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**Policy Papers**  
**of County Durham Fabian members, May 2020**

**SUMMARIES OF 6 PAPERS, INCLUDING ....**

**Introduction; how the papers link up, page 3**

The papers, listed below, share subject matter and approach, and the authors have to some extent shared the content in draft. All see the impact of coronavirus as possibly prompting a sea-change in political attitudes. Frank and Gordon see their papers, based on a society involving citizenship and life long learning, to be complementary. All stress the importance of public services, with a much more comprehensive approach, Frank to lifelong learning and David to a National Health *System*. Two authors touch on the issue of Regional governance - and the need to have more effective democracy, One author says that too many Councils are ruled by councillors who are 'pale, stale and male' and Fraser argues for a major change in approach to unseat the County's Conservative MPs. As a footnote, I would add that Andrew Marr, in this week's New Statesman, argues that Labour could emerge strongly from the nation's experience if Keir

Starmer is prepared to counter nationalism and to be a leader in climate change, a topic we don't emphasize.

<https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/introduction-to-policypapers-of-county.html> \_

### **The next few months, page 6**

**Fred Robinson is a Professorial Fellow at St Chad's College, Durham University**

The next few months – and probably years – will be tough. Recovery from the Covid-19 crisis is likely to be slow and difficult. This crisis should be a wake-up call, prompting a new urgency to develop a much more sustainable and resilient economy and society.

<https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/the-next-few-months-fred-robinson-is.html>

### **Where do we go from here?, page 8**

**Gordon Morris, former writer for the Journal, One NorthEast and Newcastle University**

When the current coronavirus crisis is over, will we put aside our differences and find the means to restore an economy in deep recession? And will that involve recreating the bulk of the public domain, along with the role of the regional or local state. Will we be able to rediscover the collective spirit and learn how to re-engage with the public? These are urgent and meaningful tasks that face a rejuvenated Labour Party

<https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/where-do-we-go-from-here-gordon-morris.html>

### **Suddenly Radical Change is Possible: Proposals for a post Covid-19 world", p.12**

**Frank Coffield Emeritus Professor\_**

Now is the time to end neo-liberal economic thinking and practices such as austerity; zero-hour contracts, where people want full-time employment, should be outlawed. We should employ a stronger definition of democracy to encourage it to be practised in all areas of society; eg local school boards to be re-introduced, with regional government, with serious devolved powers and resources, to be established. There should be a re-evaluation of the role and income of key workers; a special case to be made if executive pay is to exceed ten times the pay of the average worker in the company

Now is the time for lifelong learning to be a right of citizenship, free from cradle to grave, to render citizens personally enhanced, socially included and politically active. Conflict and resistance should be countered by organising People's Assemblies at local, regional and national levels, to agree on proposals on contentious issues

We should introduce a new Green Deal to provide decent jobs and to respond to climate breakdown "on the same scale as the problem itself", end our reliance on nuclear power and armaments and invest the money in expanding the provision of education, and care for the young and the elderly.

The cost of these proposals to be met by overhauling the tax system; eg closing tax havens, introducing a wealth tax, raising income tax on the highest earners, etc.

<https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/suddenly-radicalchange-is-possible.html>

### **Developing a National Health SYSTEM. P.24**

**David Taylor-Gooby, author on the NHS and member of Socialist Health Association**

The current National Health and Care System has shown the fact that a system can run on the basis of an ethic of altruism and public service, not profit.

The hospitals have always held primacy in our system, and reorganisations have tried to rebalance the system in favour of community health and primary care.

Public Health has been weakened by the 2012 Act and enjoyed more prominence during the period of Primary Care Trusts when it was integrated with Primary Care. This situation needs to be restored

Health and Care need to be integrated regionally and the paper argues for Combined Authorities to be given overall control.

<https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/developing-national-health-system.html>

### **Rebuilding the Red Wall: Reversing the loss of parliamentary seats in County Durham, p. 30**

**Cllr Fraser Tinsley, MRTPI, Town Mayor, Greater Willington Town Council**

**Assistant Secretary, County Durham Fabian Society.**

Fraser argues that it is essential to build up a fresh generation of activists and councillors who are involved in today's local networks of connections. The Party also needs to co-ordinate across the County, while recognising that many types of jobs have changed, from manual jobs with strong trades union backing to others which lack it, in care homes or in white collar and intermediate jobs. Above all, housing patterns and tenure has changed immensely. These all require a different Labour Party, and one which is not afraid to be patriotic!

[https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/rebuildingthe-red-wall-reversing\\_22.html](https://countydurhamfabians.blogspot.com/2020/05/rebuildingthe-red-wall-reversing_22.html)

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# Introduction to Policy Papers

## of County Durham Fabian members, May 2020

**Alan Townsend, Secretary, former Councillor and Professor of Regional Development**

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The five policy papers which follow were written by Local Society members at the end of an already busy period, January to March, 2020, when attendance at our three meetings averaged 45, due apparently to the rapid challenges arising from the December general election and delivery of BREXIT. How much more tumultuous has been the situation under lockdown, the period during which the authors wrote their pieces.

In the first paper, **Fred Robinson** accepts that recovery from the Covid-19 crisis is likely to be slow and difficult. Yet he would recognise the question put to Thomas Picketty, “Could this pandemic tip us towards the kind of participatory socialism that you recommend?” Picketty replied:

*It's too early to say, precisely because pandemics can have such contradictory effects on political mobilisation and thinking. At the very least, I think, it will reinforce the legitimacy of public investment in healthcare. But it could have a completely different impact.*

(T. Picketty, Guardian, 13/05/20, p. 17),

This points to a common theme of all our authors. **Frank Coffield** uses the title “*Suddenly radical change is possible...*” **Fred** agrees that this crisis should be a wake-up call, prompting a new urgency to develop a much more sustainable and resilient economy and society. Both **Gordon Morris** and **Frank Coffield** argue that a discrediting of neo-liberalism, a regime so eminent since Thatcher, should profoundly re-balance society against powerful wealthy elites, through tax reform to favour greater income equality.

It should also recreate the bulk of the public domain, along with the role of the regional or local state. **Gordon Morris** asks whether we will be able to rediscover the collective spirit. All authors are concerned over the quality of democracy. Their views on the Labour Party are compared with criticisms of its forward position in County Durham by (Councillor) **Fraser Tinsley** in the closing paragraph of this introduction.

**Frank Coffield** sees it as one of his three major principles to reinvigorate democracy, reminding us of **Fred's** earlier talk to the Society on “Who runs the north”, across the membership of Hospital Trusts, Local Enterprise Partnerships etc. (reference to the publication?)

As one of his principles, **Frank** cites the health crisis to demand a total re-evaluation of those considered to be the key workers in society, citing hospital cleaners and porters and supermarket staff among the lowest paid workers in the country, who have proved vital in keeping us alive and well. In looking at changing employment structures he follows critical opinion in seeking to outlaw zero hours contracts, and supports a new Green Deal to provide decent jobs and to respond to climate breakdown.

His third principle is for Lifelong Learning for all students leaving the secondary stage. The term 'education' should here be interpreted as encompassing technical training and re-training for unemployed or redundant workers and all forms of further, vocational and adult education, which deserve as much resource as that spent on higher education.

**David Taylor-Gooby** takes a similar broad approach, in this case across the whole of the Health *System*, including Public Health, Social Care, Pharmacy and Dentistry. That they all need to work together has been acknowledged by experts for years; doing something about it has proved elusive and difficult. However, the present crisis has shown many gaps and problems which need to be rectified, so perhaps this is the time to try and do it. Past reorganisations have tried to rebalance the system in favour of community health and primary care. But Public Health was weakened by the 2012 Act, having enjoyed more prominence during the period of Primary Care Trusts when it was integrated with Primary Care. This situation needs to be restored. Above all, Health and Care need to be integrated regionally and the paper argues for Combined Authorities to be given overall control, while **Frank** argues (more generally) for regional government.

In looking to the next Parliamentary elections in County Durham, **Fraser Tinsley** asserts that the state of Health and Education services in the County, and Labour's national policies for them, are important, despite the invisibility of social care. However, he might agree with **Frank** that "No-one who has been a member of a Council Committee in a city controlled by one political party for generations could claim that our current version of democracy will solve much. Too many Councils are ruled by councillors who are 'pale, stale and male', and some are female". **Fraser** argues that it is essential to build up a fresh generation of councillors who are involved in today's local networks of connections. The Party also needs to co-ordinate across the County, while recognising that many types of jobs have changed, from manual jobs with strong trades union backing to others which lack it, in care homes or in white collar and intermediate jobs. Above all, housing tenure has changed immensely, partly through sale of council houses, but particularly because most towns and villages now all have large commuter housing estates. These all require a different Labour Party, and one which is not afraid to be patriotic!

Ironically, the "completely different impact" posited earlier for the pandemic by Picketty is indeed one of nationalism. And meanwhile, more recent Guardian writers

posit that the new political situation of Spring 2020, has given way to anxiety over practical ways forward for a Conservative government with heavy debt obligations.

## **The next few months**

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### **Summary**

The next few months – and probably years – will be tough. Recovery from the Covid-19 crisis is likely to be slow and difficult. This crisis should be a wake-up call, prompting a new urgency to develop a much more sustainable and resilient economy and society

### **After Covid-19**

One day, this awful pandemic will be over. Or at least the crisis will have passed. It is possible to imagine a time when the situation will be under control. There will be far fewer new cases and widespread testing and contact tracing will be used to control infection. Better treatments will have been developed and – we hope – there'll be a safe and effective vaccine to support an 'exit strategy'.

We certainly aren't there yet. But now, as we see at least a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, thoughts can turn to what the future holds, after Covid-19. Will we be returning to normal, to 'business as usual'? Or will things be very different?

The next few months will be difficult. Recovery will be slow. Restrictions will be eased, but then may need to be imposed again if there's an increase in infections and hospitals are under renewed pressure. Social distancing is going to have to continue for a long time. People will be fearful. Of course, much depends on when (and if) a vaccine becomes widely available. And in all this there's the international dimension: gradual recovery in the UK will be overshadowed by desperate suffering in the world's poor countries.

