

# FABIAN REVIEW

*The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society*

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# FABIAN REVIEW

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**FABIAN  
SOCIETY**

## **FABIAN REVIEW**

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## Taking charge

Labour's new top team takes up office at a time of national emergency. They must help lay the ground for recovery, argues *Andrew Harrop*

**C**ONGRATULATIONS TO NEW Labour leader Keir Starmer and shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds, both members of the Fabian Society's executive committee, and to more than a dozen other Fabians who now sit in the shadow cabinet. Together they take charge of the Labour party at a moment of great peril for the country.

Their challenge is to offer patriotic opposition that binds Britain together. Keir Starmer's party may lack power, but it can assume great moral authority if it speaks for the whole country, rather than partisan or sectional interests, and provides the challenge and support the government needs.

The highest priority is to address the immediate health and living standards emergency. But Labour must also lay the ground for a strong and fast recovery and make the moral and practical case for a new settlement to follow, with a different economic model and a stronger public realm.

On the economic front, the government has so far been trying to safeguard jobs and cashflow to help business bounce back fast after the lockdown. But no one knows what happens after you deliberately close major parts of an advanced economy: we must hope for the best but prepare for the worst.

The 2020 crisis has been compared to a war. However, in economic terms it is not like the two great conflicts of the 20th century but the years that followed them, when the wartime economies were purposefully switched off. 1919 stands as an awful warning not just because of Spanish flu but because it was the start of a period where Britain's economy shrunk by a quarter and unemployment surged.

Inspired by Keynes, the lesson was learned in 1945 and while economic activity decreased at the end of the second world war, full employment was maintained. In the recession to come Labour must be similarly obsessed with jobs. Once again old economic orthodoxies cannot be allowed to stand in the way of high employment.

As the lockdown eases, the party must call on ministers to boost demand by putting money directly into people's

pockets through social security (a solution that is more progressive and efficient than tax cuts). However, that is unlikely to be enough because in high-employment industries like retail and hospitality there will be no return to business as usual. Individual businesses will fail and whole sectors will employ fewer people. Ultimately this may be good for productivity but workers must not be left to suffer in the short term.

Labour should therefore call on the government to guarantee people new jobs if their old ones disappear, just as Gordon Brown did on a modest scale after 2008. In social care, we know there is huge demand for labour which can be unlocked by adequate government spending. An activist government should also stand ready to create the green employment of the future now. Ministers can fast-forward green investments that require lots of jobs in every corner of the country and fund the training that new recruits will need.

This job creation must go hand in hand with a new pact with business. Regulatory, tax and governance reforms must expand business obligations towards society, environment and workers in exchange for the support that is coming now. Where firms receive specific bailouts, there is also the opportunity for the government to take equity shares to invest in a permanent sovereign wealth fund or to gift to employee ownership trusts.

And a crisis which has proven the case for the welfare state must give rise to a new social settlement too. Resilient public services, the rebirth of social insurance and a reckoning on tax must become the new common sense that bridges political divides.

Unlike in 1945 Labour cannot do any of this from government because the next election is too far away. It will only happen if Conservative politicians are convinced. Keir Starmer and Anneliese Dodds must change the country through the force of their ideas. **F**



# Shortcuts



## STARK WARNINGS

It is no surprise that the NHS is struggling in the face of the Covid-19 crisis—*Neena Modi*

Applying a stress is a classic approach to identify weaknesses in a system. In real life, stress factors appear unpredictably. The immediate consequences are often tragic, but if there is willingness to learn these natural experiments can drive future improvements in systems and the policies and ideological thinking that underpin them. Covid-19 struck suddenly, exposing weaknesses in healthcare and economic systems worldwide within three months of its first appearance. As lives are lost, the necessary response to the pandemic, involving mass physical distancing, threatens livelihoods further.

A resilient healthcare system delivers reliable care in the face of crises and improves and advances when times are good. The cornerstones of resilience are a strong workforce, sound infrastructure, demonstrable quality of care, and public trust. The NHS provided effective, efficient, equitable healthcare and commanded the respect of the public and the lifelong dedication of a committed workforce. Staff had a shared sense of purpose, pride in their work, decent salaries, national terms and conditions and a secure pension. However, over the last decade, despite increasingly stark warnings of the weaknesses in the NHS, the need for investment in infrastructure, development, service integration and capacity building was ignored. By December 2019, just before Covid-19 struck, there was clear evidence that the NHS was in worse shape than ever, with bed occupancy at capacity, staff vacancies at around 100,000, and more than 4.5 million on waiting lists.

The NHS could have been resilient, but tragically has been the victim of government ineptitude (or skulduggery), a weak political opposition and ineffectual professional

leadership. Few appear to comprehend that behind the familiar NHS logo now lies a fragile patchwork of poorly integrated providers each functioning as a business, not as a solid, reliable public service.

The Tories described the 2012 Health and Social Care Act as their ‘biggest mistake’, yet learning no lessons, continued to weaken the NHS on four fronts: chronic underfunding, decimating and demoralising the workforce, isolating preventive and public health from the acute, community and primary care sectors and awarding growing numbers of service contracts to the private sector.

The 2016 junior doctor strikes and 2019 pension debacle, with resulting reliance on locums – the gig economy of healthcare – could have been avoided. Every penny has been needed to firefight acute NHS pressures, including the meagre £7bn of the £140bn 2019/2020 budget earmarked for capital spending. Meanwhile, public health funding was cut and transactional

## The NHS could have been resilient but tragically has been the victim of government ineptitude

costs rose. The simultaneous encouragement of private healthcare has been further destabilising by drawing workers away from the NHS, diminishing GP budgets as the fit and well register with fee-for-service providers, and cherrypicking simple cases leaving the complex, chronic, and serious ones to the NHS. On top of this, the havoc of Brexit and the Tories’ ‘hostile environment’ policy have made employing staff from abroad increasingly difficult.

There can be only three equally unedifying explanations for such wantonly harmful behaviour. A blind ideological belief in the power of a marketised system to deliver quality, equitable healthcare despite all evidence to the contrary; a desire to profit personally from the rich pickings from the sale of UK healthcare; or total ineptitude. Whatever the reason, the result was that long before Covid-19, the inability to cope with even normal conditions was clear to anyone working in the NHS. As the pandemic began to hit, the implications of a run-down NHS became all too clear. The

UK has insufficient staff, equipment, consumables and capacity. The consequences for life and livelihood, as yet unquantified, are a matter of the gravest concern.

The lessons? Funds now being thrown at the NHS should incorporate investment to build future resilience. Above all, the country needs political commitment to health as a crucial element of a nation’s wealth and wellbeing, and to healthcare as an essential public service that functions best as a social contract not a commodity. This also requires competent cabinet responsibility, recognition that health results from far more than healthcare, and a strong opposition to hold ministers to account. Economists must learn to measure and factor health (not healthcare activity) into financial modelling. The media must become much better at unravelling the root causes of struggling systems and informing the public responsibly. Medical leaders must cease shying away from confronting the government and face up to the fact that health is a political issue which they have a collective responsibility to influence. The systems that sustain societies are interconnected; short-termism, be it ignoring climate change, encouraging a zero-hours economy or failing to safeguard the NHS, bites back.

Health is a universal leveller and ultimately we rise or fall together. **F**

*Neena Modi is a professor at Imperial College London, immediate past president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and president-elect of the Medical Women’s Federation. The views expressed are her own*



## TRANSITION TIME

The UK must continue to work closely with the EU in the uncertain times ahead—*Hilary Benn MP*

The UK left the European Union on 31 January, but that didn’t get Brexit done. We now move into the next stage of the

Brexit process; namely negotiating a new relationship to replace the one that we have just left, although everything essentially stays the same until the end of this year when the transition period expires.

This is the first time that the UK has gone into a such an important negotiation knowing that it will come out with a deal that is less good for the economy than the arrangement it had before.

The prime minister has already ruled out extending the transition period any further, because he is optimistic that he can conclude a comprehensive deal by the end of this year. This optimism is not shared by the EU or by many observers. There is a very long list of matters that need to be sorted out by the end of this year: not only trade in goods but also services, consumer safety, the transfer of data, access to security databases, cooperation in scientific research and development, the approval of medicines and chemicals, foreign policy and many other things.

It is argued by ministers that striking a deal should be straightforward because the UK is currently aligned with EU rules. The problem is the government has made it clear that it does not want to be bound by these rules in future and this will create a problem for the EU side the moment we begin to diverge from EU standards. They are very clear that there must be a level playing field in return for UK access to their markets.

Other sensitivities in the negotiations will include the precise arrangements for Northern Ireland's special status under the withdrawal agreement. There will be checks on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland – and fisheries, where the EU wants access to our waters. They will undoubtedly use this as a bargaining chip in return for giving the UK something that we really want.

I suspect that by the end of the year there will be an agreement that trade in goods will not have to face tariffs, but the outcome for everything else is uncertain.

It is possible to imagine an agreement in which the UK says that it will not give any legally binding commitments to observe EU rules in future but accepts that if it moves away from any of the rules that the UK currently observes then the EU can reduce access to its markets. In return, the EU could say that the continuation of any future access will be wholly dependent on the UK continuing to abide by EU rules and standards and that if we do not do so, then the EU will be perfectly within its rights to vary or remove that access.



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Such an approach would enable both sides to argue that they had upheld their fundamental principles, but there are significant problems involved in trying to make such an arrangement work, not least uncertainty. For example, if the UK moved away from common standards in a way which the EU felt was giving British manufacturers a competitive advantage, what would be the appropriate sanction in terms of reduced UK access to the EU market? Might this include the imposition of tariffs on some goods; in which case, which ones and how much?

As the negotiations unfold, I expect we will hear more and more from different sectors of the British economy about what they are looking for in the negotiations. Until their basic question is answered, namely how are things going to work after 1 January next year, British business will continue to be mired in uncertainty about the rules under which it is meant to operate.

It would make sense to develop as close an economic relationship as possible with our European friends and neighbours, but it seems clear now that the government has different ideas.

It would also be in our interests to continue to work closely together on foreign policy. After all, the great challenges of our time – dealing with trade, the movement of people around the globe, the threat of dangerous climate change and risks to peace and security from Russia and Iran – require us as nations to work together. It is by doing so that we can best exercise our sovereignty to protect our citizens and advance the interests of our country. **F**

*Hilary Benn is the Labour MP for Leeds Central*



## RENDERED INVISIBLE

Politicians consistently ignore the plight of Gypsies and Travellers — *Martin Myers*

This year, Gypsy boxing legend Tyson Fury regained the WBC world heavyweight championship belt. But his achievement was not lauded in the House of Commons. Instead, prime minister Boris Johnson has chosen to reassert the need for further crackdowns on Gypsy and Traveller sites. It highlights a trend in Britain: that Gypsy culture is rarely celebrated or acknowledged. This is unsurprising given the UK is one of five European countries identified by the Council of Europe this year as having no references to Gypsies and Travellers on the national curriculum.

Politicians have rarely delivered much in the way of useful policy for Gypsy and Traveller communities living in the UK. At best their interests are ignored, and at worst already marginalised communities find themselves subject to punitive regimes of social control. This is not a new phenomenon: the very first policy relating to Gypsies was the Egyptians Act passed in 1531, which conflated Gypsy identity with criminality and called upon Gypsies to renounce their identity or face exile from England. In 1968, the Caravan Act was arguably a well-intentioned attempt to address a shortage of accommodation, in practice it resulted in many families being evicted from land they owned and made homeless.

Six hundred years after the Egyptians Act we might anticipate that anti-discrimination legislation, such as the 2010 Equality Act, would prohibit governments from making policies that so blatantly discriminate along racial and ethnic lines. However, since 2015, new planning policy for Traveller sites requires occupants to be demonstrably nomadic in order to prove they are genuine Gypsies and Travellers. Whilst nomadism or travelling is often key to Gypsy and Traveller culture, it is rarely a feature of daily lives. Gypsy and Traveller families often choose to live in static trailers on Traveller sites as an expression of their identity and cultural preferences, but few rely on travelling or nomadism as a means of economic survival.

Local authorities are notorious for failing to provide adequate numbers of Traveller sites and for situating them in dangerous or unhealthy places; often adjacent to sewage farms, refuse tips or in the shadow of motorway flyovers. The direct consequence of the 2015 policy has been that fewer Traveller sites are built and more families find themselves homeless and living on the roadside. What makes such policy utterly reprehensible is that concerns about homelessness or poor educational outcomes or inadequate healthcare provision for Gypsy and Travellers are well documented. Yet despite the abundance of evidence the experiences of Gypsy and Travellers are too often rendered invisible within the political and public discourses shaping the implementation of policy.

One example of such 'invisibility' appears in education policy. We hear a great deal from politicians about social mobility and widening participation, yet very little when it comes to the two ethnic categories identified by the Department for Education as having the lowest levels of achievement by considerable margins: 'Gypsy/Roma' and 'Irish Traveller' children. They are also the children most likely to be excluded temporarily or permanently from schools. Research consistently highlights the concerns of Gypsy and Traveller families and children who want to access education, but find the reality to be one in which schools are hostile environments where children experience racist bullying and exclusion on a daily basis. Unsurprisingly too few young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities progress to university.

Politicians from both the left and right have consistently ignored the plight of Gypsy and Traveller children preferring to focus their attention on more voter-friendly constituencies. Consequently, the claim that 'white working-class boys' suffer the worst educational outcomes was at the centre of Theresa May's first speech as prime minister outside Downing Street; a mantra repeated by Labour's new deputy leader, Angela Rayner, when she was shadow education secretary in 2018.

Every time a politician makes the claim that white working-class boys are the most disadvantaged cohort of pupils in the UK they make the lives of Gypsy and Traveller boys and girls invisible.

