

21ST CENTURY PROGRESSIVE ALLIANCES AND POLITICAL REALIGNMENTS

**Social Liberal Forum
Annual William Beveridge
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Acknowledgments:

The following is the 2020 Beveridge Lecture on Social Liberalism in the 21st Century, hosted by the [Social Liberal Forum](#). The speech was delivered on Thursday 30th July.

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Compass is the pressure group for a good society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We build alliances of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link that up with top-down/state reforms and policy. The question we are trying to help solve, which we explore in the recent document [45 Degree Change](#), is not just what sort of society we want, but, increasingly, how to make it happen?

Foreword

Progressive politics in the UK and across the globe are in a mess. Pockets of resistance in small countries such as Portugal and New Zealand are exceptions to a drift to the right – sometimes the far right. Both social democracy and liberal democracy are in crisis.

To end the crisis we have to understand it and the context in which we seek to govern. We need a vision of a good society and the alliances to make it happen. This should not be impossible in a world in which neoliberalism stumbles and fails to deliver even on its wretched individualised and consumerised offer.

Resistance and better still alternatives come, as ever, from the grass roots up. People find ways to be as human as possible within the constraints of one planet living. But the paradigm shift we need demands the active intervention of the state to resource and support these emerging local and sectoral alternatives to populism in the defense of free markets.

But few politicians, let alone parties, get the shift that is needed – the new life and economy, and most of all the new democracy and politics that will get us there.

One who does is Clive Lewis the Labour MP for Norwich South. Clive stood for the leadership of Labour in early 2020 and was knocked back at the first hurdle. But his campaign carried the seeds and the hope for the kind of politics that could both win office and be transformative.

Here is this deep and thoughtful speech, given over the summer to the reviving Social Liberal Forum, he delves into the relationship between social democracy and social liberalism and then even further into how the whole Enlightenment hits up against the Black Lives Matter movement.

With the Liberal Democrats under new leadership there is an opportunity to realign British politics away from right-wing domination to a progressive direction. Yes it will be about winning seats, but that starts by winning hearts and minds – the first victory is of the intellect. This speech sets out vital terrain to win the battle of ideas and unite the left.

Neal Lawson
September 2020

Introduction

British MPs are not generally thought to be very philosophical. But I find myself right now asking the most philosophical question of all: “Why am I here?”... and yet it seems I am not the only one being so philosophical. Whilst I was preparing today's lecture I came across the SLF advertising for this event on Twitter. Underneath was a comment, from an outraged Liberal Democrat, demanding why a 'Corbynista' had been invited to give this lecture? He argued if it had been a Tory, there would have been 'uproar'. The comment, which had attracted a considerable number of likes, made me ask the same question: ‘why indeed was I being asked to speak to the Social Liberal Forum?’

I think the answer is pretty clear. I'm one of the few but growing voices in the Labour Party, calling for both electoral pacts with parties of the center-left as well as urging greater cooperation between progressives themselves. Now I'm also fully aware of the need to practice what you preach. As such I'll come onto some of the work I'm doing with other progressives – some of them in the Liberal Democrats - attempting to both lay deeper foundations of trust as well as attempting to generate political change (constitutional convention, PR, eroding the power of capital).

But whilst electoral pacts and practical working are more the mechanical and practical side of political co-operation, I also want to explore the possibility of what we can learn from one another's underpinning philosophical traditions. A progressive alliance of the mind if you like.

Why? Because any lasting collaboration achieved on the basis of political analysis is far more durable than the kind of unity built on superficial calls to simply ‘put our differences aside’ to get the Tories out. For surely given the challenges of the 21st century and the new threats: technological, ecological and political, that confront us as progressives, surely now is the time to urgently re-examine whether the 20th century political silos we've placed ourselves in are any longer fit for purpose? If ever they were?

