

Jeremy Corbyn speech to Cooperative Party Conference

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, speaking at the Cooperative Party Conference said:

*****CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY*****

Thank you Gareth for that introduction, it's a pleasure to be addressing your centenary conference.

Our movement was in its early days inspired by the actions of William Morris and Robert Owen. Owen spoke of "the union and co-operation of all for the benefit of each". Those two words "union" and "co-operation" mean so much to our movement. They are our philosophy, and our institutions, our theory and our practice.

This is an important landmark in your history, but more importantly this is a significant moment for our future.

The energy and creativity of our movement helped us to deliver in June the biggest increase in the Labour vote since 1945.

And that helped us deliver nine more Labour and Co-operative MPs from Brighton to Glasgow, bringing the total now to 38 in Parliament – more than in either 1945 or 1997.

The strength of our movement – Labour, trade union and co-operative, and more importantly co-operating – has transformed us into a government-in-waiting.

Next May we have local elections in cities and towns across England. Let's build on the 900 Labour and Co-operative councillors we have. Today let's set ourselves the challenge to make it over 1,000 Labour Co-op councillors on May 3rd.

The Tories have devolved austerity to local councils and perversely areas with higher levels of poverty

have been hit hardest. Councils have on average faced 40% cuts in their budgets. But in the face of this adversity councils such as Preston have responded with inspiring innovation. They brought together major local employers in their community, what academics call the anchor institutions, and

Preston council worked with them to drive through a local programme of economic

transformation. By changing their procurement policies, these anchor institutions were able to drive up spending in Preston by £75 million, protecting businesses and jobs.

And they're looking at

the pension fund they are part of to see where investment can support local businesses, keeping the money circulating in their city. But perhaps most relevantly to you, the council is actively seeking opportunities to create worker-led co-operatives where there are gaps in the local supply chain.

Our movement, the labour

and co-operative movement, is brimming with passion, people and ideas. And our

movement needs your ideas and I know our shadow cabinet values your input as well.

This afternoon you'll

hear from shadow education minister Tracy Brabin, talking about our plans for a

National Education Service, a vision for education in which institutions of learning co-operate rather than compete. And tomorrow our shadow

International

Development Secretary Kate Osamor, herself a Labour and Co-operative MP, will address you to outline our international policy based on our values of peace, justice and co-operation.

We live in a world riven

by conflict, spurred on by ego and neo-imperial ambition. Never has the time been more important to restate our commitment to the UN Charter, the third clause of which states its aim "To achieve international co-operation in solving international problems".

With the problems facing

us of nuclear proliferation, climate change, the global refugee crisis, the humanitarian crises in Syria, Yemen and of the Rohingya in Myanmar – a global vision driven by our co-operative principles is more necessary than ever.

Whether its Donald Trump or Kim Jong-Un – macho posturing needs to give way to

calm, rational co-operation. And across the world co-operatives play such a huge role as a spur to development, empowering women, bringing communities together. And today there are over a billion people worldwide who are members of co-operatives and I am proud to say that I am one of them.

We need co-operative

values at home and abroad.

Our economy is failing
to deliver.

For millions of people
the current system is failing to deliver secure jobs, failing to deliver
secure
housing, and failing to deliver rising living standards.

Yet this is the system
which exploits the many for the profits of a few, that the Conservatives want
to defend. They want to conserve the privilege of the few.

Philip Hammond says that
Labour poses an “existential challenge to our economic model” – Yes, we do.

I am not going to sit
back when their economic model is seeing:

–
homelessness double

–
four million children in poverty

–
over a million older people not getting
the care they need

Their economic model is
broken. It doesn't work for most people. Even the International Monetary Fund
thinks inequality and low taxes for the richest are harming the economy.

That's why Labour is now
the new mainstream, developing a new consensus of how to run an economy for
the
many not the few.

This new consensus will
reward the real wealth creators – that means all of us. It will genuinely
value
people and communities – and invest in them. It will create an economy fit
for
the 21st Century with a state that's not afraid to act when something goes
wrong but, more importantly, also proactive to make sure things work in the
first place.

Unlike Mr Hammond and
the Conservatives I don't think it's acceptable that chief executives get 180
times the pay of their average worker. I don't think it's acceptable that
when
hospital A&Es are closing the government can fund another tax giveaway for
big business. And I don't think it's right that landlords can be paid £10
billion a year in housing benefit without even the requirement that the home

is
fit for human habitation.

The Conservatives
believe everyone is motivated by the same base interests – selfishness and
greed.

For all their rhetoric
they don't even begin to understand the entrepreneurial spirit they claim to
champion. When I meet entrepreneurs, and those trying to start their own
business, their motivations are to express their creativity, serve their
community, meet people's needs, to create an income for themselves and jobs
for
others.

Their inspiration is
often closer to the pragmatic principles of the co-operative movement than it
is to the abstract ideology of Milton Friedman.

So I say to people
thinking of starting an enterprise or those struggling to run a start-up –
consider the co-operative model and get the support you need from Co-
operatives
UK.

But conference, we have
to acknowledge the obstacles to the Co-operative model. Too often people who
want to change their community or start a business don't know about the
co-operative movement. And yet co-operative start-ups are more robust
than other forms of business start-up – twice as likely to still be in
operation five years later.

The co-operative sector
in the UK is one-fifth of the size of Germany's – under-valued and
under-appreciated. A Labour government will change that.

We will promote the
co-operative option and support you to double the size of the co-operative
economy. This isn't just an aspiration – John McDonnell and Rebecca Long-
Bailey
have set out how we will:

- bring forward legislation to create a
proper legal definition for co-operative ownership
- ensure that workers have a right to own,
when a company is facing change of ownership or closure
- establish regional development banks that
will help deliver low cost finance to co-operatives

—
support the creation of publicly owned,
locally accountable energy companies and co-operatives

Because we support
co-operative principles, they are Labour principles.

