

Jeremy Corbyn speech ahead of the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Jeremy Corbyn MP, Leader of the Labour Party speaking in Birmingham today, ahead of the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on Wednesday 22nd March, said:

*** CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

I would like to start by thanking Race On The Agenda and the Runnymede Trust for hosting this event today.

And for all the work they do to highlight the issues that impact the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities in Britain.

Birmingham of course has a long race relations history.

It was in Birmingham almost 50 years ago, that the Conservative MP for Wolverhampton, Enoch Powell gave his notorious 'Rivers of Blood' speech. I remember it like it was yesterday as I was living in Jamaica at the time. The outrage on the streets was palpable.

An evil appeal to racial hatred, made just a week before the Labour government's Race Relations Bill 1968, the first legislation in the country to prohibit racial discrimination.

And some of you will remember that it was in 1972, Stuart Hall, a Jamaican-born cultural theorist and political activist became the director of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. I learned a lot from Stuart.

His writing on race, and identity, and the links between racial prejudice and the media in the 1970s, was certainly ground-breaking.

And of course, Birmingham's Handsworth, now a vibrant multi-ethnic commercial area, was rocked by unrest three decades ago following years of social injustice, poverty and racial inequality.

This coming Wednesday, the United Nations marks the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

So it's particularly fitting for me to be here today to set our Labour's vision on race equality and economic justice for Black, Asian and Minority Communities.

Labour is a party built on the values of social justice, equality, internationalism and human rights. That is why I have devoted my life to it.

Theresa May will tell you she wants a society that works for everyone. But friends, I and many others in the Labour party haven't just talked the talk; we have walked the walk as well.

I have stood side by side with your communities, to campaign against Apartheid in South Africa, against increasing Islamophobia in this country against Racism and against anti-Semitism.

And under my leadership the Labour party will deliver a credible plan to break the racial injustices in our economy and social institutions.

Now more than ever, we need to celebrate the profound and enriching transformation that the diversity of people in this country, with all the different experiences, talents and contributions has brought.

And we are privileged to have this reflected in the mass membership of the Labour party, now the biggest political party in Western Europe.

In my constituency of Islington North, we are all made better by the dynamism of cultures and languages from Ghana, Somaliland, the Kurdish region, Ireland and many more.

Here in Birmingham, one of the most diverse cities in Europe, people have come to Britain from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Birmingham is home to an elaborate variety of ethnic and religious communities:

Kashmiri Pakistanis in Sparkbrook.

Bengali Muslims in Perry Barr.

Hindus in Sutton Coldfield.

Britain wouldn't be the place it is today, people living and working together side by side, without the contribution of Black and Asian communities.

Following the Windrush Generation of 1948, it was the help of African-Caribbean communities that kept the nation moving. And of course many who came before then.

Asian people in the industrial cities like Leicester and Bradford were recruited to work the night shift when Britain retooled its textile industry after the Second World War.

Today, Britain has the world's sixth-biggest economy – no mean feat for a small island nation you might think...

That's partly about inventiveness and organisation, and it's also the legacy of immigration and an exploitative relationship with poorer nations as an imperial power. The echoing voices of Empire two point zero from this government are rightly making BME people feel very unsettled.

Labour rejects a post-Brexit Britain based on trade deals that profit from the exploitation of the world's fragile economies.

We remember the great British heroine, the late Mary Seacole, originally born in Jamaica, who set up the "British Hotel" during the Crimean War, providing care for wounded servicemen on the battlefield.

Over 150 years later, and without the contribution of your communities, our health service would struggle to survive.

The NHS was established the same year as Windrush docked. It's our most cherished national institution.

NHS England figures in 2015 show that nearly one in five of all staff were from ethnic minority backgrounds, with over two in five NHS doctors from a non-white group.

And the Tories are squeezing the NHS dry, as they hand over chunks of it to their friends in the private sector, just as they refuse entry to desperate refugees, and allow the migrants, who keep the health service going, to be demonised.

