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Angela Rayner Speech at Labour Party Conference

Oct 8, 2023

Angela Rayner MP, Labour's Shadow Deputy Prime Minister and Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Secretary

Speaking at Labour Party Conference

Sunday 8 October 2023

Good morning, Liverpool. And welcome.

This year's Conference comes at a momentous time for our Party, and a pivotal moment for our country, just days after Labour's huge win in Rutherglen.

Anas, my friend, we are all so proud of the positive campaign you and Michael ran. Years of hard work led to the people of Rutherglen putting their faith in Labour this week – a watershed moment.

Now, Conference – no offence. But I hope this speech is the last one you'll hear from me, on this podium before the General Election.

Because just like you, I am sick of being in Opposition!

When you elected me three and a half years ago, it was the honour of my life.

But you didn't elect me to be Deputy Leader of the Opposition, you elected me to be Deputy Prime Minister of a Labour Government.

One that will transform people's lives, like the last Labour government changed my own.

Now, we have a great week in store. But it comes after one where we saw the chaotic face of today's Tory Party.

They've had quite a year since we last met. The Leader who lost to a lettuce. The Chancellor who forgot his own tax return, and forgot to declare it too.

Gavin Williamson, forced to resign because it turned out he was a bully. Who knew? Dominic Raab... also forced to resign as a bully.

I think everyone knew that one... Except the Prime Minister, apparently.

Then there was the Home Secretary, sacked as a threat to national security. The same Home Secretary, reappointed the next week.

I think they call that 'time served'. Apparently she believes in the rehabilitation of offenders after all.

Now we have the Prime Minister refusing to hand over his WhatsApp messages.

I assume Jacob Rees-Mogg has also refused to hand over his carrier pigeon.

Throughout all of it, the Prime Minister simply can't stand up for the country against his party.

Apparently he's planning another reshuffle. Maybe that's why he thinks we were offering him seven different bins for different kinds of rubbish.

And at their Conference, Liz Truss was back. So one thing did become clear, we all know that he's just Ken in her Barbie-world!

What a contrast we are to the Tories. With Keir at the helm, Labour's Shadow Cabinet is hungry for change.

And I might be biased, but I think my team are shining stars.

I lead a formidable frontbench with Matt, Sarah, Flo, Paula, Mike, Nav Mary, Sharon, Sue and Waj.

With Justin and Imran leading on our New Deal for Working People.

I also want to pay tribute to the woman who paved the way for Labour's bold housing and levelling up vision with grit and determination – Lisa Nandy.

The reality is Labour is already delivering in power. From our elected mayors, our local authority leaders, or the Labour government in Wales.

Our movement has never been so united, so focused. Around one aim. To give Britain its Future Back.

But the Tories also have one singular focus. To desperately cling onto power.

That's why the Tories' levelling up project was dead on arrival.

You cannot level up from the top down. The Tories only know how to centralise power and hold wealth where it benefits them.

And it's under their watch, the places that once built Britain have been abandoned. Communities crumbling. High streets emptying. Crime rising.

Streets that were once bursting with pride. Shut down. Boarded up. Denied a brighter future.

Rents skyrocketing. Mortgages soaring.

Where work doesn't pay.

There's that lingering sense that Britain is broken. Collateral damage from the swing of the Tories' wrecking ball.

For the Conservatives, "growth" isn't for everyone. It means jobs for the boys. A free ride for vested interests.

The super-rich.

Non-doms.

Water bosses.

But our proud United Kingdom that once spearheaded the industrial world was not a trickle-down nation.

It was a country where innovation and growth rose up from the ports, factories and warehouses...

In Hartlepool, Humber and Teesside. In my lifetime, growth used to be in the hands of the workers and the communities that built Britain. From their graft, came wealth.

But today, working people are grafting while Ministers sit in their ivory tower in Whitehall.

The truth is – and I'm not afraid to say it – a responsible government recognises their role in providing stability in people's lives.

But stability has been smashed at the hands of this Prime Minister.

Who – in his conference speech, spent an hour, rallying against plots and controversies that don't exist.

Worshipping at the altar of Liz Truss.

A Government that has gone off the rails – quite literally in the North!

The Prime Minister's speech didn't even mention 'housing' once. No doubt that's because his housing policy is the same as his new smoking policy – increase the price year on year, so eventually no one can buy!

