



# WHY IS THE CREATIVE WORLD SO SOCIALIST AND WHAT, IF ANYTHING, CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

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Or, more simply, why are the ‘luvvies’ for Labour?

I am not for Labour. I have never been for Labour. I will never be for Labour. I am, however, a member of the ‘Creative World’ and a free-market radical pro-capitalist which means that I have started screaming matches at just about every ‘Luvvie’ party I have ever been invited to and, on occasion, have been asked to leave. I don’t get those invites any more but that’s their loss I say.<sup>1</sup>

However, my revenge is at hand. It was handed to me on a plate by Brian Micklethwait who asked me to give a talk at one his Fridays on some subject I am acquainted with. I suggested that the subject be the title of this piece. Brian thought it was a good idea. This paper is the follow-up to that talk which took place at Brian’s at the end of October.

Having had the benefit (or otherwise) of spending several years as an actor, comedian and writer I like to think that I know whereof I speak and, whether the assertions put forth here bear scrutiny or not, this is, first and foremost a personal view.

## Preliminary Points

What do I mean by the ‘Creative World’? Well, it can also be referred to as the ‘Artistic Community’ or the ‘Cultural World’ but I have used the term here as a convenient umbrella to cover all those persons whose are engaged in the arts or entertainment endeavours, e.g. actors, performers, dancers, writers, comedians, directors, painters, film-makers, sculptors, poets, producers, musicians, etc. Broadly speaking, anyone working in Theatre, TV, Cabaret or Cinema.

I am aware that my title contains within it an assumption that the Creative World *is* socialistic. I’d like, at this point, to be able to produce facts, figures, survey results, scientific research or graphs that would establish, at least on a balance of probabilities, that it is. I can’t. I can, however, point to that fact that just about every luminary from the showbiz world that makes themselves visible in the body politic, does so from a leftist or interventionist liberal viewpoint, e.g. in America, Jane Fonda and Warren Beatty; in Britain, Ben Elton, Dickie Attenborough, Glenda Jackson. In Britain, the extent to which the show-

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biz world rallied, fawningly, behind the Labour cause, especially in the '87 and '92 elections gave rise to the term 'Luvvies for Labour' and, even now, it has escaped nobody's attention that Tony Blair, soon after coming to power, hosted lavish parties at Downing Street where he courted, thanked and entrenched his position with the 'glitterati'. I believe that in the USA, Bill Clinton has enjoyed a similar level of support among the denizens of Hollywood and the cultural elite of New York.

Leave aside for a moment the value or otherwise of all this evidence, I think it germane to allude to my own personal experience. In the years of my involvement with the Creative World, I have found that lockstep, slackjaw, fuzzy-brained leftist conformity is so universal, so popular, so entrenched and so exasperating that my abreaction to it was one of the reasons I went from being a beleaguered Conservative to being a full-blooded Libertarian. I have simply lost count of the number of times I have heard Margaret Thatcher being compared to Adolf Hitler and the word 'Capitalist' being used only when insulting someone.

At this point I think a true story might serve to re-inforce both of the above points. A few years ago, I scripted a short film and embarked upon the road of producing it myself. For the lead role, I had in mind a reasonably well-known British comic actor who, for the purposes of this paper I shall refer to as 'The Actor'. I contacted the Actor through his agent and sent him a copy of the script, which he read. He agreed to play the role. At the time he was engaged in a long-running show in the West End and, as a consequence, I agreed to come and see him in the show and meet with him afterwards in his dressing-room to discuss the project. It was May 2nd 1997.<sup>2</sup> After the show, I went backstage and joined The Actor in his dressing room. During the course of our discussion, I was unable to stifle a yawn. Lest I appeared rude I quickly explained that my fatigue was due to staying up all the previous night watching the general election results. The Actor replied by saying: "Oh Yes. So did I. Good news, isn't it?" He said that in such a way as to betray the fact that he had clearly expected me to share his joy over a Labour victory. Yet he knew very little about me and nothing at all about my politics or personal beliefs. His assumption that I shared his enthusiasm for Tony Blair lay in the fact that I was I was a writer and a putative filmmaker and, for him, this was evidence enough.

Just that story alone, I could contend, makes the assumption about the socialistic tendency of the Creative World a fairly safe one to make.