Your invitation to me, to speak here today – for which I am extremely grateful – suggests that you are ready for that kind of thinking...but be

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aware I also intend to challenge you. Because if I'm prepared to challenge the inherent tribalism known as Labourism, in my own party – a term we'll come back to later on - then I'm afraid your own tribalism, your own comfort zones, won't be spared either. Now this is important – because the party-political culture that currently dominates Westminster is one I believe to be thin skinned, confrontational and ill-suited to the necessary, self-critical and questioning mindset we need to navigate the tsunami of political challenges ahead.

Genesis

I suppose the idea of different political traditions working together first came to me before I became an MP. Around about 2013/2014, I attended the New Economics Foundation think tank's summer school. There were scores of us attending this event from all kinds of political traditions – environmental campaigners, Green Party activists, social justice campaigners, NGOs – it was very, very varied. One of the senior economists there, who was at the time I believe aligned to one of the smaller factions of the left outside of the Labour Party, posed the question that the current and dominant right-wing political and economic hegemony would never be broken unless - 'progressives were prepared to work together'.

He used an analogy of progressives being on a cliff edge – politically and ecologically – and said 'surely the common-sense thing to now do is to take a collective step away from the edge together. One step, one area of agreement, followed by a second and if possible a third and more. We didn't all have to agree on the final destination. Rather we had to simply agree that we needed to collectively take a few steps away from the cliff edge.

That was seven years ago. Since then progressives have lost three general elections – three. We aren't standing on the edge of the cliff any longer. We are hanging from it by our finger tips

Now, there are two key concepts here I think we need to unpack before we go any further – namely 'progressives' and 'cliff-edge'. I think I need to define what they are because they're central to my argument about the need for progressive alliances. Whether you agree or not with my definition, it'll at least allow you to better understand where I'm coming from and what motivates me.

Progressives

I imagine everyone in this meeting considers themselves a progressive.

But what are the qualities that make someone 'progressive'? I find, like a rapidly fading dream, the term has a nebulous quality which makes it difficult to pin down. Probably because it's meant different things to different people at different times. For example, a key belief for a progressive in the 19th century would have been mass industrialisation. Fast-forward to the 21st century and economic de-growth is now, I believe, beginning to supplant that definition if it already hasn't. Both are valid and yet contextual to the time they inhabit.

In the here and now I believe there are two key questions that we need to be able to say 'yes' to, to be considered a progressive from my perspective:

Are you prepared to challenge economic self-interest in favour of the common good? Do you think that our political problems come from too little democracy, not from too much?

Let's be quite clear, I collaborate and work with politicians who may only say yes to one of those questions. One example is the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Limits of Growth which I'm a vice chair of. On it are what I would call progressive Conservatives. An oxymoron, many of us might assume. And whilst they are prepared to think outside the box, they're not, as far as I know, prepared to actually do that much about it. It always strikes me listening to them as more of an intellectual exercise. Now that's fine and better than nothing. But given the ticking political and ecological clock, it simply is not enough for meaningful collaboration.

But what I don't want to do is define the potential for progressive alliances simply along party political lines. That's because there are members of my own party who would fail to answer yes to either of those questions on a new economy and new democracy. They'd also be incapable of thinking outside of the political and economic orthodoxy box that we know even some Tories are able to. Therefore, I feel the definition of

progressive has to refer to individuals, groupings, campaigns, movements – not just political parties. Electoral alliances along party political lines, yes of course. That's simply realpolitik and something we'll come onto later, but that's an entirely different proposition to an alliance of progressives.

Progress can and should happen – but it has to be fought for.

The other point I'd make about being a progressive is guarding against inevitablism. Progress can and should happen – but it has to be fought for. I'm afraid to say my own party leaders have also fallen into this trap. Under Ed Miliband it was 'austerity determinism'. That belief that all you had to do was look competent and let the public come to you as the reality of austerity saw your opponent tank. Under Jeremy Corbyn it was Brexit determinism. The belief that Brexit was only a Tory civil war and all we had to do was take our popular 2017 manifesto, like some precious

Ming vase, and creep across the line to election victory. The question now for many of us is, will Keir Starmer succumb to the same thinking. The belief that Covid-determinism will deliver victory to him in 2024 – as long as he looks like a leader and doesn't scare the horses: 'Don't make the argument for transformative change, seek to manage and tweak the status-quo' is no doubt the whisper in his ear at present. I'm afraid that way, lies defeat.

