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## Change

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# Keir Starmer speech at Labour Party Conference 2024

Sep 24, 2024

## **Keir Starmer MP, Prime Minister, speech at Labour Party Conference 2024:**

Thank you, Conference. And I do mean that from the bottom of my heart.

Thank you Conference for everything you have done to fulfil the basic duty of this party – our Clause One – so we can return this great nation to the service of working people. Thank you Conference.

People said we couldn't do it, but we did. And we did it together.

And look at this now, a record-breaking conference. The biggest attendance ever in our history.

And such a far cry from my first conference speech to a live audience of one – the camera man. Socially distanced, in an arts centre in Doncaster. Remember that? Don't worry, most people don't. Not even the camera man.

But I bet you do remember the year after, Conference.

In Brighton – three years ago. The turning of the tide. A fight for the heart and soul of this party.

People said – we were going too far.

People said – we were going too fast.

They didn't want to face the country.

They wanted to go back to a comfort zone, take the easier road to nowhere, duck the challenge of change. But we stood firm, Conference. We stood together, Conference, and we won.

So take pride in your victory.

Take pride that Labour won in every single region of England.

Take pride that Labour won in Wales.

Take pride that Labour won in Scotland.

But never forget that this opportunity is only here because we changed the party.

Country first, party second – that isn't a slogan. It's the foundation of this project.

A pact with working people we must fulfil to retain the privilege of serving their interests.

On economic stability, national security, wealth creation, protecting our borders, rooting out Antisemitism, standing with NATO and Ukraine.

The changes we made are permanent. Irreversible.

And the work of service never stops. Country first, party second.

But Conference, for many people in this city the speech they may remember was the one here two years ago. Because that's when I promised, on this stage, that if I ever had the privilege to serve our country as Prime Minister one of my first acts would be to bring in a Hillsborough law – a duty of candour.

A law for Liverpool.

A law for the 97.

A law that people should never have needed to fight so hard to get, but that will be delivered by this Labour Government.

It's also a law for the sub-postmasters in the Horizon scandal.

The victims of infected blood. Windrush. Grenfell Tower.

And all the countless injustices over the years, suffered by working people at the hands of those who were supposed to serve them.

Truth and justice concealed behind the closed ranks of the state.

And Conference, this is the meaning of Clause One. Because today I can confirm that the duty of candour will apply to public authorities and public servants, the Bill will

include criminal sanctions, and that the Hillsborough law will be introduced to Parliament before the next anniversary in April.

It's work that shows how a government of service must act in everything it does.

Our driving purpose. To show to the working people of this country that politics can be a force for good. Politics can be on the side of truth and justice. Politics can secure a better life for your family through the steady but uncompromising work of service.

Because service is the responsibility and opportunity of power.

The pre-condition for hope. The bond of respect that can unite a country, bind us to the politics of national renewal. Service doesn't mean we'll get everything right.

It doesn't mean everyone will agree. But it does mean we understand that every decision we take, we take together.

And that it is our duty to the British people to face up to necessary decisions in their interest. And I mean Conference, you know me by now, so you know all those shouts and bellows, the bad faith advice from people who still hanker for the politics of noisy performance, the weak and cowardly fantasy of populism – it's water off a duck's back. Mere glitter on a shirt cuff. It's never distracted me before, and it won't distract me now.

This is a long-term project. I never said otherwise, not even in the campaign.

But Conference, make no mistake, the work of change has begun. The patient, calm, determined era of politics as service has begun.

Planning – reformed.

Doctors – back in theatre.

New solar projects.

New offshore wind projects.

The onshore ban – lifted.

Great British Energy – launched.

One-word Ofsted judgements – ended.

A Border Security Command.

A National Wealth Fund – getting Britain building again.

The Renters Reform Bill – stopping no fault evictions.

And the Railway Services Bill – bringing railways back into public ownership.

And we're only just getting started.

A crackdown on knife crime.

A real living wage.

