

David Cameron: Welsh Conference speech 2008

Speaking at the Conservative Party Welsh Conference today, Conservative Party Leader David Cameron will said:

(CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY)

INTRODUCTION

It's great to be here with you today.

Whenever I come to Wales I get a real sense of optimism.

This is a country that believes in itself.

Confidence in the future is strong.

Add to that Wales's flying start to the Six Nations...

...the fact that a Welsh singer is number 1 in the charts...

...and it's St David's Day...

...it's no wonder there are so many smiling faces.

WELSH CONSERVATIVES

Welsh Conservatives have particular reasons to be cheerful.

Our party is on the way up.

When I spoke to you last year I hoped we would improve our position in the Assembly elections.

Thanks to all your hard work, we did.

The Conservatives got the biggest increase in votes of any of the main parties.

We won four more constituencies and increased our overall representation.

That was just the start.

This year we'll be fighting more council seats and taking the fight to Labour as never before.

This party is in great shape, under the leadership of Nick Bourne, Cheryl Gillan, Lyndon Jones and Matt Lane....

...and all our MPs, Assembly members and councillors.

This is a team that works hard for Wales and we're proud of it. Across the UK our party is one the way up.

We've been setting the agenda as never before.

We announce the boldest ever plans to get people off welfare and into work and Labour rush to catch up with a pale alternative.

We announce that it's time to tear up Police paper work and change the rules so that it's easier for them to stop and search for guns, knives and drugs and Labour lamely follow.

We set out how we'll scrap inheritance tax for all but millionaires and Labour gave us their botched imitation.

For the first time in a long time people look at Labour and look at us and they can see ...

... that we have the stronger team, the better policies, and the greater understanding of what is wrong and how to put it right.

But there is not one ounce of complacency in this team.

We know what a mountain we still have to climb to win the full hearted trust of the British people ...

...and that is what we will do, patiently, carefully, day by day and week by week until that time – heaven knows when - the Prime Minister summons up the courage to call a general election.

LABOUR-PLAID CYMRU COALITION

The Welsh Conservatives have an incredible opportunity.

People are fed up with Labour.

Which raises an obvious question: who can people vote for if they want change?

It can't be Plaid Cymru because, astonishingly, they are now in coalition with

Labour.

And it can't be the Lib Dems, who wanted to be in coalition with Labour but got jilted at the altar.

There is only one party in Wales offering a real alternative – and that's the Conservative Party.

This country needs change.

People want a neighbourhood they feel safe in, but violent crime in Wales is going up four times faster than the number of police officers.

People want their money in safe hands, but council tax has more than doubled in a decade...

...and under Labour's Welsh council tax revaluation, one in three homes have moved up a tax band.

Young people want a home of their own, but the average Welsh homebuyer has to fork out £1,600 in stamp duty.

Farmers want the chance to make a living, but they have a government that doesn't understand the countryside and is utterly feeble when it comes to introducing a clear labelling scheme to help British farmers ... or doing anything to help encourage the public sector to buy British food.

We all want to see Wales do well but under Labour it's become the poorest part of Britain.

This country needs change.

And we must be the ones who say: yes you can get that change you really want.

POLITICS IS BROKEN

But the change we need is not just from Labour's old policies to our new policies.

It's about a change from the old politics to the new politics – the new politics of a new age where people demand more openness, transparency, honesty and control.

When I spoke to you last year I talked about social breakdown.

The breakdown in society that lies at the heart of our communities' problems of poverty, violence and lost hope.

Today I want to talk about a different kind of breakdown.

A breakdown of faith...a breakdown of faith in the very system that people once trusted to deliver change.

There is political breakdown in Britain today, and that is something we're going to have to tackle too.

Public faith in our political institutions is draining away.

According to MORI, the proportion of people trusting politicians to put the needs of the country before the needs of party halved between 1974 and 1999.

Trust in Parliament fell from 54 per cent in 1983 to 14 per cent in 2000.

Since then it's got even worse.

Our Parliament is scorned.

Our parties are shrinking.

Our membership is ageing.

It's getting harder to find candidates willing to stand in council elections.

As far as the public is concerned, politicians are all the same.

Not because they all say the same thing, but because they all do the same thing.

Let's be clear what they think of us: "you lie and you spin, you fiddle your expenses and you break your promises."

To describe this disengagement and cynicism as a 'mood' is to underestimate both the depth and the intensity of the breakdown in relations between the government and the governed.

WHY IT MATTERS

The consequences of this estrangement are grim.

In a democracy, politics is the expression of our collective will.

It's how we make decisions for the common good.

So when people lose faith in politics, they start to see society differently.

They start to feel powerless to influence the world around them.

Some people respond by retreating into private and family life.

Others find solidarity in narrow groupings based on shared ties.