Progressives win by making their case and in that act, they find allies - allies who will help them build wider support and change the dominant narrative.

Progressives win by making their case and in that act, they find allies - allies who will help them build wider support and change the dominant narrative. In other words, forging a new common sense. Because how we fight, and struggle has to be progressive as well. Winning the argument, alliance building – requires openness, pluralism and democracy. You can't be progressive about means or ends – only both.

The Challenges Ahead

That brings us to the second definition I feel we need to understand, which is the definition of the 'cliff-edge'.

And a cliff edge it truly is.

The threats facing humanity this century are existential. Lord Martin Rees, the astronomer royal, considers himself an optimist when it comes to the future. So much so, he says we have at best a 50/50 chance of surviving to the next century.

If any of us were given those odds going into surgery, you'd at the very least get your will in order and say farewell to your nearest and dearest. It's kind of a motivator.

Now if this cliff edge was only six-foot-high, there'd be a good argument that falling off it wouldn't be the literal end of the world and we could go on as we were. The problem is, if we believe the science, it's less 6ft and more like 6,000, with poison spikes at the bottom – just for good measure.

So, let's run through what I believe to be some of the more pressing cliff edges.

Pandemic

The obvious place to start is the crisis we're currently in the middle of – a global pandemic that's infected 15 million people and killed more than 650,000, continues to spread. Many scientists now believe this was triggered by our rapacious ecological encroachment on what remains of the rapidly disappearing natural world.

This systemic shock that has seen global economic chaos, food shortages and predicted political destabilization across vast swathes of the world.

Ecological Breakdown

That brings us to ecological breakdown which scientists have now linked to the emergence of Covid-19. Bio-diversity is collapsing on such a unique and unprecedented short time-scale, there's nothing in our geological history of extinction level events that can even compare. So unique is it, it actually has its own name – the Anthropocene. The collapse of the base of our own food chain – insects, pollinators like bees, is now well underway. Almost half of the world's insect species are on the brink of extinction. Meanwhile the WWF says 60% of all species of fish, birds and mammals have been wiped out since 1970.

Climate

This is being exacerbated by the climate crisis. Last week you will have heard the first active leak of methane from the sea floor in Antarctica has been revealed by scientists. Vast quantities of methane are thought to be stored under the sea floor. It's not conclusive but the release of methane from frozen underwater stores is considered one of the key tipping points for runaway climate change. Something which, because of collective international failure to tackle the root cause – 'free-markets', mass consumerism and deregulation, means there is no effective route map away from this planetary scale car crash.

But as if that wasn't enough, there's also the hugely disruptive technologies of Artificial Intelligence, big data and the rise of surveillance capitalism.

AI

Britain, with its low-paid workforce and enormous administrative services sector, is especially exposed to artificial intelligence. While to date AI hasn't lived up to all the hype, there are occasional hints of the power it might unleash. One blogger published a post the other day – eminently readable I'm told - before revealing the entire thing was written by GPT-3 – a language AI - on the basis of a few simple instructions. Machines are closing in on the kinds of service sector jobs — administration, communications, column-writing — which not that long ago everyone assumed would remain safe from disruption. The cheaper and better

this technology gets, the more jobs are at risk. The implications for our income tax-base, public services and social cohesion are obvious. As is the rising power and influence of the companies who produce them.

