

# Lesley Laird MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland

Scottish Labour Party conference

9 March 2018

Friends, colleagues, comrades.

What a pleasure it is to be with you on the first day of our conference – not just as Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland and interim Deputy Leader of Scottish Labour, but also, proudly, as Labour Member of Parliament for the constituency of Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath.

And what better setting for our conference than the great city of Dundee to which past Labour governments have contributed so much.

A city with a wonderful working-class past, a great Labour movement tradition and now - an exciting, transformational future.

It will be eleven years next month when Jack McConnell, as First Minister, came to Dundee to launch a feasibility study for the magnificent V&A project.

But let's not forget that it started with a vision – the vision that Jack McConnell brought to Dundee in April 2007.

And that is the theme of what I want to say to you today.

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To make a difference, politics has to be about vision.

It has to be about ideas and how they can be fulfilled.

It has to be about the vision of how life can be made better for every household and community in the land.

A vision for the many and not the few.

Delivery for the many and not the few.

That is what Labour has always been about and it is what Labour must always be about. .

In today's Scotland, there is far too much tunnel vision.

A narrow focus on the politics of the constitution with every issue and every grievance, real or imagined, manipulated to create artificial divisions.

Scotland has had more than enough of that kind of politics and in last year's General Election, Scotland - began to answer back.

When Labour offered a very different kind of vision – we got an overwhelmingly positive response.

Under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership this party has returned to its roots.

How can it be that we in the 5th richest nation still see so much inequality? .

Well it's really very simple.

It's because neither the Tories or the SNP are really prepared to do anything about it

Only Labour will. It requires principles, purpose and political will.

And when Jeremy Corbyn is Prime Minister that is what we will deliver – for the Many not the few.

We will deliver fairness in work by banning zero hours contracts, tackling in work poverty paying people a decent living wage of £10 an hour, and

addressing gender pay inequality.

We're going to embark on a life changing social house building programme – giving everyone an affordable, safe, warm, dry, home to address the growing crises of homelessness and rough sleeping on our streets. .

Labour's enduring vision is one of fairness, social justice, equality and opportunity.

That's the vision we must continue to pursue and we should never stop reminding a new generation of what politics and government CAN achieve when it is rooted in that kind of vision.

There's a lot of fake political history around, particularly in Scotland, and if we don't tell our own story well.....nobody else is going to do it for us.

And my story is this - that in the early hours of June 9th when the results were announced we won back Gordon Brown's seat – Labour GAIN I knew - in that very special moment - that my Dad and my Papa were smiling down at me.

They had both spent a life time fighting for Labour and the Trade Union cause.

My grandparents were poor – and Papa because of his views often did not get work. .

My Dad often said that if it wasn't for the Co-op they would have gone hungry but when my Papa did work my Dad would be sent to the Co-op by my Nana to pay back their tick.

I stand here today because of that legacy.

You stand here today because of the legacy that your parents and grand parents fought for.

To ensure that you had a better life than they did.

We all now carry that baton.

So what is the legacy we are all handing over to the generations that follow us?

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Because Comrades, that is the challenge to us all today.

Little did we think that in our time we would still be fighting to fill hungry bellies.

But if the Tories have their way – all those sacrifices made for us will have been in vain.

Gordon and Jeremy always understood that.

Throughout their political life, and still today, their vision was ridding this society of child poverty in order to build a land of opportunity for all.

And before all THAT is written out of history, let's remember how much of that vision was turned into reality. .

Between 1997 and 2010, nearly 1 million children were lifted out of poverty

And if Labour had been in power for longer, that trend would have carried on in the same direction.

Instead that proud legacy has been stripped away.

Here we are today with 800,000 children back in poverty a figure projected to rise to 1 million children by 2022

Comrades, can you think of anything in British - or politics today which remotely compares with the scale of that vision or the significance of that achievement

And yet, to listen to our political opponents, you would think none of it happened. .

There will always be political forces which seek to deny or minimise the past achievements of Labour governments.

