



# WINNING MATTERS

STARMER SETS OUT PERSONAL Credo AS HE LEAVES CORBYN-ERA BEHIND

## LABOUR TURNS TO FACE THE ELECTORATE

"Work. Care. Equality. Security. These are the tools of my trade. And with them I will go to work." As Keir Starmer addressed Labour Party Conference in Brighton this week he sought to demonstrate the values and experiences that motivate him in his mission to become Britain's next Prime Minister. Nearly 18 months on from his election as Labour Leader, the pressure was on to deliver a speech that would show him not just as a competent Leader of the Opposition, but also as a credible alternative to Boris Johnson.

Conference began with a complicated and noisy row over internal party democracy that only the cognoscenti could understand and which the public might see as disunity and weak leadership. Could the leader change party rules to make it harder for outsiders like Jeremy Corbyn to become leader and make it more difficult for local members to deselect MPs? Allies of the former leader used the airwaves and all their power in the party to try to block these reforms and disrupt the leadership's key announcements.

Despite the noise and pain, Starmer won the big battles. The way was cleared for the party's organisation to shift dramatically away from the Corbyn years. Starmer said that significant reforms to the party's disciplinary process will put an end to the scourge of antisemitism in the party; a view endorsed when the long-standing former MP, Dame Louise Ellman, re-joined, saying the party was "led by a man of principle in whom the British people and Britain's Jews can have trust."

But the challenge remained: could Starmer define himself and could he set out a vision for the country? Starmer's speech was the biggest political moment of his life, requiring him to face down potential leadership challengers, swipe the left aside and turn to face the electorate.

Starmer delivered a speech that saw the party talk the language of ordinary voters rather than the conference hall for the first time in many years. It was optimistic, outward looking and focussed on the future.

At the top of the speech, in one simple sentence, he rejected Corbynism outright, saying he would "never go into an election with a manifesto that was not a serious programme for government". He asked activists to think hard: "If [the Conservative Government] are so bad, what does it say about us? Because after all in 2019 we lost to them, and we lost badly." And when he was heckled with challenges to change the party's minimum wage policy he told those who shouted that he was more interested in "changing lives" than "shouting slogans".

Repeatedly he focussed on the importance of work and the dignity it brought to life, which he said he learnt "round the kitchen table with my dad" rather than "in a political seminar". In a deeply moving passage about the murder of Jane Clough – a woman, brutally

murdered by her former partner and catastrophically let down by the justice system – he described how his time as Director of Public Prosecutions had reinforced in him the importance of service.

A recurring discussion this week has been the rights and wrongs of Angela Rayner, Starmer's deputy, calling Boris Johnson "scum" at a reception. Starmer tried to move on from those troubles making it clear that he viewed the Prime Minister, not "as a bad man, but [as] a trivial man. A showman with nothing left to show". Starmer was telling voters he understood why they voted for Boris Johnson, but that the country needs something different. That will be Labour's attack line for many months to come: The Government is not delivering what it promised voters because it is not able to rise to the challenges of our age.

The challenges of the age, for Starmer and for Labour, are clear: dealing with climate change, preparing for a new technological revolution, reskilling the workforce, fighting crime, restoring the health service and growing the economy.

Starmer's answers to these had a whiff of Harold Wilson's pipe-smoke about them as he talked about the role technology, innovation and British entrepreneurship can make in tackling these challenges. He never mentioned the white heat of technology, but its glow was certainly visible on the podium.

Reversing Brexit in some form is not one of those challenges, however. Starmer put those battles firmly in the past when he said the job was now to "make Brexit work". Though Labour is light on the details of what this means.

Time and again this was a speech where you could feel Starmer speaking to the people who voted Tory in recent elections, but have voted Labour in the past. He was telling them, 'we got it wrong, we didn't deserve your trust, but we're listening and we're changing.'

So Labour showed this week that the party is on its way back as a serious player on the political scene. This conference saw the left pushed out of positions of power (sometimes even by their own hand when, for example, Andy McDonald, the Shadow Employment Minister, resigned from the Shadow Cabinet in a row about the minimum wage). The leader and his top team spoke more to the electorate than they did to the members. And the party has started to pull together a serious offer for the country. But the scars of the Corbyn-era and the devastating defeat in 2019 still loom large. Labour can shape the political debate, but with the party only winning 202 seats in 2019, they have an epic task ahead if they are to be in contention for power at the next election. Starmer's speech is the start of that journey.