Whilst planning and education are the most obvious examples of discrimination, poor healthcare is perhaps even more significant. As the government has acknowledged, Gypsies and Travellers have poorer health than the population as a whole, with

low life expectancy, high infant mortality rates, high maternal mortality, higher rates of medical conditions including chronic coughs, bronchitis, asthma, diabetes and higher prevalence of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Gypsy and Travellers are also less likely to be registered with a GP.

Improving outcomes across all areas of social policy requires politicians to acknowledge the lives of Gypsy and Traveller families are as important as their other constituents. When priorities for housing, healthcare or education spending are being set, the evidence of poor outcomes of a long history of marginalisation need to be recognised and addressed.

The clear message sent to communities throughout Britain by policymakers is that Gypsies and Travellers do not belong. Their culture and achievements are not valued and their lives are rendered invisible by politicians on all points of the political spectrum. **F**

*Martin Myers is an assistant professor in education at the University of Nottingham*



## FACE THE FACTS

Live facial recognition technology could compound racism in society — *David Smith*

If you have one of the latest smartphones, you are likely to have used facial recognition to unlock your device. If you have flown recently, you are likely to have experienced it at airport security thanks to the machines that check your face against your passport.

But what you might not have noticed so readily is that your face may well have been scanned in public by live facial recognition cameras which are increasingly being used by the police to identify 'wanted' people. This growth is happening without proper public or parliamentary approval. Not only is this detrimental to the civil liberties and privacy rights of the population as a whole, but it opens the door to discrimination and institutional racism. Research shows that this may be particularly dangerous for young, black men.

Live facial recognition cameras work by continuously scanning to find faces. Once a face has been found, facial features are measured to create a unique 'numeric representation' or 'facial map' which is then compared against a watchlist, in order to identify a match.

South Wales police and the Metropolitan police have been trialling live facial recognition since 2016 in shopping centres, at music events and on high streets, leading to several arrests. Private companies are also using the technology in public places, such as Sheffield's Meadowhall shopping centre and the Trafford centre in Manchester.

But the use of this technology has been widely criticised by academics, lawyers, campaigners and politicians. Last autumn, a cross-party group of MPs, including then shadow home secretary Diane Abbott and former Brexit secretary David Davis, said the use of facial recognition surveillance was incompatible with human rights and should be stopped immediately. And it is not just a UK issue: in February it was reported that the EU was considering a five-year ban on facial surveillance before backing away from the idea.

Yet despite all of the concern, earlier this year, the Met announced it would be increasing its use of live facial recognition to help 'tackle serious crimes' including 'violence, gun and knife crime' and 'child sexual exploitation'.

The announcement has provoked widespread criticism from civil liberties groups such as Big Brother Watch, StopWatch and Liberty, which argue that the technology may have an inbuilt bias against people of colour. In response, Met Police commissioner Cressida Dick claimed that, unlike other artificial intelligence, the advanced facial recognition software being deployed by the police did not discriminate against people of colour with no inbuilt 'ethnic bias'.

However, it is important to remember that a technological error is not the only form that discrimination can take.

To understand the dangers of live facial recognition technology we have to ask the critical questions: when is data being stored, what does it mean to be 'wanted' and, crucially, who is being targeted?

One major controversial database used by the Met for facial recognition technology is a risk-assessment tool known as the gangs matrix: a system used to monitor suspected gang members, or young people who may be affiliated to or 'at-risk' of gang activity. Amnesty International revealed in 2018 that 78 per cent of people listed on the gangs matrix were black – despite the fact



that only 27 per cent of serious youth violence is committed by black people. This statistic is not surprising given inaccurate media and public portrayals of black youth culture as dark and criminal, and the Met's loose and racially loaded use of the 'gang' label.

What we see therefore is live facial recognition technology using flawed datasets that target a certain minority, leading to the continued criminalisation of people of colour.

We interact with many well-meaning, thoughtful police officers as part of our work as a police monitoring project. Many of them celebrate being 'colour blind'; driven by facts not emotions, by actions not complexion, by data not bias – but, as the case of the gangs matrix shows, just sticking to the 'data' does not save you from racism.

Anti-racism activist Joseph Barndt popularised the theory that racism = prejudice + power. With facial recognition, the danger of discrimination comes from the prejudice in police data combining with the power of this new technology. As Barndt argues, this is all it takes for institutional racism to take hold.

Live facial recognition technology is therefore a real risk for young people in our communities. The time for scrutiny, action and accountability is now. **F**

*David Smith is head of research at Hackney Account, a youth-led police monitoring group*



## A WORLD IN CRISIS

Efforts to tackle the climate emergency must not be lost due to coronavirus—*Brianna Craft*

This year could prove to be a landmark in tackling the climate emergency as key international actions are due. But even before the global coronavirus pandemic, 2020 was characterised by great uncertainty in everything from geopolitics to the state of the world's environment. Strong leadership has never been more necessary.

The pandemic is rightly the central focus, but it is crucial that leaders ensure efforts to urgently tackle the climate emergency are not lost. The UK is presiding over this

year's UN climate negotiations, but the summit (COP26), which was scheduled to take place in Glasgow in November, has been postponed due to coronavirus. When it eventually goes ahead, the UK will be faced with a difficult task. At the last meeting in Madrid (COP25), negotiators could not agree key rules for governing the Paris Agreement, which countries are to start implementing in a matter of months. When the talks overran, many developing countries most vulnerable to climate change had to send their delegates back home. Those that remained were then excluded as the COP president held closed-door discussions only with the delegates they deemed key players. This left the high emitters to make the decisions – a move which ultimately meant the talks ended in failure.

The one billion people living in the world's 47 poorest nations – the 'least developed countries' (LDCs) – are hit first and hardest by climate change. Despite emitting less than 1 per cent of global carbon emissions, over the past 50 years, two out of every three people who died in climate-related disasters were from the LDCs.

The international process for making decisions about climate change must include the countries most vulnerable to it. It is essential that Labour's new leadership advocate a climate diplomacy with the primary aim of building a truly inclusive coalition of climate leaders. This coalition

must drive action commensurate with the scale of the crisis.

But the UK's diplomatic strategy will need to change given the rapid spread of coronavirus. In February, leading LDC negotiators were unable to reach London for climate discussions with the UK government due to new travel restrictions. Even before the coronavirus outbreak, UK restrictions made it difficult for representatives from the LDCs, which comprise countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, to obtain visas to enter the UK for crucial meetings.

Climate change is a global problem that requires an international solution. The UK must prioritise allying with the LDCs and other progressive blocs, like the Small Island Developing States and the European Union. Building these alliances is perhaps the only way to push high emitters to set reductions targets that will limit temperature rise to 1.5°C and bring emissions down to net zero by 2050. These actions are pivotal to tackling the climate emergency.

It is also vital that all developed countries provide more climate finance to developing countries, which is necessary for the world's poorest to adapt to our changing planet. 2020 marks the deadline for developed countries to fulfil their pledge to provide \$100bn a year to support developing countries' climate actions. Yet, the International Institute for Environment and Development found that just \$1 in \$10, is reaching the

Development Planning Unit, UCL and the Dept of Architecture, BRAC University/Flickr





women, children and men at the local level who need it most.

It is becoming increasingly likely that the pre-Glasgow climate negotiations due to take place in Germany this June will not be able to convene – at least not in person. This will make alliance-building with the LDCs and others more challenging. But the UK can connect with governments in-country through its extensive network of embassies and other missions. This approach will require the truly coordinated foreign policy that Labour's 2019 manifesto speaks to. With the right leadership it is possible even within the confines of coronavirus.

How the UN will function without meeting face-to-face is an open question, but whatever solutions are tried will only be successful if negotiators from the developing world have equal access. We will need innovative measures that do not further marginalise the voices of the vulnerable, most of whom live in countries where internet access is unreliable.

The UK's climate diplomacy should focus on inclusion if it hopes to land effective UN decisions in Glasgow. By allying with the people who are most vulnerable, a UK-led coalition could show moral authority to advocate reductions targets and financial pledges throughout 2020, culminating in a summit worthy of the gravity of the climate crisis. **F**

*Brianna Craft is senior researcher on climate change at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)*



## ON THE FRONTLINE

Power to change lives lies with Labour-run councils  
—Anntoinette Bramble

When Labour is out of power nationally, we should look to regional and local government for the answers. Labour councils are leading the fight against coronavirus. But even before the pandemic, throughout the Labour party's history, Labour councils pioneered the radical policies that we continue to be proud of today.

Before the creation of the NHS, in the early 20th century, local authorities had stepped in to run hospitals. At the end of the second world war, the Labour-run London County council ran the largest public service of its kind dedicated to healthcare.

Before nationalised energy companies, the Labour-run metropolitan borough of Shoreditch, which later became part of my own borough, Hackney Council, generated electricity for our residents by burning waste. Waste heat from the process was used to heat the public baths next door to the generator.

And now, during the coronavirus crisis, it is councils that are leading local responses to keep people safe. Local public health officers are coordinating services in their areas, liaising with local GPs and trusts to assess need and helping protect other council staff on the frontline of public service. They are creating local volunteering hubs to help those self-isolating, coordinating with local retailers and foodbanks to get food to those most in need, and have been standing up for their businesses and workers where the government has failed to act.

Labour in local government has continued to show the radical change that Labour ideals can bring when put into action. Labour's defeat in the general election does not mean we should give up on implementing our ideas. The truth is that time and time again, Labour, where it is in power – through the Welsh Labour government, our regional mayors, and Labour in in local government – is still delivering real change.

In Hackney for example, we have returned to our roots with our new council-owned, sustainable energy company – Hackney Light and Power. Nottingham, Liverpool, Southampton, Islington and Bristol have also set up their own municipal energy companies.

On one of the biggest issues of our generation – the climate emergency – Labour local authorities are leading the way. By April this year, Hackney council will run on 100 per cent clean and green energy. Our town hall, council buildings, street lamps and some schools will run entirely on renewable energy.

Waltham Forest has intervened on air quality, reducing the number of households exposed to illegal levels of nitrogen dioxide from 60,000 to 6,000. Telford and Wrekin council has built 16,000 solar panels to provide power to up to 1,000 homes. Plymouth City council is developing a network of wildflower meadows and bee corridors in order to combat the declining bee population. And Labour councils across Greater Manchester have worked with the charity City of Trees to set a goal to plant three million street trees.

Labour councils are also tackling the housing challenge, building on the freedoms the last Labour government gave us to start developing social housing again. In this year alone, Hackney council will build 251 genuinely affordable council homes at social rent, living rent or shared ownership.

These, and many other radical examples of Labour councils transforming our country for the better demonstrate that not only can we take on some of our biggest challenges, but we can also be trusted to take care of taxpayers' money.

Local government has arguably been the worst hit public service by Tory austerity. Tory cuts mean councils have lost 60p out of every £1 that the last Labour administration was spending on local government in 2010.

Labour councils could have followed the Tory vision for local government – delivering the very basic level of services on outsourced contracts – like the 'easyCouncil' model in Tory-run Barnet, which outsourced £300m worth of services. Services like council libraries were privatised and left unstaffed up to 80 per cent of the time. But over the past few years we have seen the problems this approach has caused.

Labour councils, in contrast, have been on the frontline in fighting austerity. We have been in-sourcing services and innovating, all while average council tax bills are £350 lower in Labour local authorities than in Conservative ones.

We need both radicalism and trust, that Labour councils are showing, if we are to regain ground nationally and win the next general election. So the Labour party needs to start taking us seriously. Just over 6,000 Labour councillors contribute more than £2m annually to the party via the councillor levy, and many millions of pounds more through donations to local campaigns.

Councillors are part of the campaigning backbone of this party and continue to win local seats where we lose nationally. And where we are in power, our councillors and mayors are on the frontline of fighting austerity – having to deal with difficult budgets thanks to Tory cuts while protecting their most vulnerable communities.

Labour councils are not the joint architects of austerity with the Tories: they are fighting to preserve services while their budgets are at breaking point. In 2020 let us acknowledge the work of Labour in local government, stand up for them in the fight ahead, and win through radicalism and trust. **F**

*Anntoinette Bramble is deputy mayor of Hackney council*

# The Starmer era

Keir Starmer has won a convincing mandate to lead Labour.  
*Tim Heppell* assesses his prospects for the months and years ahead



*Tim Heppell is associate professor of British politics at the University of Leeds. His book, Recovering Power: The Labour Party in Opposition from Attlee to Corbyn, will be published later this year by Routledge*

**T**HE LABOUR PARTY HAS MADE its choice. Four months after Jeremy Corbyn offered his resignation in the aftermath of Labour's worst election performance since 1935, at least in terms of seats gained, its members have placed their trust in Keir Starmer. However, the campaigning period, overshadowed as much of it has been cut, by the coronavirus pandemic, has left us with as many questions as answers. Can Starmer unify the Labour party? Which factional strand of Labour political thought is he really aligned to? And does he possess the political communication skills to construct a coalition of electoral support that will enable him to become the next Labour prime minister?

As Starmer sets about constructing a strategy to take him from being leader of the opposition to prime minister, the parliamentary arithmetic looks very depressing: the Labour party needs a 10 per cent swing to gain the 125 seats necessary to form a majority administration. However, although the mountain to climb appears very steep, the fact remains that the Conservatives have numerous vulnerabilities that could create opportunities for an opposition recovery. Consider the following: first, on Brexit, the Tory government has created an impression of simplicity about establishing new relations with the European Union and the economic potential that can be unleashed by new trading arrangements. That greater complexities will probably exist will provide Starmer with avenues through which to undermine Johnson.

Second, the ability of the Conservatives to deliver on their claims of economic renewal will be compromised by the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic given the likelihood of an imminent economic downturn. An era of failing businesses, job losses and increasing poverty and the choices that the government may have to make – a new

wave of austerity and public expenditure cuts or increasing taxation or both – may threaten the coalition of voters that he constructed in the general election of 2019.

