

Labour Party Conference 2010

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ED MILIBAND

The New Generation

Conference, I stand here today ready to lead: a new generation now leading Labour.

Be in no doubt.

The new generation of Labour is different. Different attitudes, different ideas, different ways of doing politics.

Today I want to tell you who I am, what I believe and how we are going to do the most important thing we have to do - win back the trust of the country.

Personal

We all of us share a deep conviction which brought us into this party and into this hall.

But each of us has our own individual story.

And I want to tell you about mine.

In 1940, my grandfather, with my Dad, climbed onto one of the last boats out of Belgium.

They had to make a heart breaking decision – to leave behind my grandmother and my father's sister. They spent the war in hiding, in a village sheltered by a brave local farmer. Month after month, year upon year, they lived in fear of the knock at the door.

At the same time, on the other side of Europe, my mother, aged five, had seen Hitler's army march into Poland.

She spent the war on the run sheltering in a convent and then with a Catholic family that took her in. Her sister, her mother and her.

My love for this country comes from this story. Two young people fled the darkness that had engulfed the Jews across Europe and in Britain they found the light of liberty.

They arrived with nothing. This country gave them everything.

It gave them life and the things that make life worth living: hope, friendship, opportunity and family.

And they took hope and opportunity. They worked hard; they got on.

My Dad learnt English, paid his way moving furniture during the day, and studying at night at technical college. He joined the Navy to fight for our country and afterwards he wanted to go to university. He did.

My Mum built a life here after the war, for all of us. I know nobody more generous, nobody more kind, nobody more loving and nobody more relieved that this contest is over, than my Mum.

The gift my parents gave to me and David are the things I want for every child in this country. A secure and loving home. Encouragement and the aspiration to succeed.

In those ways my family was just like every other. But in some ways it was different.

I suppose not everyone has a dad who wrote a book saying he didn't believe in the Parliamentary road to socialism.

But you know, it wasn't a cold house.

It was warm, full of the spirit of argument and conviction, the conviction that leads me to stand before you today, the conviction that people of courage and principle can make a huge difference to their world.

What my parents learnt in fear, they passed on to us in an environment of comfort and security.

And there was one more lesson that I learnt.

We do not have to accept the world as we find it. And we have a responsibility to leave our world a better place and never walk by on the other side of injustice.

Freedom and opportunity are precious gifts and the purpose of our politics is to expand them, for all our people.

That faith is not something I chose. It's not something I learned from books, even from my Dad's books.

It was something I was born into.

And that is why David and I have devoted our lives to politics.

And it is why I will commit to you here and now. My beliefs will run through everything I do. My beliefs, my values are my anchor and when people try to drag me, as I know they will, it is to that sense of right and wrong, that sense of who I am and what I believe, to which I will always hold.

Conference, I am so honoured that you chose me to lead your party and I know you share those values.

And I am proud that every day, day in and day out, in every village, and every town and city in the land, you work to put those values into practice.

Conference, can I thank you for the heroic work you did at the election.

The reason we denied the Conservative Party a majority was because of the incredible work of Labour and trade union members the length and breadth of our country.

From Birmingham Edgbaston to Westminster North and from Edinburgh South to the Vale of Clwyd, it was your dedication, your energy and your determination to fight for the communities you love that beat the Ashcroft millions.

And let me thank everyone, not just Labour Party members, but thousands of ordinary members of the public who drove the BNP out of Barking and Dagenham.

But let's face facts.

We had a bad result.

We had a very bad result.

And we are out of government.

And let me tell you, there is nothing good about opposition.

Every day out of power, another day when this coalition can wreak damage on our communities, another day when we cannot change our country for the better.

And let us resolve today that this will be a one-term government. That is the purpose of my leadership of this party.

But to achieve that we must go on our own journey.

And that is why the most important word in politics for us is humility.

We need to learn some painful truths about where we went wrong and how we lost touch.

We must not blame the electorate for ending up with a government we don't like, we should blame ourselves.

We have to understand why people felt they couldn't support us.

We have to show we understand the problems people face today.

This will require strong leadership. It won't always be easy. You might not always like what I have to say.

But you've elected me leader and lead I will.

This country faces some tough choices. And so do we. And we need to change.

