

Mrs May, empty words before capitulation

It takes a certain gift to combine cliché with error, but Mrs May – to judge by her recent big speech to the Conservative Party Conference – appears to have it in full. In so far as the speech did not consist of the most hackneyed and empty phrases, it could have been delivered by any Labour leader before Mr Corbyn, and part of it even by Mr Corbyn himself. In essence, Mrs May wants, and I suspect is perfectly able, to turn Britain into a macrocosm of the giant official inquiry into sexual abuse that she set up when Home Secretary, which as we can see has been so very successful. To quote the kind of language Mrs May (among other politicians) employs, it *delivers a lot of value* – to the lawyers.

One method of deciding whether or not an utterance is a cliché is to enquire whether anyone would assent to its negation. For example, Mrs May intoned in her speech that she wanted a Britain in which everyone played by the same rules with every appearance of belief that she was actually saying something; but would anyone declare that he wanted a Britain in which people played by different rules, as in a return to a feudal state?

Or again, when she said that she wanted a Britain in which everyone had the opportunity to be everything they (sic) could be, would anyone say that, to the contrary, that he wanted a Britain in which only a small handful of people had the opportunity be all they (sic) could be, and the rest could go to the devil?

She also used the tired rhetorical device much favoured by Stalin, of asking a question and replying to it herself. Do we have a plan for Brexit? Yes we do. Are we ready for the effort it will take to see it through? Yes we are. All that was

missing was *Comrades*.

Does it matter if Mrs May speaks in clichés? Yes, comrades, it does. Clichés such as hers smother the mind like an anaesthetic and render it unable to think clearly. All that is left of her speech is its tone, remaining like the grin of the Cheshire cat; and the feeling it was that of social democracy more than a century after it was first enunciated as an ideal. What does Mrs May stand for? Not being Mr Cameron. That is an excellent thing, of course, but it is not enough.

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