The truth is, looking down from his private jet, Rishi Sunak can't understand why young people can't get on the housing ladder.

Don't forget – this is the man who boasted about snatching taxpayer's money from deprived areas and funnelling it into wealthy ones.

He tells working people they're just lacking aspiration – They aren't working hard enough.

All while people are kept up at night by the pit in their stomach about whether their pay cheque will cover the bills, or be enough to keep a roof over their heads.

Or whether their children will ever earn enough to be free from the same anxiety which keeps them up at night.

That's because Rishi Sunak and his party have taken a sledgehammer to the foundations on which a good life can be built.

And now the simple things in life are crumbling.

A decent job.

A secure, affordable home.

And a strong community.

Simple things this government has snatched away from working people.

Conference, we can't go on like this any longer. The Tories are not only talking Britain down. They've dragged us down. And they're holding us back.

This is why Labour's first and most important Mission in Government is to grow the economy.

Growth – under a Labour government – will be in all places for all people.

Growth in the hands of the communities and people that built Britain. To once again provide decent work, secure homes and strong communities. To truly level up our country.

Building a strong community doesn't mean making everywhere look the same.

It means real choices put in people's hands.

Giving powers to our elected local leaders – the people who know their communities best.

New devolved powers on skills, employment support, transport, and of course, new housing.

This is how Labour will give local people control of their futures. We know this can and will work, because the march to devolution of the last Labour Government has been an almighty success.

Our Mayors, Sadiq, Andy, Steve and Tracy continue to champion locally-controlled transport, delivering cheaper tickets at a time when everything is getting more expensive.

Mark Drakeford, our First Minister for Wales, has shown the power of devolved leadership on skills, with bold action to ensure young people across Wales have access to work, education and training.

We seek power so we can hand it back to the people.

That is the Labour way. It belongs to them – not us.

But that also means recognising who is in the engine room of Britain's economy.

Labour has a long and proud history of being the party of working people. And the Party for working people.

Because we believe everyone deserves a fair day's pay for a fair day's work.

And to have enough spare at the end of the month to enjoy the fruits of their labour.

For bread and yes, roses too.

But under the Conservatives too often work doesn't pay.

The Tories' low wage economy, stagnant productivity and tumbling business investment.

Everything about this is bad for workers, bad for businesses and bad for our economy.

Now, Conference.

I'm proud that the last Labour government created the national minimum wage.

Back then the Tories hated it, they said it would crash the economy.

How wrong they were.

But so much of Labour's progress has since been reversed.

Young adult workers are getting a raw deal, when their bills are as high as everyone else's.

There's no doubt we need to raise the floor on wages – and build lasting change.

But it's only Labour that can make work pay.

With a genuine living wage that working people can actually live on. We will change the Low Pay Commission's remit so that the minimum wage will for the first time take account of the cost of living.

Conference, I've heard some rumours that we'll be watering down our New Deal for Working People.

Be in no doubt, not with Keir and I at the helm.

We'll ban zero-hour contracts.

End fire and rehire.

And give workers basic rights from day one.

We'll go further and faster in closing the gender pay gap.

Make work more family friendly.

And tackle sexual harassment.

And we won't stop there.

We'll ensure that unions can stand up for their members.

We will boost collective bargaining, to improve workers' pay, terms and conditions.

Make no mistake, this is an agenda that we will deliver hand in hand with the trade union movement.

As we will work with business too. Because they know a good modern labour market is good for growth.

Labour's New Deal for Working People is our plan to boost wages, make work more secure and support working people to thrive.

This is how Labour will make work pay!

And this is what Keir has asked me to do. The work has already started.

But it can only be completed with Labour in power – and as Deputy Prime Minister, I will personally table the legislation implementing our New Deal, within 100 days of taking office.

Let no one doubt our determination.

And I have no fear of winning that argument in an election either.

Last week, the people of Rutherglen and Hamilton West voted to make work pay.

Let's give the people of our whole country the chance to do the same.

But Conference, good wages and protections aren't enough if every penny goes simply on keeping a roof over your head, if you live in damp, cramped housing – or have no home at all.

Safe, secure, affordable housing is no longer the foundation on which people can rely.

That foundation of a good life – decent wages, strong communities, and affordable homes – crumbles in Tory Britain.