You remember. We began as restless and radical. Remember the spirit of 1997, but by the end of our time in office we had lost our way.

The most important lesson of New Labour is this: Every time we made progress we did it by challenging the conventional wisdom.

Think of how we took on the idea that there was a public ownership solution to every problem our society faced.

We changed Clause 4. We were right to do so.

Think of how we emphasised being tough on crime was as important as being tough on the causes of crime. We were right to do so.

Think of how we challenged the impression that we taxed for its own sake and that we were hostile to business. We were right to change.

And think of how we challenged the idea of a male dominated Parliament with All-Women shortlists and made the cause of gender equality central to our government. We were right to do so.

And the reason Tony and Gordon took on conventional wisdom in our party was so they could change the country.

We forget too easily what a radical challenge their ideas were to established ways of thinking about Britain and how they reshaped the centre-ground of politics.

They were reforming, restless and radical.

The old way of thinking said that economic efficiency would always come at the price of social justice.

With the minimum wage, tax credits, the New Deal, they showed that was wrong.

I am proud that our government lifted hundreds of thousands of children out of poverty, hundreds of thousands of pensioners out of poverty, proud that we created the highest levels of employment in Britain's history.

The old way of thinking said that public services would always be second-class. But we defied the conventional wisdom.

I come from a generation that suffered school lessons in portacabins and crumbling hospitals. I tell you one thing, for the eighteen years they were in power the Tories did nothing to fix the roof when the sun was shining.

Our legacy is a generation for whom newly built schools and modernised hospitals are an everyday fact of life.

I am proud of the fact that because of what we did, yes we did save the National Health Service in this country.

The old way of thinking said that you couldn't change attitudes towards gay men and lesbians.

Let me tell you that last month I was privileged to be in this great city, at Pride, to see not just thousands of people marching but thousands of people lining the street in support.

We should be proud that our commitment to equality means we have couples forming civil partnerships across the country and celebrating with their family and friends.

The old thinking told us that for 300 years, the choice was either the break up of the United Kingdom or Scotland and Wales run from London.

We should be proud that Labour established the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. And we should make sure that after next May's elections we re-elect Carwyn Jones as the First Minister in Wales and we elect Iain Gray as the new First Minister in Scotland.

And I am so proud that, against all the odds, we helped deliver peace in Northern Ireland. And it will be one of Tony Blair's great legacies to this country.

The old thinking told us that the challenges of the world were too big and our country too small to make a difference.

But thanks to our leadership around the world, development spending is now heading towards our goal, forty million more children are going to school each day, and two hundred million are protected from malaria. And that would never have happened without the leadership of Gordon Brown as Chancellor and then Prime Minister.

Tony and Gordon had the courage to take on established attitudes and institutions - and change Britain.

It is that courage that made us such a successful political force.

But our journey must also understand where it went wrong. I tell you, I believe that Britain is fairer and stronger than it was 13 years ago.

But we have to ask, how did a party with such achievements to its name end up losing five million votes between 1997 and 2010?

It didn't happen by accident.

The hard truth for all of us in this hall is that a party that started out taking on old thinking became the prisoner of its own certainties.

The world was changing all around us - from global finance to immigration to terrorism - New Labour, a political force founded on its ability to adapt and change lost its ability to do so.

The reason was that we too often bought old, established ways of thinking and over time we just looked more and more like a new establishment.

Let me say to the country:

You saw the worst financial crisis in a generation, and I understand your anger that Labour hadn't changed the old ways in the City which said deregulation was the answer.

You wanted your concerns about the impact of immigration on communities to be heard, and I understand your frustration that we didn't seem to be on your side.

And when you wanted to make it possible for your kids to get on in life, I understand why you felt that we were stuck in old thinking about higher and higher levels of personal debt, including from tuition fees.

You saw jobs disappear and economic security undermined, I understand your anger at a Labour government that claimed it could end boom and bust.

And I understand also that the promise of new politics of 1997 came to look hollow after the scandal of MPs' expenses. And we came to look like a new establishment in the company we kept, the style of our politics and our remoteness from people.

I stand before you, clear in my task: to once again make Labour a force that takes on established thinking, doesn't succumb to it, speaks for the majority and shapes the centre ground of politics.

