



Guest star: Michael Howard at the charity breakfast

JOHN RIFKIN

Howard renews attack on O'Brien at JNF breakfast

BY BERNARD JOSEPHS

OPPOSITION LEADER Michael Howard kept up his criticism of Energy Minister Mike O'Brien when addressing JNF fund-raisers in London last Thursday.

At a breakfast staged by the charity's Negev campaign committee, Mr Howard denounced the Muslim Weekly article in which Mr O'Brien accused him of harbouring a negative attitude towards British Muslims.

Mr Howard told breakfasters that the recent increase in anti-Semitic

incidents in Britain was "a danger we must be alert to."

That was "why I found it so terribly disappointing that a government minister used an article in Muslim Weekly to engage in a personal attack on me and Evan Harris [the Liberal Democrat MP also criticised in the piece, for not supporting legislation designed to ban religious discrimination]."

"It can hardly have been a coincidence that about the only thing Evan Harris and I have in common is that we are both Jewish. Politics that seeks to divide Britons in such a way is a politics that harms us all."

Turning to the Middle East, Mr Howard praised the JNF for "helping to give the people of Israel a land of which they can be proud."

Praising Israel's Ariel Sharon for pushing ahead with the disengagement process, he stressed that the Israel-Palestinian conflict had "not only robbed Israeli children of their parents, but also Palestinian mothers of their sons. The suffering of both peoples has been great."

He called on the White House to send a senior diplomat to the region to "create a momentum needed to bring people closer together." The breakfast raised £40,000.

Conservatives refer article to the CRE

THE TORIES are taking their complaints over Mike O'Brien's article to the Commission for Racial Equality.

Referring the Muslim Week piece to the CRE, Conservative Party co-chair Liam Fox called for a ruling "before these views — which appear to be fully authorised by the Labour leadership — are disseminated more widely."

In a letter sent to Labour Party chair Ian McCartney, Mr Fox alleged that Mr O'Brien's remarks carried a "distinct whiff of anti-Semitism" and did "nothing to

counter this sad trend in our society."

Meanwhile, there was support for Mr O'Brien from MP Louise Ellman, chair of both the Jewish Labour movement and the All-Party Parliamentary Group Against anti-Semitism.

"I have read the minister's article and it is not anti-Semitic," she told the JC.

"It seems to me to be a straight political attack on Mr Howard, which he would expect in the run-up to the general election," she said.

Parenting rights call

A JEWISH GROUP lobbying for parental rights has given evidence to a government inquiry concerning family law.

Jewish Unity for Multiple Parenting put its view to the Constitutional Affairs Committee.

A JUMP spokesperson told the JC: "We want a legal presumption that both parents have equal and relevant roles in parenting. In reality, this doesn't exist in statute."

In its written submission, the Chief Rabbi's office said that where there was a breakdown of the family unit, "we must do everything possible to protect the interests of the children."



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