

Jeremy Corbyn

Scottish Labour Party conference speech

Dundee

9 March 2018

Thank you conference.

Thank you Ann.

What a great comrade Ann has been in our Party and in our movement and so many congratulations to her on becoming only the second female Rector of Edinburgh University.

It's great to be here in Dundee a city whose history of struggle and trade unionism epitomises the best of our movement.

Indeed proportionally speaking more people from this city volunteered for the International Brigades volunteered to fight fascism in the Spanish Civil War than from any other city in the UK.

19 Dundonians sacrificed themselves to defend democracy in that bloody war and remain in Spain forever.

This morning I visited the grave of Caroline Martyn an absolutely tireless socialist campaigner whose early death before the turn of the century was the direct result of her unfailing campaign for workers' rights and a more equal society.

When she died in 1896 the Labour Leader publication published a poem by J. Connell containing the brilliant line:

'Where strong men faltered with courage gone, our sister comrade marched on and on.'

Thank you to Dundee Trades Council for erecting that lovely memorial

Being here just a day after International Women's Day it's important for us to remember the leading role which is often overlooked that women played in the founding of the British labour movement.

When we think about those women trade unionists working in the Jute Industry in the 19th and 20th centuries we realise that we really are standing on the shoulders of giants.

It reminds us of the historic role of our Party – standing up for everybody in the quest for the better society that is possible.

And this conference really confirms that renewed sense of purpose and optimism which now characterises our Party and the wider movement.

Conference it has been quite a year

This time last year, there were more than a few people in the media who had written the Labour Party off.

In Scotland, we were told that Labour was dying.

We were told by the commentariat and self-appointed experts that Labour could not and would not recover.

Comrades, I think they got that one wrong.

The truth is that we very much are alive and kicking.

Labour in Scotland is back.

Led by Richard Leonard who has already proven to be an excellent leader of Scottish Labour making Labour's voice heard for a radically fairer society.

And as we all know we won 6 new seats for Scottish Labour at the last general election and we came close to winning around 20 more.

Thank you to everybody for what you did in the General Election my campaigning in the election started in the snowy heights of Aviemore and finished in Glasgow on the last day of campaigning.

And led by Lesley Laird our new Scottish MPs are all doing an exceptional job of standing up for socialism and standing up for Scotland.

And today we are also celebrating two council by-election wins Cate Woodward in Nottingham and Alex Peterson in Medway who both won their seats from the Tories.

But it is not just Labour in Scotland that some wrote off.

When Theresa May went walking last year and had her masterstroke to call an election again those sages in the traditional media wrote us off.

We were heading for wipeout, they said.

But that's not how it turned out with our popular and fully costed manifesto we offered the chance of transformation and hope and confounded those so-called experts.

Of course I know that we didn't quite win.

But conference we are no longer just an opposition. We are a party preparing to go into government.

We are ready to put into practice our common sense policies to end austerity invest in people's futures and radically transform our society so that it works for the many not the few.

What resonated and enthused people in June was our vision for a country that doesn't need to be this way.

We offered a real alternative and a set of policies that command majority support but which mainstream politicians have long refused to endorse to demonstrate the kind of society we want to see:

A society that builds houses and council houses and ending homelessness.

A society that fairly rewards people for the hard work that they do.

A society that ends the scam of privateers sucking profit from our public services.

A society that ends the utter scandal of food banks

A society that cares for our public NHS, offering healthcare as a human right to all.

This is the vision that is attracting people back to our Party.

The vision that means Labour can win in Scotland again.

And it is needed more than ever.

There are currently 260,000 children in Scotland living in poverty.

There are now 430,000 Scots earning less than the living wage.

I am confident conference, just as I am sure you are, that under the progressive and principled leadership of Richard Leonard we can, we will, build on our progress here and deliver our radical programme for change.

But we are also living in tumultuous political times.

The Tories' Brexit plans are in chaos.

At one of the most important times for our country in its history we have a divided government that has no clear idea of what it's doing what it wants or where it's going.

And as Theresa May has now admitted under her plans for a reckless Tory Brexit the UK risks losing access to European markets.