A few get out altogether.

That's not the kind of Britain I want to see.

Atomised. Divided. Declining.

But that will be our future unless we mend our broken politics.

WHY IS IT HAPPENING?

To do that, we need to understand why this political breakdown has happened.

A lot of it is to with behaviour.

The behaviour of a minority of individual politicians, in all parties.

Behaviour in the House of Commons.

But I think above all, the behaviour of the current Labour government – in three particular areas.

BROKEN PROMISES

First, there are the straightforward broken promises.

They pledged a referendum on the EU Constitution...

...and broke their promise.

They swore they wouldn't introduce tuition fees...

...and broke their promise.

I could go on.

There are many other examples, each broken promise breaking people's trust and breaking our politics just that little bit more...

...until none of the promises are believed any more.

SPIN

The second characteristic of Labour's behaviour that has helped to bring politics into disrepute is a word that is now synonymous with Labour.

That word is spin.

Announcements made over and over again to create the appearance of action.

Spending that's already been allocated being presented as if it's new.

Statistics that have been massaged.

Pilot schemes that are announced in a blaze of glory and then never rolled out.

Inquiries set up to shield ministers from awkward questions.

Commissions, taskforces and tsars sent off to solve problems and then ignored.

With Labour, nothing is what it seems...

...as we saw in the ultimate, shocking proof of how cynical the public has become...

...when they thought that the Labour government's deployment of troops at Heathrow Airport was a political stunt rather than a responsible reaction to a terrorist alert.

TOP DOWN

So there are the broken promises.

There is the endless spin.

But I think the third and most profound way that Labour have helped break our politics is more fundamental than any of this.

It is the Labour philosophy of top-down, centralising state control.

The belief that all progress can be masterminded, controlled and delivered from Whitehall ...or Cardiff ... or Edinburgh.

This isn't just an illusion.

It's a deception.

Raising hopes that are impossible to fulfil.

Letting people down.

Creating cynicism.

That's why the last eleven years have been such a desperate disappointment.

That's why this government, these ministers, cannot help over-promising and under-delivering.

And that's why so many people are just giving up on politics.

WHAT'S GORDON BROWN'S ANSWER?

Of course, Gordon Brown is aware of all this.

That's why he came into 10 Downing Street promising change.

But when it comes to each of those three causes of cynicism: broken promises, spin and top-down centralisation...

...far from delivering change, Gordon Brown is making things even worse.

MORE BROKEN PROMISES

His response to Tony Blair's broken promise on a referendum on the EU constitution is to continue breaking the promise...

...and to threaten those of his backbenchers who wish to follow their consciences and keep their manifesto promises.

MORE SPIN_

His response to Tony Blair's spin is even more spin.

The tax cut that turned out to be a tax con.

The massive deep cleaning of hospitals programme that the Department of Health admitted was nothing of the sort.

The Citizen's Juries that are billed as opening up politics but are designed to rubber-stamp the decisions that have already been made.

MORE TOP DOWN

And above all, Gordon Brown's response to the top-down centralisation of the Blair years is to turbo-charge it.

He can't help it.

By instinct, character and philosophy, our Prime Minister is a man who wants to

control everything.

ID cards. A national identity register. Finger printing our children. A tax credit system that is so complicated that parents come to MPs surgeries with tears of frustration and worry.

The tragedy is, in this age of open networks and informality, the man who tries to control everything ends up unable to run anything.

One day it's "give us your details for the national id register and pay fines if you fail" ... the next it's: "oh sorry ... we just lost the tax details of half the parents in the country."

This government has descended rapidly into a pattern of drifting, dithering and incompetence.

THE MODERN CONSERVATIVE ALTERNATIVE

We know that Gordon Brown can't be the change that Britain needs.

And so we must provide the modern Conservative alternative.

Clear. Competent. Inspiring.

Not just new policies, but a whole new politics, a new politics that will start to repair the political breakdown in our country.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

That means change at Westminster.

No more MPs voting on their own pay.

Closing the final salary MP pension scheme.

Clear declaration of expenses and allowances.

Not hiding behind the mantra that these are "House of Commons matters", but getting out there, saying what needs to be done and doing it.

KEEP OUR PROMISES

But this isn't just about the institution, it is about us. We must do better.

First, we must keep our manifesto promises.

Just as I am keeping the promises I made to you when I stood for the leadership of

this party.

I said our candidates would become more representative of modern Britain with more women and more people from ethnic minorities.

Now it's happening.

I said that our modern Conservative Party would value the quality of life as well as the quantity of money....

...that we would work to improve public services for everyone, not just help a few to opt out ...

.... that we would focus on fighting poverty and protecting the environment, not just crime and immigration.

All those things are happening.

When you voted for me, you knew what to expect.

And I have done what I said I would do.

