



Press release

Ed Miliband's speech to the Welsh Labour Conference

LABOUR VALUES, WHO ARE THE 'REAL DEFICIT DENIERS', AND COALITION ATTACKS ON THE NHS

19 February 2011

Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Labour Party

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For immediate use

Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition, said in a speech to Welsh Labour Conference today:

Can I start by saying what an honour it is to be addressing Welsh conference as Leader of the Labour Party.

I want to thank the fantastic chair of the Welsh party, Jenny Smith.

And I want to thank Peter Hain for everything he has done for Wales. Peter-your values and passion are a great asset to our movement.

And let us applaud all the Labour MPs in Wales, particularly those who won against the odds.

Here in North Wales, Albert Owen in Anglesey and Chris Ruane in Rylh.

It was thanks to your hard work that we won those seats and others.

I also want to give thanks to Carwyn Jones and all the Labour members of the Welsh Assembly.

Carwyn, the reason you are doing such a great job as First minister is because you have what all successful politicians need: you know who you are, what you believe and you are showing the courage to put into practice your ideals.

You show that the Tories and Lib Dems are just plain wrong when they tell us 'there is no alternative'.

On tuition fees, on educational maintenance allowances, on the NHS, on forestry, day in, day out you are showing there is an alternative-and I thank you for it.

Here in Wales and across the United Kingdom, we have always been an internationalist party and I want to pay tribute to your MEP, Derek Vaughan.

As people who care about justice at home and abroad, all of us have been moved by what we have seen in the Middle East over the past few weeks.

We as a party should speak out where governments repress people who are demanding democratic change.

People, against overwhelming odds, are demanding economic progress, human rights, democracy and freedom.

We as a party must recognise their struggle and support their cause.

And as we debate issues here in at home, let us remember those serving in Afghanistan, including many from Wales, who are trying to bring stability to that country so that we can be safer here in Britain.

We salute their bravery, courage and dedication to duty.

Here in Wales, you know better than anyone the importance of our party and movement rooting itself in values.

Values which have shone through the ideals of our all great figures, from Keir Hardie to Aneurin Bevan to Neil Kinnock.

Those values are what brought me into this party: equality, fairness, social justice.

Values which my parents taught me: above all, a sense that we have a responsibility to leave the world a fairer, more just place than we found it.

But also something more: a sense of what defines a good society.

A belief that when we look after each other, we care for each other, we help each other, we are all stronger as a result.

That is the politics of the common good.

The Welsh miners showed that in the last century when their wages helped build the welfare halls, the swimming baths and the playing fields.

That ethic of solidarity, of collective self-help, was their legacy to this movement and to everyone who strives for a better world.

And it still drives us on today.

And what a contrast with a Conservative-led government that is today pursuing a politics which leaves us as isolated individuals, viewing us better off on our own.

You have a government here in Wales which understands the common good.

Its decisions are not just different from those being made by the government in London; they are based on a quite different vision – a Labour vision.

Take an example.

For the Conservative-led government in London, the tuition fees decision is simply about individuals in a marketplace.

You in Wales have taken a different view.

Because you know we have a shared responsibility to each other: we all should care about whether the brightest young people from all backgrounds are able to get to the top Universities.

That is the promise of Britain, the promise that each generation can do better than the last.

And by making that possible, we all do better as a result.

In that home which fears a £40,000 debt is 18-year old boy or girl who with the right support will grow up to be:

- the doctor who saves your life
- the teacher who helps your child to learn
- the architect who builds your community centre
- the entrepreneur who creates wealth and jobs in your local community.

And maybe even the Labour Prime Minister of the future.

That is the politics of the common good: all of us with children have an interest in a properly funded University system but we also have a shared interest in using the talents of all.

And the common good isn't simply the principle of your government, it is the principle of devolution.

Government by the people of Wales, for the people of Wales - but also a powerful partner in a strong, United Kingdom.

Let's be honest: many people in Wales had major doubts about devolution.

That's why it was such a close result in the 1997 referendum.

But let us declare here from this Conference: devolution has worked.

In many areas the Welsh Assembly Government has led the way.

And let me take this opportunity to pay tribute to the man who led devolution for most of its first decade, Rhodri Morgan.

Under his leadership and under Carwyn's too, the rest of Britain has seen the power of example.

