

LABOUR PARTY
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LABOUR'S PLAN FOR SCIENCE

REPRINT OF SPEECH BY THE RT. HON. HAROLD WILSON, MP, LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, AT THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE, SCARBOROUGH, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 1963.



Mr. Wilson said: It was here at Scarborough, three years ago, that we began the hard climb back from the 1959 Election defeat with a debate, also on the Tuesday morning of that week, on Morgan Phillips's document *Labour in the Sixties*; and anyone here then will, I think, always treasure the memory of that great speech of Ray Gunter, opening that debate. When I came to wind up that debate, I said then that we must harness Socialism to science, and science to Socialism. That, again, was one of the main themes of *Signposts for the Sixties*—the mobilisation of all the resources of science available to us in this new scientific revolution.

Now, this morning, we present this document to the nation, Labour and the Scientific Revolution, because the strength, the solvency, the influence of Britain, which some still think depends upon nostalgic illusions or upon nuclear posturings—these things are going to depend in the remainder of this century to a unique extent on the speed with which we come to terms with the world of change.

There is no more dangerous illusion than the comfortable doctrine that the world owes us a living. One of the dangers of the old-boy network approach to life is the thought that it is international, that whatever we do, whenever we run into trouble, we can always rely on a special relationship with someone or other to bail us out. From now on Britain will have just as much influence in the world as we can earn, as we can deserve. We have no accumulated reserves on which to live.

And if there is one theme running through this Conference this week—Fred Hayday stressed it on Sunday night in the first speech from this platform which set the keynote for all of us and Ray Gunter stressed it again yesterday—it is the theme of change, the overdue need for this country to adapt itself to different conditions. It is the theme and the

challenge which faces the Labour Party, which faces every one of us.

It is, of course, a cliché that we are living at a time of such rapid scientific change that our children are accepting as part of their everyday life things which would have been dismissed as science fiction a few years ago. We are living perhaps in a more rapid revolution than some of us realise. The period of 15 years from the last time we were in Scarborough, in 1960, to the middle of the 1970s will embrace a period of technical change, particularly in industrial methods, greater than in the whole industrial revolution of the last 250 years. When you reckon, as it is calculated, that 97 per cent of all the scientists who have ever lived in the history of the world since the days of Euclid, Pythagoras and Archimedes, are alive and at work today, you get some idea of the rate of progress we have to face.

It is only a few years since we first in this Conference debated automation, when almost every word uttered in that debate is already as out of date today as if we had been talking about the advent of the spinning jenny. Automation is beginning to make its impact felt in quarters of British industry, as many delegates here know—the engineers, the technicians, the chemical workers, the scientific workers, and, not least, the Post Office workers and the Post Office engineers, who have pioneered some of the major developments in automation and who, thanks to the combination of our trade union skill and of public ownership in the Post Office, lead the world in these developments.

Let us be frank about one thing. It is no good trying to comfort ourselves with the thought that automation need not happen here; that it is going to create so many problems that we should perhaps put our heads in the sand and let it pass us by. Because there is no room for Luddites in the Socialist Party. If we try to abstract from the automative age,

the only result will be that Britain will become a stagnant backwater, pitied and condemned by the rest of the world.

The danger, as things are, is that an unregulated private enterprise economy in this country will promote just enough automation to create serious unemployment but not enough to create a break-through in the production barrier. Let us look at what is happening in automation all over the world—and what I may say is elementary compared with the knowledge that some of our trade union delegates could present to you this morning.

Already in the engineering and automobile industries in the United States they have reached a point where a programme-controlled machine tool line can produce an entire motor-car—and I mean an American motor-car, with all the gimmicks on it—without the application of human skill or effort. They can do this without a single worker touching it. It is not commercially worth while yet, but it is technically possible.

Because we have to recognise that automation is not just one more process in the history of mechanisation, if by mechanisation we mean the application of technology to eliminate the need for human muscle. The essence of modern automation is that it replaces the hitherto unique human functions of memory and of judgment. And now the computers have reached the point where they command facilities of memory and of judgment far beyond the capacity of any human being or group of human beings who have ever lived.

