

The trade union movement will work with Keir Starmer to deliver change.

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What an extraordinary moment in British politics. Labour back in power with a near-record majority. The Conservatives brutally ejected from office. A dozen cabinet members gone. A red wave in Scotland at the SNP's expense. But while it's easy to get carried away by the seismic nature of this election – we cannot afford to be distracted. We have a country to fix.

When I congratulated Keir Starmer this morning my message to him was clear. The trade union movement stands ready to work with the new government to repair and rebuild Britain – and to deliver the change working people desperately need. After 14 years of wretched Tory rule and chaos, I am not blind to the size of the task this incoming government faces.

The Conservatives have left behind a trail of destruction for all to see. Stagnant growth and wages. Rising in-work poverty. Broken public services. The charge sheet goes on and on. But despite all of the damage wrought, I am optimistic. After nearly a decade and a half in opposition, Labour can finally begin transforming the country – an urgent and necessary challenge that must be grasped with both hands. So where should we start?

First and foremost, we need to get our economy growing again. Unions and business have been crying out for years for a proper industrial strategy. The Green Prosperity Plan starts us on the road to economic recovery. And it will be a breath of fresh air to work with ministers who are actually serious about protecting and creating good jobs, and boosting skills and productivity.

But securing growth alone is not enough – we also need better living standards. Labour needs to act urgently to make work pay. We currently have over four million people who are trapped in jobs that offer little or no financial security. This is a national disgrace. The UK's long experiment with a low-wage, low-rights economy has been terrible for productivity and workers alike. Labour's New Deal for Working People – delivered in full – will help end the Tories' race to the bottom on employment standards.

A race to the bottom that has allowed good employers to be undercut by the bad, and scandals like the illegal sacking of 800 seafarers at P&O Ferries go unpunished. Labour's plans will be a genuine game changer. Employment rights from day one. A ban on zero-hours contracts. An end to fire and rehire. New rights for unions to access the workplace. And the scrapping of anti-union legislation.

These are all part of a comprehensive new package of rights that will be good for workers, good for businesses and good for the UK economy. Inevitably there will be some siren voices in the business community who will seek to delay and water down this legislation. But it is vital Labour stays the course and ignores the doomsayers. All the tired arguments that have been made against improved rights and protections at work echo those used against the minimum wage – now widely acknowledged to be one of the great policy successes of the last 25 years.

The naysayers were wrong then and they are wrong now. It is also vital that immediate work begins on repairing our crumbling public realm. At the heart of the pressures on our schools, hospitals, prisons and social care system is a huge workforce crisis. Across the NHS and social care alone there are nearly 300,000 staffing vacancies and in education the number of teaching vacancies has more than doubled in the past three years.

With morale at rock bottom – after more than a decade of Tory vandalism and neglect – Labour has the chance to signal a new direction of travel. We've already seen really encouraging commitments on scrapping tax breaks for private schools to fund new teachers in the state sector, and on closing non-dom loopholes to help bring down waiting lists. It's no secret though that I want the party to go further and that we explore all funding options for rebuilding our public services.

The TUC has previously called for a national conversation on taxing wealth and I remain convinced that policies like equalising Capital Gains Tax with the taxes paid on earnings could bring in much-needed revenues. People voted in this election because they wanted real change – and Reform's populist insurgence is a timely warning of what happens when governments fail to act.

And this question of delivery is the crux of the matter. After 14 years of national decline the country has finally got the Labour government it desperately needs. I know how ambitious Keir Starmer and his team are to improve working people's lives, and the trade union movement wants to work with them. Of course there will be moments of tension. That comes with being a critical friend. Our job is to speak up for working people and our members and to make sure their voices are heard at the heart of government – even when the message is difficult.

But the prospect of national renewal is real. Decent jobs, strong public services, a brighter, fairer future for all our children. The work will be hard and it starts today – but together we can realise a better future.

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