WORLD:
The Use of Language in Current UK Politics — I

My View on the Aspect of Language in Current UK Politics

Jaimin L. Symonds Patel

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1   Introduction

First of all, I am no politician. I have no qualifications that I know of, which would allow me to say at all that I am knowledgeable in politics. Nonetheless, I believe and hope that what I have to say may be of value.

In recent years, I have heard the use of language in the political arena on TV, radio, and in general conversation, and there have been a few things that I can't help but notice. Furthermore, there are a few things that I think will severely hinder our ability to grow as a nation, when regarding political/societal issues.

2   Big Words

First of all, I have heard many big words (big in the sense of sounding sophisticated in some way) being used in politics, which seem to be full of nothing but air. I mean words like "left", "right", "Conservative", "Labour", "capitalism", "communism", "Marxism", and many more.

I am sure many of you reading this wouldn't say these are big words at all, but just standard political terms. Sure, I would agree in that they are certainly used as if they are standard terms, but maybe that is the problem. Whenever I have heard these terms used, I have seldom actually come to understand what anyone is trying to say with them, besides that they are either supportive or opposed to the term they use.

For example, many say that UK society is "capitalist". Many people may just be saying it because others have said it – just taking their word for it. To be frank, many would just say that "capitalist" = "wanting to make profit". Obviously there is more to society in the UK than it wanting to make profit. One might point out that I am mistaken in using "capitalist" to describe a society, and instead should only use it to describe the economy. But the thing is, that the word has been thrown about so much describing societies and economies, that I am correct to use it in the way I do.

But my point is that such a term as "capitalist" is used so commonly and arbitrarily, that the only meaning it's often come to have is "evil profit hunter". If I were to ask, "What really makes the UK capitalist?", maybe many would talk about the wish for profit, or the greed of material. But then what's the difference between that an materialism? Especially if we include money as being a "material", and if we are talking about UK society. Maybe I just don't know enough about modern politics.

Now I'll talk about "left" and "right", as well as "Conservative" and "Labour". These are the "big words" which I have greatest issue with, and I will put my case plainly. No one has any slight speck of an idea what on earth they

mean. Yet, these terms are used often without any second thoughts. Sure, maybe "left" and "right" are again standard political terms, but I would say only in the abstract domain of political theory. The same applies to our two main political parties, the "Conservatives", and "Labour". I am pretty sure 99% of people today see the Conservatives as seeking to only conserve their power and position, and Labour as only labouring to topple the Conservatives, and nothing more. And to be honest, such a view looks quite right whenever you watch TV or hear the radio.

The fact is, no one knows what "left", "right", "Conservative", or "Labour" means. Maybe when it comes to our two main political parties, people just know one to mean "the lesser of the two evils". When it comes to ideas or people that are right or left-wing, again, maybe the same applies. To illustrate the problem, let us consider two societal issues. Firstly, the housing crisis. What is the "right-wing" thing to do? What is the "left-wing" thing to do? Secondly, what about if a famine breaks out? What is the "right-wing" or "left-wing" thing to do? Which solution is better? Hopefully you see the problem. Either you spend too long trying to answer these questions, or you just dive into an abstract realm that becomes useless because you only care about categories of ideas, and not the situation. If this hinders us when we think about these issues, how much more then would this language hinder our government in governing our nation around these issues.

More generally, whenever I've talked about and heard anyone talk about political ideas/systems, they are often so abstract that they mean nothing in application. I emphasise again, I am not a politics student, but an engineering student, so maybe that is the source of my confusion. But if a word is not understood by at least 50% of the population accurately, as I think many are, then we should at least rethink how often we should use them in political discourse, which might benefit from being more understandable (without being dumbed down) to the public. Political ideas like "communism" "socialism", and "Marxism" are often popular, and quite so with some of those who are my friends and classmates. For one thing, I have read the Communist Manifesto by Marx, and find it to be one of the most repugnant documents ever. Not just because it is an insult to any notion of good politics, but because it is an insult to human nature, society, and history, plain and simple. It's free to read online because its so old now, so please do read it if you want. I would ask simply that you look at it through the lens of common sense, and not fanciful abstract political theory.

But anyhow, without any more tangents, these political theories also get over-generalised treatment when they are used. "Socialist" seems to mean something like "for the people", "Marxist" seams to mean just "violent revolution", and "communism" seems to mean "everyone equal happy place". Like "capitalism", there is seldom any more detail given in common political discourse, and it is seldom to mean anything precise. All of these theories in practice must have simple definitions, and if they don't, then how could

they ever be implemented in practice? In order do to something, one must know what that thing translates to in real practice, which often means, in simple terms.

