

COMPASSIONATE CONSERVATISM

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given at Harlow Playhouse

Introduction

- I am delighted that Harlow is hosting the conference and welcomes all of you.
- Today we sit in the wonderful Playhouse Theatre in the heart of the new town.
- But the first new town in Harlow was built by the Romans and was an important hub of the Roman colonisation of Britain.
- So much so that Harlow derives its name from Harg meaning temple and Low meaning Hill.
- So I am glad that the CCF has come to the temple on the hill.

Harlow Traditions

- But there is another reason why the CCF coming to Harlow means so much.
- Harlow's tradition both through the ages and in modern times has always been one of compassion, of social justice and doing the right thing.
- Recently I have spent some time in the Harlow museum. Thanks to the effort of the museum's historian, Mr David Devine, I have learnt a thing or two about former politicians connected with the area.
- Take William Smith, an MP who lived here in the nineteenth Century. He was a great humanitarian. He devoted his time for fighting for the weak. He worked closely with William Wilberforce to abolish slavery. He also fought for the rights of dissenters and the rights of Jews.
- As someone who is Jewish myself, this is something that means a lot to me.
- Or John Perry Watlington elected a Conservative MP for South Essex in 1859. He established a reformatory school for youngsters was the benefactor of a number of almshouses and worked hard for the poor. John Watlington's great passion was for the Church and he paid for the restoration of local chapels.
- Since that time MPs as varied as Winston Churchill, Leah Manning, (a Christian Socialist who fought hard to establish the new town), Norman Tebbit, Stan Newens and Jerry Hayes have represented the area.
- Now I may have my political differences with my contemporary Bill Rammell. But I know that he follows this tradition too.

Conservatism and Social Justice

- So what is the purpose of this conference today?
- The themes are trust, family, community, education.
- All these things are central to modern conservatism. In fact I use the word modern wrongly, because they have been part of modern conservatism through the ages. Perhaps we have not

emphasised them enough?

- I am a Conservative, because I believe in social justice. I am a would be Parliamentarian because I want to help put it into practice.
- But what does social justice mean? Of course it can mean different things to different people.
- But there is a core of which I think all of us can agree. At home it means strengthening communities, a neighbourly society, a focus on the most vulnerable and care for the environment around us.
- Abroad it means helping those who are fighting for democracy and not standing by when there is mass genocide.
- As Conservatives it is our duty to do all we can to inspire and promote those people who are working hard to transform communities.
- That means supporting small shops and neighbourhoods, supporting our arts and culture and sustaining our environment. All these things are the building blocks of community.
- Our social entrepreneurs can do more to protect the weak than any government or politician. Because they work with the grain of communities rather than being imposed from on high, they have a strengthening effect.
- I have seen this at first hand in Harlow with all the incredible charitable work that goes on. I have seen it in large scale in Balsall Heath in Birmingham.
- Our policies of getting young people off the conveyer belt to crime through mentoring and tough drug rehabilitation, our policies to give more people choice over which school or hospital they choose are all designed to achieve these things.

Compassion Abroad

- I mentioned earlier that I was Jewish. I believe it must be our duty to do all we can to stop modern holocausts.
- When the world stood by and let 1 million Rwandans be massacred in 1994, it was to our eternal shame. When the world did something right and intervened to stop the massacre of innocents in the former Yugoslavia it was the right thing to do.
- Now are we in danger of standing by whilst mass genocide occurs again in Sudan?
- I strongly believe that given the failure of our international institutions to deal with these situations it is time for a new alliance of free nations to get together to do something about mass genocide, terrorism and dictatorial regimes.
- Most importantly, we can spread the ideals and practice of liberal democracy through trade, education and support for civil society movements everywhere. It is grassroots activity that strengthens communities, and there are social entrepreneurs working for freedom all over the world, even in the most brutal of regimes. I pay tribute here to all the faith-based organisations who are striving, often in the most dangerous of conditions, to achieve peace and harmony between peoples and social opportunity for all regardless of race, sex, religion or colour.

Conclusion

- The fact that this CCF conference is taking place at all is shows how seriously Conservatives are taking these issues.
- The fact that the CCF is taking place in a town with a proud history but with its fair share of social problems is a sign of just how inclusive the CCF message is.
- The fact that you have chosen a Jewish Parliamentary Candidate to help open your conference shows that it doesn't matter from what background or religion, Conservatism is open to all.
- A Conservatism which gives the best value for money to the taxpayer at its head and compassion, duty and responsibility to our neighbour at its heart.