I don't want anyone reading this paper to take away with them the belief that every creative or showbiz person is a leftist. Not true. I have, on my travels, encountered the occasional Conservative but have found that they act in much the same way as Communists must have acted when Joe McCarthy was in full swing. In other words, they are quiet, apologetic and circumspect. The last time an actor friend of mine admitted to being a Conservative he took a look around the room first to check if anybody else was in earshot before admitting to his 'thought crime' in a hushed whisper. And, of course, in the USA the acting profession has produced arch-Republicans such as Ronald

Reagan and Charlton Heston. However, I would contend that they are exceptions which pretty much prove the rule.

Turning to the subject itself, it's fair to say that there are two questions put forward here, not one. I intend to address them separately.

### WHY IS THE CREATIVE WORLD SO SOCIALIST?

For me, there is no definitive answer or single reason. I believe that there a number of factors which, when conjoined, paint an overall picture. They are written in no particular order.

A) **The promise of public finance.** The most straightforward and easily identifiable factor is that so many artists rely on public sector finance for a living. In Britain, artistic endeavour has had, to varying degrees, the benefit of taxpayer-funding for many years and, even now organisations like the Arts Council hand out lottery money to filmmakers and theatre producers. Leaving aside the dependance and low-standards that public funding promulgates, it stands to reason that those who benefit by it will support whichever political party promises (or seems to promise) more of it. Earlier this year I attended a Cultural Conference in London at which the Chairman of the Royal Opera House passionately argued the case for higher taxes in order to facilitate what he called the 'democratisation' of art forms such as opera and ballet. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to conclude that sheer self-interest is behind his call for a more leftist agenda.

B) **The importance of art.** There is a very widely held view in the Creative World that art and cultural endeavour are simply too important to be left to the vagaries of market forces. The argument goes that books, plays, films, paintings etc. enrich our lives and, without them, we are left with a spiritually poor and monotone world.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the continuance of these things must be guaranteed by government for the benefit of us all. To suggest that they be cast upon the choppy waters of the free market is, to them, nothing short of cultural barbarism because art and culture should not be measured in purely monetary terms. There runs through this idea the often-voiced opinion that the public, left to its own devices, will choose gimmicks and cheap vulgarity rather than Dostoyevsky or Molière. Therefore Dostoyevsky or Molière must be prescribed for them on the National Wealth for their own good. I find, in this attitude, a startling similarity to the socialist view on health and education. (I should point out that I wholly subscribe to the view that books, plays, films, music etc. enrich our lives and that it would be a poorer world without them. That's exactly why I believe they should be left to free market forces. History tells us that people do want things to enrich their lives and are prepared to pay for them.)

C) **What matters is intentions not results.** Working through the analysis in B), it's easy to understand why so many artists feel profoundly threatened by the prospect of a free-market environment and why any references to or discussions of free-market policies are usually met with abject horror. Quite aside from the arguments about consumer choice, what they consider to be important is not the product but the effort that went into the product. For

example, a fringe stage production of an obscure Greek tragedy may well play out to an audience in single figures, the director's mother and a dog. Hence it will lose money hand over fist. However, the effort that went into producing it may be no less than the effort that goes into creating a smash Broadway hit. To many artists this seems dreadfully unjust and, consequently, the Labour Theory of Value seems so attractive and fair. This is not to say that, at the production meeting for the Greek Tragedy, the writer and the actors all sit around discussing Marxist economics. They don't. But the nature of the business they are in tends to lead them to the same 'logical' conclusion.

This is exacerbated by the fact that the Creative World is and always has been positively awash with wannabes most of whom will never be. This is a grudgingly-held truism. But, among the wannabes, there is no lack of desire, sincerity or effort and the realisation that, mostly, it will go scantily or wholly unrewarded is perceived as a wicked injustice that socialism can put right.