A modern industrial strategy.

A 10-year plan for our NHS.

Devolution to our nations, regions and cities.

The biggest levelling-up of workers' rights in a generation.

More teachers.

More neighbourhood police.

More operations.

Rebuilding our public services.

Change has begun.

And every single one a necessary step on a longer journey. Five national missions that will deliver the higher growth, the safer streets, the cleaner energy, the greater opportunities, the healthier society that I know the British people want and need. The mandate that we won.

But also something even more precious.

Our economy – stabilised.

The foundations of this country – fixed.

Tory rot – cleared away.

So brick by brick, we can build a new home.

A better home.

Built to last.

Built with pride.

But above all built together.

A nation rebalanced so it once again serves the interests of working people.

And through the power unleashed by that process, a renewal of who we are.

A country that gives equal voice to every person.

A country that won't expect you to change who you are just to get on.

A country that doesn't just work for you and your family but one that recognises you, sees you, respects you as part of our story.

A Britain that belongs to you.

Because make no mistake that is the Britain we are building.

'Change' isn't a few extra lines on a graph moving in the right direction.

'Change' isn't a good Labour policy or two delivered while the broader settlement remains untouched.

No, change must mean nothing less than national renewal.

Not a return to old ways, nor a new path entirely.

But a rediscovery, in the full glare of the future, of who we are.

The trouble is, Conference, just as we found with the Labour Party four years ago, Britain is no longer sure of itself.

Our story is uncertain.

The hope – beaten out of us.

There is pride – of course there is.

Pride in our communities especially.

And there is respect too, all around the world.

Trust me nobody anywhere doubts that this is a great nation.

A nation known for our creativity.

Our artistic skill.

Our scientific genius.

And of course, our pragmatism.

Qualities that, combined with the industry and pride of working people, have not just rewritten our own story but also that of the world.

We could do that again.

In fact, we must.

Technology.

Climate change.

The ageing population.

The movement of people.

This is a time when great forces demand a decisive government prepared to face the future. We can see that again in the Middle East today. So I call again for restraint and de-escalation at the border between Lebanon and Israel. I call again for all parties to pull back from the brink. I call again for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, the return of the hostages and a recommitment to the two state solution: a recognised Palestinian state alongside a safe and secure Israel.

And that's the message I will take to the UN General Assembly when I travel there later today. Alongside our steadfast support for Ukraine in the face of Russian aggression. And in this uncertain world, I also pay tribute to our armed forces for all they do to keep Britain safe.

But Conference, strength in this dangerous world depends on strength at home.

And yet look at our country. Look at our country. Do you see a Britain where people feel, with the certainty that they deserve, that the future will be better for their children? Because when I was growing up, that's what we believed.

People of a completely ordinary working-class background like mine, we took it for granted. We built our lives around it. But that is not the country we inherited in July. That confidence, that certainty, it's brittle and fragile. And so we have to restore it. That is the mandate we won. The meaning of change.

And it all comes back to that question. Can politics be a force for good in peoples' lives? There's no time to waste wondering why people think politics has failed.

We have to show what it can do for their lives. Restore, after fourteen years of chaos, faith in the values that have always guided this nation.

The stability, the moderation, the common sense. Keeping a cool head. Staying the course. Facing the future. The defiance of ambition. The determination of service.

And above all, our faith, no matter the challenge, in practical solutions that work.

Not the easy answers that may well move a crowd but do not move a nation forward.

No, Conference. We know that way lies ruin. We have seen it in our party and we changed it. And for fourteen years, against our country's best traditions, we have seen it in Britain. And now we must change that too.

We must build a new Britain. Built from that age-old spirit of creativity and enterprise. The pride and ambition of working people. That, when matched by a government of service – a decisive government, a government prepared to use its power for justice, opportunity and equal respect – can deliver a Britain that belongs to you.

A Britain that belongs to you.

Because politics sees public service as a privilege. Not privilege as an entitlement to public service.

