

# Women Must Be Respected and Safe

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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There are times when it is important to avoid controversy obscuring common sense. Over forty years ago a new Labour MP Barry Sherman took up the battle to make compulsory the use of front seat belts. Modern readers would not now believe the erroneous contrary arguments.

He and I have been associated since then with PACTS, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. Our all-party group has been vital in all modes of movement, but mostly tackling the level of road deaths. All our work was in public. Over the decades, government with highway authorities and vehicle manufacturers have combined to cut the deaths by two thirds since 1986.

One legendary woman, Barbara Sabey of the Transport Research Laboratory, was my most effective adviser. When others brought emotion and intuition, she brought science. She tested theories. She stood firm against prevailing thought when it could be demonstrated to be wrong. When people kindly asked how I had been quite successful, I said I followed her guidance.

The Mother of the House of Commons, Harriet Harman, was first elected in 1982. She and Margaret Beckett each served as acting leader of their party; each might have been the first female Labour leader, if not Prime Minister. Celebrate the work they have both done in Parliament and in championing the crucial role of women in public life.

Barry and Harriet have announced they do not intend to stand at the next general election. I do. Subject to health, the selectors and the electorate, I want to go on doing the good I can, achieve as much as possible and be prepared to fail at times when challenging major injustices that affect individuals or groups.

Some problems arise fast. One has been the controversy over gender and whether the fact of sex should be and could be written out of life. Since becoming aware of the responsibility and the opportunity to speak up for the philosopher Professor Kathleen Stock, I have experienced little abuse or criticism. This contrasts with the muck thrown at women, especially if left-wing, who voice their concerns about this topic.

Feminist campaigners rightly worry about intrusion into safe spaces and the possibility of diminishing regard for women's rights, security and feelings.

Almost half of women in refuges report feeling depressed or harbouring suicidal thoughts as a direct result of domestic abuse.

James Kirkup in a Spectator article writes that 'lobbyists working in the shadows should know that if you can't defend your proposals in the sight of the public, they will never stand.' Gay equality was argued for in public. I remain proud of my speech in the House of Commons that concluded the legislation that overturned the ban on same-sex marriage. I hope to feel the same way about standing with those who voice their concerns against the absurd accusation that Dr Kathleen Stock or any trustee of organisations such as the LGB Alliance could be classified as 'dangerous extremist'.

All those involved in the debate should read the book TRANS by the Economist's Helen Joyce or the admired analytical philosophy in Kathleen Stock's book Material Girls. Each is, like me, sympathetic to trans people. One difference between our moderate opinion and the extreme critics is that we share concern about the erosion of female safe spaces such as women's refuges, women's changing rooms, women's prisons and women's hospital wards.

Treasure a comment on these issues: 'I confidentially expect that in a future generation Professor Stock will be recognised as a brave voice of reason against absurdity, and one of the harbingers of the return to decency.'

Listen to and appreciate the voices of survivors. Deliver the support they deserve. We need to wake up, speak up and keep women safe and feeling safe.