

Newsletter – ‘Review and rebuild: around the Tory Party Conference with your CIBUK’

Demob happy seemed to be the prevailing mood among delegates at this year’s gathering in Birmingham following the Conservative Party’s catastrophic election defeat at the hands of the voters in July.

Unshackled from the burdens of office, MPs and ex-MPs finally came clean about the mistakes the party made in office which left one wondering why they didn’t act on them much sooner.

Your correspondent did his best to get round the events but on two issues critical to our campaign – immigration and Brexit – there were only two debates over the entire four days and both were massively oversubscribed.

However, there was plenty of lively debate going on elsewhere. What follows is a brief report on some of those other discussions which we will continue to campaign on.

Popular Conservatism

We begin at the top with aspiring Party leader Robert Jenrick MP talking to Mark Littlewood in a jammed marquee just outside the main convention centre.

On leaving the European Convention on Human Rights

The MP for Newark said his decision that we leave the ECHR is not ideological. It is based on outrageous case law which

prohibits the UK being able to extradite well-known criminals responsible for the most heinous crimes.

'Reform of ECHR is a fantasy'

He said reform would require unanimity among all signatories to the treaty and that would simply not happen.

Instead, he advocates a British Bill of Rights drawn up by UK lawyers as our answer to the ECHR.

'System of government is fundamentally broken'

From Covid and immigration to planning and infrastructure, he has concluded that our system of government is not fit for purpose and needs root and branch reform.

On the NHS

'We were more concerned with inputs than outputs.'

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'Civil Service is too large and unwieldy'

Jenrick claimed that you could reduce the civil service by 100,000 and still it would be bigger than it was in 2015. Across Whitehall departments he says there is a pervasive

monoculture with little or no accountability and an aversion to risk and initiative.

On Reform UK

'Reform is a symptom not a cause of our failure.' Jenrick urges Conservatives not to disparage Reform voters but steal their clothes instead.

On candidate selection

He believes the culture of the Party needs to change and that power needs to return to the members with local candidates selected by the local membership.

The future of the Conservative Party

Elsewhere, your correspondent felt honour-bound to attend the European Research Group debate on the future of His Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Sir John Redwood and Sir Bill Cash, long-standing supporters of CIBUK, were the principal speakers with Rt Hon Mark Francois MP chairing the discussion.

'Unleash our energy'

Reiterating the points he has made at our Global Discussion Forum, Sir John emphasised the need for traditional Conservative economic policies of low tax, light regulation and free market enterprise as the best generators of wealth.

'We need to do more and make more'

Citing the madness of the government's dash to net zero, Sir John lambasted the decision to close the blast furnaces in Scunthorpe and the steel works in Port Talbot. Why is the UK importing steel from overseas which merely adds to global emissions instead of manufacturing it here at home? The UK now has some of the most expensive energy in the world which will act as a damaging break on any future economic growth.

'Chaffing against the undemocratic EU'

Sir Bill emphasised how important it was to campaign on the benefits of Brexit and went on to explain that millions all over Europe are desperate to leave the EU themselves.

'ECHR – hijacked by judicial activism'

He endorsed Robert Jenrick's decision to leave the European Convention of Human Rights, and said we now have the power to override international treaties.

'Reform should be folded into the Conservative Party'

In his concluding remarks, Sir Bill said the Conservative Party needed to outflank Reform rather than oppose it.

"Populism outside parliament is to some extent irrelevant because Labour has a huge parliamentary majority [and]... can pass anything they like no matter what the public protests outside. The Conservative Party is the only vehicle that can make inroads into that in five years' time and Reform should be folded into the Conservative Party to achieve that objective."

Young Conservatives

The future of any political party – indeed any nation – depends on its youth which is why your correspondent chose to attend this fringe event in the Disraeli Theatre, a small, break-out space on the ground floor of the International Convention Centre, where Paul Holmes, MP for Hamble Valley spoke to a cluster of young activists on the merits of joining the Conservative Party.

A focus on apprenticeships, affordable housing and support for business start-ups were among the policies discussed. These must surely be at the heart of any future manifesto if the party is to connect with young voters again.

University Challenged

A similar exchange took place in one of the executive suites high up on the fifth floor of the ICC.

Advocating the merits of degree-apprenticeships, Jesse Norman MP cited the example of Hereford University which recruits local school-leavers on accelerated courses sponsored by local businesses.

The last green-field university of this kind to be built was the University of Buckingham way back in 1974.

Anecdotal evidence suggests this model of higher education may be the future particularly in the fields of data analytics, digital and artificial intelligence.

Jenny Taylor from the IBM graduate-apprentice programme says 90% of applications are school-leavers, leading to very well-paid careers at the end of their course.

On Russell Group Universities

At £60k per pupil, a three-year academic course is hugely expensive, with little accountability in terms of its value.

According to latest information, the net cost to the taxpayer for men doing arts degrees is £100k.

As ever it remains to be seen whether the present Labour government will continue to roll-out these apprenticeships or not.

The great energy debate

‘More people die from cold than from heat.’

It fell to Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg, ably backed up by Neil Record of Net Zero Watch to inject some sanity into the climate change debate which threatens to destroy our economy if the transition is not managed in a sustainable way.

‘Electricity prices are high because of our system costs...we have the highest prices in the world.’

The arguments have been made many times and do not need repeating here. Suffice to say we will still need gas and nuclear power in 2050 irrespective of advances elsewhere.

Furthermore, the idea that India and China, two of the biggest users of fossil fuels will pay the slightest attention to whatever we do here is hopelessly naïve.

‘The rules on fracking are mad’

As Sir Jacob pointed out, under current rules you can frack to a depth of 200ft for oil, but you are not permitted to go any

deeper in search of gas. If you need final proof of this country's mad attitude towards energy production, this is surely it.

And finally

To anyone who can bear it, a link to the leadership candidates' final conference speeches can be accessed [here](#).