



100 years of backing the Kiwi Dream

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Leader of the Opposition



Speech to Labour Party Special Conference

Andrew Little, Leader of the Opposition

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Tena Koutou Katoa,

Thank you so much for coming from all around the country to celebrate our 100th birthday.

It is a profound honour to be speaking to you as Leader today.

A lot of people don't know this, but as well as the customary telegram from the Queen, the Prime Minister has also taken to writing to those turning 100 to congratulate them.

I think it's safe to assume that ours got lost in the mail.

Can I acknowledge Annette King, our wonderful Deputy Leader, as well as our Finance Spokesperson Grant Robertson.

I want to acknowledge our fantastic caucus and all the hard work they do in Parliament.

And I also want to acknowledge all of the delegates to today's special conference.

Put simply, people like you are the reason the Labour Party is turning 100.

I'm constantly inspired by the commitment, the dedication and the passion of our members and volunteers.

Thank you for all that you do.

Delegates, 100 years ago today, ordinary people from around the country came together in a small hall just down the road from here.

They came here with a simple purpose - to change the course of our country's history.

They came from every corner of the nation, and from many backgrounds. There were militant socialists and temperance volunteers, moderate Christian pastors and trade unionists.

The diverse group that gathered in Wellington was united by a common vision:

They wanted a New Zealand that was fairer, better, and more just.

A place where everyone had financial security, decent and fair treatment at work, the opportunity to succeed and claim a fair share of the nation's wealth, and a democratic voice in our government.

As they met, the Great War raged on in Europe. In those circumstances of 1916, their vision must have seemed like a distant dream.

When our government tied Archibald Baxter to a stake in West Flanders for daring to oppose World War One, the idea that New Zealand would have an independent foreign policy must have seemed like a far off fantasy.

In an era where Fred Evans was murdered while standing up for his rights at Waihi, the idea that a New Zealand government would legislate rights for working people must have seemed too much to hope for.

In the midst of abject and widespread poverty, the idea that our government would insist on the welfare of its people from the cradle to the grave must have seemed entirely alien.

But as long as the odds seemed, the people who founded our party in 1916 resolved to join together to fight for those principles.

When hundreds joined them, and then thousands, and then hundreds of thousands, the history of our country was changed forever.

In the 1930s, their movement propelled Michael Joseph Savage to sign the first law guaranteeing healthcare and welfare support for every Kiwi.

In the 1940s, this Labour party supported Peter Fraser as he helped found the United Nations, laying the foundations for an international order committed to ending great wars.

In the 1970s, our commitment to principle and justice lead us to revive the Treaty of Waitangi.

And in the 1980s, Labour and David Lange made New Zealand nuclear free.

We were the first major party in New Zealand to have a female leader and, springing from her success in our party, Helen Clark is on the brink of being the world's first female Secretary General of the United Nations.

Delegates, because of Labour, we have the welfare state, we have the Cullen Fund and KiwiSaver, we have state housing, paid parental leave and free secondary education.

Because of Labour we have homosexual law reform and marriage equality.

Almost every major progressive change for the last 100 years has happened because of the Labour Party.

At the core of all of our success lie some simple values.

In Labour, we stand proudly for equal opportunity for everyone.

We believe that looking after each other, looking after our mates and neighbours is what makes good families and good communities.

That healthy communities mean declaring zero tolerance for poverty, and that every family deserves to live in dignity.

We believe that the freedom to chase our dreams and ambitions, to speak and worship as we wish, is not a claim to selfishness or self-absorption but a claim to be a part of a society made richer by difference and diversity.

We believe that the freedom of the individual is not the same as the freedom to exploit and demean, that collaborating – working together – to improve communities and society as a whole doesn't diminish any one of us but enriches us all.

We believe in an active state, dedicated to ensuring that every citizen has security, and opportunity and the chance for a good life.

We stand for the promise of a good job, a home you can call your own, security for your family and the people they love.

We stand for good education for everyone, for healthcare that's there when we need it, for an environment you can enjoy and pass on to your grandchildren.

In Labour, we stand for a fair shot at the Kiwi Dream.

Ours are enduring values, and they are uniquely relevant to the challenges we face in 2016, both here in New Zealand and around the world.

We are living in a time of immense political, financial and economic change.

For 30 years, we have been told by some that the path to prosperity was to cut taxes, cut regulations, give more money than ever to the very rich, and then wait for the wealth to trickle down.

That the correct economic strategy for a government was to do as little as humanly possible.

We were told that if we flogged off state housing, cut money from the public health system, funnelled ever more taxpayer money into charter schools, and turned our housing market into a paradise for speculators, that was the ticket to a better economy and a fairer society.

