

Party Conferences - Class Difference Personified

The Ministers and the Others

How sleek they are. How well-coiffed and neatly dressed. How slim. How free of worry-frowns. How articulate. Perhaps a little self-congratulatory, maybe also a shade authoritarian, but (thanks to subtle changes in their accents for the occasion - more populist, less Islington) they are alright, acceptable. These are the Ministers.

By contrast, those people from the party and the unions who come up to take their moment on the platform are clearly from a different milieu. Rough-edged, overweight, regional accents, poor teeth, bad hair, clumsily dressed. These are the Others.

The Ministers, many Oxford, Harvard, LSE trained, well-off, with comfortable futures already arranged should things go wrong at the next election, make their speeches to the Others couched in terms they think will be easily understood. Their presentations are uniformly shrewd, with pauses for applause (which often doesn't come), and phrases carefully chosen to make the Minister appear 'one of us'.

The Others who speak fall into two groups: those who pander and verbally grovel to their leaders, especially the Prime Minister: and those who have something worthwhile to say. These are few but are the only admirable folk at the Conference. They understand that awful truth. Jobs pay wages, wages pay taxes, taxes pay for education, justice, health, etc. Without jobs there is nothing.

But the Ministers don't concern themselves with such mundane matters. They have been advised by PR gurus to hammer home their vision, that what they are doing will save us all, and never to deviate from the script, even if there are questions. It would never do as one PR expert is heard to have said 'to let on that these guys know nothing about nothing.'