

Neoliberalism is not moderate. It is an extreme politic...

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This piece arose from a conversation over breakfast in the Murphy household this morning.

One of neoliberalism's greatest political achievements has been persuading people that it represents the sensible, moderate centre of politics. Those who accept its assumptions are described as responsible, pragmatic and realistic. Those who challenge them are dismissed as radical, extreme or economically illiterate.

President Macron of France tried to do this in his broadcast in France last night. I suggest that this is one of the greatest political deceptions of our time.

There is nothing inherently moderate about neoliberalism. It is an ideology that prioritises:

- * markets over democratic decision-making,
- * private wealth over collective wellbeing, and
- * the interests of capital over those of working people.

Its consequences have included:

- * growing inequality,
- * weakened public services,
- * insecure employment and
- * the concentration of economic power in remarkably few hands.

How can that be called moderate? The answer is that neoliberalism has captured not

just economic policy but the language through which politics is discussed, and the media that controls that discussion.

We are told that:

- * cutting public spending is responsible, but investing in public services is reckless.
- * privatisation is pragmatic, but public ownership is ideological.
- * reducing taxes on wealth encourages enterprise, but taxing wealth to reduce inequality is class warfare.

These are not neutral descriptions. They are political judgements masquerading as economic common sense.

The result is that what claims to be the political centre has ceased to be defined by what might reasonably serve the interests of society as a whole. Instead, it has become defined by what is acceptable to those who already possess economic power.

That is a profoundly dangerous development for democracy.

Consider what neoliberalism actually demands. It expects:

- * people to accept that essential services should be organised around profit,
- * that housing should be treated as an investment opportunity,
- * that workers should compete for insecure employment, and
- * that governments should defer to financial markets when deciding what they can afford.

It also expects us to believe that these arrangements are natural, inevitable and economically efficient, even when the evidence of their social consequences suggests otherwise.

There is nothing moderate about organising society around the interests of a wealthy minority while expecting everyone else to bear the costs.

Nor is there anything inherently extreme about suggesting that everyone should have:

- * a decent home,
- * adequate healthcare,
- * educational opportunities,
- * economic security and

* the prospect of living on a sustainable planet.

These should be ordinary expectations of a functioning society.

Yet neoliberalism has been so successful in defining political debate that demanding these things can now be portrayed as radical, while defending the arrangements that deny them is supposedly sensible. This is playing out now in France.

We need to challenge this inversion of political language.

Moderation should not mean accepting the existing distribution of wealth and power.

Nor should it mean refusing to contemplate change because those who benefit from the status quo might object.

Moderation should mean seeking arrangements that reconcile the legitimate interests of everyone in society, rather than systematically favouring a privileged few.

That is what the politics of care seeks to achieve.

The real political question is not whether a policy conforms to neoliberal orthodoxy. It is whether it delivers economic security, social justice, democratic accountability and environmental sustainability.

Judged against those objectives, neoliberalism has a great deal to answer for.

The time has come to stop confusing the defence of privilege with political moderation.

And we should stop allowing those who defend an increasingly unequal economic order to claim that they alone occupy the sensible centre of politics.