

Keir Starmer New Year's speech

Labour Leader Keir Starmer - New Year's speech from Stratford, London.

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2023 marks a new chapter for Britain, with a new King to be crowned in May. We must look forward with hope. But for hope to flourish, Britain needs change.

I don't think anyone seriously disputes that. It's the story of the country right now.

Amidst all the chaos, is a growing impatience for change, for real change, lasting change, national renewal.

And yes - as they've done throughout our history, the British people are turning to Labour to provide that change.

In 2022 they looked at us again and I felt, for the first time in a while, we could return their gaze with confidence.

That the changes we've made - on antisemitism, on national security and NATO, on making economic stability the platform for everything we do - has restored a degree of trust. Laid a foundation. This year, we've got to build on that.

People know we care - they always know the Labour Party cares. And they can now see a party that is both competent and compassionate. A party that understands what it means to put service to the country first.

But our task for 2023 is not to rest on our laurels. We need to push forward and rise to the moment, prove we can be a bold, reforming government.

Show not just what the Tories have done to Britain but the Britain that Labour can build. A fairer, greener, more dynamic country with an economy that works for everyone, not just those at the top. And a politics which trusts communities with the power to control their destiny.

A new government and a new way of governing. Britain needs both. And with Labour Britain will get both.

That's my message of hope for the New Year. We're going to roll up our sleeves, fix the problems and improve our country. We can't keep expecting the British people to just suck it up. Not without the hope - the possibility - of something better.

Don't get me wrong - I'm under no illusions about the scale of the challenges we face.

Houses that get burgled countless times yet the police never come. Hospitals putting out messages begging patients to stay away from A&E. Children going to school hungry. And it's not just the poorest who are struggling.

Millions of families, pensioners, working people - people who've always kept their heads above water - are going without decent food and heating. Cutting back on their holidays, their meals out, Christmas presents - all the little things that make life more enjoyable.

Now, sometimes people say to me - we'll get through this, Britain's been through worse. And they're right.

I grew up working class in the 1970s, I know what a cost of living crisis feels like. The anxiety and shame of not being able to pay bills that only months ago were affordable. Our phone was cut off like this. And that was it.

We got through it. Britain will get through it. The problem is that's exactly what the Tories are banking on. They're going to turn round in 2024 and try to claim some kind of political credit for the sacrifices working people are making now, as if it's not their mistakes people are paying for - again.

But at the heart of this cynical politics is the cost to people of just getting through.

The burden of living without the real hope of a better future. Not the sort of hope that fires grandiose, utopian visions - I don't mean that. I mean the basic, ordinary hope we used to take for granted. The sort of hope you can build your future around.

That aspirations are made of and which can hold a country together when times are tough.

That's why showing how we can change the country is so important this year - Labour can lift that burden. Give people a sense of possibility again. Light at the end of the tunnel.

Instead of asking how the British people get through it, we need to show them what we can achieve together. Because for all the challenges we face - I remain optimistic about our future.

I believe in our country, I believe in our businesses, I believe in our people and I believe in our spirit.

It was there in the coming together for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II. In the thousands of people who welcomed refugees into their homes, from Ukraine and elsewhere. In the resilience of our retailers, our pubs and venues, the creative industries fighting back from the pandemic. The brilliance of key workers, nurses, doctors, volunteers and carers who got us to that point.

It's in our love of sport - and our excellence at it. The double world champion cricketers, the Commonwealth games that were a beacon of diversity, the Lionesses who brought football home.

It's our universities, our young people, the researchers in this building and those like it. Our manufacturing genius, our superpower services, our start-ups and innovators. The green entrepreneurs, the builders and retrofitters, insulators and engineers, who will bring us energy independence and cheaper bills. The scientists making healthcare more responsive - saving more lives.

And it's in our communities. In towns and cities like Burnley, Wolverhampton, Grimsby and Swindon where the people will tell you, in no uncertain terms, that they do have ambition for themselves and their community.

What they lack is a government that shares their ambition. Because all those achievements, all that possibility, is a testament to our untapped potential. So this Year, let's imagine instead, what we could achieve if we match the ambition of the British people.

Unlock their pride and their purpose. Give them an economy and a politics they deserve.

This is crucial - economic change must go hand-in-hand with political change. We have an economy that hoards potential and a politics that hoards power. And it's no coincidence - no accident - that this leaves us with more regional inequality than anywhere else in Europe.

They feed off each other. That's why I say Britain needs a completely new way of governing. Yes, we need to use the power of dynamic government, harness technology to drive through reform, convene a real industrial partnership between business and unions. But all of that must be done in service of a politics which trusts communities.

