

Jeremy Corbyn speech at TUC Congress

Jeremy

Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, speaking at the TUC Congress in Brighton, said:

Congress,
thank you for that welcome and thank you for everything you do as a movement,
for
our people and our country, to secure better pay and conditions for working
people, to give them a voice in the workplace and a say in our politics.

Trade
unions are far and away the biggest voluntary and democratic organisations in
the country. They are the roots and the lifeblood of our party. You are
abused
by the powerful and your rights are attacked -including by this government –
but the trade union movement represents the best of Britain and is a vital
engine of progress in our democracy.

And
of course Trade Unionism has always had international solidarity at its
heart.
And it's great to see Huber Ballesteros who was unjustly imprisoned for his
trade union activity in Columbia and freed by international solidarity
action,
with us here today.

But
despite all of your tireless efforts, modern Britain is marked by growing
insecurity at work which undermines and holds back both low waged workers and
the better paid.

In
fact insecurity now goes right to the very top of public life – just ask
Theresa May.

But
Congress, this escalating insecurity is not only bad for individual workers
and
their families as it weakens bargaining strength and holds down pay, just as
it
fuels stress and powerlessness it is also bad for our economy and for our
whole
society.

This
epidemic of low pay, which is closely tied up with insecurity at work ruins
people's lives, leaving workers and their families locked in poverty. It
damages the economy as people have less to spend. It costs us all because it

means more paid in tax credits and housing benefit from the public purse and it means less tax being paid to fund public services.

So I want to pay tribute to those unions which are working so hard to organise insecure workers and have taken on the exploiters – as Unite has done at SportsDirect and the Bakers' Union has done so impressively last week at McDonald's.

McDonald's boss is paid 1,300 times more than the lowest paid of his staff, symbolic of the deep inequality and injustice that scars our society.

That's why it's crucial for our movement to organise the lowest paid and most vulnerable workers.

The TUC needs to represent all workers. And the least secure have to be our priority because they need our solidarity most. Their needs for representation are the greatest.

Last week I raised some of these cases at Prime Minister's Questions and Theresa May, Theresa May could not bring herself to utter one word of condemnation of McDonald's or SportsDirect. This from the Prime Minister who tried to rebrand the Conservatives as the 'workers' party'. No, I didn't buy it either.

It's essential we work together as a movement; trade unions and the Labour Party, as part of local communities, to stamp out low pay and insecurity.

And I know it's not easy I was once a trade union worker representing low paid garment workers, mostly women; victims of some appalling practices by unscrupulous employers.

Exploitation and discrimination at work cuts across all sectors and pay grades and that's why Unison's victory against Tribunal fees in the High Court was such an outstanding gain won on behalf of all workers. Rights mean almost nothing if you can't afford to get access to them.

And when the workers who provide the public services we all rely on are having to use foodbanks, you know that something is deeply wrong.

Seven years of Tory pay cuts have not only caused real hardship, they have damaged

our public services by hitting recruitment, retention and morale.

The Government's position seems to change by the hour. At the weekend, we were led to believe the pay cap was a thing of the past. Yesterday, the Prime Minister's spokesman said it would 'continue as planned'.

Today, as inflation rises to nearly 3 per cent, they try to divide people on the cheap. The POA is right: a pay cut is a pay cut and we must be united in breaking the pay cap for all workers.

So let me be absolutely clear today. The Labour Party totally rejects the Tories' attempt at divide and rule, to play one sector off against another. A Labour government will end the public sector pay cap and give all workers the pay rise they deserve and so desperately need.

And, Congress, in the case of the Birmingham bins workers, which I know you have discussed today, we, collectively, as the labour and trade union movement, have a duty as a labour movement to find a resolution to this dispute as soon as possible.

Congress, we often talk about workers' rights but we're not just talking about rights at work, we're talking about people's lives, about the chance to live a decent life, about work-life balance; the security of your home, living standards, your family life and your mental health too.

A Manchester University study recently found that poor-quality jobs are actually worse for mental health than unemployment.

Most people spend most of their lives as workers, selling their time, labour and skills. Workers' rights are human rights, they give protections to every single person in employment and indirectly to many more children and carers, as well as those who need care.

They are fundamental to any society that claims to be advanced or democratic and yet these rights; your rights as workers, hard won over generations, are

currently
being sacrificed by this Conservative government on the altar of a failing
and
ever more ruthless form of capitalism.

Increasingly
flexible employment is sold to us as a benefit. They call it the gig economy
—
and who doesn't like going to a gig?

And
of course it is a benefit to unscrupulous employers but it is the source of
continuous worry and insecurity for millions of people and is in part
responsible for the worsening mental health of a country that has lost over
6,000 mental health nurses in recent years.

And
when employees want genuine flexible work, TUC researchers found that
shamefully, those parents and carers, often women, requesting flexible
working,
all too often found themselves punished instead with fewer hours, fewer
opportunities to progress and even losing their jobs.

So
the next Labour government will take action right across the board to help
protect people in the workplace. And although we would like to see another
general election as soon as possible; that delivers more Labour gains and
this
time a Labour government, in the
meantime we will challenge the government in parliament, and outside, every
step of the way. To defend working people and stand by you, the trade unions,
battling for people's rights day in and day out.

Rights
are won by all of us together, but they have to be constantly defended and
enforced. And that's why we are opposing the Tories' dangerous EU Withdrawal
Bill. Not out of any attempt to frustrate the vote to leave but because of
the
extraordinary unaccountable powers it would hand to Tory government ministers
to impose decisions, scrap protections and rip up workers' rights without
parliament having any say.

