NEW HORIZONS

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FABIAN REVIEW

Volume 132—No.3

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Brighter days

Labour must utilise these difficult months ahead to
shape Britain's recovery, writes *Andrew Harrop*

SUMMER SEEMS A long time ago. For a few short weeks the coronavirus was in abeyance in most places. The beaches, parks and pubs were busy. Offices began to open and life felt almost normal.

We know now it was a false dawn. Covid-19 cases have risen fast and Britain is heading into a coronavirus winter that will prolong the devastation to our economic, cultural and family life. Instead of lockdown followed by bounce-back we face a year or more of turmoil and dislocation.

After such a protracted crisis, the country that emerges the other side will be very different from the UK of early 2020. Almost certainly we will go from record employment to record unemployment. Educational inequalities in childhood will spike. There will be long-term consequences for physical and mental health. The nation's cultural and sporting life will be diminished for many years to come. And it will take a huge amount of time and money to get public services back on their feet, as the NHS's mounting backlog shows.

The change to working life triggered by the emergency may also lead to enduring industrial and spatial shifts. After a year of social distancing, hundreds of thousands of jobs in hospitality, culture and retail will never return, with businesses forced to close, scale back or replace people with technology. It promises to be the sort of rapid industrial restructuring last seen in the 1980s, and we know what that means if not handled well.

City centre offices will not die out, but they are likely to hold less sway, with permanent consequences for the way we work and how we spend our time and money. The flexibility to work at home has suited many white-collar workers with secure jobs. But what if a long-term retreat from the office leads to the intensification of work and the atomisation of tasks, with permanent employee jobs replaced by precarious freelance gig-work?

It is right to raise these fears but Fabians are natural optimists. We believe in gradual progress forwards and the capacity for politics to reshape life for the better. With purposeful stewardship Britain can recover and in time emerge a better country.

Right now there is a vacuum of leadership at the centre, with this incompetent, rudderless Conservative government only acting when the path forward has become inevitable. But Labour can work with other forces – businesses, city leaders, unions, the media and civil society – to define the post-Covid common sense and leave ministers with no choice but to follow.

Perhaps the depth of the crisis will even force a reckoning on some of the ills that have troubled Britain for so long. For a start, the tragic scandal of this year's Covid-19 care home deaths must surely lead to that long-delayed new settlement for adult social care. More widely, the pandemic has exposed a fragility within our public services that will prompt a reassessment of our over-centralised, resource-starved and marketised public sector.

The need for so many people to find new jobs and new occupations may finally trigger the revolution in adult training which the country has needed for decades. And with so many people wanting work, there is the opportunity to fast-track labour-intensive investments – to reduce carbon emissions, rollout digital networks and improve the fabric of our townscapes and green spaces.

After this year, the case is also stronger for a resolute attack on inequality. A multi-year recovery plan for children's learning could be used to refocus the whole early years and schools system onto tackling educational attainment gaps. And for the first time in a decade, it is possible to imagine action on income inequality too. This year millions of people have applied for benefits and discovered for themselves how little the safety-net offers. The chancellor has already moved once to pay people more and with sufficient pressure he may do so again.

Sunny summer days will not be with us for a while – as metaphor or reality. But moments of crisis and transition always bring opportunities. The left must shape the post-virus common sense so the UK can rebuild stronger. **F**

Shortcuts

A BACKWARD STEP

The DfiD merger is a huge mistake— *Preet Kaur Gill MP*

The British public is rightly proud of the leading role the UK has taken in delivering life-saving and life-changing work around the world for some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable. People expect us to continue to play a key role in influencing other countries and bringing the international community together to overcome the global issues we face. It is not only our moral duty to help those less fortunate than ourselves, but it is also in our mutual interest to work with partners to make the world a safer, fairer and better place to live.

That is why the prime minister's decision to merge the Department for International Development (DfID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is a mistake which will, at a stroke, erase poverty reduction as the focus of UK aid. To do this in normal times would be wrong. To do this in the middle of a global pandemic is deeply irresponsible and counterproductive.

The Conservatives have long eyed up the aid budget and increasingly found new ways to move it away from its purpose of tackling poverty and inequality. The government should be looking to spend taxpayers' money in the most effective and transparent way to deliver value for money for British people. Instead, they have sought ways to spend it through other government departments or cross-departmental funds with patchy records on transparency, accountability and effective use of the aid budget.

In recent years, UK aid has increasingly been spent by other government departments which are bound by looser, less stringent rules on where exactly the money is spent. Many of these departments, not least the FCO, score low on many internationally recognised metrics. DfID, on the other hand, was one of only three UK departments to achieve a 'good' or 'very good' rating in the

international aid transparency index earlier this year, despite David Cameron pledging in 2015 that all aid-spending departments would achieve this rating by 2020.

At every turn the government has tried to circumvent scrutiny; from the prime minister's demonstrably false claim that the merger was subject to a "massive consultation over a long period of time" – a claim contradicted by his secretary of state, NGOs, as well as the Public and Commercial Services Union and the FDA trade union representing DfID civil servants – to the government ignoring repeated requests for detail over the make-up of the new department. The government's announcement to cut £2.9bn from the aid budget sneaked out in a letter the same day the House of Commons rose for summer recess, which meant that MPs could not use the mechanisms at their disposal to force the government to come before the House to explain.

You might be able to excuse this lack of detail if there was confidence that the government's moral compass was pointed in the right direction or that it was pursuing this course of action for any other reason than a deep-seated right-wing ideology.

At every turn the government has tried to circumvent scrutiny

In his announcement, Boris Johnson said he wanted to spend less aid money in Tanzania and Zambia and more in Ukraine and the Balkans to support security measures, and the current foreign secretary has a long history of scepticism over using UK aid to tackle poverty. Make no mistake, this decision signals a government in retreat from the world stage and our moral duties and one which shines a light on the lack of global leadership at the heart of this government.

Since becoming the shadow international development secretary, I have been clear that our immediate priorities must be the health, social and economic crises sparked by the coronavirus pandemic. This pandemic has exacerbated inequalities fuelled by the climate crisis and by a lack of access to good quality healthcare and education, safe living and working conditions, and nutritious food. Where these inequalities exist, we know it

will be the poorest, most marginalised and vulnerable who suffer most acutely. Whether it is responding to the global Covid-19 pandemic or providing essential supplies to children in war-torn Yemen, DfID is needed now more than ever.

The Labour party has a proud history of standing up for the most marginalised and vulnerable, both at home and abroad, and this focus will continue to guide all that we do. We will continue to hold the government's humanitarian and development work to account and promote our own positive vision of development. Working with a wide range of actors, from heads of state to faith groups, civil society, trade unions and domestic diaspora, we will share best practice and demonstrate solidarity with people around the world. After all, if this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we cannot tackle these global issues alone. **F**

Preet Kaur Gill is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Birmingham, Edgbaston and shadow international development secretary

NEW TIES

Labour must revive relations with Europe— *Sam Alvis*

For the majority of 2020, this 'vote leave' government has managed to push Brexit off the front pages: technical detail on state aid or rules of origin do not suit political narratives or slogans. With Brexit a key factor in its recent election woes, Labour is also hesitant to put Europe back in the spotlight.

Gravity will ultimately force a close relationship with Europe. But while David Frost and Michel Barnier wrangle over legal structures and progressives rightly focus on specifics, no one is articulating a broader vision for an effective relationship with European partners. But for Labour to govern effectively we will need not just technocratic relationships but political ones.

Our immediate concern of attachment to EU institutions means we forget that Europe is not just in Brussels. Two stories show how important political connections are to policy.

Europe was central to New Labour's vision. Pro-Europeanism gave space for cooperation with the Liberal Democrats and warmed business to the party. It combined a realistic agenda on the economy and defence, with a broader modernisation which was central to the vision of Labour's Britain as a European social democracy.

But pro-Europeanism was not easy. 1999 brought high-profile disputes on Britain's rebate, the sale of UK beef and the resignation of the Prodi commission. To counter this, Foreign Office officials pushed a new strategy of building strong party-political relationships. Whether through the Party of European Socialists, or ministerial visits, individual contacts served an important purpose. Relationships between Tony Blair and German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder become core to New Labour's reform agenda in the EU.

The Conservatives have had a very different story. In his 2005 leadership campaign, David Cameron promised to take the Tories out of the European centre-right political grouping, the European People's Party (EPP). While he claimed this was due to the EPP's backing of the Lisbon treaty, most saw it as a sop to Brexiteers whose votes he needed. What seemed like a cost-free gimmick sidelined Cameron and the UK.

Political leaders often meet in political groupings prior to European summits, to reach alignment on key decisions. Outside the tent Cameron was frozen out of deliberations over Jean-Claude Juncker's presidential nomination and the Eurocrisis response – ultimately alienating both Juncker and German chancellor Angela Merkel who would be key to his attempted 2014 renegotiation.

While these examples are instructive, 2020 will not be like 1999 or 2005. Out of power, Labour has fewer tangibles to offer to partners, while member states are still keen to leave the UK to Barnier. Meanwhile 20 years has transformed European politics. Formerly influential sister social democratic parties in France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Greece poll at under 10 per cent. While some hold power in Germany, or Italy, forthcoming elections do not bode well. Across the continent socialists and democrats are squeezed by the greens on one side, and radical movements on the other.

Even so now is the time for Labour to lay down roots for 2024. For realists, close EU relationships make our national interests

easier to achieve. For constructivists, our shared values of equality and solidarity fit a close relationship. And for those concerned with domestic politics, we need to lay the ground for the inevitable closeness of a future UK-EU relationship. As we saw with Cameron, only engaging when there is something you want does not work.

Labour's European strategy should have three arms; the first of these is a new geographic focus. Two regions are gaining prominence in the EU and offer lessons on how progressives can win. In Iberia,

Close EU relationships make our national interests easier to achieve

both Spain and Portugal are led by social democrats in partnership with the left. Both are also expanding their influence in Europe. Josep Borell, former Spanish foreign minister, is currently EU external affairs commissioner, while until recently Portugal chaired the Eurogroup of finance ministers. Scandinavia should be a parallel focus. 2019 saw the Social Democrats in Denmark return to power and despite losing seats, Stefan Lofven in Sweden held on in 2018. As well as the direct influence of their European Council seats, both are also

part of the 'frugal four' influential in recent budget negotiations.

Labour must then 'broaden the church'. Many new and established parties share Labour's goals, particularly on climate. Labour will need to work with them on an international response – but how many connections can we count on in Macron's La République En Marche or with the progressive Polish challenger Rafal Trzaskowski? Establishing such relationships should not mean abandoning our sister parties, but outside of the European parliament or Council, Labour could better bridge political groupings through personal relationships.

And finally, Labour must work with civil society. No party is better connected to civil society, through unions, small business, and our local leaders than Labour. The party should encourage European engagement by such organisations across the board, not just for its immediate value in sharing ideas and resources but for its future value. You never know who might be in office in 2024. Working with the Labour Movement for Europe, the European Trade Union Confederation and local government groups can replicate Labour's links to UK society across the continent.

Relationships are two-way, Labour will need to listen to all of its partners. Without a seat at the table or amicable relationships

to draw on, the government has held its hands over its ears on joint European responses to Covid-19. Labour will need a different approach. It should show that relationships with Europe even after Brexit are in the interest of all parties. Long-term, bottom-up partnerships will be vital for the UK remaining relevant and helping address joint challenges whether on climate, tech regulation or tax havens. **F**

Sam Alvis is a special advisor at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. He writes in a personal capacity

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A BLOODY SCANDAL

It's time we took
period poverty seriously
— *Janet Daby MP*

Like so many of us in the Labour party, I came into politics to make a difference. Since I became an MP two years ago, one of the campaigns I have been particularly involved in is the fight to end period poverty. I regularly hear from young women and their families about the horrific impact that a lack of proper access to sanitary products can have.

My heart breaks when I see stories of women being unable to afford or access sanitary products and so resort to using tea towels or even newspapers. I hear of many girls missing school due to period poverty: research has found that 49 per cent of girls across the UK have at some point missed a day of school due to not being able to afford the right period products.

Period poverty is not a new crisis: we should have eradicated it by now. But many charities and campaigners tell me this is a problem which has risen sharply during the coronavirus crisis. Research from Plan International UK shows that three in 10 girls aged between 14 and 21 struggled to afford or access sanitary wear in lockdown. Significant numbers of young women did not know where to access products or they felt too embarrassed to ask even if they did know. The shame and secrecy surrounding menstruation is forcing young people into period poverty.

The charity Bloody Good Period, which gives period products to those who cannot afford them, said it usually distributed 5,000 packs a month but had handed out more than 23,000 in the three months since lockdown began.

As schools reopen for a new academic year,, we need to make sure that period poverty does not mean more girls miss out on their schooling.

When I reflect on my own childhood, I remember being in secondary school as a 12-year-old when I would 'come on' unexpectedly. I would run to find my older sister in school for help. Not every child has an older sister in school or a trusted friend or indeed a teacher to speak to. Every child needs to know where to go and who to ask for help and it is essential that every girl and young woman has easy access to period products.

Young women have been failed by successive Conservative governments and by the inability of MPs to push this issue up the political agenda. This year we have finally seen some movement. But although the new government scheme allowing schools to order free sanitary products is a vital step towards ending gendered inequality it is not enough. We need to widen access to period products further. And we must also focus on removing the stigma of menstruation.

The new government scheme allows schools to order free sanitary products upon request, up to the age of 19, in state-funded schools. While the average age to start a menstrual cycle is 12 years and 11 months, many girls are starting their periods much younger. Research suggests that children from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, or from poorer families are more likely to start their periods earlier. There are concerns about whether younger children will be able to access the support and resources they need, either because of a lack of awareness or an inability to express their needs.

This summer we made huge strides forward with free school meals, following a personal campaign by Marcus Rashford and others. We now need a similar national conversation on the reality of period poverty in our schools.

We do not have to look very far to see the positive benefits that such a conversation can bring. Scotland is on the cusp of making world-leading progress on period poverty thanks to the member's bill proposed by Scottish Labour MSP Monica Lennon. Her bill will enshrine in law access to period products in schools, colleges and universities, which is already widespread in Scotland. It will also put a legal duty in place for a universal system of 'opt-in' access to period products in community settings, meaning that anyone who needs the products will be able to access them.

Despite initial resistance from the Scottish government, the bill now looks set to pass thanks to overwhelming public support and campaigning from third sector organisations including Girlguiding Scotland.

