

PM speech at USDAW conference: 27 April 2026

27.4.2026 - | Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

The Prime Minister's speech at USDAW conference 2026.

Thank you...

Thank you, Jane.

Thank you Joanne.

It is great to be here for your annual delegate meeting as General Secretary.

And I've heard that yesterday and today that this is going really well here.

So it's fantastic to be invited to be with you, and it's always great to be here in this room, in this environment at your conference.

I was here two years ago and I was here several years before that.

But last time I was here as Leader of the Opposition. This time I am here as Prime Minister working with you to deliver the change that we need across our country.

But I want to start by sharing something with you...

It's from a shopworker called Finnola...

Who is here with us today...

She's an USDAW rep...

She's worked in a supermarket for eleven years...

And last year, at the TUC Congress reception...

Finnola found me and just gave me a letter for me to read.

I want to share it with you because this is the letter. She said:

"A few years ago, I was verbally abused by a customer when I asked if he needed assistance.

"He started shouting racist remarks at me. And he threatened to go after my children."

She said: "I felt so scared, my legs were shaking."

Finnola then said in her letter to me: "The next day I wanted to stay at home. My mental health was in a terrible place.

"But as a single parent, reliant on Statutory Sick Pay, I couldn't afford to lose a day of pay."

And the reason why Finnola had given me the letter - and she went on to say:

"This is why the Employment Rights Bill is so important.

" It will increase the responsibility for employers to protect workers like me from harassment.

"And it will mean all workers will have access to sick pay from day one."

Finnola thank you – I think you are in Region C. Would you mind standing up so we can give you a round of applause?

Finnola – thank you for handing that letter to me.

What you went through was really awful.

But the really important thing is – we heard you...

We passed that Bill...

We stood firm on the side of working people.

And it is now, Finnola, the law of this land...

For you and every single person in this country...

To finally enjoy the protections you deserve at work.

Sick pay – from day one...

Paternity leave – from day one...

Fire and rehire – scrapped...

Protection for whistle-blowers...

No more gagging orders on sexual harassment...

No more exploitative zero-hour contracts...

Stronger collective consultation rights – and I know how important that is for shopworkers...

And, underpinning all of that...

A proper living wage...

The embodiment of the simple demand...

That has always guided the labour movement...

A fair day's pay – for a fair day's work...

That is what we have delivered, together.

That is a Britain fair for all.

And delegates – it's more than just a change in the law.

Because as Finnola said in another part of her letter...

We faced huge resistance.

I mean - we announced those proposals back in 2022 - nearly four years ago now.

And from day one...

Some people wanted to stop it at all costs.

It's a reminder for all of us that everything in politics...

Everything that the labour movement has achieved over the years...

It's always hard-won and hard-fought for...

Everything.

You have to stand firm...

You have to stand together...

You have to fight.

But when we do that...

Then together - we send a message to every corner of our country...

To the shop-workers...

But also to the cleaners...

The carers...

The drivers...

Technicians...

Cooks...

Bar tenders...

The working people of this country...

That whatever your job, whatever your background...

You deserve security, respect and fair pay at work...

That is the Britain we are building...

A country - that is fair for all.

And conference I'll always fight for working people...

Because I know exactly whose side I'm on.

Let me tell you about another worker...

A carer.

Works long hour on low pay.

Year after year after year.

She was a care worker during the pandemic.

Fourteen-hour shifts, often overnight.

And do you know - in the pandemic, just like Finnola...

Some care workers didn't have sick pay...

So if they were sick - they had to stay at home and simply not got paid at all.

In the pandemic - as we were all clapping for them...

Recognising what they were doing for our country.

Well, delegates...

That care-worker is my sister.

And every day I ask myself - does Britain work for her?

Does Britain work for people like my late brother?

I've had a life touched by opportunity - I grew up working class and I've been lucky.

But Nick, my brother...

He had difficulties learning and spent his entire adult life going from one job to the next.

Does Britain work for people like him?

Because there are millions of people like that.

People who have been ignored by politics for years.

People who don't get the dignity and respect that they deserve...

And who don't get the opportunity...

