

Digby Jones

**THOUGHTS
LEADING UP
TO THE 2010
ELECTION**

Digby Jones

CONTENT

SO THEY'RE UNDER STARTER'S ORDERS!	2
Published on Tuesday 06 April, 2010	
RECONNECTING WITH THE ELECTORATE.....	3
Published on Thursday 08 April, 2010	
NI DEBATE... THEY JUST DON'T GET IT!	5
Published on Monday 12 April, 2010	
WHAT'S GOING WRONG WITH THE PUBLIC SECTOR?	7
Published on Wednesday 14 April, 2010	
WHERE ARE THE REAL ISSUES?	10
Published on Friday 16 April, 2010	
SO THE FIRST-EVER LEADERS' DEBATE HAS BEEN AND GONE... ..	12
Published on Monday 19 April, 2010	
SHOULD THE CUSTOMER COME BEFORE THE SYSTEM?	13
Published on Tuesday 20 April, 2010	
THE BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF A HUNG PARLIAMENT	15
Published on Thursday 22 April, 2010	
WE DON'T MAKE THINGS ANY MORE? OH, YES WE DO!.....	16
Published on Monday 26 April, 2010	
IT'S OUR COUNTRY'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET	20
Published on Tuesday 04 May, 2010	
NOW IT'S JUST THE VOTER THAT COUNTS	21
Published on Wednesday 05 May, 2010	

SO THEY'RE UNDER STARTER'S ORDERS!

Published on Tuesday 06 April, 2010

Over the next few days parliamentary business will be brought to an end; manifestos will be printed; MPs become mere candidates.

And then next week... they're off!
6th May here we come!

I hope that every single businessman and woman in the country spends every available moment over the General Election campaign to put business, the creating of wealth and jobs, at the heart of the debate.

We are going to hear so much about spending. Cutting it, delaying cutting it, ringfencing cutting it, increasing it even! Why are we not going to hear about earning the stuff in the first place?

If it wasn't for business there wouldn't be any public spending at all! Because there wouldn't be any tax. Only business generates taxation. The profit business makes goes to shareholders (who pay tax on it) or is retained in the business (which pays tax on it) or it is used to pay people (who pay tax on it) .

No business... No tax

No tax... No public sector.

So I just hope that over the next four weeks we see and hear politicians standing up for business, promising a government that will work with the groove of making money, not running scared of the blindingly obvious.

Sadly ... I won't be holding my breath.

Digby Jones

RECONNECTING WITH THE ELECTORATE

Published on Thursday 08 April, 2010

It is interesting how the prospect of electoral defeat or the possible need to have the support of others after 6th May has concentrated the minds of the big parties on constitutional reform.

It is a shame that the expenses scandal didn't galvanise politicians into immediate radical action in the way that potential redundancy has!

The essential reconnection with the electorate calls for people feeling their vote matters. A system where, for the vast majority, an MP is at Westminster because a few activists adopted him or her as the official party candidate spectacularly fails to make that connection.

Three (at least) ramifications flow from this:

Whether it is constitutionally accurate or not, the vast majority are making a leadership choice on 6th May. A local MP will be the beneficiary of a Brown/Cameron/Clegg electoral choice. So why don't we call it for what it is and have direct prime ministerial elections?

One of the least edifying sights at Westminster is hearing the division bells ringing and watching MPs scurrying through the lobbies to vote according to their party writ. They have rarely heard the debate leading to the vote. They often have no idea what they are specifically voting on!

Hold the executive to account? Don't make me laugh! Why not have encrypted electronic voting? Let MPs stay in their constituencies (and connect with their voters... with no need to claim expenses!) or attend debates and force the executive to win the argument not just be treated as whip-fodder.

Digby Jones

It is difficult to argue against an elected House of Lords. An appointed second chamber in the oldest democracy is truly anachronistic. But it works! So many members are truly connected with the issues because they have done something with their lives and have a wider experience than just the Westminster beltway and weekend visits to a safe seat.

They beneficially inform legislation and do indeed, on all sides, hold the executive to account. Please do not let reform mean would-be professional politicians get another crack at getting on the party slate after failing to get into the commons or Europe.

Whatever change takes place the second chamber needs that essential quality of experienced independence.