Surveillance Capitalism

This leads us onto the threat of surveillance capitalism. This is a new, rapidly growing and influential economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction and sales. As [campaigner Naomi Klein has recently revealed](#), big tech companies like Facebook, Apple and Amazon increasingly see democracy as – an ‘inconvenient public engagement in the designing of critical institutions and public spaces’. In other words, democracy is an obstacle. One we know behind closed doors tech company lobbyists say is impeding western technological advances in comparison to their Chinese competitors, who have no such limitations. And as we’ve already seen with the Cambridge Analytica scandal, the implications for our democracy are quite profound.

Crisis of Democracy

This takes us neatly to the so called ‘crisis of democracy’ – a growing trend where the ‘established institutions of democratic representation fail to represent or enact effectively the collective will of citizens’.

In reality that means governments no longer have the degree of control they once did over flows of capital, labour, ideas, or people. Rather power resides increasingly with unaccountable quangos, corporations and the wealthy. As a consequence of this failure – increasing numbers of people turn to authoritarian populism and demagogues all too willing to offer scapegoats and simple solutions.

As we saw with Brexit, such political impotence – a result of decades of global, neoliberal policies – was effectively turned on its head so that the very mechanism which could curtail that lack of political agency, the EU, effectively became portrayed as the antagonist rather than part of the solution. Indeed, it was a variant of this neoliberal agenda, one successfully married with right-wing, nationalist populism, that so successfully coined the phrase ‘take-back control’. But as we always knew the destination of that ‘taken back control’ was never going to be the people. Instead it’s increasingly centralised in the hands of a few, with what remains given away to those opaque, unaccountable interests I mentioned earlier.

Neoliberalism and Liberalism

Now, I know the term ‘neoliberalism’ has in left-circles become a catch-all for the world’s ills. Almost a modern-day equivalent of the medieval ‘evil

eye'. Your crops fail, it's the evil eye. Your haemorrhoids are playing-up, it's the evil-eye. Neoliberalism pretty much inhabits the same space. But actually, this time, there is some truth to it.

I understand that as proponents of the liberal tradition, anything that is seen so negatively and has your namesake in it – 'liberalism', is probably going to get your back up. All I can say is try being a socialist.

Therefore, I can and will critique neoliberalism and liberalism. Just as I have critiqued the more top-down, centralising and dogmatic elements of socialism. None of our traditions has a monopoly on wisdom.

Rather, as the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci observed, the secret is to recognise the grain of truth in your opponent's argument. Although I'd like to think I wasn't your opponent and that my arguments this evening contained more than a grain of truth.

Liberalism is a powerful political philosophy with important things to say about individual freedom, democratic politics and the market economy – and about how these interact. But neoliberalism puts the market economy above everything else – including individual freedom and democratic politics. Instead of trying to create a stable economy on the top of which we can be free and work out our collective problems together, neoliberalism urges freedom and democracy only if they support the market economy.

And if they don't then it will use the state to curtail both. It tries to force us to see everything as a market transaction – to calculate the fiscal efficiency, value for money and the rate of return of everything we do: where we study and what we learn; where we live; even who we love.

But neoliberalism isn't just the imposition of free markets everywhere it's the purposeful eradication of any alternatives to it – so we can't even imagine a different world. There is no alternative.

Now I know as social liberals, you've never accepted that trinity, being beyond classic liberalism in two key ways; a commitment to redistribution and a belief in democracy. You understand both concepts can exist side by side with moderated individualism and political freedom. Because like many socialists you've grasped that the over-concentration of power, whether of individuals, corporations or the state - is itself a threat to political freedom. The growing excesses of wealth and poverty is driving us off that cliff edge as vested interests accumulate