And I tell you this: if we are not this party, nobody will be.

This new generation that leads our party is humble about our past and idealistic about our future.

It is a generation that will always stand up for the mainstream majority.

It is a generation that will fight for the centre ground, not allow it to be dominated or defined by our opponents.

And it is a generation which thirsts for change.

This week we embark on the journey back to power.

It will be a long journey involving hard thinking for our party.

We do not start that journey by claiming we know all the answers now.

We do so by setting a direction of change.

Let me tell you what kind of country I want to see:

This generation wants to change our economy so that it works better for working people and doesn't just serve the needs of the few at the top.

This generation wants to change our society so that it values community and family, not just work, because we understand there is more to life than the bottom line.

This generation wants to change the way government works because it understands the power of the state to change lives but also how frustrating it can be if not reformed.

This generation wants to change our foreign policy so that it's always based on values, not just alliances.

And this generation knows very profoundly that to change Britain we need a new politics.

Above all, I lead a new generation not bound by the fear or the ghosts of the past.

As we emerge from the global economic crisis, we face a choice: we can return to business as usual or we can challenge old thinking to build the new economy we need.

Let me say, I believe strongly that we need to reduce the deficit.

There will be cuts and there would have been if we had been in government.

Some of them will be painful and would have been if we were in government.

I won't oppose every cut the coalition proposes.

There will be some things the coalition does that we won't like as a party but we will have to support.

And come the next election there will be some things they have done that I will not be able to reverse.

I say this because the fiscal credibility we earned before 1997 was hard won and we must win it back by the time of the next general election.

I am serious about reducing our deficit.

But I am also serious about doing it in a way that learns the basic lessons of economics, fairness and history.

Economics teaches us that at times of recession governments run up deficits.

We were too exposed to financial services as an economy so the impact of the crash on the public finances was deeper on us than on others.

We should take responsibility for not building a more resilient economy.

But what we should not do as a country is make a bad situation worse by embarking on deficit reduction at a pace and in a way that endangers our recovery.

The starting point for a responsible plan is to halve the deficit over 4 years, but growth is our priority and we must remain vigilant against a downturn.

You see when you cancel thousands of new school buildings at a stroke, it isn't just bad for our kids, it's bad for construction companies at a time when their order books are empty.

It's not responsible, it's irresponsible.

When you deprive Sheffield Forgemasters of a loan, a loan from government which would be paid back, you deprive Britain of the ability to lead the world in new technology.

It's not responsible, it's irresponsible.

And when you reduce your economic policy simply to deficit reduction alone you leave Britain without a plan for growth.

It's not responsible, it's irresponsible and we should say so.

No plan for growth means no credible plan for deficit reduction.

And nor should we reduce the deficit without learning the basic lessons of fairness.

We must protect those on middle and low incomes. They did nothing to cause the crisis but are suffering the consequences.

I say the people who caused the crisis and can afford to do more should do more: with a higher bank levy allowing us to do more to protect the services and entitlements on which families depend.

And we should learn the basic lessons of history.

After 1945, we had the biggest debt we have ever had.

That generation cut the deficit but they had a bigger vision: for a new economy and a good society.

True patriotism is about reducing the debt burden we pass on to our kids.

But Mr Cameron, true patriotism is also about building an economy and a society fit for our kids to work and live in.

You were the optimist once but now all you offer is a miserable, pessimistic view of what we can achieve. And you hide behind the deficit to justify it.

But I have a different ambition, to emerge from the global economic crisis tackling the deficit, but also learning the much deeper lessons that this generation must learn.

It is a huge challenge to change our economy for the future and the same old thinking will lead to the same old results: an economy too dependent on financial services, too many people stuck in low pay and dead-end jobs and growing inequality.

We need a plan for change. A plan to reform the banks, invest in the industries of the future and support the small businesses and entrepreneurs who can be the lifeblood of our economy.

The new generation in my party understands the fundamental New Labour lesson that we must build prosperity as well as redistributing it.

And it also knows that there are huge vested interests and huge barriers to the wealth creators in this country, particularly small businesses and the self-employed.

These must be tackled. I tell you this, I will make Labour the party of enterprise and also the party of small business.