One thing we do know: the economy will be in deep recession. UK government spending has had to increase substantially to support businesses and households hit by the lockdown. Government borrowing is rising fast as tax revenues plummet. The backdrop is a global slump, at least as bad as the Great Depression of the 1920s, and a lot more sudden. Unemployment will rise and household incomes drop. Some economists think the UK economy could bounce back quite quickly, but that feels like wishful thinking. Many businesses will have gone bust. UK companies exporting products and services will be affected by weak demand and global oversupply, their difficulties quite possibly compounded by post-Brexit problems. Worried domestic consumers are going to be reluctant to spend, adding to recessionary pressures.

## Hope

But this has to be a time for hope, not despair. This trauma has certainly made us all think and it could prove to be a pivotal moment when we choose a different path. We could learn some important lessons from this.

Crises focus the mind on what really matters. Everyone is well aware of the vital importance of key workers who are keeping things going during the lockdown. There's a renewed appreciation of the NHS and of people working in care homes. There's recognition of the immense contribution of staff from BAME communities and from overseas. Shop-workers, delivery drivers, and those working for the utilities are seen to be essential.

There is also a new awareness of the role and responsibilities of the state. We look to the government to act – and we see how important it is that the state is competent and ready to intervene to support the society and economy. The importance of international co-operation is also clearly revealed: a virus doesn't recognise borders.

And of course we really are all in this together. Within local communities there has been an upsurge of mutual aid, volunteering and neighbourliness. There's a palpable intergenerational solidarity. Every day the Echo has uplifting stories of people helping each other. The selfishness that's been a strong element in our culture since the 1980s is unacceptable in such a crisis.

I hope that we will learn lessons from this experience and not just try to put it behind us and get back to 'normal'.

This pandemic has shown how fragile our lives are. It could be taken as a wake-up call, reminding us of all the issues we'd prefer not to think about. We were dimly aware that a virus like this could threaten us, but did nothing about it. Our government, like others, was unprepared and has struggled to catch up.

There are other major threats on the horizon. Climate change is an emergency, but the response to it is clearly inadequate. There are serious problems with global food production, especially livestock production – which could generate viruses far more lethal than Covid -19 as well as promoting antibiotic resistance. Our way of life, based on endless economic growth, is environmentally unsustainable.

The hope, then, is that we do everything we can to address these issues and avoid another terrible and destructive crisis like this one. We can draw on a renewed understanding of what matters, how problems need to be tackled and how we can all work together to build sustainability and resilience. Here in the North East we can draw on traditions of solidarity and community. But it's a big challenge. After this crisis, things will be different – and maybe they need to be.

# **Where do we go from here?**

**Gordon Morris, former writer for the Journal, One NorthEast and Newcastle University**

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## **Summary**

When the current coronavirus crisis is over, will we put aside our differences and find the means to restore an economy in deep recession? And will that involve recreating the bulk of the public domain, along with the role of the regional or local state.

Will we be able to rediscover the collective spirit and learn how to re-engage with the public?

These are urgent and meaningful tasks that face a rejuvenated Labour Party

## **Where do we go from here?**

The American writer Rebecca Solnit essentially asked a question many of us are thinking about at present. When the current coronavirus crisis is over, what follows?

Will we put aside our differences and find the means to restore an economy in deep recession? One that overcomes the vast financial inequality gap that divides people and undermines society? And will that involve recreating the bulk of the public domain, along with the role of the regional or local state? These are urgent and meaningful tasks that face a rejuvenated Labour Party.

Foremost among our considerations will be to understand the true nature of the problem confronting us. Will we be able to rediscover the collective spirit and learn how to re-engage with the public? Understanding change will be uppermost, from the actual circumstances that prevail to achievement of our objectives and their envisaged consequences, while allowing for contingencies – the unexpected events that throw us off course, such as the coronavirus crisis.

Solnit put the matter succinctly in her Guardian Long Read article that was published on April 8:

She wrote: “We have reached a crossroads, we have emerged from what we assumed was normality, things have suddenly overturned. One of our main tasks now – especially those of us who are not sick, are not frontline workers, and are not dealing with other economic or housing difficulties – is to understand this moment, what it might require of us, and what it might make possible.”

In response to this immense and difficult challenge I have been studying three books that offer different, yet complimentary, perspectives on this major issue. They are, in order of appearance: ‘The Great Transformation’ by Karl Polanyi, first published in 1944 yet with still great relevance to today; ‘Capital and Ideology’, the lengthy work by French economics

professor Thomas Picketty; and 'Decline of the Public' by David Marquand, the former Labour MP turned academic.

### **The Great Transformation**

In this book Karl Polanyi investigated the rise of capitalism and how it morphed into laissez-faire or free-market form during the early Victorian period, with the consequences for dire poverty of which we are aware. Following the First World War the late 1920s and 1930s Depression saw the demise of this red in tooth and claw version of capitalism, along with the gold standard that underpinned the various currencies involved in world trade.

However, this form of market capitalism found its way back into general use after President Richard Nixon took the US off the restored gold standard in 1971 and left currencies to float on foreign exchanges. Since then it has evolved into the neo-liberal system of the present day. The Labour government in the UK followed the US down the monetarist route of curbing inflation in 1976, when prices and wage policy with union agreement failed to solve the problem.

Polanyi looks into the historic roots of capitalism, including the Speenhamland payments to the poor between 1795 and 1834 which provided the rural poor with basic support for buying bread. This popular assistance was cobbled together by a group of Berkshire justices, and payments were drawn from parish sources paid for out of the rates. Unfortunately, the Speenhamland measures were seen by capitalist entrepreneurs and their political backers as a way of preventing the development of a labour market, providing a disincentive for rural workers to join the growing army of impoverished factory workers. So Speenhamland was abolished.

The most recent publication of Polanyi's great book carries a foreword by Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz and a useful introduction by the American sociology professor Fred Block.

I will not attempt to explain all the complex arguments that Polanyi outlines in his attack on the rise of free-market capitalism. Except to say that he took particular exception to what in his view was the fictitious commodification of labour, land and money.

Block explains: "Polanyi argues that creating a fully self-regulating market economy requires that human beings and the natural environment be turned into pure commodities, which assures the destruction of both society and the natural environment."

He adds: "the logic underlying this article rests on Polanyi's distinction between real and fictitious commodities... By this definition land, labour and money are fictitious commodities because they were not originally produced to be sold on a market... It means that economic theorizing is based on a lie, and this lie places human society at risk."

Despite the failures of the Stock Market Crash and the Depression of the 1930s, market capitalism returned in what was then called monetarism and then neo-liberalism during the late 1970s and 1980s, through the anti-union policies and links between the Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and US President Ronald Reagan. This led to widespread privatisation of public assets in the UK such as the water, gas, telephony and electric utilities, followed by similar moves against the rail industry by the following Major government during the 1990s.

To give a flavour of the Polanyi assault on market capitalism it is worth including a couple of quotations from his book: “Free enterprise and private ownership are declared to be essentials of freedom. No society built on other foundations is said to deserve to be called free. The freedom that regulation creates is denounced as unfreedom; the justice, liberty and welfare it offers are decried as a camouflage of slavery.”

Earlier in the book he wrote: “Industrial civilisation will continue to exist when the utopian experiment of a self-regulating market will be no more than a memory.” But he added, in 1944, something which makes uncomfortable reading to a modern reader: “Much of the massive suffering inseparable from a period of transition is already behind us. In the social and economic dislocation of our age, in the tragic vicissitudes of the Depression, fluctuations of currency, as unemployment, shifting of social status, spectacular destruction of historical states, we have experienced the worst. Unwittingly we have been paying the price of change.”

### **Capital and Ideology**

This is a detailed examination of the worldwide causes of the inequalities we are currently experiencing. Like Polanyi he looks back at the historic roots of capitalism, although in his case he uses terms such as ‘ternary’ societies to describe the noble-higher clergy-and common people systems of government that preceded the current ‘ownership’ era.

Picketty uses charts and graphs freely in more than 1,000 pages of evidence he amasses to justify his economic and political points. And he comes up with novel descriptions like ‘Brahmin Left’ to describe the emergence of the intellectual dominance on much of the European left of the political spectrum.

One example of his extensive research is the graph on page 419. This proves that the income inequality gap between the US and Europe has grown substantially between 1940 and the present. It shows that the leading earners (those in the highest decile, which is the top 10pc) earn up to 12pc more than their already heavily paid European counterparts, who themselves take over 35pc of the total income. The gap grows even greater among the top 1pc, as shown by other evidence produced in the recent past by Stiglitz and others.

Picketty investigates the situation not only in Western Europe and North America, but also in countries such as Russia and Brazil, and places including China and India, with huge and growing populations and rapidly changing economies. Along the way he examines the impact of slave and colonial cultures on emergent societies during the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

However, his critique is clear – that inequality in its current manifestation is harmful. The solution? Progressive taxation and the kind of participatory socialism on the lines of what was once found in social democratically controlled nations.

## Decline of the Public

This book was published in 2004 and in it Marquand makes an impassioned plea for the restoration of the 'public domain' that has been under attack from neo-conservatives for the past 40 years or more. What the public domain covers is such non-commercial resources as the health service, schools and universities, while also including intangible things that include the legal and parliamentary system. The civil service and other types of public resources are things on which societies depend.

There is, likewise, a more recent argument to be made for the restoration to the public domain of utilities like water, gas, electricity, telephony and rail transport, that were privatised under the Thatcher and Major governments, but which underpin the economy.

Marquand lists 13 public domain propositions that "would form the core of such a philosophy" and which summarise many of the arguments in the book. They are:

- 1 A vigorous and extensive public domain is fundamental to a civilised society, to crucially important forms of human flourishing, and, not least, to democratic citizenship.
- 2 Belief in the possibility of a public interest, distinct from private interests, is fundamental to the public domain. So is a public discourse based on that belief.
- 3 In the public domain, citizenship rights trump both market power and the ties of family, friendship, neighbourhood and connection.
- 4 The public domain is, in a special sense, the domain of trust. Trust relationships are fundamental to it; public trust is symbiotically connected with the contestations, debates and negotiations, and the values of equity and citizenship, which are of its essence.
- 5 It follows that the public domain must be protected from the ever-present threat of incursion by the market and private domains.
- 6 In our time, the chief vehicles for market incursion are the pervasive notion that public domain institutions should be managed as though they were market institutions, and the rhetoric of consumerism.
- 7 The rule of law, embodied in an independent, authoritative judiciary, and a disinterested, non-partisan professional civil service, have a crucial part to play in protecting the public domain from such incursions.
- 8 The goods of the public domain must not be treated as commodities or surrogate commodities. Performance indicators designed to mimic the indicators of the market domain are therefore out of place in the public domain, and do more harm than good.
- 9 By the same token, the language of buyer and seller, producer and consumer, does not belong in the public domain; nor do the relationships which this language implies. People are consumers only in the market domain; in the public domain, they are citizens. Attempts to focus these relationships into the market mould undermine the service ethic which is the true guarantor of quality in the public domain. In doing so, they impoverish the entire society.
- 10 The search for competitiveness – in practice, for higher productivity, achieved by substituting capital for labour – which is proper to the market domain is also out of place in the public domain.
- 11 Professions, professionalism and the professional ethic are inextricably linked to the public domain. This is most obviously true of the public-sector professions, which serve the

public interest by definition; but it is also true of private-sector professions, whose duty is to serve the private interest of their own clients.