The best reconnection with the voter is to have more, and more visible, independence in Parliament ... Not the slavish, complacent party adherence that got us into this mess in the first place.

Digby Jones

NI DEBATE... THEY JUST DON'T GET IT!

Published on Monday 12 April, 2010

So the first week of campaigning is over and the row over National Insurance contributions has dominated. The crying shame about this is that not only has it been reduced to a political spat (mind you, I guess over the next three weeks we are going to see political rows over whether it is raining or not!) but that the essential point has been missed...

... this is not about business profits. It's about jobs.

Only business will pull this Country out of recession. We are going to have to trade our way out. Only Business will create the jobs that will get the UK back to work and precisely at a time when every small businessman and woman should be encouraged to employ one extra person... wham! A tax on employment!

The Labour Party are saying that the cut suggested by the Tories can't be paid for. The Tories are saying they can afford it through nebulous so-called efficiency savings. The real questions should be...

... to the Labour side, why did you do it in the first place? Why now attack the ire of Business by saying that businesses don't like a tax on profits? How many more quite senior politicians do I have to teach that loss-making businesses pay national insurance contributions on the number of people they employ?

Digby Jones

... to the Tories... why not really command the high ground of job creation and cut National Insurance Contributions from employers big-time and pay for it with an increase on the tax paid on the profits Business makes? Stimulate job creation in the private sector... and get your money back when profits are made.

It is shameful how ignorant of business so many of our politicians are. It is seen by many as the milchcow of taxation, the target of blame for most of the evils in society... and yet just a brief appreciation of its role in getting the Nation (and especially its young) back to work would have rendered this political row redundant, which is where so many of our Country are going to stay if National Insurance Contributions for Employers isn't cut, substantially and soon.

Digby Jones

WHAT'S GOING WRONG WITH THE PUBLIC SECTOR?

Published on Wednesday 14 April, 2010

Why is it that any call for reform of our public services is immediately transformed into an attack on individuals and alarmist claims about fewer teachers and nurses, policemen and soldiers?

In my time both at the CBI and as Minister of State for UK Trade & Investment I saw just how our public services are stuffed full of good, hard-working, decent people.

But the System? Oh dear! The System! The Culture! The Unworldliness!

By more and better investment in technology.

By better and different training.

By new and systemic management change.

By more flexible working practices.

By putting the interests of the taxpaying consumer first and not those of the employees...

... This country could deliver more and even better frontline services with far fewer administrative and backroom people.

But the System militates against change and reform. Every move is seen through the eyes of the status quo and is treated as an assault on jobs. The people often asked to implement change are the very people whose jobs and comfort zones are at risk... and turkeys rarely vote for Christmas!

If someone fails in one department (after coaching and lots of help and many chances) they are simply moved to another department! The threat of the sack just doesn't exist. Pay rises are the norm not the rarity that they are for so many in the Private Sector.

The immediate response to cutting a budget is to stop delivering something; rarely is serious thought given to delivering the same or even more but in a totally different way with fewer people.

This Government has increased the headcount in the Public Sector from 5 million in 1997 to 6 million now.

Digby Jones

Those people are targetted to the point where they lose sight of what they're there for and apply their ingenuity to meeting their targets (who wouldn't?) not necessarily improving the service they are there to provide.

Many of them feel that if they are faced with one more initiative launch they will burst!

Budgetary largesse leads to the creation of non-jobs. A Local Council advertising for a "Street-naming Executive"! But hang on, worse is yet to come... the applicant would join the Council's "successful street-naming team"! And no-one stopped to think what was so wasteful and ridiculous in all of that. From Bus Lane Infringement Adjudicators (silly me ... there was I thinking we already had those; they are called magistrates!) to employees turning up to work to watch a machine do their job because a union agreement keeps the jobs intact, the Culture of jobs first and the taxpaying customer second has to end.

Whichever Party wins power on 6th May, taxes will rise. The British public realise that. And they will expect their cash to be spent in the same way and subject to the same pressures and systems as those in the Private Sector experience every day. The average pay in the Public Sector is £2000 a year more than in the Private Sector. Our attention is always directed to the low paid people in our hospitals and Councils and comparisons drawn with the fatcats in the Private Sector. There are millions of low paid people in the businesses of this country as well. Millions! All of them facing the prospect of paying more tax and yet seeing the chance of serious public sector reform disappear in the rhetorical mists of an election campaign.

