TIM FARRON SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION

On the 26th April 2016 the Cambridge Union Society welcomed Tim Farron MP, the leader of the Liberal Democrats. Tim Farron began by focusing on Brexit. He stated that the ‘referendum result was not only about Europe’. He refused to believe that the proponents of Brexit actually believed ‘what was on the side of that flipping bus’ and if they did they were now ‘being shown to be thoroughly naïve. Mr Farron stated that the Brexiteers had an intention to take us out of every connection with our neighbours, resulting in Britain becoming a smaller and less influential state. He claimed that the referendum was not about whether we were in or out of Europe but ‘whether or not we were a civilised country’.

Tim Farron continued to address the notion of British values. He recounted The Sun’s recent campaign to sack Gary Lineker as an affront to such values. In its smear campaign against Gary Lineker, The Sun gave the impression that it was ‘okay to demonise young, desperate people’. Furthermore, the Prime Minister’s plans to expand grammar schools were not a good idea. Tim Farron spoke against the idea that it is a good idea to test children aged eleven. He admitted that there will be success stories of children coming out of grammar school, but that does not weigh against the fact that 99 of every 100 children that need good education will be locked out of the system. Tim Farron then moved on to the NHS, asking whether we had the best national health service in Europe. In terms of access to the health service and staffing, Tim Farron believed we had the number one spot, but conceded that the NHS does not deliver the best results.

The leader of the Liberal Democrats called on the chamber stated he needed ‘people like you like to stiffen’ Theresa May’s back. He stated that he was not a nationalist but a patriot, as patriot’s love their country whereas nationalists tend to hate their neighbours. He wanted a Britain that he opens its doors, as it did to refugees fleeing Idi Amin, and was a space for business to thrive. He wanted a ‘decent Britain’. Tim Farron implored we ‘cannot give up our country to nationalism’. Asked about to what extent the country’s wish to leave the EU referendum should be respected, Tim Farron said ‘we have to accept there was a majority’ to leave. He distanced himself from those like David Lammy MP who had called for the result to be ignored. But he said that ‘we did not vote to leave the single market’ and the new deal should be ‘put to the people in a referendum’ with ‘an option to stay’. He believed what triggered people to leave was George Osborne’s punishment budget. Tim Farron was next asked a question about our borders. He recognised that immigration was one of the pre-eminent reasons for Brexit, but it was fuelled by the misrepresentation of information. People were not drawn to recognise that the average immigrant is young, working and paying tax, while the average British emigrant is older and cost another countries health service. He was not advocating for open borders without checks, but taking a few hundred immigrants is a ‘hideous’ representation of our national character. Tim Farron believed we could we could take as many as 60,000. When asked about the efforts the Liberal Democrats put into the referendum campaign, Mr Farron believed that in terms of actions of the ground, his party organised more events than Labour and the Conservatives.
combined. He had wanted to portray an emotional and winning message to the nation, but the media found conservative infighting more interesting. As a result of the referendum result, Mr Farron stated that ‘David Cameron will be remembered as an even worse Prime Minister than Gordon Brown’, by taking the gamble in calling the referendum to sort out Tory infighting.

Asked about the current state of Labour, Tim Farron stated that it ‘breaks his heart’. Traditionally the Conservative party was seen as ‘the enemy’ and Labour as ‘the competition’, but now the Labour party has ‘lost its way’. In the aftermath of the last general election, Mr Farron claimed that he had realised the party’s ‘greatest challenge’ would be ‘relevance’. He wants his party to be the real opposition to the Conservatives, because ‘nobody thinks the Jeremy Corbyn will be Prime Minister’. But Jeremy Corbyn being the leader of Labour is a ‘blessing in disguise’ as it may may show to the UK that the only plausible way for the UK not to have a Conservative government is the Liberal Democrats.

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For footage of the event go to https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc

Saturday, 29 October 2016