Political Thinking Meeting Report No 28

Chiltern U3A 'Political Thinking'

Meeting No 28 Monday 19th November 2018

Topics; Austerity and the effect on poverty in the UK; Immigration policy and citizen's rights; Political Thinking Group matters; Brexit

Austerity and the effect on poverty in the UK

Summary

A recently published UN commissioned report into poverty in the UK made criticisms of Government that its policies in respect of austerity had a disproportionate effect on the poor.

Members considered that Government policies should ensure a minimum standard of living for all, though there were differing views about the appropriate level. Several members were emphatic that poverty in the UK and Europe was very much less of a problem than poverty in some other countries; and that political efforts should be directed toward this.

Discussion

Discussion centred on the minimum wage; the general view was that work should always pay, both in the sense of being more rewarding than being on benefits, but also and importantly in the sense of providing for an adequate lifestyle. The practice of in work benefits was considered to be in effect a subsidy to employers. The legal minimum wage should be set at this level, higher than currently, so as to achieve this objective.

To an extent austerity policies have had the effect of bringing income for some people below this level.

As to whether there should be some limit on maximum pay, by way of a ratio or with a similar effect by way of high taxation rates there was scepticism about the effectiveness and practicality of such measures and about whether measures of this type were effective revenue raisers, having a potentially large impact but on a very small number of individuals.

Discussion about poverty becomes a debate about morals; essentially what are the principles that should govern the distribution of income in a civilised society. There was a strong opinion that levels of income for some are currently too high, and that there are adverse consequences

of such a high degree of inequality. The modern trend toward the “me” culture was considered regrettable.

Low levels of productivity were cited as being closely connected with low wages; which the cause and which the consequence was debated. Uncertainties about income,amount and timing, as a consequence of casualisation and the gig economy were seen as inducements to crime.

While recognising that some in Europe are relatively poor, several members pointed out that the worst conditions in Europe are considerably more attractive than the normal conditions in some of the poorer parts of the world. Hence the pressures of mass migration; the political consequences of which have been and could continue to be very disruptive in the years to come.

Immigration and citizen’s rights

Background papers expressing concerns about the UK Government’s track record in respect of citizen’s rights had been circulated. Though this material was principally in connection with terror prevention there seemed to be a wider impact on right of abode, statelessness and immigration, These issues are inexorably linked with post-Brexit immigration policies about which there remains uncertainty.

Discussion was postponed to a later date due to time pressures

Political Thinking Group; matters

The question of how big the group should be was raised; recognising that contributions might be inhibited if the group became too big. To be kept under review.

Topics; discussion format preferred, occasional lecture a pleasant variation; several topics on one day is a good format; future topics suggested; multiculturalism, euthanasia.

Communications; email effective it arrives without effort, web page has to be looked up.

Brexit

Snap poll of members without discussion.

There are three outcomes postulated. Number of responses to “Which do you **expect?”**

May’s plan or close variant 6 No deal 9 No Brexit 2 (35%; 53%; 12%)

But to “Which would you **prefer**?”

May’s plan or close variant 2 No deal 5 No Brexit 10 (12%; 29%; 59%)