



Campaign Launch 2017

Jacinda Ardern
Leader of the Labour Party



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Jacinda Ardern, Leader of the Labour Party
Auckland, 20 August 2017

Kia ora koutou katoa,
Kia orana,
Malo e lelei,
Ni sa bula vinaka,
Fakalofal lahiatu,
Namastae,
Ni Hao,

And thank you so much for that welcome.

And a warm welcome to those who travelled near and far, like my wonderful mum Laurell all the way from Niue, and to those watching this online – including my sister in London.

And yes, that was a test Louise to see if you are watching.

Thank you for joining our movement. Our strength rests on all your shoulders. You keep the faith. Many of you pound the pavements and work the phones.

It's your energy that has been our constant motivation, and it's your passion that will help us win.

I feel incredibly honoured to be the leader of the New Zealand Labour Party.

Let's do this.

Leadership is not always easy though. I saw that first hand, before I even took on this job.

And that's why I want start today by paying tribute to Andrew Little.

I watched you, Andrew, give everything to leading our team. Over more than two years, you pulled us together and led an incredible ground campaign. You then made one of the hardest calls I have seen someone make in politics.

You have always been focused on doing whatever it takes to put Labour in the best position to help others – and that is a legacy I promise to uphold.

To Kelvin Davis, the Deputy Leader of the Labour Party and to his informal campaign manager – Creature of Northland.

I have never seen someone whose instincts are more directly connected to the people they serve than Kelvin. We are incredibly lucky to have the leadership you provide, and also as a member of our Maori caucus. It's a caucus we will grow this election, and will see the strongest representation for Maori and women that we have ever had. That makes me so proud.

To all of our candidates who work so hard representing and advocating for their communities. Each and every one of you deserve to be in Parliament, and together, many more of you will join us on the 23rd of September.

Ladies and gentlemen, friends.

Just a few weeks ago I stood before the media and told them we were about to run the campaign of our lives. Looking at you all, I know that's true.

I remember the last time that I felt that way was nine years ago. It was the 16 of December 2008, the day I gave my first speech to parliament.

The first speech you give in Parliament, your maiden speech, is always treated as quite a big deal. It's a little bit like an Oscar acceptance speech, except in some cases you haven't actually won anything.

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They are speeches that are full of hope, and aspiration.

Here's how I started mine, nine years ago:

Quote: "Maiden speeches are a bit like words spoken in a heated argument. Like it or not, they will come back to haunt you."

But sometimes, there are words that you want to come back. Things you want to haunt you again and again, to remind you why you are there.

Because sometimes they are not just words; they're convictions, they are experiences, they are faces and they are stories.

I have described myself as relentlessly positive.

That's probably because I was born in Hamilton, where everyone is always optimistic that the fog will lift. Literally.

But at a young age my family relocated to Murupara.

I was just about to start school when we packed up to move to a place that we had never visited, and that we would call home for the next few years.

We lived in the small grey-brick house in front of the police station. When you're a child, you remember the little things. The nice lady at the dairy who you bought lolly mixes from. How you couldn't walk round town without jandals because of the broken glass. The kids who didn't have shoes, even in winter when the puddles would ice over. And the number of people who had lost their job, and their hope.

It was the 1980s and I was living in a place that remains etched in my memory even today.

But I was young. This was not the place or moment I was politicised. It was the moment I empathised.

And that is ultimately what I still see as the foundation for what we should be doing in this place. Understanding the issues people in our communities face, their experiences, and

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never being satisfied that things are the way they are, and can't be changed or made better.

That is why I chose politics. That is why I am here.

But I am not the first Labour politician to see the world that way.

My dad shed a tear when Norman Kirk died.

Kirk passed away 6 years before I was born, so the first I knew of this man was that he made my father cry. That was enough for me to know he was special.

His picture hangs on my wall. Not your usual portrait photo, but a newspaper clipping from the *Te Aroha News*. He's on his way to a Hindu wedding, standing next to a neatly dressed woman.

That woman is my Nana, or as she would have liked to have been known, the Secretary of the Piako Labour Electorate Committee.

I was twelve years old when my Nana died. I was too young to have ever talked to her about politics. So instead that clipping is a reminder to me. A reminder that MPs come and go, leaders come and go, and all we can do is make sure we leave something good behind.

That means taking on the hard issues. Thinking not just about the next three years, but the next ten. It means being bold and being brave.

Kirk was both of those things, and so were others. In fact it has always been Labour governments who have confronted New Zealand's challenges, who haven't been afraid of standing up, or of doing things differently.

For Savage, that meant seeing hardship, and creating the welfare state.

For Fraser, it was predicting the challenges of the future and bringing in free education from kindergarten to university.

