

The far-right, autism, ADHD, SEND and the need to respe...

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Nigel Farage was at his very worst yesterday. [As The Guardian reported](#):

Nigel Farage has claimed that doctors are “massively over-diagnosing” children with special educational needs and disabilities (Send) and mental health conditions.

Asked at this press conference about the rising number of children diagnosed with Send, and what could be done to help them, Farage replied:

It's a massive problem. I have to say, for my own money, when you get to 18 and you put somebody on a disability register, unemployed, with a high level of benefits, you're telling people aged 18 that they're that they're victims. And if you are told you're a victim, and you think you're a victim, you are likely to stay [a victim].

So many of these diagnoses, for Send before 18, for disability register after 18 – so many of these have been conducted on Zoom, with the family GP.

I think that is a massive mistake. I think you're the family GP, and I've known your family for generations, and you're saying to me there's a real problem here with depression, or whatever it may be, it's quite hard for me as your GP to say no.

I don't think any of these allocations should be done by family GPs. I think should be done independently.

And I think we are massively – I'm not being heartless, I'm being frank – I think we are massively over-diagnosing those with mental illness problems and those with other general behavioural disabilities. And I think we're creating class of victims in Britain that will struggle ever to get out of it.

The suggestion made by Farage is utterly absurd. Start with the fact that he still thinks we have family doctors. We don't.

Then note that he thinks these doctors will have known families for 'generations'. They

haven't. You're lucky to see anyone more than once at my GP surgery.

And after that, note that he thinks doctors 'diagnose' autism and ADHD, which are the major issues he is actually referring to. Depression is not one of them, and it's absurd to suggest that it is. But they don't 'diagnose' these conditions, almost ever. That is a very specialist activity that they are not trained to do.

What is more, neither is even an illness: they are types of being. You discover them. You realise they exist. You don't, as such, diagnose them.

Nor is it the case that having either makes anyone a 'victim'. Nor does it condemn those with them, unless neurotypical people, like Farage, want to condemn them, as they too often do, with comments like these.

Either condition, or both together, provide a description of the way someone is wired. Neither is 'curable' any more than being left-handed is curable. Many of those who have these conditions would not want to be without them. If understood correctly, they can be superpowers, not reasons for concern. The problem we have is in adapting to the fact that people have these conditions, and in learning what those with them can contribute.

That adaptation is very much harder because neurotypical people with power want to keep people in little boxes where they might be controlled. Many people with ADHD and autism are highly creative. As such, they threaten the neoliberal order. Such people have always threatened power. I bet you the child who suggested the emperor was wearing no clothes had autism, ADHD, or both. That's why the control freaks, like Farage, want to stigmatise people with these conditions. Those who oppress and stigmatise are the problem. Those with ADHD and autism are not.

And yes, the numbers with such conditions appears to be growing. That is because they are becoming more apparent in a world where individuality, creativity, opportunity, and individualism are being eroded, meaning those possessed of these qualities stand out more. It is not that there are more of them. Instead, it's much more likely that many are now refusing to mask their conditions, which is good news. And if you do not know what masking is, look it up [here](#).

I was delighted to see this response from the National Autistic Society (in the same Guardian article)

The National Autistic Society has described Nigel Farage's comments about SEND children as "wildly inaccurate" and accused him of perpetuating "stigma" and making life harder for disabled people. Mel Merritt, head of policy and campaigns at the NAS, said:

Nigel Farage's comments are wildly inaccurate and show that he's completely out of

touch with what autistic children and adults have to go through to get a diagnosis or any support at all.

For the record, absolutely no one has got an autism diagnosis through the GP – this is just incorrect, wrong, fake news.

Children with Send and disabled adults, including autistic people, are not victims who are being ‘over diagnosed’. They are people who face huge delays and long fights to get the most basic support across every aspect of their lives, including diagnosis, education, health and social care.

Spreading misinformation only perpetuates stigma and makes life harder.

We’re calling on all politicians to drop the political point scoring and stand up for their autistic and other disabled constituents.

But let me stress that Farage's fascist requirement of uniformity in the population that he wishes to govern is not peculiar to him in UK politics. Kemi Badenoch has also been on this bandwagon, [**saying last October:**](#)

Being diagnosed as neuro-diverse was once seen as helpful as it meant you could understand your own brain, and so help you to deal with the world. It was an individual focused change. But now it also offers economic advantages and protections. If you have a neurodiversity diagnosis (e.g. anxiety, autism), then that is usually seen as a disability, a category similar to race or biological sex in terms of discrimination law and general attitudes.

She suggested that these diagnoses were being used to abuse the state.

The [**National Autistic Society**](#) responded to her then, saying:

“Kemi Badenoch’s comments and the statements in the ‘Conservatism in Crisis’ document are not only offensive to autistic people but detached from reality and demonstrate a fundamental lack of understanding of autism and disability.

“Politicians need to stop looking to the autistic community as a political football and instead recognise the difficulties and challenges that so many autistic people face in their daily lives. They need to engage in good faith to make a positive impact rather than dismissing their needs. Our charity would be happy to provide factual and evidence-based information about autism through one of our excellent autism awareness training sessions.

“Autistic people and their families face huge delays and long fights to get support across all aspects of their lives, including diagnosis, health, education and social care. It is greatly concerning that in 2024, elected politicians still don’t understand that autism is not a mental health condition and to say that ‘anxiety’ is a neurodivergent condition,

is completely incorrect.

"Being autistic doesn't offer economic advantages and protections, only three in 10 autistic people are in any form of employment, the lowest of any disability. Reasonable adjustments are in no way an immediate pathway into economic privilege, but a legal right to make sure autistic people can participate in work, education and live a dignified life.

"To say children with a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition, like autism, 'may well get better treatment or equipment at school' and 'even transport to school' is to misinterpret legal protections and adjustments that give young people access to the education they need and should be entitled to. Parents of autistic children have to fight too hard and too long for support; often having to pay for expensive legal battles, that overwhelming find in favour of families."

They are right.

Badenoch, like Farage, was wrong. What they want are standard, compliant people who will fit into the neurotypical neoclassical/neoliberal economic model to be productive economic units, as they deem us all to be. That requirement of uniformity is so built into that model that macroeconomics actually assumes that all people are entirely homogenous and can be represented by a single representative agent when considering how to manage the economy.

We are not uniform.

Our diversity is to be celebrated.

The far right does not do that. It wants to destroy that diversity.

In the States, the far-right health secretary, Robert Kennedy, is demanding that a register of people with autism be prepared. He is also promising a cure by September.

I think we can see where this is going. There are horrible precedents. **[Read this. Then worry.](#)**

And for the record, I suspect I have a great deal of experience of these issues.