END THE LABOUR SPIN CULTURE

I want to be honest with the public.

When it comes to spin, let's not pretend to be holier-than-thou

All governments, indeed all organisation and all individuals in their private lives want to present things to their best advantage.

But there's a difference between the legitimate desire to communicate efficiently and positively and the systematic culture of spin that's developed under Labour.

That must come to an end.

We will put in place mechanisms to prevent government spinning.

Statistical independence.

New fiscal rules.

Budget speeches that contain all the facts.

We'll also cut the number of spin doctors.

The latest edition of the Cabinet Office's press officer directory reveals there are

now an astonishing 3,238 press and communications staff across Whitehall.

The Ministry of Defence has 229 spin doctors and the Department for Work & Pensions has 181.

We will put a statutory cap on the number of special advisers, as part of a wider Civil Service Act to strengthen the independence of the Civil Service.

And there's something else we'll do.

We'll re-engage people in politics.

And it will be real engagement not fake engagement like Gordon Brown's citizens juries...

...or the Downing Street e-petitions which the Government simply ignores.

We believe that greater use of direct democracy will help make politics more responsive.

That's why the next Conservative government will introduce Citizens Initiatives so politicians will be forced to respond to the public.

At a national level, if a petition is submitted to Parliament signed by a set number of voters, for example 100,000, there would be a formal debate on the topic.

The public should also have the right to petition to have a new law tabled before Parliament.

Local authorities and some organisations are already able to submit Bills to Parliament.

We propose that the public, if backed by a petition of one million electors, should also be able to table a Bill for Parliament to vote for, to vote against or to amend.

We also want to see more local referendums.

Our plans for greater power for local councils will be matched by greater local accountability.

We have already announced plans to allow residents to veto high council tax rises.

The Local Government Act 2003 allows councils to hold (non-binding) local referendums on local issues – but the decision on whether to hold one is a matter for the council.

We believe that local people should also be able to call a referendum by submitting a petition signed by 10 per cent of the local electorate.

To reduce costs, the referendum would be held at the next council-wide ballot or election, unless the council chose to pay to bring forward the referendum.

They have local initiatives in Portland, Oregon and the system is regarded as a great success.

What works in Portland can work just as well in Port Talbot and Portsmouth.

Taken together, I believe these proposals will do a great deal to restore the good name of politics by giving people and communities a real say over the decisions that affect their lives.

In a specifically Welsh context I can also announce today that the party is going to look at how we can make devolution work better.

And I'm delighted that Wyn Roberts, one of the most dedicated public servants Wales has ever had, has agreed to head this up.

Wyn will consult widely to find the best way ahead, study the options and offer us a full overview of the possibilities.

He's promised us an interim report by the summer.

BOTTOM UP

At the next election, we'll offer a new approach in many areas.

But the really big difference will be in our philosophy of government

Everything we do will be different.

Instead of remote control by a central state, schools, hospitals, police forces and councils will be free to set their own priorities, in consultation with the communities they serve.

This isn't so much an ideological shift as a recognition that the culture which justified the old way of running things has changed.

In our private lives and in business we are living in the post-bureaucratic age but the government hasn't caught up.

It's no longer true that the state has all the information and all the capability.

Technology has done the most amazing thing: it has put the facts, and the power to use them, at the disposal of everyone.

People don't have to accept a top-down offer anymore: they can drive their own choices.

I want to see us move from an age of bureaucratic control to an age of individual choice, local control and democratic accountability.

That's the real difference between us and Labour.

They believe in the State. We believe in society.

They believe government knows best ... we believe people know best.

They believe in big government telling people what to do... we believe in setting people free to choose what they want to do.

CHANGE

And let us not for one moment fall into the cynic's trap of peddling the view that change isn't possible. It is.

I've been to New York and seen how you can have zero tolerance, beat based Policing that defeats crime and restores trust in the Police. We can do that here.

I've been to Sweden and seen how letting new schools set up in the state sector and letting parents choose can unlock innovation and quality. We can do that here.

I've seen how in Ireland cutting tax rates for business can unleash a wave of enterprise, investment and wealth. We can do that here.

With some of the world's best businesses, most innovative universities, most enterprising charities and voluntary bodies ... there is absolutely no reason why we, in the fifth largest economy in the world, cannot solve the deep seated problems that beset us and reach for a better future.

And I am determined to start by getting rid of this utterly tired, discredited and incompetent government.

CONCLUSION

The Conservative Party now has a genuinely groundbreaking agenda.

That's why we've launched our campaign.

I'd like all of you to lead it.

To go out there and get people to join us.

To create a mass movement for change.

This country desperately needs change.

Changes in policy.

Changes in politics.

We know we can build a better society.

Our message to the people of Wales and Britain is come and join us.

Ends