The smoking ban---you led the way.

Free bus travel for the elderly - you did it first.

A Children's Commissioner - you led, the rest of the UK followed.

The United Kingdom doing better as you lead the way in Wales.

Wales doing better in a devolved United Kingdom.

And now it's time to take the logical step of ensuring that legislation which only affects Wales can be made in Wales.

It never made sense to me as a Minister in London that I had to approve your decisions.

This referendum would put that right.

And I am pleased there is widespread support for a Yes vote.

Widespread but not unanimous.

The Welsh Tories?

They never learn do they?

Through gritted teeth, some now accept devolution.

But can they bring themselves to say yes?

No they can't.

Not the No party, not the yes party, but the 'don't know' party.

Or when it comes to Wales and especially their Secretary of State:

The "I'm sorry, I haven't a clue" party.

Just imagine if the old system was in place, Wales run from London, the 1990s Planet Redwood replaced by the 2010s Planet Gillan.

What a frightening prospect.

And what sort of respect is it for Wales when they set about gerrymandering our constitution.

England will lose 7% of its seats under the changes to the boundaries, Wales 25%.

That is what the Tories really think of the people of Wales.

An obstacle to a Conservative majority.

We know what the right choice for Wales is.

Let's make it a yes vote on March 3rd.

And in those elections, let's fight the Conservative-led government on the biggest argument in politics today: the economy.

What this government is doing is deeply ideological.

And they are wrong about the past, wrong about the present, and wrong about the future too.

You've heard it over and over again from Conservative and Liberal Democrat ministers.

They say it was a decade of overspending by Labour which caused the economic crisis.

But what's the truth?

Just looking around the world you can see how wrong they are.

President Obama isn't facing a high deficit because of Labour overspending.

In the UK, the US and across the developed world, governments are struggling with the same problem.

And they are doing so for the same reason - the collapse of the global financial system.

In failing to acknowledge that, David Cameron and George Osborne are practicing true deficit denial.

And the reason they are doing this is not to just to discredit our past - it is to justify their decisions now.

But the problem is that their rush to austerity has undermined the foundations of growth.

When this Conservative-led government took office last spring, the economy was recovering strongly.

Growth was up and unemployment and borrowing were coming down.

David Cameron even started boasting that the British economy was "out of the danger zone", as if it was something to do with him.

Since then he has led Britain straight into the danger zone with the economy shrinking and unemployment rising once more.

Perhaps worst of all, they have taken youth unemployment to a new record high – one in five without work.

Nine months in, they already they have a record to be truly ashamed of.

And aren't their excuses pathetic?

As someone recently put it: "Please sir, the weather shrank my economy."

What a feeble abdication of responsibility.

The economic recovery hasn't been hit by the wrong kind of snow.

It is being undermined by the wrong kind of government with the wrong kind of priorities.

At a time when the global economy is recovering, we should be feeling the benefit.

Unemployment should be falling sharply and growth should be powering ahead.

The United States, Germany and France have economies that have continued to grow in spite of the snow.

Instead the Conservatives have steered Britain into the slower lane of the global economy.

However much they try to falsify the past, they cannot deceive people about the present.

We reject the old Conservative mantra that there is no alternative.

There is a different economic path for our country.

Yes, we must cut the deficit, halving it over four years on a timetable that fosters growth.

And let me say this.

Those who caused the crisis must do their fair share to meet the costs of recovery.

That is why David Cameron should renew the tax on banker's bonuses and not be cutting taxes for the banks.

And we must never accept the Government's complacent attitude towards the next generation, abolishing the Future Jobs Fund.

Their action means throwing a whole generation of young people on the scrapheap.

And I say this to you today, something the Tories don't seem to have learnt, unemployment is never a price worth paying.

But beyond the economics of crisis and recovery, there is a deeper truth we must acknowledge for the future.

It was a failure, above all, of markets that caused the global financial crisis.

This challenges some of the assumptions we relied on in the past.

And we will be challenged too by a world in which the financial pressures on any government will be greater than in the past, and we will need to find new ways to building social justice.

The real answer, the real test, is to rise to the challenge by developing an economic policy of the common good.

To get the right regulation in place for the future.

To build an economy that is more resilient against the swings of global finance and does more to deliver decent jobs with decent wages.