A Britain that belongs to you.

Because government is mission-driven and serious. Clear, measurable targets.

Progress displayed publicly. So every single person in this country can judge our performance on actions not words.

A Britain that belongs to you.

Because we maintain our focus, at all times, on fixing those foundations for working people. Those five national missions – providing the security and control they need.

But also protecting us from the whims of Westminster, making sure that we don't get blown off course.

And a Britain that belongs to you.

Because we came together. And together we built it. Because this has to be a partnership. We won't achieve our missions alone.

I understand the power and responsibility of government. The way it can make or break a life. When you are Chief Prosecutor, when you look into the eyes of victims who have lost everything – parents whose daughter was raped and murdered, as I did with [IRRELEVANT] and [IRRELEVANT] – trust me, you learn about what government can and must do.

But I also know from the campaigners who have inspired me.

[IRRELEVANT] and [IRRELEVANT] [IRRELEVANT]. People who fight tirelessly against murder and terrorism so no other family will suffer their awful pain.

[IRRELEVANT] Who fights for a better NHS so no other person will suffer his fatal late cancer diagnosis.

The families and survivors of Grenfell Tower.

Whose dignity, for seven years, held up a mirror to this nation and asked us – do we really give everyone an equal voice?

They have all shown that the difference between service and government – true service – is that service must listen to people far beyond the walls of the state and empower them to make our country better. Because trust me, that is without question the quickest way to clear away the Tory rot and build that Britain that belongs to you.

And so change begins. Because there is another injustice hiding in plain sight in our streets. In every town and city in this country. People who were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. Who put their lives on the line to protect all of us, but who will not have a safe place to sleep tonight.

We cannot stand by and let this happen anymore.

And so today, I can announce that this government will respect that service.

We will repay those who served us. And house all veterans in housing need.

Homes will be there for heroes.

And because we have started the hard yards of planning reform. Because we are facing up to decisions ignored for years. Because we are introducing new planning passports that will turbo-charge housebuilding in our inner cities.

We can make the very same promise to other people at risk of homelessness.

Young care leavers.

Victims of domestic abuse.

They will have the security they deserve.

They will have a roof over their head.

Because Britain belongs to them.

And another thing Conference. Another promise kept.

We said GB Energy – our publicly-owned national champion, the vehicle that will drive forward our mission on clean energy – we said it belonged in Scotland.

And it does. But the truth is, it could only really ever be based in one place in Scotland.

So today I can confirm that the future of British energy will be powered, as it has been for decades by the talent and skills of the working people in the Granite City with GB

Energy based in Aberdeen.

This is how the work of change happens. A decisive mission-led government, moving our country forward, step by step. Focused on a long-term plan.

That first, we stabilise our economy. Second, we fix the foundation.

And third, we build, with pride and determination, a Britain that belongs to you.

But it will be hard. That's not rhetoric – it's reality.

It's not just that financial black hole. The £22bn of unfunded spending commitments, concealed from our country by the Tories.

It's not just the societal black hole.

Our public services – decimated.

Communities held together with little more than good will.

It's also the political black hole.

Because the politics of national renewal, they're collective.

They involve a shared struggle.

A project that says to everyone – this will be tough in the short-term, but in the long-term it's the right thing to do for our country.

And we all benefit from that.

To coin a phrase: "We're all in it together".

But that's just it, isn't it? People have heard it all before.

And they listened. I ran a public service in the early days of austerity.

People did everything asked of them to find a way forward.

They did it in the pandemic, as well.

Saved the lives of people they will never meet.

All while their Government broke the very rules that they followed.

And so people ask us now, as we seek patience in pursuit of national renewal: "What will we get to show for it?"

I understand that. After all, what they are used to is a lie. An act, a charade, a performance.

You can call it populism – many people do. But I prefer to call it the politics of easy answers. Because at its core that's what it is. A deliberate refusal to countenance tough decisions because the political pain is just too much to bear. Party first, country second.