I'm utterly convinced about this - the Westminster system is part of the problem.

I came to politics late in my career. I've run large organisations, institutions that had to serve our country, and I've changed them all - including the Labour Party. That's why I came into politics eight years ago. A new way to serve. A new way to get things done. More opportunities to change our country for the better.

But I have to say - I haven't found much of that in Westminster.

Yes, there are good people of course - many MPs share my determination to tackle Britain's problems quickly. But as a system - it doesn't work.

You know, sometimes I hear talk about a "huge day in Westminster", but all that's happened is someone has passionately described a problem, and then that's it.

Nothing has changed, but the circus moves on. Rinse and repeat. Honestly - you can't overstate how much a short-term mind-set dominates Westminster. And from there, how it infects all the institutions which try and fail to run Britain from the centre.

I call it 'sticking plaster politics'. And in a kind of last minute frenzy, it sometimes delivers relief. But the long-term cure - that always eludes us. And it's at the heart of all the problems we see across our country right now.

I'll give you an example - energy and the cost of living crisis. Now - thank heavens we have a price freeze this winter. That Labour's campaigning in the summer eventually brought the Government to our position and its senses.

But truth be told, the price freeze is the perfect example of 'sticking plaster politics'. Necessary of course. But none the less, an expensive, last-minute fix, papering over cracks in our energy security that have been on display for years.

Don't get me wrong, nobody criticises the Government for the effects of the war in Ukraine. But the war didn't scrap home insulation. The war didn't ban onshore wind.

The war didn't stall British nuclear energy.

The Tory Government did that.

The story is the same with the NHS and care, with all our public services. The workforce and morale crisis has been an ice-berg on the horizon for years. Low pay, housing, childcare, immigration, planning, skills, investing in technology - time and again it's the same pattern.

You saw it yesterday from the Prime Minister. Commentary without solution. More promises, more platitudes. No ambition to take us forward. No sense of what the country needs. Thirteen years of nothing but sticking plaster politics.

It's why every crisis hits Britain harder than our competitors. The only country in the G7 still poorer than it was before the pandemic. The worst decade for growth in two centuries. Seven million on waiting lists and rising. That hasn't happened elsewhere.

You know - one of the greatest privileges of being born in Britain - certainly for all of my life, is knowing that if you get ill, if you have a serious accident, you'll get decent healthcare. Whatever your circumstances. Not every country has that - and the anxiety it causes is huge.

It's why, eleven years ago, in the Olympic stadium a few hundred yards away, we put the NHS on display to the world. It's who we are. We can't let sticking plaster politics destroy it. I won't stand for that and Labour won't stand for that.

It's why we've got a fully costed plan for the biggest NHS training programme in its history. We'll tackle the capacity crisis with more doctors, more nurses, more health visitors. And we'll broker a fair pay agreement that will transform the pay and conditions for every carer in the country.

Give care workers the respect and the status they deserve and help them drive up standards in our care system. That's a massive part of the NHS crisis.

I heard the Prime Minister yesterday - and he's still in denial about how we got here. Still too weak to challenge the vested interests in his party that hold Britain back. Don't expect that to change.

On planning, on onshore wind, on the NHS. Not now. Not for the past thirteen years. Not ever.

Fundamentally, the Tories don't accept that to help working people succeed you need dynamic government, government driven by a strategic purpose. They don't see that the challenges we face on climate change, artificial intelligence, caring for an ageing society mean a hands-off approach to our economy and public services just won't wash anymore. And this is a real political divide.

But it's not just Tory ideology that drives "sticking plaster politics", it's the whole Westminster system. No similar country puts so much decision-making in the hands of so few people. So it's no wonder the problems of communities up and down this country don't get the attention they deserve.

Just think about it practically for a minute. Imagine Britain is a work place. Now, the boss and the senior management, yes, of course they have to take some of the big decisions, the strategic ones. But you wouldn't have them taking every decision, would you? Standing over your shoulder telling you exactly how to use a robot arm? Getting them to write the code for computer aided manufacturing? Of course not - nothing would get done.

Big decisions would get put off, because you wouldn't be able to see the wood for the trees while other decisions - taken by the wrong people, not close enough to the action - would get botched.

Yet this is exactly how we try to run Britain. It's why for all the talk of levelling-up, nothing ever happens. It's just that old game of passionately identifying a problem. Rather than facing the real solution and accepting Westminster must give power away.

Well - no more. No more sticking plaster politics. No more Westminster hoarding power. No more holding back this country's economic potential.

This year we're going to show how real change comes from unlocking the pride and purpose of British communities.

There are two steps to this.

First - we will modernise central government so it becomes, dynamic, agile, strong and, above all, focused. Driven by clear, measurable objectives. National missions.

