

The Independent Group and anti semitism

Yesterday we had a moving and important debate in the House about the rise of anti Semitism in the UK. Most of us agreed that it is a nasty racism which no-one in a decent democracy should have to confront. James Brokenshire made a powerful speech for the government setting out how we must all take action to prevent it. The Labour spokesman Barry Gardiner apologised to the Jewish community on behalf of the Labour party and confessed that there has been a strand of virulent anti Semitism within Labour that they need to control. He spoke with passion and feeling.

The new Independent grouping of Labour MPs were well represented. They gave good support to Luciana Berger who catalogued the abuse she has faced from Labour party members and social media for her Jewish ancestry. Another group of active Labour MPs sitting on the two back benches behind their Shadow Spokesman also delivered powerful asides and interventions, demanding that their party did more than just offer an apology but tackled the backlog of cases that have been referred to the National Executive alleging anti Semitism. They showed considerable sympathy for their former colleagues and expressed similar feelings. They were keen to see the expulsion of Derek Hatton, recently admitted to the Labour party again.

Into this emotional rift came the resignations of three Conservative MPs from the Conservative party. They too wish to be seen as independent, though it is not clear they are the same kind of independent as the Labour group. Their reasons seemed somewhat different to the Labour explanations given the day before. They have yet to articulate exactly what they want to stand for, or why they have moved away from the 2017 Conservative Manifesto with its clear pledge to leave the EU and its customs union and single market in order to fulfil the mandate of the EU referendum. They say in general terms they object to the very Brexit which helped get the Conservatives elected, and that they think the modernising agenda has been overthrown. They also dislike austerity, which ironically came from the modernisers David Cameron and George Osborne that they professed to like.

The Labour independents have said they are not forming a new party and will not be contesting elections. The polling assuming they would shows them capturing just 14% of the vote, mainly at the expense of Labour who go down to 28%, and squeezing the Liberal Democrats down to 7%. The sense from yesterday is the main reason they have split from Labour is one of attitude and tone from the leadership. They dislike Mr Corbyn and dislike the intolerance they find in the party. Others might follow them judging by the reactions of some other Labour MPs during the debate.

The Conservative party will come together again as soon as we are out of the EU. It has been the delay in our exit for 2 years 9 months that has allowed the argument about how and when to fester. The Labour party has deeper seated disagreements within it which pose a problem for the leadership. At

Prime Minister's Question time neither leader wanted to mention the difficult topic of defections.