me must take responsibility for the effect of their actions and the consequences of their announcements.

I helped set up National Citizen Service. It is a noble ideal. But by what criteria do we judge it a success? The numbers who have signed up, and the warmth they feel about the programme, are welcome. But what has society, measurably, achieved for that expenditure?

I am proud to have played a part in setting up the Free Schools programme in England along with Lord Hill. But it is important to ask what, measurably and consistently, we have achieved over ten years through that investment.

In the aftermath of the 2011 riots I pressed for a range of reforms. But however well-intentioned they all were we need to be honest and self-critical about their progress. Have the Gangs Taskforce and the use of Gang Injunctions made young people safer and helped young people out of the Criminal Justice System?

One of the reforms of which I am proudest was the introduction of the Pupil Premium to support disadvantaged children with additional funding. I believe it has been transformative. But we need hard, testable, data on how it has worked. How well have we captured how effectively it is spent in the best schools and how are we setting about analysing what lessons to learn elsewhere?

To answer these questions properly, indeed to use the answers to drive improvement in all public services, requires Government to change. First, Government needs to be rigorous and fearless in its evaluation of policy and projects. And in doing so, we need to ask not only questions about spending per se, but about effectiveness against ambition. It may well be legitimate to say that Government wants to spend a large amount to achieve an incremental improvement in a specific area for a vulnerable set of people – such as support for children in care. But the crucial question is what benefits have the extra spending and attention brought?

That is not penny-pinching. It's a real concern that the vulnerable benefit from this additional expenditure. What are the metrics against which improvement will be judged? How are appropriate tools such as randomised controlled trials being deployed to assess the difference being made? How do we guard against gaming and confirmation bias? All across Government at the moment that widespread rigour is missing.

Which is just one of the reasons why the machinery needs to change.

Government needs to evaluate data more rigorously and that means opening up data so others can judge the effectiveness of programmes as well. We need proper challenge from qualified outsiders.

If Government ensures its departments and agencies share and publish data far more, then data analytics specialists can help us more rigorously to evaluate policy successes and delivery failures. People's privacy of course must be protected. But once suitably anonymised, it is imperative that we learn the hugely valuable lessons that lie buried in our data.

We also need to ask in those areas where our data is world class, as with the

NHS, how we can use that to power scientific breakthroughs. Suitably anonymised, as I say, the deep and broad pool of health data we have can improve diagnostics and treatment, support life science innovation and close the health inequality gap.

And, perhaps most importantly, Government must also ask itself if its people have the skills necessary for the challenges that I have set out.

For many decades now we have neglected to ensure the Civil Service has all the basic skills required to serve Government, and our citizens, well.

There are many brilliant people in our civil service, and I have never come across any civil servant who did not want to do his or her best for the country. But, nevertheless, there are a limited number, even in the Senior Civil Service, who have qualifications or expertise in mathematical, statistical and probability questions – and these are essential to public policy decisions. As governments in developed nations go, we in the UK are lagging behind many others in terms of numerical proficiency. But so many policy and implementation decisions depend on understanding mathematical reasoning.

That means we need to reform not just recruitment, but training. We need to ensure more policy makers and decision makers feel comfortable discussing the Monte Carlo method or Bayesian statistics, more of those in Government are equipped to read a balance sheet and discuss what constitutes an appropriate return on investment, more are conversant with the commercial practices of those from whom we procure services and can negotiate the right contracts and enforce them appropriately.

I should of course add that it is important that those of us who are politicians have the knowledge, skills, and indeed humility, to be able to ask the right questions and then seek to understand the answers. Reforming how Government works requires ministers who can reform themselves.

And the need for appropriate skills, training and knowledge within Whitehall goes much further than the areas I have mentioned. Submissions, the papers which are prepared to guide ministerial decisions, and which were once the glory of our Civil Service, have become in far too many cases formulaic, over-long, jargon-heavy and back-covering. The ability to make a tight, evidence-rich, fact-based, argument which doesn't waste words or evade hard choices is critical to effective Government. As is deep, domain-specific, knowledge.

The Prime Minister has rightly argued that foreign policy-making is often weakened by the lack of deep knowledge of the language, culture and history of the nations with whom we are negotiating or whom we seek to influence.

And as William Hague has pointed out, the decision to close the Foreign Office language school was an act of national self-harm and his restoration of it, along with his establishment of a new Diplomatic Academy, was a necessary renovation.

That same determination to instil and to cultivate deep knowledge should apply across Government. Too much current Civil Service training is about vapid abstractions such as 'Collaborating Better' rather than about what works in classroom instruction or how to interrogate climate modelling or to find out what really goes on in the preparation of Crown Prosecution cases which leads to so many cracked trials.