Third, by the time of the general election in 2024, the Conservatives will have been in government for 14 years. With a patchy record of policy achievements to their name, there will be plenty for Starmer to concentrate on as he fulfils his primary responsibilities as leader of the opposition – holding the government to account and offering an alternative government in waiting.

What then does Starmer need to do to make the Labour party look like an alternative party of government? Above all, the party needs to unify. Next, it needs to construct an alternative policy programme for government that appears viable and is deemed by voters to be deliverable. Finally, Starmer needs to come across as a credible alternative prime minister.

Let us consider the issue of unity. Since losing office in 2010 the Labour party has been led by two individuals whose mandate to lead was disputed.

Ed Miliband secured the leadership within the old electoral college system in which he was the first preference in one section – amongst the trade union affiliates – but his brother was the first preference amongst Labour parliamentarians and constituency Labour party members. Jeremy Corbyn secured comfortable victories in the 2015 and 2016 leadership elections (with 59 and 61 per cent of the vote respectively) – conducted as they were under the new rules established by the Collins report of 2014 which diluted the importance of Labour parliamentarians. Critically, however, Corbyn was opposed by over 80 per cent of his own parliamentarians.

That Miliband and Corbyn had disputed mandates matters. Research by Andreas Murr of Warwick University has demonstrated the correlation between the mandate

**Starmer takes up the leadership with a far stronger mandate than Corbyn or Miliband**

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that the respective leaders of the Conservative and Labour parties have within their parliamentary parties and their subsequent electoral performance. Murr argues that the leader with the strongest mandate at parliamentary level is significantly more likely to win the next general election. With that in mind, Starmer takes up the leadership with a far stronger mandate than Corbyn or Miliband did. At the nomination stage of the contest, when six candidates were involved, 89 out of the 203 Labour parliamentarians (42 per cent) backed him. The final number who voted for him in the actual ballot would have been even higher given that 65 parliamentarians either did not nominate at all or nominated candidates who failed to proceed to the full ballot. His mandate at the parliamentary level stands comparison with Boris Johnson's parliamentary mandate to lead the Conservatives – at the nomination stage Starmer had the backing of 42 per cent whereas Johnson had the first preference backing of 36 per cent of Conservative parliamentarians, which rose to 51 per cent in the final parliamentary ballot. At the time of writing, full details of how each Labour parliamentarian actually voted is not in the public domain, but in all likelihood Starmer's parliamentary mandate will be comparable to Johnson's – so if Murr's predictive model is right, then Starmer should be more electorally competitive than Corbyn.

During the campaigning period, Starmer presented himself as a unity candidate. He can demand unity with conviction having been endorsed across the whole of the Labour movement, as he secured the support of 56.1 per cent of party members; 53.1 per cent of affiliated supporters; and 76.6 per cent of registered supporters. But the question then remains what are they unifying around? Starmer has made it clear that he remains supportive of aspects of the Corbynite agenda – challenging austerity; abolishing tuition fees; bringing water, rail, mail and energy under public ownership – but he may have had some scepticism with regard to the 'shopping list' aspect of the manifesto.

However, it is possible that Starmer came out in support of so much of Corbyn's agenda to win the leadership ballot on the basis that the electorate tends to the left and so he needed to avoid being outflanked by Rebecca Long-Bailey. Did he talk left to win the leadership with a view to tacking to the centre to win a general election?

In terms of where he stands on the spectrum of Labour political thought, his record creates some confusion. For example, his decision to vote for Andy Burnham in the Labour party leadership election of 2015 suggests

sympathy with the social democratic tradition, and his centrist credentials were evident in his vote in favour of Trident renewal in 2016. Additionally, as a junior shadow Home Office spokesperson, he participated in the mass front-bench resignations of July 2016 designed to force Corbyn out. But unlike many, Starmer then returned to serve in the shadow cabinet, securing a promotion to the high-profile position of shadow Brexit secretary, where his record would divide opinion. On the one hand it could be argued that, as a remainer, he exploited the difficulties of the Theresa May and Johnson administrations on Brexit to present himself as a potential future leader, to a remain-leaning Labour movement. On the other hand, it could also be argued that he is tainted by his association with a manifesto commitment of seeking a confirmatory referendum, a policy position which was a contributing factor in the loss of many leave-leaning Labour constituencies.

But does Starmer possess the necessary leadership skills to cut through and project himself as a prime minister in waiting? Few doubt his credibility – he has a level of pre-parliamentary experience that few modern elite politicians possess having served as director of public prosecutions and head of the crown prosecution service. He is a competent parliamentary debater, televisual performer and set piece speaker – but he cannot generate the excitement, or the affection, that Corbyn was able to generate within the Labour movement. Maybe less excitement within the Labour core vote is an acceptable price to pay if Starmer can secure more trust beyond the Labour core vote. But can he? Is selecting a white, male QC, a remainer and a London-centric establishment figure like Starmer, the best way to appease the wishes of the grassroots for diversity and appeal to the leave-leaning and erstwhile Labour heartlands in the midlands and the north? Many challenges lie ahead for Starmer as he seeks to unify the Labour party; construct a viable policy agenda; and broaden Labour's electoral appeal. ■



# Early lessons

We cannot allow the chance to create a fairer country to be squandered once the coronavirus crisis is over, writes *Anneliese Dodds MP*



*Anneliese Dodds is the Labour and Cooperative MP for Oxford East and the new shadow chancellor. She is a member of the Fabian Society executive committee*

**A**S I WRITE THIS ARTICLE, we are approaching the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic in our hospitals and care homes. All of our practical focus must be on reducing the number of people becoming ill and helping the most vulnerable. In these circumstances, as our NHS and social care workers are under incredible pressure, it feels a difficult moment to look to the political future. The next few weeks will be lifechanging for NHS and social care staff, especially for those who contract the virus at work. Of course, it will also leave lasting trauma for the families of those who succumb to this cruel disease.

Nonetheless, as so many have said, it is essential that we learn the lessons of the current crisis, and plan how we can act on them.

We can do this by looking at the potential economic consequences of this crisis and what a Labour response could look like. At the same time, nobody should pretend that the impacts can be fully understood at this stage. Any conjectures are weakened by uncertainty about how long the crisis will last and how it will impact on behaviour, including our patterns of consumption.

It currently appears unlikely that 'normality' will resume soon, with a slow, stuttering reopening of some forms of community life, as we see currently in China, more likely than a cathartic and celebrative end to the crisis.

The impact of the crisis on public attitudes to politics is also impossible to predict. While some might anticipate that exceptionally poor planning around the production and delivery of mass testing, protective equipment and ventilators will lead (eventually) to a reduction in support for the Johnson government, these failures could instead just deepen the more generalised distrust in politicians of every stripe.

Obviously, the crisis has substantially increased the indebtedness of the UK, just as it has in many other countries. The majority of the UK's response, in quantitative terms, has been focused on loan guarantees and the deferral of tax payments, rather than direct transfers. As and when

the lockdown is lifted, it will surely be necessary to alter this balance.

It goes without saying that a very large number of people have lost their entire income as a result of the crisis. A million people were trying to access universal credit at the time of writing this article, many of them for the first time. The paucity of support in our country for the unemployed is extreme when compared with other countries: witness the debate around the need for support for the self-employed, and the often-repeated point that universal credit is simply insufficient. That is right; but it has never been sufficient for anyone, and failing to acknowledge this risks creating two categories, of deserving and undeserving unemployed people, with the latter supposedly able to feed their families on thin air. Switching the advance loan within universal credit to a grant is the very least that should be demanded, and additional measures beyond the existing limited increases to elements of universal credit must be carried out as a matter of urgency.

## **The paucity of support in our country for the unemployed is extreme**

Moving forward, demand-boosting additional transfers to individuals will be essential, especially to bolster consumption in heavily-affected areas like leisure, the arts and hospitality; and to allow individuals on a low income to pay down some of the significant (additional) personal debt that will have been accrued. In the medium to long term, we must reform social security so that it can genuinely act as a much more comprehensive social safety net; and accelerate moves to reintroduce social assistance rather than relying on (expensive) commercial lending to support incomes. Labour should not back away from strongly advocating for change in this area. At the same time, those who say the current stage of the crisis requires identical cash grants to all ignore the additional costs faced by people in particularly difficult circumstances (for example, people without sufficient savings, or with caring responsibilities or incapacitating disabilities), and the need for support to be tailored to these circumstances. In addition, while such a measure could in theory aid with boosting aggregate



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demand as the economy recovers, its impact would be limited whilst social distancing remains in place.

More comprehensive social security, as well as the funding required to repair our public services will of course require a new approach towards taxation, where the left must be ready to work hard to create new, broad and powerful coalitions for change.

The US academics Kenneth Scheve and David Stasavage have shown how significant shifts in taxation tend to follow instances of mass ‘sacrifice’ for the good of the community. There are countless examples in this pandemic, with for example low-paid social care workers, health assistants and supermarket workers putting themselves at continued risk. The crisis has also laid bare the exploitative approach of some employers. Labour must be ready not only to remind consumers following the crisis of poor employers’ misdemeanours, but also to demand that those who have benefited from government support contribute to society in the future – including through fairer taxation.

Responding to the crisis will also require the rejection of previous shibboleths around short to medium-term debt. While the UK’s post-pandemic debt levels look likely to be comparable to those built up after the 2008 financial crisis, our country will not be alone. Virtually every nation will have found its public finances under pressure as a result of the pandemic. While this obviously raises the spectre of a prolonged and international recession, it also opens up the possibility of a more mature discussion about public finances, learning from the bad example of the UK’s response to the 2008 financial crisis, which led to unnecessarily slow growth and damaged public services.

The UK’s response to Covid-19 has been painfully unilateral – obviously both in terms of the overall public health response, but also the fiscal response. The relatively small size of the UK’s fiscal and monetary firepower compared to the EU’s arguably contributed to the precipitous falls we have seen in the value of the pound over recent weeks. As the EU looks likely to adopt some form of ‘corona bond’ to aid nations like Italy and Spain, Labour must push for far more engaged leadership from the UK to boost global demand.

Current unifying scrambles over scarce life-saving equipment and essential testing materials have also indicated the need for greater rather than less international engagement. Labour will need to demonstrate close working with sister parties on all these issues, as well as highlighting government failures.

More widely, there is a risk of nations responding to the crisis by erecting barriers to free and fair trade: the UK should argue against such a destructive approach. Unnecessary trade barriers with the EU will constitute a luxury the post-crisis UK will not be able to afford. Similarly, Labour should push firmly back against those who would use the economic implications of the pandemic to justify the weakening of measures to combat the climate emergency.

Finally, we must also be wary of jumping to quick conclusions concerning the crisis’ impact on support for public services. It has been incredibly moving to see communities turn out to ‘clap for our carers’; but dealing with the problems which reduced the resilience of our public services will be complicated and controversial. Local authorities in particular will not only need to be backfilled for the costs of dealing with the crisis, but also for the massive drop in revenue that many will be confronting.

The pandemic has underscored the steady disempowerment of local authorities as bodies able to carry out the task of local coordination, whether it be of public services, volunteers or business support. As debate will inevitably turn to the funding of public services and particularly the NHS and social care following the crisis, Labour must ensure that local authorities’ critical role in ensuring resilience is at the forefront. More genuine and full-throated engagement and partnership with Labour in local government will be essential here.

Above all, we must avoid any lazy assumption that the response to the crisis will necessarily lead to a groundswell of solidarity and spending, putting the UK on the road to socialism. The chance to create a fairer country was squandered following the financial crisis. We cannot allow it to be so again following the current crisis. ■

# A new Beveridge

The coronavirus pandemic has exposed deep flaws in a social security system built for a different age. Now, more than ever, it is time to lay out a new vision for the future, writes *David Coats*



*David Coats is a research fellow at the Smith Institute and visiting professor at the Centre for Sustainable Work and Employment Futures, University of Leicester*

**L**AST NOVEMBER, BEFORE the world was transformed by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Fabian Society published *Where Next? Reforming social security over the next 10 years*, setting out the need for immediate repair work to undo the damage wrought by a decade of austerity. At the time the proposals looked ambitious, more radical than anything outlined in Labour's 2019 general election manifesto and highly unlikely to be implemented until the Johnson government had been consigned to the dustbin of history. Today, the weaknesses of the welfare state have been laid bare, leading a rather right-wing Conservative government to take measures that are anything but.

Ministers have been quick to recognise that universal credit, the contributory element of jobseeker's allowance and the pre-crisis arrangements for statutory sick pay are simply not equal to the scale of the current challenge. The upending of the world as we know it has proved the state, and the state alone, has the capacity to act and offer people the security they need in the face of the crisis. Government support is now seen as critical, not just for those on low incomes or at the margins of the labour market but for *all* citizens and for *all* businesses. The devotees of Friedrich Hayek and those who believe that public services are a burden on the 'real economy' have nothing useful to say in the face of these unprecedented events. Social democrats should take no pleasure in an unfolding global tragedy, but there is solace to be found, perhaps, in the reality that we are, philosophically and temperamentally, committed to the role of government in protecting people from social and economic risks. For 40 years or

more, market fundamentalists have been telling us that the state is the enemy of liberty and prosperity. Boris Johnson and his colleagues have had no alternative but to respond to the crisis by taking actions that are wholly inconsistent with their fundamental beliefs.

It is premature to make predictions about the political environment in which we will find ourselves after the crisis, but it seems inconceivable that the pre-Covid-19 status quo can simply be restored. The railways have already been effectively renationalised, governments may take ownership stakes in airlines and other major industries, public borrowing is set to break all the supposed rules of fiscal prudence and the Bank of England will need to crank up the printing presses to provide the authorities with the resources they need. The fundamentals of capitalism, as we have known them for the last two and a half centuries, have been suspended for the duration.