The lesson that we can take from Scotland is that progress can be made when Labour leads the way with bold ideas. Young women should not have started the new school year nervous about how their basic needs will be met; we must condemn the problem of period poverty to the past. **F**

Janet Daby is Labour MP for Lewisham East and shadow minister for faiths, women and equalities

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SYSTEM FAILURE

Labour should set out a bold
new vision for education
— *Howard Stevenson*

Education in schools in England has been the victim of more than three decades of ideologically driven change intended to wrest control from education professionals, elected local councillors and university researchers (portrayed collectively by Michael Gove as 'the Blob') and transfer it instead to sharp-suited managers, assorted private providers of education services and Westminster politicians and their friends in sympathetic think tanks and unaccountable quangos. This process began in the late 1980s when the 1988 Education Reform Act sought to transfer a system rooted in local government to one grounded in lightly regulated quasi-markets. This was the point when public service values became increasingly subordinated to the imperatives of a market system that privileges competition over collaboration. It was a system shift that was interrupted, but by no means disrupted, during the years of New Labour government, and it resumed its aggressive drive towards increasingly privatised forms

of governance following the election of the coalition government in 2010.

The result has been the development of a system in which crude high-stakes accountability has triumphed over one whereby basic values of social justice and democracy underpin all else. Monitoring and evaluation of any system is clearly important, and an essential element of democratic governance, but in England the role and influence of Ofsted is completely out of proportion to what should be necessary. It has distorted the school sector in ways that are often inimical to its own claimed commitment to achieving greater equality of outcomes.

This toxic combination of market-driven competition and hugely centralised inspection has had devastating consequences. At its worst it has introduced a degree of corruption into the school system that was completely predictable to anyone other than the market fundamentalists who have dominated policy for more than three decades. These developments have been brilliantly analysed by professor Pat Thomson whose recently published book Schools Scandals: Blowing the Whistle on our Education System should be essential reading for anyone involved in school governance. However, it has also contributed to a complete vacuum in system leadership – a problem with huge consequences, particularly for the most vulnerable children.

The Covid-19 crisis has reminded us that the real key workers are those who make sure our most important services continue to function – the basic citizenship rights of access to health, care, education and a home that are the cornerstones of the welfare state, but which have been so badly eroded by neoliberal influence seeping into every aspect of our public services. However, those who work in education have not only had to try to maintain provision in the face of the most extraordinary public health crisis but have had to do so without any effective system leadership. This is in part because of the breathtaking incompetence that is the hallmark of Boris Johnson's government. Regrettably this is evident across a range of key services but is nowhere clearer than in relation to Gavin Williamson's (mis) management of education. At the time of writing Williamson, incredibly, remains in post but surely his political future hangs by a very fine thread. Yet even more significant than the inadequacies of the personalities is the inadequacies of the system, now evident to all as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. England's atomised, competitive and fractured school system is broken and

needs fixing. The grotesque inequalities that scar our education landscape, which were exposed so graphically by this summer's exams fiasco, remain untackled because there is nobody to take responsibility. Passing the buck is the trademark response to systemic failures. Meanwhile school leaders, teachers and support staff are left to pick up the pieces, to keep calm and carry on and to try to do the right thing in a system that too often rewards doing the wrong thing.

It has become a cliché to say we must 'build back better' – but we must. The Labour party already has the 'big idea' that can provide the solution to this mess – it is a National Education Service. Clearly that aspiration was not realised in 2019 and much bigger issues than education policy explain that. However, we must recognise that neither education professionals nor the wider public had been energised by the idea of an National Education Service, or even understood what it might look like. That must be different by the time of the next election. Labour's education team needs to be bold and imaginative and engage a broad coalition in constructing an alternative vision for education. The coronavirus crisis, and the incompetence of the current administration, have reminded us that this is no time for timidity – we need a National Education Service more than we ever have. **F**

Howard Stevenson is professor of educational leadership and policy studies at the University of Nottingham

TALKING POINT

Conversations about politics can be more constructive
—*Stephen Coleman*

Political talk, once regarded as a defining expression of lived democracy, has come to be thought of as a feel-bad activity – a nervous, cacophonous, resentful flow of public grumpiness. It is as if people have lost confidence in their ability to talk about politics. They expect it to go wrong.

When approaching people to speak with me about their experiences of political discussion and argument, I lost count of the number of times people said, "I try to avoid talking about politics" or "politics isn't for me". Probing further, it became apparent that for many people political talk is associated with a debasement of language and coarseness of tone that sets it apart from more congenial social interaction. While some people are attracted to this tonal setting in which bombastic certainty and strategic interruption are commonplace, many others do their best to avoid it, regarding political talk more as a style of dogged insistence than an opportunity for shared sense-making.

Observations about public disengagement from politics are commonly observed and well-rehearsed, but there is much less research on what is lacking from contemporary habits of political talk that makes it seem so toxic. And there are three crucial deficits in the ways in which we are communicating.

The first relates to the narrow repertoire of words, phrases, gestures and tones through which politics has conventionally been expressed. There is a quality that many people have come to associate with political discourse – the finger-pointing bluster of the fully decided; the over-confidence of the Oxbridge debating society; the predictable cast of the studio discussion – that seems to emanate from the dialect of a foreign tongue. Many of the political silences in our history have arisen not from people having nothing to say, but from having no words available to say what is burning within them. Before they were able to assume their vital agenda-setting roles, the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements had to articulate a response to injustice that overcame the prejudices of those who dismissed them as oversensitive, overemotional, overdemanding. The right to speak politically entails a refusal of this claim that one's concerns are excessive – that one's experience is somehow over and beyond the terms of legitimate political discourse. Contemporary politics is as much about insisting upon an expansive language of disagreement as winning the argument.

The second deficit in our political discourse involves listening. Nobody has ever rioted in the street because they were being listened to too much. Nobody ever takes offence because an interlocutor is too eager to make sense of what they are trying to say. It is not being listened to that is bruising. When one is not recognised

because one's interpretation is sure not to matter, political conflict shifts from the validity of arguments to the recognition of subjects. The struggle for respectful attention becomes the paramount consideration. When people come to believe that they are destined to lose that struggle they give up on political talk and politics becomes a dialogue of the wilfully deaf.

But there is listening and listening. There is the pseudo-listening of the policy consultation in which the policy has already been decided; selective listening in which attention is strategically allocated; echo-chamber listening in which people become cognitively attuned to the melody of their own prejudices. Genuine listening, of the kind that the philosopher Martin Buber so wonderfully described, entails "one being turning to another as another, as this particular other being, in order to communicate with it in a sphere which is common to them but which reaches out beyond the special sphere of each". Many of us have participated in such quintessentially democratic moments, but they are not what most people think of when asked about their experience of political talk.

The third deficit is the most complex. I call it 'working through'. I prefer the term to the more lofty, rationalistic concept of 'deliberation'. The term refers to the practice of thinking and talking about a matter over time with a view to developing insight into what it is really about and why it matters. It entails a commitment to recognising the meaning of conflicting truth claims and minimizing misconceptions arising from resistance to available evidence. Such 'working through' can take place over micro-seconds or over years. It is rarely a planned event or process but a reflective urge, resisting the simplicity of instant judgement. The most exciting moments of our recent political history have involved new commitments to work through problems rather than impose solutions upon them. Whether our political institutions are capable of rising to this challenge is one of the great tests facing contemporary democracies.

At this critical moment when we are faced with unprecedented complex problems, from the pandemic to climate change, it is more important than ever that every voice is heard and no political authorities behave as if they are above the public conversation. F

Stephen Coleman is professor of political communication at the University of Leeds and author of How People Talk About Politics: Brexit and After published by Bloomsbury later this year

TOP PRIORITIES

Drop the alarming jargon around climate change — *Luke Raikes*

The scale of the climate emergency is impossible to comprehend – it is easy to understand why many are scared, and some are fanatical. But many others still switch off completely, or do not see this as a priority in their daily lives. By 2024, Labour must find a way to talk to this latter group, and to make the politics of the climate emergency work – both for the party, and for the planet.

The words 'green industrial revolution' were repeated 14 times in Labour's 2019 manifesto and there was even a separate 'green industrial revolution' manifesto with a strong regional focus.

It was an attempt to appeal to people, especially in the North, Midlands and Wales, and there was much talk of jobs and investment. But the economic benefit often seemed secondary when for many people it comes first. And while the industrial revolution holds some vague, historical, cultural significance for some people in post-industrial towns, not enough people connect with it positively, in the way people on the left often hope.

Arguably this language is even damaging: it sounds like an upheaval, a threat to people's jobs and sense of security – it confirms people's worst fears about the green agenda. Everything we know about swing voters says that they do not tend to like revolutions – industrial, green or otherwise.

The 'green new deal' is another term we have used liberally over the last few years. It is a good way of using simple language to sell something complex and multi-faceted,

to bring together disparate strands of policy, and to brigade campaigners together around a shared cause. But, clearly, it is far too intangible to most people.

In 2019 we did not translate these for public consumption. We tacked these terms onto big promises of fresh billions in public spending. And this, arguably, did yet more damage to our prospects: to many it sounded like yet another out-of-touch grand Labour plan to throw 'money we don't have', at something that sounded vague, naïve and utopian.

Clearly, this was not the only factor behind the fall of the so-called 'red wall'. Labour had too many problems to list. But it amplified our biggest weakness, and confirmed the worst of suspicions, among exactly the people we needed to win over.

To bring more people on board, Labour must now talk about the climate emergency in more grounded terms, and connect with people on their own priorities. Right now especially, most people just want to keep their jobs, secure a roof over their head, and put food on the table. It is legitimate, and understandable, for them to switch off at the thought of the climate emergency or some kind of revolution.

Let's start by stripping back the packaging, and talking specifics, not grand generalities; leading on the real, short-term improvements, not the big long-term crisis; and showing how these things can help people first, and save the planet second.

Take buses. Every so often Westminster briefly wakes up to the nightmare people outside London face every day trying to use buses. Getting buses right is a real, everyday priority for the people in the places Labour needs to win, and it would make a significant dent in our emissions too.

We often talk about 'green jobs' – and that will only become more important as Labour, and the government, ramp up the 'green recovery' rhetoric. But perhaps we should be more specific with the public and lead on what matters to them: these are good jobs, with quality training, for young people to fit insulation and cut energy bills.

By 2024, Labour must lead the way on the climate emergency, but to do so, we will need more people to follow. To date, we have only been talking to each other, and if we continue to get this wrong, we risk opening yet another, costly front in the dreaded 'culture war'.

The clock is ticking. It has, perhaps, never been more important to get a message right. F

Luke Raikes is research director at the Fabian Society and a Manchester councillor

A better future

Labour must set out its vision to right the injustices
the pandemic has laid bare, writes *Keir Starmer MP*

*Keir Starmer is MP for Holborn and
St Pancras and leader of the Labour party*

IN JANUARY, I was honoured to speak at the Fabian New Year conference. That event was called 'What Next?'. Looking back, it feels like a timely reminder of how quickly politics and society can change with events: just 11 days later, the first two cases of coronavirus were recorded in the UK.

It is safe to say that no one in attendance that day could have predicted the world we are now living in. We are reminded everywhere we go: by becalmed public transport, masked shoppers and businesses that are still closed. This September, we should have gathered as a party and a movement for Labour's annual conference in Liverpool. Instead our members came together virtually for Labour Connected.

The challenges posed by Covid-19 are immense and manifold. So far, there have been 64,000 excess deaths in the UK. Behind every single one is a life taken too early and a family left without a loved one. But we will not understand the full scale of the damage for years, if ever. The economic impact is still unfolding. The deleterious effect on our collective mental health may never truly be known. The attainment gaps that already existed in our education system have been further entrenched.

From the beginning of this crisis, Labour has promised to be a constructive and responsible opposition. Under my leadership, our party will always act in the national interest. That means having the courage to support the government to get things right while challenging when things can be done better. We have been true to these principles throughout, proposing ideas – such as the furlough scheme – that have then been adopted by the government, giving credit where it is due and accepting that in these unprecedented circumstances, no government could be expected to get every decision right straight away. But equally, there have been many occasions where the government and the prime minister have tested the limits of that.

The cold reality is that, throughout this crisis, the government has been a step behind. As a result, we were too slow into lockdown, too slow to ramp up testing and too slow to provide protective equipment to the frontline workers who have been keeping people safe. The failure to grasp what was going on in our care homes was catastrophic – with analysis showing that more than 400 residents were dying every day at the height of the pandemic. The subsequent attempts by the prime minister to lay blame at the door of care homes themselves was shameful.

People will make their own judgement as to why these mistakes were made. But it is increasingly clear that this government's toxic mixture of ideology and incompetence is holding Britain back from recovery.

The chancellor has put millions of jobs at risk with his refusal to make support schemes more targeted: as they wind down, businesses wind up. His refusal to do what it takes is creating thousands of job losses every week. The government's handling of exam results caused hundreds of thousands of children, parents and teachers unimaginable anxiety and hurt. And the government's 'world-beating' test, trace and isolate scheme remains a mirage for many parts of the country, where the system barely functions. The infamous app – once heralded by the health secretary as the key to unlocking the country and the economy – has seemingly disappeared.

We are still in the initial phase of this crisis: understanding it, dealing with the challenges it creates and adapting to them. But it is also crucial that when we emerge – which we will – we have learned lessons. Because the truth is that coronavirus has exposed the fault lines within our society. It has drawn back the curtain on a society, an economy and public services left fragile and underprepared by a decade of mismanagement. There can be no going back to business as usual.

When the country went into lockdown at the end of March, we quickly learned who our key workers really are. They are the health and care workers who cared for those in most need, often at great risk to themselves; the supermarket workers who kept shelves stocked during fraught times; the people on the frontline who emptied bins, kept

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streets safe and services running. Never again should they be taken for granted: where once they were last, now they must be first.

We have also learnt a lot about the nature of our friends, our neighbours – and ourselves. In recent years much has been said and written about the atomisation of society. As society, work and lifestyles have changed, and technology has become a bigger and bigger part of our lives, social participation has fallen. It has become accepted wisdom that people are more selfish and individu-alistic. But this crisis has brought out the generosity of spirit and kindness that – I believe – still characterises us. Neighbours checked on neighbours; people made sacrifices to protect the NHS and the lives of others; hundreds of thousands signed up to volunteer for the NHS, while many more helped out in local community groups. During the Labour leadership contest, I said that another future is possible – but we have to fight for it and own it. Harnessing this spirit – one based on people's innate sense of duty, community and contribu-tion – to a positive vision of the future of our country is the task that now faces us all.

Over the coming months and years, Labour will be setting that vision out. But the beauty of our movement is that we do not do this on our own, locked away in dark rooms in Westminster. We work with and alongside our

Another future is possible – but we have to fight for it and own it

friends and colleagues from every region and nation of the United Kingdom: from our members, the union movement, our affiliated socialist societies.

For more than 130 years the Fabian Society has been at the forefront of the intellectual thinking of our great movement, advancing the cause of equality of power, wealth and oppor-tunity. But for too much of our shared history, we have made these arguments while languishing in opposition. It is a decade since we held national power. By the next general election in 2024, it will have been almost 20 years since Labour last won a general election: a lost generation. That is why we have made it our mission in the first months of my leadership to re-engage with the public: not just to listen but to hear. For too long we have given the impression that we were set to transmit when we should have been on receive.

