

Chancellor with Attitude

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, so it is said. It's hardly surprising, therefore, that politicians should seek to increase their popularity by sharing the tastes of their electorates, or at least claiming to do so. The British chancellor of the exchequer (as Britain's finance minister is called), George Osborne, recently tried this trick by coyly admitting that he likes to listen to N.W.A., the American "gangsta rap" group. N.W.A. is short for "Niggaz With Attitudes." The important question is whether this is worse if true than untrue. I can't quite make up my mind.

If it is untrue, then Osborne is courting popular favor by an outright lie which hardly reflects well on him. He has presumably calculated that people will like him better if he shares their most degraded tastes, proving thereby that, at heart, he really is one of them. The unspoken assumption is that people are more likely to vote for someone who is like themselves. This may be mistaken.

In any case, the idea that voters will be taken in by Osborne's claim is deeply insulting to their intelligence. Everyone knows that, through no fault of his own, Osborne was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Instead of confronting the envy (one of the deadly sins, after all) and malice directed at him, by pointing out that it is a consequence of freedom that people should not all be born into the same circumstances, he affects to be an admirer of lines such as the following, taken from that charming little ballad, "Fuck tha Police":

Yeah, I'm a gangsta, but still I got flavor

Without a gun and a badge, what do ya got?

A sucker in a uniform waiting to get shot

By me, or another nigga.

Every line is chanted to a noise that makes a pneumatic drill sound like a nightingale.

However, claiming the worst taste in the world won't persuade anyone that George Osborne is a true, manual-laboring proletarian (even if most manual labor had not already been almost entirely outsourced to China), only that he is playing at being one, and that therefore he must have something to cover up, something to be ashamed of. Not a single person will be persuaded to vote for George Osborne's party because he claims to like gangsta rap, and some might even refrain from doing so.

On the other hand, it is just possible (I suppose) that Osborne really does like listening to N.W.A., and that he really does think that lines such as . . .

From the gang called Niggaz With Attitudes

When I'm called off, I got a sawed off

Squeeze the trigger, and bodies are hauled off

You too, boy, if ya fuck with me

. . . are beautifully expressed and just the right message for the black youth of Los Angeles and elsewhere; but if so I can only recall the words of Karl Kraus, back in the early thirties, with regard to Hitler. "When it comes to Hitler," Kraus said, "I just can't think of anything to say."

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