

What can the left do politically?

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I have written, or at least quoted, today about the [need for trade unions](#) and what [trade union thinking might deliver](#) for an economic recovery. But as everyone knows, it is the relationship between Labour and the trade unions that matters right now.

I am not a member of the Labour Party - and so it could be said that this is not my business. But to say that an observer cannot comment on an issue would be to deny the freedom of speech, so I will continue by suggesting that much of the commentary I have read on this issue seems to almost entirely miss the point about the debate that is needed on this issue. The discussion has been on rule changes, voting arrangements and funding. And yet all those are actually mere sidelines. What is under debate here, seems to me, to be whether the Labour Party is to represent the interests of ordinary people or not and how.

If there are three themes to this blog they are that a bias to the poor is a necessary policy objective of any government; that ensuring that all pay their fair share of tax is essential of a just society is to be created and that fiscal policy (which, remember, embraces both revenue and spending) is a key component of any government's economic strategy. I cannot and do not speak for any union, but I think these ideas are reflected in many union's thinking. They are not ideas embraced by many, but not all, on the front bench of the Labour Party. And it is these economic differences that are at the core of what is happening between the unions and Labour.

The fact is that the unions, like very many in this country, are alienated from the politics that is being presented to them by all the major political parties. This is unsurprising. That politics is neoliberal. It has a fundamental bias to wealth - and the purchasing power of the wealthy - inherent in it. It biases towards monetary policy, whose fundamental aim is to maintain the value of money owned by the best off, and it has created a system where there is nothing approaching a progressive tax system and where redistribution is limited. And people - vast numbers of people - are fed up with the resulting mantra that says they don't count and must be sacrificed to the markets.

My suspicion - no more- is that it is this that is behind Unite's strategy. No they don't

want more people who will impose austerity on their members. Be candid, why should they? And those on the right of Labour who are dedicated to a vision of the world that is based on the myth of market based solutions (a myth because the reality has never delivered on all the claims made) are fighting this on the basis of rule abuse - when the whole neoliberal economic system is an abuse of the idea of social justice.

Now this could, of course, be resolved. And that is the most likely outcome. The alternative is that it is not and Labour splits. I see that as possible too. There could be a new party on the left (the obvious name is The Left, as in France (even if, somehow it sounds better in French). That would be worrying but for one thing, and that is that UKIP still has the chance to split the Tories. Of course, the prospect of another term in office might unite the Conservative Party - but around what? They can hardly agree on anything. If that's the case then a Labour split may not be so odd - it would effectively be happening on the right and left at the same time.

And what then? A coalition after the next election? Or a government of a tiny minority? Would that deliver an 'Arab spring' effect - demanding new and fair elections?

I don't know the answer to these questions. But I am quite sure now that we are watching the death throes of political structures that cannot serve the 21st century. That makes this an exciting, and dangerous time. But it is one where ordinary people and their very real needs have to be represented and unless Labour does that then it is at real risk.