A new approach to the power of government. More strategic, more relaxed about bringing in the expertise of public and private, business and union, town and city, and using that partnership to drive our country forward.

We will announce these missions in the coming weeks - our manifesto will be built around them. And they will be the driving force of the next Labour Government.

They will pushing us on to a better future and a decade of national renewal.

But let me be clear - none of this should be taken as code for Labour getting its big government cheque-book out. Of course investment is required - I can see the damage the Tories have done to our public services as plainly as anyone else.

But we won't be able to spend our way out of their mess - it's not as simple as that.

Let me give you an example of our different approach. You start with a mission - a plan for 100 percent clean power generation by 2030.

That mission builds on an opportunity - that clean British energy is nine times cheaper than imported fossil fuels. It's backed by investment - public and private - in wind, solar, nuclear, hydrogen, green steel and carbon capture.

It's galvanised by reform: by Great British Energy, a new publicly owned company that will take this opportunity and turn it into good, secure, well-paid British jobs.

And it's driven by speed, and a long-term vision, that doesn't back down when the going gets tough, when vested interests take you on over planning or trying to hold on to fossil fuels.

Because if you take action early, if we did this now, then businesses and working people get cheaper bills forever. Our country gets energy independence from tyrants like Putin forever. And we can give every community a shot at the green jobs of the future.

That's just one example, one mission. But it shows our recipe for taking on Sticking Plaster Politics. It's new technology, unleashed by public investment and private enterprise, tackling a huge social challenge, that then provides a new foundation for long-term prosperity. Which - crucially - communities can then build on themselves.

And this is the second of our two steps.

Giving communities the chance to control their economic destiny. The argument is devastatingly simple. The decisions which create wealth in our communities should be taken by local people with skin in the game.

And a huge power shift out of Westminster can transform our economy, our politics and our democracy.

I go back to Brexit. Yes, a whole host of issues were on that ballot paper. But as I went around the country, campaigning for Remain, I couldn't disagree with the basic case so many Leave voters made to me.

People who wanted public services they could rely on. High streets they could be proud of. Opportunities for the next generation. And all of this in their town or city.

It was the same in the Scottish referendum in 2014 - many of those who voted 'yes' did so for similar reasons. And it's not an unreasonable demand.

It's not unreasonable for us to recognise the desire for communities to stand on their own feet. It's what Take Back Control meant. The control people want is control over their lives and their community.

So we will embrace the Take Back Control message. But we'll turn it from a slogan to a solution. From a catchphrase into change. We will spread control out of Westminster. Devolve new powers over employment support, transport, energy, climate change, housing, culture, childcare provision and how councils run their finances.

And we'll give communities a new right to request powers which go beyond this.

All this will be in a new "Take Back Control" Bill - a centrepiece of our first King's speech. A Bill that will deliver on the demand for a new Britain. A new approach to politics and democracy. A new approach to growth and our economy.

2022 killed the Tory idea that it's only those at the top who grow our economy. 2023 will be the year Labour shows a new path for growth. The year when we accept that if the South East races ahead, 'redistribution' can't be the one-word plan for the rest of Britain.

This was part of the Brexit moment as well. Working people want their town or city to prosper by standing on their own feet. They want growth from the grassroots. To create wealth on their terms and in their way.

So let me spell it out - no more short-cuts. Strong, dynamic government is necessary but it's not sufficient. Communities need strong public services, but that's not enough on its own. For national renewal, there is no substitute for a robust private sector, creating wealth in every community.

You can see this in the precision engineers and life scientists of Glasgow. The video game visionaries in Dundee. The cyber security firms of the Valleys and South Wales. The Hydrogen Corridor in Teesside. Nano-manufacturing in Northern Ireland. Ceramics in North Staffordshire. Fuel cells in the West Midlands. Robotics in Manchester.

We need to turbo-charge this potential, but Westminster can't do that on its own, it can only do it with communities. That's why Labour will give them the trust. The power. And the control.

We won't accept decline. Won't write our country off. Won't leave Britain in a brace position, buffeted from crisis to crisis. Holding on. Trying to make it through. It's no way to live and it's no way to run a country.

So this year, in place of sticking plaster politics, we'll set out the case for change. The case for a new Britain. The case for hope. That the country will get better. That politics can be a force for good. That Britain can be run in the interests of working people.

We can feel the public looking at us again - and we won't let up. We'll work every day to earn their trust. Show them a new way of governing. And lead them to the fairer, greener, more dynamic Britain. Where aspiration is rewarded. Working people succeed. Communities control their own destiny.

And where politics doesn't hide from the big challenges that face our children.

Thank you.