

## People don't vote for ideas so the challenge for the ...

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There are people I know who have no interest in politics, or so they say. They certainly evidence almost no knowledge of current political debate, who is who in politics, or what might be disputed. They are people who are teachers, work for the NHS, and commercial companies. As far as I know they all vote though. And in that apparent paradox there is, I think an important point to note, of which I have become increasingly aware as a result of reaction to some of the tweet threads that I post.

The point is that people do not vote for ideas. They are not pro or anti-markets. Nor are they for or against public ownership, or unions or many other things politicians think important. Rather like the LibDem councillor I know who has no great political views, but who has a long list of issues that need to be addressed where they live, most people vote on the basis of what they think has got to be done.

They may weight that concern with a 'but how are you are going to pay for it?' consideration, but only if they are not sure that a stated objective is achievable and the economics is unclear. The 'how are you going to pay for it?' question is not what it seems in that case: it is actually about competence more than anything else.

To put it another way, for all the debate about the 'Overton Window', the biggest victims of that particular debate are the public who are denied the opportunity to vote for what they might want by people competent to deliver it because either the dogmatism or paranoia of some in politics denied them the chance to do so.

My suggestion is that instead of voting on the basis of ideals the logic people use to decide who to vote for is based on three questions. The first is what is on offer? The second is to ask how closely these offerings match with their own hopes and aspirations, whoever might be offering it? The third is to ask whether the person making the offer appears competent (which embraces, crucially, confidence) enough to actually deliver it.

The opinion is reflected in my own work. I am intensely pragmatic. I have explored MMT in some depth, for example. Much of it is really useful. It is a proper explanation of the

world as it is. It helps answer the question 'what can be done?' It does not need to be explained in technical depth to be understood, so long as the person offering the explanation really understands what they are saying. And, let's be honest about this, it is also flawed at present in the sense that the question as to how tax can control inflation requires that some developments in tax have to be considered, and that most who propose it do not explain how to address the inequality that results from steady government deficit spending. This has to be addressed if society is to remain fair despite the increase in private wealth, and in the disparity of its distribution, that deficits can give rise to, as QE has proved. These ideas have to be honestly faced if people are going to believe it because don't vote for ideas, they vote for what they think are viable ideas.

Candour about how to finance green issues is also key in that case. As is very apparent from media reporting this morning, the cost of a green new deal is to be the battle ground for new disputes between the far right in the Tory party and society at large. But this battle will not be won on the basis of ideology. People know climate change threatens them. Whether we tackle it, or not, depends on who can convince people that we can do so with life still being well worth living when the transition is over.

The right-wing will argue that climate change is just a means to spread socialism with more taxes resulting. Their usual short term fear agenda will be in play. Saying in response that this is about survival is not enough in that case. Showing that the capital to deliver this change is available without hitting people's pockets (as it is) is as important. That we can have survival and a better life free from fear by better using the resources already available in society is key in that case. Of course, having the idea to do this is vital. But what is critical is convincing people that this can be done. Then, and only then, can the right be beaten. Ideas won't come into that; who can deliver will.

My suspicion is that for most people engaged in debate here ideals matter. And, of course, they do. But debate is not win on that basis, I suspect. Apart from an innate senses of fairness, which I think most people have, ideals do not drive politics when most people don't really link the two. Competence is what matters to them. In that case the issue for those who want to see their ideals influencing the way society is managed have to note that word 'managed': the translation of ideals into actions that actually matter to people is what wins or loses elections. And for too long the left has forgotten that, and quite probably still is.

But I stress, this is no appeal for a return to Blairism: the ideals matter, of course. But shouting about them does not win elections. Turning ideals into reality is the challenge. Then elections can be won. And this is what Labour, and others, are still not doing well enough.