Take Rwanda – a policy they knew, from the beginning, would never work, was never supposed to work. £700m of your money, frittered away on something that was never a credible option because politically it was an easier answer.

And just look at the difference you can make if you bring the curtain down on the show. A 23% increase in returns of people who have no right to be here, compared with last summer.

But it's not just Rwanda. It was the same story on everything.

Energy security. The housing crisis. Telling people they're tough on crime, without building enough prison places. Fourteen years of performance. Fourteen years of exploiting problems not solving them. Mining the pits of division. Searching them for conflict. Fixing your attention on those issues.

Not on growth.

Technology.

Climate change.

Public services.

The ageing population.

The cost of living crisis.

Or any of the challenges that this country desperately needed to face up to.

Well, those challenges are still here Conference. And we are facing up to them.

But do not forget what they did and do not let them attempt to shift the blame because the state of our country is on them.

Why must we release prisoners early? Because the Tories served themselves.

Why are our public services on their knees? Because the Tories served themselves.

Why is crime routinely unpunished? Our rivers polluted. Borders insecure. School roofs crumbling.

Child poverty rampant. Nothing seems to work.

Our public finances broken.

Because for fourteen years the Tories performed the politics of easy answers rather than use the power of government to serve our country.

Yet still those wounds of trust must be healed.

Still that question calls to us, "What will we get to show for it?"

So let me answer that directly and address anyone nervous about the difficult road ahead, because I know this country is exhausted by and with politics.

I know that the cost-of-living crisis drew a veil over the joy and wonder in our lives, and that people want respite and relief. May even have voted Labour for that reason.

So first, let me be clear.

Our project has not and never will change.

I changed the Labour Party to restore it to the service of working people and that is exactly what we will do for Britain.

But I will not do it with easy answers.

I will not do it with false hope.

Not now, not ever.

That is how we got here in the first place.

So I know, after everything you've been through, how hard it is to hear a politician ask for more.

But deep-down, I think you also know that our country does need a long-term plan and that we can't turn back.

The state of our country is real.

However, I would also say this. This is a Government of Service. And that means, whether we agree or not, I will always treat you with the respect of candour, not the distraction of bluster.

And the truth is that if we take tough long-term decisions now, if we stick to the driving purpose behind everything we do – higher economic growth so living standards rise in every community; our NHS facing the future – waiting lists at your hospital down; safer streets in your community; stronger borders; more opportunities for your children; clean British energy powering your home – then that light at the end of this tunnel, that Britain that belongs to you, we get there much more quickly.

And look – I understand many of the decisions we must take will be unpopular.

If they were popular – they'd be easy. But the cost of filling that black hole in our public finances, that will be shared fairly.

We will get the welfare bill down because we will tackle long-term sickness and support people back to work. We will make every penny work for you because we will root out waste and go after tax avoiders.

There will be no stone left unturned. No innovation ignored.

And no return to Tory austerity. We will rebuild our public services, protect working people, and do this in a Labour way.

And that is a promise.

And if you can't take that on faith, perhaps because you're concerned about the winter fuel allowance, then I get that. As I say, if this path were popular or easy we would have walked it already.

But the risk of showing to the world – as the Tories did – that this country does not fund its policies properly, that is a risk we can never take again.

Stabilising our economy is the first step of this long-term plan.

The only way we keep prices low, cut NHS waiting lists, and secure the triple lock so that every pensioner in this country – every pensioner – will be better off with Labour.

But more broadly, I also say this. That as we take on those massive challenges the Tories ignored, the time is long overdue for politicians to level with you about the trade-offs this country faces.

Because if the last few years have shown us anything, it's that if you bury your head because things are difficult, your country goes backwards.

So if we want justice to be served some communities must live close to new prisons.

If we want to maintain support for the welfare state, then we will legislate to stop benefit fraud. Do everything we can to tackle worklessness.

If we want cheaper electricity, we need new pylons overground otherwise the burden on taxpayers is too much.