There will always be parties which seek to steal Labour's clothes without the hard work of having contributed to, or even supported, our great reforms.

Remembering our achievements is not about living in the past but how we renew our focus, to build a better future.

For the MANY, not the few.

In today's Britain, the few - are doing very well but the many are struggling to keep their heads above water.

It was the few who created a banking collapse and the financial crisis that followed. .

But it is the many who have been forced to pay the price for it.

That is the basic injustice from which - a great deal else flows.

In Scotland, we are hit with a double whammy.

There has never been a time when the many were more dependent on public services, delivered through local authorities, to protect them from the worst of the stormy blast.

Yet the Nationalist government in Edinburgh has made local government its whipping boy.

Since 2008 – 2017 Scottish Councils have had a real terms cut of 8% and that is

not just about Tory Austerity.

Inevitably, that has translated into 3,500 fewer teachers in our schools, fewer home help hours, fewer libraries and community centres, fewer gritters on our roads.

And, of course, 30,000 fewer decently-paid, unionised jobs in local authorities.

No Scottish Government task force rolling up here!

To those at the sharp end of these cuts, and job losses Tartan Austerity looks very much the same as Tory Austerity.

Put the two together - and you have a very deadly cocktail.

It is the many not the few who depend most upon council services, it is the many not the few who are hardest hit when these cuts are forced upon councils.

The Scottish Government cannot get away any longer with blaming others for their Tartan Austerity when it is they who are putting councils in the front-line of cuts and taking away the life chances of a generation of our young people.

So let's resolve to stand up for local government.

For local government jobs.

For local government services because we believe in it – but more than that, for the sake of those who depend upon it.

For the many and not the few.

We are here today because we have an aim, an ambition and a vision for real change in this country – not just in Scotland, but right across the whole of the United Kingdom.

We are in high spirits.

Reports of the death of Labour in Scotland proved to be greatly exaggerated.

Yes, we had a huge set-back.

Now - we are on a huge fight-back.

Because, when all the petty politics are stripped away, you get back to a critical fact.

The people of Scotland, as much as any other part of the UK, need a Labour government and Labour policies at every level.

Just as they did in 1945.

Just as they did in 1997.

And just as they did in the first decade of the Scottish Parliament when vision existed and progress was made.

And, Comrades, they need us more than ever now.

Across the UK, we have the largest mass membership in Western Europe; 600,000 strong and getting stronger - in Scotland we have our magnificent 7 MPs; and we have our new leader with an agenda for real change. Real change for the many, not the few.

Today – in Brexit Britain confronts one of its biggest challenges in post war history.

This is not a game.

It is about real jobs.

Real living standards.

Real legacies.... for good or ill, to be lived with by the generations that follow.

We are focused on a jobs first, economy Brexit – protecting hard fought workers' rights, human rights, environmental rights and also enhancing the fundamental principles of devolution.

There is only one party that is working single-mindedly to achieve all of that – and obtain the all round best outcome for every nation and region of the United Kingdom – The Labour Party.

Colleagues, I voted to retain our membership of the European Union.

I do not like the result, but I believe in democracy above all else.

I accepted the result of the 2014 Independence Referendum, and I accepted the result of the 2016 EU Referendum.

Telling people to keep on voting until they get the answer we want is a dangerous game and we are not going to play it.

There are those who want Labour to become simply the anti-Brexit party.

To block everything and try to force a second referendum.

That is not our role.

Our job NOW - in Parliament - is to expose the arguments, to scrutinise, to amend, to safeguard vital interests and ultimately to ensure the best possible outcomes. For the many, not the few.

The debate about Brexit will take many twist and turns.

Labour is taking the grown-up approach to Brexit – respectful of the democratic outcome while contemptuous of the Tory fixes which are always driven by divisions in their party – rather than the needs of their country.

In Parliament, and in the country, we can help to shape events over the coming months and if we can force this shambolic government to go to the polls, – then that would be the best possible result.

The sooner the better – and nowhere more so than in Scotland.

This whole mess has been one of the Tories' own making.

