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MAYOR BILL DE BLASIO DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

It's such an honor to be here with Mr. Miliband and ALL the people who make this Labour Party what it is. From he and the other rising stars who will lead Labour to victory next year... to the everyday activists whose unflinching passion and energy will fuel the campaign.

Though I've seen your efforts mostly from afar, it's clear to me, even across five time zones and an ocean, that this group is working towards something special.... something important.

It's fitting that we find ourselves in Manchester. This city was at the forefront of the innovation and ingenuity that drove the Industrial Revolution, helping shape the contours of the modern economy that we know today.

It shares a special status in history with the city I love and am so honored to lead. Both are places where big ideas and raw grit have been honored and rewarded like few others in the world.

It is also among the first places in the world to foster a modern working class... and among the first where working people empowered themselves to take part in the political process. It's no wonder then that Manchester is a place where hard truths are deeply understood and spoken out.

I cannot imagine a more appropriate backdrop for this gathering because yours is a party BORN out of working people attaining the right to vote... a party that EXISTS to fight for working families and forcefully address their needs.

Labour has inclusiveness and progressiveness coded in its DNA... Yours is a party grounded in the idea that everyone's voice matters.... And that no one should be left behind.

THIS Labour Party is led by a new generation of progressive leaders and defined by bold ideas. You stand ready to ACT with a plan for a fairer, more prosperous United Kingdom.... And to FIGHT for an economy... a country... that works for working people.

THIS Labour Party hears the voices of the millions who feel like they are treading water... Working harder and harder but feeling less and less secure about the future.

And your party refuses to accept the politics of inertia... That resigned mindset that says the next generation is destined to do worse than this one.

By virtue of being in this room, you recognize that we owe it to our children to do better ... to live up to the most basic promise we make to the people we serve.

I say that as someone charged with the duty of overseeing New York's school system, where over one million children 18 and under learn and grow.

I also say it as a father of two beautiful children of my own, Dante and Chiara, who have attended those schools for most of their young lives.

There is NO duty more sacred than parenthood.

Nothing gives me more comfort... more joy... than watching my children grow, knowing they can be WHATEVER they want to be. The boundaries of their future are determined only by how hard they work and how big they dream.

If we accept a future – or a present – where parents can't look their kids in the eyes and tell them they have a shot at something better, then we break the promise of civilized society.... We deprive our children – AND their parents -- of so much.

Now, I've said that growing inequality is THE crisis of our time in New York City. It's true here as well.

The numbers speak for themselves.

In the UK, in 2011, the average income of an adult in the top 0.1 % (point one percent) was more than 70 times that of someone in the bottom 90%. [2011, World Income Database].

The Guardian recently reported that the five richest families in the UK have more wealth than the entire bottom 20% of the country.

And, as is the case in New York City, the trend has been moving sharply in the wrong direction. According to a study published by Oxfam, since the 1990s, incomes of the top 0.1% (point one percent) of Britons have grown four times faster than those of the bottom 90%.

Now, there's nothing wrong with attaining wealth. I'm happy to celebrate the success of those who've earned it. But this crisis is keeping so many from writing their OWN success stories.

This status quo offers only the narrowest path to opportunity. Instead, it leaves everyday working people caught in a cost-of-living crisis.

And let's be clear what we mean when we talk about a cost of living crisis. It's not a reference to the astonishingly high price of penthouse flats, Bentleys or five-star holidays. The people who can afford THOSE luxuries, are in fact, doing quite well under this Conservative government.

But feeding a family, keeping a modest home that's lit and heated, securing a safe place for children to be while parents are hard at work... THESE things are becoming more and more costly. We're not talking about luxuries, or even conveniences, but the ESSENTIALS that people need to live.

LIVING itself is getting harder and harder for working families to afford. Not living WELL... just LIVING; just getting by.

And the price people pay isn't merely monetary.

You can see it in the tired eyes of the waitress whose SECOND job is preceded by a second SHIFT at her FIRST job....

In the shaky hand of the bus driver signing the paperwork for a payday loan....

