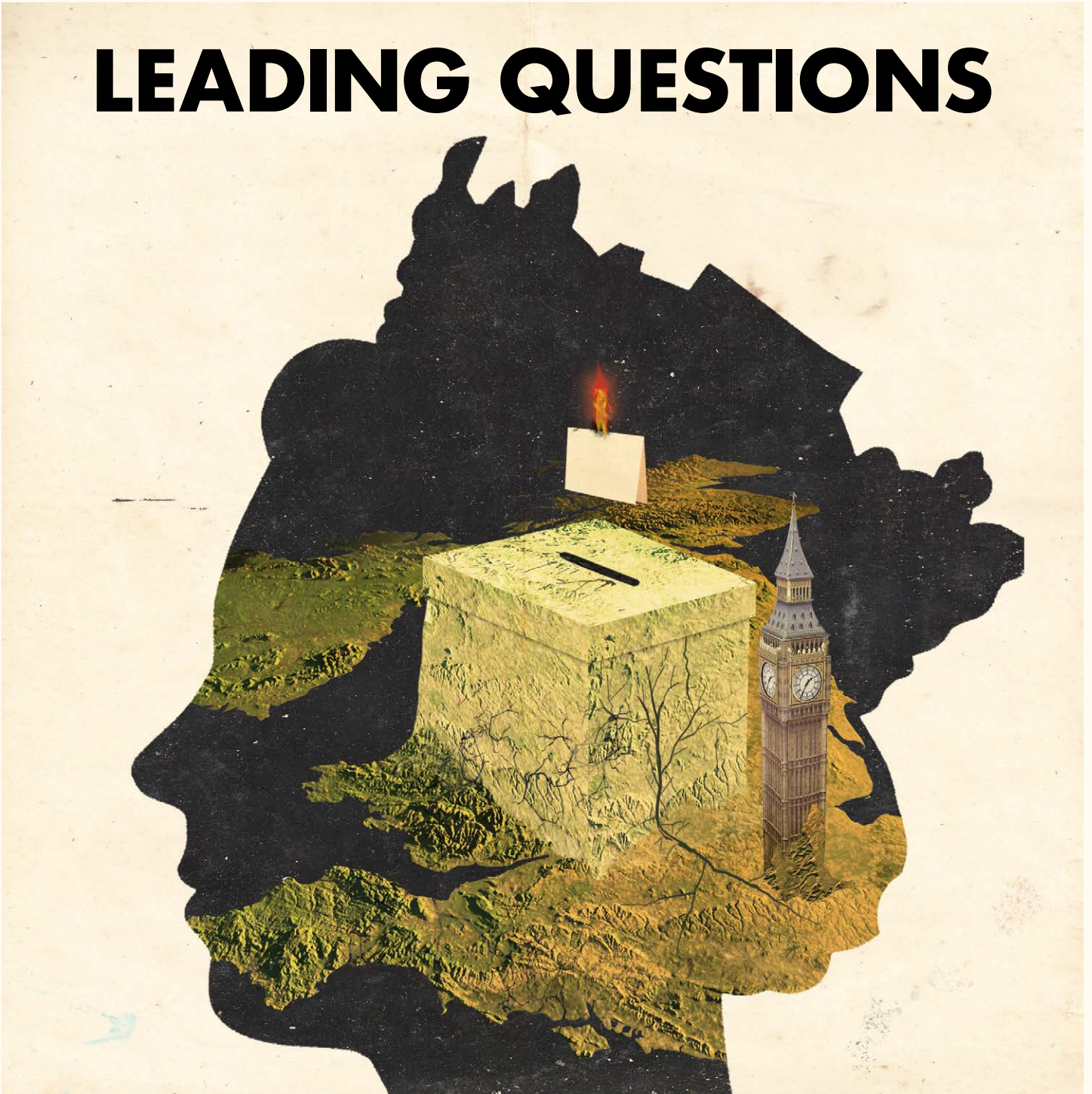


FABIAN REVIEW

The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society

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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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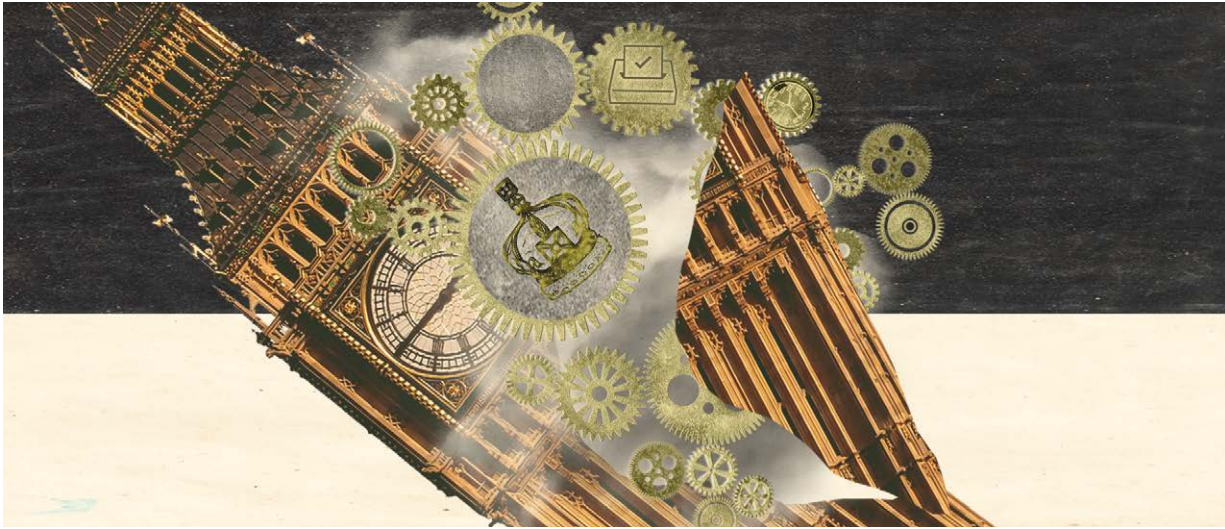
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Clear red water

In stark contrast to the conduct of this woeful government, Labour must promise integrity, openness and the sharing of power, writes *Andrew Harrop*

LABOUR'S VICTORY IN the Batley and Spen by-election was a really welcome fillip half-way through a challenging year for the British left.

The party's electoral and polling performance in 2021 has shown that the political realignment created by Brexit will not unwind fast. It is clear that past support for Labour cannot simply be reclaimed with the switch to a less extreme, more credible top team.

Some of the headwinds facing Labour this year will recede. The government's success in delivering first Brexit and then 80 million vaccines was always going to boost support for the Conservatives in the short term. These achievements will fade in the rear-view mirror as future elections loom.

But Labour cannot simply stand back and wait for political gravity, counting on people to turn against the venality and lies of the Johnson administration. The party's attacks on this woeful government need more energy and cut-through. And Labour needs to say what it is for, not just what it is against.

It starts with values. Keir Starmer is right to promise a unifying, bridge-building politics, that emphasises British decency, tolerance and solidarity as a counter to the deliberate divisiveness of the Tory culture wars. In this he can conjure the inclusive, progressive patriotism of the England football team. Batley and Spen was a petri dish for an approach Labour needs to make work everywhere, to bring together the disparate voting coalition it needs to win.

The party must promise integrity, openness and the sharing of power. Just offering a change of personnel is not enough. It needs to pledge a fundamental rewiring of how power in Britain works with big institutional changes, from the constraint and oversight of ministerial conduct to a new principle of bottom-up self-government that irreversibly transfers power to nations, regions, cities and towns.

In normal times, promises of political reform are barely noticed by most voters. But as a rebuttal to Johnson they can have purchase, and Labour needs to show how it will cleanse the stench of Tory abuse of power.

The promise of large-scale institutional reform will also help signal that a Labour government will bring big change. But that must only be the start. The party also needs to show that voting Labour will significantly improve the economic and social fabric of the country.

Labour must create clear red water not just because Starmer needs to sharpen the contrast he presents to Johnson, but because the challenges facing post-pandemic Britain are so great. This is not the time for small gestures and statements of intent, but bold, comprehensive solutions commensurate to the scale of each challenge.

The party's plans must always sound practical and problem-focused not ideological or extreme, but they must go further than the Tories could ever reach. Every idea for reform must pass a double test: that it will reequip the country for the future and give everyone a more equal chance in life.

That means a green and digital economy that leaves no one behind, with zero-carbon homes and digital connections a right for all. It means a fundamental change to education, from the nursery to the workplace, to create the breadth and depth of learning the nation needs. And it means a new crusade for good physical and mental health, where the whole of government works to equalise and extend good wellbeing and years of health.

Labour's offer must be of renewed security and opportunity for all. It must present serious answers to the housing crisis facing the young, the pension crisis facing the middle-aged and the care crisis facing the old. It needs to tell a story of how everyone's working lives will change for the better, with more rights, flexibility and power in the workplace; and with more protection from risk, by transforming temporary Covid-19 interventions into permanent new social institutions that offer meaningful security for all.

The clock is ticking because big solutions take time to create and time to spell out in public. Labour needs to start explaining how it will shape post-pandemic Britain. **F**

Shortcuts



DEEDS NOT WORDS

We must all play our part on climate change—*Darren Jones MP*

In recent years, the politics of climate action have changed beyond recognition. Labour led the way with the Climate Change Act and the Department for Energy and Climate Change. We have now been out of power for too long, but in that time, we have seen an increase in decarbonisation targets and policy announcements from ministers. The problem? The Conservatives are failing miserably at turning policy announcements into real change.

It is all well and good to set a net zero target in law, but if we continue to fall behind each year on our carbon budgets, then what is the point? It is all well and good to announce major policy documents – from the energy white paper to the industrial decarbonisation strategy – but if there is no real funding, no clear strategy on jobs and skills and no actual output, then what is the point?

Boris Johnson says he understands this, having been at pains to stress the momentousness of COP26 – the UN climate summit to which Britain will play host in November – and the high stakes of success. The conference will, he has vowed, be a time of “agreement, of action; of deeds, not words”. Developed nations must, he says, seize the opportunity to “kickstart a green industrial revolution, and build economies that withstand whatever our changing climate throws at us”.

Even for those of us appropriately sceptical about the prime minister’s motives, and jaded by years of agonisingly slow progress, Johnson is right to recognise the crucial importance of COP26. Net zero targets in the 2050s or 2060s are welcome, but if we are going to get anywhere near limiting global temperature growth to 1.5 degrees then we need to see radical action in this decade. COP26 must conclude with bold,

progressive climate action plans or the conference will be a failure.

For the Conservatives, the gap between rhetoric and reality at home risks our leadership abroad. The abandonment of the green homes grant, which aimed to upgrade 600,000 homes but was scrapped in April this year after enabling fewer than 6,000 installations, typifies the haphazardness of the current approach. It is only the tip of the iceberg. We have seen months of mixed messages over whether to approve construction of a new coal mine, the paring back of electric vehicle incentives, continued support for new oil and gas exploration; a farcically delayed heat and buildings strategy; and in May, news that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs – which has direct oversight over a tenth of UK emissions – is not only behind the curve on its obligations to decarbonise but has no plans to get on track.

What is required is a coherent whole-of-government approach, but the experience to date is of a maddening lack of seriousness and coordination. I want to take the prime minister at his word that he has found religion on the need to decarbonise, but real progress cannot be achieved by sheer force of ego – not least when he constantly refuses to convene and chair the Cabinet Office committee he set up to lead decarbonisation across government.

The Conservatives are, at heart, free marketeers. They think that making an announcement sets a direction for the free market to travel towards. They then stand back and assume the state has no role to play. This is why they are failing.

Britain’s relative success in bringing down emissions in recent decades has largely come about out of sight, as a function of the phase out of coal power plants and Labour’s successful market interventions on solar and wind power. Our next priorities – decarbonising transport and heating and helping industry decarbonise – will require state intervention and political leadership that brings the public with us.

Here especially, Labour must embrace its instinctive commitment to economic justice. We understand that ensuring a just transition means not only concentrating jobs and training in hard-hit sectors and left-behind regions, but also ensuring that the consumption changes necessary to achieving net zero are evenly borne. That

should spur rather than limit our ambition, for instance by underpinning a more ambitious and more targeted framework of energy-efficiency subsidies to enable those in the poorest-quality housing to bring down their energy bills.

The climate change committee estimates that meeting our legal obligations will require a fivefold increase in investment by the decade’s end. The parallel imperative of sustaining the recovery without locking in carbon-intensive choices raises the stakes still further. Spending taxpayers money wisely – something the Conservative party seems to have forgotten about – and creating business models to incentive private finance are key.

At the moment the government is failing its own tests, but its success and ours will be measured in decisions made during this parliament. Decarbonisation is a global priority and Britain must play her part. But we will fail unless we use the strategic power of the state, both at national and local level, well – both to win the support of the people for the change ahead and in delivering that change. **F**

Darren Jones is Labour MP for Bristol North West and the chair of the House of Commons business, energy and industrial strategy committee



MISSED OPPORTUNITY

The pandemic saw rough sleepers helped off the street, but not for long—*Pawda Tjoa*

For many homeless people, the pandemic was a moment of respite. In March 2020, the government’s Everyone In scheme required local authorities to provide emergency accommodation to everyone experiencing homelessness and committed £3.2m to that end. Local authorities and their partners worked rapidly, moving around 90 per cent of rough sleepers into

hotels and other temporary accommodation in a matter of days.

Everyone In, and its July follow-up Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP), have been crucial in preventing people from returning to the streets. A count in London showed that the number of people sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2020 was down by 37 per cent from 2019.

But while these were successful in the short term, they were temporary interventions with narrow sets of goals, primarily aimed at protecting people from Covid-19. For many in local government who have seen the damaging effect of austerity on their ability to meet local needs, they represent a missed opportunity to tackle homelessness once and for all.

Everyone In can still teach us valuable lessons. Importantly, the scheme helped expose the real extent of homelessness. The public accounts committee found that the number of people who received help through the scheme was almost nine times higher than the official number of rough sleepers recorded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. This suggests that prior to the pandemic, only a fraction of the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness were eligible for any help under the official definition of vulnerability.

The true scale of rough sleeping that became evident during the pandemic should be a wake-up call to the government. If it is as serious as it says it is about ending all rough sleeping by May 2024, it must first acknowledge the true extent of the problem. This must include widening the definition of vulnerability to capture everyone who needs help – a necessary first step taken by some Labour councils, including Calderdale.

The Everyone In scheme also demonstrated that rough sleeping can be eradicated rapidly, with enough will, resources and determination. With a clear collective goal, local authorities and voluntary organisations were able to work quickly to house everyone – regardless of immigration – status in the span of just a few days.

Once people were moved into temporary accommodation, they were able to receive specialist services around addiction, mental health and employment in a safe environment. People registered with a GP for the very first time and had access to regular clinics organised by district nurses. This holistic, multi-agency approach was the beginning of something transformative in the lives of many people.

Many Labour-led councils are seeking to embed these benefits. Newcastle is

planning to retain its multi-disciplinary panels which have supported people with complex needs and successfully prevented them from going into crisis accommodation. Likewise, Calderdale is continuing with its multi-agency public health approach which has helped people overcome long-term addictions. In Southend, the council offered to pay initial rent and act as contact for people ready to move from temporary to permanent housing. Plymouth's 'reset' strategy for a post-Covid-19 service model will include bringing in additional multiple-occupancy properties.

But since the funding for Everyone In and NSAP dried up, many local authorities are no longer able to provide the same level of support. Inevitably, people with no recourse to public funds have been the first to receive eviction notices. This is a particular challenge in more urban areas with larger proportions of rough sleepers with unclear immigration statuses. In response, leaders in Greater Manchester have called for the eviction ban to be extended. In Birmingham, the council has continued to accommodate those with no recourse to public funds at its own expense.

But not all councils are able to do the same. Local authorities and their partners continue to grapple with the complexity of homelessness and its long-term impact on local communities.

Everyone In could have been a game-changer. It showed what was possible when the local ecosystem of support works effectively together towards a common goal, with the full backing of central government. The government could have maximised this momentum by continuing with its initial commitment of funding combined with a sustainable long-term strategy. Instead, one-off schemes like Everyone In will be inadequate in sustaining reductions in rough

sleeping numbers. It will be remembered as yet another half-hearted attempt to tackle homelessness.

