

THE VISION THING

Why Labour can't win without a progressive manifesto

by Sunder Katwala

About the author

Sunder Katwala is General Secretary of the Fabian Society, and took up the post in October 2003. Sunder joined the Fabian staff from *The Observer* where he was a leader writer and internet editor, as well as editor of *The Observer's* 2001 election guide. He was previously founding Research Director of The Foreign Policy Centre (1999 – 2001), where he wrote research reports including *Reinventing the Commonwealth* (1999) and *Democratising Global Sport* (2000) and was Commissioning Editor for Politics and Economics at Macmillan (1995 to 1999).

Sunder is a regular contributor to broadcast and print media on British and international politics. His research interests include citizenship and British identity, the European Union, foreign policy and globalisation, and the future of Labour and progressive politics more generally.

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Fabian Society
11 Dartmouth Street
London SW1H 9BN

020 7227 4900
info@fabian-society.org.uk

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The Vision Thing

1. Introduction

Very few people will remember exactly where they were on 1 November 2007, the day that no General Election took place in Britain. The political fallout of the non-election has been endlessly picked over. But however we got here, Gordon Brown recognises that he must fight the next election not on a 'bounce' or a claim to managerial competence but on a progressive manifesto for change.

The Prime Minister can powerfully rebut the charge that his government has no clear idea about what it wishes to do with power. To do that, he must paint a clearer public picture of the Britain which his government strives to create by 'going public' with his vision of a fairer and more equal society.

The main debates inside the Government and Labour Party are not primarily about what 'the vision thing' is – there is a broad mainstream consensus about what Labour stands for. The crucial, unanswered question is about political strategy: can Labour publicly articulate its social democratic mission in a way which can sustain the broad electoral coalition which it needs? The case for caution has won out whenever this has been debated during New Labour's first decade. Three election victories have vindicated the argument that the 'vision thing' is a risk Labour can not afford. After all, isn't social democracy by stealth better than no social democracy at all? 'Stick to a winning formula', Brown will be told. Winning the swing votes in those 'super-marginal' constituencies demands a 'safety first' campaign focused on leadership, competence, national security and understanding individual aspiration.

But politicians should beware refighting past battles. 'Safety first' would be the electoral gamble for Labour next time. Ensuring that the 'vision thing' underpins a distinctively progressive manifesto and a value-based campaign is now a matter of strategic political necessity for Gordon Brown, not just centre-left desire.

Firstly, Labour won't win if it fights the next election campaign from the 1997 playbook. In the past, running on the economy, strength of leadership, and, above all, not being the Conservatives have been enough. Those arguments alone will not mobilise the votes that Labour needs next time. And attempts made to keep the swing voters will be in vain if Labour has not also paid sufficient attention to the other risks of fracture in its electoral coalition. Labour needs to get its working-class vote out and reconnect with disillusioned liberal opinion too.

Secondly, Brown must deliver on his own promise of 'change' to see

"The next election will decide not just who governs but where the new centre ground ends up."

off Conservative calls of 'time for a change'. He knows that it will be fatal for the Government to be seen as simply administering the new *status quo*, especially as he has raised expectations. That means that ministers must find the confidence to do more than defend the record and existing policies. They must set out a distinctive critique, from within power, of what remains wrong with Britain and an argument of how and why Britain today needs to change further.

Thirdly, the next election will decide not just who governs but where the new centre ground of British politics ends up. The Conservatives believe that their inheritance tax triumph shows that they are not just back in the game, but winning the argument. Labour retreated, having failed to make the fairness argument on inherited wealth over the decade. But is the message really that 'tax cuts work'? George Osborne and David Cameron won a significant tactical victory only by making a more significant concession in the wider war. To the bemusement of their own party, the Tory leadership will go into the election accepting Labour's spending plans, proposing that 45% of GDP is taken in tax, and pledging a tax increase to match every tax cut.

