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Britain's Politicians Damage People's Interests through Populism, says new Politeia pamphlet. Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, QC MP, to take up themes at Politeia on 14th February

Politicians in the UK today are playing a dangerous game: the decisions they take are too often determined by what they think popular, not what they judge right for the country, says Politeia's next pamphlet. In *Populism in Politics: Politics in the public interest*, Professor John Marenbon*, considers the way populism dominates the politics of Britain today, and the steps needed to return to responsible democracy. The dangers to the UK are great. As Marenbon says:

‘To the ... desire of politicians to win votes has been added the technology of marketing, which engineers both the packaging of policy and its contents to reflect popular whim. In place of governing in people's best interest ... politicians ... mouth whatever medley of diluted opinions is in fashion and let their policies be shaped by it.’

Striking signs of today's populist politics are: -

- the use of focus groups to market-test policies, as if they were items to be sold, like Cornflakes;
- the willingness of party leaderships and governments to hound unpopular groups – not just the bankers, but recently their own MPs;
- the wish to choose MPs who are supposed to be ‘like the average voter’, rather than MPs who are able to make wise decisions on their voters' behalf.

But policies that win instant approval of a majority are unlikely to be in the people's best interests. Nor do they allow a full discussion to develop of what is at stake. They can also lead to a tyranny of the majority, for example as when, in economic policy, egalitarianism is allowed to eclipse other equally important principles.

The pamphlet proposes that the UK return to its traditional – representative - democracy, where voters put politicians into parliament to decide on measures best for the country, not to appeal at every turn to public whim. It is then for the electorate to judge success and remove MPs at the next election if they fail. But for this to happen, says the author, a ‘revolution’ in political thinking is needed:

‘Although ... some principles ... are so widely endorsed that it would be foolish to question them (for example, the relief of poverty and sickness), almost every widely-accepted term of value and general belief in contemporary political discourse would benefit from scrutiny.’

* Professor John Marenbon is a Senior Research Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and Honorary Professor of Medieval Philosophy.

Publication will be marked by a seminar on Monday 14th February 12 noon - 1 pm at Politeia (22 Queen Anne's Gate, SW1H 9AA). Speaking on the panel to discuss the themes will be **The Rt Hon Dominic Grieve, QC MP, The Attorney General for England and Wales**. Journalists are very welcome to attend. If you would like to join us then please email Matt Trahair at press@politeia.co.uk. Click [here](#) for details of the event.

Populism and Democracy: Politics in the public interest will be published by Politeia on Monday 14th February 2011. To read the pamphlet click [here](#). Hard copies are available to the press on request.

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