A modern computer in a fraction of a second can make calculations and can make decisions of judgment which all the mathematicians in Britain and America combined could by ordinary methods in the space of a year. You have computers at work now controlling a planned productive system of machine tools which have an impulse cycle of three millionths of a second. They do their calculations and take their decisions in a period of three millionths of a second. Yet already those machines are out of date. New mass controllers are in production now with a speed 1,000 times as fast. It was not easy for me, at any rate, to be able to appreciate what three billionths of a second—one three-hundred millionth of a second—really means. Perhaps some of you find it easier to visualise it—until it was explained to me that if you were to set out to walk right round the earth at the Equator, assuming there was no water there, taking a step every three-hundred-millionth of a second—that is, taking one step every time these machines actually do their thinking process—then you would circle the entire earth in one second. Now perhaps we have got it.

In America technological change is begin-

ning to move now even more rapidly in the white collar professions than in engineering, because it is much easier to programme operations of costings, of wages sheets and tax schedules or of insurance premiums, than it is to programme an engineering job. And let us be clear that in America today and in Britain tomorrow we face massive redundancies in office work no less than in industry.

Already forward-looking labour leaders in the United States have calculated that at the present and prospective rate of technological change in that country, where at present there are about 70 million people at work, they are going to need to create 40 million new jobs by 1970 if they are to achieve and maintain full employment. Allowing for the fact that the automotive revolution here will be later and slower, we have to be ready to create 10 million new jobs in Britain by, say, the mid-1970s.

Or listen to the problem in another way. We can now set a programme-controlled machine tool line so that, without the intervention of any human agency, it can produce a new set of machine tools in its own image. And when machine tools have acquired, as they now have, the faculty of unassisted reproduction, you have reached a point of no return where if man is not going to assert his control over machines, the machines are going to assert their control over man.

These facts, these inescapable facts, put the whole argument about industry and economics and Socialism in a new perspective. I am not going to waste much time this morning demonstrating that a Government of the kind we have in this country is incapable even of realising the implications of creating something like 10 million new jobs by the mid-1970s, considering that after twelve years in office they have succeeded in producing a situation in the whole of Scotland, for example, where there are fewer men in work than there were in 1951. Or considering the efforts they have been making, so we are told, to bring industry to the North-East which, since 1959, have added about 30,000 new jobs gross, making no allowance for redundancies in declining industries. When you present a Government such as the one we have in this country with a problem I have just been outlining, they are not living in the same dimensions.

The problem is this. Since technological progress left to the mechanism of private industry and private property can lead only to high profits for a few, a high rate of employment for a few, and to mass redundancies for the many, if there had never been a case for Socialism before, automation would have created it. Because only if technological progress becomes part of our national planning can that progress be directed to national ends.

So the choice is not between technological progress of the kind of easy-going world we are living in today. It is the choice between the blind imposition of technological advance, with all that means in terms of unemployment, and the conscious, planned, purposive use of scientific progress to provide undreamed of living standards and the possibility of leisure ultimately on an unbelievable scale.

That is why we must, in the Labour Party, devote a lot more thought to providing facilities for the use of leisure, and this is why again, as this document suggests, we shall have to be a lot more imaginative about the provision for retraining the workers made redundant by the development of new skills and new techniques.

Now I come to what we must do, and it is a fourfold programme. First, we must produce more scientists. Secondly, having produced them we must be a great deal more successful in keeping them in this country. Thirdly, having trained them and kept them here, we must make more intelligent use of them when they are trained than we do with those we have got. Fourthly, we must organise British industry so that it applies the results of scientific research more purposively to our national production effort. These, then, are the four tasks: first, more scientists—we are simply not training anything like enough for the nation's needs. Russia is at the present time training ten to eleven times as many scientists and technologists. And the sooner we face up to that challenge the sooner we shall realise what kind of a world we are living in.

I know, of course, that a Government Committee has said that we shall have all the scientists we need by 1965. Of course we shall—if we do not use them. We shall have all the bull-fighters we need by 1965. But to train the scientists we are going to need will mean a revolution in our attitude to education, not only higher education but at every level. I do not want to anticipate the debate on education, but it means that as a nation we cannot afford to force segregation on our children at the 11-plus stage.

