

A Political Agenda – Part One

The default role of a body elected through the political system is to deliver ongoing effective enhancements to the lives of all its citizens in a manner which aligns with the prevailing world-view defined by the existing culture within the geographic area (locality, region, nation) in question. In order to measure its overall effectiveness, a broad understanding of what its responsibilities are in terms of serving the demands of its citizens, is necessary, leading to a set of pointers referencing individual areas of importance. Here, I aim to address some ideas, gleaned from various places for each of these areas.

Any team, group, community, organisation, or nation, in order to be the most effective, where individual members are fired up to contribute to their maximum, and the whole really is greater than the sum of the parts, a clear vision defining the destination and common direction of travel is a necessity. With every citizen's empowerment comes the capability to outline their own ideas and thoughts about this destination. Each has the same opportunity. Here is an overview of my initial contribution.

Vision

Thirty years out, the nation I am a part of, has a thriving and dynamic foundation provided to a large part, by genuine community enterprise, where all contribute to their maximum with a shared ethos, and shared benefits, enabled by forward-looking mission strategies funded by a financial system which is focused on long-term national well-being and fully aligned with the principles of community enterprise and stakeholder-ism. It is based on industries whose goals and processes are aligned with coherent community-wide well-being, which are not biased in a damaging way to meet only human needs. Industries developing leading-edge high technology semiconductors for scientific, consumer, clean energy and business needs, with vertical industries stacked on top, such as end-user products in a number of areas, for example consumer electronics, platforms for space and scientific exploration, and research, and clean transport systems and products. It has a thriving arts, entertainment and sports culture, funded appropriately and fully embedded within communities across the nation. The third sector, in areas that are especially well-provided for by their expertise and focus, work seamlessly with communities, businesses and government at all levels to deliver their services, but are not relied upon to meet the basic needs of any citizen. It is a nation which has effective comprehensive health and social care systems which provide for all, developed by their own mission strategies. It is a nation where the health of the wider ecosystems which support all life, including human life, is at the forefront of all activities, and where space for free natural evolution of ecosystems specifically for non-human species is set aside. It is a nation where egalitarianism, openness, fairness and social justice are central to the cultural ethos. It is forward and outward-looking and meets the world with a smile on its face. It invests in all its citizens equally with a culture of high-challenge, high-support, and provides infrastructure designed to meet all their needs, It stands by, and defends, its principles at home and overseas and lives at all times by them.

Metrics

As a brief starting point, currently the main publicly-reported metric, supposedly measuring the nation's health, is growth in GDP. This is extraordinarily narrow, and it can be imagined that metrics

taking stock of, for example, social and communal well-being, long-term health of ecosystems, measured broadly, not just from a human perspective, quality of life, economic development and progress, contributory value, personal health and well-being, appropriate and affordable accommodation, economic, social and communal involvement, and oversight of citizenship vigilance would be much more valuable and relevant to each citizen. The specific definition of a simple and minimal set of metrics is not developed here, but must surely be a big step forward if implemented.

Education

In order to ensure a genuinely egalitarian foundation for any democratic society which claims to support the broadest development of all its citizens, it is entirely appropriate that every citizen has the fullest access to the best education. This requires a focus by all, especially those who are responsible for the definition of the overall principles and goals, and execution of policy in education, on a common system which everybody uses. This results in the best levels of investment of, certainly finances, but specifically, vision and purpose, as it is in everyone's interests, without exception, to create the best system that they can. The recognition that educating all citizens in the best way, results not only in best outcomes for them individually, but also for the nation which operates, supports and maintains the education system in question.

Making it illegal to charge fees of any kind for primary and secondary education across the whole nation, ensures a level playing field, and a focus by all to develop and sustain the very best common education system for all its citizens, rather than a separate elitist system for those of wealth. This is fully aligned with the whole concept of 'stakeholder-ism' (which equates directly to active, participative, empowered democratic citizenship).

The fundamental emphasis within the education system must be to develop young people from the start as empowered citizens. This requires a programme of assistance and encouragement for the very youngest (and through their education) to begin to behave and act as such, thus embedding this cultural aspect within their foundations. This is not brain-washing, but is, in fact, the opposite, as the intention is to develop the fullest ability to think rationally and clearly for themselves in all areas, recognise their own equality of value and importance, understand rights and responsibilities as empowered citizens, to assist in understanding personal internal character foundations and to build personal values and principles, and to connect this internalisation with how they will interact with others and the wider world around them, and this develop truly as stakeholders.

