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Marquand's new order [1]

Written by **Dr Madsen Pirie** [2] | Tuesday 1 June 2010

David Marquand writes [3] prescriptively in the Guardian about the need to replace "neo-liberalism" with what he considers to be a more just social order

> The great question for our time is not how and when to cut the fiscal deficit? It is how to halt the merry-go-round before it is too late: how to switch from an unjust and unsustainable economic order to a just and sustainable one?.The need, in fact, is for a realignment of the mind, socialist in economics and republican in politics.

Heaven forbid that it should be socialist in economics ? we've seen what that can do. As for being republican in politics, constitutional monarchies seem somewhat better in practice. A key observation which strikes me is that he seems to assume that a social and economic order must come from the mind.

I think I'm with those who think we've had rather too much of that already. The notion that we can think up a society and make it happen has been tried many times in history; and it has usually ended in a bloodbath. It might, indeed, be time for a "realignment of the mind," but perhaps it should be one that declines to go in for grandiose designs to remake humanity. So many of them have ended disastrously, it might be a good idea to stop trying. I don't think our lives and societies can be encompassed by one big idea.

Why don't we start by letting humans interact with each other, each living their lives to the best of their abilities, making decisions based on their values, and respecting each other's right to do the same. The market economy, for all its faults, has lifted more people out of poverty than any other force in human history, not excluding religions and ideologies.

We can intervene cautiously to improve here and there what spontaneity would produce by itself, doing things like providing for those unable to care for themselves, and establishing decent public standards of things like sanitation, infrastructure, and access to services. This is pretty much what Popper called "piecemeal social engineering."

It doesn't have the inspiring ring of a 'big idea' that leads people to storm barricades, but it does improve the world systematically and it enables people to lead better lives, and maybe that's no bad thing.

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