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Labour's Leader in the European Parliament
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Conference, it is an honour to address you here today as Leader of your Euro MPs.

And we all want to thank you for your hard work in the elections earlier this year.

To all who stood in that election, I want to say that you carried the Labour banner with dignity and passion, and it was a privilege to campaign alongside you.

But let's not delude ourselves.

Labour suffered a serious defeat in those elections.

Only one in three bothered to vote and thousands of Labour supporters voted for minor, sometimes extremist, parties or didn't vote at all.

So why did we lose?

Was it over our European policies on the economy? Where Gordon Brown's proactive leadership was instrumental in leading Europe out of recession, while the Tories stood on the sidelines?

Was it over our European policies on the environment? Where our support for strong action on climate change was opposed by the Tories?

Was it over our policies to fight discrimination? When Tories voted against action to protect the disabled, minorities and women.

Or was it on our European policies to protect workers from third party violence, and from cancer causing chemicals. With the Tories and the LibDems opposing such moves?

No, of course it wasn't.

You'll recall that the only issue debated – day in and day out - was Westminster expenses. It was the only issue on the doorstep and didn't the media wallow in it. Although there were times when we gave them an open goal.

Add to that, the generally eurosceptic tendency in Britain, and the idea of an election being decided on the merits of the main parties, quite frankly went down the pan.

Colleagues, it was never a failure of our political arguments.

We didn't lose the argument.

The truth is we never actually had the debate.

Does that matter?

Of course it does.

Can you imagine what we could all lose?

Social Chapter- gone. Equal rights - gone. Climate change agenda – gone.

Spectating not influencing.

And just when the major issues of today so clearly demand more international co-operation – Britain would become increasingly isolated, our international influence ever decreasing.

Which leads conveniently to the hapless Tories.

I did say hapless, not hopeless, but either would do.

The poor Tories. You almost feel sorry for them, all the troubles and bust-ups of recent months.

Since the elections, they've left the centre right, and jumped into bed with some extremely strange people. From Polish homophobes to anti-Semites, to Czech climate change

deniers, and let's not forget the Latvians who have such admiration for the Nazi Waffen SS.

Their problem was that many in their own ranks weren't happy with these new found friends, and so, after a massive row, they lost one MEP, lost control of the top positions in the European Parliament, and then lost the leadership of the new political group they'd only just formed!

You couldn't make it up!

And this is the party that says it can run Europe and not be run by Europe?

Some chance!

They can't even run themselves!

Time after time, the great PR man Cameron says one thing at home. Then allows his Tories to show their true colours in the European Parliament.

They vote for profit instead of people; pollution instead of the environment. And I have to say, they're extremely dodgy on any equal rights issue.

All the time, Cameron pretends that the toxic Tory brand has changed. All the time, his Euro MPs are clear proof that it has not.

Conference, we have to expose the dishonesty of the Tories. We have to expose their deceit.

Just look at what they said about the NHS over the summer. Well, actually they said quite a few things over the summer – as usual never the same thing twice!

Cameron has no control over his extreme members like Daniel Hannan and Roger Helmer. For them, the NHS was “a terrible mistake”, had “made people iller,” and was something which “many Conservatives would have trouble supporting,”

Their words – not mine.

And what does Cameron do about it?

Does he withdraw the whip, cancel their membership, reprimand them in anyway?

No, he calls them eccentric. I can think of a better word for them!

And Hannan, well Hannan gets promoted. You have to understand that Tory poster-boy Hannan has his own column in the Telegraph, not really someone Cameron wants to upset.

So when Cameron is tested, does he have leadership qualities or the courage of his convictions? Will he defend our NHS from these head-bangers?

Absolutely not.

So while Cameron tries to show a compassionate, modern face to the voters, there's another side to the story.

His party are divided on the NHS, as they are on so many crucial issues.

Their policies are unconvincing and unclear. They certainly didn't convince the British public. They only increased their vote by one percent in the European elections!

You know, despite our own disappointment, that really should make us think.

The Tories have no momentum, no message. There's no wave of euphoria to sweep them in at the next election. Before 1997, we'd won three quarters of the European seats, yet the Tories hold barely a third of them now.

No! The fight is still on! And it is a fight we will win if we are bold and ambitious.

Unfortunately the Tories haven't got a monopoly on Neanderthal policies in the European Parliament. UKIP, the real dinosaurs are also stirring in the swamps. More interested in sound bites, than working for their constituents and increasingly divorced from reality, UKIP have developed isolationist politics into a minor art form.

But – Conference – with the European elections came an even greater threat. In June, people woke up to the news that we now have 2 members of the BNP representing Britain in the European Parliament.

What an affront to the memory of people like my dad and other war veterans who fought fascism seventy years ago.

And you know we all hold a collective responsibility to tackle the BNP and the hateful messages they peddle. But it is not enough for us just to spout anti fascist rhetoric. In those areas where the BNP succeed in spreading fear about immigration we must organise and be more active than ever and support people in those communities who find themselves in difficulties.

We know that the BNP will do nothing to help British people. They won't create more jobs, they won't improve public services and they won't protect the downtrodden in times of need.

That isn't their agenda. But it is ours.

Colleagues – despite our numbers, Labour's Euro MPs continue to punch well above our weight. Our values drive us to make the fair and responsible choices that will help people during the tough times, and prepare us all for the better times that will come.

Gordon Brown and this Labour government are committed to a fair and just society. And Labour MEPs have that same goal.

We will always stand up and fight to make the laws in Europe fairer and more responsive to the needs of people in Britain.

But conference we need your help. It is not enough for us in the Labour Party just to pay lip service to the benefits of the EU. We have to get beyond that.

We have to say that "Europe – good or bad" - is a sterile argument. What matters are the issues at stake: jobs, security, fairness, the future of our planet.

These aren't European issues or Westminster issues. These are Labour issues. The same things we've always fought for based on the values we've always had.

And we must win, once again, the basic "Labour" argument that we achieve more together than we do alone.

That our rights at work should be in every workplace.

And that our environment is sacred, to be enjoyed and protected by all.

If we are to truly win this argument, we will have to understand what motivated voters in June. Was it a fear of powerlessness in the face of an economic downturn or concerns about immigration? Was it frustration and anger over expenses? Was it the media?

Voters I spoke with during the campaign and over the summer had one thing in common: they want their politicians to do more to help, not less. They want us to listen to their concerns and they want us to help those on modest incomes, and not just the privileged few.

Conference, there are European, Westminster, regional and local politics. But running through all – the central thread – must be Labour politics. The politics of equality, freedom, fairness for all.

All parts of the Labour Party must now take on the fight that lies ahead. We have to demonstrate the ambition, the desire, as well as the practical policies that face up to the challenges of our times.

Conference, friends, we have to show the British people that we will continue to deliver for them a better, fairer, safer and more just society in Britain, in Europe, and in the rest of the world.