

## I believe in the politics of hope

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Janan Ganesh [has an article in the FT this morning](#) in which he argues:

*The politics of hope has a spurious respectability but reeks of snake oil. It elides good intentions with good outcomes and treats the status quo as a baseline that can only be improved on. For normal people in the actual world, the status quo is superior to many plausible alternatives. Things can be made worse not just better by well-meaning politicians.*

Ganesh is important. He is George Osborne's biographer and is undoubtedly close to him. If you want to know what the right wing are thinking I suspect he may be the best person to ask. And in this one paragraph (in an article in which he praises Lynton Crosby for exploiting fear to deliver a Conservative election victory) he makes clear several things.

The first is the negativity of the right wing political offering: the assumption is that by suggesting to people that they might lose what little they have they can be coerced into voting against politics itself as if that is the source of the threat.

Second, he is quite clear that there is no vision on offer on the right wing.

He is, thirdly, equally explicit that there is no offer of gain for most people in those politics either.

Instead all he makes clear that the right have to offer is a suggestion, based on fear, that the actions of the left might reduce well being. This is their politics in a nutshell.

I could not help but [contrast this with a picture in the Guardian](#) this morning of people in Paris declaring they were not afraid after Charlie Hebdo attacks.

But most of all I cannot help but feel sorry for Janan Ganesh and all who think this way. This is, of course, the politics of the [Cowardly Politician](#) I describe in [The Courageous State](#), but it still troubles me to see it written so explicitly. This is a statement of such desperation in itself.

Freedom from fear is, of course, [a fundamental human right](#). I think it the duty of politicians to deliver that freedom.

Nye Bevan virtually defined the post war ideal with his book [In Place of Fear](#). Building on Beveridge this was the founding logic of the welfare state.

And hope is, in my opinion, the motive that really drives us to do better. Surely that should be what politics is about?

Fear, in contrast, shrinks and diminishes us.

The contrast effectively defines, I'd almost say too strongly, the difference between left and right wing politics.

But there is more to it than that, and I think Ganesh is wrong. Fear may have worked in 2015, because people still thought they had something to lose. [My work suggests](#) that for many the impact of cuts had hardly been felt by 2015, and by 2020 it will have been. So, for many in the North their reality of cuts is now a living nightmare. Ganesh assumes, however, that there will be a continuing trajectory of fear of government. First, I doubt it: when the reality of the loss from austerity is faced an alternative will be sought. Second, when people realise that what they really have to lose is the safety net itself, and that is the state, then if there is a continuing trajectory of fear it will be a radically different one from the Ganesh assumes.

People will realise what is obvious. For example, no one can beat flooding by themselves.

The same as no one person can build the infrastructure the economy needs.

And that health and education have to be communally supplied services.

No amount of fear will change these realities. But appreciation that they are the greatest loss we might face will change the direction of political travel.

It may be fear that starts that process of change but when it gets underway it will be hope that will fuel the process because it will be the foundation for the belief that something better is possible.

That's why I believe in a politics of hope. Quite simply, I believe we can massively enhance the way things are. The political process has to deliver on that possibility. And any party could be part of the process. It's depressing that some seem to want to opt out.