

Jeremy Corbyn speech to UNISON annual conference

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party, speaking at the UNISON annual conference, said:

Thank you for inviting me here today to your annual conference.

It is a great pleasure to be back in Brighton for the first time since the election. Not only did the Labour Party increase our majority in Hove from just over 1,000 to almost 19,000 but we also gained Brighton Kemptown.

The brilliant Lloyd Russell-Moyle turned a Tory majority of almost 700 into a Labour majority of 10,000, the biggest majority that any MP of any party has ever had in that constituency.

Here in the South-East overall, Labour increased its vote by a fantastic 63 per cent, a figure only beaten by the South West of England where we increased our vote by 73 per cent. These are figures which show that there are no unwinnable seats for Labour now: from recent gains like Canterbury and Kensington to our Labour heartlands in the North

And can I say how glad I am that we have numerous new Labour Members of Parliament who are from Unison, such as your former regional secretary, Eleanor Smith who is now MP for Wolverhampton South West: a black woman elected in the seat once held by the Conservative MP, Enoch Powell.

Theresa May and the Tories are now weakened and divided. The Prime Minister called an election to win a landslide and lost her majority and her political authority.

Two weeks after the general election she has still been unable to stitch together a deal with the DUP to stay in office, while we have been strengthened across every part of the country in our drive to form a Labour government, deliver real change and transform people's lives.

Although

Labour did not win the General Election, there is no question that it was a real advance and success for the Labour Party and for working people across the United Kingdom.

Against

the predictions of the experts, that was achieved by putting our manifesto and our popular policies centre stage. A message of how the country could be if it was governed for the benefit of the many not the few, we showed that the politics of hope can always trump the politics of fear.

And

by doing so we have created a movement: a movement of people of all ages, all religions, all ethnicities and all backgrounds. Our strength is our unity, our determination is to change this country for the better and to win the next election and form a Labour government.

None

of this will be possible without the huge support we get from the Trade Union movement and your members. Indeed, we would not be where we are today if it were not for Trade Unions such as Unison giving us fantastic support every step of the way. It is vital you get the recognition that you deserve for being the bedrock of our party, in the knowledge that it is only a Labour government and not a Tory government that will protect and deliver for your members.

During

the election campaign whilst roughly half of all the money the Labour Party raised was from private individuals giving on average 20 to 30 pounds wanting to help our national campaign. The other half came from Trade Unions.

Whereas

other parties rely on huge private donations and handouts from corporations, the Labour Party relies on smaller donations from ordinary people and the generosity of the democratic Trade Union movement to keep going and keep representing people the concerns and needs of the people of Britain.

But

it is not only the financial contributions but also the practical help and participation which I must thank this union for.

The

Unison campaign, led by your General Secretary, Dave Prentis, and managed by Liz Snape and Lucie Hyndley gave a massive boost to the overall Labour campaign.

Whether
it was articles or adverts in newspapers highlighting the need to care for
our
NHS and end the dangerous cuts to community policing. Or if it was your
social
media campaign and Facebook advertising seen by over 8 million voters. Or
just
your targeted campaign on the ground, knocking on doors, listening to
people's
concerns and letting people know about how a Labour government would end Tory
austerity to benefit them and their families.

So my thanks to everybody
from Unison for all that you did to support our campaign and for all I hope
that you will continue to do to ensure that a Labour government is
acknowledged
by all clearly to be now within our reach.

Theresa May and the
Tories are clinging to power by the skin of their teeth and at the pleasure
of
the Democratic Unionist Party, but Labour will oppose this weak Conservative
minority government, both in Parliament and outside of it, every step of the
way.

We are in Opposition but
we are also now a government in waiting.

We are ready for another
election at any time to finish the job of beating the failed and clapped out
Tories and form a government that works for all.

The last week has shown
why how necessary it is to do this as soon as we can.

The Grenfell Tower fire
should never have happened. Every single death could have been avoided.

From Hillsborough, to the
child sex abuse scandal, to Grenfell Tower the pattern is clear. Working
class
voices are ignored by the powerful and their concerns are repeatedly
dismissed.

The
Grenfell Tower residents themselves had raised concerns about the lack of
fire
safety in the block. The Grenfell Action Group had warned: "It is a truly
terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believes that only a
catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our
landlord."

So not only should more have been done to prevent these tragic deaths but the Prime Minister has now had to publicly apologise for her government's pitiful response in helping those who had lost their homes and lost their loved ones in the disaster.

A tower block in flames due to poor building quality. A heroic response from the fire and rescue service who are dangerously overstretched and understaffed and a government and local government response that has left victims sleeping on the street and under bridges as they have nowhere else to go.

Make no mistake about it, this is the brutal reality of austerity economics that has failed in its own terms and leading to falling living standards, rising inequality and disasters.

We have always known that austerity was a choice, a choice made by those at the top which has harmed the lives of the many to maintain the privilege of a few but has had absolutely devastating and frankly inhumane consequences for those at the very bottom.

Of course, now the government offers warm words about the bravery of our firefighters and the commitment of public sector workers who have worked around the clock to organise a response to Grenfell fire and other recent terrorist attacks.

