

Russell Brand: we deserve more from our democratic system

Following his appearance on Newsnight, the comedian explains why he believes there are alternatives to our current regime



Russell Brand
The Guardian, Tuesday 5 November 2013 17:07 GMT



I've had an incredible week since I spoke from the heart, some would say via my arse, on Paxman. I've had slaps on the back, fist bumps, cheers and hugs while out and about, cock-eyed offers of political power from well intentioned chancers and some good ol' fashioned character assassinations in the papers.

The people who liked the interview said it was because I'd articulated what they were thinking. I recognise this. God knows I'd love to think the attention was about me but I said nothing new or original, it was the expression of the knowledge that democracy is irrelevant that resonated. As long as the priorities of those in government remain the interests of big business, rather than the people they were elected to serve, the impact of voting is negligible and it is our responsibility to be more active if we want real change.

Turns out that among the disenchanteds is Paxman himself who spends most of his time at the meek heart of the political establishment and can't summons up the self-delusion to drag his nib across the ballot box. He, more than any of us is aware that politicians are frauds. I've not spent too much time around them, only on the telly, it's not pleasant; once you've been on Question Time and seen Boris simpering under a make-up brush it's difficult to be enthusiastic about politics.

The only reason to vote is if the vote represents power or change. I don't think it does. I fervently believe that we deserve more from our democratic system than the few derisory tit-bits tossed from the carousel of the mighty, when they hop a few inches left or right. The lazily duplicitous servants of The City expect us to gratefully participate in what amounts to little more than a political hokey cokey where every four years we get to choose what colour tie the liar who leads us wears.

I remember the election and Cameron didn't even get properly voted in, he became prime minister by default when he teamed up with Clegg. Clegg who immediately reneged (Renegy-Cleggy?) on his flagship pledge to end tuition fees at the first whiff of power.

When students, perhaps students who had voted for him, rioted they were condemned. People riot when dialogue fails, when they feel unrepresented and bored by the illusion, bilious with the piped in toxic belch wafted into their homes by the media.

The reason these coalitions are so easily achieved is that the distinctions between the parties are insignificant. My friend went to a posh "do" in the country where David Cameron, a man whose face resembles a little painted egg, was in attendance. Also present were members of the opposition and former prime minister Tony Blair. Whatever party they claim to represent in the day, at night they show their true colours and all go to the same party.

Obviously there has been some criticism of my outburst, I've not been universally applauded as a cross between Jack Sparrow and Spartacus (which is what I'm going for) but they've been oddly personal and I think irrelevant to the argument. I try not to read about myself as the mean stuff is hurtful and the good stuff hard to believe, but my mates always give me the gist of what's going on, the bastards. Some people say I'm a hypocrite because I've got money now. When I was poor and I complained about inequality people said I was bitter, now I'm rich and I complain about inequality they say I'm a hypocrite. I'm beginning to think they just don't want inequality on the agenda because it is a real problem that needs to be addressed.

It's easy to attack me, I'm a right twerp, I'm a junkie and a cheeky monkey, I accept it, but that doesn't detract from the incontrovertible fact that we are living in a time of huge economic disparity and confronting ecological disaster. This disparity has always been, in cultures since expired, a warning sign of end of days. In Rome, Egypt and Easter Island the incubated ruling elites, who had forgotten that we are one interconnected people, destroyed their societies by not sharing. That is what's happening now, regardless of what you think of my hair or me using long words, the facts are the facts and the problem is the problem. Don't be distracted. I think these columnist fellas who give me aggro for not devising a solution or for using long words are just being territorial. When they say "long words" they mean "their words" like I'm a monkey who got in their Mum's dressing up box or a hooligan in policeman's helmet.

As I said to Paxman at the time "I can't conjure up a global Utopia right now in this hotel room". Obviously that's not my job and it doesn't need to be, we have brilliant thinkers and organisations and no one needs to cook up an egalitarian Shangri-La on their todd; we can all do it together.

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I like Jeremy Paxman, incidentally. I think he's a decent bloke but like a lot of people who work deep within the system it's hard for him to countenance ideas from outside the narrowly prescribed trench of contemporary democracy. Most of the people who criticized me have a vested interest in the maintenance of the system. They say the system works. What they mean is "the system works for me".