So we will champion a strong and diverse private sector, creating jobs and wealth for our country.

We will be the people who show how we can reform the banks, put in place an active industrial policy, including here in Wales, and provide a vision for growth and jobs.

And we will become the friend and ally of small business, standing up against vested interests on their behalf.

Because we recognise that the entrepreneur is not just in it for themselves but in it to create wealth and jobs which help us all.

Self-interest and shared interest together. The Labour way.

And we will be the people who tackle the gross inequalities that distort our society and destabilise our economy.

We are not being true to our values as a country when some top chief executives are paid hundreds of times more than their lowest paid employees.

I do care about inequality ---- about that gap between the rich and poor.

That's why we must ensure responsibility at the top, and why we should make it a priority for our party to campaign for a living wage of more than £7 an hour.

Just as we must build an economy for the common good, so too our society.

You remember what the Conservatives used to pride themselves on:

That they were the party that preserved the things we valued.

That is what it was supposed to mean to be a Conservative.

Conserving the institutions that made us proud of our country, those we hold in common.

But not this Conservative-led government.

Look around Britain and we see the biggest assault that we have seen in a generation on our common life.

Think of those things people look to in their local areas, those places where community is supported.

The local library---under threat.

The local children's centre---in danger.

The youth club---at risk.

David Cameron is always telling us that Britain is "broken".

Well he should know.

- 250 Sure Start children's centres threatened with closure.

- 10,000 front-line police officers to be cut.

- up to 400 local libraries facing the axe.

And then David Cameron says that all he is trying to do is build the Big Society.

But his Big Society idea is that a smaller state means a bigger society.

That is a dangerous ideological mistake.

Don't take it from me.

Take it from Dame Elisabeth Hoodless.

She ran the country's largest volunteering charity.

She says that badly thought through cuts are "destroying the volunteer army".

Or ask the Chief Executive of the Citizen's Advice Bureau, who has warned that government cuts will have a "devastating" impact on its work.

So it is just false to argue that less government will somehow automatically foster a healthy civil society.

Because in the right way, government is the indispensable partner of a thriving voluntary sector and the bedrock of a strong society.

The British people know it even if David Cameron doesn't.

That is why so many people are up in arms to defend the things they value most.

Like the thousands of people who took part in read-ins and storytelling events earlier this month to defend much-loved local libraries in Britain.

Like the parents groups campaigning to keep their Sure Start centres.

People of all ages, all classes, all shades of political opinion, united in their rejection of these short-sighted decisions.

David Cameron might think he is building the Big Society – but it's not in support of his policies, but against them.

As a result of public pressure this week, we have seen the government's biggest climb-down so far: on the forests.

But ask yourselves why did they get themselves into the mess?

Because these people are totally out of touch with what the British people value.

No doubt this arrogant government will be congratulating itself on executing a U-turn.

But forests are just one example of what happens when a government and a Prime Minister:

don't understand what matters to people,

don't listen to them.

and so carelessly destroy the institutions that people value.

We all know the institution Britain values perhaps more than any other and where the stakes are highest:

the National Health Service.

The Government's proposals for England bear all the hallmarks of what people dislike most about them:

ideas developed without consultation,

that nobody wants,

that nobody voted for and that put ideology before the institutions people care about.

Above all, they are showing on the NHS, just like the forests, the sure start centres, the local library, they know the price of everything and the value of nothing.

Just like they wanted to sell off the forests to highest bidder, now they want healthcare sold to the lowest bidder.

I warn David Cameron and the government: the ill-feeling he created over the forests will be nothing compared to the real anger that will build about his dangerous plans for the NHS.

Doesn't he understand that some things are just too precious to be left to the market.

So it is our responsibility to defend our greatest institution of all against this government.

Because we are a party of the whole United Kingdom, I know we will all want to defend our greatest institution against this threat.

The National Health Service is the greatest social reform in our country's history.

The founding of the NHS, by Aneurin Bevan, showed Britain at its best - not fazed by the challenge of post-war austerity, but willing to rise to it.

The Conservatives said we couldn't afford it, that Britain's war debts were too great.

But Nye Bevan was having none of that.

"Take pride" he said "in the fact that, despite our financial and economic anxieties, we are still able to do the most civilised thing in the world: put the welfare of the sick in front of every other consideration".

