

FABIAN REVIEW

The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society

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Ruy Teixeira evaluates the Democratic candidates for president **p18***

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**FABIAN
SOCIETY**

FABIAN REVIEW

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

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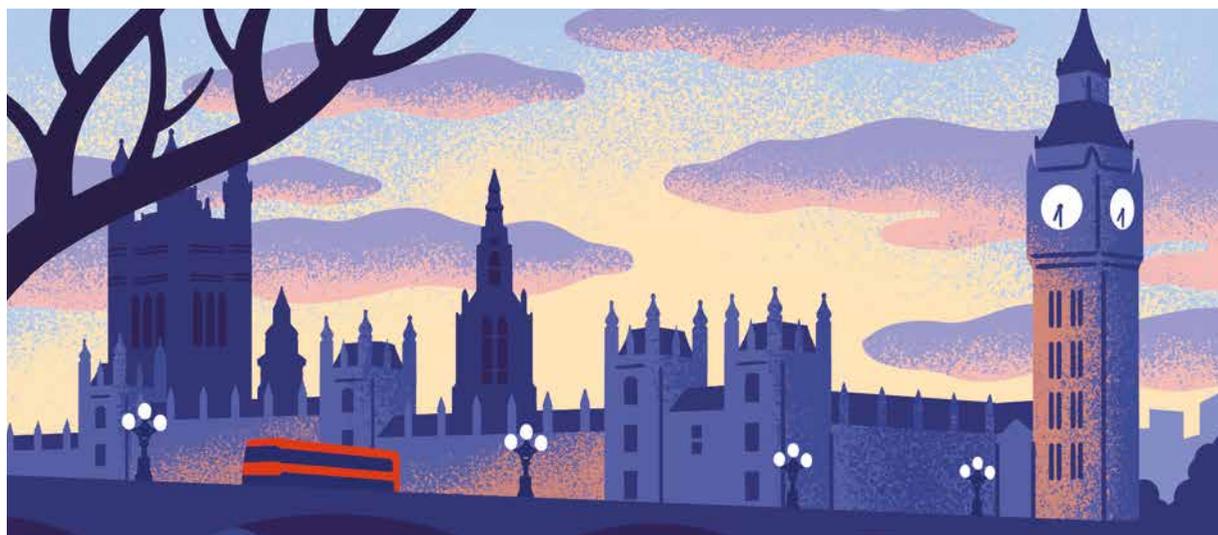
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Time to change course

Labour's disastrous election defeat shows that the party's approach to policymaking must be very different next time, argues *Andrew Harrop*

THE LABOUR PARTY has endured a humiliating defeat and it means the Corbyn experiment must end.

For this was a self-inflicted disaster, owned by the party's left-wing leadership.

They chose to accept the timing of the election. They ran a poorly targeted campaign which paid little heed to defending northern seats. They failed to accept that Jeremy Corbyn was personally unelectable and that his movement needed a different figurehead.

The policy offer was also profoundly flawed. Voters literally laughed at Labour's election promises as the party unveiled one incoherent electoral bribe after another.

Labour failed to present any reasoned, intellectual case for the free broadband that people were already happy to pay for, for the huge cuts in rail fares for affluent season ticket holders, or for the massive cash handouts for women born in the 1950s.

These were all examples of policies that benefited people with high incomes more than families in poverty and this was a critical weakness in Labour's overall electoral programme. The party offered a huge expansion in state collectivism and universalism. But it offered too little in the fight against inequality, save for raising the taxes of the very rich.

In other words, Labour reversed the decision it made in the mid-20th century to prioritise egalitarianism over statism. Extraordinary projections from the Resolution Foundation showed that after four years of a Labour government child poverty would have been no lower than it is today. The Institute for Fiscal Studies suggested that Labour's medium-term spending plans were less redistributive than those of the Liberal Democrats, as was also the case in 2017.

The egalitarianism Labour did offer came in the shape of economic reforms that were highly speculative and would have taken years to reap returns. Labour's plans to increase workers' power over businesses, expand non-shareholder ownership models and launch a green industrial revolu-

tion in disadvantaged areas included many good ideas. But over five years they would have done next to nothing for living standards or for people's sense of control over their own lives.

The party's plans for the welfare state would have helped more. There were areas where Labour's universalist proposals would have made a real difference to life chances, especially its offer of free childcare, youth services and free further education for adults. But elsewhere the extra statism – and especially so many nationalisations in one go – seemed unconnected to everyday life.

Labour's programme had too little of those Fabian virtues of practicality, precision and empiricism. There was so much of it, it would have been impossible to deliver in a single term. The detail was often flaky. And the ideologically-inspired solutions often addressed problems people did not know they had.

On everything from nationalising broadband to a four-day-week, the party should have spent years examining the evidence, debating with the public and road-testing solutions with a wide cross-section of experts. Instead Labour's conversation took place only within a comfortable activist echo chamber, often leaving traditional Labour voters bewildered and scornful at the results.

Take the four-day week. After a decade when hourly wages and productivity have barely risen, how did the party get to a place where it was publicly calling for future pay rises to be translated into shorter hours not higher take-home wages? And how did it set out plans that were so half-baked that the Tories could present a Labour policy as a threat to the NHS?

Individual voters didn't engage with all this policy detail. But they got enough of it to smell a rat. Unlike in 2017, this manifesto was an epic failure because Labour's programme was for the movement not the country. Once the leadership contest is over, on policy the party must start again. **F**

Shortcuts



A KINDER APPROACH

Compassion in politics will benefit us all

—*Kelly Grehan and Matt Hawkins*

It feels as though division and hostility have come to define our political system and, as a result, our society. Since the 2016 Brexit referendum our common ground has been swallowed up by unnavigable, choppy, and dangerous waters. Compassion has been sucked out of debates whether they be on our country's future relationship with Europe, on refugees, or on the treatment of people with disabilities. Society and politics have become poorer as a result. With a new parliament elected, it is vital that we learn the lessons from the last few months and years to make a new kinder approach a reality. Never was the lack of compassion in politics more evident than in the debate which took place in parliament back in October. Following rowdy discussions, Paula Sherriff, the then MP for Dewsbury, whose constituency neighbours that of murdered MP Jo Cox and who has previously had to stay away from her home because of the death threats she and her family have received, pleaded for compassion saying:

This evening the prime minister has continually used pejorative language to describe an act of parliament passed by this House ... and we stand here Mr Speaker under the shield of our departed friend. With many of us in this place subject to death threats and abuse every single day. And let me tell the prime minister – they often quote his words: Surrender Act. Betrayal. Traitor. And I for one am sick of it.'

Boris Johnson dismissed Sherriff's concerns and pleas with one derisive word: 'humbbug'. With that, he not only undermined the legitimate safety concerns of his peers in the Commons, but also cast

aside the emotions of an MP who has had to grieve for a dear friend and colleague.

But, there was a silver lining to that debate. In the weeks that followed people of all political hues expressed outrage and concern about the coarse language used and there have been united calls for a change in culture in the House. Young campaigners from Manchester and Salford set up a petition calling for a new code of conduct for MPs and that has already been signed by more than 65,000 people. Together Compassion in Politics and More United have launched such a new code – voluntary, for now – and over 80 MPs have already committed to using it. We hope more of those elected in 2019 will join them. The tide is turning.

We have seen how a kinder approach can be incredibly powerful. When Canterbury MP Rosie Duffield spoke movingly about her experience of coercive control she was able to complete her speech without interruption. The compassion shown to her in the House of Commons, both as she spoke and after, was largely mirrored on social media later and, as a result, her speech is likely to have had a positive impact on all who watched it.

The council chamber also has a role to play in this. While councils may not be quite as visible on our TV screens as parliament, we have to recognise that we too are part of a toxic political system and that we have a role to play in reforming it.

Regrettably, council debate is routinely characterised by hostility, insults and aggression. This behaviour discourages people from standing for election and inhibits many councillors from contributing to debates for fear of being shouted down. It might be one of



© Michael Beckwith/Flicker

the reasons why parties struggle to attract councillors from diverse backgrounds: 66 per cent of councillors are men and 96 per cent are white.

Councils have a vital role to play in changing the way we do politics. We are the closest political representatives to the public – the people they are most likely to see on their doorstep, at events, or to hear from in their local papers and newsletters. We have to set the best example we can and be open, honest, and caring. If we are the gateway to politics for many people we have to be welcoming and supportive. Many councillors will also go on to become MPs – we cannot be schooling future national leaders in a toxic style of politics. Compassion in Politics has launched a motion calling for compassionate debate in council chambers which we are urging councillors across the country to table. We believe this is a movement whose time has come. With society being torn apart at the seams we want to take on some of the responsibility for piecing it back together – so that our politics can be better in 2020. **F**

Kelly Grehan is a borough councillor in Dartford and Matt Hawkins is a founder of Compassion in Politics



A DIFFERENT COUNTRY

Progressives need to tell the positive story of modern Britain

—*Jon Bloomfield*

Race and migration are the most dangerous issues in politics today. Across Europe, they are hurting established parties severely, with the social democratic left hardest hit of all. The fast pace of change in a rapidly globalising world has disrupted economies, communities and traditional institutions. Successive waves of migration have changed the character of our major cities for ever. Living with difference is one of the grand challenges for 21st century politics.

Unlike Trump, few British politicians now say to black and Asian people, 'go back where you came from.' Yet influential voices maintain the spirit and ideas of Enoch Powell. Nigel Farage, addressing an audience of young libertarians at Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania earlier this year, asserted there are "whole streets in Oldham of people who have lived in my country for over 30 years who don't speak a word of English." The last census shows that rather than 'whole streets' just 1 per cent of people in Oldham speak 'no' English and 94 per cent of households have at least one person with English as their main language. Farage is forever whipping up fear and distrust about people who have settled in Britain. This anti-foreigner sentiment has been at the heart of the Brexit debate. It was similar 50 years ago when Powell issued his bloodcurdling 'rivers of blood' speech in Birmingham. Yet his doomsday predictions contrast with reality on the ground.

Today, 44 per cent of Birmingham's population have a migrant background with around half of that number having been born abroad. First, second and third generation migrants are at the heart of the city and make it tick. The contrast with the situation when I first came to Birmingham in 1977 is sharp. Then the city had no black or Asian councillors; the National Front was a constant menace; police relations with black and Asian residents were grim. But changes were already underway: UB40 and The Specials were about to emerge as chart-topping, mixed-race bands playing new kinds of hybrid popular music; three black footballers were making the breakthrough into top-flight football at nearby West Bromwich Albion; increasing numbers of Brummies were enjoying Indian and Chinese food in restaurants across the city. For my book, *Our City: Migrants and the Making of Modern Birmingham* I interviewed 50 migrants who have come to the city over the last 50 years and captures this transition in both the workplace and wider society.

In Birmingham, mixed workplaces are the norm: in factories and offices; hi-tech science parks and hospitals. Second and third generation migrants are increasingly present in business, public services and the professions. At Aston and Birmingham City universities around 50 per cent of the students come from ethnic minority backgrounds, many from across Greater Birmingham. A third of the city councillors are from ethnic minorities. Five per cent of the households in the city are mixed-race. The migrant experience has reshaped

Birmingham: from its football teams and terraces to its food culture; from its workplaces to its universities; from its bedrooms to its popular music. Migrants have put down roots, see Birmingham as their home and have an affection and affinity with the city and the country. Their integration has been a positive story that is replicated in many other cities. Yet liberals and socialists have been too diffident about telling this story. There is no going back to the mono-cultural world of the 1950s. People with a migrant background are here to stay. They are part of the fabric of modern Britain.

The issue now is how to make these multi-ethnic cities work. Tensions remain, worsened by a decade of wage stagnation and substantial cuts to crucial public services. A certain type of multiculturalism lapses too often into plural mono-culturalism, where some wish to retain a separate, 'fenced off' identity, with different ethnic communities living side-by-side but with little, if any, interaction. This is undoubtedly true in parts of Birmingham and some other UK towns where religious fundamentalists like Hizb-ut-Tahrir use issues such as relationship education in schools to whip up controversy and promote their agenda of separate development.

The way to defeat plural mono-culturalism is to develop an inter-cultural strategy that sees integration as a two-way process which is also dependent on the host society itself acknowledging that the process of integration means that it changes too. Inter-culturalism calls for 21st century cities that are mixed, modern and open, with strategies that combine the economic with the cultural and seek to bring together people from the inner suburbs and the outer estates.

Progress is varied but it is real. The natives don't like it, but a new, mixed country is emerging. The emerging hybridity needs a new type of politics, which can bring it together and tackle inequality in the process along with politicians who can give it clear

expression. The job of progressives is to welcome the advances of the past 50 years, consolidate them and ensure that these trends survive the Brexit imbroglio. **F**

*Jon Bloomfield is an honorary research fellow at the Institute of Local Government Studies and author of *Our City: Migrants and the Making of Modern Birmingham*, published by Unbound*



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Public dining spaces can strengthen our communities

—*Louise Delmege* and
Elliot Woodhouse

The way we grow, distribute and eat food needs to be radically transformed. The million different brands in your local supermarket might give you a dazzling choice, but is deciding which of the 10 brands of granola you'd like to eat, alone and in a rush, really the choice you want? For most of us there are fewer real options, with many of the brands on the shelves out of our price range.

The prolonged period of austerity plunged thousands of people into poverty. With poverty comes food insecurity, increased foodbank use and massively reduced choice. The market-driven distribution of food is failing to provide tasty, nutritious meals for all. Food ought to be de-commodified.

The National Food Service campaign proposes community dining as a solution that Labour needs to get behind. Cooking and eating together is more cost-effective, sustainable, and enjoyable than eating alone. Studies have shown that regularly eating alone is one of the biggest factors in mental ill-health. But eating together is a vital part of human existence that seems to have been forgotten in modern Britain.

We live in a time where public dining is conspicuously absent from our towns and cities. It was not always this way. Spaces for sharing food have a long history. From the earliest moments of civilisation, communities organised their settlements around the campfire, where they not only cooked food but socialised and played. In ancient Greece, there were grand public buildings devoted to sharing meals, where political



© Dorian Le Sénéchal/Unsplash

issues were discussed and young people were inducted into full membership of their towns and cities. The suffragettes ran neighbourhood food purchasing co-ops, and cooked food together to share the burden of women's domestic work. In both world wars, when people were hungry, or had lost their kitchens in air raids, the government organised the 'national kitchens' – public dining halls which served food for today's equivalent of £1 a head. In 1943, there were 2,160 of these, and they served 600,000 meals every day.

