FABIAN REVIEW

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COUNTING THE COST

Tackling the cost of living crisis and creating a stronger economy: Tulip Siddiq MP, Torsten Bell, Daniel Johnson MSP and more ***p14*** */ Peter Apps, Julie Ward and Jessica Toale on the war in Ukraine* ***p5***
Mark Drakeford MS reflects on devolution past and present ***p25***

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Making the case

Labour has remade itself. Now it needs to put a positive policy offer in front of the British people, writes *Andrew Harrop*

Keir Starmer has been Labour leader for two years and his major achievement in that time has been to deal with the party's negatives. Labour was once presented as a party of rearguard 'remoaners', reckless spenders, antisemites and apologists. The party has gone from being seen as unsafe and unserious to competent and mainstream.

The domestic debate during the early weeks of the terrible war in Ukraine was the proof. Labour's position on NATO, arms for Ukraine and countering Russia was totally unambiguous. No one seriously argued that Starmer was weaker than Johnson in this crisis. Quite the opposite in fact, given the Tories' slow and patchy action on Russian money in Britain.

Labour's attack on the Conservatives' oligarch connections has been just one example of Starmer's success in differentiating on the politics of character. For as long as Boris Johnson is prime minister honesty, integrity and respect will be key dividing lines between the parties.

But Labour needs to do more to differentiate on policy as well. Starmer has spent two years showing he is different from Jeremy Corbyn. Now he needs to do more to show he is different from the Conservatives too. That means setting out big but credible alternatives even if they aren't popular with everyone.

Public health is a good place to start. With Covid-19 rates soaring again, the party must break the eery Westminster consensus that we can all return to our pre-pandemic lives. It is a reckless illusion. Starmer should also set out plans to improve the nation's health more widely by changing lifestyles and business practices, from junk food to air pollution. The Tories are the prisoner of a small libertarian fringe who reject public action to safeguard life. Without promising to spend more money, Labour can create a dividing line on health – and be on the side of public opinion.

The party also needs to decide what it really thinks about Europe. A promise to 'make Brexit work' is a holding position to prove Labour knows there is no going back. It is not an answer to what Labour would do in power. Boris Johnson's international isolation, tensions in Northern Ireland and the disastrous decline in trade all point in one direction: Labour politicians know we need a deep economic and diplomatic partnership with the rest of Europe. They need to say it.

By promising to end our European isolation, Labour will have a proof-point to show that the party can grow prosperity faster than the Tories. It will need others too, so that Starmer can convince voters the party will bring an end to 15 years of economic decline. The answer to the question 'how will you pay for it?' must always be 'by growing the economy'.

The party can present pro-growth policies that the Conservatives are ideologically unable to copy. It should promise investment, regulation, partnership and genuine devolution that will boost business confidence and spending and steer the economy towards net zero.

Labour should also make the economic case for action on inequality because our huge divides hold back growth. Of course, in the short term the state needs to step in to help people worst hit by the cost of living crisis. Labour must argue for pensions and benefits to rise in line with today's record inflation, a policy that frontloads spending without adding to the deficit in future years.

But the party's main focus should be on long-term solutions to our stagnation-inducing inequality. It should first look to propose market interventions that avoid new spending and the Conservatives can't comfortably copy. Labour must make a strong, clear offer of rights, protections and power with respect to the workplace, consumer markets and housing – and explain why this is good for the economy.

A handful of clear, cost-neutral fiscal policies are also needed. Labour should explicitly promise to transfer wealth from those with great riches to those with none. The party should pledge help for three key groups who generate strong public support – low-income pensioners, families with babies and the working poor – and explain how the money will come exclusively from fairly taxing people and companies at the top.

Keir Starmer has proved Labour is sensible. Now it's time to prove Labour will change the country too. **F**

On the brink

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has brought untold human suffering – and profound questions about our foreign policy

THE ERA OF THREAT

PETER APPS

War in Ukraine has supercharged global challenges

As Britain's political and media classes obsessed over Boris Johnson's parties during lockdown in the first weeks of 2022, the largest invasion force assembled in Europe since 1945 was moving into position in plain sight as Vladimir Putin prepared for war.

The bloody conflict we have all seen unfold since has unleashed scenes across Ukraine that most in Europe hoped had been banished three quarters of a century ago. The first, second and third order consequences are only just beginning: appalling suffering and death in Ukraine, Europe's worst refugee crisis since 1945 and what the World Bank has warned is a 'global economic catastrophe' to follow from rising food and fuel prices.

The latter is already hitting every family and citizen in Britain, particularly the poorest, dramatically exacerbating an already accelerating cost of living crisis that requires much greater domestic government response. But what is unfolding in Ukraine also represents a dramatic escalation of a number of other global trends and challenges that were already alarming to begin with.

Labour has been robust on the Ukraine conflict, with Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy and Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey visiting Kyiv in January, Keir Starmer pushing for eventual war crimes trials and Labour ahead of the curve in calling for harder and faster sanctions.

But the party will also need to address the bigger issues – including a worsening global human rights crisis fuelled by advancing authoritarianism, an urgent need to tackle UK and international over-reliance on certain sources of fuel and food and a global inequitable redistribution of wealth and power of which Putin's oligarchs are amongst the grossest examples.

Bashing Boris Johnson and his party for getting far too close to individuals like Evgeny Lebedev is clearly good politics – although some Labour hands are also not entirely clean in that regard. Being

a government in waiting at such a dangerous time, however, will take more than highlighting Conservative failings. When Labour was elected in 1945, it was for its social programme, but voters also trusted it to handle the enormous challenges of the post-war world.

If there was ever a belief that those challenges had eased with the fall of the Berlin Wall, recent years have been a stark reminder that they have now returned in earnest.

The 11 years since the so-called Arab spring have already seen an unmistakable shift towards more brutal, authoritarian methods of control and intimidation by a host of autocratic governments, with Vladimir Putin in Russia and China's Xi Jinping dramatically cracking down on opposition, freedom of speech and the hallmarks of a pluralistic society.

In Russia, this crackdown has dramatically escalated further after the invasion, with media access dramatically curtailed for ordinary Russians and state-owned platforms pushing relentless coverage of war and warnings over the new heightened penalties for dissent – even if, for now at least, this has not prevented thousands of brave Russians from protesting.

Russia's use of heavy weaponry against civilian areas is the latest horror in a growing list of examples of nations and leaders turning to force, repression or the threat of both. Others include China's increasingly unambiguous threats towards Taiwan, the internment of well over a million ethnic Muslim Uyghurs by Beijing, the Saudi war in Yemen and murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi and Ethiopia's increasingly brutal campaign in Tigray.

Tackling each of these will require a different toolkit. With its actions in Ukraine, Russia has put itself almost beyond redemption under its current leadership. It is important to retain dialogue with others including China and the Gulf states in particular. But we need to be clear on our values and our limits, and that wars of aggression, genocide and mass killings of civilians will always have consequences, both real and serious.

Some of this, of course, marks a return to the kind of 'ethical foreign policy' Robin Cook talked about in the early days after 1997. What is at least as important now, however, is a broad and positive plan for the future, which both defends the very idea of liberal democracy and hardens our defences and limits our dependence on those who wish us or others harm.

Even without the realities of climate change, weaning us and other Western states off hydrocarbons would dramatically reset the power balance between us and those in Moscow or the Gulf who might kill or intimidate journalists, target civilians indiscriminately or use unacceptable means to control dissent at home.

Working with long-established and new partners and allies in Europe, North America and beyond is clearly an imperative in this new era of threat. But as well as military, diplomatic and humanitarian coordination, we should be looking at the reform of global tax and business with the opening clear priority of stopping the wealth gap growing ever wider.

None of this is easy, even for an unashamedly progressive, pluralist and internationalist party like ours. But we cannot afford not to think of these issues. As events in Ukraine are showing, the results of getting this wrong are catastrophic. **F**

Peter Apps is a global affairs columnist for Reuters news agency. He is also a member of the British Army Reserve and the Labour party

THE RIGHT VALUES

JESSICA TOALE

War in Ukraine has exposed the gulf between Labour and the Conservatives

In just a matter of weeks, the war in Ukraine has become the biggest European conflict many of us will have witnessed in our lifetimes. It is the largest deployment of troops in Europe since the second world war. The refugee population has already reached 3 million, with many more internally displaced, and the unfurling humanitarian crisis is characterised by the deliberate targeting of civilians.

While Vladimir Putin may have wished to exploit divisions and weaknesses in Europe and the US, instead these nations have shown a remarkably united front, pursuing coordinated diplomatic and economic action and providing military support to Ukraine. However, throughout the unfolding crisis, UK public opinion on issues like sanctions and the humanitarian response has been miles ahead of its government. The Conservatives' approach has been marked by compromised interests, a lack of compassion and incompetence. It is Labour that has pushed the government to take deeper and more decisive action on issues of great import.

On the issue of sanctions, the Conservatives are clearly compromised. Their party has well-documented links with Russian oligarchs – from Boris Johnson's cosy friendship with Evgeny Lebedev to the estimated £1.93m received in donations to the party since he became prime minister. As a result, they have been slow to act.

The world watched as European nations seized superyachts owned by Russian oligarchs, but the UK dragged its feet and debated whether to give foreign owners of UK property as much as 18 months to declare their interests. By contrast, unencumbered by such conflicts of interest, Labour has continually called for sanctions to go further and deeper – from expanding the list of individuals and goods subject to sanction to reducing the time allowed to register the beneficial ownership of property in the UK. These are issues that have been on the Conservatives' radar since at least 2016, when David Cameron made anti-corruption a priority, yet they have consistently failed to act.

The need for a humanitarian response to the conflict in Ukraine has been treated as if it were an inconvenience to the Home Office – which in normal times is bent on trying to criminalise asylum seekers and expand the government's powers to remove people's citizenship. Ukrainian refugees seeking refuge in the UK have been subject to restrictive policies and bureaucratic processes. Despite this, Tory MPs continue to mendaciously claim that the UK is doing more for refugees than any other nation in Europe. This is just not true. It is Labour MPs, like Shadow Home Secretary Yvette Cooper, who again are leading the charge and putting pressure on government to provide simple, unbureaucratic and safe routes to the UK for Ukrainians who wish to come here – just as they were for Syrian and Afghan refugees before them.

Labour will need to maintain this vigilance. The impacts of the conflict in Ukraine will be far reaching – including for the UK. The government is already trying to blame the cost of living crisis on the conflict. We must not let it do this. We must not let it wipe its hands of more than a decade's worth of policies that have contributed to the rising cost of energy, falling real wage growth and the decimation of our public services. And we must

not let the Conservatives off the hook for their failure to deal with these problems, now and in the future.

Labour must work constructively with the government where it can – as it has done on supporting the provision of military assistance to Ukraine – but it must also continue to hold government to account where it is compromised and incompetent. As the situation in Ukraine evolves this will be critical in the short-term to the humanitarian, military and sanction responses. And in the longer term, it will be essential to supporting Ukraine's reconstruction, standing up to authoritarianism, upholding international law and ensuring accountability for the war crimes we are now witnessing.

Labour's starting point on domestic and foreign policy is its commitment to social justice and cooperation. These values are needed more than ever, at home and abroad. F

Jessica Toale is a political and international development specialist and co-chair of the Labour Foreign Policy Group

STRENGTH IN UNITY

JULIE WARD

Unlike this government, European leaders are working together for Ukraine

I was elected as a Labour MEP in 2014 and, in the following year, made my first speech in the European Parliament at a debate on the situation in Ukraine. It was then over a year since the Maidan protests had begun, and 11 months since Russia had invaded Crimea and subsequently backed armed separatists in the eastern Donbas region. Whilst the full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in the early hours of February 24 this year, the war has been going on for more than eight years with a total loss of lives on both sides in excess of 13,000, not counting those killed during the current wider hostilities. This figure includes more than 3,000 civilian casualties. The number of those wounded is thought to be more than 33,000, a third of whom were most likely civilians. Nearly 3,000 Ukrainian military personnel have been captured, many tortured in order to make forced confessions and sentenced by kangaroo

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courts or pressured to state they are changing sides. Seventy Ukrainians are missing, including Crimean Tatars whose stories have been largely unreported.

My colleagues and I in the European Parliament were highly engaged with the Ukrainian issue, speaking on debates ranging from the murder of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov to the role of women in peace-building. We supported increased financial aid and capacity-building for Ukraine's fledging institutions, engaged with civil society, met with Ukrainian youth, parliamentarians and diplomats, and successfully called for the release of Ukrainian filmmaker Oleg Sentsov and others who had been tried on trumped-up charges.

In 2018 I opened a hospital in Ivankiv for the victims of Chernobyl and visited the stricken reactor to see the new protective shield, both EU-funded projects. Meanwhile, Westminster was consumed with a domestic culture war provoked by Nigel Farage and the ERG, and had taken its eye off the ball. No one in London was talking about Ukraine.

British Labour MEPs were experts in foreign affairs regardless of whether or not we had committee responsibility for such matters. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs regularly appeared in the plenary to give an account of EU 'external action' and we posed oral and written questions which the commission was required to answer in considerable detail. The suggestion by Boris Johnson that we are now somehow 'world-leading' in our response to this crisis (or any other) is frankly laughable. We gave away our influence on the world stage when we turned our back on our neighbours, and the photograph of European leaders at the recent Versailles Summit is a stark reminder of our painful isolation.

Notwithstanding various disagreements between the 27 remaining EU member states about issues such as Covid-19 regulations, drug patents, gender equality, trade agreements and the UN Global Compact for Migration, the current council members are united in their response to both Brexit and the war in Ukraine. There is strength in unity and even the right-wing governments in Warsaw and Budapest recognise the existential threat to peace on the continent if disunity prevails.

EU leaders dominate the media with Emmanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz rising head and shoulders above our own populist dog-whistle government, demonstrating statesmanship by making difficult decisions for the common good of all EU citizens, not simply with an eye to their own electorate. The decision to pause the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project will have financial consequences for ordinary Germans, for example. Meanwhile, the UK is strengthening links with Saudi oil sheikhs, who recently went ahead with the execution of 81 people in one day in the knowledge that human rights is not on Johnson's agenda.