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I'll give you a brief example of what this looks like in practice. Last year independent journalists at the Intercept uncovered corporate corruption on an unimageable scale. In effect the Ohio nuclear industry used millions of dollars to replace two key Republican state legislators and lobby to ensure a new speaker was elected. One who was, unlike the previous incumbent, amenable to a \$1.1bn state subsidy to the ailing state nuclear industry. The speaker, legislators, Republican Party staff and senior individuals in the nuclear industry have now been arrested on corruption charges. This is where we find ourselves. Of course, we could approach this example in a glass half-full way and argue it demonstrates the system is working. After all the corruption was discovered and the culprits arrested. Personally, I feel it highlights the remnants of a system of democratic checks and balances now in retreat. The Intercept was established to do what traditional media in the US and UK, the so called Fourth Estate, is all too often failing to do – which is hold the powerful to account. I guess it's somewhat ironic then that The Intercept is funded by philanthropist and eBay billionaire, Pierre Omidyar. What happens if The Intercept wants to investigate alleged corruption at eBay? Whatever the answer, we shouldn't even have to ask the question in the first place.

So, tonight I'm reaching out to the so called 'maximalist social-liberals' – those who acknowledge the principle of supplementary fairness to moderate their liberal commitment to political freedom. I know there can be a hierarchy of values between freedom and equality for many social liberals, with freedom usually edging out as pre-eminent. For socialists, that's often been the reverse with equality trumping freedom. But I would argue this is a false hierarchy and a false division. There is no denying there can be tensions between the two but surely given what's at stake, the cliff edge we find ourselves on, the challenges of the 21st century, the threat to our democracy and planet - we can agree to see equality and freedom as two sides of the same coin. Or better still, as part of a progressive eco-system: for without the flower there can be no bee and without the bee there can be no flower.

Socialism

Now you're probably sat there thinking what are you – a socialist - going to give up? Well, that kind of depends on what you think socialism is. Yes, I've acknowledged we often place equality before freedom. But the reality is you probably think a lot less of us than that. Much Conservative and liberal propaganda claims we want to snuff out the freedom of selfish individualism and mould it into a perfect collective.

“Yes, we are the socialist Borg – lower your shields and surrender your ships. We will add your biological and liberal distinctiveness to our own.”

For the left, we should remember that it was the liberal, Sir William Beveridge who's post War welfare reforms laid the foundations for freedom from want.

And yet most forms of socialism don't want to do this at all. We're more like the Federation, it's the neoliberals, who are actually the Borg. Most socialists want to find ways of allowing more people to benefit from, and have a say in, the management of the co-operative processes in which they are already engaged in almost every aspect of their lives. That sounds remarkably like freedom and equality to me.

Therefore, liberals should understand socialism can be a philosophy of liberty. That there is a need for democratic, collective action if we are to manage the interests of society over those of the market.

For the left, we should remember that it was the liberal, Sir William Beveridge who's post War welfare reforms laid the foundations for freedom from want. Whilst the liberal economist John Maynard Keynes provided the model of demand management that sustained full employment and the welfare state.

Beveridge and the limits of the Enlightenment

However, whatever the future may hold for both liberals and socialists – I want to go a stage further and suggest that simply amalgamating the two traditions, without critical self-reflection, doesn't go far enough.

Sir William Beveridge, in whose name this lecture is given tonight, is rightly held in high esteem by both liberals and the left. And yet he represents a contradiction that in so many ways demonstrate the necessity for a new dimension to progressive thinking.

Beveridge and Keynes were eugenicists. So too were socialists such as George Bernard Shaw and Harold Laski. Eugenics is the belief that society's fate rested on its ability to breed more of the strong and fewer of the weak. Failure to ensure a Darwinian survival of the fittest would endanger western society. That meant encouraging those of greater intellectual ability and "moral worth" to have more children, whilst seeking to urge, or even force, those deemed inferior to reproduce less often or not at all. George Bernard Shaw even suggested defectives be dealt with

by means of a “lethal chamber”.

As we now know, in the first decades of the 20th century, eugenics began to be conflated with 19th century white supremacist ideas about race. Which, by eugenicist logic, meant the very existence of other races posed a threat. We now know that logic led directly to the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

But long before the horrors of Nazi Germany, past even the beginnings of eugenics, Enlightenment Europe with all of its notions of reason, rationalism and progress had embarked on a programme of genocide, slavery and brutal empire.