As Socialists, as democrats, we oppose this system of educational apartheid, because we believe in equality of opportunity. But that is not all. We simply cannot as a nation afford to neglect the educational development of a single boy or girl. We cannot afford to cut off three-quarters or more of our children from virtually any chance of higher education. The Russians do not, the Germans do not, the Americans do not, and the Japanese do not, and we cannot afford to either. And if you want proof, only this month in part of my constituency we have a big new town where, thanks to the imagination of the

Socialist authority there, every secondary school in that town is comprehensive. The children who live there have no conception of what it means to go along on a cold February morning to take an 11-plus examination or any other system of 11-plus selection either. There is a boy who, when his family lived in Liverpool, took the 11-plus examination and was not accepted for a grammar school place, but when he came to live in Kirby he went to the comprehensive school, and this boy who, in the conventional jargon, failed his 11-plus, is starting this morning at Liverpool University with a State scholarship in physics. And how many more are there? But we cannot afford segregation at 11-plus nor can we afford segregation at 18-plus. There are students this year who are failing to secure entry to universities in State Colleges of Higher Education, who possess qualifications which a year ago would have got them in, because, to quote a phrase which I read in the paper this morning by the Director of the North-Western Council of Industry, Colonel Burford, they are facing an increasingly severe 'rat race' in the problem of entering universities.

Last year, 1962, a quarter of those who had the necessary qualifications at A level could not get in because there were not enough places, and this year a much higher proportion than that will have been excluded, despite the fact that they have got the necessary qualifications for entry. And as the number of boys and girls reaching university age rises, as a result of the birth rate of the 1940s—facts which were known to the Government a very long time ago—as a higher and higher proportion of those boys and girls stay at school—and we are glad they are doing it—we shall have a greater number of students every year failing to get in because the places are simply not there. The Government could have foreseen this, and they could have taken the steps necessary to see that the places were there. To give students today the same chances of getting a place in the late 1960s as they had even in the late 1950s, we are going to need between 180,000 and 200,000 places in our universities, and the Government's plan provides for only 150,000—and that is only to get back to the same standards of entry as we had in the late 1950s; and in the late 1950s our rate was too small; we were near the bottom of the international league. This is why we in the Labour Party give such a high priority to plans for higher education.

I think the report of Lord Taylor's working party has been one of the most important contributions to the study of the problem of higher education in this country. They recommend, and we accept, a crash programme, first, to make fuller use of existing universities

and colleges of higher education. They propose, and every one of us must accept, a tremendous building programme of new universities, and in this programme let us try and see that more of them are sited in industrial areas where they can in some way reflect the pulsating throb of local industry, where they can work in partnership with the new industries we seek to create.

Not enough thought has been given, when we fight against the problem of declining areas and the migration of population away from some of our older areas, to the establishment of new universities who, by the very nature of their industrial research, can help to revitalise areas in which they are going to be sited. As Lord Taylor said in the report, our aim must be at the earliest possible moment to provide facilities for higher education for at least 10 per cent of our young people, instead of the 5 per cent at which the Tories are tepidly aiming.

There is another thing we have got to do in the field of higher education, and this is to put an end to snobbery. Why should not the colleges of advanced technology award degrees? Why should not teachers training colleges be given more and more their proper place in the educational system? You know, what is needed here is not going to happen by chance. We are going to need a Ministry of Higher Education. You can argue about whether you link it with the existing Ministry of Education, whether you link it with the new Ministry of Science or, as may be right, constituting it as a Ministry in its own right under a Minister of Cabinet rank. You can all produce arguments. The important thing is that the Ministry of Higher Education must become the focal point of the planning of higher education in this country.

Relevant, also, to these problems are our plans for a university of the air. I repeat again that this is not a substitute for our plans for higher education, for our plans for new universities, and for our plans for extending technological education. It is not a substitute; it is a supplement to our plans. It is designed to provide an opportunity for those who, for one reason or another, have not been able to take advantage of higher education, now to do so with all that TV and radio and the State-sponsored correspondence course, and the facilities of a university for setting and marking papers and conducting examinations, in awarding degrees, can provide. Nor, may I say, do we envisage this merely as a means of providing scientists and technologists. I believe a properly planned university of the air could make an immeasurable contribution to the cultural life of our country, to the enrichment of our standard of living.

