



Chichester Labour Party - Standing Up To Racism

Speech from Chichester Labour Party at the Stand Up To Racism Unity Rally: September 2025.



What on earth's going on in this country?

We see the return of far-right protests – echoes of fascist groups from the last century; we see flags on lamp posts put up, not to unite us, but to divide us and set us one against another. We even see American money funding the far-right in the UK, undermining our democracy and dragging us into the 'post-fact' world that we see over there.

That's why I'm here today. Like you I'm distressed that extremists, led by some from out of town, are marching to a hotel where women and children refugees are having to stay. Intimidating them is not free speech. It's cruelty.

Now, everyone has a right to protest – that's important to our democracy. But this isn't just people exercising their right to free speech, it's not just another protest in England's history. I've been on a lot of protests myself but this is different! These groups are spreading hatred, lies and racism, and creating fear where they go.

And too often, demonstrations involving far-right groups tend to be violent. We've seen this in Knowsley, Plymouth, Glasgow, Epping, London ... and so on.

The protesters that we see in the street today are eating away at the heart of this country. It's setting neighbour against neighbour. 'Othering', where they look for people to blame for whatever takes their fancy today maybe unemployment, violence on our streets or housing shortages. The easiest target to blame is of course those who come here in need of help or refuge.

Well, they don't speak for us. They may be in Chichester but they are not marching in our name. We need to put a stop to this and we need to do it soon.

Fortunately we've been here before and we know how to win.

We can learn from the past

In 1941, Clement Attlee said: "... the greater the common interest, the stronger the nation in peace as well as in war. ... By playing on the rivalries and jealousies of the nations [Hitler] devoured them.

This is a battle about values and the kind of country we want to be.

So we're standing here to show solidarity with those who seek unity rather than division, compassion rather than self-interest, friendship rather than hatred, and peaceful resolution of differences rather than violence.

To be fair, I think those are the values which take most people into politics – they are certainly what brought me to the Labour party. But politics is moving to the right. Away from consensus around the social contract that has defined the UK for the last 50 years, towards ‘personality politics’ where extreme views can come to the fore, supported by external money and social media.

And I understand why some people are drawn in. It’s a lot easier to be generous and caring when you feel secure. But many don’t. They’ve lived through the global financial crisis, through austerity that followed, through Covid, through inflation, and through government policies that never quite seem to meet their needs. They feel ignored and left behind. It’s no wonder that they look for hope in a new form of politics which makes wild promises than it can never deliver. But when politics and politicians spread hate instead of hope, something is deeply wrong.

What can we do? How to replace Hate with Hope and Compassion?

Jo Cox – MP for Batley and Spen - who was sadly murdered in 2016 famously said: We have far more in common than that which divides us.

She was right. Survey after survey shows that the values shared by the vast majority of people in this country are of fairness and compassion. We differ on many things, but those underlying beliefs unite us. By standing together today, we prove that extremists do not speak for us.

But we can and must do a lot more. As Atlee said, we mustn’t let them divide us. I know that, like others, I can be guilty of speaking not listening, thinking I have the answers and that any alternative is wrong. But it’s never that easy. Black-and-white are joined by an infinitely long greyscale where a single truth can be difficult to find, and opinion prevails.

We can do more, we must listen and understand why our reasonable neighbours are taking this path. As I said, not everyone who joins these protests is a hardened extremist. We need to listen, share our views and show that our values of fairness, compassion and hope can prevail if we work together. We need to take the discussion beyond the ranting that happens on social media or on the streets to a more reasoned debate between the majority of people who want to understand each other and make life better for everyone, not just themselves.

Above all, we can’t stay silent. In whatever way we can as individuals, we have to stand up to hatred, we have to stand up to racism, and we have to stand up to the bullying tactics of a few extremists. Unity has carried us through wars and covid in the past. It can carry us through this.

The real danger today is not of a noisy march or a few broken road signs. The real danger today is allowing divisive and hateful ideologies to take root in our communities. If that happens we’re lost.

The good news is that hatred only thrives when no alternative is offered. Our task is to show that there *is* an alternative - and that it is better.

From within the Labour Movement I’m proud that we have a long history of standing up to fascism.

In 2018, Emily Thornberry said: “We beat the Blackshirts, and the NF, and the BNP, and the EDL, and whatever they call themselves today, however they dress up their racial hatred, we are there in the same streets telling the fascists: ‘No Pasaran.’” (They shall not pass).

Together we will prevail. Together we will defend the values that define us and our country. On behalf of Chichester Labour I’m proud to stand alongside others who are doing so much to defend those values and help lead us through these difficult times.

Remember, this is about the kind of country we are, and the kind of country we want to be. We need to be united in defence of it.

Phil White.

Chair, Chichester Labour Party