12 To carry out their duties, professionals must have the autonomy to exercise their judgement as they see fit. This means that professional performance cannot be assessed, or professional career prospects determined, solely or even by market criteria or criteria that mimic those of the marketplace.

13 Wrongly used, state power can do as much damage to the public domain as market power. To guard against that danger, constitutional checks and balances supported by strong and vigorous intermediate institutions, standing between the state and the individual, are indispensable.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding the roots of inequality, as both Polanyi and Picketty show, is key to working out how society has ended up in its present divisions. But one of the most urgent tasks lies in restoring our public domain and the notion of fairness which has come under sustained attack from the ideology of neo-liberalism.

Perhaps the final word should go to Picketty, whose vast and detailed research provides much of the evidence we need for the fight back and recovering our sense of social well-being. This, as he outlines, involves learning to live with an acceptable degree of inequality that has been with us since time immemorial.

Towards the end of his extensive findings Picketty writes: "Change comes when the short-term logic of events intersects with the long-term evolution of ideas. Every ideology has its weaknesses, but no human society can live without an ideology to make sense of its inequalities."

## **Suddenly radical change is possible: Proposals for a post Covid-19 world**

**Frank Coffield, Emeritus Professor**

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*"In the midst of fear and isolation, we are learning that profound change is possible. Maybe during a catastrophe we understand the power of community, and what we can achieve together ... One of our main tasks now ... is to understand this moment, what it might require of us and what it might make possible." (Rebecca Solnit, 2020: 5-6)*

### **Summary**

The main changes that this paper argues for:

- Now is the time to end neo-liberal economic thinking and practices such as austerity
- zero-hour contracts, where people want full-time employment, to be outlawed
- employ a stronger definition of democracy to encourage it to be practised in all areas of society eg local school boards to be re-introduced

- regional government, with serious devolved powers and resources, to be established
- Now is the time for lifelong learning to be a right of citizenship, free from cradle to grave, to render citizens personally enhanced, socially included and politically active. conflict and resistance to be countered by organising People's Assemblies at local, regional and national levels to agree on proposals on contentious issues
- a re-evaluation of the role and income of key workers; a special case to be made if executive pay is to exceed ten times the pay of the average worker in the company
- introduce a new Green Deal to provide decent jobs and to respond to climate breakdown "on the same scale as the problem itself" DIEM 25 (2019: 6)
- end our reliance on nuclear power and armaments and invest the money in expanding the provision of education and care for the young and the elderly
- the cost of these proposals to be met by overhauling the tax system eg closing tax havens, introducing a wealth tax, raising income tax on the highest earners, etc.

### 1. Introduction

In a period of a few short weeks our lives have been transformed and will not return to what they were before because our values, priorities and our sense of what is possible have all been stress tested, some re-affirmed and others recast. This paper aims to stimulate a discussion with fellow Fabians so that, when the lockdown is lifted, we are ready to insist on these proposals for radical changes: a redistribution of power, opportunities, wealth and income.

The task now is to construct a new vision of the kind of country we want to work and live in which would enable us to flourish – individually and collectively. This new vision needs to be more than a response to current failings but must appeal to the heart as well as the head. It must inspire us, bring out the best in our human nature and attract increasing support.

It also needs to be more than a stirring call to action: it must be hard-headed and have some understanding of the difficulties in moving from where we are to where we want to be. We will need, in short, a well-tested and practical theory of change and one is offered. The danger is leaving the public arena to those who will move quickly to re-establish the previous economic order of neo-liberalism which has been so detrimental, particularly in the North East.

For the last 40 years successive administrations have been in hock to neo-liberal economic thinking and practices, the central aim of which has been to shrink the size and change the role of the state. Three interconnecting policies have done most damage: **an unthinking belief in markets and deregulation** as the solution to most problems; **privatisation** which turns public assets into private profit; and **performance management**, where human beings are treated as commodities to be exploited. The baleful results are everywhere to be seen: tax evasion by large corporations and the elite which has contributed to grotesque and increasing levels of inequality; local government and social services starved of funds; trade

unions' rights curtailed; hundreds of thousands living precariously in the gig economy on short-term, part-time or zero-hours contracts; working families who are so poor they are one week away from destitution and have to depend on food banks; and a determination to pursue infinite growth on a finite planet.

What follows is not a comprehensive model, but three general principles, the criteria needed to judge them and a practical theory of change. Constructive comments will be most welcome.

## **2. Criteria for judging principles**

We need some criteria by which to judge their suitability. The work of Erik Olin Wright is indispensable as he has suggested three such criteria: is the principle desirable? viable? achievable? (2007:27). The first criterion is relatively easy to elaborate, but the last is the most difficult. Each principle will be subjected to these tests to see how it fares. Wright discusses two other criteria. First, who would be the winners and who the losers? Second, can we settle on intermediate reforms – what Wright calls ‘waystations’ – which contain the values of a completed programme, and which would in the meantime enhance the democratic knowledge, skills and practices of the participants?

The three principles I propose are: The need to practise rather than just praise democracy; lifelong learning as a right of citizenship; and creating jobs worthy of human beings.

## **3. Use a strong definition of democracy to re-invigorate our politics**

If you think you live in a democracy in the UK, the wool has been pulled right down over your eyes, because we have but a desiccated version of the real thing. Some politicians are for ever boasting that Westminster is the ‘mother of parliaments’ but the major institutions of our society – the House of Lords, the hereditary Monarchy, the Privy Council, the Judiciary, most businesses, factories and unions and nearly all schools, Further Education colleges, universities and Local Enterprise Partnerships – are deeply undemocratic. To quote J. Mursell (1955):

“If the central institutions of a democratic society do not work for the support and extension of democracy, then they are socially useless or socially dangerous.”

The sudden emergence of the Covid virus, the lack of knowledge about how to treat and control it, and the insatiable need for equipment would have tested the metal of any government. Unfortunately the task fell, not to a Cabinet drawn from all wings of the Tory Party, but to a group of inexperienced ideologues from the extreme right who fell back on their previous tactics for dealing with intractable problems and uncomfortable questions. The gap between their self-exonerating bluster and the ugly reality became a chasm. They waffled, they resorted to answering questions no-one had asked and they parroted pre-scripted messages. They were incapable of admitting mistakes (“we took the right decisions at the right time”), or of conceding the scale of the challenges (“We are ramping up ...”), or accepting responsibility for their decisions (“We are following the science”) but there is no such entity as “the science” which is a method. This malaise then spread to some of the scientific and medical advisers.

This behaviour is, in part, a response to pressure from our feral, tabloid press which makes mincemeat of any politician who admits a weakness, never mind a major mistake. The crisis requires politicians to treat us as adults who can cope with disquieting news. They must learn to change their stance before they confront the next crisis of climate breakdown.

Before that happens this **first principle will lay down an obligation on all our institutions to show how they plan to become ever more democratic.**

We also need a stronger definition of democracy that would encourage us to practise rather than just praise democracy: *“Democracy ... is not just a mode of decision-making, but a way of living and learning together... it has the capacity to enable us to become more fully human and lead good, creative lives together ... its essential doctrine ... is faith in the constructive powers of ordinary men and women.”* (Fielding & Moss, 2011: 9, 43 & 138). To which we need to add: it will take structural change to bring about this ethical renewal.

Democracy is not a possession of which you have more or less. It is a relationship between people which can be disempowering or enabling. The trouble is that democracy, when it has been taught in our schools, has been treated as a collection of facts and figures. Instead, it needs to be *practised*, to be put to use in all areas of our communal living. Michael Fielding has shown how schools, colleges and universities could become more democratic by climbing the ladder from the first step, where students are treated via questionnaires as a source of data, to the top step, where students are not complaining customers but partners in learning and in determining what is to count as learning (Fielding, 2014).

This principle puts habitual participation in democracy at the heart of our society. Citizens would be involved not only in voting for representatives, but also in the major decisions affecting their locality, about the allocation of resources and defining what issues need to be addressed and in what order of priority. Conflicts are inevitable but information and arguments can be openly shared and challenged by reason, logic and evidence. People’s Assemblies at local, regional and national levels will be introduced to create a new culture of civic participation and to agree on proposals for political action as used in the Irish Republic over abortion (see DIEM25, 2019). Resistance will be ferocious: in the 2016 presidential election more than half the money raised for candidates came from just 158 of the richest families in the US, 87.3% of whom backed Donald Trump (Alemanno, 2017: 271-2).

If this proposal were to be implemented, what changes would it bring about? Sometimes it is easier to describe the opposite of what is desired. Paul Valery typified our weak-kneed democracy thus: there’s a certain type of politician for whom: *“Politics is the art of preventing people from taking part in affairs which properly concern them”* (1943). In direct contrast, we need to invent new ways of involving more citizens in the decisions that affect them in order to foster a sense of personal responsibility for public issues. We could insist, for example, that no hospital, no local surgery, no body in charge of social housing, no FE college, university or school should operate outside the democratic oversight of local politicians and concerned citizens. Local school boards could be re-introduced with places (for staff, students, parents, local councillors and active citizens) open to direct election.

Would enough of us come forward to make this proposal a reality? It may take the existential emergence of an Arctic meltdown to galvanise us into action.

Local government has been systematically starved of funds and its powers emasculated; it has been treated like fish and gutted.<sup>i</sup> It was neither ignorance nor stupidity that produced the high percentage of people voting for Brexit in some working-class communities in the North East, but the feeling that for decades that they had been abandoned by local as well as national politicians. These communities point to the failure to replace the highly skilled and highly paid jobs in shipbuilding, steel-making and coal-mining when these industries were closed in the 1980s. Their craft knowledge and skills were not passed on to younger generations and were lost. Their pride in being skilled workers was trampled on.<sup>ii</sup> It would, however, be nostalgic not to remember also the heavy toll these industries took on the health of their workers and of the environment.