Making the argument for a small state, low taxes, limited regulation, unconstrained markets and a minimal welfare safety net will be much harder once the crisis is over, not least because it is public institutions, the NHS and the social security system, that will bear most of the burden in keeping the nation safe, healthy and secure. There is at least a possibility that social democrats can, once again, successfully make the case for an active and enabling state, offering security and opportunity for all citizens in good times and effective protection in times of crisis.

Labour's general election defeat now seems like ancient history, so remote from present preoccupations as to be essentially irrelevant. Living in lockdown offers ample

**Creating the welfare state stands as an enduring testament to the power of progressive politics in action**



opportunities to cultivate our gardens, but it also gives us time for reflection on our own successes and failures. No matter where one may be positioned on Labour's ideological spectrum, enthusiastic Corbynistas and unrepentant Blairites alike agree that the achievements of the 1945 to 1951 Labour governments were heroic. Creating the welfare state stands as an enduring testament to the power of progressive politics in action. And yet it is sometimes the case that a partial account of our own history distorts our understanding of the present and clouds our ability to think clearly about the future.

We should remember, for example, that the 1942 Beveridge report, which laid the foundations for the post-war settlement, was prepared by a Liberal academic, for a coalition government, led by a Conservative prime minister. Moreover, Labour's commitment to full-employment, which was a critical departure from the policies of the 1930s, and was viewed at the time as a practical expression of democratic socialism, represented nothing more than the implementation of the 1944 white paper on employment policy, similarly endorsed by the wartime coalition.

Of course, it is right to say that the Conservative party was opposed to the creation of the NHS in the form it took under Labour, and there was some Tory hostility to the social security legislation enacted in 1946. But it would be wrong to conclude that the welfare state was inspired by either of the Labour party's principal traditions – social democracy and democratic socialism. Both William Beveridge and John Maynard Keynes (who provided the intellectual foundations for the full employment policy) were trying to save capitalism from the destructive effects of unconstrained markets; they were certainly not trying to construct a new Jerusalem or a radically different social order. We might say that the 1945 to 1951 governments were successful precisely because they sought advice and guidance from within the Mandarinate and built on the success of the wartime coalition; there was broad agreement across political and policy making elites that these measures were essential for social justice and stable economic growth. Labour's vision for the welfare state in 1945 was politically persuasive precisely because it was not a partisan programme.

Seventy-eight years after Beveridge we find ourselves in a rather curious position. The NHS remains the most popular and trusted institution in the UK – “the closest the British people have to a religion”, as Nigel Lawson once remarked with disapprobation. But the post-war social security settlement has fared less well. Beveridge's proposals were for a system of social insurance, which built on the contributory principle that had been the lodestone of policymaking since Asquith's Liberal government introduced a limited old age pension: “You pay in when you are working and take out when you are in need”. The word *insurance* was used advisedly, emphasising the point that the welfare

state was (just like private insurance) a collective enterprise designed to manage risk. It was founded on the principle of reciprocity and recognised that individuals of differing means would never, in the absence of state intervention, be able effectively to cope with the vicissitudes of life to which we are all exposed – ill health, unemployment and old age.

The ideas of reciprocity and contribution remain embedded in the public mind today, but social security for adults of working age is almost entirely disconnected from the insurance principle. With the exception of the contributory element of jobseeker's allowance, almost all benefits are means tested. In contrast to the NHS, the Department for Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus are more likely to inspire hostility than affection amongst citizens using their services. Again, unlike the NHS, the tight budgetary policies pursued since 2010 (the benefit cap and freezes, intrusive medical assessments for the disabled) have provoked a muted reaction from the electorate.

In the pre-Covid-19 period, protests by anti-poverty campaigners or advocacy groups (and Labour's front bench) had no effect on either government policy or on the public mind. Certainly, there was anger about the number of homeless people on the streets and the growing use of food banks, but no connection was made between these phenomena and the coercive policies implemented since 2010. It is a testament to Labour's relative political failure that ‘welfare’ was seen as a handout not a hand up; something of interest to the lazy, feckless and undeserving and a matter

of indifference to the wider population. The Conservative party continued to see toughness in dealing with ‘claimants’ as a route to political success. In the absence of a more compelling political narrative, Labour was always going to be on the defensive.

This is a world that the architects of the welfare state would struggle to comprehend. Despite (or perhaps because of) their apparent radicalism, the 1942 proposals were popular, well-understood and subject to everyday discussion (in a way that the complexities of universal credit are not). Most public criticism was focused on the perceived inadequacy of the basic state pension rather than objections to social security and the welfare state. But, and this is the critical point, everybody had been through the war and had no desire to return to the pre-existing dispensation, millions of people had experienced unemployment, poverty and economic disruption in the 1930s. The state had played the central role in successfully prosecuting the anti-fascist struggle and marshalling the nation's resources in this endeavour. Government was trusted and had a proven capacity to combine bold ideas with effective action.

Covid-19 is changing the political rules of engagement in unexpected and unpredictable ways, just as was the case in the second world war. Policies that were condemned as lunatic or irresponsible only three months ago are



now presented as necessities. Conservative politicians who have spent their lives railing against the power of the state are now presiding over the biggest expansion of state intervention in economic and social life that has ever been witnessed.

It would be easy in these circumstances to fall back on the cliché “we may have lost the 2019 election, but we won the argument”. After all, the Tories are implementing policies beyond Jeremy Corbyn’s wildest fantasies. But it would be quite wrong to believe that emergency action in a crisis inevitably lays the foundation for an enduring settlement. The rules of engagement may have changed but the outcome remains uncertain.

Relying on the proposals in Labour’s 2019 general election manifesto is a wholly inadequate response to a radical change in circumstances. The central proposal contained therein, that universal credit should be abandoned and replaced by “an alternative system that treats people with dignity and respect”, was completely silent as to what this new system might be and how it would work. Labour’s vision for the future of social security sounded more rhetorical than practical. It is all very well condemning the awfulness of universal credit (who could think

otherwise?), but what precisely was Labour proposing to do? Where would the state act to provide insurance for citizens against social and economic risks? Where would the boundaries be drawn between universal benefits, contribution and means testing? What commitments were there to a continuous review of policy effectiveness to ensure that poverty and inequality were being reduced?

The last time the electorate embraced a vision for social security the language was grand and the ambition immense. Beveridge designed his proposals to ensure that the five giants of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness would be eliminated forever. There was a keen appreciation of the challenges that many people faced in their lives and a commitment to decisive action.

Covid-19 has exposed the fragility of our economic and social arrangements. It has revealed the inadequacy of a social security system designed for a very different world. Keynes and Beveridge may have lived through the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–19, but neither gave any thought to the impact of a public health threat on the life of the nation. Nor did they consider the likely upheavals consequent on climate change or the impact of digital technologies on settled patterns of life and work. If we want a social security system that is fit for the future, then we need a new Beveridge.

Institutions only endure if they are supported by consensus and that suggests there must be, as a first step, an impartial, dispassionate assessment of the risks to which

citizens are exposed combined with a judicious account of the capacity of the state to offer worthwhile guarantees of security. As we learned in the post-war period, an ambitious, sustainable programme of (re)construction cannot be the preserve of one party alone. Working beyond party lines is always challenging, but there are examples of collaboration leading to practical and enduring changes in policy.

The Scottish Constitutional Convention, for example, established in 1989, played a central role in the development of the devolution settlement. It brought people together across the political spectrum and engaged civil society groups too (trade unions, churches, business representatives). Their blueprint, Scotland’s Parliament, Scotland’s Right, was published in 1995 and the structure of the Scottish parliament generally followed these recommendations.

The Social Justice Commission, created in 1992 following

John Smith’s election as Labour leader, may look more obviously partisan, but its members included a future Liberal Democrat MP and representatives of faith groups with no obvious political affiliations. While the ambitions may have been more modest than the aspiration for a comprehensive Beveridge-style settlement, the Commission did lay the foundations for the 1997 to 2010

Labour government’s approach to active labour market programmes, education and training policies and the importance of work as a route out of poverty.

Perhaps what is needed is a hybrid of these two approaches – not as open as the Scottish Convention and not as ‘Labour’ as the Commission on Social Justice. Any new inquiry, following the example of Beveridge, should be led by a major public figure with the intellectual heft to manage technical and political complexity. And there must be an opportunity to engage with the public too, with formal evidence sessions, events across the nations and regions and, perhaps, the use of a citizens’ jury to consider policy options before final recommendations are made.

Labour’s recent experience has proved that simply attacking the government and making nebulous promises of radical change offers no path to victory. A world transformed by Covid-19 offers an opportunity to reassert the progressive case for evidence-based policy. A pandemic cannot be overcome by tweets, amusing after dinner speeches or dubious slogans on a bus. Social democracy is nothing if it is not rational and empirical, which explains why we have struggled in times when passion appears to trump reason and facts do not matter. Now is the time to reassert the core values of the Fabian Society. Expertise, patient investigation of the social realities and creative policy responses founded on a belief in the power of the state will be essential as we seek to build a resilient post-crisis settlement. **F**



# Digging deeper

Labour Together's post-election review had submissions from more than 11,000 Labour members across the movement. As we analyse the results, it is clear we must repair our relationship with voters and update our party structures, writes *Hannah O'Rourke*



*Hannah O'Rourke is the senior programme manager at Labour Together*

**A**FTER FOUR CONSECUTIVE election losses now is the time for Labour to take stock. If we are to continue to thrive as a political force, it is time to look at some of the more difficult issues we have failed to confront over the past two decades. We must begin with a collective analysis of what has gone wrong and of how our party might best move forward. Our election defeat was seismic and we must confront this head on – we owe it to the people in the seats we lost and to those who couldn't bring themselves to vote for us. But this means we must find the humility to come together to listen and learn.

The problem is that constructing a shared understanding requires all strands of the left to work together – and that is something we seem to have a problem doing. Comments and opinions are often twisted into attacks. We avoid constructive conversations and instead wrap ourselves in over-simplistic explanations.

This failure to reflect more deeply is a symptom of the factional war our party has been stuck in for the last five years. Internally, the Labour party has become a more hostile place, from the constituency meetings that feel increasingly strained at a local level, right through to the public disunity frequently highlighted on the national stage.

Factionalism itself is not the issue – it is healthy for our movement to champion pluralism and diversity of thought. When factions are built around genuine ideological differences or political approaches, the conflict between them can be productive. What is problematic is when our factions are shallow, built around personalities or small groups trying to protect their own power bases. It is problematic when people stop being able to talk to each other, when factions become so estranged they cannot even come together to negotiate and when they breed cronyism and infect the operation of our party and its culture at every level.

At a systematic level, it is clear the Labour party has been struggling for quite some time. Large parts of Labour are unconnected and working in silos or in opposition; there

is a lack of collaboration across different CLPs; and our internal elections have become proxies for factional battles.

To stop political structures from working against the good of our party, we need new spaces and different ways of collaborating. Labour Together's network allows exactly this. We have created a space which encourages cross-factional working and facilitates information and ideas being shared between various parts of the party, thus breaking down silos.

After the results were announced, Labour Together launched a review of the 2019 election to uncover what worked and what didn't. Unlike reviews that have gone before, Labour Together has not chosen one single expert to lead it. The review has not been controlled by a one faction or constructed to produce a desired political outcome. Instead, it has been compiled by a group of commissioners from across the Labour movement and supported by a survey of over 11,000 Labour members, supporters and former voters. It has been vital to ensure that the whole movement can take part, because the process of constructing a project that involves all our traditions is just as important as its findings.

Reading through some of the 11,000 responses to our survey (all of which are being fully coded and analysed), time and again factional infighting is highlighted as a problem. As one submission emphatically argues: "The factionalism needs to go. Top to bottom the party should represent the diversity of opinion and people we work on behalf of ... Our inability to compromise amongst ourselves has given a huge victory to the most regressive government of my lifetime ... We should be truly ashamed, yet all I've seen so far is each faction reading into our defeat a victory for their side ... A divided Labour will not correct this mistake in the next election."

While many applaud the commitment of activists on the doorstep, it is clear that basic organisational tools and structures weren't working with the phonebanking system, Dialogue, reported to have been down at the start of the campaign and the platform for designing leaflets described as "clunky". One member said: "It crashed several times and this whole area was the most stressful aspect of running the campaign."

In light of these comments, we must focus not only on how we can repair our relationship with voters but also how we can update our party structures. Our work must be to rebuild Labour nationally and also strengthen our movement internally.

There is anger, disappointment and frustration at the 2019 election result from all sides and our party needed an outlet and a space to make sense of why we lost and how to move forward. Labour Together's commission and review has attempted to offer that space. Our final report will seek not a simplification of our problems but an acknowledgement of the complexity of our current situation. It won't duck the hard questions or offer easy answers but will attempt to lay out a shared analysis of our problems and scope out a path our new leader might navigate to solve them. Ultimately our route back to power cannot be solved by a single pamphlet, a single faction or the election of a single leader. It will not begin or end with a simple review but will require a deeper commitment to a new political and organisational direction. **F**



# Leading the world

The UK is inconsistent in its commitment to human rights. If we truly want to be a force for good in this world, greater cooperation is vital, writes *Benjamin Ward*



*Benjamin Ward is the acting UK director at Human Rights Watch*

**T**HE CHALLENGES WE face right now can seem insurmountable. Covid-19 is transforming our world. The climate crisis, the ongoing impact of Syria's conflict, and the assault on our rights and our democratic institutions from authoritarian leaders will rightly continue to occupy attention.

Responding to these challenges requires multilateral action and cooperation. Yet they come at a time when the UK has chosen to leave a major values-based multilateral organisation – the European Union.

