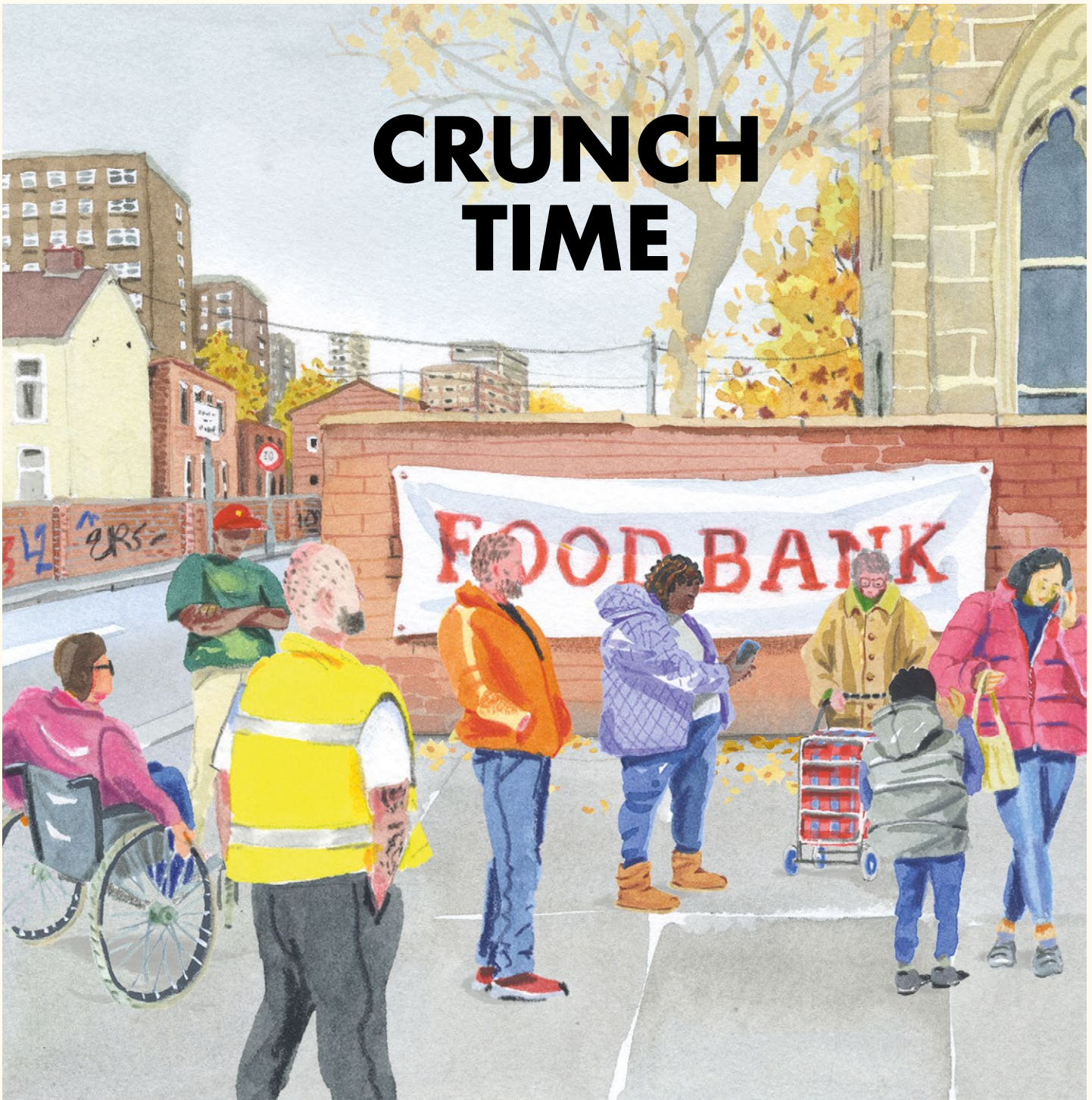


# FABIAN REVIEW

The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society

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# CRUNCH TIME

*Labour, the cost of living crisis and the next election: Wes Streeting MP, Stephen Beer, Meg Russell, Ellie Mae O'Hagan and Ayesha Baloch p10 / Jonathan Ashworth MP talks about fighting for change p20 / Nick Thomas-Symonds MP on Harold Wilson's legacy p26 / Sarah Crook on mothers in politics p34*



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Voice**

# FABIAN REVIEW

Volume 134—No.3

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### **FABIAN REVIEW**

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

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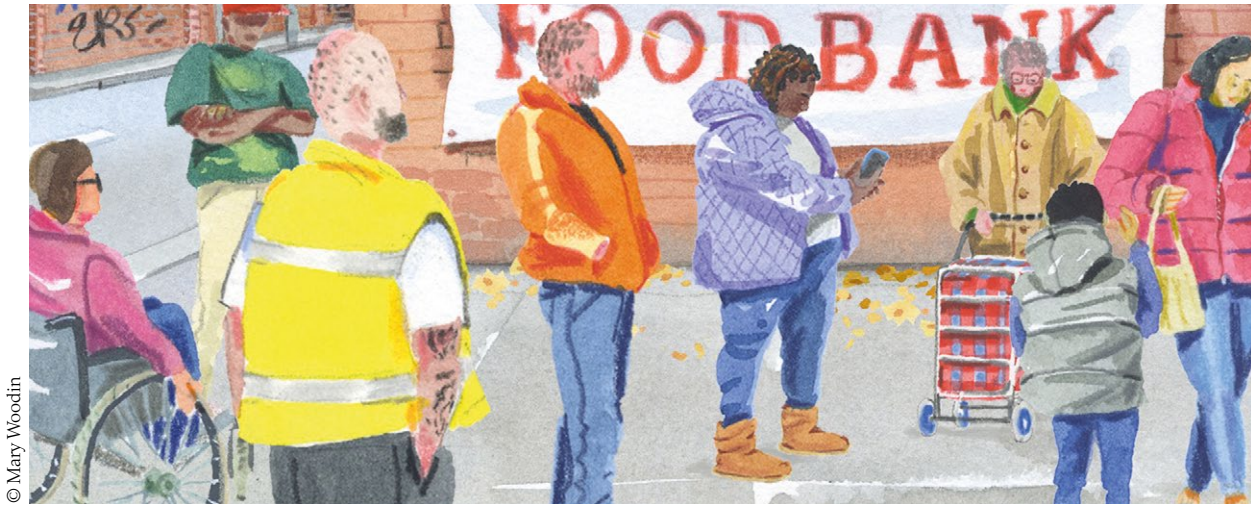
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## Changing of the guard

The end of the second Elizabethan era is a time to reflect on the country we want Britain to be, writes *Andrew Harrop*

**T**HE DEATH OF the Queen after seven decades on the throne is a moment for sober reflection about the UK's past and future. From her first prime minister, Winston Churchill, to her last, Liz Truss, the Britain of today is barely recognisable from the post-war imperial power of 1952.

Over the course of the last 70 years, the country has experienced profound technological and social change that have made people's lives far better. Thanks to the twin forces of science-led innovation and social liberalism we can do more and be more than any generation in history. But we face huge challenges too. During the first 50 years of the Queen's reign, standards of living for most families increased quickly and consistently, but in the last 20 years they have stalled.

Largely as a result, our politics has grown more resentful, polarised and zero sum. In the early 2000s, it seemed that Britain was successfully navigating its way from imperial power, and then internally-focused nation state, to becoming a society, economy and polity that was plural, European and global in its outlook and engagements. Since then, our public discourse has turned towards nationalism, insularity and intolerance – forces that feel much more prevalent in politics than everyday life. With our divisions more pronounced, the UK's place in the world and its own territorial integrity are far from certain as we look ahead.

Since 1952 we have also seen the tide rise and fall on egalitarianism and collectivism. For the first 25 years of the Queen's incumbency, Britain's increasing prosperity was accompanied by falling equality and the expansion of the welfare state. But in the 1980s that all went into reverse and for the last 40 years we have been stuck in an individualistic, market-first, high-inequality paradigm. Despite all the good achieved by the 1997 Labour government, its efforts were too small-scale and too reversible to turn the tide. But the larger truth is that

the British left has not governed enough to shape the country in its mould. The Labour party supplied only four of the Queen's 15 prime ministers: we will only create a strong and fair society if we win more often.

On the environment, the direction of travel has been better. Pollution and carbon emissions are much lower today than in the 1950s – but here it is a case of too little, too late. The UK was the first nation to industrialise and we can lead the way to net zero emissions. But for all the progress made in recent decades, Britain still emits more carbon emissions than the global average and is not on course to meet its climate change commitments.

This is the backdrop that greets our new prime minister and Liz Truss looks set to be the most doctrinaire and unyielding Conservative leader since Margaret Thatcher. In her early days she backpedalled on the UK's climate policies even though Russia's weaponisation of energy supply calls for a rapid acceleration towards net zero. Truss's only plan for growth is to deregulate and cut taxes, which we know from history will drive up inequality but do nothing for prosperity. And her combination of lower taxes and energy subsidies means there will be nothing left for public services or protecting people in need. We are heading for a second round of Conservative austerity, only this time with high inflation, war-time levels of debt and possibly a recession too. The outlook for the NHS and the rest of the welfare state is grim indeed.

Truss may believe she can win an election with full-throated Thatcherism but she is pitching her tent far to the right of mainstream public opinion. Labour must present its alternative vision for remaking Britain, because environmental, economic and social intervention can supply more plausible and popular answers to the country's ills. This is not the 1980s. Labour can have confidence that it will win the battle of ideas. **F**

# Shortcuts



## AN END TO RATIONS

A new independent body could help a reforming government raise benefit levels—*Imran Hussain*

When governments cut social security support, they ration decency. We need a way to restore that decency.

For many years, ministers used to maintain the fiction that benefits were enough for people to afford their basic living needs. Not any more. The £20 a week uplift to universal credit at the start of the pandemic, which was welcomed and which cut child poverty, was a straightforward admission that rates were unjustifiably low. The new Household Support Fund explicitly states that its grants are “to support vulnerable households meet daily needs such as food, clothing, and utilities”. Again, a clear sign that low benefit rates are leaving people struggling to meet their most basic needs.

Action for Children’s analysis of our crisis fund, which provides emergency grants to parents and young adults using our services, found that 54 per cent of those supported last winter were claiming universal credit – a strong indicator that benefits are not protecting families from severe financial hardship.

Spending reviews and budgets of successive governments in the past decade have left the living standards of families with children dangerously exposed to the economic storm that is set to rain down over us for the next two years. A lot of this damage has been inflicted through real terms cuts to benefit levels by failing to uprate them in line with inflation. Increases to most working-age benefits were limited to 1 per cent between 2013 and 2016 and frozen entirely from 2016 to 2020. Analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation shows that the value of the basic rate of unemployment benefit is at a 35-year low, having fallen in real terms in eight out of the 10 upratings between 2013 and 2022.

It is not just cuts. A number of structural obstacles have also been put in place – stemming from George Osborne’s reported “desire to ‘weaponise’ welfare policy” – to stop families getting the help they need, even if that means breaking the link between assessed need and support provided. The benefit cap, the two-child limit and the overall ‘welfare cap’ all make it harder – legislatively and politically – for future governments to provide families with a more effective social security safety net. Overturning these would require legislation or reform of the Office for Budget Responsibility’s charter.

All this has left family living standards open to the elements, with the route back to shelter stymied by arbitrary and politically driven hurdles that would require future governments to consume political capital to overcome.

A new independent body, a Living Standards Commission, modelled on the Low Pay Commission and public sector pay review bodies, is needed to make recommendations to the government on benefits uprating decisions to help cover living costs and protect living standards for those on low incomes.

Its expert members, including those with lived experience of poverty, would collect evidence through commissioned research, public and stakeholder consultations, oral evidence sessions and analysis of government data, to make annual recommendations to ministers on benefits uprating.

The Living Standards Commission would have a clear remit to help ensure that benefit uprating decisions include a clear focus on covering essential costs and protecting living standards. The body could be made to recommend minimum annual increases or be given a specific mandate by the government to bring benefit levels up to a certain level of basic adequacy over a period of time.

Such a mandate could, within its terms of reference, be subject to particular conditions, such as the health of the economy and the government’s fiscal position. This would give the commission the flexibility to adjust its target or timeframe if the external conditions change. This would be similar to the Low Pay Commission’s mandate to raise the national living wage to two-thirds of median income

by 2024, which allows for an ‘emergency brake’ to be applied if deemed necessary. Ultimately, this new independent body can only advise. It would be for the government of the day to accept, reject or build on the recommendations made.

This structural innovation could also improve the policy debate on social security by bringing it out in the open. A public discussion on the adequacy of benefit levels, driven by an independent body, undoubtedly would improve public understanding and transparency around benefit adequacy. In doing so, it could give a reforming government cover to make the reforms needed to give financial security to more families.

A Living Standards Commission would give ministers the means, motive and opportunity to take out some of the politics from decisions on benefit levels – and to give families decency and respect. ■

*Imran Hussain is director of policy and campaigns at Action for Children*



## TIME FOR ACTION

Labour would do what it takes to tackle climate change—*Kerry McCarthy MP*

The record-breaking temperatures during this summer’s heatwave, reaching 40C for the first time in the UK, were yet another warning that climate change is happening and it is happening fast.

Only the most stubborn of climate change sceptics would deny that. But they are not the real problem.

Far more dangerous are those in positions of power who acknowledge the impact of global heating, who accept the science – and who may even talk about the need to act – but still do not have the political will to do what is required.

Sadly, that label could have applied to any one of the candidates in this summer's Tory leadership contest.

But Labour has been crystal clear about the scale of this challenge and the action needed.

The ongoing energy crisis, which has left households facing skyrocketing bills, has shone a spotlight on the need for a green sprint for renewable energy sources – which are now four times cheaper than gas.

Labour has announced plans to triple solar capacity and double onshore wind power by 2030, in stark contrast to the stance taken by the new prime minister and her opponent on the campaign trail: Liz Truss called for a crackdown on solar panels on farmland and Rishi Sunak pledged to block new onshore wind.

Labour also led the way by proposing the windfall tax on oil and gas profits that the Tories eventually, reluctantly, adopted.

However, the government's version included a massive £4bn loophole for oil and gas companies investing more in fossil fuels. That is far more support than is available to renewable energy producers.

Labour was again filling in for a government missing-in-action when our party called for the current cap on energy bills to be maintained this winter.

That fully funded plan to freeze energy bills would provide households the financial security they desperately need by saving them £1,000 to get through the winter.

And we have worked up plans to drastically bring down bills in the long term, through a street-by-street energy efficiency programme, insulating 19 million homes within a decade.

If the government had listened, two million of the most vulnerable households could already have been insulated this year. And scaled-up investment in renewable energy could have meant we were well on our way to ending our dependence on costly fossil fuels.

There are huge economic opportunities in making the shift to a green economy, but we have seen very little sign that this government is capable of seizing them.

Just months ago, the High Court ruled that the government's own Net Zero Strategy was inadequate and 'unlawful', and the independent Climate Change Committee was scathing in its annual progress report.

Labour will provide the certainty needed for investment in green technologies and create good green jobs through our pledges to revive UK industry.

That includes investing to support our steel industry in the transition to green



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manufacturing methods and the financing of new gigafactories to build electric vehicle batteries at home.

Electric vehicle sales are rising, making up around 10.9 per cent of UK vehicle sales so far this year. But the government is putting this at risk.

Earlier this year, plug-in grants – which helped to make electric cars more affordable – were suddenly scrapped, despite the cost of living crisis.

Ministers are also way off track for their target of making 300,000 public electric vehicle charging points available by 2030, with only a tenth of that number delivered so far.

Regional inequalities remain stark as well. London has 111 charging points per 100,000 people, while the North West has only 26. So much for 'levelling up'.

The shift to electric vehicles, like the transition to heat pumps in homes and the production of green hydrogen for industry, will require more clean electricity generation.

But there is no government strategy to develop the grid and to scale up the green infrastructure we need. A lack of grid capacity now risks becoming a huge drag on our ability to decarbonise.

This is already affecting new house building, including in west London where development could be paused 'for at least five years' because grid connections are not available.

Labour's plans are not just focused on industry and technology, important as they are.

Natural climate solutions can also help bring down carbon emissions, prevent catastrophic flooding and avoid damage from rising sea levels.

This means planting more trees, restoring our peatlands, planting seagrass meadows and protecting salt marshes.

But this government is way behind on its tree planting targets, is still allowing the destructive burning of our peatlands and, according to the independent Climate Change Committee, has 'underfunded and ignored' climate adaptation measures to combat extreme weather events like flooding.

Labour would reverse this decade of failures and seize new economic opportunities through our commitment to invest £28bn per year in tackling climate change over this decade.

All of our proposals – alongside bringing down emissions and bills – would create good jobs in the green industries of the future.

