

Conservative Conference Speech

Sayeeda Warsi: We will give Party Members a real say on Conservative policy

Rt Hon Baroness Warsi , Sunday, October 3 2010

Thirteen years. Four Party Leaders.

Three General Elections. And now two parties, one government.

And finally something we have wanted to say for years:

A Conservative Prime Minister in Downing Street

Not so long ago people said our party was history.

They said we would never be in government again.

But look at what you have achieved this year.

The biggest swing in our history.

148 new MPs.

49 women now on the Conservative benches.

And 11 MPs who are black and minority ethnic.

You even won back my home seat of Dewsbury.

And thanks to your positive, patriotic campaigning in my home community, we finally finished off the BNP.

We also did something really special after polling day.

We could have been sullen and gone into opposition.

We could have been mean and tried to form a minority government.

But instead, we reached out and formed a strong coalition in the National Interest.

So Conference, let me say loudly and clearly:

To the army of activists who pounded the pavements...

...to the canvassers who knocked on millions of doors...

...to the associations who wore the blue rosette with pride...

...to everyone who voted Conservative - especially those who voted for us the first time....a big

heartfelt, thumping thank you

Conference, this is a big moment for me.

I thought long and hard about what I wanted to say.

I was quite humbled by the journey I've been on.

Because Conference it was only fifty years ago that my Dad came to this country with two pounds in his pocket.

He worked double shifts in the Yorkshire mills.

He did every job going.

He was a bus conductor, a bus driver, a cab driver...

...he went through unemployment.

I was born in a one up, one down.

Dewsbury Gate Road - it's still there.

But my Dad wasn't prepared to accept that this was where we should stay.

He believed in opportunity.

He believed in equality.

And he believed in hard work and fair play.

In the mills, my Dad was told that Labour was the party for him.

They said that Labour looked after the poorest.

That it looked after the vulnerable and minorities.

But Conference, today, my dad and millions of decent, hard-working, fair-minded people like him, are appalled at the state Labour have left this country in.

Appalled that Labour abandoned the very people they promised to protect.

With the poorest getting poorer.

The gap between the rich and poor getting wider.

Youth unemployment hitting new heights.

One in five pensioners living in poverty.

One in six children growing up in households where no one works.

Terrible rates of drink and drug abuse.

Appalling levels of teenage pregnancy.

One of the worst rates of family breakdown in Europe.

And UNICEF saying that Britain was the worst place in the developed world to be a child.

The longest recession.

The deepest recession.

The doubling of the debt.

And spending more on debt interest than on the education of our children.

Conference, this is Labour's legacy to Britain

This is their gift to the poor.

And that's why, Conference...

...they should never ever be allowed to do it again.

The fact is that Labour said they'd abolished boom and bust...

...but they brought bust back to Britain with one almighty bang.

And so I find it bizarre that having created this mess, Labour politicians now stump up on the news channels and attack us for taking the difficult decisions they never took.

They say we want to make spending cuts.

They say we are letting down the poor.

But it was them who left us with this mess.

So let me say something to the Labour Party.

We left you a thriving, buoyant economy in 1997...

...and you brought Britain back to the brink of bankruptcy.

You hammered the working classes by scrapping the 10p tax band.

You left an economy where people who are black or brown are twice as likely to be unemployed.

And you let down the regions by creating an economy where for every ten private sector jobs created in the South, just one was created in the North and the Midlands.

So Mr. Miliband,

Don't you dare say you are a friend of the working classes.

Don't you dare say you're a friend of minorities.

Don't you dare say you're the friend of people in the north.

Because I am all of those things and you are no friend of mine!

So what are we going to do about this mess?

It's simple: two parties, one purpose: together in the national interest.

And I'm so proud that this party is playing its part.

Because governing in the national interest is what we do best.

That's why we served under Lloyd George in the first World War.

That's why we served under Ramsay MacDonald in the 1930s.

And that's why, seventy years ago, this year, at the most dangerous moment in our history...

...Churchill formed a War Cabinet, faced up to Hitler, and together we won the Battle of Britain.

Patriotism has always powered our party.

And that's what we're showing again.

And Conference, we've made a strong start.

Look at what we have achieved.

We've scrapped Labour's jobs tax.

We're controlling immigration.

