

# FABIAN REVIEW

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# FABIAN REVIEW

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**FABIAN  
SOCIETY**

### **FABIAN REVIEW**

Fabian Review is the quarterly journal of the Fabian Society. Like all publications of the Fabian Society, it represents not the collective view of the society, but only the views of the individual writers. The responsibility of the society is limited to approving its publications as worthy of consideration within the Labour movement.

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## Making the case

Labour faces a big test in next month's elections and needs to set out its vision for the months and years beyond, writes *Andrew Harrop*

**A** YEAR HAS PASSED since Keir Starmer's election as Labour leader and the party is preparing to face its first electoral test. The contours of May's contests reflect the fallout of a miserable decade for the party. Labour will dominate in most big cities. But Scottish Labour starts from a distant third, the party's position in many former industrial strongholds is uncertain, and Labour does not run the town hall in too many places where it needs an MP to win back power.

This month the Fabian Society launches a new programme focused on the 150 constituencies Labour must gain to govern. Crucially, only a minority of these targets are the ex-industrial 'Red Wall' seats that were lost in 2019, often after having drifted away from Labour for years. Many more are classic bellwether marginals or constituencies Labour has barely ever won, but which have been trending towards the party in recent times.

The seats Labour needs to take are very diverse which is why the party must be a truly national, big tent political force. But their centre of mass lies in middle Britain – neither rich nor poor, young nor old, strongly for remain or leave: constituencies in every corner of the country, but overwhelmingly in towns and smaller cities not Labour's current urban core.

The party's problem is not that it has lost touch with a small slice of socially conservative, 'left behind' voters in places with symbolic ties to Labour. It is that it must rebuild a connection with the millions in the middle: those who are neither suffering nor prospering, liberal nor authoritarian. The party must win a hearing from people who barely think about politics and vote based on a politician's character and ability to connect.

This is the context in which Keir Starmer is rebuilding Labour's fortunes and it is the yardstick against which his success must be measured. Criticism that is unconnected to this electoral project is disingenuous and comes from people who want the party to fail not succeed.

Labour has spent a year starting to deal with its negatives: addressing the reasons people had for not voting for the party, be that Corbyn, Brexit or antisemitism. Now as the worst of the pandemic starts to recede, the party needs to set out positively what Starmer's Labour is for, and what it is against.

Elections are always referendums on the party in power and Labour must do more to prove that the Conservatives are manifestly unfit for office. In the 1990s Labour prospered by highlighting how the Tories were tired, sleazy and a menace to the public realm. All the ingredients are there to make this case again. People must go into the next election asking themselves whether our fragile public services are safe in Tory hands, and whether Conservative politicians are governing in the nation's interests or their own. But Keir Starmer also needs to offer a powerful, resonant account of why he wants to be prime minister and how a Labour government will change the country. That story should be one of security for all and of a future better than the past. Far-reaching plans for economic reform should be presented in terms of reducing risks and building secure livelihoods, not unsettling rupture and radicalism.

And Labour must paint a vision of how a purposeful state, working in partnership with business, workers and local leaders, can chart a path for Britain out of a decade of stagnation. The party needs to explain how it will shape the future not react to it – using the power of government to green the economy, create productive jobs, harness technology for good and equalise power and opportunity.

In each of these areas Labour needs to stake out ambitious positions which chime with the common sense of middle Britain, and where even shape-shifting Tories like Johnson and Sunak cannot follow. It won't be easy, but Labour's destiny is in its own hands. **F**

# Shortcuts



## NEVER SAY NEVER

Rejoining the EU is still a distant ambition—*Paula Surridge*

The divide between leave and remain has dominated our political discourse since 2016. But with Brexit now ‘done’ these categories may gradually lose their potency as a way of describing attitudes to the EU. It will no longer make sense for polling companies to ask people how they would vote in a rerun of the 2016 referendum, or the hypothetical ‘second referendum’ that caused so many headaches for the left in recent election campaigns. In the future, the question will not be leave or remain, but stay out or rejoin.

YouGov polled just this question recently. In a referendum to rejoin the EU, the headline figures suggest that 42 per cent of the British public would vote to rejoin, 40 per cent would vote to stay outside, 7 per cent would not vote and 11 per cent were uncertain.

Based on the headline figures, it may not seem unreasonable to think that public opinion, at some point in the future, will be firmly behind rejoining the EU. But the picture is more complex than this. While we must always be wary of over-interpreting the sub-groups in a poll, only two parts of Britain had a majority in favour of rejoining: London and Scotland. This gives a hint as to the issue with extrapolating from headline figures – even leaving aside the issue of whether Scotland might have its own referendum on its membership of the UK long before one on the EU. Currently, opinion very strongly relates to how people voted in 2016. We will need to watch closely to see if this relationship weakens over time.

Two processes are at play in understanding how the aggregate level of support for rejoining the EU might change. The first is whether people change their minds in the future. For all that has happened in the political sphere since 2016, people’s views on leave or remain have been remarkably



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stable. Very few people on either side give a different answer now from the one they gave in 2016 – and this is also true of the rejoin/stay outside question. This may change, and many on the remain side continue to hope (if not expect) that the reality of Brexit will lead those who voted for it to change their positions, despite evidence that this has not so far occurred. The second process is that of generational replacement within the electorate. Those eligible to vote for the first time in 2024 were aged 10 in 2016; their formative political experiences will be shaped by the Covid crisis in ways we cannot yet predict.

One element that must be considered here is the role of elite discourse, and political actors, in shaping the debate. It took the Referendum party (formed in 1997 to campaign for a referendum on leaving the EU) 20 years to see its position become a reality, and while the Rejoin EU party has the advantage of an issue already being on the agenda, it also faces a set of parties keen to put this issue behind them. Of the parties who contested the 2019 general election on a pro-EU platform, only the SNP are currently adopting a ‘rejoin’ position – albeit in a very different context and one which, were the ultimate goal of Scottish independence achieved, would make rejoining the EU less likely in the rest of Britain where the vote to leave was stronger.

We may hazard a guess at how those coming to voting age now might have been shaped by events, but what of those born tomorrow and able to shape our politics within the next two decades? On the current evidence, it seems unlikely that there will be any significant ‘rejoin’ movement within the British public in the medium term.

Deeply embedded political identities – as evidence suggests leave and remain have become – do not change rapidly when left unattended. However, they can be mobilised by political leaders – especially if the landscape should shift so that it becomes more politically advantageous to build on these identities. So when we think about whether the UK will ever rejoin the EU, it is impossible to rule it out entirely. As we all know, even a week is a long time in politics. **F**

*Paula Surridge is a senior lecturer at the University of Bristol’s School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies and deputy director at UK in a Changing Europe*



## BLOOD MONEY

The logic of empire still governs our politics—*Kehinde Andrews*

It took Tory MP Richard Drax four years to declare he owned Drax Hall Plantation in Barbados, which he inherited after his father’s death in 2017. The fact that the ownership of the £150m estate was only disclosed through a press investigation speaks to the hidden nature of the wealth from slavery. It was all so long ago that we imagine it could not possibly be relevant today. But the story of Drax Hall tells us how nothing could be further from the truth: the legacy of slavery – and the logic of white supremacy that made it possible – still shapes the world today.

Drax Hall is a 250-acre site where enslaved Africans were forced to labour from 1640 to 1836, generating untold wealth.

It was not the only plantation owned by the Drax family, whose trade in human flesh in the Caribbean consumed an estimated 30,000 lives, according to historian Hilary Beckles. After slavery was abolished, the Drax family received the equivalent of £3m in compensation for losing the free labour of the 297 Africans still toiling in the family business. They were among the 47,000 recipients of the government handouts that essentially purchased the freedom of the enslaved. In total, the equivalent of £17bn was paid in order to abolish slavery in 1834.

Drax is certainly not alone in coming from a family which benefited from the proceeds of slavery. Numerous members of parliament at the time benefited from slave owner compensation. The most notable was William Gladstone, whose father took the single largest payment, equivalent to £80m today, for 2,500 thousand Africans he held in bondage. It was also revealed that both David and Samantha Cameron's family benefited from this pot of blood money.

The total amount paid out in slave owner compensation represented 5 per cent of GDP and 40 per cent of the government's income, forcing it to take out a loan so large from the Bank of England that it was only paid back in 2015. Somehow, Her Majesty's Treasury thought that we would all be delighted to know that living British citizens helped pay to end the slave trade as they gleefully informed us in a 2018 #FridayFact tweet. It actually made me physically sick to consider that I have been paying off compensation to slave owners, along with several generations of my family that descended from the enslaved. While people like Richard Drax have been living the good life, the enslaved never received a penny.

As if that was not obscene enough, Drax Hall still functions as a sugar plantation where workers are reported to be paid less than half the average wage in Barbados. This should be the only reminder we need that not as much has changed as we would like to think. The wealth from slavery is still very much with us, along with the ongoing poverty in the Caribbean and continued struggles for justice for Black communities in the UK.

Wealthy white landowners are still making a killing exploiting the labour of Black and Brown people across the globe. Be it cocoa farmers in Ghana, tobacco cultivators in Malawi, or Indonesian workers toiling on oil palm plantations, millions of people live in very similar conditions to those of their relatives 100 years ago. Meanwhile the fruits of their labour are enjoyed by Western

corporations and the descendants of the slave-owning classes.

The only difference today is that we enjoy an economy built on white supremacy and pretend it is not racist. That is the key to the new age of empire, and what makes it more insidious: racial oppression continues whilst we convince ourselves it is an experience we have left in the past.

If we are serious about combatting racial injustice, then we first need to recognise that same logic of empire remains the governing principle today – and that Black life can never matter in a system based on the disposability of Black bodies. **F**

*Kehinde Andrews is professor of black studies at Birmingham City University and author of *The New Age of Empire**



## POWER GRAB

We need a stronger response to Myanmar's military coup—  
*Stephen Kinnock MP*

Democracy around the world is in retreat. Under the cloak of the Covid-19 pandemic, authoritarian actors are seizing opportunities to gain or strengthen their grip on power, emboldened by a disunited West which has become more fractured, in no small part due to weaknesses in US and UK foreign policy.

International law is being treated with contempt and human rights are being violated. The Chinese government, with its behaviour towards the Uyghur Muslims, Hong Kong and Taiwan, offers the most high-profile set of hugely concerning violations. But perhaps the most shocking assault on democracy so far this year has been the coup undertaken by the Burmese military on 1 February, and with it the political arrests of democratically elected leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi, followed by police brutality towards protesters.

Let us be clear: this military coup is a flagrant breach of Myanmar's constitution and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. The army's claims of voter fraud are utterly spurious. This is a naked power grab.

While Aung San Suu Kyi's failure to stand up for the Rohingya people has been deeply troubling, the fact remains that her party secured a landslide victory in Myanmar's November 2020 election. It is clear that Myanmar's young democracy must be respected and protected. Elected politicians should not be languishing in prison cells.

Since the coup began, we have seen images of the police using rubber bullets, tear gas, water cannons and then more recently live ammunition resulting in the deaths of – at the time of writing – more than 20 pro-democracy protesters. A truly tragic tale.

How has it come to this? For decades, the power-hungry Myanmar military has oppressed and persecuted the Burmese people, committing countless atrocities—most notably against the Rohingya, for which it currently stands accused of genocide in the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

## The government must lead by example by imposing sanctions on the Myanmar military and its business interests

The failure of the international community to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Rohingya may have given the military the confidence to enact this coup, based on the assumption that the international backlash will be negligible and lethargic. It appears this was combined with what experts view as 'tacit support' from China, with which Myanmar has strong economic links via the Belt and Road Initiative – but whose civilian government is said to have been concerned about Myanmar becoming victim to so-called debt-trap diplomacy. China's main news agency described the coup as merely a 'cabinet reshuffle' and the Chinese government simply 'noted' the event without condemning it.

The UK and the wider international community must act swiftly and effectively to prove the military wrong on this.

The government must lead by example by imposing sanctions on the Myanmar military and all of its business interests. Labour strongly supports the Magnitsky sanctions against officials in Myanmar, but we know that these sanctions are designed predominantly for countries where senior officials have economic interests in the UK, which is not the case for these Burmese generals.



I wrote to the minister for Asia, Nigel Adams MP, in September asking him to ensure UK businesses are not trading with the Burmese military due to its persecution of the Rohingya, but only now – following the coup – has the foreign secretary agreed with the trade secretary to conduct a review. This follows a pattern. From managing the pandemic at home to standing up for the UK's values and interests internationally, the Conservative government has been too slow to act at every turn. We need faster, more impactful action. The government must also look at the possibility of sanctioning the military's business interests and financial backers, extensive lists of which have been provided by Justice for Myanmar.

The UK government should use its international influence seek to extend the arms embargo against Myanmar so that it is as close as possible to global in its scale and scope. Clearly, Russia and China will be unlikely to participate, but we must still seek to build the broadest possible coalition.

Now must surely be the time for the UK to formally join the Netherlands and Canada in formally supporting the Gambia in its case of genocide brought against Myanmar at the ICJ. The ICJ's ruling on 23 January 2021 made clear that Myanmar must prevent genocide, preserve evidence and submit reports and evidence periodically about its treatment of the Rohingya. Now that Myanmar's first report to the ICJ has been submitted, the Foreign Office should be asking for the report to be made public so that the international community can scrutinise the contents.

What is abundantly clear is that the people of Myanmar need a stronger response, and they need it now. Labour will always stand up for democracy,

the rule of law and universal rights and freedoms. For the first time since 2001, democratic governments are outnumbered by authoritarian regimes. What is taking place in Myanmar serves to remind us of the daunting scale and nature of the challenge we face. **F**

*Stephen Kinnock is Labour MP for Aberavon and shadow minister for Asia and the Pacific*



## SMALL DOSES

Wealthy countries must end vaccine apartheid—*Heidi Chow*

At the G7 leaders' meeting in February, Boris Johnson pledged to donate UK's surplus vaccine supplies to poorer countries. It was an attempt to look like a benevolent internationalist, but was actually just a fig leaf to mask the shameless hoarding of vaccine supplies. Wealthy countries like the UK, US and the EU raced ahead with securing vaccines last year and will have enough doses to vaccinate their entire populations nearly three times over by the end of 2021. Meanwhile, nearly 70 low-income countries will only be able to vaccinate one in 10 people this year.

Giving away surplus doses at some unspecified point in the future once the

whole of the UK is vaccinated will not help the unfolding global crisis in vaccine inequality which the chief of the World Health Organization has described as 'a catastrophic moral failure'. So far, more than 75 per cent of global vaccinations have been administered in just 10 countries, while around 130 countries are yet to administer a single dose. Some studies show that low-income countries are set to wait up to 2024 before they achieve widespread vaccination.

