

Being radically normal

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John Harris is on a good run of form in The Guardian of late. [In his column this morning](#), he talks about the existence of what I might call, but he does not explicitly, ‘Glastonbury England’. He is quite specific about this being an English phenomenon.

I do not wish to overquote from what he wrote, so let me summarise this suggestion. What he is saying is that there is an unrepresented majority within England, at least, at present. They are searching for a decent form of politics which, as he put it, would be somewhere between the opinions of Ed Davey and Caroline Lucas.

In support of this contention, he notes:

Much as opinion polling remains a somewhat dismal and unreliable science, there are plenty of issue-specific statistics that paint the same picture. Even if they are presented as a way of somehow getting people into work, 40% of us [are against new limitations](#) on disability benefits. Despite politicians’ reluctance to say so, [45% of British adults](#) think Israel’s actions in Gaza are genocidal. Forty-nine percent of people “[strongly support](#)” a wealth tax. Contrary to the idea that everyone outside London, Manchester and Bristol has an essentially Farage-ist view of human movement, [45% of us](#) think that immigration into the UK should either increase or stay the same. Sixty-one percent of people either [strongly or “somewhat”](#) support the government’s net zero target, with only 12% ticking the “strongly oppose” box.

He then adds:

Despite Reform UK’s apparent monopoly on explanations for our fragmenting party system, all this is central to why everything is in such a massive state of flux. The Lib Dems are now [almost neck and neck](#) with the Tories in the polls. The Greens are now steady, on about 10% – a figure that would surely rocket upwards if they improved their dire PR skills. Moreover, adding these parties’ share of support with Labour’s usually gets you close to 50%, which only highlights how misplaced the popular idea of a seethingly reactionary country irrevocably on the path to a Reform UK government really is.

This majority are not, in other words, in Harris's opinion, possessed of anything like the right-wing opinion that Reform, the Tories, and much of Labour would like to represent us to have. Far from it, in fact, because as Harris notes, based on evidence, at least half of the UK is on the left of centre politically, albeit not radically so.

What people want is not hard to summarise. They want fairness and justice. They think there should be a proper social safety net. They believe in state services. They want a future that those who deny climate change are seeking to deny them. They recognised the importance of coexisting with their neighbours. More than that, they do not wish them to be subject to prejudice. They believe that everyone should contribute in a fair way. They actually believe that contributing is important because what the government does is of value. That is why they wish that it were done well, and that those who work for it are fairly rewarded. They do not have a dogmatic belief in the state versus markets, but they most certainly believe that markets also have a very positive role to play so long as they are appropriately regulated. They cannot be described as neoliberal as a result.

None of this should come as any great surprise to anybody who spends their time walking about and talking to people about what they really believe. John Harris might be right: it might be that Glastonbury happens to bring together such people in a particularly concentrated way, but they exist in every town, city, village, and community in the UK, because to think like this makes sense, and more than that, it is just normal.

I see nothing wrong with normality. As I occasionally have to make clear here, I have an aversion to extremes because extremes tend to be dangerous. At present, our politics is dominated by extremism, and almost wholly from the right wing, who would wish to represent that the normal majority of this country is, somehow, a threat to its well-being. Elon Musk went as far as saying that the empathy that normal people possess is dangerous. It isn't. It is what makes life possible when, as a matter of fact, the vast majority of us have to live in close coexistence with others, unlike Musk and others who can hide themselves away in gated communities.

If I have no time for extremes, it is because I think they threaten us. My problem with Reform and the Tories is that I think they are very extreme. What they propose is alien to the vast majority of people in this country. That is a measure of extremism. And what Labour is doing by copying them is choosing to fail miserably. Labour can never out-Reform Reform. Even in their worst moments, they can never be as out of touch with reality as Robert Jenrick and Kemi Badenoch are. By trying to do those things, Labour is bound to fail, and it seems unable to appreciate this.

All that is happening whilst it is glaringly obvious that there is in UK politics a void on the left, meaning that very large numbers of people - decent, normal, people who care - are being left unrepresented inside the current political set-up in England, at least. No

wonder forty per cent of people do not vote in general elections in this country. There is no one trying to represent them. The great need is for a party that does care and which does present policies based on empathic concern for others and those who will follow us.

That party does not need to be extreme. That is why I doubt that a socialist solution will work. You cannot promote care on the basis of division, and at its core socialism is divisive because it is necessarily based upon class division, and the struggle for supremacy of some over others. Ultimately, however, the challenge is not about achieving supremacy. It is instead about finding necessary compromises so that we can find ways of successfully coexisting.

That might sound weak, but it isn't. Those seeking to create an inclusive society that serves all have to be robust about those who will not participate, because society cannot afford them to opt out. Being normal does not, then, permit tolerance of intolerance, including on the part of those who refuse to live in the society in which we exist. Being radically normal requires rejection of the extremes of the right by proving that there is something better, which can and will win the argument for the way in which we wish to live.

That is the challenge we face.