

## Tories' gay views 'have changed'

**Tory frontbencher Nick Herbert says there has been a "self-evident" change in his party's attitude to gay people.**

In a speech in the US, the shadow environment secretary will promise action on homophobic bullying and hate crimes, with new laws if necessary.

Mr Herbert, who is gay, will argue the Tories once "drove away" millions of potential voters, but is now part of the consensus for "progress".

But Labour has said the Tories maintain a "deep strain of homophobia".

Conservative leader David Cameron has previously apologised for Section 28 - the controversial law brought in by his party in 1988 banning local authorities from portraying homosexuality in a positive light.

### 'Clear pink water'

Mr Herbert will give a speech at the Cato Institute in Washington DC on the theme "Is there a place for gay people in conservatism and conservative politics?"

He will say: "Conservatives should always believe that everyone should have an equal chance in life, regardless of any other factors, and that they should not be discriminated against."

**" We will speak out when countries abuse the human rights of gay people, as we should speak out when any human rights are abused. "**

Nick Herbert, Conservatives

He will add: "In the UK, all three major political parties are now assuring gay people that it's safe to vote for them.

"Typically, far from taking pleasure in this new consensus, the Left has greeted it with dismay.

"For over a decade they have sought to build a client state, where groups are beholden to their generosity. And now they want to open up 'clear pink water' between themselves and the Conservative Party...

"But we self-evidently have changed... The truth is that there are millions of people who we drove away but who share our values and want to join us."

Mr Herbert told the BBC that, if the Tories win a majority at the next general election they will have at least 15 openly gay MPs - which, he argued, was likely to be more than Labour.

### Homophobic bullying

He will add: "If we form the next government, we intend to entrench the progress made on gay equality, and to move the agenda forward.

"If there is a need for new laws, we will consider them."

Mr Herbert, who represents Arundel and South Downs, will say: "We will take the strongest stand against the homophobic bullying of children in schools, as we should take a stand against all bullying - and we will not allow our support for faith schools to undermine that stand.

"We will insist on action against hate crime where gay people are the victims, as we should insist

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on action against all hate crime which incites fear and violence.

"We will speak out when countries abuse the human rights of gay people, as we should speak out when any human rights are abused."

Last July, Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw claimed that "a deep strain of homophobia still exists on the Conservative benches" and Chris Bryant, another gay minister, said: "If gays vote Tory they will rue the day very soon."

The Tories reacted angrily to the comments, with frontbencher Alan Duncan saying they showed that Labour was "actually the nasty party".

Story from BBC NEWS:

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