The government's UK-first policy is not just dangerous but self-defeating. Ensuring there are enough vaccines for everyone, everywhere is crucial to avert an even higher death toll. Academic research shows that we could prevent 61 per cent of deaths globally if vaccines are distributed fairly, compared to 33 per cent if rich countries hoard vaccines. Implementing national vaccine programmes in rich countries alone is not enough: leaving the virus to spread unabated in large parts of the world allows it to mutate, potentially rendering the effective vaccines of today, useless tomorrow. It is also economically short-sighted. The International Chamber of Commerce estimates that leaving developing countries without vaccines will cost rich countries \$4.3tn in lost income in 2021.

So how did we end up with this vaccine apartheid?

Rich countries bought up supplies in advance because they recognised there would not be enough for all. And in the face of scarcity, it is those with the deepest pockets that get to hoard. Giving away excess doses could provide some immediate relief to other countries but the real question we need to ask, is why are we facing scarcity and how can we ensure there is enough for all?

Pharmaceutical companies can patent their products which means only they can sell their vaccine or treatment, essentially preventing competition for a minimum of 20 years. They also defend their monopolies by keeping their technological know-how under wraps – only they know the recipe for their vaccines. But monopolies are the opposite of what we need in a pandemic. No one company can satisfy global demand.

Instead of restricting production to a handful of companies, we should be mobilising as many manufacturers as possible. One way to do this, is to get companies to share their technological know-how and patent rights with other companies. The World Health Organization launched a mechanism last

year – the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool – to facilitate this. The UK has still not joined but Dr Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, openly supports the pool, giving hope that the Biden administration may participate. Meanwhile, pharmaceutical companies have condemned the scheme, with the head of Pfizer dismissing it as ‘nonsense.’

So how do we get companies to cooperate? Since the vaccines that have been approved have all benefited from billions of pounds in public funding (as shown by data from global health think tank Policy Cures Research), governments should be using their leverage to mandate companies to join the pool. Publicly funded vaccines should not be locked up by monopolies and exploited for profiteering.

Ultimately, voluntary sharing of know-how and patent rights is dependent on the good-will of companies to do the right thing – and when they do not, governments need to step in.

At the World Trade Organization, the Indian and South African governments proposed to suspend the global rules on patents. The proposal would cover all Covid-19 health products and last until widespread vaccination is in place. If approved, this would break up monopolies on Covid-19 vaccines and treatments, allowing as many suppliers as possible to maximise global supply. While 100 countries support the proposal, just a handful of rich countries are opposing it, including the UK.

Instead, the UK government is pinning its hopes of fairer distribution on Covax – the global vaccine purchasing scheme – which is struggling to access doses because of the artificial scarcity created by pharmaceutical monopolies and a lack of funding.



Dr Anthony Fauci receiving the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine

Every country should have access to the vaccine and treatments to combat this virus. It is about the right to health for every person, but it is also an economic and public health imperative for all. Countries in the global south need equitable access not just charity. So instead of asking whether the UK should give away its doses, the real issue is how we ensure there are enough supplies for all. The world can only produce sufficient doses if governments back these systemic changes. **F**

*Heidi Chow is senior campaigns and policy manager at Global Justice Now*



## SOUND OF THE SUBURBS

Our suburbs have been overlooked for too long— *Rupa Huq MP*

Suburbia: often mischaracterised in the popular imagination as a place of net curtains, in out-of-the-way districts, where people live humdrum lives. A land of people washing their cars on Sundays. Placid places at the end of the line, celebrated in song by everyone from the Beatles to Blur.

Yet the suburbs, an optimistic creation which soared as Victorian values gave way to the Edwardian housebuilding boom, are now facing pressures from all directions.

I first started writing about suburbia when Labour was last in power, arguing that the suburbs were suffering new pressures because of a changing demographic and infrastructure fraying at the edges. Where there was once said to be ‘white flight’ to the suburbs from the inner cities, some of these areas on the outskirts were facing different kinds of change – both gentrification and an increasingly ethnically diverse population.

After I was elected to parliament in 2015, I had an unparalleled opportunity and unique licence to fight for the suburbs. I wanted to draw attention to the generation of 30-somethings unable to get on the property ladder, faced with housesharing well into their adult life. The suburban semis of Ealing and Acton, conceived as family dwellings, were now populated by urban

housesharing types in professional jobs, so overheated had the London property market become.

Suburbs have historically had a bad deal. Inner cities traditionally attracted investment from Labour, for instance through the City Challenge programme, and rural areas had the support of groups like the Countryside Alliance, but suburbs had few friends. The Tory victory in 2019 has left suburbs even further behind, as another type of place has started to have money splashed at it: the ‘Red Wall’ towns. The recent £3.6bn fund investing in towns has not spread its largesse to suburbs like the one I represent. Levelling up has been for the benefit of retaining Conservative electoral gains.

Our unloved suburbs need championing. Step forward the suburbs taskforce, an offshoot of the all-party parliamentary group for London housing and planning.

The suburban taskforce’s remit is to make recommendations to futureproof our suburbs. Our gaggle of cross-party parliamentarians initially met to get the ball rolling when news of a mystery disease was starting to filter through from China and then Italy. As the housing minister Christopher Pincher MP astutely pointed out at the time, coronavirus saw us heading towards a period of isolation but paradoxically it was an isolation in which communities might be strengthened. Three lockdowns later, suburban society has changed in ways previously unimaginable, with working from home for white collar staff, flourishing mutual aid groups, and a new appreciation of space all affecting the way our suburban communities live.

Small businesses in our suburbs – although suffering from the impact of lockdown – have stepped in to fill in the gaps where state provision has sometimes failed. In my borough, there have been restaurants providing school meals when our cash-strapped council was struggling.

Also notable in the suburbs in the time of coronavirus, and indeed elsewhere, has been the groundswell of popular opinion over the future of our communities. A prime example is low traffic neighbourhoods, which have fiercely divided opinion. Wherever you stand on that issue, there is little doubt that the debate has reinvigorated local democracy and showed how people are keen to have a stake in decisions about where they live.

Our suburbs taskforce received some 50 submissions from the public, local government, academia and other organisations, demonstrating that there is significant interest in promoting a suburban renaissance.



The responses showed that, with affordable homes increasingly out of reach, housing is one of the key issues in our suburbs. But although there is support for increasing housing density, people want it to be done carefully. They want to preserve the character of their area and to ensure that good infrastructure, including sustainable transport options and vibrant community facilities, is in place to support new development. As we move onto the next phase of the taskforce's work, we aim to ensure that suburbs can thrive.

All too often, the voice of the suburbs has been ignored. It is time for the suburbanists, not just the urbanists, to play their part in shaping the future of our country. **F**

*Rupa Huq is Labour MP for Ealing Central and Acton and co-chair of the suburbs taskforce*



## AIMING HIGH

We need a post-war approach to target inequality—

*Uma Kambhampati*

The UK entered the pandemic with significant and rising inequalities, reinforced by recent austerity policies. Our death toll from Covid-19 reflects these disparities, and we are already seeing the unequal experience of the pandemic worsening them.

The UK is highly unequal on class and race terms. Before the pandemic, 80 per cent of white British working-age adults were in employment, while this figure was closer to 60 per cent for Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups. Not surprisingly, therefore, fewer than 2 per cent of white British households lived in houses with more residents than rooms, whereas this figure increased across all Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities, and was up to 30 per cent for Bangladeshi households. Unequal Britain, a 2021 study looking into inequality in the context of Covid-19, found that less than half of Britons accept that these differences might arise because of discrimination.

According to the same study, nearly half of the public believe that those who lost their jobs during the pandemic were

likely to have been underperforming; and one in eight Britons feel Black people are more likely to be unemployed or have lower incomes because they lack motivation or willpower. Until these attitudes change, the inequality gap will be hard to close.

An unequal society is a less resilient one, and the BAME experience during the pandemic bears this out.

Looking at the data then, it is clear the Bangladeshi community has suffered the most financial insecurity during lockdown. At large, BAME adults have been more concentrated in sectors shut down during the pandemic: 50 per cent of Bangladeshi men and 32 per cent of Pakistani men were employed in industries forced to close, compared to 12 per cent of white British men. And British natives who are BAME have been 1.7 times less likely than white British workers to enjoy employment protection like the furlough scheme, and were 3.1 times more likely to be laid off during lockdown.

A higher proportion of Black African,

## It is vital the public recognise there has been an unequal burden from the pandemic

Black Caribbean and Indian adults have also been disproportionately represented in high-risk occupations, such as frontline and key workers on low-paid jobs, many of whom have been insufficiently protected with PPE throughout the pandemic. Data shows that the UK's Black African community has been most exposed to the virus through employment. Plus BAME adults are more likely to be employed as sales and retail assistants, bus drivers and chefs, where exposure is high. This disparity is reflected in BAME deaths: for every three deaths per 100,000 for the white British population, there will be five for the Indian community, and approximately six for other BAME communities. Black Caribbean deaths in hospital are more than double that of white British deaths.

There have been many calls for more investment in the NHS and for better pay for key workers. Both are likely to help BAME communities. However, we need a clearer and more strategic response to the problem, based on the evidence.

The first, and probably most crucial act, is a clear acknowledgement of the costs borne by these communities during the pandemic, and a celebration of their contribution in enabling Britain to navigate its way through the crisis. It is vital that the public recognise

there has been an unequal burden from the pandemic across ethnic groups. Without this, there will be no public support for policies that target BAME groups, as can be seen by the study on Unequal Britain.

To close the inequality gap, policymakers also have much learn from the period after the second world war: its parallels to today's situation are clear.

The post-war period saw the creation of new welfare constituencies at a time of significant economic destruction to help those most in need, such as 'disabled war veterans', 'surviving dependents of killed servicemen' and 'war refugees'. Like the war, Covid-19 has left many dependents without support and many individuals suffering from long-Covid disabled, but the communities worst affected economically by Covid-19 are overwhelmingly single-earner families – with BAME households 18 per cent more likely than white British households to have a single earner. It will be equally important to divert resources towards these groups that have been most affected by the pandemic.

Sufficiently supporting single-earner families would require income transfers of the kind that were previously made to war veterans. Data from the International Labour Organization indicates that many European countries spent between 10 and 35 per cent of total social expenditure on civilian and military victims of war in the immediate post-war years. Yet given the public sector debt, this welfare expenditure needs to be carefully funded.

During the first and second world wars the country faced increasing military expenditure, but the acceptance that this burden should be equally shared led to higher taxes on the rich. To help fund today's much-needed increased expenditure, we need a combination of time-limited higher taxes for those in the top brackets, along with the sale of government debt (in the form of bonds to rich individuals who potentially have significantly higher savings and few assets to invest in). This might, perhaps, be more acceptable to voters than just increasing taxes on the rich.

In the absence of such investments in our future, the UK will remain extremely vulnerable to future crises. The post-war period saw Britain rebuilding the economy towards higher growth and greater equality. There seems no reason why we could not aim for this once again, with new challenges, new growth sectors and a more innovative approach to government finances. **F**

*Uma Kambhampati is professor of economics at the University of Reading*



# Make or break

The relationship between Labour and the unions has been crucial since the party was first founded. But is this historic alliance now under threat as never before? *Christopher Massey* takes a look



*Christopher Massey is a senior lecturer in history and politics at Teesside University and the author of The Modernisation of the Labour Party, 1979–1997. He is also a Labour councillor*

**T**HE LABOUR PARTY and the trade union movement are intrinsically linked. In 1899, a Trades Union Congress resolution began a chain of events that led to the establishment of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 and the Labour party in 1906. Undoubtedly, the Labour party was a child of the unions, but, in recent years, has the child outgrown its parents?

The unions have provided stability, finance, and an activist base since Labour's foundation. Thus, for much of the party's first century, there was broad acceptance of trade union domination within Labour's structures. The unions controlled 90 per cent of the party conference vote until 1993; a de facto majority at the National Executive Committee (NEC) until 1997; and at least one-third of the 'electoral college' vote, which selected party leaders between 1981 to 2014. However, the New Labour years saw the relationship with the unions markedly change, with the party's former masters playing an increasingly minor role.

The link between Labour and its trade union affiliates has often provoked controversy. Labour historian Lewis Minkin described this as a 'contentious alliance.' Yet, the unions have largely served in the vanguard of the party for much of its history, providing a supportive base for the leadership. However, the election of Keir Starmer in April 2020 has seen a return of hostile relations not witnessed since the 1970s. During his first year at the helm, over half of Labour's affiliated trade unions have publicly attacked either his policies or leadership. Consequently, as the party shifts direction under Starmer, what is the future of the historic union-party link?

## Lessons from previous Labour governments

Throughout Labour's history the party has been at its strongest when the trade unions have played a supportive, backstage role away from public vision. During the first majority Labour governments of 1945 to 1951, the party's relationship with the unions was based on the principle

that the parliamentary party controlled policy whilst the unions served as a 'praetorian guard', protecting the leadership from outside threats. In the lifetime of these governments, a 'triumvirate' of Arthur Deakin from the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), Will Lawther of the National Union of Mineworkers, and Tom Williamson of the National Union of General and Municipal Workers afforded Clement Attlee incredible stability. Their stewardship saw the Labour party conference vote against the leadership's position on only one occasion between 1949 and 1960.

The party-union relationship began to change after the election of Frank Cousins as the leader of the TGWU in 1956. This was the start of a swing to the left within the union movement. Cousins challenged the party's parliamentary leadership on policy issues, particularly over defence, thus abandoning the unions' usual supportive, backstage role. The shift to the left in Britain's biggest union was consolidated on Cousins' retirement in 1969 with the election of Jack Jones. Along with Hugh Scanlon, of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, Jones led left-wing opposition to the 1966–70 Labour government's prices and incomes policy.

Tensions remained in the 1970s when Jones' successor at the TGWU, Moss Evans, alongside David Basnett of the General and Municipal Workers' Union, and Alan Fisher of the National Union of Public Employees (NUPE) led the unions into a major conflict over pay policy. The strike action taken during the Winter of Discontent, including the closure of hospitals and schools, was part of the most determined act ever taken by trade unions against a Labour government. These events contributed to Labour's loss in 1979, its constitutional changes between 1979 and 1981, and the election of Michael Foot as party leader in 1980.

A fightback of the party leadership and the 'traditional right' trade unions in the early 1980s began to return the unions to their supportive role. Through secret meetings

**The party has been at its strongest when the trade unions have played a supportive, backstage role**



and campaigns, by 1981 the St. Ermins Group of right unions recaptured control of Labour's NEC from the left for the first time since 1973. This fightback continued with the election of Neil Kinnock in 1983. The new leader established a stable internal majority from 1986 through the additional support of 'soft' left unions, the TGWU and NUPE.

The election of Tony Blair as party leader in 1994 began a new chapter in Labour's relationship with the unions. Blair inherited a positive relationship with a supportive union movement; however the new leader was determined to avoid a repeat of the breakdown in relations which had catalysed the demise of the last Labour government in 1979. Blair wanted to create a 'new' Labour party and avoid what he considered to be the painstaking and time-consuming tribal rituals on which the party had built its relationship with the unions. Independently of this process, the unions also shifted into a less confrontational role. This was articulated by the TUC general secretary John Monks from 1993 as part of his 'new unionism'.

