

KEYNOTE SPEECHES - DIALOGUE SOCIETY'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND AWARDS CEREMONY

Ladies and gentlemen, as Shahid pointed out right at the beginning, when you're rather a long way down the batting order, you find that everybody said everything already that you want to say. So, you've got to think of something that's different, and I thought to myself, "I'm going to be a long way down the batting order tonight, what can I do tonight that's different?" And then I had a brilliant idea. "I know. I'll be the only person at a lounge soup dinner to wear evening dress." It worked. [applause] And I'm sure, being the sort of society you are, you are going to tolerate this sort of dissidence.

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EVENT TYPE

AWARDS CEREMONY

EVENT TITLE

KEYNOTE SPEECHES -
DIALOGUE SOCIETY'S 10TH
ANNIVERSARY DINNER AND
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SPEAKER(S)

DR JULIAN LEWIS MP,
SHADOW DEFENCE MINISTER

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Now, I want to say a word about toleration. It's the only thing that I disagree with the teenage speaker about. Of course, he's absolutely right. Of course you want to get to a stage of acceptance. Of course you want to get to a stage of embracing diversity. But let's hear it for tolerance who as I prefer to say toleration as well, because that is the first step. It is terribly important to realise that the reason why communities are divided is mutual fear. And if you are going to overcome mutual fear, you're not going to do it in one fell swoop and I think this is the message that the Dialogue Society has for us. You do it patiently, you do it slowly, you do it quietly, and you do it by stages. And I believe that toleration is the first and the most vital stage on the way to positive embracing of difference and diversity. So, please don't knock it.

There was a famous philosopher who says, Karl Popper, whom you have certain amounts about what happened in societies where toleration isn't allowed. And he said, the keynote for a democratic society is that you must tolerate all but the intolerant, because if you tolerate the intolerant, then the conditions for toleration disappear and the tolerant go with that. I believe that toleration is the watch bird, and it was very interesting to see that in the many presentations that we saw in the video, you had person after person, praising and applauding the Dialogue Society. But you could equally have made a video that would have a lot of people who would have been very concerned about the activities of the Dialogue Society indeed. Those people would be religious figures. Those people will be authoritarians. Those people would be the prejudiced. Those people would be the supporters of extreme socialism or extreme fascism or extreme anything else you care to name because extremes and toleration are holes of heart.

And so there must be some people out there who are very worried indeed about what the Dialogue Society is doing because what the Dialogue Society is doing is to recognise that the reason why Britain is such a great society in which to live is that we welcome people, we tolerate people, and we learn eventually to embrace people. I am thrilled to be associated with this organization. I come from a minority religious group myself. I know where prejudice leads. And I know what this country can do to promote tolerance first and then acceptance. May you go from strength to strength, and may we all meet in such a fine place as this in another 10 years' time to

celebrate another fine record of achievement and on that occasion, maybe I'll get the dress code right.