The war in Ukraine has consequences for all of us – but Vladimir Putin is not just fighting a ground war. He has been winning the information war for the best part of a decade, investing in troll farms and promoting notorious state media outlets RT and Sputnik TV as a means of sowing discord and confusion across the globe. When I was given responsibility for an EU report on propaganda against the EU in 2017, I naively assumed it would be about UKIP. It was about Russia. Brexit and the Trump election were welcomed by Putin who needs a divided world in order to push his expansionist agenda.

In the days before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I was in Kyiv as part of a progressive left delegation. We met with trade unionists, parliamentarians, ministers, human rights defenders, Kyiv's mayor Vitaliy Klitschko and command and control of the city's civil defence force. All were grateful for our expressions of solidarity in the face of rising tensions but were clear that Putin's military had been bolstered by flows of money from Russian oligarchs living it up in London and Europe's reliance on Russian oil and gas.

We will all be paying a high price for our failure to see what was coming out of the Kremlin in the latter days of the post-Soviet era, but none more so than the Ukrainian people who were so full of hope for a brighter, more prosperous and democratic European future. F

Julie Ward is the former Labour MEP for North West England

Shortcuts

ON THE WRONG PATH

Government plans for prisons will not break the cycle of crime —*Ellie Reeves MP*

Our prisons play a vital role in keeping the public safe. But more than a decade of Conservative cuts to the justice system has left them in crisis.

Violence is up, drug seizures are up, and the service is haemorrhaging experienced staff. Most facilities were created in the Victorian era and many prisons are old, dilapidated, and dangerous. With such a poor environment to rehabilitate, it is no wonder that re-offending rates are over a staggering 40 per cent and are costing the taxpayer £18bn a year.

Throughout the pandemic most prisoners have been locked in their cells for up to 23 hours a day. They have had to go without family visits, work, and learning. This has presented huge challenges for inmates' mental health and their prospects of moving away from crime.

The government's recent prisons strategy White Paper acknowledged some of these problems and put forward some measures to be welcomed. However, many of the proposals have been promised before and not delivered. They also remain unfunded, with no clear timetable for delivery. And although the paper recognises some of the symptoms of our broken prison system, it fails to put forward a serious strategy to tackle the root causes and keep the public safe.

For example, it outlines that the government will recruit up to 5,000 additional prison officers. But this will do little to make up for the prison officer experience – amounting to some 86,000 hours – which has left the service since 2010 because of funding cuts. This knowhow is vital in de-escalating conflict and putting offenders back on the right path.

Given this loss of expertise, it is unsurprising that violence has soared. Assaults on staff increased by 242 per cent between

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2010 and 2020 – creating an exodus of staff leaving the service for more lucrative and less risky work.

The surging availability of drugs – up by 500 per cent over the last decade – has further fuelled disorder.

Most shockingly, over this period the Ministry of Justice paid out £33m in compensation for violent incidents – equivalent to the salaries of 1,044 prison officers.

The number of inmates receiving NHS alcohol and drug treatment courses has plunged and the proportion of prisoners who developed a drug problem in prison more than doubled between 2015 and 2020.

Since 2010, the Tories have made empty promises on improving prisoners' employment prospects, but during that time they cut the education, training and staff that would support them to find a job.

Education and treatment programmes make prisoners less likely to reoffend – but there are fewer offenders taking them, and the paper was weak on solutions to getting people engaged in these schemes again.

The White Paper did outline a new prisoner education service to offer the skills and qualifications needed to get employment on release. But it failed once again to say when this service will be introduced.

The White Paper shows how the government continues to drift away from its own female offender strategy. This promised to focus on early intervention and community-based solutions for women that are predominantly themselves the victims of crime.

Instead of investing in what works for most female offenders – women's centres and community sentences – the government is spending £150m to build 500 new prison cells for women, meaning the cycle of crime will continue.

To reduce reoffending and truly protect the public, we need a fit for purpose prison system that rehabilitates. By every measure, the government has failed on this and only has warm words and broken promises to offer. Real action, real investment and real reform are required.

Otherwise we can expect more crime and more victims – and it is the public that will pay the price. **F**

Ellie Reeves is Labour MP for Lewisham West and Penge and shadow minister for justice

THE PURSUIT OF OBJECTIVITY

The licence fee is an imperfect beast, but it has supported a vital public service—*Laura Beers*

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, both Britons and citizens around the globe have turned to BBC News, the BBC World Service, and BBC foreign language broadcasts for on-the-ground reporting and informed analysis of the conflict. While the government contributes to the BBC's international services, the bulk of funding for this coverage has come from the licence fees paid by British television and radio owners.

In January this year, culture secretary Nadine Dorries announced via Twitter a change in government policy with profound implications for the future of broadcasting: "We're freezing the licence fee for the next two years," she said. "That's more money in the pockets of pensioners; in the pockets of families who are struggling to make ends meet." Dorries followed up by suggesting that the government was considering scrapping the licence fee altogether. Labour figures, including shadow culture secretary Lucy Powell

and leader Keir Starmer, have denounced the policy as driven by spite – a malicious retaliation against the broadcaster for its coverage of current scandals and its reporting on both Brexit and the 2019 general election campaign.

Yet while Labour is currently championing both the licence fee and the BBC more broadly, the party has itself toyed with the idea of radical change. Former leader Jeremy Corbyn put forward his own proposals to restructure the funding and governance of the corporation and, as far back as the 1970s, Jim Callaghan's government imposed financial strictures on the BBC and contemplated abolishing the licence fee in favour of funding through taxation – a decision which would have de facto weakened the independence of the BBC.

So what would be lost if the licence fee finally goes?

The licence fee dates to the formation of the British Broadcasting Company in December 1922, when the government granted a monopoly charter to a group of radio set manufacturers to broadcast wireless content over British airwaves. The following year, the government passed the Wireless Telegraphy Act, which stipulated that the government would collect a licence fee from every radio set owner and remit a portion of the fee to the BBC to finance its output. In the early 1920s, that output was principally musical productions and talks on 'non-controversial' subjects. News bulletins were limited to the evenings, and the company was prohibited from producing news in-house, instead reading directly from press service bulletins. Politicians' voices remained almost absent from the airwaves, with the notable exception of a single broadcast by each of the three party leaders on the eve of the 1924 general election.

If citizens of Britain's newly minted mass democracy wanted political news, they were forced to turn to the print press, which was dominated by a clique of Tory press barons who did not attempt to present an unbiased record of political events.

As early as 1923, Labour's representative to a government-appointed committee to review the BBC charter mooted the possibility of the BBC filling a void within British political discourse, suggesting that the British public would be better served by the transformation of the BBC from a private company into a public corporation tasked with reporting unbiased news in the public interest, under the close regulation of the government.

At the time, neither the BBC directors, nor the Tory government which benefited from the status quo, were keen to have the BBC enter the field of news production. The 1926 general strike, which saw printers join the picket lines and forced the public to tune into their radios for news, changed the calculus, and on 1 January 1927 the BBC was transformed from a private company into a public corporation and given more latitude both to produce its own news and to broadcast on 'controversial' political subjects, as long as it presented news in an unbiased manner. Effectively, the BBC was allowed to broadcast news if it committed to educate the listener, not inflame prejudices.

Over the years, critics of all political hues have at times accused the broadcaster of bias, and, unlike its competitors, the BBC has been compelled to take these criticisms on board and seek to reform its practice in pursuit of objectivity.

The BBC's commitment to high-quality, comparatively unbiased news programming is a public good, which comes at a public cost, but, as with other public goods, it is one that people tend to take for granted and whose costs they often resent. If given the chance, many would opt not to support the service, hobbling its ability to survive without recourse to advertising revenue. At the time of the BBC's creation, the licence fee was fairly uncontroversial. Those who were not overly interested in the BBC's political reporting accepted the licence fee because it gave them access to entertainment. But now, with sport leagues making broadcast deals with Sky and new streaming services like Netflix, and Amazon producing entertainment content to rival the BBC, some do not want to pay to subsidise a service which they perceive as offering them little personal benefit. The argument, "I don't watch or listen to the BBC, why should I pay for it?" resonates in a culture which is much more deeply imbued with the ethos of consumer choice than that which gave rise to the BBC a century ago.

The licence fee is an imperfect beast, born of unique historical circumstances, but it has largely done the job of bringing in revenue necessary to support a vital public service. If Labour cannot safeguard the licence fee, it needs to consider alternatives that will ensure that the corporation's news coverage does not become another 'tragedy of the Commons'. **F**

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Laura Beers is a professor of history at the American University, Washington DC and author of Red Ellen: The Life of Ellen Wilkinson, Socialist, Feminist, Internationalist

Dear leaders

Labour is often tougher on its ex-PMs than the Conservatives, as *Richard Carr* explains

Richard Carr is a senior lecturer in history and politics at Anglia Ruskin University and author of the book March of the Moderates

What do you do when you walk out from that famous black door for the last time? With David Cameron and Tony Blair in the news over the past year, this is a question that still dogs our politics. Most prime ministers live a good 20 to 25 years after ceding power. Some, like Ted Heath or Alec Douglas-Home, experience an even longer denouement. That is a long time to be in the shadow of office – seeing friends, enemies or, in Blair's case Brownite frenemies, exercise functions you once held. The temptation to enter the fray must be overwhelming. There have usually been three to five living ex-PMs at any one point in time, all searching for a function beyond the annual set piece occasions like laying a wreath at the Cenotaph. Finding a purpose must be tough. The West Wing ended with the now ex-president Jeb Bartlett relieved with the prospect of thinking about 'tomorrow', but for many ex-leaders it is hard enough to fill 'today.'

Logistically, there are immediate daily challenges. Tony Blair has talked about not having done a supermarket shop or driven a car since 1997. Things change when you take office, and then, again, when you leave it. You suddenly do not live above your work, and no longer have hundreds of staff nominally at your whim. You have to manage the minutiae of everyday life like buying clothes and getting haircuts. This sounds trivial but it has obviously proven difficult.

Something has gone wrong with Labour and its political memory. It is high time to begin rethinking Labour's past

In making the adjustment, there are, perhaps, three broad channels our former prime ministers have fallen into. First, there is the grumpy long 'sulk', personified by Ted Heath after he was deposed as Tory leader by Margaret Thatcher in 1975 and grouched from the backbenches for the next quarter of a century. Losing a prime ministerial empire and not being able to find a meaningful role must be tough, but it was not a situation Heath coped with well. In a sense he had the worst of all worlds – still in the Commons until 2001 and so in the domestic political game, but not able to make much of a meaningful contribution to it. Accepting the job offers Thatcher passed his way such as ambassador to the US or secretary general of NATO would probably have been a wiser move. In the end, he rather ended up like a slightly less dramatic Edward VIII – a deposed King without a Wallis.

Conversely, John Major's decision to watch Surrey County Cricket club on the day he left office was viewed as a bit comedic at the time – but indicated he had a life, and a joviality, that perhaps had not been obvious with the pressures of government. He has gone on to form quite a regular double act with Blair on issues from Northern Ireland to Brexit, and is now something of a centrist (gran)dad hero. His disdain for Boris Johnson has been clear, and entirely fair, although his public role has largely now become laying into the incumbent on a think tank speech circuit so regular it should be plugged into 'the grid.' Still, he left office at 54 looking like he was pushing 60, and continues to make interventions in to his late 70s looking a decade younger. Time has served him well, so much so that Jonny Lee Miller will play him in The Crown. He is a good exemplar of the second, probably ideal, path: the genial, consensual elder statesman who pops up every now and then but basically enjoys their life.

The last group can largely be defined by those recent prime ministers who still feel they have something regular to offer to the political scene. Theresa May and Gordon Brown probably exemplified the public's belief in them as diligent, honest figures by sticking it out in Westminster for a few years. For both, there hasn't been a Heath level of sour grapes (probably more impressive in May's case, whose gravitas has added something to the Tory backbenches). But they have also benefited from the controversy of the figures that preceded them: Blair and Cameron. Blair's think tank has done sterling work

on Covid-19 policy, and his advocacy of a second referendum on Brexit included some admirably sharp analysis, but his reputation continues to be defined by his time in office. "Where's the government on immunisation?" has been a harder punch to land when a small minority continue to yell: "What about Iraq!?!" That said, he continues to plough an insightful furrow on issues from Covid-19 to climate change.

'The heir to Blair' has obviously fared worse. David Cameron's Greensill lobbying scandal rightly drew widespread criticism – most sharply from Rachel Reeves – but it was interesting that it closely followed his own apparent semi-fantastical musing about a political return as foreign secretary in a post-May cabinet. He has, perhaps, struggled to let go – not in as dramatically a sulky manner as Heath, but still regarding himself as a big fish in a world that has largely moved on. The contrast with his former deputy, Nick Clegg, now at Facebook, is certainly stark. One former Clegg advisor has declared that "Cameron wants to play tennis with people, but no one has time to play tennis with him. Nick wanted a proper job."

The challenge for any ex-PM is presumably made more difficult by the fact that, upon leaving office, you instantly become a private citizen like any other. Of course, most people do not gain access to the public duty cost allowance – providing up to £110,000 a year to former prime ministers (and, when he was resident in the UK, Nick Clegg) to cover various expenses. But even here the taxpayer exerts a slightly ambiguous demand of its recipients – it does not support private or parliamentary duties, but is supposed to offset costs 'arising from their special position in public life.' That special position is akin to a political ghost – an electoral mandate that people remember, can still perceive, but that has clearly expired.

There are wider questions of memory here – and the degree to which this 'special position' should be formalised. After all, Britain tends to commemorate its former leaders in a less obviously official manner than, say, the Americans. In the US, quite aside from attending their successors' inauguration, every president since Herbert Hoover has maintained a presidential library (and, usually, museum) funded by a combination of public and private sources. This is a geeky academic historian point – but a Blair library in Sedgefield, or a Wilson library on the Isles of Scilly might help us understand our former leaders, their constituencies or their hinterlands a little better.