This Government has made a rod for its own back, for if any party could have changed things to an affordable, productive model it was this one, with a thumping majority and a reputation that they were on the public sector's side.

Why should public sector workers retire earlier and on better pensions than their private sector counterparts?

Because historically they were paid a lot less on the way through? No longer true.

It's because this Government caved in to pressure from their paymasters the Unions (at the time, as CBI Chief, I called it "craven surrender") to preserve pension arrangements and retirement ages that frankly, no matter how desirable they may be, the Country can't afford now and that our children will go bankrupt trying to pay in the future!

Digby Jones

The crying shame is that on so many fronts the public get better services in quality and quantity than 13 years ago was ever thought possible, yet that will all be forgotten because of the lack of reform. The quality of teaching has increased amazingly (a pity that the quality of parenting hasn't matched it!), the waiting lists for cancer treatment have been drastically reduced, there are more policemen on our streets, so many councils are delivering more with less or the same. But at what a cost!

The same results (and probably even better) could have been delivered with less of our cash...

If things had been done differently.

If the System and the jobs didn't come 1st, 2nd & 3rd.

If the Public Sector Unions were as responsible as their brethren in the Private Sector have been throughout this recession (I see the BA dispute as the last remnants of a Nationalised Industry's working practices being sorted, not a typical private sector situation).

It is time those 6 million people sheltered from the rigours of the Private Sector woke up and smelt the coffee. The party's over!

Welcome to the real world that everyone else has to deal with and face up to every working day! You are not being asked to "pay the price of failure by fatcat bankers" any more than a low paid shelf-stacker in a supermarket is. You are being asked to do what you should have been asked to do some 13 years ago. Deliver more for less. The difference is that the Private Sector had to reform years ago or go under.

This recession may have been the catalyst for change in the Public Sector but it's not what caused it. The Country should have been doing this years ago!

No matter how uncomfortable it may be (and change is never comfortable) major job cuts and changes to working practices and pensions in our Public Sector are on their way... the voter will expect no less from whichever Party wins through on 6th May.

WHERE ARE THE REAL ISSUES?

Published on Friday 16 April, 2010

So the Prospectuses are out; the written promises are made. Do they actually matter? Will they actually make a difference?

One of Tony Blair's Manifesto's promised no introduction of University Top-up Fees... ?!

This Government's last one promised no rise in income tax... ?!

And so much for a referendum on the European Constitution from both sides!!

Historically the Lib Dem one was a Document of Protest but hey! it's for real this time ... they might hold the balance of power and the price of parliamentary co-operation is in their Manifesto.

The Conservatives give a written promise to give us our power back and get out of our lives... but there are enough questions left unanswered to allow a horse and cart oceans of wriggle room.

All three have failed to address in terms two of the biggest issues our Country faces over the next Parliament.

Firstly, they are all heavy on public spending; cutting it, not cutting it, ring fencing it, increasing it even!

Not one word on making the stuff in the first place! Only Business generates taxation; when profit is made a business can only do one of three things with it: reward those who took the risk of the enterprise, the shareholders or partners, and they pay tax on it; or keep it in the business as retained profit and pay tax on it; or employ people, who pay tax on it!

Taxation (both direct and indirect, paid by private and public sector employees alike) has its origins in the wealth Business creates.

And yet, here, at a time of National Peril, when the only way out of this mess is to trade our way out and help Business create wealth and jobs, no-one is talking about helping businesses do the job.

Taking the milch cow for granted or what!

One side puts up the tax on jobs; the other would partially cut it!

Digby Jones

How about abolishing it completely and then increasing tax-take on profits after the money is made?

One side says they should have regulated more; another says “See, you’re to blame!” whilst the third says “I told you so!”

We do not need more regulation (especially on a “go-it-alone” isolated basis); we do not need more rules strangling the lifeblood out of non-financial sector small business; we need what we’ve got better enforced and that which emanates from Brussels strictly implemented in other EU member countries where compliance is a voluntary event!

So far in this campaign Politicians have shown a remarkable ignorance of the issues preventing the wealth creators in our Society from getting on with the job-in-hand.

