

Dear Mr Hammond

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Dear Mr Hammond

I noted your appearance before the Treasury Select Committee yesterday. In particular, I note your suggestion that the relative decline in UK productivity might have been caused by “far higher levels of participation by marginal groups” in the workforce. I note that you suggested that those with a disability are a marginal group in society.

I am aware that others have objected to your comments. I think they are entirely right to do so. Those with a disability are only marginalised in our society if we choose to make them so: your comments clearly suggest that is your choice. That is not just wrong, it is offensively so.

But let me make an additional comment. I strongly suspect your claim is also false. There are four reasons for thinking so.

First, it is an unfortunate fact that less than 50% of those with a disability are employed in the UK when more than 70% of the population as a whole are economically active. Most disability is no impediment to work. Because people of all inclinations and ability do, by and large (and when not inappropriately coerced by government agencies), choose the work that is best suited to them and the fact is that those with some form of disability are as likely to choose work to which they are well suited as any other person when given the opportunity to do so. But, precisely because fewer seem able to access work than the population as a whole it is very likely that those who do work are of above average ability for the tasks that they undertake, assuming (I think entirely appropriately) that this suitability to undertake particular tasks is fairly normal distributed amongst the population as a whole.

Second, your assumption is that those who are disabled are a marginal group in society. I am not sure how you define marginal, but it seems to me that those with what you suggest to be disability are numerous and so anything but marginal.

Third, I would ask you to consider with care what you think might represent disability in

the context of inability to undertake an employment. For example, the mathematical abilities of many denies them access to a very wide range of work. In fact, a majority may be in that position in the country. But you are not apparently labelling them, or calling them marginal. It seems that your choice of definition is highly selective, and prejudiced.

Lastly, let me be clear that to measure productivity across the most able, or only those at work, is a particularly futile exercise that clearly suggests that you think only those undertaking some particular activities in society are of worth. We are not just a working population in the UK. We are a population as a whole. If you think productivity measures have changed because we have rising employment that offers opportunity to some previously denied it then it is not productivity that is at fault, but it is the measurement that is to blame. Those people now at work were previously in the population but denied the chance of employment. If that meant they were excluded from productivity calculations as a result that just shows that the calculations were wrong: the measure should have always been across those able and willing to work, and not just those able to find it. It would seem that you are unable to appreciate this obvious point and yet as a politician you are meant to represent all in society and not just those at work.

The consequence is that in the face of a problem to which you are not willing to provide answers, even though it is readily available in the form of new investment that your government could and should undertake at low or no marginal cost to the country because interest rates are so low at present, but to which you will not commit for purely ideological reasons, you have instead chosen to make offensive comments in the age old political game of seeking to find a scapegoat amongst those you consider more vulnerable for the ills you have created of your own volition. This is politics at its lowest common denominator. It reveals ignorance and prejudice on your part, and a willingness to blame and so intimidate, which are the sure signs of the bully.

It takes some effort for a politician to neatly encapsulate in a sentence or two why they are wholly unfit for high office. You managed it yesterday. If you had any decency you would resign.

Yours sincerely

Richard Murphy