People come together around the dinner table. In Rojava, the threatened Kurdish region in Syria, restorative justice is currently being practiced. Rather than a punishment and prison-based system, justice in Rojava can mean two families eat together to make peace. In a country divided on Brexit, we need opportunities to step outside our immediate circles. But our public spaces, centred around spending, do not foster interactions with new people. Sitting and eating with others could break down these barriers. In public dining rooms there are hundreds of anecdotes of people building relationships with each other across the usual boundaries.

This is why activists from the Foodhall project in Sheffield have been working to develop the National Food Service campaign. Foodhall is a prototype National Food Service venue, where people from all walks of life can cook and eat food together on a 'contribute what you can' basis. Unlike a foodbank, Foodhall sees the community meal not just as emergency food provision, but as the stepping stone to a plethora of social goods. Community architecture designed around food sharing can become the backbone of flourishing, caring neighbourhoods and cities.

The word 'resilient' has become diluted by people using it to make light of government cuts. 'Resilience' cannot undo the violence of austerity – state support is needed to achieve food equality. However, in the event of climate collapse, which may well be within our lifetime, we'll need communities that know how to look after each other. Community-run dining spaces are practice for this.

There are many organisations up and down the country practicing communal dining. These include networks like FoodCycle and The Real Junk food project, Eid meals held in mosques, coffee mornings held in churches and school holiday lunch clubs. Many of these organisations redistribute food to reduce waste. The reduction of food waste, whilst vital in a society where an increasing number of people are becoming reliant on

foodbanks, is not our primary goal. Once no more food is wasted and when no one lives in poverty, communal meals will still be valuable. Cooking and eating together is not just a solution to the problems we're facing now, it's how our eating culture ought to be organised forever. We need to invest in these ideas, and transform them from local activism to a new cohesive public service. It's our hope that councils will benefit from increased budgets, allowing them to invest in community projects, giving them permanent spaces with affordable rents and protecting community space by supporting community land trusts and cooperatives.

We were thrilled when the previous shadow environment secretary Sue Hayman announced a role for 'community kitchens' in Labour's policies on food. With the party's renewed commitment to nationalised industry, we hope food remains high on the agenda. **F**

Elliott Woodhouse is a PhD candidate at the University of Sheffield working on global justice and geoeconomics. Louise Delmege is a National Food Service and Labour party activist based in Bristol



CORE CHANGES

Labour must rekindle its relationship with working-class northern voters — *Jessie Joe Jacobs*

As the world looks again to the North East to understand the political earthquake of the general election, I would like to share a few thoughts, as candidate to be Tees Valley mayor next year, about how we begin to turn the tide back to Labour. We lost three Labour MPs to the Tory party in seats which just a few years ago we would never have dreamed could turn blue. But after the last lot of local elections in May where we lost all but one council and a Conservative win in the mayoral race in 2017, maybe the writing was on the wall.

Our history is steeped in heavy industry, steel-making, ship-building and, more recently, chemical production. I love this place and I am proud to call it home, but over the years we've seen industry declining,

a transport system stuck in the dark ages, drug use, health inequalities, alcoholism and poverty rising and a failure by many governments to listen or even understand.

The outcome of this is a deep sense of powerlessness and a genuine identity crisis, particularly within our working-class communities and a sense of being ignored for too long by the political class.

It is against this backdrop that a message rooted in British national identity and taking back control became so powerful. It spoke deeply to the pain and lack of power that people feel here. To cling to an idea of a powerful nation makes you feel less powerless. To 'BeLeave in Britain', as the Brexit campaigners put it, is seductive, when you have little else to believe in. To have a strong sense of national identity when your local or personal identity is being shaken makes sense.

But it hasn't seemed to make sense to a Labour party that prides itself (rightly so) on its deep sense of internationalism, yet at times fails to understand the complexities of national identity. It doesn't make sense to a movement that seems much more comfortable with hierarchies and top-down control than it does with genuine grassroots democracy. It doesn't make sense to a party where election results have been the only game in town.

What is happening here in Teesside has similarities with what's been happening in Scotland since the independence referendum: somewhere along the line, we lost a genuine and deep relationship with our working-class communities. And now the Labour party looks increasingly out of touch with its core vote. So what do we do?

First, we must develop a shared sense of identity with our communities. We should look to embrace ideas of regionalism and localism. My campaign has a sense of strong regional pride. I offer a vision for a new Teesside – one that doesn't cling to its past but bravely faces a new future. This new sense of identity and belonging seems to be working in places like Liverpool, which have not seen the Labour losses many other post-industrial areas of the North have.

Second, we must build power in our communities and workplaces. When the current Conservative mayor won in 2017, by around 1,000 votes one of the main contributors to his success was his promise to save our small local airport. It might not seem much to those elsewhere, but people felt proud of the airport and there was a huge campaign to save it. It gave the people campaigning a sense of power, of taking back control.

In places like the Tees Valley, community organisers are absolutely vital. We need to be campaigning with communities seven days a week, from bus services to school uniform prices and from the need for more play and community green spaces to climate change. The more we can be the party that offers a sense of power, the more people will connect to us once again.

My campaign has people-powered democracy at its heart. We are developing a people's manifesto, not a policy book made by politicians in dark rooms, but a document bursting with ideas from people all across our community. We are also setting up various citizens' assemblies, which will continue to hold politicians to account on the delivery of these ideas.

Third, we must offer visible hope in our communities. Once upon a time, the Labour movement set up social clubs and youth clubs, food banks and other public services. We then turned to securing the state delivery of many of these services, or we saw them led by civic society and charities. In so doing we lost our connection with those communities. My first staff member on this campaign is a community engagement worker. Her role is to mobilise the Labour movement within our communities, organising events and community campaigns, getting people trained up on community organising basics and setting up a citizens' blog.

If we get active, get out and about, get busy representing hope and change, then we may just stand a chance of turning the tide. **F**

Jessie Joe Jacobs is Labour's candidate for the 2020 Tees Valley mayoral election



DEMOCRACY ON THE LINE

We must combat disinformation with a civil internet tax
—Areeq Chowdhury

The 2020s may well be the defining decade of disinformation. Ten years from now, we may look back and reminisce about the good old days of fake news sites, social media bots, and doctored videos. As we

enter the 2020s, we enter a world where AI-generated deepfakes will proliferate, where bots become indiscernible from real users, and where call centres are repurposed for content moderators. Meanwhile, the battle will continue between small government and big tech as both shift the burden of responsibility onto each other. "Do more," cries small government. "Tell us what to do," big tech shouts back. Can governments, and by extension, the people win in this war?

The online disinformation tactics we've seen so far have been concerning, but crude. Bots on Twitter have very distinct tells, from strings of numbers in their usernames to an obviously disingenuous profile image. Fake news websites purporting to be genuine news outlets are often patently false

The only proactive solution isn't a flashy algorithm, it's boring old tax and spending

and simple to fact-check. Generic lies and deception have existed throughout history and such tactics in politics predate the internet. Even the techniques behind so-called 'shallow fakes' – where video clips are chopped and cropped together – are at least a decade old. One of the first viral videos I can remember was a clipped-together video of Tony Blair singing "Should I stay or should I go?" – and that was uploaded back in 2006. Regulating against these fairly crude tactics, however, has proven to be challenging so far.

Given the vast majority of big tech companies are based overseas, with billions of pieces of content uploaded onto their sites every day, is it reasonable or realistic to expect UK authorities to regulate them? Imagine the thousands of abusive tweets, fake news Facebook posts, and racist Reddit threads that are posted and shared daily. Is it likely that the police in the UK will be able or willing to investigate each and every incident? The truth is, they do not have the resources or public backing to do so. It's therefore unsurprising that the answer from politicians has often been to call on the tech companies themselves to take action.

Whilst tech companies certainly do have a responsibility to ensure their platforms are safe and legal spaces, I would heavily question the notion that the responsibility for protecting our democracy online rests solely with executives in Silicon Valley and not with the institutions of Westminster.

So how do we square this circle? Imposing fines on tech giants is one option, but unless the fine is significant it would be akin to giving a parking ticket to a premiership footballer. A nuclear option could be to block websites from operating in the UK should they fail to clean up their act. We could also focus directly on the individual users who create and spread fake news, but this is problematic on a number of levels. What if we are unable to track these users down? What if the user is a prominent politician? All of these options deserve consideration, even if they are fraught with challenges. However, they all share one key characteristic, and that is the fact that they are all retrospective actions. By the time these sanctions have been imposed, the lie will have spread across the world.

The only proactive solution isn't a flashy algorithm, it's boring old tax and spending. For a while now, I have been advocating the introduction of a new 'civil internet tax', designed specifically to address the negative externalities which exist on social media platforms. The tax would have the effect of encouraging verification and transparency over the number of users each platform actually has, and the funds would help tackle the offline root causes of disinformation which social media platforms, alone, can never hope to address. This is because the revenues will be ring-fenced for investment into offline digital literacy initiatives, anti-discrimination campaigns, and the creation of a new independent internet regulator. This tax will not be predicated on profits or revenue, but as a simple tariff based on the number of users each platform has. If a platform had 30 million UK users, and the annual tariff was set at £3 per user, that platform would send £90m a year to the treasury. Such a tax would be difficult for big tech firms to avoid paying, as unlike revenues and profits which can be shifted globally, a platform either does or does not have a certain number of users in a given country.

Only by investing in offline solutions and equipping citizens with the necessary tools to sift through fact and fiction online can we best protect ourselves in the coming decade of deepfakes and disinformation. Like climate change, online disinformation is a global problem. The aspiration should, of course, be global cooperation but until then the UK can play a role domestically through the introduction of a civil internet tax. **F**

Areeq Chowdhury is head of think tank at Future Advocacy and founder of WebRoots Democracy

Picking up the pieces

The voters' verdict on Labour was brutal. *The Fabian Review* asked commentators and politicians and activists from across the labour movement for their views on what comes next for the party – and the country

Vaughan Gething AM

We cannot and must not avoid confronting the clear message from the public. They understood that Boris Johnson was a liar and they understood that he is a threat to the future of the NHS. However the public still voted for a Conservative majority. Brexit was of course a factor, with leavers and remainers not fully trusting us.

However on doorsteps across the country Jeremy Corbyn was an even bigger problem. Every canvass in every constituency came back with the same message from our core supporters. Change is inevitable and Essential. It's time we chose to listen to the public rather than ignore what we have been told. The UK Labour government we need won't be elected until we do.

Vaughan Gething is a Welsh Labour and Cooperative politician and the minister for health and social services in Wales

Shaista Aziz

Many people across the country are feeling numb, others are feeling devastated and hurt. The scale of the defeat is shocking for everyone, even for those of us who are not surprised we didn't win. I spent the last week of the election campaign canvassing in Labour's heartlands, Dudley South, and Southampton Itchen. Brexit and immigration didn't come up once in any of the conversations I had with people in Dudley South over four days of campaigning and overwhelmingly it was white men who went out of their way to engage in conversation with me.



It's time we chose to listen to the public rather than ignore what we have been told

Labour needs to now regroup and create a long-term grassroots movement, reflecting and representing the people of this country, many of whom are bracing themselves for increased racism and xenophobia. We need to develop an intersectional, grassroots, working class, anti-racism movement funded and backed by the unions and led by the people and communities most at risk of further harm unleashed by Johnson's government. We have to stand up for everyone but especially those hardest impacted by the extremist ideology of the ultra-right wing, nativist Tory party.

Crucially, there needs to be a clear acknowledgment by the party that the Labour vote has consistently held among working-class BAME communities across the country. This is important because it

shows the people most at risk voted for a more compassionate, equal and just country. They voted for hope. We still have to work as a movement to revive and deliver that hope.

Shaista Aziz is a Labour councillor in Oxford, co-vice chair of the Fabian Women's Network and co-founder of the Labour Homelessness Campaign

Paula Surridge

Parts of Labour's heartlands had been threatening to turn blue for some time, and in this election the threat became a reality as seat after seat that Labour had held throughout the post-war period fell to the Conservatives. At the start of the campaign 'Workington man' seemed like a media creation with little chance that the seat would fall. In the end the Conservatives won it comfortably. There is no doubt that this was a terrible night for the party and that in some measure this reflected the Brexit vote in these areas and the unpopularity of the Labour leader.

But it is not the whole story. Many of these places saw at best muted rises in turnout in 2017 where enthusiasm was high elsewhere and had been becoming more Conservative in recent elections. Groups of voters with more socially conservative values have been moving away from Labour since at least 2010 and while Brexit and the party leadership accelerated this process it will be critical for the success and perhaps even the survival of the party to understand how to reconnect with a broader coalition of voters. While I would not advocate a simplistic move away from the party's liberal stances,

the need to earn back trust among these groups, who are often very much in tune with Labour's economic messages, is urgent.

It is also clear this was not a wholesale realignment of politics around only the 'leave-remain' axis. If it were, the Liberal Democrats ought to have won Cheltenham and possibly Guildford. While the economic programme put forward by Labour was broadly popular among many of those in the traditional heartlands, it terrified some 'liberal' Conservatives, demonstrating the continued importance of the traditional left-right divide in constraining the choices of some voters.

In the immediate aftermath of a defeat of this magnitude it is important not to rush to snap judgements about the causes, or the solutions. The early analyses are often missing much that is going on under the surface. A pause, a deep breath and a short wait for better data about individual voters would be wise.

Paula Surridge is senior lecturer in the school of politics, sociology and international studies at the University of Bristol

Lara McNeill

The acute problem in this election, what changed from 2017 to 2019, was our Brexit position. Some might say we didn't win in 2017 – but I am yet to meet anyone who wouldn't prefer that result to this catastrophe. In 2017, we made huge strides forward, this year we have taken steps back.

Labour's path to backing a second referendum was a long one, and all support was not lost at once. But on that road, the party at all times since 2017 appeared to be edging closer to rejecting the democratic mandate of the largest referendum in our history. All the while, Euroscepticism, whether genuine or as frustration with an out-of-touch political system, grew and grew. While the constituencies that turned against Labour are not one monolithic demographic, they are united by regional inequality, compounding the decimation of their labour movement and working-class institutions by the Conservatives. No real attempt was made to reverse these things under the last Labour government. Too little focus was placed on that task by the Corbyn project. We need to be rooted in these communities, that much is clear.

