

Introduction

Conference, it is an honour and a pleasure to be addressing you as a Liberal Democrat Member of Parliament and as your Shadow Foreign Secretary.

Now, I've been to a few parties and I hope I don't sound immodest when I say my experience of joining this party underlines that it was one of the best decisions I have ever made since going into politics.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for making me feel so welcome. I could not be more at home in the wonderful Liberal Democrat family.

And the decision to join was not made out of crude self interest...If self interest or climbing the greasy poll is your goal, I would not recommend following my example.

The truth is, all the incredibly difficult decisions I have made on the journey I've been on this year were routed in my values and principles. I joined this party out of conviction.

As you know, I am a Remainer and proud of it - we have spent far too long apologising for being pro-European in this country. Because you cannot be pro-Britain and put our national interest first without seeking to put Britain at the heart of Europe.

But, even more importantly, I am a social democrat with liberal values. You see, to be a Remainer is not only to be an advocate of our continued membership of the European Union; it is to hold a set of liberal, internationalist values of which we Liberal Democrats are the champions and defenders in Britain.

In an attempt to smear those of us who have an internationalist outlook, Theresa May said "if you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere". What utter garbage. We are citizens of the world and - just you watch - at the next election you will see Liberal Democrats taking seats from the Tories in every part of the country as so many people are flocking to us, the strongest and biggest Remain party.

Be in no doubt: this is the battle of our time and it goes far beyond Britain's borders.

What it is to be a liberal

Our party exists to build and defend a fair, free and open society, a society in which we seek to balance the fundamental values of liberty, equality and community, and in which no one shall be enslaved by poverty, ignorance or conformity.....That was taken straight from our constitution - as you can see, I've done my homework.

In essence, the society we seek to build is one where if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be free to lead a happy, prosperous and secure life free of domination of either the state or the market. And we want to ensure future generations can do the same by preserving our planet for the long term continuity of life in all its forms.

I grew up in world in which we took these values for granted.

As a family of mixed heritage - English, Irish and Nigerian - our back story, alongside that of millions of others, stands as an example of Britain's liberal, open, internationalist spirit.

The notion that we all share the same basic rights and should live together in peace, regardless of background is something we will always fight for.

That different cultures should be able to develop freely and that there is diversity in modern Britain is not something simply to be tolerated – it is something we positively celebrate.

And, whatever the political complexion, we will always demand our governments respect the rule of law, with an independent judiciary able to uphold those laws, free from abuse and attack by the Executive.

This is the Britain we know and love – and Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage and the peddlers of hate and division in our country better know that this is what we will fight for at the coming election.

It is our job to make sure this country's heart beats in a liberal and internationalist direction; not nationalist, populist authoritarianism. This is the new fault line in British politics and we know where we stand.

The liberal rules based international order

Because we recognise that these things cannot be achieved in isolation and that the pursuit of individual and social justice does not stop at the border, we seek to work together with other liberal democracies who share our values to overcome cross border obstacles to achieving our goals. As Menzies Campbell said at conference back in 2005, "in an inevitably interdependent world, cooperation is not only in our interests, it is essential to survival". And the best way to protect British interests, he argued, was "strong and effective multilateralism". He was right then and still is now.

That is why we are internationalists. That is why we are pro-European. Liberalism is needed at home to protect personal freedom and liberty; Liberalism and cooperation are also needed abroad to secure peace, promote democracy and defend human rights.

If we are elected, we will fight poverty, oppression, hunger, ignorance, disease and aggression wherever they occur and we will seek to promote the free movement of ideas, people, goods and services. Conference, there is no constructive ambiguity on this in this party.

So we support the liberal international rule-based order established in the wake of the Second World War which has underpinned liberal democracy across the globe and guarded against authoritarianism and oppression. The Atlantic Charter of 1941, of which the UK was a signatory, set out the framework for this order, its aims and values.

With the memory of fascism and the threat of communism, collective security was paramount and a robust national defence married to a passionate commitment to social and global justice was the goal.

Under the Charter, all countries would have the right to self-determination. All people the right to freedom of speech, of expression, of religion, and freedom from want and fear. The rule of law would be promoted. And this struck a chord with President Roosevelt's 'New Deal' – nations would collaborate to 'improve labour standards, economic advancement, and social security' for all.

It led to the international institutions which facilitate the multilateralism which is essential to maintaining this rules based order today: the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation; the IMF and the World Bank; and, of course, NATO to defend our democracies. In fact it was in the 1940s that the Liberals were the first UK political party to vote in favour of a European Union.

The EU, once it came into being, evolved to become not only an important lynchpin of this order on the continent but it expanded this order to cover Central and Eastern Europe states too. In government, we will seek to maximize British influence in all these institutions and play the most active possible role because, as Liberals, we put our values into action.

There is no better an example of this than the late, great Paddy Ashdown, whose life and achievements we remember this week.

As the first High Representative in Bosnia Paddy pulled together multilateral resources and created the political will to push ahead with political reforms. In a lesson that still rings true today, Paddy often liked to say that "if the international community is united, there is absolutely nothing we *cannot* do in the Balkans. If the international community is divided, there is absolutely nothing we *can* do in the Balkans."

Of course, the first thing we will do in Government is revoke Article 50 so that, once again, the British people can resume their role of providing leadership as a full and active member of the European Union.

This order is imperfect. It must do far better at reducing inequality and fostering a more inclusive global economic system. But however flawed it may be, this liberal international order has none the less created peace and prosperity.

It helped transform states which had been aggressive autocracies – Germany and Japan – into liberal democracies.

The trade it has opened up between countries helped ensure global competition no longer resulted in military conflict. In turn, this has helped lift hundreds of millions out of poverty and people are more healthy than before.