To build a new
high-investment economy for the 21st century we must get Brexit right. That
means securing full access to the Single Market and using the powers we get
back from Brussels to help transform our economy.

The Tories are
transparently failing Britain in the Brexit negotiations. They are making a
shocking mess of Brexit. They are split down the middle, negotiating with
each
other instead of the EU.

With each passing day
they are driving us closer to a 'no deal' Brexit. Let's be clear: no deal is
the worst possible deal. It would leave us with World Trade Organisation
tariffs and restrictions instead of the full access to European markets we
need.

The risk would be that
key manufacturers leave for the European mainland taking skilled jobs with
them. In sector after sector, 'no deal' could prove to be an economic
disaster.

Theresa May's cabinet of
chaos is risking a jobs meltdown across Britain. A powerful faction of the
Conservatives want a no-deal outcome because they think they can use it to
turn
our economy into a deregulated tax haven. We must not let them.

So when we talk about
taking natural monopolies into public ownership we're not inspired by the
centralised and remote models of the 1940s and 1950s. We're determined to
create models of ownership that involve workers and consumers based on
Co-operative principles, whether that's at community, regional or national
level.

Last year the profit
margins at the big six energy firms hit their highest level on record,
falling
wholesale costs were not passed on, and since then providers like British Gas
have hiked prices again by 12.5%.

Why does this happen?

Because energy is run
for profit, for the interests of the few over the many.

Our shadow energy team has just returned from Denmark, a country where the grid is publicly owned and municipal and co-operative ownership dominates.

And look at what this has allowed them to achieve:

- a 30% reduction in industry use of fossil fuels
- an overall 40% CO2 reduction
- a reduction in energy consumption
- and by 2020 Denmark will get 50% of its electricity from wind.

British people are being short-changed by a system that is failing:

- failing to provide energy at an affordable rate
- failing to invest in new technology to tackle climate change
- and failing to deliver clean air.

And I want to say a word about Royal Mail, taking legal action against the will of their own staff rather than negotiating with them and their union

And look at what has happened since privatisation: The company has made £195 million in profits through the sale of assets and closed one in 10 delivery offices, running down and asset stripping the service.

They've paid out over £600 million in dividends to private shareholders – that's £344 every minute since privatisation. And of course the public business was sold off on the cheap by the Lib Dem and Tory coalition.

That's why we have committed to bringing Royal Mail into public ownership – run in the interest

of
the public, Royal Mail workers and service users.

I want to end my speech
with a challenge to you in the Co-op Party, and to those in the wider
co-operative movement – come forward with your ideas, your enthusiasm, your
energy.

We have an opportunity
in this period of opposition to prepare for government – a Labour government
that will transform our economy to work for the many not the few. So
contribute
your ideas into the Labour Party.

Two areas where I think
we can do something practical in the here and now. We know that co-operative
start-ups are more likely to survive than conventional business start-ups so
what can you as a movement do now, to engage with entrepreneurs to take up
the
co-operative model, working with local chambers of commerce and the
Federation
of Small Businesses. Let's get Labour councils, the co-operative movement,
and
small business organisations working together to promote the co-operative
model.

And finally, I believe
that we are entering a period of unprecedented opportunity for socialist
politics and co-operative principles. New technology is empowering
participation, new social movements today are horizontalist rather than
hierarchical, networked rather than top-down. That's why when I ran to be
Labour leader I said I wanted our party to be a movement. And today we are
with
well over half a million members who joined because they want to be involved
and want to participate in our movement.

The top-down model of
organisation, whether in politics, the media or in business, is being
challenged and is breaking down.

The technology of the
digital age should be empowering workers, enabling us to co-operate on a
scale
not possible before and yet too often it has enabled a more rapacious and
exploitative form of capitalism to emerge.

Look at Uber, Deliveroo,
and others. The platforms these companies use are the technologies of the
future. But, too often, their business models depend not on technological
advantage, but on establishing an effective monopoly in their market and
using
it to drive wages and conditions through the floor.

Governments have to make sure that regulation keeps pace with changing technologies.

But sensible regulation of working conditions would not only improve the lot of existing workers – and yes, despite what some firms try to claim, they are workers – it would mean that new businesses could survive in the market.

Digital platforms are opening up huge opportunities for horizontal, more democratic, forms of organisation to flourish.

Imagine an Uber run co-operatively by their drivers, collectively controlling their futures, agreeing their own pay and conditions, with profits shared or re-invested. The next Labour Government, working with you, can make that a reality.

The biggest obstacle to this is not technological but ourselves. We must have the confidence and organisational skill to make it happen. That's why we commissioned our report on Alternative Models of Ownership. To start asking fundamental questions about who should own our economy in the digital age, and how to ensure that its enormous potential benefits serve the many, not the few.

Its authors recommend that co-operatives be supported by government through access to finance, through legal changes to level the playing field for cooperatives in the market, and through a better government procurement policy, so that public money is being used to support companies that serve the public good.

To prevent just the few benefiting from the “rise of the robots” the report suggests we consider higher minimum wages, a shorter working week, profit sharing schemes, or putting the ownership and control of the robots in the hands of those who work with them and come to rely on them.

We don't have all the answers yet but are thinking radically about how we can shape the next thirty years to use the power of new technology to make our economy work for the many not the few.

Today Labour and Co-op parties are the largest in Britain with more members than all the other parties combined. We are winning the arguments ... with support for public and co-operative ownership. And we are inspiring millions.

We are a movement ready

to take office and ready to shape our country for the future.

Conference, thank you.