To go as far as their talent and effort would take them.

So yes - I know whose side I am on.

I'm on the side of the young people, whose gifts lie in their hands...

Who work hard - want their talents to be recognised...

Just want an opportunity in their community.

That's why I'm boosting apprenticeships...

Setting up new Technical Excellence Colleges...

Investing in special needs education...

And giving every young person in the country, struggling to find work...

The guarantee of training, work support or an apprenticeship.

I'm on the side of the children who during austerity had to go to school without breakfast.

Cold, because they couldn't afford to put their heating on...

Tired, because the same thing happened yesterday and the day before that and the day before that.

That's why I've extended free school meals...

Why I'm setting up free breakfast clubs in every primary school...

And why I've ended the shameful two-child benefit limit...

Lifting - nearly half a million children out of poverty and giving them the chance that they deserve in life.

And I'm on the side of working people, just like my sister...

The backbone of this country...

People who work harder and harder...

But see their pay getting them less and less...

The people - who worry about the cost of living...

They're not asking for the world...

They want a bit of security...

Peace of mind...

And a little bit of extra money...

So they can treat their kids, every now and again.

That's who's side I am on, delegates...

That is why I've frozen rail fares...

Frozen prescription charges...

Given renters more power...

Capped ground rents...

Raised the living wage by a record amount...

And why - whatever happens in the Middle East...

We have cut your energy bills...

And we have capped them until July.

Delegates...

That is another thing I will always stand firm on.

I will never let this country be dragged into a war that is not in our interest - never.

That is a lesson British politics should have learnt a long time ago, with Iraq.

And yet - when the rush to war began on Iran...

I was heavily criticised by others...

Who had no thought for the consequences...

For our country - for your family.

But that is not how I operate.

Because I have working people in my minds eye...

For every decision.

And yet, delegates...

I have to level with you about Iran.

Because the truth is - the economic consequences could still be with us for some time.

You don't need to be a politician to know that...

You can see it on every petrol forecourt across the country.

I'll repeat what I just said, because it's important...

In April - because of decisions we made at the budget...

Your gas bills came down.

And they will stay down until July - whatever happens in Iran.

Fuel duty is also frozen until September.

We've supported people who heat their homes using oil.

And we are monitoring this daily...

So delegates for example - tomorrow...

I am chairing a meeting in COBR on the impact...

Bringing in people from the Bank of England...

So you can be sure...

We will stand by working people in this crisis.

But look - just like with Iraq years ago, there is a deeper lesson here.

One that British politics has continually refused to learn.

Because what Iran shows - is that once again...

Events happening miles away from Britain...

Have the capacity to hurt our living standards, our future, and our security.

And so our response will define, not just this Government...

But arguably - this generation.

And so this time it must be different.

We cannot respond to this moment...

By thinking we just need to get back to the status quo...

That is the mistake that was made after the 2008 financial crash, with austerity...

It was made in Brexit...

Covid...

And the Ukraine war...

And we cannot add Iran to that list.

Because the status quo manifestly failed working people...

It kept your wages low...

The economy stagnant...

And your public services - decimated.

In other words - the status quo...

Made working people like you: pay the price.

I would not go back to that - even if I could...

And delegates - we can't...

Because the world has changed.

It is more volatile and dangerous now than at any other point in my lifetime, and I'm sure in yours.

It will test and test again, every element of our security...

Our economic security...

Our energy security...

Our defence security.

That's why we've had to confront such difficult decisions...

We are working at pace to give Britain a stronger foundation...

Trying to make us a more resilient country...

So that we can weather, not just this storm...

But all the storms that are going to be much more frequent in this dangerous world.

It's about resilience.

That's what gives us security and control...

Without it, we are constantly pushed off course by events beyond our borders.

But with it, we have the power to act...

We can strengthen our security...

Take control of our future...

And with that control...

We can deliver the fairer Britain that working people want to see.

Now you can see this in everything we've done...

Before and during the Middle East crisis.

Yes - we capped your energy bills...

But we've also invested in clean British energy...

That's the only way to free us from tyrants like Putin who can manipulate gas prices...