This is work that has to be done urgently. But only a Labour government will do it. **F**

*Kerry McCarthy is the Labour MP for Bristol East and Labour's shadow minister for climate change*



## ON TREND

Regulating the fashion industry would help address both the cost of living crisis and climate change — *Ruth MacGilp*

Decades of campaigning for a crackdown on poor practices in the fashion industry are finally starting to yield results. The Competition and Markets Authority recently launched an investigation into ASOS, Boohoo and Asda to scrutinise their sustainability claims and, it is hoped, hold them to account for greenwashing tactics that might mislead climate-concerned consumers.

And Liz Twist, the Labour MP for Blyden, has introduced a private member's bill on the fashion supply chain, which would introduce a strict code of practice for retailers and appoint a trade adjudicator to enforce compliance.

This call for a fashion watchdog attempts to tackle the shameful working conditions and poverty pay, particularly in Leicester's garment factories, where many clothes sold by online retailers like Missguided and Boohoo are produced.

In recent times we have seen growing media attention on British fashion retailers – but there is a much larger systemic issue that undermines the legitimacy of the entire industry: fashion is built upon a system of exploitation that leaves the majority of its workers desperate and destitute. And so far, voluntary measures from individual brands and coalitions of PR-hungry luxury labels have not been enough to tackle the deep roots of inequality in the supply chain.

The canary in the coalmine here is living wages. At present, 96 per cent of brands do not publish the number of workers in their supply chain who are paid a living wage. This is according to the 2022 Fashion Transparency Index, which reviewed public disclosure on social and environmental issues from the world's 250 largest fashion brands.

In the UK, workers in two Leicester factories were found to be earning a dismal £3.25 an hour – significantly less than the legal minimum wage. Meanwhile, some of the country's richest individuals can be found in the fashion industry. For example, founder of Manchester-based brand PrettyLittleThing Umar Kamani is reportedly worth £331m and is regularly photographed alongside private yachts and million-dollar diamonds.

Irresponsible purchasing practices keep this wheel of poverty spinning for workers. The Fashion Transparency Index 2022 also found that just 11 per cent of brands disclose a 60-day payment term. This means consumers are often wearing new clothes long before the suppliers get paid, and the people stitching those clothes together wait even longer for their paycheck to arrive.

In May, when Missguided entered administration, suppliers lamented that they were still awaiting payment for orders completed months before. Now these suppliers are expected to receive less than 2 per cent of the £30m they are owed, leaving workers even more out of pocket, a cruel echo of the order cancellations crisis during lockdown.

Transparency around these purchasing practices is abysmal, meaning we still do not know the extent to which brands are failing to uphold timely payments and therefore pushing workers into toxic cycles of debt. Clearly, we cannot wait for corporate social responsibility; legislation is needed now to hold brands to account.

This issue is closely linked to intersecting crises currently facing the most vulnerable people in the UK. During the pandemic, women working in garment factories were four times more likely to die from Covid-19

than women in any other occupation, including healthcare. These women – who make up the majority of garment workers globally – are often responsible for unpaid domestic work at home, in addition to long hours on the factory floor. Research has also shown that poverty is a root cause of gender-based violence, so earning a living wage could help lift fashion's millions of unseen women out of a cycle of exploitation and abuse.

Living wages are also connected to sustainability. Against the backdrop of the climate crisis, the fashion industry continues to increase clothing production by 2.7 per cent per year, putting immense pressure on suppliers and workers alike. This business model relies upon customers buying too many clothes and treating them as disposable and our planet cannot sustain it. Paying workers enough to earn a decent living in a standard working week could have the potential to slow down overproduction and therefore environmental impacts by forcing clothing companies to assume the real cost of labour.

To address this imbalance of wealth and power in the fashion industry, a group of campaigners in the EU have launched Good Clothes, Fair Pay. This new campaign is demanding living wages for the people who make our clothes around the world. It also calls for EU legislation requiring fashion retailers selling to the EU market – which includes most major UK and international brands – to conduct due diligence on living wages in their supply chain.



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Fashion may not appear to be a top priority for the left in the UK. But the triad of the cost of living crisis, the climate emergency and the ongoing pandemic make regulating the fashion industry a crucial step towards social and environmental justice. **F**

*Ruth MacGilp is communications manager at Fashion Revolution*



## THE ENERGY FOR CHANGE

Progressives in Latin America should inspire worldwide change  
—*Fabian Hamilton MP*

As the waves of right-wing populism that seemed to grip the world over the last few years fade away, there is now a chance for progressives to make the case for change globally. But it is in Latin America where progressives are not only winning the arguments but winning elections too – and the UK should do more to work with them.

Victory for Gabriel Boric in Chile and, most recently, the victory of Gustavo Petro in Colombia has shown how the promise of real change can make a difference. In Colombia, Petro's pledge to end the violence that has plagued the country has brought swathes of voters with him and seen him elected as Colombia's first ever left-wing president. In a traditionally conservative country, it is extremely encouraging to see the success of a candidate like Petro – who champions social security and peace-building initiatives – after years of internal conflict and economic mismanagement.

When I visited Colombia to help observe the election in June, I was struck by the sheer zest for change among the poor and the middle classes, the young and the elderly. Thankfully, that was matched with the political will to deliver an election victory. It has also brought an almost immediate improvement as plans to reform the Colombian police, who have been implicated in attacks on peaceful protestors and

trade unionists in recent months, are accelerated.

I hope to travel to Brazil in October to observe the elections there. With the disturbing news that the Brazilian government is going to install the country's military as observers, the upcoming elections are absolutely vital to one of the UK's most important partners in Latin America – and a regional economic and political powerhouse.

During President Bolsonaro's term of office, violence against trade unionists and environmental activists has gone largely unchallenged and over 300 LGBT people were murdered in 2021, although the true figure is believed to be much higher. The tragic death of British journalist Dom Phillips has made this violence and the destruction of the Amazon rainforest an even more poignant story in the northern hemisphere.

But, like Colombia, Brazil has an opportunity for change in October. There are currently more than 30 parties represented in the 513-seat National Congress. Unfortunately, over 200 of these seats are occupied by socially conservative politicians who are undermining the rights of many marginalised groups – especially the LGBT community and the indigenous population. The UK has a part to play in urging the Brazilian government to protect the rights of these groups and it must do more to use its influence in the region.

Given President Bolsonaro's inaction in tackling the violence, it is not surprising that there are concerns about how the election will be carried out. Bolsonaro has overseen a democracy that has been described as 'extremely flawed' by the Democracy Index and ranked as one of the worst in the region.

Limits placed on the freedom of expression in Brazil have led to investigative journalists being threatened, attacked and harassed. Human rights defenders and indigenous people who have campaigned to protect fundamental freedoms have also pointed to a disturbing increase in calls for violence if President Bolsonaro loses the election, with the president himself criticising the judiciary that has investigated his own government's allegations of corruption.

A Labour government would not spend its time cosying up to people like Bolsonaro as the Conservatives have done. We would not roll out the red carpet, but would challenge any government that turns a blind eye to violence against human rights activists and indigenous populations.

The Conservative government simply has not been loud enough on the international

stage when it comes to fundamental rights. For example, it refused to support investigations of Brazil's breaches of International Labour Organization conventions at the ILO conference committee and has failed to challenge Bolsonaro at every turn.

As Labour campaigners and activists, we should take inspiration from the recent victories in Latin America and garner the energy for change in our own country as we look towards defeating the Conservatives at the ballot box. **F**

*Fabian Hamilton is the Labour MP for Leeds North East and shadow minister for peace and disarmament, Latin America and the Caribbean*



## PLAYING FAIR

We need more inclusive spaces for disabled children

— *Hannah Dobbin*

For families with disabled children, life is much harder than it needs to be. They often have to fight for the support their child is entitled to and, on average, families with disabled children face extra costs of £581 a month. Alongside this, they can face barriers to everyday equality. For parents, carers and siblings of disabled children, one of the most significant of these barriers is the lack of inclusive spaces and places.

Families with disabled children told us that inclusive spaces allow them to spend invaluable time together. It enables them to experience activities that families with non-disabled children can take for granted. It means

they can feel part of their local community. Inclusive spaces also benefit all children, as they are accessible to all and encourage interactions and shared experiences.

As one parent of a disabled child put it: "An inclusive playground with a range of accessible equipment makes all the difference to our family. My daughter is a wheelchair user but that doesn't stop her wanting to play in the same way non-disabled children do. The things that stop her are poorly designed playgrounds that forget disabled children and effectively shut us out as a family."

Many disabled children cannot engage in, or benefit from, play like their non-disabled peers. This was heightened by the pandemic which placed even greater restrictions on opportunities for disabled children and their families to engage with their local communities. Services and support for disabled children, such as therapies, disappeared and outdoor play has become increasingly important.

Local playgrounds are places where memories are made and where children can be themselves. Yet, according to a Scope survey earlier this year, half of families with disabled children face accessibility problems with their local playground, leaving them and their families isolated and excluded from their local community. Less than a third of parents and carers that Scope surveyed said they feel part of the community while at their local playground.

Parents of disabled children have said that privately-owned accessible play spaces, such as soft play or adventure centres, can be difficult for families with disabled children to find and can be prohibitively expensive. And that does not include the additional financial costs such as having to pay for petrol or public transport to reach inclusive spaces because they aren't available very close to home. It goes without saying that the current cost of living crisis makes it even more difficult for families to cover these sorts of costs.



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We need more inclusive, accessible spaces and settings for disabled children as well as better, more accessible information about what services and support are available to families.

Scope is calling on the government to step up and make changes, starting with introducing dedicated inclusive playground funds. The funds would allow cash-strapped local authorities to allocate ringfenced money to create new, or refurbish existing, inclusive and accessible playgrounds. We also want government to publish guidance for local authorities on creating these spaces.

Inclusive and accessible spaces benefit all children. Enabling them to play supports their development and helps them build relationships with family and friends. Inclusive spaces can bring communities together by providing a safe place that everyone can enjoy. Government can play its part by investing and providing guidance on how to achieve this. This would be a catalyst for wider societal change. **F**

*Hannah Dobbin is policy manager for children and young people at Scope*



## VISIONS OF HOME

Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Britain can find unity in their visions for social housing  
— Owen Hatherley

Britain's old white settler colonies – 'the dominions' as they were termed – have had a minor renaissance in right-wing thinking over the last few years through the idea of a 'CANZUK' union of Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. This would be a jet-connected free-market reunion of the mother country with what one historian called the 'neo-Britains'.

Yet if these countries were forged in Britain's image, this also extends to their left. None has had an explicitly socialist mass party, but they have had strong 'parties with socialists in them', to paraphrase Tony Benn: Labor in

Australia, Labour in New Zealand, and the New Democratic Party (NDP) in Canada. Each has built some form of welfare state; each has a free market Blairite wing that is influential to varying degrees; each is founded upon a link to the trade unions; and each has governed at length – though the NDP only at province level.

Right now, outside Britain each Labourist party is in government, or rather, in the Canadian case, in a confidence-and-supply agreement with the ruling Liberals. Today, big cities in each of these countries face a historic crisis of access and affordability in housing. Whether in Montreal, Auckland or Melbourne, housing is more insecure and expensive, and homelessness has risen sharply. Is there anything in our shared political tradition that could help solve that crisis?

In two of these countries – Canada and Australia – the market has always dominated housing supply, but there have been exceptions. In the 1960s, Canada emulated the mixed developments of the London County Council, like the demolished Regent Park in Toronto or the more successful Habitations Jeanne-Mance in Montreal. Australian states and cities built much low-rise housing, and more notoriously, Sydney and Melbourne built big inner-city high-rise estates in former 'slums' like Redfern and Fitzroy. New Zealand has the most impressive record, with massive construction of usually detached, sprawling 'state houses' in the 30s and 40s by its influential Labour government. Some aesthetically daring inner-city housing was designed by antifascist Central European exiles, such as Ernst Plischke and Frederick Newman.

That tradition has not been maintained. Not everywhere has gone in for the widespread privatisation seen in Britain or the massive demolitions of public housing seen in Chicago, but in every case non-market housing construction stopped in the 70s, just as in Britain.

Surviving estates have undergone significant changes. Some have become more diverse and lively; places that were originally considered bleak, like Atherton Gardens in Fitzroy, Melbourne, are now full of street life and community organisations.

In somewhere like Auckland where state housing always went further and deeper, 1960s allocation policies with their complicated legacy mean some estates are mainly Maori and others are overwhelmingly Pakeha (white).

Canada's last great state-funded experiment, the concrete village of Habitat

'67 in Montreal, is today a luxury enclave that does not welcome visitors. Similarly, the most iconic public housing complex in Australia, the space-age Sirius apartments in Sydney, is being transformed into expensive private flats, emulating the similar clearance and sell-off of Balfron Tower in London or Park Hill flats in Sheffield.

There have been some signs of life. Melbourne's two recent 'Council House' eco-building projects, one a housing development in the inner suburbs and one a municipal office block, show that the local state can still create innovative and egalitarian spaces.

Unfortunately, the idea that supply alone will solve the problem remains popular, and is behind the massive construction of private high-rises in cities like Melbourne, Auckland or Vancouver, based on the notion that letting the market rip will make housing affordable. It hasn't.

However, there is some awareness that each country has a useable past of taking housing out of the hands of developers and landlords. Jacinda Ardern has praised the state housing estates of the Austrian emigre Frederick Newman as a potential model for the future; and a new law in Montreal mandates that developers build social housing. But why not let public bodies do it themselves?

Ironically, the notion of getting developers to perform social roles is now being rejected in its former heartland, London, which has seen more council housing starts under Sadiq Khan than at any time since the early 1980s.

Looking at the 'CANZUK' zone from the left, rather than the right, some of the affinities are more obvious than others – culture wars, post-colonial nostalgia, and the dominance of free-market ideas in public life. But these countries also shared in the 20th century a willingness to intervene in housing, in those places and people for which the market patently did not provide.

There is an increasing awareness within this alleged trans-global free-market union in waiting that the market has not managed to provide everyone with a decent, affordable home. But in the return of council housing within London, maybe there is something the left in Canada, Australia and New Zealand can learn from Britain for once. **F**

*Owen Hatherley is a writer and the culture editor of Tribune. His latest book, *Artificial Islands: Adventures in the Dominions*, is published by Repeater Books*

# Honest approach

There is no guarantee that the Johnson government's dismal record on safeguarding our democracy will be improved upon by the new PM.

This creates big opportunities for Labour to offer a real alternative by restoring integrity and accountability to politics, writes *Meg Russell*



*Meg Russell is professor of British and comparative politics and director of the Constitution Unit at University College London*

CONCERNS ABOUT HONESTY and integrity and the erosion of constitutional norms were central to Boris Johnson's dramatic downfall. The new prime minister's attitudes in this area remain largely untested – though the omens during this summer's leadership contest were not good. Meanwhile, public opinion research suggests that voters really care about these questions. That presents significant opportunities for Labour.

The charge sheet against Johnson was remarkably long. The journalist Peter Osborne, formerly political editor of the Spectator and a Telegraph columnist, dedicated both a website ([boris-johnson-lies.com](http://boris-johnson-lies.com)) and a book to chronicling Johnson's uneasy relationship with the truth. This trait was well known before he assumed the premiership and to an extent 'priced in'. But the difficulties under his leadership went far wider, covering multiple aspects of integrity in politics and respect for the essential rules and norms that underpin UK democracy. This often put him at odds with regulators and non-political figures holding responsibility for maintaining the system, as well as with senior figures in his own party.

One glaring example concerned ministerial standards, and adherence to the ministerial code. Prime ministers have an independent adviser who helps police the code, but two successive officeholders resigned in protest over Johnson's behaviour. Johnson became the first prime minister to overrule the independent House of Lords Appointments Commission over the propriety of one of his peerage nominees (Peter Cruddas, a major Conservative donor). His appointments to the Lords were excessive (and often controversial), attracting harsh criticisms from previous Lord Speaker Norman Fowler – a respected former Conservative Cabinet minister. There were also persistent concerns about other public appointments, including an attempt to install former Daily Mail editor Paul Dacre as the chair of Ofcom. When Johnson asked his MPs to overrule the findings of the cross-party Commons Standards Committee into his old ally Owen Paterson they ultimately resisted and forced a U-turn.

Generally, Johnson's relationship with parliament was difficult, reflecting his reluctance to face scrutiny and accountability. The most famous manifestation was 2019's attempted five-week prorogation, subsequently overturned by the Supreme Court. Although it was denied at the time, those close to Johnson subsequently admitted that this was done to allow the pursuit of a no-deal Brexit, which MPs had explicitly rejected. This desire to avoid checks on his powers was also demonstrated through disproportionate use of 'delegated' legislation (over which MPs have limited control) to impose Covid restrictions, rushed timetables even for key government bills, and heavy-handed whipping. This all fed ill feeling on the backbenches; but more importantly it overlooked the fact that scrutiny is essential to good policy: ill-considered measures risk storing up trouble later.