The world has been changed irrevocably by Covid-19. There can be no looking backwards, longing for what came before. The future will belong to those with the courage and the vision to seize it. If we want to see Labour back in power, creating a better, fairer society; a stronger, greener, sustainable economy; restoring Britain's moral position in the world; giving the country a government it can be proud of, then we must – again – stand shoulder to shoulder to make it happen. Another future is possible: a better future. The fight for that future begins here. **F**

Our systems and institutions allow for complex, interconnected inequalities to persist, as exposed by this year's health crisis. To rebuild a more equal Britain, what meaningful, structural changes are needed? The Fabian Review asks authors for their demands.

Remaking the system

Reforming our democracy is a top priority in the fight against inequality, argues *Faiza Shaheen*

Dr Faiza Shaheen is director of CLASS (The Centre for Labour and Social Studies)

WHEN THE HOME secretary Priti Patel responded to Extinction Rebellion's blockade of the Murdoch printing press by arguing that the stunt was an "attack on our free press, society and democracy", she was met with an immediate barrage of mocking tweets. A free press does not have the sort of concentrated ownership structure ours does – with five billionaires owning 80 per cent of our print papers; it would not allow corporate sponsors to censor its content, like HSBC did to Peter Oborne at The Telegraph; and it would not be dominated by the same posh white men from a tiny selection of private schools and elite universities. We have a print press in the UK which is disproportionately right-wing. In my lifetime every elected UK prime minister has had the backing of Rupert Murdoch – and we all know that is not a coincidence.

Our skewed media is far from the only way our democratic system fails to be free and fair. The most glaring example is the House of Lords – recently stuffed with yet more privately educated right wingers – including Boris Johnson's own brother, Jo. In June 2020 there were four dukes, one marquess, 24 earls, 16 viscounts and 44 barons among the 92 hereditary peers entitled to sit in the House of Lords. Does that sound like democracy? A whopping 57 per cent of those in the House of Lords were privately educated, compared to 7 per cent of the British population. It is also over 70 per cent male. And there are lots of these unelected Lords – at over 800 members the UK's House of Lords is the only upper house of any bicameral parliament in the world

> **The UK's House of Lords is the only upper house of any bicameral parliament in the world to be larger than its lower house**

to be larger than its lower house. Among legislative bodies worldwide, only the Chinese National People's Congress is larger, with nearly 3,000 seats.

You cannot have a House of Lords configured this way and legitimately argue that we do not have an elite democratic structure in this country. The elected House of Commons is better in terms of socioeconomic mix, but with 29 per cent having attended private school it is is still far from representative of this country. To top it off we are on our 20th Etonian prime minister – meaning a third of all British prime ministers were educated at this one relatively small school. I suppose old habits die hard. In his bestselling book, Capital in the 21st Century, Thomas Piketty declared that western society is returning to what he terms the 'patrimonial capitalism' of the 19th century, where an entrenched class of wealth-owners, rentiers and high-income labourers enjoy an unassailable position at the top of society. Whether you look at the Sunday Times rich list, the labour market or the make-up of our parliament you can see how this conclusion fits the UK today.

This representation mismatch and biased press has real consequences – not least for inequality. It is not rocket science – when you have more politicians that understand and have lived experience of poverty and hardship, or even just everyday middle class life, you have more politicians that fight for well-funded public services, affordable housing and a greater willingness to curb the excess wealth and power of the super rich. On the flipside, when you have a sticky and dominant elite at the top they

shape policy and public narratives to suit their agendas and protect their assets.

Abolishing the House of Lords and creating a new elected chamber of citizens is one obvious way we can start the radical reform our highly problematic democratic system needs. Given Johnson's efforts to stuff the House of Lords with loyalists, there is zero chance that this is on the government's 'to do' list. Turkeys don't vote for Christmas so we will need these demands to come from the public and other political figures.

Proportional representation must also be on the list of radical changes to remake the democratic system. Studies have found that countries with proportional electoral systems have considerably lower income inequality than those with majoritarian systems like first past the post. Based on the evidence, political scientists have concluded there is a causal relationship at work, with income inequality decreasing as the degree of proportionality of a system increases. Countries with PR also tend to have a more equal distribution of public goods. This can be explained by the way PR systems mean more power sharing and hence temper the more extreme policy measures that do not speak to median voter preferences.

It is not just about structural change at the top: there is also a lack of development of grassroots and working-class activists in our communities. This is true of all working-class groups, but especially appears to be the case for black and young people. In my experience, too often black and young activists are used for photo opportunities and their energy in canvassing, but then find their political advancement blocked as they are patronised and, as is shockingly common for young female activists, face sexual harassment.

These blocked pipelines of talent shut out the voices of the young, who want to see opportunities to live in spacious and genuinely affordable homes where they can begin raising their own families instead of being trapped with their parents. Limited black and brown voices also mean that institutional problems with racism are pushed down the agenda. Without these voices, the priorities of much of the political class remain with preserving the wealth of existing homeowners, well-off pensioners, and the rentier class of landlords. No wonder so many young people and working-class minorities give up on traditional politics.

The good news is that young people are more politically engaged than ever, whether that be in resistance projects fighting gentrification, opposing inequality in our education system, Black Lives Matter protests, or direct action and protests to save the planet. I am hoping that this new generation will refuse to be sidelined, but the Labour party needs to step up its approach to use this engagement effectively. Trade unions too have a major and renewed role to play in organising in workplaces, finding new diverse and working-class voices, bringing democracy to people's everyday lives and ultimately engaging them with politics more generally.

Of course, democratic reform is hampered not just by a right-wing elite Conservative government, but all the biased media that support them. Murdoch will continue to be a menace to our democracy unless we finally implement the proposals of the supposed first phase of the Leveson Inquiry, and finally move to phase 2 to look at corruption and collusion between the press and institutions. This touches on the wider issue of the vested interests of newspaper proprietors – including their favoured economic policies – and how these manifest themselves in a diet of biased news.

Again, we can not wait in vain for the Conservatives to take this agenda forward. We are in an era when people – aided by technology – are shunning the legacy media in favour of alternatives. On the Left, new podcasts and outlets like Novara Media and Tribune have grown fast. An explosion in citizen journalism had previously been predicted but failed to materialise. However, with new apps and platforms, we may finally be witnessing a blossoming of democracy and creativity from the grassroots to tell the stories not told by privately educated columnists. These will be crucial in setting an agenda for this country, and reminding people of Malcolm X's still very relevant warning: "If you're not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people doing the oppressing."

As those who have worked on inequality issues for a long time know, the issue and its solutions are highly complex. Even if we started taxing wealth, without a major shift in our power structures we will fail to tackle inequality in a sustainable way. Those power structures include a so-called 'free press' that bats for the interests of the financial and political elite over the need for equality and saving our planet, as well as our arcane democratic system which favours the voice of a handful of dukes over millions of carers. **F**

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Turning the tables

A new policy agenda which focuses on housing and employment can tackle decades of identity-based inequality, writes *Fahmida Rahman*

Fahmida Rahman was research and policy analyst at the Resolution Foundation

OVER RECENT YEARS, structural inequality has been fast shifting up the political agenda. There is much greater recognition of the particular inequalities faced by structurally disadvantaged groups, and governments and firms are increasingly being held to account on these issues. For instance, the introduction of mandatory gender pay gap reporting in 2018 means that large employers must reflect on the levels of gendered inequality within their ranks at least once a year. And the launch of the government's race disparity audit in 2017 raised a myriad of questions about the disadvantages faced by different racial groups in their interactions with various public services across the UK.

Now increased recognition of structural inequality as a key political issue has come to a head in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. And the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the racist murder of George Floyd in the United States has added fuel to this fire.

In the early stages of the pandemic there was much talk about how the virus did not discriminate. It seemed that anyone was susceptible to catching it, so everyone should do as much as they could to prevent it. But this idea was fast debunked as it became apparent that people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, those living in socioeconomically deprived areas, and people in professions that require large amounts of social contact and are typically low-paid, such as social care, are more susceptible to infection and, ultimately, death.

What coronavirus has highlighted is that the existence of structural inequality continually reinforces poorer outcomes for the already disadvantaged. A quick look at the state of housing in the UK can explain how this plays out. Recent research by the magazine Inside Housing showed that

> **The existence of structural inequality continually reinforces poorer outcomes for the already disadvantaged**

areas with more overcrowded housing had been worst hit by coronavirus. This makes sense given that living in overcrowded housing will make it much harder for those with symptoms to self-isolate. Overcrowding disproportionately affects people living in rented accommodation, particularly those in the social rented sector who are overwhelmingly on lower incomes and cannot afford to buy their own homes. Disparities in housing quality between wealthier and poorer groups are therefore likely to have contributed to the disproportionate number of those living in socioeconomically deprived areas who have been affected by the virus.

But it is not just income levels that determine housing outcomes. Historic discrimination in housing allocation, which has meant people from BAME backgrounds have faced unequal access to better quality housing and have been disproportionately housed in deprived inner-city areas, continues to play out today. The council areas that Inside Housing showed to have both the highest rates of overcrowding and the highest Covid-19 death rates – Newham, Brent and Tower Hamlets – also have some of the highest BAME populations in the UK. Similarly, other research has shown that people from BAME groups are much more likely to face overcrowding than their white counterparts. And it is the groups with the lowest average incomes – Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and black Africans – who face the highest rates of overcrowding, highlighting a clear intersect between race and income inequality in the coronavirus landscape.

Beyond the health implications of the pandemic, the need to shut down large swathes of the economy in order to contain the virus has sown the seeds for a recession, and it is low-paid workers who have borne the brunt of this. Research from the Institute for Employment Studies shows that between February and April, employment fell by

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four percentage points – from 82 to 78 per cent – for those in low-paying jobs, but remained unchanged for higher-paid workers. Given that typically disadvantaged groups including women, people from BAME groups and those with lower qualifications are most likely to be low paid, it is these people who will once more be disproportionately affected by the crisis.

The fact that structural inequality reinforces poorer outcomes for disadvantaged groups was already known long before the pandemic: in 2010, the Marmot review systematically documented the ways in which socioeconomic inequalities determine inequalities in health. And a review of this, published just one month before the country went into lockdown, found that the health gap between wealthy and deprived areas had grown during the 10 years since 2010.

It is also well known that structural inequality reproduces itself over generations. For example, buying a house is much more difficult without access to prior wealth, and with decades of increasing house prices it has become increasingly difficult to purchase a home without help from family or friends. Since BAME groups historically hold less wealth, they are less likely to be able to help younger generations afford homes, so younger BAME people will continue to be disproportionately affected by the housing quality issues discussed above. Moreover, living in more deprived areas limits access to a better quality education and jobs which would improve outcomes in the long term. In effect, as well as reinforcing and reproducing themselves over a lifetime, inequalities in different areas such as education and employment can serve to reinforce and reproduce one another over generations.

Much research has been done showing that people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to go into higher education and are more likely to work in low-paid jobs. And structural inequalities are such that even when people from disadvantaged backgrounds do overcome the initial barriers to social progress they are faced with further barriers down the line. For instance, despite being more likely to come from lower-income families, young people from BAME backgrounds are on average more likely to go to university than their white peers. But the attainment gap at university between BAME students and their white counterparts is large, and when BAME students graduate they continue to face barriers in terms of access to higher paid jobs and are often paid less than their white counterparts for doing the same work.

While conversations about structural inequality have been bubbling away for a number of years, the coronavirus crisis coupled with the growth of the BLM movement have created a renewed urgency to tackle these issues head-on. But addressing decades of entrenched structural inequality is no small feat. It will require a wholesale approach to policymaking that works across sectors to unpin the root causes of inequality that create ripple effects throughout people's lifetimes. We need to not only understand how different forms of inequality come together to reinforce one another, but to find practical and meaningful ways to act upon this. Moreover, we need concerted action to tackle the specific inequalities that have resulted in certain disadvantaged groups being held back for generations.

We need meaningful investment in social housing with a concerted effort to build more homes that meet the needs of the families that live in them. We also need more targeted support for homeownership among young people who do not have access to accumulated family wealth. We need to tackle the structural barriers that prevent people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds from accessing better paid jobs and to dismantle the discriminatory culture that keeps BAME graduates from accessing higher paid work or receiving the same pay for the same work.

None of this work is easy and it certainly won't come without effective political campaigning. But hearts and minds are fast being won, especially with the devastating impacts of the coronavirus crisis continuing to loom over us. If we ever had a case for a new policy agenda that places tackling structural inequalities at its heart, it is now. ◼

Breathing space

The pandemic has shown just how vital parks and green spaces are for our wellbeing. Yet we are not sharing them fairly, as *Meredith Whitten* explains

Dr Meredith Whitten is a planner and ESRC postdoctoral fellow at the London School of Economics. Her research focuses on urban greening

DESPITE A CULTURAL proclivity for the countryside, the British are urban people. Eighty-three per cent of the population lives in urban areas, the highest in the OECD. Urban design and planning decisions shape our daily lives and have a big impact on our health and wellbeing. Local road networks can increase air and noise pollution. Transport connections affect the ability to commute to work, school, social networks and health services. Both indoor and outdoor public spaces foster interaction with others and combat social isolation. And green spaces provide sites for exercise and relaxation.

The Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown have highlighted how critical access to nearby high-quality green space is for urban dwellers. Green spaces provide a place for physical activity, which is vital for preventing chronic diseases, such as diabetes and obesity, and for improving mental health. These spaces mitigate environmental harms – reducing air and noise pollution, the risk of flooding and the urban heat island. And they offer an opportunity to relax and destress, connect with nature, and interact with others, thus strengthening a sense of belonging and reducing loneliness.

Yet, urban green space is not shared fairly. Many neighbourhoods across the UK lack access to the extensive benefits it provides. An estimated 2.6 million Britons live more than a 10-minute walk from green space. Twelve per cent of households had no access to a private or shared garden during lockdown. This is more acute in urban areas – 20 per cent of Londoners lack a garden – and for low and unskilled workers and black and minority ethnic (BAME) people. BAME residents are more likely to live in areas lacking access to open space and nature and were more affected by park and green space closures during the lockdown.

People living in the most deprived neighbourhoods die younger, spend more time in ill health and are more exposed to harmful environmental conditions than those in the least deprived neighbourhoods. Economically deprived neighbourhoods have fewer accessible quality public green spaces. Residents in these areas are more likely to experience poorer health outcomes than those who live in green environments – disparities in green space access have been linked to obesity, longevity and mental health. Research shows health inequalities are halved in greener areas.

Yet, while the pandemic has highlighted inequalities in access to urban nature, green spaces cannot be disentangled from the broader context in which they exist. Because green spaces have long been seen as refuges from the stress of urban life, they are often considered as detached from the city around them. Their status as a discretionary service provided primarily by local authorities reflects this: green space is seen as nice to have, but not essential for urban life.

An administratively and disciplinarily siloed approach to urban design and planning compounds this conceptualisation. Healthy environments depend on an intricate interplay of a range of design elements. Yet design and planning often occur in a piecemeal fashion rather than from a more holistic perspective grounded in integrated decision-making. Thus, green spaces are designed and managed in a vacuum, disconnected from other decisions about the city.