The number of people at risk of homelessness is expected to skyrocket given the economic impact of the pandemic. Without more commitment from central government, we could see more and more people returning to the street, reversing the progress made during the pandemic and harming the life chances of many. **F**

Dr Pawda Tjoa is senior policy researcher at New Local



A FUTILE WAR

We need to rethink our approach to drugs—*Marvin Rees*

Prussian field marshal Von Moltke once said: "No battle plan survives first contact with the enemy." It means we must be able to adapt. But after half a century of fighting the 'war on drugs' with one strategy, we are locked in a battle of attrition which costs lives, millions of pounds in enforcement, incarcerates thousands (disproportionately from Black, Brown and low-income communities), with no clear idea of what victory would even look like.

The Misuse of Drugs Act was passed in 1971 and, with minor changes in 2001, is still the basis of policing drugs in the UK. Given how society and cultural views have progressed since the early 1970s it must be time to start a conversation about our attitudes and approach, to ensure evidence leads our debate, and those who lead on delivery are placed in the heart of the conversation.

Right now, there are an estimated 5,000 users of opiates and crack cocaine in Bristol, almost double the national average. I have seen how people I went to school with have had their lives destroyed at both ends of the supply chain, either locked in prison or trapped in cycles of addiction. Both outcomes are usually a result of desperation and a lack of opportunity to break out of inner-city poverty.

Fundamentally an approach that treats addiction solely as a criminal issue and



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does not take account of it as a medical issue is not working. While the criminal justice system creaks under the weight of the demands placed on it by the current approach, the results often do not allow us to reduce harm or bring about justice but instead further marginalise communities.

Repeated reports into drug policing conclude that the enforcement of drug laws unfairly targets Black and Asian communities, despite their rates of drug use being lower than among the white majority. And it is well known that middle-class users are treated differently from those in the supply chains who produce, smuggle and launder the product and profits.

Given the damage drugs cause to individual users, to communities and to people through the supply chains, we must make harm reduction the focus of any policy change. We cannot allow this debate to become a rush to be seen as the most draconian in response, another 'Red Wall' test or fodder in the culture wars. Instead, we should conduct a cool-headed, evidence-led assessment of the harm drugs, and current policies, actually do. Bringing more views and experiences around the table would be a start, especially from the professionals in police, health, the courts, community organisations and addiction services.

We also have an opportunity to include cities and other communities in that conversation. It is in these spaces that health services work with police and communities to look at the impact the rhetoric around the war on drugs has in practice. A place-based approach would allow us to hold the honest conversations we need about drug policy and policing in the UK.

There are no easy solutions to addiction and its consequences, however there are pragmatic steps that can be taken to reduce harm. In the vacuum left by national politics, cities want to step forward and find solutions. Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, pledged to set up an independent London drugs commission to examine the potential health, economic and criminal justice benefits of decriminalising cannabis.

And in Bristol we continue to take a pioneering approach to drugs policy within the current limits. When pandemic restrictions allow events and festivals to return to our city, we intend to continue the work we started in 2018, as the first UK city to facilitate on-site drug testing services to reduce the number of medical emergencies.

We are also committed to lobbying the government to allow the pilot of safe drug

consumption rooms as part of the approach to help addicts rebuild their lives.

Experts view drug consumption rooms as a way of bringing users into contact with services that can then begin to proactively build relationships and help navigate people to pathways away from dependency and rebuild their lives and human relationships.

Where people do continue to use drugs or alcohol, we will use the best available evidence to reduce harm and provide appropriate support, recognising the importance of working with families and wider communities to ensure the services we provide are more than just a sticking plaster.

Of course, in our drugs and alcohol policy approach in Bristol we remain committed to the principles of prevention, early intervention and recovery. To reduce the harm drugs cause in the UK, we need to take forward a similar approach to address the causes of drug use. The first step will be the government admitting we have a problem. **F**

Marvin Rees is mayor of Bristol



POLICING HISTORY

Labour must go further in the fight against institutional racism — *Meghan Tinsley*

Earlier this year, thousands of people marched through central London to protest over the proposed police, crime, sentencing and courts bill. The crowd made their way down Park Lane, past Buckingham Palace, and on to Parliament Square. As police encroached on the crowd to clear a path for traffic, clashes broke out, and police pepper sprayed several protesters. Then riot police pushed through the crowd and marched into the square, forming a protective circle around the statue of Winston Churchill. Why did the police devote so many resources to protecting a statue? And what did this have to do with the bill the crowd was protesting against?

The police, crime, sentencing and courts (PCSC) bill threatens to infringe upon the right to peaceful assembly. In particular, Clauses 54 and 55 would empower police

to intervene in a protest if 'the noise generated ... may result in serious disruption' to a nearby organisation, or if they determined that the noise was causing 'serious unease, alarm, or distress' to people in the vicinity. That the bill was tabled in the wake of the largest anti-racist movement in Britain since abolition is no accident: the home secretary had described the Black Lives Matter protests as 'dreadful', and had condemned the toppling of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol as 'mob rule'. Indeed, Clause 59 of the bill increases the maximum penalty for damaging a statue from three months to 10 years.

Protecting the Churchill statue signalled that the government was committed to propping up a particular narrative of history. Actively restricting the right to protest – in particular, to alter statues – revealed that history is neither singular nor settled. Rather, our relationship to the past continues to shape the present. Only by engaging with the past may we overcome the ongoing violence of institutional racism and coloniality in the present.

The Black Lives Matter movement is, at its core, about racism and state violence. The people who took to the streets in the hundreds of thousands last summer did so not only in solidarity with African-Americans, but also to proclaim that 'the UK is not innocent'. They highlighted the names of Black Britons who had died in police custody – Rashan Charles, Sean Rigg, Sara Reed. They also called on the government to remember the history of the British Empire, and to teach that history in schools. These demands must be taken together: remembering that the British Empire at its height spanned four continents, and encompassed one quarter of the world's population, lays bare the lie that Britain is historically a 'white' country.

Further, remembering that Britain conquered and ruled its empire through brutal violence, from the suppression of the Morant Bay rebellion to the aftermath of the Mau Mau uprising, demonstrates that violence against Black and minority ethnic people is a longstanding practice of the British state. The fact that Black people in Britain today are disproportionately represented in stop and search, arrests, prison sentences, and deaths in custody cannot be understood separately from imperial history. In order to oppose contemporary institutional racism, we must engage critically with empire and its legacies.

The PCSC bill does the opposite: it actively criminalises people who engage critically with the past. Rather

than reckoning critically with the scale of the slave trade and its legacies for British institutions, the government claims that ‘we cannot edit our past’. Rather than researching the links of historical figures to slavery and empire, the government reduces them to statues who must be revered. And rather than listening to Black Lives Matter activists, the government dismisses them as ‘thugs and criminals’.

In this context, there should be no question about Labour’s opposition to the PCSC bill. To oppose this bill is to reject the government’s attempt to replace critical history with a contrived culture war.

Yet Labour must go further: engaging with empire and its legacies must entail actively supporting and listening to anti-racist social movements, like Black Lives Matter, which link past and present. Labour should call for reform of the history curriculum so that every student learns the history of the British Empire, including the state violence that maintained it. And Labour should encourage the initiatives to engage critically with the past that have proliferated in Labour-led councils, from London’s commission on diversity in the public realm to Manchester’s Histories, Stories, Voices.

The police, crime, sentencing and courts bill is part of a larger government effort to impose a narrow, ahistorical understanding of Britain’s past and present – and, by extension, a narrow understanding of who has the right to belong. To counter the violence of this narrative in the present, Labour must engage with history in its messy totality. **F**

Meghan Tinsley is presidential fellow in ethnicity and inequalities at the University of Manchester



RIDING ROUGHSHOD

Britain is failing in its duty to protect refugees—*Bell Ribeiro-Addy MP*

The Conservative party has reached new lows in its treatment of people fleeing persecution, conflict, poverty and climate breakdown during the pandemic. Whether it was sending gunboats after people in dinghies, holding asylum seekers in squalid barracks-style accommodation, or rolling back international refugee conventions, one thing is clear: this government is willing to go one step further than its predecessors in order to make life difficult for migrants and refugees.

The government is right that our asylum system is broken. But the answer is not to keep hammering away at it with the same broken policies. The publication of the Windrush Lessons Learned review at the start of the pandemic should have been a time for reflection on how to keep the most vulnerable safe, remove barriers to support and implement adequate protections. But instead of this, the Home Office has been doubling down on past mistakes. Nothing better exemplifies this than its treatment of the most vulnerable categories of migrants: refugees and trafficking victims.

The Conservatives’ new plan for immigration, announced in March, is inhumane and impractical and will do nothing to address the channel crossings which it supposedly aims to end. More border controls only mean a bigger market for people-smuggling and trafficking. If the government is serious about putting people smugglers out of business, it must open up safe and legal routes for refugees to travel to the UK.

Among the 4,695 confirmed foreign victims of trafficking between 2016 and 2019, just 28 children have been granted leave to remain, and while the Home Office refuses to list how many more of these individuals are minors, it could be as many as half. This rings further alarm bells about the human rights implications of the push to deport, which is placing children in harm’s way and at serious risk of being re-exploited.

Lockdown has been hard for everyone, but it was incredibly dangerous for victims of modern slavery, placing them at heightened risk of exploitation. At a time when the government should be taking extra precautions to safeguard the most vulnerable, it has chosen to punish those it has a duty to protect. And for too long, charities have had to plug the gaps left by a decade of cuts to the services that refugees and trafficking victims rely on. Because of the pandemic, these same charities have seen their incomes slashed, whilst often facing increased demand. There is a serious risk of people slipping through the frayed safety net.

As Public Health England’s post-mortem of unequal health outcomes notes, the hostile environment is particularly harmful to undocumented immigrants, unsuccessful asylum seekers and also settled Black, Asian and minority ethnic populations, who are often mistakenly persecuted under its key provisions. The government was warned by medical professionals, including the British Medical Association and Doctors of the World, that data sharing, charging and immigration checks would deter vulnerable people from seeking healthcare, and that is exactly what has happened.

Research from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants reports that almost half of all migrants surveyed expressed reservations about accessing healthcare if they got ill during the pandemic. It is a similar picture when it comes to the Covid-19 vaccination, and another driving factor behind the lower uptake rates among Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities.



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We need to recognise that the hostile environment casts a long shadow over our public services. Remedying this means addressing the deep-seated reasons that migrant communities have been alienated from our public services, and taking steps to right this wrong.

Against an uncaring government reneging on its international duties and riding roughshod over human rights, Labour needs to make a strong humanitarian case for universal protection and remind people that the only thing separating us from migrants is an accident of birth.

The scenes earlier this year of solidarity in Glasgow, where hundreds of people stopped a deportation, should hearten everyone interested in building a fairer immigration system, rooted in evidence and compassion. We must be part of the fight for a progressive immigration system which genuinely reflects our country's economic needs, upholds human rights and ensures migrants are supported and employed on equal terms with everyone else.

The toxic debate surrounding immigration has meant that there are increasingly fewer people in positions of power willing to speak up for the most vulnerable in our society. Now more than ever, as countries around the world retreat back behind their own borders, migrants need a Labour party that stands up for their rights too. **F**

Bell Ribeiro-Addy is Labour MP for Streatham



LANGUAGE MATTERS

How we frame the fight against inequality is important —
Rachel Hesketh and Bobby Duffy

It is by now very clear that, as far as the Covid-19 pandemic goes, we are not 'all in this together'. Different groups within society have been affected in very different ways by the crisis and its wider social and economic effects. Underlying patterns of inequality in Britain have been revealed and reinforced, and perhaps, are becoming harder to ignore.

It is in the context of the Covid-19 crisis that we explored how people in Britain

think and feel about inequalities. Do we believe we live in an unequal society, and, if we do, is this a problem to us? Which types of inequality concern us most? How much do these views vary across the population, including between supporters of different parties?

It is clear that the public believe Britain to be an unequal society and are uncomfortable with this. A majority of us (62 per cent) believe that Britain was an unequal society before the coronavirus crisis hit, and a similar proportion (63 per cent) believe it will be unequal after it has passed.

Attitudes to inequality are one of the fundamental building blocks of party identity in the UK, where the economic left-right split has helped define party positions. It is no surprise then that Labour voters are more sensitive to it – 79 per cent believe the country was unequal before the crisis, and 81 per cent think it will be unequal after it.

As well as being aware of the existence of inequality, the British public are also uncomfortable with it. When asked for their views about income differentials between high and low earners in Britain today, over 80 per cent said the gap between rich and poor was too large, rising to 91 per cent of Labour voters. Vanishingly few of us – around 1 per cent – believe this gap to be too small.

But we are not equally concerned about all types of inequality.

When presented with different forms of inequality and asked to select which are most serious in Britain today, inequalities between more and less deprived areas, and those in income and wealth, come out as being of the greatest concern – each selected by around 60 per cent of people.

The extent of concern with place-based inequalities and left-behind areas is perhaps surprising, but it underscores the resonance of the government's 'levelling up' messaging in the eyes of the public irrespective of their political views – this is one area where Labour and Conservative supporters are highly aligned. The Labour party therefore needs to engage seriously with the aims of the levelling up agenda, finding its own take on an issue crucial to many of its current and potential supporters.

People express less concern about inequalities between groups with different characteristics: 45 per cent of people chose inequalities between racial or ethnic groups as being among the most serious in Britain, while fewer still cited inequalities between men and women (28 per cent) or between older and younger generations (22 per cent) as key issues.

And while more likely to express concern about racial inequalities than the average respondent, Labour voters were similarly unlikely as the population overall to consider gender and generational inequalities to be among the serious types of inequality in Britain.

Yet the findings show that we do not necessarily want the government to intervene to address inequality.

While most of us consider income gaps in Britain to be too high, only around half of people agree that the government should redistribute income from the better off to the less well-off, while a quarter disagree. But Labour voters feel rather differently from the average respondent – almost three-quarters agree with redistribution, including almost 40 per cent who strongly agree with this.

What we do see, however, are signs that how policy is framed matters: 62 per cent of people agree with the government 'taking measures' to reduce differences in income levels, indicating a latent support for action to address inequality, and perhaps some nervousness about the term 'redistribution'. This change of framing is also persuasive to some Labour voters – more than 80 per cent support government efforts to tackle inequality when framed in this way, slightly higher than the proportion which supports them when described as redistribution. Language matters, and in a society that still starts from a strong belief in meritocracy, where hard work brings success, a more nuanced set of measures will appeal more generally.

The pandemic has provided a good basis to start these conversations about longer term measures: 45 per cent of people believe that the support provided by the government during the crisis strengthens the case for a more active role for government in the economy in the future, while 36 per cent believe the kind of intervention we have seen during the crisis should be a one off. For Labour voters, the question is less polarising – 63 per cent believe the case for more state intervention has been made, while 19 per cent view the crisis as an exception.

But many other findings in the study do not suggest a sea-change in attitudes, because our views of inequality, and how government should respond, are so tied up in personal values and political identities. The door is opening for a more meaningful discussion, but first we need to listen carefully. **F**

Rachel Hesketh is research associate and Bobby Duffy is director at the Policy Institute, King's College London



A right royal debate

Is it time for Labour to get behind moves to scrap the monarchy in favour of an elected head of state? *Kenneth Morgan*, who led a Fabian commission on the monarchy back in 2003, assesses the party's attitudes past, present and future



Kenneth Morgan is a Labour peer and former university vice-chancellor in Wales

LABOUR'S REACTION TO the death of the Duke of Edinburgh was quietist and predictable. His outdated, post-imperialist – and sometimes racist – opinions of other people were presented as an endearing eccentricity from a universally popular grandfather of the nation. Labour made itself part of a kind of benign centrism towards the monarchy. It was startlingly different from earlier days, when the opinions of Labour socialists on the constitution were seen as extremist, and even mad.