This is the central paradox of British politics. Even after a decade in power Labour fears this is an essentially conservative country, where the centre-left are interlopers in power, while it is the Tory leadership which knows that the reality is that of a social democratic Britain, to which they must persuade their party to adapt. This is because both parties remain haunted by their most recent election defeats. The Conservatives do not want to lose again on 'investment versus cuts' as in 2001 and 2005, yet the shadow of 1992 still haunts Labour. Yet a fourth Labour victory would be a 'realigning' election, shifting the centre-ground of British politics onto definably social democratic territory, setting the terms for a deeper inquest about what modernising the centre-right would demand.

All of this demands that Brown puts forward a distinctively Labour case. Labour will win only by making a positive argument to the country about why it deserves a fresh mandate to govern.

In part, this is because of a necessary tension between the demands of being a national leader and a party leader. Prime Ministers must represent the whole country, particularly at times of crisis. Addressing his first Labour conference as Prime Minister, Brown chose, perhaps naturally, to appeal above politics, across party, to a unity of national purpose. It was a strikingly different speech from those he had made in previous years as Chancellor, in which he put the Labour vision for Britain more clearly. Most observers saw this as a natural progression: Brown was used to talking to a party audience; he now needed to step up and address the country. But such a sharp distinction between the two roles is flawed, when Brown's political project depends on putting that Labour case to the national audience.

All politicians will want to appeal widely for support, but Brown can not achieve the 'progressive consensus' he seeks if he is only prepared to say things with which nobody could disagree. Such a catch-all consensus will lack progressive content. There is no value in division for its own sake, but if the goal is to build broad-based support for progressive principles and policies, then that means making distinctive arguments which can shift public arguments, and the boundaries of debates between parties. Achieving this will, at times, require a willingness to divide, as well as to unite.

The Government must regain the ability to make the political weather. The Prime Minister has the 'bully pulpit' of the nation – he can seek to start the national debates which he believes the country needs. But he has yet to put his core argument powerfully to the public. Gordon Brown's positive public reception on taking office this summer was built on strengths of leadership, competence and authenticity. Yet political vision and values form such a large part of the authentic Gordon Brown. If his advisers want advice it should be 'let Gordon be Gordon' – and that must mean letting Gordon be Labour too.

Campaign 2009: why the 1997 playbook will no longer work next time

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the Labour Party needs a broad electoral coalition to win. New Labour broke out of the Party's declining electoral base, proving to a generation of political sociologists debating 'Must Labour Lose?' that the success and failure of parties is not socially determined.

Gordon Brown will be advised to 'stick to a winning formula'. But a fourth term bid is uncharted territory. The 1997 playbook and 'more of the same' will not deliver for Labour next time.

Several of the (mainly negative) arguments which have proved decisive for Labour in the last three elections will have much less force when Britain next goes to the polls.

In 1997, '**Kick the Tories out**' was the overwhelmingly dominant campaign narrative. New Labour won a landslide, because anti-Tory voters organised themselves remarkably efficiently – including tactically across party lines – so as to do the maximum damage. Labour's manifesto contained some important progressive policies – the minimum wage and the new deal – but its focus was strongly on not promising more than it could deliver, even if the landslide swept away this careful attempt to manage expectations.

In 2001, '**More time needed**' – the argument that it was too soon to judge the new Government ('a lot done, a lot to do') summed up the public mood, though the plummeting turnout showed that few were

inspired. Labour's pledge to 'Put Schools and Hospitals First' – to place public services ahead of tax cuts – won a major progressive argument. For tax cuts to have become an electoral liability in British politics would have been unthinkable in 1992 or 1997. Yet the broader vision was muted. Inequality became a campaign issue only when the Labour Prime Minister refused to tell Jeremy Paxman that narrowing the gap between rich and poor mattered.

By 2005, 'The nasty party hasn't changed' was enough – along with the underlying strength of the economy – to see a stumbling government return with a reduced majority, despite its own lacklustre campaign. But the argument for Labour had become less clear. Labour's campaign slogans – 'Forward, Not Back' and 'Your Family Better Off' – had no ideological content, and there was little reason to expect that 'Labour' rather than 'Conservative' or 'Lib Dem' would appear beneath them. By the end of the campaign, Labour was running on empty, devoting most of the final campaign week to trying to persuade the voters that its unelectable opponents really could win.