This to my mind raises some profound issues we need to consider about the philosophies of socialism and liberalism – based, as they both were, on Enlightenment thinking. Because if aspects of the Enlightenment were inherently racist then it follows that our two respective creeds are tainted by this supposition.

First, I should explain why I think the Enlightenment had racism at its heart. Because it's entirely possible the terrible events of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries could all have taken place in spite of the Enlightenment rather than because of it.

The Enlightenment reinforced the idea of human unity, of an essential biological quality that elevated humans above all other creatures. We quite rightly live with that concept to this day, seeing it as positive and inclusive and something to rightly be celebrated. But when European thinkers set the standard for what they considered a modern human, they built it around their own limited experience of other human cultures. Whatever their personal beliefs, Hegel, Kant and Wilhelm, amongst many others, defined humanity in the idiom of western Christian thought without much of an idea about how most humans lived or thought or even looked like. Consequently, those that didn't conform to this limited notion of 'humanity' very quickly became seen as inferior and ultimately less than human. How else do we explain the fine words of the US Declaration of Independence – 'that all men are created equal' – but then watch the growth of African slavery and the genocide of American indigenous peoples?

The outcome of this underexplored heritage is the fact that despite 200 years of post-enlightenment thinking, the resulting rise of the humanitarian political movements of liberalism and socialism, we still need a campaign that reminds us Black Lives Matter!

The outcome of this underexplored heritage is the fact that despite 200 years of post-enlightenment thinking, the resulting rise of the humanitarian political movements of liberalism and socialism, we still need a campaign that reminds us Black Lives Matter!

But let me be really clear here. I'm not talking about turning away from rationalism, burning my Keynesian economic text books or seeking to topple busts of Beveridge. What I am suggesting we do is unpick some of the structural assumptions around our 'progressive' ideas and their genesis.

Let's take the issue of the Climate Crisis. For years it was a niche issue of the Green Party. One that both socialists and liberals paid much lip service to. Why do I say lip service? Because its impacts have been disproportionately felt in post-colonial countries of black and brown people. And yet our economic policies have and continue to be overwhelmingly focussed on mass consumerism and growth rather than sustainability. And even when we have finally acknowledged the scale of the problem, we're happy to outsource our carbon usage to the developing world where we enjoy the benefits of cheap, exploited Labour.

Even the Green New Deal we all talk about has neo-colonial overtones to it. We talk about switching to electric vehicles en masse, completely refitting our infrastructure onto a 'sustainable footing' with little consideration of the cost this mass extractivism will have on the poorest countries of the world where the resources we need are often found. So even when we speak the language of sustainability and ecological justice we do so with limited regard for its impact on the world's poorest in Africa and Asia.

Even Beveridge's welfare state and the NHS – core to socialist and social liberal pride – was only achieved because of the vast wealth and resources taken from the empire – that made us and still makes us one of the richest countries in the world. And before anyone says, 'yes, but it was US Marshall Plan money, not our bankrupt empire, that enabled the post-war welfare state', I'd simply say look at the genesis of the US and upon whose backs it came into being.

So challenging questions about what any future 21st century progressive political movement must look like should necessarily involve this realisation: in a world of global pandemics, planetary-wide climate breakdown and weapons of global mass destruction; where the internet and near instant communication are everywhere – our politics needs to ensure the values of both freedom and equality are applied internationally in a way they have not yet been to date. This raises profound questions about how we approach nationalism, patriotism, immigration, international trade and the system of debt we have overseen since the end of the second world war.

But before any of this can be enacted we need to be in power. We know domestically the 20th century was primarily a Tory century. The question now is who will own the 21st and on what terms?

Looking at the Liberal Democrats – the embodiment of mainstream liberalism in the UK, we can see both leadership candidates looking to move the party to the left. But what does that mean? What does it look like?

