

DAVID CAMERON'S SPEECH TO THE OPENING DAY OF TORY CONFERENCE

"It's a huge honour to be standing before you as leader of the Conservative Party.

And first of all I want to thank you for the support you've given me in the past ten months.

It's been a time of great change.

I'm already on my second leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Before long I'll be on to my second Labour Prime Minister.

Soon I'll be the longest-serving leader of a major British political party.

I wanted this job for a very simple reason.

I love this country.

I have great ambitions for our future.

And I want the Party I love...

...to serve the country I love...

...in helping Britain be the best that it can.

We need to change in order to have that chance.

You cannot shape the future if you're stuck in the past.

You knew that.

And that's why you voted for change.

I believe we can all be proud of what we've achieved these past ten months.

People looking at us with new interest.

25,000 new members.

And in our first electoral test, in the local elections, we won forty per cent of the vote.

Let's hear it for our fantastic local councillors who worked so hard and won so well.

Tony Blair says it's all style and no substance.

In fact he wrote me a letter about it.

Dear Kettle...

You're black.

Signed, Pot.

What a nerve that man has got.

In the whole of the last year, there is only one substantial thing that the Labour Party has achieved for our country.

Their education reforms.

Right now, across the country, trust schools are being prepared with greater freedoms to teach children the way teachers and parents want.

The only reason - the only reason - that's happening is because the Conservative Party did the right thing and took the legislation through the House of Commons.

I'm proud of that - proud of us, for putting the future of our children before party politics.

Another sign of our changing fortunes is the impressive array of speakers who have come to join us at our conference this year.

SENATOR McCAIN

And I'd like to pay a special tribute to one in particular.

He's a man who knows about leadership.

He's endured hardship that's unimaginable to many of us here.

And he's fought battles for principles that we all admire.

Who knows what the future may hold?

But John, I for one would be proud to see you - a great American and a great friend to Britain - as leader of the free world.

COLLEAGUES

I'd also like to pay tribute to my colleagues who have spoken already today.

A year ago, David Davis and I were rivals.

Today we're partners.

He has given me the most fantastic support over these past ten months.

Ideas, energy, advice.

He has not only helped bring this Party together...

...he has helped take our Party in the right direction, and I want to thank him for all he's done.

And I'm proud to work with another man who is a brave politician, a wise counsellor and a great Conservative.

A man who would be a Foreign Secretary that this country could be truly proud of: William Hague.

Then there's Francis.

I know Francis likes to pretend that everything is doom and gloom.

He's always talking about the mountain we have to climb.

He's so gloomy, he makes Gordon Brown look like a ray of sunshine.

But Francis, you're doing a great job.

LABOUR SPLITS AND BACKSTABBING

Of course Francis has long told us to avoid the point-scoring and name-calling that can give politics such a bad name.

He's right.

But we didn't bargain on the Labour Party.

First Gordon said he could never trust Tony again, then Tony called Gordon a blackmailer.

Charles said Gordon was stupid, then John popped up and said no, Tony was stupid.

Charles called Gordon a deluded control freak.

And a member of the Cabinet said "it would be an absolute effing disaster" if Gordon got to No.10.

That was just the husbands.

When I look at these Labour ministers I ask myself how much time they're worrying about their own jobs...

...and how much time they're worrying about NHS, about crime, about our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan.

You only have to ask the question to know what the answer is.

And there are months more of it still to come.

Months of infighting, instability, indecision, jockeying for position...

They said it would be a "stable and orderly transition."

Yeah, right.

Like they said "24 hours to save the NHS", "education education education."

These are the things they should be fighting for, but they're too busy fighting each other.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

So we have a great responsibility.

To set out a clear, united and credible alternative.

With some elections, you just know the result before a single vote has been cast.

We were never going to win in 1997.

People wanted change.

I remember it well.

I fought Stafford.

And Stafford fought back.

Labour were never going to win in 1983 when they offered Michael Foot as Prime Minister.

Other elections are wide open.

And the next election will be one of those.

But we will not win, nor deserve to win, without a clear purpose and a proper plan.

We must learn from Labour's big mistake.

When Tony Blair won his first election, he had only one clear purpose: to win a second term.

Even now he says that the only legacy - the only legacy - that really matters to him is Labour winning a fourth term.

Back in 1997, he had no proper plan.

No real understanding of how to make change happen.

He had good intentions.

But he hadn't worked out how to deliver them.

So New Labour went round and round in circles.

