

PM's speech at the Centre for Policy Studies: 22 November 2021

The reason I am here tonight above all else is that I want to pay tribute to my friend Robert Colvile. Not only for his fantastic leadership of the Centre for Policy Studies – the pre-eminent centre-right think tank – also of his thoughtful columns – he used to be my editor I think. But also I want to thank Robert for his work on the 2019 Conservative Party Manifesto – which I found extremely helpful and the people of this country enjoyed, eminently. But most importantly of I all I want to commend Robert, because as many of you will know he lost his wife Andrea to the little-known disease autoimmune hepatitis at a tragically young age just after the birth of your second son. An earth shattering event that is hard for any of us to comprehend, let alone to imagine we could go through.

And yet Robert you responded with extraordinary courage and forbearance, and you wrote movingly about your love for Andrea and his experience of losing her. And in doing so, in communicating so well, you've raised over £100,000 and launched new research projects with the Medical Research Foundation.

And it's a small thing but there's a little-known tradition in Downing Street, whereby every day the Prime Minister writes a thank you letter to recognise someone somewhere in our country for their service.

And so today I am sending you such a letter Robert, and I think we have a framed certificate for you too, because you are a true Point of Light. And on behalf of everyone here, and indeed the whole country, I want to say thank you.

I'm very pleased to be here in addition because this is a great celebration of free trade and the critical role played by Margaret Thatcher, if I'm right, which I think I am.

And I'm delighted to support that. But even her most ardent fans would have to accept that there was a blot on her record.

Of course, she did amazing things for free markets.

She ended the restraints on trades imposed by the unions, the so-called 'Spanish practices' of the print workers and others.

She also decreed that you did not need to go to an optician to buy a pair of spectacles. Just think next time anyone buys a pair of readers in the supermarket, you owe that to Margaret Thatcher.

But she had a blind spot. She actively campaigned to join what was then called the common market.

And under the terms of the Treaty of Rome, I'm a Thatcher fan I can say this, she was part of the government that handed away this country's ability to

control its own trade policy.

And while she was always sceptical over the inexorable extension of European powers over those things, she was later persuaded that she needed to go further and agree to another cession of powers in the mid-1980s.

And I am not going to name the guilty men who talked her into it – I can't see any here tonight – but my fellow CPS disciples I am proud to tell you that thanks at least partly to your assistance we have righted that spiritual wrong. We have freed Margaret Thatcher posthumously from the ideological prison in which she inadvertently locked herself.

And we have honoured the true meaning of her legacy and we have in the immortal phrase, taken back control.

And this country has resumed its role as the great global agitator and campaigner for free trade. We have done free trade deals with 70 countries around the world plus the EU including New Zealand who I'm glad to see represented here.

We have persuaded the Japanese to eat more of our Stilton, how much of our Stilton I don't know. They have the option of eating our Stilton. We have persuaded the Americans to eat not just British beef, but to get rid of their punitive tariffs on Scotch whisky. And we have persuaded Australians to dispense with the requirement that young Britons who want to go and live and work in Australia must spend six months working on a farm.

When I was told about that I thought maybe they should spend nine months on a farm...anyway, we've dropped that.

And once we have got world trade humming again. And once we have cleared the backlogs and the bottlenecks world trade is currently experiencing, largely caused by resurgent global demand, we are very ambitious in this country. I see some real experts on trade policy and we know quite what can be done. We want to double the volume of our trade to £1 trillion. And we are going to sell not just goods but services of all kinds, we are going to sell the fruits of our imagination.

I don't know if you've heard the news my friends but yesterday I went to Peppa Pig World. Hands up who has been to Peppa Pig World?

I was initially quite hesitant but I found it was very much my kind of place. It had good schools, excellent health care – there's a bear called Dr Brown Bear, no trouble too great, always turns up for a consultation. Superb infrastructure – novel transport systems in Peppa Pig World. And safe streets, virtually no crime.

But what amazed me most of all was the discovery that this hairdryer shaped pig has already got two theme parks in her honour in China and two I think in America and she is currently exported, her shows and her merchandise, to 180 countries around the world in a multi-billion pound franchise. Isn't that an astonishing thing?

And I want to leave you with this closing thought. Think how much more we could do when we revive the slightly moribund world trading system and protect our intellectual property with deals, with the CPTPP and so many others. And do more to send fantastic products like Peppa Pig around the world. If we can sell this Picasso-oid pig to Chinese children there is no limit to our creative abilities.

Peppa's influence, cultural influence – she's got a younger brother called George by the way – is so pervasive that kids in America now say 'tomato' instead of 'tomato' and 'mummy' rather than 'mom'. And there you go – that is believed to be a direct result of Peppa Pig and that is the effect of the free trade in which Margaret Thatcher believed.

Thank you Centre for Policy Studies for flying the flag for market capitalism, for free markets, for free trade and so on.

And by the way, I think this is being sponsored by the Daily Telegraph, isn't it? And HSBC?

Well thank you HSBC for everything you do. In the dark days of 2008 only one Conservative politician said anything remotely positive about the banks and that was me. I continue to believe the financial services are crucial for our country. I believe HSBC is a colossal employer not just in the UK but around the world so thank you.

And thank you also to the Daily Telegraph for your long, heroic and sometimes lonely campaign for a new aquatic headquarters for the sales force of Global Britain.

There is one overriding reason I think for supporting a new national flagship. It is not just the joy that it will bring to the face of Chris Hope, the kind of joy that you see in the face of an 18 month-old child meeting Peppa Pig. The reason is it is obvious that it would pay for itself over and over again, as British goods and services and ideas are championed and marketed up every creek and inlet in the world for the benefit of the British people in every expo and marketplace in the world.

And with that final thought and those thanks to the Daily Telegraph I want to say that we are now reclaiming our place as a great, independent free trading nation – agitator, campaigner, paladin for free trade in a way that would have made Margaret Thatcher very proud.