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The Left does not own the gay vote, says Nick Herbert

David Bridle of Boyz magazine [recently wrote for ConservativeHome](#) about how instinctively Conservative gay people could now vote Tory again.

Earlier today Nick Herbert MP, Shadow DEFRA Secretary, talked about the Conservative Party's attitude to homosexuality with leading gay rights campaigner Andrew Sullivan. They were interviewed on the Today programme and you can listen again [here](#).

On Saturday, [interviewed for The Guardian](#), Mr Herbert explained why he had decided to become much more outspoken, as a gay Tory, in support of gay rights:

"Herbert, MP for Arundel and South Downs, initially regarded himself as an MP who happened to be gay and was annoyed to be described as "gay Eurosceptic" by the Times. But his view changed. "What I have discovered is it is incredibly important for others that they see gay people succeeding in politics without impediment. I have realised it matters to people, I have realised from the emails I get not just from people who are interested in politics but to others – to young people who email me and say thank you for taking out a civil partnership, thank you for taking a stand."



Later today, alongside Andrew Sullivan, Mr Herbert will deliver a speech on gay equality in Washington DC. Five of his key messages are posted below:

Gay people don't want special treatment, just equality: "People often speak of gays as though we are a society apart from the rest, living in our own quarter. And a few choose to be apart. But most of us don't. We live in every city and town. We are businessmen and women. We run shops and stack shelves. We labour on farms and in factories. We are fire fighters and police officers. We save lives in hospitals. We fight for our countries and sometimes we die for our countries. Some of us are extraordinary, but mostly we are quietly ordinary. We are not different. And we don't want to be different. We're not asking for special treatment."

The Conservative Party may soon have more openly gay MPs than Labour: "At the last election, of our 193 MPs elected, just 17 were women, only two black or minority ethnic and two were openly gay. If we were truly representative of the country we would have 99 women, 16 black or minority ethnic and 10 gay MPs. So our party leadership recognised the need to change. Change because we are a national party which needs to be able to speak to, and speak up for, all sections of society in all parts of the country. As David Cameron [said on Monday](#), "Unless you can represent everyone in our country you cannot be a one nation party." Change because we need to reconnect politics with a public who are increasingly disillusioned with a political class. And change because it was the right thing to do – to promote an environment where people can succeed and live without fear, regardless of their gender, colour or sexuality. We now

have more female candidates, more black and minority ethnic candidates and more gay candidates. In fact, if we secure a majority in the House of Commons of just one seat, we are likely to have more openly gay MPs on our benches than the Labour Party."

Conservatives support recognising gay partnerships: "In his first speech to the Conservative Conference as Leader of the Party – a major event which brings together party activists from across the country – David Cameron said something extraordinary. Defying the critics who claimed that party leaders could no longer express a moral preference for the institution, he spoke of the importance of commitment and marriage as the bedrock of our society. But then he added: "and by the way, it means something whether you're a man and a woman, a woman and a woman, or a man and another man." And when he said these words, the delegates applauded. Not a half-hearted ripple of applause, but a spontaneous burst of approbation."

The Left does not own gay people: "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... Gay people are not the property of the Left, or of any party. They are not an interest group or a political commodity to be traded. They are not vessels for votes. Gay people are motivated by the same issues as any other voter. They will vote for the political party which best sits with their views – so long as that party does not make itself taboo."

A Conservative government will defend gay rights at home and abroad: "We will show leadership in demanding action to tackle homophobic abuse in sport, where behaviour and role models can exert such a powerful influence on young people... as we should demand action against all abusive behaviour on the playing fields. 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 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."

Mr Herbert concludes his speech by saying that he wants to help build a society "where the Prime Minister of the UK or the President of the United States could just as easily be gay as black."

Where there is clear water between the Conservatives and Labour is in the Tory determination to defend the freedom of religious bodies to run their own affairs in a way consistent with their beliefs. Unfortunately Nick Herbert and David Cameron both supported forcing Catholic adoption agencies to place children with gay couples; adding to the right of gay people to adopt an attack on religious freedom. The party has been much better on other aspects of freedom of association, recently opposing Labour's changes to the Equality Bill. Nick Herbert's speech today will be welcomed by most Tories but he needs to avoid political correctness in his support for diversity. In addition to his record on freedom of religious organisation he is also an enthusiastic supporter of initiatives such as All Women Shortlists. Candidates of every background must progress on merit - as Nick Herbert himself did - and not by new forms of discrimination.

You can watch the speech live at 5pm (UK time) from Washington's Cato Institute.

Tim Montgomerie

Posted at 12:18 in [Compassionate conservatism](#), [Faith](#), [Family and relationships](#) | [Permalink](#)

Comments



Edward Huxley said...

Not again! Why the preoccupation with all these minority groups?

This pandering to them is frankly nauseating.