The New Labour era fundamentally altered the balance of the party-union relationship. Building on John Smith's one member, one vote (OMOV) reforms, Blair cut the bloc vote of the unions at party conference from 70 per cent (since 1993) to 50 per cent in 1995. In 1997, under the Partnership in Power reforms the unions also shifted into the minority at the NEC, controlling only 40.6 per cent of the seats, compared with 62 per cent before the changes.

Blair was determined to create public distance between the unions and the party, announcing to the TUC in 1999: "You run the unions. We run the government." Despite monumental pledges to introduce a new trade union act and the minimum wage, he consistently refused to reverse

the Conservative trade union laws. Throughout the lifetime of the New Labour period, Blair found himself in battles with the trade unions over the Employment Relations Act, pensions, the Private Finance Initiative, and foundation hospitals.

In 2004, two smaller unions left the Labour fold; the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), which disaffiliated, and the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), which was expelled. However, none of these events boiled over into widespread industrial unrest (or significant internal conflicts) as they had in 1979, suggesting that Blair's reforms and the desire for a Labour government after 18 years in opposition held the party together.

Despite speculation about an impending 'divorce', the union-party link survived the New Labour years and played an increasingly prominent role from 2010. Ed Miliband became Labour leader through the votes of the trade unions in the electoral college. This led to accusations of Miliband being in the pockets of the unions and the 'Red Ed' label. Yet, by 2014, Gabriel Pogrund and Patrick Maguire have written that Miliband began to see the unions as a 'drag anchor'. In this year, following highly publicised controversies with selections in Falkirk, the Collins Review scrapped Labour's electoral college for leadership elections and with it the unions' 33 per cent share of the vote. From this point Labour operated true one member, one vote.

Jeremy Corbyn's election to the leadership rejuvenated the link and provided left-wing unions with the type of leader they had long dreamed of. In the 2015 leadership contest, Corbyn gained support from six of the 11 trade unions to nominate a candidate, including the two largest affiliates, Unite and UNISON. Significant numbers of

affiliated members, the vast majority of whom are trade unionists, voted for Corbyn to be leader in 2015 (57.6 per cent) and 2016 (at 60 per cent). Yet, affiliate members comprised only 16.9 per cent and 24 per cent of the total vote at these elections, highlighting the decline in union influence since the Collins Review.

Throughout the Corbyn years, an alliance of unions and party members, in defiance of occasional parliamentary opposition, safeguarded his leadership. Len McCluskey, the leader of Unite, became Corbyn's loudest backer. In addition, the leader's office featured several former union employees: Andrew Murray and Anneliese Midgley from Unite, Andrew Fisher from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), and Kevin Slocombe from the Communication Worker's Union (CWU) – whilst Labour's general secretary from 2018, Jennie Formby, was also a former Unite official.

Corbyn also forged closer ties with left-wing unions outside of the party, including Matt Wrack of the FBU – which reaffiliated to the party in 2015 – as well as the RMT and PCS, which endorsed Corbyn in 2018 but stopped short of affiliating.

The Labour leader could also count on Manuel Cortes of the Transport Salaried Staffs' Association (TSSA), Mark Serwotka of the unaffiliated PCS, and Dave Ward of the CWU within his inner circle. In addition, Mick Whelan, of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), and Ronnie Draper of the Bakers, Food and Allied Workers Union (BFAWU) provided unwavering support.

Thus, despite changes to the relationship between Labour and its affiliated trade unions, the party-union link was still able to provide stability. However, new challenges have emerged for Starmer since his election in 2020.

### **The challenge ahead: Where next for Starmer?**

Labour's new leader appears passionate about the union link, pledging to "work shoulder to shoulder with the trade unions" during his election campaign, but the unions are increasingly divided along the same lines as Labour members between 'left' and 'moderate'. Whilst Starmer has been able to count on the loyal support of three of the four largest trade union affiliates, UNISON, GMB and the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), the opposition of Unite and several smaller unions on the left are increasingly prickly thorns in his side.

In August 2020, McCluskey claimed that Labour's decision to pay damages to former staff members, who had spoken out on a BBC Panorama documentary about anti-semitism, was 'an abuse of members' money.' Unite made further headlines in October 2020 when it announced a 10 per cent cut to the affiliation fee it pays to the Labour party. In the following month, the FBU and CWU were reported to be considering similarly sized cuts to their contributions. Unite also campaigned against Starmer's initial support for the Conservative's 'spycops' bill.

Labour's decision to suspend Jeremy Corbyn in October last year, after his comments on the Equality and Human Rights Commission Report, posed the biggest threat to the party-union link for a generation. Seven of Labour's 12 affiliated unions openly criticised the party's decision to suspend their former leader. Crucially, for Starmer, UNISON, GMB, and USDAW did not. Corbyn returned to

party membership in November but continued to have the parliamentary whip withheld by Starmer. The leader's decision was lambasted by the general secretaries of the CWU, Unite and TSSA. The BFAWU went a step further, signaling plans to consult their members on the union's continued affiliation to the Labour party, whilst the CWU accused Starmer of leading the party into 'civil war'.

Across the first year of his tenure, Starmer has been able to build a fragile majority within Labour's internal structures despite the opposition of several unions. The support of UNISON, the GMB and USDAW has been vital, alongside his removal of Corbyn allies on the NEC and the fightback of Labour 'moderates' within local parties, to securing control of the internal party structures. Attempts were made in February 2021 to unite the party and the unions around a new campaign, linked to Covid-19, featuring all 12 of Labour's affiliated unions named the 'Recovery and Rebuild: Power in the Workplace' taskforce. Indeed, due to the health, societal and workplace impacts of Covid-19, the link between Labour and the unions has never felt more necessary. However, contests to replace the top officials of Britain's largest three unions could make or break Starmer's tenure. The election of Christine McAnea as UNISON's new leader removed one threat, but forthcoming elections within Unite and the GMB could tip the balance of power within Labour's internal structures.

The unions continue to play a crucial role within the Labour party but their relationship with Starmer has become increasingly strained. The union-party alliance remains key to both internal and external party unity.

Internally, at present, the unions control 50 per cent of Labour's conference vote, 33 per cent of the NEC seats and around 14.7 per cent of the National Policy Forum's membership. In addition, the unions continue to be a major funder of the party, contributing 30 per cent of Labour's income in 2016, though down from 75 per cent in 1992. The support of three out of the four largest union affiliates, alongside other allies, has enabled Starmer to capture an internal majority in the face of left-wing opposition. However, externally, the relationship between the party and half of Labour's affiliated unions has broken down. Such public spats threaten both the future of the historic alliance and Labour's chances of victory at the next election.

Following Labour's 2019 defeat, the party is some distance from power. The millions of additional voters that Labour requires for victory at the next election cannot come solely from its union base. A new, broader, coalition is required. Starmer's initial months appear to be laying such foundations, despite vocal opposition from some left unions. The voters which Labour needs to capture will likely be those who observe workplace relations from the sidelines, outside of union membership.

The unions still have a vital part to play within the party but must return to their backstage role for Labour to be successful. In 2017, an Ipsos MORI survey recorded that 49 per cent of the public believed Labour was too close to the unions. Consequently, the unions must take action to reinvigorate the party internally, ensuring that Labour looks outwards to engage the interest of new voters. In this way unions can return to their historic, supportive role and provide a reliable ally to a party that will need all the friends it can find in the years ahead. ■

# Unity is strength

Amid the biggest health and jobs crisis in generations, how can trade unions best protect workers, and what should their relationship with Labour look like? The Fabian Review asks the experts

## CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Trade unions have an important role to play in fighting the erosion of workers' rights post-Brexit—*Marley Morris*

The question of whether the government will weaken workers' rights post-Brexit has been a matter of fierce debate since the UK voted to leave the EU. This issue has dogged the Brexit process over the course of the negotiations and provoked ongoing concern from trade unions and their members.

There is no doubt that one of the UK's principal objectives in the recent negotiations was to secure an agreement which gave it as free a hand as possible in setting its own employment laws. Chief negotiator David Frost repeatedly fought against the EU's efforts to maintain a 'level playing field' for trade on issues such as workers' rights.

And while the UK did in the end agree to a 'level playing field', the final text was far weaker than the EU had originally intended. Rather than the UK and the EU signing up to a blanket agreement to maintain current labour standards, they only agreed to not weaken protections if this would affect trade or investment flows. As a result, the UK now has more scope to water down EU labour rules than expected.

But amongst both leavers and remainers there is still broad public support for high labour standards. Trade unions thus have a particularly important role to play in holding the government to account for its commitments to maintain workers' rights after Brexit. After all, in the last few weeks, the government was forced to swiftly backtrack on a post-Brexit plan to review employment law after a widespread backlash from politicians and unions.

The political appetite for wholesale deregulation is therefore limited. But this does not rule out the slow erosion of rights over time – or the failure to keep pace with new EU rules as they are introduced in Brussels. It is this risk of erosion – rather than straightforward repeal – which unions will no doubt be closely monitoring in the months ahead. **F**

*Marley Morris is associate director for immigration, trade and EU relations at the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)*

## PLAYING IT SAFE

We need better health and safety protections for workers—*Shelly Asquith*

The Covid crisis has exposed the flaws in Britain's health and safety infrastructure, some more clearly than others. An insufficient sick pay system, an austerity-hit regulator, and a ruling class more interested in protecting profits than people. Those who have continued working outside the home have faced far greater risks, be it climbing infection rates or dwindling PPE supply.

For workers hidden out of view, the hazards are often intensified. This is true for those in retail supply chains. The rate of Covid death among working women is highest for those in sewing machinist roles: four times higher than the average, according to ONS data. In food manufacturing, Covid outbreaks have been rife. A low-paid workforce plus no protection when required to self-isolate has been a recipe for Covid transmission.

TUC research demonstrates that the presence of a recognised trade union results in more effective Covid management. Employers are more likely to have conducted a risk assessment and implemented safety measures when there is a union safety representative. We know our reps have taken on hundreds of thousands of additional hours to perform their duties and keep colleagues safe, often in their own time.

While our movement continues to focus on recruitment and organisation in these sectors, we need policy change to best protect workers.

It is time for extended rights for union safety reps, so that we not only have the right to investigate hazards within our own workplace, but in the workplaces in the supply chain of our employer, where we also have members.

We also need liability on businesses for the working conditions along their supply chain. For too long, online clothing retailers and supermarkets have washed their hands of exploitation in the factories that make their products. They must be made to take responsibility. These are foundational workplace concerns that should be at the heart of any future party plans to strengthen industrial strategy and labour rights. Holding bosses to account and building union power is the natural cause for the party of labour. **F**

*Shelly Asquith is health, safety and wellbeing officer at the Trades Union Congress*



## CLOSING THE GAPS

We need to close the gender, ethnicity and disability pay gaps—Gloria Mills

Equality must be at the heart of everything the Labour party and trade unions do. At UNISON, we strive to make equality a reality for everyone – at work, at home and in society in general. That is done through tireless campaigning to get a new deal for working people and make sure everyone has access to the same opportunities.

To spearhead change, trade unions must ensure high membership numbers and collective bargaining power to approach inequality disputes from a position of strength. Employers and the government can be held to account in different ways. Often, we can achieve a lot through simple negotiation but sometimes the pressure must be ratcheted up with industrial action, strikes or a legal battle in the highest court in the land. Labour must support the trade unions when doing so.

One important legal case was UNISON's victory in the Supreme Court in 2017, which reversed the government's decision to impose fees for employment tribunals. The removal of the restrictive charge ensured the tribunal system could be open to everyone, regardless of income.

Unions have a long history of remoulding the political landscape to make it fairer. We have an important influence on the Labour party because many of our members contribute to a political fund, which enables them to engage with the party. In turn, this helps Labour match some of the donations the Conservatives receive from wealthy business owners. It also gives us influence in the development of policies, which of course helps in reducing social and economic inequalities which have worsened after a decade of Tory austerity, compounded by the pandemic.

We worked closely with the last Labour government to introduce the Equality Act and implement the national minimum wage. Now unions have to develop a progressive agenda with Labour to rebuild the UK's economic resilience, deliver sustainable growth and reduce socio-economic inequalities. What is needed is a new deal for working people, investment in public services and manufacturing, and opportunities to boost employment through growth

in green and digital jobs. Together we need to close the gender, ethnicity and disability pay and pension gaps.

Equality has always been unions' beating heart. We must continue to campaign for it alongside the Labour party, while speaking out against Conservative policies we see as unfair and immoral. **F**

*Gloria Mills is national secretary for equality at UNISON*

## COLLECTIVE RENEWAL

Back in 2005, in a Fabian pamphlet called *Raising Lazarus*, David Coats said unions needed to reform to reverse their declining fortunes. Now he sees fresh potential for their role.

According to Beatrice and Sydney Webb in their classic *Industrial Democracy*, there are three elements that constitute the trade union method – collective bargaining, mutual insurance and legislative enactment. Despite the passage of time, the Webbs' schema still offers real insights and enables us to understand the challenges and opportunities facing British trade unions today.

Collective bargaining in the UK is in a straitened condition. In 1979, half of all employees were members of a trade union and four in every five workers had their pay and conditions determined by a collective agreement. Now, fewer than one in four employees is a trade union member (23.4 per cent) and collective bargaining covers a similar proportion of the workforce. In the private sector fewer than one in seven workers (13.2 per cent) is a trade union member and most workers have never had any connection with organised labour. The phenomenon of trade union decline is widespread across the developed world but the UK is an outlier in western and northern Europe, having witnessed a catastrophic fall in collective bargaining coverage, which remains much higher elsewhere – 56 per cent of the workforce in Germany, 80 per cent in Italy, 82 per cent in Denmark, 90 per cent in Sweden. It is hardly surprising, perhaps, that the UK has a persistent problem of low pay or that wage growth has been disconnected from productivity growth for all workers with median earnings or less since the middle 1990s.

The mutual insurance functions of the trade unions have been largely subsumed in the welfare state since the post-war Labour government's implementation of a comprehensive social security settlement. But as all Fabians know, the system is now bedevilled by complex means tests which have undermined the insurance principle. Trade unions could make real progress in cementing their social and economic role by identifying the risks to which workers are exposed today and arguing for a new consensus to tackle these profound problems. The Beveridge report was the outcome of a prolonged campaign for a robust system of social insurance in which trade unions had played a central part – and unions continued to address these issues as priorities through to the 1970s, when the introduction of the state earnings-related pension was agreed by the TUC and the Wilson government.

While the Webbs placed much emphasis on legislative enactment, trade unions were historically ambivalent about the role of the law in the employment relationship and in industrial relations more generally. As Lord Wedderburn observed in 1986: "Most workers want nothing more of the law than that it should leave them alone. A secure job is preferable to a claim to a redundancy payment; a grievance settled in the plant or the office is better than going to a court or an industrial tribunal."

Certainly, unions came to believe that there had to be a floor under wages for unorganised workers, that health and safety standards should be fixed by law and that all forms of discrimination should be outlawed by statute.



