

Tom Watson speech to Labour Party Conference

Tom

Watson MP, Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, speaking at the Labour Party Conference in Brighton today, said:

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

Conference, thank you for being here. Thanks for your enthusiasm, for your passion, for all your hard work on behalf of the Labour Party, on behalf of our country. I'm grateful to every one of you.

Last week, the Prime Minister made yet another speech to reboot, yet again, her Brexit strategy. She chose to deliver this latest oration in the great city of Florence, though no-one seems to know why. For politicians, Florence, even more than the city of Dante, the Medicis and Michelangelo, is the city of Niccolo Machiavelli.

I can only assume Michael Gove picked the venue. Michael Gove, who undermined his own Tory leadership bid last year, by admitting he doesn't have the right skills to be Prime Minister. For once in his life, he was right. Trouble is, none of the rest of them do either.

So now he's back. Machiavelli's famous advice was that it's better to be feared than to be loved. This mantra runs as deep in the Tory Party as blue through a stick of Brighton rock. Fear is how they win. Fear is how they govern.

It's fear of strangers behind this Government's callous treatment of EU citizens living here. It's with the peddled fear of economic ruin that they justify their cruelty to our nurses and teachers, our armed forces and our police officers. It's with fear that they hammer our poorest and most vulnerable, while turning a blind eye to their plutocrat friends.

I'm going to be honest with you, Conference: fear is a powerful force. It won the Conservative Party elections in 2010 and in 2015. But this year, something magical happened. The spell has been broken. Jeremy told this country that we don't need to be afraid. That another way is possible. That living in fear is not inevitable: we can choose to live in love and hope

instead.

And this country, our great country, began to throw off the shackles.

Mrs May, the Tory Party was never loved. But you were happy to be feared. It worked for you. Well not any more. 15 months in, you still seem as dazed as on day one. Caught between your enemies and, even worse, your friends.

Caught in the headlights. Living on Boris time.

As Shadow Culture Secretary, I've got one of the best jobs there is. When I get invited to the theatre or to the cinema or, yes, to Glastonbury, I get to say I'm only there for work. And one of the most surreal moments of my political life happened to me late at night, in a field, surrounded by people much younger and far more stylish than me.

I realised something as the crowd at Glastonbury's silent disco began to sing:

"Oh, Jeremy Corbyn...." And as they sang, I realised it's actually better to be loved than to be feared. And Jeremy has shown us that it's possible.

Thank you Jeremy.

There are some serious bits to my job, too, though. It's not all music festivals and opening nights. Digital, culture, media and sport are key battlegrounds in our fight against fear and despair.

And alongside me in those battles I have the best Shadow DCMS team you could want: Kevin Brennan, my deputy, Rosena Allin-Khan, Liam Byrne, Steve Reed, Ruth Smeeth and Wilf Stevenson.

And we've recently lost Louise Haigh, the finest mind of her generation, who was rightly promoted to join Diane's team in the shadow Home Office.

And we have a leader in Jeremy who stamped his leadership on culture policy when the two of us launched our innovative culture manifesto in Hull – deservedly the UK City of Culture.

What a great job they've done this year. An early priority for our DCMS team in Government will be to finally confront problem gambling. Of course, gambling isn't risk free. Even bets you think are absolute certainties can end up costing you a lot. Just ask Theresa May.

That was a joke, by the way, but it's a

serious problem. The damage to the families of gambling addicts can be terrible. Yet some gambling firms, driven by greed, are deliberately targeting our poorest communities. We now know that when vulnerable people try to opt out of online gambling, companies don't always block their accounts as they should.

Gambling companies are even harvesting data to deliberately target low-income gamblers and people who've given up.

As Mike Dixon, boss of mental health charity Addaction says, "gambling addiction tears lives and families apart. It's outrageous that an industry with a £13bn revenue contributes less than £10m to treatment".

Well Mike, I can tell you that a Labour Government will introduce a compulsory levy.

Can you imagine the uproar if the drinks industry started targeting Alcoholics Anonymous by selling drink outside AA meetings? We wouldn't tolerate that – and we shouldn't tolerate the same kind of behavior by some bookmakers. And addicts must be given the help they need. Gambling addiction is an illness and it's about time it was taken seriously.