If we want home ownership to be a credible aspiration for our children, then every community has a duty to contribute to that purpose.

If we want to tackle illegal migration seriously, we can't pretend there's a magical process that allows you to return people here unlawfully without accepting that process will also grant some people asylum.

If we want to be serious about levelling-up, then we must be proud to be the party of wealth creation. Unashamed to partner with the private sector.

And perhaps most importantly of all, that just because we all want low taxes and good public services that does not mean that the iron law of properly funding policies can be ignored, because it can't. We have seen the damage that that does and I will not let that happen again. I will not let Tory economic recklessness hold back the working people of this country.

And let me tell you something else I won't let happen. I will never let a minority of violent, racist, thugs terrorise our communities.

Look – I have always accepted concerns about immigration are legitimate.

It is – as point of fact – the policy of this Government to reduce both net migration and our economic dependency upon it.

I have never thought we should be relaxed about some sectors importing labour when there are millions of young people, ambitious and highly talented, who are desperate to work and contribute to their community.

And trust me, there are plenty of examples of apprenticeship starts going down at the very same time that visa applications for the same skills are going up, and so we will get tough on this.

But at the same time, we'll also get our skills system right.

We've got to give businesses more flexibility to adapt to real training needs and also unlock the pride, the ambition, the pull of the badge of the shirt that young people feel when building a future, not just for themselves but for their community.

So we will introduce new foundation apprenticeships.

Rebalance funding in our training system back to young people.

Align that with what businesses really need.

The first step to a youth guarantee that will eradicate inactivity and unemployment for our young people – once and for all.

But Conference, whatever anyone thinks about immigration, I will never accept the argument made not just by the usual suspects, but by people who should have known better, who said that millions of people concerned about immigration are one and the same thing as the people who smashed up businesses.

Who targeted mosques.

Attempted to burn refugees.

Scrawled racist graffiti over walls.

Nazi salutes at the cenotaph.

Attacked NHS nurses.

And told people, with different coloured skin, people who contribute here, people who grew up here, that they should "go home".

No Conference – people concerned about immigration were not doing that because they understand that this country, this democratic country, is built on the rule of law.

The ballot box.

The common understanding that we debate our differences.

We do not settle them with violent thuggery.

And racism is vile.

And Conference, so to those who equivocate about this, I simply say – the country sees you and it rejects you.

And to those who say that the only way to love your country is to hate your neighbour because they look different, I say not only do we reject you, we know that you will never win. Because the British values we stand for, not just the rule of law, but a love for this country and our neighbours, the respect for difference under the same flag, that is stronger than bricks and you know it.

It's what you cannot stand about our country – our reasonable, tolerant country – but it is absolutely who we are.

No – the debate is not about the worth of migrants. That is toxic and we must move beyond it. It's about control of migration. It's always been about control.

That is what people have voted for time and again.

And look – they weren't just ignored after Brexit.

The Tories gave them the exact opposite.

An immigration system deliberately reformed to reduce control.

Because, in the end, they are the party of the uncontrolled market.

Now don't get me wrong – markets are dynamic.

Competition is a vital life force in our economy.

This is a Labour Party proud to say that.

We work hand-in-hand with business.

But markets don't give you control – that is almost literally their point.

So if you want a country with more control.

If you want the great forces that affect your community to be better managed.

Whether that's migration, climate change, law and order, or security at work.

Then that does need more decisive government, and that is a Labour government.

Taking back control is a Labour argument.

It's why I say we are rebalancing our country to serve working people.

Because this is a question of balance.

We can't afford any more polluted rivers.

We can't afford any more Covid contracts.

We can't afford any more Grenfell Towers.

We have to become serious and mission-led.

Have to put respect and service deep in the bones of our institutions.

That's not a debate about investment or reform.

It's always been both.

But again I have to warn you.

Working people do want more decisive government.

They do want us to rebuild our public services.

And they do want that to lead to more control in their lives.