Beyond these measures, however, it was an article of faith for trade unions that the detailed regulation of the employment relationship should be left to collective bargaining and the engagement of workplace representatives and employers. Today, increasing reliance on the law as the best route to protect workers is almost certainly a reflection of trade union weakness rather than strength.

A cursory glance at these phenomena suggests that each element of the trade union method has crumbled under the pressure of economic and social change. It is easy to write obituaries with the general theme “trade unions are finished, there is no way back” and much harder to produce an optimistic prospectus. A useful starting point is to recognise that there are no easy answers and it is presumptuous to suggest that there is an off-the-shelf programme available that will lead to a resurgence of organised labour. There is a compelling need for a sophisticated conversation between unions themselves (and the labour movement more generally), shorn of ideological preconceptions and avoiding the usual right-left binaries that have bedevilled the discussion to date.

To begin with, it is essential for unions to understand the world in which they are operating. Much attention today is focused on appalling exploitation on the margins of the labour market – but most people at work are neither marginal nor exploited. Four in every five employees is in a notionally secure job with permanent status. Low pay is a far more serious problem than the growth of zero hours contracts or the supposed burgeoning of the gig economy. Trade union growth depends on the recruitment of workers in the labour market mainstream where problems abound – falling job quality, work intensification, widespread unfair treatment, an imbalance between effort and reward, generally poor management and low trust relationships at work.

The principle of solidarity, that we are all in this together and that an injury to one is an injury to all is the foundation of trade unionism. Collectivism in the workplace is an expression of shared interests, not altruism. In other words, trade unions can and should tell a story about the world of work that unites the concerns of the teacher, the auto worker and the Uber driver. Without collective voice, all workers, not just those at the margins, are unable to speak up, be heard and demand a response from their employer. Without collective voice, employers can behave with baronial authority and workers have no choice but to do as they are told. The labour economist Richard Freeman describes the current dispensation in the UK and the USA as a ‘new feudalism’, which is wholly inconsistent with the values of a democratic and inclusive economy. Reviving the argument for industrial democracy offers real potential for trade union resurgence and growth.

Employers have to be part of the equation too – not least because employer support for the trade union role is critical for effective workplace organisation. There is nothing to be gained from treating all employers as hostile actors, from engaging in perpetual trench warfare



over small slices of terrain where an occasional and unstable truce might be negotiated. Put simply, trade unions should consider how to support good employers, encourage the mediocre to improve their performance and condemn the bad for their failure to observe civilised standards.

Finally, and by no means least, there is the challenge of climate change which, according to the IPCC will “require unprecedented transitions in all aspects of society”. Despite the focus on the post-Covid 19 recession, Brexit and the supposed risks of automation, it is the achievement of net zero CO<sub>2</sub> emissions that will generate the most serious disruption, dislocation and upheaval in the world of work. Trade unions at international level have already made the case for a just transition to ensure that workers are treated fairly and are active participants in the process rather than the victims of events beyond their control. There is a strong argument that a new green corporatism is essential, with trade unions and employers involved as genuine social partners, if a just transition is to be secured. **F**

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

## FAIR ACCESS

### The next Labour government must update union law—Kate Dearden

Trade unions are the best route to representation in the workplace. However, restrictive legislation hinders our efforts to promote workers’ voices across the UK. A Labour government must update trade union law to enhance unions’ access to workers in workplaces where they are not recognised. Throughout the pandemic it has been even harder for trade unions to get access to workers who are in lower-paid and insecure work, and who need a union in their corner. We need to be able to organise these workers to fight for better terms and conditions, as well as properly support our existing members in workplaces where we are not recognised.

A Labour government must also relax the rules around statutory recognition procedures. We need to reduce the required level of union membership necessary to make a request for compulsory recognition, facilitate the use of electronic balloting on those proposals for recognition, and legislate for electronic balloting for industrial action too. Finally, the pandemic has shown why trade unions are so vital for workers, a Labour government must require employers to provide information on joining a union to new recruits and all workers.

By taking these important steps, a Labour government, employers, and unions could build culture of workplace and social partnership. By working together, we will be able to make lasting positive changes for workers and businesses across the UK. **F**

*Kate Dearden is head of research, policy and external relations at Community*



# One voice



Labour and the trade unions will continue to fight side by side for workers' rights, writes *Angela Rayner*



*Angela Rayner is deputy leader and chair of the Labour party and MP for Ashton-under-Lyne*

**T**HE LAST YEAR has proven the importance of trade unions, and the power that comes with having a union membership card in your back pocket.

Throughout this crisis, it is the trade union movement that has been fighting for safety at work whilst the government failed on PPE and failed to make our workplaces Covid-safe.

It is our trade union movement that has stood up against fire and rehire, and it was the collective strength of the labour and trade union movement speaking with one voice that forced Kwasi Kwarteng MP into a U-turn on his plan to 'review' workers' rights post-Brexit.

Just recently, it was the trade union movement that took on the might of Uber and stood up for the rights of gig economy workers to decent pay, safety and job security in the face of zero-hours contracts and insecure work.

The message sent by the Supreme Court through their landmark ruling that Uber drivers should be classed as workers is abundantly clear: companies cannot outsource their responsibilities, game the system or otherwise attempt to dodge their legal duties to treat their workers with dignity and respect and uphold hard-won workers' rights.

Our party was born out of the trade unions. We have always been one movement and we will always stay that way.

As deputy leader and chair of the Labour party, this is deeply personal. I was born in Stockport, but I was raised by the trade union movement. It was my workmates back when I was a home help who empowered me and told me my voice matters, and it was my trade union that gave me a chance, gave me an education and gave me a vocation.

You never forget where you come from, and that is why when I stood at the despatch box opposite Boris Johnson at Prime Minister's Questions last year, my very first question was about the scandal of low pay in social care.

And that is why I am so proud of Labour's demand that our care workers get a well overdue pay rise, to at least £10 an hour.

The faces of this pandemic are the care workers, nurses, paramedics, hospital cleaners, local government workers, school support staff and so many more besides.

Whilst we have been at home, they have been at work in the ICUs, care homes and in our schools keeping the country running, and people safe.

It should be a source of shame for Tory ministers that the very same people who have been putting their lives on the line to care for others throughout this crisis are still being paid poverty wages, struggling to support themselves and their families. In the midst of this pandemic, three in four care workers are going out to work for less than the living wage, and more than 4 million children are growing up in poverty. We urgently need a new approach.

It is now well past time for this government to give our carers – and all of our key workers – the pay rise they deserve to at least £10 an hour. That would give a social care worker on the minimum wage a pay rise of over £2,500 a year, the least that they deserve after all they have done for us.

It is not just morally wrong that our care workers are being paid poverty wages, it is also economic stupidity. An extra £50 a week in the pocket of an underpaid care worker will not be stashed away in an offshore account – that pay rise will be spent and will help to secure our economy.

When we come out of this pandemic, we must rebuild our communities and our country based on Labour and the trade union movement's values of fairness, decency and compassion.

Earlier this year, Keir Starmer set out a vision for an economy based on our values of social justice and equality, where the proceeds of growth and our prosperity are shared. There can be no going back to business as usual, but forward to a fairer, stronger and more secure Britain.

That starts with fair pay and security at work.

Our trade unions will be at the heart of Labour's vision for Britain. That is why I am so pleased that shadow employment rights and protections secretary Andy McDonald has launched the power in the workplace taskforce, to not only defend our rights, but to fight for a new deal for workers as we emerge from this crisis.

A fair society will lead to a more prosperous economy for all of us. We either have both or we have neither. That is our vision, and I look forward to standing side by side with our trade unions as we deliver it. **F**

**Our party was born out of the trade unions. We have always been one movement**





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# DIVIDING LINES

Scottish Labour's new leader, Anas Sarwar, takes on the job just weeks before crucial elections.

He talks to *Vanessa Singh* about the challenges ahead

SCOTLAND'S PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS will take place this May and it is no secret that, for Scottish Labour to win, its new leader has a mountain to climb. But if Anas Sarwar is at all doubtful that the Labour party will one day mount a red flag atop Ben Nevis, it does not show.

Sarwar will be standing in his home patch of Glasgow Southside. Yet despite having worked 20-hour days for the last two weeks, the MSP for Glasgow feels 'energetic' about the election, stirred by his belief that Labour principles are needed 'now more than ever'. "I feel really enthused by it," he says, "I think we have a real opportunity to set a positive agenda in Scotland and advocate a politics that I believe in to my very core."

Sarwar, who defeated Monica Lennon MSP in the leadership election this February, maintains he is not naive about the scale of the challenge. "We are starting from a really difficult place, there's no point being complacent about that. Three days before the leadership election result, the

*Continues on page 18*

**“We’ve got to take  
the party on a journey,  
and that journey starts  
with survival”**

polls had us on 14 per cent, which would be a decimation for us in Scotland.”

“I’m not one of those leaders that’s coming in and pretending that everything is resolved, that the Labour party is back again and everything’s changed, and we’re on the verge of a Labour government and a Labour first minister. I’m not going to do that chest-beating, macho leadership that people expect, or what our leaders have done in the past. Instead, I think we’ve got to take the party on a journey, and that journey starts with survival.”

Sarwar recounts speaking to the Labour MPs and peers in Westminster shortly after the leadership election, when he says he decided to tell them ‘a few home truths’. “We keep hearing about the need to win back the Red Wall if we’re to have a Labour government across the UK again. The first Red Wall to fall was Scotland. There is no pathway back to a UK Labour government without a functioning, active Scottish Labour party”.

Sarwar is nonetheless confident in the UK Labour leadership of Keir Starmer, who he believes is serious about winning back Scotland.

Becoming the leader of the Scottish Labour party – and the first Asian and Muslim leader of any major political party in the UK – would have come as a surprise to a young Anas. “I joined the Labour party when I was 15 and was active in my local community, but never in a million years at that time would I have ever thought I’d stand for political office. The idea of standing for politics when I was that age completely repulsed me.”

Anas, son of former Labour MP Mohammad Sarwar, was initially deterred from political office. His father – the UK’s first Muslim MP and now governor of Pakistan’s Punjab province – was elected in 1997, when Anas was 14. “It was really difficult growing up in a political family, particularly in terms of the attention and the heat, it was really negative,” he recalls.

He did, however, enjoy helping his father write speeches. “I remember before he would go to Westminster usually on a Monday night or Monday afternoon even, or when he’d phone if he was going to do a speech the next day. I’d still be finishing off my homework and he’d be like, ‘I’ve got a speech on x topic tomorrow, write me a speech’ and I’d have to sit and research and learn all about it and write a speech for him and then hope he’d use some of it. Usually, he’d butcher half of it and do his own thing. I always argue that my version was better.”

It wasn’t until the boundaries changed, which meant his father was no longer the MP for the area where Anas was a party member, that his attitude towards Labour softened. “That was a really, really strange moment, because I could go to party political meetings and CLP meetings and branch meetings and not be the local MP’s son, I could just be there as myself. That was a real change for me.”

But it was Labour’s decisions to go to war with Iraq, and its ensuing ‘war on terror’, which truly politicised Sarwar and guaranteed his involvement in the party. “I was an opponent of the Iraq war,” he says. “And I saw people my age that were sympathetic to the Labour party have two reactions. I saw a lot of them run away from the Labour party, and I saw some of the other ones run towards it. And the ones who ran towards it said ‘this doesn’t represent the Labour party that we joined, how do we change it, how do we get it back to what we believe in?’, and I was one of those.”

For Sarwar, it is important to reflect on that time. “You’ve got to remember the atmosphere that was being created, where a large section of young Muslims across the country felt as if they were under attack by the state.”

Yet although Sarwar believes a lot has changed in the last 20 years, the war on terror and Labour’s wider foreign stance on Palestine and Kashmir still leave Muslim members feeling they are not represented by the party. That is according to recent research from the Labour Muslim Network on the Islamophobia in the party’s ranks. “I’ve been to Gaza now twice, I think it was 2013 last time, and the horrific scenes there, of course that shapes you, of course that makes you think about politics in a different way,” says Sarwar.

“The challenge for us as a Labour party is we have a large diaspora community. And I think that there is a natural sensitivity around not wanting to upset individual communities but also not wanting to inflame tensions between communities, when we’re thinking about our response to issues that happen on the other side of the world,” he adds. “That’s why, when it comes to issues like Kashmir or around Palestine, we’ve got to try and take as best we can some of that identity stuff out of it and take it back to principles – the principle of peace, the principles of equality, the principles of human rights. And I think if we have a principles-based approach, it can stop us having any kind of divisions in our communities that we need to try and avoid. I think that’s a lesson we need to learn around our own foreign policy, but also in our domestic agenda as well.”

Domestically then, and in a bid to bring about the unity he talks of, Sarwar has made a national Covid recovery ‘that will work for everyone’ the centrepiece of his Holyrood campaign, with a focus on jobs, the NHS, education, the climate and communities.

“I don’t just say this as a framing of the election, I honestly believe that we can’t rely on the Tories to deliver a recovery that works for everyone. It’s not in their DNA,” he says. “Only a functioning, outward-looking, hopeful Labour party can actually respond to the challenge of our time. Boris Johnson ain’t gonna do it. Nicola Sturgeon ain’t gonna do it.”

The Conservatives cannot be trusted with a Covid recovery, says Sarwar, because they have fed into the politics of

division and fuelled the inequality in our society. “And the reason why we can’t rely on the SNP is one, their record shows that they talk a good game on equality but they don’t deliver, but also they’re distracted, they have no interest in healing the wounds in our country. All they are relentlessly focused on is having a referendum and having an argument about the constitution.”

“This pandemic is an economic hit even sharper and deeper than the banking crisis, and you’ve got 300,000 of our fellow Scots on furlough that ends at the end of autumn, unsure about their job prospects after that comes to an end,” he says. For Sarwar, then, it would be a ‘sad reflection on our politics’ if we ignored the realities of the pandemic and went back to ‘old arguments’ around Brexit and Scottish independence.

“I want as close a relationship as possible with the European Union without opening up all those big constitutional divides again that put our entire country on pause and paralyse us from delivering the kind of recovery we need across the country,” he adds. “I think it would be contradictory of me to say in Scotland that we shouldn’t focus on the constitution to put recovery first, but then say we should focus on Brexit and not put the recovery first.”

On the issue of independence, the new leader ‘completely agrees’ with the findings from a recent report by FEPS and the Scottish Fabians that Scottish Labour needs to reassert itself as champions of the United Kingdom, Scotland and devolution. Sarwar adds, though, that the status quo around devolution is no longer credible. “The UK doesn’t work for you if you live in Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Cardiff, just like it doesn’t work if you live in Glasgow and Edinburgh.” Instead he would like to see power pushed out of our parliaments and into communities.

Over the course of the campaign, Sarwar will be announcing his plans around his five chosen policy areas, from a fairer examination process for current students, to a focus on tech and green jobs, as well as more support for businesses, greater ambition around the climate emergency, and an NHS catch-up plan to deal with the backlog of postponed treatment. He says these issues – around unemployment, cancelled operations, children’s education and mental health, climate change, and staying safe – are what people across the UK are worrying about right now.

