

Martin Whitfield MP: Maiden speech

Martin Whitfield MP

May I thank the Speaker for calling me during this debate on the Gracious Speech and allow me to deliver my maiden speech.

This parliament sits at a time of constitutional uncertainty and change, a parliament in the balance over shadowed by deep tragedy.

In such an environment, it is with some trepidation I offer my thoughts. Trepidation blunted by the knowledge that it is with the authority of my constituents that I attend here. My constituents who have placed their trust in me. Their trust that I seek to deliver a more hopeful better future. It is, I understand, tradition to point out the strengths and character of ones constituency. A task made easier by my constituency being East Lothian. The honourable member for Berwickshire, Roxburgh and Selkirk said in his maiden speech on Thursday: "I count myself very lucky to live in and represent one of the most beautiful parts of the UK". He spoke eloquently of his constituency. But to avoid polite derision from members here today, I do not question the beauty of your constituencies – but let me say I know the most beautiful constituency in this land.

Its history as an arterial route for pilgrims, soldiers, scholars and artists. The development of its six towns that reflect their connection to the sea, to trade, fishing, embarkation points for armies of all hues. Towns that drew farmers to trade, to gossip and exchange ideas. Towns that reflect the long history of industrial production and the industrial revolution.

Coal mining evidenced back to 1210 – 140 years before the post of the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod was founded.

And also the honest town. The town that hosted the first open golf championship on a course that dates from 1672. The town that also houses Newhailes. The Palladian-style house that witnessed so much debate during the Scottish Enlightenment. Another time of constitutional and social change. The six towns their distinctive and individual characteristics complimented by the surrounding villages that each carry their own identity.

These weave together to create a constituency community that is distinctive, supportive, welcoming, creative, industrious, entrepreneurial and both forward and outward looking. Characteristics I would recommend to this honourable House.

Tradition dictates I must also pay tribute to the former MP. George Kerevan represented East Lothian for two years. I thank him for his work and welcome the opportunity to correct an innocent mistake. In his maiden speech Mr Kerevan omitted to pay tribute to Fiona O'Donnell the MP who represented East Lothian between 2010 and 2015 and I thank her for her excellent service and I am able to right a wrong.

Looking at former MPs shows me the size of task before me. John Home Robertson and, of course, John Mackintosh – both pro-European politicians. Indeed, John Mackintosh an advocate of being Scottish, British and European. On perusing John Home Robertson's maiden speech, I find words that both articulate the trepidation that I feel, but also words I choose as a guide.

He said:

“If we are always open and stick to what we believe in we may not always be able to satisfy our Whips, but in the end we shall earn the respect of our constituents. I believe that they are the people who really matter to us” This is, of course, a speech in the debate on the Gracious Speech and to prevent a point of order, but also to contribute to the discussion, I wish to mention young people and education. To pre-empt hollow cries, I am aware that education is a devolved matter but our responsibility for and too our children is universal and absolute. From fighting poverty, facilitating experience and coordinating and developing services. Much is spoken of this land’s assets, but I hope we can all agree that our land’s greatest asset is our young people. We hold their future in escrow and we will be most acutely judged by history on the choices we make. It is said we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before. As we stand on the shoulders of giants, we have a duty to our children to give them the opportunity to build a future that is fairer, stronger and kinder. My promise to my constituents and this House is that I will always be open, I will advocate what I believe and will fight for a kinder more hopeful and fairer future.

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

[Lesley Laird MP: Maiden speech](#)

Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland Lesley Laird MP

Mr Speaker

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in today’s debate.

Before looking forward, I want to take a few moments to pause and reflect on the maiden speeches made by the Members of Parliament that have gone before me representing the constituency of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath.

My predecessor, Roger Mullin, served the constituency from June 2015 to May 2017 and in his maiden speech he quoted Kirkcaldy’s famous son, Adam Smith, who said: “that no society can surely be flourishing and happy of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable”.

That same line was also used by Dr Lewis Moonie, another predecessor, who served this fine constituency from 1987 till 2005.

So what struck me about this was, that while so much may have changed in our society, the fundamental challenges reflected then – and here today – remain the same.

It would, of course, be remiss of me not to mention Gordon Brown – who served the Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath constituency for 10 years from 2005 and also served this country as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Prime Minister – a true and sincere public servant for his constituency and this country.

But Dr Brown did in fact make his maiden speech in the then seat of Dunfermline East constituency in 1983.

On that occasion the debate was about Social Security and proposals to reduce the benefit level to be paid – an issue still reflected within today's society.

The constituency that I am honoured and privileged to represent is Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath. I would like to thank the people of this resilient constituency for giving me the opportunity to represent them.

