

# Jeremy Corbyn's Speech at the Labour Conference

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*How the British right-wing media (that's almost all of it these days) must have anticipated Jeremy Corbyn's speech to Labour's Annual [Conference](#). After all the sniping and sneering, the attempts at character assassination, the dredging up of something he said 30 years ago and the universal hands held up in horror because he [didn't sing](#) 'God Save the Queen' (nor, if you study photos of the event, did some others), here was their chance to really put the boot in.*

Since Corbyn was so convincingly elected Labour's leader, the press has been full of articles saying he was 'unelectable' as a Prime Minister, and running polls to prove people didn't think he looked like a Prime Minister. Do we seriously choose a Prime Minister because he/she looks the part, wears the right suit/dress?

Things looked good after the Financial Times printed an [article](#) by Janan Ganesh the day before. Tweeters were full of praise for this 'wonderful, incisive political commentator', including arch Tony Blair lover John Rentoul. Ganesh displayed some thoughtful analytical rubbish, as in:

*The electors who were decisive in giving him the run of the Labour party are public-sector professionals or students on their way to becoming the same.*

The media had hopefully prepared the public by claiming it would be a short speech, some 35 minutes long, mostly just focussing on wanting kinder, compassionate politics. The knives were out and hands hovering over Tablets and I phones, ready to pick holes big enough to bury him in. I was also keen to see how Corbyn would fare, being of course *not* a public-sector professional or a student, but an ageing self-employed Corbyn supporter.

It is worth remembering that the Conference delegates had booked their places before Corbyn was elected. Would they be for or against him? They managed a standing ovation for Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell's speech a day earlier so perhaps all would be well.

How wrong the media was. Walking on to a standing ovation and having to beg, "Please, can I start speaking now?" Corbyn [spoke](#) for more than an hour. He had some notes, very occasionally glanced at and pages turned over, and if there was an autocue it wasn't that apparent. He stumbled over words once or twice, but no matter.

This was Corbyn, speaking as he has been speaking to the country for the last three and a half months, but this time reaching out as Leader to the Conference, to all those who voted for him, all those who had their doubts and all those who feared him and the changes that might come. There was passion, anger at the state of the country and the world, and there was hope.

His leadership election campaign had proved that people are hungry for a different form of politics. Labour now has the chance to create those politics; by accepting that even within the Party there would be disagreement, something that should not split the Party; by honest debate not just among MPs but among all Party members; by consulting with and working with the public. A far better version of David Cameron's 'boots on the ground' was being offered.

Sitting in the front row were his Shadow Cabinet. Tom Watson, who doesn't necessarily agree with Corbyn, but was voted in as Deputy Leader because he is a popular, dependable and dogged campaigner for those things he cares about, displayed a happy smile and clapped a lot. John McDonnell appeared well satisfied with his 'hard-left firebrand' comrade in arms.

The surprise was the Shadow Foreign Secretary Hilary Benn, son of the famous (or notorious) left-winger Tony Benn. He had served under both Tony Blair (voting for the Iraq invasion, which must have upset his father) and Gordon Brown. He was part of Ed Miliband's Shadow Cabinet. For some people, that's a lot of dodgy history. But there he was, applauding like mad and grinning with joy, looking like a 'born-again' convert. Has father Tony been tapping his shoulder?

Yes, there were a few who didn't respond, whose faces were glum, MPs who sat like sad little yesterdays while the hall erupted around them. Gone was the hype and razzmatazz they were used to, the 'leader' standing on the stage, one hand raised in triumph while the other clutched the wife.

To a standing ovation Corbyn said, "No, I won't say any more. I've spoken at 37 meetings since Saturday evening - isn't that enough?" With which he went onto the floor and through the scrum of photographers to hug and shake hands with as many as he could reach, while the applause went on - and on.

Such was the speech that it took some time for the political journalists or 'Commentariat' as Corbyn called them, to fight back. Their initial efforts failed. While some of their comments on Twitter were vaguely favourable some were sour and very dismissive:

"The worst leader's speech I have ever heard." "... but heavens, that was grim." "Just amazed anyone can think that was anything but terrible." Guardian readers [disagreed](#), as did [many others](#).

The Telegraph focussed on "He didn't mention the deficit!" Could that possibly be because McDonnell had dealt with it in his speech a day earlier? But no - brains don't work when hatchet jobs are being done.

Another complaint was that he didn't speak about why Labour lost the last election. Had he done so, they would of course have accused Labour of navel gazing. But he didn't, being far more focussed on the future. And some said his speech was devoid of policies. Had they already prepared their comments before they heard the speech? Did they even listen?

But how diligent are the diggers of disinformation. Speaking of the inequality that has existed throughout history a key line of Corbyn's speech was "You don't have to take what you are given". [Critics were jubilant](#). They had found something that proved Corbyn had 'stolen' part of his speech!

He was accused of using words apparently written for Ed Miliband by [Richard Heller](#). Heller himself says that he wrote these words some time ago and had offered them to every Labour leader since. Having posted them on his blog after Miliband failed to make use of them, he offered them again, to Corbyn. Heller thought what he had written was what Labour should be about. Corbyn obviously agreed and made good use of them. Heller's comment was: "Jeremy is the first reader who liked it and used it. I'm very glad he's used it... to say it was stolen or plagiarised is nonsense." And why, when too many politicians employ speech writers, should Corbyn be castigated for using someone else's words?

By the following morning even the BBC had to admit Corbyn mentioned several policies, but his 'failure' to mention the deficit or the reasons for Labour's poor election result featured in their news headlines, as did the business of 'stolen words'.

And inevitably there was [widespread ridicule](#) from the press but Gary Younge of the Guardian [summed it up well](#):

*The trouble for his most venomous critics is twofold. First, they have demonised and caricatured him so relentlessly that expectations are so low that he can't but get over them. The other is that he became leader by giving speeches like this up and down the country. This is who he is. This is how he won.*

The politicians still don't get it. The public do. After his speech a [snap poll](#) by Sky News found that 53 per cent of people said they could imagine him as Prime Minister.

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