Short of unveiling such a tribute-paying institution, then, can former leaders improve their historical reputation? This is difficult but not impossible – and owes something to luck. Winston Churchill famously said that 'history would be kind to me, because I intend to write it' – and much of the 'gathering storm' interpretation of the 1930s certainly comes from the publication of his famous, somewhat self-serving books on the second world war. But Churchill was also helped by the fact that, for several years, none of his predecessors in Downing Street were alive, and therefore could not explain the rationale behind their actions. The so-called 'guilty men' of the 1930s – Ramsay Macdonald and Stanley Baldwin – both died before Churchill's books were published – and were therefore unable to offer much defence, or elaboration, of their policies of appeasement. Likewise, perhaps the 20th century's most controversial prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, had succumbed to the effects of throat cancer only six months after handing over power to Churchill in 1940.

There is no question that a post-war Chamberlain would have had a difficult job explaining the Munich Agreement, but the point was that the terrain was free for Churchill to tell the story as he wanted. As such, Churchill's 'fight them on the beaches' spirit of 1940 came to obscure the more ambiguous, largely anti-war sentiment of the late 1930s, and that was that as far as popular understanding went. Arguably it has formed a mirror image of public views regarding the 2003 war in Iraq (positive at first, but then clearly waning).

Whereas Churchill castigated his predecessors like Baldwin for putting 'party before country', this was arguably the exception and not the rule. Indeed, Labour might be more guilty of attacking former leaders than the Tories – and it is certainly less understanding. In the case of Macdonald, it was largely left to a politician turned academic, David Marquand, to try and rehabilitate the turncoat of 1931. Maybe Nick Thomas-Symonds' forthcoming book on Harold Wilson will do similar for the criticisms regarding opportunism and honours levelled against Harold Wilson. All in all however the left, mostly, tends to bury its traitors whilst the Conservative party attempts to reconcile them within its canon. This is doubtless easier for a party that has historically prided itself on a cheery lack of ideology, but it is also something for Labour to reflect upon. Corbyn's inability to talk about the achievements of Blair, and, in turn, Blair being somewhat cold on Wilson, seems politically shortsighted when it comes to their own reputations. After all, critics might say, why rehabilitate them, when they castigated their own predecessors?

This internal squabbling may have consequences. In 2019 a YouGov poll had two Conservatives – Thatcher (with 21 per cent of the vote) and Churchill (19 per cent) – as the greatest postwar prime ministers amongst the British public. Labour's big three of Blair (6 per cent), Attlee (5 per cent) and Wilson (4 per cent) lagged far behind. Given the veneration of the NHS, Attlee's score may seem a little low, but these aggregate statistics perhaps obscure the point that whilst Tories venerate their own history (rose-tinted spectacles or not), Labour has a decidedly more mixed and contested view of its own. Both Blair and Attlee were more likely to be selected by modern Liberal Democrat voters as the best prime minister than they were by backers of Labour (who plumped for Churchill). Forty-three per cent of Labour voters said they didn't know who their favourite PM was, more than double the 21 per cent of Conservative voters who said similar.

Something has gone wrong with Labour and its political memory somewhere and it is high time, to echo the title of the new edited collection by Nathan Yeowell, to begin rethinking Labour's past. In the year Tony Blair received his knighthood, that may best begin with a more unambiguously positive verdict on our last government than has recently been possible. To his credit, Keir Starmer seems to get this. After all, to set himself up to take Downing Street, the achievements of those who previously entered that door may be worth some reflection. F

Personality politics

The gulf between the values of politicians and those they seek to represent must be bridged if Labour is to win power again, writes *James Weinberg*

Dr James Weinberg is a lecturer in political behaviour at the University of Sheffield. His book, Who Enters Politics and Why?, is published by Bristol University Press

At the time of writing, the Labour party is seeing a boom in electoral support. Over the last four months, it has enjoyed a steady lead in the polls that, at one point in mid-January, was its largest since 2002. Accounting for recent surveys of political attitudes, it seems that the current Conservative government has finally started to pay the price for its handling of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as a string of scandals that have damaged perceptions of its competence, integrity and benevolence.

Yet to draw on an adage attributed to the late Harold Wilson, a week can be a long time in politics. Public opinion is a fickle beast and the Labour party cannot afford to be complacent or, more specifically, to be satisfied with accruing momentary public support as a default alternative to Conservative failure. It is worth remembering that in order to win the next election with a majority of one, Labour will have to increase its share of parliamentary seats by a little over 60 per cent. This is something that no political party has ever done.

My recent book, Who Enters Politics and Why? seeks to cast light on the psychological dimensions of this challenge – amongst others – using original survey and interview data on the basic human values of UK MPs and councillors as well as the UK electorate.

Basic values are well studied across the social sciences as one measure of personality; they denote a series of different motivational goals that we each hold to differing degrees and thus act to fulfil in various domains of our lives. A raft of research in psychology and political science has demonstrated the importance of personality characteristics, like basic values, for people's political attitudes and participation. Comparing the basic values of governors and governed, I ask: do politicians share the value priorities (and thus motivational goals) of those citizens who vote for them and, ultimately, trust them with their democratic sovereignty?

In picking apart this question, I find first that partisanship and basic values share a strong relationship at all levels of UK politics. Second, partisan elites are much more polarised in their basic values than partisans in the public. And third, psychological congruence between MPs and voters occurs to a much greater extent on the right of British politics than the left.

What exactly does this mean? On the first point, for example, I find that Labour, SNP and Liberal Democrat MPs and voters score higher for 'self-transcendence' values (denoting benevolence and universalism) than their Conservative colleagues and peers. In many ways, these results reflect the ideological foundations of the UK's centre-left parties and, in particular, their strong advocacy of social welfare ideals. By contrast, Conservative MPs and voters score higher for 'conservation' values (denoting conformity, tradition and security), again in line with the party's historic ideological roots in social and economic hierarchy.

More informative still, I find that voters for parties on the left of British politics (primarily Labour) are more psychologically akin to voters on the right and elected politicians on the right (primarily Conservative), than those politicians on the left that they actually elect. The same is true of non-voters. These results paint a worrying picture for politicians and parties on the left – Labour in particular – who not only lack psychological affinity with their existing voters but also those who do not vote at all.

It is right to ask why and how these results matter. The first answer to that question lies in a theory from political psychology known as the congruency principle. Put simply, the congruency principle relates to the ways in which voters use personality characteristics as yardsticks to appraise politicians' suitability for office and, in turn, their performance or policy proposals. Voters will seek and identify congruency between their own basic values and those of candidates or groups of candidates (ie political parties). Corroborated by studies in the US and a number of European states, the congruency principle – coupled with the findings reported above – may help to explain the Labour party's recent misfortunes.

On the ideological right, it would seem that basic values, as part of a reflexive and purposive system of personality, help people to make political choices consistent

with the basic principles that guide their lives. Thus, there is psychological congruence between politicians and their voters; a lead-follower match as the esteemed academic David Winter would put it.

On the ideological left, the leader-follower match appears to fail in the UK (on aggregate). This may reflect the broader ideological space on the left and the challenge facing parties like Labour, which must bridge support from small-c conservatives, cosmopolitan liberals, and democratic socialists alike. Nevertheless, there is a considerable personality gap between Labour office-holders and the average Labour voter (let alone the average voter in the whole electorate).

The significance of this analysis is two-fold and pertains both to Labour's past and future. To elaborate, let us consider first the nature of partisanship and how it forms.

Very crudely, prominent explanations tend to focus on one of two 'pathways' known as instrumental and expressive partisanship. From an instrumental perspective, partisanship is grounded in a responsive and relatively well-informed degree of contemplation by citizens. Voting behaviours – taken as indicators of partisanship – therefore reflect citizens' agreement with a particular party manifesto and can be equally responsive to a party's policy successes, failures and the appearance or performance of its leaders. In the second pathway, partisanship is an expressive choice grounded in identity and emotion, and is therefore largely resistant to changes in party personnel or policy platforms. Expressive partisans engage more in motivated reasoning: biased thought patterns whereby we process information positively if it conforms to prior beliefs and process information negatively if it does not. Expressive partisans also display more animosity to out-groups, and exhibit defensive emotions when their party is threatened.

Whilst the so-called Red Wall may have fallen in 2019, the cracks had been widening for the best part of two decades or more

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So what can we glean when we apply these theories and data to Labour's past performance? Let us start in 1997, when Tony Blair's New Labour offered an unashamedly neoliberal policy agenda. Policies such as caps on income tax and the end of the party's commitment to national ownership of public services drastically reduced the RILE scores (ideological differences) between Labour and Conservative campaign manifestos, and arguably made the former far more attractive to 'instrumental partisans' motivated by 'conservation' values.

However, the New Labour movement simultaneously violated many of the norms associated with expressive social identification among its traditional support base. As the perceived differences between the two main parties decreased (both in terms of the types of people entering the parliamentary parties and their policy positions), the cohesion of this support base dwindled and expressive partisans started to look elsewhere or did not vote at all. Indeed, whilst the so-called Red Wall may have fallen in 2019, the cracks had been widening for the best part of two decades or more. The New Labour movement was, then, psychologically unsustainable, but by the same token subsequent strategists and leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn moved the Labour party to the 'radical' left in a way that failed to compete with the Conservatives' instrumental appeal to the psychology of the average British voter and previous non-voters (on Brexit in particular).

This leaves the Labour party in somewhat of a quandary. Labour is proud to be the party of economic and social transformation (and rightly so), but at times this can also lead to a public image of Labour as a party *for* rather than *of* the people. Put another way, Labour seeks to sell a manifesto built on change to a median voter who is inherently more motivated by security, tradition, and conservation. In recent years, the Conservative party has operated in reverse and fared much better at the ballot box. At the same time, the Labour party – comprised of MPs and members who are not psychologically aligned with the wider electorate – has arguably failed to get outside of itself in order to understand when and why its message has not successfully resonated with (enough) voters. In this respect, the Labour Together inquiry into the 2019 election defeat was a highly instructive exercise.

In politics, there is no consolation in losing an election; transformative governance can only take place when one is in government. This does not mean that the Labour party should abandon its longstanding ideals, but it should think strategically about how it works those ideals into an alternative vision for the UK that properly resonates with the most important basic values of voters around the country (and not just its own membership or parliamentary body); how it communicates that vision and its derivative policies in a way that clearly targets and thus activates people's basic values in the run-up to elections; as well as how it selects candidates that are more psychologically representative of the nation it seeks to govern. Whilst the polls today do, then, show an encouraging picture for the party, there remains a great deal of work to be done. And that work needs to start sooner rather than later. **F**

Easing the squeeze

What should be Labour's priorities for the economy? The Fabian Review canvassed some ideas

LASTING PAIN

The cost of living crisis is going to hurt. To tackle it, we will also need to address the stagnation which has bedevilled the UK economy for years, writes *Torsten Bell*

Britain is at last stepping out of the pandemic that has dominated the last two years – only to step straight into a huge cost of living crisis that will be the defining economic feature of what remains of this parliament. The lives of those at risk from the unfolding nightmare in Ukraine are our top concern, but the return of war to Europe will also deepen the downturn in living standards here in the UK.

The scale and immediacy of the current income squeeze, combined with the distribution of pain it brings and the historical context of a decade of stagnation, help to explain why it will be so deeply felt. The fact that high inflation today is forecast to be followed by a continuation of Britain's disastrous productivity stagnation tomorrow also means the pain will last. This is crucial to understanding the task facing everyone in, or aspiring to be in, government during the 2020s.

The scale of the pain to come is hard to overstate. Inflation was already surging towards its highest level in three decades before president Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, as the swift reopening of the global economy drove up prices – particularly for energy. Now it looks likely it will exceed 8 per cent, reaching levels not seen since the early 1980s. Even taking into account the support announced by the chancellor, the result will be the typical household's income falling by 4 per cent – or £1,000 – in the year ahead. This is something only seen during major recessions.

The immediacy of hits to living standards is also very unusual. We started 2021 with inflation well under 1 per cent, but ended it at more than five times that level. As a result, real wages have been falling since before last summer. The energy price cap is now setting prices for many of us so unlike the gradual energy bill surges of the early 2010s, we saw a widespread, overnight 50 per cent rise in energy bills on 1 April. The following week tax rises totalling £14bn came into effect.

So far the high inflation squeeze has been broad-based – affecting those on low, middle and high incomes alike. But energy bill surges will hit poorer households harder – they spend three times as much of their family budgets on such bills as the richest fifth of households. And, unlike higher income households, lower income households have not built up extra savings during the pandemic that they can now draw down on. This will matter when, despite the chancellor's measures to limit the scale of energy bill rises, the number of us suffering from 'fuel stress' – spending 10 per cent of their family budgets on energy bills – more than doubles to five million households after April's bill rise.

This downturn in living standards is so tough because it comes on the back of over a decade of stagnating incomes. Policies like furlough and temporary benefit boosts protected household incomes from the huge falls in GDP during the pandemic. But we went into that pandemic with pay packets no higher than before the financial crisis. The poorest households have seen no income rises since the early 2000s. The tough year ahead might have been more manageable if it had come on the back of a living standards boom, but our recent history is one of an almost unprecedented lack of growth.

High inflation and weak productivity growth lie behind our living standards woes

Crucially, official forecasters at the Bank of England and Office for Budget Responsibility expect that stagnation to continue even once this inflation shock passes. If they are right that the poor productivity – and therefore wage – growth that plagued us during the 2010s will continue, the typical household's income will still be lower in 2025–26 than in 2021–22: living standards-wise the pandemic would be as good as the first half of the 2020s got. The result is that absolute child poverty, something we always used to take for granted would be falling, is on the rise. In fact, according to our forecasts, over one million people could fall below the absolute poverty in the coming financial year.

So what is to be done?

The chancellor had an opportunity to soften the immediate pain ahead with his recent spring statement – but instead of prioritising those hit hardest by the cost of living crisis he focused on rebuilding his tax cutting credentials. The result, a 1p income tax cut for richer households in two years' time while benefits fail to keep pace with price rises today, is deeply unsatisfactory.

This is all the more frustrating as the short-term answer is staring us in the face. While we cannot protect

Britain from the reality that rising energy prices make us poorer as a nation, we can decide where that pain falls. Benefit levels are rising by only by 3.1 per cent in April, when inflation may be running at over 8 per cent. Over 2022–23 this is equivalent to a one-off £11bn cut to benefits. The usual approach to setting benefits would then be a huge rise next April to catch up with prices – but this rollercoaster will leave the poorest households hugely exposed over the coming 12 months. Instead we need benefits to rise by more like 8 per cent immediately – and the Treasury can do so without permanently raising public spending with a lower increase next year. This was the big hole in the spring statement.