Mr. Chairman, because this morning we are talking about science I have been referring so far to plans for training scientists, but of course in the whole of our university and higher education expansion programme scientists will have their place but no more than their place in the development, because the development of higher education based purely on the training of scientists and technologists would, of course, fail to meet the full human requirements of our nation. Secondly, we must hold our scientists in this country. The Royal Society has recently reported that 12 per cent of new Ph.Ds. are now leaving this country every year to go abroad. We have heard recently of universities where practically the whole scientific department has emigrated *en bloc*. Only the other day I heard of one of our most famous scientific colleges where in one particular faculty nine Ph.Ds. have been awarded this year in a field which is as relevant to the future of Britain as any subject I could think of, and of those nine, seven have already left to go to the United States. Lord Hailsham tells us that this loss of scientists is due to the deficiencies of the American educational system. His Lordship is wrong. It is due not to the deficiencies of the American educational system; it is due to the deficiencies of the British industrial system, in that we do not put a proper valuation on our trained scientists; that they are not afforded the status and the prospects to which they are entitled.

I have talked in America to British scientists who have gone abroad. It is not so much a question of salary; it is the poor valuation put on their work by British industry and in some cases by impoverished British universities; the inadequate provision of adequate research facilities and equipment. It is because in so many cases in British industry today promotion for a scientist depends on waiting for dead men's shoes. Britain is not so rich in facilities for training scientists and technologists that we can let this brain drain continue. We are not even selling the seed corn; we are giving it away.

One message I hope this Conference can send out, not only to those who are wondering whether to emigrate or not, but to those who have already emigrated is this: we want you to stay here. We want those of you who have left Britain to think about coming back, because the Britain that is going to be is going to need you.

So the next point is that we must make a more intelligent use of our scientists when we have them. Until very recently over half our trained scientists were engaged in defence projects or so-called defence projects. Real defence, of course, is essential. But so many of our scientists were employed on purely

prestige projects that never left the drawing board, and many more scientists are deployed, not on projects that are going to increase Britain's productive power, but on some new gimmick or additive to some consumer product which will enable the advertising managers to rush to the television screen to tell us all to buy a little more of something we did not even know we wanted in the first place. This is not strengthening Britain.

Scientific research in industry needs to be very purposively organised. This is one reason why we are going to establish a full Ministry of Science; not what we have today—an office of the Minister for Science, with no powers, no staff, no scientists, no clear direction of what he is about. The Labour Party has been saying for years, that we have got to get a proper organisation and a proper sponsorship of scientific research in this country, and we are glad now to have the support, the powerful if belated support, of the Federation of British Industries in their recent report to the British Government.

So now I come to the fourth point, the vital issue of applying the results of scientific research in industry, because—let us be clear—unless we can harness science to our economic planning, we are not going to get the expansion that we need. Of course, the Labour Party welcomes the Government's conversion to the idea of economic planning. We have been pressing for it for years. We welcomed the signs of conversion, of repentance, two years ago, when they told us about this. But we must warn the Government that planning pieces of paper targets alone, planning which requires for its enforcement monetary regulation and manipulation of the tax system, is not going to produce the changes in British industry which we shall require if we are to expand the production year by year, without running into an export/import crisis. The 'stop-go' economy of the last 12 years failed because the expansionary phases have not created the growth of those industries which can provide the permanent breakthrough in our export trade or can provide a lasting saving in imports, and the margin between continual repetitive crisis, on the one hand, and economic solvency on the other, is a narrow one. Monetary planning is not enough. What is needed is structural changes in British industry, and we are not going to achieve those structural changes on the basis of pre-election spurts every four years in our industry, or in the hope of just selling the overspill of the affluent society in the highly developed markets of Western Europe. What we need is new industries and it will be the job of the next Government to see that we get them. This means mobilising scientific

research in this country in producing a new technological breakthrough. We have spent thousands of millions in the past few years on misdirected research and development contracts in the field of defence. If we were now to use the technique of R. and D. contracts in civil industry I believe we could within a measurable period of time establish new industries which would make us once again one of the foremost industrial nations of the world.

We know this can be done. The National Research Development Council set up by the Labour Government, with total funds of only £5 million, has already produced new industries based on State sponsored research. What we now need to do and what we are committed to doing is, first, carefully to expand the scope of this research development and, secondly, to ensure that where new industries are established on the basis of State sponsored research the State will control the industries which result.