Each of those winning arguments will have much less force in 2009. The Tories are long gone, and painful memories of the recession and ERM crisis have faded, particularly for younger voters who have only known a Labour Government. A 12 year old Government will not be able to call for 'more time' but must counter calls of 'time for change' by offering change itself. Labour will challenge the central claim of David Cameron's leadership – that he and his party have changed – but the opposition leader will not personify the electorally toxic qualities of the 'same old Tories' to the extent that Michael Howard did.

Judgments about leadership and competence play an important role in any General Election. But a claim to managerial competence should not be Labour's central argument. And while Labour must interrogate its opponents' spending plans, the argument that the sums don't add up failed to see off the SNP in Scotland this year, having worked well in previous elections. The campaign politics of claim and counter-claim can risk turning into a messy no-score draw if not made part of a larger public argument about what is at stake in the election. This is particularly important for Labour, given that the party suffers disproportionately electorally if turnout falls. Yet that is the likely consequence of a Punch-and-Jury campaign.

It would be a mistake to think that Labour's problems in 2005 were simply about the Iraq war, or the fact that Tony Blair – a major electoral asset in 1997 and 2001 – had become a deeply divisive figure. His Government had lost trust, and with it the public 'permission' to get a hearing on several major issues.

His successor, by contrast, now has an opportunity to restart the conversation over key issues – including foreign policy and civil

liberties. Yes, not being Blair will help. But it will not succeed unless there is a clear sense of a new vision.

The broader strategic problem for Labour in 2005 was that its broad electoral coalition was visibly cracking on three fronts. Labour does need to prevent the ‘switchers’ to New Labour in marginal constituencies returning to the Conservatives. But it also needs to ensure that it retains the rest of the Labour vote for those voters to give it a winning coalition. The party must ensure it persuades its traditional working-class support to go to the polls and also win back left-liberal voters who deserted to the Lib Dems last time. It is no longer the case (as it was in 1997) that two parts of the coalition could largely be taken for granted. The electoral system may skew political attention, but there are also ‘heartland’ and ‘liberal’ votes in every marginal seat.

The party’s post-2005 election inquest became polarised, depending on which part of the electoral challenge was being addressed. Appeal too strongly to the centre and the heartlands won’t turn out; address the concerns of the liberal-left and wave goodbye to Middle England: at times, Labour seemed to be deciding which voters it didn’t want!

Instead, Labour needs to define a coherent and positive agenda which can appeal across this coalition because, unlike opposition and niche parties, a party of government can not easily maintain a ‘sticking plaster’ coalition where it makes different arguments to different groups. The priority given to housing is an excellent example – increasing housing supply, supporting first-time buyers and providing more and better social housing will meet a range of different needs and aspirations, while also directly challenging the ‘nimby’ instincts of political opponents.

Labour must also respond to a new opposition strategy since 2005, because the Conservatives have finally at least tried to learn the lessons of their previous defeats. Where previous leaders responded to Tony Blair by ensuring clear blue water, David Cameron’s strategy is to minimise the differences between the parties on core Labour issues – health, education and public investment – and to echo progressive sentiments on social justice, international development and the environment so as to neutralise these issues. Cameron’s strategy will have succeeded if the voters believe there is no great difference between the political parties, meaning there is little of consequence in changing to a fresh managerial team.

If Brown does not want to find himself in the election battle that his opponent wants to fight, he needs to articulate clear progressive dividing lines between the parties. The choice between Brown and Cameron as candidates to be Prime Minister will be a central Labour argument – but Labour should ensure that this is not just a presidential

“Labour needs to define a coherent and positive agenda which can appeal across this coalition.”

comparison of their personal leadership abilities, but also about their contrasting agendas for Britain.

Labour Britain: so what is the vision?

Gordon Brown should set out why his moral purpose in politics is defined by extending opportunity to all and narrowing the gaps in life chances in Britain today. This Prime Minister, unlike Tony Blair, will say that ‘the gap matters’, and make the case for tackling inequality as well as poverty.

“Brown can only make this a winning issue if he translates popular debates into the language of the election poster.”