Allowing benefits to rise in line with prices would focus support on poorer households, while calls to scrap the planned rise in national insurance would overwhelmingly benefit the highest earners. The chancellor was right to rebuff this. That is not to say that national insurance – a tax purely on earnings – is a good way to raise revenue. Alongside an unprecedented squeeze on people's earnings, Britain's recent economic history includes a boom in wealth, even during the pandemic. So future tax rises need to shift away from taxes solely on earnings to wider sources of income and wealth.

On energy bills, the longer term shift towards renewables and nuclear power, or the badly needed acceleration of home insulation, will come too late to make any material impact this year. But some levies could be moved off electricity bills and instead be funded by general taxation. Moving renewables obligation costs, for example, would take around £70 a year off bills at a cost of around £2bn a year.

But current or would-be national leaders are not just being asked to fight the immediate cost of living crisis – but also to turn around the UK's relative economic decline that underpins our stagnation in living standards. Had incomes grown in line with previous trends from 2005–06 to 2025–26 the typical income in 2025–26 would be 43 per cent (£11,000) higher than is currently projected.

The key task facing politicians of all stripes then is to renew the UK's economic strategy for a 2020s shaped by Brexit, Covid-19 and the net zero transition. That requires us to be honest about our nation's strengths – overwhelmingly made up by high-end services, unfashionable as they are – and the challenges we face. There is no route to economic success that ignores the facts that our economy is less open to the world post-Brexit, our firms refuse to invest, and that we live with the highest level of inequality among major European economies.

The job of politics is to address the immediate effects, and longer lasting drivers, of our living standards stagnation. Much as it pains us to admit it, the UK's recovery from Covid-19 is now well underway, but our living standard downturn is just beginning. **F**

Torsten Bell is chief executive of the Resolution Foundation

FAIRER OPTIONS

Tax changes must reduce inequality, not exacerbate it — *Shreya Nanda*

Has the pandemic opened up space for more progressive taxation?

Many were initially heartened to see polling last year that showed public support for an increase in national insurance contributions to fund higher spending on the NHS or social care. This appeared to indicate a shift in public attitudes, breaking with the post-financial crisis ethos of tax and spending cuts. But that support has since melted away.

Boris Johnson went on to announce such a change in September last year with the introduction of the new health and social care levy. Polling in the weeks following the announcement found that more now feel the changes are unfair than fair; public disapproval of the government's handling of the tax system has shot up; and the Conservatives have overtaken Labour as the party judged most likely to raise taxes in a future government.

Johnson's levy is distributionally unjust. National insurance is in some respects unfair by design – the effective tax rate peaks at £50,000 and then reduces for the highest earners. And national insurance contributions only tax earnings from work, not earnings from ownership or investment.

The tax rises are also intergenerationally unjust – while the new levy will apply to working pensioners, which national insurance currently does not, only a minority of pensioners fall into the affected group. Most of the increase in tax will be paid by those of working age, while the benefits will accrue mostly to the retired, who are on average wealthier. And most of the income derived by the retired will not be affected by the changes.

This rise in national insurance contribution rates was partially offset by the rise in national insurance contribution thresholds announced at the recent spring statement. Meanwhile, the income tax cut announced at the same time will impact not just income from work, but also some forms of income from wealth, such as pension and rental income. Overall, this package of measures further reduces the taxation of income from wealth relative to income from work.

The government was not wrong to propose increased investment in healthcare, and to achieve this through tax rises. But tax changes should target the wealthiest.

At IPPR, we have previously recommended bringing capital gains and dividend tax in line with income tax; replacing inheritance tax with a lifetime gifts tax; and replacing council tax with a proportional property tax. This would help to redistribute some of the asset price gains that have built up over the pandemic, reducing wealth gaps instead of exacerbating them. It would be good for growth. And who knows, it might even be more popular. **F**

Shreya Nanda is an economist at the Centre for Economic Justice at the IPPR

SHORT AND SWEET?

Cutting the working week would be bold, but it would need to be done fairly—*Aveek Bhattacharya* and *Jake Shepherd*

The notion of a four-day week is gaining momentum. Across the world, workers, businesses, and politicians have been exploring the idea – not least the Labour party, which pledged in its 2019 manifesto to reduce the average work week to 32 hours.

The excitement is understandable. The four-day week has the potential to radically transform the lives of workers, improving health and wellbeing, increasing productivity, and supporting social equality. This goes beyond theory: a growing number of trials suggest that it can have real world success, making it even more compelling – and worthy of political attention.

However, every policy has challenges and drawbacks, and the hype around a four-day week should not blind us to the potential issues it raises. In our research looking at people's working time preferences, we found some evidence that strengthens the case for a four-day week – 11 per cent of workers would be willing to take a pay cut for shorter hours. But there is also some cause for caution.

The four-day week is a big, bold and potentially revolutionary policy idea

Not everyone is likely to reap the benefits of a four-day week. For all its egalitarian ambitions, we found signs that it may actually exacerbate certain inequalities. Better-paid workers tend to be keener on the idea of shortening their work week, whereas lower earners are more likely to say that they want (or need) to work more hours. Proponents of the four-day week also intend it to create a more level playing field between men and women in terms of caring responsibilities, career progression and pay, but that requires us to displace deep-seated gender norms. The risk is that women end up more marginalised from work: our analysis showed that they would prefer a significantly shorter work week than men on average.

Another major concern is that it is unclear how to pay for a four-day week. Advocates insist that workers should not lose any income, but it remains to be seen whether shorter hours can boost productivity by enough to pay for its introduction.

The four-day week has plenty of promise, but it is not a silver bullet for ensuring fairer working practices. It cannot eliminate pre-existing inequalities and prejudices, nor can it simply make poor quality work good. To benefit all working people, not just a privileged few, it needs to be a component of a much wider policy agenda.

For many workers, flexibility is as important as hours, which implies the government should explore measures to give people greater freedom to choose when and where they work, as well as improving parental leave. At a time of increasing in-work poverty where millions of workers are unable to escape hardship even when employed, policies that ensure higher pay, pathways to progression, and employee benefits can help to lift people from poverty and bad work. They can also lay the foundations for a fair, more equitable four-day week programme in the future.

The four-day week is a big, bold and potentially revolutionary policy idea. But it needs to be implemented carefully, based on continued experimentation, to ensure it is fair and affordable. As part of Labour's new deal for working people, a considered approach to the four-day week could do a lot of good – as long as the party remembers the other important elements of good work beyond shorter hours. **F**

Aveek Bhattacharya is chief economist and Jake Shepherd is a researcher at the Social Market Foundation

CRUCIAL CHOICES

Government must support businesses to power the economic recovery—*Claire Walker*

Accredited chambers of commerce sit at the juncture where communities and businesses intersect. This grassroots connection to the firms we represent means we have crucial insight into the issues facing local economies in every part of the United Kingdom.

Many businesses have been battered by the pandemic, yet they have been amazingly adaptable, changing how they operate and pivoting their business models to survive. But two years of Covid-19 has inevitably taken its toll – particularly on smaller firms – and current conditions plus ongoing uncertainty mean we are not out of the woods yet. The government needs to work with us to ensure an equitable recovery from Covid-19 for firms across the country. This requires action across several areas.

In recent months firms have experienced an explosion in energy and shipping costs, huge increases in steel and fuel prices and shortages for many raw materials. While larger firms have the balance sheets and credit lines to enable them to more readily weather current pressures, smaller firms need to see action sooner rather than later to ensure they are not left behind. For example, an SME energy price cap would provide some relief while delaying the planned national insurance hike by at least a year would help to keep down the upfront cost of doing business.

The impact of Covid-19 has cast a long shadow over the UK economy. Many firms have been left with reduced cash flow and higher levels of debt. The fear of a future

pandemic wave and a return to restrictions fills many business leaders with dread. To encourage investment, firms need more certainty which is why they need the government to set out what support will be made available in the event of future restrictions.

British Chambers of Commerce research tells us that companies that export are more productive, resilient and innovative. Yet only 10 per cent of UK businesses are currently involved in exporting. If we want more firms to get involved in overseas trade, then trade agreements alone are not enough – we need to see more end-to-end support to help them make the leap.

Many businesses have also told us that they do not know their carbon footprint or do not yet have a plan to reach net zero. There must be more support from government to create momentum on the switch to a more sustainable and carbon-neutral future. If business can be helped along this path, then a whole new world of economic opportunity will open up.

Promises in the government's recent White Paper on levelling up must be seen through. For example, the funding system needs to be simplified – there are too many pots of money, which are too small and too short-term, and are unnecessarily complicated to access. By creating bigger regional funds and putting more control over them in the hands of stakeholders, including accredited chambers who understand what will make the biggest difference to their communities, then real progress can be made.

Business performs a vital role in bringing prosperity to communities and generating the sustainable tax receipts needed to fund our public services. That is why measures to actively stimulate the recovery, for businesses large and small, will also be ones which pass those benefits on to people across communities as well as the public purse. **F**

Claire Walker is co-executive director of the British Chambers of Commerce

REGIONS THAT THRIVE

If government is serious about levelling up, it must first address the cost of living crisis— *Zoë Billingham*

The renewed political focus on regional inequality in the UK – now often described as the levelling up agenda – is welcome and necessary. It has become an accepted mantra that the UK is one of the most regionally unbalanced amongst industrialised nations and, according to an Ipsos Mori poll last year, this is central to voter concerns.

The recent levelling up White Paper set out 12 missions that rightly broadened the agenda to a whole government effort. But the ambitions of the agenda will be undermined by the cost of living crisis unless more and better targeted support is urgently put in place and our safety net strengthened. As we enter the biggest fall in living standards for 30 years, this must be government's priority.

There is plenty of reason to be concerned about the current cost of living crisis. Soaring energy prices and sharp inflation growth coupled with upcoming tax rises on working people were previously forecast to cost the average family an extra £1,200 a year and this is set to rise. Meanwhile, almost 4 million families are already behind on their bills and our security net is threadbare, with protection at its lowest point in decades for people out of work.

The government can no longer give with one hand and take away with the other

The crisis will undermine the new levelling up missions without more serious intervention by the government. While one of the new levelling up missions is to increase healthy life expectancy, we know that worsening levels of poverty and an increasing number of people turning off their heating to put food on the table will only work against this goal.

And it is our 'left behind' communities, full of talent and potential but held back by a lack of access to opportunity, that will suffer the most. Levelling up has sent local political leaders out bargaining with government and investors, pitching the potential of their places. This advocacy is becoming one of the most visible roles of our city and regional mayors. But the vision sold to these communities in the levelling up White Paper, one of investment in infrastructure and education, higher productivity and research and development spend, will seem a million miles away from the day-to-day reality of empty pockets and cold homes faced by millions across the UK.

To make a success of levelling up, the government can no longer give with one hand and take away with the other. The cost of living crisis is making our inequalities worse and will work directly against many of the objectives set out in the new White Paper.

To help people this year, the government should supplement the one-off support provided to date with a proper uprating of universal credit in line with expected inflation whilst also addressing the ongoing precariousness of this safety net. People need to know how they will get through the week before they can make positive choices for the long term. Without a level of economic security, we are held back in our ability to envision the type of future we want and progress in life, which also has a significant cost in terms of productivity and economic growth.

The leader, or political party, that confronts this new economic reality and offers security and stability whilst understanding the need for optimism about our regions will be the one who has the best chance at really levelling up the country. **F**

Zoë Billingham is co-director at the Centre for Progressive Policy and a Crook fellow at the University of Sheffield

MISSING THE FUNDAMENTALS

Scotland needs a fresh approach to economic policy—*Daniel Johnson MSP*

The Scottish National party has long cultivated economic competence as part of its brand. Yet the Scottish Fiscal Commission's report in December punctured this image, showing growth in wages and employment that is slower than the UK average and lags behind the other devolved nations. Digging further reveals huge regional inequalities in productivity, workforce engagement and wages. The renewed interest in regional economic development exposes the reality of SNP economic policies – they are heavy on spin and light on substance.

A 'Brand Scotland' approach may be designed to look superficially impressive but it does little to tackle the looming crises in the Scottish economy. This matters, not just because it has real world consequences for opportunities and incomes, but because it impacts on public finances. Since 2016, Scotland has had control of income tax rates and bands with income tax receipts setting resource allocation through the fiscal framework. But with receipts growing more slowly than the UK average, that will leave Scotland almost £200m worse off this year than if income tax had not been devolved. That figure will rise to over £400m over the next five years.

The disparity between Scottish cities and regions is unsustainable for the future. The productivity gap between Edinburgh and Dundee stands at 35 per cent. And while it may always be hard to outpace London, Scotland now lags behind the North East and North West of England and the other devolved nations in productivity. Yet this is an area completely unexamined by SNP policymakers.

There is also a failure to acknowledge the fundamentals of the Scottish economy. The public sector represents half of our economy and the private sector is dominated by small firms that have negligible growth in productivity. Therefore, failing to address continuing low pay amongst key workers in the public sector is short-sighted, ignoring the wider economic impacts. The absence of direct policies to assist SMEs with training and technology is ill-advised too. The SNP talks in the language of entrepreneurialism and productivity but fails to understand both the impact of its decisions in the public sector and the fundamentals of the private sector in Scotland.

Finally, there has been a failure to ensure supply chains and investments are retained in Scotland. It is ironic that, after a summer in which we were given a new Minister for a Circular Economy – and a Scottish Green party minister at that – the incredibly valuable asset of our offshore wind was sold to BP, Shell and Vattenfall, an auctioning-off of assets that is short-termist and provides no retained value or interest for our public purse. It represents neither a circular spend in Scotland, nor value for money for the Scottish taxpayer. In the 1970s, the SNP popularised their cause by saying: "It's Scotland's oil". Well, why is it no longer Scotland's wind?

Within these agreements, there is little room for government control in the future. There were no golden shares, which could have given the Scottish government a substantial amount of control over the projects while still attracting investment.

Within the English devolved model, Labour mayors such as Sadiq Khan and Andy Burnham have been able to use development corporations to regenerate urban areas using expertise from a number of sources, including local councillors and borough mayors. As is often the case with their view of local government, the SNP treats such measures with contempt, preferring instead to use central government funds for entrepreneurial ventures that, however noble in their efforts, do not offer a circular spend in Scotland.