For Kirk, it was seeing a loss of dignity and getting back to basics like full employment.

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For Lange, it was standing up for peace by standing up to nukes.

For Clark, it was about social infrastructure.

And for me it's simple: I want to build a country where every child grows up free from poverty, and is filled with hope and opportunity.

But of course, that requires me, and Labour to be elected. And for some people, there are some unanswered questions which simply boil down to one, simple thing.

Now what?

Kiwis know we have an economy some would argue compares well internationally, and we're told people want predictability and certainty. But the gap between rich and poor is just getting more and more entrenched.

So now what?

We know we have homelessness, that there are people living in cars who can't afford increasing rents, but we don't want to waste time with blame and sometimes we're not even sure it's something politicians can fix.

So now what?

We have infrastructure in our cities that cannot keep up with daily demand, while our regions look for the job opportunities that will make their young people stay.

So I ask again: Now what?

Well now we stand up. We do what we have done before. We refuse to accept the status quo, the idea that things can't be improved and that we have no choice.

We have a choice, and we can choose better.

Some have said that the only thing I need to show you to prove that I deserve to govern is an appreciation of the economy.

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You will never hear me question the importance of a strong economy. Never. I worked alongside the last Labour government whose economic record speaks for itself and for that, I say thank you Helen Clark, and thank you Michael Cullen.

But the major point of difference on economic issues this election is not how long either leader has spent working with Treasury – it's what we use as the signs of success.

I will always maintain that a successful economy is one that serves its people. Not the other way around. And that means judging success differently.

GDP rates, and numbers on a sheet of paper don't always tell you much about the wellbeing of the people working to keep our economy going.

Yes GDP is rising in New Zealand. And in some respects we're told we are the envy of the world. But how someone in Whanganui feels about their wages, their cost of living, and their prospects matters more to me than the praise of overseas financial commentators.

And on that measure, we could be doing so much better. Last year two thirds of people had a pay rise that didn't keep up with the increasing cost of living. If people feel like they are going backwards, how can we claim we are moving forwards.

Add to that the more than 70,000 young people not in employment, education, or training, and perhaps the measure that bothers me the most, we have nearly 300,000 kids living in poverty.

I want economic success to feel real, and it won't feel like anything but faint praise until it feels real for all New Zealanders.

That is why the markers of success have to change, and I am starting with kids.

Under Labour, we will change the Public Finance Act so that every budget, you don't just hear about surpluses and deficits, you will hear about how many kids we have lifted out of poverty.

We will do the same when it comes to showing our progress on challenges we have

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postponed for too long, and yes that includes the environment and climate change.

Because when we hold ourselves to account, you can hold us to account.

And we will only do better, when we are honest about where we are starting.

But it's also time we shared that same honesty about economic success not being evenly spread – between people, but also across our regions.

I have spent longer living in small town New Zealand than I have spent in Auckland. I have seen the constant battle to find a way to make young people stay, and to build a future.

No one expects central government to have all of the answers, but they should expect us to ask questions.

A government that I lead will be an active partner in our regions – not telling them what to do, but sitting down with council, employers, unions and employees – figuring out ways to support the growth of decent, well paid jobs.

That is why last year we went to Gisborne, and collectively developed an initiative to process timber into prefabricated houses.

That is why we went to Dunedin, and co-created the Centre of Digital Excellence.

That is why we went to Whanganui and pledged to fix their Port.

And that is why we will keep asking – what can we do together, because I know regional economic development can change towns, it can change cities and it can change lives.

But there is one more marker of success I want to focus on. Because the answer to this one lies at Labour's core.

Economic experts talk a lot about our low productivity. I can see why.

It's shorthand for relying on people to work longer to prop up our economy. It's shorthand for low wages. It's shorthand for fewer hours at home with your kids.

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And it's shorthand for a country that's dropped the ball on skills and innovation.

All of that flies in the face of what New Zealand is meant to be.

We are a nation of small business, so let's reward people who invest in them.

We are innovators, so let's bring back the R&D tax credit.

We are young and facing so much change so let's educate our workers of today, and upskill our workers of tomorrow.

And with Labour, that's exactly what we'll do.

You will have heard it said that education is the great leveller. It's part of what has made us the fair society we have all been so proud of.

But I would go further – education is a public good, and that's why it should be free.

I remember when I first started studying. I worked in a fish n chip shop, then a gift shop, then a supermarket. For a time I was doing all three at once. I would change into my chippy uniform at the back of the gift shop ready for my Friday night shift. My wages basically kept my 1979 Toyota Corona on the road.

I saved hard. I wanted to go to university, and I was determined to do it without debt. But I had choices and opportunities, many don't and that should never be a barrier to learning.

