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Vince Cable's one-liners may have gone down a storm with Lib Dem delegates but pub chain Wetherspoons is not laughing.

It is angry about a passage in the Lib Dem treasury spokesman's speech to the party's spring conference in Liverpool.

Mr Cable said High Street banks "had become the financial equivalent of a Wetherspoons pub – but with even less of a sense of social responsibility".

The pub firm said this was "ridiculous" adding: "Perhaps he has been barred from a Wetherspoons pub."

Mr Cable was using the pub chain to illustrate a point about the alleged reckless lending policy of some banks.

"Just as binge drinking has become one of Britain's main recreational activities, binge lending has now become a mainstay of the economy," Mr Cable told delegates.

Funny

But Wetherspoons, which is one of the UK's biggest pub chains, insisted it took its social responsibilities seriously.

"As far we are concerned his statement is absolutely ridiculous. Wetherspoons is a good example of responsible pub operator.

"It has won more plaudits from local councils and police authorities for the manner in which it runs its pubs than probably any other pub chain in the UK.

"I don't know why he picked on us. Perhaps he has been barred from a Wetherspoons pub."

Mr Cable has developed a reputation for funny speeches and put-downs in recent months.

He reduced MPs to hysterics when he said Gordon Brown had "gone from Stalin to Mr Bean", when he was standing in as Lib Dem leader following the resignation of Sir Menzies Campbell.

And his speech to the Lib Dem Spring Conference in Liverpool was filled with more one-liners.

'Bully to bumbler'

The Twickenham MP reserved his sharpest barbs for Mr Brown, a former friend and colleague from his days in the Labour Party in the 1970s.

He told delegates: "I don't want to overdo my Stalin joke. But I think I captured the pathos of Gordon Brown's sad decline: from ruthless to rudderless: from bully to bumbler and, perhaps as variation on a theme, from Brezhnev to Blackadder.

"He does genuinely sadden me, because Blair was obsessed by image and positioning and I think we all hoped Brown would be a serious man with serious ideas and a serious commitment to social justice. No chance.

"Within weeks he was dressing up in a Penguin suit to grovel to a Saudi king who presides over the execution of women for immorality and corruption which makes the late President Mobutu look like a small time pick pocket.

"The nuclear power lobby, the airport expansion lobby, the arms dealers all know they have a true friend in Downing Street.

"And, as for social justice, he stands ready to copy whatever regressive, badly thought out wheeze the Tories dream up on a boozy night out at the Bullingdon Club."

Pre-match nerves

Mr Cable accused Tory leader David Cameron and shadow chancellor George Osborne of pursuing an "Alzheimer's strategy: a fervent hope that the country will lose its collective memory of Conservative governments".

And he said Mr Osborne's inheritance tax cut plans showed "dead millionaires are clearly at the heart of the Tory core vote strategy".

Mr Cable received a standing ovation from Lib Dem delegates for the speech, in which he called for more tax on wealthy non-doms and alcopops.

But speaking to BBC News beforehand, he betrayed a hint of pre-match nerves, saying the danger of packing a speech with jokes was that the audience would not get them and you would be left feeling like a "plonker".

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