Business, and Research, Design, Development and Manufacturing

The market alone, especially an unfettered, free-for-all market, is not a sufficient basis upon which to create a coherent long-term strategy for modern national enterprise. It has been apparent that for at least a significant part of the past, there has been a lack of long-term vision, defining the framework for implementing such a coherent strategy. Whilst it is an extremely important vehicle for free innovation and creative enterprise, it should not be viewed as a panacea, requiring no additional mechanisms, for all economic and social well-being.

To enable and activate a focused long-term strategy for a nation's progress, it requires, firstly, a clearly defined vision stretching out over a thirty year moving window, led by government and developed by contributions from many areas (such as democratic representatives, industry, business and commerce, environmental interests, social interests, academia and specially-convened citizens councils), and revisited regularly and often. This forms a framework for the subsequent development of a number of mission strategies (ref. Mazzucato), and as an imperative, associated action plans for not only economic, but also social and environmental progress and activity, each developed with a 'blinkers off' approach which recognises and takes into account the boundaries of each others' missions. The goal is to ensure a fully coherent national strategy with the understanding that the boundaries of the individual mission strategies must be flexible enough to support some 'give' in order to allow some almost certainly necessary compromises where there may be some potentially conflictual overlap.

The 'visioning' process needs to be conducted in an environment every citizen has the opportunity to fully contribute and feel that their contribution has been included giving them a feeling of buy-in, and inspiration from the overall vision, leading to genuine stakeholder-ship. The mission strategies should almost certainly be developed and, as rapidly be put into effect, by experts in the particular mission fields, but in a way which is visible to all so that each citizen feels part of the process, and can, in exceptional circumstances, where they feel they have a real concern, wave a flag and give input. This requirement for an open process leads to a connectivity across the nation, and develops a trust and respect between citizens.

In implementation, through an organisational point of view, whether this is via businesses, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for example, or start-ups or larger enterprises, or via social organisations, or NGOs, then governance rules and guidelines, should reflect fully the concept of community enterprise, where the term 'enterprise' is not limited to commercially-based organisations. This concept of community enterprise is founded on, depending on your point of view, 'stakeholder-ism', or active, participative, empowered, democratic citizenship (which really is the same thing). Some examples of these governance rules, which may be enacted through legislation or ongoing active policy, are:

- tipping the balance in all ways, significantly towards co-operative, and employee-owned structures for companies
- requiring the active inclusion of employee-elected representatives on the board, or decision-making bodies
- great encouragement to both ensure that organisational leaders operate in a manner which recognises fully that all members of the organisation are part of a community, and that all are active and participatory members of that community, and also each stakeholder within this community takes it upon themselves to do everything to step outside of the boundaries of their own job specification, and contribute fully in an active way to the organisation, whilst ensuring they don't neglect their own roles.

It is also very important to note that mission strategy development and activation must recognise the regional nature of a nation and push that activation in a manner that covers all regions of a nation. This ensures that every region has strategic investment in its geographic area and its resident citizens. It can be imagined, for example, that one particular region may be identified as a centre for

strategic investment in the area of solar photo voltaic (PV) product research and development (R&D), design and manufacture. This is just one example of many that could be high-lighted.

In order to ensure a vibrant, creative and dynamic environment for organisational birth (i.e. start-ups in all and any sectors), extremely simple rules and a consistent implementation of high support, and high challenge (where this is appropriate) are necessary. In Norway rules were simplified to ensure that it took no more than seven days to turn a clear business idea into a working reality (notwithstanding the logistical challenges).

Financial Services

In order to fully support the vision and mission strategies outlined in principle above, it is a requirement (and also from many respects, a fundamental reason-for-being) that the financial services industry (which includes in this definition, investment management) is focused on operations, processes and activities which are fully aligned with the needs of all mission strategies.

This changes the focus onto long-term investment, and regulations and rules (which should definitely be simple, which does not mean lax) should reflect this objective, and ensure that the outcome of organisational activities in this sector fully support the objectives of the mission-based national direction, as well as the needs of start-ups and market-led SMEs.

