

Keir Starmer speech to Labour Party Conference

Keir Starmer MP, Shadow

Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, speaking at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton today, said:

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you conference. Thank you to everyone who has taken part this morning. Thank you also to Labour's fantastic Shadow Brexit team: Jenny Chapman; Paul Blomfield; Matt Pennycook; Dianne Hayter; Karin Smyth; Emma Hardy; and Jess Morden. Believe you me, they could all have chosen easier jobs in the last year.

What a year it has been. Article 50 triggered. A snap election. It was meant to be a coronation, but it left us with a broken Government. Too weak to govern. Too divided to negotiate Brexit. Constructive ambiguity is now official government policy.

It would be funny, if it wasn't so tragic.

Britain's place in the world is at stake. People's jobs are at stake. People's mortgages are at stake. People's futures are at stake. And who are the authors of this Tory tragedy?

First, David Cameron, who gambled his country, because he couldn't hold his party together. Then, Boris Johnson, standing in front of his red bus, with a lie on the side – a false promise of £350m a week for the NHS. Ruthless about his own ambitions, but reckless about our country.

Now Theresa May, robotically marching towards an extreme Brexit – focussed on her own survival not the national interest. Maybe the Tories can afford this disastrous approach to Brexit. Maybe the Tories would benefit from a Brexit of deregulation, where rights are put at risk.

But you know, and I know, that millions of working people cannot. Whether

you're in the front seat with Theresa May, or in the backseat with Boris Johnson, there's nothing patriotic about joy-riding our country's economy off a cliff.

This has to stop. It's time for a different approach. So let me share with you Labour's approach. An approach that is both democratically legitimate and economically sensible. That respects the referendum result and puts jobs and the economy first. An approach rooted in our core values. Values that bind us together. Labour values.

Values of internationalism: we have always been an internationalist party; reaching out to Europe and the rest of the world rather than turning inwards. Values of co-operation, solidarity, and a simple belief that we achieve more together than we do alone. An unflinching commitment to human rights, the rule of law, rights at work and the protection of our environment. Fairness, equality and social justice in our economy and in our society.

As we exit the EU, we should not abandon these values. On the contrary, these values should drive everything we do in these uncertain times. That is why, over the summer, Labour reached an agreed position that transitional arrangements on the same basic terms that we currently have with the EU are in the national interest. For Labour that means that during the transitional phase, we would remain in a customs union with the EU and within the Single Market.

The Government on the other hand spent their summer squabbling in public. So dysfunctional had it all become, that the Prime Minister had to fly to Florence on Friday, only to accept Labour's position on transitional arrangements. Let's see if that survives contact with Tory party conference.

But let's not be fooled by what the Prime Minister said in Florence. All she has done is to delay the cliff edge. All her ideological red-lines remain. She still prioritises arbitrary immigration targets over jobs and the economy. She has no answer to fundamental questions in Northern Ireland. And she still insists – in spite of all the warnings – that no deal is a viable option.

The Labour Party rejects that approach. If we were in Government, we would build a new progressive partnership with the EU. We would negotiate a final deal that ensured continued co-operation and collaboration with our EU partners in all

fields. And a final deal, that retained the benefits of the Customs Union and the Single Market. Options for achieving this should not be swept off the table.

Subject,

of course to negotiations, remaining in a form of customs union with the EU is a possible end destination for Labour.

We are also flexible as to whether the benefits of the Single Market are best retained by negotiating a new Single Market relationship or by working up from a bespoke trade deal. No rash, ideological red lines preventing a sensible deal. No fantastical, 'blue sky' proposals. A pragmatic approach. Labour are now the grown-ups in the room. We stand ready to take charge of the negotiations. Not acting for narrow political gain. But in the national interest.

Conference,

the way the Tories are handling Brexit tells you a lot about their competence – or should I say incompetence. But it also tells you about their character. About their dogmatic disregard of the national interest; about their sheer sense of entitlement; about their post-imperial delusions; about their willingness to put other people's jobs at risk.

Our

country today is so much better than our Government. This is a country yearning for change. Theresa May – and whichever Brexiteer replaces her – cannot deliver that change. The old politics and the Tory old guard have had their day.

We need a transformative Labour Government. Not just to break the impasse in Brexit negotiations and to deliver a progressive new partnership with the EU – vital though that is. But to tackle the wider injustices and inequalities we see all around us. To give hope that our society, our public services and our economy don't have to be like this. That we can build a better, fairer and more inclusive Britain.

That's why I came into politics. That is why you are in this hall. It's why Jeremy has been able to mobilise 600,000 members ...and inspire the support of over 12 million people. It's why the clock is ticking for this Prime Minister and this Government.

We
have come a long way in the last year. Now is the time for us to lead. To
bring
a divided country back together. To mend our broken politics. This is
Labour's
opportunity. This is Labour's responsibility. And, working together, this
can be Labour's achievement.

Delivering
a Government for the many, not the few.

Ends