

We need a politics that meets needs

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Published: January 12, 2026, 8:06 pm

I recorded a podcast with Tony Groves and Martin McMahon from the [Echo Chamber Podcast](#) in Ireland yesterday, which I do every few weeks or so. This is now published, but only for subscribers.

These discussions often centre on the state of UK politics and what might be done about it. This time we got to asking the question, given the state of what they call the uniparty in Ireland, and we call the single transferable party on this blog, what is it that any party actually needs to do to succeed?

That was not asked in the narrow sense of what is required to get elected on the back of slick marketing. Instead, it was about how to build a genuine, sustainable political consensus that actually improves lives by delivering policy intended to meet the needs of real people.

The aim would be to rediscover politics that actually engages people by breaking the total disconnection between politics as seen in both Dublin and Westminster, which in both places is currently all about power games that are unrelated to real lives, and which people know to be fabrications in which they have no interest

What we recognised was that after decades of neoliberal politics, the very idea that the state should actively deliver for people seems to have been lost. Yet that connection is precisely what is essential for any party to secure durable support now. In that case, let me explain what I think is required.

First, politics must put people at its heart. This sounds obvious. It should be. However, it has not been the case for years. Instead, we have endured governments obsessed with markets, debt ratios, bond yields, and a grotesque managerialism that treats citizens as units to be administered, not people to be cared for. Any successful political movement must reverse this. People are the point of politics.

Second, a decent society meets people's needs from cradle to grave. That should, I think, start with education. In saying so, this is not about perpetuating a marketplace of

fragmented academies competing for advantage or saddling young people with debt; it should instead be about providing education that is free, excellent, and accessible to all, especially when young, but throughout life as well. We invest in children not just because it's fair, but because it is the only route to a productive, creative, and confident society. Any politician who actually believes in the long-term well-being of their community would put this at the heart of their policy.

Third, though, this makes no sense without a policy to deliver affordable, secure, and safe housing for all. Housing should be a human right. The market will never deliver this on its own. It has instead delivered rentierism, insecurity, mould, overcrowding, and homelessness. A successful political programme must embrace public intervention, massive investment in social housing, rent regulation, and quality standards that guarantee dignity. Only if people know that they have the security of living in a community amongst people they can get to know and trust, and where a family can live without the fear of eviction, through no fault of their own, can they really prosper. That is why housing policy is essential: there is no society without it.

Fourth, it means health care for all, truly free at the point of need and without profit interests distorting what care is available. This should not be controversial. Yet we see creeping privatisation and the erosion of services due to underfunding. A civilised society ensures that nobody fears falling ill because they cannot afford treatment, or waits in pain because the system is broken, but that is what we are getting used to, which is an insidious policy to create acceptance of privatisation by stealth. This has to end..

Fifth, it means ensuring that work pays enough to support a decent standard of living. That means a minimum wage that is genuinely sufficient for people to live on with security and dignity, and not just scraping by. It also means a benefits system designed to do the same, rather than one rigged to punish, degrade, and drive people into desperation.

Sixth, it means guaranteeing people's security in old age. It is no good guaranteeing people the right to sufficient to live on during their working lives if they face an old age blighted by poverty, as far too many do now. A state pension that is actually enough to live on should be non-negotiable. It is remarkable that in one of the richest countries on earth, we have pensioners choosing between heat and food. That is not the hallmark of a prosperous or decent society.

Seventh, it means providing social care for all who need it. We have known this for decades, yet governments of all stripes have ducked the responsibility, outsourcing misery to families and low-paid care workers. A proper social care system is essential if we are to offer freedom from fear and dignity to the elderly and vulnerable.

Of course, more than this is essential, but without these building blocks, nothing else - including prosperity for anyone - can be created. This is what I see as political reality,

although almost every existing politician promotes the claim that we must build prosperity first and only then can we afford such things. To be blunt, they have the cart and horse the wrong way round, which shows how little they know about driving the real economy.

In summary, a successful political party will be one that makes people feel secure or as Nye Bevan would have put it, free from fear. That is the common thread running through all these essentials. Security from cradle to grave. Security in knowing that your children will be educated, that you will have a roof over your head, that you will be cared for if ill, that your work will support you, that old age will not mean poverty, that you will be looked after if you become frail. In short, that you can live without fear.

So what does this demand of our politics?

It demands abandoning the neoliberal obsession with shrinking the state.

It requires recognising that only collective provision — through the state, funded by its own money creation, supported by fair taxation — can deliver these guarantees.

It means rejecting the idea that we can marketise or privatise our way to security.

It also requires ending the absurd fiscal rules that treat balanced budgets as more important than balanced lives.

And it demands honesty with the electorate. We can afford these things. We can have the resources to deliver all that we need, even if some might take a while to create, meaning that this cannot happen overnight. What we lack is the political will and the imagination to break free of failed orthodoxies.

In conclusion, if any political party wishes to truly succeed — not just scrape by, but build lasting loyalty and transform this country — it must make the promise that it will put people first, meet their needs from cradle to grave, and offer them freedom from fear.

That is the standard by which they should be appraised. It is also, I suspect, the standard by which most people would wish to appraise them, if only someone were brave enough to offer it.