They abolished grant maintained schools - and now they're trying to recreate them.

They reversed our NHS reforms - and now they're trying to bring them back.

Road building - cancelled, then reinstated.

They wasted time, wasted money, wasted the country's goodwill.

Only now, after nine years, does Tony Blair seem clear about his purpose.

Well I'm sorry Mr Blair.

That's nine years too late.

THIS WEEK

We won't make the same mistake.

On Wednesday, the last day of our conference, I want to talk in detail about the important issues we face as a nation - and what our response will be.

But today, on this first day of our conference, I'd like to set the scene for our discussions this week.

I want to explain how we will arrive at the next election knowing exactly what we want to do, and how we're going to do it.

My argument is based on a simple analogy.

Getting ready for the responsibility of government is like building a house together.

Think of it in three stages.

First you prepare the ground.

Then you lay the foundations.

And then, finally, brick by brick, you build your house.

PREPARING THE GROUND

These last ten months, we have been preparing the ground.

Our Party's history tells us the ground on which political success is built.

It is the centre ground.

Not the bog of political compromise.

Not the ideological wilderness, out on the fringes of debate.

But the solid ground where people are.

The centre ground is where you find the concerns, the hopes and the dreams of most people and families in this country.

In 1979, they wanted a government to tame the unions, rescue our economy and restore Britain's pride.

Margaret Thatcher offered precisely that alternative.

And this Party can forever take pride in her magnificent achievements.

Today, people want different things.

The priorities are different.

Safer streets.

Schools that teach.

A better quality of life.

Better treatment for carers.

That's what people are talking about today.

But for too long, we were having a different conversation.

Instead of talking about the things that most people care about, we talked about what we cared about most.

While parents worried about childcare, getting the kids to school, balancing work and family life - we were banging on about Europe.

As they worried about standards in thousands of secondary schools, we obsessed about a handful more grammar schools.

As rising expectations demanded a better NHS for everyone, we put our faith in opt-outs for a few.

While people wanted, more than anything, stability and low mortgage rates, the first thing we talked about was tax cuts.

For years, this country wanted - desperately needed - a sensible centre-right party to sort things out in a sensible way.

Well, that's what we are today.

In these past ten months we have moved back to the ground on which this Party's success has always been built.

The centre ground of British politics.

And that is where we will stay.

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS - SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

But preparing the ground is just the first stage.

Now we must show what we will build there.

A strong government needs strong foundations.

And I want us to lay those foundations this week.

That's not about individual policies.

It is about a vision of the Britain we want to see.

A Britain where we do not just ask what government can do.

We ask what people can do, what society can do.

A Britain where we stop thinking you can pass laws to make people good.

And start realising that we are all in this together.

Social responsibility - that is the essence of liberal Conservatism.

That is the idea I want us to explain this week.

That is what we stand for.

That is what we're fighting for.

That is the Britain we want to build.

Take fighting crime.

It is not just a state responsibility.

It is a social responsibility.

Let's not pretend that all we need is tough talk and tough laws to bring safety to our streets.

Of course the state must play its part.

That's why we're developing a programme of radical police reform.

That's why we want to build more prisons and reform the ones we've got, so they help reduce re-offending instead of encouraging it.

And that's why we'll invest in drug rehabilitation, so we help addicts get clean and stay clean, instead of living a life of crime to feed their habit.

But that is not the end of the story.

It is just the start.

We need parents to bring up their children with the right values.

We need schools to be places of discipline and order.

We need to stand up for civilised values in public places.

We need to design crime out of the housing estates of the future.

We've got to stop selling alcohol to children.

We need the music industry to understand that profiting from violent and homophobic words and images is morally wrong and socially unacceptable.

But more than this, we need people, families, communities, businesses to step up to the plate and understand that it's not just about stopping the bad things...

...it's about actively doing the good things.

Not waiting for the state to do it all, but taking responsibility, making a difference, saying loudly and proudly: this is my country, this is my community: I will play my part.

That is social responsibility.

That is our idea.

So I want us to be the champions of a new spirit of social responsibility in this land.

A new spirit of social responsibility that will succeed for Britain where Labour's outdated state responsibility has failed.

LABOUR'S APPROACH

Think of any issue - not just crime - and then think of Labour's response.

This Government's way of doing things - the old way of doing things - is so familiar, and so depressing.

Ministers hold a summit.

They announce an eye-catching initiative.

A five-year plan.

Gordon Brown generously finds the money for it.