Brexit does not mean that the UK can no longer play a positive role in the world. It does, however, require the UK to make the right choices. It should continue to work with partners in Europe and around the world and to prioritise core values like human rights, the rule of law, democratic institutions and accountability for serious crimes.

Standing up for those values is critically important.

In the last few years, we have seen those who try to protest injustice face repression in many parts of the world, with sometimes violent responses, including in Hong Kong, Iraq, Sudan, Iran, Russia, Venezuela and Nigeria.

Today, human rights defenders are subject to state repression, including politically motivated jailing for their peaceful activism in many countries, such as Rwanda, Azerbaijan, India, and Egypt.

Journalists and bloggers continue to face grave risks for doing their work. The murders of Jamal Khashoggi by Saudi state forces and journalist and anti-corruption activist Daphne Caruana Galizia in Malta highlight this, as well as the jailing of Ahmet Altan in Turkey and imprisonment of Christine Kamikazi, Agnès Ndirubusa, Egide Harerimana, and Tércence Mpozenzi in Burundi.

The government has said many of the right things about its ambitions for the UK to lead the world post-Brexit. In September last year, the foreign secretary Dominic Raab spoke about the UK being 'a force for good'. The government has embarked on comprehensive review of security,

defence, and foreign policy which offers a chance to show what that approach will mean in practice.

The critical question is whether the UK is serious about standing up for shared values and willing to work with others to defend them. So far, its record is decidedly mixed.

There certainly are positives. The UK continues to play an important role at the UN Human Rights Council. The government plans to introduce 'Magnitsky Act' style mechanisms – based on US measures to sanction human rights offenders – to impose travel bans, asset freezes and seizures on people involved in serious human rights abuses around the world. It has, together with Canada, opened a global campaign for media freedom.

The UK has also shown leadership at the UN in addressing China's repression of Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang. This has included an intervention at the General Assembly, where the UK delivered a statement on behalf of some two dozen countries condemning persecution and mass arbitrary detention by Beijing.

The UK government also looks set to maintain human rights clauses in trade agreements that will continue EU trade terms. It has committed to support human

rights defenders around the world, including through its diplomatic posts. And it has committed to maintain a strong focus on education for girls around the world.

On the negative side of the ledger, the UK government seems determined to reject forms of international cooperation that involve ongoing EU ties, even when maintaining them would be in the UK's obvious interest – such as the European arrest warrant, maintaining rights of workers, or preserving security cooperation.

There is even renewed talk of the UK leaving the Council of Europe – the region's main human rights body – so that the government can water down human rights protections in domestic law. Such a move could embolden governments like Russia and Turkey who would prefer a muted Council of Europe, and thereby risks weakening human rights protection and access to justice for millions of people across the continent and as well as in the UK.

**The critical question is whether the UK is serious about standing up for shared values**



And the government is failing to speak out forcefully in the face of serious abuse, including in Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Turkey, Israel/Palestine, and Rwanda. If the UK is serious about its commitment to media freedom, and to human rights defenders like Bahrain's Nabeel Rajab, it needs to be willing to speak out when they are threatened, including by countries with whom the UK has close ties.

Then there are the countries and issues where the government has taken some positive steps and could be doing a better and more principled job; places like Sri Lanka and Myanmar, where it should use its positions of leadership at the UN Human Rights Council and Security Council respectively to press for accountability for serious crimes against civilians.

Then there is Yemen, where the UK's admirable humanitarian efforts are overshadowed by its ongoing desire to arm the Saudi-UAE-led coalition despite deep evidence of war crimes. UK exports have only been halted because of litigation in the UK courts.

International justice is a good illustration of the UK's inconsistent approach – it is a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) and has historically backed international justice in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. More recently it has pushed for accountability over Syria and Libya. Yet the UK government is actively contemplating immunising historic abuses by its own forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. The UK has been among a handful of ICC member countries pressing for arbitrary limits to the court's budget at a time when its workload is growing. It has also called for timelines for completion of the prosecutor's preliminary inquiries, one of which concerns allegations of abuse involving UK forces in Iraq. This is not good enough from a country that helped create and codify international humanitarian law.

In some cases, the UK's execution fails to match up to its ideals. The government here has positioned itself as a

global leader on preventing sexual violence in conflict, but a recent independent review found that its multimillion-pound initiative lacked vision, strategy, and rigorous monitoring, calling its efficacy into question.

On trade, there is a worry that human rights clauses in fresh trade agreements will be abandoned or rejected, robbing the UK of leverage at one end, and of an obligation to uphold high standards at the other. The government's reluctance in Brexit talks to be bound by EU standards on labour and other rights derived from EU law does not bode well in this regard.

What can be done to encourage the UK government to make a commitment to human rights a consistent part of its foreign policy?

The UK parliament has a crucial role to play including through the foreign affairs and development select committees and both houses must scrutinise legislation and policies to ensure that the UK is acting in a way that is consistent with its values and that it is cooperating with others to maximise the effectiveness of its efforts. The UK's hosting of the next UN climate change conference – COP26 – when it is rearranged after the coronavirus crisis, will offer an opportunity to reflect on the importance of that cooperation.

As the main opposition party, Labour has a particular duty to play a principled role. Key activities should include helping to shape the comprehensive security, defence and foreign policy review, identifying key priorities for action and setting out practical arguments for the public about the continued importance of engaging with the world, including partners in Europe, in the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

The UK is an island state. When it comes to dealing with the world's challenges and standing up for core values, however, it cannot go it alone. **F**

# The new tribalism

To combat polarisation, British identity must be rebuilt with inclusiveness, openness and hope at its centre — *David Lammy MP*



*David Lammy is the Labour MP for Tottenham and the new shadow justice secretary. He is the author of Tribes: How Our Need to Belong Can Make or Break Society, published by Constable*

**I**N 2007, WHEN Tony Blair asked me to lead commemorations on the bicentenary of the 1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, I received an invitation from the Science Museum to undergo a DNA test. It revealed that I am a 25 per cent match to the Tuareg tribe in Fafa, Niger; a 25 per cent match to the Temne tribe in Sierra Leone; and a 25 per cent match to the Bantu tribe in South Africa. The most surprising detail was the reference to traces of Scottish DNA.

In recent years, I have become fascinated by the human need to belong. For my new book, *Tribes*, I went on a journey to understand three tribes that have shaped me. I travelled to Fafa, Niger, to explore my connection to my genetic roots. Next, I returned to Peterborough and the home of the parents of my best friend from the state boarding school I went to from age 11. I spoke to them about their unease about immigration, their experience of change as loss, and the feeling of crisis in middle England. Finally, I examined what it means to be British Caribbean, a community with a unique ability to bend, flex and adapt.

Many of us are seeking connection, after an era of individualism that went too far. Our longing for belonging in part explains why many of us have become more tribal. It is not only far-right extremists, Islamic terrorists, or gang members who have become more polarised. Split into tribes of right and left, Leave and Remain, as well as Labour and Conservative, political discourse has become toxic. Bipartisanship has become increasingly rare. Too many of us automatically think the worst of our opponents and turn a blind eye to wrongdoing within our own group.

To understand the new tribalism that has gripped society, we must examine the technological revolution that caused it. Traditional lifelong careers and the social classes they were linked to were once the source of peoples' identities, but technological disruption and globalisation have eroded them. The social media algorithms that determine what content appears on our newsfeeds rarely show us new perspectives, instead offering up opinions we already agree with. The government has systematically under-invested in our communities, leaving fewer spaces and places for people from different backgrounds to interact. The result is a spike in depression across the Western world and a loneliness crisis. New tribal identities, often formed online, offer an appealing substitute for the communities we once had. They include many of the positive aspects of

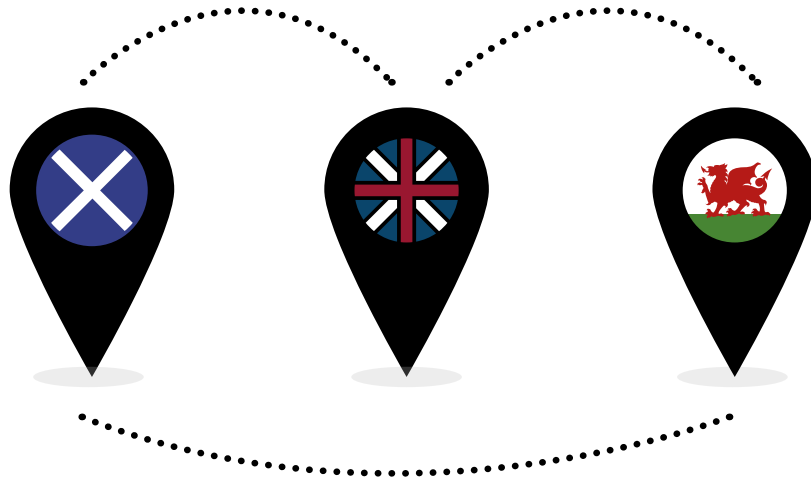
group membership: solidarity, friendship and loyalty, but also the supremacy, exclusivity and blind loyalty that is fracturing society.

My solution to the new tribalism starts at the local level. A radical decentralisation of power and wealth to metro mayors is a vital first step. In addition, I propose a new 'encounter culture', which encourages meaningful engagement between people of different ages, ethnicities, backgrounds and places on an equal basis. This can range from reinvesting in traditional clubs, pubs, libraries and sports teams, to more original local initiatives, such as 'chatty café' schemes where tables are left for people to speak to strangers, 'creative sheds' where people gather to make items in workshops; and 'playing out' initiatives which turn streets into temporary playgrounds. A universal basic income – giving every adult citizen a monthly cash payment from the government – would offer all of us more freedom to take part in civic events, activities or clubs that can help bring people closer together.

But at the national level, the UK must create a new civic identity, founded on shared institutions and ideals, to provide a progressive alternative to the ethnic nationalism, based on skin colour and genetic ancestry, that is taking root. A start would be to give England, left out of devolution, its own civic voice through a new permanent English Citizens' Assembly. At the UK level, the priority must be come together around a new written constitution. Among other benefits, this would clearly articulate the values our four nations share, exactly where power lies for each political decision, and settle any ambiguities over the separation of powers between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. A newly compulsory national civic service would bring young people from across the country together in a new environment; allowing them to make fresh bonds while learning new skills.

It is only by rebuilding our local and national identities in a way that is inclusive, open and hopeful that the UK can begin to engage on the global level again. We cannot win the argument for the supranational cooperation needed to fix the world's problems, including the climate crisis, migration and inequality, until people feel confident and secure in their neighbourhoods. A world beyond tribes will fail if it is a world without belonging. The solution is to replace competitiveness with cooperation. Swap fear for hope. Create communities instead of tribes. **F**





# State of the union

Brexit has driven the debate over the future of the union to the top of the agenda. The Fabian Review took soundings from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales on what might lie ahead



## Brexit with a kilt on

Independence would not be in the interests of Scotland or the UK as a whole. We must stand firm against the breakup of the union  
— *Ian Murray MP*

If I had a pound for every person that has asked how we win back Scotland, I would be lying on a beach in the Bahamas. The interesting thing is that nobody in the last Labour shadow cabinet asked me that question before the 2019 general election. If they had, perhaps then shadow chancellor John McDonnell would not have come to a lunchtime comedy festival chat show and changed our well-established position on Scottish independence a few months before a general election that we should never have agreed to.

But we cannot dwell on the past. We must look to the future if we are to prevent the breakup of the UK, although it is my own belief that this is very unlikely. The opinion polls back that up, and rarely put support for Scottish independence ahead, beyond the margin of error – although, given all that has gone on with Brexit and Boris Johnson, it is surprising that the nationalist campaign is not riding much higher.

But Scotland's future in the UK depends on a strong Labour party. And we do not have much time to recover. The 2021 Scottish parliamentary elections will be a pivotal moment in the history of Scotland, and the Labour movement must come together and do what we have always done so proudly: stand up for the interests of Scotland.

Those interests lie firmly in remaining part of the UK. As an internationalist party that has solidarity at its core, how could we believe in anything else? It is in the national interest. We must therefore reject the political dogma that comes from the nationalists who want to rip Scotland out of the UK at all and any cost.

We have to acknowledge that Brexit will be bad. It will damage the Scottish and UK economies, harm our future prosperity and diminish us as a country. That is not only my view but the view of every respected commentator and, unsurprisingly, the UK government itself with forecasts suggesting from a 2 per cent to 16 per cent hit on GDP depending on the type of Brexit and the region. Scottish independence on top of Brexit would be unpardonable folly and inflict untold uncertainty with inevitable damage to the Scottish economy.

So, what must the Labour party do to resist Scottish nationalism and win back support for the union? There are three key steps.

## Standing firm

First, we must be absolutely clear where we stand as a movement. We are against independence and against a second independence referendum. Full stop.

There is no gain to be had for Labour in flirting with the issue of independence. It will not bring us any more votes and we will be giving up on our core Labour values built around solidarity. We need to stop dancing to the tune of our opponents.

With only 45 per cent of those who voted backing Scottish independence in 2016, there is no mandate for another referendum. And as the UK's most eminent pollster, Sir John Curtice, said, you clearly can't extrapolate

a mandate for a new independence vote from the general election results in 2019.

Labour must stand firm in its values. The Tories won an 80-seat majority in December, but that doesn't mean we now accept all their policies and positions are the right ones. Quite the contrary – we continue the fight. We have not suddenly started supporting Tory austerity. So why then would we concede something we don't believe in because the Scottish National Party (SNP) won the majority of seats on a minority of the vote?

Imagine this scenario. A prime minister decides that in order to resolve a major constitutional issue he will offer a referendum totally convinced he will win it comfortably. Does this sound familiar? Well, it should as this is what David Cameron did on the European Union (EU). He facilitated an EU referendum without believing in the potential ends. He lost. We should never facilitate the means if we disagree with the ends.