Your communities also play an important role in our civil service, local government and voluntary sector.

Today Black and Asian owned businesses are an important and growing feature of our economy and society.

These businesses are important not just because of their financial contribution; they have also helped transform particular sectors of the economy and in the regeneration of inner-city areas like Birmingham.

In the wake of the Brexit decision, it is vitally important, that we value, celebrate and protect our diverse society.

And that includes the 3 million EU nationals who live and work here, and who have made lives, have families, friends and colleagues here and so are connected to many millions more of us.

Equality is the central bedrock of Labour's values, and that message must be heard loud and clear, particularly in the current political climate.

However, the challenges remain stark.

It's indefensible that in Britain today, if you're Black or Asian you are more likely to be living in poverty than if you're white.

And that young black men have experienced the worst long-term employment and economic outcomes in generations.

Or the fact that women of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin are less than half as likely to be employed compared with rates for other women.

How can it be just or fair that black people with degrees earn 23% less on average than their white peers?

And despite significant equality legislation brought in by Labour governments, racial inequality is a routine feature in the British economy.

Why? The political choices of this Tory government are a good place to begin.

Time and time again Theresa May patronises the electorate with empty rhetoric of "building an economy that works for everyone".

After 7 years in government, the political machine she herself dubbed "the nasty party" continues to pursue an economic agenda that serves the elite at the expense of the majority of the people, including Black and Asian communities in particular.

Let's just look at the budget her chancellor delivered last week. The biggest losers of this government's tax and benefit policy are Black and Asian women.

Analysis from the Runnymede Trust and the Women's Budget Group shows:

Asian women in the poorest third of households will be £2,247 worse off by 2020, facing almost twice the loss faced by white men in the poorest third of households.

And Black and Asian lone mothers stand to lose about 15% and 17% respectively of their net income due to punitive benefit changes.

The Race Equality Foundation showed in 2013 that overcrowding is most commonly experienced by Black African and Bangladeshi groups (with just over a third of households living in overcrowded accommodation).

And sadly, you are more likely to be homeless in Birmingham if you are Black or from an ethnic minority than if you are white.

The government's own data reveals that a shocking 15 in every 1,000 BME households in Birmingham were homeless in 2015-16, the equivalent figure for white households is bad enough at four per 1,000.

Britain's housing crisis is at its worst for 20 years and the government are not doing enough to address this problem. The housing minister has ruled out raising the housing revenue account which enables councils to borrow money to build. Councils cannot meet local needs.

Far from building an economy for everyone and helping the 'just about managing', this government is intent on the transfer of cash from the purses of poorer Black and Asian women to the wallets of the richest men.

There are also huge health inequalities in this country, particularly when it comes to mental health and social care.

Black British women are four times more likely to be detained under the mental health act than White British women.

Older people from Black and minority ethnic groups are often under

represented users of health and social care services, where they do, often receive poorer treatment.

So how can Theresa May justify huge cuts to social care, but a special deal for Surrey?

The people of Birmingham are worth no less and deserve better!

The Tories talk a lot about the need for integration. Let them start by integrating our communities – black and white – into the economy, into secure and well-paid jobs, into the education system, into the health care system, onto a viable transport system.

They say they want more people to speak English and then cut the funding for English courses.

They say they want communities to integrate but then allow schools to opt out and slash the kind of youth services and education funding that would make that possible.

Britain has come a long way. But the journey was not an act of our own genius.

People fought for it ... Black and white and Asian, side by side, to build the kind of country that could celebrate our racial differences rather than be wary of them.

But we have a long way to go. Black and Asian people are still more likely to be excluded, stopped, searched, arrested, charged and get longer sentences.

Still less likely to go to university, get to the boardroom, the Houses of Commons.

We shouldn't be content with tolerance. You tolerate things you don't like.

We can do better than that. We DO do better than that.

People are right to be anxious. These are volatile times and people feel insecure in their work, about their children's future, about this country's future, they look for someone to blame.