The first leader of the party, Keir Hardie, embodied this judgement in a famous, perhaps notorious, speech in the House of Commons in April 1894. The occasion was a Commons motion which congratulated the Crown on the birth of a new royal grandchild – the future Edward VIII – but ignored the deaths of 251 Welsh miners in a pit explosion in Cilfynydd in the Taff valley. Hardie pulled no punches: “The life of one Welsh miner is of greater commercial and moral value to the British nation than the whole royal crowd put together.” Such language caused a sensation in Westminster. Hardie's republicanism, more than his pacifism or socialism, tarred his reputation for life. He returned to the theme later, when he condemned the King's voyage down the Baltic in July 1908 to visit the Tsar of Russia, virtually condoning the Tsar's atrocities in suppressing the Russian Duma (parliament). The King reacted by withdrawing Hardie's name from those eligible to attend royal garden parties – events which it is inconceivable that Hardie would ever have attended.

Thereafter, attacks on members of the royal family by prominent Labour figures virtually disappeared, amid the unifying patriotic pressures of the first world war. In 1924, Ramsay MacDonald did keep the old East End leftist, George Lansbury, out of the first Labour government for his flippant remarks about the sad fate of Charles I in 1649: “One King who stood up against the common people of the day and lost his head – lost it really,” he said, and was met with laughter and cheers.

The post-war atmosphere generated a far broader respect for the monarchy. After the collapse of other royal

houses elsewhere, the newly christened House of Windsor emerged in almost solitary dignity. Important to this was King George V, the maker of modern British kingship, refusing to give refuge to Russia's Tsar after the revolution (he was then of course murdered). The King took another important decision – to have a more tranquil relationship with his own people, combining life on the grouse moors with turning the monarchy into a more accessible institution with which the people could identify. Thus, George V was the first monarch to attend the popular festival of the FA Cup Final.

A potentially dangerous political intervention came in August 1931 with King George's initiative ranging a multi-party coalition, a self-styled ‘national government’, against a divided Labour party deeply hostile to its leader, Ramsay MacDonald. The subsequent general election in October saw the parliamentary Labour party collapse from 287 to 52 and MacDonald's reputation in his former party was henceforth one of clandestine treachery. Nevertheless, despite these events, the King and Queen Mary stayed personally popular while MacDonald remained prime minister for a further four years.

The monarchy was not only popular constitutionally, but also inextricably tied up with the personality of the monarch. Nothing showed this more clearly than the abdication crisis of 1936. Edward VIII's free-spending lifestyle did not go down well with Labour MPs, many of them reared in the ethos of the nonconformist chapels and morally disapproving of how the new monarch conducted himself. So much now depended on the personal respect shown to an increasingly marginalised Crown. This hostility reached a climax when Edward VIII chose to give up the crown to marry an American divorcee. This public disapproval proved to be a mercy when the newly created Duke of Windsor, as titled after his abdication, turned up at Nazi rallies in Germany and was photographed giving Adolf Hitler the Nazi salute.

The Labour party's erstwhile republicanism dwindled to zero during the second world war when the Battle of

Britain and the rhetoric of ‘fighting alone’ created a new, more deeply rooted patriotism. The monarchy had long been largely excluded from Labour’s far from radical constitutional policies; socialist ideologues such as Hugh Dalton skirted around the issue without analysis. During the second world war, the Army Bureau of Current Affairs booklets simultaneously celebrated both the left-wing levellers and ‘the Crown in parliament’ as part of the British way of life which the war was defending. That was what we were fighting for. But nothing added to the popularity of the diffident George VI and his Queen, Elizabeth, more than the latter’s comment that, “we can now look the East End in the face,” when Buckingham palace was bombed during the blitz. This created the basis of a lifelong personal affection for the Windsor family among the public, as did photos of the young princess Elizabeth, equipped with spanners, repairing army convoys in the auxiliary territorial service. For the first time in history, it looked like a popular – almost populist – monarchy, and memories of wartime afterwards served to shore it up at times of tabloid criticism. The Queen’s highly effective speech during the Covid-19 pandemic last year cited the celebrated ballad of the centenarian Dame Vera Lynn, *We’ll Meet Again*. She had joined the Queen Mother as an icon of the blitz.

For close political analysts, it was no surprise when the ‘people’s war’ led to a Labour landslide in the post-war general election, a people’s peace indeed. A national upsurge of interest in equality, the NHS, planning, a Commonwealth to replace the empire (which ended formally in 1947) and a revived sense of common citizenship were staples of the post-war democratic mood.

In Britain, the Crown was not controversial. Major crises over decades, such as the invasions of Suez and Iraq, economic crashes, rows over Europe and the possible break-up of the United Kingdom following a growing Scottish nationalism, did not affect the Crown, which remained not merely impartial but perhaps peripheral to these moments of crisis.

A succession of conformist Labour leaders – Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson, James Callaghan, Tony Blair, even the venerable leftist Michael Foot – also enjoyed close relationships with their sovereign. The Queen Mother personally approved Foot’s alleged ‘donkey jacket’ at the Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. This warmth from Labour’s leaders towards the monarch was rightly stressed in the popular play *The Queen*, which recognised Wilson most of all.

The only Labour leader to suggest statutory changes to the monarchy was Gordon Brown. His Constitutional Reform Act of 2008 removed the criterion that overseas military and naval action must have Crown approval. The increasing centralising of government through ministerial operation of the once royal prerogative of governmental power tended to make ministers alternative targets for public criticism. It rather helped Labour that these ministers were mostly Conservatives, and that the prime ministers with whom the Queen had the coolest relationships were two Conservatives, Ted Heath and, of course, Margaret Thatcher. A third, Boris Johnson, was by far the most unpredictable.

So how should Labour shape its views on constitutional reform around the monarchy now? Is the party missing an opportunity to claim mass republican votes? My view

is emphatically not, since although the popularity of the royal family has wavered at times, there has been no serious question over the institution itself since the abdication crisis of 1936. The reputational problems the royal family has faced have been almost entirely centred on personal issues, as with Princess Diana and a succession of divorced duchesses, Camilla, Fergie, and latterly Meghan, but there has been very little constitutional argument. Instead of intelligent analysis of the purpose of the Crown, we have tabloid gossip about the personal lives of the monarchs and their spouses. The roles of the monarchy, the Crown and the royal family are hopelessly mixed up.

A major opportunity for a public debate on the monarchy came in July 2003 when I had the honour of chairing a commission on the monarchy for the Fabian Society. It did not generate much general debate because we chose not to discuss the merits of a British republic. This led to some predictable left-wing protest but our debate was largely an academic one over a written, codified constitution and the desirability of a participatory citizenship. Some big, detailed issues were raised, such as ending the royal power to make war or scrutinise foreign treaties, which was agreed by Blair when Iraq was invaded and followed over Syria, and the heir to the throne being a Roman Catholic. But sensitive issues such as taxation and the legal status of the Crown – was the Royal Art Collection the possession of the Queen as the Duke of Edinburgh once claimed? – were not widely discussed because of the general confusion between the Crown as an institution and the royal family as individuals.

Now, the future of the monarchy feels perhaps more than ever marginal to our public debate. Today, the formal powers of the Crown are minimal. And a country perhaps confronting the self-chosen isolation of Brexit, a pandemic, the possible break-up of the United Kingdom and dangerous ethnic tensions is hardly looking for further torments to pursue in the shape of a divisive abolition debate. Black Lives clearly matter, even in faraway Minneapolis, but royal lives are more marginal. This is illustrated by a glance at the different national anthems. *God Save the Queen* celebrates a family, while the Welsh anthem, *Yr Hen Wlad fy Nhadau* celebrates a people’s culture.

Labour’s main contribution to the debate on the role of the royals in the Keir Starmer era has been to emphasise British (more obviously English) patriotism. This was helpful after Jeremy Corbyn, a sectarian leader who seemed not to like his own country. But patriotism cannot be sprayed on like paint. It cannot be created artificially by mass flying of the Union flag from public buildings, nor should it be confused with attempts to reproduce the English nationalism that lay behind Brexit. Instead, Labour should aim to turn its people into devotees of democracy.

Our commission in 2003 made a practical, though piecemeal, start. Seventeen years on, its successors should focus on an expansive democratising and balancing of all our institutions, an unelected crown and upper house of the legislature, an independent judiciary, no Henry VIII prerogative powers, and perhaps federal nationhood for Scotland and Wales. Our disorganised constitution is valuable in reminding us of major features of our past. But as a substitute for real democracy it will not help our people, as it did in 1945, to face the future with confidence. ■



New foundations

Westminster isn't working. Labour must back electoral reform, writes *Justina Cruickshank*



Justina Cruickshank is vice-chair of the Electoral Reform Society. She writes in a personal capacity

THERE ARE 21 candidates, and just 43 voters. Every single one is a hereditary aristocrat. And they can pick three Lords to vote on our laws for life.

These hereditary peer by-elections are happening as I write and are one of the most visible absurdities in Britain's warped political system. But they are just the tip of the iceberg. Voters are systematically ignored in the UK – and not just through the elitist House of Lords.

It is fair to say that if, in 2021, you were sketching out the structures and features of a new democracy it would look a lot different from the one we have here in the UK.

The House of Lords is one of the only chambers in the world to have hereditary and clerical members in it by default.

In the Commons, Westminster's voting system, once exported around the world, has been wholly rejected by virtually every modern democracy anywhere, with the UK remaining the only country in Europe (except Belarus) to continue to use first past the post for its main elections.

There is a growing sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the state of our democracy. While issues of democratic reform were once seen as fringe – that in the face of more pressing issues such as the economy, the environment and affordable housing that tend to dominate the progressive agenda – the effects of our failing system are becoming ever clearer.

Polling from earlier this year for the Electoral Reform Society found that two-thirds of the public feel powerless over decision-making and think that they have little or no opportunity to influence decisions made at Westminster. And who can blame them? Across the UK, more than 22 million votes (70.8 per cent) were ignored because they went to non-elected candidates or simply added to an MP's already healthy majority.

But this is not just about statistics. This is about millions of people feeling sidelined at every election, often going decades without any representation. The phrase 'my vote

doesn't count' is a doorstep issue, and it is one that a party committed to equality needs to respond to.

The stark figures showing that the public feel more distant from Westminster politics than ever come amid growing calls for greater decision-making powers to be given to the nations and regions of the UK – with debates on devolution continuing to rage in Scotland, Wales and England.

And the awareness of the need for democratic reform is growing within the Labour party – from Andy Burnham leading the charge for greater devolution to Greater Manchester to the formation of a Constitutional Commission, led by Gordon Brown, to set out an agenda to spread 'power, wealth and opportunity' out of Westminster.

But a fish rots from the head down. That means a commission can not simply look at off-loading powers without reforming the centre. That means building a united franchise across the UK – something those involved in the commission seem to have recognised.

In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, voters are used to their votes being genuinely reflected in fair representation. They look to Westminster, and see an unaccountable, unresponsive behemoth.

We are witnessing funding being poured into pro-union campaigns from central government – without any attempt to ask why so many Scots feel alienated in the first place. Instead, cash is doled out to a handful of swing seats.

The recent Towns Fund scandal – where ministers handpicked swing seats for millions in funds – was not an anomaly: it is a symptom of deep unease in our democracy.

Inbuilt bias

The Scottish National Party's near total domination of Scottish seats in Westminster is a prime example of how winner-takes-all politics silences voters and skews the debate. The SNP (which, to its credit, backs proportional representation) walked away with 48 out of 59 seats in

This is not just about statistics. This is about millions of people feeling sidelined at every election

2019 despite getting less than half the vote. Labour, which polled at nearly 20 per cent of the Scottish vote, was left with just one. It is proportional representation which is providing a platform for Labour to rebuild in Scotland, maintaining its voice in Holyrood while being disproportionately wiped out at Westminster.

Our current electoral system is one that hands a big advantage to the Conservatives – and will do so even more following the current boundary review. In the 2019 election, it took on average 50,835 votes to elect a Labour MP, whilst only 38,264 votes were needed to return a Conservative MP.

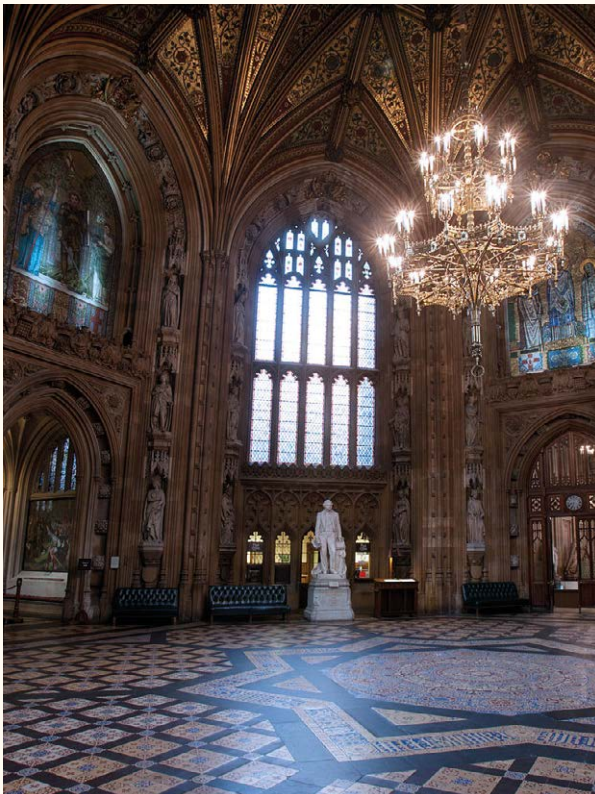
Between 2017 and 2019 the Conservatives increased their vote share by just 1.2 per cent yet gained 48 seats and walked away with a majority of 80.

First past the post is a system that works when there are only two parties – but for a long time this has not been the case.

In the last couple of years, the Conservatives have succeeded in capturing the right of the political spectrum – eating up votes that had previously gone to the Brexit party and, before it, UKIP (which, let us not forget, got nearly 4 million votes in 2015). However, Labour has not managed to do the same with left of centre votes and the ‘progressive’ side of politics remains much more fractured.

Research done before May’s local elections by Politics for the Many – the trade union campaign for political reform – found that in 85 per cent of seats up for election the number of ‘progressive’ parties (typically Labour, the Liberal Democrats or the Green party) outnumbered that of parties on the right (typically the Conservatives).

In almost half of council wards, the Conservatives were on one side and three more progressive parties in the shape of Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens were on the other.



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The very nature of our party system is itself a barrier to a more progressive politics. And unless something changes, the Conservatives will keep on winning.

A proud movement

Support for proportional representation within the Labour party has a long history. Keir Hardie backed the Electoral Reform Society (then called the Proportional Representation Society) and as early as 1913 the Independent Labour Party, one of the constituent parts of the new Labour party, passed policy in support of a proportional voting system.

Over the years, however, as Labour gained power from the current system, the pressure for reform faded away. But once again, it now feels that we are at a point in our politics where the importance and urgency for change are becoming ever clearer.

Last September saw the launch of Labour for a New Democracy – a new coalition, bringing together Labour MPs and groups such as Open Labour, Compass and the Electoral Reform Society, to build support for electoral reform within the party.

Back in 2020 during his leadership campaign Keir Starmer vowed to consult party members on electoral reform and to include it in a constitutional convention saying the party must address the fact that many people ‘feel their voice doesn’t count.’ Since then, pressure has continued to grow – from Momentum backing proportional representation earlier this year, to the Labour-affiliated trade union ASLEF in May. It is a powerful coalition for political equality.

Tory plans

In this year’s Queen’s Speech, the government unveiled plans for an electoral integrity bill to ‘protect our democracy’, including proposals to introduce mandatory photo ID at the polling station.

The plans, which will cost up to £20m per general election to implement, could see millions of people who lack ID prevented from casting their vote, while at the same time making it harder for everyone to vote.

We have also seen home secretary Priti Patel MP announce her hopes to impose first past the post in mayoral and police and crime commissioner elections – affecting every single voter in England and Wales.

This is a power grab, designed to remove voters’ second preferences. Priti Patel knows that the left vote is more ‘split’ under first past the post – something that has been true since the foundation of the Labour party – and is capitalising on it. Meanwhile, Brexit itself represented the biggest constitutional shift the UK has seen for decades.