There are today groups of scientists in our universities, in our national research laboratories, in N.R.D.C. and in public and private industry who are frustrated because they are not being used. Harwell and Capenhurst are running down and hundreds of trained technicians will be redundant. The cancellation of missile contracts is freeing for productive work scientists and technologists who are both highly qualified and used to working in research teams. So why, Mr. Chairman, should we not give to these scientists, or, if you like, to groups of young scientists fresh from universities, the chance of producing a feasibility project study leading to full-scale Government research and development contracts. There are delegates here with experience over a wide range of British industry, who know that if we could mobilise these scientists on research projects of this kind, we could within a very short period produce a major breakthrough in a whole number of fields: perhaps some new breakthrough in marine propulsion, in aircraft guidance, in transport, in electronics, in agricultural or textile machinery. Some of these projects may fail, but many will succeed and in succeeding will provide Britain with new industries with which to conquer markets all over the world.

Yesterday we were talking about modernisation in transport. I remember seeing in a national newspaper two or three weeks ago the details of an imaginative new scientific approach to the problems of the railways. I do not know whether that is a winner or not. All I know is that it is not going on, through lack of money, and I know if somebody had produced something equally imaginative, perhaps equally fanciful in the field of defence they would have had the money years ago to

push on with it. While we are not doctrinaire, while we are prepared to see the fruits of this sponsored research developed by public and private industry alike, and while we are prepared to establish productive partnerships between the public and private industries to exploit these research successes, we hold it as a basic principle that the profits which result from State sponsored research should accrue in good measure to the community that created them.

These policies I think will provide the answer to the problem of Britain's declining industries and Britain's declining areas. We reject the Conservatives' solution of mass depopulation of Britain's traditional industrial areas. Remember this: when we set up new industries based on science there need be no argument about location, no costly bribes to private enterprise to go here rather than there: we shall provide the enterprise and we shall decide where it goes. Some of our declining industries will be revitalised, not on a basis—and I want to make this plain, because this is not our policy—of uneconomic protection or subsidies, but revitalised by mobilising these industries for new tasks.

Let me give an example. Anyone who has discussed trade prospects with Soviet leaders, as many of us have, or with some of our great Commonwealth countries, knows that there is a great demand for new chemical industries based on British research. We have the best chemists in the world, but we have never mobilised to the full the possible resources of chemical engineering to enable us to ship complete factories to these areas on a scale commensurate with their needs or our capacities. For some reason in so many of our universities, while the chemist is exalted the chemical engineer is told to go and sit somewhere below the salt. For some reason we have not developed the chemical engineering industry of this country on an adequate scale.

The Russians have talked to me of orders amounting to hundreds of millions over the next few years. A Labour Government would initiate a State-sponsored chemical engineering consortium to meet the needs, not only of Eastern Europe, but far more important, of developing Commonwealth countries. We would train and we would mobilise chemical engineers to design the plants that the world needs, plants which are at present being supplied far too often by Germany or by America on the basis of British know-how and research. And in the fabrication of this plant which the new chemical engineering industry would call into being we could bring new orders to our depressed marine and heavy engineering shops in shipbuilding and other areas.

Here again lies the answer to the economic problems that we are going to face when, as we all hope, the arms race ends in a comprehensive disarmament agreement. The economic consequences of disarmament cannot be dealt with except on a basis of socialist planning. Advanced capitalist countries are maintaining full employment today only by virtue of vast arms orders and panic would be the order of the day in Wall Street and other stock markets, the day peace breaks out. We have announced that the Labour Government will include a Minister for Disarmament, and among his duties will be to prepare for the economic problems that will follow hard on the heels of massive disarmament, because Conservative economic policies, thermostatic monetary controls, cannot deal with the problems of physical adjustment of the moving of real resources that we shall have to face.

You know this is the answer to another great problem that besets this country, the problem of employment for our young people. Last month the Ministry of Labour told us that 38,000 boys and girls, who left school in July, had not found work. This figure, as we all know, excluded many who, unable to find work, had returned to schools unfitted and ill-equipped to take them back. It excludes, too, the many who found temporary employment in blind-alley jobs. That this country should not be able to provide employment for boys and girls leaving school and going out into the world for the first time is an intolerable reflection on our so-called civilisation. Galbraith warned the world a few years ago that social imbalance is the inevitable consequence of the unplanned affluent society, and we are finding this imbalance in the growing number of young people and of old people who cannot find employment. That is why we need the new industries, the revitalisation of declining industries and declining areas, to provide new hope for the nation's youth.