D) **Money is a mystery.** Writers, actors, directors or painters are, I maintain, not quite like normal people. For them their creative endeavour is not just a job; it is something to which they are deeply emotionally and intellectually committed — more a 'calling' than a career. Most creatives have embarked upon their journey after leaving school or university (sometimes before) and, therefore, have very little experience of working or trying to make a living in the real world. It is hardly cause for surprise, then, that many, if not most, dwell in an almost permanent state of economic illiteracy. They simply don't understand how money or economics works and tend to see it more as a necessary evil or a hindrance to whatever it is they are trying, culturally, to achieve. Add to this the fact that most of their intellectual effort and time is channelled towards their particular artistic endeavour(s) and what you have is a large section of the community who treat monetary matters the same as the clergy or monks do. Money is outside of their realm, something they don't need to bother themselves with unduly, a 'temporal' matter, vulgar. What matters is their art. It is for this reason that even very successful and wealthy artists cling to the same naive, child-like view of the world. It is not unusual for millionaire movie or rock stars to remain clueless as to how they have managed to accumulate their wealth, cushioned, as they invariably are, by a phalanx of managers and accountants.<sup>4</sup> I have been genuinely shocked by the number of people in the Creative World who have no conception that there is a link between government spending and taxation. The government, they seem to think, just has lots of money and governments who don't distribute it to worthy causes are mean and fascistic and that's that. Even if they do understand the link, for the reason stated in C) above, most creatives are dirt poor and pay no or very little in the way of tax. Hence, arguments about the evils of increasing tax rates don't cut much ice with them. Tax is something paid by 'rich people' and who cares about them?

E) **Populism.** I don't think I have to argue very long or hard to establish the proposition that every artist strives to 'chime' with their audience. More than anything else, cre-

atives love to be loved and approval really does mean just about more to them than anything else. During the twentieth century at least, it's the socialists who have sung the sweetest tunes and, as most politicians know, specious bleatings about social justice and equality are a surefire way to get the 'masses' to like you. Stories of evil, money-grubbing industrialists who turf widows and orphans out onto the streets to starve may not have much basis in fact but they're a damn good way to get your audience crying buckets into their bucket-sized popcorn.

F) **The perceived social liberalism of the left.** This is the one factor which, to me, does have some validity. Particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world, Conservatives or Rightists have always been strongly associated with sexual repression and censorship. Not an unjustified claim. However, the creative world, possibly because of its ethos of exploring humanity and challenging cultural boundaries, has enjoyed a long history of social liberalism among its ranks. 'Freedom' for them means the freedom of sexual experience, the freedom to be gay, the freedom to take mind-enhancing drugs, the freedom to write or say anything they wish. Conservatives/Republicans have tended to believe in the repression of these things or even imprisonment for them, as well as in White, Christian hegemony. It has been the left, particularly the anarchist and libertarian communist<sup>4</sup> strains, that have championed gay rights, anti-racism, women's liberation and the legalisation of marijuana. Looking at it from that point of view, it's easy to understand why so many creatives think that the lefties are decent, humane and progressive and the capitalist Conservatives are reactionary, oppressive, racist, homophobic exploiters. It is the right that stands for excess authority and the left that struggles for freedom.

G) **The Anti-Establishment 'kick'.** Most artists become artists because they feel they have something to say about the world they live in. There is a long tradition in the Creative World of challenging the Established Order and orthodox beliefs. Since, until recently, the Established Order meant the Monarchy, the Church, the House of Lords, the Aristocracy and the City, that was the hierarchy to rebel against and challenge. The Conservative Party were seen as a part of that hierarchy and, indeed, its defenders. The socialists also made loud noises about taking on the Established Order and the Ranks of Privilege (only with a view, of course, to establishing their own) which, once again made them appear as the good guys or, at the very least, to be fighting the common foe.

H) **The Empire of Emotion.** The left has also advanced on the back of emotional rather than rational arguments. It has been said that creative people, by their very nature (something to do with which side of the brain is predominant) enjoy a more heightened sense of emotion than ordinary work-a-day members of the public. This may or may not be true but, if it is true, it would certainly go some way to explaining why they are more receptive to emotional arguments and resistant to rational ones.<sup>5</sup>

These factors may not be exhaustive and I am the first to say that they are generalisations. I am not suggesting that each point can be specifically applied to each and every artist, even the self-confessed leftist ones, but, taken as a

whole, I maintain they have a resonance that goes most of the way to explaining why the Luvvies are for Labour.

### WHAT, IF ANYTHING, CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

My answer here is twofold: 1) We can fight them on their turf, and 2) given time, we may not have to.

1) To batter them with sound and sensible arguments about free-market economics is, in my view, quite futile. It's rather like trying to explain the significance of Yom Kippur to Josef Goebbels: the audience isn't listening, doesn't understand and, in any event, a goodly proportion of them will be harbouring the pre-conceived view that we are evil incarnate and we eat babies. No, much more effective is to stress our social liberalism. Our opposition to all forms of censorship and impediments to free speech is an argument that will go down very well indeed. Our opposition to all laws and prohibitions governing the sexual conduct of consenting adults will earn a huge round of applause. Our proposal to decriminalise drugs is one which will earn us an army of grudging admirers.<sup>6</sup>

These are the arguments which can open the door and maybe, just maybe, if we can use them to win friends and influence people in the Creative World, we will stand a marginally better chance of convincing them that we are, actually, the good guys (or, at least, not as bad as they might have thought).