Johnson's threats to flout conventions went even further when it came to protecting his own position. In 2019, Downing Street briefed that he might respond to a no confidence motion by 'daring the Queen to sack him', and in 2022 many feared he might evade his MPs by calling an early general election if they insisted on his removal. In a system whose core principle is government accountability to parliament, Johnson seemed to believe that he possessed a personal presidential mandate that simply did not exist.

Finally, there were worrying signs of disrespect for the rule of law, particularly regarding plans to legislate domestically for changes to the Northern Ireland Protocol integral to his Brexit deal, notwithstanding that it formed part of an international treaty that Johnson himself had signed. On the first occasion, this triggered the resignation of the head of the Government Legal Service, and protests from former Conservative leaders, including Theresa May and Michael Howard. Those plans were dropped, but subsequently re-emerged.

In the end, it was the lying that brought Johnson down. He faced persistent allegations of misleading parliament (itself a breach of the ministerial code) over 'partygate', for which he was referred to the House of Commons



**There are important principled reasons for wanting to put the system right, but it could bring significant electoral benefits too. There is an increasingly clear menu of the changes needed**

Privileges Committee. But the final straw came when he apparently asked ministers to cover up what he had known about Chris Pincher's behaviour. This sparked an unprecedented wave of ministerial resignations, starting with that of Sajid Javid, whose letter observed that 'The British people... rightly expect integrity from their government'. Multiple subsequent letters made similar points.

It was surprising, then, that questions of propriety and constitutional standards were nearly invisible during the Conservative leadership contest. One early exception was the Channel 4 debate when all five candidates squirmed at the question: "Is Boris Johnson honest?" Kemi Badenoch responded 'sometimes' and Tom Tugendhat simply 'no', while Rishi Sunak said that 'trust and honesty' was a key reason for his resignation from the government. At a subsequent Sky debate, no candidate raised their hand to indicate that they would accept Johnson serving in their cabinet. But after this, such issues largely disappeared. The final two candidates became reluctant to distance themselves from Johnson's legacy, in the face of a backlash among party members about his removal, and a petition for his reinstatement – notably sponsored by the aforementioned Peter Cruddas. Sunak did make occasional references to the 'need to bring trust and integrity and honesty back into politics', and indicated that he would reappoint an independent adviser on ministers' interests. But Liz Truss seemed to reject this. She also accused the media of 'misrepresenting' policy on which she had plainly done a U-turn – which did not bode well for moving on from post-truth politics.

The road ahead also looks troubling regarding parliament and the rule of law. As Foreign Secretary,

Truss sponsored the follow-up bill to seek unilaterally to amend the Northern Ireland protocol, and remains committed to it. Both candidates enthusiastically embraced fast-track procedures to promote 'Brexit freedoms', which could result in parliament being locked out of decisions in crucial areas such as environmental and employment regulation.

Meanwhile, there is clear evidence that the UK public supports the restoration of higher standards in politics. A major survey of over 6000 people for the Constitution Unit's Democracy in the UK after Brexit project found that the single most valued attribute in a prime minister was honesty. A whopping 75 per cent of respondents believed that healthy democracy required politicians to 'always act within the rules', compared to just 6 per cent who thought that this depended on 'getting things done, even if that sometimes requires politicians to break the rules'. Both in the survey, and a subsequent citizens' assembly to deliberate on options for the future of UK democracy, there was strikingly high support for the power of judges and independent regulators, for close parliamentary oversight over policymaking, and for tough punishment of politicians who mislead parliament.

This should provide clear signposts for what is needed in the post-Johnson era. But despite clear concerns from some Conservative MPs about the developments described above, and from many Conservative voters, there is limited indication that change will be forthcoming from the government side. Notably, some have drawn parallels between the current period and the 'sleaze' that bedevilled the Conservative government in the 1990s, and which helped to bring it down. But the response by then prime minister John Major was to seize the problem, embrace new regulation, and set up the Committee on Standards and Public Life (CSPL). Today's mood feels rather different.

This is troubling, but does potentially provide an opportunity for Labour. There are important principled reasons for wanting to put the system right, but it could bring significant electoral benefits too. There is an increasingly clear menu of the changes needed. Notably, the CSPL last year proposed wholesale change to the landscape of constitutional regulation, including stronger powers for the independent adviser and a greater underpinning of various other regulators in statute. These are being pursued in a bill by crossbench peer Lord Anderson, which deserves widespread support. Labour should pledge an immediate clean-up of Lords appointments – a quick win, not even necessarily requiring legislation – as a necessary precursor to any further reform. Likewise, public pledges to restore standards of parliamentary scrutiny and respect for the rule of law from day one of a Labour government can be made right now and then followed through. Rather than talking down core institutions, such as parliament, the courts and regulators, there is a real public appetite for politicians who act as their defenders.

It is easy to be complacent about the robustness of UK democracy. But democracy is a fragile thing, and under attack all over the world. The UK's constitutional norms and standards took a severe battering under Johnson. But the public wants better and may reward politicians who pledge to restore the system. ■

# Getting a grip

The economy is in a mess – and Liz Truss’ approach will not fix it. Labour needs to offer the prospect of radical reforms, argues *Stephen Beer*



*Stephen Beer writes on economic policy based on an investment career spanning over two decades, most recently as a chief investment officer and head of ESG for pension and charity funds. He is the author of a Fabian pamphlet on the economy*

**W**E ARE IN a severe economic crisis. We are reaping the results of historic complacency and poor government decisions. We may not be fighting a war but similar urgency and focus are required. The Conservatives have changed leader again, but without inspiring any confidence they can get to grips with the situation. It is no surprise Labour is ahead on economic credibility in the opinion polls. To stay there, it should aim to radically reform the economy and government.

## **Inflation**

The most immediate problem we face is inflation. Energy prices are by far the main driver. Gas prices, caught up with Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, are driving up energy bills for households and businesses. Food prices are higher following disruption of supplies and droughts. Supply chain bottle necks have contributed, as have Covid lockdowns in China. We have been hit by a series of one-off price rises, pushing up the inflation rate and raising costs everywhere. This has made us all poorer as wage increases lag inflation, with the poorest households hit hardest.

Spikes in commodity prices after the global financial crisis were absorbed, painfully, by businesses and households because monetary conditions were tight as banks rebuilt their balance sheets. This time prices rises are much higher and spreading to other sectors, helped by pandemic quantitative easing (QE), an increase in money supply, and central bank complacency. It is easier for businesses to push through price rises to consumers.

High inflation is a problem for many reasons. It is a tax on incomes and savings, unless you are lucky enough to have an inflation-busting pay rise. It benefits those with debts but harms those who save or who have fixed incomes. High inflation usually means more volatile prices. It encourages us to be short-termist – if you need a durable good tomorrow but believe the price will rise, you will buy it today. It is unfair. It sows division and erodes hope. Pray that when it gets worse the weather will be too cold for riots.

## **Policymakers could make things worse**

Bank of England independence from 1997 worked well and supported Labour’s economic credibility. However,

the Bank later fell into an institutionalised mindset and it has struggled to see the wood for the trees. Now it is trying to catch up with events by rapidly hiking interest rates, forecasting five quarters of recession as a result with businesses suffering and unemployment rising.

The Bank is also, independently of government, reversing QE, which could push up government borrowing costs because both will compete to sell gilts to the same market, when markets are already running scared of the UK. It does not know what impact this ‘quantitative tightening’ will have on the money supply and inflation, because its models do not consider it.

Threats to Bank independence should be resisted unless we admire Turkey’s 80 per cent inflation rate. However, the Bank seems to be constraining fiscal policy with damaging determinism, even before Liz Truss’ tax cuts lead to higher interest rates. It is likely something will snap: the economy or Bank independence, or the Bank will reverse course and start up QE again down the line. All three could happen.

A century ago, the Bank, wedded to conventional wisdom and a fear of losing credibility, led calls for sterling to rejoin the gold standard, resulting in depression and high unemployment. That finished off a Labour government, after which conventional wisdom was ignored and the link with gold was cut. “No one told us we could do that,” ex-minister and Fabian Sidney Webb is reported to have exclaimed and it took a new generation of Fabians to rebuild Labour’s economic approach. The Bank may be making a comparable mistake today. The inflation mandate is clear but that does not mean the Bank alone should decide how quickly to get inflation to target or, where hitting it is unaffected, constraints on fiscal policy.

Such has been the scale of the crisis that it became obvious over the summer that something would be done. With energy bills soaring there had to be further government support. That is why Labour’s plan to freeze the household energy price cap was so warmly received. Neither Liz Truss nor Rishi Sunak seemed to have given the matter much thought when they began their leadership campaigns and they frequently shifted rhetoric and policy to catch up with public concern. The election remained what Michael Gove called ‘a holiday

from reality'. That reality now faces Liz Truss: the early signs are we can expect the government to lurch between knee-jerk responses to the crisis and ideological commitments to cut taxes and spending while borrowing more.

### Sorry state of the UK economy

The UK has been a low growth and unequal economy for a long time. The financial crisis made things worse, cutting around 1 per cent from annual GDP growth. Business investment growth has been lacklustre and was hit by the own goal that was the Brexit vote and the version of Brexit the Conservatives have pursued. Growth in productivity, in terms of output per hour worked, is low at less than 1 per cent annually in the years pre-Covid. The two are linked. Low wages for many have been the result. Previously, GDP could be expanded by importing labour from the EU. That is now limited and the labour market seems to have changed, with many opting out, or suffering from long Covid or the NHS's failures to treat serious illnesses. There is wide regional disparity in productivity, as the OECD has highlighted, and outside London our cities are not the growth hubs they should be. Unless productivity can be improved, the UK is pretty much condemned to low growth, which means we will fall further behind trying to pay for health, social care, education, and other public services.

Income and wealth inequality remain stubbornly high. Those with financial and housing assets have done very well post financial crisis, as central banks supported markets with ultra-low interest rates and QE, though policy is being reversed now. Money begets money. We are now a "property-owning democracy" in which young people cannot afford to buy their own home.

### Powerful long-term trends

Perhaps policy-makers are indeed the "slaves of some defunct economist... distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back" as John Maynard Keynes wrote, but they also operate amidst long term forces which can be at least as influential.

For decades, the global economy benefited from increases in the working population, as China and former communist countries in Eastern Europe opened their economies. As economists Charles Goodhart and Manoj Pradhan describe, this was a downward force on real wages, inflation, and interest rates. It also increased inequality. That was the context for politics in that period. Now the situation is reversed, as the workforce reduces as a proportion of an ageing population. The pressure on real wages, inflation, and interest rates is upwards and the fight against inequality may have a tailwind. There are many unknowns, but we are in a new world with old politics.

Technological development has been rapid and, alongside other intangible assets as outlined by Jonathan Haskel and Stian Westlake, may well be our economic salvation, eventually boosting productivity and so driving growth and incomes. There are risks, such as the artificial

intelligence existential risk and the effect on employment, and challenges such as the distribution of gains.

Climate catastrophe is near but we are also on the cusp of profound change and the so-called 'electrification of everything' could be imminent. Today our concerns are energy scarcity and efficiency. In a few years, our concern may be how to use all the energy we have. Some countries and communities will benefit while others will struggle. Suddenly the new world will be the thing and people will scramble to avoid being left behind. The challenges we face, such as rolling out battery storage and securing supplies of vital metals and rare earth minerals, appear considerable but must be surmounted. Relevant questions are, by whom and who will benefit?

### Axioms for policymakers

Policymaking should acknowledge the following:

First, market economies are dynamic. Prices respond to supply and demand, acting as signals and incentives.

Uncertainty, and people's perceptions of risk play an important role. Labour has had difficulty appreciating this. Consumers and businesses respond to price changes.

Gas prices are intensely painful now but over time will change behaviour.

We cannot simply redirect money from A to B and expect people to continue behaving in the same way. We can adjust the factors that incentivise people, clear institutional blockages, and make strategic investments, interventions and redistributions. Government does not need to have all the answers,

but it should create the best conditions for innovation, prosperity, and fairness, and fundamentally change some of the rules. Ultimately, we are limited only by our productive potential: the rest of the debate is about how to allocate resources.

Second, the impact of Brexit is so severe that we have to be radical. If economic policy could ever be about doing things just a bit better those days are gone. There will be progressive, fairer, alternatives than transforming London into a 'Singapore on Thames' but they will come with costs, if we do not adopt closer ties. If we are not radical, we will not get the growth required to help those in need and to stop our public services declining.

Third, we need trade. Trade leads to growth. It is about focusing on our comparative advantages while importing goods, component parts, and services that would be more expensive to produce ourselves.

Fourth, current government and public institutions cannot deliver effectively. The vaccine taskforce was an exception because it bypassed the health bureaucracy. There are many examples to the contrary. We waste billions on defence spending for a military which does not know what it needs nor how to get it. The result is insufficient munitions, armoured vehicles over 40 years old still in use, and destroyers that cannot fight in warm water. Yet procurement failures are repeated. Defence is just one government department. Pretty much every area of government is failing and not only due to lack of resources.



Water companies waste over a fifth of the water for which we pay and pump sewage onto our beaches, and our energy market multiplies the effects of high gas prices. Yet nationalisation of industries is not a panacea: what matters more than ownership is being clear what we need monopoly providers to do and holding them to account. Failures are often down to regulators, regulations, civil service advice, and political decisions over decades.

The Conservatives have ignored opportunities for vital institutional reform and investment. Government has been treated like a plaything by people with little capability for leadership while structural problems have worsened. An incoming Labour government should avoid managerialism and reform from the beginning or it will waste billions and pay the electoral price for failing to deliver.

### Starting with values

A new approach should start with our values, from which should flow economic policy priorities. The ethical socialist vision, as promoted by RH Tawney, should be rediscovered and reaffirmed. It values people as individuals of equal worth, looking for themselves and their families to lead fulfilling lives and thriving in community, with a bias to supporting the less well off.

There is an increasing appetite for expressing values in business and finance, as seen in the rise in responsible/ESG (environmental, social and governance) investing. Business leaders have gone further, trying to fill the democratic policy vacuum by expounding on ethical issues, but they know they need government. We are right to be sceptical but when even City voices are talking about the need to remake capitalism, we should recognise the opportunity. We can learn from the ESG movement how to link principles with action that counts. We can lead by promoting an economy in which all have a stake and which works for everyone.

### A policy agenda

The next election, unless it happens soon, will take place after at least one hard winter even if energy prices do not fulfil this summer's doom-laden prophecies. We will need to borrow from tomorrow to get through. This is reasonable as long as any new tax cuts and spending are targeted, borrowing clearly controlled, and measures linked to changes in the use and sources of energy.

Meanwhile, Labour's economic plan should be formed with work on the following elements, each led by a shadow cabinet member:

- A fiscal framework that assures markets government will control spending and focus on sustainable growth.
- Review the Bank of England's inflation target time horizon and the impact of quantitative tightening on fiscal policy.
- Tax reforms that uphold tax as a badge of citizenship while shifting away from penalising labour, including a land tax, clearer taxing of externalities offset by credits for good corporate behaviour and those on poorer incomes, incentives for use of

renewable and secure energy, incentives for trade, and a commitment to a stable corporate tax and regulatory environment to promote investment, including by overseas companies.

- Time limits for extra spending unless shown to be effective, as I and other Fabians have advocated.
- Crisis public spending boosts and key manifesto commitments delivered by special taskforces focused on outcomes rather than via existing mechanisms. For example, the social care and NHS waiting list challenges are too urgent to rely on the bureaucracy and divided responsibilities.
- Review and reform of government departments to prevent wastage of billions, with separate procurement departments.
- Continued large-scale investment in infrastructure spending including technology, renewable energy, and support for cities and housing, plus management training for small businesses linked to tax credits.
- Crisis interventions in private sector to be linked to government equity stakes and other reforms, to ensure society benefits from upside.
- Reform regulators to ensure they act robustly in the public interest and have sufficient expertise.
- Reform the City with emphasis on getting companies beyond the initial investment stage, reducing incentives for debt rather than equity, plus promotion of ethical standards and impact investing and reform of executive pay.
- Massive focus on education from early years throughout life, centrally coordinated and sufficiently agile to exploit technology.

Finally, Labour should link economic reforms, such as fighting inflation or boosting growth, with a clear 'citizen's stake' in their success. Keynes proposed fighting inflation, while preventing only a few benefiting from it, by mandating saving until war was over. We need solutions like that today, to ensure everyone benefits after going through hard times.

