

There is a politics that needs a champion - and its mes...

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I have long felt that politics should bring hope. It's why I believe in the causes I do. Equality, peace, truth and sustainability are fundamental to hope, but they are a hard sell to many. Martin Luther King Jr dreamed, famously. Most politicians don't.

So I think the flip side has an important role to play in any politics. That's Freedom From Fear (and yes, I acknowledge the similarity to Nye Bevan's In Place of Fear, but think Freedom more powerful).

I see a lot of fear in the world. Of failing at school, in the work place, and in relationships. I see fear of unemployment and the resulting misery of poverty. There is far too much fear of homelessness, or at least inadequate and expensive housing. I see fear of ill health and old age. And many suffer from fear of the future and environmental failure. I see fear resulting from inequality as people feel trapped where they are. I see fear of others and difference - so graphically illustrated in the fear of the immigrant. And I see the fear of those who suffer being cast as unwanted migrants. There is fear of being considered a drain on society - whether because of claiming benefits or working for the state. And I believe that much of this fear is deliberately generated by world where a few want many to live in fear as a means of control.

The Guardian has two articles on this theme this morning. One is by Larry Elliott. [He argues that:](#)

Labour needs the debate over the next 18 months to be about the NHS, care for the elderly, the shortage of housing, falling living standards, the shortage of skills and rising child poverty. Areas, in other words, where it feels more comfortable.

But comfort is not enough. It has to be bold. Larry says that means Labour has to:

defend what it got right more vigorously than it has done, admitting what it got wrong with less reluctance and coming up with some proposals for tackling Britain's chronic problems — poverty, under-investment, falling living standards among them — that don't look cramped and defensive.

It should start with a manifesto for the young: tackling the housing crisis through building rather than mortgage subsidies and youth unemployment through national insurance cuts for employers that take on the under-25s and a 10-year programme to boost skills.

It's a start, but it's a timid start. The important thing about it though is that it recognises that the Tory / UKIP fear agenda on the EU and immigration should not be centre stage and that Labour's job is to move the agenda to hope.

That though requires something that Gary Younge has written about in a powerful and moving article describing the actions of a woman who talked a potential mass school killer into surrendering himself to the police. Read the article itself, please: I want to concentrate on some of his conclusions. As he puts it:

Our politics, particularly in an age of terror, austerity and growing inequality, is predicated on the basis that people are basically venal, selfish, dishonest and untrustworthy. The poor are assumed not to be looking for work but cheating on welfare; foreigners are assumed to be taking something from a culture rather than contributing something to it; public sector workers, like Tuff, are assumed not to be devoted to public service but a drain on our taxes. The disabled are assumed to be well. When we look at others, the default position in much of western political culture is not to see ourselves in them but to see a threat.

There's a great deal in there that a lot in Labour are going to have to re-learn if they are to deliver Freedom From Fear. Liam Byrne is nowhere near understanding almost any of what Younge has written.

The second point is one that has not been raised in the Guardian for a long time, and I am glad Younge, who acknowledges his lack of religious faith in the article, had the courage to recognise that the Antoinette Tuff, who did the talking to the potential gunman, attributed her courage to her religious faith. As he has written:

It has become fashionable, particularly among those who think themselves progressive in Europe, to disparage not just faith but the faithful (with particular disdain reserved for Islam). All too often mistaking incivility for satire, those who set themselves up as the arbiters of reason present religion as the source of the world's problems and the religious as its unquestioning dupes.

Emerging from a decade that pitted George Bush against Osama bin Laden to deadly effect, we should not be too surprised. People have done terrible things in the name of religion. From Pol Pot to the reign of terror following the French revolution, they have also done terrible things in the name of reason.

Leaving aside for a moment where ridiculing the religious leaves the contributions of Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King, Trevor Huddleston, Bruce Kent, Harriet Tubman,

Muhammad Ali, Gandhi and Malcolm X: where does it leave Tuff? A sucker or a saviour?

We can't all be that heroic. But we all deserve a political culture that assumes the best of us rather than pandering to the worst, and the space to find our best selves free from contempt, so long as we don't harm anyone else on the way.

I have no idea if Tuff would have acted as she did with or without her faith. And nor has anyone else, Tuff included. The fact was she did attribute it to her faith. Whatever someone else might think she believed it changed her behaviour. It temporarily at least gave her Freedom From Fear.

Now don't get me wrong: I acknowledge I have a faith but exercise it in one of the most liberal religious groups that now exists. I do not expect faith from anyone, and never seek to convert to whatever I believe in on this issue. My point is different, and so is Younge's, I think. And it's in his last line.

We should have politics that assumes the best of us - all of us, and not just the mythical 'hard working family' which excludes most in society.

We should have freedom to find our best selves.

We should be free from the harm of others.

That's the politics we need. There's not a lot of it available right now.