Office of the Mayor

Mayoral Speech
New Zealand Labour Party Annual Conference Welcome
Dunedin, Friday, 2 November 2018

Tēnā koutou katoa e huihui mai nei
Ki nga mate – haere, haere, haere e tu ra
Ki te whare e tu, e tu, e tu
E ngā manuhiri, harae mai ki Otepoti
E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rakatira mā
Tēnā kōutou
E ngā iwi
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tamatoa katoa

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern
Labour Party President Nigel Haworth
Te Tai Tonga Labour MP Rino Tirikatene
Minister for Local Government Hon Nanaia Mahuta
Other government ministers
Local Labour MPs Hon David Clark and Clare Curran
Labour Party MPs
Labour Party members
Ladies and gentlemen

Welcome to Dunedin for the New Zealand Labour Party Conference for 2018.

It is appropriate you’ve chosen our city as the location for this year’s conference. Otepoti/Dunedin has a long, proud history of progressive, social democratic thinking and social activism in line with core Labour Party’s values.

Indeed, the Labour Party’s productive 100+ years is due, at least in part, to Dunedin and its place, not only as New Zealand’s first city and business centre, but also a centre of inclusive socio/political reform in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

A little bit of context. Dunedin’s early, and indeed enduring attraction centres on Otago Harbour – one of the area’s greatest resources for both manawhenua and later arrivals.

Maori started settling here from about 1200. They were attracted by the plentiful food sources provided by the harbour, and the security of mooring for their waka and the hope of security against attack from enemies provided by the Harbour Headland Pukekura/Taiaroa Head. Manawhenua established the kaiakitanga for this place that the Dunedin community now shares responsibility for.

Next came the Scots, arriving in 1848 and looking to establish a self-sufficient, Presbyterian farming community.
After those Scottish settlers arrived, they were assisted and sustained by the local Maori who helped them with housing and food over that first crucial year when they had few means of supporting themselves.

Some of the settlers’ surviving diaries acknowledge that they might not have been able to get by without that manaakitanga – a principle of welcoming care enshrined in our Council’s Social Wellbeing Strategy and expressed latterly in our city’s welcome for Syrian refugees.

The cooperative bond between manawhenua and the wider Dunedin community remains today. I and my Council greatly value the warmth and mutual respect of our ever-growing partnership, with Kai Tahu – both at runaka and iwi levels, as we explore further strengthening that partnership. We are increasingly giving concrete expression to our city’s coat of arms which bears a kilted highlander on one side and a Maori warrior on the other.

It is those early Scots, however, to whom we owe two of the city’s other important foundation values. First the focus on democratic egalitarianism – springing from the Free Church’s insistence on congregations’ right to choose their own clergy.

Second the city’s reverence for education – for literacy, learning and literature – for both girls and boys. The Scots set up the University of Otago in 1869 and among other institutions, the first public girls high school in the southern hemisphere, Otago Girls High School, in 1871.

Dunedin’s Presbyterian Church, particularly under Reverend Rutherford Waddell, was a vigorous promoter of social justice in the late 19th century.

In 1888, Rev Waddell delivered what would become a famous sermon on the 'sin of cheapness', arguing that a lust for low prices was wages down to below subsistence level. That sermon particularly highlighted the issue of sweatshop labour and eventually led to a raft of social and labour reforms in New Zealand. I suspect I’m not the only one who thinks that sermon continues to be relevant.

Inter-racial marriage – very early on – and more widely later, marriages across class and sectarian lines, and porous professional and business boundaries were much more common in Dunedin than in Britain of the time or indeed than in other parts of New Zealand.

Dunedin also led the way when it came to gender equality.

Sir Julius Vogel, founder of the Otago Daily Times and later Premier of New Zealand, introduced the first women's suffrage bill to Parliament in 1887. The women's suffrage movement in the 1890s was strong in Dunedin – more signatures for suffrage petitions were collected per capita here than in other centres.

As we know, New Zealand women gained the right to vote in 1893 – a world first. A series of other 'firsts' for women were soon to follow in Dunedin:

- **Emily Siedeberg** was the country’s first female medical graduate in 1896, and served as Medical Superintendent of the local St Helen's Hospital for 33 years.

- **Ethel Benjamin** was New Zealand's first female lawyer. She ran a successful legal practice in Dunedin with the majority of her cases involving domestic abuse, divorce and adoption.

- And **Ethel McMillan** was the first woman elected to the Dunedin City Council in 1950. As well as serving as a councillor for 30 years, Ethel was the North Dunedin Labour MP from 1953 to 1975.

So, we have a proud heritage – social, intellectual, commercial – and cultural – with hoards of taoka and literary treasures endowed to the city by the business benefactors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
However, Dunedin pretty much stopped developing around the time of World War One. Part of the reason for the slow down must have been the wartime loss of nearly 2000 young men from a population of only 70,000 at the time.

But centralisation – of both government and the private sector – throughout the 20th century also took its toll. The less control the community had at a local level, the more inward looking we became, and the further backwards we went. More recent examples include the loss of jobs through Kiwirail's closure of the Hillside Engineering Workshops and the downsizing of AgResearch's Invermay research facility.

But fast forward to 2018, and Dunedin has gone ‘back to the future’ by re-focusing on our original strengths in innovation and being outward-looking. Our city is now experiencing a strong resurgence.

We’re seeing sustained (and sustainable) economic development, and rising confidence across the city.

Latest figures show our city’s estimated population grew by 1900 to just over 130,000 in the year ending June 2018, following an increase of 1800 the year before. That follows decades of very little growth.