The Tories are making big changes to our constitution: because they know the long-lasting impact it can have. They are reshaping the state.

And the truth is that reforms to our political system are too important to be left in the hands of the Conservatives. Questions about where power lies, who makes decisions, and how our institutions work – or don’t – affect political outcomes.

It is time to build new foundations for our politics, based on values of political equality, diversity and cooperation. Labour cannot opt out of these conversations.

Westminster is crumbling. What will take its place? **F**



Culture change

Recent events have shown the need for greater transparency and higher standards in public life, but *Tim Durrant* is not convinced that ministers will step up to the challenge



Tim Durrant is an associate director at the Institute for Government

REVELATIONS ABOUT DAVID Cameron's lobbying, Matt Hancock's conduct, and possible unreported donations towards the refurbishment of Boris Johnson's Downing Street flat have raised questions about how robust the UK's system of standards in public life really is. This issue may seem remote from everyday life for most people, but it matters. Transparency over how former ministers seek to influence their successors, and over what financial support ministers receive from whom, is essential in a functioning democracy.

The fact that this issue is in the news has presented the government with an opportunity to make changes to the rules and, just as importantly, the culture around relations between government and business. Greater transparency and higher standards are possible, if the prime minister and his team take the lead. As Dominic Cummings, Johnson's former adviser, reflected at his epic select committee outing in May, openness should be the default setting for government. More transparency by ministers might even help them counter some of Cummings' allegations about chaos in government during the early stages of the pandemic.

There is already a patchwork of rules for current and former ministers, civil servants and others in public life – but as we at the Institute for Government argued recently, enforcing these rules and expectations more thoroughly would go a long way to reassure people. Currently, for example, ministers are expected to publish information on all the meetings they have on government business. But they do not always do so. For example, we only know that the former health secretary, Matt Hancock, met Lex Greensill, head of the failed finance firm that employed David Cameron, because of the work of journalists – there is no record of the meeting on the Department of Health and Social Care's official list of ministerial meetings.

Similarly, the most senior civil servants are expected to publish information on their meetings. But the Department for Education has not published any information on

its permanent secretary's meetings since March 2020. The pandemic has meant that civil servants have other priorities, of course, and the Department for Education's new permanent secretary was appointed in September, so some delay was always likely. But it is not acceptable that we have had to wait over a year for information about who the most senior official in a department has been meeting.

There are other rules that are effectively unenforced by design. The 'business appointment rules', which govern what ministers and senior officials can do in the first months or years after they leave government, are overseen by the advisory committee on business appointments (ACOPA). But ACOPA has no way of forcing people to comply with the rules, or even to ensure they seek its advice when they are considering a post-government job. The committee can only write a letter saying that it was not consulted, or that a former minister or official has ignored its advice.

ACOPA's chair, former government minister Lord Pickles, has argued that embarrassment caused by such a notice can be a useful sanction in itself, as it can force a former minister or official to think twice about taking up a particular role, or force the company

to rethink appointing them. This may be the case for some ministers, but shame does not seem to be a driving factor for all of them. Proper sanctions in the form of fines, based on the salary of the post they are taking up, are needed so that the business appointment rules actually bite.

As well as better enforcement of the existing rules, ministers should also update these to better reflect the reality of how government works today. Ministers have to declare when they meet in person with businesses, charities or other outside groups to discuss government-related issues, but do not if they contact the same parties via email, phone call or WhatsApp. This is clearly out of date, particularly given the remote nature of work imposed by the pandemic.

And as the events with Cameron and Greensill have shown, the rules on what ministers can do after leaving

As well as better enforcement of the existing rules, ministers should also update these to better reflect the reality of how government works today



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government need to be tightened. This does not mean that former ministers should be barred from using their experience in government to take up roles in the private sector. No political job lasts forever and shutting down other options will only reduce the number of people who consider this career path. But clearly things need to change.

One straightforward adjustment would be to extend the ban on lobbying on behalf of private sector companies for two years to five after a minister leaves government, for former members of the cabinet. Both Cameron and Gordon Brown have suggested recently that the ban on lobbying government should be extended for former prime ministers (Cameron was employed by Greensill two years after resigning in 2016). Any change to the rules should apply to their former cabinet colleagues too.

So far, however, the government has not shown any strong desire to make changes, and has not taken opportunities to do so that have presented themselves. One such opportunity was the prime minister's appointment of his new independent adviser on minister interests, Lord Geidt. Since this role was created in 2006 by Tony Blair, the post-holder has only been able to investigate potential breaches of the ministerial code, the rules of conduct for ministers, if the prime minister asks them to. In April, when the prime minister appointed Geidt, former private secretary to the Queen, as his new independent adviser, he did not change his remit. Johnson's previous adviser, former senior civil servant Sir Alex Allan, had quit the post in November 2020 after the prime minister disagreed with his conclusion that Priti Patel had broken the ministerial code by bullying Home Office civil servants. The job then remained vacant for five months. So the appointment of Geidt was a chance for Johnson to show that he was serious about creating a culture of high standards and people being held accountable for their actions.

But in the terms of reference for the role, the prime minister made clear that he was not planning to increase Geidt's

independence. The adviser still needs to seek Johnson's permission to begin an investigation into a minister, and cannot publish the findings of his inquiries – though he can 'require' the government to do so 'in a timely manner'. Geidt defended the scope of his role at a recent select committee outing but it is clear that Johnson still wants to hold most of the cards when it comes to enforcing standards of behaviour among his ministers. Given his record of protect political allies rather than listening to his adviser, this is hardly a robust way to defend standards.

Labour have criticised government ministers for their approach to standards, and have called for Geidt to have the power to launch his own investigations. But arguments about rules and codes are unlikely to be a major political opportunity for the opposition. Committing to a policy of greater transparency as part of their platform for the next election would be welcome. In reality, though, the ability of the opposition to affect how much importance the government places on standards of behaviour is limited.

Because ultimately, whatever the rules are and however they are enforced, it will always be the responsibility of the prime minister to take the lead and set the tone for a government. Johnson has shown that he is happy to put winning short-term political battles over upholding high standards. That may deliver short-term victories but will ultimately be damaging to the functioning of government. As prime minister, Johnson must show through his actions as well as his words that he expects all members of his government, and the civil servants that work in it, to adhere to the highest standards.

Taken together, the changes proposed here would go some way to help rebuild public confidence that the system ensures transparency and that the rules are not solely enforced by the people they apply to. However, rules can only do so much. To make a lasting change, leadership from the prime minister is needed. Unfortunately, we are still waiting to see whether he is up to this challenge. **F**

UP TO THE MARK

Wales' first minister has been returned to office with a record-equalling election result. He tells *Vanesha Singh* the secret of Welsh Labour's success

EVER WONDERED HOW it might feel to lead a country through a pandemic? "Well, I suppose if I was to choose just one word, it would probably be relentless," says Mark Drakeford, first minister of Wales. "It has often felt like a great high-wire act, not just personally but collectively, because we'd so often be making decisions where the balance of argument as to what you should do next has been so finely cast, where you're always hoping that you're managing to find the right path forward but you could topple off it at any moment."

For Drakeford – who was elected first minister in 2018 – being in power through the course of the pandemic has been 'full on'. "In an unprecedented way we were doing press conferences at least three times a week. They were watched by thousands of people every time," he recounts, acknowledging too that "there are always people who feel we've done things too quickly. There are always people who think we've not been good enough."

Be that as it may, the leader of the Welsh Labour party has been entrusted by the electorate to continue steering Wales through the biggest health crisis of our time. In fact, the outcome for Welsh Labour this May was, in Drakeford's words, 'pretty remarkable'. "We've been in power here ever since the start of devolution. 'Time for a change' is one of the strongest slogans in politics, isn't it, and our opponents played that card very hard in this election. And yet we matched our best ever performance, both in terms of number of seats won and the share of the vote of the Labour party."

Yet with support for Labour crumbling elsewhere, the party is looking to Wales for the winning formula. "The

key thing for us is we never take a single vote for granted," says Drakeford. "I never want anybody in any Labour constituency, no matter how high our majority might be, to think that we simply assume they're going to go on voting Labour. They vote Labour, because every time we go out to renew that relationship with them."

This approach is 'hard work', Drakeford admits. "You've got to bang the drum harder for people to know that every one of those votes matters to us, every one of those votes is a vote we've got to earn, not because we're entitled to it in any way at all, but because we get it, because we go in to a conversation with people that persuades them that we're a party that listens to them, a party that represents them, a party that's on their side."

According to the first minister, this election has proven that showing people Labour is on their side means having a strong identity rooted in the local area. "You know, one of the things that has always been very important to the Welsh Labour party is that we have a strong sense of identification with being Welsh *and* being Labour, they are two identities that people feel very comfortable with sitting on top of one another," he explains.

Drakeford believes this infusion of identities – a combination of Labour and local – has been key to its popularity in other places too. "Where Labour succeeded across the border, in somewhere like Manchester, is because Andy Burnham was able to create that same sense of strong identity between being in Manchester and being Labour – they are two things that people are very comfortable to feel together. I think you can see it in London as well, to be in London and to be Labour are identities that reinforce



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one another," he says. "So, when we were able to do that, I think you can see some common successes. And where we struggled to do it, then obviously the results for us were not as we would have hoped for."

In Drakeford's opinion, it also helped the party electorally that Welsh Labour has managed to keep the bulk of public opinion on its side during nearly a year and a half of lockdowns and restrictions. "One of the things that is slightly different in Wales is almost everything we are told that forms the basis of our judgements, we publish it. We publish it all. So anybody who wants to see why we have made the decisions we have can go to the primary sources and decide for themselves whether or not they would have made the same decision, faced with the same advice and information."

In his view, people across Wales have been more willing to accept 'a relationship of trust' with their government because of such transparency and this openness should be replicated by those in power across the UK. "The more you share with people, the more I think people are willing to have confidence in you. This is not because I think, by the way, that thousands of people in Wales make their way through detailed technical advisory group reports week by week, but the fact that it's available, I think gives people

some confidence in it. The fact that there's a thing we share with people, so they could look at it for themselves, tends to say to people, well if they're willing to do that, then they probably are making the best decisions they can."

"What we try and avoid is the dark arts of spin too much, and trying not to do things for gesture purposes," adds Drakeford. "I mean, this has been a bit less more recently, but there were times when I really did think that the UK government's approach to handling it all was always to make eye-catching announcements, and then to try and work out the plan as to how that was going to be achieved. The headline of the day was more important to them than the actual delivery of the objective." This, Drakeford stresses, is in contrast to Welsh Labour's approach. "We have always tried to have a plan first, and then to explain to people how that plan will take us to where we need to go. It probably doesn't capture as many headlines, I would guess, but I think over time people have come to feel that that is a more reliable way of conducting affairs on their behalf."

And now, just weeks after winning on a platform of trust and ambition, Drakeford and his team have released their 2021 to 2026 programme for government, laying out plans to translate manifesto commitments into action. "You know, it's the strangest system we have isn't it, that

you spend well over 12 months dealing with a global pandemic, you go straight into an election campaign where you are having to be everywhere, doing all of that, and the day after the campaign is over you are straight into forming governments and getting back into the business of a new manifesto implementation," he says.

But what in the previous term had taken the first minister and his team 18 months to devise, has this time taken not many more than 18 days. "I am very keen indeed that the new administration gets on with the things that we are elected to do and grapples early on with the most challenging parts of our agenda while we've got the momentum from the election behind us. We've got the mandate for our manifesto, let's use that by developing immediate plans for the hard things."

Already, the first minister is confident that the groundwork to solving one of today's most pressing issues is underway, having created a new climate change ministry immediately after his re-election. "We're the first part of the United Kingdom to have a climate change minister and a deputy minister," says Drakeford. This new department, which encompasses transport, planning and housing too, will focus on issues such as decarbonisation, the loss of biodiversity and the impacts of climate change, he explains. "It's a challenging agenda. All of us will have to be willing to live some aspects of our lives differently."

It is important to Drakeford that Welsh Labour demonstrates 'the seriousness of its commitments' to the climate agenda over his next term in office. "And I want to do it within the framework of our Wellbeing and Future Generations Act, possibly the most radical piece of legislation the Senedd has ever passed," he says. "So I have an obligation, and all my ministerial colleagues have an obligation whenever we are making a decision to ask ourselves, not simply, what will the impact of this be in the here and now and for Wales today, but what will be the impact of this decision on generations who come beyond us, how will we hand over this very beautiful, but very fragile spot on the planet to people in Wales in future years? And having to ask yourself that question does make a difference to the way in which decisions are made."

But on top of the climate and Covid-19 crises, Drakeford feels another major struggle brewing, and that is avoiding the breakup of the United Kingdom. Yet although there is certainly an appetite for Welsh independence in some quarters, Drakeford sees the result of this year's election as a strong endorsement of devolution. "People in Wales are very committed to being able to make decisions on the things that only affect people in Wales but continuing to believe that we do better when we are part of a successful United Kingdom," he says.

Still, the first minister believes we need something 'radically different'. "When devolution was first established, the facts on the ground, pretty much, were that there was a sovereign parliament at Westminster, and it provided powers to three national parliaments, essentially under that umbrella. Sovereignty was retained at Westminster, but located on Westminster's terms to the

three parliaments. Twenty five years later, the facts on the ground are very different."

"It's no longer a matter of only one parliament that is supreme and three subordinate bodies. For an awful lot of what goes on in Wales, and this was very much highlighted during the pandemic, the decisions are just made here in Wales. And there is no reference to, or reporting to, or oversight from the UK government. And the same is true in Scotland and Northern Ireland. So, instead of sovereignty being held in one place and we share it out a bit, I think the future of the United Kingdom is to recognise that sovereignty is dispersed and that we choose to pool it back for certain purposes that we discharge better together."

Defence, foreign affairs and, perhaps controversially, social security because of its redistributive potential, are all areas which Drakeford believes would be better exercised as a UK-wide responsibility. "But there will be a choice for the different nations as to how they come together to pool those responsibilities," he explains.

"It is entirely different to the instinctive approach of a prime minister who continues to talk about a unitary state, something that I don't think has existed since 1972 probably, and badly, badly misunderstands the way the United Kingdom can best be kept together," Drakeford remarks. "Because if a UK government was seriously trying to make a reality of a unitary state, that could only now be done by reversing 25 years of devolution, in a way that I think, even in Wales, would cause far more people to ask themselves the question as to whether or not we'd be better off without being part of such an arrangement. So the people in Wales, I think, continue to want to be part of the United Kingdom, but they want the United Kingdom to operate differently, much more on the basis of it being a voluntary association of four nations."

As Drakeford grapples with these resounding issues over his next few years in office, he sees the Fabian Society as playing a 'very important' part. "If you are in power as we have been successively over the whole of devolution, you've got to, not reinvent your values, but you have to reinvent the way you are applying those values in the changing challenges that you

face. And that's what the Fabian Society helps us to do".

"It was Thatcher's belief that government is best when government is least, but we absolutely don't believe that in Wales. The government can be the vehicle for which you can solve those great problems, like dealing with a global pandemic together. But how you do it, and how you create practical policies that make that difference in the lives of people as we face changing challenges, that's where the work of the Fabian Society comes to the fore for us in Wales, because we read the stuff, we draw on the ideas, we look to extend the repertoire of practical actions that we can draw on as a government," says Drakeford.

"Every time we manage to win an election, then we have to apply ourselves again to that challenge. And having the Fabian Society there to help us is always a huge plus." **F**

Vanesha Singh is assistant editor at the Fabian Society

The people in Wales continue to want to be part of the United Kingdom but they want the United Kingdom to operate differently

Crossing the line

Trust is the glue that holds the Good Friday Agreement together and that has been undermined, writes *Louise Haigh MP*



Louise Haigh is Labour MP for Sheffield, Heeley and shadow secretary of state for Northern Ireland

TWENTY-THREE YEARS AGO, the Belfast/Good Friday agreement was signed. The agreement was personal to Labour, and one of our proudest achievements. And though politicians in a room ushered in the peace, it was every inch a story of the people and communities of Northern Ireland coming together to demand a better future.

Today, an entire generation has grown up in relative peace – a precious prize that has come from a determination to lay differences to one side and cooperate in the interest of all communities.