In the clenched jaws and stiff lips of working parents mustering brave faces in front of their son and daughter... in the STRAIN that goes into just hiding the fear that they won't be able to attain a better life.

As wealth becomes more concentrated at the top, stories like these are becoming all too common.

If unaddressed, the crisis will become THE defining characteristic of our societies... It won't be prosperity or opportunity... tragically, it will be inequality and the cost-of-living crisis.

I know this Labour Party understands what's at stake.

I also know the weight of this moment can feel like a burden: the exasperation that comes from knowing the gravity of this threat – a generation at risk of being forsaken – at a time when so many seem unwilling to act in response.

The right side of history can feel like a lonely place. But it isn't. It never has been.

Rather, history itself tells us that people gravitate towards decency, inclusion and progress. And you don't have to look back thousands of years to see that – go walk around the streets of Manchester... Go to a school, a church, a mosque... You can see the trust people put in one another every day; the value people place in simple moral action.

So why then is COLLECTIVE moral action often so difficult?

In the case of the inequality and cost-of-living crisis, part of the issue is scope: the problem seems so difficult, so deeply embedded, that good people can be tempted to throw their hands up and declare that nothing can be done about it.

But there's something else going on as well. As is the case with many injustices, there are people – small in number but oversized in power – who benefit from the status quo, and they work to maintain it. Their voices seem louder... more confident and authoritative... and those of everyday people get drowned out.

In this way, people are made to feel powerless... made to feel that their voice doesn't matter at all.

So at the same time that inequality is skyrocketing and the cost of living is overwhelming – something people can see and feel every day – we're told that just speaking of this problem is unconstructive, divisive... harmful, even.

You know that it isn't. So do the people of your country.

Part of your job then is to help them find their voice to say – together – that Britons deserve something better.

Sometimes people – good, hardworking people – need to hear the truth spoken before they feel comfortable speaking it themselves.

And there's so much power that comes from speaking the truth... especially from speaking HARD truths.

That's because the status quo gets perpetuated through a series of falsehoods...false CHOICES that assign mutual exclusivity to ideas that should be complementary.

We're told that prosperity can't be both great, and shared....

That you can't lift the floor for those struggling in a tough economy, and still balance a budget....

That those of us who serve can't expect to achieve anything at all if we dare to advance policies that are bold and morally right.

In the lead-up to the election for New York City Mayor last year, the voices of the status quo gave voters another false choice: support MY candidacy ... OR vote for someone with a real shot at winning.

Well, I am here before you today because the people of New York City rejected the lazy logic of false-choice politics.

I want to tell you how it happened.

I announced my candidacy for Mayor from the front steps of my home in Brooklyn in January 2013. A few hundred people were there with me... the earliest believers in our campaign.

We were brought together by a deep concern: that New York had become a Tale of Two Cities; a place where a few were doing very well, but millions of working people were struggling.

It threatened to degrade New York's status in the world.

The beacon of opportunity that for generations shone so brightly across-our-five-boroughs-and-out-into-the -world was dimming.

We saw it, we FELT it in our city.... Even if it was unspoken, we saw on our neighbors' faces: the weight of worry about a future of diminished possibilities.

And we knew the policies of the status quo were exacerbating the problem rather than addressing it.

But though our mission was in many ways somber, our mood that day was not. It was a grey, frigid afternoon, but the event had an aura of excitement and joy one would expect at a summer street party. It was no doubt a strange sight to those passing by.

There was a feeling that something special was happening that made the chill tolerable. It came from having found in one another a group of people who spoke the same truth about our Tale of Two Cities...the harm it was doing.... the threat it posed.

There was a sense of relief that came from learning we weren't alone in our beliefs... a lifting of lonely burdens.

There was a powerful sense of MISSION that came from accepting a mutual responsibility to act, together, against this scourge... and a heartfelt faith that victory was achievable, no matter the odds.

Now, the odds did appear quite long, at first. It felt like the total number of those in the city who had HEARD of me was limited to those standing in front of my home that day... And my house is not very big.

And not only were other candidates for mayor better known, they espoused ideas that were seen as more politically practical, hewing to the familiarity of the status quo.