But Brown can only make this a winning issue if he can translate those policy debates into the popular language of the election poster and the doorstep campaign – and define the progressive causes and campaigns for this generation: that no child should grow up in poverty in this affluent society; that pupils in state schools should enjoy similar opportunities to those educated privately; that work should earn a living wage; and that we should not expect to die sooner if we are born in a poorer town.

There are three significant challenges for an effective modern politics of inequality.

The first is to explain why equality matters, and which inequalities matter most and why. Labour should make the case for more equal life chances as essential to a fair society. The compelling moral argument which underpins Labour politics is about fairness – that we should not inherit our life chances at birth. But too often we do. The social democratic critique of Britain today is that our opportunities and outcomes in life still depend far too much on how lucky we are in which parents we are born too, while our own efforts and talents matter too little in determining how we do at school, at work and even how long we can expect to live.

This argument about more equal life chances is important, because it cuts through a debate about whether equal opportunity or equal outcomes should be the goal, by explaining how there can be no substantive fair distribution of opportunities if inequalities of outcome are too large. And unless particular attention is paid to breaking down the inter-generational transmission of advantage and disadvantage, today’s unequal outcomes will drive our children’s unequal opportunities.

This should also be an argument about aspiration – and extending opportunity to all. The left’s mission is to extend to all of us the freedom and autonomy to be the authors of our own lives. This can help to deal with concerns about excessive uniformity or constraints on freedom, while appealing to an instinctive sense of fairness that

opportunities and freedoms should not be confined to a privileged elite.

Secondly, Labour must also develop policies which can narrow the gap in practice. The return of inequality in driving the future policy agenda has been particularly noticeable in education and health, for example in the Comprehensive Spending Review commitment to target the attainment gap for disadvantaged pupils, and in moves to tackle health inequalities, such as more financial support to improve nutrition during pregnancy.

But there are significant areas where policy development is in its infancy. A cohesive agenda to address the intergenerational transmission of opportunity and disadvantage must recognise the importance of families and parenting in shaping life chances. The new Department for Children, Schools and Families provides the institutional architecture to seek to create a cohesive agenda, yet the public debate about this has barely yet begun.

How to deal with wealth inequalities in a global economy and inequality at the top is an issue where the Government has been very cautious. While there are practical challenges in pursuing a modern agenda to narrow inequalities in an era of globalisation, there is also a more compelling case for doing so. One of Gordon Brown's key arguments is that our historic pattern of offering opportunities only to an elite is a social injustice which we can not afford economically either. This 'business case' for extending opportunity should not be the principal argument – but it can broaden the coalition of support for investing in education and skills.

Thirdly, there are the political challenges of securing sufficient public support to make progress. This can not be done overnight – but nor can government expect to mobilise resources for a problem which the public does not know exists. The Fabian Society's Life Chances Commission undertook deliberative polling, where not a single participant was aware that the Government had undertaken to abolish child poverty. That was before the 2005 election – but there is little reason to think that much would have changed. While there was considerable scepticism about whether there was any real poverty in Britain, participants ended up convinced of an important moral and economic case.

Building an effective coalition to extend opportunity and narrow inequalities depends on linking the aspirations of those at the bottom and the middle, ensuring that those in the middle do not fear that their interests will be sacrificed to the worst off, while appealing to the enlightened self-interest of the more affluent – that we all benefit from living in a more cohesive society. Here, Labour has pioneered the policy approach of 'progressive universalism' – where a majority gain from public provision, but most support goes to those most in need – which can chime with a public sense of fairness. John Denham's recent

"Fabian polling showed that not a single participant was aware that the Government had undertaken to abolish child poverty."



university funding reforms offer a good example, where support was extended up the income scale but focused most on those from disadvantaged backgrounds where university participation remains too low. Narrowing inequalities requires some direct redistribution, but will more often mean shifting the pattern of resources over time so that disadvantaged areas catch up. But this will mean explaining publicly what is happening and why.

But the biggest concern about making a more public case for tackling inequalities is how to avoid this being seen as an old-fashioned 'politics of envy'. A fairness case needs to be argued through – combining 'fair chances, fair rewards and fair contributions'. This depends on winning the argument that the pattern of opportunities is not currently fair, and making the public case that action is needed to extend opportunity and to restart social mobility.