I remember Peter Morrison, then Minister of State at the Department of Employment, responding as follows at a meeting in Durham to a question about the horrendous rates of local unemployment and the devastating effect it was having on communities: *“Let them rot”*, he snarled, *“they will never vote Conservative.”* But they have and they may be about to learn a painful lesson.

Regional government also needs to be established. We need to end the dominance of London by building up strong regions and cities with serious devolved powers and resources, where, as in Germany, regional banks support regional industries and invest in innovative businesses. Another crucial difference: regional leaders in Germany (in industry, the arts, and politics) show their long-term commitment to the region by sending their children to local schools.<sup>iii</sup>

To sum up, “democracy is not only something to fight **for**, it is something to fight **with**” (Williams, F, 1941, v-vi, emphasis added).

#### **4. Lifelong learning as a right of citizenship**

The second principle states: **It will be the right of every citizen in the UK to be educated free of charge, from cradle to grave.** For too many what is offered as “education” is experienced as an imposition which destroys their curiosity; instead lifelong learning needs to be revitalised as opportunities at all stages of life to be engaged as equals in negotiating curricula that suit their needs. Not only the curriculum but teaching, learning and assessment need to be remodelled so that students become educated citizens who realise that democracy is not a given, but a fragile good that each generation must fight for. We need an education that will enable us to respond adequately to the major threats to our collective well-being, principally climate breakdown. It will also ensure, for instance, that all students leave the secondary stage as lifelong learners, with the ability and desire to continue learning (Coffield & Williamson, 2015). The term ‘education’ should here be interpreted as encompassing technical training and re-training for unemployed or redundant workers and all forms of further, vocational and adult education, which deserve as much resource as that spent on higher education.

By introducing this principle, citizens will have the democratic rights to be personally enhanced, to be socially included and to become politically active throughout their lives. Students need to be taught the political skills necessary to put solutions into practice. As Titus Alexander argues in his study guide, **Students as Change Agents**, “Knowledge is not enough” (2020: 3).

### **5. Creating jobs worthy of human beings**

Once the spread of the virus begins to be halted, the economy will be in recession if not depression, millions will be out of work and the burden of debt will be enormous. A staged return to work is likely but accompanied by a seismic shift in public opinion – a total re-evaluation of those considered to be the key workers in society. The hospital cleaners and porters, the ambulance, bus and delivery van drivers, the supermarket staff and the refuse collectors are among the lowest paid workers in the country, but have proved vital in keeping us alive and well.

Similarly, the public is re-evaluating the role in society of billionaires like Richard Branson, who has not paid tax in this country for 14 years, but who wants a massive bailout from the public purse to keep his businesses afloat rather than use his own vast fortune (Neate, 2020: 32). His profits are private gain but his losses are public liabilities.

Economic recovery will need a new Marshall plan with a Green New Deal at its heart, but fleshing out that plan is beyond the scope of this paper. Even before the outbreak, the artificial intelligence (AI) industry was having a wide-ranging impact on the nature of work and causing unemployment. This job crisis, however, has been with us for at least 40 years, since the time millions of workers were thrown onto the scrapheap during the recessions of the 1970s and 1980s. Politicians of all parties turned the crisis into one of individual responsibility where the onus was placed on workers to keep their skills up-to-date. The weasel word used was ‘*employability*’ and the spiralling rates of unemployment were forced down by putting unemployed miners onto disability benefits.

The nature of work is being transformed but what remains is the human desire for dignity. We must unmask euphemisms like ‘*flexibility*’ used by some employers to disguise their harsh treatment of workers. Zero-hour contracts, for those who want full-time employment with all the benefits the rest of us take for granted, is the exploitation of the weakest by the most powerful and must be outlawed. **Everyone in future will, as a result of the second principle, have been well educated to lead a life worth living and then trained to cope in a rapidly changing job market, which provides jobs worthy of human beings.**

But where are such jobs to come from? Three main sources are suggested. During a previous period of mass unemployment in the 1980s Raymond Williams showed where good, dignified jobs could come from:

*“The one great area of work that will never be made redundant ... is in the nurture and lifelong care of people. The permanent need for such work ... makes it nonsense to say that in any future society there will not be enough work to go round. At different phases of life, but especially in infancy, sickness, disability and old age, the*

*ratio of work is never less than one to one and can be as high as three to one, if it is to be properly carried out” (1983: 91).*

His argument remains as valid today as when he first made it - care of the young and the old is labour intensive. Let us re-open the thousands of Sure Start centres and Youth Clubs that have been closed since 2010 (Benn, 2018: 47) and extend free child care to all children under school age. Similarly, the long years of neglect of social care of the elderly could be ended by making social care into a profession. There are jobs that cannot be done by a machine, even by the clever robots being introduced to the care of the elderly.

The first source of new jobs is working with the young, the second working with the elderly and the third is in expanding all forms of renewable energy. Investing in green industries – solar, wind and wave power - to cope with climate breakdown would employ thousands of scientists, engineers and technicians in developing new technologies. Insulating homes and businesses, a massive programme of building social housing and of tree planting throughout the UK would bring well-paid and dignified work to every corner of the country. The blight of unoccupied properties owned by speculators also needs to be ended; and the unreliable supply of personal protective equipment should prompt us to stop the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs to poorer countries.

Greta Thunberg argues convincingly as follows: “... why invest in [nuclear power] that takes over ten years to build when wind and solar can be ready within a few months ... and falling in price by the minute? .... We haven’t even solved the problem of storing existing nuclear waste” (2020: 259).

The criteria suggested by Wright are: is this principle desirable? viable? achievable? Each of the three principles will now be examined.

## **6. The three tests**

### ***6a The first principle: democracy***

It will be desired by those who presently feel cut out of the political process, who feel powerless. Whether it would attract the support of the unemployed or those who have become politically apathetic and do not vote, or those who failed to receive government support during the crisis is highly unlikely. Those who are likely to object to power being redistributed are the ones who have accumulated power to themselves and who will fight to hold on to it.

Is it viable? It will be hard to enact because the principle calls for nothing less than a redistribution of power, but there are examples of this working successfully eg: the formal representation of unions on the boards of German companies; the profit sharing scheme for the workers at John Lewis and the involvement of students in organising the rules, curriculum and even staff appointments in certain radical schools in England (Fielding & Moss, 2011). Or the university students in England, forcing their institutions to take responsibility for sustainable development (Lightfoot, 2017). These ‘waystations’ or outposts of hope, show that political engagement is happening. In short, we have a history of successes to draw on.

Is it achievable? The number of politicians who have voluntarily given up power can be counted on the fingers of one badly mutilated hand. They routinely claim they are devolving power while surreptitiously increasing centralisation. This principle will provoke a battle for power and Wright did not call this criterion the hardest of all for nothing, because resistance from those in power will be instinctive, multi-faceted and implacable. This proposal will prove the hardest to enact for, as Levitsky & Ziblatt argue *“Democracy is grinding work [and requires] negotiation, compromise and concessions. Setbacks are inevitable, victories always partial”* (2018: 77).

There is, however, growing anger across all the political parties with the handling of this crisis by elite politicians and senior civil servants, but change in their behaviour is as elusive as ever. No-one who has been a member of a Council Committee in a city controlled by one political party for generations could claim that our current version of democracy will solve much. Too many Councils are ruled by councillors who are “pale, stale and male”, and some are female.

### **6b The second principle: lifelong learning**

Is the proposal desirable? The all-inclusive nature of the proposal should attract widespread support, apart from those who have throughout history fought to restrict education to an elite few. In practice the principle means that the long tail of underachievement in the UK will have to be tackled with sufficient resources, knowledge and expert teachers.<sup>iv</sup>

Is it viable? Primary, secondary and higher education is already free in Scotland, so why not in the rest of the UK? Will the costs be prohibitive especially given the huge costs of coping with the virus? Not if income tax were to be raised for the richest individuals (say, those earning more than £100,000 a year), multi-national corporations paid their fair share of tax, a new tax introduced on all properties in London over £1 million, tax havens were closed, properties revalued to increase council taxes and a wealth tax introduced, the tax benefits of private schools abolished, and corporation tax increased. But, if these measures did not raise sufficient funds, then we must be prepared to raise the standard rate of taxation for all taxpayers.<sup>v</sup> There would be losers who would use their economic power to fight tooth and nail to oppose such a measure, but its realisation is central to our ambitions.

Is it achievable? The egalitarian nature of the proposal is likely to be attractive to those young students burdened with huge debts on graduation. Some of the resources spent on Education needs, in the interests of fairness, to be redistributed from higher education towards further, adult and vocational education. The role of private schooling in the reproduction of a wealthy elite who are over-represented in the key positions in society must be curtailed (see Peter Taylor-Gooby, in press). A majority would have to be found in national parliaments for such a measure to pass into law. The conclusion is that the second proposal is both desirable and viable, but a major political battle will have to be won for it to be achieved.

### **6c The third principle: job creation**

Is it desirable? It may at first hearing appear utopian, but the digital revolution, which AI threatens, claims to remove many boring jobs that are better done by smart machines. AI

will also destroy many jobs currently done by educated members of the middle-class in finance, health care and administration. This proposal shows where worthwhile employment could still be found.

Is it viable? If those caring for the young and the elderly were to become members of well-paid professions with structured opportunities for continuing learning throughout their careers, then the cost will be immense.