The notion that the financial services sector exists to feed its own participants is not consistent in any way with the vision and mission-based framework for national progress, nor with the concept of stakeholder-ism, and therefore needs to be rejected. It is also apparent that the financial services sector has invested much effort into defining 'products' of increasing complexity which greatly widen the gap between genuine shareholders and the boardrooms of the companies who are supposedly accountable to them. This 'product' complexity, which evidently provides great returns in many cases for those, often insiders, who know how to work the system, weakens the concept that a company's board must always answer in full for their actions to their shareholders. This has seemingly given board members free reign to look after their own interests often above that of others who have some kind of 'investment' in the company in question, such as employees and genuine shareholders. Ensuring that revised regulations limit the financial services industry in this area, and reinvigorate the notion that the board is answerable to the shareholders directly, will strengthen oversight and encourage directors to take a longer-term approach in the broader interests of those who, as mentioned above, have an investment of some sort in the organisation.

In post-industrial Britain, financial services have grown in importance and are not an insignificant part of the economy, and this should be recognised. However, the financial services industry must be geared to underpin other important aspects of the economy, and not be seen as simply a stand-alone contributor to GDP, where a relatively small number of people benefit greatly from the way in which it operates.

Tax

The current tax system is renowned for being extremely complex and full of holes. In order to ensure both simple and effective taxation for both tax payer and revenue and customs, a complete overhaul and simplification of the tax system would benefit all. As a vital part of this overhaul, it is important that all tax loopholes are closed, enabling a fully coherent and comprehensive tax

structure. Whilst wealth creation, in particular in community enterprise, is very important, it is necessary to ensure that wealth itself plays a full part in the cycling of resources through the economic system. If 'wealth' is not employed to benefit the nation, but is instead 'hoarded', adding no economic 'value' to society, then this is detrimental to the nation's progress, and should be addressed through the taxation system. It is also potentially beneficial, given earlier reference to a common administrative function (see earlier essay) across all levels of government would aid tax simplification and remove to a large degree the almost complete reliance of local government on national government policy with regard to funding.

Wealth

Wealth, per se, is not an issue. The issue is what is done with any individual's wealth. If it is invested in enterprise and infrastructure for the nation's benefit, then the tax regime should touch it relatively lightly. If however, it is left sitting, doing no work, or else invested purely for private gain (such as in property, for example) then the tax regime should touch it much more significantly. This needs to be embedded in the infrastructure of the financial system, such that the tax authorities can not have the wool pulled over their eyes. Also alongside this, if an individual or organisation moves their capital offshore to a tax haven, the financial system infrastructure should be such that this activity is passed to the tax authorities in all cases, and there is a strong argument that the capital gains should be taxed in the country of residence, as though the capital were invested locally for private gain. This would negate that tax haven's 'benefits' to the greedy individual and offset the tax evasion taking place.

Local Government

With the afore-mentioned common administrative function across all levels of government, local government becomes an independent part of a coherent system. It is an imperative too, that local government is taken as seriously within its scope of responsibilities as is national government. Thus a STV PR voting system is appropriate, as is an agreed constitution for the roles and responsibilities of the elected representatives, as well as the clearly defined limits on their activities. Local power will once again be permanently held by citizens, and as in national government, it is vital that all activity within the bounds of local government is carried out in an open manner, so as to ensure that power remains with the electorate at all times.

Some specifics for local government responsibilities, defined in statute, and recognising the costs, are that, firstly, local government is legally bound to provide long-term independent accommodation, a clear set of real opportunities to reintegrate into community, and high challenge, high support investment in all homeless people.

Secondly, local government financing has, for a long time been held in the hands of national government policy. The objective here, is to create the situation where local government is largely independent, and in the hands, to a very large degree, of the local community, with a recognition that penny-pinching does not provide good, effective local government or services.

Thirdly, on a level more focused at high support for citizens, in particular new citizens in any particular area, it would seem to me, to be extremely valuable on a number of fronts, if when moving to a new district, a citizen was presented with a nationally common and simple online

system for both activating services (doctors, water, gas, electricity, voting rights, local tax and other services and information) and also for enabling the rapid assimilation into and access to the local community. Simply by registering with email address and some general information about themselves, as well as any non-voting age cohabiting dependents, the system could easily connect the citizen directly to all local services in a one-shot registration, allowing communication and any necessary logistics to happen very easily, and also allow connection to and development of community in whatever way that may be defined, by for example, requesting a mailing list for the local residential street, or people of the same age group, or the local village, etc, which the system returns to the citizen without compromising anyone's privacy, allowing the citizen to email them as a group with any chosen message, giving an option to respond by email either just directly or to the whole group, at which point the email (and community) connection is made.