This should be home turf for the Labour party, both here in Scotland and the rest of the UK. Investment in technology and infrastructure that enriches communities long-term is what we do best. We are the party which balanced the 'white heat of technology' with the development of the New Towns and ushered in the era of devolution that should be being used by the SNP to keep asset value in Scotland. An 'entrepreneurial people and culture' is all well and good, but it needs to be tempered with real investment in our local communities and ensuring that such spending retains value for them and for Scotland.

If we do not take action now to stimulate our economy and our ailing productivity, there will be little recourse in the public finances to do so in future. Of course, Scotland must always remain open to investment, but that must not be at the expense of retaining value and long-term benefit for Scotland's public purse. **F**

Daniel Johnson is the Labour and Co-operative MSP for Edinburgh Southern and shadow finance secretary

THE ECONOMICS OF THE GOOD LIFE

We should be looking to promote wellbeing and not just economic growth—*Jeevun Sandher*

WE ALL WANT to live a good life and, as socialists, we want everyone else to be able to live one too. To build that good life requires understanding what it is. To know that a good life is made up of many different parts: being healthy, happy, safe, living in a decent home, having a good job, enough money, friends, spare time, and a clean environment.

'Good life economics' deliberately and consciously tries to create a good life for everyone, by first measuring how people are doing in each part of their lives and then figuring out how to improve each one.

Keir Starmer understands this, which is why he chose economist Angus Deaton's definition of wellbeing at the Fabian Society's New Year conference this year: "All the things that are good for a person, that make for a good life." Bettering *all* the things is necessary to create a good life.

And the simple truth is this: For most of the elements that make up a good life, making sure people have good jobs and enough money is necessary, but not sufficient.

Let's take happiness as an example. Around one in 10 of us were depressed before the pandemic. Starmer, rightly, has pledged to address this, promising more treatment and 8,500 more mental health professionals. With suicide being the biggest killer for men under 45, these extra mental health workers are urgently needed. They will stop thousands of stories of unspeakable grief from ever being told.

But they will not be enough to make everyone happy. Because this also requires cold, hard cash. If you are stressed because you don't know how you will put food on the table, heat your home, or if you will even *have* a home, that will damage your mental health. People in the bottom fifth are twice as likely to have a mental health problem as those in the top fifth precisely because they are struggling to get by.

In Blackpool, one of the most deprived areas in the country with (not coincidentally) one of the nation's highest rates of antidepressant prescriptions, the doctors have a diagnosis for those who do not have stable jobs, meaningful relationships, or decent homes and are, consequently, deeply unhappy. 'Shit life syndrome' is the name they give it.

These doctors can prescribe antidepressants and theoretically give people therapy – if it were available – but that won't fix the underlying problems of Blackpool's residents being unable to earn enough to live a good life. They can only treat the symptoms, but they cannot cure the cause.

Most parts of the good life require putting money in people's pockets *and* other measures to better them. For happiness, mental health treatment *and* enough money to get by are needed. For physical safety, improving job opportunities *and* having more police officers is required.

Economic growth is, unfortunately, no longer sufficient to ensure that people will have enough money to get by. It used to be. Before the 1980s, economic growth was shared equally across people and places. Economic growth rates served as a crude indicator of how people's lives were improving.

But then, automation and trade destroyed mid-pay manufacturing jobs in the now-former industrial heartlands. The economy became divided between high-pay service sector jobs in major cities like London, and low-pay service sector jobs across the nation. Between 1980 and the great recession, top wages grew by around 70 per cent while bottom wages grew by only 15 per cent. London sucked in graduates looking for high-pay jobs, growing by 30 per cent in the past 30 years.

The people and places locked out of economic growth saw the good life slip away from them. Non-graduate men who could no longer find work often turned to drugs, alcohol, and suicide in greater numbers – the number dying from these 'deaths of despair' has doubled over the past 30 years.

Those without good jobs are even finding it harder to find love – their marriage rates declined along with their job prospects. J.Lo was, unfortunately, wrong in believing that: "Love don't cost a thing." It very much does.

Then there are parts of the good life where raising personal incomes has little effect, where government does most of the heavy lifting. Being well-educated is more about decent schools – and particularly pre-schools – than the cash in your pocket. Having a decent home needs the government to build more houses where demand is rising. Living in a clean environment needs the government to invest in renewable sources and insulation so we can transition to net zero. And so on.

Creating the good life for all of Britain's citizens means improving every part. That is the essence of good life economics

Creating the good life for all of Britain's citizens means improving every part. That is the essence of good life economics. In a post-industrial economy, the government will have to step in to make sure every person, at the very least, has enough money.

But that won't be enough. There is no single policy, silver bullet, or magic rabbit that will ensure that everyone can live a good life. And why should there be? A good life is not basic, simple, or predictable. It is beautiful, complicated, surprising, and messy. I personally wouldn't have it any other way. **F**

Jeevun Sandher is an economist who is undertaking research at King's College London on the political and economic causes of income inequality and poverty as well as their mpact on wellbeing

A REAL ALTERNATIVE

Tulip Siddiq MP sets out Labour's vision for the economy, with sustainable growth which is fair for all

© Unsplash/Kai Bossom

More than a decade of austerity and poor economic growth left the UK ill-prepared for the ravages of Covid-19. As well as a high death rate, we ended up with the biggest hit to our economy in the G7. Recovering from Covid-19, the cost of living crisis and the climate emergency are huge challenges that we must face together. They require a government with a vision capable of rising to them.

Instead, this government has trapped the UK in a cycle of low growth and high taxes. And the consequences of the Conservatives' failed economic approach were evident in the chancellor's recent spring statement. Rather than taking steps to boost growth and productivity, he chose to raise national insurance contributions and place the highest tax burden on working people since the 1940s.

We desperately need an alternative model that prioritises sustainable growth, fairly distributed, not just a short-term bounceback from the pandemic, which will be eaten away by high inflation. Getting it right will mean the difference between declining public services and services that prevent ill health, between poverty and healthy living and between high taxes and low taxes for working people. And we need to have sustainable growth that does not come at a cost to the planet. Labour has a plan to spread jobs and opportunities across the country, invest in the green transition and allow Britain to compete in the global race for the jobs of the future.

We want to see proper investment in jobs, technological innovation and skills, in both the public and private sectors. This is a win-win that drives up growth and living standards, increases funding for public services without increasing taxes on working people, and drives down environmental degradation. We want economic growth that comes from increasing productivity, getting more from the resources we are using, rather than using more resources in an unsustainable way. Labour's vision is of a high-skill, high-wage, high-growth, low-carbon economy with outstanding public services. Above all, Labour wants to spread security, prosperity and respect across our country. This is possible but it requires ambition and political will.

A Conservative low-growth, high-tax cycle is holding Britain back

First though, it is worth setting out how we got here. A wasted decade of low growth under the Conservatives is holding Britain back. It has left our economy weakened and ill-prepared for shocks. The Conservatives repeatedly cut government spending before economic recovery bedded in properly, choking off growth. Now we are left with high inflation, high taxes and a cost of living crisis. According to the IPPR, one in six working households cannot make ends meet.

Historically, Conservative austerity stalled the recovery after the 2008 global financial crisis and the UK never got back to its previous trend growth rate. The Resolution Foundation estimates that if the economy had grown in 2008–2019 by the same amount as it did before then, we could have had a staggering £200bn more per year to spend on world-class public services or Covid-19 emergency relief.

Under austerity the state shrank, but taxes did not. In effect we were paying the same or more tax for worse services. And taxes including council tax and national insurance are going to rise, with a freeze too on the income tax threshold – disproportionately hurting those already struggling with high inflation including food costs, energy bills and petrol. Never before have people paid so much and had so little back in return. This pain is compounded by Tory incompetence on delivering Brexit, hurting our ability to trade and decreasing GDP even more.

The Conservatives have failed on business investment

It is not just the state that has been cut back. Private enterprise has not realised its full potential either. In the nine years leading up to the pandemic, the UK ranked third last in the OECD for investment as a proportion of GDP. In 2019, the UK invested a fifth less than other advanced economies, equivalent to around £90bn. Indeed, business investment was actually lower in real terms in 2019 than it was in 2016, falling for three consecutive years from 2017.

And the Conservatives' record is not set to improve: the IMF ranks the UK 35th out of 38 advanced economies for investment in the next five years, an investment gap worth nearly £800bn.

Labour's plan to build a strong economy

How can we overcome these immense challenges, and ensure that people across Britain achieve the prosperity and security they deserve? The answer will be in putting forward credible but radical policies aimed at kick-starting our economy, improving lives and helping business and

public services to thrive. I am proud to represent the Hampstead and Kilburn constituency in London, a city that greatly contributes to our economic and cultural lives, and which would benefit hugely from an ambitious Labour government. However, we need to make sure that opportunity and prosperity is equally spread across the UK.

To start with the immediate issues: if we were in power now, we would relieve the immediate cost of living crisis by offering direct help to the poorest and a cut in VAT on energy. This would be paid for by a one-off windfall tax on oil and gas producers who have enormously profited from the crisis. We would not be going ahead with the national insurance rise at the worst possible time – a rise that will hit families and businesses hard with no plan to actually address any of the problems facing our health and social care sector.

To tackle the longer-term structural issues, we would invest £28bn per year until 2030 as part of our climate investment pledge. This would do so much to create jobs and boost industry: from insulating 19 million homes across the country to greening our steel industry, it is a pledge that would get our economy firing on all cylinders. We would use procurement rules to buy, make and sell more in Britain and boost research and development across our public and private sectors. We would support businesses and our high streets by scrapping business rates, replacing them with a fairer system fit for the 21st century. For economic stability, we would apply strong fiscal rules so that necessary investment and sustainable public finances go hand-in-hand.

Labour's vision for the UK's financial services

As Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury, I will be working with Labour colleagues to set out our vision for the UK's financial services. Supporting the sector to thrive will be fundamental to our economic recovery and to delivering the higher growth, jobs, and tax receipts we need to fund public services. The financial services sector employed over 1 million people in 2021 but, despite this, the Conservatives hung the sector out to dry during negotiations with the EU, giving it barely a mention in the Brexit deal.

If we are going to make Brexit work for the UK's financial services, the sector must be ready for the challenges of the future. This will require a proactive government to provide the space and regulatory landscape for financial services to innovate. That's why Labour wholeheartedly welcomes developments in financial technology – or fintech – which will allow companies to experiment with new finance models and create high-skilled jobs for the future in every region of the UK.

Our financial sector will also be key to securing a successful transition to a green economy. As we shape our financial services sector outside of the EU, there will be opportunities to ensure that more is invested in green technology through pension funds and other innovative financial devices.

Delivering for the whole of the UK

A Labour government will put our mission for prosperity, security and respect at the heart of what we do. We will create a transformation in living standards across the UK, from Swansea to Stockport, and from Nuneaton to Newcastle – and in Scotland and Northern Ireland too. It is not just the Conservatives who are failing, the SNP is not up to the job either. The SNP's failure to properly manage the economy means that Scotland has some of the lowest wage growth and labour market participation of young and old than anywhere in the UK.

We would support businesses and our high streets by scrapping business rates

They have failed to take action to deal with poverty, including for instance ignoring Labour's call for a £70 supplement winter fuel payment and freezing rail fares. Scotland desperately needs change.

Northern Ireland would benefit from our approach too, not only because of the measures I have outlined above, but also by us taking pragmatic steps to fix the gaps in the Brexit deal, improving life for those in Northern Ireland.

What will all this mean?

There is a future open to us of high-quality jobs, new, green infrastructure from energy systems to transportation and of a prosperous UK exporting the latest green technologies. It is a future with a thriving, highly skilled workforce exploiting opportunities in technologies like AI as well as our traditional strengths in, for example, culture and finance, of which we are rightly proud. It is a secure future where your background, where you come from, and where you live do not affect your life chances. The Labour party is determined to fight for this future: we need to strain every sinew together to make it happen. **F**

Tulip Siddiq is the Labour MP for Hampstead and Kilburn and Shadow Economic Secretary to the Treasury

HOLDING THE LINE

A raft of terrible legislation is facing strong resistance in the House of Lords. *Vanesha Singh* speaks to Angela Smith, the peer leading the opposition charge

If you are terrified by the mass of repressive legislation being pushed through by the Conservative party then you may have found a glimmer of hope in the challenge it has faced from our upper chamber, where Labour peers have helped to inflict the highest number of defeats on the government in a single parliamentary session since 1976. At the helm is Baroness Angela Smith, former Labour MP for Basildon turned shadow leader in the House of Lords and leader of Labour's Lords.

"Just look at the nationality and borders bill. I think it's hugely significant that we've passed more amendments to that bill than any other bill in my time in the Lords and possibly any other bill in our history," says Smith.

"Normally you want to focus on quite a small number of amendments. And I'm a great one for having a red pen and saying look, the priority has to be these three out of these 20. We struggled on this because there was so much in it that was really offensive. I've never known a bill as bad as that for this. It was just horrible," she says.

It is not hard to see why. As people flee to western Europe from war-torn Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, Iraq – and now Ukraine – the legislation will make it even harder to seek asylum in the UK. It also includes provisions for offshore detention centres for refugees and stronger powers to remove British citizenship – an element Smith found 'particularly offensive'. "You would expect anything that has Priti Patel behind it to be pretty awful. This I think exceeds even the expectations of Priti Patel in how bad it is."

Still, the government of the day can overturn these defeats in the Lords, and this is something we are already seeing as we approach the 'wash-up' period before parliament dissolves. "I have to say for an unelected house, there's a limit to how much you can insist that the elected house takes what you say," she says.

According to Smith, our upper chamber does not exist to 'derail' government: it is there to 'make legislation better'. She describes the House of Lords as 'the chamber of sober second thought'.

"I think one of the strengths of the Lords is that I haven't got a constituency. I spent 13 years as a constituency MP and was a government minister for most of that time, and the pressures are enormous. But here I focus on legislation."

And for Smith, legislation at the moment – such as the elections bill and the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill – is 'hugely controversial' with 'far too much crammed in'.