But ‘staying safe’ as a key concern is about much more than just wanting a Covid-19 vaccination. The tragic news of Sarah Everard’s death has awakened a national conversation about both gender-based and state violence. Across the country, including in Glasgow, vigils and marches have taken place – and in London were met with a violent response from the police, sending further shockwaves across the country. “The reaction from the Met was just

unforgivable. I mean, the lack of self-awareness of the significance of the moment was really, really upsetting,” Sarwar says.

“It is sadly still the case for far too many women that they have to think twice before walking down the street,” he adds.

One problem is that police officers are not adequately trained in dealing with hate crime, he believes. “We should have, on every beat, and every shift, in every police force across Scotland, but I don’t see why it can’t be done across the UK, at least one officer that is a designated expert in how to deal with hate crime, in a way that is sensitive to community demands, but also alive to people’s lived experiences. And I think if we did it that way then we can get policing to work.”

But doesn’t this solution of policing to tackle violence against women miss the mood? After all many on the left, particularly younger people and the Black Lives Matter movement see police brutality as part of the problem. Whilst Sarwar says Labour needs to ‘listen’ and ‘not be aloof’ to the demands from these movements, he insists that policing is important, and we should not pretend it is not.

Scottish Labour’s new leader clearly believes only a Labour government can overcome the challenges of inequality, hate and prejudice, but says the party cannot preach the message of unity if it is not demonstrating unity itself. For this to happen, Sarwar says the Scottish Labour party ‘needs to stop with the Hunger Games’. “We think that we can spend all day fighting with each other, arguing with each other, eating each other alive until one person’s left.”

As leader, he promises to work across the party, and not get involved in any ‘petty internal fights’. “Whatever wing people might think they’re from, as long as they’ve got something to contribute, I want to work with them to deliver the Labour party that we all need,” he says. This willingness to respect and represent the broad church of Labour is something Sarwar maintains Keir Starmer is already demonstrating, and will be key to giving people a Labour party they can vote for.

“Because, whatever divisions that we think may exist within our own political party, or whatever divisions you think exists between our political parties, they honestly pale into insignificance compared to the divisions that people want to create in our communities. And I honestly think, whilst there’s been a wave of division, a moment is going to come where a wave of optimism and unity is going to be able to beat that division. The challenge is whether we’re going to be ready to turn that tide, and I want to build that movement and turn that tide.” **F**

*Vanessa Singh is assistant editor at the Fabian Society*

**“I want as close a relationship as possible with the European Union without opening up all those big constitutional divides again that put our entire country on pause”**



# “London is a place where you can be who you want to be, love who you want to love and where anyone can achieve their full potential”

In the run-up to May’s election, London mayor *Sadiq Khan* answers questions from the Fabian Review

## **What has the last year meant for London?**

The past year has been the most difficult of many Londoners’ lives and has been defined by suffering and sacrifice. Both on a personal and professional level it has taken an immense toll – socially and economically. Yet, even in the midst of a global pandemic, Londoners have come together. I have seen and heard so many stories about people in our city supporting and encouraging one another through these most challenging of times.

## **What are the key issues Londoners are telling you they will be voting on?**

London is the greatest city in the world – but I have a 1945-style plan to build an even better, safer and greener London after the pandemic. Londoners tell me again and again that the housing crisis needs further action – which is why I’ll continue to build more genuinely affordable housing including council homes and campaign for the introduction of rent controls. As a father I share Londoners’ concerns about crime rising in our capital once lockdown lifts, which is why I’ll continue to invest record amounts in being tough on crime and tough on its causes.

Londoners have also repeatedly said that they want a green recovery. Under my leadership I’ve set a target for our city to be net-zero by 2030, doubling the size of the green jobs sector by the end of the decade too.

## **You are, of course, running for a second term. How do you assess your own record so far as mayor?**

I’m extremely proud of the achievements made during my first term which includes investing £70m in the Young Londoners Fund to help give those at risk of getting caught up in crime positive and constructive opportunities. Since 2016 I have started a record number of affordable homes with more council homes begun in the last year than in any year since 1983. I entered City Hall determined to clean up London’s toxic air and we have seen toxic air pollution fall by more than a third in central London, as well as increasing the number of protected cycle lanes in our capital fivefold. On top of that, Transport for London fares were frozen over five years and we introduced the hopper bus fare, saving Londoners hundreds of pounds.



**If, as the polls suggests, you defeat Shaun Bailey in the upcoming mayoral election, what will be your priorities for your next term as mayor?**

The only poll that matters to me is the one on 6 May and I will be doing all I can to make sure that London stays Labour. The pandemic has been devastating for many of London's key industries including leisure, tourism and hospitality. More than 300,000 Londoners have lost their jobs as a result of the coronavirus crisis and some have shared with me their concerns about the future. My priority is getting them back to work, that's why my relentless focus for this election and beyond will be jobs, jobs, jobs. But beyond that, there's so much work to do as part of London's recovery from the pandemic to build a better, greener and fairer city.

**London is a diverse city. How do you plan to ensure it remains a beacon in a post-Brexit world?**

This city has given me and my family everything and I will always stand up for London, its openness and its inclusivity. London is a place where you can be who you want to

be, love who you want to love and where anyone can achieve their full potential. Whichever way you slice it, the deal we got from the EU was not as good as full membership so my message to EU Londoners is simple, this is your home and always will be. The election on May 6th is a two-horse race between me and the Tory candidate who has shown time and time again, through his appalling views on women, diversity and our working-class communities that he simply does not share London's values.

**Although there is huge support for Labour in London, this is not reciprocated across the country. Why do you think this is – and how does the party need to change in order to win in 2024?**

The wonderful thing about elections is they enable everyone to have a say. Voters will let you know whether they think you're doing well or if you've let them down. The loss of Red Wall seats should concern every one of us on the left as it was a sign that people in those areas no longer trust our party. We must do all we can to win their confidence and earn back that trust. I've been impressed by the start Keir Starmer has made in reshaping our party's priorities –

and asking voters right across the country to trust us once more and lend us their vote.

**How has the Labour party under Starmer changed?**

I have known Keir for many years and he has brought focus and direction to the party leadership. He has shown a deep commitment to rooting out the scourge of antisemitism. Crucially, Keir has also reminded us of the importance of securing power. I know a Labour government can transform lives – but it can only do so by winning elections.

**As a Fabian, what is your vision of a Labour city in a Labour country in the 2020s?**

I want to see a Labour mayor in City Hall, and a Labour government winning the next general election and going on to invest in public services and devolving more powers to the cities and regions. The first step towards that vision begins with voting for it on May 6. **F**

*Sadiq Khan is the mayor of London, standing for re-election and a vice-president of the Fabian Society*

# Local heroes

The real lives of ordinary people, not flags and Rule Britannia, should inspire Labour's progressive patriotism today, writes *Marc Stears*



*Marc Stears is director of the Sydney Policy Lab at the University of Sydney. He was previously chief speechwriter to former Labour leader Ed Miliband and a professor of political theory at the University of Oxford. His new book *Out of the Ordinary: How Everyday Life Inspired a Nation and How it Can Again* is published by Harvard University Press*

**H**AS BRITAIN GIVEN up on Labour, or has Labour given up on Britain?" a senior figure in Australian political life asked me the other day.

It is one of the subtler questions I have been presented with since arriving in Sydney three years ago.

Usually people just ask: "What on earth is going on in your country?" or some blunter variant of the same. Australians, like people around the world, have looked on in utter disbelief as the country has lurched from Theresa May's dancing at Conservative party conference through parliamentary chaos over Brexit and the rise of Boris Johnson to the catastrophic Covid-19 response that has left hundreds of thousands of people bereaved.

Britain may not be a failed state, but it certainly seems to be ruled by a state that has failed.

The more attentive observers are now seeking reasons why this has not led to a renaissance for the party of the opposition. It has been almost 16 years since Labour last won a UK general election, and despite everything that has happened, we now read that the party has a double digit deficit to the Conservatives in some polls.

Those observers often hypothesise that a fundamental gulf has opened up between Labour and the people it seeks to represent. And given how long-lasting the rift has been, they believe it is rooted in something bigger and more profound than politics as usual. Perhaps it is not an economic or ideological issue but is instead one of underlying questions of cultural identity.

It is not just overseas commentators who see the challenge in this way. Within the current leader of the opposition's office, there are several senior figures who worry that

the fall of the 'Red Wall' in the 2019 general election, indicates that Labour now faces a historic choice: it can carry on espousing an internationalist ideal, replete with cultural liberalism – as it has for the last few decades – and slide into electoral oblivion or it can shift back towards a more explicitly patriotic, even nationalist, story and compete again for those voters who identify with more traditional, socially conservative values.

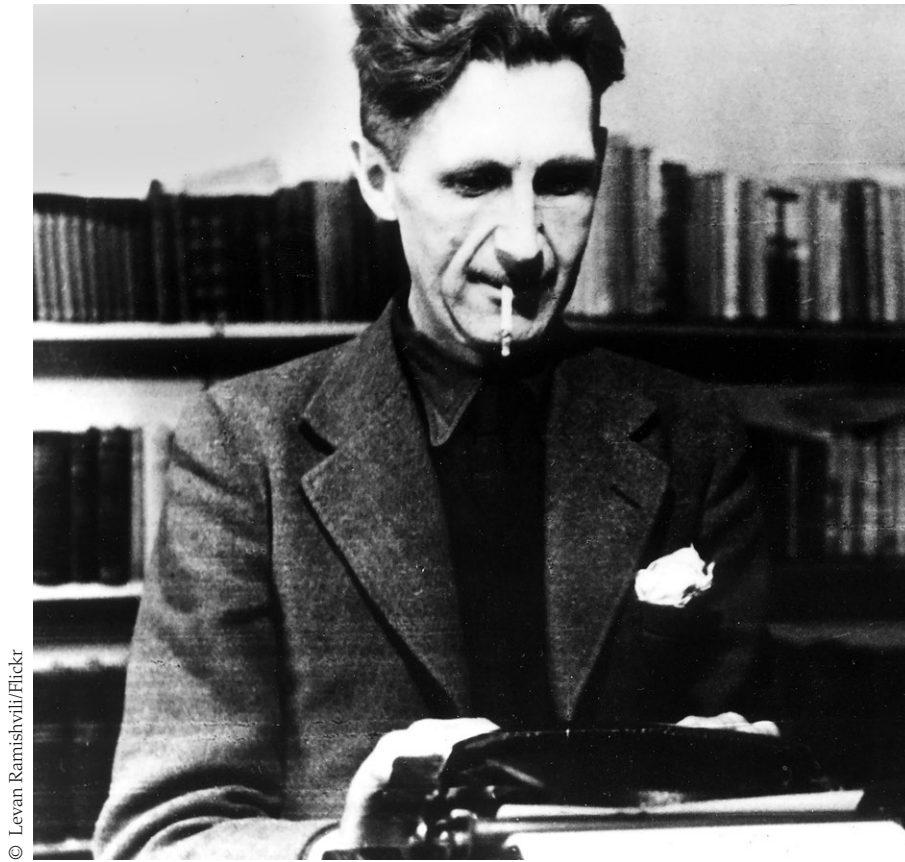
Keir Starmer has not decided where he stands on this divide as yet. But the Union flag has started to appear in the background of his video addresses and the rhetoric of his speeches is now chock-full of the legacy of Captain Tom Moore, the second world war and the Attlee government of 1945. Starmer talks energetically about Britain, and about England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland too. He is eager to point out that he spent time as director of public prosecutions, ruthlessly pursuing those who put the country's national security at risk. And he seems much less eager to talk about Brexit or the problems it has unleashed.

All of this has already opened an intense debate in Labour circles. Is it a vital move to repairing Labour's compact with the people, or is it a step away from the party's fundamental values and towards a compromise with the populist right?

Whatever view we take of that question, though, a more fundamental problem confronts the strategy. When progressive politicians do patriotism too often it seems just achingly false.

Keir Starmer, like Jeremy Corbyn and Ed Miliband before him, makes an unconvincing public patriot. That is not because he does not love the country. I am sure he does,

**Keir Starmer, like  
Jeremy Corbyn and  
Ed Miliband before  
him, makes an unconvincing  
public patriot**



© Levan Ramishvili/Flickr

*George Orwell*

just like Corbyn and Miliband in their own ways did. But he does not naturally display that affection in the way that those imagined voters of the Red Wall seats conventionally do and it looks inherently unconvincing when he tries.

Nor is it just displays of loyalty to Britain itself that seem to come so hard. Starmer's displays of national affection have sometimes gone awry in other contexts. In a recent party promotional video released for St David's Day, the patron Saint of Wales, Starmer did not just have one daffodil pinned to his jacket, but three. It was a display of patriotic fervour that would have made Max Boyce blush.

For some, this is a further reason to abandon the patriotism project altogether. If a leader cannot make you believe that they enjoy nothing more than singing along to Land of Hope and Glory at the Last Night of the Proms, the argument goes, they should just give it up and stick to the policy announcements.

But that is a mistake. There is another way of displaying affection for, and loyalty to, the country, its culture and its traditions.

That other way begins with two commitments.

The first is authenticity. People know when they are being spun a yarn and voters are especially adept at noticing when someone is pretending to be a caricatured version of who they themselves are said to be. In short, candidates for high office should only run as the person they really are, however difficult that might be to square with the message they are promoting. Otherwise, we will find them out.

The second is empathy. Too many people now suspect that senior politicians look down on them and treat their fundamental identities with disdain and contempt. As voters, we do not want our politicians to be exactly like us and we certainly do not want them to pretend to be something they are not, but we do want to be shown respect and have our perspectives taken into account. We want politicians to listen and attend and to care and not to believe they are somehow superior or morally pure.

Although these two principles might appear very straightforward, it remains extremely rare for them to be displayed at the same time, especially when it comes to these questions of patriotism and national identity.

There was authenticity when Jeremy Corbyn refused to sing the national anthem at the Battle of Britain memorial, for example, but there was no empathy. He did not care enough how his silence would be received by those for whom

this was a solemn moment of great meaning.

Conversely, there was empathy when my old boss Ed Miliband reacted furiously to Emily Thornberry seeming to mock the cross of St George as it flew from a house in Rochester. But there was not a lot of authenticity. Few people believed Miliband really wanted to sack a long-term ally from the shadow cabinet for a single tweet.

So how can a progressive political leader develop an approach to patriotism and the nation that is both truly authentic and empathetic at the same time?

In my recent book, *Out of the Ordinary*, I reveal how in the years from the Great Depression to the 1950s there was a conscious effort to do just that.

Confronted by the joint challenges of fascism and communism, a group of writers, thinkers, artists and activists, including George Orwell, Dylan Thomas and Barbara Jones, generated a political language of nation and nationhood that was both respectful of those who were deeply loyal to the country and its traditions, at the same time as being open to the need for bold, transformative change.