And I want British businesses, large and small, to be able to make the most of the advantages of globalisation.

New Labour was right to be enthusiastic about the opportunities that come in a more connected world: the movement of goods and services, the chance to travel, the new markets for our companies.

But this new generation recognises that we did not do enough to address concerns about some of the consequences of globalisation, including migration.

All of us heard it. Like the man I met in my constituency who told me he had seen his mates' wages driven down by the consequences of migration.

If we don't understand why he would feel angry—and it wasn't about prejudice—then we are failing to serve those who we are in politics to represent.

I am the son of immigrants. I believe that Britain has benefited economically, culturally, socially from those who come to this country.

I don't believe either that we can turn back the clock on free movement of labour in Europe. But we should never have pretended it would not have consequences.

Consequences we should have dealt with.

We have to challenge the old thinking that flexible labour markets are always the answer.

Employers should not be allowed to exploit migrant labour in order to undercut wages.

And if we have free movement of labour across Europe we need proper labour standards in our economy, including real protection for agency workers.

And, as every democratic country recognises, it is vital that workers have a voice that speaks for them.

I remember during this campaign I met some school dinner ladies. They had to buy their own uniforms, their shift patterns were being changed at a moment's notice, frankly conference they were being exploited.

So they looked to their union to help them. They weren't interested in going on strike, they loved the kids they served and wanted to serve their schools. But they wanted someone to help them get basic standards of decency and fairness.

Responsible trade unions are part of a civilised society, every democratic country recognises that.

But all of us in this movement bear a heavy responsibility. We want to win an argument about the danger this coalition poses to our economy and our society.

To do so we must understand the lessons of history.

We need to win the public to our cause and what we must avoid at all costs is alienating them and adding to the book of historic union failures.

That is why I have no truck, and you should have no truck, with overblown rhetoric about waves of irresponsible strikes.

The public won't support them. I won't support them. And you shouldn't support them either.

But it is not just from trade unions that I want to see responsibility.

This new generation demands responsibility from business too.

During this campaign, I have met some extraordinary people doing amazing service for our country.

I remember a care worker I met in Durham.

She worked hard and with dedication, looking after our Mums, Dads and grandparents when they couldn't look after themselves anymore.

She is doing one of the most important jobs in our society, and if it was my Mum or Dad, I would want anyone who cared for them to be paid a decent wage.

But she was barely paid the minimum wage – and barely a few pence extra for higher skills.

She told me that she thought a fair wage would be £7 an hour because after all she would get that for stacking shelves at the local supermarket.

I believe in responsibility in every part of our society.

That's why I believe in not just a minimum wage but the foundation of our economy in the future must be a living wage.

And we need a tax system for business that rewards responsibility:

To pay a living wage;

To provide high quality apprenticeships;

And family-friendly employment.

And we need responsibility at the top of society too. The gap between rich and poor does matter. It doesn't just harm the poor it harms us all.

What does it say about the values of our society, what have we become, that a banker can earn in a day what the care worker can earn in a year?

I say: responsibility in this country shouldn't just be about what you can get away with.

And that applies to every chief executive of every major company in this country.

And, just as businesses have responsibility to ensure fair pay, so those who can work have a responsibility to do so.

This is one of the hardest issues for our party because all of us know in our communities people who are in genuine need and who worry about the impact of new medical tests, or changes to rules on them.

At the same time, let's be honest, we also know there are those for whom the benefits system has become a trap.

That is not in their interests or the interests of us a society and we are right when we say it must be challenged.

Reforming our benefits system is not about stereotyping everybody out of work, it's about transforming their lives.

Real help matched with real responsibility.

That is why on welfare, I will look closely at whatever the government comes forward with: not arbitrary cuts to benefits but a genuine plan to make sure that those in need are protected and that those who can work have the help they need to ensure they do so.

Work is a central part of life. But it is not all that matters.

We all care about making a living but we don't just care about that.

Here is our generation's paradox: the biggest ever consumers of goods and services, but a generation that yearns so much for the things that business cannot provide.

Strong families.

Time with your children.

Green spaces.

Community life

Love and compassion.

New Labour embraced markets in our economy and was right to do so.

But lets be honest we became naïve about them.

