

Ruth Davidson Speech at the 2017 Conservative Party Conference

It's great to be here in Manchester. Or as I call it, the Southern powerhouse. I want to talk to you about the general election. In fact, I want to talk to you about two of them. The first one – two years ago. And for us in Scotland, the same old story. Knocking our pans in. Hitting countless doors, delivering thousands of leaflets, too many conversations to count, another pair of boots ruined. And at the end of it all?

We started with one MP. We ended with one MP.

We'd survived the SNP tsunami, but were no further forward than when we began....we were still outgunned by those sodding pandas.

But, two years later, we had a second election – this June.

Back on the stump.

Back knocking those same doors, delivering more leaflets, having thousands more conversations and – yes – by the end of it, another pair of boots totalled.

But this time, it was different. This time people were looking for a serious alternative to a nationalism that had let down our schools and was more concerned with division than delivery.

And we went from one MP to 13. Our best result in decades.

After years of heroically holding the line on his own, suddenly David Mundell got some company.

The pandas are going to have to go some, to catch up now...

It's been quite a ride, conference.

And we're not done yet – far from it.

But, conference, we didn't turn things around in one seven-week campaign.

We did it through grafting hard between elections. By organising. By making and remaking the argument.

And I have watched. With incredulity, the response to the Labour party conference this week.

Commentators, who should know better, declaring Jeremy Corbyn as a shoo-in to number 10, just because Glastonbury chanted his name to the White Stripes. Folks, he hasnae even won a raffle.

Well, conference I have been here before and I can tell you how this story ends.

I have watched as Nicola Sturgeon sold out rock venues. As she released a line of signature clothing. As she sold foam fingers to the faithful so they could point at the sky as she flew in a helicopter she'd slapped her face on, over their heads.

I've read the commentary that said her momentum was irresistible, that everything would be swept before her.

And all the other parties in Scotland should just pack up, and go home.

Well, conference, I don't like anyone telling me where to go.

Politics is not for faint hearts. It's not about what's in fashion or who is the absolute boy.

It's about making the case for what you believe in.

It's about service and duty and getting the job done. Delivering for others. And giving everyone the chance to get on.

And, just as the SNP came crashing down to earth. Just as they lost 40 per cent of their seats in June. Just as half a million Scots chose to take their vote away. So too can the Corbyn bubble burst, but only if we work hard to make it so.

Because, you know what? People tire of being offered free unicorns. Of easy promises that don't add up.

They want serious solutions to the issues facing their world.

They want opportunities to make their own lives better.

A good school so their children can do anything they set their mind to.

A strong economy so they'll always have the security of work.

Well-funded public services to look after their needs

And to keep more of their own money because they make better decisions for their family's future than the state makes for them.

That's what we offer. That's what Theresa May offers.

A belief in country, duty, service and the power of people.

And that's what we fight for.

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Always. We fight.

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We may have five years, but I tell you – we need to get to work right now. Because the in-tray is full.

Firstly. Brexit.

It's time to get the best deal we can.

And you know what?

It's time we in this party made it clear – that we're not Leavers or Remainers anymore – we're just Brits.

People who were asked to make a decision. Did. And now want to deliver that decision in the best way possible. Who now must unite behind our leader to get the best deal for us and the right deal for Europe as well.

Next we've got to deliver that strong economy and world-class public services.

Ten years of tough times since the crash – it's time to show working families right across the UK – from a tenement in Glasgow, to a one-bed in Grantham – that we've got their back.

Yes, we've got record employment in the UK today – but we also need to recognise the pressures faced by the job-juggling generation, where two or even three jobs are needed to make ends meet.

The sheer effort that takes – just to keep going.

The strain it puts on relationships.

The stress of not knowing if you're going to make your rent. And what will happen if you can't. These people are looking to us for answers – and for action to make their lives easier.

It's our duty to deliver. Also, to make our country fairer. To make it clear: this party isn't there for those at the top of the ladder – this party IS a ladder. It's what we're about: to help people move up and get on. To be the party of home-building. The party that enshrines excellence in education – no matter the school. The party that will take action on the low wage economy and help lift living standards. Further, to be a beacon in the world. To help those that are hurting and fight for those who can't fight for themselves. To go into bat for our friends and allies. To be able to say when you go abroad that despite the financial hit of the last few years – that my country, our country, kept its commitments to the world's poor and will continue to do so. And finally, conference, to stay united.

To stay one United Kingdom. By being a nation that realises the ambitions of everyone in this country. That seeks to be a home for all who live here. And I mean everyone. From the people who voted to leave the UK, to the majority who voted to stay... From the people who voted to remain in the EU to the people who voted to leave. From the people who can trace their ancestors back through generations, to people who've settled here from somewhere else. ...who pursued that innate Conservative instinct to better themselves and their families and build a new life in a new land.

We need to stand together, Not defensive in this diversity and our sometime disagreement – but to be confident in our ability to embrace difference and debate.

And to have the courage to confront not just our strengths but our weaknesses too. We are a remarkable Union, conference. Because of the leadership of this party – our Union is known the world over as a Union of choice, not of force. A Union that, three years ago, put our democratic right to choose whether to leave before its very survival. That's not nothing. In fact, the more time passes, the more remarkable it becomes. And let's say it loud and proud – that this is a Union that that does not hoard power to the centre, but has sought to push it out. And again, did so thanks to a Conservative party which – as Edinburgh, as Cardiff, Manchester and Teeside will attest – is now THE party of devolution.