Corbyn's unpopularity with the general public also can't be denied. There is a challenge for the next leader to work out how the onslaught from the right-wing media

A TREND WHICH TOOK ITS TOLL

Olivia Bailey

Labour's failure in this election was yet another reminder of the rapidly changing nature of its electoral coalition. It performed well in big cities and in strong remain areas but fell back in towns and strongly working-class areas across the North.

These trends have been evident for some time. The Fabian Society report *For the Many?*(2018) demonstrated that big cities had overtaken the most working-class seats as Labour's heartlands and warned Labour must reverse its falling support amongst those communities if it wanted to win power.

The graph below shows the changes in Labour's core support since 2005. It presents seven clusters of seats where Labour performs well and shows how much better Labour performs in those seats compared to its average vote share in England and Wales.

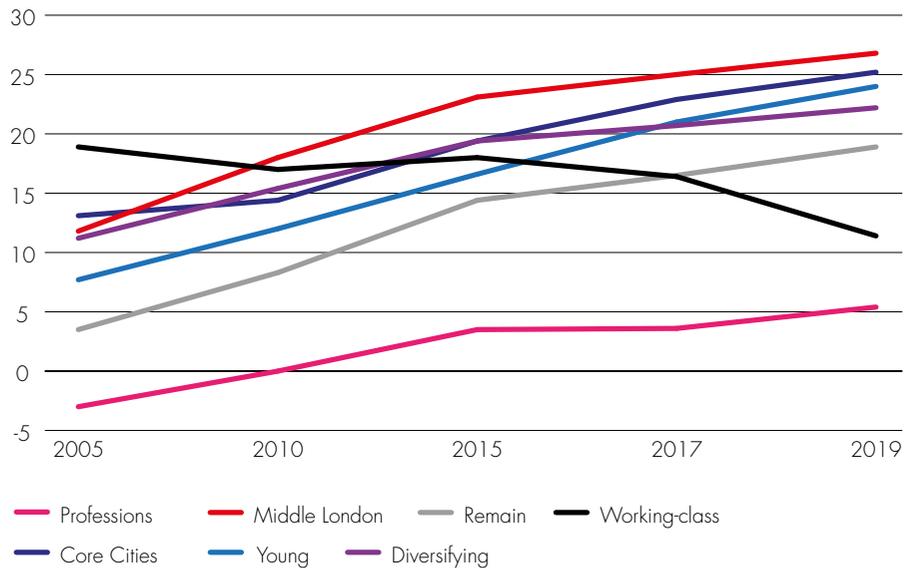
The most striking finding is that Labour's support in the 63 most working-class seats in the country has fallen significantly to just 11 points above Labour's average vote share across England and Wales. This is a dramatic worsening of a trend which has been evident for decades.

Labour's overperformance in all other clusters of strong Labour seats has continued to rise. Remarkably, this also includes the seats with the most professionals, which were five points more likely to vote Labour than the national average.

For more details on the seat clusters and for more information on Labour's changing electoral coalition see *For the Many?* at www.fabians.org.uk/publication/for-the-many/

Olivia Bailey is deputy general secretary of the Fabian Society

The difference between Labour's vote share in seven groupings of constituencies and the party's vote share across England and Wales in the same election



can be bypassed without cosyng up to billionaire owners who oppose our values.

There are internal issues to consider as well. Our poor handling of antisemitism fed into media demonisation of the party, to the point where we were perceived as more racist than the worst of the right. There has

to be a strategy of being proactive on our own issues and not being forced into action only under duress.

Labour has not completely lost the working class. Young people are voting for Labour more than ever before, not because they are inherently more progressive, but because they

are struggling to pay rent, locked in insecure work and burdened with debt with no assets. This can be the basis of class politics for years to come – as long as we build those politics not based on generational resentments but on shared circumstances impacting all working people no matter their age or where they come from.

Lara McNeill is the youth rep on Labour's National Executive Committee

Frances Ryan

This election has been bruising and toxic but it's also been inspiring and hopeful: thousands of activists took to the streets in the December cold and rain to fight for something better. The left will need all this and more to recover and rebuild.

Labour were always up against it: the juggernaut of Brexit, a campaign where Tory lies became normalised and a deeply polarising leader. But it is a devastating loss and one that shouldn't be underplayed.

The manifesto's policies were largely strong but scattergun; too many working-class voters saw the pledges as unrealistic and without a narrative that connected to their lives. Labour will need to relearn to communicate with its base and win back trust from disconnected Leave communities. It is morally right to rebuild trust with Jewish voters.

If Boris Johnson delivers Brexit and Labour reorganises, there is a chance the new Tory hold will weaken. Transformative change takes generations to achieve. Millions of people are waiting.

Frances Ryan is a Guardian columnist and author of Crippled: Austerity and the Demonisation of Disabled People

Wes Streeting MP

As a child of the 1980s who grew up on a council estate, in a single parent family relying on benefits, I understand better than most the consequences of what happens when Conservative success arises as a result of Labour's failure. When Labour loses, our people suffer.

This is the worst defeat for Labour since 1935 and our response to it must match the scale of this political crisis. In the aftermath of a defeat like this, we must tell the truth. Brexit was a big challenge for us, but it wasn't the biggest problem on the doorstep: Corbynism was. Jeremy Corbyn and his

supporters had everything they wanted: the leadership, the manifesto, the Brexit policy, the National Executive Committee and the political strategy. This defeat is theirs.

There is no hope in nostalgia, nor fresh inspiration to be found in old orthodoxies. Losing isn't radical. It is in danger of becoming normalised. No one Labour tradition has a monopoly on wisdom. The Labour party wins when, together, we turn our face firmly to the future. It's time for us to move on from Corbynism and to build a fresh centre-left politics offering change we can believe in.

Wes Streeting is the Labour MP for Ilford North

Miatta Fahnbulleh

The Labour party is still reeling from a devastating election defeat in which many of its traditional voters turned their backs on a party they had always voted for. Much will be written about what Labour did wrong in this election in the weeks and months to come. But the one thing the party did right was to grasp the scale of the economic and environmental challenge the country faces and offer ambitious solutions in response. Against the backdrop of the longest squeeze in living standards for generations, economic growth that has passed many communities by, entrenched poverty and a climate emergency; Labour offered up a prospectus that began to rise to the challenge. It wasn't perfect and there were flaws in its plan, but it would have undoubtedly begun the process of transforming our economy. Those eager to reject Jeremy Corbyn and everything he stood for would be wrong to abandon this ground.

But Labour must also learn from this election. Policies that are individually popular with voters simply did not cut through, in part because they were pitched as a series of give-aways with no clear story about the change Labour was seeking to create. A 10-year economic agenda was crammed into a programme for one parliament and voters rightly questioned whether it could all be delivered. Critically, too much of the change that Labour sought to achieve was top-down. Rather than pushing power out to root change in communities, it sought change through an expanded national state with regional offices. For communities distrustful of Westminster and disconnected

from national government, Labour failed to tell the story of how it could deliver radical change by giving them more say to make it happen.

Labour's route back to power lies in building on, not binning, its answers to the problems the country faces. But its response must move on from a top-down formula that isn't sufficiently rooted in the lives of the people it seeks to change.

Miatta Fahnbulleh is the chief executive of the New Economics Foundation

Tom Gardiner

The result of the general election has cast the future of the NHS into uncertainty. Rightly, our National Health Service was a central issue in the campaign and one which I think Labour managed to maintain the upper hand on. Of special note was the sheer number of NHS workers who spoke up publicly about their experiences in an underfunded and understaffed healthcare system; social media was littered with testimonials from staff up and down the country. Likewise, activists were well-versed in making local NHS cutbacks a key talking point on the doorstep. But ultimately, this wasn't enough. The lessons we learn from inward reflection and discussions with swing voters will be crucial in optimising the left's approach to policymaking and campaigning around the NHS going forward.

Soon we will be entering a winter which, by all accounts, is set to be one of the worst since records began. In the week of the election every single major accident and emergency department in the country failed to meet waiting time targets for the first time ever. We need to develop a formidable strategy for communicating the significance of these performance figures, including the rebuttal of accompanying spin from the Conservative party. This means maintaining an impressive level of NHS staff and patient testimonials; engaging regional and national media will be crucial to this. We will also need to develop networks of NHS staff so that workers feel supported in voicing their concerns.

And then there were the scores of NHS pledges made by the Conservative party during the election. They promised 40 new



hospitals, record investment, 50,000 more nurses and a plan to fix social care. All of these received their due scrutiny at the time, but we must now be unrelenting in holding the Conservatives to account on each and every one of their misleading pledges.

Whilst this is undeniably a difficult period, it is also a time for exciting new policy and the Fabian Society has the opportunity to play a pivotal role in the development of Labour's new health and social care agenda. The NHS will not cease to be at the centre of political debate, and you can expect it to be just as central an issue at the next election. So, get involved in the Fabian Health Network now to be part of an important movement in the years to come.

Dr Tom Gardiner is a Fabian executive committee member and co-chair of the Fabian Health Network

Catriona Munro

Scottish Labour has suffered punishing electoral defeats before but this feels worse; there is so much at stake. Scotland is divided not just by opinions on Brexit but also by independence. The conundrum that Scotland now faces is that the harder the Brexit, the more likely independence becomes; yet the harder the Brexit, then the harder the border between England and Scotland and the more economically damaging independence could be. What is clear from the general election result is that there is a majority for remaining in the EU; it is less clear that there is a majority for independence. Labour's position on the EU was, for many Scottish voters, reached too late and too reluctantly to chime with them. Jeremy Corbyn's leadership was undoubtedly the main reason for the dreadful electoral showing last Thursday but fixing that will not fix Scottish Labour.

Labour has long argued that Scotland can have the best of both – control in Scotland of most public services but an integrated UK-wide market. With Brexit (and probably a hard one) now all but inevitable and a further referendum on independence likely, Scottish Labour needs to consider what its offer now is. For those struggling to put food on the table tonight, a promise to oust Boris Johnson in five years' time will offer little comfort. They may well conclude that the risks of independence are now worth taking, weighed in the balance against at least five years of Tory rule.

Had Labour won the election, it might have been possible to stop Brexit and radically reform the UK's constitution to modernise it

and to distribute power beyond London. Had that happened, calls for Scottish independence could have been assuaged. The election has changed the game; Scottish Labour will need to change too.

Catriona Munro is the chair of Scottish Fabians

James Frith

On a night when national headwinds and questions of leadership were too overwhelming, in Bury North we were within an inch of holding on. We lost by just 105 votes and 0.2 per cent, bucking the national trend on performance and becoming the most marginal seat in the country. It's a seat that felt desperately ready to stay Labour despite being a marginally higher leave seat than the country's 2016 referendum result. As it turned out, only 53 people needed to vote Labour instead of Tory and we'd have won.

At eight in every 10 doors voters raised with us their problem with our leadership. Brexit featured far fewer times (two out of 10). We found even those ready to vote for Labour, or for me personally, would then ask that we promise the leader wouldn't stay on or become prime minister. The die was cast on Jeremy Corbyn for too many. A drop-down menu of reasons was cited back to us: neutral on Brexit, dithering on decisions, the failure to manage the abhorrent antisemitism in our midst, bullied MPs, poor on security, inadequate response to the Skripal incident, a nuanced position on imprisoned convicted terrorists serving their full term just a day after the latest London attack

whilst we fought a general election campaign. Campaigners' efforts felt undermined by refusals to apologise on TV or for the snap announcement to be neutral on Brexit. Each day a new broom was needed to sweep up the mess left overnight when confronted with voters' latest concerns.

The risk with these summaries is they can be misread as personal opinion and not personal experience. My view though is that we've felt this was coming for too long and continued to hurl ourselves and free stuff at the 'red wall' in the hope of getting its attention. I have pledged to listen further still and I will ensure that this experience of the most marginal seat in England features prominently in the reflections to come for the party I love and still wish to represent in parliament. For those that still want me I have said, hold on and remain faithful, as I will.

Lastly, my challenge to all leadership candidates; you should not expect to become leader of our blessed party without passing the marginal seat test. Patently, our leaders and policies are not forged in the white heat of a marginal seat. Yet this is what frames our electoral system and is the only gateway back to winning in the country. So I am inviting every leader and deputy leader candidate to Bury North to take a walkabout with me, do a public meeting and answer the concerns of everyday life in Britain, away from the protective, sound-proof majorities that so many of those confident in our victory before now, have returned to. **F**

James Frith was the Labour MP for Bury North

Longer versions of some of these articles can be found at www.fabians.org.uk

ENERGY TO REBUILD

Florence Eshalomi MP

I have really mixed emotions about the general election result. I am absolutely devastated to have lost so many excellent colleagues from Westminster and I feel unbearably sad that we let down those people that desperately need a Labour government. But as a new MP elected for the first time, I am also excited about the opportunity to serve and humbled by the trust that my constituents have placed in me. There are 26 new Labour MPs and we bring new energy and ideas and as the results have sunk in, I feel a huge sense of responsibility to play my part in rebuilding a Labour party that can challenge this

government and win back the keys to Downing Street. I will strive to ensure that as we look to the future, we do it in an inclusive way, that we put an end to the factional in-fighting which has torn our party apart and build an outward-looking pluralist party which is tolerant and open. The Labour party can once again be the party for working people if we can come together, listen, reflect and focus on how we deliver a fairer, more equal society for the many not the few.

Florence Eshalomi is the newly elected Labour MP for Vauxhall



What next for Brexit?

By *Eloise Todd*

BARRING A POLITICAL earthquake of Trumpian impeachment proportions, Britain will be leaving the European Union in 2020 – stage one of the break-up with the EU will happen on 31 January.

The general election was a brutal end to a three-year struggle to keep a foot in the door to full membership of the EU. Despite the election outcome, support for a final say on Brexit for the people of this country has increased both in parliament and in the electorate over the last couple of years. But when the trigger was pulled on the election race, the delicate opposition coalition that had been diligently working towards securing a final say was blown apart by the surprise Lib Dem backing for Johnson's election.

In the campaign, clarity and decisiveness of message won out. 'Get Brexit done' was as seductive as 'take back control' – and of course although it was dubbed the Brexit election, any general election is fought on the full range of policies, and the Conservatives stole just enough Labour clothes to obscure their naked austerity, and Labour's manifesto, with some inspiring and visionary policies, failed the credibility sniff test with too many older voters.

Labour had finally got to a clear position on Brexit – in favour of a referendum on a credible, softer Brexit option versus remain, with the leadership staying neutral and so neither side being 'Brexit-shamed' in a future referendum campaign. In the end though, the position was only clear-ish. Earlier clarity would have allowed more time to communicate the final say policy to the public.