The less privileged among us are already living in the apocalypse, the thousands of street sleepers in our country, the refugees and the exploited underclass across our planet daily confront what we would regard as the end of the world. No money, no home, no friends, no support, no hand of friendship reaching out, just acculturated and inculcated condemnation.

When I first got a few quid it was like an anaesthetic that made me forget what was important but now I've woken up. I can't deny that I've done a lot of daft things while I was under the capitalist fugue, some silly telly, sappy scandals, movies better left unmade. I've also become rich. I don't hate rich people; Che Guevara was a rich person. I don't hate anyone, I judge no one, that's not my job, I'm a comedian and my job is to say whatever I like to whoever I want if I'm prepared to take the consequences. Well I am.

My favourite experiences since Paxman-nacht are both examples of the dialogue it sparked. Firstly my friend's 15-year-old son wrote an essay for his politics class after he read my New Statesman piece. He didn't agree with everything I said, he prefers the idea of spoiling ballots to not voting "to show we do care" maybe he's right, I don't know. The reason not voting could be effective is that if we starve them of our consent we could force them to acknowledge that they operate on behalf of The City and Wall Street; that the financing of political parties and lobbying is where the true influence lies; not in the ballot box. However, this 15-year-old is quite smart and it's quite possible that my opinions are a result of decades of drug abuse.

I'm on tour so I've been with thousands of people every night (not like in the old days, I'm a changed man) this is why I'm aware of how much impact the Newsnight interview had. Not everyone I chat to agrees with me but their beliefs are a lot closer to mine than the broadsheets, and it's their job to be serious. One thing I've learned and was surprised by is that I may suffer from the ol' sexism. I can only assume I have an unaddressed cultural hangover, like my adorable Nan who had a heart that shone like a pearl but was, let's face it, a bit racist. I don't want to be a sexist so I'm trying my best to check meself before I wreck meself. The problem may resolve itself as I'm in a loving relationship with a benevolent dictator and have entirely relinquished personal autonomy.

Whilst travelling between gigs I had my second notable encounter. One night late at the Watford Gap I got chatting to a couple of squaddies, one Para, one Marine, we talked a bit about family and politics, I invited them to a show. Then we were joined by three Muslim women, all hijabbed up. For a few perfect minutes in the strip lit inertia of this place, that was nowhere in particular but uniquely Britain, I felt how plausible and beautiful The Revolution could be. We just chatted.

Between three sets of different people; first generation Muslims, servicemen and the privileged elite that they serve (that would be me) effortless cooperation occurred. Here we were free from the divisive rule that tears us apart. That sends brave men and women to foreign lands to fight their capitalist wars, that intimidates and unsettles people whose faith and culture superficially distinguishes them, that tells the comfortable "hush now" you have your trinkets. It seemed ridiculous that refracted through the power prism that blinds us; the soldiers could be invading the homeland of these women's forefathers in order to augment my luxurious stupour. Here in the gap we were together. Our differences irrelevant. With no one to impose separation we are united.

I realised then that our treasured concepts of tribe and nation are not valued by those who govern except when it is to divide us from each other. They don't believe in Britain or America they believe in the dollar and the pound. These are deep and entrenched systemic wrongs that are unaddressed by party politics.

The symptoms of these wrongs are obvious, global and painful. Drone strikes on the innocent, a festering investment for future conflict.

How many combatants are created each time an innocent person in a faraway land is silently ironed out from an Arizona call centre? The reality is we have more in common with the people we're bombing than the people we're bombing them for.

NSA spying, how far-reaching is the issue of surveillance? Do you think we don't have our own cute, quaint British version? Does it matter if the dominant paradigm of Western Capitalism is indifferent to our Bud Flanagan belief in nation? Can we really believe these problems can be altered within the system that created them? That depends on them? The system that we are invited to vote for? Of course not, that's why I won't vote. That's why I support the growing revolution.

If we all collude and collaborate together we can design a new system that makes the current one obsolete. The reality is there are alternatives. That is the terrifying truth that the media, government and big business work so hard to conceal. Well I am naïve and I believe in change. I don't mind getting my hands dirty because my hands are dirty already. I don't mind giving my life to this because I'm only alive because of the compassion and love of others. Men and women strong enough to defy this system and live according to higher laws. This is a journey we can all go on together, all of us. We can include everyone and fear no one. A system that serves the planet and the people. I'd vote for that.