### The positive case

The second step to rebuilding support for the union is to make the positive case for staying in the UK while calling out the extreme form of separation the nationalists are offering. The positive case is something we did not present as much as we would all have liked in the 2014 referendum. We live in a family of nations that pools and shares its resources. The taxpayers of the whole of the UK put their money into the central pot and these funds are then reallocated according to a well-established formula. Scotland benefits from this to the tune of over £13bn a year. That is a UK dividend that will be difficult to turn away from.

Then there is the issue of the UK single market. One of the main pillars of the nationalists' opposition to Brexit was, rightly, the impact leaving the EU and turning away from our largest trading partner would have on the UK economy from. After the Brexit vote, the nationalist position – and mine as the co-chair of Scottish Labour for the Single Market – was to take the least painful option and stay in its institutions – the single market and customs union. It would have been the right thing to do. So, how is it that the SNP's argument is good for the UK and the EU, but not good for Scotland and the UK? It is intellectually incoherent.

This leads to the question of borders. Sadly, a border will now be required between the UK and the EU, whether that be in the Irish Sea or otherwise, but we would also need a border between an independent Scotland and the rest of the UK. Already Scottish government ministers are talking of 'tampon raids' from those pesky English after Holyrood approved free sanitary provision for women in Scotland. If they can't stop the illegal trade in tampons what kind of border will be required in the event of independence?

The positive case for the UK is economic and is about the free movement of goods, people and services. But it is also much more than that. It is social, political and

cultural. We are all 'Jock Tamson's Bairns' whether you are in Liverpool or Ullapool, Folkestone or Fort William – it's a common Scottish phrase which means our issues are the same. Our history is the same. Our future is interlinked.

But what of the Scottish nationalist sentiment – that feels more prominent and extreme than in 2014? Here, Labour can win the argument by taking on the nationalists' plans for Scotland. The analysis in the SNP's own 'growth' commission conceded there would be at least 15 years of austerity with no clear path back into the EU and a deficit that will require increases in tax and slashing of public spending. On top of this, the nationalists' previous case for independence was based on an average oil price of around \$115 a barrel. It's less than \$40 today at the time of writing, and revenues have plummeted. It is now a net cost to the Treasury rather than the financial foundation for a new country.

Then there is the potential introduction of a new currency. That would mean ditching the pound and putting something in its place which would require tens of billions to be maintained in reserves. Those funds would have to be borrowed through the creation of eye-watering national debt.

We get no answers from SNP politicians when we confront them on these issues other than a wave of a flag, a cry of 'standing up for Scotland', and the accusation that you are somehow 'unScottish' if you dare question them. Their vision sounds like Brexit with a kilt on to me, but even more damaging.

### A vision for Scotland

Labour should provide a radical progressive policy platform at Scottish and UK level that looks to the future. What is the Labour party vision for Scotland in 10, 20 and 30 years' time? We haven't really articulated this well as our politics is paralysed and poisoned by constitutional arguments.

We should start by demonstrating to the Scottish public that the UK Labour party is a credible alternative government at Westminster. The cocktail of Brexit with a large Conservative majority is music to the ears of the SNP but a progressive and popular UK Labour government would change all that and show that there is an alternative path for Scotland.

We have to change to win but we also have to reconnect. That is what many of us have been fighting for in these recent leadership and deputy leadership elections.

Labour should be talking about the future and taking on the big issues of the day. We do not need to have all the answers, but we need to have the ability to listen, learn and respond.

These big issues are plentiful: how do we resolve the crisis in social care? What is our response to the climate emergency? How do we see the future of work with automation and disruptive technologies? Where will the future careers of the UK be with artificial intelligence, robotics and biosciences? How do our workforce and education

**"The positive case for the UK is economic. But it is also social, political and cultural"**

## “Welsh Labour needs to start thinking about what Wales could look like with more devolution or even as an independent state”

system respond to the rapid change in the world of work? And how do we fund our public services?

It is a fact of British politics that the road to UK Labour government runs through Scotland. That is as true today as ever. The scale of the challenge is huge. We need a 13 per cent swing across Britain to get a one-seat majority if only one Scottish Labour MP is elected, or an 11 per cent swing if we manage to get 16 Scottish Labour MPs. The 1997 Labour government got a 10 per cent swing. This is the challenge we must meet if we are to have any realistic chance of having a Labour prime minister again.

Winning back Scotland is not just in the Scottish national interest, but the UK national interest too. We need a credible alternative government at Westminster to prevent the breakup of the union. That is what is at stake. I'm up for that challenge. **F**

*Ian Murray is the Labour MP for Edinburgh South and shadow Scottish secretary*



### Independence or bust?

Welsh Labour now needs to grapple with the independence issue — *Harriet Protheroe Davis*

Wales has historically been the home of the Labour party. My hometown of Merthyr Tydfil has been a Labour safe seat since 1900, when Keir Hardie first stood. Across the Valleys, seats such as Cynon Valley and Rhondda have similarly returned Labour MPs since the early 1900s. The majority of the Valleys stayed with Labour in the 2019 general election – bucking the national trend of leave voting seats – but this cannot give Welsh Labour false hope.

The 2019 general election saw Labour lose six seats to the Tories in Wales: Bridgend, Ynys Mon, Aberconwy, Clwyd West, Vale of Clwyd and Delyn. No pundit predicted these losses, especially Bridgend – a Labour seat for the last 37 years.

In January this year, an opinion poll released by YouGov put the Tories at ‘historic levels’ in Wales 41 per cent said they would vote Conservative with only 36 per cent saying they would vote for Labour. That is a statistic very few of us saw coming.

The Welsh Labour party is currently in a panic, with Labour Welsh assembly members (AMs) terrified that they will lose control in next year’s Welsh Assembly election. This would be seismic: Welsh Labour has been in government in Wales since the assembly was founded. Now Labour’s fear is that it will lose their working majority and that the Conservatives will form a coalition with Plaid Cymru. This means Plaid Cymru leader Adam Price could very soon become the first minister in Wales.

### Growing support for Welsh independence

If the 2021 assembly elections do indeed return Price as first minister, then Welsh Labour will need a radical response to the question of Welsh independence. If it fails to discuss the national question in Wales, the progressive nationalists in Plaid Cymru could take the radical ground from underneath Welsh Labour by positioning themselves leftwards on this as well as other key issues of the day, just as we saw happen to Scottish Labour with the SNP.

The Welsh independence movement is growing day-by-day. In September 2019 a YouGov poll showed that 24 per cent of people would vote for Welsh independence – up from 8 per cent in the last Sky poll in December 2018. Significantly, 44 per cent of Labour voters said they would vote in favour of Welsh independence. Since the general election, the campaign group ‘Labour For An Independent Wales’ has reported a membership increase. It believes that Welsh Labour members are becoming increasingly ‘indy-curious’.

Given this context, Welsh Labour needs to be bold and start thinking about what Wales could look like with more devolution or even, ultimately, as an independent state. It could begin a mass-participatory listening programme, especially in the Valleys communities that feel left behind, and use this as the basis to make radical policy suggestions. Key themes could be increased money for flood defence in the Valleys; radically reimagining how a green economy in Wales could function; reforming policing; decriminalising cannabis and abolishing universal credit – all of which the Welsh Labour government currently cannot do because the environment isn’t a fully devolved issue and welfare and justice aren’t devolved at all.

If Welsh Labour doesn’t demand further devolution – or even consider independence – as a radical solution to solve the key issues in Wales, then Plaid Cymru will.

### Growing apathy towards the assembly

But the need to talk about the national question is not just prompted by increasing pro-independence sentiment. There is a threat to Labour’s position too from the right thanks to a growing anti-Welsh assembly movement. YouGov found that 24 per cent of people in Wales would be willing to abolish the Welsh assembly.

Calls to scrap the assembly are primarily being stoked by the right. Welsh UKIP members such as Neil Hamilton and Welsh Brexit Party members, who claim that, to paraphrase: “Labour have been in power in Wales for the last 20 years – what have they done for us?!” Or more cynically, they argue that the Welsh assembly is a bureaucratic drain on the UK economy, and therefore Wales should hand all its powers back to Westminster. The familiar sentiment of disdain towards the European Union is now being replicated towards the Welsh assembly. British nationalism is kicking and screaming (once again) in Wales.

This is a notable problem for Welsh Labour, as UKIP gained seven regional seats in the Welsh assembly in 2014



## “As unionism in Northern Ireland faces its greatest challenge, the policies of the left could provide the answers”

(although some have since switched to the Brexit party or gone independent) – indicating that the right have political purchase in Wales.

It is not impossible to imagine the right running a vocal anti-devolution campaign in the run up to the next election. Unless Welsh Labour speaks out in favour of the assembly, and further devolution to give it the power to do more for Wales, Labour risks appealing neither to supporters of independence or to its harshest critics.

### The kids are all right – Welsh Labour’s hope for the future

Jeremy Corbyn – love him or hate him – inspired a new younger generation of people to join the Labour party. In the 2019 election 56 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds and 54 per cent of 25 to 29-year-olds voted Labour.

It has to be said that the Welsh Labour project is not the Corbyn project. But it is clear that there are many young Labour voters looking for a radical policy offer.

And on top of this, there is a whole new generation of voters for Labour to win over: 16-year-olds now have the right to vote in council and assembly elections in Wales. This is a huge opportunity for Welsh Labour:

If it is to seize this opportunity, Welsh Labour need to be radical and bold. It must provide the answers to the questions that most young people consider important, such as the environment and economy. But in government, Welsh Labour will be powerless to enact change unless more powers are devolved. If Welsh Labour is to win over younger voters and secure its ability to deliver a more equal Wales in the future, it should be looking for a more independent future for Wales. **F**

*Harriet Protheroe Davis is a trade union organiser, Welsh independence activist and founder of new media outlet Wales.Pol*

### Left turn

Nationalists and republicans may seize what they see as a once in a lifetime opportunity for Irish unity. To convince people that their best interests lie inside the United Kingdom, we need to enact socialist policies that make Northern Ireland a better place for everyone to live — *Sarah Creighton*

“Celt, Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane and Scot, Time and this Island tied in a crazy knot” wrote John Hewitt in his poem, The Ulsterman. On 3 May 2021, 100 years will have passed since the Government of Ireland Act 1920 was passed and Northern Ireland was created.

Reflecting on the centenary, Northern Ireland’s first minister Arlene Foster has suggested that the occasion could be an opportunity for the country to ‘unite’.

Some unionists intend to celebrate next year’s anniversary. But unionism itself stands on difficult ground.

In 2017, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) lost its majority in the Northern Ireland Assembly. And thanks to the prime minister’s withdrawal agreement there will be a border down the Irish Sea, which the government’s own analysis states as putting Northern Ireland ‘symbolically outside the union’. There is a nickname for Boris Johnson’s Brexit deal in some unionist and loyalist circles: the Betrayal Act.

Most unionists supported Brexit, but ironically, the UK’s exit from the European Union has pushed the question of a united Ireland further up the agenda. Widespread constitutional change, prompted by English nationalism, has provided nationalists and republicans with a once in a lifetime opportunity to push for Irish unity.

As 2021 approaches the question to be asked is: will Northern Ireland last another 100 years? A recent study from Liverpool University shows that support for a united Ireland is as low as 29 per cent yet a poll commissioned by the Detail, an investigative journalism site in Northern Ireland, shows it as high as 45.4 per cent. What is certain is that nobody can afford to be complacent.

As unionism in Northern Ireland faces its greatest challenge, the policies of the left could provide the answers.

### The crisis in public services

Forty-nine-year-old Dianne Thomas was diagnosed with cataracts in February 2019. It was October 2019 before Thomas, from Derry, got an appointment with a consultant. At that appointment, she was told she would have to wait up to 18 months to get surgery. Voice wavering, Thomas told the BBC news: “I worry I will lose my sight while I am waiting, you kind of feel you have been left to rot.”

Northern Ireland’s public services are crumbling. After years of mismanagement, incompetence, neoliberal policies and Tory austerity, the health service has all but collapsed. Waiting lists are the highest in the UK. In 2019 people waiting more than a year to see a consultant totalled 1,089 in England and 108,582 in Northern Ireland. Patients arriving at accident and emergency are, in some cases, having to wait two days to be seen. In December 2019 nurses across Northern Ireland went on strike for the first time in their history.

The Northern Ireland Assembly collapsed in January 2017 over a botched heating scheme, the renewable heat incentive (RHI). For more than 1000 days, no government sat in Stormont. As the DUP entered into a confidence and supply agreement with the Tories and Northern Ireland’s members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) concentrated on Brexit, the crisis in public services worsened.

When canvassers knocked on doors in December 2019 for the Westminster general election, it became quite clear that the public were furious. At the last Westminster election, both the DUP and Sinn Féin's votes dropped, by 5.4 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively. Both parties have been blamed for the for the current crisis.

On a stormy, wet night in Belfast on the 9 January 2020 then secretary of state Julian Smith and Tánaiste Simon Coveney stood outside Stormont and introduced their political deal, 'New Decade, New Approach'. Both men asked politicians in Northern Ireland to sign up to the agreement and get back to work.

Northern Ireland now has a government again. On the 11 January 2020 politicians shuffled back into Stormont with their heads bowed. There was no champagne popped, just the cold, stern acknowledgement that voters had called time on the shambles of the past few years.

In his book on the collapse of Stormont, *Burned*, Northern Irish journalist Sam McBride reflects that: "In time RHI may be viewed as a warning to the leaders of unionism ... there is potential for a far greater collapse: that of Northern Ireland itself."

Unionists argue that Northern Ireland is economically better off in the union because of the block grant, the size of the British economy and the strength of the four regions working together.

