

Keir Starmer Conference Speech

“Fairer, Greener Britain”

Tuesday 27 September 2022

Thank you, Conference. It's great to be here in Liverpool.

After all the changes we've made, all the hard work we've put in, finally we are seeing the results we want.

Yes, Conference, we can say it at last: Arsenal are top of the league.

But before I begin, I want to address something important. This is our first conference in Liverpool since 2018. And that means it's our first conference since this city's call for Justice for the 96 became Justice for the 97.

For too long his city has been let down. So, when Labour wins the next election, one of my first acts as Prime Minister will be to put the Hillsborough Law on the statute book.

I know how much this matters. I've spent a lifetime helping those who have been failed by the system. I worked with Stephen Lawrence's family and Jane Clough's to get them justice. I promise you we will get this city the justice it deserves.

Conference, we've seen two sides of Britain in the last few weeks.

On one side, a nation united by a profound purpose – to pay its respects to a remarkable sovereign. And that queue. 5 miles at its peak. Even in death our Queen found a unique way to capture the British spirit.

But Conference, the other side of Britain never went away. A Britain all at sea, where a cloud of anxiety hangs over working people.

At moments of uncertainty like this we must provide clear leadership. We must stand with working people. Meet their ambitions for real change. Walk towards a better future. And build a new Britain, together.

A Britain that is fairer, greener, more dynamic. And that isn't afraid to use the power of government to help working people succeed.

Because we can't go on like this. What we've seen in the past few days has no precedent.

The Government has lost control of the British economy – and for what? They've crashed the pound – and for what?

Higher interest rates. Higher inflation. Higher borrowing. And for what?

Not for you. Not for working people. For tax cuts for the richest 1% in our society. Don't forget. Don't forgive.

The only way forward is to stop this – with a Labour Government.

And our problems don't end there. Raw sewage in our rivers and seas. Backlogs everywhere – at our borders, in our courts, in our hospitals. Crimes like burglary totally unpunished. People told to drive themselves to hospital after a heart attack. And millions of families, pensioners, the poorest in our society still facing the coldest winter of their lives.

I said on Sunday that a fitting tribute to The Late Queen would be to turn our collar up and face the storm. And we will. Because Britain never won its battles with wishful thinking.

Our success comes, first and foremost, from the hard work, the graft and the common sense of the British people. A common sense that teachers up and down the country drum into their pupils: "fail to prepare and you prepare to fail".

Conference, that is how the Tories have governed our country for twelve long years. That's why our economy has been more brittle than others in the face of crisis. They used to lecture us about fixing the roof when the sun was shining.

But take a look around Britain. They haven't just failed to fix the roof. They've ripped out the foundations, smashed through the windows and now they've blown the doors off for good measure.

My government will be different. We will run towards the challenges of tomorrow. We will get us out of this endless cycle of crisis. And we will do it with a fresh start, a new set of priorities and a new way of governing.

But it won't be easy. And the first step must be to tackle the cost-of-living crisis. The Prime Minister has finally accepted there's no alternative to Labour's plan to freeze energy prices.

When she was arguing against "handouts", Labour provided the clarity our nation needed. We said: this winter not a penny more on anyone's bills.

But politics is about choices. And the choice – the political choice – is: who pays? Working people? Or the oil and gas companies making huge profits from higher prices?

The Head of BP has said that this crisis is a "cash machine" for his company. But that's a cash machine fed by working people.

So our choice, the only choice, the Labour choice is to put those profits to work. This party is always on the side of working people in times of crisis.

And Conference, I know this will shock you but the Tories aren't on the side of our NHS either.

My Mum worked for the NHS. My sister worked for the NHS. My wife still works for the NHS. The NHS runs through my family like a stick of rock.

But I tell you what – I'm really worried about how many lives are at risk this winter.

Talking to doctors in my local hospital, I said "the NHS is on its knees, isn't it". They said "no Keir, it's face down on the floor". And the pathetic response of the Government last week left it there.

The way to get it back on its feet is with a stronger NHS workforce. That's the main barrier to capacity right now – staff.