So I can announce today that, together with Jonathan Ashworth, our shadow Health Secretary, I'm launching a thorough review of gambling addiction in this country and current provision for treatment on the NHS. Jon Ashworth, by the way: what a sparkling star of Labour's front bench. He's going to be an outstanding Health Secretary in the next Labour Government.

Our review will look at how best to fund NHS treatment and help free problem gamblers from the destructive cycle of addiction. My message to gambling firms today is clear: stop targeting vulnerable people. Start acting properly. And meet your obligation to help those whose lives have been blighted by addiction.

You can do it now, because it's the right thing to do. Or you can wait for the next Labour Government to do it for you.

Oh and by the way, the same applies to the organisations that run football in this country. If you won't ban football clubs from signing shirt sponsorship deals with betting companies – Labour will.

Conference, as I said, I know how lucky I am. I love my job. Serving my constituents in West Bromwich, serving the Party, serving each of you as Deputy Leader. There's no better job – perhaps that's why so many people want to do it.

But I know not everyone's as lucky as me. More and more are being left behind by an economy that serves the few, not the many.

And the world's changing in ways we can't continue to ignore: the labour market's polarising. Today's choice for too many young people is precarious employment or no employment, a zero hours contract or no contract, shabby, dangerous, soul-destroying work, or no work at all.

Income inequality in Britain is amongst the highest in the developed world. Inequality between those with fulfilment and security in work, and those without it is growing too.

This is a stain on our country. But the Tories just shrug their shoulders and say there's no alternative.

Just like they did on low pay, before our party introduced the minimum wage. Just like they did on maternity rights, before we secured them. Just like they did on healthcare, before we created the NHS to treat the many, not just the few.

And the Tories are still doing it now. Transport for London has told Uber it has to follow the same rules as everyone else. Nothing more. That it can run its mini-cab service, as long as they respect our rules. Treat your customers with respect and keep them safe, like everyone else has to. And then you'll be welcome to make money in London.

Uber, you're becoming the perfect picture of how the future gig economy must *not* look. You may think you're immune because your friends in the Tory party run Britain and its newspapers. You know the Tories don't care about level playing fields and orderly markets. They don't care about consumer protection. They certainly don't care about workers' rights. But they don't run London – and that's where you make your money.

And, mark my words, they won't be running Britain for much longer. Conservatives don't have the imagination to embrace change. They never have. Theresa May summed it up in her now infamous line from the election:

“Nothing has changed.

Nothing. Has. Changed.”

So: no lessons learned. No message received. It's the same old Tories. No end to austerity. No change for public servants who deserve a pay rise. No change for the millions who desperately need something different. The truth is, the Tories don't really want to change things.

But Labour does. And when Jeremy forms the next Government, Labour will. A time for change is upon us. The old fear is gone. We're ready for bold, transformative reform, hungry for it.

That's what Labour's campaign showed – as hundreds of thousands knocked on doors, went to rallies, got out the vote and delivered stunning Labour victories in Tory strongholds like Canterbury. Like Kensington.

This year's election showed that real change is possible. We can and we will form a radical Government which does things differently.

We have the imagination; we have the drive; we have the momentum. The fight is so important. Not just because we need to undo the damage of all these years of Tory rule. But because fresh challenges lie ahead.

On the horizon – in sight, in the next few years – automation and artificial intelligence threatening jobs and wages on a scale the world has never seen. Digital platforms making access to work much more direct and immediate. But the quality of that work, the safeguards, the wages, the pensions – too often these are cast aside, disguised as innovation.

Whereas Labour believes that secure, high-quality work should be available to every adult who wants it. And in order to get it, in the digital age, the successful worker will need to be a creative worker. It's the job of Government to make that happen. And that starts with education.

In an age when every child has access to all the knowledge that has ever existed on a device that fits in the palm of their hand, just teaching them to memorise thousands of facts is missing the point. Michael Gove's curriculum reforms were a useless return to the past – obsessed by what children can remember, instead of how they use the knowledge they have.

We don't yet know what the jobs of the future will be, so we've got to teach children not just what to learn but how to learn. And how to be. Self-awareness, emotional intelligence, social skills, creativity and collaborative learning. Transferable skills they can adapt as the new world swirls around them.