The money gets a headline, but no-one knows what to do with it.

So they create a unit in the Cabinet Office.

A task force is set up.

Regional co-ordinators are appointed.

Gordon Brown sets them targets - after all, it is his money.

Pilot schemes are launched.

The pilot schemes are rolled out across the country.

They are evaluated.

Then revised, re-organised and re-launched.

And then finally, once the reality dawns that the only people to benefit are the lawyers, accountants and consultants of Labour's quango army...

...with a pathetic whimper - but no hint of an apology - the whole thing is just abandoned.

We've seen too much of this in the past nine years.

Headline after headline but absolutely no follow-through.

It is a story of ignorance, incompetence, arrogance.

A story of wasted billions - and disappointed millions.

Somewhere out there, there is a place where Blair and Brown will never go.

It's dark.

It's depressing.

It's haunted by the failures of nine years of centralisation, gimmick and spin.

It is the graveyard of initiatives, where you'll find the e-University that died a death,

the drugs czar that came and went...

...the Individual Learning Accounts that collapsed in fraud and waste, the tax credits that were paid and reclaimed...

...the Connexions service that flopped, the Strategic Health Authorities that were dropped...

...the marching of jobs to the hole in the wall; the night courts that never happened at all.

And still they keep coming, those hubristic monuments to big government, the living dead that walk the well-trodden path from Downing Street and the Treasury to New Labour's graveyard of initiatives.

The NHS computer: delayed, disorganised, a £20 billion shambles.

Forced police mergers: the direct opposite of the community policing we need.

And then the perfect example.

ID cards.

When a half-way competent government would be protecting our security by controlling our borders...

...these Labour ministers are pressing ahead with their vast white elephant, their plastic poll tax, twenty Millennium Domes rolled into one giant catastrophe in the making.

They've given up trying to find a good reason for it.

Last week Tony Blair said that ID cards would help control immigration, when new immigrants won't even have them.

Does he even know what's going on in his Government?

ID cards are wrong, they're a waste of money, and we will abolish them.

These last nine years have been the story of a Government which instinctively believes, whatever it says, that everything is the state's responsibility.

We believe in social responsibility.

Because there is such a thing as society, it's just not the same thing as the state.

THE BRITAIN WE WANT TO SEE

So let us define this week the kind of Britain we want to see.

And let us show how our idea - social responsibility...

...not Labour's idea - state responsibility...

...is the right response to the challenges Britain faces.

GLOBALISATION, WELL-BEING, THE ENVIRONMENT

We know that in the age of globalisation, in the face of fast-moving economic change, people want their government to provide security.

We know that the end of the traditional 9 to 5 job can make life tough for families, and people look to their government for answers.

And we know that in the race against time to tackle climate change and protect the environment, people expect their government to show leadership.

On all these challenges, Labour's first response is to regulate business, hoping to offer protection.

It may sound attractive.

But there are unintended consequences.

Well-intentioned regulation can make us less secure in the age of globalisation.

Less able to provide the jobs, wealth and opportunity on which well-being depends.

It can undermine the competitiveness of our companies, so it's harder for them to invest in the new, green technologies of the future.

So our response, based on our philosophy of social responsibility, is to say to business:

Yes you should look after your workers, yes you should look after your

community, yes you should look after our environment.

And we must stand up to big business when it's in the interests of Britain and the wider world.

So next week our MEPs will vote to strengthen proposals to make companies replace dangerous chemicals with safe ones.

But where Labour are casual about increasing regulation, we will be careful.

We will ask:

Are we making it easier to start a business?

Easier to employ someone?

Is the overall burden of regulation going down?

Will the regulation that's being put forward lead to real changes in behaviour, or just time-wasting and box-ticking?

If only we had a government that was asking these questions today.

We want companies to create their own solutions to social and environmental challenges, because those are the solutions most likely to last.

So in a Conservative Britain, corporate responsibility will provide the best long-term answer to economic insecurity, well-being in the workplace, and environmental care.

It is the same approach when you look at the other great challenges we face.

PUBLIC SERVICES

We know that in an age of amazing technological advance, instant information exchange, and empowered consumers who don't have the deference of previous generations...

...people expect more from our health service and our schools.

And government has to respond to that.

Labour's response is the culture of targets, directives and central control, aimed

at raising standards in our public services.

They mean well.

But the unintended consequence is to make these services less responsive to the people who use them, dashing expectations not meeting them.