"There's one debate I was in for the other day where the implications of what they were saying on immigration issues and visas impacts north-south relations in Ireland. And so I thought well that's OK, because they'll sort this out, that's clearly a mistake. But no. They haven't discussed it with the Irish government or with the Northern Ireland office and it's typical of how bad the legislation is."

It was earlier this year that Smith helped orchestrate several defeats to the policing bill which seeks to severely curtail the right to protest. Here, the Lords acted as an effective block against the government which attempted to avoid scrutiny in the Commons by adding amendments at the last minute. "We were able to take things completely out of the bill and they couldn't put them back in again, they have to be in a separate bill because they introduced them late," she explains.

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"I remember talking to Keir [Starmer] in the morning about that bill. He said: 'How's it gonna go?' and I said: 'Look, these are hugely controversial issues, but the government is pulling out all the stops to get their people out to defend them. There's a lot of disquiet about putting things in at the last stage. So there's quite a few Tory peers who don't like the process of the government, they don't like the policy, but they're on a heavy three-line whip, they'll be doing a lot of work. So we're doing our best. There's key ones I think we'll win but we obviously can't win everything' … And we won everything."

For Smith, Labour's opposition to the policing bill is a great example of how it is working effectively. It made a 'sensible case' which won support across the house, she says.

But this comes at a cost to peers. "Quite often we're asking people to stay late. We've had nights and nights of three-line whips. You're talking about people, some of them are older, they have got a distance to travel when they leave, they're not getting paid very much to do this despite some of the things you see. And they've really put themselves out. On the policing bill we've had some people come in who have had hospital trips that day and came back straight here from the hospital. That's a big ask of people. And they're not here to just win amendments, they want change."

With defeat after defeat, you might be forgiven for thinking Labour has a majority in the Lords. But this has never been the case. It is the Tories who are – by far – the largest group. How then, is Smith organising? "Do you want my secrets?" she laughs. "It is all based around an issue. We'll work around the house and with our Commons teams and we work very closely with the leadership team and individual shadow cabinet members around issues. We'll look at what our priorities are. And we just try and build alliances."

"We work very closely with the leadership team and shadow cabinet members. We just try and build alliances"

Yet for Smith, the scale of defeat is not just about Labour being well organised but how 'rubbish' the government is at controlling its own party. "They have 258 Conservative peers. The other night they couldn't get even 100 voting."

According to Smith, the Tories are 'pretty demoralised'. "If you're uncomfortable with the legislation, you're uncomfortable with your leader, you don't feel inclined to stay till late. So we've been able to use that. But they're getting a little bit more worried. I think there've been instructions from on high because they've been losing so many votes," she says.

Still, Smith reveals that both the scale of defeats and the number of government-sided peers who are staying away have come as a surprise. "I remember one of my colleagues was saying he'd gone for a cup of tea and two Tories sat on the same table as him and they said: 'Why are we here voting for this?' and he said: 'Well, why don't you go home then?' They went: 'Yeah, OK'. And they went home!"

In contrast, the mood amongst Labour peers is 'pretty good'. "They're getting increasingly angry with the government. I have to say, on some things now they are pushing for us to do more."

"I hope that some of the things we do in the Lords can give some hope and encouragement to the people"

In the weeks to come, Smith says we can expect to see a challenge from Labour Lords on the elections bill, which is 'hugely anti-democratic'. Labour is particularly angered by new plans to allow British citizens living overseas for more than 15 years to donate to political parties, and will be pushing back against proposals to reform the Electoral Commission and introduce photo ID – none of which, she says, are in line with Labour's interests. "We're having to say to the government, hang on, all bets are off for this one. You're behaving badly, you're trying to cram it through and there isn't time for it."

Yet Johnson's government is one that believes it gets 'everything right first time', she says. And to someone who has spent 25 years in Westminster, there is something uniquely dangerous about its unwillingness to listen to opposition.

Relations between both chambers were not always like this, Smith explains. She recalls being particularly struck by a recent conversation with an ex-government minister. "He said it's not like the old days. In the old days we'd say: 'Let's talk about it, we'll have a conversation about it and see if we can amend it in some way' and as ministers they were able to say: 'Can I take this away and look at it again?' but they don't do that now. They just plough on."

Smith maintains this attitude – that government can do what it wants – stems from Boris Johnson. "I can't think of any other prime minister, ones I've agreed with or disagreed with, if I look back at Conservative prime ministers in my lifetime like Margaret Thatcher, like John Major, like Theresa May, none of them would have behaved in the way that Boris Johnson has, whether we're talking about the partygate scandals, whether we're talking about ignoring the advice of the Holac committee into House of Lords appointments, when we're talking about whether ministers like Priti Patel have broken the ministerial code, this is a prime minister that defies conventions. He thinks the rules don't apply to him and that attitude filters down through government."

Smith refers here to Johnson's decision to appoint Peter Cruddas to the Lords in defiance of the appointments commission. It was followed by an investigation from OpenDemocracy and the Sunday Times which revealed that Conservative treasurers who donate £3m or more are almost guaranteed a peerage. And now, fresh questions are being raised by the Labour leadership around Johnson's appointment to the Lords of Russian oligarch Evgeny Lebedev.

In an attempt to tackle some of the cronyism, Smith has put forward a plan. It includes more transparency around appointments so the public know why people are coming in; a cap on numbers because 'this is just getting silly'; mechanisms to remove peers who are not meeting expectations; and an end to donations. "The idea that you can make a donation to get a peerage is just deeply shocking. That's corrupt. It's totally corrupt. I'd thought we stopped that under Lloyd George," she says.

"I find it interesting that in all the Labour years when we were looking at House of Lords reform, I served on the committees in the Commons on this, the House of Lords resisted reform. We have a situation now where the House of Lords has produced a document calling for reform, about limited terms, about age limits, and all those kinds of things about a smaller house, and it's the government that won't do it."

That said, Smith admits she does not trust the Tories at all with reform of the House of Lords. "It will only be to do away with opposition, it won't be in the interest of democracy," she says.

For Smith, there is a 'stark contrast' between the values of Johnson's government and Starmer's Labour, which she feels is important in the current climate: "We've got Ukraine, we've had the pandemic, we've got the cost of living crisis. Petrol prices aren't just going up now. The cost of living crisis isn't just a problem now because of the pandemic and Ukraine. This is something where consciously government has been taking decisions that are making it harder for working people, the national insurance increase for example, all those things are making it harder".

She says it is Labour which understands what people are going through. "Labour was talking about energy security before this crisis came along. We were talking about the cost of living before the crisis came along. We were talking about climate change before it came along, and so it just shows that all of the values and things we were saying are more important now than ever before, but they're not new to us. It's just the way we are."

And as one of the longest serving members in the shadow cabinet, Smith feels positive about Labour's future. "We could walk into Downing Street and government departments tomorrow and be ready to do that job, I'm not sure if I've said that for some time. We can say it now. And that should give us the encouragement we need."

"I got elected in 1997," she adds. "And in 1992 everyone went 'we're gonna win this.' I was working in Basildon then and thinking, I'm not so sure, it's not looking so great. And we didn't. And then come '97 we never took our foot off the accelerator at any time, we just kept on and on. I don't think there were any of us that were fighting seats or our campaigns teams that weren't exhausted the day after the election."

"I think that we will work ourselves into the ground between now and the election to win it. And we will recoup the energy by winning and being ready to govern."

"And I hope that some of the things we do in the Lords can give some hope and encouragement to the people. But it's not just us in the Lords, it's us working with our Labour colleagues in the House of Commons and the party as a whole that can do these things together to make a difference." **F**

Vanesha Singh is assistant editor of the Fabian Review

The party's over

In the wake of 'partygate', it is time for parliament to clean up its act, argues *Hannah White*

Hannah White is deputy director of the Institute for Government. Her new book, Held in Contempt, will be published this month by Manchester University Press

The parlous state of trust in British politics is hardly a new phenomenon. But 'partygate' – the latest in the series of scandals engulfing Boris Johnson and the Conservative party – cut through to the public in a way that few previous scandals have. Indeed, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it looked as if it could bring the prime minister down, and it remains unclear whether the war will temporarily or permanently relieve the intense pressure the scandal has placed on Johnson's premiership.

The public's outrage focused on the series of lockdown-breaking gatherings held by Johnson and others working at the centre of government. But sadly these events are just the latest examples of inappropriate behaviour by MPs who believe there should be one set of rules for them, and another for the rest of us. As I argue in my new book, the exceptionalist attitude of too many MPs is a longstanding problem afflicting the House of Commons. It damages its reputation, undermines the work of MPs and distances them from their constituents.

In some ways it is understandable that MPs think they are special. Certain rules do not apply to them for very good reason. Freedom of speech in parliament, for example, allows MPs to speak up about important issues and to challenge the government without fear of legal action being taken against them. But there are limits to how MPs should make use of this 'privilege'. For example, freedom of speech should not be misused simply to score political points against opponents, as the prime minister did by wrongly accusing Keir Starmer of failing to prosecute Jimmy Savile during his time as director of public prosecutions.

Another reason that MPs feel exceptional is because the House of Commons benefits from an ancient right to govern itself. This 'exclusive cognisance' is an important safeguard against an over-mighty monarch or government trying to circumscribe parliament's activity or powers. But the scope of this right to self-governance has sometimes been misunderstood or even wilfully misinterpreted. Over time the boundaries of this privilege have been drawn ever more tightly, as MPs have reluctantly acknowledged that there is no good reason they should retain responsibility for adjudicating on electoral law, for administering their own expenses, for setting their own salaries and pensions or for determining claims of bullying or harassment made against their colleagues. Unfortunately none of these concessions were made willingly – all happened only after a serious scandal which forced parliamentarians to recognise the limits of their 'specialness'.

So what consequences should flow from partygate? Any legal or political penalties will be determined by Metropolitan police and Conservative MPs. But what lessons should MPs take from partygate for the House of Commons itself?

MPs must recognise that the privileges attached to their position are designed to facilitate the parliamentary process not to enhance their personal status. Just because MPs have been elected to parliament does not mean that the rules they have designed for others do not apply to them.

Indeed MPs should acknowledge the particularly damaging impact on public trust in politics because of the spectacle of rules being flouted by the people who make them. The corollary of the unique power to make the law is the special responsibility to set an example by following it. Rather than setting the House of Commons up as an exception, MPs should strive to establish the institution as an exemplar.

MPs must begin by recognising that the House of Commons is not their own private club

But this recognition of responsibility is only the minimum needed to increase public trust in the House of Commons. MPs must begin by recognising that the House of Commons is not their own private club but an institution that belongs to their constituents. They should make decisions about the House of Commons in the best interests of the public, rather than for their own comfort and convenience.

Essential changes should include making parliamentary language and procedures easier to understand – so that citizens can comprehend what MPs are doing in their name – as well as making parliament a more welcoming environment that is more accessible to the public. And more must be done to make election to the House of Commons an attractive proposition for a diverse set of prospective MPs so that the elected House becomes more descriptively representative of the UK population.

The House of Commons is held in contempt by the public, but it need not be. Just as confidence in politics has been gradually eroded by the steady drip of scandal and misbehaviour, so it must be re-established by the accretion of small steps designed in the interests of the public. These changes will not dissipate the public's contempt for the House of Commons overnight, but it is nonetheless the responsibility of all MPs to take them. F

Turning tides

It is almost quarter of a century since the people of Wales voted yes to devolution. Welsh first minister *Mark Drakeford* looks at what has happened since – and suggests there are some stark choices ahead for the Union

Mark Drakeford is the First Minister of Wales

In 2010, the Conservative party returned to power in Westminster for the first time since the National Assembly was created in 1999. And, in 2011, a second referendum provided emphatic endorsement of greater powers for the assembly, marking the point at which devolution was fully embraced in all parts of Wales. These key moments have helped to shape the short history of devolution in Wales.

The first 10 years

In the first decade after devolution, a Labour government in Wales faced a Labour government in Westminster. For all the occasional tensions, the relationship was one of people who knew each other, treated each other with respect and belonged to the same tribe.

Serious debates about Wales' place in the Union were very rarely part of mainstream political debate because the UK Labour government remained attentive to the case which made the UK worthwhile: it delivered devolution, it achieved a peace process in Northern Ireland and it shared the proceeds of economic growth in all parts of the UK.

The politics of the National Assembly too were stable. The four political parties elected in 1999 were the same four parties elected in 2011, in more-or-less the same proportions. All parties were agreed on using the assembly to secure a strong voice for Wales in Europe.

Buoyed by year-on-year real terms growth in its budget, Welsh Labour pursued a distinctively different policy agenda from UK Labour, summed up by the approach set out by Rhodri Morgan – First Minister for the first decade of devolution – in his 'clear red water' speech.

The Welsh Conservatives used the first decade to re-establish and rehabilitate themselves in the minds of a Welsh public which had declined to return a single Tory MP at the general elections in 1997 and 2001. The Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru demonstrated an early adjustment to political life under proportional representation by sharing power in Labour-led administrations in 2000–2003 (Lib Dem) and 2007–2011 (Plaid Cymru).

But the second decade has been, in many respects, a reverse of the first.

Labour governments in Wales have found themselves faced with successive Conservative governments at Westminster.

Dealing with the Tories

In constitutional terms, the David Cameron years were relatively benign, as far as the assembly was concerned. The prime minister took little direct interest in the future of the United Kingdom as an entity – and was to pay the price for this neglect in his conduct of Scottish affairs.

In Wales, devolved powers were strengthened in the aftermath of the Scottish referendum. But the real long-term damage was to be found in the flawed and failed policies of austerity, which were the hallmark of the Cameron-Osborne era and which have done so much to accelerate inequality, undermine public services and damage the case for the Union.

Theresa May's premiership was dominated entirely by Brexit and by internal warfare in the Conservative party. Whether because of the nature of the Brexit negotiations, the rise of Scottish nationalism, her own perilous parliamentary position or because of a genuinely different view of the Union, May paid the most attention to the devolved nature of the United Kingdom.

In the weeks before her departure from Number 10 she delivered a lecture in Edinburgh which described the UK as a 'voluntary association of four nations' – a genuinely radical conceptualisation for a Conservative leader.

All that changed, of course, in 2019 with the election of the first majority Conservative government since devolution in 1999. The Johnson administration has been the first to take a straightforwardly hostile approach to

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devolution, telling a group of his own backbenchers that it had been Tony Blair's 'greatest mistake'.

