

Gordon Brown: Leadership acceptance speech in full  
Sun, 24 Jun 2007

## **The full text of Gordon Brown's first speech as leader of the Labour Party.**

Can I start by saying thank you.

It is with humility, pride and a great sense of duty that I accept the privilege and the great responsibility of leading our party and changing our country.

I will endeavour to justify every day and in every act the trust you have placed in me.

Leadership is an awesome responsibility.

So let me begin by personally thanking Tony Blair – a man who for ten years has borne the burden of leadership of our country.

All of us will remember his leadership – his leadership has made Britain stronger, more tolerant, more prosperous and fairer.

And let us never forget his towering presence in the international community, his work on Africa, climate change, his work to win the Olympics for Britain, and the skills and determination he brought to securing peace in Northern Ireland.

Tony Blair's achievements are unprecedented, historic and enduring.

Tony – on behalf of the Labour party, thank you.

And let us also pay tribute to Neil Kinnock – here with us today in Manchester – who led us out of the wilderness years and made it possible for us together to forge New Labour.

And John Prescott – for his determination, his strength, his commitment to social justice, and a lifetime of standing up for working people: let us applaud John Prescott.

And we know there is a worthy successor in Harriet Harman who has done so much to increase women's representation in Parliament.

As a South East MP, as a working mother herself, Harriet has more consistently than anyone understood the changing pressures on British families – and there is no one who has done more to campaign and deliver for child care, better work life balance, maternity and paternity rights, and for a Britain that values and celebrates families and family life.

This week I will form a new government with new priorities to meet the new challenges ahead.

And having visited every part of Britain and listened to and learned from the British people, I have seen at first hand a Britain of rising aspiration and I see the need for change to meet new needs.

I've met parents in Newcastle wanting more help to balance work and family life, teenagers in Lewisham wanting better chances of education after school, working mothers in Basildon calling for better child care, entrepreneurs in Warwickshire who value economic stability but want help to gain new markets, young couples in every city I've visited wanting to buy their first home of their own - men and women who look to us to respond to their hopes for a better life for themselves and their children.

Rising aspirations that are no longer just about a basic safety net and basic services, but aspirations that are about higher standards tailored to people's individual needs.

And I have seen also in fast changing communities the new insecurities people feel – and I know we can make changes to address them too.

In Liverpool and Cardiff I've met pensioners wanting more police on local streets, police and local communities in Birmingham and Glasgow calling for new action on drugs and anti social behaviour, men and women anxious about their jobs, their future and our way of life, and they are yearning for stronger communities.

We need to change too to meet the new challenges – climate change, global competition, tackling extremism – and we are learning an inescapable truth: it is only by engaging people in the decisions that matter to their lives, only by a new government building trust by involving the British people, that we as a country will meet the new challenges of 2007 and beyond.

So as people's aspirations and priorities change, we the Labour party must renew ourselves as the party of change.

Our mission has always been to be the party of progressive change.

Our party was born because of a demand for change.

We became a governing party because we championed the need for economic and social change.

We were reborn under Neil Kinnock, John Smith and Tony Blair because we believed that to change the country we as a party had to change.

And once again we are called to be the party of change.

And let me tell you the values that will guide me:

I grew up in Kirkcaldy, the community I now represent in Parliament.

I went to my local school and was one of the people in my class to get to university. When at 16 I suffered an injury at rugby and lost my sight in one eye, I was fortunate enough to have the NHS which saved the sight in my other. And it is for me a matter of fundamental principle that the best education and the best health care I received should be there not only for me and my family, but there for all families in all parts of Britain.

All I believe and all I try to do comes from the values that I grew up with: duty, honesty, hard work, family and respect for others.

And this is what my parents taught me and will never leave me: that each and everyone of us has a talent, each and everyone of us should have the chance to develop their talent, and that each of us should use whatever talents we have to enable people least able to help themselves.

And so I say honestly: I am a conviction politician.

My conviction that everyone deserves a fair chance in life.

My conviction that each of us has a responsibility to each other.

And my conviction that when the strong help the weak, it makes us all stronger.

Call it 'the driving power of social conscience', call it 'the better angels of our nature', call it 'our moral sense', call it a belief in 'civic duty'.

I joined this party as a teenager because I believed in these values. They guide my work, they are my moral compass. This is who I am.

And because these are the values of our party too the party I lead must have more than a set of policies – we must have a soul.

Wherever we find opportunity denied, aspirations unfulfilled, potential unrealised; wherever and whenever we find injustice and unfairness, there we must be also – and it is our duty to act.

That's why after the Second World War, in place of fear our party ensured the right to health care – creating the NHS. In place of slums we created the right to decent housing. In the 1960s and 70s in place of prejudice, social reform. In place of poverty in old age new rights to pensions. And then in 1997, in place of unemployment we implemented the vision of full employment. In place of neglect we won the argument for investing in and reforming public services.