### Rewrite the conventional wisdom

There is much to relearn from Labour's 1997 success, but despite current fashion trends we are not living in a repeat of the late 1990s. We can learn from the experience of the Attlee government as it introduced radical reform amidst economic crisis, severe winters, and fuel shortages – but this is not the 1940s either. A risk today is that to boost credibility Labour binds itself too tightly, with restrictive fiscal rules, blind support for the Bank of England, and conventional thinking. Go down that route and any time in government will be painful and short-lived. However, in both 1945 and 1997 Labour rewrote conventional wisdom. Today should be no different. ■



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\*Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) 2022. Households below average income: for financial years ending 1995 to 2021. Data Tables, HBA1 summary results, Table 1.6b. [online]. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-for-financial-years-ending-1995-to-2021>

# Trust in Labour

After years of broken promises and mismanagement from the scandal-ridden Conservatives, Labour needs to show it can do better – and health will be a top priority, as *Wes Streeting MP* explains



*Wes Streeting is the Labour MP for Ilford North and Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

**A**T THE NEXT election, Britain will choose the party it trusts to lead it through multiple crises. Inflation at levels not seen since the 1980s, following a decade of stagnant wage growth. A generation of children who have seen huge disruption to their education and development. War returning to Europe.

There is reason to hope that the public may turn once again to Labour. In elections around the world following the Covid-19 pandemic, the pendulum has swung against the populist right. Centre-left candidates in the United States, Germany and Australia have triumphed, not by promising the earth but by speaking to the priorities of the public.

After the numerous scandals of Boris Johnson's time in Number 10, the British people now say what they most want from a leader is honesty, something they will get in spades with Keir Starmer. Whether it was their promise not to raise national insurance rates, to build 40 new hospitals or hire 6,000 more GPs, the Conservatives have overpromised and underdelivered. We should aim to do the opposite.

To win, Labour must show we have the vision and the plans to meet the scale of the challenge, while persuading voters they can once again trust us with power. We must be both radical and reassuring.

In health, the NHS is facing the biggest crisis in its history. One in eight people in England are waiting for treatment, and they are waiting longer than ever before. Patients find it impossible to get dentist and GP appointments or an ambulance. Staff are burnt-out from their heroics during the pandemic and are leaving in droves. I have been to hospitals with leaking roofs and freezing

pipes, but the only place you will find the feted '40 new hospitals' is in Boris Johnson's imagination.

There is no doubt that Covid-19 has made the situation worse, but waiting lists were at a record high before the pandemic, cancer waits have grown every year since 2010, and the NHS was short of 100,000 staff in 2020, with 17,000 fewer hospital beds than when Labour left office. It is not that the Conservatives did not fix the roof when the sun was shining, they dismantled the roof and removed the floorboards – or, as Nadine Dorries put it, a decade of Conservative mismanagement left the health service 'wanting and inadequate'.

With the NHS struggling to provide the care people need when they need it, patients who can afford it are paying to jump the queue and go private: 250,000 patients paid for operations out of their own pockets last year, while many more are taking out medical insurance. The Conservatives' managed decline of the NHS has led us into a two-tier healthcare system.

This is what happens when the NHS is left in the hands of the Conservatives. It always ends in tiers.

And the situation does not look likely to improve anytime soon with new prime minister Liz Truss, who has previously proposed charging patients to see a doctor.

This is a betrayal of the founding principles of the NHS. It was never intended to be a charity or a safety net only for those who cannot afford anything better. It is a national service. It was set up to universalise the best. It should be made so good that private healthcare goes out of business.

In 1997, patient satisfaction with the NHS was low and more patients than ever before were waiting for an





**In the long term, our aim is to make the NHS so good that people never need private healthcare and to build capacity so that the NHS will not need to pay for people to go private**

operation. The last Labour government turned it around, and by the end of our time in office, we delivered the lowest waiting times and highest patient satisfaction on record.

Once again, that is the task we will face if we win the next election. By applying the lessons of our achievements in government to the challenges facing the NHS today, Labour will build a health and social care system that is fit for the future and get patients treated on time again.

However, we must be honest with the public about what is possible. In a system where the biggest challenge is a lack of staff, and when it takes seven years to train a doctor, we will not be able to fix the NHS overnight. We will not even finish the job within a single parliament.

The last Labour government worked with the NHS to deliver a 10-year plan. It not only turned services around, but also galvanised the system to innovate and improve the patient experience. The next Labour government will again take an ambitious, realistic, long-term approach.

Take social care. Just as the 1945 Labour government built the NHS out of the ashes of the second world war,

the next Labour government will build a National Care Service in the aftermath of the pandemic. Not only is this necessary to provide good quality care for all elderly and disabled people who need it, it will also help deal with the 400,000 delayed discharges in hospital every month, when people are fit to go home but cannot get the care they need in their community.

We will be bold in recruiting more carers by ensuring full rights at work, decent standards, fair pay, and proper training. It is simply wrong that care workers are leaving for jobs at Amazon, because they are offered a better deal. At the same time, we will be realistic about the fact that this is just the first step needed to put care on an equal footing to health. I am delighted that the Fabian Society is now conducting a review on how to make this aim a reality.

In health, we will recruit, train and retain the staff our NHS desperately needs. It is unforgivable that an organisation the size of the NHS has not had a long-term workforce strategy since 2003. When Labour backed an amendment to the Health and Care Bill, which would have allowed for an independent analysis of the current and future workforce needs of the health service, the Conservatives chose instead to bury their heads in the sand. Ignorance is bliss is no way to run the NHS.

In the shorter term, we will keep the staff we already have. This means ending the absurdity of doctors' pension rules that force them to retire early rather than stay in the NHS. It means putting the hundreds of medical graduates we have got on waiting lists to start junior doctor training to work right away.

The pandemic has had a terrible impact on our nation's mental health, particularly for children. As part of our plans to help children recover, as well as to relieve the pressure on GPs and A&E units, Labour will recruit 8,500 extra mental health professionals. We will place a mental health specialist in every school, and make sure there is adequate support for everyone who needs it. We have set out how we would pay for it, by ending the carried interest loophole enjoyed by private equity fund managers and ending charitable status for private schools.

Labour will put patients first, above systems or ideology. We will harness cutting-edge modern technology to transform the way patients get care, starting with making sure everyone has the option of using the NHS app as a way to book appointments and get prescriptions.

We will not tolerate working people waiting longer while those who can pay to go private jump the queue. While we rebuild the NHS, we will use spare private sector capacity to get waiting lists down. In the long term, our aim is to make the NHS so good that people never need private healthcare and to build capacity so that the NHS will not need to pay for people to go private.

The public trust Labour with the NHS, not just because we created it, but because we have demonstrated we know how to get the best out of it. We earned that trust in government, and we will keep it by underpromising in opposition and overdelivering when we are given the chance. ■

# Standing together

Employment insecurity has been on the rise for more than a decade. No wonder workers are striking, write *Ayesha Baloch* and *Ellie Mae O'Hagan*



*Ayesha Baloch is public affairs officer and Ellie Mae O'Hagan the former director of the think tank CLASS*

**T**HE PAST FEW months have been coloured by industrial action on an unprecedented scale, with hundreds of thousands of workers demanding higher pay and better working conditions. It beggars belief that 180 years after the Great Strike of 1842, British workers are striking once again for more or less the same demands.

The summer of 1842 marked the first ever general strike in a capitalist country, as workers organised after a brutal period of trade recession, followed by mass unemployment and consistent wage cuts. The strike was also intimately linked to the Chartist movement, which – among other things – demanded universal male suffrage. Indeed, with its origins in collective action from striking union members, the strike grew into a wider movement which would push the government to concede the Charter.

Today – facing the largest cost of living crisis in half a century – we see an eerily similar turn of events taking place. From refuse workers in Edinburgh to dock workers in Felixstowe, hundreds of thousands of union members across various industries have taken industrial action since May of this year. Their demands are simple; better working conditions and a real terms pay rise to counter inflation – already at 10.1 per cent and rising.

Yet, the demands extend far beyond the labour market. The strikes this summer are not only a call for an economy where working for a living means earning a living, but for a political system which will provide for everyone, not just the privileged few.

When the cost of living crisis first hit, the then prime minister Boris Johnson and his government attempted to spin it as a short-term product of the war in Ukraine and the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, with inflation projected to hit over 18 per cent by the beginning of 2023, it is increasingly clear that this crisis is not a symptom of a few economic shocks, but the culmination of a political and economic system which exploits the average worker to make the rich wealthier.

The failure of austerity over the past decade reveals how it was a thinly veiled plan through which the rich

would perpetually become richer. Now, we see the government and the governor of the Bank of England trying to suggest that the cost of living crisis is due to a ‘wage-price’ spiral, where prices are increasing due to rising wages. Yet, ONS numbers have debunked this repeatedly, with recent statistics showing that real terms pay has fallen by a record 3 per cent.

The worsening of living conditions has ostensibly been recognised by the Conservatives, who, in the 2019 general election, stood on the platform of ‘leveling up’. The hand that successive Conservative governments have had in bringing us to this dire position would be laughable, were it not so grim. Austerity policies, precarious employment models, reduced state support, funding cuts, the continued reduction of public housing stock, and the ongoing concentration of property ownership over the past decades have decimated our socioeconomic system.

Moreover, while previous eras saw settlements between businesses and certain workers, capital and sections of the labour force, under neoliberalism, insecurity has become the bedrock of the UK economy. Earlier this year, in a joint project with Autonomy think tank, CLASS uncovered how employment insecurity has been steadily rising since 2005.

Despite the usual Tory platitudes of a soaring employment rate, by developing a new, data-driven measure of economic insecurity, we found that this narrow focus belies the rapid deterioration in the quality of jobs. Analysing precarious contracts, underemployment, family circumstances, and housing, our report generated an ‘insecurity score’ to measure the precarity of different workers. From this, we found a devastatingly different picture to the myth peddled by this government.

Our report found insecurity to have increased across almost every industry, region, age group and gender, with the worst hit sector – hospitality – seeing an 107 per cent increase since 2005. We also uncovered that women are 25 per cent more insecure than men, while the average 20-year-old is 4.6 times more insecure than the average 60-year-old.

The research used a novel methodology to highlight how zero hours, ‘tiny hours’ and temporary contracts are all on the rise, along with bogus and forced self-employment. These practices that have been normalised in the so-called ‘gig economy’ have spread to other sectors such as healthcare and even academia.

Through interviews and case studies, the human impact of an insecure livelihood became increasingly clear. Too many people feel a sense of constant anxiety as a result of exploitative and precarious employment models and – in some extreme cases – the very real threat of physical harm.

This slide into insecurity began when the financial markets crashed in 2008, with the ensuing mass employment mutating into various kinds of quasi-employment. The resulting jobs only provide temporary contracts, where the number of hours can be changed on a whim and where there is no guarantee of another shift.

With such exploitative and unstable employment structures – reminiscent of the beginnings of the industrial revolution – it is unsurprising that we are once again witnessing industrial action comparable to the Great Strike of 1842.

At the time of the report, we faced the rise of zero-hours contracts, the gig economy and soaring housing costs. Since then, these issues have been further compounded by the greatest cost of living crisis in half a century, as energy and food prices spiral out of control.

According to market analysts Cornwall Insight, the cap on energy bills is projected to rise to more than £5,300 by January next year – and then to £6,600 from April. With 14.5 million people already living in poverty, it is shocking that this is the state of the fifth largest economy in the world.

Meanwhile, as employment becomes more precarious and the cost of living crisis worsens, the profits of British corporations skyrocket. By the end of 2021 these profits were up by 34 per cent compared to pre-pandemic levels – far ahead of RPI and wage growth.

Worse still, a new report by the High Pay Centre has shown that average FTSE 100 CEO pay jumped by almost £1m to £3.41m in 2021 – some 109 times that of the median full-time UK worker.

It is no surprise then, that this summer marked a watershed in labour history, where not only bus drivers but workers on the underground, overground and train networks took mass industrial action on the same weekend.

For transport workers, striking is the last resort in the face of a transport system that has been decimated by Tory austerity measures over the past 15 years, including cuts to networks and the steady erosion of workers’ conditions.

Other industries are also mobilising. CWU members at BT and Openreach balloted in May, resulting in 30,000 engineers and call centre workers going on strike. 115,000 postal workers at Royal Mail voted to take industrial action in August. Journalists across dozens of newspapers including the Daily Express and Daily Mirror also walked out on the 26th of August, while criminal barristers in England and Wales have voted to strike indefinitely from September onwards.

This autumn may also bring a wave of public sector walk-outs, with millions of workers expected to vote on

strike action over pay. Members of the University and College Union (UCU) – who have long been striking – are balloting once again, joined now by NEU teachers, RCN nurses and FBU firefighters.

The issue is simple: workers in 2022 are working longer hours in worse conditions for less pay which they are then forced to spend on ludicrous rents and skyrocketing food and fuel prices. Each day, the average British worker becomes worse off as wages stagnate while inflation rises.

The UK labour market is broken. Heading into this winter, it is no secret that British workers will die as a direct result of this cost of living crisis, brought on by years of Tory austerity and a system which exploits the working class to line the pockets of the wealthy.

Compounding the state of our economy, Tory leadership favourite Liz Truss is simultaneously preparing to mount the biggest attack on trade unions seen in a generation. Threatening to impose minimum service levels on ‘critical national infrastructure’, her proposal would practically outlaw effective industrial action across the education, postal service and energy sectors.

Just as in the summer of 1842, working-class people once again face massive political and economic turmoil and it is clear the avenues of Whitehall will not provide any respite. For workers, collective organising is the only recourse. What we urgently need then, is a Labour government which will rise to the challenge, standing solidly with trade unions.

As Nye Bevan said, the party rose ‘out of the bowels’ of unions. Removed from each other, bringing about real change will be an arduous task. But when we stand together, demanding better for workers across the country, surely we will triumph. ■

**The issue is simple: workers in 2022 are working longer hours in worse conditions for less pay**



# FIGHTING FOR CHANGE

Only a Labour government can sort out the mess we are in, Jonathan Ashworth tells *Vanesha Singh*

AS SUMMER COMES to an end, a darkness looms: things in the UK are about to get worse. Another sharp hike in energy prices in the coming weeks means more people will struggle this winter – even with new prime minister Liz Truss’ measures. For us to survive this cost of living crisis takes government intervention, Jonathan Ashworth tells me. As Shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, he says we can expect ‘significant structural changes’ to the economy should Labour be elected at the next general election.

“The country is in a mess,” Ashworth says. “We’ve got a third of children growing up in poverty, people in work turning up at food banks, pensioner poverty increasing again, half a million children growing up destitute. That means they don’t even have access to the basics such as heating, food, shelter, or toiletries. This is an absolute scandal. And at the same time, we’ve got the highest tax burden for 70 years.”

It’s high summer when we meet over Zoom to discuss his new plans for welfare and employment, just as the Conservative leadership contest kicks off. “We will have a new prime minister by the time this Fabian Review comes out and it’s unacceptable that in this leadership contest their focus is tax cuts. Not one of them has offered any serious plan as to how they’re going to protect families and pensioners when the energy price cap rises this autumn,” he says.

Ashworth, who was elected Labour and Co-operative MP for Leicester South in 2011, has served in the party’s shadow cabinet since 2016 – first as its longest-running Shadow Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and now, since 2021, turning his focus to work and pensions. Throughout

those six years he has toured the country, learning what life is like for those below the breadline in Britain.

Things have worsened. He relays tales from teachers of children scavenging in bins and asking for food from their friends. “Can you imagine a situation where a child is so hungry that they have to beg from their friends to have some of their sandwich?” he says in disbelief. “And just think of the way in which poverty holds children

back. There is a wealth of evidence that shows children who are hungry and from poorer backgrounds will do worse at school.”

“I heard a story at one food bank of a mother who was given fresh food and said: ‘I’m now going to have to put my fridge back on’. She’s not been able to afford the electricity bill associated with keeping the fridge running. I’ve heard stories of pensioners forgoing hot meals, forgoing hot showers for

needing to save on their energy bills. And of course, this is only going to get worse.”

Of note is the pervasiveness of in-work poverty. “Because of this Tory approach to our economy, run on low wages, limited hours and temporary work, you’ve got people turning up to food banks to pick up a parcel for their family on the way home from a shift,” he says.

“Yet even though work is not a guaranteed route out of poverty, it’s still immeasurably better for somebody to be in work, because I believe being out of work damages lives and it undermines a sense of solidarity in society,” adds Ashworth.

It is clear that solidarity between workers has been vital this year – but perhaps not just in this way. It feels as if not just employment itself has increased solidarity, but that more people are coming together to fight the

**“Can you imagine a situation where a child is so hungry that they have to beg from their friends to have some of their sandwich?”**



government's assault on our living standards. Over the last few months we have seen large numbers of workers voting in favour of industrial action against real terms pay cuts and unfair employment practices like fire and rehire – all as companies make record profits.

"The unrest that we are seeing across the country is a symptom of austerity, and a symptom of the Tory philosophy that argues inequality is necessary to make your economy more efficient," Ashworth says.

Yet during nationwide rail strikes this summer, Labour leader Keir Starmer banned his frontbench from appearing on picket lines. The move has been met with much anger and resistance from trade unionists who are disappointed with the party's direction. "Keir didn't want us to become a sort of distraction in the dispute," Ashworth tells me. "We wanted to keep the focus on the government who were failing to negotiate a fair deal with the trade unions,

whereas the government were trying to suggest that somehow it was all the Labour party's fault that workers were on strike. It's actually their fault because they run the economy in such a way that the value of workers' wages is being squeezed," he says.