Syrian refugees did not trade in credit default swaps and crash the economy.

East European builders and technicians did not slash funding for children's centres and libraries.

Since BME communities can be disproportionately found in poor areas, and are more likely to be less well-off, everything we can do to support those families who are struggling to get by, will disproportionately support them.

And everything that is done to attack the living standards of families who are struggling to get by, will disproportionately make things worse.

Enoch Powell was wrong. There have not been rivers of blood. We have one of

the highest rates of mixed-race marriage in the western world.

What we need is leadership that does not stoop to preying on those anxieties, blaming people who look differently, talk a different language or dress differently, for the mess that we're in.

Our Labour party has a proud record on race and equality.

Every progressive piece of equality legislation has been delivered by a Labour government:

The Race Relations Act
The Human Rights
The Equality Act

But these were not gifts from the liberal well-intentioned. They were won by struggle from well organised campaigns from the Black and Asian community in alliance with the wider labour and progressive movement.

The late 1980s saw a concerted push by members of Vauxhall Labour Party, in alliance with other members across the country, to establish Black Sections in the Labour Party.

Black Sections would become self-organised, autonomous groupings within the Labour Party, with the aim of increasing black and minority ethnic representation in the party but also in elected positions.

At the time they were opposed by many Labour Party members are being "divisive" or "segregationist".

Today self organisation is much more accepted across the Labour movement.

But these important milestones won by your communities are now vulnerable.

Without a mandate, but with a motive, Theresa May seeks a dilution of rights and protections of people in this country.

Threatening to abolish the Human Rights Act.

Cutting to the bone funding to Equality and Human Rights Commission and all its vital work.

This Prime Minister is happy play to the gallery of her backbenchers and media cheerleaders who think your rights are a bureaucratic burden.

While serving as a distraction from the economic failure, the inequality and injustice that six years of Conservative government has delivered to our country and to our Black and Asian communities in particular.

This has serious consequences. Look at hate crimes against ethnic and religious minorities.

We see an alarming rises in racism and anti-Semitism, we are implacably opposed to racism and anti-Semitism in any form.

The party has carried out important work in this regard, both in terms of our policies to advance equality and combat hate crime, and in terms of taking forward the recommendations of the Chakrabarti Inquiry into racism and anti-Semitism.

Just last week, a report from Equality and Human Rights Commission to MPs expressed concern that the start of formally leaving the EU could cause a backlash, similar to the period of increased hate crime that followed the EU referendum.

Any move to tackle such heinous crimes head-on would be laudable, if it didn't come from a government which has actively stoked the fires of frenzied scaremongering as Europe faces its biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

"Go home or face arrest" vans, razor wire in Calais and warnings of swarms and migrants flooding our shores throws light on a party much more content to steal the clothes of far-right forces than attempt in any meaningful way to tackle racial and religious prejudice.

The Government strategy for Muslim integration has been through the lens of counter-extremism.

It has confused race, religion and immigration, with alarming consequences.

It woefully ignores the fact that your communities bear the brunt of its own economic choices that fund tax breaks for the richest in our society.

There is a long line of critical reports of the Government's failing Prevent strategy.

The parliamentary joint committee on human rights has called for a review, arguing that it has the potential to drive a wedge between the authorities and whole communities.

None of these organisations or bodies have any sympathies with terrorism or act as apologists for it.

Anti-terrorism is a serious issue and effective anti-terrorism is always intelligence and community-led.

This must be fully supported and resourced. Prevent is the opposite of intelligence-led policy.

It is time for a major review of the strategy and a fundamental rethink by Government.

The rise of so called populist parties on the right in Europe reinforces how important it is for us to implement policy – both in the UK and internationally – which is inclusive and based on human rights and justice.

We must not allow people's freedoms to be curbed and must at all times promote religious acceptance.

In this country we have a tradition of acceptance and I am sure many of us will want to maintain that tradition – including opposing any discriminatory bans of religious symbols, whether these be crucifixes, turbans, kippahs or niqabs or any other form of dress.