An approach to 'fair rewards' should make clear that there is no intention to punish or cap aspiration, but Labour might also rediscover the ability it had before 1997 to publicly question 'rewards for failure' where all sense of corporate or social responsibility is lost.

And where the provision of fair chances requires increased resources to improve education and skills, we need to decide how to share the burden fairly. At present, our system of taxation is too flat, and has too many regressive features. An argument for mutual respect should make reasonable demands of the responsibilities of citizenship, both at the top and bottom of the pile, while stressing too the shared benefits of collective provision and mutual protection.

The argument here is not that Labour should campaign on social justice, and ignore 'difficult' issues such as crime and immigration. Any government needs to show that it has credible answers to issues of strong public concern. The test of a progressive party is how it can, over time, shift the terms of political trade, addressing these issues in a way which creates a hearing for its broader argument. The pledge to be 'tough on crime and its causes' was an excellent example of this, though not subsequently reflected strongly enough in the way that government has talked about crime.

This should also present a challenge to broader progressive opinion. Government leadership will be necessary to put the issue at the centre of national debate. Whether or not child poverty is a central campaign issue can not be determined when the election leaflets are being printed. Shifting the salience of different issues can not be done during the campaign: it depends on government making inequality an issue over a broader period. But campaigning for change should mean more than making demands of government. Those outside government also

have an essential role in shifting public attitudes, to make space for progressive advance, and must raise their game here too.

A realigning election? Defining the new centre-ground

Labour has spent too much time in a stale and muddled debate about whether the party must cleave to the centre-ground – or have the courage to leave it. No social democratic party can ignore the need to win sufficient public support to make the practical pursuit of its goals possible. But Labour's strategic challenge is how to shift the centre-ground of British politics onto definably social democratic territory.

Where does the centre-ground of British politics now lie? Labour has won a half victory. It has made some potentially significant advances but has not ratified its achievements. After three election defeats, its opponents are suing for peace – and yet nobody yet knows the terms of surrender.

Labour's weakness is that it has successfully redefined much of the policy agenda and the cross-party battle without being confident that it has won the broader public argument. As the two parties shadow box over the centre-ground, nobody is quite sure where 'the new centre' of British politics will end up. Hence the political cross-dressing as David Cameron claims to be 'heir to Blair' while Gordon Brown seeks tactical advantage in paying tribute to the Thatcher legacy which the New Tories discard. On public services and spending, social democrats have set the agenda. On crime and immigration, the right calls the shots.

That the Conservatives are pledging to adopt Labour spending plans is a tribute to Gordon Brown's inherently social democratic achievement in making tax cuts an electoral liability in British politics. It matters that the Conservative Party feels that it must adopt the aspirations and language of progressive politics, even if this is clearly a tactical conversion rather than one of conviction. Converting your opponents is an important way to embed political change, even if it might make them a more serious electoral threat.

Within the Tories, the jury is still out as to whether 'being in touch with modern Britain' demands rebranding, and comfort with ethnic diversity and civil partnerships, or whether it also involves accepting that there are significant limits on the ideological project to 'roll back the state'.

Gordon Brown will again want to campaign on a favourite election theme – the choice between 'public investment' and 'cuts'. That sent Oliver Letwin scurrying into hiding in 2001 and saw Howard Flight defenestrated by his leader in 2005 simply for expressing what every Tory believes: that the state should be smaller. David Cameron and George Osborne are torn: they share that belief, yet are desperate not

to fight the same campaign again. Hence their tactical decision to accept Labour's spending plans. But they are struggling to hold the line against an emboldened right-wing argues that 'tax cuts work', following their own inheritance tax coup.

The next election result will prove decisive in this internal debate. The question for the centre-left is whether New Labour's record from 1997 to 2007 mark the limits of social democratic advance in an affluent, individualistic society like our own.