Despite growing tensions, Ashworth still believes the partnership between Labour and the unions will 'always endure' and is vital to ending poverty.

A key concern for Ashworth is not only that poverty and deprivation 'denies people the chance to make the most of themselves' but that it stunts our economy by undermining productivity. "And that's why tackling this ingrained poverty will be one of my driving missions," he says.

"And it's also a driving mission because of the personal circumstances of my own childhood," adds Ashworth, who has spoken candidly in the media about growing up in poverty. "My dad was a croupier and my mum started up as a bunny girl in the Playboy casino. These are not particularly well-to-do occupations".

"I've seen poverty through times in my life and I know it haunts and humiliates. I'm not one to claim that this particular set of experiences put me on sort of a Monty Python-esque pedestal – I can only speak from my own point of view, but of course, they have made me really determined and utterly resolute in wanting to change this society," he says.

First on Ashworth's agenda is to provide 'quality' employment opportunities 'for all'. "That means moving away from the system that we have at the moment, where the jobcentre essentially polices those who are looking for work by imposing ever-more sanctions and ever-more threats. Instead, we need to provide personalised help, tailored to the needs of that individual and breaking down the barriers that prevent people from moving into work," he says.

Particular attention is being paid to older people's employment. "The Tories tell you that we've got this employment miracle. It's actually a myth. Overall, employment is down since the pandemic. We've had the lowest rate of employment progress of the major G7 countries, and actually hundreds of thousands of over 50s have left the labour market, whether that be because of sickness, caring responsibilities, or just because they want to leave. That means we've lost a lot of skill and expertise at a point where we have record vacancies, inflation and a cost of living crisis. So I'm looking at what support we can provide the over 50s whether that's skills and retraining, more access to carers' leave or more tailored support," he says.

Labour will also be reforming welfare – and to do this well, Ashworth says he is looking to the Fabian Society for guidance, which he joined as 'a nerdy, precocious 15-year-old' and of which he is still a keen member.

"Beatrice Webb was a great Fabian, who in the commission on the poor laws and the minority report from the poor laws, this is all over 100 years ago, argued that what is needed is universal welfare provisions as a right of citizenship – something which then came into fruition around 40 years later when a Labour government implemented the Beveridge report. So we need reforms – universalist reforms – where we challenge the degradation of welfare that we've seen under the Tories."

If in power, Ashworth hopes to transform our universal credit system which, he explains, ‘wilfully impoverishes’. “People have to wait five weeks for a payment, which means that they are already indebted and have to pay back their debts. Because the system demands it’s paid on a monthly basis it projects people into all kinds of debt,” he says.

To this new brief, Ashworth clearly brings his passion for health policy – particularly around the issue of mental health. He recently visited Cambridge University to explore research on the impact our long hours work culture is having on mental health. “If you do reduce working hours and give people more leisure time, that does generally lead to better mental health outcomes” says Ashworth.

His prediction is that in the next 10 years – if not already – mental ill-health will be the leading cause for someone to be absent from work, whether that’s for a particular episode or long-term absence. And he believes the option of ‘less work and more leisure’ would be an important new approach.

“But there is some evidence now that integrating your employment support with your mental health provider can actually help people move into work,” he adds.

“I have to be very clear on this. This is not remotely forcing people into work who should not be working. But there is some evidence that some people with mental health conditions will find being in work, even if it’s limited hours, will help them recover.”

In the months ahead, Ashworth is looking forward to seeing the results from several pilot studies around the country which are looking into this. “It’s a very different approach from the Conservatives who are forcing people to apply for jobs even if they’re not suitable, with the sword of Damocles hanging over them that if they don’t, their benefits will be docked. That’s not the right approach to reforming welfare. The way to do it is to support people and then you make progress.”

And there is a final ‘new frontier’ of welfare reform which Ashworth is keen to explore: how Labour encourages people to save more and build up assets. Here, Ashworth – who worked as an advisor to Gordon Brown before becoming an MP – believes two of the greatest initiatives of the last Labour government can be built on: the automatic enrolment into workplace pensions and the introduction of a child trust fund, which the Tories scrapped.

This is what Ashworth summarises as his ‘big approach’: helping people into work, supporting them out of poverty and giving greater access to savings. But for Labour to be trusted to run the economy, he says it must show how such a vision will be funded.

“The Conservatives always lie about our record. So Labour will be going into the election with a completely costed manifesto.” This, for Ashworth, diverges from the past where manifestos ‘felt like they were promising the earth to everybody’. “People don’t believe that,” he tells me.

Looking ahead, Ashworth points to three major trends in the economy which he believes will be crucial for Labour keep in mind. ‘Digitisation’ is the v of these – and how, in a world of increased automation, Labour ensures good, well-paid jobs which people can advance in.

The second is ‘demographics’; with an ageing society comes more retired people than ever before. “It provokes big questions about the right support in terms of income, pensions and social care,” he says.

But it is the final D – ‘decarbonisation’ – which feels most pressing to discuss: our chat took place as temperatures in the UK exceeded 40°C for the first time in history.

“Climate change is an existential threat, but there can be new jobs to help us transition to net zero. And our employment support reforms are a key part of that,” says Ashworth.

“I know this from my health days, I feel very passionate about this. We understandably talk about the climate

change threat. But it’s not just about the impact of global warming and of days like this which are an obvious health risk. If we don’t tackle climate change, we put ourselves at more risk of future pandemics as well. The more that we destroy biodiversity, the more that we disrupt natural habitats across the world, the more that we are at risk again of a zoonotic disease spread from animals to humans. And the more the globe warms up, you’ll see mosquitoes

with malaria making their way to parts of Europe they’ve never been before. So climate change is a very real health risk as well,” he says.

Despite these apocalyptic forecasts, Ashworth is steadfast that we ‘mustn’t worry’. “People should mobilise, campaign, rally and petition because that is the way in which you bring about change,” he says.

But with the draconian policing bill which significantly restricts our right to peaceful protest being passed in April, plus both Starmer and shadow justice secretary Steve Reed calling for a ban on peaceful protest tactics after a disruptive campaign to end fossil fuel extraction by Just Stop Oil, it is any surprise that some, particularly the young, have lost faith in politics?

For them, Ashworth has a message: “I really urge people to keep faith in what we are trying to do,” he says. “Because I’ve only seen a Labour government elected once, and we can look back on that Labour government, and it did make mistakes as every Labour government in history has made mistakes. But it was the best government of my lifetime.”

“It was a government that lifted a million children out of poverty, it lifted pensioners out of poverty, which brought waiting lists down in the NHS to the best they’ve ever been. Yes, there were things that disappointed us, but my God is it better than what we have now. And I think a Labour government can make a change in society that we desperately need. And I’m determined to play a part in that next Labour government and fight for these causes that I passionately believe in.” **F**

*Vanessa Singh is the former assistant editor at the Fabian Society*

**“It’s not just about the impact of global warming, If we don’t tackle climate change, we put ourselves at more risk of future pandemics”**

# Joining the dots

The Conservatives' levelling up plans are incoherent and perfunctory. Labour will need a more strategic approach, writes *Graham Chapman*



*Cllr Graham Chapman is a former vice-chair of the East Midlands Development Agency and has a PhD in regional development*

**T**HE PROBLEM FOR any political party with an ambition like levelling up is explaining the links between the moving parts of the policy. There is a tendency to segment these policies into lists to 'sell' to the public. The problem with lists, however, is they do not translate into effective policy. And the greater danger still is when the politicians start to believe that simply working down the list actually delivers their vision.

The art is to do both, which means identifying a small set of key policy levers which mesh the individual aims together and provide an overarching strategy, while adding some short-term but coherent gains for public consumption.

The Tories have made the cardinal error of drawing up too long a list, with little coordination and no real narrative gluing the bits together. They have 12 stated missions – some of which are means, some of which are ends. Some are platitudes – decreased inequality; some are simply impossible – London-style public transport everywhere; others have already gone into reverse – net pay and productivity and the education gap. Many are being undermined by their own national policies such as the new schools funding formula and the loss of the £20 benefit uplift.

The net effect is a lack of coherence. Overlaid onto this is a huge dose of political expediency and an equally incoherent national economic strategy.

So there is, by default, a vacuum for Labour to move into. There may be somewhere a grand strategy being hatched by Labour, and we have had a hint of this in Keir Starmer's recent Liverpool speech on growth.

But to date, what is in the Labour shop window still feels like a shopping list (albeit a worthier and more sincere one) – jobs, town centres, connectivity, devolution, safety, a serious and creditable commitment to a green economy and supply chain. It therefore still feels vulnerable to the sort of criticism Ali Mira threw at Lisa Nandy on Radio 4 Any Questions back in July: "Where is the grand strategy which brings it all together?"

'Listism' stems from a failure to understand some of the basics of regeneration, which is a long haul, taking at least 20 to 30 years as Labour acknowledges. Regeneration needs substantial upfront devolved funding in the short to medium term before any fruits can be garnered. But in a modern economy the ultimate key and principal lever to levelling up is people and not things.

No growth, investment or increased productivity in a modern economy can happen without a skilled and educated workforce. Nor will an area attract inward investment or maintain the aggregate spending to sustain demand without it. Labour is right, devolution is critical. But it is not the panacea. A government will not solve the skills and education deficit without a robust national framework. And the hardest part, which neither party acknowledges, is that you cannot level up everywhere. Some areas, by definition, have to receive less attention in order to divert resources.

In the short to medium term too there are a number of key factors. First and critically we need a locally developed but nationally supported sector-led regeneration plan in order to focus skill development and infrastructure needs. This includes R&D and finance as well as connectivity. Some areas have begun to develop such plans to date but progress is sporadic and has to respond to structural underfunding in public services, top-down short-term competitive bidding and centrally directed 'grands projects' such as HS2 and freeports.

Second, Labour is right to make the green energy sector a key regeneration factor, vital in the path to decarbonisation. But the indigenous supply chain, involving new technologies in electrification, hydrogen, wave power, even insulation programmes, not only has to be developed but delivered by an educated workforce which won't happen by magic.

Third, there are other sectors which require support and direction such as health, where there is growing demand and limited scope for job displacement via automation. Another is fintech (the source of enormous wealth and spending power), where the gravitational pull is to the south east, risking even greater regional disparity.

Fourth, if Labour is to maintain tight fiscal control, then all this needs funding. Public investment in the UK has been stifled by Treasury accounting convention. There is scope for freeing up millions of upfront investment for the long-term payback by capitalising skills training, taking housing investment out of the public sector net cash requirement and redirecting housing allowance to social housing construction. But that is for another discussion.

And finally, the realpolitik demands quick wins and the segmenting of the policy into sellable sound bites. Apart from being the basis for regeneration, sector-related skills training and early years education, especially linked to childcare, have immediate electoral appeal, not least to parents and grandparents. As for tangible benefits, revamping high streets is all well and good but it is not the panacea that the Tories naively believe. Neighbourhood renewal along the lines of the housing action areas of the 70s – tackling parking, boundary treatment, insulation, designing out crime, all linked to local skill development and re-establishing pride of place – will offer quick political wins. It is also the right thing to do. **F**

# Unlocking potential

Labour must set out a levelling up agenda that improves living standards for our poorest citizens – in all parts of the country. *Nick Forbes* explains



*Nick Forbes is the chair of the Fabian Society's Commission on Poverty and Regional Inequality. The commission will publish its final report next year*

**L**ABOUR NOW HAS a major political opportunity, which is also a pressing moral imperative: the party must show how it would make 'levelling up' a reality for every community in the country. Our Commission on Poverty and Regional Inequality, set up by the Fabian Society, has brought policymakers and people living in poverty from all corners of England together, to find common cause and set out some concrete solutions. Many are ideas which, if scaled up, could make a real and practical difference to people in the face of the Tory cost of living crisis.

National inequalities are too often dismissed as the 'north-south' divide, as if this justifies their existence. When I led Newcastle City Council, I often reflected on how our regional economic problems are different in nature, but inextricably connected: poverty in our overheating capital and wasted potential in our post-industrial towns are two sides of the same coin. And from Newcastle to Newham, along our coasts and deep in our countryside, the way our local economies function and interact affects every city, town and village in the country.

In some ways, many of our challenges are similar. High rents and poor housing availability are problems in London and in tourist hotspots in Cornwall or Cumbria. Meanwhile, the great potential of our post-industrial towns and cities has been neglected by London-based politicians and civil servants for too long, a problem which affects a vast swathe of the south west, midlands, Wales, the north of England and Northern Ireland.

But while poverty exists everywhere, it is not everywhere the same. To be poor in London is to be confronted by gross inequalities in wealth on a daily basis and to compete in a stratified labour market where inflexible, low-paid work isn't enough to afford the capital's astronomical rents. To be poor in a remote, idyllic coastal tourist town is to endure a punishing rollercoaster of the seasonal labour market, where dismal bus services, high fuel costs and minimal further educational provision create a sense of hopelessness about the future.

We must analyse this problem with clarity and objectivity. We must look for real strengths in different types of places, not just in cities. When I was chair of the Core Cities group, which represents the UK's largest cities outside London, we explicitly recognised the economic evidence that cities are not high-density economic islands, detached from their wider region. Invisible threads bind towns, cities and rural communities together in ways that are not represented in our politics. Towns offer many opportunities that are often rarer in cities – space for businesses to grow, for example, or affordable starter family homes with gardens, or cleaner air, or easy access to the countryside. Cities and towns work best in partnership and there is mutual benefit in enabling them to do so.

That is why Labour is right to make 'levelling up' a national mission for a future Labour government. There is a shared purpose in ending this poverty, caused simply by our dysfunctional approach to managing regional economies. The first step is to understand the true nature of the problem that we have, and it is encouraging that Labour has taken that step.

The harder part now is developing solutions. Politicians can learn a thing or two from the people they represent. Because while people do have preconceptions about a wealthy London or an idyllic countryside, our qualitative research has found them ready to empathise with the reality of poverty in such places. So the first building block for real solutions is to see one another's point of view and collaborate. Many of our leading regional politicians have shown they understand this. Andy Burnham wrote in the *London Evening Standard*: "A more self-sufficient London would be in the rest of the country's interests" while Sadiq Khan wrote, in the *Yorkshire Post*: "Rather than focusing on what divides us, I want to focus more on what unites us, both culturally and economically, and how we can work together with common purpose."

But the reality is that despite the best intentions of regional politicians, they have increasingly been pitted

**The reality is that despite the best intentions of regional politicians, they have increasingly been pitted against each other**



against each other by Westminster, in a longstanding divide-and-rule strategy which, ultimately, leaves all regions worse off – even London, which is often the major net beneficiary of public investment. Lisa Nandy has compared this approach to the Hunger Games, but at least the Hunger Games had a winner. This ‘game’ is lose-lose for the poorest people in all our regions and nations.

That is why it is so important to devolve real power and settle economic development funding for the long term. Labour needs to go above and beyond the current transactional devolution offer in the government’s levelling up White Paper and should be ready to make trailblazer devolution deals the standard offer from day one – and to stop imposing governance changes on places as a pre-condition for powers. Labour also needs to acknowledge that mayors and councils can only really find shared purpose when they have funding that is secure for the long term and are not forced to compete with each other on a daily basis.

Like many public policy issues, this is very challenging. Funding allocations will always be contentious: not even the wealthiest places want to have a smaller budget. And often aggregate statistics at a council level mask a wide range of inequalities. Councils from leafy Berkshire to metropolitan Manchester have become experts in arguing their own version of fairness to maximise their funding allocations – whether it is highlighting local poverty, or local potential, or their contribution in taxes or in GDP. And, as Tory leadership contender Rishi Sunak recently admitted, Conservative politicians are perfectly happy to strip funding out of poor councils in major cities to play political games. That is no way to run a country.

There is no perfect way to distribute money, and even countries like Germany have heated debates about who puts in and who takes out of the national tax base. We have an established, albeit crude, method for allocating funding to the devolved nations, but councils and mayors in England have no settled way of distributing essential economic development cash and our revenue settlements are despairingly short-term. In Newcastle, we would often find out our budget settlement on Christmas Eve for the financial year starting the following April. If we were really lucky, it would be a two-year allocation – but this only happened twice in more than a decade. And local government funding settlements tend to reflect current public service spending in an area rather than economic opportunity or potential. That means we are held back not just by the quantity of funding, but the uncertainty of that funding and the way in which it is matched, for good or ill, to the delivery of public services. It means towns and cities can not plan transformative projects as well as they would like, private sector partners have to hold back, inflationary increases are often swallowed up by staff pay pressures and we can’t link up with long-term regeneration plans with real confidence.