Too many people are stuck paying unaffordable private rents.

Or living the nightmare of a home wrapped in flammable cladding.

While leaseholders linger in a system left over from the Middle Ages, the dream of homeownership is slipping away as more than a million families wait for social housing.

Over the last 13 years, Tory Ministers sold or demolished more than double the number of social homes than they've delivered.

Families who need a council house are often stuck in cramped temporary accommodation or at the mercy of private landlords.

And this summer Michael Gove handed back almost two billion pounds destined for affordable housing to the Treasury... because he couldn't spend it.

A Labour Government will right this wrong.

We know a secure home, like a secure job, is a crucial foundation for a good life.

That's why we will get social homes built, brick by brick.

Building not just homes, but also communities.

And I'll get out my hard hat and hi vis if needs be!

I pledge to you today, Keir and I will deliver the biggest boost in affordable and social housing for a generation.

And Conference, that includes council housing!

The Tories look down on people living in social housing.

Well I say, let's stare right back.

And never be ashamed.

A council house changed my life.

And so here's what Labour is going to do.

We'll start by salvaging the system that the Tories have taken a sledgehammer to.

Where the Tories have snatched billions from affordable housing, Labour will unlock government grants to deliver new homes by making the Affordable Homes Programme more flexible so that every penny gets out the door to build the homes people need.

And by working with the local leaders – who know their areas best – we'll use these funds more effectively.

Second, we will strengthen the rules to prevent developers from wriggling out of their responsibilities and we will speed up the building of new social and affordable housing.

We will do this by reforming the planning system.

Elected local leaders will be given the powers they need to stand up to vested interests in building new developments, through a specialist government Take Back Control Unit that will work with them to rebalance the scales.

And, Conference, we will provide stability and certainty for the affordable and social housing market so there is confidence to invest.

Affordable, social and council houses aren't just a nice add on.

They're fundamental to securing decent homes for all.

A hammer to smash the class ceiling.

And a lynchpin of the economy.

They are quicker to occupy and build, and to get the growth we need.

Creating reliable, well-paid, and highly skilled jobs in the process.

But that's not all.

Labour will achieve rental reform where the Tories have failed for four and a half years.

Finishing the job by banning 'no fault' evictions.

We'll give first-time buyers 'first dibs' on new developments in their communities.

With a comprehensive mortgage guarantee scheme for those who don't have access to the bank of mum and dad.

We'll end the mediaeval leasehold system, with root and branch reforms.

We will deliver planning reform to build the houses the next generation so desperately needs.

It's Labour that is the party of home ownership.

Because we understand what it means.

To make your home. To start a family. To get on in life.

And I know the difference a decent wage and a secure home can have.

It was a Labour Government that introduced the minimum wage that improved my income.

A Labour government built council houses. I got the keys to my first home, to security.

A Labour government introduced equal pay. I started saving money.

The Labour Government took me from a council estate to the parliamentary estate.

And that's where my Labour values come from.

And my confidence to succeed.

Ever since those days – to all those people who've underestimated me throughout my life.

I've always said: 'Watch this space'.

So, I say to anyone who feels written off or looked down on.

I've got your back.

Labour is on your side.

Conference, the Tories last week not only showed they're not on your side.

They showed they're not fit to govern.

It's not just that they don't have a plan – frankly they haven't got a clue.

They can't solve the country's problems.

Because they are the problem.

They've broken Britain.

And left working people paying the price.

We don't just know Britain can be better than this.

We have a plan to make it better.

Not short-term sticking plaster solutions, but a mission-driven government

So you'll see that plan from us this week.

A different kind of economy.

Where better living standards for all are how we drive growth...

And why we drive growth.

That repairs and revives our broken public services and provides a secure job, decent pay, a strong community, and a home of your own.

The foundations on which a good life is built.

Conference, earlier I quoted one of the great anthems of our movement.

It was a woman trade unionist, Helen Todd, who first demanded bread, and roses too.

A century ago, she wanted the right to vote.

And something worth voting for.

In her words, that bread and roses be "the heritage of every child that is born in this country, in the government of which she has a voice."

Conference, our mission as a movement is the same now as it was then.

So let us fulfil it.

Let's make that our legacy for every child in our country once more.

And let us be the government where they can find their voice and follow their dreams

Thank you.

Ends

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