So our response, based on our philosophy of social responsibility, is to say to our nurses, doctors, teachers:

Yes you should meet higher standards, yes you should give your patients and your pupils more.

But we're not going to tell you how to do it.

You are professionals.

We trust in your vocation

So in a Conservative Britain, professional responsibility will provide the answer to rising expectations in the NHS and schools.

POVERTY AND REGENERATION

And just as people will no longer accept second best in public services, we know that in their communities they are fed up with squalor and poverty and crime...

...and they look to their leaders to sort things out.

Labour's response has been a massive expansion of central government into local communities.

The centralised Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, the insensitive Pathfinder programme, prescriptive top-down schemes for regeneration.

You can see why Labour have done it.

But the unintended consequence is to stifle the very spirit of community self-improvement that they are responding to.

Our response, based on our philosophy of social responsibility, is to trust local leaders, not undermine them.

So we will hand power and control to local councils and local people who have the solutions to poverty, to crime, to urban decay in their hands.

We trust in your knowledge and commitment.

So in a Conservative Britain, civic responsibility will provide the answer to improving the quality of life in the communities left behind.

CHILDREN

And then perhaps the greatest challenge of all.

The challenge of bringing up children in a world that often seems fraught with risk and danger.

There is nothing that matters more to me than the safety and happiness of my family.

Of course it's right that government should be on parents' side.

But Labour take it way too far.

A national database of every child.

Making childcare a state monopoly.

Slapping ASBOs on children who haven't even been born.

Labour's intentions may be good.

But the unintended consequence is to create a culture of irresponsibility.

They may have abandoned Clause 4 and the nationalisation of industry.

But they are replacing it with the nationalisation of everyday life.

The state can never be everywhere, policing the interactions of our daily lives - and it shouldn't try.

Real change will take years of patient hard work, and we will test every policy by asking: does it enhance parental responsibility?

We need to understand that cultural change is worth any number of government

initiatives.

Who has done more to improve school food, Jamie Oliver, or the Department of Education?

Put another way, we need more of Supernanny, less of the nanny state.

So in a Conservative Britain, personal responsibility will provide the best answer to the risks and dangers of the modern world.

Personal responsibility.

Professional responsibility.

Corporate responsibility.

Civic responsibility.

These are the four pillars of our social responsibility.

That is the Britain we want to build.

A Britain that is more green.

More family-friendly.

More local control over the things that matter.

Less arrogant about politicians' ability to do it all on their own.

But more optimistic about what we can achieve if we all work together.

We want an opportunity society, not an overpowering state.

BUILDING OUR HOUSE

This week, in our debates, we will lay the foundations of the house we are building together.

The foundations must come first.

How superficial, how insubstantial it would be, for us to make up policies to meet the pressures of the moment.

Policy without principle is like a house without foundations.

It will not stand the test of time.

That is what our Policy Review is all about: getting it right for the long term.

OPTIMISM ABOUT BRITAIN'S FUTURE

If we do this, we can help achieve so much for this country.

In a few years' time, Britain could wake up to a bright new morning.

We have everything to be optimistic about.

You could not design a country with better natural advantages than we have.

We speak the language of the world.

We have links of history and culture with every continent on earth.

We have institutions - our legal system, our armed forces, the BBC, our great universities - which set the standard that all other countries measure themselves by.

Our artists, writers and musicians inspire people the world over.

We are inventive, creative, irreverent and daring.

In this young century, these old advantages give us the edge we need.

CONCLUSION

What a prospect for a great Party - to guide our nation at this time of opportunity.

So let us stick to the plan.

Let us build - carefully, thoughtfully and patiently, a new house together.

Preparing the ground as we move to the centre, meeting the priorities of the modern world.

Laying the foundations with our idea - social responsibility.

And building on those foundations with the right policies for our long-term future.

The nation's hopes are in our hands.

People's hopes.

Your hopes.

My hopes.

In eight days' time I will be forty years old.

I have so much to look forward to.

My young family.

They have so much to look forward to.

The world I want for them is the world I want for every family and every community.

If you want to know what I'm all about, I can explain it one word.

That word is optimism.

I am optimistic about human nature.

That's why I will trust people to do the right thing.

Labour are pessimists.

They think that without their guidance, people will do the wrong thing.

That's why they want to regulate and control.

So let us show clearly which side we are on.

Let optimism beat pessimism.

Let sunshine win the day.

And let everyone know that the Conservative Party is ready.

Ready to serve.

Ready to fight.

Ready to win."