Make no mistake about it reduced access to European markets means fewer economic opportunities for people in the UK.

This is why we need a Labour government to take the reins from the free market ideologues. Who want to use Brexit to sign a race-to-the-bottom trade deal with Trump's America and turn the UK into a deregulated offshore tax haven, and instead take the new common sense into the heart of government, and help bring about a society that truly does work for all.

Labour is the only party focusing on the issues that matter to people in their everyday lives, and the only party committed to putting power back into every community in the UK.

When it comes to Brexit, Labour's priorities have been clear from the outset.

We will fight for a deal that puts jobs and living standards first.

Because the priority for people in Scotland and across the UK is access to high wage secure employment that will enable them to live the healthy, prosperous and well-rounded lives that they deserve.

That means that we will not accept an off the peg model for our future relationship with the European Union. The Norwegian model may work for Norway, but we need to find our own model that works for everybody in the UK.

That is why we would seek to negotiate a new customs union with the EU after Brexit.

To ensure that there are no tariffs with Europe, and help avoid any need for a hard border in Northern Ireland.

But we are also clear that the option of a new UK customs union with the EU would need to ensure the UK has a say in future trade deals.

Labour would not countenance a deal that left Britain as a passive recipient of rules decided elsewhere by others.

A comprehensive new customs union would cement our close trading relationship with our European partners.

That relationship is vital to our interests vital to jobs across Scotland and the UK.

Take the food and drink sector which is worth around £14 billion in Scotland alone with ambitions to grow to around £30 billion by 2030.

With complex food supply chains ingredients and products have to cross many borders.

Adding to that complexity with considerable delays for checks at ports and airports would cause real difficulties and cost for perishable goods such as seafood.

That is why retaining the benefits of the customs union and the single market is vital to future Labour governments in both Holyrood and Westminster if we

are to fully implement our socialist programme for change in our society.

As democratic socialists we respect the result of the referendum.

But Labour has its own common sense approach in stark contrast to the Tories' extreme and reckless plans for Brexit.

We would aim to negotiate a new and strong relationship with the single market and a floor under existing rights, standards and protections for workers, consumers and the environment.

That new relationship would need to ensure we can deliver our ambitious economic plans take the essential steps to intervene, upgrade and transform our economy, and build an economy for the 21st century that works for the many, not the few.

That's why we would want to negotiate protections or exemptions where necessary from current rules and directives that push privatisation and public service competition, or restrict our ability to intervene to support domestic and local industry and business, or undermine attempts to protect rights at work.

We cannot be held back inside or outside the EU from taking the steps we need to develop and invest in cutting edge industries and local business to stop the tide of privatisation and outsourcing.

Or from preventing employers being able to import cheap agency labour, to undercut existing pay and conditions in the name of free market orthodoxy.

It's striking that Theresa May's only clear priority when she laid out her new Brexit negotiating position last week seemed to be to tie the UK permanently to EU rules which are used to drive privatisation and block support for British industry.

The European Union is set to make changes of its own in the coming period,

especially in relation to the rules governing Eurozone economies and the rights of temporary migrant workers.

It would therefore be wrong to sign up to a single market deal without agreement that our final relationship with the EU would be fully compatible with our radical plans to change Britain's economy.

We are determined to negotiate a deal that gives us full tariff-free access to the single market.

But if we are genuinely going to have a jobs first Brexit, that deal must be compatible with:

- our plans to bring the railways and postal service into full public ownership
- transform energy markets
- and end the privatisation of our public services.

And we also need to be clear, we could not accept a situation where we were subject to all EU rules and EU law, yet had no say in making those laws.

That would leave us as mere rule-takers and isn't a tenable position for a democracy.

As the party of devolution the Party that oversaw the creation of all three devolved administrations in the UK, we have consistently argued that powers being returned from Brussels should go directly to devolved administrations.

The Tories have played right into the SNP's hands in hoarding power for themselves in the back corridors of Westminster.

The fact that the Scottish and UK governments are unable to reach agreement

on the 24 areas of dispute that were revealed this morning highlights the utter chaos and mismanagement that is defining this Tory Brexit.