Secondly, has there been any meaningful publicity about this country’s dirty little secret? Has any manifesto highlighted the debilitating cancer in our society? After eleven years of full-time, compulsory, free education (and how many billions of children in this World would love to have been provided with that start in life?!), nearly half the young people who take a GCSE this summer will not get Grade C or above in English or Maths; and they’re the ones who take it! Nearly half the new recruits for the world of work are leaving our education system not fit for purpose.

Colleges of Education have to spend the first term in remedial training! Employers (in both private and public sectors) have to teach people to read and add up before they can train them for the job they’re paid to do; just imagine what that does to national productivity and efficiency... precisely at the time when we need a Public Sector that can be equipped to provide more with less and a Private Sector that must take on India and China in global markets and win!

20% of the adult population of the UK cannot read to the standard expected of an 11 year-old and 30% of them cannot add up two three-figure numbers.

Does this disgraceful situation get a mention in the Manifesto’s? Has any Party explained in terms what it’s going to do about it? Don’t make me laugh!

Sadly I’m not laughing; on behalf of hundreds of thousands of people who will be ill-equipped to deal with 21st century Britain for the rest of their lives, impacting on their social standing, health and ability to get on (far more than so many initiatives shouted from the rooftops at the launches this week), I feel like crying.

SO THE FIRST-EVER LEADERS' DEBATE HAS BEEN AND GONE...

Published on Monday 19 April, 2010

So the first-ever Leaders' Debate has been and gone and we look forward to the one concentrating on Foreign Policy next Thursday and the last one on "The Economy, Stupid" a week before votes are cast.

But the reaction to it all shows up a big flaw in our electoral system and raises the question as to whether it is fit for purpose in a different, technologically-fuelled 21st Century.

The British People don't vote for a Prime Minister, they vote for a local MP

They might really like Nick Clegg on the TV but then cling to voting for a Labour or Tory candidate on 6th May because they like the approach on local issues or don't like certain aspects of the Leader's policies.

We should have a directly-elected Prime Minister who appointed his or her Executive from within or without Parliament (expertise rather than inexperienced political careerists being the order of the day), with the PM and that Executive being accountable to Parliament which had been elected on Party lines but accommodating sufficient independents and more independently-minded Party politicians.

Then the TV debates would have so much more direct relevance, would mean more on the streets and would lead to MPs being more powerful and less political cannon-fodder. The exercise of Democracy would resonate more with a voter (and especially the young voter) brought up on exercising more power in choosing this week's winner of Strictly or X-Factor than they have in choosing the next Prime Minister as a person than as a Party Leader.

The TV Debates are imported from the USA; there the voter gets to elect directly the Country's Leader. That's why their TV Debates are so relevant. Here we are denied that choice.

Well done Mr Clegg on winning the Beauty Parade... shame that it has no relevance to how we choose the job you want!

Digby Jones

SHOULD THE CUSTOMER COME BEFORE THE SYSTEM?

Published on Tuesday 20 April, 2010

A few years ago, when I was Director-General of the CBI, I visited an NHS hospital in the North-West of our Country.

My visits to Hospitals and Schools, to Prisons and the Military, were a new direction for the UK's premier business lobbying organisation but I felt (and still do) that we should take a much greater interest in them since, after all, it is the tax that is generated from the profits and employment that Business creates that pays for them!

During my tour I came across a particularly fabulous piece of diagnostic kit that did wonderful things in early cancer detection. The problem was that it was being used for only a few hours every day and thus there was a months-long waiting list for its use. The reasons were the working practices in the Hospital, the system of booking, a lack of co-ordination between the different departments and stages involved in patient management and a culture that wouldn't dream of maximising capital expenditure by running it 24/7 as would happen in the private sector.

Given the choice. a person worried sick that he or she might have cancer would, I suggest, rather come in on a Saturday afternoon for the test than wait two months for a weekday appointment.

When I suggested that I found this unacceptable and would take up the issue in our lobbying I was asked not to do anything since the waiting list was going to be halved very soon because ...

... they were buying another machine!

Digby Jones

So increased spending on the NHS did indeed halve a particular waiting list much to the delight of the Politicians and the UK taxpayer never knew that what had really been needed to achieve the same result was no more money being spent but better management of resources, more flexible working patterns and a different culture where the customer comes before the system.