It is the same optimism - the same devotion to the cause of the common good - that means we must fight David Cameron's plans to break apart our health service in England today.

The NHS is too precious for ill-judged reforms.

It is too precious for experiments in right-wing ideology.

Labour will always have a restless desire for a better NHS.

Our achievements in office show that.

Shorter waiting times than ever before.

Higher patient satisfaction than ever before.

More new hospitals than ever before.

So the NHS must continue to reform and change, because the status quo will never be good enough for Labour when it comes to the health of the British people.

But it's got to be the right sort of reform, the right sort of change.

What David Cameron is doing is wrong for England because it takes the N out of the NHS.

National standards - gone.

Accountability - gone.

Patient power - gone, handed back to the system.

In its place - competition, not for the highest quality but for the cheapest price.

Will these Tories ever understand - healthcare is not a commodity to be bought and sold.

What happens when a local hospital is undercut by a cheap provider twenty miles away?

Will this Conservative government intervene to stop it from closing? They say no.

Will David Cameron protect good NHS services if they are undermined by cheap private competitors?

He says no.

Will the interests of patients and local communities take priority over the interests of commerce? No.

Will the government act if waiting times rise and patients lose out? No.

We will take on David Cameron as he wastes billions of pounds putting ideology before people.

And on the NHS, on our common institutions, it falls to us to be the people who stand up for the things we value.

The free market Conservatism of the government in London is destroying their claim to be the people who conserve.

We will always be the people who take on entrenched privilege, spread opportunity, champion political reform.

But we must also be the people who protect those institutions that are central to our common life.

At times we forgot that in government—we didn't do enough to stand up for the local post office, high street or the other things people value.

In the future, we must always be the people who must fight for the common good, true to our traditions of solidarity.

Our task is to fight with every fibre of our being for the people we came into politics for.

Some people might say, in these tough times, can we really make any difference?

Welsh Labour is showing the difference we can make.

What is the choice at the Welsh elections?

Vote Conservative or Liberal Democrat and endorse going too far too fast on the deficit, the destruction of the things we value.

Or vote Labour for a different way.

Plaid Cymru -they offer a very different alternative to Labour.

They say the answer is independence for Wales.

That's not a politics of the common good, it's a politics of going it alone.

But all the lessons of the financial crisis are that it's a recipe for disaster.

Think of all the challenges we face as a United Kingdom: economic, environmental, social.

All of these challenges need us to work together not go it alone.

Make no mistake, the results of these elections will send a message across Wales and across the United Kingdom.

I want to see Carwyn back as First Minister in a Welsh Labour Government in May.

That's the best hope for Wales.

And for Britain: a Labour Welsh Assembly Government showcasing with every decision it makes how there is a better alternative to the dogma of the Conservative-led Government at Westminster.

And us showing we are not just different caretakers of the system, we are people with different ideals.

The Labour Party of Wales was founded on the principles of the common good: the idea that by us helping each other, by the spirit of solidarity, we could enrich the lives of others.

Politics will always be about asking people to vote for us.

But what the pioneers taught us is that it must be about more than that.

It is about local labour parties as community organisations, changing our society from the ground up.

And by winning those local campaigns, and by showing the relevance of politics, we do something bigger and awaken people's consciousness of what politics can do.

A Welsh writer once wrote: "To be truly radical is to make hope possible rather than despair convincing".

Today many people will feel a sense of despair about what is happening to their communities.

We must be the eternal warriors against despair.

We must be the people who show that hope is possible.

And don't believe that this government has persuaded people of its cause.

See the alliance against selling off the forests.

See the people marching against library closures.

See the forces ---the patients, the nurses, the doctors, telling them not to destroy our NHS.

Don't believe those who would tell you what whatever the radicalism of Wales, England is always a Conservative country.

There are millions who want a politics of the common good.

Who know that our interests are bound together and we do better in a society where we look after each other instead of one where we are left on our own.

Let's go out and argue for the politics we believe in.

Let's create a party that speaks to our ideals.

Let's show as you are doing in Wales that there is another way.

Let's stand up and win for the people of Wales.

Let's stand up and win for the people of Britain.

Ends

Editor's notes: For more information, please contact the Labour Party press office on 020 7783 1393.

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