

A New Agenda for Peace and Justice

Speech at the Progressive Alliance

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Thank you,

And let me start by thanking all of you for your attendance, your energy and your ideas over the past two days.

From across the globe, progressives have come together to prove that we have the radical insights and practical policies to shape the future.

From Argentina to Mongolia; from Costa Rica to Cameroun, from across this continent, and beyond.

Thank you to the Progressive Alliance for bringing us together.

We've met some difficult challenges head-on.

We've recognised the scale of the tasks ahead.

And we've conducted ourselves as brothers, sisters, and friends, prepared to disagree, of course, but unwilling to break the bonds of solidarity that bind us one to the other.

As progressives, we are best placed not only to predict, identify and analyse the challenges ahead, we are also most likely going to be ones to supply the solutions.

When considering our programme title 'a new agenda for peace and justice', I was struck by the thought that whilst we may require a 'new agenda' we are facing some very old problems:

Poverty.

War.

Worklessness.

Slavery.

Racism and fascism.

On **poverty** – we can be proud that extreme poverty rates have been cut by more than half since 1990. But we remain angry that 836 million people, our fellow citizens, live in extreme poverty, according to the United Nations.

Extreme poverty condemns millions to mere existence, no time for education or leisure, just a daily struggle to survive.

One in five people in developing regions living on less than \$1.25 a day, and millions more are just above the poverty line, at risk of going under at any time.

Extreme poverty is so often linked to **war** and regional conflict.

10,000 killed in Afghanistan. 14,000 killed in Iraq. 55,000 killed in Syria. And that's just this year so far.

And crises blight the people in many other regions affected by war from Somalia to Sudan, from Yemen to Libya.

And where war and poverty tears apart countries and communities, the opportunities disappear for rewarding, fulfilling **work**.

According to the International Labor Organization the global number of people unemployed will rise to 199.4 million this year, and rise again next year by another million, meaning that 200 million people will have no fulfilling work.

Many of the parties represented here today were formed from workers' organisations and trade unions. They were born in coal mines and factories and farms and steelworks and shipyards.

The socialist movement in the 20th century came from an organised working class.

Today, we have a disorganised, non-working class: 200 million people, many of them young, with no work, day after day.

What a scandalous waste of human talent. What a missed opportunity.

And whilst there are millions out of work, who want to work, there are millions forced into work against their will. Our modern world carries the stain of **slavery**. The UN estimates up to 30 million people are enslaved. This is a multi-billion dollar industry, built by ruthless traffickers and criminal gangs. India has 18 million slaves, China 3.4 million, Pakistan 2.1 million and Bangladesh 1.5 million. This includes bonded labour, child labour, and sex slaves.

The US State Department estimates that up to 820,000 people are trafficked across borders each year: and 7 out of every 10 is a woman or girl.

And into this global maelstrom steps dark forces of nationalism, populism and **fascism**. Just as in the 1930s, where there is discord and hopelessness, so nationalists and fascists can exploit people's fears and lack of confidence.

Just consider the role of fear and anti-immigrant sentiment stoked up the UK Independence Party (UKIP) ahead of the UK's vote on Brexit.

Of course we are patriotic about our own peoples and nations. We love our countries. But we recognise the difference between a patriot and a nationalist: a patriot loves his or her own country; a nationalist hates everyone else's country.

So these are some of the old problems that we are confronting.

I'm reminded of the words of George Orwell who wrote in 1937 that

'the world is a raft sailing through space with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody; the idea that we must cooperate and see to it that everyone does his fair share of the work and gets his fair share of the provisions seems so blatantly obvious that one would say that no one could possibly fail to accept it, unless he had some corrupt motive for clinging to the present system.'

What Orwell said all those years ago, remains true today: The earth's resources remain in too few hands, and opportunities are denied to too many.

But they are joined by some very new problems too: the climate is warming, threatening millions in coastal regions;

Fanatical terrorists such as ISIL, Al-Qaeda or Boko Haram threaten our very way of life;

Millions of people have their lives damaged by drugs, and the criminals who supply them.