Furthermore, the liberal democracies that fall within the order have, in the main, also provided better protection of the rights and civil liberties of their peoples.

And Extreme nationalism was forced to retreat.

Yet the advances made then are now at risk.

The decline of the liberal rules based order and the need for renewal

Today it is that liberal international order that is now in retreat. As a result the world is becoming a more dangerous place. Consider what has happened since Conference gathered last year.

If his attempted travel ban for muslims and scapegoating of Mexican immigrants were not enough to convince you that far Right politics has entered the White House, we have watched President Trump telling four congresswomen of colour to “go home.” It is racism, pure and simple. What a disgrace.

Abroad he is seeking to pull the US out of the Paris Climate agreement, he is flouting WTO rules in the pursuit of what he calls “fair trade”, and he has pulled the US out of the Iran nuclear deal.

In China, we are witnessing violent and repressive scenes in Hong Kong with the disproportionate use of force against the protests calling into question China’s commitment to upholding Hong Kong’s way of life and the “two systems, one country” model which demands the rule of law, human rights and democracy be observed.

Russia’s President Putin has claimed international “liberalism is obsolete” and at the same time made remarks which amounted to thinly veiled homophobia. He also suggested Trump’s racist rhetoric was justified given immigrants kill, plunder and rape with impunity. This of course is the man who went into another country – Ukraine – and annexed part of it, Crimea.

In Kashmir, the abolition of the region’s special status by the Indian government, and the unrest and human rights abuses we have seen subsequently in the area, should be a cause of alarm around the world.

In short, across the world, nationalist populism - the pernicious mantra that nations should be homogeneous and one people is superior to another - is making strides. Matteo Salvini and his Northern League dominate Italian politics. Viktor Orban has

distorted public life in Hungary to monopolize power there. President Erdogan and President Jair Bolsonaro are undermining democracy in Turkey and Brazil respectively.

So a giant battle is raging globally, between the pluralist, progressive creed of liberal democracy on the one hand and a desiccated authoritarianism on the other.

Let us be clear: the Liberal Democrats are the only party that can get into office which is capable of meeting this challenge in Britain today.

Only the Liberal Democrats are capable of renewing international liberalism

You see, you cannot defend a liberal, rules based order abroad if you so openly flout the rules at home.

Boris Johnson has facilitated the takeover of Her Majesty's Government by the remnants of Vote Leave campaign – an outfit that was not only was found guilty of lying during the 2016 referendum in relation to its claims on the NHS by the Statistics Authority, but it was found guilty of cheating and breaking the law by the Electoral Commission.

Now, as he seeks to force through a catastrophic “no deal” Brexit, the Prime Minister has shut down Parliament and is threatening to break the law if necessary. The Tory right, who have taken over their party, like nothing more than to bang on about incarcerating more and more people who break the law, but strangely think a different approach should be adopting in relation to their law breaking.

And, as he seeks to force the UK out of the EU, he will become ever reliant on President Trump, whose political playbook he follows. But President Trump has always been clear - it will be America not Britain First.

Beyond Brexit and cosing up to President Trump, no one seems to know what the foreign policy strategy of this government is. What is clear is that we will not see the leadership on the world stage required from the new occupant of No 10. He likes to think of himself as a modern Winston Churchill. Churchill was of course the Prime Minister who signed the Atlantic Charter and played a private role founding the liberal international order – Boris Johnson has been busy kicking his relatives out of the Tory party.

This brings me to the Opposition. The Labour Party likes to think of itself as a champion of liberal values at home and abroad. Clement Attlee and Ernest Bevin played pivotal roles in the founding of NATO but this is not the party of Attlee and Bevin; this is Jeremy Corbyn's Labour.

You cannot be a champion of liberalism if you are currently subject to a formal investigation by the Equality & Human Rights Commission for institutional racism against Jewish people. You cannot be a champion of liberalism when your leader's

supporters think it is acceptable to abuse, vilify and deselect anyone who dares to question the leader. And you cannot claim to be liberal when the political editor of the BBC needs to take a bodyguard to your conference.

And then you look at Jeremy Corbyn's foreign policy positions. Acting as an apologist for a hard-right -Russian government that thinks it can poison people on British soil, lauding authoritarian regimes in Venezuela and Iran, failing to support the prescription of Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation. Attlee and Bevin helped found NATO – Jeremy Corbyn and those around him want to abolish it.

Of course what unites both Johnson and Corbyn is the fact that they want to leave the EU, the organisation which has been the biggest champion of liberalism in our part of the global neighbourhood. Neither is fit to lead this country.

Its time for a change and someone who I know can provide that leadership: Jo Swinson.

Conclusion

Under Jo's premiership we can breathe a progressive breath of fresh air into the British foreign policy.

Liberal Democrats are internationalists. This is at the heart of who we are as a party, it flows through everything we do.

We believe in tearing down walls, not building them. We believe in working together through multilateral organisations, not standing alone.

And we believe that to tackle the biggest issues facing us today, from the climate emergency to terrorism, we need to ensure that the UK is at the table, achieving consensus internationally.

Perhaps now more than ever, UK foreign policy is yearning for clear liberal, democratic values. A Liberal Democrat government would not be tied to outdated tropes or biases, but would be clear that the UK must continue to work with allies from across the world, playing a leading role in the EU and other international institutions.

With Jo as our Prime Minister we will revive our reputation on the world stage and get on with helping to improve the lives of those across the world.

As Liberal Democrats we have a duty to do this, to defend the values of human rights, democracy, and equality.

And as your Liberal Democrat Shadow Foreign Secretary I can promise you that I will stand up for a truly global Britain.

Thank you.