Is it achievable? The job of enacting these three principles will become more arduous given the economic crisis that will follow the health crisis. The scale of the task is daunting, but on offer is an alternative strategy to the one employed by politicians in the UK in the 80s who left hundreds of thousands of workers with workless futures and blamed the subsequent deterioration of their communities on a lack of moral fibre or of economic enterprise and

### **7. A theory of change**

None of the above proposals will happen unless we have in addition a well-tested, practical theory of change.<sup>vi</sup> Leslie Crutchfield has studied in detail why some social movements in the States succeeded (like *Mothers Against Drunk Driving* and the *National Rifle Association*), while others (like *Occupy Wall Street* or the *Gun Control Movement* in the USA) did not. For years the researchers scrutinised, interviewed and compared a wide range of movements in order to extract insights into what distinguished the effective movements from the rest. The context is clearly different with Americans more willing to fund advocacy for causes, but her findings are summarised here under six headings:

- (i) **Turn Grassroots Gold** is about letting local activists lead the campaign and building networks among grassroots members.
- (ii) **Sharpen your Vision** means pushing for change locally and regionally and, only when support has been established, moving for change at a national level. Leaders of successful movements saw themselves “not as *commander* at the helm of an army, but rather a *co-ordinator* at the centre of a network” (2018:58. Original emphasis). This tactic is about composing a compelling story with a punchy title (eg Obama’s “*Yes We Can*” and Trump’s “*Make America Great Again*”) to galvanise supporters.
- (iii) **Change Hearts and Policy**, not one or the other, but both together by reframing the way the public view the issue. For example, the campaign for same-sex marriage changed its campaign message from “rights” to “love” and transformed its appeal.<sup>vii</sup>
- (iv) **Reckon with Adversarial Allies** is a plea to welcome rather than reject internal critics. This is where I part company with Crutchfield, based on my experience of campaigning to reform Ofsted, the government office for standards in education. There is a distinction which needs to be drawn between allies who usefully spot problems or solutions you have missed and those who offer objection after

objection to whatever is proposed. Some people are afraid of change, worrying that it will involve them in extra work; some have too much to gain from the *status quo*; for some the timing is never right; and for still others (mainly a type of etiolated academic) they love exploring the pros and cons of every proposal but will never come off the fence and actively support any course of action.

- (v) **Break from Business as Usual** is a reminder that some companies can be brought on board to support positive social and environmental changes. Some of the biggest corporations in the States have been highly influential in campaigns by altering their treatment of employees, by entering public debates and by using their capacity for innovation.
- (vi) **Be 'Leaderfull'** is their (rather ugly) term for movements which empower local leaders who bring coalitions together under one big tent and who insist that those people with lived experience of the problem should be the ones to lead the campaign. Successful causes are staffed by people "who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others" (2018:146).

Taken together these six patterns offer a powerful, if not surprising, list of tactics. Their book ends with a useful list of questions (under the headings described above) with which to interrogate any movement (pp 175-177). The most successful causes in their study were those which fired simultaneously on all six of these cylinders.

Will all the unnecessary deaths and suffering caused by Covid-19 finally push people to act or will the desire to return to life as previously lived be too strong? Neo-liberalism is dead as an intellectual force; the state has rescued countless firms, families and individuals; and an opportunity has opened up to construct a different future. If we are to use Crutchfield's insights, what would be our campaign message to change both hearts and policy? (Suggestion: "*Never again! Let's Live Differently*" or "*Redistribute power, opportunities, wealth and income*".) What initiatives are coming from the grassroots? What businesses can be brought on board? Where are the local leaders to spearhead the cause?

## **8. Final comments**

Walk down Northumberland Street in Newcastle or Sauchiehall Street in Glasgow and see abundant evidence of poor people, two-thirds of whom are in employment and yet still in poverty (Beckett, 2018). Rough sleepers are the most obvious sign of deprivation, but poverty is also etched into the faces of men, women and children. These adults have been beaten down by harsh working conditions and humiliating poverty, which is visible in their clothes and in their emaciated or obese bodies. Many survive by resorting to food banks. To talk of a 'classless' society or of an end to inequality<sup>viii</sup>, is to ignore the truth that is staring you in the face. It is a reproach to all the politicians in the UK who have been in power since the 1970s that, of the ten most deprived regions in the EU, six are in the UK; and their plight would be worse if it had not been for the EU.

We need a form of democracy which we practise by, for example, making lifelong learning a right of citizenship; by creating thousands of jobs worthy of human beings and by enhancing our social life as friends, neighbours, volunteers and concerned citizens. The crisis is creating renewed respect for our key workers, for scientists, for teachers and for the restorative power of the state as the bulwark of last resort. The crisis has shown us that governments have access not just to 'a magic money tree' but to a forest of such trees; they will fund whatever they deem essential, whatever the cost and even if they have to print money. We need a new vision, into which citizens voluntarily invest their trust, their energies and their hopes, because they feel confident that if the reforms outlined above were to be enacted, they themselves could turn their hopes into reality.

Ending on a note of hope should not be seen as a weakness, but rather a call to collective action to achieve radical change. Greta Thunberg's family end their book with these tough-minded words: *"... without demands hope is hollow. Without demands hope is simply standing in the way of the major change that is required"* (2020:270). Similarly, Rebecca Solnit argued: *"... hope is not optimism that everything will be fine regardless. Hope offers us clarity that, amid the uncertainty ahead, there will be conflicts worth joining and the possibility of winning some of them"* (2020: 8). This paper makes demands for the redistribution of power, opportunities, wealth and income, and will involve those who support them in conflicts. If we believe in these changes, then we must fight for them.

#### **SUDDENLY RADICAL CHANGE IS POSSIBLE - SUMMARY**

Finally, I summarise the main changes that this paper argues for:

- Now is the time to end neo-liberal economic thinking and practices such as austerity
- zero-hour contracts, where people want full-time employment, to be outlawed
- employ a stronger definition of democracy to encourage it to be practised in all areas of society eg local school boards to be re-introduced
- regional government, with serious devolved powers and resources, to be established
- Now is the time for lifelong learning to be a right of citizenship, free from cradle to grave, to render citizens personally enhanced, socially included and politically active. Students to be taught how to become agents of change. Tackle the long tail of under-achievement in the UK. Redistribute resources from higher education to further, adult and vocational education.
- conflict and resistance to be countered by organising People's Assemblies at local, regional and national levels to agree on proposals on contentious issues
- a re-evaluation of the role and income of key workers; a special case to be made if executive pay is to exceed ten times the pay of the average worker in the company

- introduce a new Green Deal to provide decent jobs and to respond to climate breakdown “on the same scale as the problem itself” DIEM 25 (2019: 6)
- end our reliance on nuclear power and armaments and invest the money in expanding the provision of education and care for the young and the elderly
- the cost of these proposals to be met by overhauling the tax system eg closing tax havens, introducing a wealth tax, raising income tax on the highest earners, etc.
- Now is the time to use a well-tested and practical theory of change to enact these proposals.<sup>ix</sup>

Frank Coffield

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## **Developing a National Health System**

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### **Summary**

The current National Health and Care System has shown the fact that a system can run on the basis of an ethic of altruism and public service, not profit.

The hospitals have always held primacy in our system, and reorganisations have tried to rebalance the system in favour of community health and primary care.

Public Health has been weakened by the 2012 Act and enjoyed more prominence during the period of Primary Care Trusts when it was integrated with Primary Care. This situation needs to be restored

Health and Care need to be integrated regionally and the paper argues for Combined Authorities to be given overall control.

## **Introduction**

No, the title was not a typo. There is more to healthcare than the NHS which we all know and love. Health Care includes Public Health, Social Care, Pharmacy and Dentistry, and they all need to work together. The present crisis has shown this. This is something which many experts in the field have acknowledged for years; doing something about it has proved elusive and difficult. This present crisis has shown not only the heroic dedication and commitment of the staff, but also the gaps and problems which need to be rectified, so perhaps this is the time to try and do it.

In this paper I have tried to set out some sort of roadmap of the problems we need to tackle. That is why I have called the objective a National Health System, rather than the current NHS, but have preserved the iconic brand which is known all over the world. I once met mountaineers in a foreign land who praised the NHS.

I am not an academic. I have taught about how the Health System works, but more practically I have been a councillor, worked for the NHS, served on a Clinical Commissioning Group and now Health Education England. I wrote a book about how the NHS should be organised with Sunderland University, and I will draw on bits of that in this paper, but my knowledge comes mainly from my practical experience. ("What Sort of NHS do We Want?", Searching Finance, 2012)

## **How we arrived at the present position**

There is much ignorance amongst the public as to how the NHS actually works. It is certainly very fragmented, but still able to respond as a national system, which has been shown by the present crisis. Many fondly think there was a "golden age" back in the 1950's when the NHS was first established. Aneurin Bevan boasted of a national system where the "sound of a bedpan dropped in Tredegar would reverberate around the Palace of Westminster".

We all know establishing the NHS was a political struggle and what emerged was a messy compromise. The immediate problem was sorting out hospitals which needed investment after the war. I can remember seeing pictures of my Grandmother, who was a hospital almoner, lining up the nurses to go out with the collection tins. Hospitals seem to have dominated ever since although they deal with a minority of the people who use the system. There are more patient contacts with GPs, carers, Public Health programmes, and Social Workers. Local Government had played an important role in health before 1948, and Directors of Public Health were important people. Much of what we would now call primary care was still run by local authorities up until the major reorganisation of 1974. Strong central control was the way things worked in 1948, a legacy of the war – the NCB, British Railways, The National Grid and even the New Towns. The new NHS was no different.

Initially Governments thought that a strong NHS would improve health and once the backlog of bad health had been dealt with, costs would reduce. This of course did not happen, so managing the NHS became a constant struggle between improving the service and keeping a lid on costs. In 1974 all health services came under Regional Health Authorities and this remained until the next major reorganisations at

the end of Thatcher's period in power. This was when the concept of the "market" was introduced into the NHS.

At that time the model of the big top-down organisation was being challenged both in the public and private sphere. Although big organisations were still centrally controlled from the top, they wanted more flexibility locally to restructure and adapt to changing conditions at the bottom. Even the army now operates like this. The idea was that those who planned a service would commission it from who could provide it best. Commissioning meant what the service was going to be had to be evaluated and planned. The NHS had to think exactly what it wanted and the best, and most cost-effective way, of achieving it. This does not necessarily mean using the private sector. Other NHS and not for profit organisations are often involved. But it was never a free-for-all. The NHS was still in charge. Resulting from the Thatcher reforms there was a privatisation of many ancillary services such as cleaning, maintenance and catering. For clinical services there was still a preference to commission NHS and not for profit organisations. One consequence of these changes was that local authorities outsourced much of their social care provision, mainly for economic reasons.

The Labour Governments after 1997 modified the model, introducing both Foundation Hospitals and Primary Care Trusts. In my opinion the PCTs were a very progressive reform, and one for which the Blair Governments, Frank Dobson and Alan Milburn received very little credit. They brought together Public and Community Health and allowed a high degree of local government involvement since they covered the same areas as local authorities and usually had councillors on their boards. Under the Blair Government resources were diverted to PCTs, and also prioritised deprived areas such as Easington in County Durham. There was a real push to reduce health inequalities. In my experience the PCTs also put a considerable amount of resource and effort into engaging with the public. In some ways this was a "golden age" for engagement, compared to the much less robust arrangements which replaced them.

