

[Nothing left](#) [1]

Written by [Dr Madsen Pirie](#) [2] | Friday 13 July 2012

Tim Worstall and I rarely disagree about anything. Indeed, if the genie of the lamp gave me three wishes, the first would be to have Tim Worstall installed as Economic Advisor to the Treasury.

Tim, however, [claims he is a left-winger](#) [3], whereas I know I am not. He says:

But as I have argued before, we also share the basic lefty goals: we want a world that is getting better, a greener one, one in which all can achieve their potential and so on. As long as we stick to political vacuity we sign up to pretty much all of the desired goals. All we argue about is what is the best way to get from here to that desired goal.

I do not agree that these are left-wing goals. They may be goals that are shared by some left-wingers, and certainly are ones that I espouse. I also go along, of course, with Tim's commitment to breaking monopolies and creating conditions for competition and choice. But it is worth looking at what 'left wing' and 'right wing' actually entail, apart from their BBC usage as synonyms for 'good' and 'bad.'

Tim's case (with maybe just a touch of the mischief that is a hallmark of the ASI) is that sharing those goals makes him a lefty, albeit one who thinks free markets and judicious tweaking are the best way to achieve those goals. I, in contrast, do not think that it is your goals that define your position on the left or the right.

There are those who think that individuals and their families can generally do better for themselves, and that the order produced by the interaction between them is more humane and more efficient than an imposed one.

On the other side are grouped those who think that society can do these things better collectively, acting in concert to plan and produce an order different from the one that spontaneity would achieve, and one that they think will achieve more worthwhile things.

Those leaning to the right tend to be more concerned with opportunities for self-betterment, whereas those who lean left seem more preoccupied with equality. And since I have a deep distrust of central planning and a deep dislike of forcing people to live out someone else's ideal of what they ought to be like, I do not describe myself as left wing. Tim and I will just have to differ on this one.

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