We must never again give the impression that we know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

We must be on the side of communities who want to save their local post office, not be the people trying to close it.

We must be on the side of people trying to protect their high street from looking like every other high street, not the people who say that's just the forces of progress.

And we must be on the side of those who are dismayed by the undermining of the local pub with cut-price alcohol from supermarkets.

We must shed old thinking and stand up for those who believe there is more to life than the bottom line.

We stand for these things not because we are social conservatives but because we believe in community, belonging and solidarity.

And I tell you this: the good life is about the things we do in our community and the time we spend with family.

I feel this so deeply since the birth of my son sixteen months ago.

As we rebuild our economy, we must think how we protect families up and down this country.

Families can't do the best job if they are stressed out, working 60 or 70 hours a week, can't be there when the kids get home from school, doing two or three jobs.

We've got to change our culture on working time not just for the good of families, but because it is through family that we learn right from wrong, develop ambitions for ourselves and show kindness and respect for others that is the foundation of our society.

When I look at some of the challenges we face as a country -from gangs to teenage pregnancy - it is only a government that stands up for families that are trying their best to bring up their kids that can offer answers.

So as we rebuild our economy we must think about how we protect and nourish the things that matter to families and to family life.

This new generation also wants to challenge the way we think about the state and what it can achieve.

I believe profoundly that government must play its part in creating the good society.

But our new generation also knows that government can itself become just such a vested interest. That unless reformed, unless accountable, unless responsive, government can impede the good society.

Our new generation, hungry for change, is unwilling to see that happen.

Like millions of people around the country, I went to my local comprehensive. I know the value of a good school, a good teacher.

And I know there are many parents frustrated, with a school that doesn't suit your child or live up to your hopes.

There are amazing secondary schools in my constituency and amazing teachers and head teachers. But one of them was consistently failing its pupils.

And it pained me as an MP to see those kids being consistently let down. Now that school has been taken over, the kids life chances transformed.

That is what good public service reform is all about.

My generation recognises too that government can itself become a vested interest when it comes to civil liberties.

I believe too in a society where individual freedom and liberty matter and should never be given away lightly.

The first job of government is the protection of its citizens. As Prime Minister I would never forget that.

And that means working with all the legitimate means at our disposal to disrupt and destroy terrorist networks.

But we must always remember that British liberties were hard fought and hard won over hundreds of years.

We should always take the greatest care in protecting them.

And too often we seemed casual about them.

Like the idea of locking someone away for 90 days - nearly three months in prison – without charging them with a crime.

Or the broad use of anti-terrorism measures for purposes for which they were not intended.

They just undermined the important things we did like CCTV and DNA testing.

Protecting the public involves protecting all their freedoms.

I won't let the Tories or the Liberals take ownership of the British tradition of liberty.

I want our party to reclaim that tradition.

So too in our foreign policy the new generation must challenge old thinking.

We are the generation that came of age at the end of the Cold War.

The generation that was taught that the end of history had arrived and then saw 9/11 shatter that illusion.

And we are the generation that recognises that we belong to a global community: we can't insulate ourselves from the world's problems.

For that reason, right now this country has troops engaged in Afghanistan.

They represent the very best of our country.

They and their families are making enormous sacrifices on our behalf and we should today acknowledge their service and their sacrifice.

Our troops are there to stabilise the country and enable a political settlement to be reached so that Afghanistan can be stable and we can be safe.

I will work in a bi-partisan way with the government to both support our mission and ensure Afghanistan is not a war without end.

But just as I support the mission in Afghanistan as a necessary response to terrorism, I've got to be honest with you about the lessons of Iraq.

Iraq was an issue that divided our party and our country. Many sincerely believed that the world faced a real threat. I criticise nobody faced with making the toughest of decisions and I honour our troops who fought and died there.

But I do believe that we were wrong. Wrong to take Britain to war and we need to be honest about that.

Wrong because that war was not a last resort, because we did not build sufficient alliances and because we undermined the United Nations.

America has drawn a line under Iraq and so must we.

Our alliance with America is incredibly important to us but we must always remember that our values must shape the alliances that we form and any military action that we take.

So many of the world's problems need functioning international institutions. The days in which any country could achieve their goals on their own are over.