Again we must relate our scientific planning to the problems of the war on world poverty. In a system of society beset by the delirium of advertising and the ceaseless drive to produce new and different variants of existing consumer goods and services, there is no thought being given to the research that is needed to find the means of increasing food production for those millions in Asia and Africa who are living on the poverty line and below the poverty line.

It is very nice that we should be putting so much research into colour television, it is very nice that we should be putting all our energies into producing bigger and better washing machines to sell in Dusseldorf. What we should be doing is to be developing the means of mass

producing simple tractors and ploughs to increase food production. In an advanced world which has long by-passed the steam engine in favour of oil and electricity as a means of propulsion we ought to be giving more thought to developing the research of this country for producing little simple one- or two-horsepower steam engines, because that is what the world needs, able to use local fuels, and capable of lifting water from *that* ditch to *those* fields a few hundred yards away. Swift saw the answer and the problem in *Gulliver's Travels* 250 years ago when he said: 'Whoever could make two ears of corn or two blades of grass to grow upon a spot of ground where only one grew before, would deserve better of mankind and do more essential service to his country than the whole race of politicians put together.'

Again, Mr. Chairman, I should like to see the scientific departments of the new universities that we have been talking about mobilised to direct their scientific research to the special problems of underdeveloped countries, the needs of biological research to provide new breakthroughs in plant breeding, in the use of fertilisers, and in animal husbandry; in all the things that are needed to increase crops and to increase production.

Then again, what is the sense of closing down railway workshops that could provide the transport equipment that would make all the difference between poverty and solvency in newly developing countries?

Labour means business about world development. We are going to establish a full-scale Ministry of Overseas Development, with a Minister of Cabinet rank, to join with the Ministry of Science in mobilising Britain's scientific wealth for the task of creating, not the means of human destruction, but the munitions of peace.

Mr. Chairman, let me conclude with what I think the message of all this is for this Conference, because in this Conference, in all our plans for the future, we are re-defining and we are re-stating our Socialism in terms of the scientific revolution. But that revolution cannot become a reality unless we are prepared to make far-reaching changes in economic and social attitudes which permeate our whole system of society.

The Britain that is going to be forged in the white heat of this revolution will be no place for restrictive practices or for outdated methods on either side of industry. We shall need a totally new attitude to the problems of apprenticeship, of training and re-training

for skill. If there is one thing where the traditional philosophy of capitalism breaks down it is in training for apprenticeship, because quite frankly it does not pay any individual firm, unless it is very altruistic or quixotic or farsighted, to train apprentices if it knows at the end of the period of training they will be snapped up by some unscrupulous firm that makes no contribution to apprenticeship training. That is what economists mean when they talk about the difference between marginal private cost and net social cost.

So we are going to need a new attitude. In some industries we shall have to get right away from the idea of apprenticeship to a single firm. There will have to be apprenticeship with the industry as a whole, and the industry will have to take responsibility for it. Indeed, if we are going to end demarcation and snobbery in our training for skill and for science why should not these apprenticeship contracts be signed with the State itself? Then again, in the Cabinet room and the board room alike those charged with the control of our affairs must be ready to think and to speak in the language of our scientific age.

For the commanding heights of British industry to be controlled today by men whose only claim is their aristocratic connections or the power of inherited wealth or speculative finance is as irrelevant to the twentieth century as would be the continued purchase of commissions in the armed forces by lordly amateurs. At the very time that even the M.C.C. has abolished the distinction between amateurs and professionals, in science and industry we are content to remain a nation of Gentlemen in a world of Players.

For those of us who have studied the formidable Soviet challenge in the education of scientists and technologists, and above all, in the ruthless application of scientific techniques in Soviet industry, know that our future lies not in military strength alone but in the efforts, the sacrifices, and above all the energies which a free people can mobilise for the future greatness of our country. Because we are democrats, we reject the methods which Communist countries are deploying in applying the results of scientific research to industrial life, but because we care deeply about the future of Britain, we must use all the resources of democratic planning, all the latent and underdeveloped energies and skills of our people, to ensure Britain's standing in the world. That is the message which I believe will go out from this Conference to the people of Britain and to the people of the world.

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