I suggest we bear this tale in mind when we listen to promises about dealing with waste, cutting spending, ring fencing spending and the rest... it isn't always the amount that's spent but how it's spent that matters.

But then there is no political sound bite in that, only the sheer hard work of difficult implementation and tough decisions.

Digby Jones

THE BUSINESS IMPLICATIONS OF A HUNG PARLIAMENT

Published on Thursday 22 April, 2010

Business is the only part of our society that generates taxation. Lots of people will tell you how to spend it! Some will tell you how to cut spending it or ring fence spending it... but few talk about earning the stuff! And that's what business does. Earns profits... Pays tax... Employs people who pay tax!

In a world where China wants your lunch and India wants your dinner to do the business, business needs a stable, boringly predictable economy where it can invest in kit and people with confidence and the expectation of predictable outcomes with no nasty surprises. Our nation's prosperity depends on a well invested, competitive globally engaged business sector of society.

If we have a changed electoral system in the future then a structured, understood, managed coalition form of long term government would work in this country.

But, as Margaret Thatcher famously said, politics is about the acquisition, maintenance and use of power. None of the present leaders will explain how a hung parliament would work. None of them will yield power or opportunity at virtually any cost. The uncertainty will destroy stability, play havoc with international money markets and take the whole nation's eye off the ball at precisely the time we should be manning the pumps!

A clear, understood, tough government and a cobbled together administration lurching from crisis to crisis are as different as this country could get. We must create jobs in an atmosphere of "can do"... Not in the second guessing game of minority politics.

If we get a hung parliament with the prime minister spending more time on watching his back, doing deals in smoke free rooms, turning ingenuity and fire power onto the issue of survival and not creating an environment where business can flourish and trade our way out of this mess, then we will pay a price as a country for which our children will never forgive us.

WE DON'T MAKE THINGS ANY MORE? OH, YES WE DO!

Published on Monday 26 April, 2010

Two Leadership Debates down, one to go... and lots of talk and promises about jobs and growth, but not a word, not one syllable, about how we are going to trade our way out of this mess, how we are going to earn our living as a Nation. Three Leaders, talking about Public Spending, cutting it, delaying cutting it, ring fencing it, even increasing it! But not a word about earning the stuff first! It is down to Business to generate the wealth to pay the tax, or employ the people who will pay the tax, upon which the public sector and public spending depends.

This week's GDP figures shows a fragile recovery at best, with a resurgent Financial Services Sector interestingly to the fore. Nothing wrong with that. Indeed we badly need our financial services sector and giving it a political kicking might help standing in the polls (Mr Clegg even called them "wretched Banks" in last Thursday's Debate) but we would be the poorer in so many ways without them. After all, they may only be some 8% of GDP, but our Banks, Insurance companies, lawyers and accountants are your genuine value-added tax generator, delivering up some 22% of all Business Tax in the Country.

But we must rebalance our economy! Never again must we be so dependent on one sector that when it goes bust, it takes us into a deeper and longer-lasting recession than any of our competitor Nations. Rebalancing will call for support for our Tourism Industry, our Creative Industries, our Higher Education capability; all these are world-class and big employers and wealth generators. But the elephant in the room, the one sector capable of bringing in the dosh from overseas, equipped to fly the flag around the World and earn our living is the one that not one political Leader has mentioned to date: Manufacturing.

Digby Jones

“We don’t make things anymore” is a cry that I hear so often, often from people who should know better. We are the sixth biggest manufacturer on earth, we have restructured our industrial base in a way that has eluded the protectionist-fuelled businesses of America or France. Half of every Airbus that takes to the skies is made in the UK. The wings, the undercarriages, some of the avionics and, of course, under the wings, the greatest and best engines in the World, Rolls-Royce made in Derby. Tell the most productive car plant in Europe (no it’s not in Germany or Poland) and the 2nd most productive in the World - Nissan’s plant in Sunderland - that we don’t make things anymore.

Kraft shelled out a fortune for a class act, THE chocolate manufacturer, Cadbury, doing it in Bournville in the heart of the Country. The 2nd largest pharmaceutical manufacturer on Earth is British; Glaxo Smithkline do it here in the UK. Our Defence Manufacturing capability is globally successful, massively important to our Country and employs hundreds of thousands of people earning billions for the UK. “We don’t make things anymore”? Wrong!