Well, the first priority is to analyse what's gone wrong. To concede that technocratic, liberal centrism, in its support for free markets and globalisation, has left people behind and in so doing created new forms of exclusion. Forms of exclusion the right have readily exploited using a heady mix of Thatcherite, nationalist and colonial tropes.

Any honest analysis needs to acknowledge that the institutions and infrastructure of British and international public life are increasingly

dysfunctional and emaciated. That the liberal dream that certain institutions are neutral and beyond politics has long gone. That the checks and balances of liberal democracy need much more than recalibrating. By slipping into a kneejerk defence of the status quo, of believing that turbo-capitalism can be managed within such eroded institutions - you risk not understanding where the threats come from and how they can be fought.

Ironically, it was the Corbyn project that decisively identified this problem – of the need for a reset to capitalism and a

democracy whose checks and balances have been ravaged by decades of neoliberalism. That we needed to build new economic and cultural institutions, form national and regional investment banks to new and independent public media platforms to challenge the growing dominance of vested interests.

Corbynism understood the need for transformative change. We can argue about the scale, scope and detail of the policies, but its analysis was essentially correct. It's why it put the climate at the heart of its 2019 manifesto. It understood the existential nature of threats before us. But what it wasn't prepared to do – and with this it has much in common with the centre and the right of my party – was acknowledge the limitations of Labourism. That being the belief there is only one true vehicle for

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progressive politics, and that's the Labour Party. Anyone outside of the party, is in effect the political equivalent of an infidel. As a result, it also struggled to identify, let alone successfully address, the toxic elements of a culture of 'one truth' politics; the corollary of believing there is only one 'true way' to further progressive politics. This thinking is itself a child of the less attractive legacy of the Enlightenment, although it would take a lot more self-awareness to join these dots.

But there's a growing number of Labour members who are looking to galvanise support for PR not simply because we want, quite rightly, to change the unfair electoral system we currently have which holds back our chances of success. It is also because a change of voting system will, we believe, help foster cultural change within centre left political parties.

But no end of culture change will take away from the fact that politicians of the left and centre must move way beyond their former comfort zones. That simply managing and tweaking the status quo is no longer an option. Covid-19 has shown us two important things:

1. That the first of the multiple global systemic shocks science has been warning us of, is now here.
2. But two, it's also shown us a sense of possibility. That another world is possible.

[In a recent essay, thinker and activist, Anthony Barnett](#) says what is also so compelling about the virus and our response to it is that it "makes it clear that the future of humanity is a matter of our choice".

Globalisation, as Barnett sees it, has two increasingly irreconcilable aspects. It embeds "profit maximisation and marketisation" but also a generalised capacity for people to become citizens, with expectations of rights and protections. Millions of us might be exploited, but we also have a deep awareness that "we share the same planet ... at the same time as each other". In ensuring one of these aspects has clashed with the other, the pandemic has commenced a new era, so far manifested not just in the politics of the virus itself but in what has swirled around it: Barnett tell us this is the first pandemic where lives came before profit. Where business as usual was impossible and while written just before events in Minneapolis, he anticipates that the Black Lives Matter upsurge is the most obvious example, and there will soon, he suggests, be more.

I like this observation. I like it because it allows me to end this talk on the politics of hope. Because as we know, to be "truly radical is to make hope possible, rather than despair convincing."

But none of us here tonight will be given that chance unless we show courage and leadership and willingness to think outside of our collective silos. So, I will end on an appeal to your radical nature. An appeal to:

- The shared tradition of the social liberals and socialists who worked alongside each other and built the welfare state.
- To the common values embedded in our collective institutions – most obviously the NHS
- To our principled commitment to defend the human rights of all – including those who migrate here to work and to seek refuge

The policies of the future may look very different from those of the past - far more de-centralised, far more empowering at a local and individual level. But at their core will remain a radical commitment to freedom and to equality for all.

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