What's even more important than the numbers, is that the bulk of the increases appear to be in the 15-39-year age group – people of a working/family age. That helps to make our economy and our community more sustainable.

So, what are the reasons for our current resurgence?

A lot of it has to do with our community taking more ownership of what is important to us – our values, our strengths and our aspirations – who we are as a city and a community – and, as importantly, who we want to be.

And Dunedin offers excellent work, business and education opportunities, but perhaps more importantly, it offers a quality of life that is hard to beat.

And enhancing a place's 'liveability” is something best achieved at a local level – which is why we are delighted to this Government leading the charge to reinstate the four well-beings (social, economic, environmental and cultural) in the Local Government Act. The Local Government (Community Wellbeing) Amendment Bill recognises that councils have a critical role in fostering liveable communities. It is way more than simply providing "core services". It's essentially about placemaking.

Of course, as a council, we need to keep providing, maintaining and improving all the 'business as usual’ services that keep the city ticking over.

But on the back of a renewed appreciation and recognition of the wonderful lifestyle assets Dunedin has, Council has a major role in facilitating and investing in things that make Dunedin a more attractive place to live, work, study and do business.

We’ve had many recent successes in this regard.

A renewed pride in our impressive built heritage has emerged, as people open their eyes to the beauty and important history of our city, which has the largest concentration of Victorian and Edwardian architecture in the country. Ten years ago, those buildings were widely regarded as a liability. They are now appreciated as among our city’s most significant assets.

So the area known as the Warehouse Precinct is thriving after a significant regeneration partnership project. The area now houses all manner of businesses from boutique chocolatiers to tech companies, interspersed with outstanding street art.
We are also putting an increased emphasis on creative arts – building on our strong history of visual, performance and literary artistic endeavour. That’s recognised internationally by our designation as a UNESCO Creative City of Literature, which showcases our storytellers to the world and connects us with over 150 other creative cities like Edinburgh, Prague, Melbourne, Barcelona and Beijing.

That outward-looking spirit extends to other strong civic relationships, particularly with our Chinese sister city, Shanghai. That relationship is attracting more international students and visitors to Dunedin each year, along with other mutually productive business, education and research interactions.

Our harbour port continues to help us export our agricultural produce to the world, but also now plays a vital role in our growing tourist industry, being the port of call for tens of thousands of cruise ship passengers each year.

Not far from here, New Zealand’s first and only multi-use covered stadium, has this year already hosted Ed Sheeran, Robbie Williams, Kendrick Lamar, Roger Waters and Pink, and is arguably the country’s premier ground for viewing sports.

And in becoming the first southern hemisphere city with 1 gig per second broadband, a new breed of talented and innovative IT businesses are emerging, like computer gaming developers, and film and production businesses.

To help further grow Dunedin’s IT sector and economy, the city is progressing a business case to the Provincial Growth Fund to establish a Centre of Digital Excellence here. Actually, we are confident of that funding since plans for the initiative were announced by the Labour Party last year. The establishment of a Centre is an incredible opportunity for Dunedin, which will build on existing gaming and digital businesses, and educational institutions in the city.

Further exciting developments are afoot.

The imminent Dunedin Hospital rebuild – estimated at around $1.4 billion – will be the largest project of its kind in New Zealand’s history and will require up to 1000 workers from outside the city at the peak of construction.

Not only will the hospital rebuild be huge for the city because of the work generated and the associated employment and training opportunities during the build. It is also vital for the long-term health and wellbeing of our community.

It will help us to better attract and retain top-quality medical professionals, and cement Dunedin’s status as a city with a top-flight teaching hospital.

Our community campaigned hard for the hospital to be rebuilt in a central city location for these reasons, and Labour-led coalition’s commitment to the project is very much appreciated, and is another nod to the high level of confidence in investing in Dunedin.

Another transformational project which has captured our community’s imagination is the visionary plan to develop Dunedin’s waterfront.

Dunedin architect Damien van Brandenburg developed and gifted to the city the stunning design.

As a necessary catalyst for the waterfront vision, the Council has committed to building an architectural pedestrian/cycle bridge to better connect the centre city with the harbour.

The vision also includes a range of new public spaces, a marine research centre, a hotel and convention centre, offices, apartments, exhibition spaces and restaurants.
Again, we are delighted that the Labour-led Government has supported our city to develop a business case to inform the Provincial Growth Fund application for capital funding for the waterfront vision.

If you haven’t already, I urge you all to have a look at the public exhibition space just around the corner in The Octagon over the weekend, so you can see just how exciting the plans are.

The University of Otago is progressing a major redevelopment plan on its campus, including a $130 million redevelopment of the Dental School. The Dunedin City Council is planning its own multi-million re-development of the tertiary area to complement the University’s work, as well as a major revamp of the central city.

As you can see, the Dunedin of 2018 has retained its reverence for education, and core values of fairness and equality which were ingrained over 150 years ago. However, we’ve shed the reclusive, inward-looking, and somewhat negative disposition that crept in through the 20th century.

We now have a much clearer vision of an eminently liveable, outward looking city, full of thriving creative businesses, and even more conscious of the lasting value of our fabulous heritage, educational, cultural, wildlife and lifestyle assets.

So you’ve come at just the right time. And once again, welcome to Dunedin. Enjoy the conference and have a wonderful time in Otepoti/Dunedin.

No reira. Tena koutou, tena koutou tena tatou katoa.

Dave Cull
Mayor of Dunedin