So as Rachel announced yesterday, we will take on an extra 7,500 medical students every year, we will double the number of district nurses, 5,000 new health visitors, 10,000 extra nursing placements.

If it's a choice between a tax cut for those earning hundreds of thousands of pounds or supporting our NHS that is not a hard choice for us – Labour will always deliver for our NHS.

But these are just the first steps on a much bigger journey. The next Labour Government must restore our sense of collective hope. We should never be left cowering in a brace position.

It's time for Britain to stand tall again. To believe in ourselves again. To chart a new course. And to get our future back.

Now, you may have heard some of this before. I grew up in a pebble-dashed semi. Dad was a tool-maker, Mum was a nurse, our first car was a Ford Cortina – this was the 1970s.

So, I remember what rising prices feel like. I remember when our phone was cut off because we couldn't pay the bill. How hard it was to make ends meet. It wasn't easy.

But there's something else I remember about being working class in the 1970s: hope.

Not a grandiose, utopian dream, kind of hope. A hope that was ordinary. Basic. Taken for granted. Because like all families, although we had our ups and downs, my parents never doubted for one second that things would get better.

And you know what: they were right. They worked their socks off and gave me the gift of opportunity. That gift drives me to make sure no one, anywhere in this country, is held back by their circumstances.

That's not just words – it's the story of my life.

And I don't think these values are special. The opportunity to get on is what everyone wants for their family. It's more than a British value, it's what we tell our children: "Work hard and you can achieve anything". "Work hard and you will get a fair chance in Britain".

My parents didn't just believe this, it comforted them. But is it still true? I don't think so.

After twelve long years our spirit is ground down. When I talk to working people now, they tell me they work harder and harder just to stand still. That their graft can't provide their family with a sense of security. That they're worried their kids won't have a better life than them.

Conference, what does it say about Britain, when families worry like this about their children's future?

It says an unwritten contract is broken. A contract where in return for hard work, you get on. Where your contribution is always be respected. And which reaches through the generations to say Britain will be better for your children.

That's the deep cost of Tory failure. They keep talking about aspiration, but they don't understand how they've choked it off for working people. And it gets worse.

Because the other thing people say is politics can't do anything about it. They don't think real change is possible anymore. And who can blame them?

Just look at what they've been through. They were told we're "all in this together" – yet they paid for a mess made by bankers. They cried out for economic change in a referendum, but their calls went unanswered. They united to defeat a virus only to see the Government break all the rules that they respected.

And now, this. The biggest hit to their living standards in a century. And it turns out there is money — for the top 1 percent.

Now, I'm not going to stand here and pretend the awful conflict in Ukraine is not the immediate spark of the cost-of-living crisis.

We will never allow Putin's threats and imperialism to succeed. We will stand alongside Ukraine and its people fighting on the frontline of freedom. So let this entire conference say together:

Slava Ukraini!

But I will never accept that the war is an excuse for how unprepared Britain was to tackle the fallout. The war didn't ban onshore wind. The war didn't scrap home insulation. The war didn't stall British nuclear energy. The Tories did that.

And in their budget last week they sent out a new message. A message that echoes around the kitchens and workplaces of families right across the country and says your struggles, your hopes, your ambitions don't matter to us. We are not here for you. You are not our people. We are here for those at the top and the rest of you can shove off.

And Conference, make no mistake about it in one bold move on Friday the Tory Party gave up on any claim it may have had to be a party of aspiration.

So we need to get moving. That's the other thing my background gives me: impatience. If you're born without privilege, you don't have time for messing around. You don't walk around problems without fixing them. And you don't surrender to the instincts of organisations that won't face up to change.

As a human rights lawyer, I took on Governments who wanted to keep the barbaric practice of death by hanging. In Northern Ireland, I worked alongside others to make sure the Police Service worked for all communities. As Director of Public Prosecutions, I overhauled the handling of sexual violence cases to make them work better for victims.

And this working class impatience is what drives me in this job too.

