



## General Election: what next?

There's that old joke about someone asking for directions, and the response that goes:

"If you want to get there, I wouldn't start from here."

I wonder if that is how politicians and civil servants are feeling when they start to try to think how our next Parliament can actually work.

We had a hung Parliament before, in 2010, but on that occasion, while it probably wasn't the most natural alliance, the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats managed to provide a very stable coalition. Parliamentary politics could more or less go on as normal.

Even if the will was there, and I suspect it isn't, then the numbers from today's result just don't add up to make any kind of coalition particularly easy. (And of course, unfortunately for Theresa May, these results have delivered precisely the opposite of what she aimed for, namely a clearer majority than the one they had before.)

Moreover, it's not just the numbers that are difficult. The Liberal Democrats are probably more different, in their pro-European stance, from both Conservative and Labour than they have been in years. And Labour, under Corbyn, have become much more authentically left wing than they have been in decades. The difference between Corbyn and May is starker than that between Blair and Cameron.

On one level, it is just impossible, and perhaps that's

how it will prove.

At another level, what we have in the next parliament are 650 individuals who are fundamentally reasonable people, all attempting to do the best for the country.

Just to assume it's impossible, while possibly realistic, betrays an underlying negativity about the human condition in terms of how we operate in politics. "It'll be impossible for them to make it work."

And that in turn tells us something about systems and structures, and how they govern us and how we behave. And if any structure begins to make human relationships harder, it's probably worth questioning the structure as much as the people involved.

To take a trivial example, in tennis, we used to be dependent on human line judges. Periodically, one player or other would have a hissy fit about a 'bad' line call. Now, with the computerised Hawkeye system to turn to, it has just cut out that form of complaint. There are fewer hissy fits. This is not because tennis players have become more humane and tolerant: it's because the system around them has changed. (Football by contrast has resisted changes in the use of technology.)

I genuinely wish all those who try to make the next government work well, but the system's conditions arguably make it tougher on the humans involved than it need to be.

*June 2017 Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*