

WHY WE NEED AN OPEN LEFT

by Andrew Gamble



The Left has been losing ground for a decade. How does it reinvent itself and become successful again in the battle of ideas? It has to embrace new radical ideas and do politics differently

Progressives believe that human societies are capable of being improved, but are also aware that progress has always been uneven, often won at huge cost, and that in the name of progress, human beings have unleashed forces that they increasingly seem unable to control. The situation for most people in the world has measurably improved over the last two centuries, but there is so much more to do, and new dangers threaten what has been achieved. The rise of populist nationalism in the last decade is a reminder of the fragility of political orders. Institutions which have provided peace, prosperity and well-being can easily be undermined and even discarded.

Two things are needed to face those risks. Firstly, the Left needs to embrace ideas which once again speak of the future and a better society for all, which can inspire change and build new coalitions of support. Secondly it has to do politics differently. The Left has to be an Open Left, building the broadest possible coalitions, avoiding the factionalism and tribalism which have so often hampered the Left in the past, and they have to become democrats again rather

than technocrats, constantly interacting with citizens.

The Open Left's vision for the future has four main priorities.

- ▶ The first priority is an open multilateral international order, which develops the multilateral institutions we already have both at the global and regional levels, but also goes beyond the western-centric order of the past by fully involving the rising powers in Asia, Africa and South America in determining the rules which should govern this order. Failure to maintain multilateral institutions and build on them hands the field to economic nationalism and military adventurism.

- ▶ The second priority is an inclusive and sustainable economy, based on reorienting our economic thinking away from the pursuit of economic growth at any cost and the maximisation of shareholder value to what is required to safeguard the biosphere and maximise value for all stakeholders, particularly domestic households and local

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economies. It's about what comes after austerity, the future of work in the new digitalised economy, a universal basic income, and a green New Deal. The next economic model – in seeking to rebalance the economy and tackle the problems of climate change and of places left behind by globalisation – will need to strengthen and extend state capacities to make possible a more decentralised, egalitarian and sharing economy and to encourage the emergence of new forms of enterprise. Local economies need more insulation from the globalised sectors of the economy, and economic activities should be judged as to how well they maximise stakeholder value rather than shareholder value.

► The third priority is a remodeled welfare state, based on a new commitment to universal basic services, which might include a form of universal basic income, to provide households with security, through income support and services, but also opportunity, through investment in education, health and

care, ensuring that no-one is left behind. Citizens have to be persuaded to pay more for the many benefits they receive from public services which make up modern welfare states, and providers need to experiment with delivering their services in more local and decentralised ways. Hypothecated taxes, living wages, equal investment in all 16-20-year-olds, and capital grants to individuals are all ideas that should be explored further.

► The fourth priority is a renewed democracy, based on defending the basic institutions that have come to define democracy, including the rule of law, equal rights for all citizens, media plurality, freedom of association and freedom of speech, but going beyond them to deepen democracy by extending it into new areas in order to

tackle the many new threats, such as the erosion of trust in representatives and experts, the eruption of social media, and the weakening of communities. We need to change the relationship between government and citizens, by increasing the transparency of government and the way government and citizens interact. Power needs to be decentralised to ensure real local accountability and more local partic-

ipation in decision-making about local economies, the needs of households and the protection of the biosphere. The quest for equal citizenship, targeting the many forms of discrimination, disadvantage and abuse which still damage so many lives, remains central to the progressive project.

Doing politics differently means accepting that there is no single progressive party, no

single will of the people or class that progressives can lean on in developing projects for change.

We live in complex post-industrial economies and multicultural societies. Opinions, interests, and knowledge are all divided, and the old certainties and landmarks have disappeared.

An Open Left has to acknowledge that there are many values, many perspectives and no single right way. That is the first step necessary to forming a new progressive coalition. Out of this can emerge a new and convincing vision of what is wrong and what has to be done to put it right, and a leadership that can convince voters that it is both competent and honest.

Millions of voters across Europe will rally to a party of progress that has an inspiring vision of the future, detailed policy ideas, a leadership that wins trust, and a politics that is open and inclusive. Bringing that party into existence and challenging the orthodoxies of the old political establishment of traditional conservatives and the new emerging political establishment of populist nationalists is the challenge now for progressives everywhere.



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