Sand in the gears of the remain effort came from many quarters, from the Liberal Democrats' abandonment of support for a referendum in favour of revoke, to the 'Unite to Remain' effort that gained no seats for its three parties (and lost one for the Lib Dems) to some tactical vote websites that called too early and sowed confusion. The net result of all that activity was to obscure the central priority for all those that cared about staying in the EU: the hardest fight was always going to be in the Labour-Conservative marginals, and those wanting to stay in the EU needed Labour victory in those places. As those voters and seats increased in relevance, the movement to stay in the EU slipped further away from them.

In the end the goodwill built between opposition parties in late August and September that successfully opposed Johnson at his most 'Viktor Orbanesque' splintered just at the crucial moment. Instead we had confusion and rivalry.

So what do the anti-Brexit campaigners, supporters of a referendum, the citizens who have protested in their hundreds of thousands – topping a million more than once – do next?

First, holding the government accountable this year – and right up to 2024 – has never been more important.

It's never been more important to mobilise. Our country needs us

There is a place for strong Brexit accountability campaign this year, especially since the government may bring the spectre of 'no deal' back into play in order to bounce the country and Europe into its desired trade deal. The anti-Brexit movement should have always been a convening place for the businesses and civil society organisations that would lose out because of Brexit, but all too often those groups have given the government a free pass on Brexit, fearing that overt criticism of plans would affect their access to ministers. One of the most worrying trends in the UK over the past few years is the lack of willingness of most civil society organisations and businesses to speak truth to power. If that was the case with a government with only a slim majority based on a confidence and supply arrangement, it could be worse with a majority government.

Organisations that will confront the prime minister and the Cabinet with the truth will be more important than ever – and the anti-Brexit groups that have already signalled they will be moving into this space should also work hard to get influential figures in business and

society to speak out without fear or favour. While the next year will mean putting in very hard yards, all such groups should have an eye to the future and be ready to pounce when the mortar in Johnson's newly grouted blue wall begins to crumble and as the wheels on the get Brexit done bus start to fall off. When manufacturing jobs go in the newly Tory areas which were formerly Labour heartlands, sacrificed to a US trade deal, Johnson will be under pressure. If the UK fails to use all its remaining diplomatic muscle to change the course of the global climate negotiations and ends up siding with Bolsanaro and Trump, Johnson will be under even more pressure.

Second, if you share Labour values, join Labour and make the leadership election the biggest primary our country has ever seen.

Right now, joining Labour should be an act of political responsibility. Holding the government accountable on Brexit, human rights, fighting racism, protecting workers' rights, keeping up ambition on the environment, and creating jobs for the future in skilled green jobs, tech and managing the AI revolution needs to be taken on wholesale by the next leader of the Labour party. It's time for those from all parts of the left to come together, join or rejoin and help create a vision for the country that is internationalist to the core, and gets older voters on board while satisfying the hunger of young people for a different future.

The early days of the movement to fight Brexit were confused by the conflicting and multiple agendas around the table for many of those involved. The desire to establish a new centrist party, to fight Corbyn both within and outside the Labour party and to make the case for voting reform obscured the effectiveness of the anti-Brexit fight. All of that in-fighting needs to be boxed off and kept in the past, and the opportunity now centres on the ability of the party to move on from those deep visceral divisions and unite.

In the five short years to the next election, the demographics of Britain's voting public will have changed radically, with millions of new young, deeply concerned and internationalist voters entering the fray and many who have found solace from a fast-changing world in isolationism departing the field. That new cohort needs to know there is an option for them, and more established Tory voters need to see that there is a case for a more progressive response to their concerns.

If ever a government needed an effective opposition, it is this one. It's never been more important to mobilise. Our country needs us. **F**

Eloise Todd is a political and campaign strategist and co-founder and former chief executive of Best for Britain



The leadership factor

Corbyn and his team are to blame for Johnson's crushing electoral victory. Labour's next leader must be far shrewder in the game of British party politics, writes *Andy Price*



Andy Price has a PhD in political theory and has written for the national and international media on UK politics

IT WASN'T SUPPOSED to end this way. After four years of Corbynism, and nearly four years of a Conservative government tearing itself to pieces over Brexit, the general election of 2019 was not expected to produce the largest Tory majority since Margaret Thatcher's in 1987. Under normal circumstances, it is extremely difficult for an incumbent government, in power for almost a decade, to win a fourth election in a row. It is even more difficult for a government to do so if they have governed badly, which is undeniable over the last three and a half years of turmoil.

So what happened in this election that ended up giving Boris Johnson an 80-seat majority and left the Labour party trying to pick up the pieces of its worst election performance since 1935? No matter that many people in the party are already looking to blame external factors in this historic defeat, in politics and in life, the only real place to

start in the face of such failure is to look at ourselves – and it is in analysing these failures that we may find the seeds of a recovery for the Labour party.

Our starting point for this analysis is both very simple and yet profound in consequence. Since Corbyn came to the leadership, the Labour party has failed consistently to do the one thing we have needed it to do most since David Cameron won his majority: to oppose as the party of opposition.

We see this no more clearly than throughout the weeks of this campaign. In the face of a Tory campaign based on almost zero policy and outright mendacity, there was no meaningful resistance on the details. Labour could have made the lies of Johnson and his team the central plank of its campaign. The party could have built an entire campaign around how Johnson was lying to them, on 'get Brexit done', on nurse numbers and so on.

Johnson was clearly playing on his personality cutting through; Corbyn, rather than insisting on 'not doing the personal', should have met Johnson on the same playing field and focused on the failings of that very personality.

Of course, at the root of this weak campaign is the Labour party's lack of any meaningful opposition for the last three and a half years on Brexit. Yes, the Labour party had no easy options on Brexit, having to speak to its large numbers of leave and remain voters at the same time. But as we have long known in electoral politics, equivocation is not a good look – and Corbyn and his team have equivocated since 2016.

This is why the Brexit position taken during the campaign – negotiate a new deal with the EU, put it the people in a new referendum, with Corbyn remaining neutral in the referendum campaign – failed spectacularly to hold up. It might have been an eminently sensible policy to bring a divided nation back together – indeed, in my opinion, it was one of the more grown-up and serious policies in the whole campaign – but it withered on the vine on the back of three and half years of prevarication and obfuscation on Brexit.

This lack of opposition extended also to the Labour party's own manifesto. Packed with policy ideas, a lot of them extremely popular, and nearly all of them framed as a move away from the last 10 years of austerity – and even the last 20 years of centrism – the manifesto was not pushed hard enough as the radical break it represented. Often the ideas were discussed only in the abstract, in an almost virtual political theory classroom. Many of the policies were seemingly thrown out there to see if they would fly – almost as if the Labour leadership treated the entire election campaign as a focus group.

These ideas needed much, much more than that. Nationalisation, abolition of tuition fees, repaying WASPI women – all of these ideas embodied end-of-an-era-type shifts away from austerity and from the shrunken state spending ushered in by Margaret Thatcher, to something totally different. Even if voters find these things appealing – which they clearly did in 2017 and many still do in 2019 – such era-shifting ideas need careful, meticulous selling.

Supporters of such ideas amongst the electorate have spent the last 10 years (and perhaps the last 30 years) being told there is not enough money to go around, that if the government spends too much, the country will be on the verge of bankruptcy. A long-standing narrative such as this that makes individual voters and families worry for their own economic security cannot be reversed simply by having a list of policies that propose spending on a massive scale. You can cost them all to the final penny, but you still need to explain to voters why this once in a generation shift in public spending and politics generally is both necessary and nothing to worry about.

What is the other element that is required if the Labour party wants to make these policies into an election-winning platform? The truth is, it is the one thing that will be perhaps the most difficult for the Labour party to find

as it recovers from this defeat: the commensurate level of strategic, political leadership in the UK polity of the 2020s. You can have the most popular ideas the country has ever seen, but you need the ability to sell those ideas. Ideas never sell themselves. They have to be packaged in a narrative that makes sense and pushed by a leader that people can believe in.

Like it or not, whatever side of the Labour party you stand on, Jeremy Corbyn and his team were incapable of providing such leadership. As we have heard already in the post-mortem on Labour's campaign, it is accurate to say the odds are stacked against the Labour party: the conservative wing of the press is against them, industry, business and finance have in-built resistance to any parties committed to strong policies of redistribution.

But the fact that these things are true does not absolve Corbyn and his team. These things are true for all Labour leaders, and the leadership thus needs to work within a system that is so tilted. And this Corbyn categorically failed to do. He failed to play the game of UK party politics. In response to any criticism, he exuded the air of the righteous fringe activist he has always been: "Ah, here they go again, with their unthinking political biases and games," he seemed to say. Indeed, he treated the entire antisemitism issue in this way: "This is just 'them' – the media, the establishment, The Tories, whoever – trying to discredit me."

This inflexibility has been writ large across all of Corbyn's media interviews as leader. He came across consistently as self-righteous, often sanctimonious and condescending – and in no area was this more damaging (and unforgivable) than on the question of antisemitism in the party. But these were the most basic of political mistakes – it is difficult to imagine how anyone could think they could get away with this in British politics, post-Alastair Campbell and New Labour. Communication is everything in high-level politics; Corbyn treated it as a nuisance.

To turn this around, Labour has to play the game of politics far more cunningly and shrewdly. It has to find a way to sell its ideas – its strong and popular ideas – to win votes, not just arguments, in an arena where the odds are stacked against it. It has to find ways to call out the mendacity of the Conservative party not only over what it promised in this election, but also, perhaps more importantly, over Brexit.

Finally, to do all of this, you need the one magic ingredient that we have known to be essential in modern politics, at least since Machiavelli. Like it or lump it, you need a charismatic, skilful leader at the top of the leadership team, one with an agile mind and an ability to speak to more than just one audience. Corbyn speaking to large crowds of Corbyn supporters is not this.

Whether the Labour party can find this leader from within its ranks remains to be seen, particularly if the Corbyn team has a hand in picking the next leader. But find this leader and leadership it must, if it wants to maintain any hope of overturning Johnson's crushing electoral victory. ■

Labour has to find a way to sell its strong and popular ideas to win votes, not just arguments

Making change happen

After a campaign characterised by fantasy wishlists and cynical manipulation, it is time for Labour to embrace a more robust approach to reform, writes *Charles Clarke*



The Rt Hon Charles Clarke was the Labour MP for Norwich South from 1997 to 2010. He served as education secretary and home secretary. He is now visiting professor in politics at the Policy Institute of Kings College London and in politics and faith at Lancaster University

WE HAVE ALL just experienced a general election campaign marked by stunning promises, enormous aspirations and giddy financial assertions. All the parties combined their own fantastical rhetoric with withering and often dishonest attacks upon the character and credibility of their opponents and their plans. It was all pretty depressing, however you feel about the final outcome.

What was notably lacking from all parties was clarity about the ways in which they would implement the ambitions which they were happy to trumpet.

Their manifestos – by convention the places where the parties would set out both their goals and the mechanisms by which these would be put into effect – were all almost bereft of any detail about how the policies would be carried through. The information which electors, and indeed any informed commentators, needed in order to make their judgements of the promises of the opposing parties was simply absent.

Over the last five years or so this absence of detail and process has come to characterise democratic politics in many countries where ‘fake news’ and sharply targeted social media, rather than open debate and the contest of ideas, now characterise the political fight within a sharply partisan media.

The traditional discussions and debates, for example those on the left between ‘revolutionary change’ and ‘Fabian gradualism’, have now given way to a simple contest of aspirations, hardly challenged at all in open debate.

This developing lack of connection between over-optimistic desires and policy delivery is highly dangerous for the stability of democracy since it builds a serious disconnection between the desires and ambitions of the people and governments’ actual achievements. This fuels cynicism and distrust at precisely the time when confidence and a demonstrable sense of purpose are so essential.

This lack of connection between over-optimistic desires and policy is highly dangerous for the stability of democracy

Excellent past examples of raising false expectations can be seen in a highly contested and incendiary field of policy – immigration: Gordon Brown’s infamous pledge of ‘British jobs for British workers’ and David Cameron’s utterly dishonest and unimplementable pledge to ‘reduce net migration to less than 100,000 a year’.

Neither of these commitments were ever capable of being implemented and of course they never were, not even close. But the fact that they were stated by authoritative prime ministers led people to the not unreasonable belief that they were attainable. And so expectations were raised, built up and then dashed, with cynicism increased, anger at the failures more manifest, a sense of ‘establishment conspiracy’ enhanced and political alienation of substantial numbers of voters signally increased.

Such mistakes laid the basis for the 2016 referendum which millions of those alienated voters took as their opportunity to strike back at those who had misled them and their political conduct. That Brexit decision sent the country down the slippery slope of removing many of the roots and foundations of our democratic political and parliamentary culture.

This process has intensified at the 2019 election. Cynical manipulation, such as the Conservatives’ creation of doctored videos and their own ‘factchecker’ Twitter link, has deepened.

And all the parties have made enormous, almost unimaginable, spending pledges. The ‘magic money tree’ has been reinvented with a vengeance, including everything from 20,000 extra police officers and the abolition of student tuition fees to unfunded reductions in national insurance and universal free access to broadband. This fantasy wishlist can only lead to policy failure and disappointment.

So it is beyond time to re-establish the Fabian tradition of well thought-out policies and well thought-out routes to putting them into effect.

That is the best way to stand against fake news, against the ignorant and vicious denigration of ‘experts’ and for



a politics of integrity. From Labour's point of view it is also the best way to challenge the perception of Labour incompetence which was a core reason for the party's extremely poor performance. It is worth recalling that throughout Labour's long history the party has only been able to claim the electorally vital mantle of economic competence between about 1996 and 2008, though at some points, for example after 'Black Wednesday' in 1992 and in their adherence to an economically incoherent Brexit, the Conservatives' deep incompetence has mitigated Labour's weakness.

So what steps should be taken to build a programme of reforms which can really be implemented and restore confidence in politics? The journey from policy speech to green paper, then white paper and then legislation and implementation is long and difficult. Reform can only be successfully carried through with top-class preparation.

First in each policy area the problem to be addressed needs to be clearly identified. There should be precision about the reform's goals and intentions, with no confusion of ends and means.

This needs accurate language to ensure transparency. So, for example on taxation, it needs to be recognised that a commitment not to increase the standard rate of income tax is different from a commitment not to raise the overall level of taxation. Or on school performance a commitment to reduce the number of poorly performing schools is not the same as increasing the number of children with good GCSE results. Reducing NHS waiting lists is not the same as lowering the number of deaths from cancer or cardiac failure. And reducing levels of crime is not the same as employing more police officers.