The Black Report in 1979 pointed out that despite large investment in the NHS, health inequalities persisted. Professor Townsend, one of the main authors, mentioned Easington in a later report and visited Peterlee to explain his ideas. The dominance of the Hospitals in the system had led to a neglect of both social care and the promotion of health in the community. To reduce inequalities meant placing far more emphasis on how people lived, the conditions in which they lived and looking after them in the community when they were frail or unwell. Successive reports re-emphasised what the Black Report had said.

The Primary Care Trusts were an attempt to redress the power balance with the hospitals. More resources were given to community and public health, which were now integrated. GPs had a major role. The PCTs were coterminous (horrible NHS word) with local authorities, and the Director of Public Health was now appointed jointly between the local authority and the PCT. Cooperation was much easier. Many PCTs had councillors on their boards. The PCTs now had more power to negotiate with the hospitals to get better deals, and work with them. At this stage commissioning was mainly for other public sector and voluntary organisations. The

NHS was the “preferred provider”. The PCTs made considerable progress in improving public health, such as the reduction of smoking and teenage pregnancies, and set up many community initiatives.

In my opinion the PCTs were a very progressive reform, and one for which the Blair Governments, Frank Dobson and Alan Milburn received very little credit. They brought together Public and Community Health and allowed a high degree of local government involvement since they covered the same areas as local authorities and usually had councillors on their boards. Under the Blair Government resources were diverted to PCTs, and deprived areas were prioritised. There was a real push to reduce health inequalities. In my experience the PCTs also put a considerable amount of resource and effort into engaging with the public. In some ways this was a “golden age” for engagement, compared to the much less robust arrangements which replaced them.

I think I should make a few remarks about commissioning. Many on the left regard it as synonymous with privatisation. This simply is not so. As explained above the NHS is not monolithic and contains many different sections and specialities. Some of commissioning is straightforward – estimating the number of routine, predictable operations required in a year, like hip replacements. Then it is about negotiating the best deal with a provider. But some is more complex, such as public and community health which requires constructing alliances between different organisations. Using a private provider is not a necessary part of this at all.

All this was changed by the infamous Social Care Act of 2012 which established the Clinical Commissioning Groups. It compelled contracts to be put out for public tender, so private providers could apply, and often threatened to sue if they thought they had not been fairly considered.

Councillors were not allowed to be involved, and their only oversight was through Scrutiny Committees. Public Health was handed back to local authorities. A strong national agency, Public Health England was created to exercise many of the responsibilities which PCTs had previously done including disaster planning and campaigns to reduce smoking and other habits deemed to be harmful to health. I will say more about the consequences of that later.

The CCGs were a result of lobbying by a minority of GPs who wanted to commission directly without the NHS bureaucracy and pressure from private providers who wanted a bigger slice of the action. The Government thought they could use them to reduce costs. The whole enterprise was ill thought out and very disruptive. It is a useful lesson in the sort of “creative destruction” advocated by the likes of Dominic Cummings. The idea being that somehow once the bureaucratic shackles of the NHS and local government had been thrown off, GPs would somehow emerge as the heroes of the NHS and challenge the dominance of the Trusts. I can remember attending seminars before the new act was implemented where it was even advocated that two GPs could form a commissioning group. How they would work out the necessary plans and calculations was not thought about. I can remember a seminar about the changes entitled “Breaking Through”.

In reality it was only a minority of GPs who wanted to run the NHS. Most of them simply wanted to get on with their jobs which were demanding enough. Much of the pressure came from private providers, aided and abetted by members of the government anxious to reduce costs and eliminate, as they saw it, unnecessary bureaucracy. Andrew Lansley, in many other ways a fairly level-headed man, seemed carried away by it all, and David Cameron and Nick Clegg did not really understand it. The only contribution by the Liberals was to ensure lay representation on the new CCGs. The reorganisation was described by one critic as “visible from space” and disrupted the NHS for several years. Patterns of cooperation between agencies, carefully established over time were either disrupted or had to be carried on “under the radar” in the new competitive model. A new bureaucracy had to be established from the PCT staff to perform commissioning.

One hospital (Hinchinbrooke) was taken over by a private company which could not cope and had to hand it back to the NHS. Many private providers attempted to run the new 111 services, but now most of them are organised by Ambulance Trusts.

The idea behind the 2012 Act was that there would be a free market. The CCGs would commission the most efficient service, public or private. Collaboration, whether between hospitals and other parts of the NHS was not, in theory, allowed. Private providers could take the NHS to court if they thought the NHS had an unfair advantage. In practice, however, the national NHS kept a firm grip on things. There is always the need in the NHS to pool risk. If there is an outbreak or crisis in one area the whole system has to pitch in.

The 2012 Act led to an extremely costly and disruptive reorganisation. Many health professionals soon realised that it did not work. In reality the bureaucracy expanded, and much energy had to be expended negotiating between different parts of the NHS. The majority view was that if the NHS was going to cope, two things were necessary. Firstly, more resources needed to be directed to promoting good health, and thus reducing those diseases which were caused, or exacerbated, by a bad lifestyle, such as diabetes. Secondly an ageing population meant more people would need care in the community, rather than treatment in hospital. If they did not receive this care, then they would end up in hospital, as so called “bed blockers”. Hopefully if policies to address these objectives could be put into place it would reduce unnecessary hospital admissions.

Local health professionals have tried to negotiate arrangements for CCGs, Hospitals and Local Authorities to work together. These were originally called Strategic Transformation Partnerships, but have now morphed into Integrated Care Systems.

Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of the NHS, said in the Five Year Forward View

*“The government will not impose how the NHS and local government deliver this. The ways local areas integrate will be different, and some parts of the country are already demonstrating different approaches, which reflect models the government supports, including: Accountable Care Organisations such as the one being formed in Northumberland, to create a single partnership responsible for meeting all health and social care needs; devolution deals with places such as Greater Manchester which is joining up health and social care across a large urban area; and Lead*

*Commissioners such as the NHS in North East Lincolnshire which is spending all health and social care funding under a single local plan.”(Implementing the five Year Forward View 2017)*

More detailed plans for ICSs have been set out last year

*The NHS Long-Term Plan set the ambition that every part of the country should be an integrated care system by 2021. It encourages all organisations in each health and care system to join forces, so they are better able to improve the health of their populations and offer well-coordinated efficient services to those who need them.(The NHS, Designing Integrated Care Systems in England 2019)*

It is important to notice the word “Systems”. These ideas rely on different organisations working together. They do not pool budgets, and have no one accountable management, just committees who liaise.

The trouble is all this is against the 2012 Act. Manchester eventually commissioned other NHS organisations to deliver its community health services, but was threatened with court cases from private providers. All that would have wasted a considerable amount of public money.

The Conservative election manifesto recognised the system was not working in 2017 and proposed changes to the rules. All this has since been forgotten about with the dominance of Brexit but will eventually have to be addressed.

Some on the left see the ICS’ as some sort of conspiracy, implying that there is a secret plan to fragment the NHS and then sell off parts of it. Simon Stevens is often portrayed as being some sort of ogre who is using his American experience to somehow smuggle American health companies into this country. Remember that health is largely organised on state lines in America, and the insurers who pay for much of it want single organisations whom they can work with. I think the reality is somewhat different. Many think Simon Stevens is a shrewd operator who managed to secure additional funding for the NHS.

Ever since I have been involved with the NHS there have been efforts to join up health and social care at a community level, and to challenge the dominance of the hospital Trusts. In the early 2000’s the former Sedgefield Borough Council worked with their Primary Care Trust and Durham County Council to effectively integrate services by putting social workers, district nurses and housing officers in the same room, and Easington PCT considered integrated care initiatives. The Sedgefield initiative worked at a grassroots level because it did not involve redesigning systems. As soon as you tried to set up a new structure people retreated into their bunkers.

It is much easier to set up an integrated system in theory than in practice. One senior insider I spoke to recently said that negotiations to set up an integrated care system locally were not getting very far because of vested interests. Different organisations have different hierarchies and systems of accountability. They are also keen to hang onto their budgets. It looks like a solution will only be reached if the NHS imposes it, and they do not have much spare energy for that at the moment.

I remember the days before local government was reorganised in Northumberland and Durham, and District and County Councils were merged into the present unitary ones. The Government asked councils to work out ways of working together. There were interminable liaison meetings between the different councils which got precisely nowhere, each one wanting to preserve its own interests. Eventually the Government imposed a solution.

Insiders also tell me there is very little interest from councils in the new arrangements. Although in practice working relationships between the local authority and the NHS in most areas are good, some councillors appear to prefer the scrutiny role than actually being responsible for the service.

So overall I think the problem is not so much a conspiracy to carve up the NHS as some on the left seem to think, but rather getting our fragmented system to work together for the benefit of all of us.

### **Where we are now**

Most people on the left believe in a publicly run health service, free at the point of use. They also value the dedication of the staff and think they should be better rewarded.

Socialists also dislike privatisation. There is a difference between having to use the private sector if nothing else is available and the obligation to put services out to tender regardless of whether they are functioning properly as happens now. Efforts to integrate services are also hampered if parts are privately owned, as private providers may not disclose their information and not cooperate. (I remember my efforts on the CCG to get Capita to produce its accounts to the Audit Committee for a service they provided.)

Privatisation often results in poor staff conditions and pay. I think nearly all Labour Party members would wish a future Labour Government to repeal the 2012 act and restore the NHS as the preferred provider.

That is the easy part. Now we get to the difficult issues of how we organise an integrated service in the future and ensure it is accountable. Let me stress now that I do not want another major reorganisation. Our NHS staff do not deserve that. Rather we must think about how what we have now can be made to work better.

