

Lessons from Netroots UK: blog less, delete more, make ...

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I was at Netroots UK on Saturday. Others will blog this event in more detail than I will, I'm sure. But it is, for me this was a really useful event.

I've been blogging for more than four years now. Back then it was still relatively rare and other social media were rarer still. Now there are blogs galore — and I'm not complaining. And the whole social media phenomenon has developed to the point that politics is inconceivable without thinking about its use.

It's great that those from the left of centre are now well aware of this. Driven by sites like [Liberal Conspiracy](#) and [Left Foot Forward](#) alternatives are being made available for those who are politically aware of the massive intellectual deficit within neoliberal thinking. I hope in some way to have contributed to this.

But the event was also interesting in other ways. First, with so much obviously going on it occurs to me that I can withdraw from some things I've been doing. Some of the broader commentary I've offered is now very obviously available in increasing quantity elsewhere and I've never been one for doing what is not needed. I would rather play to my strengths. That even relates to some issues on tax avoidance. When even the Daily Mail campaigns against corporation tax avoidance (in their case on Cadburys) it can reasonably be argued to have made such real progress that others can now more than ably take some aspects of that issue forward.

One other particularly useful feature of the day was the opportunity to talk to a few really experienced bloggers about their experience of the process. Something we all agreed on is that this is much harder work than we had ever appreciated. Keeping a blog going and dealing with moderation (and, let's be candid, some of the hassle that comes with it) is hard work, especially when there's another job or two to do as well. That confirmed a very strong feeling I have had on the return from the Christmas break. I can't help but say it, but the break from the blog and the fact that almost no one commented for a while was quite enjoyable.

What does all this make me feel? Well, I'm expecting to blog less. I might twitter a bit

more (which is now 50% of social media traffic, apparently) and on the blog I'm expecting to focus on research and even learning materials more. One good session I attended was on using video. I expect to be doing more of this. It was one reason for the Mac transition.

And on comments? Fascinating input here. I'll quote Tim Montgomerie of [Conservative Home](#), who was at the event. He says blogs are about preaching to the choir. In other words they're about getting the choir to sing better from the communal hymn sheet. Those who want to sing out of tune are not welcome. And nor are those who want to sing something else. As a result Tim Montgomerie admits Conservative Home deleted all comments they thought from the far right for a long period (and maybe they still do) — and that's UKIP and onwards. Why did they do that? Because they felt just allowing the comments on might have discredited the site. I know the feeling! And as he put it, about 97% of the content on the internet is rubbish, a ratio that he reckoned might be slightly lower for comments, but where 85% to 90% fell into that category. If they block the path to good content — and we were sufficiently mutually respectful to recognise the contribution each tries to make in this respect without seeking to agree with each other on politics — then comments deserve not to make it. In fact to be fair to him, his praise for this blog was high, and appreciated.

Another interesting tale confirmed by several bloggers I know who are reliable commentators is that many more right wing sites are now editing out most left of centre comment. The Taxpayer's Alliance is one who is now definitely doing this. I would hate to be so partisan but the idea that the web is somehow a space where anything goes and there are no rules for appropriate engagement is just anarchic — and democrats need to be wary of such thinking. I do not want to live in an anarchic world — and distrust those who do. Those who think otherwise are also those most likely to make ad hominem attacks. And that's a wholly unsavoury form of blogging, and politics.

So be warned, change is on the way. There are though, I hope, some quite interesting things that will come out on the blog as a result. But let's wait and see; for now less but more focussed content and a greater use of the delete button may well be the most obvious change.

If that keeps up my enthusiasm for the process that's good. Because one thing another commentator noted is that of the top left wing blogs from two years ago almost none are now left. To go back to near the beginning of this piece, I'm not surprised: doing a blog is hard work and sometimes more than a little bit thankless.