I knew in April 2020, when I became leader of this party, we had a big task before us. We had to change our party and prepare for power all in one go. Not change for change's sake. Change with a purpose. To make our Labour Party fit to serve our country.

That's why we had to rip antisemitism out by its roots. Why we had to show our support for NATO is non-negotiable. Show we want business to prosper. Shed unworkable policies.

Country first, party second.

But I didn't do any of this alone. Conference: we did it together. And it shows. We've taken councils in Scotland, in Wales, in every part of England from Southampton to Stevenage, Wrexham to Wolverhampton. We've shown Labour can win again, anywhere.

We won in Wakefield, with Simon Lightwood, our first by-election gain for a decade.

But people need more. They are crying out for change, looking for decisive leadership. They need to know we can be a reforming government with clear answers to the big challenges they face.

That we can grow the economy and raise living standards for everyone, not just a privileged few. Tackle climate change by creating new jobs, new industries, new opportunities. Redesign our public services to unleash opportunity and provide security. Restore faith in politics as a force for good. Get Britain's hope, its confidence and its future back.

So imagine we are looking back at the first term of the next Labour Government. How is Britain different? I'll tell you. We've defeated the cost-of-living crisis and the clouds of anxiety have lifted. Services are there when you need them. Our economy is stable again. Business has the certainty to invest. The NHS is back in good health.

And people are starting to raise their sights. Believe in Britain again. Britain is fairer. People feel they can get on. There's more opportunity, more affordable housing, fairer taxes, higher wages, jobs – more secure.

Families can aspire again. Look forward with hope, again.

And Britain is greener. We're leading the world on climate change. People look at us and follow our example. New jobs, industries, technologies benefit all parts of the country.

We're proving net-zero can be achieved, the most precious gift to the next generation is within our grasp, a safer, more prosperous world to live in.

And because we are fairer, because we are greener, we're also more dynamic. Our entrepreneurial spirit – unleashed. New technology – improving public services. Cutting edge science and world-class services driving economic growth. And working people are respected as the people who create the wealth that drives Britain forward.

And there's one more thing. Something important. People have started to notice it's possible to govern with integrity. To unite rather than divide. To respect other points of view. To see that long term plans, trump short-term fixes. That decline is not inevitable.

Yes, some people will say “politicians are all the same” – but not as many.

In Grimsby a few months ago I was really struck by a woman I met. She said something to me which was really simple: “I don't just want to survive; I want to live”. As I got the train back, that phrase went round and round in my head. “I don't just want to survive; I want to live”.

Conference, I want to look her in the eyes after five years of a Labour government and I want to know that she, and millions of people like her, are not just surviving, they're thriving.

That's the difference a Labour government will make. That's the Britain we're fighting for.

But Conference, let's be honest: missions don't achieve themselves. You need focus. Determination. And the courage to make very difficult choices. Particularly when managing the country's finances.

Rachel Reeves and I have set out a framework for sound money. We're determined to reduce debt as a share of our economy. Every policy we announce will be fully costed. And we will set up an Office for Value for Money to make sure public spending targets the national interest.

And we should be clear about what that means. It means not being able to do things – good Labour things – as quickly as we might like. That's what responsible government looks like. Because if you lose control of the economy, if you act irresponsibly – as the Tories have in spectacular fashion – then you lose the ability to do anything. And working people pay the price.

We will not let that happen.

We will only borrow to invest when it's in the long-term national interest. When the cost of not investing makes it much more expensive for the next generation.

Conference, the Labour Party is at its best when we glimpse the future and lead our country towards it.

In 1945, out of the rubble of the Second World War, we built a land fit for heroes. In 1964, we harnessed the white heat of technology to pay our way in a modern economy. And in 1997, we modernised a country held back by crumbling public services and outdated institutions.

It's time to write a new chapter of Labour Party history about how we built a fairer, greener, more dynamic Britain by tackling the climate emergency head on and used it to create the jobs, the industries, the opportunities of the future.

I come at this not just as leader of the Labour Party, but also as a father. And as a father, I am spurred on by the voices of our children, the cry of indignation, demanding our generation act before it's too late.