And it is in this spirit of advancing economic progress and social justice that I wish to serve.

So we will build on what has gone right and we will continue our successful reforms, and we learn from where we have not done well enough.

I have learned from the difficult decisions we had to make in economic policy that successful progress depends not on quick fixes or taking the easy option –that is not the New Labour way – but on having the strength to take the long term course and see it through.

If people think we will achieve our goals in the future by retreating to failed approaches of the past, then they have not learned the lesson I have learned from the last ten years.

Half a century ago, housing became a national priority and there was a promise of a property owning democracy, but then unfortunately it was just for a few.

Now in 2007, housing will be a priority. The Housing Minister will attend Cabinet and will lead the national debate on the new homes we must build. And this time the

promise of a property owning democracy must be open to all those wanting to get on the housing ladder for the first time.

And because we need to build new homes not just to own but to rent, we will bring together the private sector, housing associations and local authorities to renew the promise of social housing for our communities.

By building new eco towns and villages we will show Labour on the side of aspiration, that new housing can respect our environment too, and that by involving and engaging the British people in a national debate about the future of housing we can make affordable housing for all one of the great causes of our time.

Our national mission is to be world class in education – and we will be world class only if we build on our successes by mobilising and engaging not just teachers and parents but the whole community.

In the coming weeks the Education Secretary will announce how in support of world class schools we will bring together business, universities, colleges and the voluntary sector. Every secondary school – trusts, specialists or academies – linked to a business, every school linked to a college or university.

Step by step we will raise investment in state school pupils – now £5,500 per pupil – to today's levels for private school pupils: £8,000 a year.

For every boy and girl the right to education until 18, reforms to ensure learning personal to their needs, and for every young person the offer of a college or university place or an apprenticeship, or pre-apprenticeship course, as the route to a career.

From thousands of children benefiting from Sure Start to thousands staying on to 18, I want for our young people the biggest expansion in educational opportunity our country has ever seen.

And we will be truly world class in education only if we raise the aspirations of young people themselves, so we will launch a national campaign for thousands more to stay on at sixteen, to sign up to an apprenticeship, to study at university and college.

To those who say more going to university must mean worse standards, let us reply: when in other countries 50 per cent of all their young people already go to university, and in Britain only 40 per cent, and in Britain just 10 per cent from low income backgrounds, now is the time, this is the task: to show education for what it is – what it was for me and so many others; what it must be in the future for more: the great liberating force of our generation.

And let me say also that in the fourth richest country in the world it is simply wrong – wrong that any child should grow up in poverty.

To address this poverty of income and to address also the poverty of aspirations by better parenting, better schools and more one-to-one support, I want to bring together all the forces of compassion – charities, voluntary sector, local councils so that at the heart of building a better Britain is the cause of ending child poverty.

I've spent a lot of time in the last six weeks talking to patients and doctors, nurses and NHS staff.

Let me say: every person I have met believes in the principles of our NHS – and like them I am proud that in this generation Britain will uphold an NHS free at the point of use, available to all on the basis of need, not ability to pay.

But I know also from everything I have heard round the country, that we need to do better - and the NHS will be my immediate priority.

We need to and will do better at ensuring access for patients at the hours that suit them; better at getting basics of food, hygiene and cleanliness right; better at helping people to manage their own health; better at ensuring patients are treated with dignity in the NHS; better at providing the wider range of services now needed by our growing elderly population, and while implementing our essential reforms, better at listening to and valuing our staff.

And in the NHS we will also make progress by putting more power locally in the hands of patients and staff. So I propose that as we approach the 60th anniversary of the NHS we discuss a new settlement for a modern NHS free at the point of need – clear about where accountability lies – clear where Government should set overall objectives, clear where it should not interfere, and clear how independently local people should have their voice heard and acted upon in shaping the future of the NHS.

And it is right that this party that created the NHS, that has always invested in the NHS, that has always believed in the NHS, will be the party that for the coming generation, renews the NHS.

But today we also face all the challenges that globalisation brings.

What defines modern Britain is not just peoples rising aspirations but their recognition that the world around us is fragile and uncertain.

And for families insecure because they see their communities changing so fast around them, elderly citizens anxious about crime and the British way of life – wanting us to respond not just to their hopes but to answer their fears – I want us to put more power in the hands of the people to make their streets safe and secure. And let us implement the vision: the public informed and consulted, the police supported, and neighbourhood policing in every community of the country.

I believe in a British economy founded on dynamic, flexible markets and open competition. But for workers undercut by employers in this country who break the law by paying less than the minimum wage we will act – new protection for vulnerable workers. That's what I mean by safeguarding and advancing the British way of life.

And we must be far clearer in speaking up for the common ground upon which we stand – the shared British values of liberty, civic duty and fairness to all. Let us affirm that in return for opportunity for all that we expect and demand responsibility from all: to learn English, contribute to and respect the culture we build together – and not just the hard working majority but everyone must play by the rules.