In all of these cases, and many more, increased public spending may well be neither a necessary nor a sufficient

condition for making change happen. In some cases, increasing public spending may not change any outcomes at all. And in many areas increased public spending will only make a difference if accompanied by substantial reform of the way in which services are delivered.

Second, once the policy goal has been clearly stated, its proposed solution needs to be lucidly set out. To repeat, ends must not be confused with means. The function of institutions and organisations must always be guided by their current or future purposes and not their past roles.

This is very tough since there will probably be strongly differing views about how best to achieve the policy goal: Nationalisation or regulation? Stronger local government or new national agencies (such as the 'National Education Service')? Increased taxation or borrowing money? and many more such dilemmas.

Then, third, we need to be clear that we do properly understand the challenge of implementing the solution which has been identified.

There will always be strong vested interests which need to be either placated or overcome (remember Nye Bevan's 'stuffing the doctors' mouths with gold' to get to the goal of establishing a National Health Service in 1948). And in a modern democracy the power of an oppositional vested interest is even greater. The losers from any reform will always be far more vocal and committed than the potential beneficiaries.

And, particularly since the enactment of the Human Rights Act in 1998, it is essential for any proposed policy reform to analyse and then successfully circumnavigate whatever legal constraints there may be. In our globalised world no policy reform can succeed without understanding the international dimension, which is more pervasive than some think.

And finally, fourth, any reforming government needs to be clear how it will address the vicissitudes of the political process, notably the precise parliamentary arithmetic in a context of lower levels of party discipline than in the past, a weaker manifesto framework than used to be conventional, a more activist House of Lords, and a sensationalist media with diminishing space for reasonably rational and objective policy discussion.

These four steps can be daunting for any reforming government. It is very difficult to sustain reforming political energy and creativity within a political system based on adversarial politics and the duty of an opposition to oppose. Mistakes will inevitably be made which will debilitate and erode confidence. There is certainly a good case for building a more consensual political system but we are a long way from that now.

The best way of minimising these risks is to start from a hard-headed policy analysis in all fields, on the basis which I describe above. This is what the Fabians have demonstrated throughout their history, most notably in preparation for the Attlee administration.

That analysis, rather than overblown and overoptimistic policy pledges, is the best way for Labour to re-establish the confidence of the population, to end the pervasive cynicism about politics and to regain the democratic power to rebuild the strong society which this country now needs even more than before this general election was called. **F**

Smarter politics

To defeat Donald Trump in the presidential elections, the Democrats will need a common sense approach. *Ruy Teixeira* looks at which of the candidates is best-placed to deliver



*Ruy Teixeira is a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. His most recent book is *The Optimistic Leftist: Why the 21st Century Will Be Better Than You Think**

LOOKING FORWARD TO 2020, Democrats have a lot of very important questions that can reasonably be debated, from the specific candidate to nominate, to which issues to emphasise, to the best campaign tactics. But there is a need for political common sense to undergird these debates. If polling, trend data, campaign history and electoral arithmetic make clear that certain approaches are minimum requirements for success, they should be front-loaded into the discussion. That way discussion can focus on what is truly important instead of endlessly relitigating questions that are essentially settled.

In other words, start with common sense and then build from there. There will still be plenty of room for debate between left and right in the party, but matters of common sense should be neither left nor right. They are simply what is and what anyone's strategy, whatever their political leanings, must take into account.

Let's call practitioners of this approach 'Common Sense Democrats'. Here are seven propositions Common Sense Democrats should agree on.

1. Of course, Democrats need to reach persuadable white working-class voters. There is abundant evidence that such voters exist, that they were particularly important in the 2018 elections, that such voters have serious reservations about Trump and that they are central to a winning electoral coalition in 'rustbelt states' like Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. Shifts among such voters do not have to be large to be effective.
2. Naturally then, Democrats need to target the rustbelt. Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin were the closest states in 2016, gave the Democrats big bounceback victories in 2018 and, of states Clinton did not win in 2016, currently give Trump the lowest approval ratings.
3. As you would expect, Democrats need to promote as high turnout as possible among supportive constituencies like nonwhites and younger voters. But evidence indicates that high turnout is not a panacea and cannot be substituted for persuasion efforts.
4. Without doubt, Democrats need to compete strongly in southern and southwestern swing states like Arizona, Florida, Georgia and North Carolina. Recent election results, trend data and Trump approval ratings all

indicate that these states are accessible to Democrats – though less so than the key rustbelt states. As such, they form a necessary complement to rustbelt efforts but not a substitute.

5. Of course, Democrats need to run on more than denouncing Trump and Trump's racism. One lesson of the 2016 campaign is that it is not enough to 'call out' Trump for having detestable views. That did not work then and it is not likely to work now. Democrats' 2018 successes were based on far more than that, effectively employing issue contrasts that disadvantaged the GOP. Trump will be happy to have an unending conversation about those he loves to denounce – 'criminal' immigrants, radical Congresswomen like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and anyone who denounces his denunciations. We must not let him.
6. It is obvious that Democrats should not run against Trump with positions that are unambiguously unpopular. These include, but are not limited to, abolishing ICE (the immigration and customs enforcement agency), reparations for the descendants of slaves, abolishing private health insurance and decriminalising the border with Mexico. Whatever merits such ideas may have as policy – and these are generally debatable – there is strong evidence that they are quite unpopular with most voters and therefore will operate as a drag on the Democratic nominee.
7. Needless to say, Democrats should focus on what will maximize their probability of beating Trump. By this I mean there are plenty of strategies that have some chance of beating Trump – if such and such happens, if such and such goes right (cutting-edge progressive positions produce high turnout among Democratic voters but not among Republicans). You can always tell a story. But the important thing is: what *maximises* your chance of victory, given what we know about political trends and the current state of public opinion. In this election, Democrats can afford nothing less.

So who are the Common Sense Democrats among the Democrats vying for the presidential nomination and the chance to defeat Trump? First, a very brief review of the state of the nomination race.

Joe Biden, Barack Obama's vice-president, has led the Democratic race nationally since he first entered the contest in late April of this year. However, he is far down from his peak level of support of around 40 per cent in polling averages and is now consistently in the high 20s. Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren has recently been holding down second place, averaging around 20 per cent support, a dramatic improvement from June when she was still under 10 per cent. Vermont senator Bernie Sanders is very close to Warren, recently polling in the high teens. Far behind these three is South Bend mayor Pete Buttigieg at around 8 per cent and California senator Kamala Harris at around 4 per cent. All the other candidates are under 3 per cent.

Note however that Biden is not leading in either of the two earliest primary states, Iowa and New Hampshire, which have very white and very liberal primary electorates (Buttigieg is currently leading in Iowa and Warren in New Hampshire). These states have traditionally played an outsize role in nomination race dynamics though that may be less true today than in the past.

Do these leading candidates qualify as Common Sense Democrats? The record is spotty. For example, on 'Medicare for all', both Sanders and Warren – who previously had been fairly cagey on the issue – have committed themselves to abolishing private health insurance; an unpopular position which could weaponise the health care issue for Trump and sink a Democratic candidate. Harris also declared her support for this approach in an early debate, but has since backtracked her position considerably. Biden's and Buttigieg's positions amount to Medicare for all (who want it) with private insurance remaining as an option, which public opinion data suggest is quite popular.

Candidates have been vague about abolishing ICE, but they are aggressively competing with one another on how leniently to deal with border issues. In their zeal to show how much they oppose Trump's cruelty on the issue, most candidates, with the exception of Biden, have signed onto the idea that illegal border crossing should be decriminalised. Like abolishing ICE, this is likely to sound to many voters like open borders, which is a terrible position for a Democratic candidate to take. Public opinion data show that Americans want their borders to be controlled, with limits on the amount of immigration and asylum-seeking. If Democrats have a humane and workable way to deal with these issues, voters need to hear this, rather than proposals that sound like calls for much looser borders.



As for reparations, most talk about it has been vague, but all the leading candidates have signed onto the idea of at least studying the issue for possible future action. It is unclear that voters will make the distinction between the policy (massively unpopular) and merely studying the issue.

Overall, Biden seems closest to the profile of a Common Sense Democrat. He has mostly avoided taking positions that would be clear liabilities in a general election context. He is also clearly committed to reaching persuadable white working-class voters, particularly in the rustbelt, and has a persona that may well appeal to these voters in a way that other candidates may not. He also is well-liked by black voters, certainly a key turnout target for Democrats in 2020.

On the other hand, he does not appear to be generating much enthusiasm on the campaign trail and is noticeably lacking in appeal to younger voters, critical for the Democrats' chances in 2020. He also has raised concerns about his ability to stand up to withering Republican attacks, especially those that will be levelled at him by an opponent of unlimited pugnacity like Trump. His performances in debates and other

venues do not inspire confidence in this regard.

Of the other leading candidates, Buttigieg is closest to Biden in embodying a Common Sense Democrat. However, as a cerebral 37-year-old gay mayor of a small city, it is quite unclear how strongly he will appeal to nonwhites – central to the Democrats' base – and white working-class voters – their central persuasion target.

Sanders and Warren are more exciting candidates and Warren, especially, is viewed by many as the most probable nominee due to her forward momentum and dynamic campaigning (Sanders is seen as more of a niche candidate). Warren, as noted, has staked out quite a few positions that put her outside of Common Sense Democrat territory. She has also showed limited appeal to nonwhites and working-class white voters, doing by far the best among college-educated white liberals. If she was the nominee that could change, but some of the positions she has taken and her strenuously progressive persona could make that difficult.

Of course, it's still early days. This is, for sure, a nomination process – and a candidate like Warren can conceivably tack back to the centre in the general election and recant or 'clarify' their unpopular issue positions. But that's easier said than done, especially when such pains have been taken to delineate positions in detail. It is wiser to give your enemy as little ammunition as possible. That is a stricture that the Democratic candidates as a group have done a poor job of observing. **F**

The people's champion

Keir Hardie played a towering role in the foundation of the Labour party. *Pauline Bryan* explores what his story can tell us today



Pauline Bryan is a Labour peer and editor of a new book, Keir Hardie and the 21st Century Socialist Revival, published by Luath Press, priced £9.99

THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR Party (ILP) and the Fabian Society were both involved in the founding meeting of the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900. With the attendance of the Social Democratic Federation and some trade unions, every strand within the movement was represented in what marked the birth of the modern Labour party.

The LRC was the culmination of years of campaigning led by Keir Hardie to persuade the trade unions to support an independent Labour party, rather than rely on a few trade union members being selected as Liberal candidates to represent working people.

By 1906 when the title 'the Labour party' was adopted, the role of activists from the ILP tradition was vital to its success. The founding meeting took place in Bradford rather than London in recognition of the activist base in the north of England. The Taff Vale judgement of 1901 – which essentially made strikes impossible – had encouraged more unions to become involved and the link with the trade union movement was recognised as central to the new party's future.

For the first 30 years of its existence, the leaders of the Labour party were manual workers, with little formal education but often great orators. This, you could say, was the ILP influence. From 1935, the elected party leaders have been more in the Fabian mould with all but three of them graduates of Oxbridge or ancient Scottish universities.

Hardie is often nowadays presented in a sentimental way and photos usually portray him as an old man with sad eyes. His speeches and writing show that his own experiences had made him sensitive to the misery of the lives of many women and children and the damage done to the lives of men, but his main emotion wasn't sadness – it was anger.

For many years his was a lone voice in the House of Commons. He was surrounded by people who despised him and all he stood for. He probably had the least formal education of anyone in the House; he had at first no parliamentary party to support him, yet he had the courage

to stand alone and to rebuke the other members for their callousness and sycophancy.

His speeches, whether about mining disasters, unemployment, the oppression of working people, the rights of children or women's suffrage, were often accompanied by boos and catcalls from the Tory and Liberal benches – and sometimes even from his own.

He described the House of Commons 'as a place which I remember with a haunting horror'. Yet he knew he had to take the fight there, even though he was more at ease campaigning in the country, travelling across the globe and writing his column for children in the Labour Leader newspaper

Keir Hardie's place in history is well known, but what is his relevance to the present day? I would argue that Hardie's experience and his writings have much to tell us in every area where people are in struggle. Hardie spoke directly to young people and encouraged them to have a voice in politics. He would recognise the campaigning zeal of climate change activists and welcome school-age kids into the movement.

His own earliest involvement in the Labour movement was as a trade union activist which resulted in him and his brothers being blacklisted from work in the Scottish mines. Zero-hours contracts and the gig economy are the daily experience of many working people and are not that different from the insecurity in Hardie's day when the master hired workers on a daily basis at the factory or dock gate.

Local government was a central struggle at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. In the early years of the ILP when many women, who had no voice in parliament, devoted their energies to winning improvements through councils, school boards and local welfare committees, Hardie campaigned for municipal socialism. It is an idea that needs rediscovering, as local government in the 21st century has sadly lost much of its radicalism. But there is a glimmer of hope coming out of Preston where the 'Preston model' is using local government to revive the local economy. It is Hardie's municipal socialism in action today.

Hardie spoke directly to young people and encouraged them to have a voice in politics

One issue close to my heart is Hardie's opposition to an unelected House of Lords. In his 1910 election manifesto he said: "I would rather End than Mend the Lords". He would be shocked to see that it continues to this day and still contains a number of hereditary peers. The very least we in the 21st century should do is to end this undemocratic part of our legislature as soon as possible.

Hardie's support for women's suffrage is well known, as is his defence of the role of civil disobedience. He, along with Sylvia Pankhurst and other socialists, saw that the rights of women needed to go beyond securing the vote to include rights within marriage and in the workplace.

At a time when travel within Britain was hard enough, Hardie travelled extensively across Europe, the British empire and the United States. In Ireland he stood in solidarity with striking trade unionists. Though he had differences with Irish members of parliament who put nationalism above socialism, he did support the cause of Home Rule. After travelling in the empire, he began to support liberation struggles under the influence of Gandhi and others. It seems incredible that over 100 years ago he was part of a worldwide network that would put modern day socialist parties to shame. While in the US he linked up with Eugene Debs and encouraged him to recognise the link between industrial and political struggle that formed the basis of the Labour party. He had high hopes for socialism in the US and more than a century later it is good to see parts of the Democratic party becoming more radical.