On top of this, a tendency to think of green spaces narrowly as conventional parks and gardens limits opportunities to increase urban greening throughout a city. A wide range of green elements, such as tree canopy, pocket parks, living roofs and walls, and some external amenity space provided in housing estates and developments, can contribute to positive health outcomes. Such non-traditional spaces have a number of benefits, including shading and urban cooling, promotion of active travel, biodiversity habitat, improved air quality, and places to relax. Collectively, these green elements – alongside conventional parks and gardens – make up an interconnected, multifaceted network of green space.

A more comprehensive urban greening approach acknowledges the reality of density, as well as how urban space is used, including vertically and across a mix of public and private spaces. And with increasing urban density, a broader range of green elements can more readily be delivered instead of relying on conventional parks as sole providers of green space. Indeed, opportunities to retrofit built-up cities – where people already are less likely to have access to nature – with new large, conventional green spaces in dense urban areas are rare.

Siloed approaches in design and planning policies can perpetuate socioeconomic and health inequalities.

Permitted development rights, for example, allow conversion of office space to residential use to quickly deliver housing by bypassing the planning process. However, requirements for access to open or amenity space – including green space – are bypassed as well. Recent research led by Dr Ben Clifford found that just 3.5 per cent of permitted development units had access to private amenity space, compared to 23.1 percent of homes delivered via planning permission. Housing created through permitted development is eight times more likely to be located in primarily commercial or industrial areas, where public green space is typically lacking. Thus, the short-term focus on adding residential units can lead to long-term problems stemming from lack of access to nature.

People engage more with green spaces near where they live – even when travel is not limited by a pandemic. We therefore need to provide local green spaces throughout a city to move towards more equitable health outcomes. But often resources are focused on larger, flagship spaces. While these destination spaces are critical nodes in a green network, they are not the spaces that most urban residents encounter daily. With more people indicating they plan to work from home long term post-pandemic, delivering 'nature at the doorstep' becomes all the more critical.

Green space falls within the wider – and vaguer – category of open or amenity space, which means in housing developments, small residential balconies or unimaginative hard-surfaced spaces are often provided instead of natural features. When green space is supplied, it is largely ornamental, providing limited benefit. Opportunities to deliver urban greening that actively contributes to health outcomes are missed. For example, roof gardens can be places for quiet reflection, social interaction and small-scale food growing. High urban land values mean developers and homebuilders squeeze in more units – typically at the expense of on-site green space – to maximise profits. This puts pressure on existing green spaces by crowding in more users. The effects were evident during lockdown, when green spaces – and their litter bins – were overflowing.

Yet, simply providing access to green space is not enough in itself. Research has shown even when a community is well-endowed with green space, other factors affect if and how a space is used. These other qualities can stem from the design of the green space itself or can reflect wider cultural, socioeconomic and behavioural issues.

Demands on local green space constantly change, as cities experience population, demographic and cultural churn, as well as gentrification. If the design and management of green space does not reflect the community around it, people are less likely to use the space. For example, the presence of off-lead dogs can cause some populations to avoid green spaces. Research has shown that parks featuring a lot of sports pitches are more actively used by men. Lack of benches or handrails along walking trails can deter older residents from accessing green space.

Crime and anti-social behaviour in a surrounding neighbourhood can also reduce use of local green spaces. Poorly designed surrounding streetscapes can be perceived as unsafe and discourage people from accessing green spaces. Providing a safe environment outside a green space is, then, as critical as the design choices made within the space.

Finally, delivering and managing green space must be collaborative. With rising demand on statutory social services and austerity-ravaged budgets, local authorities cannot provide all the green space we need, particularly when much of urban life is spent weaving through a mixture of public and private spaces. There should be requirements on developers – with adequate teeth to enforce them – to provide on-site green space proportionate to the size of a residential or office development. Community and voluntary organisations have long helped maintain Britain's green spaces, but such groups do not always represent the overall community. Reflecting the needs of all local residents – including those who do not engage with local green spaces – is imperative.

As we have seen, addressing inequalities in green space provision in increasingly dense urban areas is key for improving health and wellbeing. Yet, doing so requires tackling systemic inequalities beyond a conventional park's boundaries. A more integrated design, planning and governance approach that breaks down administrative, disciplinary and funding siloes is needed to connect green space to the rest of a city's social and spatial fabric.

Prescriptive design measures can make green spaces – and urban greening more broadly – even more useful in improving health outcomes. A more inclusive conceptualisation of green space that reflects the realities of contemporary cities can contribute to addressing persistent issues of unequal access to some of the health benefits nature provides. Central to this is changing the perception of green space from passive, ornamental amenity to critical, active infrastructure. Conventional parks are just one part of a larger system. Parklets, for example, will not replicate a flagship park, but they provide opportunities for small-scale interactive moments and exposure to nature that might not otherwise occur. And, critically, they can serve as a link in a wider network of green space.

As cities grow and change, so, too, must their green spaces. Addressing crime and safety across the neighbourhood should form part of strategies to increase use of green spaces for health and wellbeing benefits. Green spaces must reflect the needs of all of the local community, not just the most vocal. Residents who don't find a space welcoming or safe will not use it, no matter how accessible it is. This means continual community engagement and assessment to encourage all residents to engage with green space. Ultimately, increasing access to – and use of – urban green space to address health inequalities requires looking beyond physical interventions. Instead, broader social, cultural and economic issues must be addressed in tandem with improving how urban greening is spatially woven through our cities. **F**

> With more people indicating they plan to work from home long term post-pandemic, delivering 'nature at the doorstep' becomes all the more critical

A long trail

Equipping citizens with skills for life is now more
important than ever, argues *Gordon Marsden*

*Gordon Marsden was shadow higher education, further
education and skills minister from 2015 to 2019 and
MP for Blackpool South from 1997 until 2019*

"WHEN SORROWS COME, they come not single
spies, but in battalions." Shakespeare, who
penned those words in Hamlet, was born in
a time of plague in Stratford. He saw the disease come back
repeatedly, claiming thousands of lives in London and closing for long periods the theatres that were his livelihood.

Pandemics in both his time and ours, like comets,
blaze a long trail. Coronavirus is no exception. As well as
resulting in appalling tragedies for thousands of families
across Britain, its consequences for livelihoods, economic
prospects and, in a time of physical distancing, for social
cohesion are multifaceted.

The worlds of higher, further education and skills are
not exempt from this. Decisions taken now will reverberate
for jobs, life chances and social mobility long after this
pandemic departs.

The impact of the crisis is already daunting. It was
forecast in May that an additional 600,000 18 to 24-year-
olds could be pushed into unemployment in the year ahead
and tens of thousands of others from their mid-20s into
their 50s have already lost theirs.

Many of those who have lost their jobs will need retraining
and reskilling, as will others whose jobs will disappear as
the pandemic accelerates the changes
expected to come about because of
digital growth and automation.

Right now there are others whose
immediate futures will be affected.
School leavers with GCSEs, A levels or
BTecs – their heads perhaps reeling after
an extraordinary August of govern-
ment indecision and U-turns – are off
to colleges, universities, apprenticeships or other training
in unprecedented circumstances.

Those graduating this year from universities or colleges
face a very tough job market – as will those graduating in
2021 – given Brexit as well as the continuing impact of the
pandemic. Add in apprentices whose employers or learning
providers have become pandemic casualties and adult
learners shortchanged by government over the past decade
(leaving us a million fewer of them) – and the magnitude of
the challenge is clear.

Much has been made of the differential treatment the
government has meted out to the higher education and
further education sectors. The chancellor's statement in
July, as well as promising a new £2bn kickstart scheme for
16 to 24-year-olds on universal credit with fully funded

six-month work placements, offered 30,000 new trainee-
ships and incentives for employers to take on apprentices.

There were warm words too from education secretary
Gavin Williamson about new higher tech qualifications,
more institutes of technology and a 'German-style appren-
ticeship system', all potentially to be spelt out this autumn
in the budget and an FE Bill.

By contrast the universities minister Michelle Donelan
carped at unidentified universities for recruiting disad-
vantaged students onto low grade courses (without
any evidence). Proposals from Universities UK for
a pandemic package of funding similar to those given to
other sectors were ignored, as were suggestions for reduced
tuition fees if the impact on students locked out of campus
life became severe.

Ironically the row of lemons from the government's
August fiascos have put universities back in the spotlight,
given the devastating impact the results created by an
algorithm would have had on applications from disadvan-
taged young people. The case for social mobility is back on
the table. But so far there's little lemonade from govern-
ment to show for it.

Even before the results debacle, higher education was
already facing a potential perfect storm,
fuelled by the 2021 hike in fees for EU
students post-Brexit and the likely end of
UK participation in both the EU Erasmus
scheme, which allows thousands of
young people to study abroad, and the
EU's Horizon programmes from which
UK researchers have benefited hugely.
Then there is the disappearance from
the UK of many Chinese students after the coronavirus
outbreak and the deterioration of UK-China relations
over Huawei and Hong Kong – a major financial blow for
universities heavily dependent on them.

Now the demands of social distancing are impacting on
universities' planning for students on campus this autumn.
London Economics has found that nearly two-thirds
of HE institutions are in deficit, so it is no wonder UUK
and Million Plus (whose universities represent significant
numbers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds)
have renewed their call for financial support.

The response of ministers so far to all this has been
dismal. There has been little focus on how young students
could cope – or afford – to keep switching between home
and campus if local lockdowns (like those seen recently

> **Even before the results
> debacle, higher education
> was already facing a
> potential perfect storm**

in Greater Manchester, Preston and Leicester, all with sizeable numbers of students) continue. Failure to engage with unions concerned about members' health and safety or with the NUS about student support has not helped.

But neither is it all roses in the FE and skills sector. Despite being lovebombed by government, the legacy of year-on-year neglect and £3bn of cuts since 2010 has left deep fragility – despite their famed adaptability – in colleges and their finances.

Even with the summer's initiatives, the devil is in the detail. A boost for traineeships was a consistent demand learning providers and I, when I was shadow skills minister, made. But for some of the institutions hit by the pandemic, it may be too little too late. It is crucial kickstart has some afterlife in providing long-term jobs.

Swift delivery of Whitehall measures is crucial for confidence given fears of a second coronavirus wave this winter. But Department for Work and Pensions secretary Therese Coffey told MPs returning from recess that the first kickstart placements would not be ready until November. Meanwhile the Department of Education has given FE colleges only half of the money they asked for to support students in lockdown – despite 85 per cent of colleges saying they had evidence of increased student hardship.

The truth is that those studying or working in both HE and FE have been badly let down by Tory governments for a decade. The lack of competence in Boris Johnson's team has been ruthlessly exposed under the blowtorch of this pandemic and so too have the silos in which ministers operate.

The need to overcome this silo working – and the assumptions that Whitehall knows best in micromanaging decisions and funding to the regions, is not new. It underpinned the principles behind Labour's independent lifelong learning commission in early 2019 which I helped set up and then co-ordinate.

The commission's report last November was designed to address immediate needs in the next couple of years but also to set out a road map for the 2020s to a strong economy and a better society. The unique pressures thrown up by the coronavirus pandemic now turbocharge those objectives. How do we respond quickly to the pandemic but in a way that provides long-term benefits for education, jobs and skills?

We should do so using three guiding principles. Economic demand matters just as much as supply. That should be embedded across all the departments of government that impact on skills, jobs and education. Though input and resources are key at every stage, success should be measured by output, and most importantly outcomes, above all in productivity. And there need be no conflict between quality of life and social justice and the needs of the economy.

Labour has been ahead of the curve here in its plans for a Green New Deal. They build on previous commitments to create 80,000 climate apprenticeships a year with energy, transport and low carbon industries as priorities; retraining older people for green initiatives as well as recruiting a 'zero-carbon army' of young people, many of whom could otherwise, post-pandemic, end up swelling the current figure of 750,000 16 to 24-year-olds not in education, employment or training.

As for practical things to do now in HE during the pandemic, why not offer matched funding from Whitehall to encourage universities to replicate Cambridge's £1m adult bursaries initiative? Target HE institutions based in disadvantaged areas for support and incentivise place-focused universities to co-operate with – but not take over – further education colleges. Trial means-tested grants for successful students completing HE access courses and for adult and part time learners.

Elected mayors and combined authorities have persistently lobbied government for more powers and money to regenerate their local economies, skills and jobs. Those arguments made repeatedly by Andy Burnham, Steve Rotheram and others acquire extra force in the pandemic. Dan Jarvis, Labour's mayor for the Sheffield City region, has said: "What we have across England is still too often delegation, not devolution." He is right and government should learn the lessons from what other UK nations are doing.

For too long Tory-led governments were lukewarm towards engaging with trade unions eager to reskill their members. The much-praised Union Learning Fund, set up by Labour in the 2000s, and their reps have done fantastic work, but they remain thinly resourced. The lifelong learning commission recommended ULF funding be fully restored – now in this pandemic its role and resources should be expanded.

Working collaboratively is crucial. Our lifelong learning commisioners were drawn from right across the post-16 education sector, but all were united in their conviction that we need a radical shift to a fairer system of education and skills at all ages.

Their recommendations included a universal publicly funded right to learn through life, a range of entitlements to fully funded level 3 provision and publicly funded credits at level 4 and above, a potential right to paid time off for training, a truly national career service, the promotion of the integration of local skills, innovation and industrial strategies, a renewed focus on models of credit transfer and accumulation and improved pay and conditions for staff in the sector.

These recommendations all reflect that golden thread of progression and social justice embodied in the ideal of a National Education Service, which should start by reviving the investment in early years embodied in Labour's Sure Start and then give multiple chances at every stage of life for people to draw out their skills and talents, to their benefit and ours.

In the Life Lessons essay collection, published by the Fabian Society in 2018, Angela Rayner spoke of the need to "transform the lives of individuals and society and bring meaningful opportunities to all those areas that for too long have been left behind". That should still be our goal. And as I said in my Life Lessons essay, progression and outcomes should be at the heart of this, "wrapped around and made stronger by funding systems that reflect our vision of education as a public good and not just a private consumable".

In 1919, in the wake of the first world war and another devastating pandemic, the Spanish flu, a young civil servant published a book full of striking economic analysis and passion. That person was John Maynard Keynes, in his book The Economic Consequences of the Peace.

Now is the time to think hard about the economic consequences of coronavirus and climate change - bearing in mind the watchword of Keynes' contemporary and kindred spirit E M Forster: "Only connect." **F**

WORK TO DO

Shadow equalities minister Marsha de Cordova talks
to *Vanesha Singh* about the party's response to Black Lives Matter
and why language matters in the fight against racism

THIS HAS BEEN a year when racial injustice and widening inequalities have become harder to ignore, owing both to the coronavirus pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) uprising. The murder of George Floyd by white police officers in the United States brought to the fore issues of institutional racism, policing and white privilege, with protesters in Britain's cities, towns and villages joining the global movement. Tens of thousands of people across the UK, including shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, Marsha de Cordova, protested in solidarity. "For me, it was personal. And it really cut deep … because that could have been my brother, it could have been my nephew."