Now, we are seeing all around us the failures of this approach.

Rapidly widening inequality.

A greater sense of financial and economic insecurity for most people.

A younger generation burdened with debt, facing the prospects of never owning their own home, entering a workforce that is increasingly precarious and casualised, and living on a planet at risk from climate change.

The security and opportunity and wealth we were promised would trickle down has failed to do so.

That cannot stand. That. Cannot. Stand.

Those of us on the progressive side of politics have a responsibility to provide a better way forward.

To provide real, practical ways to deliver the security that people need.

That's why Labour's approach is so vital today.

An active state, in a country where we are all in this together, is the only real path to a lasting prosperity.

Delegates: here is my commitment:

As Prime Minister, restoring security and opportunity to New Zealanders will be my number one goal.

Everything my government does will be about backing people to succeed, giving them the building blocks they need to live good, fulfilling lives:

Jobs.

Housing.

Health.

Education.

That's what my government will stand for.

In all of our announcements since I became leader, you will see my strong belief that we need a new approach, one that's about an active state making a difference in the areas it matters most.

That's why I've launched our Future of Work Commission, to develop concrete plans to ensure everyone still has the opportunity to earn a secure living in a changing world.

It's why earlier this year I announced three years of free post-school education for every New Zealander, so they can train and re-train as the world of work changes.

It's why the next Labour government will restore the funding National has slashed from our health system, and why we will prioritise new spending into our hospitals and clinics so everyone gets the healthcare they need.

It's why I've declared the government I lead will have zero tolerance for child poverty, and will introduce a healthy homes guarantee so every Kiwi kid grows up in a home that is warm and safe and dry.

And it is why my government will deal with the housing crisis that National has ignored for far too long.

We have a comprehensive plan to tackle this crisis.

- Building more homes.
- Cracking down on offshore speculators.
- Freeing up restrictive rules that choke off the supply of affordable housing.
- Doing more on emergency housing.

Across all of these plans, you'll see the same approach:

A government that backs people, that makes bold changes and delivers security and opportunity.

But today, I want to announce our next step.

It's about state housing.

You know, of all the galling aspects of National's non-response to the housing crisis, the worst has got to be their treatment of state housing.

How out of touch do you have to be to flog off two and a half thousand state houses – and plan on selling eight thousand more – all in the middle of a housing crisis?

How is it that in the worst housing crisis in living memory the highest ambition National has for Housing New Zealand is to be a cash cow?

Well with Labour, that stops.

Today, I am announcing the next Labour Government will stop the state house sell off.

And I am announcing that we will stop taking a profit out of Housing New Zealand and instead will invest that money in building thousands of new, high quality modern state houses.

Since 2008, National's stripped \$520 million out of Housing New Zealand.

Imagine the good we can do if we reinvest that money into building more homes.

Under Labour, Housing New Zealand will only have one job: provide homes for people in need.

We'll make that Housing New Zealand's mission, and restore the staff National cut so they can do their job properly. We'll make sure there is a real person to talk to those in need, not an 0800 number.

Let me tell you how this change will help people: One of our MPs recently helped a West Auckland woman who was living with her two kids in a campground. With our MP's help, she navigated the system and got a state house.

Once the family had more security at home, she was able to enrol at polytech, and was considering getting her plumber's trade certificate and starting her own business.

But here's the thing – you shouldn't need an MP on your side to get a state house. Under National, too many people are stuck living in campgrounds and cars.

There's just not enough state houses, and National's selling them. We'll build them instead.

In Labour, we stand for good public services. Public services that put people first.

Next year, as Labour turns 101, our relentless focus will be on those issues that provide people with the building blocks of a good life.

- Where National cut health funding, we will restore it.
- Where they've delivered growing inequality and insecurity, we will grow our economy and create jobs.
- Where they fiddled while the housing market burned, we'll build more affordable homes.
- And where they used state housing as a cash cow, we'll get to work building state homes.

Delegates, that is the choice in front of New Zealand at next year's election.

All of us, everyone here in this room today, has a role to play in making sure the country chooses hope again.

In 2017, change will come because you – everyone in this room – chooses to fight for it.

We will win next year on the doorsteps in your community, and in town halls and churches and lunch rooms and workplaces around the country.

We will win it with everyday people talking to our neighbours, our friends, and our workmates.

As we have done for 100 years, the Labour Party will change New Zealand from the grassroots up.

The issues New Zealand faces today: rising inequality, greater insecurity.

We'll solve them.

Together, we'll restore security.

Together, we'll give everyone the building blocks of a great life.

Together, we'll offer hope to New Zealanders.

Thank you.