As Labour leader, I see it as a matter of justice and opportunity. About the fairness and better society that I came into politics to create the biggest opportunity we've had in decades to make this country work for working people.

Across the world countries are already gearing up to meet this challenge – we cannot afford to miss out.

Because some nation is going to lead the world in offshore wind. Why not this one? Some nation will win the race for electric vehicles. Why not us? Some nation will be the first to harness new hydrogen power. Why not Britain?

That's why today I'm so proud to launch our Green Prosperity Plan. A plan that will turn the UK into a green growth superpower. And driving the plan forward is a goal that will put us ahead of any major economy in the world: 100 percent clean power by 2030.

A huge national effort. An effort that will: double Britain's onshore wind capacity, treble solar power, quadruple offshore wind, invest in tidal, hydrogen, nuclear.

Back carbon capture. Commit to green steel production. New renewable ports. New gigafactories. And insulate 19 million homes.

And working with Ed Miliband and his team, we'll make sure this energy revolution powers up all parts of the country. Let's get clean hydrogen energy in South Yorkshire, in the East of England, across the river in the Wirral. Offshore wind in Scotland, Teesside, East and North Yorkshire. Solar power growing rural communities, in the South East, South West and Midlands.

This will require a different way of working – the biggest partnership between government, business and communities this country has ever seen. It will mean new jobs – more than a million new jobs, training for plumbers, electricians, engineers, software designers, technicians, builders. And it will all start within the first 100 days of a new Labour government.

And what will it mean for working people? Cheaper bills and higher living standards. Take home insulation. I saw this for myself on Abbey Road – not that

one. This one's on a council estate in Kirklees, where the Labour council had the good Yorkshire foresight to do a real job on insulation.

I went in January. It was freezing cold. I was invited in, the house was warm, the energy bills were next to nothing, and the tenants were grinning from ear to ear. And why not: over a grand off your winter fuel bill – what's not to like!

Clean energy is already cheaper than fossil fuels. Nine times cheaper. We just need more of it. This is about fair growth powered by clean British energy everywhere in the country.

That's what levelling-up really looks like: practical Labour solutions, not empty Tory slogans.

And Conference, as Rachel announced yesterday – a new British sovereign wealth fund will drive us forward on this mission. We will make sure that the public money we spend building-up British industry spurs on private investment, stimulates growth in construction, life sciences, finance and insurance and the British people enjoy the returns.

We won't make the mistake the Tories made with North Sea oil and gas back in the 1980s where they frittered away the wealth from our national resources.

Just look at what's happening at the moment. The largest onshore wind farm in Wales. Who owns it? Sweden. Energy bills in Swansea are paying for schools and hospitals in Stockholm. The Chinese Communist Party has a stake in our nuclear industry. And five million people in Britain pay their bills to an energy company owned by France.

So we will set up Great British Energy within the first year of a Labour government. A new company that takes advantage of the opportunities in clean British power and because it's right for jobs, because it's right for growth, because it's right for energy independence from tyrants like Putin.

Yes Conference, Great British Energy will be publicly owned.

None of this will be easy – it won't be like flicking a switch. It will mean tough battles on issues like planning and regulation. But when the Tories nay-say and carp, remember this: the road to net-zero is no longer one of stern, austere, self-denial. It's at the heart of modern, 21st century aspiration.

Technology has turned everything on its head. Green and growth don't just go together – they're inseparable. The future wealth of this country is in our air, in our seas, in our skies. Britain should harness that wealth and share it with all.

British power to the British people.

That's why I've always said we will fight the Tories on economic growth. Their record is appalling – the worst decade of growth in two centuries. Or as the Chancellor puts it: “a vicious cycle of stagnation”.

I have to say, as a former prosecutor, it always warms my heart, when someone caught bang to rights, pleads guilty at the first opportunity. And after twelve years what's their big idea? Unlimited bonuses for bankers? Back the billionaires? Go easy on the oil and gas companies?