Not Labour, certainly not the LibDems. Us. And a party that now wants to use Brexit to go further – to ensure that the power surge that will hit Britain when we leave the EU is felt in Edinburgh, in Cardiff Bay and in Stormont too.

I'm proud of that, conference. I'm proud of all we've done in the last few years to keep this country together and move forward as one. But we should recognise that these huge changes to our nation pose challenges too. Devolution of power has transformed our nation for the better. It has put power closer to people. But – at the same time – while we've built vigorous new devolved structures, we've not done enough to nurture that which binds us.

As the Prime Minister said in Scotland earlier this year, all too often, Whitehall devolves and forgets. And the danger is that we become a country that stays together, but lives apart. With the cracks exploited by those who would pull us apart for good. So let me make a plea today. Yes – let's absolutely press on with more devolution. But it's time for a bit more Union too. More Union right across Britain. More Union in all parts of our nation – benefiting us all. More Union spread evenly– and not just based in London.

Now let me make this clear: conference, I love London. No plans to move there myself, but great to visit.

And it's wonderful that our small island nation plays host to the capital of the world. But the truth is: for all the devolution of power in the last twenty years, our Union continues to be far too London-centric.

Compare us to our friends around the world. New York's global status doesn't diminish Washington's political clout, or LA's creativity, or Silicon Valley's entrepreneurialism. Instead, America has a cluster of great global cities.

Or look at Germany – where Berlin's political heft is balanced by the financial hub of Frankfurt and the industry of Munich. We're the odd one out – in fact, among major global capitals, only Moscow accounts for a greater share of national product than London.

And this imbalance is getting crazy. We live in a country where the property values of London's top 10 boroughs are worth more than all of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales combined. Where you can sell a three bed semi in Ilford, and buy half of Sutherland.

Where, in a capital city already zooming forward on the jet fuel of high finance, the economy is further boosted by enough civil servants to fill Wembley. It is time for change – to fulfil the

plans we set out at the election this year.....to give Britain a shake and spread more of our Union outside the capital.

To see our great metropolitan cities have a larger share in the government of our country. To ensure that – if our civil service and cultural bodies are to claim to be UK institutions – they must be present across our whole United Kingdom. To move more of the infrastructure, the people and the administration of our country out of the capital and into the country.

It is happening to a degree already of course. More civil service jobs coming to my constituency in central Edinburgh. The fantastic new V+A museum rising up in Dundee, ready to show the best of Scottish and British design. And here in Manchester, the Northern Powerhouse now showing the way ahead. But I want to see more. We need to see more. The government's industrial strategy is designed to boost growth in places across all four nations of the United Kingdom.

And it's reviewing the various agencies based in London to see which ones could be ready for a move. So I want us to seize the opportunity to ensure more of them come to Scotland.

Conference, here's the bottom line. The success of our Union cannot and should not be measured by the fact the alternative has failed. That separation is a busted flush.

No – our success must be measured by our determination to always improve. By going the extra mile. By refusing to accept the status quo as a given. And being restless for change. By recognising that thousands of our fellow countrymen and women no longer see this country as theirs. By seeking not to shun them, or dismiss their complaints – but to answer them with action. And that must be our task as we go forward from conference this week. In Government, across the United Kingdom, united behind our Prime Minister, determined to face the challenges of the future. To tackle injustice. To be the ladder. To create real social cohesion. And – in opposition in Scotland – we must be ready to change, and to win. Because, I don't know about you, but after ten years of SNP Government, it seems to me like it's time for a new broom. It's not going to be Scottish Labour, by the way. They swap leaders so often that Trump's communications director feels sorry for them.

But us? We're serious....serious about restoring Scotland's reputation as the education capital of the world.....serious about boosting our productivity – to get Scotland's economy firing once again. And serious about running a government in Scotland that just gets on with the job for once. A government you can trust to focus on the tough choices. To dump the tedious grievance politics and the petty complaints. Instead, to act as a grown-up partner within a reformed United Kingdom – eager not just to better Scotland but – in so doing – to better our wider nation too. As a party that, in Scotland, is re-engaging with our roots. A party as Teddy Taylor once put it, isn't just there for the people in the 'big hoooses'. But for those who clean their tenement step as well. That's the party we are building in Scotland and across the United Kingdom.

A party that speaks to the hopes of our nation as a whole. From car production lines in Coventry to contact centre staff in Cardiff. From ship workers in Glasgow to software designers in Dundee. A party that reaches out to every corner of our country with a level head, but also an open heart. And with a clear set of values....That strong families are the foundation of a stable society....A good education is the key to a lifetime of opportunity....That everybody should have a safe and secure home. ...That there should be a job for everyone who wants to work – and that pay should be fair. These are the things I

believe in – and I know you believe in them too. So it's time for us – all of us – to unite and fight. Unite and fight for the union of our nation...For the security people want...For the prosperity families need...For the future our young people deserve. Unite and fight for this country we are proud to serve. Thank you.