What repeatedly strikes me about my area is that it is full of talent, and as yet, untapped and unfulfilled potential – potential that deserves to be unlocked.

My constituency is an area that has known the highs of industrial prosperity through mining, manufacturing, linoleum and shipping and now the lows of poverty and hardship as these industries have slipped away and never really been replaced.

It is an area that offers so much – in terms of skills and spirit, and remains a hidden gem in terms of the contribution that it could make to our economy and society.

It has character and resilience – shown so strongly through the towns and villages of our mining communities and beyond. Attributes that have seen it continue to hold its ground – its head high – but it deserves to make better progress.

And so I ask myself what can we all do differently in this House to stop repeating history and that quote and sentiment from Adam Smith?

Are we really saying that the many talents in this House cannot turn the tide for our most deprived communities?

Are we really saying that our political will does not match the spirit and resilience of the communities we represent?

Today, we will be discussing Education and Local Services – two enablers for people in my constituency – and yours – to a better life for themselves and their families.

For the previous five years I have been an elected councillor in Fife, and know first hand the life changing, and life saving services, that are delivered by local authorities.

Yet these life bridging services are being systematically dismantled and eroded, leaving investment in people – in communities and infrastructure –

flawed and fragmented.

It was Sir Winston Churchill who expressed concerns for “the harsh excess of accumulated capital” and the “gaping sorrows of the left out millions”.

And so, as we discuss these life changing issues today, I put it to the House – is it therefore not our duty to try something new.

Today we are talking about education – an enabler of change, an opportunity for many to leave poverty behind – but only through adequate funding for local services can that opportunity be delivered.

So, back to the start; the issues discussed by my predecessors in Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath are still the issues we are debating today. Are we accepting of the notion that the poor are always with us – or are we prepared to take a different path – and what could be the harm in that?

Let me leave you with a little story – Fife Council ran a Construction Academy with local businesses and Fife College. One young man seized the opportunity. It was life changing. In more ways than one.

He had been in habit of staying up late – because he had no job to get up for. However, on the first day of work he went to bed at midnight. An early night. By the end of the week he was in his bed at 9pm. His mother was worried about this and came into his room to see if he was ok. Yes, he said – he just wanted a good night’s sleep so that he could do his very best at work the next day. Education – and business working together – but an opportunity brought to life and enabled by a local authority. Opening up a world of opportunity, respect and dignity.

Let me close today by once again quoting Sir Winston Churchill – “the state must increasingly and earnestly concern itself with the care of the sick, the aged and the young. The state must increasingly assume the position of the reserve employer of Labour.”

For the sake of the people of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath and communities across the country, I sincerely hope we all seize this moment to stop repeating the mistakes of history and look to finding new ways to regain a sense of society and opportunity for all.

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Hugh Gaffney MP: Maiden speech

Hugh Gaffney MP

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.

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A Brexit that puts jobs and living standards first

Jeremy Corbyn writes for the Sunday Herald on Labour's plan for Brexit:

One year on from the EU referendum, Theresa May's minority Tory government has finally started the Brexit negotiations weakened and in disarray.

This week's threadbare Queen's speech underlined that the Conservatives have ran out of ideas and lost their political authority.

They are divided and ill-prepared to carry out some of the most important negotiations our country has ever faced.

Two months ago the Prime Minister called a general election to win a landslide and a mandate for a Tory Brexit that would see a race-to-the-bottom in jobs and living standards. She failed and lost her majority instead.

The Conservative government's approach to Brexit threatens to damage links with our most important trading partners, ditch workers' rights and environmental protections, slash corporate taxes and lead to even deeper cuts to our public services.

A Tory Brexit would put British jobs and living standards at risk, damaging our economy and threaten to take Britain over an economic cliff, worsening the already outrageous levels of poverty and inequality here in Britain.

Labour would do things very differently. We are clear, just as we were during the election, that the issue of Brexit has been settled. We are leaving the EU. The question is what kind of Brexit we will have.

A Labour Government would negotiate a Brexit deal that puts jobs and living standards first, and secures workers' rights and environmental protections.

We would seek a close relationship with the EU – not membership, but a partnership for peace, trade and co-operation – that strengthens trade and security, and underpins the investment in jobs and the industries of the future that will raise living standards for all British people.

Unlike the Tories, who started the negotiations with megaphone diplomacy, Labour would work sensibly with our European neighbours to ensure a flourishing post-Brexit economic relationship that works for both sides.

That is the kind of jobs-first and community-first Brexit that Britain, and Scotland, need.

Labour's Brexit team would seek continued tariff-free access to the single market, with no new non-tariff burdens for British business.

The precise institutional mechanism for achieving that is less important than ensuring that jobs, the economy and living standards are protected and expanded, not cut or damaged. We need a Brexit that delivers for the many, not the few.

