

Can an ultra-wealthy person be a successful prime minis...

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A couple of times in the last week I have been on radio to discuss whether a really wealthy person could ever truly understand the country that they are governing and the needs of the people within it. LBC asked me this question on Thursday. Times Radio did yesterday.

My answer to the question is that in theory there is no reason why not. It must be possible for a person with considerable wealth to have the empathy to understand the position of the person who does not enjoy that privilege.

I did, however, add two things. The first was that this understanding is not commonplace in my experience. I have, as a result of my work, met quite a number of very wealthy people. I have not really spotted that ability to be that empathetic amongst almost any of them. More common was the lawyer, making approximately half a million a year, who sat in front of me once and assured me that "It's so hard to make ends meet, Richard".

The second point was that the exception seems to apply only where, despite their wealth, the person in question did not set store by that wealth, or rate it as what was important about them. In other words, the exceptional people had a deeply embedded personal philosophy that let them look beyond their own position to imagine not only what life might be like for those without their own good fortune, but also to imagine what could be done about their contrasting fortunes. These people were, I stress, the exceptions.

So could, in my opinion, a truly wealthy person be a successful prime minister? I reiterate that the answer has to be that it is possible. But reframe the question to ask can a person who espouses the accumulation of wealth, and who already enjoyed that privilege be a successful prime minister and my answer has to be that I do not think that possible. By definition, that person will think the person without wealth 'a loser' (as they would put it) and their empathy will be limited, at best. They will have chosen this position as an inherent foundation of their politics. Of course they cannot then ever really understand the position of the person who does not share their fortune, because

they do not want to.

And that is the problem that the right-wing has.

But what is your opinion? A poll:

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