But to listen to the radio silence that has been maintained by the Leaders you would have thought they too believe we don’t. And the conduct of this Labour Government over the past 13 years (and, it has to be said, its Tory predecessor) has effectively ignored manufacturing.

The sector has special requirements when it comes to investing in kit. But where has the help been over decades for small manufacturers to invest in plant? “State Aid contravenes EU rules” scream officials. So France and Germany worry about that do they?

The sector’s lifeblood is a flow of skilled young people, but with disgraceful levels of adult illiteracy and innumeracy after the taxpayer has forked out for 11 years of full-time, compulsory, free education the sector immediately experiences adverse impacts on productivity by having to teach applicants to read before it can train them in the job.

When manufacturers across Europe were having to lay off skilled workers in the depths of recession, the Governments of France, Germany, Holland and Belgium all invested in their countries’ skills base by helping manufacturers retain their workforce on short time so that when the upturn came there was a ready, fit-for-purpose reservoir of talent geared up to make things to sell around the world. And us? Not a penny! Fine talk about caring and understanding (the tea and sympathy of Government spin) but a Government still traumatised by decades of subsidising British Leyland refused to “bail out” fabulous world-class businesses. “Bail out”? JCB? Jaguar? Land Rover? Nissan? It would be insulting if it wasn’t so ignorant about modern manufacturing.

Digby Jones

Look at JCB where I serve on the Advisory Board. They have choice where they manufacture and create wealth and jobs. Not just the Indias and Chinas of a lower cost base but Germany, hardly the Vietnam of low-cost manufacturing! So while Lord Mandelson watched skilled welders in the East Midlands leave manufacturing (forever) and become binmen in Derby, men with the same skills in Germany were retained in their jobs (on less pay but with help from the taxpayer) so that now the upturn has arrived JCB Germany is ready, willing and able to deliver.

What our political class doesn't seem to get is that the globalisation they witter on about everyday is, in manufacturing, a harsh reality. "Get real, Nick" said the Prime Minister to one of his challengers the other night. It was about Trident, but it may as well have been addressed to all three of them about the competitive field in which our exporters operate every day. Our politicians can cry foul about the protectionist behaviour of some countries, they can tell our manufacturers that subsidies to our Banks are a special case, they can talk til they are green in the face about our climate change credentials, but if we are to rebalance our economy then manufacturing must matter more in what politicians do rather than what they just talk about. It is also vital that the media mood-music changes about making things. Objective, informed journalism is fine; ill-informed jingoism is damaging at a time when we want the young to come into the Sector.

And UK manufacturing is ready to deliver. The CBI Quarterly Trends Survey last Thursday reported rising orders on the back of a weak pound and a recovering global economy. Domestic demand is improving as well. Sentiment is more optimistic than for years. But ...

Is this all too late? I am Chairman of Triumph Motorcycles, making nearly 50,000 bikes a year in Hinckley in Leicestershire. ("We don't make things anymore"? Tell that to the great men and women at our facility who have stuck with it through these dark days and now see their products sell in some seventy countries) But we source our components from 32 countries, in part because we just can't find tier-two and tier-three suppliers in sufficient volume and of the right quality at home.

And it is in these two aspects of our manufacturing base that the greatest worry lies.

Digby Jones

Firstly, we do really well at the top end. The emblematic, quality, branded manufacturers employing our people, exporting around the world, earning profits and paying tax here in the UK. Brand Britain sells globally. I don't care where the Headquarters of many of these firms are so long as they do it here! But will they keep doing it here? Global manufacturers have choice and a Government that sends out a message that their global employees aren't welcome here with a non-dom tax, that has lost its reputation for having a competitively- based tax regime, that goldplates with misguided pride every regulation coming out of the Sales Prevention Team in Brussels and that has failed to address the skills base of the Nation really isn't (by its actions not its fine words) putting up the "Welcome Manufacturers of the World" signs at Heathrow!

Secondly, the Country has lost the critical mass of small manufacturers that creates thousands of jobs, makes profits and generates taxation in Germany, France and the USA. Our OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) would love to source as much as possible locally. Just ask Toyota or JCB or GKN. But decades of Governmental neglect, of ignorance of what 21st century manufacturing entails, of denuding the skills base and of politicians paying fiscal, political and regulatory homage at the feet of the financial services sector has skewed our economy to the point where "we don't make things - in volume by small businesses - anymore".