Our constitution needs to make room for a long-term economic development funding settlement between England’s councils and mayoral combined authorities, facilitated by Westminster. But tackling and eradicating poverty should be the focus: the level of poverty and the scale of ambition in places’ plans to eliminate poverty, should be uppermost in considerations – what some have



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termed inclusive growth or inclusive economies. Solutions in particular places should match the problems they have, ranging from the need to create jobs, to controlling living costs. The people living in poverty in our regions need to be part of that conversation too.

When funding is settled and the debate moves on from winners and losers in the latest public spending round, we can then establish a new partnership between central and local government to take a long-term, strategic approach to economic growth and development. Framed by the twin ambitions of zero poverty and zero carbon – both potentially transformational objectives in shaping our economies of the future – a shared endeavour with appropriate devolved powers and long-term funding can breathe new life into communities in every corner of the country.

Together, central and local government need to work in a way that is tailored to each geography, working with the diverse assets and talents of local people and businesses to adapt, build resilience and grow their economies in a way that reduces poverty. In partnership, they can knit together their interventions, from big, job-creating infrastructure, to training and bus regulation, to ensuring local access to affordable childcare and housing. These need to be tackled together to be effective.

Finally, levelling up requires patience and sustained effort – regional economies take time to turn around, as London and Manchester did, although both cities still suffer from deeply entrenched poverty.

These are the foundations for a new ‘levelling up’ agenda. But in the coming months our Commission will be talking to people living in poverty, as well as local and national politicians, businesses and charities and we will set out our agenda for change in the new year.

The wasted potential across our country is our enduring national shame. Talent exists everywhere; opportunity does not. My home region of the north east now has the highest child poverty in the country, surpassing London in the latest year. There is no good reason why the simple fact of where you live should have such a massive impact on your job, your income, your quality of life, and, ultimately how long you are expected to live. And lost opportunity, through these social barriers to individual progress, ultimately impoverishes us all.

But it is within our power to turn it around. It will take time, and hard work, but we must start this work urgently. The next Labour government must step up to the challenge. But what else is a Labour government for? **F**

# A moral crusade

It is time to recognise the many achievements of Harold Wilson's governments, writes *Nick Thomas-Symonds MP*



*Nick Thomas-Symonds is the Labour MP for Torfaen and Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade. His new book, Harold Wilson: The Winner, is published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson*

**H**AROLD WILSON WAS Labour's 'winner': no other party leader has triumphed in four general elections. Yet, what has – too often – been overlooked is the constructive achievement of his governments that modernised our society, making it more equal and more just. In office from 1964 to 1970, and then for a further two years from 1974, Wilson was a reforming prime minister whose legacy was a real improvement in many people's everyday lives.

From the vantage point of 2022, we can reflect on his wise decision not to commit British troops to the American war in Vietnam and his ability to secure the result he wanted in the first European referendum of 1975, with 67 per cent voting in favour of remaining in the Common Market. On 7 June, the day after the referendum, the Daily Telegraph could not have been clearer in its judgment: "The result is quite frankly a triumph for Mr Wilson." Wilson also emerges as a change-maker; his Congregationalist background was often evident in his speeches, most obviously at the 1962 party conference when he said that the Labour party was "a moral crusade or it is nothing."

In a period of great economic turbulence, Wilson's two periods in office had a profound impact on society. His first government passed the very first piece of legislation addressing discrimination on the grounds of race. The Race Relations Act 1965 applied to public places such as hotels, pubs and theatres, and created a new criminal offence of incitement to racial hatred, together with a Race Relations Board. A second Race Relations Act came into force in November 1968, outlawing discrimination in housing, employment and access to public services.

Enoch Powell had spoken against the measures in his infamous speech in Birmingham on 20 April 1968. Quoting the epic poem Aeneid, and the prophecy of wars, he predicted a race conflict: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'" The 'Rivers of Blood' speech, as it was to become known, was a speech

of hatred and division. A horrified Wilson responded with a set-piece speech of his own in Birmingham on 5 May 1968: "... I am not prepared to stand aside and see this country engulfed by the racial conflict which calculated orators or ignorant prejudice can create." He appealed to a very different history from that of Powell, citing British values of "tolerance, of kindness, and of fair play, qualities for which the British people are admired throughout the world". The journey of change continued. The Race Relations Act 1976, though it completed its passage through parliament after Wilson had left office, extended protection to indirect discrimination.

This Act was a change in response to the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 which had covered indirect discrimination, and received Royal Assent around the same time as Barbara Castle's 1970 Equal Pay Act finally came into effect – a five-year transition period had been allowed for the latter. The Equal Pay Act benefited women in workplaces across the country, who had been discriminated against with inferior terms and conditions in comparison to those of their male counterparts. At the same time, all workers – men and women – gained from further additional protections. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 introduced the Health and Safety Executive, still the national regulator today. The Employment Protection Act 1975 introduced the UK's first maternity leave legislation, introducing six weeks of paid leave after having a baby and a right to return to the same or similar job for up to 29 weeks. It also introduced the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), a body that could be called upon to facilitate the finding of solutions in industrial disagreements that proved so effective it is still a central aspect of dispute resolution in the 2020s.

If Wilson can claim to have laid foundations of modern employment law, he can also claim to have changed how people lived their everyday lives. Welsh Labour MP Leo Abse created the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which legalised homosexuality, meaning people could love who they

**In a period of great economic turbulence, Wilson's two periods in office had a profound impact on society**

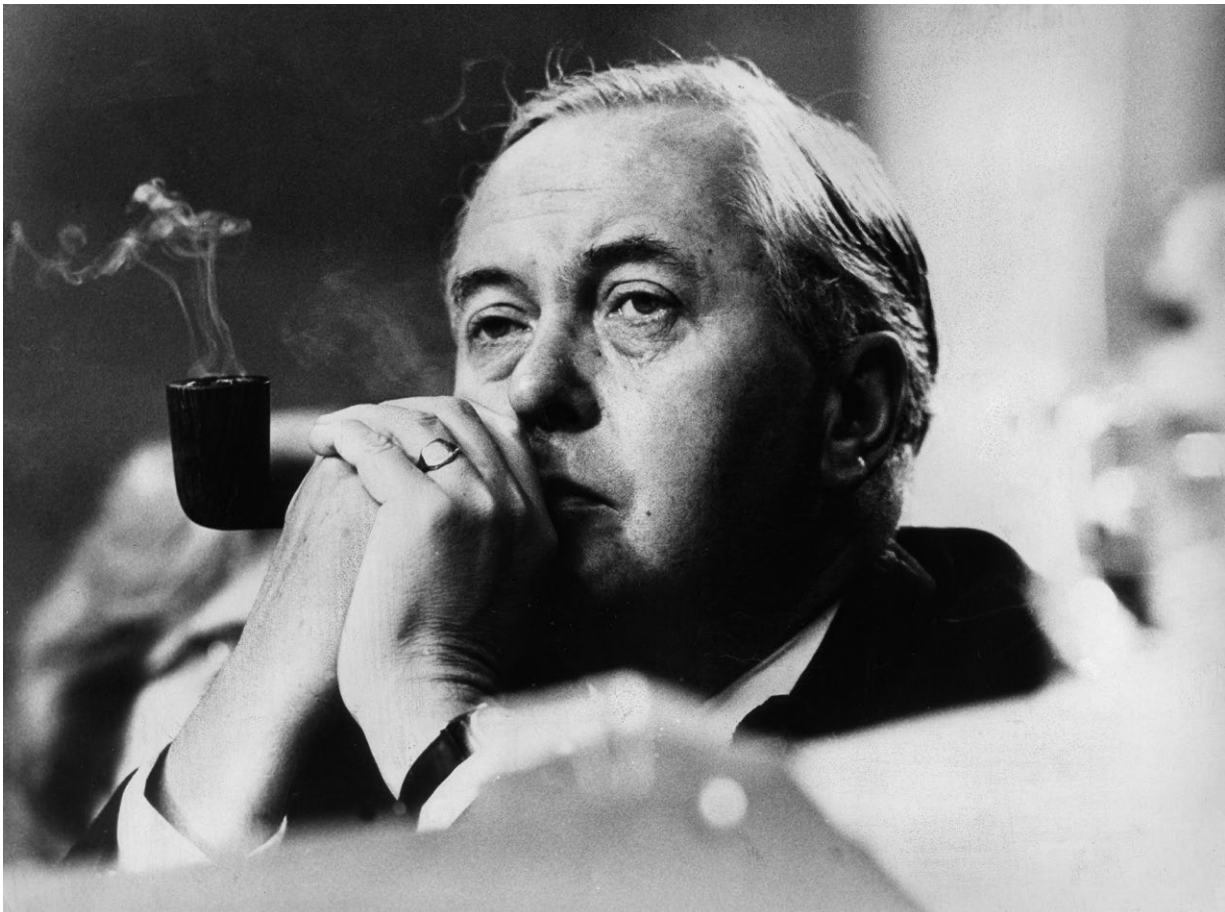
wanted to without fear of blackmail or a knock at the door from the police. That same year, David Steel's Abortion Act legalised terminations up to 24 weeks. Whilst both pieces of legislation – moral issues on which ministers remained neutral – were sponsored by backbenchers, they needed the government to allow them enough time to complete their passage through Parliament. Roy Jenkins, as Home Secretary from 1965 to 1967, was a strong supporter of creating what he called a 'civilised society'. Wilson, with his religious background, was a social conservative. Yet he could have stopped these reforms and chose not to do so. After all, George Brown and James Callaghan who, together with him were the dominant figures in the Cabinet at the time shared his concerns about time being given to the Bills: so, had Wilson overruled Jenkins, the position would have been supported by them.

Social reform continued. Theatre censorship was abolished in 1968. The Divorce Law Reform Act of 1969, following another Abse campaign, introduced 'no fault' divorce so that people were no longer trapped in loveless marriages. The Matrimonial Proceedings and Property Act 1970 allowed courts to order financial support for children from either spouse when marriages broke down, and also sought to correct the bias whereby both parties kept their earnings and inheritances post-divorce, which meant, at the time, that women, who often did not work, lost out.

In the field of criminal justice, Wilson was proud that, in 1965, capital punishment had finally been abolished, and, in 1967, corporal punishment, still then applied in prisons, was ended.

In education, the crowning achievement was the creation of the Open University, with Nye Bevan's widow Jennie Lee charged with making Wilson's vision of a "University of the Air" a reality. Opened in May 1970, the Open University provided opportunities for those who had not thrived in their formal education, or had not been able to access higher education, and addressed the need to skill and re-skill people throughout their adult lives. It has stood the test of time, has had over two million students, and is one of the largest universities in Europe. None of these opportunities would have been available without Wilson's passion to see the policy through. Wilson also started the move away from academic selection at the age of eleven, via Tony Crosland's Circular 10/65, of 12 July 1965, issued to local education authorities to move to a system of comprehensives. At the same time, the Representation of the People Act of 1969 reduced the voting age from 21 to 18.

Wilson's Britain moved beyond the judgemental, stultifying society of the 1950s. His was a country of tolerance, respect and second chances. He gave rights and legal protections to people that they had never had before. One of Wilson's best-known phrases was that 'a week is a long time in politics'. It was meant to convey that political leaders should not be diverted from long-term aims by short-term crises. Yet it came to be understood as the opposite: that his moves were designed to survive the next week with little care for the long-term consequences. It is time to move beyond such misperceptions and to recognise all that Wilson did. ■



# Mission statement

The next Labour government must make tackling health inequalities a top priority, argues *Olivia Bailey*



*Olivia Bailey is director of social policy at Public First and former head of domestic policy for Keir Starmer. She was previously deputy general secretary at the Fabian Society. Her recent report Healthy Places is available at [www.publicfirst.co.uk](http://www.publicfirst.co.uk)*

**I**T IS STRANGE how distant the pandemic feels. Just 18 months ago schools, shops and restaurants were shut and we were confined to our homes. The lockdowns were seismic events, set to determine politics and society for a generation. But do we talk about it now? Or think about it much? I certainly don't. The pandemic has become an unpleasant blip which we just want to forget.

That's fine as a way to deal with our feelings (although a therapist might say differently). I want to forget and move on from the pain of separation from my loved ones, the damage it did to their health and missed time with friends. But it is unacceptable that the pandemic has almost disappeared from our political debate. Our children missed months and months of school. My niece sat her A-levels this summer and they were the first exams she has sat since her Sats in Y6. But when is the last time you heard about plans for school catch-up? Lockdowns precipitated a new mental health crisis, but I did not notice the candidates for PM even mention it during this summer's Conservative leadership campaign.

And there is another public policy challenge that we must not forget: the brutal reality of health inequality. I was working for Keir Starmer on our Covid response during the pandemic, and the statistics are imprinted on my mind. People from poorer areas were four times more likely to die than those in the richest.

It was the pandemic that drove Keir to put preventative healthcare at the centre of his offer on health – in his words at the Fabian Society conference in January he wants a healthcare system “as much about prevention as it is about cure”.

I saw how influenced he was by Sir Michael Marmot's research on health inequality, and by the report he commissioned from Doreen Lawrence on race inequality. Now the challenge is to keep that commitment front and centre.

There are two arguments used against Labour talking more about health inequalities. The first, from those who think talking about inequalities is perhaps a little too 'retro Labour', is that it isn't widely popular with the electorate. The second is that the policies to help address it are either too wide-ranging or completely unexciting.

With colleagues at Public First, I have just published a report for the Health Foundation which challenges both of those arguments. We spoke to people in places with low healthy life expectancy (the age at which you can expect to live before getting a chronic condition) and ran a nationally representative poll.

We found that the nay-sayers are wrong: there is strong public support for action to tackle health inequalities.

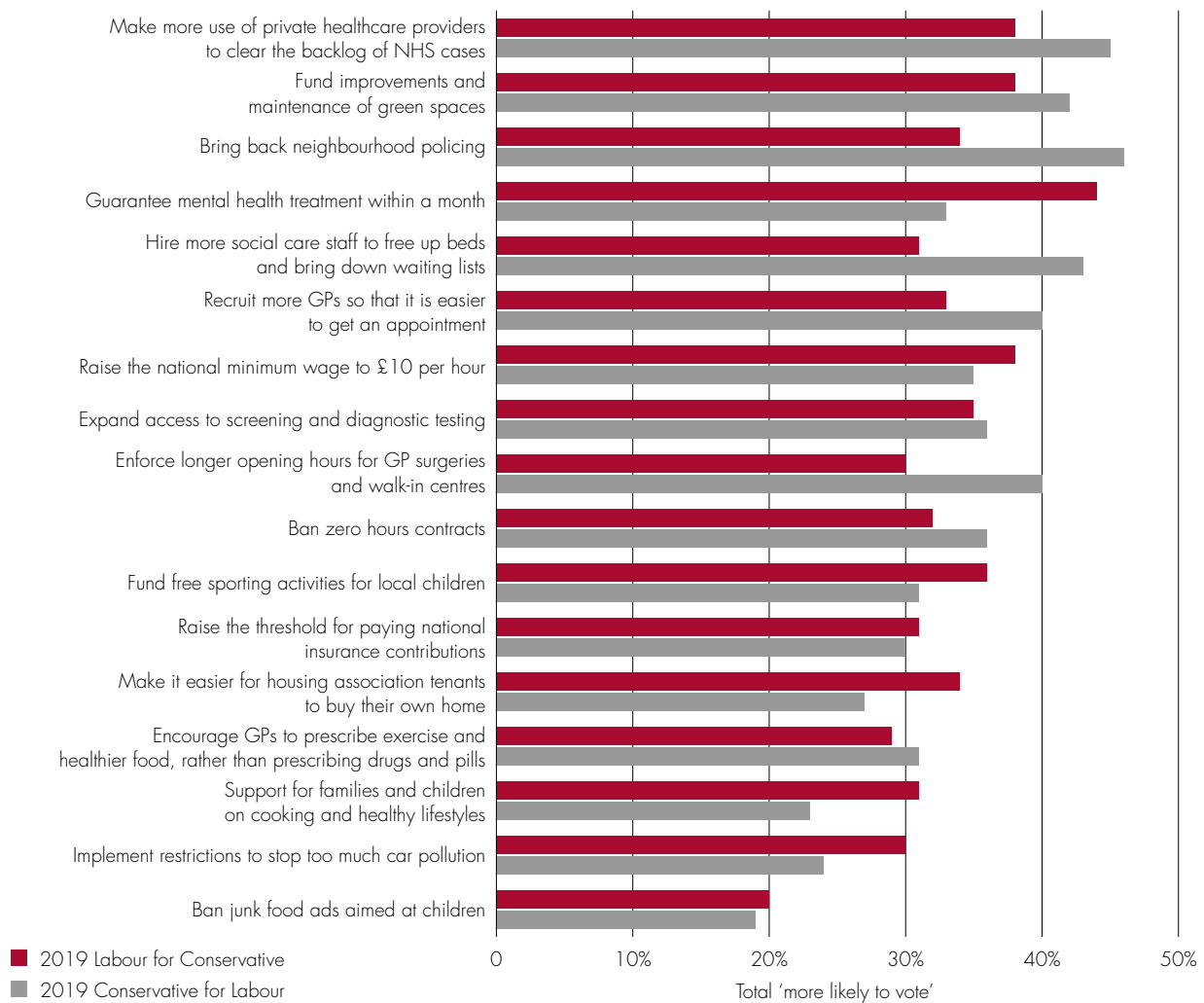
A significant majority of the public (69 per cent) support the government's levelling up target on health inequality, and just 8 per cent think that health inequalities are not much of a concern. Perhaps most significantly we found that any worsening of health inequalities or decrease in healthy life expectancy before the next election both significantly reduces the likelihood of 2019 Conservative voters to vote Conservative in the next general election (–37 per cent net decrease for both measures).