While the prime minister's relationship with the truth is tangential at best, my own experience suggests this remark betrays the thinking behind much of what has happened since December 2019.

Today's Senedd finds itself under constant attack from a UK government forever on the look-out for powers and money to take away from the devolved parliaments. The Welsh budget will be more than £1bn smaller that it would have been had we remained in the European Union because of Treasury gerrymandering.

The Internal Market Act is the single most destructive blow to the future of the United Kingdom ever struck by any government in the modern era.

Devolution confidence

As everyone involved will always remember, the Welsh devolution referendum in 1997 was won by a whisker. In itself, that was a miracle of Lazarus proportions, given the emphatic rejection of the same proposition just 20 years earlier.

The tentative nature of Wales' embrace of the opportunity to become responsible for at least a part of its own affairs had deep roots.

In the early years of devolution, I would regularly share a platform with the distinguished Canadian academic Scott Greer, who was then working in London on comparative health policy across the newly devolved United Kingdom. He would tell a story about giving a lecture on successive days: in Edinburgh on Monday and Cardiff on Tuesday. The lecture's title was Scotland is Good, but Wales is Better. In neither venue, he reported, was he believed. Scotland could not believe that it was not best – but a Welsh audience could not imagine itself in that position either.

My predecessor Rhodri Morgan sometimes used to say that Welsh people are 'pathologically modest'. The history of devolution has been about retaining the modesty, while eliminating the pathology. The 2011 referendum is the moment when that tide turned.

Today, devolved government is firmly entrenched in the preferences of Welsh citizens. In the May 2021 Senedd election, the Abolish the Assembly party – despite being treated by broadcasters as being on a par with the other mainstream political parties – did not win a single constituency or regional list seat.

The conduct of government during the pandemic has secured and sustained the support of the majority of the Welsh population, in sharp contrast to that of the UK administration.

What now for Labour and devolution?

This is where the two themes of this article – and the last decade of devolution – come together.

There is a powerful case to be made for the Union of the United Kingdom, but it is a Labour case – with arguments for social solidarity, collective defence against risk and powerful redistribution of the rewards which come from acting together.

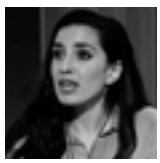
Far from wishing to settle back into the 'unitary state' of the prime minister's imagination, the hostility of his government drives more people, especially young people, to wonder whether Wales would not be better off without it.

I want the confidence which lies behind such questioning to be directed to the making of a new Union, not simply the rejection of the way things are today. That new Union would see sovereignty dispersed among the four legislatures of the United Kingdom, and a voluntary coming together for those purposes which are best pursued together. It would entrench devolution beyond the depredations of a hostile Westminster government of the sort we see today. And it would rest, not on the politics of fear or disrespect, but on the positive case for a Union in which each component nation has the confidence to play its part.

It is the future of the Union itself which is at play in the third decade of devolution, and the choices are stark. But once we are freed from the shackles of those who call themselves 'unionists' there is a future to which every part of the Union would wish to belong. **F**

The antidote

A typical Monday morning in a GP practice reveals the harsh realities of our failing healthcare service. Labour must fix this, writes *Sonia Adesara*



Sonia Adesara is a medical doctor working in general practice. She is former national medical director's clinical fellow 2018/19 and former co-chair of the Medical Women International Association

My first patient on Monday morning was an elderly man requesting stronger analgesia. We had referred him to the hospital for surgical treatment of his progressive hip problem 11 months before. In that time, this gentleman had become increasingly debilitated and increasingly housebound. He spent every day in agonising pain.

I was later struck by the normality of this conversation. I have hundreds of patients in my practice with a similar story. Across the country there are at least 6 million people on NHS waiting lists – with 300,000 waiting over a year for treatment, many of whom will be in pain, conditions deteriorating.

The Tories are quick to blame this on Covid-19 but waiting lists were rising prior to the pandemic. A&E waiting times and cancer treatment targets – the very things the Tories claim to care about – were the worst on record. The lack of spare capacity pre-Covid-19 meant the NHS was in effect running in crisis mode – and so when coronavirus hit, mass cancellations and redeployment were necessary to prevent collapse.

But the inadequacies of the NHS run wider than capacity. A study of global health systems in advanced economies by the Commonwealth Fund put the NHS second from bottom on healthcare outcomes. Research from International Cancer Benchmarking Partnership puts UK cancer outcomes behind comparable health systems. And international studies on amenable mortality, infant and young person mortality also show the NHS performing below average with comparable health systems. The consequence of this is preventable death and suffering. To put this into perspective, if we had the same infant mortality rate as Sweden 1,000 more babies would survive every year.

Our NHS has one of the smallest healthcare workforces in the world for our population size: For every 1,000 people, we have eight nurses and three doctors, both below the average in the OECD. When it comes to diagnostic technology, we have significantly fewer MRI and CT scanners than the OECD average. And when it comes to offering the best treatments to patients, again the UK falls short. In 2019, just 20 per cent of new medicines available elsewhere in Europe were available in the UK, despite having been formally approved for use. These statistics disguise the large variation in performance across the system, with luck of the draw on whether you encounter an excellent or underperforming part of the health service.

You get what you pay in. The Kings Fund still says that we are one of the best value for money healthcare systems in the world. But years of austerity and 'efficiency savings' have resulted in quality and compassion being squeezed out of care. The result of this has been scandal after scandal: thousands of preventable deaths that occurred at Mid Staffs, the deaths of mental health patients in Essex NHS trust, and the scores of babies and mothers that died or came to harm from maternity scandals at Morecambe Bay, East Kent, and Shrewsbury and Telford NHS trust. All reveal an underlying problem – those in charge put their fear of bad headlines ahead of patient care. A toxic top-down culture of neglect, cover-up and failure to learn.

Nye Bevan's founding aim of world-class healthcare for all is being eroded by Tory ideology and incompetence. And as Covid-19 brutally exposed, those who are poorer and racialised minorities are getting sick and dying at a younger age.

The public remain grateful for the NHS, but they are not blind to its failings.

The elderly gentleman I spoke to that Monday was thankful for his NHS care but asked if I could advise him on getting the operation done privately, the pain was grinding him down. My patient afterwards was a mother of a young person with complex mental health needs. She broke down to me in tears of anger and exhaustion from

constantly having to 'battle the system' to get the care her child needed.

This is not an isolated incident but in fact part of a growing trend. Research by the IPPR showed one in three people found it hard to access the care they needed, and as a result, one in eight of them have chosen to pay for private healthcare. The UK is now the G7 nation with the fastest rise in healthcare expenditure from out-of-pocket or voluntary insurance sources. And after receiving billions of taxpayer funds during Covid-19, the private health sector is booming.

The consequences of this are manifold. It is manifestly unjust if you have a system where those with greater means are able to receive timely healthcare, whilst those without are left to suffer. This two-tier system will widen existing health inequalities. Our NHS exists on the principle of collective solidarity. As more people experience poor care, or 'opt out' of the NHS, that collective solidarity is undermined and fragmented.

So how should Labour respond? First, we must acknowledge people's lived reality.

Simply declaring "we will protect the NHS" but maintaining the status quo is not good enough, when for many people their lived experience is an NHS failing to provide optimum care to themselves or their loved ones. We need to articulate the benefits of socialised healthcare and show how an extension of our principles leads to improvement in health.

Our plans cannot simply be reduced to more funding. We must show our vision for bold structural and cultural change to transform the health system, with patient care at the heart of everything we do. And finally, we must be loud with our ambition. The status quo is simply not good enough. We must show we have a comprehensive policy platform, to universalise the best, to ensure we have world-class healthcare for all.

Of course we must get the basics right. The government's current funding settlement, against the background of 10 years of funding cuts, falls short of being able to deliver any realistic improvements in care. The NHS Confederation stated the service will need an extra £10bn of revenue funding within the next financial year. The lack of surge capacity, constantly running the system 'hot', means it lacks resilience to sustain shocks like outbreaks or pandemics. We must increase capacity, particularly in community and social care, recognising that the rising need comes disproportionately from the elderly with complex chronic morbidity.

The market structure within the NHS has fragmented the system, encouraging competition over collaboration. We need legislative change to allow integration and encourage the sharing of best practices and new innovations. To ensure we never again have scandals like Mid Staffs requires a shift away from a target-driven blame culture, towards openness, transparency, and shared learning with an emphasis on patient autonomy.

The pandemic showed how, under the right conditions, technology can be adapted and utilised swiftly. As the recent report from Policy Exchange shows, the Tories see greater use of technology as another form of cost-cutting, such as allowing virtual consultations with clinicians stationed overseas. Needless to say this is counterproductive to continuity of care. But if used thoughtfully, technology can enrich care. For example, virtual wards in care settings allow professionals from different disciplines to deliver holistic care to the patient in their own setting.

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Reversing entrenched health inequalities requires cross-government action and a radical rethink of our social and economic model

A nationalised health model has huge potential for innovation. It allows us, in theory, to collect real-world data, perform real-time and world-leading clinical trials, (as exemplified by the recovery trial, which allowed us to learn about Covid-19 treatments in real-time). Within the NHS we have an enormously rich source of health data. With the correct legislative safeguards in place, this data can be used for the shared benefit of us all, with exciting potential for innovation, and transforming healthcare delivery.

Reversing entrenched health inequalities will not be easy. It requires cross-government action and a radical rethink of our social and economic model. Societal good health must be valued as an asset. We should introduce metrics such as the ONS 'health index', reported on in fiscal statements as a measure of our prosperity alongside GDP. Health exploitation by profit-driven corporations needs to be countered. Learning from the environmental movement, the fiscal system can be used to reduce incentives to profit from ill-health. Tackling health disparities is not only just, but has societal and economic benefits. The IPPR estimates closing the health gap between the North of England and the rest of England would be worth over £20bn per year to the economy, from gained productivity.

Health is our asset. The status quo is not good enough. The Labour party must be bold with its ambition and offer a comprehensive policy platform to truly transform healthcare. **F**

Mutual aid is for life

Oly Durose sets out how to win the unwinnable, one act of solidarity at a time

Oly Durose is a researcher for a Labour MP and a policy fellow at SOAS, University of London. In the 2019 UK general election, he stood as the Labour parliamentary candidate for Brentwood & Ongar. His new book, Suburban Socialism, is published by Repeater Books

"I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity."
Eduardo Galeano

In the midst of the coronavirus crisis, thousands of self-organising volunteers provided invaluable care and assistance to those experiencing illness and isolation in their neighbourhoods. From grocery shopping to medication collection, dog-sitting to dog-walking, lawn-mowing to rubbish disposal, and from friendly chats to mental health support, local networks of mutual aid mushroomed in local communities up and down the country. Almost two years on, however, and the energy underpinning these systems of collective care has waned. So too, has cross-party applause, which faded as quickly as it appeared. For many, mutual aid was an urgent but temporary response to an anomalous crisis. But for those who were providing community care long before coronavirus, mutual aid is anything but momentary. Instead, it represents the lasting struggle for a radically new way of life.

Anarchists assemble?

Many of those who engaged in mutual aid during lockdown may be surprised to know that they were practising a longstanding anarchist tradition. In his collection of anthropological essays Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution, anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin explains how localised networks of co-operation have played a crucial role in the maintenance of the human race. The relationship between mutual aid and collective survival is perhaps no more palpable than in the context of a global pandemic – where my health is dependent on yours, and yours on mine. As Dean Spade (another self-proclaimed anarchist) testifies in his book, mutual aid is a deeply political act. Stemming from an awareness that our existing systems cannot satisfy human needs, mutual aid showcases how alternative systems, grounded in unconditional and universal support, are better for everybody.

All the more fascinating, then, to see these apparent acts of anarchism spread to terrain famous for fiercely upholding the status quo. I am from Brentwood & Ongar in Essex, a relatively affluent and suburban constituency that has been safely Conservative since its creation in 1974. During the run-up to the 2019 general election, it took us more than three months to get barely 500 people to like our local Labour campaign's Facebook page. By contrast, when a few of us decided to create a Covid-19 mutual aid group in March 2020, it took just 24 hours to attract 1,000 members (the total now exceeds 2,000), who were all seemingly acutely aware that the dispersed suburban terrain generated an alienating lockdown experience for the elderly, the disabled, and those in less accessible settings.

Initially, I found the discrepancy frustrating. Why were suburbanites suddenly so keen to address suburban inequality and isolation – the very issue that we had spent the past eight weeks bitterly – and unsuccessfully – campaigning against? It wasn't long, however, before I began to understand how voters could have decisively rejected a platform of collective care one month, and then decisively rejoiced in actively building one the next. It was a realisation that, in the end, not all systems of mutual aid are created equal.

Suburban solidarity

Near the beginning of our mutual aid experiment, we agreed that assistance would be given on the following principle: if you asked, we helped. No data was gathered, no identity was checked, and no means were tested. Soon, however, many in the group began to betray, rather than reflect, the universalist principle of mutual aid. Namely, acts of solidarity had eroded into expressions of charity. Vertical modes of decision-making emerged to allow a few people at the top to decide which of the most vulnerable in the constituency was eligible for – thus worthy of – support. And certain sections of

the community – in particular homeless people and the Traveller community – were demonised as members of the undeserving poor.

This might explain why many Conservative suburbanites (including councillors) who oppose radically redistributive platforms could also engage in (a distorted version of) suburban mutual aid. That's because, in Brentwood at least, the descent of mutual aid into conditional, charitable and profitable assistance legitimised their dual belief that assisting the least fortunate is a virtuous display of voluntarism, but not a responsibility any collective body should bear. This leaves us with the following paradox: how do we maintain and augment the resurgent enthusiasm for mutual aid in Tory suburbia – and in fact right across the country – without betraying what mutual aid is all about?

I do not have a definitive solution to this dilemma, but I do have the following conviction: experimenting with mutual aid is not about developing forms of assistance that Conservative suburbanites are most comfortable with. It is about showcasing the workability of collective structures. Mutual aid should still welcome donations from wealthier suburbanites, but they should not have asymmetric power in deciding who gets support. Besides, mutual aid in Tory suburbia is not necessarily *dependent* on donations from the wealthy for expansion. Let's think creatively – for example, can we combine mutual aid with a unionisation drive? By affiliating with mutual aid groups, unions could represent the interests of those who both provide and are reliant on the service, making redistributive demands of employers on their behalf. Any progressive party should provide mutual aid with financial support too, as well as encouraging activists to get involved on the ground.