Great schools are places of imagination, inspiration, love. They help our young people become great humans, constantly adjusting in a continually changing world. Such schools are as powerful as the creative imaginations they nurture. They're fabulous places. And, let's be clear, they do exist.

But let's be equally clear that they exist in spite of Michael Gove, Nicky Morgan and Justine Greening, and all the other names of Tory shame. If it was left up to them, our children would be totally ill equipped for the economy of now – let alone the economy

of
the future.

Whereas

Angela Rayner, our fantastic Shadow Education Secretary, will lead an education system that prepares our young people for a world we can't yet see.

Angie's

talked about how a Labour Government helped her grow from teenage mom into Shadow Minister. Our education system failed her at first, but when she's running it, she won't let it fail the next generation. We're all so proud of her. So proud of what she's going to do.

The next Labour Government will educate and train a nation of workers that are the most creative and adaptive on the planet. We'll give working people the tools to use technology to enhance their lives, rather than restricting them to a digital elite.

The digital economy succeeds only when it gives each of us the means to realise our true potential. Which doesn't stop in our schools. It must be threaded throughout our economy, throughout our lives.

So let's extend employment rights to all workers in the gig economy – the self-employed, agency workers and contractors as well as the traditionally employed. Let's stop dancing on the head of a legalistic pin about when is a job not a job and when is self-employed not really self-employed. It's a fake fight which big business always wins and Tory governments love to hide behind.

So let's put an end to all that and just give rights to people. Yes, in one of the richest countries in the world in the 21st century, let's just make basic employment rights non-negotiable in all circumstances and give them to everybody.

Anybody tells you it can't be done, it's because they don't want to do it. They said it about the minimum wage. They said it about maternity rights. They said it about the NHS. Don't let them frighten you out of the rights you deserve.

We need to revolutionise our trade unions for the digital age, finding new ways to build solidarity and collectivism.

And let's not forget social enterprises: community-focused, people-oriented companies, that have thrived since the recession and will be vital to unlocking the future.

At last year's Conference, I announced an independent commission to look at the future of work. It will be reporting shortly, having done a tremendous job, and I'd like to thank the chair, Helen Mountfield,

and all the Commissioners.

This year, Conference, together, we rewrote the rules of politics. We overcame fear and we took the country with us. Using new digital platforms, instead of our biased media, we talked straight to the people and they heard our message.

In contrast, last September Theresa May had a secret meeting with Rupert Murdoch in New York. Nine months later, at the election, Murdoch's papers did their best to start a Tory landslide. They threw the kitchen sink at Jeremy. But this time the dirty tricks didn't work. This time it was not the Sun wot won it.

And let me tell you, Conference: it never will be the Sun wot won it again.

Winding up my speech last year, I predicted an early election. In which, I also said, we're going to give the Tories the surprise of their lives. Well conference, we did it.

Jeremy, you did it. So this year I'm going to go out on another limb.

Yes, there's hard work to do and no, we mustn't be complacent, but Jeremy Corbyn has broken the spell of fear the Tories sought to cast on this country. He has helped us all to remember that politics should be about inspiring hope, not peddling despair. He has shown us again what a real alternative to Toryism looks like and what it can achieve.

And because of that, I tell you, Conference, Jeremy Corbyn will be our next Prime Minister.

And in ten or twelve years' time, this Conference will be celebrating the achievements of two transformative terms of Labour government:

Abolishing tuition fees and reintroducing the education maintenance allowance;

Taking back our utilities into social ownership;

Re-nationalising our railways;

A £10/hour real living wage, and rising;

Hundreds of thousands of new council houses;

Waiting

lists down by at least a million and A&E waiting times back to 4 hours;

No
more Tory hospital closures;

Freezing
the state pension age;

Free
school meals for all primary school children and smaller class sizes;

Banning
zero hours contracts and giving all workers full and equal rights from day
one.

That's what a Labour Government
looks like. That's what we do.
That's who we are.

Politics now is a fight between those who want to be feared and
those who're not frightened to love. Britain's run out of patience with the
tin-pot Machiavellis. Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, Liam Fox and the rest of
you: your time is up.

This country is ready for change. Ready to throw off the shackles,
to turn back the tide; ready to do the right thing and to do the thing right.
In place of fear, love.

Conference, Britain is ready for Labour.

Love wins and so will we.

Thank
you.

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