But their pockets are not deep – not at all.

So we have to be a great reforming government.

Our NHS reformed so patients have more control over their health.

Our energy system reformed so our country has more control over its security.

Police and justice reformed, so communities have more control of their streets.

Education reformed, so children have more control of their future.

And our economy reformed with the unique force that is economic growth.

Giving every community the breathing space, the calm, the control to focus on the little things they love in life, not the anxiety and insecurity we have now.

Because we do need joy. We do need that in our lives.

And one place that has always done that for me, Conference – I told you about it last year – it's the Lake District. A place my Mum loved, not just because of what it meant to her – her determination to show she could walk in a place like that – but because of the beauty, everywhere.

Last year I took my family to the old cottage where we used to stay in as children.

So we walked up to the cottage and stood outside.

It must have looked a little odd.

And so the couple who now live there came out and they were lovely.

And when we told them why we were there, they said come inside, go upstairs, take a walk down memory lane.

So we did and we're back outside, chatting.

Then she stopped, suddenly, and said someone's nicking your car. I said no – that's the police moving the car.

And that, that really confused her.

Anyway – at this point her husband comes in.

He said: "You haven't clocked have you?"

"He's the Leader of the Opposition, a politician".

And she stops.

She smiles.

Laughs.

And says politely – "oh, if I'd known that you were a politician, I'd have pushed you down the stairs when I had the chance!"

The beauty of the Lake District and the heart of the British people, in a nutshell.

But seriously, when you're there walking around a place like Langdale Valley. When you can see the grass there every bit as green as it was fourteen years ago, it's a reminder and an inspiration that yes things change and some things need to change.

But some things do not.

And the joy and wonder of our nation, the spirit of its people – the cleaners, drivers, small business owners, teachers, teaching assistants.

The people who came out and cleaned the streets

The brickies who rebuilt the broken walls in Southport.

The backbone of this country.

They are just as resilient as they were fourteen years ago.

And no matter what loudmouths say on social media, their values are the same.

So we will turn our collar up and face the storm.

We will rise above the challenges that we've inherited.

Because this is a country with fairness in the water, that believes in justice, and that wants working people to be respected.

And also – for opportunities to be there for your children.

Because Conference, one of the other things that gave me great joy as a kid – as well as the football, obviously – was the flute. Don't think you were expecting that, were you.

But seriously – the flute gave me so many opportunities. My first ever trip abroad was to Malta with the Croydon Youth Philharmonic Orchestra.

And I'm sure everyone here will know the feeling of being drawn in by music.

Getting lost in something bigger than yourself. Or being moved by a book, a painting, a play. Even now I turn to Beethoven or Brahms in those moments when, how to put it, the reviews aren't so good. I've got some Shostakovich lined up for tomorrow.

But these early encounters with art and culture, they change us forever, and we are brilliant at them in this country. Brilliant.

But those opportunities don't go to every child, do they?

My brother – who had difficulties learning – he didn't get those opportunities.

Every time I achieved something in my life, my dad used to say: "Your brother has achieved just as much as you, Keir".

And he was right. I still believe that.

But this is what we do in this country now, isn't it?

We elevate the stories of the individuals who go to the Guild Hall School of Music.

The Prime Minister from a pebble-dashed semi.

The working class few who do break through the class ceiling.

I don't blame anyone for that – I'm guilty of it.

It gives people hope. It's important to tell those stories.

But it's not everyone, is it?

And we must remember everyone, Conference.

Because everyone deserves the chance to be touched by art.

Everyone deserves access to moments that light up their lives.

And every child deserves the chance to study the creative subjects that widen their horizons, provide skills employers do value, and prepares them for the future, the jobs and the world that they will inherit.

But more than that.

Every child, every person, deserves to be respected for the contribution they make.

My sister was a care worker in the pandemic. She's still a care worker.

Work that surely we know by now is so important for the future of this country.