It's a nonsense – everyone earning less than £155k a year loses out with their plans. They say they don't believe in redistribution, but they do – from the poor to the rich and they're loading up the country with debt to pay for it.

And what about those in the middle? They're losing £780 pounds. Conference, I'm sure you all heard that tape. Where Liz Truss says Britain's working people lack “skill” and “application”. That the problem with our economy is they don't “graft” hard enough.

Working people don't graft hard enough.

No. We're not going to take this. This is the fight.

If they want to fight us on redistribution, if they want to fight us on workers' rights, if they want to tell us working people don't come first, we will take them on – and we will win.

And we will win not just because we have fairness on our side but because we have economic reason on our side too. Trickle-down economics doesn't work. Britain won't be better off just because we make the rich, richer.

The real problem is we create too many jobs that are low paid and insecure. Lock too many communities out of the wealth we create. And public services aren't strong enough to help working people succeed.

That's why we struggle to grow – our economic foundations are weak. And the Tory argument is: that's fine. If the City of London races ahead and the rest of the country stagnates – they think that's ok.

Conference, they're the ones not prepared to graft. They're the ones not prepared to do the hard yards on growth. But we will.

We will end the blight of low pay and insecure work with our New Deal for Working People. We will transform the state so the decisions which drive growth in communities are made by local people with skin in the game.

The people of Liverpool know what's best for Liverpool. And the same is true in Burnley, Sunderland, Peterborough, Plymouth. If we want fair growth everywhere, communities need a stake. And they need good affordable housing for working people to own.

I've seen home ownership rise almost my entire life – it's the bedrock of security and aspiration. That pebble-dashed semi meant everything to my family. But now, under the Tories, the dream of owning your own home is slipping away for too many.

And that's a political choice. Because if you keep inflating demand without increasing supply house prices will only rise. And homes become less affordable for working people.

So we will set a new target – 70% home ownership and we will meet it with a new set of political choices. A Labour set of political choices.

No more buy-to-let landlords or second homeowners getting in first. We will back working people's aspiration. Help real first-time buyers onto the ladder with a new mortgage guarantee scheme. Reform planning so speculators can't stop communities getting shovels in the ground.

My message is this if you're grafting every hour to buy your own home Labour is on your side. Labour is the party of home ownership in Britain today.

And let me say something about business too – don't be fooled into thinking they buy into the Tory trickle-down fantasy.

Business leaders aren't knocking on my door saying they want to rip up employee rights. They don't tell me the problems they face will be solved by corporation tax cuts. They want fair taxes, high skills and the long-term confidence to invest.

I want to be crystal clear about this: I'm not just pro-business, I want to partner with business. So we will scrap business rates, level the playing-field for start-ups and the high street, give employers new flexibility to invest in the world class training they need.

And, as Jonny Reynolds said yesterday, invite them to drive forward our modern industrial strategy: a true partnership between government, business and trade unions.

This isn't about the size of government – it's about what government can do. Government can support businesses to innovate and grow. Can bring in the creative genius of our scientists and universities. Can unite us to tackle the country's challenges on behalf of working people.

Tory ideology on this is a barrier to growth. And I'll tell you another one: the mess they've made of our public services.

Strong public services are the foundation of a successful economy– always. Deal with NHS waiting lists and growth improves. Invest in childcare so parents go back to work and growth improves. More mental health support, world class schooling, skills training when you need it and growth improves.

But we have to be honest. I would love to stand here and say Labour will fix everything. But the damage they've done – to our finances and our public services means this time the rescue will be harder than ever.

It will take investment – of course it will. But it will also take reform.

One – we need to recruit, train and motivate the very best doctors, nurses, teachers, police officers.

Two – we need to get the best innovation in their hands, make technology work for us.

Three – we need to make sure services are built around peoples' lives, empower them to meet the challenges of the future.

Four – above all, we must shift towards 'a prevention first' policy. I've seen it for myself: early intervention saves lives and saves money. Every time I read a serious case review as Director of Public Prosecutions, the story was the same, just a change of name.