But as people in Northern Ireland watch their relatives suffer on hospital waiting lists, as the border down the Irish Sea looks likely to damage industry and employment, nationalists and republicans are making the argument that Northern Ireland, partition itself, doesn't work. As the crisis in the public sector gets worse, some voters might be listening.

### Looking to the Republic

Unionists have been lucky so far. No matter how bad the situation in Northern Ireland, there has always been a boogymen to wave at voters: the Republic of Ireland.

Compared to the north, the Republic has a small public sector. There is no statutory sick pay or National Health Service. Until relatively recently, the Republic had no divorce, no contraception and the Catholic Church held sway over public life.

Over the past few years, all that has changed. In May 2015 the Republic voted for equal marriage. In May 2018 it voted to repeal the eighth amendment of the Irish Constitution that restricted abortion.

Thanks to Westminster, Northern Ireland now also has equal marriage and abortion has been decriminalised. These advances are the result of decades of campaigning and activism, but these are not victories that unionism can claim. On the contrary, political unionism, particularly the DUP, has done all it can to stop such progress.

Sinn Féin is on the left, and pushing for the reunification of Ireland. Their recent electoral success in the Republic is another significant moment in the Republic's history. The party got 24 per cent of the vote in February 2020. Voters identified with the party's left-wing policies on housing and health. If Sinn Féin can get into government and transform the Republic, moving it away from being a conservative, small public sector state,

economic arguments that favour the union could be harder to make.

The solution for unionism is logical. It must embrace left-wing policies that tackle poverty, wealth and inequality. It must stop cosying up to the Conservative party and bolster the welfare state, the health service, provide more social housing and invest in working-class communities.

### The case for left-wing unionism

The peace process has benefited a select few. While middle-class communities have flourished, working-class areas, including unionist ones, have been ignored and have higher rates of poverty and suicide. The parts of Northern Ireland most affected by the Troubles have not reaped the benefits of peace.

The problem is that Northern Irish unionism is inherently conservative. Right-wing policies and parties, such as the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), have dominated since partition. Adopting a siege mentality where dissent was equated to disloyalty, unionists have always viewed left wingers with suspicion. They are often painted as traitors for not supporting the conservatives.

In the early days after partition, socialist candidates were intimidated by unionists and loyalists during elections. When catholic workers were expelled from Belfast shipyards in the early 1900s, socialist protestants were removed as well. They were dubbed 'rotten prods'.

The two largest unionist parties today, the DUP and UUP, are still broadly right-wing. The Northern Ireland Labour party, once an option for left-wing unionists in Belfast, declined in the 1980s. There is only one, left-wing unionist party now: The Progressive Unionist Party. It has two seats on Belfast City council. The party has historical ties to a paramilitary group, the Ulster Volunteer Force.

Asking the DUP and the UUP to shift leftwards is a big ask. If mainstream unionism can't embrace the left, then space should be allowed for others to do so. It will be very difficult but there is space for another left-wing unionist party to grow in Northern Ireland. They shouldn't be labelled traitors or be made to feel disloyal for refusing to go along with right wing policies.

Unionists have never had to sell the union or Northern Ireland. Since partition in 1921 the state has always been a certainty. Northern Ireland was created with an in-built unionist majority inside it. That isn't the case anymore.

The 2019 local, European and Westminster election saw the rise of the cross-community Alliance Party, a liberal, social democratic party that doesn't take a position on the constitutional question. Its voters have been dubbed 'the neithers' because they don't identify as unionist or nationalist. Alliance voters are broadly pro-union but some haven't made their minds up yet. These voters could decide the future of Northern Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement sets a challenge to unionism in Northern Ireland. The state will only remain in the union based on consent. Unionists must convince people that their best interests lie inside the United Kingdom. They can only do that by making Northern Ireland a better place to live for everyone. If they don't, they could lose everything. **F**

*Sarah Creighton is a writer and lawyer from Belfast*

# Cruel and unusual

The power to revoke citizenship is undemocratic – but the UK government has been denationalising its citizens at an increasing rate.

*Patti Tamara Lenard* looks closely at the Shamima Begum case



*Patti Tamara Lenard is associate professor of applied ethics at the University of Ottawa and the author of How Should Democracy Fight Terrorism? published by Polity Press in June 2020*

**T**HE UK GOVERNMENT revoked Shamima Begum's citizenship in February 2019, and in February this year, her appeal of this revocation was denied.

Since the second world war, there has been a consensus that the right to citizenship is a basic human right. Begum's case and others like hers highlight the fact that this consensus is breaking, posing severe risks to our democracies. Democratic states should not be allowed to withdraw from their job of protecting the rights of *all* citizens.

Begum came to international attention when she turned up at a refugee camp in Syria in February 2019, heavily pregnant, asking to return to the UK. Begum was not a sympathetic figure – she left the UK in 2015 as a 15-year-old to join ISIS as a so-called 'jihadi bride'. Reports suggest that she was responsible both for enforcing ISIS morality on others and for sewing on suicide bomber vests in such a way that they would detonate if the would-be bomber attempted to remove it. Her initial public statements suggested a distinct lack of remorse for her activities and hinted that she continued to support ISIS objectives. The UK government promptly declared its intention to revoke her citizenship, stating that she presented a threat to the state's 'public good'.

The UK is one of the most aggressive at denationalising its citizens accused of terrorism, but it is not alone. Actors in many states, including Australia, Norway, France, and Denmark, have recently defended the right to withdraw citizenship from individuals they believe, by their actions, threaten or intend to threaten the very foundations of their democratic institutions. They believe that protecting democracy trumps the rights of citizens – and particularly criminals – to be protected by their state of citizenship. But abandoning citizens is equivalent to abandoning democracy.

Of course, terrorism is scary. Indeed, that is its intent. The point of hijacking airplanes, attacking places of worship, and driving vans into bystanders, is to make citizens think twice about flying, praying, and participating in public events. In response to the threat of terrorism, governments have two jobs: to protect citizens from terrorism by stopping terrorists before they terrorise and to punish terrorists who have committed crimes.

The 2014 Immigration Act declared that the UK has the right to revoke the citizenship of terrorists, like Begum,

where it believes that they pose a threat to British security. Initially, the law permitted denationalisation even in cases where individuals would be rendered stateless; a later modification stated that denationalisation was legally permitted only where the state has good faith reason to believe that another citizenship is accessible. In practice, this means that British citizens can be made stateless, as Begum now is.

Exiling terrorists may seem plausible to many people who see the relationship between citizens and their state as a kind of contract: The state protects the security of its citizens; in exchange, citizens must abide by its laws. Where either party fails to carry out their side of the bargain, the contract is dissolved. Apply this view to Begum's case, and the proposal looks like this: the UK state is charged with protecting Begum, so long as she abides by UK law. When she chose to leave the UK to join its existential enemy, she withdrew from the contract, releasing the UK from its responsibility to protect her. On this interpretation, the UK isn't so much revoking Begum's citizenship, as it is responding to Begum's freely made choice to abandon the citizen-state contract.

But this contractual view is the wrong way to think about Begum and cases like hers. Although Begum's actions deserve our strongest condemnation, the UK government can not justifiably withdraw her citizenship.

Democratic states are defined by their obligation to protect the basic rights of all citizens. This requirement means that as they prevent terrorism and punish terrorists, democratic states must *at the same time* protect all citizens' basic rights. This produces at least three reasons why citizenship should not be revoked.

First, any punishment imposed must leave space for citizens' reintegration into the democratic community. Protecting the opportunity for reintegration is a key component of equal respect for those who are members of a political state, and it restricts the punishments that a democratic state may fairly impose on its citizens. Capital punishment is ruled out, most obviously, but so is denationalisation, which permanently removes citizens from the community.

Second, this focus on reintegration – associated with rehabilitation – allows for criminals to change their minds.





Maybe Begum intended to collaborate with ISIS to secure the disintegration of the British state, when she left the country as a 15-year-old. But maybe she no longer does. Revoking her citizenship in effect denies her the right to change her mind, which is something that democratic punishments assume is possible and, indeed, the desirable outcome of an appropriate punishment.

Third, in a democratic state any punishment must be imposed after an open trial in which accused citizens have an opportunity to refute the claims against them. Begum, in being denied the right to return to the UK, is not being offered this chance. One reason why states are reluctant to permit trials in cases like Begum's is because the crimes are committed abroad, and there are tremendous challenges in meeting the evidentiary requirements for a criminal conviction. It is unfair and unjustified to respond to this challenge by denying Begum the opportunity to make her case. Begum's critics point to her public statements of ongoing support for ISIS and her refusal to display remorse. Her defenders observe that she is at serious risk of reprisals from ISIS and may not feel safe to express anti-ISIS views. Indeed, she has recently claimed just this. An open trial would give her the opportunity to state more clearly her views and to determine her past actions, rather than imposing an irrevocable punishment based on a small number of public statements and limited public evidence.

What if Begum came to trial, and expressed ongoing commitment to ISIS, and was convicted of her crimes? Then, just like all criminals, her punishment can be adjusted accordingly – though she may not be exiled or killed by the state, because these punishments do not permit the rehabilitation possibility that *democratic* punishments require.

Surrounding public debate around Begum's case is the UK's claim that Begum is entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship even though she was born in the UK, has never visited Bangladesh, and the Bangladeshi government denies that

she is entitled to citizenship. Even the government agrees that it should only revoke her citizenship if she is plausibly entitled to another. Statelessness is a grave harm, one that – as a punishment – is cruel and unusual and must thereby be avoided. To render someone stateless is to deny them the protection their basic human rights need. In my new book, I propose that even were Begum provably entitled to Bangladeshi citizenship, the UK government may not revoke her UK citizenship. Doing so means punishing her more severely than a single nationality citizen who has committed the same crime: unequal punishment for the same crime is undemocratic.

In revoking her citizenship, the UK state is denying Begum a fair trial conducted according to British rules. If she were convicted in such a trial, she should be punished – as are all convicted criminals – and given the opportunity to rehabilitate and reintegrate. The state is denying her protection, even though the special immigration appeals commission acknowledged that the conditions she faces in northern Syria are inhumane and degrading. For Britain to live up to its commitments as an equality-respecting democracy, it must respect its obligations to all its citizens, including those accused of terrorism.

Assuming that her citizenship remains revoked, Begum will join 150 other ex-Britons whose citizenship has been revoked in the last 10 years. This may seem like a small number, but the rate at which the British government is revoking citizenship is increasing. There is a slippery slope here: once it is accepted that possible terrorists can be exiled, others too may be thought deserving of this treatment. But it is a defining feature of genuinely democratic states that they treat all citizens as worthy of having their basic human rights protected. Abdicating the responsibility to treat all citizens fairly will not make states safer. It will just make them less deserving of being called democratic. ■

# Books

## An unconventional life

*Paul Richards* finds a rich and radical tradition laid out in the biography of an early Fabian



*Paul Richards is a former chair of the Fabian Society, and has just completed an MA in Victorian Studies at Birkbeck*

As soon as one gets past the austere image of Beatrice and Sidney Webb, with their filing systems and abstinence, the true, rich, radical tradition of the early Fabians is revealed. They were fun-loving, sexually liberated radicals, casting off the conventions of the late-Victorian age, and exploring new styles of dress, new diets, new relations between men and women, new pastimes from cycling to cigarettes and a new approach to politics and economics.

The founding Fabians, emerging from under the wing of the Fellowship of the New Life, belonged to a mosaic of feminism, anarchism, socialism and same-sex relationships. In the 1880s and 1890s, you could bump into anyone from Oscar Wilde to Mahatma Gandhi at a Fabian meeting, and discuss Fabianism with George Bernard Shaw or Annie Besant over a vegetarian curry. A generation before Bloomsbury, they lived in complicated patterns of sexual relationships. They saw their world, and challenged its values, systems and mores full on.

Eleanor Fitzsimons has done us a great service by bringing her considerable scholarship to bear on the life of one such founding Fabian, Edith Nesbit. Nesbit has international celebrity as the author of *The Railway Children*, *Five Children and It*, as well as dozens of other popular children's titles, but her political life is often overlooked. Fitzsimons examines Nesbit's role as a socialist, feminist and Fabian, and in doing so reminds us how tumultuous were the years leading up to the founding of the Labour party and the new century.

Nesbit was a devotee of William Morris and a contemporary of GB Shaw and HG Wells. Her husband, Hubert Bland, chaired the meeting on 4 January 1884 which established the Fabian Society and he remained the treasurer until his death in 1911. He was also a hideous philanderer, opposing women's suffrage, engaging in a series of long-term affairs, including one under the same roof as Edith, and fathering several children with other women.

Nesbit, though, maintained her socialist principles, writing under the pseudonym 'Fabian Bland', and lecturing at the new London School of Economics (founded of course by a vote at the Fabian Society executive). After being one of the nine people in the room to vote to establish the Fabian Society, she remained an active Fabian, serving on the 'pamphlet committee' and the 'conference committee' and serving as co-editor of the Fabian journal *To-day*. In 1885, she had her third child with Hubert Bland, who

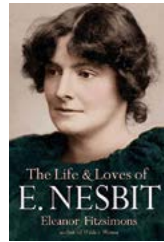
they named Fabian. Tragically, Fabian died aged 15 after an operation for tonsillitis went wrong.

This was a time when socialists could mingle freely through the porous walls of various groupings. London was full of earnest debate and inquiry. Nesbit was briefly a member of the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) as well as the Fellowship of the New Life and the Fabians. She mixed with the anarchists at Charlotte Wilson's soirees in Hampstead and knew Prince Kropotkin. A sympathetic portrayal of a Russian anarchist émigré appears in *The Railway Children*. She has been described as a 'Marxist' (in its pre-USSR usage), and a feminist, although she opposed women's suffrage if it meant enfranchising thousands of Conservative women and delaying the arrival of socialism.