That is why the stakes will be very high, contrary to the conventional wisdom that there will be little choice on offer. A fourth Labour victory remains a highly achievable outcome. It should also be a 'realigning' election which shifts the centre-ground of British politics onto identifiably social democratic terrain defining 'a new centre' in British politics and setting the terms for a post-election inquest on the right. But it is a prize which demands that Labour articulates the differences between the parties at the next election, so as to seek a mandate for a vision of progressive change.

A progressive manifesto: five tests for Gordon Brown

The next election is probably 18 months away, but the task of defining the vision and progressive manifesto on which Labour should run is much more urgent. Labour's manifesto needs to win enough support to return the Government to power. But the argument on which Labour fights will also define its ambition to embed a new 'progressive consensus' in British politics, where it is social democratic arguments that define the new 'common sense' around which different political parties compete.

Labour's core narrative should be about extending opportunity and making life chances more equal. But it should connect this argument to a series of key progressive campaigns and constituencies. There is a broader question among trade unionists, environmentalists, and campaigners for democracy and civil liberties as to whether the Government is sufficiently committed to key progressive causes, or whether it is agnostic or indeed actively hostile. Research and polling for the Fabian Society's party reform project Facing Out showed that there is a constituency of several million progressive campaigners who support and identify with Labour but are active only outside party politics. Of course, a party of government can not accede to every campaigning demand. Trade-offs are inevitable, and disappointment is part of the condition of grown-up democratic politics. But Labour needs to set out an agenda and argument which will enable it to draw on these sources of progressive campaigning energy. A manifesto centred on vision and values should be able to reconnect, and ensure substantial progressive audiences feel that the Government is on their side.

Here are five progressive tests which a manifesto rooted in the vision thing should try to meet.

1. The inequality challenge

A key test for the Government is to resist giving up on their child poverty targets. Confronting this challenge would mean **raising the 4 billion pounds needed for tax credits to get back on track to halve child poverty by 2010**. Ending child poverty by 2020 could then become a cause for our generation. But while tax credits can meet the 2010 target, the 2020 target requires a broad range of interventions, and can not sensibly be attempted by relying primarily on redistribution.

Narrowing the gaps in life chances requires a cohesive agenda across all areas of domestic policy. Inequalities are deeply linked: it is not possible to narrow health or educational inequalities through health or schools policy alone, given that the social and economic causes. A high-level Cabinet Committee should scrutinise every piece of legislation, to ask 'what impact will this have on child poverty and on narrowing the gaps in life chances?'. Every government department needs to scrutinise its agenda for the impact it can have on extending opportunity and narrowing the gap.'

Labour must also go public with this argument to 'narrow the gap' – to generate the public support and resources needed. The Government should create a Life Chances Commission, to examine the evidence and inform a deeper public debate about opportunity and inequality in Britain today. Government can not successfully address a problem if large parts of the public are not aware that it exists. The Commission could also address how existing public instincts about fairness, and rights and responsibilities, could help shape future policies.

Labour must also offer hard-edged political and policy tests for any other party that wishes to aspire to progressive goals and use progressive language, as the New Tory party will want to. The most important strategic test should be around priorities for public spending, by conducting an early **Spending Review in the Spring of 2009, to set out spending plans for the period through to 2013**. This would include a series of commitments – involving both new money and the redistribution of current resources to address these priority areas – on child poverty, on spending per pupil on state schools and on narrowing health inequalities. The Conservatives would then face a choice of signing up to government spending plans not just for two years (mirroring what New Labour did in 1997), but to constrain themselves across an entire Parliament or alternatively to abandon their centre-ground credentials – in either case, reopening a serious debate between investment and cuts. , If the public finances have improved, this could well be more difficult than the decision to accept

Labour's plans during the current tight spending round.

2. The democracy challenge

Labour should bite the bullet and back a written constitution. But the party should also pledge to put a more radical '**democracy package**' to a public referendum. This should propose electoral reform – the **Alternative Vote** for the Commons, so that every MP must seek 50% of the vote in their constituency – which should be combined with proportional representation for an 80% **elected second chamber**.

Making voting a duty of citizenship could also be put to the public vote. Increasing turnout is important for the health of our democracy. And it is also in progressives' interest to ensure that as many people as possible vote, particularly to prevent the political agenda being skewed against the interests of the young and the poor.

