

Leonard: Scottish Labour will deliver a fairer and greener country

Richard Leonard MSP

Scottish Labour Leader

Address to party members and climate activists in Ravenscraig

There is a growing restlessness out there and a growing resistance.

Last month, campaigners from the Extinction Rebellion movement also raised their voices some even got out their glue and their padlocks in non violent direct action during a five-day protest camped outside the Scottish Parliament.

They are calling for us to be bold to make commitments beyond words to take action now to halt the damage which humanity has done to our planet.

And our job today in this Party is, as it has always been, to act as a bridge between extra-parliamentary protest and Parliamentary action.

And our job as a Party of labour is, as it has always been to understand and represent the interests of working people.

Because we cannot solve the climate crisis at the expense of those who already have a bad deal.

When we are calling for a green industrial revolution.

We are calling for a decisive social revolution too.

And the fact is that over the last decade.

The standard of living has not increased, real wages have not risen, the working week is getting longer not shorter, inequality has widened, work –related stress has rocketed, and over 900,000 patients in Scotland, that's the equivalent of 23 per cent of the adult population, were prescribed at least one anti-depressant last year.

So our job as the Scottish Labour Party is to show that there is an alternative: to offer people credible hope, based on a workable strategy.

It is to set out not just what we are against but what we are for. A positive vision and a radical programme, based on full employment, based on more co-operat.ive ways of working and living, based on a managed reduction in working time, So a future vision built on the idea of democracy, including economic democracy and the ideal of socialism

I am optimistic that we can make the leap, the transformative change, that we need to make from the limited horizons of the current economic order and from our present way of living with a planned transition.

A democratic transition.

A just transition.

So that the very economic foundations of our society become much more democratic. Much more accountable. Much more sustainable.

Some of the answers to the climate crisis are technological and scientific.

But it is also about the type of jobs and work organisation too which is why the role of trade unions in planning the change, beyond the market is so essential.

And let me be clear as well it is about radical economic change:

saying farewell to the current economic model which has failed workers in towns and communities like this.

Which is failing workers like those at the Caledonian Railway Works in Springburn who after 160 years, at the very point when we should be investing in public transport are facing a strike of capital and the depot's complete closure.

Ask the workers at the Caley and they will tell you that we cannot continue with this industrial system. This is not academic it is existential. It is not abstract theory, it is a practical reality of Scotland in 2019.

We will need in my view to experiment in different forms of ownership, and new institutions, so that we cease to be spectators or victims of circumstances, but participants and common owners.

So for the avoidance of doubt we will not attain the transformative change we need by leaving it to market forces.

Or merely leaving it to the mitigation of market forces, through defensive rescues.

If we are to re-purpose the whole Scottish economy it cannot be done according to the central tenets of neo-liberal economics – the old ideas of privatisation, of austerity, of rolling back the state.

It cannot be done either through a continued over-reliance on imported goods and services, on Foreign Direct Investment, on multinational financial and corporate interests.

Instead we need an innovative state.

That means using the powers the Scottish Government has in procurement, in planning, in licensing – To ensure that low carbon and renewable energy developments bring far greater economic benefit to communities. Like those around the BiFab yards in Fife: where we need an

urgent and decisive breakthrough.

That is the greatest and most pressing challenge which climate change calls on us to rise to, the challenge of a just transition from the old world to the new.

And we must develop a Just Transition Programme so that working people and working class communities are not left behind.

We want to put a Just Transition Commission into law.

And I say to the SNP Government today, Back our proposals for the Climate Bill to do this OR tell us why you are so afraid to bring trades unions into the process?

Because Scotland needs a clear plan for green jobs to send out a message of real hope. Not phoney optimism, but real hope built on radical but credible plans drawn up by workers and industry and driven by uncompromising leadership.

Now we are here today to discuss a Green Industrial Revolution and what that would mean for Scotland.

But we cannot discuss our future plans without recognising the real and present danger posed by the Tories to Scotland's place in the UK.

Particularly the abandonment of Conservatism and Unionism which Boris Johnson represents and their adoption of a dangerous form of English nationalism.