The technological revolution threatens traditional jobs and industries, without supplying easy alternatives.

In many of our countries, the population is aging, placing growing burdens on traditional systems of insurance, pensions and healthcare.

And all around us, traditional institutions are being undermined, trust in politics is falling, people are keen for alternatives, and there is a growing resentment and anger towards elites, governments, parties and politicians.

This is just one of the consequences of the global crash that we are dealing with nearly a decade later.

So what should our proper response be?

I think the proper progressive response should firstly not to panic! In the last century, the progressives came through a terrible world war and build the robust institutions that we still value seventy years later: the United Nations, the European Union, bodies for world peace, trade and co-operation.

In the previous centuries, the progressives ended the Atlantic Slave Trade, fought for, and won, votes for women, outlawed racial discrimination and expanded universal education and healthcare.

Societies' great advances in science, education, and growing life expectancy can be credited to the great cause of progress we all represent.

So we can be confident of our collective strength and ingenuity to shape humanity's future in no less a systemic and seismic fashion.

But we should also be clear: the old answers will not be the answers to the new challenges. We cannot sing the old songs, mouth the old slogans, wave the old banners, and hope for a return to past triumphs.

No, our approach must be anchored in the future, attached like a sail on a mast to modernity.

Our political appeal must be rooted in our progressive values – human rights, global justice, freedom from tyranny and opportunity for all – but the ways in which we express our values, through policies, must be in tune with the modern world.

We cannot resist the technological revolution, any more than we can stop the waves or the wind.

So we must shape it, harness it, make it work to the ends of human happiness not personal profit.

If the robots are coming, we must make sure they work for us, not us for them!

We cannot build walls to stop people travelling across borders (no matter what Donald Trump thinks) so we need a new, humane approach to mass migration which recognises the economic and social benefits that immigration brings, and also recognises that where immigration has a big impact, we need to help communities adjust.

We cannot let millions languish on the scrap heap of unemployment, so we need to create work for young people and older workers, with government schemes to retrain workers for the new jobs in green technologies, start-ups and disrupter companies.

We cannot ignore the imbalance of power in our societies, between men and women, between different races and ethnicities, and between different sexualities, so we must tackle prejudice, create new frameworks of law, and smash the shackles of oppression which hold people back.

We must work beyond national borders, and even beyond continental boundaries. Today, we live in the global village. We can get on an aeroplane pretty much anywhere, and end up pretty much anywhere else. The young, in particular, are citizens of the world, connected by technology, unbothered by old boundaries.

So we need strong international institutions, including a stronger, bigger United Nations, capable of engendering and maintaining peace across the globe.

And crucially, friends, these institutions must be democratic, transparent, incorruptible, accountable to the people, and shaped by people-power, not elites.

The same goes for our national parliaments, our devolved and regional assemblies, and our own political party structures. If we want and expect people to value democracy, to participate in democracy, and to defend democracy against other forms of governance, then we must make democracy work for everyone.

If we view democracy through the narrow lens of a vote every few years, then we shouldn't be surprised if populism supplies a more interesting outlet for people's frustrations.

Instead, we need to 'democratise our democracy', constantly exploring new ways to involve and engage.

More women, young people and minorities as elected representatives.

More systems for direct involvement of citizens between elections, on citizens juries and panels.

More ways to shine a light on the inner workings of parliaments.

More ways to hold representatives to account.

And proper support for elected representatives to do their jobs, including resources for campaigning, research and communications.

This then, is our approach. More light. More hope. More confidence in the people. Traditional values informing our new agenda.

And let's be clear. Who else is going to deliver this new future? The old right-wing parties cling to the past ways and the old institutions. The new populist movements fizzle and explode like a firework, but then fade from view leaving little behind.

And that leaves us: the progressives.

Yes, we are inspired by our vision of a world free from poverty, war and hunger, and we believe such a world is possible.

But we are builders as well as dreamers.

We are hard-headed and practical. We are realists. We know it won't be easy. But we will build a new world the only way we know how: brick by brick, building peace, building prosperity, building the better world we all desire.

Thank you.