That vision of a shared Northern Ireland, where each community has its rights upheld and a say in its future, was no idle dream: it has been the solid foundation of the Good Friday agreement, and the only basis on which it has ever worked.

Recent months, though, have shown how fragile those foundations are. Trust was the glue that held them together, and it is trust that the prime minister has shattered.

It is Northern Ireland's deep misfortune that the person who bears a shared responsibility for safeguarding the agreement, has placed such little value on his words, and has shown such little regard for the consequences of his decisions.

To make a promise as he did when he stood up in Northern Ireland and vowed to the unionist community that he would never impose a sea border, and then just a few months later do exactly that, showed a profound lack of integrity.

This – alongside the subsequent denial not only of the implications of the sea border – but even of the fact of its existence, has badly shaken trust.

Leaders like Tony Blair and John Major understood that in order to safeguard the peace, the UK government had a duty to behave as an honest broker

That matters because the role of the British government as an honest broker, and a trusted partner, is fundamental. But to take up that mantle, first you have to tell the truth.

Northern Ireland, its people and the precious peace process have too often come second to Johnson's narrow priorities. Many within unionism and across communities see a prime minister who puts his own interests over and above the interests of Northern Ireland. The growing instability we have seen, including seven nights of rioting in Belfast earlier this year, flows directly from the loss of trust this has caused.

Rather than engaging and managing those concerns, the government chose to try and wish them away. Where Northern Ireland needed leadership, there has been a vacuum.

These growing tensions must now be addressed, yet ministers are lost at sea. Erratically drifting between denying the border exists, as the Northern Ireland secretary did at the beginning of the year, to provocative game-playing with the European Union over checks across the same border just weeks later. There is seemingly no short-term strategy, let alone a long-term one.

The protocol can be made to work and agreement must be found on the practical, pragmatic solutions which will reduce the friction down the Irish Sea that has given rise to tensions.

But ultimately, we need to strip this back to first principles – the constitutional position of Northern Ireland cannot be changed without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. The government should be doing everything within its power to engage with unionist and loyalist communities to reassure them that this has not changed. That will require trust.

And relationships need to be repaired: the East/West institutions to encourage cooperation between Britain and Ireland that the Good Friday agreement created, and which have never been prioritised, should be reinvigorated and revived. This could not be more important post-Brexit to give voice to our devolved assemblies across our union, and to improve relations with the Irish government. If these institutions had been given the political prominence they deserved, very many of these problems could have been avoided.

There is a tendency within Britain to view peace in Northern Ireland's as something that was completed in 1998 and could be filed away. This fails to acknowledge that it is an ongoing process and much of which it imagined and promised is yet to be fulfilled. That work needs to restart. Integrated education, housing and a shared future will not happen in isolation. It requires a government refocused on the principles of the Good Friday agreement and committed to delivering on its promise.

Political leaders like Tony Blair and John Major understood that in order to safeguard the peace, and build on its promise, the UK government had a duty to behave as an honest broker to allow Northern Ireland and its politicians to navigate the many complex challenges it faces. This government is falling seriously short and communities across Northern Ireland are paying the price.

The gaping hole of real leadership in Northern Ireland must be filled. The prime minister needs to face up to the consequences of his own actions, engage honestly and find the practical, political solutions that communities are crying out for. ■

A losing battle?

This May's election results were not what Labour had hoped for. But what is behind the surge in support for the Conservatives in 2021? *Paul Whiteley* takes a look



Paul Whiteley is professor of government at the University of Essex

THE MAY 2021 election results were a big disappointment for Labour, and they have triggered turmoil in the party. To briefly review the results: Labour lost control of eight top tier county councils, including Durham which has been controlled by the party since 1919. The Conservatives now control 63 local councils in England compared with Labour's 44 nationwide and have about a thousand more councillors than Labour.

In the elections for the Holyrood parliament in Scotland, Labour lost two seats retaining 22 MSPs altogether, well behind the Conservative tally of 31 seats. The nationalists were one seat short of an overall majority, but they will be supported in power by the Scottish Greens which won eight seats. Clearly Labour is a long way from the goal of replacing the Conservatives as the second party in Scotland.

Undoubtedly, the biggest shock was the loss of the Hartlepool by-election where the Conservatives took

52 per cent of the vote to Labour's 29 per cent, in a seat held by Labour since it was created in 1974. The constituency is one of the 'Red Wall' seats which should have gone to the Conservatives in the 2019 election but was retained by Labour largely because 26 per cent of the vote went to the Brexit party. That party has since collapsed, and the Conservatives took the lion's share of its vote in the by-election.

That said, there was positive news in these elections for Labour. The first was the party's performance in various mayoral contests, winning Cambridge and Peterborough and the West of England from the Conservatives. The party also won mayoral elections in London, Manchester, Liverpool and in several other urban areas. Andy Burnham won by an increased majority in Manchester and Sadiq Khan would probably have done so in London had there not been 114,000 spoilt ballots produced by a badly designed ballot paper.

Figure 1: Labour, Conservative and no party identification in elections from 1964–2019

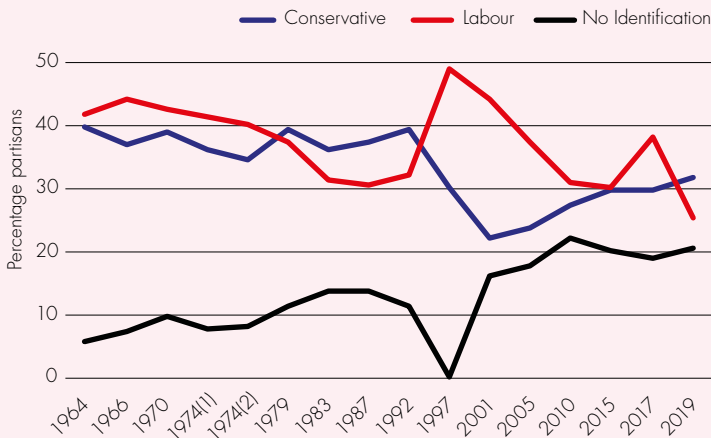


Figure 2: Voting support for political parties in Britain 1945–2019

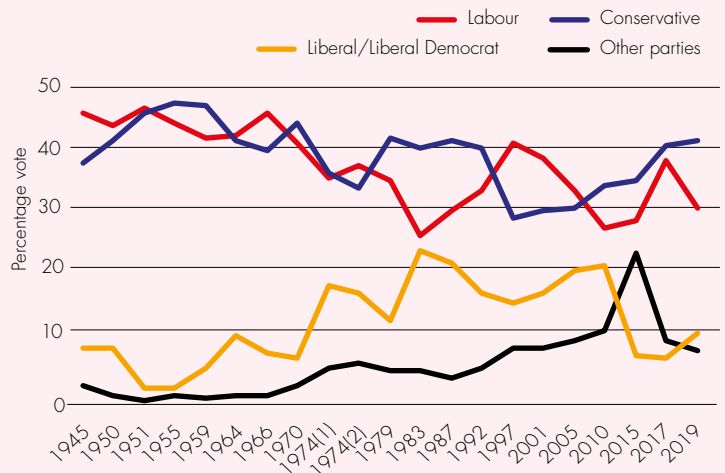


Figure 3: The Conservative vote share in 2019 and the vote to leave in the 2016 referendum across constituencies in Britain

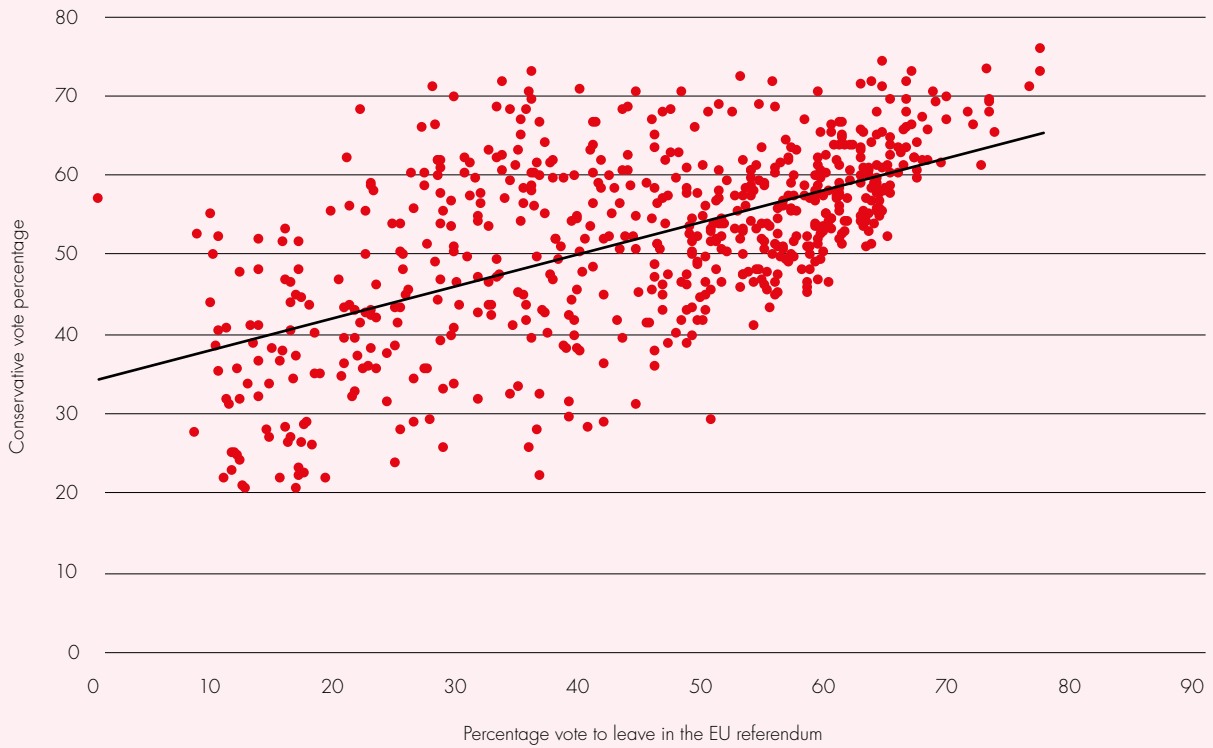
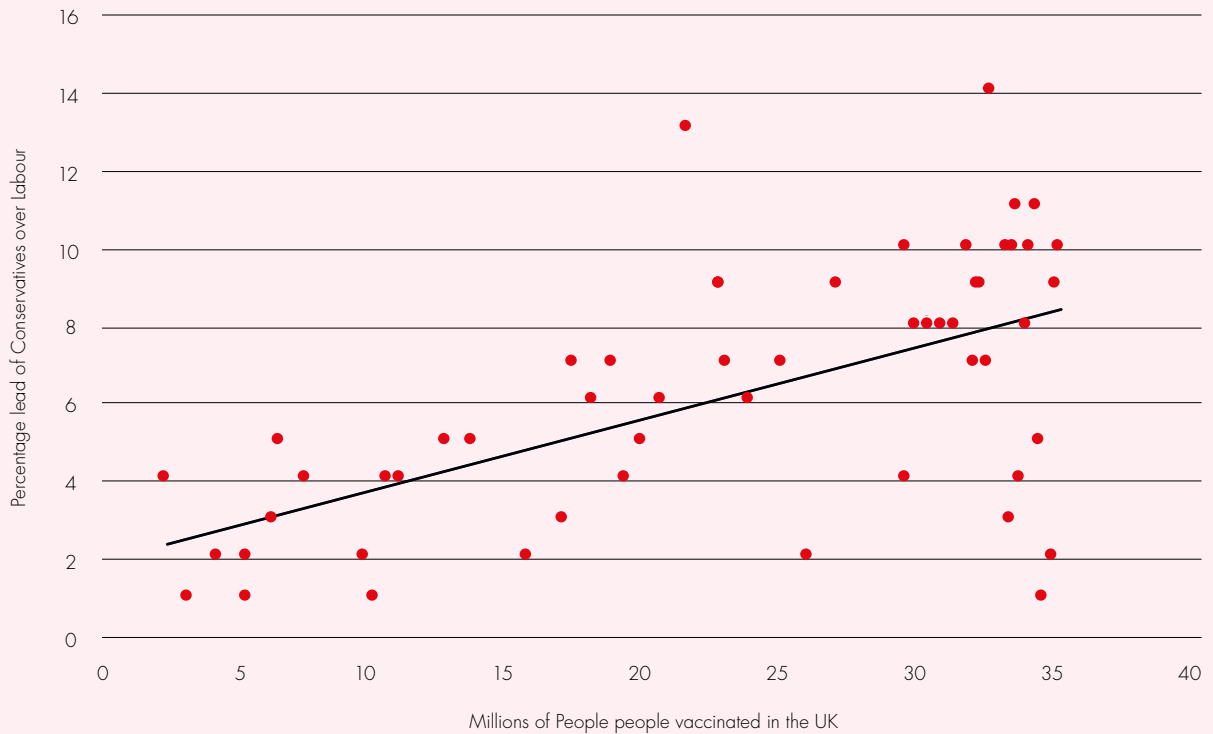


Figure 4: The Conservative lead over Labour during the vaccine rollout since January 2021



A second positive outcome was that Labour retained control of the Welsh parliament taking 30 seats altogether, a result equal to its best performance in previous elections to the Welsh Senedd. This was undoubtedly an example of incumbency advantage which also helped Nicola Sturgeon in Scotland and Boris Johnson in England.

A third success was rather hidden in the statistics, namely the improved performance of the party against the Conservatives in comparison with 2019. In that election, the Conservatives took a 44 per cent vote share and Labour took 32 per cent. According to election guru, John Curtice, in this year's elections the Conservatives captured 36 per cent against Labour's 29 per cent across Britain. In other words, a gap of 12 per cent in 2019 was reduced to 7 per cent by 2021. This is not a spectacular outcome, but it does demonstrate that Labour has made steady progress.

These results have been thoroughly picked over by journalists and commentators, but they leave the tantalising question: why did Labour not do better? Normally an opposition party does well against a government which has been in power for a decade, particularly in the context of the turmoil in British politics over the last few years. To understand what happened we need to look at what drives voting behaviour in Britain.

What drives voting behaviour?

Popular analyses of elections tend to focus on the voters' social backgrounds, with characteristics such as their social class, age, gender and ethnicity as drivers of the vote. The problem is that social backgrounds are rather poor predictors of voting and they are declining in importance over time. In particular, the relationship between social class and voting has greatly weakened over the last 30 years. This is partly due to social changes such as the decline in traditional working-class occupations. But it is also driven by a weakening of voter attachments to political parties. The latter is charted in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of voters who thought of themselves as Labour or Conservatives supporters in every election since 1964, using data from British Election Studies. Up to the end of the 1970s, identification with Labour and the Conservatives was quite strong, hovering around 40 per cent each. Subsequently these attachments have weakened, and we observe a rising proportion of non-partisans.

This means that electoral behaviour in Britain is getting more and more volatile and the consequences of this can be seen in Figure 2 which shows voting support for the three major parties in Britain in every election since 1945. The party system has clearly fragmented over time.

What does this all mean for Labour's support in the 2021 elections? Some over-excited Tories are claiming that Labour is finished, but in the words of Mark Twain, 'Rumours of my death have been greatly exaggerated'. The question 'Must Labour Lose?' was first posed by Mark Abrams and Richard Rose in a book published in 1960. This question has subsequently reappeared after every election defeat for the party since then. Voting support

for Labour has clearly declined over time, but this is also true for the Conservatives. It has been accompanied by a clear rising trend of support for other parties, notably the nationalists.

Performance politics in Britain

If demographics are weak drivers of voting behaviour, what then caused the surge in support for the Conservatives in 2021? The simple answer is 'performance politics' meaning that a party which delivers on what most people want gets elected and a party that fails to do this will lose. Voters in the Red Wall seats were largely Brexiters and Boris Johnson delivered for them. Figure 3 compares Conservative support in the 2019 general election with the leave vote in the referendum of 2016. Each dot in the figure represents a constituency and it shows that Conservative support was strongly boosted by a large Leave vote, something subsequently repeated in the Hartlepool by-election.