Of course, the vast majority of civil servants strive mightily to master the policy or delivery area that they are asked to cover. And I owe a personal debt to many great civil servants who have helped secure lasting change, who have warned me off foolish initiatives and who have demonstrated the very best in rigorous policy thinking. But there are systemic problems which mean that we often lose institutional memory and fail to build on hard-won success.

With the exception of a few bodies such as the Education Endowment Foundation there are precious few Government-sponsored or owned sources of reliable evidence on what works.

And the current structure of the Civil Service career ladder means that promotion comes from switching roles, and departments, with determined regularity. Just at the point that an official at the Department for International Trade who is a deputy director masters the intricacies of tariff schedules and their impact on important UK sectors and can recognise the opportunities that arise from liberalisation with Ruritania, he or she, if they want to progress in their career, then goes on to become a director in, say, the Department for Education overhauling child protection.

Commentators, rightly, criticise the rapid turnover of ministers and the seemingly random reshuffle of Parliamentary Under-Secretaries for Paperclips after just a year to become Ministers of State for Paper Files. But far less noticed and just as, if not more, damaging, is the whirligig of Civil Service transfers and promotions.

We must be able to promote those with proven expertise in their current role to perform the same, or similar, functions with greater status and higher rewards without them thinking they have to move away from the areas they know and love to rise in their profession. We would not ask an Orthopaedics Registrar to become a psychiatrist in order to make consultant. So why should we require an expert in agriculture negotiations with the EU to supervise the Universal Credit IT system in order to see their career progress? So, if we are to make the most of the amazing talent that we have in such abundance in the Civil Service, we need to both train better and incentivise more smartly. And we need to ensure that those in Government have access to teaching which develops deep knowledge.

We know already from evidence of what works in education and the classroom that mastery of deep knowledge is the precondition of creativity and open-mindedness. Confident musical literacy, achieved after learning to read scores and to practise scales, allows them to move from laborious application to automatic performance, and mastering it allows the performer to become not just the passive reciter of others' achievements but the author of original

new work of quality and merit. Similarly, if those in Government have deep subject knowledge they move from reciters of the jargon generated by producer interests into the creators of original policy that serve the widest possible public interest.

That is why we need to ensure that we have a proper, and properly-resourced campus for training those in Government. One which is not preoccupied with the latest coaching theology or sub-business school jargon but equips the many hugely talented people within the Civil Service to become as knowledgeable in their policy areas as consultant surgeons, chancery barristers and biochemistry professors are in theirs. And, more than that, we need to ensure that basic writing, meeting chairing and time management skills are de rigueur for all policy civil servants.

The third Rooseveltian imperative I have invoked is the bias towards experimentation. And this is perhaps the hardest to achieve.

There are so many barriers to doing things differently in Government, and so many incentives to play safe that it is difficult to know where to start.

It is a cliché to say of Government that no-one ever lost their job for recommending the contract go to IBM.

If you decide that you will procure services from a new organisation and, if things go wrong, you will face the wrath of the National Audit Office, the criticism of self-righteous chairs of parliamentary select committees, the hindsight-rich rancour of newspaper columnists as well as the disappointed froideur of your Permanent Secretary and Secretary of State.

On the other hand, if you choose to have the service performed by an established supplier, choose to assess their performance by deferring to management consultants, set up a board to manage the process with officials from lots of different departments then you are insulated from failure. The delivery companies are too big to fail, too embedded in so much else that Government does, too sanctified by the faith other departments have already placed in them. The consultants are an invaluable prophylactic – if these super bright people from the private sector with MBA degrees and huge earnings outside said it was okay, well, it must have been. And the cross-Whitehall board is the biggest insurance policy of all. You can't hold me accountable – it was a 'shared' decision.

All of these factors work against innovation – and accountability. Innovation comes when people take reasonable risks – and also responsibility. We need to move to a system where those who propose the innovative, the different, the challenging, are given room to progress and, if necessary, fail. But we must then ensure that we learn quickly, adjust and respond.

In my time in politics I have got many things wrong. But I have, most of the time, been blessed by the ability of Prime Ministers to forgive, provided I learned the lesson.

That is why it is the responsibility of those in positions of political

leadership – myself chief among them – to support those who try something different and defend them if, at first, it doesn't work. And then to ensure we learn why and do better next time.

My first attempt as Education Secretary at a new history curriculum was deeply flawed, but the challenge it provoked improved on everything that had gone before. My cancellation of the Brown government's Building Schools for the Future programme was a political fiasco, but it led to a method of commissioning new school buildings that saved the taxpayer billions. My proposal to bring back O-Levels strained the bonds of the 2010-2015 coalition and it had to be abandoned but it led to a significant improvement in GCSE standards and school performance.