I have not said much about Social Care, either personal, which is delivered at home, or residential in care homes. It is widely accepted that the situation is at crisis point. The paper by Professor Paul Corrigan is an excellent starting point. A recent briefing by the Nuffield Trust emphasised the dimensions of it. (*Nuffield Trust, Election Briefing Nov 2019.*) Here are a few statistics:

*We believe the scale of the workforce challenge has so far been underestimated: our new calculations show that just providing a basic package of care of one hour per day to older people with high needs would require approximately 50,000 additional home care workers now. To provide up to two hours would need around 90,000 extra workers. ( Then there is the question of where they would come from if Brexit is implemented)*

*A decade of austerity has seen government funding for local authorities halve in real terms between 2010–11 and 2017–18,\* which has led to councils tightening the eligibility criteria for care. It is known that there were 20,000 fewer older people receiving long-term social care services in 2017/18 than in 2015/16, but this is likely to understate the problem – estimates of unmet need go as high as 1.5 million.*

*Constraints on public sector finances in recent years have meant that fees paid by councils to the organisations that provide home and residential care have been cut repeatedly. The predominant approach used for buying services from providers incentivises organisations to provide a bare minimum of services and nothing more. Some 75% of councils report that these organisations have either closed or handed back contracts in the last 6 months, creating enormous disruption and discontinuity for those receiving care.*

The problems of Care Homes have been highlighted by the current pandemic. There are roughly 11,300 care homes in the UK who look after 410,000 residents. Most of their income comes from fees paid by residents or their families, with a minority provided by local authorities. In practice the private fees subsidise the public ones which are often insufficient to cover the costs of the residents. Sally Copley of the Alzheimers Society says “The whole system hasn’t been working properly for some time”. Many staff are on zero hours contracts and staff shortages are endemic as Professor Corrigan pointed out. Staff are paid far less than they are worth and do not receive adequate training nor professional recognition.

We all have formative experiences which make us socialists. One of mine was in a care home where a member of my family was a resident. I knew two married members of staff well. Both were dedicated to their work and the residents. They were always cheerful. I can remember them saying with great enthusiasm how they had saved up enough to take their young family to Great Yarmouth for a week in the summer. Their work deserved far more reward than that. I thought “something has to be done about this”.

A proper care system would assess people on the basis of clinical need, not ability to pay. At the moment there is continuing health care, provided by the NHS, which is free, for those thought to have health issues, but domiciliary and residential care largely has to be paid for by the clients or their families except for the minority who benefit from a stringent means test. Dementia is not classified as a medical condition. Many people feel this system is unfair. A senior commissioner I spoke to said she would rather commission “care” which would be provided by professionals trained by the NHS, rather than try and distinguish between continuing health care and social care.

At the last election the Labour Party promised free personal care for those over 65, as in Scotland. As the Nuffield Report points out this does not include assistance with cleaning and general supervision.

One of the best assessments of the cost of integrating health and social care was done by Kate Barker and associates for the Kings Fund in 2014. They looked carefully at what social care involves, and how it could be paid for. There are different levels of social care, and they conclude that the same principles should

apply as to the NHS. Afflictions can strike anyone, rich or poor, so care funding should come from the public purse. The costs of care and treatment should be publicly funded, although this might not include the actual “hotel charges” for residential care. The authors suggest various ways to raise the extra funding, such as means testing free TV licences, and requiring those (usually better off) who continue to work after the retirement age to pay national insurance. There would of course be a need for those on higher incomes to pay more tax, possibly after the age of 40, and the Government should consider a wealth tax which in reality for most would be a tax on your home. There are various avoidance schemes and tax loopholes for the wealthy which could be closed.

There would probably be agreement amongst socialists that health and social care should be integrated and paid for out of taxation, but it is no good thinking only the rich would have to pay. Everyone would have to pay something.

Finally, there is the issue of Public Health. Transferring it to local government has not been a success. The budget, supposedly ring fenced, has been diverted to other local government departments because of the squeeze on local authority finance, and last year some of the poorest authorities took a very big hit. Durham lost almost 40% of its public health funding. Yet even in its diminished state, The Centre for Health Economics at York has estimated that expenditure on Public Health is four times more effective in promoting health than that spent on the NHS. Simple common sense tells us that keeping people healthy is better than curing them once they are ill.

Several distinguished epidemiologists, including Professor Allyson Pollock at Newcastle, have argued that the marginalisation of Public Health locally has severely reduced the country’s ability to deal with the coronavirus epidemic. Back in PCT days Public Health had the resources and plans to deal with disasters, often pooling risk with others. Now that has been transferred to Public Health England, leaving local authority public health departments to deal mainly with schemes to keep people fit. Worthy enough, but nothing like the resources they used to have. A regional public health response might have led to better testing and efforts to contain the virus. The Government’s response has been “one size fits all”. Restoration of the importance of Public Health and its reintegration with the NHS should be a major aim of policy.

### **Policy Objectives**

Our policy objectives will be ambitious. We might need a five year, or even ten year forward view to coin a phrase.

We seek an integrated National Health System, encompassing the National Health Service, Social Care, Public Health, with links to Pharmacy, which has a role in primary care, and Dentistry, which is not a totally public service although the NHS controls the training. But we do not want a major reorganisation again. Our dedicated health and care staff do not deserve that. What we want to do is give the present system more resources and steer it in the right direction. Repealing the 2012 Act would be a priority.

We must ensure that particularly in social care staff are paid a decent wage and given proper access to training. The present system which relies on the minimum wage and zero-hour contracts must end.

The first thing we know is that all this will cost more than it does now, although integration may produce some savings. A future Labour Government has to be honest about this. It is no good promising a few rich people will pay, as the public simply will not believe it. It is a good principle that everyone should contribute to something which is part of national solidarity, so all feel that it is theirs, but contributions have to be proportionate to the ability to pay. A proper revaluation of properties, which is akin to a wealth tax, would raise money through the community charge to make a substantial contribution to social care. An increase in National Insurance, earmarked for the NHS should be considered, provided that it became more progressive.

Then we come to the whole issue of Governance. Despite showing little enthusiasm, local government needs to be involved in the whole strategic planning of the NHS. But they must not see it as simply concerning their own territory, so to speak. The present structure of Foundation Trusts should stay, but Public Health and Commissioning Services should be reintegrated into Primary Care Trusts, in my opinion one of the most successful NHS organisations in its long history of restructuring. The PCTs would have oversight of Pharmacy and Dentistry. Many of the responsibilities transferred to Public Health England should be restored to the PCTs. Their boards should contain both professional and local government representation.

There is a need for a regional dimension in all this. When the Northumbria Trust reorganised its A&E provision to build a super emergency only hospital at Cramlington it did not consider the effect on major hospitals in Newcastle like the RVI. Patients in Hexham, for example would find it easier to go there than to Cramlington. This is just one example of where a regional perspective would have been useful.

Local authorities' power over social care providers need to be strengthened. At present there is a real mixture of providers, commercial companies, charities, cooperatives and individuals who provide personal care as a small business. There is a strong argument for integrating the private sector, which is virtually bankrupt anyway, into area trusts responsible to local authorities. Standards and remuneration need to be strengthened.

Trying to merge different organisations would be very difficult and disruptive. The result could be some unwieldy bureaucracy which would be difficult to manage and slow to react to changing needs and priorities. Accountability should be pushed upwards. We need to have some sort of accountable umbrella which ensures that hospital trusts, PCTs (coterminous with local authorities) and Social Care, which is regulated by local authorities, all work together. There will always be oversight from NHS England, NHS Improvement, and the Care Quality Commission, but these bodies are mainly regulatory. There needs to be a more local system of Governance and Oversight.

Nationally the country is moving to a system of Combined Authorities which at present oversee economic development and transport. Manchester has also had community health added to its powers. A combined authority does not take powers away from local authorities. It has power and oversight over services provided by other organisations. Its membership is delegated from existing councils, with a mayor if that is agreed. It would seem logical for a combined authority to exercise oversight over the Foundation Trusts, PCTs and Local Authority Care in its area and produce a plan to ensure they work together. The CCGs now cooperate to cover larger areas in any case. That way we preserve flexibility within the system without adding another layer of bureaucracy, and move towards the integrated National Health System we want.

I want to end by stating that as socialists we owe a great deal to the NHS and Care Services. They are an example, much admired elsewhere, of how a publicly run system can be successful, and that duty and altruism more important motivators of human conduct as making a profit. It is our duty to ensure it is funded and run properly.

David Taylor-Gooby

## **Rebuilding the Red Wall: Reversing the loss of parliamentary seats in County Durham.**

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### **Summary**

Fraser argues that it is essential to build up a fresh generation of activists and councillors who are involved in today's local networks of connections. The Party also needs to co-ordinate across the County, while recognising that many types of jobs have changed, from manual jobs with strong trades union backing to others which lack it, in care homes or in white collar and intermediate jobs. Above all, housing patterns and tenure has changed immensely. These all require a different Labour Party, and one which is not afraid to be patriotic!

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Much has been written about the reasons for the Conservative victory in North West Durham, Bishop Auckland and Sedgefield parliamentary constituencies at the 2019 general election. Analysis has been provided from across the political spectrum. It is now 6 months since this seismic political event for both main political parties and a

new political reality is establishing itself in County Durham. Gone are the days when Labour votes were weighed, and a red rosette was a guarantee of victory.

Rather than look back at the reasons for the result of the 2019 General Election, this paper looks forward to what will likely be the next General Election in 2024. It attempts to set out a roadmap for how the Labour Party can regain these three seats. This is likely to be critical at a national level, as it is difficult to plot a road to power for the Labour Party at the next general election, in a scenario where at least two out of three of these seats are not regained.

### **Where we stand today**

Despite almost 10 years of austerity since the election of the coalition government in 2010, it should not be underestimated to what extent the Conservatives have been able to insulate themselves from blame for the impact that austerity has had on communities in County Durham. A prime example of this is cuts of over 45% to Durham County Council funding. This has impacted on day to day services as cuts have either been absorbed or passed on in terms of altered service provision. Any blame for this has been laid directly at the door of the council rather than the government. The emergence of foodbanks, diminishing NHS services in the west of the county and the roll out of a draconian Universal Credit system, have all provided a recent context to Conservative victory. This seems counter intuitive. But it has happened. Why?

Despite a period between 2010 and 2019 when the Labour Party experienced huge change and a radical change in direction, particularly after 2015 under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. For many in County Durham, the Labour Party retained the position as the 'establishment' party. This is a legacy of a century of almost unbroken control in County Durham. This combined catastrophically with a sense for many, that the Labour Party no longer connected with the issues that mattered to them and confusion over the Brexit position of the Labour Party.

It should not be underestimated the extent to which the 2019 general election was 'a vote against Labour' rather than 'a vote for the Conservatives'. Understanding this is key to plotting a way back to victory for the Labour Party. What has happened is that issues, policies and actual details of facts are less important for many. What matters is 'tribe' and feelings of connection to an 'ethos' or 'approach to life' or 'attitude'. This is identity politics.