Friends you know the progress that has been made, but you know too problems that endure, you live these challenges. And you know too the forces that want to turn back the clock.

It is no coincidence that these and the economic injustice faced by your communities have worsened since 2010, when the Tory led coalition government began dismantling social provision.

The truth is austerity has hit ethnic-minority groups the hardest.

When left to its own devices what is called the free market has shown again and again that its impact is racial discrimination.

The loss of more than a million public sector jobs, either disappearing completely or outsourced to the private sector, has shattered one of the few footholds for ethnic minority young people to gain a real stake in society.

I am proud that Labour has the highest number of Black and Asian MPs of any other political party. This year we celebrate the 30 year anniversary of the historic election to the House of Commons of four black members of parliament – Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng, Bernie Grant and Keith Vaz.

Labour will remain the party for aspiring councillors and members of parliament from Black and Asian communities.

As leader, it has been an honour to appoint Labour's most ethnically diverse Shadow Cabinet, including the first Black woman, Shadow Home Secretary – Diane Abbott.

Labour is proud to have the support of many Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

I will not take this for granted. I don't want you to just vote Labour.

I want you to organise, campaign and lead for Labour in your communities and within the party. And to drive us to do more.

But we together must go further.

And address the systematic economic disadvantage and institutional barriers your communities, the forgotten communities face.

If we are to build an economy that delivers for black and Asian people, not the privileged few off the back of you.

The Labour Party is passionately committed to equality and human rights. It has been at the forefront of championing changes in legislation and policy across the UK to combat discrimination.

That is why under my leadership, a Labour government will commit to eliminate racial inequality in our economy.

Work is now less secure and pays less, leaving Black and Asian employees, in increasingly precarious situations.

Labour has committed to introducing a real living wage, of at least £10 an hour by 2020 that will do most to boost the incomes of Black and Asian women.

We will work with businesses, stakeholders, and trade unions to ensure resources are available to investigate and deal with racial inequality in relation to pay, promotion and recruitment.

This is not red tape. It should not be burdensome to ensure transparency in equality and diversity policy, or for tenders to demonstrate a zero-tolerance approach to racism.

At the same time as overseeing the proliferation of zero-hours contracts.

The Conservative government has pursued an agenda of removing employee protections, denying access to justice and fairness at work.

One example was introducing a regime of Employment Tribunal Fees in 2013, a financial barrier to challenging employers over equal pay, race and gender discrimination, putting a price on justice

Since the introduction of these charges, cases of race discrimination have fallen by 50%.

The fees brought in just £8.5 million last year. The low level of income from fees shows this was a purely political decision, not an economic necessity.

Labour's policy is clear: we will abolish these punitive fees, giving employees seeking to challenge racism and discrimination in the workplace back access to the justice system.

A Labour government in a post Brexit Britain will safeguard the rights of all citizens by incorporating the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination into British law.

Just up the road in Stoke last month Labour defeated an attempt by UKIP to divide that community – to whip up hatred and division.

Ukip stood their leader as a candidate, they poured resources into the campaign – but they were emphatically rejected.

The far right and this government seek to divide our communities, the communities of working people.

But we have far more in common than the fake anti-establishment elitists want us to think.

Labour will unite our communities around economic and social justice for

working people.

We will create a society where our origins don't determine our destinies.

A Labour government will break the rigged economy.

End austerity.

And call time on the economic disadvantage faced by black and Asian communities in Britain.

Labour will deliver change.

Yesterday, the world lost Sir Derek Alton Walcott, the Saint Lucian poet and playwright whose intricately metaphorical poetry captured the physical beauty of the Caribbean, the harsh legacy of colonialism and the complexities of living and writing in two cultural worlds won him a Nobel Prize in Literature.

I end with a sentence from his poem about being kind to yourself:

You will love again the stranger who was yourself.
Give wine. Give bread. Give back your heart
to itself, to the stranger who has loved you

Thank you.

ENDS