Press Release: Thursday 27th April

THIS HOUSE BELIEVES RIGHT WING POPULISM IS THE GREATEST THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

Proposition 1: Dr Daniele Albertazzi

Dr Albertazzi, a senior lecturer at Birmingham University opened by saying that populism is not just about appealing to the feelings of people or being popular. However why is populism always opposed? Liberal democracy argues that the power of the majority should be restrained and should be divided between different institutions. He highlighted that it is difficult to address a majority as there are so many minorities in society, particularly in the UK that we cannot define what would attract everyone.

Opposition 1: David Campbell-Bannerman

Campbell-Bannerman points that populism is not necessarily right wing, nor bad. Pointing to the rise in support of right wing parties from the working class across Europe. Populism occurs because of a loss of faith in mainstream parties. He blames populism on the 2008 economic crisis, the Eurozone crisis causing austerity, notably in Greece, and the perceived immigration crisis. Populism causes for changes of the political establishment, but not what should replace it. People vs establishment. Populism doesn’t have to be attached to bad things, and it appeals to the masses. He criticizes the political elite for the lack of ‘humility’ in claiming that if people were more educated results would go differently. Brexit was about super-state or sovereignty. Campbell-Bannerman goes on to argue that the UK has a place in inter-governmental institutions such as the WTO or UN, but not institutions that so significantly have control over UK laws. The EU super state to Campbell-Bannerman is unpopular fundamentally because of its legislative power, corporate mentality and the secrecy of the European Council. To conclude, Campbell-Bannerman says populism is, to repeat, not bad or right-wing, but simply the will of the people.

Proposition 2: Dr Lisa McKenzie

Dr McKenzie, research fellow at the London School of Economics, opened by stating that she is the only, poor, white, working-class woman in the room but she still argues that right wing populism is bad for the working class. The working class cannot weather whatever politics throws at them. Academic elitists always create a divide and right wing populism will not create a collaboration between classes. Right wing populism is elite. It belongs to Brexit, Farage and Trump and none of these men speak for the working class. When right wing populism moves in, it is the greatest threat to the working class people whom she refers to as ‘my people’ as they are the most desperate.
**Opposition 2: James Delingpole**

Delingpole humours the idea that right-wing is synonymous with Hitler, and populism all bad. Delingpole points to the historic failures of left-wing populists, such as Venezuela today. Criticising the ‘snobbery’ of the political elite, the establishment need to understand why people would vote for right-wing populist ideas, as the working-class prioritise themselves and their job over establishment politics of environmentalism, for example.

**Proposition 3: Baroness Julie Smith**

Baroness Smith, a self-proclaimed member of the elite, oxford educated, Cambridge academic and member of the House of Lords highlighted that education matters to everyone regardless of their background. We must focus on the importance of benefiting everybody and the people putting forward right wing populism are not the normal people but are members of the elite. The vast majority of people who voted to leave were not all populists but believed it was the best thing. Populists are the elite and pretend they have the answers and this is why right wing populism is the greatest danger to democracy as people are being misled. She argued that Trump got elected because he knew how to play the system, is extremely wealthy and offered false promises. Right wing populists seek to divide and they use race and xenophobia to win support. Left wing populism might be a danger but Corbyn would never use fear. She ended by passionately arguing that the most dangerous thing is the manipulation of the truth and that is the greatest threat to democracy.

**Opposition 3: Claire Fox**

Fox sees the biggest problem as the misconception that multiple movements are all similar to fascism and far-right wing. Fox sees the biggest threat as anti-populism. By implying populism is dangerously far right, it is the establishment trying to stop the people’s will. Fox notes how the populist right-wing parties in the Netherlands, Germany and France are all not at the peak, but struggling simply doing well with ordinary people. Noting the BNP, EDL and UKIP are all failing. Fox claims Brexit wasn’t right-wing, but working-class, ordinary people wanting to take back control of their politics. Fox says it is Tony Benn, not Nigel Farage who got her into Brexit. Fox says it is always the opposition using the word populist as a loaded sneer. Not treating people as stupid, is key to winning people’s support in a democracy, Fox believes. Fox says the contempt for people who are uneducated needs to end, and realise that something serious is happening that the major political parties are not understanding.

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