



COMMENT & ANALYSIS

Letters

Libertarian position is gaining ground

By Mattias Bengtsson

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From Mr Mattias Bengtsson.

Sir, Michael Lind claims that "the libertarian moment has passed" ("The un mourned end of libertarian politics", August 17). As a European I beg to differ.

It might be true that libertarian rhetoric is not popular today among politicians. But I would argue that such has been the case since Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher left active politics and the fall of the Berlin wall. Since then we have seen pragmatism (basically arguments about reinventing the welfare state) dominating the rhetoric agenda of electoral politics from successful politicians such as Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. But if you look at serious ideological and intellectual debate in both the US and Europe, the free market position is gaining ground.

I would even say that if you look for a real and viable vision for the future, the only one available is more or less libertarian. Since the mid-1990s there has, for example, been an explosion of libertarian think-tank activity in Europe. The network of European free market think-tanks - the Stockholm Network - now has more than 130 members.

Coming from Sweden I also notice that, on many of the issues Mr Lind mentions, my home country is turning towards libertarian practice. Sweden adopted school vouchers in the early 1990s. Many Swedish children now attend private, for-profit schools. The Swedish governmental pension system has been reformed - the system will never pay out more than comes in, and it is partly privatised and fully funded. Major state-owned companies have been sold out, many markets deregulated. Even nuclear power plants have been sold to foreign owners. There is no minimum wage. Immigration from the 25 European Union members is free. The socialist government, with the support of the former Communist party, recently abolished inheritance tax and the gift tax. Healthcare is to a growing degree produced by private companies - one of the largest hospitals in Stockholm is owned by a for-profit company listed on the stock exchange. The underground in the capital is run by a French company. The taxi business is open for entry and without regulation regarding fares. And the Swedish edition of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged* has sold more than 10,000 copies since last year. This is just to mention a few examples.

All this does not necessarily mean that the future will be libertarian. Muslim fundamentalist terror, anti-globalism, populist critique of politics-as-usual and welfare state nostalgia still play a role. But the libertarian movement is growing stronger. And it will not only change the definition of left, right and centre in politics. It will change Europe, the US and the world.

Mattias Bengtsson,
President,
Centre for the New Europe,
B-1000 Brussels, Belgium

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