Sadly that deterioration in health inequalities now seems likely. We are in the midst of a cost of living crisis and have a new PM who looks unlikely to deliver the scale of support people need. who looks set to refuse the support that people need. As one of our focus group participants told us: “We've got kids eating turkey twizzlers and the parents eating nothing... we are never going to get there.” This is on top of a decade of austerity which meant that life expectancy stalled – and started to fall for some people – for the first time ever before the pandemic hit.

We also found that policies to tackle health inequalities are popular and can help Labour win the next election. The most popular policy to tackle health inequalities is to significantly expand screening services. We showed half of the sample this policy as a Labour announcement, and half as a Conservative announcement. Some 53 per cent of those shown the Labour arguments said that expanding screening would make them much more or somewhat more likely to vote for Labour at the election – the highest overall score. We also found improving green spaces to be highly persuasive, with 52 per cent who saw it as a Labour argument saying it would make them more likely to vote Labour.

We then analysed the data by 2019 voting record and found that screening expansion and green space policies

Imagine that you read the following electoral pledge from the Conservative/Labour party ahead of the next election. How would such a headline affect your likelihood of voting Conservative/Labour?



would be highly effective at persuading 2019 Conservative voters to come to Labour this time. 36 per cent of people who voted Conservative in 2019 said a screening expansion policy would make them more likely to vote Labour this time, and 42 per cent of the same sample said a policy to improve green spaces would also make them more likely to vote Labour (see chart).

We also found that policies to tackle health inequalities must be rooted in a politics of place – and must tackle the wider determinants of health. Our research found that people living in areas of very low healthy life expectancy tend to be more negative about their area and see a healthy place as one with good housing, low crime, green spaces and good jobs.

The importance of improving community links was a particularly striking finding, with many talking about the importance of connection to the community to a person's health. One person compared the importance of community to a pride of lions – a sense of belonging makes you feel better in yourself. Another said "human contact makes you healthy". Another called for: "...somewhere to go, somebody to see, somebody to speak to, and to join in and become part of the community. So it makes you

healthier on the inside, it makes a healthy mind, healthy mind, healthy body is what they say."

Others focused on the importance of crime. Participants talked about how they did not feel safe letting their children out to play in local parks, and that concerns around safety were stopping them walking or exercising in their community too. This chimed with our poll which showed people in very low healthy life expectancy areas have significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction with crime than people in very high healthy life expectancy areas.

Tackling health inequality must be one of the defining missions of the next Labour government.

This is not a straightforward challenge. The problems we face are entwined with most aspects of social policy. But instead of ignoring it because we think it is too hard or not popular enough with the electorate, Labour's strategists must recognise that the ambition and policies are popular – and drive forward a policy agenda that improves places and improves health. Every community must have safe, well-maintained green spaces and community services which bring people together – and we must support people through these incredibly hard times so we don't see a further deterioration in people's health. ■

# The Fabian Society at Labour Conference 2022



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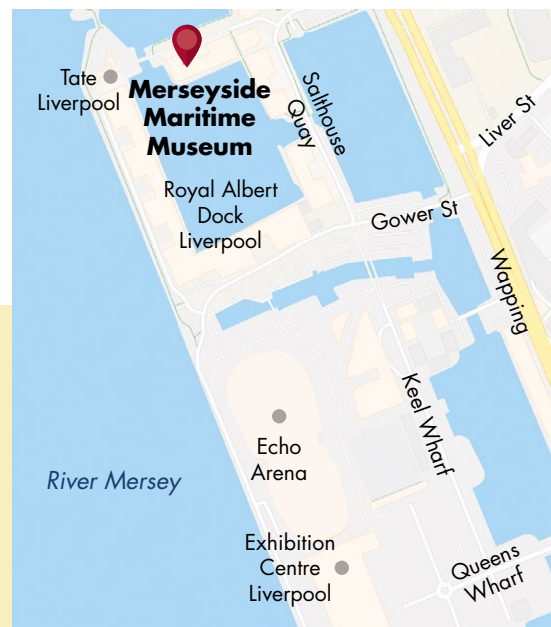
## KEY SPEAKERS INCLUDE:

#FabiansLPC22

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**Anneliese Dodds MP**  
**Preet Kaur Gill MP**  
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# Match fit

The Conservatives may have a new leader – but they are governing as if it's business as usual. Labour's campaign coordinator *Shabana Mahmood MP* sets out how the party is getting ready to defeat them at the next election



*Shabana Mahmood is the Labour MP for Birmingham Ladywood and Labour's national campaign coordinator*

**T**HE TORIES SHOULD fear a general election. They may have that enormous majority, whatever perceived benefits they think 12 years of incumbency will offer them and of course an army of rich donors lining up to maintain the status quo. But even so, they should be worried.

Labour is ready for a general election. We have to be ready because the Tories' status quo is no longer an option. We are hungry for the chance to put this government out of its misery.

The Labour party is in a place it never expected to be in after the terrible defeat we suffered in 2019. Under Keir Starmer's leadership we are now match fit and back in the game much sooner than anyone foresaw.

Keir appointed me as Labour's national campaign coordinator just over a year ago. My priority has been getting the party ready for a general election. This has largely been about the organisation, our party machine. And it has been fine-tuned. This was evident both in the local elections in May and in the by-elections we have contested over the last year. The last of these of course was Wakefield.

The significance of Labour's victory in Wakefield cannot be downplayed. We exceeded expectations in very difficult circumstances in a seat that illustrates perfectly the crushing move away from Labour in 2019. Winning back a seat like Wakefield is a huge deal.

Voters in Wakefield backed a confident, renewed Labour party that, following victories from north to south in May's local elections, proved it had the ideas and drive to appeal to working people. Our ground operation built on the organisational advances we made in the year's previous by-elections, notably in Batley and Spen and in Erdington. We were side by side with local people in Wakefield, taking on the issues that mattered to them.

And we offered a clear choice between a failing government and a Labour party that has listened since the 2019 general election and changed itself to reflect the bruising lessons it was taught.

We won in every ward in Wakefield – an improvement even on our local election results there where we won more than 50 per cent of the popular votes and took seats from the Tories. The size of the majority alone is the highest Labour has ever had in the seat as it is now drawn, even on a much lower turnout than in general elections. We won votes from every part of the constituency and across every demographic.

That result built on the significant progress made in May's local elections, not least in the so-called Red Wall seats. And based on May's election results, we'd be winning back seats we lost in 2019 and more besides. We are competitive in seats we thought were out of reach, certainly in the short term.

But we will not be going into the general election with any sense of complacency. We know there is much more still to do. And preparations are well-progressed. We are currently selecting candidates – not just in seats where Labour MPs are stepping down, but also in the key battlegrounds where the next general election will be won and lost.

Our new vetting process is designed to make sure we are finding the very best people possible to represent our party and the future candidates programme has been working with hundreds of aspiring MPs to prepare them for the rigours of an election campaign.

A full programme of support for candidates and for those battleground seats is in place. Central to that will be our newly appointed army of trainee organisers who are already in post and working in battleground seats. The trainee organiser scheme has, in the past, proved

**Our new vetting process is designed to make sure we are finding the very best people possible to represent our party**



invaluable and has helped us find and develop some of the most talented staff we have ever had working for the party.

This programme is a major part of our preparations for the seats we need to gain but we are also acutely aware of the need to hold what we currently have. That's why I have set up a taskforce to support our incumbent MPs – particularly those in the most marginal seats.

Anyone involved in Labour politics for any length of time knows how important it is to eradicate the mistakes that have dogged us so many times before – not least the way we have allowed the Tories to set and sustain a destructive narrative against us. To that end, we are enhancing our digital operation and beefing up our attack operation.

Of course, it is not all about organisation. There is also the small matter of politics.

The Tories have a lot to answer for. Who would have thought that they could do themselves even more damage than that inflicted by Boris Johnson? Then along came their leadership election. There is a line in the film *The Untouchables* from Sean Connery about the foolishness of bringing a knife to a gunfight. Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak made no such mistake as they set about each other in the TV studios and provincial town halls. Whatever we think of the Tories and whatever we think they believe about the rest of us, it is quite clear that there is no level of contempt to match what they have for each other.

The contest laid bare a disturbing reality – that the Tories will say anything and promise anything to protect their interests and cling to power. They will savage each other. They will promise the earth, hang the consequences. There was a point early in the contest where the unfunded giveaways being promised amounted to hundreds of billions of pounds – every time a candidate appeared on the TV it cost the British taxpayer billions. A month from the end and Liz Truss alone had promised £50bn of unfunded commitments.

The Tories dragged a prime minister from office and then held the door open for him to continue. Not in the country's interest, in their own interest. We need change.

And we need that change to come from our politicians. That means we must think differently.

Much like the pandemic, the cost of living crisis – and the sheer scale and depth of it – has forced politicians to reassess how we tackle the challenges we face and those that will be upon us in the future.

This is where the Tories have exposed themselves and been found lacking. Their instinct is not to rise to meet these challenges but to defend the status quo. This intransigent defence of the way things are is among the worst of the Tories' crimes – a bold claim considering the charge sheet. They have learned nothing in the last 12 years. More worrying still, they refuse to acknowledge the change the country now needs.

Labour must put ourselves in the shoes of voters. What is worrying them, what are they concerned about, what is keeping them awake at night? This is what we did in Wakefield.

How do we fix the NHS? How do we deal with extreme profits in the face of extreme failure? How do we make sure consumers are getting a better deal at the petrol pumps or from their energy and water companies? How do we finally create a rail network and wider public transport system that not only meets the needs of the travelling public but also tackles the climate emergency?

These are the challenges the country faces – and which Labour will address. We know it will not be enough to say the Tories are bad and getting worse. It will not be enough to say the Tories have broken our country and have no clue how to fix it. It will not be enough to say they broke the law and broke the economy.

That is why we are giving the country a vision of what a Labour government will offer, to provide voters with a sense of what Britain will look like five years after the next general election with Keir Starmer as prime minister.

That is why the next general election is the most important election of our generation. The curtain must come down on chaos, the corruption and the destruction wrought on our country by the Tories. This is their status quo and it must end at the next general election. **F**



# Mum's the word

The decision to ban babies from parliament is symbolic of a wider failure to provide adequate support to parents across the country, writes *Sarah Crook*



*Sarah Crook is senior lecturer in history at Swansea University*

**I**T IS RARE for sleeping three-month-old babies to make political headlines. But when in 2021 Labour MP Stella Creasy was reprimanded for bringing her baby into Westminster Hall, the apparent irreconcilability of professional political obligations and the necessary work of mothering were brought into sharp relief.

Despite an outcry, parliament's procedure committee was unmoved, issuing a report this summer that upheld the ban on babies being present during parliamentary debates. On a broad level, the rebuke symbolises how the labour of parenting is obscured in public life. Mothers are ostensibly welcome in the workforce, but the work of mothering must remain invisible. On a narrower level, the reprimand represents the ways that successive governments have failed parents both inside and outside of parliament.

Mothering has long held a fraught place in the political imagination: are mothers an untapped force of reserve labour, or are national interests best served by their unpaid childcare work? Are there skills, experiences and perspectives that can be drawn from mothering without essentialising womanhood?

Does it matter, then, that – as academics Rosie Campbell and Sarah Childs have shown – mothers of young children are underrepresented in the UK parliament?

Certainly, women have sometimes used their experience as mothers as evidence of their suitability for public office. In the 1970s and 1980s, the media emphasised Margaret Thatcher's status as a mother to affirm her qualifications as a leader. More recently, Andrea Leadsom drew ire in 2016 when she suggested motherhood gave her an advantage over Theresa May, her childfree rival for the prime ministership (a claim on which she subsequently rowed back). And in this year's Conservative leadership debates, Kemi Badenoch used her closing remarks to highlight that she has 'three children, and I want the very best future for them'. Such claims imply that mothers have a diffuse but superior investment in the future.

Meanwhile other parliamentary mothers are castigated for bringing their small children into their workplace. Academic Fiona MacKay has argued that the invisibility of care work constructs the ideal political agent as 'unencumbered'. The visibility, then, of a baby in the Commons undermines the mirage of the unencumbered parliamentarian. The message is clear: mothers are welcome, but mothering is not.

It has most often been female parliamentarians who have had to navigate the tension between being seen as both devoted to their families and committed to their constituents. Parliamentarian fathers, though, have also entered the fray. Tony Blair's paternity leave in 2000 was a subject of national discussion: 'Take it Off, Tony', urged *The Mirror*, 'Go on, Tony, take paternity leave', encouraged the *New Statesman*, while *The Guardian* called it 'The big question'.

Ten years later David Cameron took paternity leave following the birth of his daughter Florence. Boris Johnson did not take paternity leave following the birth of Wilfred in 2021, citing his workload. Such decisions are important; just as the presence of a baby in the Chamber is evidence of the necessary labour of parenting, the decision to pause paid work is an acknowledgement of care work's value.

And it is a man who has provided the most recent striking image of combining nurturing and law making. A video of Trevor Mallard, the Speaker in New Zealand, soothing and feeding an MP's baby went viral in 2019.

It seems the response to Creasy was not inevitable or unavoidable: it is possible to care for babies and do the business of parliament. Neither was Creasy's baby the first to attend a debate. In 2018 Jo Swinson's baby accompanied her to a debate on proxy voting. The presence of Swinson's baby was itself a product of an egregious failure to meet the needs of parliamentarian parents, though.

In July 2018, the then Conservative party chairman Brandon Lewis revealed the frailty of procedures that rest on trust when he broke a pairing agreement – designed to

**The next Labour government needs to invest in supporting parents – in parliament and outside**



mitigate an MP's necessary absence from voting – while Swinson was on maternity leave. Although progress on proxy voting was subsequently made, other needs endure: backbench MPs still need a system of maternity cover. The very presence of babies in the Chamber is a product of the failure to address the needs of parliamentary parents. The recent disavowal of mothering in the Chamber is therefore a double failure.

But failures extend beyond the walls of Westminster. The UK's parental and maternity leave policies lag behind other European countries. Summarising a major international review of leave policies in 2021, academics Peter Moss and Alison Koslowski concluded that the UK's leave policy is "implicitly matriarchal, eschewing gender equality for the idea that women should be the main carers of young children".

After leave, working parents face years of painful childcare costs. The government has recently unimaginatively indicated that costs could be addressed by changing the ratio of adults to toddlers in nurseries. Such a suggestion will do little to help nurseries that are struggling to stay afloat.

Parliamentary pass holders share in the struggle to hold on to childcare: a parliament nursery finally opened in 2010 and has survived calls for its closure in the years since. That it was on the site of the old Bellamy's Bar has lending symbolism. Change is possible.

But the childcare crisis is far from new to the political agenda. During the second world war, a concerned peer urged the Lords to consider the provision of childcare "not from the standpoint mainly of child welfare but as an economic problem, as a problem related to the better utilisation of our woman-power."

Mothers of children under five were crucial to the war effort but could not work without childcare. One Lord pointed out that: "You may have factories with the best equipment in the world and mothers willing to go and work in them, but unless the accommodation for their children is there ... you may just as well have no factory at all."

Wartime nurseries were established to cater to this need. These nurseries closed in the wake of the war, philosopher Denise Riley argued, not as part of an ideologically driven effort to push mothers out of the labour market but due to strained resources and muddled policy interests.

Given the insufficient provision of childcare in postwar Britain, it is little surprise that the topic formed a major area of concern for the Women's Liberation Movement during feminism's 'second wave'.

Indeed, the frustrations of new mothers was a critical seed for the movement.

The movement formulated the demand for free 24-hour nurseries in 1970. This demand was never met, although governments have, to varying degrees and with varying success, attempted to address parents' needs. In 1998 Harriet Harman, then Secretary of State for Social Security and Minister for Women, set out an intention to "achieve a real alignment between what women want and what the government intend". One of the central issues for this process of alignment was childcare – and affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare was set out as a new priority. Harman believed that, "the best thing that we can do is to support parents, by offering them choice backed up with opportunities, and opportunities backed up with real investment." That parents continue to struggle shows how easily such priorities are shaken off.

Without adequate support for parents of small children – both through well-supported leave and through affordable, accessible, and high-quality childcare – this struggle will continue. And mothers will continue to bear the brunt.

