

Why do some people HATE the poor?

I have been poor in my time. I grew up in a one-parent extended family when being a kid on free school meals was unusual. Luckily I did not know that it should also have been a topic of shame. I was, after all, a very naive child. Our poverty was not absolute. We could (I, my mum, my sister and my grandparents) go on holiday, even if it was only a caravan in a vast holiday park full of identical units up near Ambleside in Northumberland. I was a small, skeletally skinny child who liked digging holes in the sand. So for me, it was fine. But we were poor. Not 'starvation poor'. Just the kind of poor that meant there were more chips and eggs on the menu than most other people probably had. I grew anyway. I got taller. I remained 'spelk' thin. As I am today. Life exigencies train the body, even when you don't actually know it.

But now, after forty years of doughty work as a teacher in FE/HE, I am poor once again. Why? Did I mismanage my life? Yeah, maybe I did. I had no idea what a private pension was. I wanted to teach, out on the chalk-dusted floor, with students who were like me. I did what I was told: 'get on yer bike and find a job'. Good old Norman Tebbit... the man who fooled a whole generation into selling their souls for neoliberalism. Of course, I worked like an ass. I did as many hours as I could as a contractual worker (portfolio careers, they called them), not realising that NONE of the so-called socially concerned organisations I worked for all those years actually wanted to take reciprocal responsibility for my welfare. Irrespective of the amounts of work, income and innovation I created. They profited. I pocketed my hourly rate and thought myself lucky. What luck.

Today I'm seventy, and I live on the state pension and pension credit. I seek work, primarily because I still have self-respect, and though my body is far more frail than it was, my brain works better now than it did when I was small. But I resent living from pension day to pension day. I deeply resent having to plead fake incapacity when I literally have no money (because an unforeseen bill has arrived) and I can't meet a friend for coffee as planned. I resent being treated by people who would, in earlier years, have been one of my students as being a 'burden on the state'. I resent having to ask for financial help from friends (whom I love for their kindness but who I worry may think I'm profligate).

Resentment butters no parsnips. So I carry on.