

Political Thinking Meeting Report No 35

Chiltern U3A 'Political Thinking'

Meeting No 35 Monday 20th May 2019

Topic 1. Collapse of Parliamentary Democracy.

Has democracy actually collapsed ?

The meeting reviewed the current situation with respect to Brexit.

Though Parliamentary democracy could not be considered to have collapsed, it was the general view that it was not functioning effectively to produce resolution.

There was a general agreement that a solution was required, and that the continuing impasse was detrimental to the functioning of government in almost other respects. A large number of important issues are not receiving the attention they need. There is no point in repeating the list.

The opinion that in fact parliamentary democracy was functioning well, in that it does in fact reflect the division in the country, was accepted.

Despite intense discussion there was no agreement on any possible course action that might lead to a resolution.

Even a general election was discounted as being likely to result in a similarly divided Parliament with no majority for any course of action

The opinions within our group appear to reflect the division in the country with views becoming more polarised over time.

Topic 2. What qualities are needed for the position of Prime Minister?

A leadership contest seems quite likely, is the current process of selection likely to result in a choice of someone with the appropriate qualities?

Some of the qualities listed were charisma, political experience, ability to communicate.

Comparisons were made with previous Prime Ministers, all of whom exhibited very different talents, skills etc.

If there were a quality that were held in common it might be the ability to be selected as PM!

Two general comments were made:

Firstly, that the selection process for PM is quite unlike that for any other important position other than in politics, in that whether or not candidates have the necessary ability, experience or any other quality does not appear to be taken into account.

Secondly, that the procedure involves very few people if the Conservative Party leadership process is followed. From all candidates proposed and seconded by Conservative MPs, a short list of two is reached by successive elimination votes among Conservative MP's only; the final two are voted on only by Conservative party members.

Whatever the merits of the process, it is not a choice in which the general public, or eligible voters, have participation.

Whether or not there could or should be wider participation was not a question that could be considered in the context of the current political system.

Overall the discussion surfaced a considerable doubt and uncertainty about the effectiveness of current political systems.

More worryingly there is no direction toward resolution.