Hardie was not a pacifist, but he did oppose what he saw as wars of capitalism. By the outbreak of the first world war in 1914 his great comrade the French socialist leader Jean Jaures had been assassinated and the Socialist International that he had helped build had begun to disintegrate. The British Labour party along with other European socialist parties supported their own governments rather than

international peace. This put Hardie at odds with his own parliamentary party, although not with the ILP.

Hardie died in September 1915 while still an MP, but his death went unacknowledged by the House of Commons. No tribute was made. It was unlikely that he would have wanted one. In his maiden speech to the House of Commons in 1893, he had begun as he meant to go on. Avoiding the tradition of being non-controversial, his first act was to move an amendment to the Queen's Speech which was considered the equivalent of a vote of no confidence in the government. His speech was about unemployment and he became known as 'the member for the unemployed', a title he was happy to bear.

A speech Jeremy Corbyn made in September 2018 would have sounded very familiar to followers of Hardie:

"Everywhere you look this government is failing: one million families using food banks, one million workers on zero-hours contracts, four million children in poverty, wages lower today than 10 years ago. On top of that, there's the flawed and failing universal credit, disabled people risk losing their homes and vital support, children forced to use food banks and the prime minister wants to put two million more people onto this. The prime minister is not challenging the burning injustices in our society, she's pouring petrol on the crisis."

The Labour party has recruited thousands of new members in the past five years. In some local communities it has become a bit more like the ILP of the last century by involving itself in local campaigns and following the ILP's goal of 'making socialists'. Hardie's legacy must not be reduced to his image on banners and badges. Instead we can learn from his ideas and values and use them to strengthen today's growing labour movement. **F**



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Working it out

A four-day working week was one of the ideas which grabbed the headlines in the election campaign. Could it really become a reality? *Rayhan Haque* takes a look



Rayhan Haque is founder of the London Good Work Commission. He is writing in a personal capacity

JOHN LENNON WAS once asked at school what he wanted to be when he grew up. He wrote down 'happy'. The school said he didn't understand the assignment. He responded by saying they didn't understand life. There are parallels between this story and how we have come to view economic success. For many years now, the 'assignment' has been the unbridled pursuit of growth and high employment, with little regard for anything else. Now of course, every society needs to create prosperity and job opportunities. But like John Lennon's school, we have been failing to grasp the true meaning behind work and our economy – which is to enable you to enjoy a good life.

A central component of the good life is a healthy work-life balance. Yet the UK is currently working some of the longest hours in Europe (42.5 hours), with only Austria and Greece doing more. We also endure long commutes, with Londoners spending on average 81 minutes a day travelling to work. And a recent study found that 54 per cent of commuters are regularly 'switched on', saying that they use the train's wi-fi to do work.

This culture of overworking hugely affects organisational productivity, happiness, and wellbeing. Official figures show that nationally 15.4 million working days were lost to work-related stress, depression, or anxiety between 2017 and 2018, with workload cited as the biggest cause. Its impact on key frontline professions is also considerable. More than half of Britain's teachers have a diagnosed mental health problem, according to a study by Leeds Beckett University. The 'excessive workloads' on education staff was a key reason cited for the problems.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Three quarters of the public support moving to a four-day week, according to YouGov. Encouragingly, nearly two thirds of businesses also back a shorter working week. Political leaders have also been pushing for change. During the election campaign, the Labour party committed to introducing a 32-hour week for all within a decade, using collective bargaining and increased annual leave.

These strategies would have been important in helping to reduce working hours, as well as increased public sector investment and recruitment. But the scope of their impact would have been limited, as only 13.2 per cent of workers in the private sector are union members and 40 per cent of employees admit to only taking half of their holiday entitlement. And the TUC recently found that more than a million workers are not getting any paid holiday. Workload pressure is one of the most cited reasons for not using statutory holiday.

So for a widespread and lasting reduction to working hours, there must be a focus on boosting productivity and helping businesses to redesign jobs and structure working practices around a shorter 32-hour week. Firms operate in different ways, and some will find the transition to a shorter working week more challenging than others. Adopting a tailored approach, with the right incentives and support, will be crucial. There are a number of ideas that can help achieve this.

This culture of overworking hugely affects organisational productivity, happiness and wellbeing

Jobs guarantee

Tackling labour market exclusion with a jobs guarantee based on a shorter working week would see employers creating

one-year long job placements anchored around a 32-hour week for the most marginalised groups. There should be a particular focus on disabled people, out of work single parents, young people, the long-term unemployed, and those who have been struggling with homelessness. All job placements must pay a real living wage based on the cost of living.

The government could incentivise the creation of these placements by covering the salary costs for host organisations and supporting the recruitment of participants. It would be an entirely voluntary scheme (for employers and individuals), with organisations able to apply for funding if they clearly demonstrate these jobs placements are "additional", target the most excluded groups within the labour market, and ensure good work-life balance for participants.



As part of our investigation into poverty and bad work across London, we constantly heard from people that they “couldn’t get a job, as they didn’t have experience, but can’t get experience, because they don’t have a job”. The jobs guarantee aims to break that catch 22 situation. It will also allow employers to design real living-wage-paying jobs around a shorter working week and to test and assess their impact.

Good work funds

The government should also establish a national network of good work funds, that provides help to employers who wish to improve business practices, redesign jobs into good ones, and introduce a shorter working week for their staff without cutting pay. A key focus of the funds would be on supporting businesses to make investments and changes to increase productivity.

A recent study by Henley Business School, found hundreds of UK employers who had moved to a four-day week were now collectively saving £92bn each year, with over 60 per cent seeing productivity increase. These proposed regional funds are designed to help other firms across the country similarly benefit from improving their working practices and reducing working hours. For example, a business would be able to apply for funding to help develop a shorter working week pilot and measure its impact.

It also aims to support the development of a ‘place-based’ approach to reducing working hours, helping local authorities to develop trials by involving key anchor institutions such as schools and large local employers. Forest Gate Community School is currently piloting reduced working week schedules for teachers and students. In this case, the good work funds could support other employers in the area to similarly test a shorter working week, with

the effect being to create a more sustainable community led approach to reducing long hours.

Paid leave for learning

Everyone should be a learner for life. In a rapidly changing world of work, adaptability, resilience, and skill levels, will be crucial to professional success as well as that of the wider economy. For this reason, there should be a new right to paid time off work to undertake learning and training. Currently employees at large firms only have a ‘right to request’ time off for training, which can easily be rejected by the employer, or if not, only approved on the basis it is done unpaid. Employees at small and medium enterprises have no such right to request.

And according to the Learning and Work Institute, participation in lifelong learning is only 37 per cent – its lowest ever level. The most commonly cited barrier to engaging in learning is work or other time pressures. This new statutory right should guarantee four days of paid leave each year (based on a worker doing full-time hours) for any evidenced learning and training undertaken.

Paid leave for learning will help the lowest earners with the poorest skills improve their life chances, as they are currently the least likely to partake and benefit from lifelong education. Employers will also benefit. Not only will they be able to upskill their workforce, but paid learning leave will help them restructure their operations for a shorter working week in a way that harnesses productivity.

Despite the outcome of the election, a four-day week is still a real possibility. But to get there, we can’t just rely on past methods. Policymakers, in all tiers of government, must also support employers to make the shift. And only by embedding a shorter working week into the culture and practices of how businesses operate, will we build that new economy for the many. **F**

A form of hope

How do we wrest back control of our working futures in this age of radical technologies? The answer must lie, as it always has, in collective action, argues *Asheem Singh*



Asheem Singh is director of economy, enterprise and manufacturing at the RSA

*Work without Hope draws nectar in a sieve,
And Hope without an object cannot live*
—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

THE FUTURE OF work is often a game of predictions. The godfather-soothsayer of workplace automation is Oxford University's Carl Benedikt Frey who famously predicted in 2013 that 47 per cent of American jobs were at risk from an army of robots (35 per cent in the UK). Since then, a flurry of different prophecies have been published, each using a different methodology. The OECD prognosticates that 10 per cent of UK jobs are at significant risk of automation. McKinsey puts the figure closer to 5 per cent. PwC, meanwhile, reckons that as many jobs will be created as destroyed by new innovations. The MIT Tech Review has identified no fewer than 18 separate predictions, all of which speak to the mantra that 'the robots are coming and it's your job they want.'

This fetish for prediction shows no sign of abating. And it is fair to predict (see, I can't resist it myself) that as the debate transitions from the halls of academia to the pages of red-tops, the debate will become yet more degraded. The academics are already resiling; they eschew the idea that they ever predicted anything. They accept (as Frey does in his recent book, *The Technology Trap*) that predictions about what technology does to us over two, three or 20 generations are relatively solipsistic exercises; that social justice demands that we look, not with a telescope to some utopia or hellhole in the 23rd century, but with a magnifying glass to understand what is happening to us here and now.

Robotics, artificial intelligence (AI), automation, platforms like Uber and Deliveroo these 'radical technologies' are already radically changing the workplace. In Estonia they are trialling AI judges while Alibaba is in an arms race with Amazon in the way it uses robots to organise its warehouses. The cleavages, almost perfectly, split along socio-economic lines. While some of us enjoy free kombucha and flexible working and mindfulness and massages, many more labour

under zero-hours contracts, sporadically ride Uber or use Deliveroo and live a hand-to-mouth existence.

This then is the challenge for the 21st century: how do we workers take control of our destinies?

The answer – as it always has – lies in collective action.

The collective case

Throughout history, technology has been one of the single most impactful determinants of economic progress. Our capacity to survive and thrive at unparalleled scale rests on the seedbed of technological transfer and take-up. Economies that 'get with the programme' in any given era are the ones that thrive.

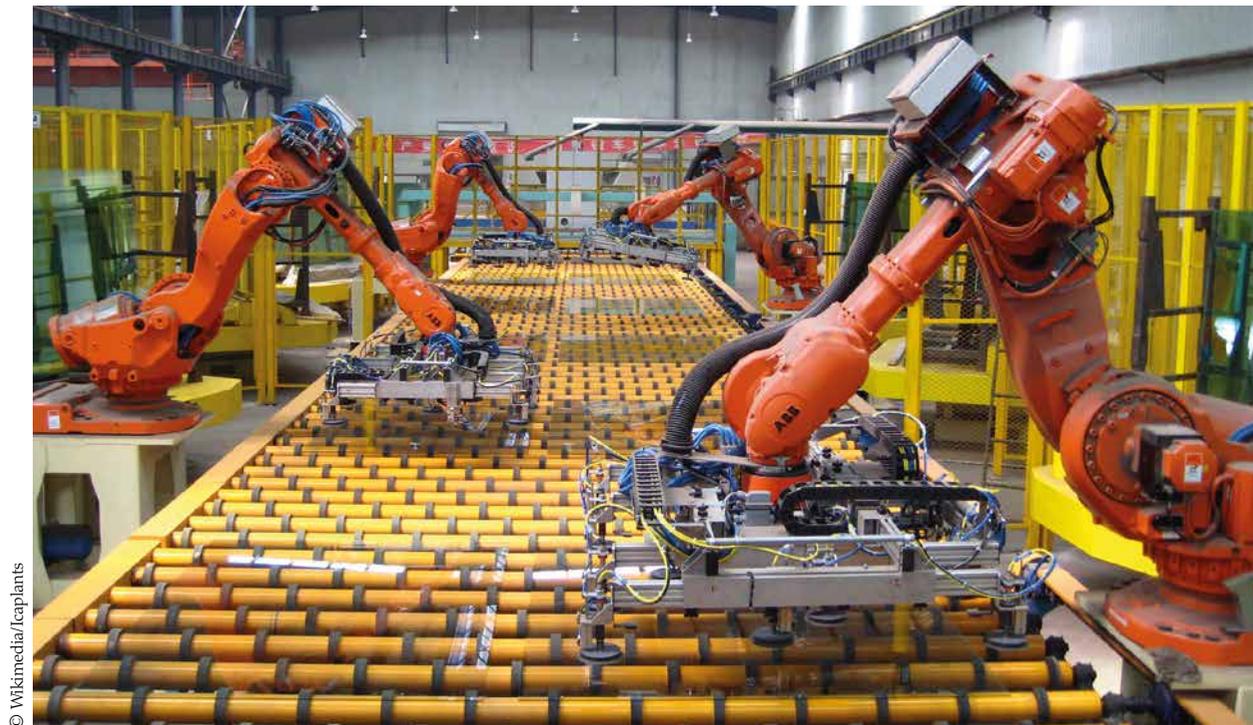
This truth, however, can lead technology's champions into error. Whether it is talk of Marcusean leisure utopias where we no longer work or a world of full employment and multiple as-yet-unknowable tasks, these are futures for a century from hence. And in a century we will all be dead.

In the 18th century, one of the reasons for the growth of Britain and America into the dominant powers of the world rested on a series of policy and institutional decisions. While the Chinese resisted industrialisation for fear of worker unrest, Britain and America were perhaps the first to side with technology's champions and owners. The entire vernacular of today's socio-economic struggle, from 'factory' to 'communism' thus rests on this decision, a decision that has shaped the world we see today, for better or for worse, by the Anglo-Saxon economies to resist the entreaties of their workers.

The direct effects were untold prosperity and reductions in absolute poverty for these two nations. It resulted in new and unusual subjugations for much of the global south. It also led to the evisceration of a generation of British and American working-class artisans – purveyors of what author Laetitia Vitaud refers to as 'l'ouvrage' (creative manual working).

Net benefit or net gain? All of this turmoil happens before we get to the shadow victims of labour politics through

Economies that 'get with the programme' in any given era are the ones that thrive



© Wikimedia/caplants

the ages. It was Thomas Jefferson who, at his home in Monticello, Sweetwater, created the ‘dumbwaiter,’ an automated food-servant, that could take at least some of the place of the slaves that helped him keep his estate in check.

The idea of automation as the inverse – but also the counterpart – of new forms of slavery continues to terrorise the imagination. After all, who were the automatons of the industrial revolution but children, for whose tiny bodies back-breaking cotton looms were custom made? Who are the robots of today but those workers in tech company warehouses wearing diapers so they can shit without having to leave their workstation – or the immigrant workers who travel thousands of miles to clean our homes? Who will speak for them as, in this age of radical technologies, history’s wheel turns again?

Layers of the union

It is in this context that we must rethink and reshape the role of unions. On the one hand, as the work of people like MIT’s David Autor shows, one of the evolutionary strategies of capitalism has been to systematically reduce the economic power of the worker and reduce the size of the share of GDP allocated to labour, as opposed to capital. The capitalism of radical technologies, ultra-innovative as it is in so many ways, finds ingenious new ways to screw labour over all of the time.