There can be no solution to the conflicts of the Middle East without international action, providing support where it is needed, and pressure where it is right to do so.

And let me say this, as Israel ends the moratorium on settlement building, I will always defend the right of Israel to exist in peace and security. But Israel must accept and recognise in its actions the Palestinian right to statehood.

That is why the attack on the Gaza Flotilla was so wrong.

And that is why the Gaza blockade must be lifted and we must strain every sinew to work to make that happen.

The government must step up and work with our partners in Europe and around the world to help bring a just and lasting peace to the Middle East.

But to achieve all these things – a different economy, a different society and reform of the state we must change our politics too.

Let's be honest, politics isn't working.

People have lost faith in politicians and politics.

And trust is gone.

Politics is broken.

Its practice, its reputation and its institutions.

I'm in it and even I sometimes find it depressing.

This generation has a chance - and a huge responsibility - to change our politics. We must seize it and meet the challenge.

So we need to reform our House of Commons and I support changing our voting system and will vote Yes in the referendum on AV.

Yes we need to finally elect the House of Lords after talking about it for so long – about a hundred years.

Yes we need more decisions to be made locally, with local democracy free of the constraints we have placed on it in the past and free of an attitude which has looked down its nose at local government.

And I want to congratulate all our local councillors and tell you: I will be shoulder to shoulder with you at next May's local elections.

And the following year, we will be proud not only of the Olympics in London, but proud too to see them presided over by the next Mayor of London. Ken Livingstone.

And let me also congratulate Oona on the campaign that she fought.

Let's be honest, changing our institutions won't be enough to restore trust on its own.

Look in the end, it's politicians who have to change.

This generation must reject the old ways of doing politics. And must speak to the issues our generation knows it must confront.

The focus groups will tell you that there's no votes in green issues.

Maybe not.

But taking the difficult steps to protect our planet for future generations is the greatest challenge our generation faces.

When I think about my son, I think what he will be asking me in twenty years time is whether I was part of the last generation not to get climate change or the first generation to get it.

And climate change, just like the aging society, can't be tackled by the politics we have.

They don't lend themselves to the politics of now: instant results, instant votes, instant popularity. X-factor politics.

So we can't be imprisoned by the focus groups.

Politics has to be about leadership or it is about nothing.

I also know something else. Wisdom is not the preserve of any one party. Some of the political figures in history who I admire most are Keynes, Lloyd George, Beveridge, who were not members of the Labour Party.

Frankly, the political establishment too often conducts debate in a way that insults the intelligence of the public.

We must change this for the good of the country.

I will be a responsible Leader of the Opposition.

What does that mean?

When I disagree with the government, as on the deficit, I will say so loud and clear and I will take the argument to them.

But when Ken Clarke says we need to look at short sentences in prison because of high re-offending rates, I'm not going to say he's soft on crime.

When Theresa May says we should review stop and search laws to prevent excessive use of state power, I'm not going to say she is soft on terrorism.

I tell you this conference, this new generation must find a new way of conducting politics.

And that brings me to some of the names I've been called...

Wallace out of Wallace and Gromit...I can see the resemblance

Forrest Gump...Not so much

And what about Red Ed?

Come off it.

Let's start to have a grown up debate in this country about who we are and where we want to go and what kind of country we want to leave for our kids.

Conclusion

A few days ago our contest came to an end and now the real contest has begun.

I relish the chance to take on David Cameron.

We may be of a similar age, but in my values and ideals I am of a different and new generation.

The new generation is not simply defined by age, but by attitudes and ideals.

And there is a defining difference between us and David Cameron.... and that is optimism.

We are the heirs to an extraordinary tradition, to great leaders who were above all the optimists of history.

The optimism of 1945 which built the National Health Service and the welfare state.

The optimism of Harold Wilson and the white heat of technology and the great social reforms of that government.

The optimism of Tony and Gordon who took on the established thinking and reshaped our country.

We are the optimists in politics today.

So let's be humble about our past.

Let's understand the need to change.

Let's inspire people with our vision of the good society.

Let the message go out, a new generation has taken charge of Labour.

Optimistic about our country.

Optimistic about our world.

Optimistic about the power of politics.

We are the optimists and together we will change Britain