For these thinkers the answer lay in steering discussion away from the abstract, grandiose language of patriotism. They chose not to talk about the flags and the glorious histories, what George Orwell called "all that Rule Britannia stuff". Instead, they rooted their account of a patriotic politics in the smaller, more everyday, places and values of ordinary people. Their heroes were local heroes.

Perhaps the most poignant version of this account came in a short film that Dylan Thomas wrote during the second

world war, called *Our Country*. Originally conceived as a way of persuading Britain's allies overseas that it was a country worth fighting for, *Our Country* strove to depict the whole of the nation, revealing its fundamental character and laying out the reasons why even those most sceptical of the very idea of nation should believe in it.

*Our Country* opens with a bird's eye view across Britain, beginning in Glasgow, journeying to London, to the white cliffs of Dover, to the orchards and farms of East Anglia, the markets of the marches and the industrial heartlands of South Wales, before returning to Scotland and ending with the faces of fishermen in Aberdeen.

It captures the brutality of war. A young woman is shown walking home from work imagining what would happen if the bombs began to drop, with "suddenly all the houses falling down on you and everybody you knew lying all dead in the street".

But it is essentially a celebration. Thomas wanted to show that Britain was a country where people had learned to struggle collectively not because of any belief in the established order, but because they had realised they shared a deep and abiding love of the elements of life that many had previously dismissed as utterly mundane.

To underline this vision, *Our Country* features apple picking and hop picking in the fields, commuters rushing across the platforms at Waterloo Station, people listening to music in their kitchens, people haggling and drinking in the pubs, people sitting in contemplative silence on the bus. There are no invocations of past military glories or vast noble ideals. There is nothing grand at all, apart, that is, from the dome of St Paul's, briefly shown towering above it all. There at the top of the dome, Thomas told us, it was possible for one's eyes to "move over London". There, everything and everyone, can find "peace under one roof".

That tradition can inspire us to try to paint a picture of what a progressive patriotism could really look like today; a patriotism, that is, and could be shared with authenticity and empathy.

In essence, I believe it embraces a politics that is bold and transformative, that invests power in the hands of ordinary people, and does not shackle it to those in Westminster. It is a politics that has big ambitions, but also treats people with the respect that they deserve.

If Labour could speak this language, it would be articulating patriotism and pride in a manner that is both believable and impactful.

There is work still to do, of course, in explaining precisely what this should look like in detailed programmatic terms. It is an idea that can be dismissed either as too vague and sentimental, or too reminiscent of David Cameron's Big Society, which was just a pleasant mask for a deeply regressive austerity.

Fortunately, there are already an extraordinary range of practical social experiments going on across Britain, each of which shows that this need not be the case.

One of the largest of these efforts is the *Every One, Every Day* initiative run by the Participatory City Foundation,

masterminded by the social entrepreneur Tessy Britton, in the east London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Founded on the idea that 'what people do together every day matters', *Every One, Every Day* fosters and facilitates 'widespread networks of co-operation and friendship' in one of the most economically deprived and ethnically diverse communities in the whole of the UK. It does so through a host of projects, each co-designed and co-produced by ordinary residents themselves.

In its first year alone, funded both by the local council and a host of major philanthropic foundations, *Every One, Every Day* has seen at least 2,000 people involved in 40 different ongoing projects, including taking over shops on the high street and turning them into welcoming spaces for people to meet and socialise, cultivating disused public land as community gardens where people can grow food to eat, providing spaces and equipment for families from different backgrounds to cook together and to entertain their children and opening a warehouse equipped with free-to-use tools, IT equipment, sewing machines, laser cutters, co-working space, financial advice and a co-operatively run childcare facility to help foster new community businesses.

There is a similar initiative in Wigan in the north of England, where the local council has worked to create

The Deal, which it describes as an "informal agreement between the council and everyone who lives or works here to work together to create a better borough". Projects include programmes for supporting community businesses, enabling children and young people to exercise their own influence in shaping education and social

services and a wholly new way of providing social care to the elderly, developed on the principle that residents should never be approached as 'a collection of needs and problems' but rather as 'unique individuals, who have strengths, assets, gifts and talents'.

The same principle motivates the social reformer Hillary Cottam's brilliant work, as outlined in her masterpiece, *Radical Help*. It is shared too by the think tank *New Local*, which has recently published its 'community paradigm', a series of practical instructions to local authorities and service providers that explains the transformative potential of one simple idea: handing power over to communities.

Each of these endeavours is potentially profoundly important. They connect elements of the everyday to the deep business of social change. They show that it is possible to be bold and ambitious at the same time as acting in a way that is respectful of people and place. It offers a new sense of direction to the progressive cause. It is what real patriotism can mean.

These projects also offer hope that I might finally have something to say to the sceptical commentators here in Australia. After all, if this kind of work became the heart of a new vision, we could confidently say that there was no way that Labour had given up on Britain. Then too there would be a real chance that the country would repay its faith. ■

**Candidates for high office should only run as the person they really are, however difficult that might be**



# People person

Jacinda Arden has created a new form of politics, rooted in emotion, empathy, personality and, most crucially, electoral success. *Bryan Gould* discusses



*Bryan Gould is a former Labour MP. He was born in New Zealand and was a member of the Labour party's shadow cabinet from 1986 to 1992. He is also a former chair of the Fabian Society*

JACINDA ARDEN IS the most popular leader New Zealand has ever had. She established her domestic popularity and her international reputation by virtue of the calmness, decisiveness and empathy she brought to bear in enabling New Zealand to withstand and confront the coronavirus epidemic with more success than any other country.

This success – remarkable for a young politician with no previous experience of government – came on the back of her similarly sure-footed handling of the murderous attack by an Australian terrorist on Christchurch mosques, and her empathetic reaction to the loss of life when a volcano erupted in the Bay of Plenty.

She proved herself in each of these scenarios to be a leader who could be trusted, not least because she was a brilliant communicator. Her televised daily press conferences and grilling by the media in the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak were masterclasses in how to build public trust and understanding.

Ardern's "team of five million" – as she calls the country – were prepared to follow her to the ends of the earth (which is where most of the rest of the world would place her anyway). As the plaudits began to roll in from around the world, New Zealand enjoyed the experience of becoming – for once – the cynosure of all eyes.

The reward for her efforts came in the general election in late 2020. An electorate that might have been expected to punish a government that had imposed on them all the economic disruption and uncertainty of successive lockdowns, reacted instead with gratitude and affection. Ardern's Labour government became the first to secure, under New Zealand's proportional representation system, an outright majority in parliament without any need to seek coalition partners.



© Kirk Hargreaves/Wikimedia Commons

During the campaign, I lost count of those whom I knew to be lifelong supporters of the right-wing opposition National party, who said no more to me than: "She's done a good job" and who then felt it unnecessary to elaborate further on their intention to vote for her.

Her crushing victory is undoubtedly owed much to her ability to unite the country and to render party differences beside the point. But that could prove to be far from an unalloyed benefit.

Some of her critics on the left – and there are some – fear that her success in attracting support from the centre-right could mean that she has become their prisoner. New Zealand's short three-year parliamentary term means that there is precious little time to enact a truly transformative programme and to carry the country with it. Critics fear that, rather than risk losing the support she has gained from those who would not normally vote Labour, she might soft-pedal on the need for change.

It is not that Jacinda – she is one of those politicians who is best identified and widely known by her first name alone – lacks ambition for what her government might achieve. She has been clear in setting her goals: combating climate change, reducing child poverty, solving the housing crisis by building more houses. But there is doubt over her ability to achieve these goals, given that she has boxed herself in, through a pledge made under pressure from the opposition during the campaign, not to introduce a capital gains tax.

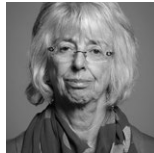
The critics say, not without reason, that there is no solution to growing inequality without taxing the rich. Her defenders might respond by pointing to the unexpectedly positive performance by the New Zealand economy as it bounces back from lockdown – an outcome much helped by the quantitative easing put in place by the finance minister, Grant Robertson. As a result, the prospects for increased government spending are surprisingly bright.

Time will tell – but it would be a brave person who would bet against an extended term in government for a leader who reads and represents the New Zealand psyche so well.

Jacinda Arden has discovered and demonstrated that politics is not just about "the economy, stupid", but is also about emotion, empathy and personality: the key word in Ardern's politics is "kindness". She has created a new version of left-wing politics which distinguishes itself from its right-wing opponents, not only through sheer competence and what it thinks, but through what it feels as well – its sympathy with, and regard and respect for, all of our fellow citizens. ■

# Poor lore

The pandemic has highlighted how poverty has been deepening over the last decade. But it may also mark a shift in public attitudes towards those struggling to make ends meet, as *Ruth Lister* explains



*Ruth Lister is a Labour peer and Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, Loughborough University. Her new book Poverty, 2nd edition, is published by Polity*

**D**ESTITUTION IS NOT a word we expect to see describing the situation of fellow members of a rich, industrialised society such as the UK in the 21st century. Yet recent reports from Heriot-Watt University (for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) and the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (for Channel 4) document growing destitution: the former identifies 2.4 million people in households who were unable to afford the essentials needed to eat and to keep warm, dry and clean, even before the pandemic. This is the context in which the second edition of my book *Poverty* is published. Looking back at the first edition, the word ‘destitution’ did not even appear in the index. Nor did charitable ‘food banks’, which have now become normalised as part of the safety net on which destitute people and others on low incomes increasingly rely.

This shocking picture reflects not just how poverty is on the rise again, especially among children, but also how it has intensified as people are pushed further below the poverty line. A reduction in living standards (in particular due to social security cuts) among those on low incomes might not show up in the overall headcount rate if those affected are already living below the poverty line. As a consequence, we are witnessing an increase in deep poverty.

Worsening poverty is not just attributable to the impact of the pandemic. Indeed, a more robust welfare state would have been better placed to provide adequate protection against this shock. Instead, a decade of social security cuts and freezes, together with stricter behavioural conditions, more punitive sanctions and the monthly assessment of universal credit (from which stems the five-week wait for the first payment) have contributed to a diminution in the security that the social security system provides.

**The pandemic has aggravated the insecurity experienced by a growing proportion of the population**

Security was the first principle in the ‘people’s charter’ for social security proposed by the Fabian Society last year, in a project which involved close collaboration with benefit recipients. The pandemic has exposed and aggravated the economic insecurity experienced by a growing proportion of the population, one consequence being increased indebtedness. Economic insecurity is not new for people in poverty, but it is an issue to which I pay much greater attention in the second edition, in part reflecting this wider economic insecurity. One aspect of this, often referred to as ‘in-work poverty’, has become much more prevalent in recent years to the extent that the number of people of working age in poverty in households with at least one member in paid employment exceeds the number out of work. It should, however, be remembered that for people in poverty, insecurity involves not just labour market precariousness and the fluctuating incomes associated with low pay but also the everyday insecurity that arises from lacking any kind of buffer against unexpected financial shocks, such as a broken fridge. The resultant anxiety and stress is borne in particular by women who still bear the main burden of budgeting on a low income.

The worsening poverty situation reflects the very different political context from that in 2004, when *Poverty* was first published. Then we had a Labour government committed to tackling child and pensioner poverty – although a tendency to do good by stealth and to disparage out-of-work benefits did nothing to build the public support needed to safeguard its achievements on child poverty in the longer term. The 2010 Child Poverty Act, which set out a child poverty strategy for national and local government with clear targets and measures, was abolished in 2016

so that there is now no UK-wide anti-poverty strategy. In contrast, Wales has a clear child poverty strategy (referencing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and Scotland resurrected legal targets, measures and plans, together with the establishment of an independent poverty and inequality commission and more recently, Scottish child payments.

These developments, within the limits of the devolved nations' powers, are examples of how today's picture is not all gloomy. Scotland has also introduced social security legislation that enshrines a number of important principles including that social security is a human right 'essential to the realisation of other human rights' so that 'respect for the dignity of individuals is to be at the heart of the Scottish social security system'. Having argued for a human rights approach to poverty, premised on human dignity, this is music to my ears. So too is the emphasis on the participation of both claimants and staff in the development of the devolved social security system.

This speaks to what is one of the most positive changes since I wrote the first edition: the growing recognition of the expertise born of the experience of poverty. Although there is always a danger of governments paying lip service to the principle (for instance when Tory ministers reference the importance of lived experience), the Scottish approach is at least attempting to embed this form of expertise into the system. Moreover, increasingly people in poverty and social security claimants themselves are seizing the initiative through networked groups such as APLE (Addressing Poverty through Lived Experience) and Poverty2Solutions. They are speaking out against regressive

policies and putting forward their own alternatives, as is the claimant-led Commission on Social Security.

The media landscape is also, on the whole, more positive today. When I wrote the first edition, the issue of poverty was either largely ignored, as too boring, or was represented in a very negative way. There was then a period of 'poverty porn' television, exemplified by *Benefits Street*, through which the vilification and othering of people in poverty intensified, encouraged also by the Tory 'skiver/striver' narrative. Although there is still a tendency to individualise the problem, while ignoring structural causes, and to 'other' people in poverty, albeit sometimes sympathetically, the overall tone today is rather less negative. An example is the general response to footballer Marcus Rashford's campaigning on free school meals, notwithstanding some hostile reactions.

This more sympathetic response may be one consequence of the pandemic, which has exposed large numbers to the realities of an inadequate income. Indeed, for a brief moment in October 2020, poverty/inequality figured as the fourth most important concern in the Ipsos Mori index of the public's key issues, probably a product of the 'Rashford effect'. While it has dropped down again, it remains relatively high. And the British Social Attitudes Survey shows that attitudes towards social security were already softening prior to the pandemic, with its 2019 survey and more recent YouGov data indicating an encouraging increase in the numbers who believe benefits are too low.

It remains to be seen what the long-term impact of the pandemic on public attitudes will be. On the one hand, some point out that the universal credit system that many are having to fall back on is not typical of the system outside pandemic times (given in particular the temporary £20 uplift and less punitive conditionality) and many of those affected may be more comfortable with the system's digital by default approach than a more 'typical' claimant. Moreover, a sizeable proportion of the population is piling up savings, having remained unaffected economically. On the other hand, even with the temporary uplift, life on universal credit remains a struggle, especially for parents who have received no extra social security support for their children; and disbelief has been expressed at the low level of statutory sick pay, which the uplift was intended to match.

Moreover, as many more people are swept into poverty as a result of a shock outside their control, misleading individualistic explanations of poverty that attribute its causes to the behaviour or capacities of people in poverty themselves might lose some of their purchase. In the same way, it should become harder to divide the working-age population misleadingly into 'hard-working', self-reliant families and the 'dependent' workless. Many more people will now understand how easy it is to fall into poverty through no fault of their own and will experience the insecurity of hovering just above the poverty line or of cycling in and out of poverty. Although recent research from King's College reminds us that such attitudinal changes do not necessarily follow, a shared experience of economic insecurity could potentially provide a common platform for future anti-poverty action to prevent as well as mitigate poverty. But it will require strong political leadership for that to happen. ■



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# Leaving no-one behind

Keir Starmer has talked of giving power to the people. Putting money in their hands to transform their communities would be a good way to start, writes *Rayhan Haque*



*Rayhan Haque is senior policy adviser at Local Trust*

**B**ACK IN EARLY February, in a speech that got somewhat lost in the relentless Covid-19 news cycle, Keir Starmer began to flesh out his nascent policy agenda. “I believe that power, resources and decision-making should lie as close to people as possible,” he said. “My view is simple: power should be exercised locally unless it has to be exercised centrally.”