The Labour Party in this area are in danger of losing their connection to the communities they have represented for decades. Those opposing the Labour Party have coalesced. They have carefully and successfully constructed a 'wedge' between the Labour Party and its traditional communities. They have used an agency approach to the delivery of cuts, painted the Labour Party as middle class and manipulated the narrative around very local issues, particularly decisions of Labour controlled Durham County Council, to define the party as remote from the communities they represent. They have fostered suspicion around the motives of the Labour Party and their interest in matters relevant to communities in this area. This has focused on issues of patriotism, deemed excessive social liberalism, political correctness and feminism. They have pointed to nepotism and disdain for

the electorate. The period of leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, particularly after the 2017 election, was manipulated skilfully in the shadow of the Brexit crisis. The general election results in County Durham were part of a process rather than an event. We must stop this process.

### **Meeting the challenge ahead.**

Winning back the parliamentary seats lost in 2019 will require a strategy which addresses this context and provides a vision for the future. It must join up with the national focus of the Labour Party, but not be tied rigidly to it. It must be joined up across the county. Fundamentally it must build from the local level upwards. Only this way can we ensure we are again a core part of the 'tribe.' It must:?

#### ***1) Understand the changing area.***

We must understand how the area has changed since the days of coal, steel and railways and critically its implications. Our electorate is older and generally more conservative in outlook than those living in metropolitan areas, social structures have changed dramatically, Methodism, Catholicism and trade unionism are forces in varying degrees of retreat in the area. This has had a major impact on local Labour Party structures as they have been its foundation for decades, providing deep linkages to communities. Within the three constituencies lost in 2019, there are no large-scale public sector trade unionised workplaces which are today's focus for trade unionism. There is now no major general hospital, no major local authority headquarters, no prison and no university. Education is increasingly dominated by academy trusts and there is under provision in the area at secondary level, due to leakage of students to Durham City and Darlington. The social care, retail and construction sectors have key roles as employers in the area and trade union representation in these sectors is patchy at best. Long distance commuting is the norm for many. The local Labour Party must understand this change and fathom how it can replace these diminished structures.

A huge amount of good work is done across the area by Labour Party members in community centres, foodbanks and other roles helping the vulnerable. This is vitally important and continues strong traditions within the Labour Party, where many members are driven by a moral force to improve the plight of the vulnerable and marginalised. However, it is unclear what translates into electoral success when this is done in isolation. Many of the electorate do not interface with these services and initiatives. They are 'getting on with life' and dealing with the everyday issues that this entails. This leads to where the battle for electoral success at the next general election will be fought.

Across the area the last 20 years have seen a significant increase in private sector housing estate development. Virtually every settlement in the area has a new private housing estate. These are occupied by a more mobile workforce. They are often the sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of coal and steel and railway workers. They are less tribally Labour. Many earn a living in the private sector or are younger frontline public sector workers. Increasing levels of support in

these areas is critical. Labour Party membership representation in these areas is low. Understanding these voters is crucial. The other major change that has occurred in the area which has significant implications for the Labour Party is the changes to former council housing estates. Forty years of the right-to-buy policy has resulted in many of these being predominantly privately owned. They are occupied by older residents many of whom were traditionally Labour but who have drifted away over the past 15 years. They are more connected locally than private housing estate residents, but less so than may have been in the past. They express many traditional anxieties, including a focus on criminal justice and health care. For many their horizon is to the past rather than the present.

The central challenge facing the local Labour Party is that of continuing to operate as the party representing the people of this area. We must talk about the issues that matter to people in their everyday lives and we must go to them to talk about them. This is why the new networks of local connection are so important. These are the community associations, local charities, foodbanks, the school academy councils, the sports clubs, the local 'We Are' and 'Past and Present' social media groups, the Police and Community Together Meetings. Being involved in local contentious issues like planning applications and NHS consultation groups.

## ***2) Build local narrative that resonates locally***

In the context of the realisation of the importance of 'tribe' in defining the result of the next general election, it would be wrong to ignore the role of democratic socialist principles to identifying priorities for the area. It should not be distinctly local Labour Party policy agenda or manifesto. It should focus on the themes of people place and identity.

A prime example is in relation to housing which is now consistently a key national issue. Much of the national debate is likely to be shaped by issues around affordability. In this area the focus is different. Emphasis on security of tenure for renters and securing statutory registration of tenancies should be a focus for the local Labour Party. As should addressing anti-social behaviour associated with privately rented property. This should build on work already being undertaken by Durham County Council on this issue.

In transport the poor state of bus service provision in the area is an opportunity for the Labour Party. The current COVID19 crisis is likely to have particular impacts in this area. Pushing the introduction of Quality Contracts with bus operators is likely to be popular with voters. As is continuing the focus on difficulties with commuting and access to Tyne and Wear and Durham City. Holding to account Conservative promises to extend the Metro to Consett is a prime example.

In the health sector the debacle around health service provision at Shotley Bridge and Bishop Auckland must be a focus. There are significant issues with GP services notably in the Crook and the Sedgfield areas. The sustainability of social care locally is questionable reflecting the national agenda. Any reform proposals may

have a proportionally bigger impact on this area, if a cap is placed on personal financial liabilities related to residential property.

There are other issues in education, policing and town centres which allow the local Labour Party to establish a distinct voice. However, the real value in developing a local policy agenda and discussion is more subtle.

While we are talking about these issues, we are talking about issues that matter to the 'tribe.' They resonate with people particularly when there is a local context. Better than that, Conservative policy in these areas is weak and generally detrimental to the interests of people in this area. Focusing on people (employment, health, social care,), place (towns and villages, housing, transport) and identity (patriotism, pride) which I discuss below, should be the mantra.

The promotion of the narrative that the Labour Party at the national and local level is not patriotic has been effective and profound. To date the Labour Party have not addressed this sufficiently. Hostility to the Labour Party in this regard in sections of the former military community and elements of the far-right in the area have seeped into mainstream discourse. The patriotism and social conservatism of many (including lifelong Labour) voters in this area is underestimated. The Labour Party must never again be afraid to be patriotic while not shying away from key issues where mistakes have been made. The famous Great War maxim of 'Lions led by donkeys' is a good starting point in this regard. It is often underestimated the extent to which this phrase resonated to the Labour Party's benefit in 1945 as much of the pre-war order was swept away. The Union Jack is 'ours' as much as it is 'theirs'.

### **3) *Work effectively across County Durham.***

For this strategy to be effective, it must work across the three lost constituencies and County Durham as a whole, where the Labour Party's hold on the three remaining parliamentary constituencies (Durham City, Easington and North Durham) has weakened.

Communication will be a critical factor in delivering any strategy for the area. Across the area there is no functioning co-ordination of messaging. There is no currently no functioning system for developing strategy and tactics. CLPs have experienced significant upheaval in recent years. The number of Labour County Councillors in the area has reduced since 2013. CLPs do not coordinate with one another effectively and relationships with other parts of the Labour Party have been problematic. There is a need for leadership. A focus should be on (1) establishing communication between grassroots Labour Party bodies, (2) developing a small steering group across all three constituencies, meeting regularly and responsible for developing strategy and communication; (3) moving towards identifying parliamentary candidates for the next general election by 2022. This will allow for the leadership needed to move forward.

#### **4) *Promote leaders from within***

Gone are the days when the proving ground for Labour Party leaders and politicians in County Durham was the yard of the local colliery or chapel lectern. Times have moved on, but it does provide a pointer to the future.

Our next generation of leaders and politicians must come from the communities they represent and be recognisable in those communities. They must be establishing themselves in the 'new networks' now. This will develop trust with the 'tribe.' The incumbent Conservative MPs know this and are currently working incessantly to endear themselves to their constituents with grassroots initiatives, effective casework operations and strategic use of social media to ingratiate themselves within the community and grow their 'tribe'.

The interface between national politics and local politics is critical. National issues dominate television and social media. The new leaders must be able to operate in this context and be heard focusing on local issues above the noise. We must ensure that any emerging leaders are not easily pigeonholed into one of the many boxes that have been carefully crafted by our opponents over many years. This will be their angle of attack

#### **The tribe is our tribe**

We may never again be able to weigh the Labour Party votes in County Durham, but this has a benefit in that we will no longer be taken for granted by both main parties. The three 'lost' constituencies are there for the taking in 2024, as many of those who changed their vote from Labour to Conservation in 2019 are there to be won back.

This will require the right mix at the national level in terms of leader and policies, but the local approach is crucial. This paper has sought to shed some light on a way forward. Time is short and 2024 will be upon us soon. The first test is the Durham County Council, Town and Parish Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May 2021. Consolidating in these elections must be the first staging post as the road to 2024 lies ahead.

#### **Cllr Fraser Tinsley**

Willington & Hunwick Division, Durham County Council

Town Mayor, Greater Willington Town Council

Assistant Secretary, County Durham Fabian Society.

## **End notes to Frank Coffield**

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<sup>i</sup> For example, in March 2016 Michael Gove, the then Secretary of State for Education, removed parents from the boards of school governors.

<sup>ii</sup> *“Working is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying”* Studs Terkel (1974). The German social partnership model ensured that redundant miners were offered re-training and jobs in less polluting industries.

<sup>iii</sup> Even though we are out of the EU, we can still learn from our nearest neighbours. For example, the French Constitution makes explicit provision for the funding of culture, sports and libraries in every community. That would have stopped some of the worst features of austerity in its tracks.

<sup>iv</sup> *“At current trends, we estimate that it would take around fifty years for the disadvantage gap to close completely by the time pupils take their GCSEs.”* Andrews, Robinson & Hutchinson (2017).

<sup>v</sup> Melissa Benn (2018) devotes the third chapter of her recent book to this question: *“Can We Really Afford Free Education?”* She advocates such measures as an all-age graduate tax, an increase in corporation tax, a Tobin tax on all capital transactions and a removal of all the tax benefits enjoyed by private schools.

<sup>vi</sup> A variety of texts exist offering toolboxes for campaigners (eg Alberto Alemanno, 2017 and Laura Coryton, 2019), but I’ve chosen the one which has the strongest evidence base.

<sup>vii</sup> The technique is not new. In 1536 the lawyer Robert Aske changed the name of his Rebellion of the North to the Pilgrimage of Grace. It was not enough to save him and thousands of his followers.

<sup>viii</sup> *“Even the very word ‘inequality’ seems to me to be a euphemism that papers over the reality of the situation, the naked violence of exploitation. A worker’s body, as it ages, reveals to anyone who looks at it the truth about the existence of classes.”* Didier Eribon (2013: 86-7).

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