As the MP for Battersea, home to the United States embassy, de Cordova's constituency became a focal point for the protests. "Seeing thousands of people from all different walks of life and all different backgrounds coming together, demanding fundamental change, we were challenging the racial injustice that exists in this country. Because I think it's important to highlight that whilst we were showing solidarity with what happened in the US, it's also about recognising and knowing the problems that we face here."

And there is indisputable evidence of the persistent inequalities black people in Britain face. "When you think that a black worker with a degree will earn 23 per cent less than their white counterparts, that's unjust. Black Caribbean children or children that are mixed are three times more likely to be excluded from school, that's unjust as well. And if you look at our criminal justice system, there is a huge element of disproportionality there. You are nine times more likely to be stopped and searched if you are a black person," she says. "We're living in such a racially unjust society. And for me, it's so important that we cannot let this moment pass, let any of the momentum fade away."

Like many, she found the government's response to the BLM protests 'disappointing'. "This was a real opportunity for the government to step up to the plate. But for the prime minister to announce yet another commission to look at racism and discrimination isn't the kind of action that was needed."

The move provoked de Cordova to look into the numerous government-led reviews, commissions and reports on racial injustice over the last three years: the McGregor Smith report on race in the workplace; David Lammy MP's review on discrimination in the criminal justice system; the Angiolini report into deaths in custody; Edward Timpson's review on school exclusions; the recent Windrush Lessons Learned review and two Public Health England reports that came out this June. Each had numerous recommendations. "And I kid you not when I say, how many of those recommendations have been implemented? Little over a few to say the least, and the only ones that have been are from the Lammy review. All the others, nothing has been implemented. So I don't think another review is going to really help us."

Instead, she has called for the government to implement a number of policies. "One of the things I believe we

need is a race equality strategy that seeks to fundamentally change some of the systems and institutions where these racial injustices exist."

Another top priority for de Cordova is reforming the national curriculum so it includes 'an honest account' of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. And on her return to parliament this September, she wrote to the prime minister to introduce mandatory ethnicity pay gap reporting from next April. "Then we will be able to hold companies to account and highlight any disparities that exist within the workplace."

In order to better address racial and socioeconomic inequality in the UK, de Cordova has decided to reject acronyms like 'BME' or 'BAME' (black, Asian and minority ethnic), and 'POC' (people of colour) which homogenise all non-white ethnic groups. "We're different and our experiences are going to be different." She joins a growing number of people using nuanced and direct language around ethnicity. "Language is important," she says. "I am a black woman, that's it, I'm not anything else."

She places Labour, with its 'proud history', at the forefront of the fight for fairness, equality, inclusion and antiracism. "In 2017 and 2019, we were the only party to have manifestos for disabled people. We have a race and faith manifesto as well. We have a strong track record of fighting for the rights of LGBTQ+ communities. It's all been done by the labour movement."

Clear, too, is her faith in Labour's new leader, Keir Starmer, who she says is 'incredibly committed' to ensuring Labour represents 'all communities'. But this summer, Starmer was heavily criticised for dismissing BLM's calls to 'defund the police' in Britain as 'nonsense'. This came on top of accusations the party has been too slow to act on anti-black racism, in response to behaviour towards black MPs by former staff cited in the leaked Labour antisemitism report. It led to swathes of members – particularly black members – feeling angry and wanting to leave the party.

De Cordova agrees the party 'absolutely' has 'work to do' on tackling anti-black prejudice and other forms of discrimination, which she stresses existed long before Starmer became leader. But she insists the answer is not to leave. "My message to members is, if you feel like walking away, think again, don't walk away. You stay and you fight. You fight for what's right," she says. "I think as black members, we need to self-organise, which is what is happening, and people are doing that. And we need to hold the leadership to account, whether that's the general secretary or the leader of our party, because no form of racism, anti-black racism, antisemitism, should have any place in our party or our movement."

Going forward, de Cordova believes it is vital Labour maintains its radical policy agenda, but that during these early stages under Starmer, the initial steps are for the leadership to 'listen to all different communities', and 'rebuild trust', particularly with those parts of the country that chose not to vote for the party in 2019. "There is no question that Labour has a mountain to climb. But ultimately it's really

up to us as Labour in opposition to have a strong and bold, clear message [about] this government's incompetence … We need to continually be calling the government out for not caring and understanding what needs to be done to tackle the rising inequalities that we face."

Indeed, Covid-19 has exposed how unequal we were coming into the crisis and exacerbated that inequality further. "For me, from an equalities perspective, since this whole pandemic, we've seen an over-representation of impact on women, and on our black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, and also on young people and older people."

Looking, then, at Boris Johnson's handling of the coronavirus crisis, de Cordova recalls 'so many examples' of ineptitude that have subsequently led to the UK having one of Europe's highest numbers of Covid-19 deaths. "At every stage I think this government has failed to really prepare and protect us and also to lead us through to any sort of recovery," she says.

The government – which de Cordova describes as 'incredibly right wing' – does not have a 'credible plan' for the looming unemployment crisis and has also been failing in its public sector equality duties to carry out comprehensive equality impact assessments, aside from those it produced on legislation passed in April. "And that's really worrying," she says, "because even when the chancellor announced his economic support package, there was no impact assessment carried out on any of that. And that also gives you an insight into their thinking."

Its failure to consider the human impact of their policies or to provide personal protective equipment to NHS, social care and transport network staff, and its refusal to pay key workers a real living wage has led de Cordova to believe that the government 'really does not care about certain communities'.

And as former shadow minister for disabled people under Jeremy Corbyn, de Cordova is conscious of the 'harrowing' impacts austerity and Tory incompetence throughout the coronavirus crisis have had on people with disabilities, many of whom were shielding and have struggled to get the bare essentials, including 'hundreds and hundreds' of disabled people who were unable to access food delivery services. The solution, she believes, is to put equality at the heart of how we shape our institutions, systems and policies.

Despite worrying examples of far-right nationalism in the UK, de Cordova chooses instead to look at the neighbourliness and compassion witnessed throughout lockdown. "Let's focus on all the good things. The government has wanted us to focus on some of the negatives and is wanting to be quite divisive. They tried to do that with BLM as well. And we just have to rise above that."

She takes this year's goodwill and community spirit as proof that, in the difficult months ahead, Britain will continue to come together around shared values of justice and fairness. "I'm always going to remain hopeful," de Cordova says. "That's why I do what I do." **F**

> We need to continually be calling the government out for not caring and understanding what needs to be done to tackle the rising inequalities that we face

Vanesha Singh is assistant editor of The Fabian Review

Road to recovery

Scottish Labour has a mountain to climb in next year's elections but its values still chime with voters, writes *Jackie Baillie MSP*

Jackie Baillie MSP is deputy leader of the Scottish Labour party

THIS HAS BEEN a year that no one could have predicted. Covid-19 has torn apart our families, our communities and our economy. Unemployment levels are through the roof and our health and social care services are at breaking point. The pandemic has presented the Labour party with challenges we have never had to tackle before, and the way that the coronavirus crisis has been handled – both in Holyrood and Westminster – has shown that there has never been a greater need for a strong Labour party. Success in Scotland is key to success in the UK as a whole.

Considerable polling has been carried out over the last six months which has told a story about Scottish Labour's support, where we have gone wrong and what we can do to rebuild and move forward. Despite polls showing growing support for independence, the majority of people in Scotland believe that independence is a distraction from more important issues impacting the country. Amid the ongoing Covid-19 crisis, just 36 per cent of voters in a recent survey said they consider independence 'one of the most important issues facing the country'. However only 9 per cent of voters are willing to consider voting for a party that has a different view on independence from theirs. Therefore we must remain unequivocal on our pro-UK stance whilst setting out policies that will make a difference to the lives of Scots.

I have never been one to beat about the bush and I am going to be honest now: on our current polling, Scottish Labour will not gain the support that we need to form the Scottish government come May 2021. I am always ambitious for the Scottish Labour party, as I am ambitious for my country, but we need to do much, much better if we are to take over St. Andrew's House.

There is a huge mountain to climb, but that does not mean we cannot make progress. Labour's values remain the values of the Scottish people. Polling suggests a quarter of SNP leaning voters would consider Labour if we showed leadership, unity and vision for ordinary Scots. We are a party which can move the country on from the divisions of Brexit and independence, which both the SNP and Tories thrive off, and instead anchor our politics in the issues that matter to people: jobs, the NHS and schools.

At present, the SNP and Greens have formed a faux-friendly alliance in pursuit of independence. The Greens support the SNP even though its policies are far from progressive and the vote of no confidence in John Swinney after his disastrous handling of school exams failed because the Greens voted with the government to keep his position. On the other side of the chamber are the Scottish Tories who spend their time falling over themselves to defend the indefensible actions of Boris Johnson and his government. Jackson Carlaw MSP proved ineffectual but with Ruth Davidson MSP back in the driving seat, and Douglas Ross MP as their new leader, we must redouble our efforts to prove that they are no better than their blond boss in Number 10.

When it comes to progressive politics the SNP is all talk and little action, a message that Scottish Labour must drive home with the electorate. Nicola Sturgeon says that her party's record speaks for itself – I couldn't agree more. Just this year alone, we have watched the SNP government pass up on the opportunity to provide fair rents in the private sector or tackle debt for those who have lost their jobs. We have seen our cherished NHS staff and social care workers being forced to tackle the pandemic with wholly inadequate protection, whilst hospital patients are transferred to care homes without being tested – and even on some occasions after testing positive – for Covid-19. John Swinney was forced to make a truly historic U-turn after realising that he had ruined the future prospects of hundreds of thousands of pupils across Scotland. He had been willing to allow for Scotland's most disadvantaged but brightest pupils to receive completely unfair grades, because he trusted postcodes over the professional judgement of Scotland's teachers. Yet what

> On our current polling, Scottish Labour will not gain the support that we need to form the Scottish government come May 2021

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that it will have a wide reach are over. To its credit, the SNP has a huge following across online platforms and it uses this effectively to gain support and amplify its message. We must do the same.

Not only is the way that we campaign changing, but the focus of our 2021 campaign is changing too. Scottish Labour has long focused, almost exclusively, on trying to gain as many constituency seats in Holyrood as we can – viewing any seats that we pick up on the regional list as a bonus. There was some sense in working this way when our support was high across the country but we must recognise that this is, unfortunately, no longer the case. So for the first time in Scottish Labour's history, we will be running the

was Sturgeon's announcement of the summer? A second independence referendum would be a key policy within her 2021 manifesto.

Breaking up the United Kingdom is the SNP's sole priority. That is the entirety of their political project. Tackling poverty, closing the attainment gap, ending injustice and inequality all play second fiddle to independence. Voters want the focus to be on rebuilding our health and social care sector, supporting our teachers and schools, finding secure work for all those who find themselves newly unemployed and protecting our planet for future generations. These are Labour's priorities.

Scottish Labour has a clear position on the constitution – we believe in a strong Scotland in a strong UK. Never again can we flip flop on some of the most important issues that face our country. But now is not the time for a second independence referendum and constitutional upheaval.

Communities across Scotland need a party which seeks to tackle the problems of today and helps our nation recover, rather than rehash the debates of the past. We must therefore deny the SNP an overall majority in Holyrood. Keir Starmer's strong leadership and his high approval ratings in Scotland, along with a well-run campaign, can help us achieve this.

How Scottish Labour campaign in the forthcoming Holyrood election is going to be very different from ever before. Scottish Labour is full of dedicated and experienced activists who come out year after year and election after election to knock on doors in constituencies across Scotland. But this time around, Scottish Labour's campaign is going to be highly digitalised. This will ensure that we still speak to voters whilst keeping both the electorate and ourselves safe. The Labour party is currently completing a review of our digital resources but we need additional capacity developed in Scotland to increase engagement across social media and online platforms. The days of being able to place a column in a newspaper safe in the knowledge

2021 Holyrood campaign with a well-targeted strategy. This will run parallel to the defensive constituency campaigns that will be run in Dumbarton, Edinburgh Southern and East Lothian.

As one of Scottish Labour's only three constituency MSPs – and with a constituency majority of 109 votes – I know all too well that Scottish Labour's support in constituencies is low, but I remain determined to win my seat. I strongly believe that we have areas of embedded support in communities across Scotland which a regional list campaign would allow us to tap into. Our local council wards are the building blocks for growing and retaining support for Scottish Labour. Indeed many activists tell me that it is at the level of the neighbourhood that you win elections. There will be hundreds of thousands of voters across Scotland who see Labour delivering at local level, through their councillors and local Labour MSPs. Our progressive values and policies, focused on the wants and needs of their family and local community, are attractive to local voters. The potential support for a party, focused on the things that matter to people – jobs, health, education, public services – is there, but we've got to work for it.

During a speech in August, our leader Richard Leonard laid out exactly how Scottish Labour will hold both the SNP and Conservative governments to account. We have a clear understanding of what communities across Scotland desperately need. From rebuilding our NHS and valuing staff, to creating a National Care Service so that our older people are treated with dignity; from a jobs guarantee scheme to offer our young people hope for the future to creating a Green New Deal with investment in over 100,000 jobs. As we rebuild and recover after the coronavirus pandemic, Scottish Labour will provide bold, progressive policies that offer hope and opportunity to people in every area of Scotland. We need a strong Labour party to bring about change in the UK and our road to recovery starts in Scotland. **F**

Owning the future

Labour needs to offer a path to a fairer and more resilient society post-coronavirus, argues *James Meadway*

James Meadway is an economist. He was an advisor to shadow chancellor John McDonnell MP and a former chief economist at the New Economics Foundation

I N THE NINE months since the first cases of Covid-19 were identified, the pandemic has inflicted an exceptional toll: both in the tragically high number of fatalities and the sheer scale of the economic shock, the world has been plunged into its greatest collective crisis for generations.

Yet through all this, Westminster politics looks at times almost becalmed. Since becoming Labour leader, Keir Starmer has done an effective job of positioning himself as a critic of the government's competence, as those from all wings of the party have noted. If polling is any guide, this is beginning to pay dividends, most obviously for Starmer personally whose approval ratings are now consistently above Boris Johnson's, but perhaps now also for the Labour party as a whole.

Yet the Tories' polling remains consistently at or above 40 per cent, despite their catastrophic political failures and despite the near-weekly U-turns. The worsening economic news and the appalling mishandling of the first months of the pandemic are evidently not enough, by themselves, to significantly undermine the Conservatives' political position. To chisel away at their support will require not only establishing an effective day-by-day response to events – positioning Labour as a credible alternative government – but setting out a programme for that government which addresses the emerging challenges more convincingly than this government can. Labour has only ever won when it owns the future, whether in 1945, 1964 or 1997. If that future is now darker than any of us would wish for, we will fail in 2024 if we do not confront it head-on. Warm nostalgia – whether for 1945 or 1997 – is political death.