So Conference, wouldn't it be great if this was also a country, where because of that contribution, that vital, life-affirming work, she could walk into any room and instantly command the same respect as the Prime Minister?

Because those are my values.

That is what I believe.

And those are the values of the Britain that we will build.

What will people get to show for it?

They'll get a country with its future back.

Renewed by respect and service.

Rebalanced towards the interests of working people.

Confident in its values and story.

Because together – we took action.

Millions who feel better off, without just being told they're better off by politicians.

Going to the supermarket without a calculator, because the nation's numbers now add up.

More money in their pocket to do the things they love.

And more faith in their public services because once again Labour rebuilt them.

An NHS facing the future.

More security and dignity at work.

Town centres – thriving.

Streets – safe.

Borders – controlled at last.

Clean energy – harnessed for national renewal.

New homes, new towns, new hospitals, roads and schools.

A new future for our children.

That is what people will get, and mark my words – we will deliver it.

People said we couldn't change the party – but we did.

People said we wouldn't win across Britain – but we have.

People say we can't deliver national renewal – but we can and we will.

We will stabilise our economy.

Clear out the Tory rot.

Fix the foundations.

And deliver the mandate of change.

A Britain built to last.

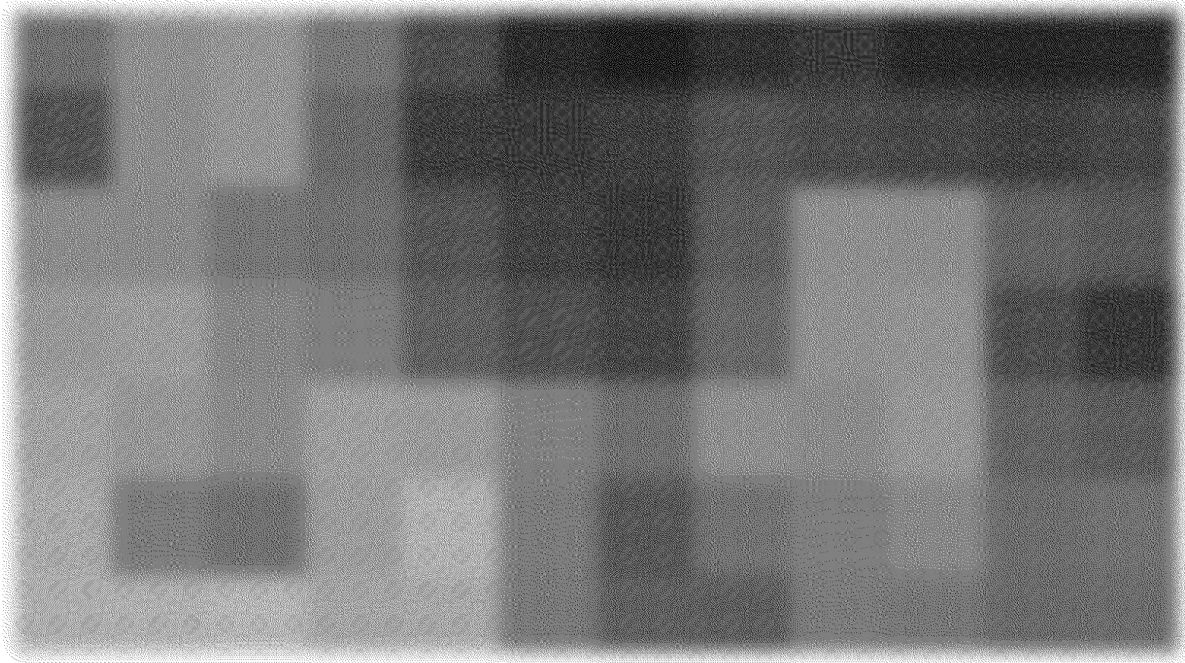
Built with respect.

And built with pride.

Because together, we have shown.

That Britain belongs to you.

Thank you Conference.



**VOLUNTEERING WITH LABOUR**

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