Only this week we have again seen the brilliant role by the emergency services in dealing with the terrible attack in my own constituency as well as the resilience and strength of our communities who refuse to be divided and set against each other.

But it is not good enough to be grateful to our public sector workers only at moments of crisis and disaster.

You deserve dignity at work and the public deserves the dignity of well-funded public services.

It is the police and PCSOs that make our communities safer and it is their knowledge of their communities and local intelligence gathering that helps prevent terrorism. Terrorism is not defeated by tearing up our human rights or by dividing our communities.

There are now 20,000 fewer police officers than there were when the Tories took office in 2010 but when the Police Federation raised this with Theresa May when she was then Home Secretary she accused them of crying wolf.

It is this attitude, the same attitude that we always see when this government dismisses unions such as Unison when you raise concerns about the brutality of austerity and the dangers of public sector cuts that have left us in the position that we are now in.

That is why Labour's manifesto for the recent election, *'For the Many, Not the Few'*, committed us to a fresh approach to policing: 10,000 more police officers to work on community beats under a Labour government, equivalent to an extra officer for every neighbourhood in the country.

Whereas the Conservatives have cut the number of firefighters and closed dozens of fire stations, Labour would recruit 3,000 more.

This is the only way to keep people safe and ensure that current firefighters are not demeaned by being run into the ground with physical and mental exhaustion by excessive shifts.

This is the investment that Britain needs: investment yes to create jobs and give people opportunities but also essential investment to keep people safe in their homes. You cannot protect people's lives on the cheap.

Not only do we need more money to be spent on our vital public services but we need more money to be spent on our vital public servants too.

A future Labour government will scrap the public sector pay cap. It is a disgrace that NHS nurses are paid 14 per cent less today in real terms than they were in 2010.

In Britain, in 2017, we have nurses and other public sector workers being forced to go to food banks, along with one million other people whose chances have been crushed in the name of austerity.

When this was put to the Prime Minister she said that there are 'complex reasons' for people having to use foodbanks.

Well I hope the Prime Minister is listening today when I say that there are not complex reasons for people having to use foodbanks: the only reason is that this government refuses to ensure people have enough income to feed themselves.

So ending the pay cap is a necessity.

And, as our fully costed manifesto set out, our new spending commitments would be paid for asking the top five per cent to pay a small amount extra in tax, still with a lower tax rate than under most of Mrs Thatcher's reign, and by asking big business to pay a little more but still a lower rate than any other country in the G7.

More funding would then be available for our children's schools and for our NHS, this country's proudest achievement, as well as its most socialist one offering universal healthcare for all on the basis of need: free at the point of use.

This is a sacred principle for the overwhelming majority of people in this country. But is one that the Tories have seriously put under threat through chronic defunding and creeping privatisation.

Labour is committed to ending this. We will halt the dreaded and much derided 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans' and would instead put over £30 billion in extra funding over the course of a five year Parliament.

This is absolutely essential to ensure that NHS staff have the conditions which they deserve and everyone has the NHS services they deserve.

We would protect people by introducing legislation and imposing legal requirements for minimum staffing levels in the NHS.

Labour is also committed to re-introduce nurses' bursaries and funding for health related degrees to encourage more people to train, as well as immediately guaranteeing the rights of EU nationals protecting the tens of thousands working in our health and social care sector.

Yesterday the Prime Minister put down her first offer in Brussels on the rights of EU nationals after Brexit but as our Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer has said people should not be used as bargaining chips in the Brexit negotiations.

And what she has floated falls far short of the full guarantee Labour would make. That isn't just the right thing to do, it's also the best way to guarantee the rights of British nationals living in the EU.

Just as the 1945 Labour government created the National Health Service out of post-war ruin. The next

Labour government will lay the foundations for a National Care Service in the aftermath of the ruinous austerity of the Conservatives.

We would ensure that all care workers were paid a real living wage, reaching £10 an hour by 2020.

Improving social care is so essential in providing dignity to people in old age and giving independence to those who are vulnerable or have a disability or a mental health condition.

Only a universal approach will be sufficient to tackle the problem. The election showed the Tories for what they really are: how they desire to introduce a dementia tax, to take people's homes away from them purely because they have the misfortune of having to rely on social care.

Losing so many seats at the General Election has forced the Conservatives into abandoning their social care plans, abandoning their plans to bring back grammar schools and to scrap free school meals for children.

The election showed that the public is with us. People know from their experience that privatisation has failed, that austerity has failed. It has damaged services and held people back.

The Labour Party and the Labour movement exist so that working people's voices are heard.

Their dropping so many of their proposals shows they have heard us, and now the Conservatives need to hear us on declining living standards, falling wages, public service cuts, from the NHS to schools to social care.

But if this election, with increased turnout, was about people's voices being heard we must ensure that the next election is people's cheers of hope.

Hope for the better society that is possible.

Hope for the better country that we could be.

Hope for a Labour government that will bring equality, opportunity, and prosperity.

Together we can make that happen, the Labour Party and the labour movement, united for the many not the

few.