The 2009 manifesto could end a century of stalemate since Lloyd George's 1909 People's Budget began the argument about democracy and the Lords. Putting a new **Great Reform Act** in place for the centenary of the 1911 Parliament Act – always intended as a stop gap – would give progressives from Labour and Liberal traditions an historic common cause. That cooperation would be rooted in shared democratic principles on the particular issue of democratic reform.

3. The green challenge

Saving the planet would be an important issue for governments, even if there were no votes in it at all. Sadly, it is probably the reality that there will be fewer votes resting on this issue at the next election than there ought to be.

Still, Labour must be much bolder on the environment. The moral courage it has shown on international development could look selective if not extended to tackling climate change. This is a key test of Labour's social justice principles in the 21st century.

There is also a strategic challenge: both opposition parties have chosen green issues as a key area through which to demonstrate their positioning. For Cameron's Conservatives it is the best way to surprise voters by adopting an issue at odds with the party's public image. And for the Lib Dems it is a chance to show that they will take positions that the other parties will not.

The public is actually now ahead of the Government on climate change – but people want to know that everybody will share the burden fairly. Individual voluntary actions will never be enough if the Government does not set the rules so that we all pay for the environmental costs of

our behaviour with no-one able to free-ride. So Labour must not back down from controversial ideas, including introducing a **national road pricing scheme** and **compulsory water metering** in every home. Now that authenticity has become as much of a challenge for the opposition leaders as appearing centrist, genuine action from government – serving up the tough choices leaders must take – can smoke them out.

4. The civil liberties challenge

Gordon Brown's recent speech on liberty marks a serious attempt to re-engage with and rebalance the debate about security and civil liberties. It is likely that the Government will continue to have some serious disagreements with civil liberties campaigners, but this could prove a significant step to ensuring that disagreements take place within an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Starting from where we are, a **bonfire of petty restrictions against democratic rights to protest and assembly** – which have nothing to do with a terrorist threat – and clear safeguards against 'mission creep' to overuse or extend these powers, will be essential to rebuild trust, and to begin the real battle to win hearts and minds. If additional security measures against violent extremism are genuinely needed to protect our freedoms, the Government must demonstrate a real commitment to increased transparency and democratic scrutiny of proposals.

Much greater scrutiny should also be applied to the issue of ID cards – where the case for their compulsory introduction remains opaque and unproven – particularly around pragmatic tests about what benefits the scheme is supposed to generate, and whether this represents sufficient value for public money.

The Government should also have the courage to defend the Human Rights Act – one of its proudest achievements – against populist attack. This is an issue which has the potential to show the Tories haven't really changed all that much, and which ultimately taps into good old-fashioned Conservative splits linked to anything related to the European project.

5. The foreign policy challenge

We will need a '**new multilateralism**' for the World After Bush. But there will be no effective multilateralism without a more effective EU role in international affairs, and that will depend on Britain being able to contribute fully, overcoming our historic ambivalence about Europe and working with France, Germany and others to create a more effective European voice.

This also requires Gordon Brown to overcome his Eurosceptic image

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and publicly challenge the myths and misunderstanding about the European Union, resisting the temptation to pander to *The Mail* and *The Sun*.

A looming **Iran** crisis offers an urgent opportunity to show that effective EU-led multilateral diplomacy can stop the disastrous consequences of a US-led military confrontation. British participation or support in a final Bush adventure should be unthinkable. Militarily, diplomatically and politically, Brown's Britain must choose engagement, diplomacy and Europe this time around.

'We campaign in poetry but we govern in prose' Mario Cuomo, the former Democratic Governor of New York, once famously remarked. For New Labour, managing expectations has often meant campaigning in prose too.

It is now time for more poetry and a greater sense of public mission. The case for keeping this under wraps is much weaker. Too much caution is now the electoral risk to avoid. That case for 'the vision thing' was made by Gordon Brown himself in accepting the party leadership in Manchester. He must now show the public, as much as his own party, that he will deliver on his pledge, that "The party I lead must have more than a set of policies – we must have a soul."

November 2007

Sunder Katwala

The Vision Thing

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