Paradoxically however those same radical technologies – especially platforms which rely upon connecting demand for labour with an on-tap community of workers – depend on organised labour in order to continue to offer a viable, sustainable product. And so there is a huge opportunity for unions to influence the ingress of radical technologies in the workplace.

At this moment, then, unions are in a position to take control of the conversation: to help us pivot away from

a world of work without hope. I wonder, however, if in the UK, at least, they are primed to respond.

There are at least two messages currently in play. First is to bitterly and firmly oppose the platform approach to work offered by Deliveroo and Uber. Secondly, there is a dispiritingly familiar utopian radicalism: a flirtation with an accelerationist strand of that results in navel-gazing suggestions like John McDonnell’s four-day working week. These suggestions suffer from the 100 years fallacy; they do precisely nothing to deal with the real issues of power, class and exploitation in our workplace.

This is where we need our unions to be at the top of their game. At the interface of work and welfare there is much for unions to do. Laetitia Vitaud has called the 20th century ‘bargain’ a “division of labour in exchange for a bundle of benefits and security”. But the institutional approaches – employment legislation, tax and benefits, education and training – that make up this bundle are still stuck in a world built around traditional one-employer full employment. Advocacy too often veers into this line, rather than enjoining the alternatives in collective action.

A society where platforms might mediate work across six or seven firms would, for example, need entitlements that were both portable and pro-rated. Benefits would need to accrue and follow individual workers between jobs and platforms.

Such a system requires partnership. In September, ride-sharing platform Uber announced a partnership with the Open University that would see entitlements to higher education training accrued through trips completed and driver ratings. Coordinating private portable benefits like this into a universal system of coverage for all gig workers – let alone as society’s default ‘bundle’ – is a mammoth task.

Which agencies are responsible, who delivers, who has a say: these are the questions that require our nicely polished magnifying glass. Unions and other vestiges of collective action must help drive that conversation.

Scandinavian models

I wrote the bulk of this essay in a hotel room in Stockholm, Sweden. Here I encountered some hopeful visions of what forward-focused unions might achieve in this era of radical technologies. Across Sweden and the wider Nordics we see some fascinating examples of practical and progressive partnership between unions and gig platforms in pursuit of a pro-worker agenda.

Unionen is a white-collar union in Sweden; its largest. The Swedish model is of collective agreements in which the conditions in each sector are determined by the trade unions and the employer organisations. The government may set the boundaries through labour laws but largely refrains from interfering. The model combines flexibility for companies with security and influence for employees.

The level of trade union membership in Sweden is relatively high – about 70 per cent, compared to just 23 per cent in the UK – and membership is often encouraged by employers.

Unionen has been vocal in adopting a progressive approach to working with platforms. It is currently attempting to programme a collective bargaining agreement with platforms that specifically applies to workers with multiple projects in a portfolio career. This vision is not necessarily pro-platform; rather it is pro-worker and in favour of security for the gig-worker. As Martin Linder, president of Unionen, said at its conference in autumn: “The solution lies not in looking nostalgically backwards but by curiously looking forward.”

Just across the Øresund, in Denmark, there are more examples of innovation. Hilfr, a platform for domestic cleaners, in 2018 struck a collective agreement with 3F Union in 2018. Here workers who have clocked more than 100 hours on the platform to receive employment benefits such as holidays, sick pay, pension contributions and a minimum wage of €19 per hour. These workers become Hilfr employees, but those who just use the platform for odd jobs may opt out and remain self-employed.

Denmark has minimal levels of employment protection regulation. However most workers are signed up to unemployment insurance funds, which provide high compensation rates for up to two years (up to 90 per cent of previous earnings for lower-paid workers). Additionally Denmark invests heavily in reskilling and lifelong learning – far more than the OECD average. Its labour market is thus highly flexible.

The Scandinavian model – ‘flexicurity’ – is for some the holy grail that combines ongoing support and security with incentives and empowerment to lean in to the gig economy. While it is facile to suggest that we roll out the Scandinavian model in Britain, we can learn the places where unions might usefully focus energies in the age of radical technologies. The UK already has a flexible labour market, but are our workers provided with enough support, access to collective bargaining power and lifelong learning in the event of needing to reskill? Are we providing the right framework that promotes economic security?

These are the advocacy challenges of our time that sit alongside a broader, graver task: of finding a frame in which work and welfare, mediated through global platforms,

finds nourishing and hopeful expression for a generation of today’s workers. Are we up to the task?

Genius as a social movement

Thomas Jefferson’s contemporary and rival Benjamin Franklin was the Royal Society of Arts’ (RSA’s) first overseas fellow. He was one of a number of early RSA fellows who developed challenge prizes that championed innovations – artefacts of genius – that shifted the dial towards worker rights.

One such innovation was the long-handled broom. It was once the shameful custom that poor children would clean chimney stacks. An RSA fellow, by way of an early challenge prize, designed the deceptively simple object that would liberate platoons of child-labourers from having to eke out their little lives and early deaths in soot and dismay.

The challenges of our age require this level of humanist ingenuity. But they also require more than individual innovations. They require individual effort but they also require collective action to take on the superstar firms and their global grip.

In support of this idea, for the last year my team at the RSA’s Future Work Centre have collaborated with technologists, employers and employees from all over the world to sketch the future’s four corners. We have created a series of robust, stress-tested scenarios for the future of work in 2035, filtered for critical uncertainties like economic collapse or climate change.

We talk about The Big Tech Economy: this is a world in which tech companies proliferate and curb worker rights through sophisticated corporate social responsibility campaigns. Or The Precision Economy: a world in which surveillance culture trumps all. We refer to The Exodus Economy: a world in which financial or environmental events prompt recession and technological reversal. And finally, The Empathy Economy: a world in which all that can be automated is automated, leaving humans to do high-touch, high-empathy jobs.

Now, let me be clear – lest we risk falling back into the errors of the academics – the purpose of these scenarios is not to predict. They are not predictions but rather pedagogical tools. The purpose is to focus minds and resources. How do we respond to these scenarios? How do we ensure that the actual future that sits somewhere between these four scenarios rests in the best possible place for workers? How do we mediate conversations about our collective future?

Inevitably the answers to those questions involve the whole system – from businesses, to platforms, to unions, to workers – forming a loop that is attuned to the demands of good, nourishing work, to security, to lifelong learning and creativity, in pursuit of the highest ideals of human endeavour.

Scenarios are one way to move from the passive conversations of the present to the more active, hopeful conversations of the future. We cannot predict the future but we can prepare for it. We can, in concert, create a labour market that values workers. We can like Doctor Pangloss, envision the best of all possible worlds through a future of good work and actually mean it. Because unlike the craven predictions of our academic brethren, these ideas have a life and a velocity. Collective action gives hope a form and an object and – in this age as in others – it will change the world for the better. ■

The challenges of our age require individual effort but they also require collective action

Books

Blazing the trail

A history of Labour's pioneering female cabinet ministers shows the barriers women have to overcome if they want to reach the top in politics, writes *Rachel Reeves MP*



Rachel Reeves is the Labour MP for Leeds West

"You should aim to be successful, but not too successful, otherwise you will threaten the man". Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words from her seminal Ted talk in 2012, 'Why we should all be feminists', encapsulate the double-sided sexism often experienced by women in power. It is a theme that runs like a current through Paula Bartley's book about Labour women cabinet ministers in the 20th century.

Bartley delves into the histories of the five first Labour cabinet ministers – Margaret Bondfield, Ellen Wilkinson, Barbara Castle, Judith Hart and Shirley Williams. Five remarkable women, all of whom have failed, Bartley argues, to gain the recognition and respect they deserve. Perhaps what lies behind this lack of credit is a level of scrutiny of women in power that is, quite simply, never applied to men. Bartley's work makes an invaluable contribution to writing the achievements of these phenomenal women back into the history books.

It also conveys the magnitude of the barriers placed before women MPs to prevent them from making it to the top. When women were first elected to parliament, their presence was begrudgingly accepted by their male colleagues. But they were confined to restricted areas within the parliamentary estate such as the unappealing lady members' room located in the basement. When women were appointed as ministers, it was in traditional feminised policy briefs or in what Bartley calls 'glass cliff' roles from which they were bound to fall. They were, quite literally, prevented from being 'too successful'. Labour's first female cabinet minister, Margaret Bondfield, was a hard-working and principled working-class woman who was elected as one of the first Labour women MPs in 1923. In 1929, at a time that could not have been less propitious, Ramsay MacDonald made her minister of labour. With the Great Depression looming, Bondfield was made responsible for making cuts to unemployment relief – a difficult if not impossible position for a Labour minister to take, and perhaps particularly for a woman. It was political suicide for Bondfield: she lost her seat two years later and never returned to parliament, the ministerial ladder swept from beneath her feet.

When Barbara Castle – who, many feel, could have reached the very top of government – was given the ministry of labour brief by Harold Wilson amidst industrial strife in 1969, she was reluctant to take it on, fearing that she would become 'Maggie Bondfield Mark II'. Castle's previous cabinet brief – at transport – was also no sinecure: she described it as a 'hot-seat of politics, littered with broken repu-



**Labour Women
in Power:
Cabinet
Ministers in
the Twentieth
Century,**
Paula Bartley,
Palgrave
Macmillan, £22.99

tations'. Castle managed to manoeuvre brilliantly around the transport glass cliff – instituting road safety measures like seatbelts and the breathalyser – but at the ministry of labour her white paper *In Place of Strife* sounded the death knell for her career. Like Bondfield, Castle's reputation was undermined by criticism from both the right and the left, particularly from the unions, who viewed her policy as a betrayal of the Labour movement. Yet, had it been implemented, it could have stopped Margaret Thatcher's much more brutal reforms a decade later.

While Bondfield and Castle were criticised for being too pragmatic, other female Labour cabinet ministers were criticised for being too idealistic. Ellen Wilkinson – who served in Attlee's 1945 government as minister of education – fought passionately to achieve the raising of the school leaving age, despite the protestations of her fellow cabinet members (including Nye Bevan) that it was unaffordable. Judith Hart – who served as the first female paymaster general under Harold Wilson – was continually on the brink of dismissal for having strong stances on Rhodesia and international development. The radicalism of these women was portrayed in exaggerated and sexualised terms that served to trivialise and objectify them, with 'red' often signifying more than just an allusion to the left: Ellen Wilkinson was known as 'Red Ellen', Barbara Castle was described as a 'Red Queen' or 'Tigress', Judith Hart as Wilson's 'Glamour Girl' – they were all considered too attractive, too young and too idealistic to be political heavyweights.

Bartley's account of these formidable women and their achievements is a treasure trove of facts and stories. One of my favourites is the *Daily Mirror's* reporting of the arrival of three women cabinet ministers at the Home Office in the 1960s: "One woman minister in a government department is ideal. Two is fine for the feminist cause. Three is perhaps over-egging the pudding." This, for me, encapsulates the attitudes that have continued to hold Labour's female cabinet ministers back. Perhaps more so than Conservative women, Labour women have faced censure from both sides: when they are too pragmatic, they are held up as callous symbols of betrayal and when they are too principled, they are dismissed as a naïve political irrelevancy. Meanwhile, for men, both of these characteristics are viewed through the lens of political leadership and decisiveness. With the Labour party now the only British political party not to have had a female leader, Bartley's book shows us that it is high time for the glass ceilings – and glass cliffs – to be smashed. ■

Cameron by himself

David Cameron's memoirs reveal a man whose irresistible rise was eventually torpedoed by a disastrous decision on Europe, finds *Dick Leonard*



Dick Leonard is a journalist, author and former Labour MP. He is also a past chair of the Fabian Society. A revised and updated edition of his book A History of British Prime Ministers will appear, in two volumes, in 2020

When a box of chocolates is handed round, the most popular choice is often the one with the smoothest surface, but the hardest centre. So it often is with politicians. The trouble with David Cameron was that, though he was the smoothest by far, his innards were as soft as marshmallow. Just why can be deduced from his memoirs, in which he talks frankly of his privileged upbringing by upper middle class parents in the idyllic Berkshire village of Peasemore.

From there he progressed through the most exclusive prep school in the country, rubbing shoulders with princes and dukes, and on to Eton, Oxford, the Conservative research department, a job as ministerial aide to the chancellor of the exchequer and then the prime minister, followed by a highly paid and cushy job in PR, and a safe seat at the age of 34. Less than five years later he was already leader of the opposition.

His rise seemed irresistible, though there had been a few setbacks on the way. Aged 16, he narrowly escaped being expelled from Eton for smoking pot and lying about it to the school authorities. Even this, though, had beneficial consequences. Previously, he had been an indifferent student, more intent on having a good time than obtaining any academic distinction. Now he was determined to 'redeem' himself and buckled down to score high marks in his A levels and a place at Oxford.

A much heavier blow was the birth in 2002 to his wife, Samantha, of a highly disabled son, Ivan. Both parents came to love their son deeply and lavished care on him. They were shattered when he died in 2009, just under seven years old. The experience undoubtedly made Cameron more aware of the misfortunes of others and more empathetic to them. He also became an outspoken supporter of the NHS, who carried more conviction on this issue than any other Tory leader.

Cameron makes no secret of his admiration for Tony Blair, and his conscious attempt to model himself on him as opposition leader, going so far as describing himself as the 'heir to Blair'. He and his entourage minutely followed Blair's career, and closely studied the book written by his chief election strategist, Philip Gould, *The Unfinished Revolution*, for tips as to how they might proceed. They learnt their lessons well, as Cameron showed in

2005, when, as a rank outsider, he swept past the favourite, David Davis, and his main challenger, Liam Fox, to claim the Tory leadership.

Things looked promising for Cameron, as Blair showed damaging signs of losing his grip, and eventually in June 2007 made way for the much less popular Gordon Brown. But Brown made a triumphant success of his first few months as premier in 2007. The polls moved sharply in his favour, and, as Cameron recounts, the Tories faced their annual conference with the threat of a crushing electoral defeat. But Cameron kept his nerve and made a defiant speech which galvanised a restless conference, and 'shadow' chancellor George Osborne pulled a rabbit out of his hat by offering a mammoth rise in the threshold for inheritance tax, to which the public reaction was very favourable, at least in the short term. The polls swung back in the Tories' favour, and Brown, no longer confident of winning the election, in Cameron's words 'bottled it'. To emphasise the point, Cameron ordered a large number of bottles of brown ale, and swept into a polling lead which persisted, with fluctuations, right up until the 2010 general election.

