

Ed Balls and the politics of jealousy

It has been amusing to watch Ed Balls trying to understand the support for Donald Trump in the USA. Quite a lot of the time Mr Balls seems thrilled to be part of the car loving outdoors lifestyle of the typical Trump supporters. He seems very at home with the not so rich that he rubs shoulders with, and wants to enjoy his time with the wealthy and glamorous. He leaves it to his individual private talks to the camera after his social events and interviews to confide in us that he still disapproves, with some large moral objection or other to this democratic phenomenon of a popular movement.

The main issue Mr Balls keeps coming back to is how can the low income Trump supporters back a billionaire? How can they vote for a man who gives the rich tax cuts? He seeks to stir up jealousy. So far he has had no success. The replies come back that they like the fact that Mr Trump is a businessman – he might help them make some money just as he has made some money for himself. They are very relaxed about the higher income people getting tax cuts, because they are getting tax cuts too. Some of the Trump supporters on lower income reckon they might be much richer one day anyway. As one said this Sunday, I am \$100 a week better off with the Trump tax cuts which helps me so I don't mind the rich getting tax cuts as well.

I am surprised Mr Balls finds this absence of jealousy surprising. The whole idea of the American dream is someone can go from Bell boy to hotel owner, from a kid in a deprived neighbourhood to a top paid lawyer or banker . It is at best a get up and do society, where many want their government to get out of their way, and to let them keep more of the money they earn.

In the UK where Mr Balls learned his politics maybe he hopes the politics of jealousy will be more successful. Here too there are many more people who are not jealous. They vote for parties and candidates that can improve their lifestyle, incomes and life chances, not for parties and people who will do down those who have succeeded. Labour wanted to get rid of grammar schools by giving the vote to decide their future mainly to the parents of children who did not get in. The first ballot failed to deliver the closure many in Labour craved, because the parents of children not at the grammar were not jealous of those who went to the grammar. They gave up and grammars survived.

Mr Balls as often on the left also argues from contradictory positions. He both thinks poorer Americans should shun Mr Trump because he is rich and privileged, then argues they should shun him because he has had business failures and was not the in past rich enough! So is he too successful to represent people, or too much of a failure to do so in Balls land? And does it matter, as enough US voters backed him whichever.

I will enjoy the remainder of this mini series. I like it when Mr Balls looks thrilled to be there and is visibly enjoying lifestyles he would normally condemn. I then like it even more when we get the private musings to camera to sure him up with the left wing UK audience that will see the programme as he struggles to find things to complain about. He is going to have do better

than the crusade for jealousy, which is an unbecoming political emotion.