

The Oxford Union believes the right can represent the working class.

On Thursday I was one of the speakers at the Oxford Union debate on the motion "This House believes the right cannot represent the interests of the working class". I was dismayed by the dated, arrogant, condescending and foolish motion. It was as if we were still living in the mid nineteenth century, with Marx telling us all to see things through the prism of class. Then there were three classes of rail carriage and liner cabins, in an age when people with money hired domestic servants and many adults including all women still did not have the vote. Today most of us are workers, and many workers now work with brain and computer. Machines dig ditches, speed the construction of buildings, make things in factories where before hard labour was needed from the hand and arm of man. All adults have the vote, and many adults aspire to what a class campaigner would call a middle class lifestyle. The many want and expect a good home of their own, a family car, tv, washing machine and holiday away that were the prerogatives of the better off seventy years ago.

The proposers of the motion elided "working class" with poor as the left seeks to do. There was no allowance in their backward looking view for the better paid workers, and every assumption that the minority that is temporarily on benefits is the norm and the core of their "working class". There was no recognition that centre right parties often get elected, represent the workers and go on to get re-elected. There was even less understanding of why that should be. The left in the UK have never forgiven Margaret Thatcher for having great appeal to many of their chosen working class. They ignore the popularity of policies which allow people to keep more of the money they earn, to own their own homes and to gain a stake in the wealth of the nation through their savings, pension plans, ISAs and the rest.

The arrogance of the motion was poignant a few days after Angela Rayner's important quote that "for too long we (Labour) have given off an air of talking down to people and telling people what they need, or even what they should want or what they should think." The Oxford union narrowly voted down this archaic foolishness. Many people want a hand up, not to live on hand outs. Politicians should not seek to lecture people on what they should believe, think and want, but should seek to compete to offer people more and better service related to their problems and above all to their aspirations. The aim of debate is persuasion, not stern correction. Most people aspire to live in a better home they own, to own a better car, to have some money in the bank and to have more freedom to choose. Few aspire to live on benefits in a rented flat under the control of the state as paymaster, landlord, policeman and social worker. I pointed out that the students at Oxford, assembled from so many backgrounds and all income levels, are surely united in seeking a better life for themselves through personal effort. By excelling at school and College they aim for well paid jobs and comfortable homes. Why seek to deny this upward mobility to others or pretend that the right does

not have policies that can help achieve these aims?