



The Return of the Public

Dan Hind

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Our politicians have ever-decreasing legitimacy. Even as they amass ever more riches our financiers are now morally and intellectually bankrupt. In their different ways politicians and those who control the private economy system claim to be acting in the public interest. Yet we, the public, have little say in decision-making and almost no power to change the terms of a series of increasingly absurd debates about economic and foreign policy. How have we been excluded from so many discussions about the public interest?

Dan Hind traces how, historically, political and intellectual elites constructed deeply ambiguous ideas of the public, designed to serve their own ends and preserve the status quo. After the Second World War, as women, ethnic minorities, the young, and the working majority became more assertive and self-confident, the propertied and their allies in the state made fresh attempts to deny most of us a public identity. The financial crisis, and the ability of those who caused it to preside over policy-making in its aftermath, have made it impossible to ignore what has long been obvious: the institutions on which most of us rely for our knowledge of the wider world have become radically and demonstrably unaccountable and unsafe.

For decades, the public has been told to leave democracy to the experts. Now, Hind outlines a way forward for a new participatory politics, one based on the wholesale reform of the media. After the failure of the private, now is the time for the return of the public.

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