

Conference, this speech may be the last time a leader of the EPLP ever speaks to party conference.

A moment to reflect, perhaps, on 43 years of battles won, battles lost and battles still being fought by Labour MEPs.

And conference, we should pay tribute to all my MEP colleagues, past and present, who have given so much for Labour, on the doorstep and in the parliamentary chamber.

In our work at European level, the dividing lines have rarely been one country against another. They are political dividing lines, just as they are at national level and at local level.

As part of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Labour MEPs have won more battles than we have lost.

We have made sure that the European single market is a market with rules - rules to protect workers, consumers, and the environment.

Rights and standards applicable across Europe, preventing a race to the bottom:

Workers' rights - from the right to a paid holiday, to equal rights for part time workers, to working time.

Consumer protections - from roaming charges to the safety of toys.

Common environmental standards, medical research programmes, student exchanges, a crack-down on bankers' bonuses. I could go on -- the list is a long one.

Of course, we have not won every battle at European level -- any more than we have at national level.

But those European rules and standards have enough bite for the neo-liberal right to go apoplectic.

And that is why the right wing of the Tory party is so determined to take us out of the European Union and out of any common European standards that get in the way of their aim of a corporate free-for-all.

They want a Wild West economy where anything goes.

And that, conference, is where this Tory government is taking us.

Make no mistake: the Chequers plan was already a hard Brexit.

It took two years of negotiation, not between Britain and the EU, but between factions of the Tory party.

It lasted just two days before cabinet ministers resigned and 50 Tory MPs said they would never vote for it, because it wasn't hard enough.

What a shambles! What a joke!

Talking of jokes, did you hear the one about how many Brexit ministers it takes to change a light bulb? One to promise a brighter future, and all the others... to screw it up!

But, conference, Brexit is no joke.

As her deal falls apart, Theresa May is even threatening to leave without a deal, creating legal limbo on everything from the right of residence for EU citizens to aircraft landing rights. Reverting to costly WTO tariffs on trade, with customs checks disrupting our supplies and our exports.

This sounds technical, but as every trade unionist in this hall knows, thousands of jobs are at stake.

No deal or a bad deal, it will be a Tory deal: a hard Brexit...

...the worst outcome for this country, and for the people we represent.

So, Conference, our challenge now as the Labour Party is what to do in this situation.

We must certainly oppose a costly, damaging, job-destroying, rights-threatening, Tory Brexit that will wreak havoc on our country, hit our public finances and get in the way of everything that we want to achieve

when we come to government, with Jeremy as our Prime Minister.

The EPLP is fully behind the six tests that Jeremy and the front bench have set to evaluate any Tory Brexit deal, and their decision to vote against it when those tests are not met, leaving all options open if the deal is rejected.

And rightly so. Because the least you can say is that Brexit is not what was promised.

Boris Johnson, Gove, Fox, and their associates told us:

- Brexit would be easy - *well, that's a laugh!*
- That it would save lots of money that would all go to the NHS - *it's turning out to cost a fortune.*
- That we'd have shiny new trade deals ready on day one - *well, that's not working either – unless you're a fan of chlorinated chickens!*

So, people who voted 'Leave' are entitled to say:

*“Hang on a minute, this is not what I was promised, not what we were told and it’s damn well not what I voted for”.*

It’s not surprising that there is widespread disquiet, ...  
... that people are worried.

People have a right to oppose a bad deal.

People have a right to stand up to broken promises.

People have a right to a fair, democratic process.

Comrades, the most crucial weeks of Britain’s post-war history lie ahead of us. We face chaos and confusion on the government’s side.

It’s up to Labour - the party of democracy - to restore public trust and protect the country from Brexit ruin.

And I call on colleagues across this hall, in the weeks and months to

come, to defend Labour's European legacy and the achievements of  
Labour's MEPs...

...defend the rights we have won,...

...defend the standards we have secured,...

and

...defend the values for which we have always stood.

Thank you.

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