But it was never my intention to nibble around the edges with policies of timid maintenance; I ran to take dead aim at the crisis of our time. And I became Mayor because everyday New Yorkers, too, were hungry for a clean break from the status quo.

Our campaign was powered by people of every race, every age, every income bracket. And yes, even many New Yorkers who had enjoyed great success joined our fight against rising inequality. They wanted the next generation of New Yorkers to have the same opportunities the city had given them.

We were a small group, at first, but as New Yorkers learned that we were fighting for a government that would represent THEIR values -- fairness, justice, real opportunity for all -- our campaign grew. And grew... And grew.

We worked -- together -- as activists, to spread the word.

And so, in living rooms and parks... on Twitter and Facebook... people were hearing from one another for the first time things they already knew in their own hearts to be true... and they were learning the POWER that could come when they themselves spoke out.

THAT is how in a matter of months we went from a few hundred souls gathered on that blustery Brooklyn day, to not just winning, but winning BIG on ELECTION day.

And our shared resolve to remake our city didn't end when the votes were tallied.

The same tenets that defined our campaign now drive our Administration: a constant push for bold action; a willingness to hear and speak hard truths; an agenda set by listening to the PEOPLE.

With regard to my absolute highest priority, that's meant working aggressively to secure unprecedented access to free, full day -- FULL DAY -- early education programs for 4-year-olds.

We did this because study after study shows the great equalizing effect of early education. But you don't need to read an academic journal to get that: we all know access to quality education does so much to determine a person's economic destiny... and as with most matters of destiny, timing is everything.

Now, to give you some context on the politics we faced when trying to expand full day early education for all families, I'd like to read you two assessments from New York newspapers, published almost exactly one year apart.

In September 2013, a few months before I was elected Mayor... the New York Daily News wrote QUOTE "[The] promise to create 48,000 educational slots for four-year-olds...has little chance of becoming a reality."

Then, in September 2014, in The New York Times QUOTE "51,000 Answer de Blasio's Bell for New Pre-K."

Now, the 51,000 there refers to the number of kids who have been signed up for these programs. That's three thousand MORE than the number said to be impossible just one year ago.

It also means that 51,000 beautiful children are on a better path to success... And all of their mothers and fathers... grandparents and guardians... they get to experience the comfort... the joy... that comes from seeing the shine of brighter futures.

It's hard to express how much that means for the working people of our city. But it's also not all we've done in our first few months in office.

We've launched a plan to secure affordable housing for 500,000 New Yorkers over the next decade. That's more than the total population of Bristol... Or of Miami, for anyone watching back home.

We ended what had been one of the saddest manifestations of inequality by reforming racially biased police practices so that ALL law-abiding New Yorkers are granted the basic right of walking down the street without fear of being hassled by authorities.

And we've done all of this while reaching agreement on a contract with our city teachers – educators who had gone without a contract for nearly five years. In all that time, the good men and women charged with safeguarding the futures of our children had enjoyed little security when it came to their own futures.

We made a deal grounded in partnership and mutual respect, because RESPECT for working men and women is a core principle that all GOOD governments live by. It was a fair deal for teachers – offering increased pay that they greatly deserved. But it also generated important savings that labor was a partner in achieving. Put simply: it was a good deal for the people of New York.

So if anyone tells you that a balanced budget and an agenda of economic fairness can't go hand-in-hand, tell them to come visit New York City.

Really, it's beautiful this time of year.

I notice so many similarities between the UK I see today and the New York where I stood on that cold afternoon and announced my candidacy.

It comes through so clearly, even across great physical distance: the people of the UK are ready for bold, progressive change.

And if we can make the strides that we've made in New York City from a campaign so humble in its origins, imagine the feats that can come from this great hall!

The work you have in front of you is so important. Here's the evidence of that: the other side is trying to talk you into underestimating the reach of the good you can do.

There is little basis for glib assertion from the Conservatives that a progressive agenda is narrow in terms of whose lives it would improve.