Disappointed at not winning an overall majority, Cameron rose to the occasion, making 'a big, big, open and comprehensive offer' of a coalition to the Liberal Democrats who, desperate for office after so many years in the wilderness, were unwise enough to accept. Cameron was keen to use office as an attempt to detoxify the Conservative party, which had been identified as 'the nasty party' by his colleague and successor, Theresa May. To an extent, he succeeded in this, broadening the base of the party by increasing the number of women, state-educated and black and minority ethnic candidates, and introducing a number of reforms, such as same-sex marriage. But his administration was marked mostly by two factors – austerity and his progressive surrender to the demands of Ukip, whom he had initially characterised as 'fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists' and finished up by agreeing to an in/out referendum on the EU, for which there had been previously very little public demand. His failure to stand up to them was the ultimate cause of his downfall, and of the sad fate which awaits our country, after his successor but one proved victorious on 12 December. **F**



David Cameron, *For the Record*, William Collins, £25

End of an era

As she steps down, *Deborah Stoate* reflects on local Fabian societies past and present



Deborah Stoate is outgoing local societies officer of the Fabian Society

AFTER 28 YEARS as local societies officer at the Fabian Society, I have decided to retire. I followed in the footsteps of Annie Besant, Dorothy Fox, Jennifer Beever and Hope Roper to name but a few. It has been, as someone once said to me 'my legacy job', and I shall miss it. The history of the local societies is fascinating and is what makes the Fabian Society unique.

The local societies were conceived by Annie Besant, prominent founding Fabian and campaigner, on 19 February 1885. She was keen to 'carry socialism to the unconverted all over the country' through a network of local groups, which, when you think about it, was a brilliant idea. As I know well, the fortunes of local societies ebb and flow and indeed many societies in the 1890s died, possibly with the tedium of listening to 'dull' speakers, as George Bernard Shaw noted: "Dreadfully dull meeting. Infernal draught from the window. Coffin fidgeting. Somebody making a dreadful noise like the winding of a rusty clock. Mrs Bland (E Nesbit) suspected of doing it with the handles of her fan. Wish she wouldn't. Two or three meetings like this would finish up any society."

Some societies back then were much more involved in

direct action and practical work, a tradition which unfortunately came to an end. For instance, the Liverpool society in 1895 started a bureau for the unemployed which the local authority later took over as a municipal labour department. The East London group of 1892 raised money for two bronze shields as swimming trophies for the children of London's school boards, and the Hampstead group made toys for board school children.

And I note from the 1886 annual report that the society had a special committee on lantern lectures, devoted to procuring lantern slides for London and the provinces. A lantern was placed at the disposal of the society for deployment round the country for local society use, along with a sketch lecture and accompanying slides. The lectures attracted audiences of up to 500 and it was noted that 'something has been done to give a better opinion of

socialism and its propaganda among those who have hitherto looked upon it with contempt'. Note to secretaries. Forget the powerpoint and get a magic lantern. It obviously works.

We now have roughly 55 societies, meeting regularly – though not as regularly as the Central London Fabian Society in the 1950s, when in 1956, June Solomon met her future husband John on CLFS's social committee. That society had weekly political meetings in Dean Street, Soho with monthly tea dances, art and theatre meetings and weekend rambles. Today's Central London society has taken up the rambling tradition again very successfully. They are working on the tea dances.

Putting the social back into socialism was a feature of the Fabian Society for many years, with many and varied activities. When I began working at the society, New Year conferences were held at Nuffield College, Oxford. They were residential and combined political discussion with country walks and quizzes and an opportunity to mingle with the 'great and good', in the great tradition of the annual Fabian holiday. Leading Fabians had always attended those holidays – George Bernard Shaw, the Webbs (though Beatrice disapproved of 'larks'), the Coles, leading academics and politicians, so ordinary members mixing with them were able to identify more completely with the aims and work of the society. Familiarity brought confidence and those who might have remained silent in a meeting, might, at a summer school, find themselves



Deborah Stoate's granddaughter Astrid keeping up the family Fabian tradition

FABIAN QUIZ

BLACK SKIN, WHITE MASKS, Frantz Fanon



Frantz Fanon was a revolutionary thinker and major influence on civil rights, anticolonial and black

consciousness movements around the world.

Originally published in 1952, *Black Skin, White Mask* is Fanon's first major work. Combining autobiography, case study, philosophy, and psychoanalytic theory, *Black Skin, White Mask* describes and analyses lived experiences of racism in the Caribbean and France, and explores how we might move beyond this situation in which black people are treated as inferior.

As one of the foremost writers of the 20th century on the topics of racism, colonialism, and decolonisation, *Black Skin, White Mask* remains a foundational text in the growing body of literature in the field of critical race studies. Fanon's message remains just as pertinent and powerful for today.

Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away.

To win one, answer the following question: *Which North African country did Frantz Fanon famously support in its fight for independence?*

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

Or send a postcard to Fabian Society, Fabian Quiz, 61 Petty France, London, SW1H 9EU

ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN FRIDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2020



Images from the summer school in 1921 and 1922



challenging Webb or Shaw – a great leveller but also a great deal of fun, which I do think is a missing element today in these troubled and divisive times.

When I started at the Fabian Society, John Major was prime minister, my children were small, Ian Taylor had only been secretary of Bournemouth Fabians for 22 years and in my office I had a typewriter, carbon paper, tippex and a filing cabinet. Dartmouth Street then seemed to be a magnet for passing politicians. It was a hive of ideas and energy and the Cole room was always full of interesting people, or so it seemed to me. I have worked for six general secretaries – Simon Crine, Glenys Thornton, Stephen Twigg, Michael Jacobs, Sunder Katwala and Andrew Harrop. I have organised 28 House of Commons and Lords teas which drove me mad at the time, but which I shall miss. I remember panicking so many times at losing my committee room at two days' notice and pleading with the House for a replacement. I recall

speakers pulling out on the day, memorably one grand Labour figure who told me he simply had to take the dog to the vet as it had developed a nettle allergy. I sympathised, but mentioned that as I had 120 Fabians coming from all over Britain just to hear him, maybe the dog could hang on a bit?

Local societies are the place for sectarian-free open discussion on how Labour can make a difference

I have developed the greatest admiration for local society secretaries, constantly finding speakers and venues and drumming up audiences. I have run my local group for many years and respect their dedication and tenacity. On many occasions, my group's venue, the working men's club, held a Shadows tribute band night on Fabian meeting evening

and many speakers competed with ear-shattering versions of *Stars Fell* on Stockton. I well recall one renowned guest speaking at full volume whilst 'Apache' accompanied his talk asking rhetorically: "And of course we all long for a Labour victory?", and a voice from the back replying: "I bloody well don't." Local societies – forums for frank and open debate!

So I'd like to thank all those local society secretaries for their hard work and friendship over the years and also the many others I've worked with, particularly Giles Wright. As Baroness Dianne Hayter wrote: "Whether joining to learn or to contribute, local Fabian societies are the place for sectarian-free, open discussion on how Labour can make a difference." You in the local societies are part of what AH Halsey described as 'that great tradition of strong, generous-hearted, public spirited vein of classical Fabianism'.

Keep up the good work. I'll miss you. **F**

Listings

BIRMINGHAM & WEST MIDLANDS

Regular meetings. Details and information from Luke John Davies at bhamfabians@gmail.com

BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

Friday 31 January: Neil Duncan-Jordan, secretary of Poole CLP
Friday 28 February: Lord Roy Kennedy, Labour's housing spokesman in the Lords
Meetings 7.30pm in the Friends Meeting House, Bournemouth BH5 1AH
Contact: Ian Taylor, 01202 396634 or taylorbournemouth@gmail.com for details

BRIGHTON & HOVE

Friday 28 February: Professor Adam Tickell on the economics of UK universities
Most meetings at 8pm at the Friends Meeting House, Ship St, Brighton BN1 1AF.
Contact Ralph Bayley at ralphbayley@gmail.com for details

CENTRAL LONDON

'Everything Left' discussion group meeting in Central London venue on the 4th Tuesday of the month, 6.30pm – 8.3pm.
RSVP Michael Weatherburn at londonfabians@gmail.com and website <https://fabians.org.uk/central-london-fabian-society>

CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

Tuesday 4 February.
Details of speaker and all meetings from Alison Baker at a.m.baker@blueyonder.co.uk

COLCHESTER

Meetings in the Hexagonal Room, Quaker Meeting House, 6 Church St, Colchester. 7pm for 7.30pm
Details from Maurice Austin – Maurice.austin@phonedcoop.coop

COUNTY DURHAM

Regular meetings at Ushaw College DH7 9RH. £4.00 including lunch.
Details from Professor Alan Townsend 01388 746479

CROYDON & SUTTON

Details from Emily Brothers – info@emilybrothers.com

DARTFORD & GRAVESHAM

Meetings in the Rose and Crown, West Hill, Dartford.
Contact Deborah Stoate – debstoate@hotmail.com

FINCHLEY

Society re-forming.
Contact David Beere for details djbeere@btinternet.com

GRIMSBY

Regular meetings. Contact Pat Holland for details at hollandpat@hotmail.com

HAVERING

15 January. Journalist Chris Smith on lessons from the Grenfell fire
7 February. AGM followed by Miriam Mirwitch, Chair of Young Labour
Both meetings at 7.30 at Fairkytes Arts Centre, Billet Lane, Hornchurch RM11 1AX
Details from Davis Marshall at haveringfabians@outlook.com

HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

Regular meetings and socials.
Details from Mark Cooke at hwgfabians@gmail.com

ISLINGTON

Details of meetings from Adeline Au at siewyin.au@gmail.com

NORTH EAST LONDON

Details of all meetings from Nathan Ashley at NELondonFabians@outlook.com

NEWHAM

Regular meetings.
Details from Rohit Dasgupta at rh_t_svu@hotmail.com

NORTHUMBRIA AREA

For details of meetings, contact Pat Hobson at pathobson@hotmail.com

OXFORD

Monthly discussion meetings on 2nd Tuesday at different venues around Oxford, plus monthly reading group. Regular meetings and events. Contact Dave Addison at admin@oxfordfabians.org.uk

PETERBOROUGH

10 January. Charlotte Norton, Young Fabians on Ireland
7 February. Lord Roy Kennedy on social Mobility v egalitarianism
6 March. Dr Hugh Hunt, University of Cambridge on refreezing the Arctic, 24 April
Steven Pettican, CEO Light Project Peterborough on homelessness, 8pm at the Dragonfly Hotel, Thorpe Meadows, Peterborough.
Details from Brian Keegan 01733 265769 or brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk

PORTSMOUTH

Details from Nita Cary at dewicary@yahoo.com

READING & DISTRICT

Details of meetings from Tony Skuse at tony@skuse.net

RUGBY

Wednesday 25 March. Speaker tbc.
Usual venue: Friends Meeting House. 28 Regent Place, Rugby CV21 2PN
Contact John Goodman rugbyfabians@myphone.coop

SOUTHAMPTON AREA

Regular meetings.
Details from Eliot Horn at eliot.horn@btinternet.com

SOUTH TYNESIDE

Regular monthly meetings at Lookout Community Pub, Fort St, South Shields.
Details from Paul Freeman at southtynesidefabians@gmail.com

SUFFOLK

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

TONBRIDGE & TUNBRIDGE WELLS

Regular meetings.
Contact Martin Clay at Martin.clay@btinternet.com

WALSALL

Society re-forming. Please contact Ian Robertson at robertsonic@hotmail.co.uk for details

YORK & DISTRICT

Details from Jack Mason at jm2161@york.ac.uk

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Fabian Society
New Year conference
Saturday 18 January,
Friends House, 173-177
Euston Road, London
NW1 2BJ

#FEPSFAB20

Saturday 18 January 2020

Friends House, London NW1 2BJ

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
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FABIAN
SOCIETY

FEPS-Fabian New Year Conference

Where next? The left in the 2020s

Featuring:

Sadiq Khan

Lisa Nandy MP

Keir Starmer MP

László Andor

Sir John Curtice

Kate Green MP

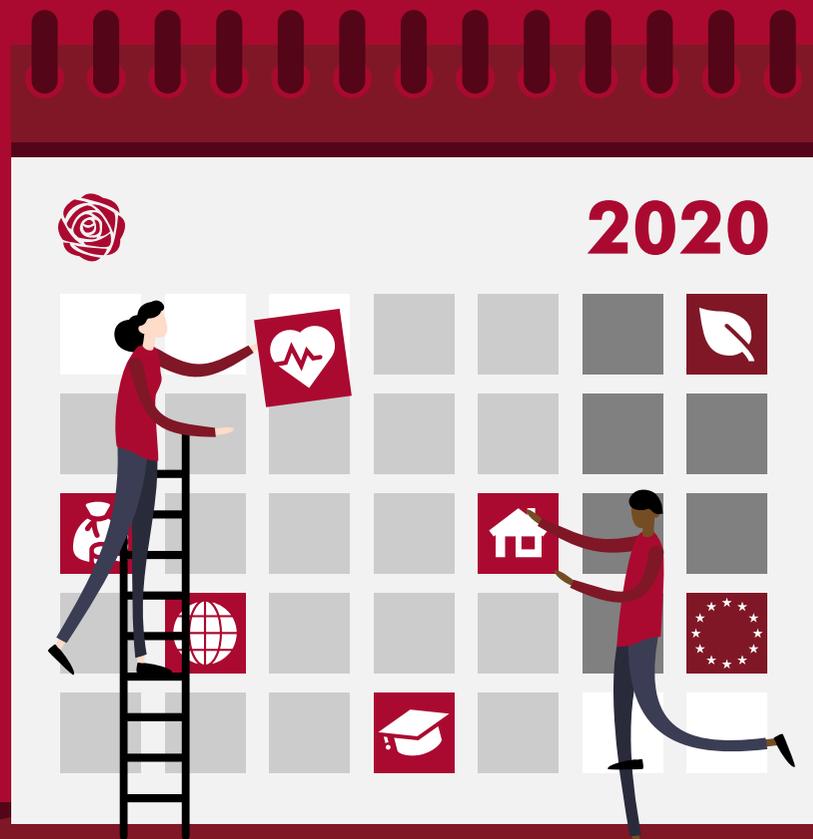
Rory Palmer MEP

Rachel Reeves MP

Wes Streeting MP

Polly Toynbee

and many more



Visit fabians.org.uk/events for information and to book online