Modern manufacturing (be it in the areas of green technology or rarified science, let alone the more well-known areas) will never again employ the sheer levels of numbers of people that making the old commodity stuff used to do. The only way to achieve the rebalancing we need is to provide skilled people into a well-invested manufacturing base that is helped in its investing in kit and in its exporting around the world. All our competitor nations do it. The sector stands ready to do its bit at this time of crisis. Does manufacturing matter? You bet your kids' futures it does. Actions not words please Gentlemen! Yes Gordon, David and Nick... That means You... Get Real indeed!

IT'S OUR COUNTRY'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET

Published on Tuesday 04 May, 2010

It is difficult enough to get a job in the UK at the moment. It is even more so if you've just come out of prison.

And yet... The rate of re-offending drops from 90% (yes 90%) to... wait for it... 10% if the person leaves prison and goes straight into the world of work.

Why should this bother us? Well... Every re-offender whose act lands him back inside costs you and me £250,000. Money we haven't got. And that is before we think of the human cost, the disruption to victim's lives, and the dislocation of our society.

So whilst business and public sector employers should step up to the plate more and work with prisons to bring those coming out of prison into the world of work immediately upon release, the Government must act.

The prison population is some 85,000. Over three quarters of them cannot read, write or count to the standard expected of an eleven year old. So what do our political leaders do with our money? Inmates earn a few pounds a week for doing menial work. If instead they volunteer to learn to read and count and operate a computer... They are paid less! You couldn't make this up!

But why am I surprised when in this election campaign I haven't heard one word about how we intend to achieve a reduction in unemployment when 20% of the adult population is functionally illiterate and a third cannot add up two three - figure numbers!

It's our country's dirty little secret ... and not one Leader's Debate has even mentioned it.

Take on China? Develop a skilled economy? Reform public services? Rebalance our society? I'd laugh if it wasn't so sad.

Digby Jones

NOW IT'S JUST THE VOTER THAT COUNTS

Published on Wednesday 05 May, 2010

So the closest, most interesting General election campaign for years draws to its nail biting close. No more gaffes, no more surprises, no more X-Factor style “Strictly Come Electioneering”.

Now it's just the voter that counts. The only opinion poll that actually matters.

Have we learned anything from the last month? Are we better for the experience?

Well... we certainly are in denial. We stand ready to punish any politician who has the temerity to promise us what we must have. Detailed and specific massive spending cuts and tax rises. As we condescendingly and arrogantly look down at Greece we should beware of the pot and kettle!

Well... we have half-lost our virginity! An impossibility which will be rectified in the weeks ahead. We go to the polls tomorrow turned on by the leadership debates and thinking we're electing a prime minister when of course we're not. The system must change. Public opinion will ensure it does. Maybe... just maybe... the greatest elected dictatorship on earth will have seen its last days.

Well... there will be more new MP's in the new parliament than at any time since 1945. It will be fascinating to see just how long it will take for fresh zeal and promised independence to sink without trace into the swamp of party political pork-barrel deal-doing and the world of threatened demotion or promised advancement up the greasy pole of a political career.

Well... there have been some elephants in the electoral room that have been studiously ignored.

Digby Jones

Inefficiency in the NHS.

Transport.

Adult illiteracy and innumeracy.

Overseas aid in untied and unmonitored form.

Scottish MP's being elected by Scots to pass laws over English people when the reciprocal no longer applies.

Well... virtually the entire business agenda of wealth creation. Politicians of all parties have just taken it for granted that the jobs will be there, that the tax will be generated, that the exports will happen. Not one nod to the men and women of this country who risk their money, their homes and their reputations every day to create the wealth and jobs of the UK in hundreds of thousands of small businesses across the land. If you tell people often enough that the money that pays for their local hospital or School grows on trees they will eventually believe you ... and allow politicians to act accordingly.

So off to the polling stations the good people of this Nation go tomorrow.

A Nation that stood alone just 70 years ago in the name of freedom. A Nation that was voting when America didn't even exist. A Nation that sent a generation to die so that they may vote and yet doesn't value it all that highly and takes it so much for granted.

As Sir Winston Churchill said...

“Democracy is the worst form of government...
apart from all the others!”