The opposite is true. Mounting inequality creates ripple effects that undermine our whole societies. Here's just one example of how:

The Financial Times recently concluded that the income gap between America's richest and poorest metropolitan regions is not only the widest it has ever been, but that this phenomenon was QUOTE "shaping an uneven housing recovery that threatens to hold back the broader revival of the world's largest economy."

In an increasingly interconnected world, a system grounded in exclusivity is not sustainable for ANYONE, including those at the very top.

But that also means a progressive agenda has the power to help EVERYONE, whether your opponents acknowledge it or not.

Don't hold your breath waiting for this conservative government to do that. Their top-down policies are making things harder for working people every day.

Among the many ways they've aggravated the wounds of this crisis, the most painful might be their tax policy.

Instead of giving working families the leg-up they deserve, they gave huge tax cuts to the wealthiest with the vague hope that money would magically trickle down to everyone else. In my country, that's an approach we call voodoo economics.

I have no doubt the word "voodoo" sounds more elegant in a British accent than an American one, but in any intonation, we know it's a policy that doesn't work.

So let me tell you about what does work. And you don't have to look far to see it. In fact, you heard it at your own conference last evening.

Ed Miliband has so clearly articulated both the challenges, and the opportunities this moment in history creates for the British people.

He knows that a cautious approach won't do when it comes to addressing the crisis of our time. He has a BOLD vision for big change. As he said last evening: "I'm not talking about changing a policy or simply a different programme, but something that is bigger: transforming the idea and ethic of how our country is run."

And he knows well what needs to be done. As he told this conference LAST YEAR: "We have to rebuild anew One Nation. An economy built on your success, a society based on your values, a politics that hears your voice – rich and poor alike – accepting their responsibilities to each other."

Ed Miliband will be a Prime Minister for Britons with second jobs, not just those with second homes.

Ed Miliband understands -- this Labour Party understands -- the true cost of a status quo that puts a barrier between working people and prosperity.

And this Labour Party not only has the right values, it has an agenda that translates values into action. Not political talk, but a real plan that reforms the crux of the economy.

Labour has a plan for a tax policy that rewards hard work over existing wealth and power. A plan to end the current government's tax cut for the wealthiest and instead give tax relief to 24 million middle and working class people....

A plan that protects and STRENGTHENS – not curtails – the NHS so that quality healthcare remains a right and not a privilege...

A plan that puts working people ahead of big corporations by controlling energy costs, and taking unprecedented steps to make housing more affordable.

And a plan that significantly increases – to 25 hours a week – free child care to working parents of 3- and 4-year olds, so that ALL kids can get on a path to success and opportunity early.

I speak from personal experience when I say that this initiative in particular has the power to lift lives like few others that governments can implement. And it will make such a difference for so many children, and for their parents.

Your agenda is a blueprint of what a fairer, more prosperous, STRONGER United Kingdom will look like.

That is not only why you MUST win, it is why you WILL win!

The upcoming election represents a choice for the people of your country: build a United Kingdom that rewards hard work and ensures the next generation does better... Or continue down a path of growing inequality and rising cost of living.

To me, that choice is very clear, as I know it is to the people in this room... and as I know it will become to everyday people across this country.

But to those on the other side, who argue things work BETTER when opportunity is scarce and exclusive, I offer this thought: not even DARWIN was a social Darwinist.

Indeed, Charles Darwin, one of the greatest minds that yours or any country ever produced, put it this way: "If the misery of the poor be caused not by the laws of nature, but by our institutions, great is our sin."

Among the cruelest false choices we are given is one that says we can only move forward if some are left behind. You don't need to accept that. No one should.

The work ahead of you will be anything but easy... I can assure you of that. That distinct histories written on opposite ends of an ocean leave us, at this moment, facing essentially the same crisis – underscores its profound scale.

But you have the power to overcome it.

If you reject the cold complacency of the status quo, its power will erode.

If you speak hard truths, others will listen.

If you empower the people of your great country to speak THEIR truths, to stand up and TO ACT in the face of this crisis, then there is so much good that you can achieve, together.

And I believe you will.

Thank you!

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