Since 1999 we have been campaigning to make education more accessible, and we're still doing it today.

That is why Labour is committed to revolutionising education.

We have already pledged to make the first three years of post secondary education free. Whether you are an apprentice, going to polytech, or taking on a degree. Whether you are coming straight from school, or need to retrain - Labour will invest in your future.

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We will change our schools from being a place of assessment to a place of creativity.

We will reopen our night schools so that people of any age and any background can keep learning.

With a Labour Government, education won't just be a leveller again, it will be what sets our country apart.

Leading a country that gives our next generation hope and opportunity means there is another issue we can't look past. Housing.

Housing affects everything. There is nothing more basic than having a roof over your head. That is why a warm, dry, decent home is a right.

I was door knocking in Hastings a few years back, and remember some doors where I couldn't see inside for the dampness pouring down them. Even in my home electorate. I've seen kids who sleep stacked underneath bunk beds because there is just no room.

That is our housing situation at its worst. But this is not a reality we have to accept.

I do not accept that young people, our teachers and our nurses should give up on owning a home. Not when we can do just three things that will make all the difference.

Under Labour, we will remove speculators' unfair tax advantages.

We'll stop foreign buyers who have no interest in New Zealand buying existing homes.

And we'll just get on and build more houses.

And for those who genuinely choose to rent, you deserve to know that your home is warm and dry. You deserve to have greater security. And under Labour, you will.

There is an old saying of Norman Kirk's that I really treasure. He once said that people don't want much, just "someone to love, somewhere to live, somewhere to work and something to hope for".

Let's do this.

Some might say that hope and love aren't things that government can really offer. Those people haven't thought enough about an issue we all have a stake in - our country's mental health.

I've spoken before about why this issue matters to me. Everyone knows someone affected by mental health, or devastated by suicide.

Yesterday I asked a room full of young people if they did, and every single hand in that room was lifted into the air. Every single one.

New Zealand's youth suicide rate is the highest in the OECD. While there is a lot of talk about targets, I know I will never ever be satisfied so long as there is even one life lost.

It is time we focused on love and hope rather than grief and loss. And we need to start with young people.

That's why we will put a nurse in every single public high school across the country. And we will make sure that every single child in Canterbury and Kaikoura will also have the support they need, when they need it.

It's a \$50 million investment, and it's amongst the most important investments we will make.

But our children, and our young people, also need us to look to their future.

The very first time I was booed in politics was in Matamata. It was a public meeting during the 2008 election, and I was asked about climate change. A wise candidate told me later – if 50% of a public meeting isn't disagreeing with you at any one time, you're probably not saying anything. I did wonder if 100% of the room meant I was saying too much.

But I will never stop talking about it, because it's the challenge that defines my generation.

I remember listening to a couple of members of my family discussing climate change a few years ago. It's fair to say they were sceptical. I was waiting for my moment to jump in, when suddenly I heard my father pipe up. "I don't know much about the science he said, "but I do know what they showed me in Kiribati".

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He had visited with local village leaders who had shown him where the water sat when they were children, and where it was now - lapping squarely around their survival.

There will always be those who say it's too difficult. There will be those who say we are too small, and that pollution and climate change are the price of progress.

They are wrong.

We will take climate change seriously because my Government will be driven by principle, not expediency. And opportunity, not fear.

And there is an opportunity, that we can turn into our advantage, and shape our identity. It is a transition that can, and must, be just.

This is my generation's nuclear free moment, and I am determined that we will tackle it head on.

But restoring our role as innovators, and as a clean green nation on the world stage, means tackling something closer to home.

Our rivers are dying. The majority are almost too dirty to swim in.

I don't accept that this is just the way things are now. Not when we our water is a taonga. Not when we have a duty to protect it. And not when we can turn things around.

We will clean up our rivers. We will do it for the next generation. And we will do it together.

We do have some hard calls to make. But the government I lead will be a government that listens, then acts. A government that leads, not follows.

I will never stop believing that politics is a place where we can do good.

That we can build a confident and caring nation if we include each and every person, in each and every town and region. That is New Zealand at its best.

It's been three weeks now since I was asked to take this job and lead our campaign. In those

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three weeks, I've never once felt alone. Whether it's been on social media, on the streets, or by your show of support here today, I feel humbled and heartened.

So, the question for all of us – for you and for me - is this: Now what?

Now we re-double our efforts.

Now we focus not just on the challenges, but the opportunities that will bring lasting change.

Now we be bold, and now we be brave.

This is our moment, and it starts with you.

This is a time for talking with your families and friends. This is a time for knocking on doors and working the phones. This is a time for sharing our vision of tomorrow with everyone you meet.

Let's go from here today and run the campaign of our lives.

Let's do this.

Let's do this.