Yet we have a Prime Minister, who having failed to secure the mandate she wanted for a Tory Brexit, appears to be willing to give up on tariff free access to the European single market before negotiations have even begun.

Leaving the EU means Britain will have a different relationship with the single market. The government's focus must be on securing a new partnership with the EU that maintains the benefits of both the EU single market and the customs union.

How that is best achieved, along with the freedom to negotiate new international trade agreements, should be part of the negotiations.

When it comes migration, our reform of the immigration system would put jobs and the needs of the economy first. Leaving the EU will mean that freedom of movement will end.

In its place, we support fair rules and reasonable management of migration, underpinned by tough action to end the undercutting of pay and conditions by unscrupulous employers and stop overseas-only recruitment.

This week, Theresa May has finally put down her first offer on the rights of EU Nationals in Britain, by promising a "settled status" for those who have lived in Britain for 5 years. This is too little, too late and falls far short of the full guarantee Labour would make.

Labour would give a clear commitment to all EU nationals who live and work in Britain, and make a huge contribution to our society, that they will retain their existing rights.

From my own discussions with European leaders, it is clear that unilaterally guaranteeing the rights of EU citizens to remain in Britain would be the best way to secure the rights of British nationals living in other parts of the EU.

For Scotland, we are clear that the voice of the Scottish people must be heard – and the same goes for the other devolved administrations.

The EU will only negotiate with the British government. But Scotland needs a clear input into the Brexit negotiating process. The Scottish government must have regular and systematic access to the British negotiating team so that the Scottish perspective, especially in those areas for which the Scottish Parliament is responsible, is fully taken into account.

That is of course a two-way street. The Scottish government also needs regularly to share the content of its dialogue with the Westminster government with the Scottish people through the Scottish parliament and the other political parties in Scotland.

Of course Brexit is going to be difficult and the negotiations will be challenging. But with the right approach and negotiating plan, I am convinced we can negotiate a new relationship with the EU that works for all our people, not just a privileged few.

We have set our plan for the Brexit negotiations, and we believe that only our plan can protect living standards and our wider economy, and deliver a Brexit for jobs, living standards and investment in our future.

The Tories have no mandate, no authority and no vision for our country's future. Labour is determined to build the fairer Britain that the millions who voted both 'Remain' and 'Leave' last year want to see.

Labour is the only party which can deliver a jobs-first, people-first Brexit that brings our country together. We are now a government in waiting, ready to provide that leadership.

This article first appeared in the Sunday Herald on June 25, 2017

It's time for a united Britain that works for the many, not the few.

23 June 2017

Kezia Dugdale writes for the Times Red Box on the Queen's speech:

When Theresa May planned the Queen's speech before calling her snap General Election, she would have thought it would be anything but threadbare.

She was planning to have a commanding Commons majority, allowing her to force through a raft of policies to punish the poorest in our society.

But her gamble backfired spectacularly, and her dreadful campaign and floundering attempts to stitch a deal together with the DUP has left her with no mandate and no authority.

As a result, we saw a Queen's speech reflecting the position of a Prime Minister in name only, while Jeremy Corbyn's government-in-waiting watched on.

Labour MPs, including the seven that Scotland sent to the Commons, will relish every chance in this parliament to derail the Tories' agenda.

The Queen's speech offered very little for Scotland. No further support for our vital oil and gas industry, no measures to protect the 250,000 WASPI

women in Scotland affected by the botched acceleration of the state pension age, and no attempt to scrap the emergency services tax, which sees Scotland's overstretched fire and police services pay millions of pounds in VAT.

The General Election should have sent a clear message to the Prime Minister. She needs to abandon the failed politics of austerity. Seven years of painful cuts have simply gone too far.

Our public services are at breaking point, working families are struggling to make ends meet, and the Tory government lurches from crisis to crisis. It simply isn't good enough.

The parallels between Theresa May and Nicola Sturgeon are now striking. Both have lost all authority and their supporters are deserting them – both in the country at large and within their inner circles.

Their brand of isolationist, nationalist politics feels outdated to an electorate sick of division.

Both now lead governments which are exhausted, having completely run out of ideas.

It is more important than ever that people in Scotland and across the UK realise there is an alternative to the extremes of Tory and SNP nationalism.

That alternative is the Labour Party. Our pro-UK anti-austerity message that together we're stronger is what the majority of Scots want.

That's why in the General Election we overturned huge SNP majorities and slashed many more. When the next election is called, we are ready to seize more seats from of an out-of-touch SNP – and we will kick Theresa May out of Downing Street.

After seven years of Tory austerity, and a decade of SNP division, it's time for a united Britain that works for the many, not the few.

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