The Labour leader’s instincts – to push power down and out into neighbourhoods, so that local people can take “charge of the resources – and the opportunities – to improve their own communities” – is spot on. The UK is one of the most centralised and geographically unequal of the world’s rich countries.

Tackling the stark and systemic inequalities that have left so many places and people behind is a pressing priority. We must build a better future and do so in new ways. The old approach of doing things, thinking that everything can be solved by an interventionist state or left to free market forces, will not suffice.

Rather, we need to heed the lessons from the last 40 years of regeneration initiatives and follow what does work: adopt a neighbourhood approach; invest in social infrastructure or ‘people’s palaces’, as the American sociologist Eric Klinenberg would say; nurture the development of civic capital and our social economy; and give communities real power and resources to lead their own change.

It will be crucial too, to focus on those places who have been most ‘left behind’ by the forces of global change, years of failed economic orthodoxy, and a decade of austerity.

## **What we mean by ‘left behind’ areas**

Research by Local Trust and Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) has identified 225 wards in England that have both high levels of deprivation (they are amongst the 10 per cent most deprived on the index of multiple deprivation) and the lowest levels of social infrastructure (ranking amongst the 10 per cent worst on the new national community needs index).

These places, ranging from Tunstall in Stoke, to Eston in Redcar, and Newington in Thanet, are both suffering from

economic failure but also lack the building blocks of social capital and strong civic life: places to meet, an engaged community and connectivity to other places. The research suggests that these are some of the most ‘left behind’ areas in the country. Labour might prefer to think of these neighbourhoods as being ‘held back’.

When compared to other equally deprived areas, these ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods – many of which are located on the edge of former industrial towns and cities in the North and the West Midlands or are coastal – have worse outcomes across a range of key socio-economic indicators: worse educational attainment; lower participation in higher education; fewer job opportunities, with available work low-paid; and significantly worse health outcomes.

Let’s consider employment and jobs. An OCSI deep dive found there are 20 ‘left behind’ areas where the majority of people aged 16 to 74 are not in employment, with Golf Green (in Jaywick, Essex) having the highest proportion of adults not working – 62.7 per cent.

A key factor is the lack of jobs – there are barely 50 jobs for every 100 working-age people in ‘left behind’ areas compared with around 80 in similarly deprived areas.

These communities are also suffering disproportionately from the impact of Covid-19; they have found it harder to develop mutual aid-based responses during the crisis; and their challenges, particularly those associated with unemployment and poor health, are likely to be exacerbated by the pandemic over the medium to long term. For instance, North Ormesby (in Middlesbrough) saw the largest increase in unemployment benefits since the pandemic (by 7.7 percentage points).

## **The importance of ‘left behind’ communities to Labour**

Since 2017, 57 traditional Labour constituencies in old industrial areas have swung to the Conservatives. Another 10 currently held by Labour in similar places could be target seats at the next election. Of these 67 Red Wall battleground constituencies, more than half (55 per cent) have ‘left behind’ neighbourhoods.

**These ‘left behind’ areas have worse outcomes across a range of socio-economic indicators**

Delving a bit deeper, our analysis found a powerful association between high community needs and an area's propensity to vote leave. In fact, the correlation is three times stronger than that between deprivation and support for Brexit.

This strengthens the case that some of the forces driving changing political allegiance over the last three to four years may have been perceptions about a lack of community provision in neighbourhoods, in addition to obvious concerns about economics and other nationally salient issues. This is significant for Labour, as after the 2019 election, the party has only managed to retain a third of its 2010 'leave minded' voters.

### The need for a neighbourhood focus

Recent large-scale programmes to boost local economies have been presented as a solution to 'levelling up'. These are unlikely though, to deliver significant benefits to 'left behind' neighbourhoods. The Towns Fund is focused on relatively large-scale capital projects in town centres such as new arts centres and not the small-scale investment the most 'left behind' neighbourhoods need.

Further details of the government's Levelling Up Fund were released at the budget, suggesting it will primarily target investments towards bricks and mortar economic and transport infrastructure. In other words, projects already in the pipeline and that are shovel ready. Few, if any, community hubs or other social centres are likely to be supported. And, neither fund will support neighbourhood activities that are so vital to rebuilding social capital where it has been lost.

There is a need – alongside larger-scale capital projects and Covid recovery initiatives – to focus policy interventions at the hyper-local level and provide long term, if relatively small-scale, revenue funding if we are to directly improve the lives of those who have been most 'left behind'.

### Repairing our social infrastructure

Polling in 'left behind' neighbourhoods commissioned by Local Trust from Survation indicates that residents believe that they are missing out on funding compared to other areas. People who said that their area gets fewer resources identify places to meet and recreational facilities – core elements of social infrastructure – as the greatest deficits.

Our experience has found that communities lacking in places to meet and social infrastructure – such as youth centres, pubs, cafés, parks, community hubs – can find it much more difficult to nurture the social interactions and bonds that play an essential part in developing a community's civic spirit.

Without these foundational structures and assets, neighbourhoods can struggle to build the social fabric (or bonding capital) that binds people together in communities and creates strong levels of civic engagement and public trust. They also struggle to build the networks and relationships (the bridging capital) needed to access opportunities, outside their own neighbourhood.

### A community wealth fund – creating the foundations for prosperity

The Survation research found people in 'left behind' areas have a strong belief in the direct power of their local

community, with 63 per cent agreeing that residents have the capacity to really change the way their area is run. And when asked who should lead decisions about how the money is spent if a fund was set up to help their community, over 70 per cent said it should be local people and community organisations, echoing Starmer's recent sentiments on pushing power down and out.

So what is the answer? Whilst higher levels of public investment and help for businesses are a key part, this money needs to be accompanied by support for stronger local communities, with local residents taking the lead in delivering improvements on their estates and neighbourhoods.

We need a once in a generation commitment to reinvest in the social infrastructure of communities that have been 'left behind'. We could use the next wave of dormant assets (funding from bonds, stocks, shares and insurance policies) to establish a community wealth fund – a national endowment designed to invest in the most 'left behind' and deprived neighbourhoods across the country. It would devolve spending decisions to communities at a neighbourhood level enabling them, with the right support, to improve their areas, building community capacity and resilience in the process.

The idea for the fund is inspired by the success of the Big Local programme, a radical place-based community-led initiative that has given 150 communities across England just over £1m each to improve their areas over 10 to 15 years. Unlike many other regeneration schemes, communities spend their money at their own chosen pace and according to their own plans and priorities.

The results can be transformative. In one post-war housing estate in north west Bristol, Lawrence Weston, where poor transport links left the estate cut off both socially and economically and 30 per cent of children live in poverty, the community has focused on creating and keeping wealth local. The community group Ambition Lawrence Weston lives up to its name.

They have attracted a Lidl supermarket to the area creating new local jobs and ensuring residents have access to cheaper food; supported a new bus service to provide transport to access jobs; improved local green space and provided recreational facilities; developed new environmentally friendly housing and created a new community hub providing employment and training services.

Perhaps most impressive is they have developed a solar farm in partnership with a local energy cooperative and the city council. This will generate enough electricity, each year, to power 1,000 average homes, with profits now being invested into projects run by the partnership.

This community group illustrates what is possible if trust is placed in local people. They have used a relatively small amount of funding, just over £1m, to leverage in millions more in investment and social value for their area and the wider region.

Starmer concluded his speech by saying: "We often hear that people don't trust politicians. I think the bigger problem is that politicians don't trust the people." He is right. The time has come for politicians to let go and push power down and out to communities. If we get it right, the result will be nothing less than transformative – a country where no place or person is 'left behind'. ■

# The road from ruin

Labour should mobilise ideas and tools, old and new, to seize the initiative on the economy, argues *Asheem Singh*



*Asheem Singh is director of economy at the RSA and a member of the Labour party*

“The hardest part is getting investment capital into these areas. If we can get low-or no-return social investors to support us then we can increase the work we do. If not, then it stays small. That’s the challenge.”

**T**HAT WAS THE view a prominent leader in the Labour movement shared with me as we talked about the impoverished Grangetown area of my home, Middlesbrough. We were doing so in a place just about as far away from there as one can be: the gilded corridors of the RSA building in Covent Garden, London.

I am fond of my hometown, and it pains me to see what has happened there since the 2008 financial crash. The town’s thoroughfares no longer heave. At a crossroads where my sisters and I used to eat sandwiches and chat, there are three ugly, fulminating megaliths dedicated to the discount wares of Mike Ashley.

The greatest irony of all? This part of the world increasingly votes blue. A combination of economic vandalism and cultural violence has been weaponised by today’s Conservatives. Its prime purveyors, from fumbling Teesside mayor Ben Houchen to generally disinterested local MP Rishi Sunak, bear but one idea: freeports, the Conservative panacea to attract inward investment and votes to these parts. They call it levelling up, but really the idea is no more than enterprise zones on steroids, a revamped version of an old, tried-and-failed policy from the 1980s.

There will be eight regional freeports across Britain. Sunak announced they would be put to tender in his Spring budget – and they have come this far on the wings of bad-faith lobbying, cocktail napkin mathematics, and a cheerleader chancellor whose ambition doesn’t apparently extend to local economies of dignity for those whose votes he covets. The vision: impoverished citizens turned into factotums for art-market fencers and tax avoiders. Forget freeports: ‘sleazeports’ would be a more accurate description.

We need an alternative from Labour: a vision of an economy based not on regional trickle-down and pockets of kleptocracy but something greater – mutuality, aspiration, dignity, hope. The best of the Labour movement itself. But in a post-Covid world what might that alternative look like? What is the shape of the road from ruin?

## **Out of the wilderness**

There is no doubt that Labour’s message on the economy is difficult to deliver. The wilderness years have

yielded an instinctive view among the public that Labour is Panglossian and anti-aspirational. Poll after poll shows how these suppositions pull at the popular imagination. In my home town, the regeneration funding of the New Labour years and the smart new shopping quarter did not yield a concomitant upswing in civic unity. Austerity merely compounded the mistrust, and the feeling that it was Labour’s crisis that caused all this was never quite shaken.

Such views are not immutable. The Conservatives were once viewed with a general suspicion when it comes to social policy. People often remember the Cameronite Tory detoxification process in soundbites and stunts: hug a hoodie, Big Society. But one of the most inadequately-discussed factors in David Cameron’s ascent to the premiership was his collegial approach to social policy.

Over four years, from 2006 to 2010, a party that generally loathes the idea of government as anything other than ‘army, navy and Treasury,’ produced a remarkable array of internal and external actors developing social programmes for an incoming Tory government. From free schools, to universal credit, to cutting the deficit, to Big Society Capital, each part of the Conservative movement had its own piece of a distinct Cameronism. And these alliances evolved the Conservative movement into the relatively coherent cultural war-machine that dominates the politics of today.

Edmund Burke, the Conservative philosopher, envisioned a society of ‘little platoons’ that improve their localities through effort and ‘love.’ This trope continues to appeal Conservatives today. For sure, this is a party with but two decent philosophers and one decent idea, and even this idea is being wilfully traduced by today’s bully-boy Conservatism. 2019 was the night of the long knives that put unserious and unready militants in the place of the One Nation caucus. But in this generational changing of the guard there is an opportunity for Labour.

Labour has its own array of economic ‘little platoons’, ready to be deployed and supported by smart party messaging. Together they can deliver an alternative to freeport neoliberalism and form a substantive, rich, evocative economic agenda. In concert with smart fiscal and monetary policies, these little economic platoons are the frontline of an ambitious programme for economic reform. Indeed, this broad-spectrum economic movement is as crucial to Labour’s economic detoxification as the wider Tory social policymaking movement was to Cameron’s.

## Who should Labour call upon to deliver this message?

First there is the co-operative movement. Labour's sister party remains the beating heart of any transformational economy agenda. Cameron had his Big Society; Corbyn had his call to double the size of the mutual movement. Starmer's Labour will need its own message on co-operatives; he will need to give a platform to the fastest growing business form in the world and the hopeful values it represents and offers: ownership, aspiration and control at community level in the hands of more of us.

Labour must also call on its exciting cadre 'technomists': smart thinkers about the psychic and haptic shifts that tech-bros and their wares are creating in our lives. Every account of hope needs a positive vision of the sunlit uplands of the future. In my last piece for the Fabian Review, I outlined four technology-driven visions of the future that emerge from my work as a futurologist. None were particularly sunny. Workers' rights were perpetually at risk; civil society was in danger. Laissez-faire and fiscal conservatism is singularly ill-placed to respond to these challenges. There is opportunity here.

Labour can be a force to help civilise technology, and its outsized impact on our economy. How to give workers control over our shared data? Alternative governance models such as data trusts. How to encourage economic development in future? Worker experience and personal development. How to tackle surveillance capitalism? Take on market concentration. This is where there is licence to be radical and where Labour's voice and relative youthfulness is a prime asset.

Labour also has the resource of the new 'greatest generation' in my first book, *The Moral Marketplace*, I wrote of the 'mission driven millennials' I had encountered all over the world who are using innovative, multi-disciplinary approaches to change our world. The Tories in opposition tried to occupy this territory of hope by categorising these entrepreneurial actors as 'natural Conservatives'. Now they are all but forgotten, cast as culture war enemies and this territory is now Labour's to own, to become the party of social entrepreneurship; of positive corporate action; and emergent social innovation championed by a new 'greatest generation.'

Then you have the 'radical doers' who are absolutely key to delivering Labour's new narrative on the economy. The effervescent world of community wealth building has lit up towns across the UK. What Labour's Preston council leader Matthew Brown has done with others to develop the 'Preston model' of community wealth-building, to take one example, is a crown jewel in the Labour story. It continues to evolve as new approaches and new challenges – such as the drive to cleaner, greener, net-zero communities or direct cash payments – gather pace. The Labour offer to the community wealth-building movement should be comprehensive and mutually supportive. The leadership should hug this movement close: everyone loves a doer.

## Real impact

Putting it simply, Labour's economic agenda needs to show results.

For the last three years, I have seen such economic radicalism succeed. At the RSA, by helping to lead

a movement of radical economic reformers, we have worked directly with social entrepreneurs, local councils and communities to add an entirely new layer to our financial services infrastructure that is community owned and led: a network of regional, co-operative community banks right across the UK.

To get this movement off the ground, we carried out deep research on market need, consumer attitudes, and corporate behaviours that see the big banks increasingly absent themselves from marginalised communities. We studied 'the dash from cash' that excludes the elderly and infirm, an issue which Sunak now ignores despite once promising otherwise. We studied international parallel examples such as Germany's *Sparkassen*. We tapped into a new generation of social entrepreneur bankers. A lot of our recent work was supporting these fledgeling businesses to gain regulatory approval. The regulator had never seen a regional bank structured like a community benefit society before, so there has been much patient diplomacy.