But let us affirm also that no matter your class, colour or creed every individual citizen has the right to rise as far as your talents take you. That is why our way of life is to reject the prejudice and discrimination practised by those who preach xenophobia and racism.

Advancing and protecting the British way of life means taking seriously the stewardship of our environment and countryside, building stronger rural communities. And because it matters that people take personal responsibility themselves, we want all individuals and all businesses to join us and build a shared national purpose to make Britain a world leader in tackling climate change.

And just as we work with the European Union, America and the rest of the world on global warming, we will also work with them to build the strongest multilateral response to all the security challenges we face.

In Iraq, which all of us accept has been a divisive issue for our party and our country, in Afghanistan and in the Middle East, we will meet our international obligations, we will learn lessons that need to be learned, and at all times be unyielding in support for our dedicated armed forces, and resolute in our determination to take the tough decisions to ensure the long term defence and security of our country.

Our foreign policy in years ahead will reflect the truth that to isolate and defeat terrorist extremism now involves more than military force – it is also a struggle of ideas and ideals that in the coming years will be waged and won for hearts and minds here at home and round the world. And an essential contribution to this will be what becomes daily more urgent – a Middle East settlement upholding a two state solution, that protects the security of Israel and the legitimate enduring desire for a Palestinian state.

Because we all want to address the roots of injustice, I can tell you today that we will strengthen and enhance the work of the department of international development and align aid, debt relief and trade policies to wage an unremitting battle against the poverty, illiteracy, disease and environmental degradation that it has fallen to our generation to eradicate.

And just as our policies must change to meet new challenges, so too our party must change. And this time for change for our country must also be a time of renewal for our party.

That is why I can announce that the new Deputy Leader will be the Party Chair – from today not appointed by the Leader but elected by the party.

And I can also announce that Douglas Alexander will be the General Election Coordinator so that we are ready not just to fight but to win a General Election.

All of us share a responsibility to ensure that in the coming years the whole programme of our party is founded on listening to the aspirations of our whole country. It means our membership reaching out to every local community; and it means proper consultation by the leadership with every member.

So that is why our National Executive will now consult with members on policy forums in every constituency, leading to a stronger National Policy Forum better able to deal with big issues of the day. And just as we have one member one vote to choose our leaders, we propose that the final decision on the party programme will be made by one member one vote.

And it is time for a new and better relationship between government and the British people – with government the servant and more power in the hands of the people.

That's why constitutional reform matters directly to me and to all our lives – because all the big challenges we face: the environment, raising education standards, building better communities – can only be met by directly involving and engaging the British people in their solution.

I tell you: the power of government can never substitute for the empowerment of people. The days of Whitehall ever thinking it knows best are over. We need government that does not overreach but reaches out; government as servant at all times putting opportunity in the hands of people.

That's why I want a new constitutional settlement for Britain. And the principles of my reforms are these: Government giving more power to Parliament; both government and Parliament giving more power to the people; Parliament voting on all the major issues of our time including peace and war; civil liberties safeguarded and enhanced; devolution within a Union of nations: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – a Union that I believe in and will defend; local government strengthened with new powers – local communities empowered to hold those who make the decisions to account; and with community ownership of assets – greater power for more people to control their lives.

Government putting our trust in the people – and we will renew people's trust in government. And our local democracy strengthened by citizens' forums and new citizens juries where citizens and their representatives have the chance to fully debate the concerns that matter to them.

And I've learned something else about how we can change our country – how we can build a progressive consensus.

In the last ten years, from make poverty history to campaigns on disability, gay rights and the environment, Britain has changed for the better, not just because of government, but because of movements that have gone beyond traditional parties, captured people's imaginations and transformed people's lives.

As a party we have always known that we succeed best when we reach out to and engage the whole community. So here I stand proud of our Labour party but determined that we reach out to all people who can be persuaded to share our values and who would like to be part of building a more just society.

So my message today is also to people who want to change from the old politics, who yearn for a public life founded on values, who are inspired by what we as a nation can now achieve together – join us. Join us in building the Britain we believe in.

And don't let anyone tell you the choice at the next election will be change with other parties and no change with Labour. Because when I take office on Wednesday I will, as our party has always done, heed and lead the call of change.

So for young people wanting the first step on the housing ladder to their first home, we will meet the challenge of change.

For families wanting their sons and daughters to get the chance of college or university, we will meet the challenge of change.

For parents wanting affordable child care, we will meet the challenge of change.

For families and pensioners who want an NHS there when they need it, we will meet the challenge of change.

For people wanting a stronger democracy, we will meet the challenge of change.

And we will govern for all the people of our country.

This week marks a new start

A chance to renew.

And I say to the people of Britain:

The new government I will lead belongs to you.

I will work hard for you.

I shall always try my utmost.

I am ready to serve.