I should add that those GCSE reforms only worked because of the leadership of two outstanding public servants – Dame Glenys Stacey and Amanda Spielman – who ran the exams watchdog Ofqual at the time. They stood firm in the face of orchestrated opposition from those who wanted standards lowered, and they helped end grade inflation. Exam reform was a rocky road but they made the experiment work.

We need, as a Government, to create the space for the experimental and to acknowledge we won't always achieve perfection on Day One. We will throw everything at increasing ventilator capacity, some projects will misfire, some will seem promising but fall at the final hurdle, but along the way we will end up with unexpected gains, and as we have seen in the past few months, a willingness to experiment will help drive up a huge increase in ventilator capacity.

There is of course also a particular merit also in investing in the literal experimentation of pure science. As the success of DARPA in the US shows, sometimes by design, and sometimes by obliquity, hugely beneficial innovation can occur. Of course, some of the projects in which DARPA has invested have failed and foundered, but the knowledge that high ambition is supported and incentivised and wrong turnings accepted as necessary costs along the way has clearly brought huge benefits.

Sadly far too often, innovation in Government is treated as though it were a mischief rather than a model. The default mechanism of the National Audit Office, Public Accounts Committee, other select committees and various commentators is that any departure from the status quo must be assumed to be more downside than upside. Had they been able to interrogate George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton in 1783 they would have concluded that American independence was an expensive, untried and unjustifiable innovation. In Treasury terms they would have said it was novel and contentious and therefore should be stopped.

The whole culture of Government, and the wider world of political commentary, is hostile to risk, adventure, experimentation and novelty. But the experience of FDR and his administration was that it was only through big risks, and radical experiments, that progress could be assured. Many of the programmes initiated as part of the New Deal failed on their own terms. But, overall, the re-orientation of Government to help the Forgotten Man, to

restore hope in place of fear, to change Government so it worked for all citizens and to be bold and restless in experimentation of new ways of working succeeded.

That is why now, as is our intention as Government, we should reform planning rules to fast track beautiful development, we should pioneer biodiversity net gain to offset any adverse consequences of development, we should better use anonymised NHS data to improve healthcare delivery, we should allow parents and others to compare schools on value added, exam entries and attendance, among other factors, we should compare individual courts, judges and CPS managers on their efficacy on processing cases, we should look at how successful individual prisons are at delivering education and rehabilitation programmes, and we should compare that with re-offending rates, we should assess the effectiveness of anti-radicalisation programmes, we should ask what value for money gains the Troubled Families Programme has secured, we should interrogate the basis on which defence procurement contracts are considered value for money and by who, and we should ask how we judge the real impact of development spending, and I could go on...

The heart of my case, as I hope everyone now appreciates, is simple.

Faith in conventional political parties, their leadership and their allies in business has been broken.

Failures of policy and judgment have put previously existing elites in the dock.

Their misjudgements, in the eyes of many, have been compounded by cultural condescension and insulation from accountability.

The concerns of our fellow citizens are real. They matter. Their analysis is resonant. To carry on rejecting it will only weaken our politics and strengthen division.

We have faced similar, though not identical, crises, before.

To face the crisis honestly, we must change.

Confronted with a similar, though not identical, challenge in the 1930s FDR identified three critical needs: first, to make the Forgotten Man – i.e. the victim of crisis and inequality – our first concern; second, to transform Government to make it the efficient force for good the times command; and third, experiment and explore different routes in a crisis in order to escape with an emphasis on risk-taking.

I defy anyone now to say that the scale of the challenges our governments face are lesser than those faced by FDR in 1933, or the scale of change required is smaller. If the suggestions for change I have put forward are wrong, or mistaken, which they may honestly be, I hope the response is to call for greater radicalism not less. We should always be receptive to bold new policy proposals. And now in Government we must listen to ideas on transforming how we deliver, such as those from GovernUp and the Commission for Smart Government which it will shortly launch, because we surely know the

machinery of government is no longer equal to the challenges of today. We owe change to the people we serve.

Every morning I wake up saddened by the fact we haven't done more to make the most of every talent in our land, reproaching myself that we did not do more in children's social care, primary schooling and secondary schooling to provide opportunities and keep young people safe. I worry that we have not succeeded in reforming the youth justice system, the police, the CPS and the courts. But we can do better, we can redeem souls, we can save lives through public sector reform. If money is rightly directed, properly authorised and its spending effectively evaluated then massive progress can be made.

Let me end on a personal note. I am in public service, as an MP and Government Minister, because I want to tackle inequality. I have other passions – the environment, culture, sport. But my driving mission in politics is to make opportunity more equal. I want to ensure that whatever their background, every child has the chance to succeed, and nothing we do should hold them back. It is on that basis I make my case and on which I am happy to be judged.