That
is a threat to every worker in this country: you simply cannot trust the
Tories
with your rights at work, and that's why Labour voted against the Bill last
night.

There
is no doubt that the British workplace is already one of the most unequal in
the world. We have a huge and damaging imbalance of power between employers
and

employees which has led to the proliferation of low wage jobs, race-to-the-bottom agency working, zero-hours contracts and employers avoiding paying sick pay, holiday pay and even the minimum wage through bogus self-employment.

That has been effectively targeted by unions such as the GMB, fighting for Uber drivers denied their basic rights at work.

Such practices are rife throughout the 'gig economy' which presents itself as modern and dynamic but all too often uses technology as a cover to deny both employees and customers basic protections.

Technological innovation is crucial for our economic success. But technological advance cannot represent real progress if it means we are dragged back to 19th century employment practices or is used to impose deregulation that leaves people without dignity or security.

Technological advance is driving change in the economy and the workplace at unprecedented speeds but what is not inevitable is who benefits from it.

We need a government and economic and industrial policies that are not stuck in a 1980s time warp of neoliberal dogma but are driven by the need to channel and shape technological change, to benefit the many not the few.

That will not happen if we leave it to the market or corporate boardrooms.

The Bank of England estimates that 15 million jobs could be at risk of automation over the next decade and as is so often the way those who are most at risk are those who are paid the least.

The deregulated gig economy is ripe for automation. It is no basis for economic advance and rising living standards. No, that demands high investment in the cutting edge jobs of the future.

When you add the Conservatives' continuing determination to hack away at the state cutting investment, squeezing public services, and removing your rights. It's not hard to see the dangers of our present course.

We already know that the Tory way of running the economy has dramatically widened regional inequalities, sharply increased the wealth gap, with tax breaks for the few and public services cuts for the many.

And the Tory approach to Brexit is to use the process of leaving to go much further, much faster in that direction and deliver a deregulated, free market tax haven, off the shores of Europe, underpinned with a race to the bottom trade deal with Donald Trump, a Shangri La for bosses and bankers. But nothing of the kind for everybody else.

Because that is the real divide over Brexit, a Tory Brexit to drive down standards or a Labour Brexit that puts jobs first.

Labour respects the referendum result. But we want a jobs-first Brexit, which guarantees full access to the European single market as part of a new trade agreement and relationship with the EU which maintains and develops workers' rights, and consumer and environmental protections and uses powers returned from Brussels to support a new industrial strategy, with investment in good jobs in every region and nation of Britain, where work pays, where employees have security and decent conditions and prosperity is shared by the true wealth creators: the workforce.

When we leave the EU the current free movement rules will end. Labour wants to see fair rules and management of migration, fair rules that put jobs, living standards and the economy first, not fake immigration targets, as the Tories do, that will never be met.

And we will continue to assert that the rights of EU nationals must be guaranteed.

We must never let ourselves be duped and divided. It isn't migrants who drive down wages and conditions but unscrupulous employers, supported by a government that slashes rights and protections at work whenever it gets the chance.

It is our movement that has been the bedrock of resisting racism and fascism in the workplace and on the streets and we must continue to oppose the division of

the far right.

So
if we want to tackle low pay and insecure work we need a Labour government strengthening workers' rights, enforced by strong trade unions, taking action to prevent employers undercutting pay and conditions, not closed borders, xenophobic intimidation and scapegoating.

That's
why our General Election manifesto set out a 20 point plan for security and equality at work, including: equal rights for all from day one in a job, banning zero hours contracts, guaranteeing unions a right to access workplaces, raising the minimum wage to a real living wage, ending the public sector pay cap, setting maximum pay ratios of 20 to 1 in the public sector and beyond, banning unpaid internships, doubling paternity pay, reinstating protection against harassment at work and supporting the Dying to Work campaign to protect workers with terminal illnesses.

But
ultimately protections at work depend on those who work themselves.

Winning
a Labour government, even one with a programme to transform the country, which is now our goal, is simply not enough.

That
is why the most important thing any worker can do is to join a trade union.

And
I want young people especially to hear this message.

Many
young people have recently got involved in politics for the first time. Tens of thousands of young people have joined the Labour Party in recent months.

And
at the recent General Election we saw the long running decline in young people voting reversed, with young people voting in higher numbers than they have for a generation.

Politics
is about power and democratic politics is about putting power in the hands of the many not just the few.

That

principle applies in the workplace too. if you want a job that pays a decent wage, gives you the chance to get on in life, live independently and enjoy your work, then join a trade union. Do it today.

Trade

unions are often demonised in the right-wing press. I know it's a shock that billionaire tax dodging press barons don't like trade unions. And they don't like us because our movement, through which the values of solidarity, community and social justice run like a thread from top to bottom, our movement challenges unaccountable power of both government and bosses.

But

of course the power of the billionaires, who control great chunks of the media, isn't what it was. They tried to dictate the election result in June with a blizzard of propaganda and millions of voters simply ignored them.

Trade

unions don't just defend their members, they defend the institutions that benefit all employees, our NHS, our schools, our social care, and they defend our rights.

We

don't know when the next election will come. We are not in control of that but you are in control of whether you join a trade union, organise in your workplace or in your community and start changing people's lives for the better right now.

We

don't know how long it will take but this weak and chaotic government will be prised out of Downing Street. And we know that the advances we made in the general election in June are a powerful springboard to win the radical Labour government we want to see so that together we can change our country so it truly works for the many not the few.

Ends