

SONNY LEONG | CHINESE FOR LABOUR NEW YEAR BANQUET
FEBRUARY 2017

Thank you so much.

On behalf of Chinese for Labour,
I want to say a very warm welcome
and a happy New Year!

It is wonderful to be amongst so many friends -
thank you for taking the time
to be with us.

You know,
when I gave my welcome speech last year,
I joked that
thinking about the 12 months leading up to it .
losing the 2015 election,
a Tory majority
and a Labour Party at war with itself .
had driven me to need a drink.

Another twelve months on,
and I'm not going to lie to you,
that joke has **not** aged well.

What a year since we met here last.

I would recount all that has happened .
we don't have that kind of time tonight.

I don't think
there has ever been a year like it
in my lifetime.

I imagine the last time
that the world was in such a state of flux
as we find ourselves in today
was in 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Yet while that year felt like
and was an enormous change
in a very positive direction,
that can't be said to be true
of the time we are living now.

Then the world seemed to be coming together,
whereas now
it seems to be splitting at the seams.

That's not helped
when every time you check the news
there is a new shock,
a new tremor
or a new tweet by Donald Trump!

But those of you who know me,
know that I'm an optimist.

Yes, the future is uncertain.

Yes, we've seen a return of a xenophobic,
sometimes racist rhetoric and behaviour
that we thought we'd seen the last of.

Yes, there is, right now,
an absence of a politics of hope strong enough
to counter the growing force
of a politics of fear.

But like some of you here tonight,
I remember what it used to be like.

I know that we've overcome these things before,
often in worse forms than they exist at the moment.

That doesn't make the now any better
for those who are suffering,
or those who will,
but it does tell us that together
we can and will overcome.

This re-emergence of division
is not the final destination.
As the last 25 years have shown:
there is no such thing as the End of History.

I subscribe much more
to that old Martin Luther King quote that
"The arc of the moral universe is long,
and it bends towards justice."

But it only bends that way
because we . people of every walk of life .
grab it in our hands
and bend it towards justice and towards progress.

After all .
that is what this great Labour Party
was founded to do and has done
each and every time
it has been in government.

That is why all of us are here .
because we believe in the importance of justice
and social progress,
and our ability to shape and secure it.

And despite being shocked .
and quite possibly scarred .
by the events of the last two years,

we have to now re-double
our efforts and determination.

Not only because the longer that we delay,
the harder the task .
but it is also now the Year of the Fire Rooster!

According to the Zodiac,
the year 2017 will be dominated
by the orientation towards progress, honour
and increased integrity.

That may be hard to believe
now that Nigel Farage has got his own radio show,
but . as ever .
it is up to us to make it so!

The question for each of us
must ask ourselves is .
are we up to it?

And so tonight,
I would like to make a simple observation
about the challenge that lies ahead.

It is that
we haven't won the argument
about how one views and measures
the success and strength of a society,

and that if we are going to
grab that arc of the moral universe
and bend it towards justice .
then we have to have and win that argument.

What do I mean by that?

Take the economy as an example.

It might have told us
that the economy was booming
or in recovery,
but it didn't tell enough
about the struggles of people
in post-industrialised towns.

Take job numbers.

Under this Conservative government,
total numbers may have grown,
but don't say anything
about how all the risk of work
has been transferred from business to the worker,
increasing insecurity on those, for example,
who are on zero hour and exploitative contracts.

Businesses are seen to be growing,
but the truth is that all the benefits
went to its bosses.

It leads to a needlessly antagonistic and combative society, with all of us being the poorer for it.

- We've seen it in the economy, where business leaders and workers are too often seen in opposite trenches, rather than working together for the long-term, sustainable benefit.
- We've seen it in the fall-out of the EU Referendum and the growing divide between those who voted leave and remain, where every call for moderation is treated as a betrayal of the result.

Where even Supreme Court judges are called traitors for applying the law or Civil Servants feel they have to resign because they see difficulty ahead.

- And, of course, we've seen it on immigration, where a combination of media and right-wing politicians have over years painted this vicious, false picture of immigrants benefitting from the British public or abusing the British system.

A picture that incites people to blame.

As we know in Chinese for Labour .
that immediate condemnation
makes it harder to fight real discrimination and racism.

That is why we are supporting % Day without Us+
on 20 February where all of us will come together
to celebrate the contribution that migrants make
- Come and join us

We contribute hugely
to all aspects of life here in the UK
from our economy to our businesses, arts and public services.

As China is poised to become the world's largest
economy by 2030, through our shared heritage
we can play a part in strengthening UK-China relations.

Making and winning important arguments
are the keys to Labour's return to government:
putting forward a compelling and muscular
vision of the future .
backed up by practical policies .
that is about the success of all of us,
not just that of some of us.

Winning that argument
will allow us to take the courageous steps
we need to take to re-build our society .
and to re-build Labour's vote.

It will allow us to successfully challenge
the current economic model.

We cannot accept globalisation as it is
given the impact it has had
on driving divisions within our society.

We have to say that shareholder value
isn't as important
as the value of our citizens.

Especially given
the impact of the rapid development of technology
on the job market,
we have to proactively invest
in those things that will create jobs
and enhance our shared life.

We have to be brave and bold
in the investments we will make
in infrastructure, roads, rail and housing.

They are the argument
and the evidence for the role of government
to be an investor
in building our society's future.

And we have to challenge ourselves
to put forward a platform
that offers everyone in society
opportunity and hope,
because despair and hopelessness
spreads through society like a disease.

An ambitious programme like this
will be possible,
if we win the argument
for our vision of society.

If we don't,
we will always be fighting
on someone else's battlefield.

We might win some policy arguments,
but we won't win the future.

Re-discovering our essential purpose .
of building the UK's society
on a basis of mutuality and reciprocity .
may seem a simple concept .
but it is something we have forgotten

in the cut and thrust of politics
and the mania of the last year:

that politics is about our vision
of how society should work
and winning power
so we can implement deliverable policies that will .
step-after-painful-step .
realise it.

We find ourselves
at a historically challenging time,
where what we hold dear is under threat.

Yet, seeing the friends, talent,
and colleagues around this room,
I believe that working together
we can win a majority of this country
to our vision of a society
not in aggregate and not in silos .
but a society built on the strength of our common endeavour
and on the strength of the connections
between us that make us British.

That is why
I am so proud to be Chair of Chinese for Labour,
because we are up for the fight .
working with every part of the Labour family.

That is why I must thank
our incredibly hard working team,
who this year won a Socialist Society of the Year Award
for our work in combatting discrimination and hatred after Brexit.

And it's why we are so grateful to you
for your unstinting support .
we couldn't do it without you.

Thank you . and have a wonderful night