We're lifting almost a million out of income tax.

We're restoring the link between earnings and the basic pension.

And we are ensuring that never again will a British government hand more power to Brussels without your say so. Above all, Conference we're rolling up our sleeves and getting the job done.

Taking the difficult decisions.

Making the tough calls.

Dealing with the deficit.

Restoring confidence in our economy.

And thanks to George Osborne, Britain is once again open to business.

And the big question for Labour is what part do they want to play?

They can stand on the sidelines and snipe.

Or they can start making amends for the mess they made.

And that, for me, was what was so depressing about the whole Labour leadership race.

You know, back in May, they had an amazing opportunity.

They could have turned a page on their past.

They could have moved on from the Blair-Brown saga.

Instead, they went backwards.

They picked a man who doesn't even have the support of his own party.

He wasn't the choice of Labour MPs.

He wasn't the choice of Labour activists.

For all I know, he wasn't even the first choice of his own family.

So, after more feuding, new factions, and still no answers...

...in the end, the Unions got their man.

Now Mr. Miliband needs to prove that he has some answers...

...to the challenges Britain faces today...

...to the big problems left by Labour...

...and that he has a real vision of where he wants Britain to go.

And that begins with a proper economic plan.

He said he would be serious, he promised responsibility.

He said there are cuts he wouldn't oppose

But all we've heard so far is a long list of the things he does oppose.

This is the big question for Mr. Miliband.

What's your plan?

Will you tell us how you would deal with the biggest problem facing our country?

Or will you follow Ed Balls and his union buddies and abandon the centre ground?

Conference, I hope you don't mind if I end by saying a few personal things.

It's an honour to be here.

And I'm surrounded by a fabulous team.

I've got the experience of Michael Fallon.

The activism of Nicola Blackwood.

The youth of Andrew Stephenson.

And the business brains of Alan Lewis.

And there's one person I want to mention particularly.

Thanks to this man, our party is in ship shape condition.

Thanks to him, we're better organised than ever.

No David, this time I'm not talking about you.

It's Andrew Feldman, and I'm so proud that he is co-Chairmen with me.

Andrew, you are a huge asset to our party...

...you could even say that you are like a brother to me....

...but that's an older brother, Andrew!

But to be serious, it should be a source of huge pride that we have two people running this party.

One the great grandson of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe;

One the daughter of Muslim immigrants from Pakistan.

But the fact is it's no big surprise.

This party has always been a champion of progress and equality.

It's why we had Nancy Astor, the first woman in Parliament.

It's why we had Benjamin Disraeli, the first Jewish Prime Minister.

And that's why we had that fantastic first female Prime Minister - Margaret Thatcher.

And now Conference, it is my privilege to stand before you as the first British Muslim to be a full Member of the British Cabinet.

And my job is to fly the flag for our party.

Conference, I know that in the past I have sometimes given my press officer sleepless nights.

Well I didn't come into politics to stand on the sidelines.

I didn't come into politics to play it safe. These are tough times - and I tell it as it is.

So when I saw immigration getting out of control, I said so.

I believe AV is the wrong system, so I will fight it.

And when there are cases of electoral fraud, I will always speak out.

So let me tell you what I want to see for our great Party.

I want us to attract more members.

I want to see a strengthened and robust voluntary party.

And I want our grassroots to have a strong voice on policy.

Our Party has always been at its best when we develop policy together.

We want to harness the talents of all of our members to help identify the future challenges that Britain will face.

And that's why, Conference, today I can announce that our reinvigorated Conservative Policy Forum is back up and running...

..and that we will now be reaching out to hear your views.

It means that all our Party Members can have real say on how our policies develop.

And we will always make sure that voice is heard, respected and understood.

Conference, in 2005 you elected David Cameron as our leader.

You made a choice about the way our party should be.

Since then, we have reclaimed the centre ground of politics.

And today this party is the force of progressive change once again.

The One Nation Party...

...that thinks, looks and feels like today's Britain....

...that understands the challenge of today's Britain.

And Conference, it's because we changed our party that we can change our country.

Yes of course, we are today's generation.

But let's also respect the last generation too.

And think deeply and responsibly about the next generation -

Our children and our children's children

Conference, this party fights for all generations.

We've done it before. We will do it again.