

# Liberalism Trumped. It's time to listen to the angry mob.

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By *Charlie Beckett*

What I find fascinating about the rise of Donald Trump is not what it says about the US Right, but what it tells us about the liberal/Left's idealism about democracy.

A similar syndrome is at work in pro-EU elite reaction to the surprisingly strong support for Euroscepticism. It's not just an anti-right wing thing either. Perhaps the horror of much of the 'moderate' liberal left at the ability of Jeremy Corbyn to capture the leadership of the Labour Party is similar.

Despite so much evidence to the contrary, they still believe in the primacy of a kind of rational, evidence-based decision-making that would inevitably lead people to support the kind of liberal leftism they espouse.

The paradox of these people who believe in plurality, is that they can't imagine a different view of the world, so they dismiss it as stupidity or conspiracy (Fox News, Murdoch, Momentum, etc).



In fact, the rise of populist, anti-Establishment politics has been exaggerated. UKIP has been around for a long time, for example, and has failed to move on from its relatively small base. Both Trump and Corbyn have succeeded within the selection process of an activist community not the wider public. So far.

The danger here is that liberal contempt for the real motives that people have for turning to these outlier politicians is that they could create a self-fulfilling cycle of confirmation by contempt. The more that 'liberals' dismiss Trump supporters as nutters and their supporters as sheep, the more that they confirm the gap between the liberals and the varied, disgruntled groups of voters acting out of instinct and personal discontent rather than 'reason'.

There is a whole strata of economically distressed lower middle class people. Trump is talking to them. Bill Clinton did, too. Is Hillary? Are liberals?

One of the reasons that Tony Blair, for example, succeeded as an election-winning politician was that he reached out

to these people. He listened to those who would not automatically subscribe to his brand of liberal politics. [You might not now like Blair or New Labour, but back in 1997 he certainly represented the rational aspirations of the liberal establishment in the UK and was pretty successful at implementing a range of liberal and redistributive policies].

I'm not suggesting a return to Blairism per se – that would be about as popular as saying I'd vote for Trump – but if liberalism is going to re-connect to the disenchanting and to those who don't sign up for its values, then it needs to ask honest questions about the real motives for those who disagree. We need dialogue not disdain. It would be the liberal thing to do.

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