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Working-class support for Republican policies is grounded in a rational shift from New Deal

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From Mr Daniel J. Aronoff.

Sir, Christopher Caldwell ("Democrats let their class slip", July 24) purports to explain the "anomaly" of working-class people in America supporting Republicans who are "cheapening their daily existence and endangering their way of life" by revealing these beer-sucking Bubbas to be cultural Neanderthals who cling to a semi-reactionary religious morality more represented by Republicans than Democrats. Adding insult to injury, Mr Caldwell exposes the cynical manipulation embodied in the "Republican strategy of turning elections into culture wars" knowing all the while that "the culture never gets fixed but these emotional issues allow Republicans to sidestep questions of economics and class".

The Democrats, meanwhile, are hampered by their honourable inability to dissimulate. For example, "no Democrat is going to stand on a dais . . . to welcome those who dissent from the party's platform on abortion - as Republicans have done at their last two national conventions".

Yet perhaps the American working class is less duped than Mr Caldwell supposes. Blue-collar workers are the largest group of taxpayers and the widespread perception that their share of the benefits of government largesse is below the level of their contribution has been borne out by numerous studies of the actual pattern of benefit of government expenditure.

"Bracket creep" placed many of these people in relatively high tax brackets by the 1980s and was a powerful impetus behind the "Reagan Democrat" phenomenon that reflected widespread discontent over the stagflation that policies of ever-increasing government expenditure and taxes had produced.

Most importantly, the two decades of job creation and rising incomes that have followed the Reagan revolution shift of political consensus away from the New Deal welfare state policies toward limited government and pro-market policies provide a rational basis for the majority of Americans to support continuation of those policies - and by all accounts they do.

It would be educational for Mr Caldwell to recall the campaign slogan that brought Bill Clinton - a Democrat who compromised party principles - into the White House; it's the economy, stupid.

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