

Hugh Gaffney MP: Maiden speech

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Mr Speaker, it has been a privilege to start work here and a privilege to represent the people of Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill who have sent me here to work.

I do offer some sympathy to the man I have replaced – Phil Boswell and his staff. No doubt Phil and his staff expected a longer time down here than what they received. Politics can be risky, as many of the members in this House will know better than May – sorry, I meant me.

I do follow in the footsteps of many good people such as “Mr Coatbridge”, The Right Honourable Tom Clarke, who served all his constituents for 33

Another good man who covered Lanarkshire was the late Labour leader John Smith – the best Prime Minister we never had.

However, the man I have come to follow was a working man who recognised that workers had no voice inside Parliament.

He was a man who was also Lanarkshire-born, who gave birth to the Labour Party and today his name lives on with the Keir Hardie Society of which I am one of the founders.

Mr Speaker, Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill – along with our other communities like Stepps, Moodiesburn, Glenboig, Bargeddie, Birkenshaw, Tannochside and Viewpark – are the areas I represent.

We were once part of the industrial landscape of Lanarkshire, which was renowned for our coal and steel, which like many other communities have sadly gone.

What is left is not enough; we have poverty and not enough housing.

Our generation of children today and tomorrow have no real vision – they are kept on low pay with zero hours’ contracts and told to be grateful to have a job.

There is no opportunity for a house as they cannot afford it. Our society is failing them and the gap between the rich and poor widens every day.

My day job was with Royal Mail Parcelforce delivering and collecting parcels every day. It was also a privilege to represent my workmates for over 25 years within the Glasgow Parcelforce, to whom I am grateful. I represented these workers as a trade union representative for the Communications Workers’ Union (CWU).

For workers today I recommend you join a trade union where unity is our strength. I represent the CWU and I am proud to be part of the trade union movement.

Mr Speaker, I will also declare an interest. Royal Mail was not for sale, it was stolen and I do aim to return this great public service back to its rightful owners and that is the residents of the UK.

I can tell this House today – to the private profiteer hedge funders – I am coming to take back my sons’ and daughters’ money stolen by people who have

no interest in Royal Mail other than the pounds for profit.

I come here as a working man – just as proud as my father Matt Gaffney and my mother Helen Gaffney, who both worked every day in life.

They will be watching on the telly back home in Uddingston to witness my moment – love you both and thank you – and to all my family and friends who know me – enjoy this moment; it is yours.

My new job starts now. With the help of my family – Anne, Matthew, Christopher and Paul – and the CWU, my feet will stay on the ground.

I am here to represent all my constituents, and will aim to change society for the better. There is enough wealth in this country to close the poverty gap and close down foodbanks.

As we enter Brexit we could build a new United Kingdom, one that cares for all walks of life, one that cares for humanity, one that shows equality for all, no matter your race, colour, religion or sexuality.

We are all equal, and everyone from the cradle to the grave deserves dignity and respect.

May I also say as a new local councillor voted in recently to North Lanarkshire Council, I have now seen what austerity is creating with workers losing jobs and not being replaced and with those who are left behind having to cover the extra workloads, adding more stress to workers doing more.

We have a motto from my North Lanarkshire Trade Union Council – “The past we inherit, the future we build” – and this I will apply as I stand here for the unemployed workers, the disabled workers, and the taxpaying workers to whom there are many more than the privileged few.

Finally, Mr Speaker, as a new MP I would like to pay my thanks to the staff inside this building who have helped me, with a special recognition to Trevor Browning, with 45 years’ service in the Parliament mail room.

I do know the importance and history this building provides and I look forward to the many challenges I will face.

I will give my respect to you and Westminster and to all my constituents from Coatbridge, Chryston and Bellshill to whom I owe this day.

The boy from Alpine, raised in Birkenhead, born and bred within my constituency, has arrived.

Thank you, Mr Speaker.

This speech was delivered on June 27 2017. The text should be checked against delivery.