But the Brexit effect in the local elections was dwarfed by the 'vaccine effect' – a key factor in understanding the Tory success. This can be seen in Figure 4 which compares the Conservative lead over Labour in voting intentions in the polls with the total numbers of people vaccinated on the day the poll was published. The figure shows that from January 2021 this lead grew consistently as the number of people receiving the first jab of the Covid-19 vaccine increased. The vaccine rollout has wiped away the memory of nearly 130,000 deaths resulting from the government's inept earlier handling of the crisis, not to mention 10 years of underfunding the NHS.

The important lesson from this for the future is that both the Brexit and vaccine effects are wasting assets. Both issues will be largely forgotten by the time of the next election in May 2024. In addition, there is likely to be a big fallout from Brexit and the pandemic for the economy. A lot of research into the effects of the economy on voting suggests that the government will be held responsible for this in 2024.

The Bank of England published a recent forecast suggesting that the economy will grow by 7.25 per cent by the end of this year. The claim is that the effects of the pandemic will follow a V-shaped trajectory of a severe impact followed by a rapid recovery. But extensive research by International Monetary Fund economists reaches much more pessimistic conclusions about the effects of a major shock like Covid-19 on the economy. Its team examined data from 190 countries over a period of 40 years and concluded that recovery from major shocks is slow and sometimes does not happen at all. They wrote: "The magnitude of persistent output losses ranges from around 4 per cent to 16 per cent for various shocks."

A serious economic recession over the next few years will damage support for the government and set the scene for a Labour recovery by the next general election. That said, the party needs to offer more than a critique of Conservative failures. It must communicate a convincing narrative about stimulating growth, prosperity and levelling up across Britain in the future. This is the central task facing Keir Starmer over the next few years. ■

A party which delivers on what most people want gets elected and a party that fails to do this will lose

Left out

Support for right-wing parties across Europe is growing. To defeat them, social democratic parties, including Labour, must reclaim themselves as the champions of equality, writes *Daphne Halikiopoulou*



Daphne Halikiopoulou is professor of comparative politics at the University of Reading

ACROSS WESTERN EUROPE, the political landscape is shifting. Recent elections, both national and regional, confirm longer-term trends: an increasing number of centre-right parties are in government and far-right parties either in governing coalitions or as strong opposition.

In Greece, the Panhellenic Socialist Party (PASOK), which imploded in 2012 as a result of the economic crisis, has never regained support. The centre-right New Democracy (ND), in power since 2019, has benefited from a ‘rally around the flag’ effect within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, leading in the polls by a strong margin. In the Netherlands, earlier this year the liberal-conservative People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) won the Dutch general election for the fourth time in a row. The election also produced a strong combined result for the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), Forum for Democracy (FVD) and JA21.

In Spain, while the socialists (PSOE) won most seats in 2019, election news was dominated by the rise of the far-right Vox, which marked the end of Spanish ‘exceptionalism’. Regional elections in Madrid more recently showed considerable support for the centre-right Partido Popular (PP) candidate and Vox.

In Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD) performed particularly poorly during the 2017 national elections, and an equally weak performance is expected in the upcoming September elections. On the opposite side of the political spectrum, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) increased its support significantly, becoming the first far-right party to enter the German Bundestag since the second world war. Meanwhile, and despite its weakening in 2017, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany’s (CDU) victory in Saxony earlier this June reveals a similar ‘rally around the flag’ effect taking place in Germany as is the case elsewhere in Europe.

And in France, the Parti Socialiste (PS) has also experienced a fate of electoral decline. Polls suggest a race between Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen in the upcoming 2022 presidential elections, though in regional elections that took place this June, both parties lagged behind the conservative Les Républicains. In Sweden, the Swedish Social Democrats (SD) may be in government, but their position appears increasingly precarious.

Current constraints

All of this begs the question: why? What major factors are influencing support for right-wing parties across Europe? And what can the left do to increase its electoral fortunes?

It is important to remember that even those leftist parties that fare well electorally, such as the social liberal D66 which emerged as the second largest party in the Netherlands in 2021, operate in an unfavourable political climate of far-right normalisation and systemic entrenchment, where far-right ideas have become increasingly embedded in mainstream politics. The left is thus competing in a political climate that emphasises the issues it does not ‘own’: immigration, nationalism, and cultural grievances. By contrast, their association with immigration-related issues over time has meant far-right parties now ‘own’ these issues and are perceived as most competent in dealing with them. As such the far right are succeeding in mobilising people around cultural-based concerns, and centre-right parties are better able to adapt to such narratives because of their social and cultural conservatism.

Other issues currently high up on the political agenda have not necessarily benefited the left either. First, the pandemic. So far, election results and polls across Europe, for example in the Netherlands, Greece, Germany and the UK, indicate, as previously mentioned, a ‘rally around the flag’ effect during a time of crisis. Centre-right parties with

ideologically moderate positions already in government are being perceived as experienced and competent actors that can implement effective policies to deal with the pandemic, and are benefitting electorally. Second, is the climate crisis. While the left can, in principle, articulate a clear vision around its environmental policies, in practice it has proven more difficult to bring the electorate on its side. Voters with egalitarian attitudes do not necessarily support green policies; and those that do are highly likely to support the party that ‘owns’ the issue, which, in this case, is the Greens. Costly environmental protection policies, often encouraged on the left, are being rejected by economically insecure and low-income voters who cannot afford them. This is particularly true of those residing in less economically developed rural areas that are more likely to be adversely affected by climate change policies. Recent debates in Germany between the Greens and the left about increasing fuel prices are telling in this respect; as is the result of the recent referendum in Switzerland where rural cantons like Wallis, Schwyz or Graubünden voted against certain climate change measures.

Far-right narratives and the ‘many’ right-wing voters

Given the increasing importance of ‘new’ issues such as immigration and the environment, pundits and political analysts alike have suggested the left should tailor its narrative to appeal to such demands and downplay the importance of traditional societal divisions between ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’. But herein lies the problem: first, there are significant economic and trust-related voter concerns that are often overlooked in the current hype about new issues. Second, ‘copycat’ strategies that extend well beyond an issue that a party ‘owns’ are rarely successful electorally.

Let me focus on the immigration issue. The assumption that immigration is by default a cultural issue is at best problematic. Indeed, far-right parties that ‘own’ this issue and have benefited electorally from its increased salience have themselves attempted to capitalise on its many dimensions. They emphasise not only the erosion of cultural norms, but also competition in the labour market, public goods provision, housing scarcity, crime and terrorism. By directly associating these concerns with immigration, these parties increasingly propose solutions that are distinct from their older market liberal stances, such as an emphasis on the welfare state but with restricted in-group-only access. This ‘welfarist turn’ makes them appear credible to deal with rising unemployment and economic hardship. It is part of a far right ‘normalisation’ strategy which has allowed these parties to extend beyond their secure voting base and appeal more broadly to a range of insecure groups including both working-class individuals and also individuals that can suffer from relative deprivation.

But this means that the cultural grievance story captures the motive behind some, but not all nor even most, supporters of populist right-wing parties. To visualise this, suppose two types of voters. First, those driven by ideology, who oppose immigration on principle. These voters are likely

to identify more staunchly with a right-wing platform and are more likely to switch from ‘far’ to centre right. Second are the protest or peripheral voters whose opposition to immigration is contingent. They are primarily concerned with its economic impact and tend to support the populist right as a way of expressing their discontent and punishing the establishment. These voters feel economically insecure and may have lost trust in institutions and the political system. Because they have salient concerns about inequality – broadly defined – and have no principled opposition to immigration, these voters can ‘switch’ to parties that emphasise issues related to equality and offer effective policy solutions to them. For example, in previous research I have shown that certain welfare state policies traditionally associated with the left moderate various societal risks thereby reducing the likelihood of supporting the far right among insecure individuals such as the unemployed, pensioners, low-income workers and employees on temporary contracts. The mechanism is twofold, as these policies both protect and compensate insecure individuals.

Opportunities: What now for the left?

A substantial number of voters across Europe are concerned about inequality. These concerns are not niche, nor are they confined to a shrinking voter group that is becoming obsolete. Even within the context of a so-called ‘transnational cleavage’, where societal divisions tend to be value-based, inequalities are embedded in – and shape the salience of – ‘new’ issues. People are widely concerned about job security, working conditions, unemployment risks, equal opportunities, housing and health access. Women want equal pay and access to the labour market, large families need support to balance work obligations and childcare, young people entering the labour market after university need reassuring employment prospects, pensioners who have paid into the system expect some security into their retirement, new middle-class

individuals support welfare states that offer them a sense of security. Not only the ‘left-behind’, but also the new middle classes and those on more comfortable incomes may feel insecure. These groups need concrete and effective proposals that will incentivise them, protect them and provide them with high-quality public services, especially as the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic will become more pronounced.

Labour must regain these voters. To do so, it must reclaim ownership of the issue it knows best: equality. This will allow the party to rebuild its own broad voter coalitions and pioneer a strategy that mobilises voters on an issue it can credibly claim as its ‘signature theme’ that it is competent in handling, rather than copy an issue that other parties ‘own’. How? By clearly articulating a vision of an equitable society, by proposing a credible plan of how it will address the multiple inequalities that concern voters and by instilling trust in the institutions that will implement this plan.

With the upcoming elections in Germany and France, this change in tack has rarely been more pressing. As support for right-wing parties across Europe continues to grow, the left must now reclaim the terrain on equality. ■

**Concerns about
inequality are not
niche, nor are they
confined to a shrinking
voter group**

Sharing power

Devolution requires a profound change in how we do our politics – and Labour must take the lead. *John Denham* explains



John Denham is director of the Centre for English Identity and Politics at Southampton University. He is the former Labour MP for Southampton Itchen and served as Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

NUMEROUS THINK-TANK REPORTS have identified England's hyper-centralisation as the root cause of regional inequality, uneven growth and deprivation. The transition to zero-carbon emissions will require state leadership and empowered organisations at every level. Andy Burnham has been crowned 'king of the North', and Gordon Brown is leading Labour's Constitutional Commission to explore a 'union of the nations and regions', and it was mayoral successes which provided the bright spots in the grim May elections. It is not surprising, then, that 'English regional devolution' is gaining support across the party.

But how well has Labour has grasped the radical implications of devolution? Our approach to government, our support for the culture of the union state and our attitudes towards other parties must all change. In 1997 we had not thought these issues through. As a result, we left office with England outside London as centralised as before. Tory ministers could sweep aside Labour's regional structures with little public protest. Next time, we must understand the politics at the outset.

Reforming the centre

A precondition of devolution is to have an English tier of government to devolve power from. Nowhere in Whitehall coordinates the domestic policy for this nation of 55 million people. Contesting departments, some 'England only', some 'England and Wales' and some union-wide, defend their narrow turfs jealously. Whitehall's entire culture assumes that governing is best done from London by the union state. It is the fragmented governance of England by the union that keeps England so centralised.

An incoming government must confront this entrenched culture by creating a machinery of English government with a powerful secretary of state for England, second only in power to the prime minister. Facing many pressing issues, the temptation will be to do what we can first and leave devolution until later. But if we do not insist that change starts on day one, the union state will block English devolution again.

Centre-local relations

Conservative 'devolution' has been a limited delegation whose aim is to get localities to do what the centre wants. 'Devo deals' – as they are often referred to – offer some extra finance in return for a promise to deliver government priorities. But the process excludes many local stakeholders and nearly all voters. Council leaders and mayors had little choice but to get the best deal they could – yet real power remains in Whitehall. And now Johnson's government has dropped devolution and asserted more direct rule from Westminster.

Labour must create a right to devolved powers, conferred by statute and not subject to the political whim of ministers. Localities should be able to set their own priorities. Those powers must be enjoyed by elected political opponents, not just Labour colleagues.

Doing so will have a huge impact on how Labour governs. No longer will Labour ministers in London pretend to solve problems in every corner of England. MPs will no longer sit in the exclusive centre of power. Governing will require constructive engagement with autonomous and legitimate centres of power. Partnership and pluralism must replace top-down centralism and political tribalism.

Fiscal devolution and fair funding

Devolved power needs fiscal autonomy: a guaranteed fair share of funding according to need (and the varied ability of different areas to raise money locally); a much wider range of powers to generate income (including stamp duty, planning gain, and extended public asset ownership); and the power to coordinate all public spending – schools, health and social care, housing and transport – within a locality. This too must change how Labour governs. Stable long-term devolution will need underpinning by a cross-party consensus on a new funding formula. As the local becomes more powerful and autonomous, central government's ability to favour some areas over others will be curbed.

Devolution: neat or messy?

With myriad local councils, combined authorities and mayors exercising different powers, it is often assumed

that Labour's devolution must take a uniform approach: perhaps requiring all councils to be single tier unitaries, mayors in every part of England, and regions with equal powers. But what works in a city-region may not suit places with a different economic geography. Some regions reflect strongly held identities, but other regions mean nothing. Imposing uniform structures will fuel local opposition and the more uniformity demanded the bigger the upheaval before devolution even starts. Top-down reform in the name of empowering local people is a bad place to start.

The real problem is not local government structures but arbitrary decision-making by ministers and the instinctive centralism of the union state. Labour should start devolution by empowering the structures we inherit and allowing England's local government to draw down the powers it needs, trusting local people to design the authorities that suit each area. Public demand for English devolution is as yet quite limited. By starting with the familiar, we can enable support for greater empowerment to grow.

Local leadership

Elected mayors may be powerful local advocates but, outside London, their formal powers are very limited. But empowering mayors would give a single elected office the powers that currently belong to many local councils or might be devolved to them. The London mayoralty is well embedded but requiring a power shift from several councils to a single mayor may create much deeper tensions elsewhere. Central government might prefer the convenience of dealing with a single powerful individual covering large area, but, in starting from where we are, we should allow different models of local leadership to evolve.

Tackling regional issues

If devolution must start messy, issues like strategic transport will still need to be tackled at regional level. Whitehall designed regions will always take powers from more local areas and impose priorities from the centre. Real devolution favours a 'bottom-up' approach that supports local

authorities to design the institutions and wield the powers they need to cooperate at regional level. Regions that work will grow from a diversity of local authorities that reflect places to which people feel they belong.

An English solution

However English regions evolve, they will not be devolved legislatures like those in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Leaving aside – for now – whether English MPs should make English laws, few people want nine regional law-making assemblies, with different laws on the NHS, higher education or farming. English devolution must be designed for England, not the pretence that English regions are like devolved nations or English mayors sit as equals with first ministers. English localities need a voice alongside local government from other nations in a reformed union. But English regions do not solve the 'English question' nor can they be forced into a template for Whitehall or the rest of the union. Alongside devolution, England's national governance must be untangled from that union, with its own machinery of national government and democratic control over its own domestic policy. How best to do that is the biggest challenge of constitutional reform and one Labour's new commission must not duck.

Devolution and Labour politics

An audacious Labour can be the party of the country, leaving the Conservatives as the party wedded to Whitehall. Devolution is not an additional paragraph in a normal Labour manifesto but must be a profound change in how we do our politics: changing the way England is governed at the centre, empowering local authorities by right, limiting our ability to impose our will centrally, seeking a consensus on fair funding, and working with elected local leaders of other parties. If we are not prepared to change we should not start. But we cannot tackle regional inequality and exclusion, build a post-Brexit economy or transition to zero carbon from Whitehall. We cannot transform England without learning how to govern when power is shared, not hoarded. ■



The big picture

Social democratic parties, from Darlington to Darwin, are struggling to articulate what they stand for. We need a totally new vision, argues *Alan Milburn*



Alan Milburn was Labour MP for Darlington from 1992 to 2010 and former health secretary. He advised Australian Labor in the 2007 and 2010 election campaigns

SOcial democracy is in its worst global crisis for a century. In Italy, Holland and France social democratic parties are in meltdown. In Germany, the SPD is a shadow of its former self. There are liberal-left exceptions to the rule – Canada and New Zealand for example – but in Poland, Hungary and Brazil it is nationalist authoritarianism that is in the ascendancy. And while it is true that in Spain and Sweden social democratic parties are in power, they are hanging on by their fingernails. It is easy to take comfort of course from president Biden’s victory in the USA but it is very possible that, without the Covid-19 pandemic, a Trump second term would have been the most likely outcome. Meanwhile in the UK, Labour has not won a general election since 2005 and it has been a similar story for Labor in Australia since 2010.