There has certainly been some talk from progressives about the pandemic provoking a reconsideration of how our society is run, emphasising the need for collective goods like a fully-functioning NHS, or greater social solidarity, or a recognition of the value of 'key workers' in keeping the economy going. This kind of speculation is a comfortable place to be for anyone on the left, but the truth is that, whilst this pandemic will have permanent effects, there is no guarantee that these will play out to the benefit of social or environmental justice. If anything, they could work hard against both.

Because it is clear by now that Covid-19 is accelerating and deepening the economic trends we have seen in the decade since the Great Financial Crisis of 2008. 'Deglobalisation' is partially evident: in 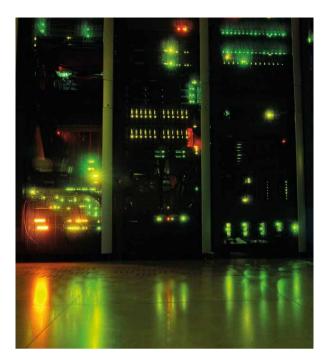2019, global goods trade, as a share of global GDP, was already below its pre-crash peak; cross-border financial flows are down 65 per cent since 2007. The trade rows between major powers are not going away: they are far more likely to intensify and spread, as the USA's moves against Huawei indicate. For good or ill, the multilateral, free-trade economic order is being pulled apart, as states intervene in defence of perceived national economic interests both against each other, and, increasingly, within their domestic economies.

And whilst in 2007 the five largest companies on the planet were the oil majors, today they are nearly all the data giants: the collection, storage, transmission and analysis of data is the decisive factor in the global economy, and a key component of the new forms of instability, whether in the well-known social disruptions of fake news and micro-targeted advertising, or in the (as yet) more subtle dislocation of work through data-driven automation. The shift into working from home and online consumption, driven by the need for social distancing, has accelerated the growth of data dramatically, pointing to a longer-term

> **The Tories' polling remains consistently at or above 40 per cent, despite their catastrophic political failures**

economic shift: for a period in May, teleconferencer Zoom was worth more than the seven largest airlines added together, whilst the major US tech corporations have seen their valuation grow by $1.9tr – nearly 40 per cent – since the start of the pandemic.

Environmental instability is now a fact of life. As humanity has expanded its economic footprint, so, too, has it pushed further and deeper into the natural environment, stirring up ancient diseases and encountering new pathogens. Melting permafrost threatens to release frozen viruses, for which we have perhaps no immunity; intensive farming creates the conditions for the rapid mutation and spread of novel influenzas; and climate change brings a radical instability to weather patterns. Covid-19 will almost certainly not be the last major epidemic we face.

Taken together, the cumulative impact is to generate a world characterised not by the broad stability generations born in Britain since the second world war have known, but a form of pervasive instability. The result is a profound dislocation and uncertainty about the future, where questions not only of the fairness in the distribution of outcomes, but of fundamental security and identity come to the fore.

This poses a profound challenge for the left. A society that is subject to great instability and inequality may produce demands for redistribution, but they will be tied to demands for what American academic Nancy Fraser called 'recognition': of people wanting to have not only fair outcomes, but fair processes and a sense of security and identity: that their worth as a person is valued and the anxiety of instability is minimised.

The political right has already seen much of this and moved to exploit it. The Tories have offered their amalgam of 'Keynesian' government spending and targeted deregulation to 'level up' the economy, and larded it over with promises of national renewal. They will not have genuine or lasting solutions to the real problems – there is little about Johnson that suggests 'genuine' or 'lasting' – but they can, nonetheless, offer something.

Moreover, a society subject to multiple shocks and pervasive insecurity cannot rely on the state alone as its defence mechanism. Clearly, public services (notably health and social care) will need to build in more slack than they have, on a more secure funding base and operating to a broader idea of efficiency. But a capacity to respond to shocks after they happen is not enough. Nor, subject to multiple shocks, increasing in frequency, is the state likely to be able to maintain sufficient reserve capacity to respond in good order. Genuine security requires society as a whole to be more resilient: for the economy, this would mean reducing the exposure of our financial system to shocks, for example, by taking account of environmental degradation, or reducing the environmental footprint and exposure of our supply chains by localising production.

But this is a direct challenge to the baseline offer of post-war social democracy, which – whether in the form of Old or New Labour – centred on using the state to redistribute incomes and provide public services. Redistribution alone will not address the demand for recognition, and public service spending alone will not address the need to create a more resilient economy.

We need, instead, to understand that the world is deeply imperfect, and getting worse, but that certain fundamental values can be reasserted on the biggest questions: since we are surely beyond at least some climate points of no return, how, for example, will the next Labour government not only act to reduce environmental destruction, but offer a socially just adaptation to a changing environment, as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation has argued for? Can we start to bring the extraordinary powers of the data economy under meaningful public control, as I suggested in a recent IPPR report? As conventional working patterns are under strain, and with the pandemic raising questions about the type of work we value, can we use this moment to create fairer outcomes, as think tank Autonomy have urged?

The answers point us towards thinking about how fairer and more resilient communities can be built, and how we can give people the tools to build them in a way that answers the demand for recognition. That part of our labour movement and socialist tradition that spoke of decentralisation and common ownership is where we need to look, and where a consensus in the party increasingly rests, from John McDonnell to Wes Streeting: giving people the security they need to live a life that is meaningful to them, in an economy where power and wealth is fairly distributed.

A Labour manifesto which addresses the emerging challenges more convincingly than this government can is one that fights for a resilient economy of widespread, decentralised common ownership – of worker-owned firms, community-owned assets, publicly-owned infrastructure – alongside a protected public realm of high-quality public services. It means national economic goals focused on meaningful improvements to people's lives, not increasingly redundant 20th century measures like GDP. It means supporting local and regional initiatives to establish clear alternatives to the centralising quasi-Keynesianism of the Tories and pushing for and supporting further devolution. If we can find the language and economic programme around these themes, we can start to rebuild Labour's alliance for a socially just society in the face of a gravely uncertain future. **F**

Can Labour win?

Keir Starmer should take a leaf out of Tony Crosland's book by building a Labour programme fit for the future, writes *Paul Richards*

Paul Richards is a writer and former chair of the Fabian Society

IN THE SPRING of 1960, the 42-year-old Anthony Crosland MP, a member of the Fabian Society executive, gave a lecture in London to the Fabians, taking as his title Can Labour Win? The talk was subsequently produced as a Fabian pamphlet and sent to the Fabian membership.

What are the similarities and differences between the situation facing the Labour party in 1960 and 2020, and how can Tony Crosland's arguments and approaches help a Labour party led by Keir Starmer construct a modern, values-led programme capable of answering the great questions of the age and simultaneously gaining electoral support? The question for us today, 60 years on, is can Labour win?

When he gave his Fabian lecture, Tony Crosland, the MP for Grimsby, was at the height of his intellectual powers. Four years earlier he had published The Future of Socialism, an explicit attempt to revise British socialism away from its ideological quasi-Marxist attachment to state ownership, and to reposition Labour as a party driven by socialist values, applied anew in each generation. Crosland, in a party deeply distrustful of intellectuals, was the closest Labour came.

The difference between the arguments in The Future of Socialism in 1956, and his Fabian pamphlet four years later, aside from depth and length, was the fact of the 1959 general election. This was the Conservatives' third election victory in a row, and as Crosland pointed out: "The Party has now suffered a humiliation unprecedented in the annals of British democratic politics, namely, of losing seats at four successive General Elections."

The question he posed was more than academic; it was existential. The following year Richard Rose, Mark Abrams and Rita Hinden published a Penguin special called Must Labour Lose? which concluded that unless Labour modernised in light of changing attitudes, aspirations, class identification and relative affluence, the answer was yes. The book's blurb stated: "Unless the Labour Party has a fighting chance to win elections, the country may be governed indefinitely without an essential feature of parliamentary democracy – an alternative government in the House of Commons." Then, as now, Labour's ability to form governments, and its very existence as a party of government, was in serious doubt.

In 1959 the Conservatives led by Harold MacMillan won a majority of 100, gaining 20 seats taking its total to 365. Hugh Gaitskell led the party to an overall loss of 19 seats, resulting in 258 Labour MPs. Labour won 43.9 per cent of the popular vote. However, as we know from Labour's 2017 defeat, percentage of the vote is irrelevant and meaningless if the other side wins more votes and more seats. The Tories won 49.4 per cent of the vote, and 1,534,703 more ballots than Labour. This, remember, was a much more binary electoral system, with only six Liberals, and zero Plaid Cymru, SNP, Sinn Fein, Ulster Unionists or Greens. The 1959 election was a zero-sum game, without the complexities of today's multi-party system.

Crosland based his argument that Labour had to change and modernise in the light of defeat in two factors, one theological, the second psephological. First, he started his pamphlet with a rehearsal of what he saw as 10 'basic socialist values'. These can be read in full online, but in essence they are: an over-riding concern with social welfare, equal distribution of wealth, classlessness, a non-elite system of education, diffusion of economic power, the substitution of co-operation for competition in social and economic relations, disarmament and the 'rule of law' over nationalism, racial equality both at home and abroad, an increase in economic growth, and a belief in parliamentary democracy, with the rights of liberty of the individual against the state, police, private or public bureaucracy, or 'organised intolerance of any kind.'

He argued that "No one can call himself a socialist who does not assent to the basic values." This in itself falls into the trap of confusing ends and means (the greatest misdemeanour that can befall socialism, according to Crosland), because Crosland's own identification of fundamental values, whilst progressive and laudable, belongs to its own time and circumstance.

He was writing against the backdrop of a growing economy and greater prosperity, with an uncontested welfare state and publicly owned utilities and corporations, a rigid class system, and before the rightful influence of the second wave of feminism, the rise of concerns about climate change, or the politics of race, gender, disability or sexuality which would emerge more fully in the following decades.

When revisionists revised Clause IV in the mid-90s, these issues were embedded into Labour's stated aims and values, in language that would have been largely incomprehensible in 1959. As a great Fabian Tony Wright described at the time:

> "The battle of ideas was now not only central to the party but driven from the top. The Blairite revolution, converting socialism into 'social-ism' and constructing a liberal communitarianism anchored in a broad intellectual inheritance of the left centre, succeeded where the putative revisionism of a generation earlier had failed. The means and ends of socialism had finally been disentangled, not through evasion or obfuscation but through a direct and explicit process of theoretical reconstruction."

However, this conviction that British socialism was a series of ethics, or values, which could be applied to changing social and economic situations, rather than a rigid set of 'demands' or manifesto policies, is Crosland's greatest insight for us today. This revisionist approach means that Labour can never become wedded to redundant ideas and ossify as society evolves around us. The application of traditional values in modern settings, as John Prescott put it, is what has guided Labour into election-winning strategies in 1945, 1997, and under Harold Wilson four years after Crosland's pamphlet in 1964 (and again more convincingly in 1966).

The opposite approach, namely imbuing certain policies with near-religious significance, which cannot be challenged for fear of heresy, is what led Labour into the doldrums in the worst electoral calamities of 1983 and 2019. There are those today who wish to stitch Labour's 2019 manifesto into Labour's fabric, like an indelible tattoo, regardless of its popularity or efficacy, and ignorant of its relevance in our pandemic-stricken world.

Crosland dismantled this latter approach in his pamphlet, drawing on an essay by Max Weber, Politics as a Vocation. Weber distinguished the ethic of ultimate ends and the ethic of responsibility, and Crosland characterised the ethic of ultimate ends as she or he who:

> "Has no interest in political power; for he takes no interest in, or responsibility for, the consequences of his actions – even when they fall on other people than himself … political tactics, reconciliation, compromise, an order of priorities, a choice between objectives – these have no place in his system."

Crosland decried those socialists who 'would remain in opposition for 30 years rather than risk one tittle of his doctrinal purity' rather than consider their responsibility for their actions 'on British old-age pensioners or the inhabitants of Nyasaland'. We can make the same charge stick on those today who do not see their own role, by keeping Labour out of office, in the poverty of pensioners or reductions in overseas aid.

I mentioned earlier that Crosland's argument was anchored in two approaches, one theological, the second psephological, and to this second one we must now turn. As Dick Leonard noted in a collection of essays to commemorate Crosland after his death in 1977:

> "Crosland himself retained a consistent interest in the attitudes and behaviour of voters. He read and mastered, as Can Labour Win? made clear, all the earlier literature on the subject and he took a lively interest in opinion poll data at all times – not just when an election was pending."

This belief in, and understanding of, the science of voter behaviour marked Crosland out as a man of modernity within Labour circles. The science of opinion polling and understanding of voting behaviour was relatively new, and some of the methods were pioneered in commercial advertising, marketing and public relations. As such there was a deep suspicion of these techniques. This same suspicion was encountered in the 1980s when Peter Mandelson, Philip Gould, Deborah Mattinson and others attempted to professionalise Labour's relationships with the voters and it has survived in some parts of the Labour movement.

The group ruling the Labour party between 2015 and 2019, and their acolytes, certainly espoused a total disregard for opinion polls and survey evidence in a manner and with a force that would have been immediately recognisable to Tony Crosland. Instead of measuring results from election data or stated voter intentions, they measured attendances at rallies or numbers of social media shares and built their political platform on those shaky foundations. The question for Keir Starmer is whether to repeat that mistake, or to use the insights gleaned from modern methods of political science to inform his understanding, decisions and Labour's direction.

Again, we must learn from Crosland's broad approach not his specific remedy. For example, in Can Labour Win? he states that all voting studies agree that political attitudes are primarily correlated with social class: 'Most middle-class people vote Conservative, most working-class people vote Labour.' In Crosland's time, the political scientist Peter Pulzer stated that: 'Class is the basis of British party politics; all else is embellishment and detail'. Crosland, with some prescience, had identified that in the future voters would behave more like consumers 'more fluid and open to rational persuasion.'

By the time of the 2019 general election, the class position was reversed. More working-class people (in the C2DE category of skilled workers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers, and the unemployed) voted Conservative than Labour. Labour's own membership, now at a new peak under Starmer, is overwhelmingly middle-class, unlike in Crosland's time. The research of Tim Bale and colleagues shows that by 2017, 77 per cent of Labour members were ABC1 (managers, professionals and administrators), compared to 60 per cent of the population.

Labour's own membership, now at a new peak under Starmer, is overwhelmingly middle class, unlike in Crosland's time

Across the former industrial areas of the North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Midlands, places like Crosland's own seat of Grimsby, and a roll-call of 'safe' Labour seats fell to the Tories. Crosland's socialism was rooted in a political map, where Labour's strength and values derived from the communities of Bassetlaw, Blyth, Bishop Auckland, Bolsover, Wakefield, Workington, Durham and Sedgefield, all lost to the Tories in 2019.