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The role of the Labour party, however, goes well beyond immediate assistance. That's because expanding mutual aid in Tory seats is not just a challenge. It is also an opportunity: to garner widespread support for a radical electoral platform in otherwise hostile territory.

Upscaling mutual aid

> "We are going to Tredegarise you."
> *Nye Bevan, 1945*

Before the NHS, healthcare was bought and sold. Those who couldn't afford doctors relied on charitable services provided by the church, or run-down hospitals set up by local governments. Taking matters into their own hands, workers across England and Wales formed 'friendly societies', which pooled together small portions of their income to pay for doctors and to establish free clinics. One of the most advanced systems was the Medical Aid Society in Tredegar, South Wales, in the early 20th century. Clinics grew into full-time services that provided healthcare not just for workers but for their families and communities too. It was not until the end of the second world war that Tredegar's model was adopted across the country. "I am determined to extend to the entire population of Britain the benefits we had in Tredegar for a generation or more." Those were the words of Tredegar-born Nye Bevan, the minister of health in the post-war Labour government. A few years later, he helped establish the National Health Service to make healthcare freely available to all.

The NHS, then, was not created by the Labour party out of thin air. It was built on the foundations laid by those who knew what it meant to look after each other, long before the electoral system caught up. More than 70 years later, we are once again lagging behind the collective mood. To ensure the resurgent energy does not go to waste, the Labour party should vow to scale up mutual aid services. Inspired by local communities who have been providing food, prescriptions and friendly phone calls to isolated residents, a Labour government could (for example) establish a National Food Service, set up a Universal Prescription Service, and provide counselling and companionship as part of a National Care Service.

Mutual aid has awoken entire communities to the idea that it is better to deal collectively with problems that affect every individual. As long as we stay firm on our principles of solidarity, then mutual aid can showcase the workability and preferability of a society grounded in collective care. This is our chance to garner widescale support for a radical electoral platform, grounded in the belief that local communities should have the power and resources to meet everybody's human needs on a democratic, unconditional and universal basis. This is our chance to turn the safest of Tory seats red by cultivating acts of solidarity on unlikely soil. This is our chance to build a society in which people give what they can and take what they need. **F**

Books

A tale of failure

The story behind the chaotic withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan is traced in a damning account, writes *Paul Rogers*

Paul Rogers is emeritus professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University and an honorary fellow at the Joint Service Command and Staff College

Twenty-five years ago, in Bill Clinton's second term in the White House, the neo-conservative wing of the Republican party was in full cry with its declaration of 'the new American century'. As the sole superpower, the United States had a duty to lead the world to a new global peace, facing down its remaining enemies and ensuring the thriving of a truly free market liberal democracy under benign American leadership.

George W Bush's narrow victory in 2000 saw such a world view entrenched in the new administration's defence and foreign policies. All looked good but then came the visceral shock of 9/11 and war against the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan, followed by Iraq. Initially things went well, culminating in Bush's 'Mission Accomplished' speech on May Day 2003, but it was all downhill from there on, ending in last summer's disaster in Kabul.

The Ledger, by two security analysts with years of experience in Afghanistan, is a first attempt to assess the Afghan disaster from an informed western perspective. It is a mine of information and, for such a rapidly completed book, it is a major achievement. While it does branch out into wider issues, including UN peacekeeping and regional actors, its emphasis is on internal developments in Afghanistan over 20 years with useful reminders of earlier US experiences in Vietnam.

As the title implies, the book is about success or failure, and the question from the authors' perspective is whether western-built partner forces can ever be viable. They point to four elements to consider in Afghanistan. First is the corruption and nepotism that took hold and the second, in parallel, is the negative impact of large amounts of western money flowing in. The third factor is the unwillingness of local diplomats and military on the ground to speak truth to power back in Washington. And finally there is "the flawed assumption that a Western design based on Western values could be imposed on a culturally conservative population, thousands of miles away and against their will".

The Ledger: Accounting for Failure in Afghanistan
David Kilcullen and Greg Mills
Hurst, £14.99

The Ledger explores these issues, with much more to say on related matters, and its analysis of failure is damning. That is hardly easy to disguise, especially as so much of the failure was in the public eye if one knew where to look. For more than a decade, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reported regularly to Congress on progress – or more commonly the lack of it – and these reports alone made for thoroughly uncomfortable reading.

Why so little notice was taken is best answered if we return to the aftermath of 9/11 and the intense need to save the 'new American century' almost before it had begun. This was what necessitated extending the conflict to the much "wider axis of evil". Since then, we have had not two but four failed wars – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and now the continuing air war against ISIS. Meanwhile, ISIS itself as well as al-Qaida and other paramilitary movements operate from Libya through the Sahel, right down to the DRC and Mozambique, as well as Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and through to South and South-East Asia.

The Ledger is one of the best of the books of its kind so far – but perhaps we need two more studies, one focused on US politics from the mid-1990s and another written from within Afghanistan or Pakistan. There are certainly some very good writers from that region and their contributions are badly needed, if only to balance the inevitable western orientation of The Ledger.

Perhaps the book's most telling conclusion is that the terrible ISIS attack at Kabul Airport last August right at the end of the chaotic evacuation means that the last American soldiers to be killed in Afghanistan were killed not by the Taliban but by the local branch of ISIS. It serves as grim inspiration for others in the years ahead. **F**

A strong ally

Peter Hain's story makes for a thought-provoking read, finds *Elizabeth Williams*

Elizabeth Williams is an academic librarian at Goldsmiths University of London and author of The Politics of Race in Britain and South Africa: Black British Solidarity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle. Her new book Black Britain and Nelson Mandela: "Pulling the Branch of a Tree" will be published in 2023 by Bloomsbury

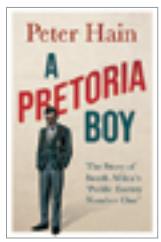
What is there left to say about South Africa under apartheid? Quite a lot it seems, if one judges by the many works still hitting the shelves, including the latest book from Peter Hain, former Labour MP for Neath who now sits in the Lords.

Hain's account of his South African childhood comes across as fresh and thought-provoking on many levels. His pedigree of what might be termed 'white allyship' is beyond question.

We are led through his story of a white, middle-class, South African schoolboy who attended a 'good school' and could have had a glittering career of choice in apartheid South Africa. However, Hain's parents had strong racially inclusive social justice perspectives backed up by action. This ensured they would be social pariahs in the eyes of the majority of their white peers – who were benefactors of the system of apartheid – and cast out by family and the wider community. Aligning themselves with the African liberation movement contributed to their eventual banishment in the mid-1960s to the UK.

Hain's trajectory is unique, from 'public enemy number one' – as he was dubbed by the South African government during his time as an anti-apartheid campaigner – to respected government minister.

In the post-apartheid era, Hain returned to South Africa a number of times, and the reader is taken on a reflective path looking at what was lost and what was gained and the imperfections of the new 'democratised' nation. It is here that Hain, without preachiness, sketches out the high price white South Africans like his parents and their children paid for taking a stand on the right side of history: rejection by family, community, society. He is however careful to remind the reader that price was not as high as that paid in the destruction of African lives. Nevertheless, the most moving part of his narrative is describing the impact on his parents returning to South Africa after nearly 30 years. A realisation of a life lost.



A Pretoria Boy: The Story of Africa's 'Public Enemy Number One'
Peter Hain
Icon Books, £20

Hain comments that: "It made me wonder what all those agents of the police state who had intimidated, tortured and killed in the name of apartheid were doing with themselves these days. Were we passing them by as we walked in the city centre?" Similar thoughts crossed my mind when I was in South Africa.

Hain's retelling of the trumped-up charges he faced during the mid-1970s, his celebrated chairmanship of the Stop the Seventy tour campaign, and travelling to Australia to support similar campaigns is told at a pace that places the reader back in those heady days of what now seem like a bygone age. One cannot underestimate the viciousness of the apartheid state against their opponents at home or abroad. The clear complicity of the British state (the usual suspects; elements of the judiciary, the police, and the shadowy secret forces and spies) is not sugar-coated.

"A connectivity of both racisms is not lost on Black activists in the UK"

Hain is not shy to go out on a limb if asked to do so, both in exposing corruption in South Africa and the unethical practices of British businessmen. In our contemporary context of heightened racialised awareness in the wake of George Floyd's murder and Black Lives Matter campaigning, the 'Rhodes must fall' dramas in Oxford and beyond, one can easily see an impassioned Hain getting involved in the fray. The one criticism one may have is around the silence on the domestic race issues of 1960s to 1980s Britain. A connectivity of both racisms is not lost on Black activists in the UK and for many, the failure to address it is a lasting critique of the single focus of the anti-apartheid movement. But that, as they say, is another story. F

Research round-up

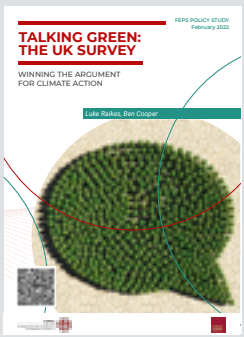
Recent research from the Fabian Society looks into messaging around climate change, digital exclusion and the experiences of Labour party activists. Find out more about what we've been up to

Some are trying to turn the climate emergency into a Brexit-style culture war, with the launch of Nigel Farage's anti net zero campaign and a group of Conservative MPs lining up to call for cuts in green taxes and an increase in fossil fuel production. We all know that mitigating climate change necessitates concerted action –and that may well mean costs and lifestyle changes for the public. In the face of the growing opposition to a greener approach, winning the fight for hearts and minds will be crucial if meaningful progress is to be made.

Talking Green, the final report of a project by FEPS (the Foundation for European Progressive Studies), the Fabian Society and TASC, examines how the case for action on climate change can best be made.

Its message to politicians and policymakers is clear: drop the jargon and find new ways of connecting with the public. Messaging around 'green' jobs is unconvincing: although it resonates with those who are already convinced that the benefits of climate action outweigh the costs, it is far less effective among those who are more sceptical, including working-class households, older people, leave and Conservative voters. Arguments around quality of life and shared values are more effective in persuading people of the need for action, the report says.

"Politicians and activists must turn outward and connect with the wider public to make a case for action that people in all their diversity can relate to," the report says. "Instead of using slogans about 'green jobs', politicians should avoid jargon; highlight the link between climate, nature and a good quality of life; and appeal to widely shared values," it adds.



More than 5,000 people were surveyed for the report.

Talking Green: Winning the Argument for Climate Action is written by Fabian Society research director Luke Raikes and senior researcher Ben Cooper.

Bridging the Divide: Tackling Digital Inequality in a Post-Pandemic World

Our computers, phones and tablets kept many of us connected to the outside world during the pandemic, allowing us to work from home, video call family and friends and take part in all sorts of leisure activities online. But successive lockdowns also highlighted the continuing digital exclusion faced by those who don't have the equipment or skills to participate in life online. This report, by Fabian Society senior researcher Josh Abey, sets out recommendations for a new package of 'digital entitlements' including a mandatory social tariff for internet connections for everyone in need and universal access to free digital skills support in the community.

More to Do: Unequal Experiences of Labour Party Membership

The Fabian Society first asked Labour activists about their experiences in the party back in 2015. This follow-up research shows not enough has improved since then: many party activists still find some fellow members unfriendly, meetings difficult and local parties unfair. A survey of nearly 2,900 members for the report found that factionalism was a particular problem. The report also includes recommendations from members for improving membership experiences.

All reports are available on the Fabian Society website: www.fabians.org.uk

Listings

ANNOUNCEMENT

Fabian Society events
Some 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
Friday 29 April: Guest speaker: Rob Martin, former GMB regional officer. The Friends Meeting House, Wharncliffe Road, Bournemouth at 7.30pm. Contact Ian Taylor at 01202 396634 or taylorbournemouth @gmail.com for details

BRIGHTON & HOVE
Contact Stephen Ottaway at stephenottaway1@gmail.com for details

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

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

COLCHESTER
Contact Maurice Austin at maurice.austin @phonecoop.coop

COUNTY DURHAM
All are invited to three in-person Saturday meetings over the next three months, with no membership required on your first visit. This is at our modern new venue St. Paul's Hall, Meadowfield, Durham City, DH7 8RP.

9 April
Dr Nigel Speight introducing a debate on the case for a progressive alliance.

28 May
Kevan Jones, MP for North Durham, on austerity spending in County Durham and the North East by the coalition and Conservative governments.

25 June
Tim Blackman, vice-chancellor of the Open University on higher and further education: lessons from devolution. Contact professor Alan Townsend at alan.townsend1939@gmail.com

CROYDON & SUTTON
Contact Emily Brothers at info@emilybrothers.com

ENFIELD FABIANS
Contact Andrew Gilbert at enfieldfabians@gmail.com

FINCHLEY
Contact Sam Jacobs at sam.jacobs@netapp.com

HAVERING
Contact Davis Marshall at haveringfabians@outlook.com

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

NEWHAM
Contact Mike Reader at mike.reader99@gmail.com

NORTHUMBRIA AREA
Contact Pat Hobson at pathobson@hotmail.com

PETERBOROUGH
Contact Brian Keegan at brian@keeganpeterborough.com

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

RUGBY
Contact John Goodman at 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
Contact Mary Cannon at yorkfabiansociety@gmail.com

FABIAN QUIZ

RESISTANCE: THE UNDERGROUND WAR IN EUROPE, 1939–45
Halik Kochanski

Resistance is a powerful and humane account of how and why all across Nazi-occupied Europe some people decided to resist the Third Reich. This could range from open partisan warfare in the occupied Soviet Union to dangerous acts of defiance in the Netherlands or Norway. Some of these resistance movements were entirely homegrown, others supported by the Allies.

Resistance shows the reader just how difficult such actions were. Filled with powerful and often little-known stories, Halik Kochanski's new book is a fascinating examination of the convoluted challenges faced by those prepared to resist the Germans, ordinary people who carried out exceptional acts of defiance and resistance.

Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away. To win one, answer the following question:
Who was leader of the Labour party during the second world war?

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

ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN 10 JUNE 2022

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