This is a losing pattern which progresses the world over can no longer ignore. So why it is happening and what can be done? The explanations are as multiple as the defeats. For the ‘hard left’, social democracy got its comeuppance by dancing too willingly to globalisation’s tune and ignoring its losers. Sadly for the leftists who seized control of the UK Labour party under Jeremy Corbyn, the alternative they favoured – a dose of the old style socialist religion – when put to the electorate, took Labour to its worst result since 1935.

Other more progressive voices point to the inequalities and imbalances created by globalisation, particularly after the global financial crisis put markets in the dock and left social democracy uncertain how to create a new state activism without replicating outdated state interventionism. Yet others highlight how the upsurge in a new politics of identity found the centre-left stranded on uncomfortable terrain and without compelling answers. Profound economic and social change has left many voters clinging to what they know, hence their concerns over place and immigration, identity and security.

Tony Blair argues convincingly that the megatrends of change – globalisation, mass migration, growing inequity – left social democrats confused between the ends we believe in and the means we deploy. One remains fixed – our commitment to fairness and justice, our belief that we achieve more together than we ever can alone. But the other, our means, has to be flexible if we are to keep pace with the modern world. The calibration between what is fixed and what should be flexible is what the centre-left has found most difficult to get right and is at the root of the social democratic crisis.

There is much in these analyses. But in my view the problem facing social democracy all boils down to this: right now it is hard to discern what today’s social democratic project really is. It was not always so. Social Democracy 1.0 was about giving rights to people who lacked them – workers and women for example. Although there is more still to do, there has been much progress, not least the successful creation of social democratic welfare state systems. So Social Democracy 2.0, led by Bob Hawke, Paul Keating, Tony Blair and Bill Clinton, moved onto new terrain, trying to make markets and globalisation work for the many not the few. Again social democracy delivered real results with prosperity growing among working families even though inequalities sharpened too. Today a new agenda beckons but it is not at all clear what the Social Democracy 3.0 project looks like. That is as true in Australia, where I advised Labor in the 2007 and 2010 election campaigns, as it is in the UK.

Of course there are lots of individual policies Labour and Labor are in favour of. But a list is not a project. Political parties have to exist for a purpose. They have to have a big project if their values are to be translated into policies. Without it they are nothing. Both Margaret Thatcher’s project to marketise and Blair’s project to modernise Britain

gave voters a clear sense of what their parties were about. It is no coincidence that they delivered thumping parliamentary majorities for their respective parties. In politics, clarity kills. Today, by contrast, it is hard to disagree with leftist trade union leader Len McCluskey when he says that people no longer know what today's British Labour party stands for. I share the diagnosis but part company over the solution.

What is clear is that the shocking UK election results in May are a wake-up and smell the coffee moment for Labour. They can no more be dismissed as prime minister Boris Johnson enjoying a Covid-19 vaccination dividend than they can be explained by the aftershocks of Corbyn or of Brexit, still less of Keir Starmer's leadership. The rot did not set in over a few months or years. The last time the Labour party won a general election was 16 years ago and currently we look likely to lose the next one. That would be two decades in the political wilderness.

It is not a particular surprise. Labour gets what it deserves. With no discernible overarching change or future project, the public have moved on from Labour. Starmer is competent, credible and has shown courage but, set against the headwinds he faces, the pace and scale of reform to date is simply inadequate. It is not enough to say that Labour is under new leadership. That has to be proven in practice, day in day out. The disaster of the Corbynite agenda has to be put in the dustbin of history where it belongs and the drift towards Labour becoming a leftist, 'woke-ish', metropolitan party out of touch with aspirational (not just working class) voters has to be reversed. Equally, Labour needs to resist the temptation of putting all of our eggs in the Red Wall basket – those Northern and Midlands seats lost to the Conservatives under Corbyn – and instead work on building a coalition of support across the whole country. To win again Labour will have to take Hastings in the south and not just Hartlepool in the north.

In short, the only way forward is a total reinvention of what Labour is – starting with an open diagnosis of why we keep losing, moving on to a full-scale policy review and a fundamental change in how as a party we organise and are structured. Without a major process of public engagement and far-reaching change the British Labour party risks going the way of other social democratic parties across Europe. Avoiding that outcome will be hard. There are no easy answers. It will require deep strategic thought and patience.

So far then so bad. But here is the good news.

After Labour lost for the fourth time in 1992 many people thought they would never see a Labour government again. What changed is that we did. It is possible to turn a streak of losses into a series of wins. Under Blair's leadership Labour became a winning party not a losing one. As Peter Mandelson graphically puts it the last eleven general elections for Labour have been lose, lose, lose, lose, lose, Blair, Blair, Blair, lose, lose, lose. To be clear, I am not advocating a return to the politics of 1997. The world has moved on and so should we. Rather the focus should be learning from what worked strategically to turn defeat into victory.

**Change and the future:
these are the ingredients
that have always
unlocked victory for social
democrats the world over**

In essence the lessons are five-fold. First, forge an electoral coalition of support by becoming as comfortable with individual aspiration as traditional redistribution. Second, make the public's concerns the party's and make their pragmatism – tough on crime and tough on its causes, tolerant on sexuality and immigration but intolerant on a failure to abide by society's rules – Labour's watchwords. Third, separate ends and means by being willing to change old approaches to policy, for example through radical reform of public services. Fourth, offer hope not fear by championing a sense of patriotic optimism about our country and our place in the world. And finally, in a world of rapid change always face outwards to the future rather than finding solace in the positions of the past.

Much is different since New Labour demonstrated how progressive parties could both change and make change. Growing insecurity – about the future of the environment and employment for example – have been heightened by the advent of social media leaving people more sceptical and less tribal, more uncertain and less loyal, more assertive and less trusting. People will no longer act as passive recipients of a political message. They want to know that parties and their leaders get their lives and they want to have a say. That calls not just for new policies but for a new politics, one that is different from 1997 and far more engaging.

But in politics there are some constants. Change and the future: these are the ingredients that have always unlocked victory for social democrats the world over. And here too there are some reasons for optimism. Change is the currency of the times in which we live. Shocks on the scale of the Covid-19 pandemic always produce change. Of course people want a return to normality but they also want a better world to emerge from what has happened in the last year. It is not a coincidence that 'build back better' is the slogan of choice both of a centre-left president in the USA and a right wing prime minister in the UK.

The world faces multiple uncertainties in the light of the pandemic. Covid-19 has shown how vulnerable we are, calling for new approaches to improve equity in society and tackle the climate emergency. These are huge challenges that call for a new approach to how government works and what it does. We need a new approach to secure our supply chains, our borders and our care systems. Long-term investment is required to secure prosperity for future generations by investing in new skills, new infrastructure and new jobs. Above all, technological change which is disrupting all aspects of our lives, has to be harnessed properly to address these challenges and make society more fair, not less. This has the makings of a new social democratic project. Social democrats believe in the collective action that is needed to secure new jobs, a greener economy, safe borders, better care and less inequality. President Biden is showing, by framing the debate on tax and spend in a progressive way, how an argument can be won about an active state being the route to a future that is prosperous, sustainable and fair.

But it must be recognised that this is terrain that the right is now contesting, rather than assuming it will naturally



Julia Gillard speaking at the lunch of the Australian Multicultural Council in August 2011 © Kate Lundy/Wikimedia

be the property of the centre left. Johnson's levelling up agenda is the centrepiece of a new brand of interventionist Conservatism. The age of austerity, the defining right-wing tenet for over a decade, has been ditched. That makes the going still harder for Labour. Of course, Johnson faces the twin problems of having to deliver meaningful change whilst keeping the deep conflict within the Conservative party between his home counties small state and low tax faction aligned with his Red Wall interventionists. But we should not underestimate either him or this new conservatism. The easiest mistake to make in politics is to create a convenient truth about your opponents: that they are not up to the job and that eventually the public will see through them. It is worth remembering that when he became mayor of London, Johnson was able to win from the right in arguably one of the most progressive cities in the world. So Labour needs to protect its progressive flank. Johnson has succeeded in making equity an issue over which Conservatives have some ownership.

To wrestle it back Labour will need to redefine equity as more than a place-based agenda, important though that is. Inequality hurts people not just places. In particular, grandparents and parents alike are concerned that the social progress they enjoyed will not be repeated for this and future generations of young people. If older people have been on the health frontline of the pandemic it is the young who seem doomed to suffer the biggest economic and social consequences. More than half of under-25s in the UK had been furloughed or lost their jobs by last June. One million of them are already unemployed. Meanwhile the rate of home ownership has plummeted amongst young people from well over half to around one third in just twenty years and the prospects of getting a place on the housing ladder feels increasingly remote. These concerns about thwarted aspirations straddle middle income and lower income families. As both Thatcher and Blair realised, it is aligning behind the politics of aspiration that creates the electoral coalitions that help parties win elections. It is a lesson Starmer would do well to heed.

The next UK election is probably some way off but in Australia it could take place later this year. I have worked on election campaigns there with both Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard. There are always mutual lessons to be learned between UK Labour and Australian Labor. I admire the current ALP leader, Anthony Albanese, who is one of the few opposition leaders to have kept his party in a competitive position during the pandemic. I very much hope that he is the next Australian prime minister. If he is to succeed he will need to resist the temptation to dismiss the current prime minister, Scott Morrison, as 'Scotty from marketing'. Morrison no less than Johnson should not be underestimated. If I was advising Anthony I would suggest that instead he paints Morrison's party as one, having been in office for eight years, that is locked into yesterday's solutions and therefore cannot provide security for Australians in a world that is changing. That will require an argument from Labor about the nature of the change that is taking place and the insecurities that it is causing. Of course voters in Australia, as across the globe, are yearning for a return to many of the facets of life from before the pandemic but if that is the terrain on which Labor allows the election to be fought it will merely favour the incumbent. Instead, Australian Labor will need to show how the world has moved on and demonstrate that its policies can be woven into a golden thread of narrative around a clear project for the future: one that is about harnessing change, not least in technology, so that families and communities – the young especially – can face a future of security not insecurity.

Focusing on the next generation would give Labour and Labor the most precious of advantages, without which progressive parties never win: an agenda for change and ownership of the future. That is what has been missing in Australia, the UK and beyond. It is time to fill it. **F**

This is an edited version of an article commissioned by the Australian Fabian Review, the new magazine launched by the Australian Fabians

Books

A Sisyphean task?

Two remarkable studies on British prime ministership help highlight the shifting challenges of the role, writes *Dick Leonard*



Dick Leonard, former Labour MP and one-time Fabian deputy general secretary, completed this review before his death last month at the age of 90. His book, Modern British Prime Ministers from Balfour to Johnson, will be published later this year

Fifty three men and two women have held the post of prime minister (or, more formally, first lord of the Treasury) since Robert Walpole was appointed by George I in 1721. Over the last two decades I have made a close study of each one of these 55 individuals, but there are now two remarkable books which look at the nature of the office and how it has changed over time. Though very different in tone and structure, both are centred around the core idea that the role poses a Sisyphean, and maybe even an ultimately unfulfillable, challenge.

Anthony Seldon captures the dilemma in his title, *The Impossible Office?* "Why have more incumbents not achieved even their own ambitions?", he asks poignantly. He provides an engaging and erudite survey of the last three centuries, combining an ability to evoke the sweep of history with an unsurpassable ability to zone in on details and anecdotes which bring it to life.

Seldon's book begins in an engaging if somewhat whimsical style with an imagined conversation between Robert Walpole, the first occupant of the role, and Boris Johnson, the latest incumbent. Seldon looks at some of the many parallels between the two figures – as well as the gulf that separates their worlds. He then proceeds to explore how the role of PM has developed over the years looking not just at the formal powers and the development of key positions such as that of chancellor and foreign secretary, but also at the history of issues which are very much in the news today, such as the role of the prime ministerial spouse. His final chapter says that in spite of the increasing expectations put on incumbents and the stresses of the role, the job is not impossible after all, before making some thoughtful recommendations on how to make the office more doable as it enters its fourth century. These include formalising the role of deputy prime minister(s), downgrading the role of the chancellor, and working hard to ensure that the PM is not surrounded by a clique of like-minded advisers.

Mark Garnett has not had the same intimate access to British prime ministers as Seldon, but his book is a tour de force in making sense of the changing role of the job. Bringing to bear the depth of a historian and the analytic skills of a political scientist, Garnett has written an



The Impossible Office? The history of the British Prime Minister
by Anthony Seldon (with Jonathan Seldon and Ilias Thomas)
(Cambridge University Press £19.99)



The British Prime Minister in an age of Upheaval
by Mark Garnett
(Polity, £18.99)

indispensable book which will cement his reputation as a demystifier of the political process.

Garnett begins with the PM's role as the leader of the majority party, exploring how important the mastery of the House of Commons has been over the years. There is a useful description of how the European issue has divided parliaments and challenged party discipline (something I discovered when my conscience led me to defy the Labour party whip and vote to join the Common Market in 1973, although this episode does not appear in the book!). Garnett explores the way the prime minister became more than a *primus inter pares* in the cabinet, examining the role of assembling and leading the government.

One of the big changes in the role has come with the revolution in the media landscape. Garnett devotes a whole chapter to the PM as a 'communicator in chief', with a thoughtful comparison between the styles of all the incumbents since 1979. He adopts the same approach to explore the PM as a diplomat and statesman, rattling through the different wars that were waged in the Falklands, the Balkans and the Middle East as well as relations with the USA and Europe.

Like Seldon, Garnett is preoccupied with the question of whether we have created a job that is ultimately impossible. His answer is somewhat gloomier than Seldon's. Garnett thinks that there is now an unbridgeable gulf between the expectations which we place on British prime ministers and their ability actually to deliver. Unlike Seldon who looks at constraints within the role itself, Garnett thinks that the biggest barriers to success are external. During the 200 years that the prime ministership has existed, Britain has gone from being an imperial giant that rules the waves to being a mid-sized power that can only succeed in alliance with others. The role of the PM has often been to fill the gap between expectation and reality with spin, bonhomie and rhetoric. In that sense, in Johnson's bombastic Brexit leadership, we may have got the PM we deserve.

Both of these excellent studies explore the interplay between historical forces, political structure and personality. By reading them, we can understand more deeply why so many of our prime ministers have struggled to live up to their ambitions. **F**

Worked up

A new vision of work needs to encompass thinking from across the labour movement, argues *Kyle Lewis*



Kyle Lewis is co-founder and researcher at Autonomy, a think tank focused on the future of work

Should the left embrace the labour-saving potential of automating technologies and direct them towards a society free from insecure, waged labour? Not according to Labour MP Jon Cruddas. In his new book, *The Dignity of Labour*, Cruddas sets himself against what he regards as the ‘fashionable’ ‘post-work’ vision of the future, a vision portrayed by its primitive ‘technological determinism’, and attempts to rehabilitate an ethical socialist tradition based on the dignity and agency offered by labour.

Whilst the book looks to offer an alternative, more grounded conception of the history of work, it does so by attempting repeatedly to discredit and attack what are essentially fringe ideas both within the party and on the left more broadly. Indeed, the post-work bogeyman looms large in *The Dignity of Labour*.

For Cruddas, not only is the evidence of a workless future highly contested and theoretically inaccurate, but its embrace among Labour’s young radical base poses an existential threat to the party. By turning its back on work, the party, driven by the ideas of its ‘cosmopolitan winners’, is abandoning the interests and values of its traditional working-class base. This dualistic assessment of class, whereby there is a metropolitan elite who have given up on the value of work and a traditional base who long for the moral virtue afforded by good work, is just as fictitious as the abstract utopias Cruddas accuses the radical left of promoting.

First of all, the notion that the Labour party under Corbyn’s leadership was in thrall to the political direction advanced by post-work literature simply does not ring true. Rather than abandoning work, the manifestos of 2017 and 2019 were in line with many of the proposals Cruddas endorses in the final chapter of his book. Where we did see some influence of post-work thinking was on policy concerning work time reduction. And while Cruddas hones his attacks on post-work as being simply UBI plus the embrace of automation, he neglects how post-work literature helped reignite the case for reducing the working week without a loss in pay – demands that have now been endorsed by unions such as Unite and the CWU as well as the TUC itself.

