



sider themselves progressive.”

Last month directors of the tour company ‘Activities Abroad’ sparked controversy when they advertised ‘chav-free’ holidays in an email to over 24,000 people as part of their marketing strategy. ‘Defending their stance Director Alistair McLean claimed that the statement was ‘tongue in cheek.’ The tour company took advantage of some research that suggested that particular names were often associated with certain demographic segments of Britain’s population. Having googled the word ‘chav’ to find out which names were most highly associated with it they then looked at their own data and found out that no Dazzas, Britneys, Biancas, Chardonnays or Candices had ever been on one of their trips. They then used this ‘evidence’ to entice the young on ‘chav-free’ experiences to meet the more appealable likes of John, Sarah, James, Charlotte and Lucy.

They received 17 complaints. One woman, named ‘Candice’ wrote: “How dare you define and typecast people by their name. I own my own business, have a postgraduate degree, an undergraduate degree, 4 A-Levels, an advanced diploma in Life Skills, a diploma in Performance Coaching, GCSEs, speak French and Italian and drive a Merc. Happy slap that”.

Even more drastic action has been taken against those who dare to use the word in a professional context, warning those who use it to take care, even when online. Last year Virgin Atlantic sacked 13 cabin crew members for referring to passengers as ‘chavs’ on a

Facebook group. A spokesperson from Virgin justified the dismissal saying that the comments “brought the company into disrepute and insulted some of our passengers.” She claimed “It is impossible for these cabin crew members to uphold the high standards of customer service that Virgin Atlantic is renowned for if they hold these views.” Such a response arguably puts the word ‘chav’ on the same level as homophobic and racially offensive vocabulary. It certainly demonstrates not just the level of insult that the phrase can denote but also how seriously its usage can be taken.

Lembit Opik, the Liberal Democrat MP feels that the word is indeed a derogatory term used to attack young working class people whose terminology can even be akin to ‘council house scum’: “I do feel strongly that people who think this is a genuine label are really only labelling themselves as snobs” he reveals. Yet it may indeed be hard to take such sentiments to heart when you hear that he was formerly engaged to a ‘cheeky girl.’

Is it not also possible to argue that the term is light-hearted, akin to any stereotyped group, ‘goth,’ ‘hippy’ or ‘skater?’ “I think that ‘chav’ is just the opposite word to ‘Toff.’” says Andy Parker, a University of York student from Doncaster. “They’re not that offensive, certainly not on the same scale as racially abusive words. I think it all depends what you mean when you refer to one, if it’s just the way someone dresses or speaks, or whether you associate these characteristics coupled with much worse behaviour.” Though a fair



**Above Left:
Lembit opik
and his Cheeky
girlfriend
Right:
MP Stephen
Pound**



“The Urban Dictionary describes ‘Chavs’ as ‘amoral’, ‘inherently racist’, and ‘highly fertile’, with many offspring”

point, whether TRU would have attracted as much clientele if it had formerly been known as ‘Chavs’ rather than ‘Toffs,’ remains doubtful.

It seems that there’s not only defence of the term itself, but defence of the group it represents on such a large scale that Parliament is taking notice. Ealing MP Stephen Pound would happily be a spokesperson for the chav nation. “People who use the word don’t understand the joy and confidence in display. They are just jealous that they can’t play football as well as Wayne Rooney,” he told the BBC. He also comments that the chav phenomenon is a form of social snobbery, yet seems happy to use the word itself. He

describes himself as an “aspirant chav”, who proudly wears his Fulham shirt, yet is saving up for his gold rings. One angry commenter responded: “Chavs have votes and can buy newspapers. That’s the only reason MPs and journalists have taken to them.”

The MP was also criticised for being naive, and recommended to leave his “luxury home” to move to an inner city area, where he would soon learn why ‘chavs’ have such a bad reputation when he is “harassed for no reason” and has his “property vandalised”.

“The term is superfluous” says Tom Nethercott, a student from Tyne and Wear. “I use it myself but only to describe openly abusive, aggressive individuals who sit around drinking cider in tracksuits and baseball caps. That’s what the term ‘charva’ was originally meant to refer to. I think the problem is that it has become a term for snobby people to use to talk down to people that they deem working class irrelevant of their behaviour. Anyone basically wearing three white stripes.”

Mark Littlewood who writes for the Telegraph defends the phrase and says ‘chav’ “might not be an elegant or beautiful term, but its widespread acceptance and use in modern English has informed, amused and helped us to articulate how we experience modern society.” There are certainly plenty of entertaining articles detailing the escapades of a ‘chav mum’ and even a ‘design a chav’ website,

So is it okay to use the word chav? In the words of one far more knowledgeable on the subject; “Yeah, but, no, but, yeah, but, no, but, but...” **M**