And so we've backed British power...

Taken control of our energy security.

Yes - we've stayed out of the war...

But we've also rebuilt our alliances in Europe...

Boosted our defences with the biggest sustained investment since the Cold War...

Backed British jobs...

And taken control of our defence security.

And yes – we have taken steps to push your wages up, as you deserve...

But we've also launched an ambitious industrial strategy...

Repaired the public finances...

And given ordinary people, in places like Blackpool...

The power to decide how we rebuild together...

That's our Pride in Place investment programme...

We put those with skin in the game...

In charge of their community...

To give you more control over what matters to you.

And delegates – I know what matters to you, particularly in this room, and those that you represent...

Is security in your workplace.

Greater stability in the hours that you work...

Regular hours – each week...

So you can plan work around your family life.

This is my point...

Security isn't something that is delivered by Government...

It is something that has to be felt.

And you should feel safe and secure in your workplace...

That is fundamental.

It is your right.

Now, I started this by reading out Finnola's letter...

And when you do that with a letter, during a speech like this...

You can give the impression, you know that...

This example is extraordinary.

But it's not – is it?

Finnola's experience is the kind of thing happens every day, right across this country...

Working people, grafters – go to work, do the right thing, keep our high streets thriving...

And yet too often they are abused or assaulted by people who think they can get away with it...

And just cheat the system.

It's disgraceful.

It is disgraceful - that people, just working in their shop, have to take abuse from customers.

It is disgraceful - that people feel sick to the stomach thinking about how they are going to get through the day...

And it is disgraceful - that people can have their lives and livelihoods ruined by persistent shop theft.

So – first of all, I want you to know – that we see this...

We're not going to dismiss it...

We're not going to fob you off with half-measures.

We are currently reforming the police across the country...

So we can free up their time and their money...

To focus more on street policing...

Neighbourhood policing...

Cracking down on anti-social behaviour...

We've already got an extra 3000 neighbourhood police on the streets...

And there's more to come.

We've scrapped the ridiculous regulation...

Where stolen goods worth less than £200 would not be properly investigated...

That was a shoplifters' charter – and we've ended it. And not before time.

And we've toughened up punishment too...

We're giving police stronger powers...

Making the abuse and assault of retail workers a specific crime...

Giving you the same protections as emergency workers. And you deserve it.

And look – I'm not blind to how big this challenge is...

But the number of people charged has gone up by 17% in the latest stats...

Shop theft is down – it's only slightly down...

But the tide could be turning.

There's also the hope of technology...

Because in some parts of the country...

Police and retailers have been using technology that sends CCTV footage through to the police – immediately.

So there's no delay...

No risk that the footage might be wiped before evidence can be collated...

You're all familiar with that.

It all happens straight away, goes straight through...

And in some of those areas where those trials are taking place...

The police are solving double the number of shop thefts – double.

So I want to see that rolled out across the country...

Make a real difference...

Because this Government has your back...

We are calling time on the free-for-all...

And we are standing firm, together...

Against the disgraceful crime of shop theft.

(5)

And you know – what is true of shoplifting...

Is true of everything...

It is how we change this country...

We change it – together.

I know times are tough – they've been tough for years...

I've seen it through my own family.

And so given everything that working people have been through because of politics...

I know it's a bit rich for politicians to say – Britain needs you...

I get that.

But I've always believed in partnership.

Those have always been my values when it comes to this movement...

To business...

To the whole country.

Because I fundamentally believe...

That the common bond of our country...

The ground that we all share and love... .

It is stronger than the grievance and division we see in so much of politics.

And so - bottling the pride that you all feel...

For your workplace...

Your community...

Your country...

That is the key to changing Britain...

And coming out of this period...

Stronger and fairer.

And I tell you now...

I will fight for that with every breath I have...

I will fight for working people...

Fight - for the tolerant, decent, respectful Britain that I know and I love...

Because that is my politics and it is time...

To strengthen our security...

Take control of our future...

And build a Britain that is fair for all.

Thank you so much conference.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-usdaw-conference-27-april-2026>