Often we have been discouraged. One investment leader said we may as well forget it unless we have £500m pledged up front per institution. Yet I can vouch for how economic radicalism works in the teeth of neoliberal homily like this.

Today, new co-operative and regional banks move closer to market. SouthWest Mutual, run by the indefatigable Tony Greenham, is perhaps the closest to a ribbon-cutting. Banc Cambria in Wales and Avon Mutual make progress. Our work as movement builders cannot guarantee success; that will belong to the banks and their products.

But this relentless, bottom-up, community owned alternative to Sunak's retro top-down neoliberalism is Labour's to own. The rewards of community banking themselves show just what is achievable. Investment in local communities long-abandoned by convention and cant. Banking civilised, back at the heart of communities, supporting local businesses and citizens. New services that support elderly and vulnerable folk long-forgotten. A bottom-up movement that might grow to turnover not just millions, but billions for social good. Banks as social infrastructure: who could have imagined that? Labour values, ideas: the Labour party did.

## The Age of Labour Burkeism

The age of Starmerism must be the age of Labour's own Burkeism. We might call it the ownership society or the stakeholder economy. Or the moral marketplace, or the entrepreneurial state. What matters is that we make it happen.

There will also be inflection points along the way, salients in the strategy that condition Labour's approach to the next three years. But the principle of building a broad-spectrum economic movement of not only court thinkers but community doers, must be the heart of the strategy. If the Tories' approach to levelling up is pure trickle down, Labour's little platoons can take the centre ground. If the territory of economic aspiration beyond tax-and-spend is open, Labour has the tools to grab it.

Labour's oven-ready economy of doers, entrepreneurs and community anchors would be better for 'the Boro' than Sunak's 'sleazeports'. An economic war-machine greater than the considerable sum of its parts is ready to take us on the road away from ruin. If Labour's leadership can make it cohere, it is a winning machine. ■

# Books

## Bold move

Emily Kenway's debut reclaims the narrative around ending modern slavery — *Angharad Smith*



*Angharad Smith works at the United Nations modern slavery programme. She is writing in a personal capacity*

The Truth About Modern Slavery weaves together different academic theories with ground-breaking investigative journalism to highlight how the modern slavery narrative has been appropriated by those in power to detract from the vital work that is really needed to combat modern slavery in all its forms – including human trafficking, forced labour, child labour and slavery-like practices.

Drawing on the ideas and influence of cognitive linguist George Lakoff, author Emily Kenway shows how the construction of a modern slavery framework has enabled the issue to be characterised as an apolitical, exceptional aberration, one that sets up a binary between ‘victim’ and ‘perpetrator’. In focusing on modern slavery as an aberration, we deflect from questioning the structural inequities of the system which created the breeding ground for exploitation to occur, detracting from the deep and broad policy changes that are needed. This individualisation of perpetration serves to both hide and legitimise policies that enable severe exploitation – allowing Western political leaders to condemn modern slavery whilst also pursuing repressive immigration agendas, which create the conditions for modern slavery to persist.

Kenway neither renounces nor dismisses the modern slavery discourse but rather foregrounds how it can act as a veneer for hypocritical government policies. Her critique is measured, recognising for instance, that the UK's Modern Slavery Act has made some positive inroads in establishing coherence in the law around forms of exploitation. Rightly, she acknowledges the laudable dedication and hard work of numerous campaigners, academics and civil society organisations who have fought to tackle modern slavery.

Kenway highlights the stark contrast between the UK government's rhetoric on combating modern slavery and its track record of knowingly creating the conditions for slavery and exploitation to thrive. Why, Kenway asks, would the government invest resources in modern slavery awareness-raising campaigns at homeless shelters, instead of investing in social measures which would alleviate poverty? Why is the importance of collective bargaining and trade unions so often excluded from these debates?



**The Truth About Modern Slavery,**  
Emily Kenway,  
Pluto Press, £14.99

Why does the Modern Slavery Act only require companies to report on efforts they are taking to address modern slavery without enforcing penalties for noncompliance? Indeed, a recent damning report released by the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre, which analysed more than 16,000 statements in the modern slavery registry, saw no significant improvement in forced labour policy, practice or performance since the 2015 Act was passed.

Exploitation is a product and manifestation of power imbalances. And those who are marginalised, discriminated against and impoverished are more vulnerable to exploitation. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, these individuals are now at even greater risk, as they are excluded from adequate health care, have their already constrained movement restricted further by border closures and travel disruptions and risk stigmatisation and discrimination by nativist rhetoric and politics.

Instead of focusing on a criminal individual or gang, we must shift to transforming the current system, dismantling the power structures in place and creating appropriate social safety nets. Without these interventions, modern slavery and labour exploitation will continue to occur throughout the globe.

Kenway's challenge to the modern slavery 'movement' comes at an opportune and critical moment, when drastic global economic reform needs to happen. Her book makes it clear that modern slavery is part of a continuum of exploitation that is a product of the global neoliberal political economy. And while her book is not specifically about economics, Kenway contributes to ongoing discussions in the field about the need to innovatively reshape and transform the economy.

Kenway's book is uncomfortable in its realism, pragmatic in its outlook and bold in the suggestions it makes to transform the modern slavery agenda. She challenges those reporting on modern slavery to shift the narrative to one of nuance, instead of sensationalism, and, in so doing, usher in the possibility of developing effective solutions.

This is a book for anyone who wants to understand more about this complex and challenging human rights issue. **F**



# Rising to the challenge

With Fabians at the heart of the shadow team, we have the chance to develop the ideas which will bring Labour to power, writes *Martin Edobor*



*Dr Martin Edobor is chair of the Fabian Society*



**O**N THE WEEKEND of 16 and 17 January, I welcomed Fabian Society members to our new year conference as chair of the society. Although we were not meeting in our usual way, I cherished the chance to connect with members virtually. The nature of our gathering was a sign of the unprecedented times in which we now find ourselves.

We are amid a global pandemic that has upended our lives and touched every corner of our nation. With more than 4 million cases and 125,000 deaths in the United Kingdom, the coronavirus pandemic is, without a doubt, the most significant challenge our nation has faced in living memory. As an NHS general practitioner, I have seen first-hand the devastating impact this pandemic has had on human life – loved ones laid to rest, devastating long term side effects and loving families kept apart. However, I have also seen the heroic efforts of healthcare and key workers to keep our country safe. In this darkest of times, the light of human compassion has shone brighter.

In the space of a year, we have experienced unprecedented curbs on civil liberties, economic orthodoxy torn apart, and in the United Kingdom, an expansion of the state on a scale not seen since the second world war.

Nevertheless, we have seen a Conservative government that has failed to meet the responsibility of protecting the nation's health. From dithering over lockdowns to the failed outsourcing of track and trace, from 'eat out to help out' to the failure to implement border testing, we seem to have a Conservative party that seems either dangerously incompetent or venal in the extreme.

With the Labour party under new leadership, there is hope, as we now have a government-in-waiting on the opposition benches. Under Keir Starmer, our movement has a renewed sense of purpose, with a talented shadow cabinet including Fabian Society executive committee members holding the government to account.

Those Fabians on the frontbench include shadow chancellor, Anneliese Dodds who, in her Mais lecture in

January, outlined the need for a more resilient economy, setting out a new fiscal and monetary framework for the UK. Then there's shadow education secretary Kate Green who recently launched Labour's Bright Future Taskforce, which will develop a national strategy to ensure all children recover the learning and social development lost during the pandemic and have the chance to reach their full potential.

I want to thank our national executive members, general secretary Andrew Harrop, the wider staff team, and all our policy contributors for working hard throughout the year in such difficult conditions.

As Fabians, the challenge is immense as we emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, a hard Brexit and face the looming climate emergency. I believe the Fabian Society can rise to the challenge. Our priorities include focusing on policy development, engaging Fabian Society members through a plethora of publications, virtual and or hybrid events and supporting Fabian Women's Network and the

Scottish, Welsh and Young Fabians with their work.

Our challenges also mirror the struggle our wider movement faces. I acknowledge the important role we must play in supporting the Labour party.

The Labour party is rooted in Fabianism. Throughout the 20th century, the Fabian Society was the intellectual heart of our movement. From universal healthcare to the minimum wage to independence for the Bank of England, Fabian ideas have fuelled the engine of progressive change in our nation. Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson and Tony Blair each used the Fabians' gradualist policies, alongside their leadership qualities, to bring the party and the public with them towards a better future.

I am immensely proud to be your chair and of our society's history. As we move forward, the Fabian Society will continue to play its crucial role in our movement and provide the foundations from which the Labour party can build upon on its road to 2024. **F**

## FABIAN MEMBERS' SURVEY

The first tract published by the Fabian Society after it was established in 1884 contained a rallying cry: "You who live dainty and pleasant lives, reflect that your ease and luxury are paid for by the misery and want of others," a section of *Why are the Many Poor?* read. "Come out from your ease and superfluities and help us!"

In the 137 years since, many tens of thousands on the left have heeded that call. The founding members were driven by a desire to promote debate on the key issues of the day through lectures and pamphlets, and, ultimately of course to advance Fabian gradualism – 'waiting patiently as Fabius did' but when the time came 'striking hard', as that very first pamphlet put it.

Were the society's founding members to come back today, they would surely find current members share some of the same motivation for involvement as they once did, our latest members' survey suggests. "I like the opportunity to discuss and help shape left-wing policies, I like the excellent events and publications and like participating in my local society," one respondent said when asked why they were a member. "I share its ideals of equity and fairness" and "I like the commitment to evidence-based argument" were two others.

Our members, more than 550 of whom took part in the survey, were asked to choose the three things they valued best about being a Fabian. Supporting the politics and values of the society was

the top answer, cited by 58 per cent of respondents, closely followed by publications and the Fabian Review (55 per cent) and then supporting the society's research and advocacy (41 per cent).

Some 77 per cent of members who responded felt that membership represented good value for money – although 16 per cent either agreed or tended to agree that the cost of membership excluded too many. As for our influence, 57 per cent agreed the society was effective at influencing political and public debate, while just over 70 per cent felt we had an influential relationship with the Labour leadership.

Members think the top priority of our work should be supporting Labour to win the next election, with the second most popular priority securing the adoption of Fabian policy proposals in the next Labour manifesto. These priorities will be reflected in our 2021–2024 strategy, which will be focused around four objectives: supporting Labour to win the next election; securing the adoption of policy proposals and perspectives in the Labour manifesto and Labour policy platforms; helping to build a strong, united and diverse Labour movement; and strengthening the capabilities, activism and reach of the society.

Politically, the society seems to be getting the balance right: 4 per cent think our programme is too left-wing and 13 per cent too right-wing compared with 83 per cent who believe it is about right. Unsurprisingly,

perhaps, two-thirds of respondents voted for Keir Starmer in the last leadership election, with nearly 18 per cent backing Lisa Nandy and over 6 per cent Rebecca Long-Bailey. But it is clear the society continues to be a broad church: when asked to name the Labour figure who best represents their views, answers ranged from Tony Blair to Jeremy Corbyn, with Gordon Brown, Harold Wilson, Tony Crosland, Barbara Castle, Nye Bevan and Michael Foot all getting at least one namecheck alongside current Labour party figures such as Starmer, Nandy, Anneliese Dodds, Yvette Cooper and David Lammy.

The members' survey is designed to inform our work and the society staff team are looking at responses to see how we can best meet members' expectations. We know there is scope to do more to improve diversity and to ensure members can participate: 60 per cent of respondents would like to get more involved in the work of the society. This past year has of course been marked by the Covid-19 pandemic and many members have welcomed the chance to attend events online which they might not have been able to attend in person in normal times because of their location. As one respondent put it: "Without losing the energy of in-person events such as the New Year conference, consider keeping virtual conferences as a way of having more people involved." **F**

*The full survey results are available on the Fabian Society website at [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)*

# Listings

## ANNOUNCEMENT

### Fabian Society events

Due to Covid-19, all Fabian Society events are still being held online. Keep an eye on our website for news of up-to-date activities and contact your local society for ways to stay involved.

### BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS

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

### BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

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

### BRIGHTON & HOVE

Contact Stephen Ottaway [stephenottaway1@gmail.com](mailto:stephenottaway1@gmail.com) for details

### CENTRAL LONDON

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

### CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

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

### COLCHESTER

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

### COUNTY DURHAM

Contact Professor Alan Townsend 01388 746479

### CROYDON & SUTTON

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

### ENFIELD FABIANS

Contact Andrew Gilbert at [enfieldfabians@gmail.com](mailto:enfieldfabians@gmail.com)

### FINCHLEY

Contact Sam Jacobs Sam at [Jacobs@netapp.com](mailto:Jacobs@netapp.com)

### HAVERING

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

### HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

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

### NEWHAM

Contact Mike Reader at [mike.reader99@gmail.com](mailto:mike.reader99@gmail.com)

### NORTHUMBRIA AREA

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

### PETERBOROUGH

Usual Venue: 20:00 at Dragonfly Hotel, Thorpe Meadows, PE3 6GA. Contact: Brian Keegan [brian@keeganpeterborough.co.uk](mailto:brian@keeganpeterborough.co.uk)

### READING & DISTRICT

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

### RUGBY

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

### SOUTH TYNESIDE

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

### SUFFOLK

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

### TONBRIDGE & TUNBRIDGE WELLS

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

### WALSALL

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

### YORK & DISTRICT

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

## FABIAN QUIZ

### THE PARTITION IRELAND DIVIDED, 1885–1925

*Charles Townshend*



In the aftermath of the horrors of the Irish Famine, the grim, distrustful relationship

between Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom deteriorated into a generations-long argument about 'home rule'. The unprecedented nature of the Irish problem – with most Irish people wanting to break away from the world's largest Empire – made it extraordinarily difficult for either side to come up with a compromise.

Here, Charles Townshend gives a compelling history of the turbulent journey to Irish independence and the creation of the state of Northern Ireland.

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

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

*In what year was Ireland partitioned?*

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

**ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN 28 MAY 2021**



# Fabian membership + donation

For members who are in a position to give more to the society we offer three tiers of membership plus donation:



## **COLE membership plus donation – £10 / month**

All the benefits of standard membership plus: a Fabian Society branded canvas bag; a free ticket to either our new year or summer conference; invitation to an annual drinks reception; and regular personal updates from the general secretary.

## **CROSLAND membership plus donation – £25 / month**

All the benefits of COLE plus: free tickets to all Fabian events; a printed copy of every Fabian report, sent to your home; and invitations to political breakfasts with leading figures on the left.



## **WEBB membership plus donation – £50 / month**

All the benefits of CROSLAND plus: regular personal updates from leading Fabian parliamentarians; an annual dinner with the general secretary and Fabian parliamentarians; and special acknowledgement as a patron in our annual report and on our website.

For more information & to donate visit [fabians.org.uk/donate](https://fabians.org.uk/donate)