Nesbit, like many socialists in these circles, saw socialism as a lifestyle choice as well as a political credo. She cut her hair short as an act of radicalism, and adopted 'rational dress', eschewing tight corsets and uncomfortable shoes. She smoked cigarettes, and at times cheroots. She also had a habit of affecting to faint and demand a glass of water if a political meeting was boring her, or if an argument was not going her way.

Edith Nesbit's life, and the retelling of it in Fitzsimons' book, remind us of several important things. One is that the tributaries of late-Victorian socialism that flowed into the Labour party in 1900 were incredibly radical, varied, as concerned with personal transformation as the transformation of society, and in aspects thoroughly modern. They challenged capitalism through their choices in food and dress. They pioneered veganism and vegetarianism, recreational drug use and what we now term LGBTQ rights and yearned for a pre-industrial rural idyll.

Second, it reminds us how constrained women were by the patriarchal laws and culture. Nesbit wrote under 'E Nesbit' to hide her sex (HG Wells assumed she was a man until he met her). Often women wrote under the names of their husbands or other men as the only way to get published. History and biography, even histories and biographies of those on the left, have often diminished or obliterated altogether the role of women. In bringing the complex and brilliant life of Edith Nesbit to the fore for a contemporary audience, Fitzsimons has redressed the balance in a significant way and offers a fascinating insight into the politics and culture of our Fabian forebears. **F**



**The Life and Loves of E Nesbit,**  
Eleanor Fitzsimons,  
Duckworth, £20

## The antidote

Lola Olufemi's debut is a worthy guide for those seeking a more inclusive feminism, finds *Huda Elmi*



*Huda Elmi is a CLP representative on Labour's National Executive Committee*

Lola Olufemi's *Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power* is an incisive and urgent interjection into the discourse. Refreshing, lyrical and sharp, it gives form to the pitfalls of prevailing feminist ideology and offers an alternative as we organise in the #MeToo age.

The opening chapter, *Know Your History*, serves as an anchor for themes and analysis explored throughout the book. Olufemi uses her lived experience to tie together complicated academic terminology, creating an accessible narrative. She first acknowledges that history is inherently political. In schools, the texts that are chosen, the voices and experiences that are amplified, the narratives that are taught and the values we use to shape our understanding of history are biased. Olufemi therefore establishes that we hold subjective understandings of the past. She then moves on to a critique of the unstable foundations of neoliberal feminism and argues that, from its inception, it has worked to undermine progress for women.

Confident in tone, every page is punctured with a political message. From the state to the home, every layer of society is unpeeled to uncover the nefarious ways in which misogyny and patriarchy operate. Notably, the questioning of institutions such as prisons, healthcare and the judicial system takes aim at the very notion of 'safety'. Who is afforded this safety and at what cost?

Olufemi posits that harm to marginalised or silenced women should be treated as harm to all women, a decisive breakaway from the pervasive type of feminism uninterested in social transformation. As you navigate each chapter, demands often presented as politically radical in today's public discourse are explained as necessary.

All things considered, it would be a mistake to think this work is laden with jargon. Largely, Olufemi's political analysis is woven into anecdotes, historical moments or broader exposition of feminist thought. Olufemi's voice is clear throughout, masterfully switching between storyteller and activist.



**Feminism Interrupted: Disrupting Power,**  
Lola Olufemi,  
Pluto Press, £9.99

Art for Art's Sake is a notable and standout chapter. Nestled between chapters exploring gendered Islamophobia and rights for sex workers, this section transports the reader from the tangible to the abstract as it examines how art can be used as a tool to disseminate feminist ideas. It is packed with detail and wrapped with carefully constructed insight. Evident in this section is Olufemi's creative background; from paintings to protest songs, each medium is given space to bear testimony. This provides useful context in an imaginative way. To me this chapter is the most passionate: a truly rich and vibrant injection that colours the entire book.

Olufemi is impressive in her ability to string together disparate concepts without giving you whiplash. This is no easy skill. To help the reader to transition between reproductive justice and transmisogyny whilst still feeling connected to the wider critique and satiated with the level of detail is impressive. It is what gives this work a feeling of comprehensiveness even though it is only 145 pages long.

This book is brilliant for those who, like me, have felt often let down by feminism in its current mainstream iteration to ever really delve too deeply into its meaning. It provides voice to the frustrations felt as you navigate feminist spaces, only to feel as though you don't quite belong.

Intersectionality has become a buzzword in recent years to try and mitigate these barriers to participation experienced by marginalised groups, but this book suggests a more powerful antidote is needed.

It is not enough to diversify or pay lip service to spaces that, in and of themselves, don't challenge the political and social order we exist in. Something much more drastic and forceful is needed. Olufemi's book hopes to be the catalyst in this transformation. It should become the go-to work for those seeking to redefine feminism in the image and interests of all women. **F**



# Justice not charity

This year marks the centenary of a march by blind trade unionists from across the country. Their struggle remains relevant today, as *Emily Brothers* explains



*Emily Brothers is a member of the Fabian Society executive committee. In 2015, as the parliamentary candidate for Sutton and Cheam, she became the first blind woman to stand for Westminster*

**A** CENTURY AGO, 171 blind trade unionists marched under the slogan 'Justice Not Charity'. The Jarrow March in 1936 was modelled on their activism.

Ever since the poor laws, blind people had been considered incapable of work and consequently dependent on local authority funding. But after the development of braille and "good works" by religious charities, the expectations of blind people began to change.

The Royal Commission on the Blind in 1889 recommended compulsory education for blind children to lead them into trades such as basket-weaving and rug-making. The schools and workshops were segregated facilities. Pay was on piece rate because it was believed that blind workers could not compete with the output of sighted people. Wages were not enough to meet living costs and the blind factory workers contrasted their treatment with the circumstances of charity administrators who they considered corrupt. Like other workers of the time, they recognised that the way forward lay in uniting to take collective action.

The National League of the Blind, founded in 1894, held its first strike lasting six months during 1912 in Bristol. With many to follow, there was often a backlash from the workshop managers victimising union members who had taken action.

The league represented members in collective bargaining and campaigned for the state to take over responsibility for employing blind people and for a decent pension for those who could not work.

After several years of lobbying their cause was taken up by Ben Tillett, the Labour MP

for Salford North who was also a Fabian Society member. Tillett introduced a private member's bill in February 1920 in support of blind workers' demands, but it was blocked by the government.

The league responded by taking the novel approach of a march from three locations to converge on London for a mass demonstration in Trafalgar Square. There had been many protest marches before, but none had choreographed different contingents to raise awareness with rallies in towns along their route. The Jarrow March 16 years later was based on their experience.

On 5 April 1920, 74 blind workers from Scotland and the north east of England left Leeds, 60 from Ireland and the north west left Manchester and 37 from around the south west departed from Newport. They marched behind a banner proclaiming 'justice not charity'. The marchers reached Trafalgar Square on 25 April 1920 and then waited five days to see prime minister Lloyd George.

**There had been many protest marches before, but none had choreographed different contingents to raise awareness**

Thanks to the pressure asserted by the marchers, the Blind Persons Act became law in September 1920. Despite the huge propaganda success of the march, it was still less prescriptive than the league had wanted. Consequently, they continued to lobby against a postcode lottery in local authority pay and provision.

Shortly after the Blind Persons Act 1920 came into law differences in tactics divided union leaders, with the League's general secretary Ben Purse forming a breakaway union, the National Union of Industrial and Professional Blind, in 1921. It was more sympathetic to charitable giving. In contrast, the National League of the Blind, although it

accepted trade union donations and money from regular street collections, refused to be passive recipients of charity with all the sense of oppression this brought.

The rift between unions, charities and self-organised groups continued until the 1980s when common cause was found in taking on Thatcher's government with a campaign for benefits reform to enable blind people to qualify for the disability living allowance, as they had been excluded from the preceding mobility allowance.

In October 1936 the league held another march. As before it was supported by the trade union movement, but the public mood was less supportive, and the blind workers were marginalised by the more prominent national unemployed hunger marches. Nonetheless, the league did win some concessions from the government with a second Blind Persons Act in 1938.

The league merged with the union Community in 2000 due to falling membership after many factory closures because of local authority cuts, changes in government policy and many disabled activists striving for inclusive employment. Whilst more blind and disabled people have entered the mainstream labour market, legislative requirements such as reasonable adjustments have been applied inconsistently by employers and support through government programmes like Access to Work have not been well administered.

The disability employment gap remains stubbornly wide – with 53.3 per cent of disabled people in work compared to 81.8 per cent of non – disabled people in January 2020. Research by the TUC published last November estimates a 15.5 per cent disability pay gap. Although the nature of work has changed over the last 100 years, blind and disabled people remain seriously disadvantaged in getting, retaining and progressing in work. This picture is exacerbated by Tory austerity cuts to local government services and benefits reform leading to the pernicious universal credit system. All in all, the task to secure 'justice not charity' for blind and disabled people remains vital today. ■

# Listings

## ANNOUNCEMENT

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, all upcoming Fabian Society events have been cancelled including those organised by local societies. The Fabian Society and Young Fabians are running online events. Keep an eye on our website for up-to-date activities and contact your local society for ways to stay involved.

### BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS

Contact Luke John Davies at [bhamfabians@gmail.com](mailto:bhamfabians@gmail.com)

### BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

Contact Ian Taylor, 01202 396634 or [taylorbournemouth@gmail.com](mailto:taylorbournemouth@gmail.com) for details

### BRIGHTON & HOVE

Contact Ralph Bayley at [ralphfbayley@gmail.com](mailto:ralphfbayley@gmail.com) for details

### CENTRAL LONDON

Contact Michael Weatherburn at [londonfabians@gmail.com](mailto:londonfabians@gmail.com) and website <https://fabians.org.uk/central-london-fabian-society/>

### CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

Contact Alison Baker at [a.m.baker@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:a.m.baker@blueyonder.co.uk)

### COLCHESTER

Contact Maurice Austin – [Maurice.austin@phonecoop.coop](mailto:Maurice.austin@phonecoop.coop)

### COUNTY DURHAM

Contact Professor Alan Townsend 01388 746479

### CROYDON & SUTTON

Contact Emily Brothers – [info@emilybrothers.com](mailto:info@emilybrothers.com)

### DARTFORD & GRAVESHAM

Contact Deborah Stoate – [debstoate@hotmail.com](mailto:debstoate@hotmail.com)

### FINCHLEY

Contact David Beere for details [djbeere@btinternet.com](mailto:djbeere@btinternet.com)

### GRIMSBY

Contact Pat Holland for details at [hollandpat@hotmail.com](mailto:hollandpat@hotmail.com)

### HAVERING

Contact Davis Marshall at [haveringfabians@outlook.com](mailto:haveringfabians@outlook.com)

### HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

Contact Mark Cooke at [hwgfabians@gmail.com](mailto:hwgfabians@gmail.com)

### ISLINGTON

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### NORTH EAST LONDON

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### NEWHAM

Contact Rohit Dasgupta at [rhit\\_svu@hotmail.com](mailto:rhit_svu@hotmail.com)

### NORTHUMBRIA AREA

Contact Pat Hobson at [pathobson@hotmail.com](mailto:pathobson@hotmail.com)

### OXFORD

Contact Dave Addison at [admin@oxfordfabians.org.uk](mailto:admin@oxfordfabians.org.uk)

### PETERBOROUGH

Contact Brian Keegan 01733 265769 or [brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk](mailto:brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk)

### PORTSMOUTH

Contact Nita Cary at [dewicary@yahoo.com](mailto:dewicary@yahoo.com)

### READING & DISTRICT

Contact Tony Skuse at [tony@skuse.net](mailto:tony@skuse.net)

### RUGBY

Contact John Goodman [rugbyfabians@myphone.coop](mailto:rugbyfabians@myphone.coop)

### SOUTHAMPTON AREA

Contact Eliot Horn at [eliot.horn@btinternet.com](mailto:eliot.horn@btinternet.com)

### SOUTH TYNESIDE

Contact Paul Freeman at [southtynesidefabians@gmail.com](mailto:southtynesidefabians@gmail.com)

### SUFFOLK

Would you like to get involved in re-launching the Suffolk Fabian Society? If so, please contact John Cook at [contact@ipswich-labour.org.uk](mailto:contact@ipswich-labour.org.uk)

### TONBRIDGE &

### TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Contact Martin Clay at [Martin.clay@btinternet.com](mailto:Martin.clay@btinternet.com)

### WALSALL

Contact Ian Robertson at [robertsonic@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:robertsonic@hotmail.co.uk) for details

### YORK & DISTRICT

Contact Jack Mason at [jm2161@york.ac.uk](mailto:jm2161@york.ac.uk)

## FABIAN QUIZ



**WE**  
*Yevgeny Zamyatin*

A seminal work of dystopian fiction that foreshadowed the worst excesses of Soviet Russia, Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* is a powerfully inventive vision that depicts a futuristic totalitarian society, 'OneState', where humans have become numbers.

Suppressed in Russia for decades, Zamyatin's *We* is a chilling vision of a world enslaved by technology.

It is part of Penguin's new Classics Science-Fiction series.

**Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away.**

**To win one, answer the following question:**

*Zamyatin's We inspired George Orwell to write which novel:*

- a. *Animal Farm*
- b. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*
- c. *Burmese Days*

Please email your answer and your address to [review@fabian-society.org.uk](mailto:review@fabian-society.org.uk).

**ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN MONDAY 1 JUNE 2020**



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- Economic measures to create a more level playing field between the high street and online retailing.
- Fair pay and job security for retail workers - a minimum wage of £10 per hour, tackle zero-hours and short-hours contracts, investment in skills and training.
- Government action to protect jobs in the retail sector. Retail jobs are real jobs - retail is a key part of the economy providing jobs and income for millions of families.



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or call **0800 030 80 30**

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