2) Whilst I think the strategy outlined in 1) above is worthwhile in any event, I also have to say that time and circumstance may be on our side whatever we do. I say this for the following reasons:

a) Whilst I maintain that the Creative World is socialistic in nature, it's probably equally true that there are very, very few committed ideologues among their number. In my judgement most of the others are along for the ride, socialist by default or simply not interested enough in politics or economics to go to the effort of challenging the accepted orthodoxies of the world around them. It's my experience that, when all is said and done, most artists would much rather be rubbing shoulders with the illuminati at an Awards Ceremony than coming out in sympathy with the Dockers. In the meantime, they'll pay such causes only lip-service. I say this because, if we have any serious battles to fight here, there aren't too many well-defended walls we need to scale.

b) Going back to the point about the tradition of kicking against the establishment, I don't think it has quite dawned on anybody yet (least of all the Conservative Party) that the 'right' are no longer the establishment. The establishment is now, quite firmly, liberal-left of centre. The Woodstock generation got older, got a haircut and got elected! As a new, younger generation of writers and directors etc. start to emerge it might just be their 'trendy, lefty, politically-correct parents' that they'll see as the enemy.

c) A constant theme in the Creative World is the eternal search for the new idea, the radical alternative or the ground-breaking statement. That is the very staff of life for such people as movie-makers and theatre producers. As disillusionment with the existing, and sclerotic, political structure grows so will the search for new ideas and

radical alternatives. Political-correctness is already beginning to look stale and jaded. Since, in my view, we Libertarians are the only ones offering hitherto unseen or unspoken visions, then it could just be that curiosity, if nothing else, could drive budding, young artists on an exploratory trip through the virgin territory of libertarian philosophies. Whether we are treated kindly or not is immaterial as far as I am concerned; it's the publicity that counts and the more publicity we get the more we seep into everyday life and public awareness. That is good and cause for cautious optimism.<sup>7</sup>

### Why It Matters

Why is any of this important? Why should we care what a few TV scriptwriters or actors think? Well, I think it is important. The economic war with the left has, by and large, been won. Nobody is out there arguing for Marxist economics anymore and, if they are, they are not being taken seriously in any quarter that matters. However, the cultural war has been lost to us. It's important that we get it back. The battle we face is not with Marxist militants but with Corporatists and Environmentalists. If we can influence the Creative World so that, at least, some of it is prepared to champion the values of the Enlightenment and the cause of individual freedom, then we will have added a fearsome weapon to our armoury.

### FOOTNOTES

1. I once had a good friend who was a theatre director. About three years ago, during a conversation in a pub, I raised some doubts at the truth of global warming. He promptly got up and walked out of the room. I have not seen him nor heard from him since.
2. In other words, the day after Tony Blair's 'New Labour' Government was elected.
3. I once saw a recorded interview with the late Artie Shaw, a famous American jazz clarinetist of the 'Swing' era. He said that during the height of his popularity in the 40's and 50's he was earning vast sums of money but it was handled for him by his managers. He cheerfully admitted he had no idea how much he earned, why he earned it or what to do with it. He was taken charge of like a Victorian Ward-of-Court. The only thing he did was to buy himself a new watch every week as an 'indulgence'. The only thing he was ever interested in was playing the clarinet to the best of his ability.
4. This is an aside. I do not believe that there is such a thing as 'libertarian communism'. One is either a libertarian or a communist but it is impossible to be both. To suggest that someone can be a 'libertarian communist' is rather like saying a person can be a 'meat-eating vegetarian'. I might call myself a 'meat-eating vegetarian'. I may even *believe* I am a 'meat-eating vegetarian'. But the cold, hard fact remains that I am no sort of vegetarian and that's that.
5. This may explain why environmentalism has gained such a foothold in the Creative World.
6. It is pretty much an open secret that drug use is almost commonplace in the Creative World. It is an accepted norm. Certainly this is true from my own experience. Further, many artists or writers freely used drugs to alter their perceptions and as a boost to their creative impulses (whether or not they were successful is another matter).
7. During a recent radio interview, Scottish author Iain M. Banks admitted that his latest novel *The Business* was, at least partly, influenced by libertarian ideas.