Starmer's socialism must therefore be based on the new realities of modern Britain, where age, education, sex, aspiration, and social attitudes are stronger determinants of voting behaviour than social class and occupation. The Durham Miners' Gala may be a nice day out – and one which teaches us a great deal about our industrial past – but it informs us very little about future elections. Crosland's key insight is that election-winning strategy must be based on scientific research not on what Crosland called 'whim or hunch'.

Having established his approach, Crosland addresses the question of how Labour may win again. For someone so keen to establish himself as an intellectual, his first piece of advice seems lightweight: 'We manifestly need to change the image of the party: in terms of issues, attitudes and the underlying class identification.' He is keen on better, more professional public relations and advertising. He is clear, though, this is not at the expense of principle: 'No one suggests that we should give up our African policy, or promise lavish tax concessions, merely because these might be the popular things to do.' This was a side-swipe at Gaitskell who had pledged in the election campaign 'no tax rises' despite Labour's stated policy. This is helpful to a nascent 'Starmerism' – unpopular, or repellent, aspects of Labour's recent positions and public face can be safely jettisoned without endangering Labour's core principles. Indeed, in the case of antisemitism, ejecting those with anti-Jewish views is a reassertion of Labour's true values, not an abandonment of them.

For Crosland, the main drags on Labour's performance were the confusion over nationalisation. For example, sugar and cement were targets for state control in Labour's programme in 1950, but not in 1955 or 1959, chemicals were on the list in 1955 but not 1950 and 1959, and 'insurance, meat wholesaling, machine tools, mining machinery aircraft and electrical engineering have all made transient appearances at different times.' Crosland is not against state control of certain industries, but only if the policy is 'carefully argued and consistently propagated and not … tossed into the programme at the last minute with no convincing explanation.' This last error was unfortunately repeated at the 2019 election, with a similar result in the minds of the voters.

Crosland also cites the impression that Labour in 1959 was seen as an enemy of progress and affluence – indeed 'anti-prosperity'. Labour must always recognise that aspiration is a core component of people's make-up, and not antipathetic to socialist values. Neil Kinnock reminded the 1987 Labour conference of the words of Ron Todd, the leader of the Transport & General Workers Union:

"What do you say to a docker who earns £400 a week, owns his house, a new car, a microwave and a video, as well as a small place near Marbella? You do not say 'let me take you out of your misery, brother'."

Tony Blair told the 1996 conference the story of the voter he encountered in the Midlands, polishing his Ford Sierra. He was a 'self-employed electrician, Dad always voted Labour. He used to vote Labour, he said, but he bought his own home, he had set up his own business, he was doing quite nicely, so he said I've become a Tory.' Blair explained it thus: "His instincts were to get on in life, and he thought our instincts were to stop him."

Hazel Blears, in an essay for the Fabian Society in 2007, quoted Ernest Bevin: "It's inherent in the working class to want a better deal for your children than your parents or grandparents had." At its best, Labour has understood this need to get on and do well. Harold Wilson managed to harness the aspirational spirit of his times by the 1964 election, and was rewarded with electoral victory. In 2019, however, Labour gave the impression of a narrow class-based approach, disapproving of social mobility and critical of success. Starmer needs to show that he gets modern society and people's desire to get on and do well. He will be helped in this task by his own working-class-lad-done-well backstory, with a knighthood to prove it.

Perhaps the greatest difference between the challenges facing Crosland and Starmer is the state of the economy. Crosland was grappling with the challenge of rising standards, a blurring of class distinctions, and a new salience of status over the alleviation of material want. The times were a-changing, at least for some. This required "an ethical, idealistic appeal, such as a true Socialist party should always make" which might prove "more in tune with the temper of the country".

Starmer, by contrast, must construct a popular programme in the midst of the climate emergency, technological disruption, mass unemployment and a pandemic. This stark contrast is perhaps the most important reason to listen to the voice of Crosland, echoing down the decades. Because, although on the surface views formulated before Love Me Do, never mind before the internet, may seem utterly irrelevant, the crucial gift Crosland bestows is an understanding that socialist values can be reapplied regardless of context or circumstance. Values are what give us an enduring appeal, transcendent of time and place. As long as we do not fix on particular personalities or policies (as some are now proposing), Labour can prosper.

Crosland said if Labour in the early 1960s could modernise as a 'progressive, national and social-democratic Party' it might win again, and so it proved. Faced with a similarly-sized Tory majority, after a comparable length of time in opposition, as the one faced by Crosland's generation, Keir Starmer must again forge an electoral strategy based on psephological evidence, imbued with modernity, in tune with society and rooted in socialist values. If Starmer ignores and marginalises the siren voices, and reaches deep into Labour's true egalitarian, libertarian and communitarian values, there is no reason why he cannot succeed. **F**

Western deceptions

Global health is deeply embedded in colonialism, writes *Michael Jennings*

Michael Jennings is reader in international development at SOAS University of London

I N APRIL, DISCUSSING how coronavirus vaccine trials might be carried out rapidly, two French doctors suggested conducting trials in Africa, where a lack of protective equipment, treatment or resuscitation would make it quicker and easier to see if the vaccine worked. The comments were widely interpreted as suggesting trials could be better done where ethics and regulations around medical trials were weaker.

Underpinning the response to Covid-19 are global health narratives that reflect longstanding assumed superiority of global north systems, norms and cultures. It is a reminder of how language, structures and interventions around global health remain embedded in colonialism. Certain regions and peoples are still seen as inherently dangerous to the global north: reservoirs of endemic disease or vulnerable to contagious outbreaks that could be 'imported' to the rich world.

The 2015 World Health Organization (WHO) guidance on the naming of newly discovered diseases or syndromes called for neutral generic names that avoided the use of geographic locations, people's names, species of animal or food, or references to culture, populations, industries, and occupations The WHO highlighted the ways in which particular ethnic groups, members of religious groups or even entire national populations, could face backlashes during health panics. In continued (and deliberate) references to the 'Chinese disease', President Trump and his administration have been ignoring these guidelines, and engaging in damaging narratives about disease, race and place.

'Decolonisation' has taken root in many university social science and humanities departments in recent years (in rhetoric if not always in practice). Decolonisation calls for attention to be paid to how knowledge is constructed, how it can stigmatise and marginalise those outside the main sites of knowledge production, and how alternative (and critical) voices can be silenced through neglect.

Western biomedicine is as much a social construct as economics, politics and history. How people think of health and sickness, the assumed geographic distribution of particular health risks and even understandings of human bodies, are shaped and limited by social narratives. 'Tropical medicine', the term that emerged in the late 19th century to describe the types of disease environment that existed across the global south, was a product of European empires and imperial imagination. It helped create and underpin the view of these regions as ones where inhabitants still led Hobbesian poor, nasty, brutish and short lives. It justified colonial occupation and rule: the spreading of the benefits of western biomedicine was a key defence of imperial oppression, even as colonial occupation was associated with the spread of new human and animal diseases that killed in vast numbers.

Decolonisation of global health matters because the continuation of colonial models still shapes interventions. It has contributed to the 'verticalisation' of health systems as donors support specific diseases rather than general health, leaving regions such as sub-Saharan Africa highly vulnerable to Covid-19 as well as a huge number of other health risks. It creates different standards for achieving the human right to health: what is deemed 'unacceptable' in the global north is presented as 'inevitable' in the global south; and this allows for arguments to be made that ethics and safety have less priority in such areas in medical trials.

The global north, too, is underprepared for epidemics it thinks 'belong' to the global south. In the early phases of the Covid-19 epidemic in China, its spread was ascribed to poor regulatory systems, limited capacity for disease control and the limitations of the Chinese state and culture. It was a narrative that left Europe and North America complacent in their own abilities to limit the spread, and one that spectacularly failed to explain why parts of Europe were harder hit than China, despite more advance notice of the impending pandemic.

> **Western biomedicine is as much a social construct as economics, politics and history**

This idea that presents health crises in the global north as individual failures, whilst those in China are seen as systemic and inherent, also leads to failures to address underlying problems, putting us all at risk. The widespread contamination of prepared foods in the UK with horsemeat in 2013 was portrayed as a technical failure, and blamed on 'foreign' meat processors and suppliers, rather than as the inevitable result of weak regulation and cost-cutting. The thalidomide scandal was presented as one of negligence, a mistake, rather than symptomatic of capitalist modes of pharmaceutical production.

Decolonising health requires more than just thinking about the structures and systems of global health and the ways that colonialism is institutionalised within them. It also requires us to think about the language of global health. Sticks and stones do indeed hurt, but so too can names and labels cause actual harm: to individuals, to whole societies, and ultimately to the idea of global health itself. **F**

The precarity of pre-existing conditions

Looking back over lockdown in the United States and Bangladesh, *Elora Halim Chowdhury* makes the case for a transnational feminism that emphasises our interconnectedness and interdependence

Elora Halim Chowdhury is professor of women's, gender, and sexuality studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston

COVID-19's path and the measures adopted to tackle it illuminate far-reaching social and political inequities. The rate in which the virus travelled across borders – national, urban to suburban, industrial and agricultural, race, gender and class, citizen, migrant and refugee, professional and daily wage worker – brought into sharp relief its stunning spread as well as the tremendous asymmetries of our lives. These differential border crossings have been the consequence of unfettered capitalist development and accumulation. In other words, the pursuit of progress, and the mindset and policy of unrestrained, exploitative and unsustainable growth, has led to deeply unequal consequences. Indeed, feminist scholars in particular have pointed to capitalism as the virus, humans as its agents, and the ensuing pandemic and its faultlines as being caused by the relentless greed, plunder, individualism and 'progress' in the age of the anthropocene.

When we choose to not heed the signs of devastation wreaked upon the earth by ever-increasing encroachment into natural habitats; when we choose to dismantle national pandemic teams, or deem it unnecessary to stockpile emergency medical equipment because they are not 'profitable' in the here and now; when we choose to build and sustain national economies on exploitation and oppression of disadvantaged and minoritised populations here and elsewhere in the global south, the shocking but not surprising, slow but sure consequence is that all of us – that is, humanity – are brought to our knees.

In this moment, we might reflect on how we – humanity – arrived here and what kind of future might we strive for on the other side of Covid-19. What we can say for sure is that the principles of capitalist growth must be stopped and an alternate way of living – emphasizing a care ethic and economy – has to be imagined.

Looking back over lockdown

From the outset, I followed the responses and coverage in my two contrasting 'homes' – the United States and Bangladesh. Those early days of lockdown that moved so quickly are worth reflecting on; they gave much insight into the inequalities of today and hold important lessons for confronting global inequities in the future.

A series of unfathomable blunders by the highest office in the US initially resulted in the country having the highest number of Covid-19 cases as well as deaths in the world. New York City, which was the epicentre, had been ravaged, with the most deaths – as well as job losses – occurring among African American and Latinx communities. Similar patterns then emerged in Boston, Chicago, Detroit and New Orleans in which unemployed and underemployed communities living in less than adequate housing, facing lower life expectancies, without access to nourishing and affordable diets – and thus suffering from 'pre-existing' socio-economic and health precarities – were worst affected.

Dr Anthony Fauci, the wise director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984, responded to the bleak racial inequity and higher numbers of death and disease among African Americans by saying, "There is nothing we can do about it right now except to give them the best possible care and to avoid complications." In a similar vein, during a webinar on the South Asian response to Covid-19, Dr Srinath Reddy, president of Public Health Foundation of India, when questioned about the sensibility of the stern lockdown and its murderous consequences for migrant labour, responded that the time for post-mortem of such policies was later; efforts in the now needed to prioritise healthcare. In response to the glib 'not now, later' response by authorities, American Studies scholar Lynnell Thomas poignantly asked, "That begs the question, when can we do something about it?"

Following the course of action in the global north, Bangladesh instituted a lockdown in late March, initially calling it a "general holiday", a clever euphemism that enabled a lockdown without specifications regarding legal responsibilities. That is, there was no attendant recognition whether the 'holiday' falls under the guidelines of the 2018 communicable diseases act or the 2012 disaster management act covering restrictions around worker lay-off. Experts in South Asia questioned the sensibility behind Bangladesh's approach given the vastly different national contexts existing between Europe, America and South Asia and pointed out the need for prioritising local approaches in thinking about strategies to combat a pandemic about which so much remains unknown.

In the context of Bangladesh, where 90 per cent of the working population are engaged in the informal sector, what did social isolation look like? Middle to upper-classes maintained the strict curfew-like imperatives, having planned for and purchased supplies to hunker down for the duration. Their service staff – drivers, cooks, cleaners – were released from their duties with, one hopes, advance salary payments. Many of their populations live in close quarters in the urban slums, often crammed 10 to 12 in a room. They do not have running water, let alone secure and sanitised living conditions. There was an exodus from the city to the villages. This exodus included migrant populations of daily wage earners and factory workers.

Eighty-four per cent of the country's export income comes from Bangladesh's garment industry, which employs 4 million workers, mostly women. In its lockdown directive, the government did not specify closing factories down, leaving the decision to be made ad hoc by individual owners. Neither did the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, the nationwide trade organisation of garments manufacturers, offer a clear directive at the start of the lockdown as to what the workers might expect. Many workers were sent home without wages for the month of March. One garment factory in particular – A-One (Bd) Ltd – has been called out by labour organisers for not having paid its workers for 4 months. On April 16, when the workers gathered in front of the factory to demand their overdue wages, police showered them with hot water and charged at them with sticks. Workers were then summoned multiple times by their managers, but their wages had not been paid.

We are now in a situation where mass scale economic downturn means brands are not coming forward with payment for goods that are currently in the pipeline. In the interests of workers, a supply chain of profit must integrate a chain of care and ethics. This surely includes the wellbeing of workers as much as the wellbeing of the business that is frequently put first.

A two-tiered enactment of humanity is at play. Human rights discourse emphasises universal values of humanity and dignity, yet what the pandemic fallout and policies have shown, time and again, is the use of a euphemism like 'essential workers' and the much celebrated 'women garment workers' in the case of a neoliberal-market-driven

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Throughout 2020, in Bangladesh as well as the US and UK, we have seen a hollow celebration of frontline workers

Bangladesh, obscures the very real daily dangers these workers are forced to face in order to keep considerable segments of the population safe and comfortable. Throughout 2020, in Bangladesh as well as the US and UK, we have seen a hollow celebration of frontline workers. They are celebrated as heroes yet are sent to these 'frontlines' without adequate social protections.

In March, at the peak of the pandemic, two thousand garment factories remained open in Bangladesh. In many, workers stood shoulder to shoulder. Among the poor in Bangladesh, there are stories of people dying of hunger and illness en route to the city on foot when workers were summoned back to work; of suicide in the face of hunger and the stigma of unemployment; and of sick relatives being abandoned by the roadside for fear of infection.