But right now the Tories are going nowhere.

A £1B deal with the DUP has seen to that.

Their front bench is full of leadership pretenders – but no contenders and back benchers waiting with knives at the ready....

Their avoidance of any contentious vote in Parliament – their attitude to the Devolution Settlement.

No JMC for 8 months.

No Scottish representative at the Cabinet Brexit table.

No David Mundell.

No Ruth Davidson.

And what about the 13 Tory MPs who Ruth Davidson promised would be going to London to stand up for Scotland – Well - On protecting the devolution settlement and Clause 11 they were posted missing.

Out manoeuvred / outvoted and ultimately.... overruled.

The Tories are sleepwalking into a serious constitutional crisis that threatens the whole of the United Kingdom.

But as we all know constitutional crises suit one party very well indeed.

So where are the SNP on Brexit?

At the last count I think they're on their 6th Brexit position.

But, oh the irony of the SNP position— don't want to be "ruled" by Westminster but seem prepared to sign up to 27 other countries setting the agenda and making the rules for them.

I have a message to the SNP – no regulation without representation.

Labour – is the party of devolution which established the powers of the Scottish Parliament and has subsequently led the way in adding to them, we have no intention of seeing these powers in any way threatened by Brexit.

All logic says that with so many powers being repatriated from Brussels, the devolved Parliament and Assemblies will end up with more powers rather than fewer.

Labour will continue to resist any reduction in powers, we will also work constructively to ensure that additional powers coming back from Brussels end up where they rightfully belong – and that does not mean stopping at Holyrood.

Unlike the SNP, we are not interested in conflict with the UK Government on this issue for the sake of conflict.

Our job is to ensure the devolution settlement is not only safeguarded but enhanced.

We need the shroud of secrecy lifted by the Scottish and UK Government.

What are the actual issues that will affect people's lives that they are so anxious to make a quarrel about?

If we knew what they were, then we would be able to judge whether they can be dealt with by negotiation.

So let's have some transparency about what exactly the outstanding issues actually are.

And then, let's get on with sorting them out – in the open – free of grandstanding and focused solely on what is best for Scotland – rather than what the Nationalists think is best for them.

As Jeremy Corbyn has said - only Labour can unite the country.

From the outset we set out our six tests for Brexit.

It's taken Theresa May 20 months to figure out her 5.

We have been clear if those six tests are not satisfied, we will not support the final deal in Parliament.

And alongside my Scottish Labour colleagues, we have been unequivocal in our commitment and protection of the Scottish devolution settlement.

But Labour has a bigger vision for Scotland.

Not only should the new powers transfer to the Scottish Parliament but that democratic franchise should not stop at centralising Holyrood – instead it should be extended to local government.

Labour were the party of vision on devolution and Brexit presents the opportunity to take that next step.

We must fundamental change where powers reside - and if there is indeed to be any power grab then local government should be top of the queue including the financial settlement .

To determine its local priorities and make it - once again - the deliverer of effective, life changing, life saving public services – for the Many, not the few.

But Comrades, there are issues even more fundamental than Brexit.

Since the economic crash in 2008 the combined wealth of the wealthiest 1000 people in the UK has doubled.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that there are now 19 million people in the UK whose income is so low they are at risk of falling into poverty.

Comrades, that is one in every three people in the UK.

My Dad and my Papa would not be smiling about that.

It is clear that we have an economy in Scotland that is stagnating

It is clear that we have an economy propped up by low-paid, low-productivity, low skill jobs.

Our Manifesto last year set out our stall.

We outlined our positive vision for investment and growth for this country.

But - this is just the start – without you this desire for change will remain nothing more than words on paper.

If we all don't take up this challenge, the Tories will complete their decimation of all the great things that our predecessors fought for and won.

Well, Comrades – It ain't happening on our watch.

So my call to you today is let's dig in.

Let's work together. Let's fight the real enemy.

Let's all keep our eyes on the big prize.

Let 's get the keys to No 10.

Because believe me – Comrades , we've got work to do.

For the many not the few.