Mothers do not have a deeper commitment to the future than others. They do, however, need better policies to have better futures. Until then, the labour of mothering is obscured by platitudes.

This government has proven itself unable to meet the needs of mothers of young babies who work in parliament, let alone beyond it. The next Labour government needs to seize the mantle laid down by Harriet Harman and invest in supporting parents – in parliament and outside – by implementing policies that value and facilitate both care work and paid work. ■

# Books

## Battle lines

Labour's internal strife provides some rich material for two books, finds *Kate Murray*



*Kate Murray is editor of the Fabian Review*

Foxhunting may have been banned years ago, but the Conservatives' other favourite bloodsport – tearing lumps out of each other – has continued unabated. From the ousting of Margaret Thatcher to this summer's toppling of Boris Johnson and the bitter leadership contest between Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak which followed, Tory party infighting has marked our politics, and our country, for decades. Yet the Conservatives themselves seem to emerge relatively unscathed from their feuding come election time, while to the electorate Labour has too often looked like the house most divided.

Patrick Diamond and the late Giles Radice, in their fascinating history of Labour's civil wars, offer us some clues as to why Labour, a party with a rich and complex tradition, might have suffered more damage from its internal wranglings than its opponents. They trace the story of some of the most bitter disputes within the party, starting with Ramsay MacDonald and ending with Jeremy Corbyn – and give some useful pointers on how we might prevent history repeating itself.

Diamond and Radice suggest that Labour is particularly prone to internal conflict, both because of its institutional structure, with trade unions, parliamentarians and members all holding sway, and because its ideology has been contested by, as they put it, everyone from prophets to pragmatists and fundamentalists to revisionists. Throw in personality politics – Bevan and Gaitskell or Blair and then Corbyn – and you have a recipe for trouble.

The result is that over the party's history, Labour leaders have had to grapple not just with developing a policy offer to put before the British people, but with quelling the internal wrangling which throws their electoral chances off course.

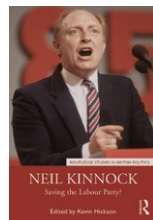
Once it has covered the key battles of the past, the book moves on to setting out a way forward.

Diamond and Radice, both avowed revisionists, rightly argue for a pluralist approach, condemning both the 'unhealthy antipathy to internal debate and disagreement' of the New Labour era and the 'conservatism and inertia' of the Corbyn years. At a time when we desperately need



### Labour's Civil Wars: How Infighting has Kept the Left from Power (and What can be Done About it)

Patrick Diamond and Giles Radice (Haus, £16.99)



### Neil Kinnock: Saving the Labour Party?

Kevin Hickson (ed) (Routledge, £34.99)

a Labour government, those on both sides still engaging in factional struggles would do well to heed their message.

A period little touched on in Diamond and Radice's book is Neil Kinnock's time as Labour leader and the contribution he made, after yet more internal strife, to Labour's eventual return to power. The collection of essays edited by Kevin Hickson provides not just a reassessment of Kinnock's record, but a welcome addition to thinking about the party's present and future. For, as some of the contributions show, there are significant similarities between then and now: questions over patriotism, nationhood and devolution and soul-searching over our relationship with Europe, for example. A broad array of contributors, including Charles Clarke, Patrick Wintour, Dianne Hayter and Jon Lansman, are featured, with John Redwood chipping in with an unsurprisingly somewhat graceless chapter. There is a particularly entertaining look at Kinnock's engagement with popular culture, including his appearance in a promo video for a Tracey Ullman single, a collaboration which, we are told "did neither of the participants any favours". And there's a whole chapter devoted to Kinnock's struggles with Militant.

But perhaps the most revealing part of the book is Anthony Seldon's write-up of a conversation with Kinnock. In the interview, the former Labour leader talks of how he tried to reshape the party, right down to arguing over the length of the stem of the rose which became the party's new logo. He tells of run-ins with Thatcher and Scargill - and an attempted coup by Donald Dewar in favour of John Smith (who apparently declined to get involved). Yet another example of the internal discord which has so marked Labour's history.

Kinnock says his overriding aim was to make the Labour party relevant again, but regrets that he could not go faster, sooner. As he puts it: "I'm not naturally a nasty bastard, but I was enough of a nasty bastard to do what was necessary. I just would have liked to have done it more quickly." **F**

*Patrick Diamond's tribute to Giles Radice, former MP, peer and Fabian chair who died in August, is published on the Fabian Society website: [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)*



# Aiming high

*Christine Megson* looks back at the success of a pioneering Fabian scheme to get more women into political and public life



*Christine Megson MBE is the co-coordinator of FWN's mentoring programme*

**I**N 2010, WHEN Seema Malhotra MP and I first thought of launching the Fabian Women's Network political and public life mentoring programme, we little thought that we'd be looking back 12 years later at the amazing impact that 90 mentors supporting nearly 300 mentees has had. We knew from our initial research that it can be harder for women to overcome challenges to get to the top. We knew the skills that are needed to be successful in politics and public life and we appreciated the value of mentoring. But we had not anticipated how powerful a crucible an annual cohort of 28 Fabian women interacting with each other would be. We did not know we were going to generate a tribe that would provide each other with role models, a network of support and expertise and opportunities.

As co-ordinators, Caroline Adams, who has worked for Labour for over 25 years, and I bring decades of experience, expertise and contacts from political and public life. We have refined the annual recruitment of each cohort and this forms a key element in the success of the programme. Ensuring a powerful mix of age, sector, ethnicity, experience and geography is vital. Our alumni range from their early 20s to their mid-60s and from anaesthetist and architect to farmer and fashion photographer. We have got better at attracting Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and supporting them – although there is much more to do. We have a strong pool of mentors from both the House of Commons and Lords and a varied pool of women with a lifetime of success in public life roles and we bring in new mentors to match the varying needs of mentees. Buddies from previous cohorts strengthen the internal links with the alumni network.

The core workshop elements such as speaking with confidence, handling the media and understanding how

the Labour party works are organised by the co-ordinators but mentees organise other events using their own skills or contacts and tailoring sessions to their own needs. Central to the programme is providing opportunities for political analysis and commentary as well as taking the mentees into spaces they can own. It is striking how many mentees had not recognised that parliament belongs to them too.

The programme is firmly rooted in the Fabian Society and FWN. Fabian women MPs were our first mentors and advisers and often continue to be so even when they are no longer MPs: Meg Munn and now Roberta Blackman-Woods have chaired the advisory committee with constant support from Kate Green MP.

One theme running through the applications we receive is the lack of confidence so many women feel in finding their political voice. In their evaluations after taking part in the programme, women report how much their confidence has grown. Many women come to us with limited networks or role models. Others are passionate about an issue but do not know how to act upon it. Some have vague ideas about going into politics but no firm plan. The combination of a growth in confidence, immediate role models, individual and peer mentoring, and a network of support and experience propels women into new roles often faster than they previously thought possible.

I could fill pages with the individual achievements of mentees – taking on positions of influence locally, nationally or internationally; seeing their names in print or appearing on broadcast media. Currently a number are standing for parliamentary selection.

More than 80 mentees have been elected as councillors and Anna Smith, Mary Ann Brocklesby and Karen Kilgour

are council leaders and deputy with many more in cabinet or whip positions; Abena Oppong-Asare, now the MP for Erith and Thamesmead, was in an early cohort and so too were London Assembly member Sem Moema and Joy Allen, Durham police and crime commissioner. Mentees including Kiran Gill and Sarah Waite have founded their own charities and many are now board chairs or trustees. A significant number have gained PhDs; others have run influential campaigns such as the ‘three hijabis’ campaign against racism in football launched by Shaista Aziz, Amna Abdullatif and Huda Jawad.

In May this year, four mentees from different cohorts stood in the council elections in Tory-controlled Monmouthshire. They supported each other and other mentees came to campaign for them. They made Fabian

history by turning Monmouthshire red. Mary Ann Brocklesby won her ‘unwinnable’ seat by 11 votes and in her first council role was elected the first woman leader of Monmouthshire. Su McConnel became chief whip and Dr Catrin Maby OBE and Catherine Fookes (who is the Welsh Fabians convenor) are now members of the cabinet. Monmouthshire became the first council in Wales to achieve a gender balance across their elected councillors.

The impact of the programme is best summed up by the comments of a former participant who said: “The programme opened doors I didn’t know even existed.”**F**

*We Belong Here Too, by Dr Jess Smith of Southampton University, the fourth evaluation of the FWN mentoring programme, will be published this autumn.*

## Noticeboard

### NEW BYE-LAW

The executive committee has approved the following bye-law:

### MEMBER POLICY GROUPS

Policy groups are units of the Fabian Society that provide a forum for members to focus on specified policy areas in detail. Each shall be formed or disbanded by a decision of the executive committee. Membership of each policy group shall be open to all national members of the society. A policy group shall be responsible for the organisation of its own activities. These may include holding events and meetings and the preparation of articles and papers. The executive committee may make any decision on the affairs of a policy group and groups will report regularly to the committee.

### NOTICE OF AGM AND CONFERENCE

**Saturday 5 November 2022,  
11.30am–4.30pm, Friends House,  
173-177 Euston Road, London  
NW1 2BJ**

### Formal AGM starts at 3.30pm

AGM business  
Apologies  
Minutes of the 2021 AGM  
Matters arising  
In memoriam  
Chair’s report  
General secretary’s report  
Reports from Fabian sections  
Treasurer’s report

Approval of annual report 2020/21  
Appointment of auditors

### Motions

Jenny Jeger prize for writing  
Date of next AGM  
Any other business

More details will be available on the Fabian Society website: [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)

### AGM Motions

Rule changes proposed by the executive committee

### RULE 9

Replace the first paragraph with: The executive committee shall be elected as provided in rule 12 and comprise:

- (a) the honorary treasurer
- (b) six ordinary members
- (c) four members who shall be Westminster politicians
- (d) four members who shall be non-Westminster politicians
- (e) one member elected to represent and convene local Fabian societies
- (f) one member who shall be appointed by the Scottish Fabians executive and one member appointed by the Welsh Fabians executive (subject to the provisions of rule 12);
- (g) one member who shall be an employee of the Society and who shall be elected to hold office for one year by the employees excluding the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary who may neither stand nor vote;

(h) one member who shall be appointed by the Young Fabian executive;

(i) one member who shall be appointed by the Fabian Women’s Network executive;

(j) members co-opted by the executive committee provided that the membership of the committee does not at any time exceed 22 in number.

### RULE 12

Replace the first two paragraphs with: Before every second annual meeting (in odd-numbered years), the society shall elect by ballot the following positions, to hold office for two years:

- (a) an honorary treasurer
- (b) six ordinary members of the executive committee
- (c) four Westminster politicians
- (d) four non-Westminster politicians

Nominations for these shall be invited from national members and fully paid-up members of local societies whose names have been received one month before voting commences. At least two of the ordinary members elected shall be under 31 years of age on the date of the forthcoming annual general meeting, provided that two such members are duly nominated. If only one such member is duly nominated, that member shall be elected. The category of Westminster politicians shall consist of members of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

Members eligible to stand in this category are ineligible to stand as ordinary members of the committee. The category of non-Westminster politicians shall consist of one elected Scottish politician, one elected Welsh politician, one elected English regional politician, and one elected local government councillor (who shall represent and convene members of the society who are councillors).

The society shall also elect by ballot one member of the executive committee to represent and convene local Fabian societies. Nominations for this section shall be limited to currently affiliated local societies. Each candidate must be nominated by a local society which has satisfied itself that the candidate is an active member of that society. The member elected shall not be a Westminster politician.

### RULE 15

Replace: ‘The concession rate for under-23s, students, low-income pensioners and people receiving out of work benefits shall be’ with: ‘The concession rate for members who have not reached their 26th birthday, students, low-income pensioners and people living in households with no earnings or low earnings shall be’.

The maximum duration of membership of the committee shall be eight consecutive years.

# 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](mailto:bhamfabians@gmail.com)

### BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

Meetings at the Friends Meeting House, Wharncliffe Road, Bournemouth Wednesday 20 October Zoom meeting, with Southampton Fabians with former cabinet minister, Lord Hain, speaking on "Back to the future with socialism". For details, contact Ian Taylor, 01202 396634 or [taylorbournemouth@gmail.com](mailto:taylorbournemouth@gmail.com)

### BRIGHTON & HOVE

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

### CENTRAL LONDON

Contact Michael Weatherburn at [londonfabians@gmail.com](mailto:londonfabians@gmail.com) and website [londonfabians.org.uk](http://londonfabians.org.uk)

### CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

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

### COLCHESTER

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

### COUNTY DURHAM

Saturday meetings take place at our new venue, St. Paul's Hall, Meadowfield, Durham City, DH7 8RP. No membership required on your first visit. Contact Professor Alan Townsend at [alan.townsend1939@gmail.com](mailto:alan.townsend1939@gmail.com)

### CROYDON & SUTTON

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

### ENFIELD

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

### FINCHLEY

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

### HAVERING

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

### HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

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

### NEWHAM

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

### NORTHUMBRIA AREA

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

### PETERBOROUGH

Contact Brian Keegan at [brian@keeganpeterborough.com](mailto:brian@keeganpeterborough.com)

### READING & DISTRICT

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

### RUGBY

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

### SOUTH TYNESIDE

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

### SUFFOLK

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

### TONBRIDGE

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

### WALSALL

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

### YORK

Contact Mary Cannon at [yorkfabiansociety@gmail.com](mailto:yorkfabiansociety@gmail.com)

## FUTURE OPTIONS

New Fabian reports on music education and the original 'Red Wall' offer food for thought to Labour

If you're at school in England today, you're much less likely to have music lessons than you were a decade ago. The proportion of schools offering music to 13 and 14-year-olds fell from 84 per cent to 67 per cent between 2012 and 2016 – and 11,000 fewer youngsters were studying GCSE music in 2021 than a decade earlier. As for learning an instrument, as budgets have fallen, so tuition has become more out of reach for many children. Those from the wealthiest backgrounds are 27 percentage points more likely to be playing an instrument than their more disadvantaged peers.

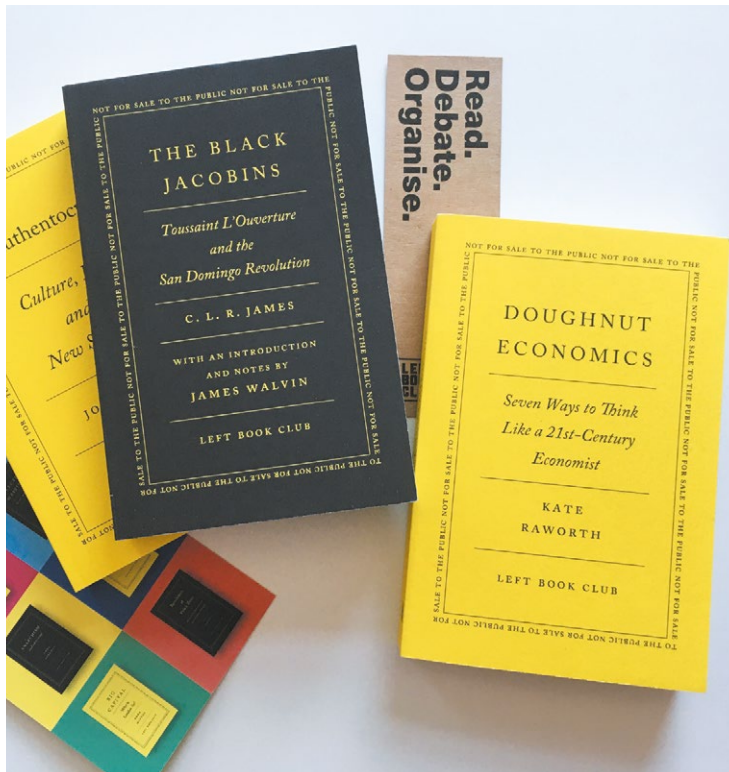
Yet we know that learning music has huge benefits: it supports educational outcomes, boosts health and wellbeing, and creates opportunities in the creative economy.

In A National Music Service, Fabian Society senior researcher Ben Cooper makes the case for a new approach to ensure high-quality music education.

A National Music Service, produced in partnership with the Musicians' Union, is available on the Fabian Society website at [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk)

The scale of the task for Labour to win the next election was laid bare in last autumn's Fabian Society report, Winning 150. Now the Scottish Fabians have looked in more detail at the electoral landscape in Scotland. In Winning Back the First Red Wall, report authors Katherine Sangster, Lewis Wotherspoon, Jake Ballantyne, and Zack Langmead-Jones suggest that 25 seats are within the party's grasp. There is no doubt there is still a mountain to climb, they say, but the path to a Labour government is now clear. The focus of Scottish Labour should be to offer a clear alternative to the SNP in Scotland and to the Tories across the UK.

Winning Back the First Red Wall: Scotland and the Path to a Labour Government can be downloaded from the Fabian Society website at [www.fabians.org.uk](http://www.fabians.org.uk) **F**



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