The wider Community of Life

The area of natural environmental welfare and associated space and opportunity for all other species to live alongside humans, is crucial to ensure a broad overall well-being. An approach to all issues of human development and progress needs to be 'blinkers off' so that impacts on other species of all kinds are recognised and understood, and that appropriate steps are taken to allow other life forms the same opportunities for living space and evolutionary progress as we afford ourselves.

In order to remove, or at least greatly reduce, the 'management' of the natural environment, and replace it with a significant 'hands-off' approach, which truly allows nature to run its course, it seems appropriate to establish a wide variety of both local, small-scale, as well as a defined number of targeted large-scale rewilding projects with full support of all relevant agencies and organisations, including a programme fully involving and focusing on realigning human activities, within the specific areas chosen for rewilding, with the goals and objectives of the projects concerned, to create human opportunity to work with the direction of flow in that particular geographic ecosystem. Examples of large-scale projects may be the Somerset Levels and Snowdonia, but not just this number.

Public Services

It seems inappropriate that key vital services such as water, gas, electricity and also from a slightly different perspective, the railways, should be provided by private utility companies, in a false market, where what they are actually selling is a commodity, and can not really be differentiated on added value in any way. It also is important to recognise that, in many respects, the privatisation of these utilities has been driven by ideology and has not produced the supposed benefits which were claimed by its promoters. Previous to privatisation, it is clear that the model for operating these utilities as nationalised industries was flawed in some ways resulting in inefficiencies and top-heaviness. Also, for other reasons, which also to some significant degree blight the utilities as they exist today, performance has been limited by lack of investment which is an ongoing theme across the nation in many areas.

A model based on social ownership – a reflection if ever there was one of community enterprise in action – would connect users directly to the service providers as common stakeholders with, in the hands of the right leadership, a dynamic and efficient operation overseen by the watchful eye of the users. This model could work in all basic utilities, and may even be extended, although perhaps with more complexity, to the national railway system, which albeit monolithic, may still benefit from escape from a false market or the older model of nationalisation.

The establishment of a comprehensive National Care Service (NCS), alongside the National Health Service, publicly funded, perhaps using the Japanese model of a life-long national insurance contribution (starting at the point of first employment), which is used to fund post-work care needs, would provide security and well-being beyond retirement age for all those who need it, rather than a reliance on a market-based system which leaves many out in the cold. Both the NCS and the NHS could also provide closer connection to users (stakeholders) if the social ownership model (of community enterprise) were extended where appropriate. The investment of the private sector should not be ruled out on ideological grounds, just as the takeover of the services by the private sector should not be driven by an opposite ideology. A partnership if and where appropriate can undoubtedly provide a dynamic and responsive system, but it should be remembered that leadership which results in such a system does not depend on whether or not it comes from a private or public provider. It is a personal and cultural thing and there is no reason at all why a public organisation (or in this case, a social enterprise) can not provide this dynamism and responsiveness. It is also critical to ensure that, in both cases (public and private), ongoing investment is at the level which is required for an outstanding service, meeting the needs of its users. My personal view here is that from a standpoint of principle, making profit from people's health is questionable and I would rather see a system which was wholly driven by meeting all the health needs of its stakeholders, and not partially, or wholly by the need for profit.

Conclusion

The ideas outlined above are the first part of three which, in combination, express thoughts pulled together after reading, research and information gathering, as well as learnings from life experiences and critiquing government direction, process, infrastructure and policy over a number of years. They are obviously not fully expanded as directly implementable plans, but instead are intended to create a skeletal framework upon which detail can be hung. The idea has been, and will be extended in parts two and three, to develop a coherent (ie joined-up) set of components which form a broad agenda based on a 'blinkers-off' analysis of the nation's requirements in the 21st century, and beyond.

It represents, obviously, only one set of ideas and opinions and hopefully will stimulate debate and, equally importantly, actions to generate positive forward momentum. The second and third parts of this essay will cover, in the same manner, more areas of a nation's overall agenda.