

Speech by 18 year old Rob Thompson to the rally on 6 November 2010

Good afternoon comrades. Thank you so much for inviting me here to speak to you today. I am particularly grateful for the invite because I can tell you-as a young person I have reason to be here today. My name is Rob Thompson and I am a second year student at Richard Huish Sixth Form College here in Taunton. Next year I hope to go to university.

I have a problem. I have a big problem. I have a problem with David Cameron. I have a problem with Nick Clegg. I have a problem with the deepest cuts to public spending since 1918. I have a problem with Jeremy Browne the MP for Taunton Deane. My problem is this.

During the general election campaign of this year, the Politics Society at Richard Huish invited the four candidates for Taunton Deane to a hustings. In front of a hall packed full of first time voters, Jeremy Browne did what almost all of his fellow Lib Dem MPs did; he categorically pledged to vote against any, any, rise in tuition fees. To all of those young people, voting for the first time, Mr Browne broke his promise. It has become the norm for the Coalition to attempt to disguise their vicious and ideological cuts in a cloak of progressiveness. Yet cuts that begin by directly disadvantaging the young and their families are anything but progressive. When will this Coalition realise that there are young people in this country who live in difficult circumstances and who fear the prospect of going to University because of the immense cost of doing so?

Comrades, it is simply not right that young people are now terrified of university because of the debt they will be burdened with on graduation. It is not right that teenagers are being turned away from university because they just cannot cope with the idea of £30,000 - £40,000 worth of debt. It is not right that students will be forced to choose an institution because it charges the cheapest fees instead of choosing a university that is right for them. And it is simply not right that ministers who benefitted so much from the fundamental right to a free education can now turn away so many of my generation with such catastrophic costs.

We are not the ones who should be paying the price. Not us. Not students and young children, not the elderly, not the poor and vulnerable of Taunton or Somerset, not the poor the entire length and breadth of the country. Who should be paying the price? I'll tell you who should be paying the price. The rich bankers who live abroad so they don't have to pay their tax to contribute to our beloved NHS or the education of young people or the welfare programmes that offer hope to millions of people. They should be the ones paying the price, not us. Who says we are all in it together? George Osborne whose £4million trust fund is stored offshore so that he doesn't pay the tax on it? David Cameron who said that his wife Samantha is really a very unconventional Tory Prime Minister's wife because, wait for it, she went to day

school!! Nick Clegg who thought that the state pension was £30 a week? An amount that would devastate elderly people. We're not all in this together. It doesn't take much to work out who's in and who's out.

Time and time again it is the poor that have paid the price. And indeed now they are joined by the middle classes as well. But comrades, this time we will not stand by. We will not stand by whilst families are forced from their homes, whilst students are burdened with debts they cannot repay and whilst stability and security is snatched from ordinary people.

Let the word go out here today; that there is an alternative. There is an alternative that speaks up for ordinary people. There is an alternative that provides hope for those in and out of work and there is an alternative that safeguards the future and does not keep us in the past.

I appreciate the fact that Ross Henley and other Lib Dems are here today but until they disassociate themselves from their parliamentary colleagues, until they condemn the actions of their MP Jeremy Browne, only then will we believe the local Lib Dems again. Are the local Lib Dems with their national government colleagues or not? Are they with the Tories or are they with us? Because I can assure them that Lib Dem promises will never be believed again. Not here. Not now. Not after thousands of people voted against the cuts here in Taunton and across Somerset. Our so called Liberal MPs have abandoned the progressive platforms they were elected upon and we will punish them for it. Never again shall we believe the Lib Dems, never again will we allow them to disown the British electorate and never again will we talk of the importance of tactical voting because it simply doesn't work. This government must and will be confined to the history books.

I am sorry if all I seem to you is an angry teenager. But I have reason to be angry. I am angry because I live in a society where I feel compelled to take to the streets to fight for my generation. I am angry because my friends voted for a candidate who they believed was progressive but who turned out to be anything but and I am angry because my government are taking retrograde steps to an unjust society.

John F Kennedy said in his inauguration speech in 1961; "If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich." I believe as a society our first duty is to our neighbours, whoever they may be. And for me, speaking as a young person, that includes students of whatever background. The first duty of a government is to safeguard the future of our country, of which our students are a vital part. This coalition government is thinking too much about their own personal political gains, about the attraction of a little red ministerial box or a posh ministerial car. What they should be thinking and worrying about is where we will be in the future. Because if my generation are abandoned by their government, there will be no future for us. And I fear the future. I fear the recurring impact that this Coalition's prejudices will have upon my country and upon my friends.

So in conclusion comrades, thank you for your support today. Thank you for all you have done, all you are doing and all you will do in the future to work for the rights and the freedoms of ordinary people. And remember this; in 2010 the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrat Party abandoned the most promising generation of young people in the entire history of our nation and it is up to us therefore, to ensure that that generation is given the future that they deserve. Thank you.