If I asked anyone to give me a "socialist", "communist", "Marxist", or "capitalist" answer to the issue of the housing crisis, I would just get some airy-fairy vague answer. But if I asked anyone to just give me as reasonable or good an answer as possible, then I suspect I would get far more detailed and precise answers. And so, I think that a possible solution to be more accurate in the area of political ideological terms is frankly, to scrap them.

I am sure political ideas are valuable, but not when they are hid in a smoke screen of terms, often just full of smoke. If someone thinks they are "communist", it probably is just because they care about people, more than they seem to think they care about institutions, so lets just say that. If someone is "capitalist", then they probably just care more about making money than other things. If someone is "Marxist", maybe they just hate institutions and want to see any remnant of order and stability burn, and justify it with a magical state that does everything perfectly. Maybe an "anarchist" simply doesn't like all the burdens of supporting the government through taxation. So let us just say these instead of using labels that mean nothing at all, that only add to the confusion.

If our government is to govern the nation well, is it not in it's best interest to throw all these charged words away, and talk in terms of how things actually are? That way all of the people of this country can understand what needs to get sorted, and furthermore, help sort it. That way also, the people who might be poorest in society, who's opinions are precisely what democracy rightly defends, might be able to vote and voice concerns in confidence. Is that not better than the semantic stalemate that current politics finds itself in today?

Surely we shouldn't be asking about what ideas are "right-leaning" or "left-leaning", but simply what is right and what is wrong for each given situation and issue. Simply put, why not focus on what is good politics, and what is bad politics, with regard to the betterment of the people? Indeed, maybe no one today knows what the betterment of the people should mean, but that is also what was must seek to answer surely.

3   Vague Language

Besides using words that lost their meaning, another huge issue is that politicians are purposely vague. The nature of media today means politicians are often forced to explain and answer complicated issues in one minute or less. This naturally causes their answers to be as useful as the droppings of any animal of your choice.

Politicians are also often vague to avoid any opposition, since no one can oppose something they don't understand. Hopefully I don't have to explain why this is a problem. Simply put, it is just poor communication. For example, I couldn't care less when any politician says only that something is "good for the British people". Well lovely, sure that's good, but tell me why. Oh wait, they're off-air already because it's been 60 seconds.

There are so many assumptions, loose arguments, and absent explanations, that I am just made dizzy. So, let us be precise, assume as little as possible, and actually explain our reasoning when it comes to politics.

4   Accusations

Finally, I would like to talk a bit on accusations, in a similar way as when I talked about "big words". I heard maybe two months ago that an official report revealed that the either the Metropolitan Police or the UK Fire Service (my memory fails me, but definitely one of the two, if not both) were "misogynistic" and "racist" (maybe with more charges). I heard this on the news, and was given no more information. I am not denying the possibility of the report being accurate, but simply the fact that the information was so vague and broad, and for such serious accusations as those.

It seems slightly irresponsible of at least the media, in my eyes, to simply say anyone was misogynistic or racist, without any detail on what actually was done, even if it is a short list of such instances. The public are at liberty to take those accusations to mean absolutely anything, since the accusations are so broad. In this example, if such an organisation was deemed misogynistic or racist, I can't and don't know what on earth that specifically means. If the report was this vague in its conclusions also, then that just makes me doubtful on the quality of the same.

Now of course, there is no shortage of accusations also on individual people, especially in government. I see the same problem of vague accusations being used, or at least reported on such people. This at least effects their public image, and let us not forget that these are people, who may be tarnished wrongly for the rest of their lives, because of vague accusations being reported. If they have done wrong, then the precise act should be reported (which doesn't have to be in immense detail of course), and not the *possible personality/psychology* behind the act. So for example, instead of someone being misogynistic, I think it is far more helpful to the public and institutions, to simply say that person X spoke in ill terms toward woman Y (not to deny the weight of the offense, but simply to state the facts). Maybe it would most likely have been out of some prejudice, but we can't know. Surely it is more helpful to report the simple facts accurately and precisely.

5   Conclusion

These are all my grievances when it comes to how language is used in UK politics, without dragging it on for too long. Maybe the points which I did not explain too well or left without emphasis can be added to in another entry in this series.

I hope that my points are clear enough, and make sense, and I apologise for any typos.

Thank you for reading.

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