## LABOUR AND BUSINESS

Labour's attitude to business has taken an about turn at this conference. Keir Starmer said it was not just a change in approach but a complete change in attitude. As Rachel Reeves, the shadow Chancellor, said in her speech, "...an approach that is unapologetically pro-worker and unapologetically pro-business."

Reeves put forward a substantial package of measures to tackle climate change and achieve net zero at the heart of Labour's economic policy. While the current Government has seen debt rise above 100% of GDP for the first time in several decades, a future Labour government committed to continuing to borrow to invest in a green revolution.

But Reeves said there would be tough fiscal rules in place to ensure borrowing wasn't supporting day-to-day spending. This means that though Labour won't return to the austerity of the Cameron years, it will have to make difficult decisions on public spending.

Labour's approach to working with business will be demanding. Business will be expected to deliver value for money when it works with government – and Reeves highlighted spending on Covid measures as examples of where this delivery has not happened.

There was a move from the language of Labour shibboleths like nationalisation, to the practical politics of abolishing business rates and working out a new form of business taxation to support high streets and incentivise investment.

But most of all it was the change in tone that rang loud and clear. Under Reeves and Starmer, Labour has committed to backing business and investing "in good jobs in the green industries of the future."

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND NET ZERO

Turning the British economy around so that it achieves net zero is universally understood to be the challenge of our age. Under Jeremy Corbyn, Labour's plan for a green new deal had been one of the few pieces of fresh thinking that couldn't be found in a pamphlet from the 1970s. But the details were often thinner than the rhetoric.

Under new management and with a renewed desire to work with business in partnership, Labour have this week put tackling climate change at the heart of their economic plan. From building gigafactories for battery technology to developing a home-grown wind turbine industry, from planting millions of trees to low-cost loans to help everyone shift to electric vehicles, Rachel Reeves and Ed Miliband set out a range of policies to deliver this transformation.

This is the heart of Reeves' plan for £28bn of investment every year this decade. If Labour get to implement this agenda it will change the way we all live our lives and the way every sector of the economy works.

Ed Miliband, the party's former leader and now its shadow Business Secretary, was clear that his focus would be on making this transition a just and fair one. He set out the scale of investment needed to ensure people had the skills to take up new jobs in the green economy.

With Labour's new commitment to work in partnership with business, there is now a big opportunity to help inform and educate them about how to deliver on this radical green ambition in a practical way.

## REACTION



**Laura Kuenssberg**  
@bbclaurak  
Political Editor, BBC



Keir Starmer tells me winning is more important than party unity - 'I didn't come into politics to lose and then tweet about it' he says, interview on [@BBCNews](#) soon.

5:00 PM · 28 Sep 2021



**Ayesha Hazarika**  
@ayeshahazarika  
Columnist, Evening Standard & the i paper



[@RachelReevesMP](#) told me at our business Q&A this afternoon that no shadow minister can make spending commitments without her team's approval & that she was going to be super tough on that. I guess we are seeing a new culture & that's resulted in Andy McDonald's resignation.

06:25 PM · 27 Sep 2021



**Gabriel Poggrund**  
@Gabriel\_Poggrund  
Whitehall Correspondent, The Sunday Times



NEC member [@lukeakehurst](#): "This extraordinary win shows Labour is rapidly putting the Corbyn years behind it. The party will not be saddled with leaders with no parliamentary support, with a trigger system that forced MPs to look over their shoulder for fear of being deselected, and with the danger of committed Labour members being out voted in a leadership election by £3 easy come easy go registered supporters."

07:52 PM · 26 Sep 2021



**Pippa Crerar**  
@PippaCrerar  
Political Editor, Daily Mirror



🇬🇧 Keir Starmer will be going home fr Brighton with spring in step. Speech too long & only smattering of policy (holding back for next year). BUT good direction of travel & left-wing hecklers did him favour. Symbolic moment as Labour members cheered Blair govt's achievements.

01:45 PM · 29 Sep 2021



**Paul Waugh**  
@paulwaugh  
Chief Political Commentator, the i paper



Keir Starmer speech: Labour leader finally seizes moment to show party is once again about power, not protest.

01:48 PM · 29 Sep 2021



**Sebastian Payne**  
@SebastianEPayne  
Whitehall Editor, Financial Times



Keir Starmer's speech was impressive, well crafted and well delivered. Flabby in the middle but it had a big heart. In substance and tone, it was pure New Labour. Could have easily been delivered by Tony Blair. Starmer took on the left hecklers and won, it's his party now. [#lab21](#).

01:41 PM · 29 Sep 2021

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## ANALYSIS FROM



**Wes Ball**  
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