And the present danger posed by the SNP with their prospectus for a second independence referendum, ditching the pound and huge economic shock measures, massive fiscal contraction to pay for that decision. And that's precisely why we are prepared to back a Citizens Assembly not run away from it but to make the case for remain and reform.

Labour is not a Party that stands for the status quo in the UK: economically, politically or constitutionally.

We delivered the Scottish Parliament.

But I recognise that the UK is still too centralised a state.

And that's not just the view from Motherwell or from Edinburgh, or Inverness. It's the view from Manchester and Leeds. And it's the view from Birmingham.

I have set up a working group exploring Scotland's options for change that delivers more devolution. People want to see more decisions being made in Scotland. But don't want to walk away from a successful economic, political and social union that has lasted for more than 300 years.

So we are tapping into an understanding, which is clear to many people that the UK state needs to be reformed.

We want to see the abolition of the House of Lords.

And I want to see stronger regional and national governments within the UK as well.

Later this year, I shall present the interim report.

Despite the Scottish Parliament becoming one of the most powerful devolved institutions in the world, it has failed to tackle some of the biggest issues facing Scotland.

We have huge disparities in incomes and wealth which are reflected in child poverty, homelessness, health inequalities and big gaps in life expectancy between rich and poor.

Many Scottish workers are in insecure work on poverty pay lacking even basic protection against unscrupulous employers.

Those on benefits have been subjected to the vicious Tory austerity with little protection from the Scottish Government.

While the Tories threaten the very future of the UK, we are tapping into an understanding that the UK state needs to change if we are to secure Scotland's place within it.

<https://t.co/LfiHK8I5Lf>

– Richard Leonard (@LabourRichard) [July 6, 2019](#)

Rural towns and villages are losing shops and services and even something as simple as access to cash.

Our manufacturing and service industries are increasingly owned and run by an ever narrowing elite, and more and more from faraway boardrooms according to the short-termism of speculative financial markets. Meanwhile land ownership remains stubbornly concentrated in the hands of a few super-wealthy individuals.

The current Scottish Government has had the powers to prevent or at least mitigate the worst of these assaults but failed.

What a Scottish Labour Government that I lead will do is:

Firstly use the existing powers more effectively.

Secondly we will identify what new powers would make a real difference in tackling the problems I have listed.

We must be able to invest in our manufacturing base to make the Just Transition we need. For this we need borrowing powers fit for a Parliament. In making that investment we will ensure that Scottish people get a stake in any future development, not just giving handouts

to foreign investors who can then disinvest.

We must be able to empower working people with greater employment rights. We should have a real living wage, control of procurement, no public contracts awarded to blacklisting companies, and the right to terms and conditions of work suitable for the 21st century not the 19th century.

The Scottish Labour Government will use the powers it has to improve the lives of people on benefits both in and out of work.

We can go further. Wealth isn't generated in London, but it is all too often sucked into the City of London. Political power should rest closest to the people it will affect, instead of being heavily centralised in Westminster and Whitehall. And even within Scotland it is becoming increasingly centralised in Edinburgh.

We need to break up the centralisation of politics and wealth and distribute power throughout the UK. Power must be shared not only between the nations of the UK but also regions and communities.

We need a new way of working together that shares both political and economic power that is based on solidarity and not on competition between different parts of the UK.

That means that at last the unelected House of Lords should be abolished. It could be replaced by a Senate of the Nations and Regions that could begin the process of shaking up our political system that for centuries has served the political establishment not the people.

Nationalism belongs to a perspective rooted in the past. It is insufficient for the great challenges we face: economic, social, environmental. It holds us back. It inhibits our ability to bring about real and radical change. Which is why we are clear that we need to remain in and reform the UK and we need to remain in and reform the European Union too.

We need a Scottish Labour Government that will do more than simply correct market failure, that is prepared to shape markets, to intervene,

to use public procurement, to tackle climate change, to eradicate inequality, and to change the balance of power to build a different, better, economic future

A Scottish Labour Government that will reinstate full employment as a goal of public policy that will deliver real economic change and a new kind of society.

A caring society where the whole economy is a social economy and every job is a green job.

Where there is greater economic self-determination and greater decentralisation

There are no short cuts.

It will be a long revolution.

But it is both an absolutely necessary.

And an absolutely possible revolution.