

Book The Road to Somewhere; David Goodhart
Discussion led by Terry Glover

Summary

That political differences and allegiances are explained by the conflicting views and values of two groups of people described as “Anywheres” and “Somewheres,” (and a third group of “inbetweeners”) is the essence of the book “The Road to Somewhere.”

“Anywheres” are more educated, liberal, relatively prosperous and geographically mobile.

“Somewheres” are less educated, more conservative, poorer and rooted in their local community usually from birth.

The descriptive epithet refers to the last characteristic.

The thesis is that members of each of two groups hold similar opinions on many political issues and therefore represent a significant potential political force. Traditional loyalties to the major parties based on income/assets and social class no longer hold.

Discussion

Several themes recurred in the general discussion.

The Two Tribes

Most seemed to recognise the distinction between the two tribes as proposed though the alignment of political values and beliefs seemed to be less certain.

The tendency for Anywheres to denigrate Somewheres as being reactionary, prejudiced and unreasonably wedded to outdated ideas was recognised.

Perhaps the majority are “inbetweeners” and the aggregation of views on political issues is rather more blurred than suggested by Goodhart.

Social Change

Much of the social changes since the 1950's are considered to be consequences of WW11, particularly with respect to the role, status and position of women. The 60's may have seen the ending of an ordered society in which everybody knew their place.

Broadly it is suggested that “Somewheres” resent or at least do not actively support these social trends and would prefer a return to the more traditional values. “Anywheres” may actively drive these changes.

Technology and rising incomes as well as education are drivers of social change, and the previous period between the two world wars also saw very substantial social changes.

Perhaps the distinction is in the effects on the individual, adverse or otherwise, of the social change, rather than the fact of change itself.

Education and Employment opportunities

The nature of employment has changed very considerably, technology and globalisation being drivers.

It has been a political imperative to maintain full employment, but the quality of employment opportunities particularly for those with more traditional skills has declined.

The “Somewheres” aligned with more traditional industries have not benefited from technological change.

Immigration

The issue of immigration is perhaps the most divisive.

“Anywheres” have been much less affected by perceived pressure on jobs, housing and public services, and indeed may have been beneficiaries.

Family Life

The decline in the traditional family unit is the main factor.

This seems to apply to both tribes, perhaps the difference is that the difference in relative prosperity makes it less of a problem.

The State and the Family

Child poverty is still a major issue. Substantially among single parent families. Policies seem merely to alleviate the consequences without addressing the causes.

Political Consequences

It is suggested that it was a Somewheres backlash that led to Brexit and the Conservatives winning a number of previously rock-solid Labour seats at the last election

The Way Forward

Some of the Goodhart suggestions seem somewhat racist; similar policies have been adopted by some Middle East countries.

The others involving infrastructure development seem to assume that economic prosperity will automatically follow; it seems more likely that the forces which lead to growth of metropolitan areas like London, like other megacities worldwide, will continue.

There have been many predictions over many years about the growth of an underclass.

These have not been disproved.

Current policies do not seem likely to stop or even slow the trend.