The Dignity of Labour is at its best when contextualising the history of the Labour party in relation to its traditions



The Dignity of Labour
by Jon Cruddas,
(Polity, £14.99)

and ethical orientation towards work. You get a sense of Cruddas as a keen and articulate Labour scholar who places his Marxist approach within the English radicalist tradition of thinkers such as William Morris, E P Thompson and John Ruskin. In fact, the constant need to turn back and critique ‘post-work’ positions undermines the flow of the book.

The final chapters aim to outline a vision of the future of work beyond UBI welfare and technological determinism. However, it fails to turn its critical assessment into an impassioned propositional alternative. In the chapter *Human Labour and Radical Hope*, Cruddas underpins his vision of the future of work under a ‘good work covenant’. The public policy framework includes statements such as ‘everyone should be paid fairly’ and ‘everyone should be treated equally and without discrimination’. The covenant feels more like a corporate induction starter pack rather than a statement that nails its colours to the mast of a future led by an empowered working-class movement. Indeed, much of the policy in the final chapter offers the same, now very stale, sentiments around re-training, upskilling, and realigning higher education under a ‘renewal of vocation’. Where we do see sparks of originality and coalition-building are on universal rights for workers and the creation of environmentally sustainable jobs under a Green New Deal.

The Dignity of Labour manages to rehabilitate and promote intellectual traditions underpinned by the moral value and worth of labour. In so doing, we are reminded of the challenges that we face in the 21st century in creating the working conditions where dignity, human flourishing and prosperity are accessible to all. In order to achieve this, the right of the Labour party would be best served by creating a constructive dialogue with the left rather than creating a dualistic notion of the working class. Both the book and the party would be improved as a result. **F**

The Dignity of Labour is at its best when contextualising the history of the Labour party in relation to its traditions and ethical orientation towards work

A perfect Fabian

Shirley Williams was an inspiration to those who followed in her footsteps, recalls *Dianne Hayter*



Dianne Hayter is deputy leader of the Labour Lords and shadow minister for consumers and the Cabinet Office. She was general secretary of the Fabian Society from 1976 to 1982, and Fabian Chair from 1992 to 1993

DESPITE SPENDING ONLY four years as general secretary, from 1960 to 1964, Shirley Williams always seemed the quintessential Fabian. Her commitment to democratic socialism, policy, debate and people were a perfect fit for the society with its meetings, publications and practical policies to promote equality and fairness.

As general secretary, I worked with Shirley when she was chair, at first intimidated by following in her footsteps whilst dazzled by her achievements, enthusiasm and energy. However, she was nothing but supportive and encouraging to me, even inviting me to her amazing parties and, once, boosting my confidence when – in an interview – she named me as one of the rising younger women she admired. A blessing from a role model which altered my view of my own potential. Sadly, I never got to thank her for this, as Shirley passed away earlier this year.

It was, however, as chair, that she led the then treasurer, John Roper, and two other executive members out of the society in March 1981 when they set up the Social Democratic Party.

This searing split – removing a key part of the Fabian family – was immensely painful and led to months of constitutional wrangles as the departing members sought to remain as Fabians, necessitating a ballot of our members and a highly tense AGM in November 1981 when they were finally shown the door, the society confirming that only actual or eligible Labour members could be Fabians. The hurt for many of us remained for years, fuelled both by the impact the SDP had on Labour fortunes but also by the schism in the comradeship and friendships honed over decades.

Shirley's early family life makes uncomfortable reading – her childhood punctured by three years as a wartime evacuee in north America without her parents. Yet what I found most chilling was the description by her famous mother, Vera Brittain, of 13-year-old Shirley's return to London, about which she wrote in *Testament of Experience*: "Clasping her tightly in a surge of emotion which I never allowed myself to show again" – a passage which has haunted me for 40 years. Yet despite that clearly undemonstrative mother, Shirley bubbled with more warmth and genuine affection than most of her generation. As Philip



Shirley Williams photographed in 1984. ©Wikimedia Commons

Collins said, "[She] really was as warm as all her obituary writers have noted", whilst her popularity as a politician had a wider and deeper reach than her former Labour or subsequent SDP colleagues. One of the great 'what ifs' is the difference to the SDP fortunes had she challenged Roy Jenkins for the leadership or – earlier – succeeded in her bid to be Labour's deputy leader. Commentators ascribe her lack of the 'killer instinct' needed for the top job to such outcomes, whilst ignoring any discussion of whether men's perception of this highly capable woman also played a part.

For me, her early advocacy of consumer rights, rarely championed by other politicians, marked her out as someone with real concern with people's daily life and, without using the language, of women's preoccupations. As the Secretary of State for Prices and Consumer Protection,

she wanted to reduce retail companies' profit margins on fresh food: an idea ahead of its time. She was also a noted internationalist, pro-Europe and a longstanding participant at the Königswinter conferences, established in 1950 to restore relations between Germany and the UK and create bonds between politicians – a typical Fabian-style endeavour to use debate and friendships to further peace and understanding.

Shirley's own marriage to Bernard Williams ended in divorce but not before they had produced a much-loved daughter, Becky. Her subsequent relationship with Anthony King had significant intellectual impact, as his work with Ivor Crewe spelt out what they identified as an inexorable decline in the working-class/Labour vote, which influenced her thinking on a possible new party, as she spelt out in

the Fabian New Year School in Oxford in January 1981. Her later marriage to an American academic, Richard Neustadt, took her out of mainstream UK politics for a while, but she returned with some gusto to the Lords (regrettably also to vote for Lansley's ill-fated NHS reforms).

Shirley Williams was much loved by fellow Fabians at schools, conferences and at local society meetings. I inherited her formidable secretary – Gladys Cremer – who forbade me from opening my own mail after her experience of Shirley stuffing unanswered letters in her pocket in haste, only to be retrieved months later. Gladys also threatened to put my clock 30 minutes forward so that I didn't inherit another of her foibles. What I wish I had inherited was her success as a persuasive politician, albeit not her decision to forsake the party she loved. **F**

Noticeboard

Annual general meeting and Fabian Northern conference – 13 November

The Fabian Society AGM will take place on Saturday 13 November 2021. The meeting will take place in central Leeds as part of the Fabian Northern conference 2021. Remote digital access to the AGM will be available for members unable to attend in person.

Any full member of the society or a local Fabian society may submit a motion for the AGM by 16 August 2021. Motions will be published in the autumn issue of the Fabian Review and amendments will be invited with a deadline of 16 October 2021. For more information contact membership@fabians.org.uk or 0207 227 4904.

Fabian Society executive committee election 2021

The Fabian Society is proud to be a democratically governed member-led organisation. Every two years our executive committee is elected by our membership to direct the work of the society and represent members' interests.

Notice of election

The executive committee ballot will take place between Friday 24 September and Friday 29 October 2021.

For the first time the ballot will take place online only (except for members who request a paper ballot).

- If we have your email address, access to the online ballot will be issued by email. If you are receiving emails from us now you do not need to take any action. If you are not receiving our weekly Fabian News email please

register an email address with us before 6 September.

- If we do not have your email address when the election begins, we will write to you with access details for the online ballot. Members who are unable to access the balloting website will be able to request a paper ballot.

Membership inquiries:

membership@fabians.org.uk
or 0207 227 4904.

Call for nominations

Members of the society are now invited to nominate themselves for election to the committee. We strongly encourage all members to consider standing.

Nominations should be sent to membership@fabians.org.uk. Please write the position nominated for in the subject line of the email. Nominees should submit a statement in support of their nomination, including information about themselves and their activities within the society, of not more than 70 words. The closing date for nominations is 9am on Friday 3 September.

Nominations are invited for:

- 10 executive committee members (main ballot).
- Honorary treasurer.
- Three local societies representative (nominations to be made by local societies).

If you are interested in standing you are invited to email gensec@fabians.org.uk for information about the responsibilities.

At least two of the 10 national

members and one of the three local society members elected must be under the age of 31 at the AGM on Saturday 13 November 2021. No more than five places in the main ballot may be taken by Westminster parliamentarians. You need to have been a member of the society before 12 June 2021 to be eligible to stand and vote in the elections.

Young Fabian and Fabian Women's Network elections

The Young Fabians and Fabian Women's Network are also holding elections for their executives. The deadline for nominations is 9am on Friday 3 September.

For full details see www.youngfabians.org.uk and www.fabianwomen.org.uk

Christine Megson MBE

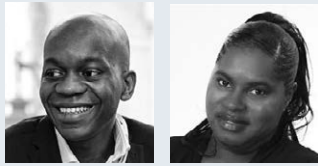
Christine Megson, Fabian Society vice president and co-founder of the Fabian Women's Network mentoring programme has been awarded an MBE for services to gender equality.

Christine has been instrumental in shaping and leading the programme over the last decade, supporting hundreds of women from a wide range of backgrounds to find their political voice.

FWN chair Sara Hyde said: "Christine is a powerhouse and inspiration to many. Over the last decade, she and Caroline Adams (the co-leader of the scheme) have mentored over 250 women from all walks of life, from all over the UK to enable them to realise their potential and achieve great things in political and public life. She has changed many lives and her impact is felt in the work of FWN mentees nationwide. We are delighted she has been recognised in this way." **F**

Making a stand

We all have a responsibility to confront the past in order to shape a better future. *Sanchia Alasia* and *Martin Edobor* report on the work of the Fabian Society's race taskforce



Martin Edobor is chair of the Fabian Society, an NHS GP and clinical director of North Newham Primary Care Network. Sanchia Alasia is a Labour councillor in Barking and Dagenham and the former mayor of the borough. She is a local societies representative on the Fabian executive committee

EIGHT MINUTES 46 seconds was the length of time American police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on the neck of George Floyd under the glare of a camera and the eyes of passers-by. This single horrific moment was an embodiment of police brutality in America and the physical manifestation of institutional racism, unveiled, unfiltered and unvarnished for all to see.

The tragic death of George Floyd on 25 May 2020, and the images that beamed around the world, triggered a new wave of protest and demand for accountability and change.

Our colonial past permeates our nation today, running through much-loved institutions, including our own. As an organisation founded in the 19th century, we must recognise that many of our past members' racist prejudices, opinions, and actions were not in keeping with society's commitment to equality for all, either then or now.

As a society, we have a role in acknowledging and highlighting the dark parts of our past to reflect and build a better future. Over the last year, we have organised a series of events with academics at the LSE and King's College London to deepen our understanding of the society's engagement with questions of race, eugenics and empire. Our website now reflects and acknowledges these dimensions of Fabian history.

However, the reality is that the lived experiences of Black people in British society today show that there is still much to do to tackle systemic racism. There is an overwhelming amount of data from reports over the years – including the Lammy Report, Angiolini Review and the Parker Review, which outline the disproportionate inequalities Black people face in society and which this pandemic and the murder of George Floyd have put a spotlight on – not just

with the higher death rate, but with Black people also being more likely to lose their job and finding it harder to gain re-employment.

Black people have to apply for 80 per cent more job roles to get a positive response. UK Black professional representation has been stagnant since 2014, with just 1.5 per cent in leadership positions. Reportedly, on average Black people are paid 23 per cent less than their white counterparts. The ethnicity pay gap remains, and, currently, it is not a legal requirement for employers to collate ethnicity data despite prominent members of the community pushing for it a few years ago.

A recent debate in parliament led by Fabian MPs including Taiwo Owatemi and Abena Oppong-Asare highlighted that Black women are four times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth. This information has been known for many years, but no concrete action plans have yet been put in place. The list of injustice goes on, but despite this, BAME people keep going.

As an organisation, we support the advancement of Black people in politics and society, but we recognise the need to do more to make the Fabian Society a welcoming and inclusive place for Black members and employees. That is why the Fabian Society set up the Race Equality Taskforce in June 2020, a time-limited year-long group to gather evidence and develop and implement an action plan to advance race equality in the Fabian Society. Members of the group included prominent Fabian members from the Fabian Women's Network, Scottish Fabians and Young Fabians.

Our taskforce focused on discrimination and injustice experienced by Black people, but we recognise that this needs to be situated within the broader context of achieving race equality for people from all ethnic backgrounds; and equality and inclusion concerning every aspect of social identity.

The race equality taskforce also reviewed how the Fabian Society can support the development and advancement of Black people within the left. We examined specific measures that the Fabian Society could take to recruit, retain, promote, and support Black employees as part of our broader commitment to diversity, equality, and inclusion in employment.

We have also heard from the lived experiences of our Black members concerning the Fabian Society and their membership, as well as how this relates to their broader experience of politics and society – with an aim to increase the number of Black members as part of broader efforts to improve the diversity of our membership (including within sections, groups, and local societies).

We also asked how the society can support and promote Black members' political activism in the Fabian Society and the wider Labour movement. The society already has a commitment to achieve diverse platforming across its publications and events, but we are looking to make more progress here.

We are proud that the action plan proposed by our taskforce was adopted in full by the Fabian Society executive. This action plan is helping to ensure that the Fabian Society continues to have a strong and enduring commitment to race equality and recognises the historic role the Fabian Society must play in dismantling the forces that perpetuate structural inequality and racial prejudice. ■

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

BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

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

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Contact Stephen Ottaway stephenottaway1@gmail.com for details

CENTRAL LONDON

Contact Michael Weatherburn at 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

COLCHESTER

Contact Maurice Austin – Maurice.austin@phonecoop.coop

COUNTY DURHAM

Contact Professor Alan Townsend 01388 746479

CROYDON & SUTTON

Contact Emily Brothers – info@emilybrothers.com

ENFIELD FABIANS

Contact Andrew Gilbert at enfieldfabians@gmail.com

FINCHLEY

Contact Sam Jacobs Sam. Jacobs@netapp.com

HAVERING

Contact Davis Marshall at haveringfabians@outlook.com

HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

Contact Mark Cooke at hwwfabians@gmail.com

NEWHAM

Contact Mike Reader at mike.reader99@gmail.com

NORTHUMBRIA AREA

Contact Pat Hobson at pathobson@hotmail.com

READING & DISTRICT

Contact Tony Skuse at tony@skuse.net

RUGBY

Contact John Goodman rugbyfabians@myphone.coop

SOUTH TYNESIDE

Contact Paul Freeman at southtynesidefabians@gmail.com

SUFFOLK

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

TONBRIDGE & TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Contact Martin Clay at Martin.clay@btinternet.com

WALSALL

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

YORK & DISTRICT

Contact Jack Mason at jm2161@york.ac.uk

FABIAN QUIZ

WHAT WHITE PEOPLE CAN DO NEXT: FROM ALLYSHIP TO COALITION

Emma Dabiri



Approaching the issue of racial injustice from a new angle, this Sunday Times and Irish Times bestseller is filled with realistic, constructive actions for white people to take to fight systemic racism. Drawing on years of research, revolutionary thinking, and her own experiences, this essay from the acclaimed author of *Don't Touch My Hair* challenges us to build alliances and work together in unity to create meaningful, lasting change.

Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away. To win one, answer the following question:

A black woman is four times more likely to die in labour than a white woman. True or false?

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

ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN FRIDAY 20 AUGUST 2021

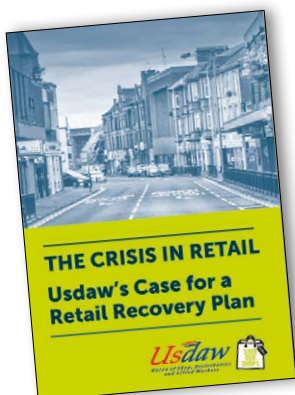


URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED TO SAVE OUR SHOPS



Usdaw is calling for:

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



**TO DOWNLOAD OUR RETAIL RECOVERY PLAN OR
FIND OUT MORE ABOUT OUR CAMPAIGN VISIT**

WWW.USDAW.ORG.UK/SOS

To join Usdaw visit **WWW.USDAW.ORG.UK/JOIN**
or call **0800 030 80 30**



**General Secretary Paddy Lillis
President Jane Jones**