We cannot talk about health and disease in pandemic conditions, divorced from the pre-existing lack of a socio-economic infrastructure of protection. Who had the privilege to maintain a 6-feet distance in a factory or in slum quarters? Whose health, wellness and safety did these lockdown policies protect and at the cost of whose livelihoods? Was it a real choice for the vulnerable, whose 'normal' is already a condition of precarity, to return to work in the face of death by starvation? Who should be held accountable for the fragility of a $22bn garment industry that, after four decades of growth and prosperity for the nation and for multinational corporations, threatened workers with layoffs and no compensation, additional to the extreme lack of emergency protection?

On a televised talk show in Bangladesh, a news anchor asked Taslima Akhter, coordinator of Bangladesh Garment Workers Solidarity, about the capacity of factory owners to "feed the workers as they sit idle". This begs several questions: Who is feeding the owners and the retail companies in good times and in bad? Who has benefitted from the labour of factory workers, that they can ride the lockdown without having to worry about the next meal, about feeding their children, about paying rent?

This misrecognition of profit and security as entitlement resonates within the US debate around health insurance and protection, that often excludes those most in need of protection. Under the US capitalist system, insurance companies can refuse to provide coverage for those with health – namely those with pre-existing conditions. In some cases, socio-economic, racialised conditions are the pre-existing conditions. In Bangladesh too, workers' vulnerabilities make them ineligible for social and corporate responsibility. Akhter captured this double-standard:

> "10 *lakh* workers are on the verge of losing their livelihoods. The professional classes are protected by the state but when it comes to ensuring the job security for workers the response from the factory owners has been an astounding, 'how can we support them to sit idle?' … Already, they are facing the potential loss of $3bn from northern retailers. Nowhere in this equation is a recognition of how the businesses have benefited from paying workers meagre wages – wages that did not enable nutritious meals and good health, that barely maintained the workers' substandard and precarious lifestyles. At a time when our nation faces grave uncertainty, these business owners do not hesitate to turn their backs on the workers, talking about layoffs, and salary cuts. Workers are being made to bear the burden of the lost contracts.
>
> What a cruel system this is that discards the very people who enabled this class to emerge as the leading manufacturers, and for our country to rise to middle-income status. If owners and buyers don't take on the responsibility, who will? We must demand that the government will. The sweat of the workers are what grew the garment industry, yet these are the same people who are being made to bear the brunt of the pandemic. They face not just a health risk, but a risk to their livelihoods." (Translated by the author)

The incantation "we are all in it together" alludes to the borderless transmission of the virus and appeals to an evocation of global community, but it obscures universal and deeply entrenched systems of social stratifications based on race, class, caste, and nation. Such incommensurate words also obfuscate what should be a call for a 'just responsibility', a term feminist scholar Brooke Ackerly defines as awareness of location and privilege in our courses of political action and service towards humanity, encompassing an ethic of care and justice.

Interconnected and interdependent

As with capitalism, the pandemic's spread and consequences have been far more lethal for those with 'pre-existing conditions'. Negligence and systemic structural oppression of race, gender, class, and nation have made it so. To remedy this, we need a sense of collective good and a deeper appreciation of the interdependence between humans and the natural world. The pandemic has conjured war-like metaphors even though what will actually save us, ironically, is ethical care for one another. We cannot be isolated from the idea of sociality – that our lives must be in touch, that our sense of responsibility must involve solidarity, reciprocity and mutuality.

While our forward thinking must be policy-driven, the policies that will truly disentangle us from the thorns of the virus have to be trans-disciplinary and transnational. This is reinforced by feminist scholars as well as a spiritual-humanistic scholar like Japan's Daisaku Ikeda who outlines three key principles to realise a mode of global citizenship rooted in a pluralistic, and diverse form of humanitarianism: first a realisation that all life and living beings are interconnected; second, the embracing of difference rather than denying or fearing encounters with the other; and finally, cultivating compassion and 'imaginative empathy' for others.

Drawing from a Buddhist worldview, Ikeda encourages an 'all-encompassing interrelatedness' by active dialogue and engagement with others in order to grow our own humanity. In the foreword to Ikeda's essays, Hope Is A Decision, feminist scholar Sarah Wider notes the centrality of the concept of Ubuntu in his work — the idea of 'codependent origination' and the belief, 'I am because we are'. She elucidates that even when Ikeda seems to focus primarily on individual and interpersonal interactions as the mode for personal transformation, he urges us to see the individual as inseparable from our relational worlds and the interconnectedness of all existences. The act of understanding and living this interconnectedness is what Ikeda terms a 'committed persistence' to the 'profoundly relational world' humans inhabit.

Richa Nagar of the University of Minnesota posits that one must seek a 'metaphysics of interdependence', a planetary consciousness. She articulates this by evoking a powerful play written and performed by grassroots human rights organisers in northern India, where activists repeatedly chant, "If I speak my truth you will feel a stabbing pain". In the same vein, Ikeda writes, "Harm done to anyone, anywhere, causes agony in the poet's heart".

These incantations align with a transnational feminist analytic of interconnectedness, interdependence, and what Ikeda calls the theory of dependent origination. In them, we find the acknowledgment of a mutual vulnerability of humanity across borders and a collective commitment to co-create, to strive for social justice and ethical responsibility. These interdependent and transnational connections offer potential pathways for enhancing mutual care, healing and social justice: that is, if 'we' – a global community – truly are in this together, what would a compassionate and just response look like? It would mean collectively striving to rid the world of its current pre-existing precarities: the noxious air of uneven development, extractive economies, and appropriative human interactions. This response calls for an appreciation of the mutual vulnerability and dependency of humanity with one another and our ecologies, and a cultivation of just responsibility in our collective actions. **F**

Books

Facing neofascism

Samir Gandesha's formidable collection of essays is ambitious in scope, finds *Nina Kelly*

Nina Kelly is editor at the Runnymede Trust

Samir Gandesha's Spectres of Fascism offers a thorough examination of contemporary populist and neofascist movements across the globe, crucially understood in the context of an interrogation of 20th century fascism.
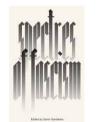
The book is a series of essays, many of which trace their origin to a year-long programme of seminars and lectures at Canada's Simon Fraser University, bringing together students, visiting professors and resident academics.

The introduction, written by anthology editor Gandesha, situates the present-day 'spectre' of fascism's birth somewhere between the September 11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in 2001 and the global financial crisis later that same decade. The former, it is argued, gave a mandate for a preexisting neoconservative agenda to openly pursue the aggressive foreign policy of 'direct regime change', while the latter created the failing economic environment for reactionary and nationalistic sentiment to thrive.

Similarly, the inception of fascism 'proper' – the kind that is widely accepted to have begun in early 20th century Europe – is given generous scrutiny in the introduction. It is understood as racism and xenophobia in response to capitalist crises. Not confined to Europe however, it is characterised in part as a reenactment of colonial atrocities, drawing on the spectacle of war and dominion. Examples given include Benito Mussolini in Abyssinia and the Herero and Namaqua genocidal massacre by German imperialists.

The individual perspectives that make up the main body of Spectres of Fascism mostly take one specific contemporary phenomenon and one historical episode or theory to cross-examine and compare. The essays are knitted together to form three distinct sections: history; theory; and the contemporary horizon.

Gandesha uses historical context and hindsight examination to help us make sense of the rise of populism and neofascism in the 21st century. We get an idea, with this scene setting, of the exhaustive breadth to be covered by this book, albeit by very specifically-focused comparison perspectives in this section including "Are the Alt-Right and the French New Right Kindred Movements?"

Spectres of Fascism, Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives, Samir Gandesha, Pluto Press, £24.99

The second section makes an audit of a formidable body of fascist theory, looking at where it may be used, in whatever limited way, to interpret the new 'spectres' of fascism now on display globally. For example, the editor's own chapter looks at how Theodor Adorno's social psychology on authoritarianism provides an insight into Donald Trump's contemporary appeal.

They are fresh and important perspectives, though a lot to take in for one sitting; readers will benefit from second reading or later reference.

The third and final section brings us back to the present, examining the global geopolitical landscape. Again showing an impressive scope, recent populist movements from Bolsonaro to Breitbart are interrogated, always with a focus on how existing literature might inform our thinking and understanding of these phenomena.

Overall, a consistent argument is built, as the book title suggests, that the neofascism of our current era is both the ghost and spirit of 20th century fascism.

The perspectives offer key differences, with today's fascism surviving in liberal democracies, apparently accelerated by an "extreme centre" including Clinton and Blair.

The challenge now is rising populist movements, bringing in policies that undermine democracy via democratic means, rather than an organised power grab. In other words, a threat not from outside, but from within.
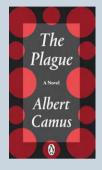
Much like the old manifestations they evoke, the new spectres are caused by economic insecurities, cultural anxieties and loss of privilege. Added to which, populist movements are actively transposing economic insecurities into cultural anxieties.

Pitched at an academic readership, with extensive referencing of existing theory and historical exploration of fascism, this book offers a valuable contribution to the comparison of 'then' and 'now'. The essays themselves are genuinely interdisciplinary, using specialists in art history, philosophy, political science, psychoanalysis and sociology.

More a set of well-constructed ideas than a cohesive framework for understanding today's neofascism, Spectres of Fascism is nonetheless ambitious in scope and convincing in expertise. **F**

FABIAN QUIZ

THE PLAGUE
Albert Camus

The people of Oran, Algeria, are in the grip of a deadly plague which condemns its victims to a swift and horrifying death.

Fear, isolation and claustrophobia follow as the townspeople are forced into quarantine. Each person responds in their own way to the deadly virus: some resign themselves to fate, others seek blame, and a few, like Dr Bernard Rieux, resist the terror.

First published in 1947, The Plague is widely considered an allegory for France's suffering under the Nazi occupation, and a story of bravery and determination against the precariousness of human existence.

Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away. To win one, answer the following question:
Which pandemic is considered the deadliest in history?
a) Spanish flu
b) Smallpox
c) The Black Death

Please email your answer and your address to review@fabian-society.org.uk

ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN 11 DECEMBER 2020

Noticeboard

Fabian Society Annual General Meeting 2020

The AGM will take place online this year on Saturday 14 November, 1pm.

AGM agenda
1. Apologies
2. Minutes of the 2018 AGM
3. Matters arising
4. In memoriam
5. Chair's report
6. Treasurer's report
7. General secretary's report
8. Approval of annual report 2019/20
9. Appointment of auditors
10. Motions
11. Jenny Jeger prize for writing
12. Date of next AGM
13. Any Other business

Close of meeting

More details of how to attend will be available on the Fabian Society website: www.fabians.org.uk

Motions submitted to the AGM Rule changes, proposed by the Executive Committee

RULE 7–Delete 'postal'
RULE 8–Delete 'postal ballot' on line 2 and 4 and replace with 'a ballot of all members'.

NEW RULE 16
The executive committee may take such disciplinary measures as it deems necessary to ensure that all members and officers conform to the rules, bye-laws and policies of the society. Action may include a written warning, removal from a position of responsibility, suspension or expulsion from the society.

No member of the society shall engage in conduct which in the opinion of the executive committee is harmful or grossly detrimental to the society. The executive committee shall make bye-laws and policies to give effect to this rule.

Motions proposed by Peter Stern

1. Society Re-launch
In view of the "systemic crisis" affecting the political arena, this annual general meeting, calls on the executive committee to arrange a conference, to relaunch the Society and to discuss what action could be taken to improve its effectiveness. Members of other societies, affiliated to the Labour party, could be invited.

2 Name change (possible)
The terms 'Fabian' and 'Fabianism', being redolent of a bygone age, this annual general meeting, calls on the executive committee to arrange a competition calling for suggestions for a new name for the Society. The winner to be awarded a substantial prize.

Listings

BIRMINGHAM AND WEST MIDLANDS
Contact Luke John Davies at bhamfabians@gmail.com

BOURNEMOUTH AND DISTRICT
Contact Ian Taylor, 01202 396634 or taylorbournemouth @gmail.com for details

BRIGHTON AND HOVE
Contact Stephen Ottaway stephenottaway1@gmail.com for details
Thursday 29 October 7pm with Sandy Martin
Thursday 19 November 7pm with Paul Dimoldenberg)
Thursday 10 December 7pm with Anneliese Dodds)

CENTRAL LONDON
Contact Michael Weatherburn at londonfabians@gmail.com and website https://fabians. org.uk/central-london-fabian-society/

CHISWICK AND WEST LONDON
Contact Alison Baker at a.m.baker@blueyonder.co.uk

COLCHESTER
Contact Maurice Austin – Maurice.austin @phonecoop.coop
Thursday 24 September 8pm with Paul Dimoldenberg
Thursday 15 October 8pm LGBT matters with member Pauline Bacon
Thursday 19 November 8pm with Andrew Adonis

COUNTY DURHAM
Contact Professor Alan Townsend 01388 746479

CROYDON AND SUTTON
Contact Emily Brothers – info@emilybrothers.com

DARTFORD AND GRAVESHAM
Contact Deborah Stoate – debstoate@hotmail.com

FINCHLEY
Contact David Beere for details djbeere @btinternet.com for details

GRIMSBY
Contact Pat Holland for details at hollandpat@ hotmail.com

HAVERING
Contact Davis Marshall at haveringfabians @outlook.com

HORNSEY AND WOOD GREEN
Contact Mark Cooke at hwgfabians@gmail.com

ISLINGTON
Contact Adeline Au at siewyin.au@gmail.com

NORTH EAST LONDON
Contact Nathan Ashley at NELondonFabians@ outlook.com

NEWHAM
Contact Rohit Dasgupta at rhit_svu@hotmail.com

NORTHUMBRIA AREA
Contact Pat Hobson at pathobson@hotmail.com

OXFORD
Contact Dave Addison at admin@oxfordfabians.org.uk

PETERBOROUGH
Contact Brian Keegan 01733 265769 or brian@ briankeegan.demon.co.uk
Wednesday 23rd September 7.30 pm, The NHS Post COVID with Dr Martin Edobor

PORTSMOUTH
Contact Nita Cary at dewicary@yahoo.com

READING and DISTRICT
Contact Tony Skuse at tony@skuse.net

RUGBY
Contact John Goodman rugbyfabians@myphone.coop

SOUTHAMPTON AREA
Contact Eliot Horn at eliot.horn@btinternet.com

SOUTH TYNESIDE
Contact Paul Freeman at 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

TONBRIDGE and TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Contact Martin Clay at Martin.clay@btinternet.com

WALSALL
Contact Ian Robertson at robertsonic@hotmail.co.uk for details

YORK AND DISTRICT
Contact Jack Mason at jm2161@york.ac.uk

End violence and abuse against retail workers

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USDAW'S CAMPAIGN TO PROTECT WORKERS FROM VIOLENCE AND ABUSE

Let's work together to ensure the Government takes real action to protect retail workers from violence, threats and abuse. Help us get there by signing and sharing our petition.

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For more information or to join Usdaw visit our website **www.usdaw.org.uk/fff** or call **0800 030 80 30**

Usdaw
Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers

General Secretary: **Paddy Lillis** ● President: **Amy Murphy**
Usdaw, 188 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 6LJ