Another life that could have gone in a different direction if someone had stepped in earlier. It's that kind of injustice that must drive us to think differently about our public services. In health, it's about moving treatment towards communities, exploring how technology can free up NHS workers to focus on care.

In education it means not just imparting knowledge but developing the creativity, the resilience, the curiosity young people need in a modern world.

In crime, it means a model of policing that can focus on prevention and give victims faith in a system that will not let violence go unpunished.

And Conference, the state of our public services shows you exactly who the Tories are. Shows they fundamentally don't believe government can help working people succeed.

Every time they choose a new Prime Minister – and there's been plenty of them – you get a hymn of lip service to its power, usually from the steps of Downing Street itself. But as soon as the black door swings shut behind them, they retreat to their comfort zone.

That's why they don't plan for the future – they don't believe it's their job. And so we lurch from crisis to crisis, always reacting, always behind the curve, a sticking plaster, never a cure.

And if you want the totemic symbol of this, the biggest failure to grasp the nettle, then look no further than Brexit.

Conference, the policy of my Labour Government will always be to make Brexit work. It's no secret I voted Remain – as the Prime Minister did.

But what I heard, across the country, was people who thought we'd got our priorities wrong. Who wanted democratic control over their lives. But who also wanted opportunities for the next generation, communities they felt proud of, public services they could rely on.

I didn't hear that Brexit was about slashing workers' rights. I didn't hear people wanting to lower standards on food, animal welfare or the environment. I didn't hear them wanting to end redistribution.

So I want to speak directly to the people who left Labour on this issue. Whether you voted Leave or Remain, you've been let down.

And with Liz Truss, the Tories are changing the meaning of Brexit before your eyes.

If you voted for government to step in on your side for better work, higher wages, more opportunities in your community, for an NHS that is modern and reliable.

If you voted to take control of your life and for the next generation to have control of theirs, then I say to you: that is what I will deliver.

I will make work pay for the people who create this country's wealth. I will make sure we buy, make and sell more in Britain. I will revitalise public services and control immigration using a points-based system. I will spread power and opportunity to all our communities. And I will never be shy to use the power of government to help working people succeed.

Labour will make Brexit work. Labour will deliver change. You'll never get that from the Tories. And you won't get it from the SNP either.

Conference, the challenges we face – the cost-of-living crisis, climate change, standing up to Putin – are common across our four nations.

We saw off the threat of fascism and deadly disease, together. We built the NHS and the welfare state, together. But I don't believe in our union just because of our history. I believe in it because of our future.

I know we can meet the great challenges to come. Build new beacons of fairness that light up the islands we share.

Scotland needs a Labour Government that can deliver change. But it also needs the power and resources to shape its own future, whoever's in power in Westminster. And the SNP are not interested in this.

For them, Scotland's success in the UK is met with gritted teeth, seen as a roadblock to independence, and so, they stand in the way.

We can't work with them. We won't work with them. No deal under any circumstances.

A fairer, greener, more dynamic Scotland. In a fairer, greener, more dynamic, Labour Britain.

Conference, on climate change, growth, aspiration, levelling-up, Brexit, economic responsibility we are the party of the centre-ground

Once again, the political wing of the British people and we can achieve great things.

Yesterday, we even managed to get a Liverpool crowd cheering Gary Neville...

But let's not kid ourselves: the next two years will be tough. The Tories want a fifth term and they will stop at nothing to achieve it.

And because of their record, because of the state of Britain, they are getting desperate. With so little that's good to defend, they lash out.

We need to be prepared, disciplined, focused. Spend each day working to earn the trust of the British people.

Meet their attacks with hope. Provide the leadership this country so desperately needs.

Because as in 1945, 1964, 1997, this is a Labour moment.

So, Conference, say it loud and believe it. Britain will deal with the cost-of-living crisis. Britain will get its future back.

A country where aspiration is rewarded. Where working people succeed. A force for good in the world. A clean energy superpower.

A fairer, greener, more dynamic nation. That's my commitment to you. The national mission of the next Labour government. And together with the British people – we will do it.

Thank you, Conference.