Added to the prospects of both economic and constitutional crises, the government's dangerous risking of peace in Northern Ireland, offering no clear alternative to a hard border on the island, as it refuses to consider the option of a customs union, shows why a Labour government is needed so badly to steer the negotiations in a sensible direction.

Because as well as being a democratic socialist Party, Labour is also an internationalist Party.

We realise that the great problems of our age:

- fighting for people's rights and living standards against the power of international capital.
- ending the incessant destruction of our climate and our natural world.
- clamping down on rich tax dodgers who hide their excessive wealth and refuse to pay their way.
- and defending international human rights that have been fought for and defended by people on the ground for generations.

These are problems which individual nations cannot deal with alone.

We cannot give in to Tory demands to cut Britain off or SNP demands to cut Scotland off from the rest of the world.

We recognise the need to have a strong voice in combating human rights abuses across the globe and are absolutely committed to retaining the UK's

place in the European Convention on Human Rights.

Having that strong voice means standing up for what we believe in.

That's why we have demanded Theresa May's government uses the visit this week of Saudi Arabia's ruler Muhammad bin Salman to halt British arms sales to Saudi Arabia while its devastating bombing of Yemen continues and demand an immediate ceasefire.

A humanitarian disaster is now taking place in Yemen as a direct result of the Saudi-led bombing and blockade.

Millions face starvation and hundreds of thousands of children have cholera while thousands of civilians have been killed.

UK arms supplies to Saudi Arabia have increased sharply since the war began and British military advisers are directly involved in the prosecution of the Saudi bombing campaign which has repeatedly targeted civilian infrastructure, including schools and hospitals.

It cannot be right, as I told the Prime Minister on Wednesday, that her government is colluding in what the UN and others say is evidence of war crimes.

Germany has suspended arms supplies to Saudi Arabia, and so must the British government. This outrage must end.

Nor is it true, as the Prime Minister claimed, that the Saudi-led war in Yemen has been authorised by the United Nations Security Council.

What's needed now is both a ceasefire and a concerted international effort to achieve a negotiated political settlement.

I also want to pay tribute to Richard Leonard for the work he has done

preparing a movement to oppose any visit by US President Donald Trump to Scotland.

While the SNP wooed Trump to build his golf course in Aberdeenshire, and Theresa May appeases him as she bets the UK economy on a race-to-the-bottom trade deal with the US.

Richard has shown Labour is standing up to oppose the racism, misogyny and dangerous belligerence coming from the US administration.

A Labour government will ensure that our international relations are not dictated by the global dominance of multinational corporations, but are governed by the values of socialism and international solidarity and shared progress in the interests of working people across the globe both inside and outside of Europe.

They're values which are encapsulated in part of a poem by Liz Lochhead, the previous Makar.

She wrote in her poem Connecting Cultures:

Remembering how hard fellow feeling is to summon

When Wealth is what we do not have in Common,

May every individual

And all the peoples in each nation

Work and hope and

Strive for true communication –

Only by a shift and sharing is there any chance

For the welfare of all our people and Good Governance.

Such words can sound like flagged-up slogans, true.

What we merely say says nothing –

All that matters is what we do.

I think you'll agree conference that sums up the central philosophy of what our internationalist outlook should be.

The outlook that must define our international policy as we work to ensure that our voice in the world is a wholly positive one encouraging peace and prosperity.

Conference the Labour Party has a vision, a vision for a society where everybody cares for everybody else, we call it socialism.

And when we do get into government:

We will go further than any government has ever gone before.

We will go further in tackling inequality.

We will go further in ending poverty.

We will go further in bringing power closer to people.

Further in transforming our economy to work for the many and not the few.

Further in bringing about a common sense revolution that puts public service above private profit.

And we know the further we go in reflecting people's priorities the more support we will get.

That is why we are building a genuine mass movement of people.

One that is capable of organising in every city, town and village in Scotland and across this island.

A movement that can propel Labour into government in both Holyrood and in Westminster, so that we can bring real change and create a society that truly is for the many and not the few.