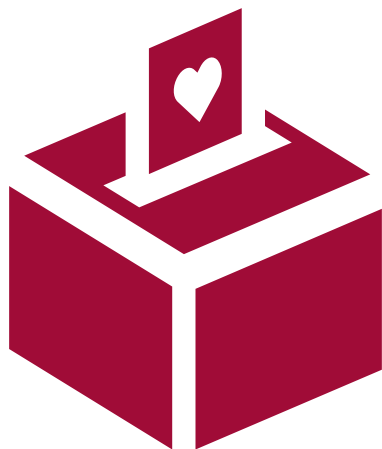


**FABIAN
SOCIETY**

Usdaw
*Union of Shop, Distributive
and Allied Workers*

HEARTS AND MINDS

WINNING THE WORKING-CLASS VOTE



Edited by John Healey MP

Fabian Ideas 653

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Hearts and minds

Winning the working-class vote

Edited by John Healey MP

Project partner



Usdaw is one of Britain's largest trade unions, representing workers in the retail, distributive, manufacturing and service sectors. We organise for the purpose of improving our members' lives through our campaigns, securing the best possible terms and conditions, and providing support and protection at work.

John Healey MP's acknowledgements

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Paddy Lillis, general secretary, Usdaw

As the general secretary of Usdaw, a trade union representing over 400,000 people working in retail, distribution and manufacturing from every part of our country, I know how important securing a Labour government is if we are going to make sweeping and measurable improvements to people's lives.

Usdaw aims to base our campaigns on the day-to-day experiences of our members. These include long-running campaigns such as Supporting Parents and Carers, which highlights the issues facing working people with caring responsibilities, and Freedom From Fear, a drive to end the abuse and violence that frontline workers face. But we also have newer campaigns focused on good quality employment and job security such as the New Deal for Workers, about the importance of getting a living wage and guaranteed hours for many of our low-paid key workers, and the campaign to Save Our Shops through a retail strategy to save the high street and promote growth in the retail sector. Usdaw believes in campaigning on the issues that matter and have the potential to improve the lives of our members.

The Labour party must be rooted in the lives of people like Usdaw members and it must reflect the real issues they face. This is key not just in terms of making sure that the policy priorities of Labour are right but also in making a Labour

government a reality in the first place. Labour needs to win elections so that it can then deliver the material change that working people need.

Winning the next election and securing that government will be a different challenge from the one we have faced in the past; the ground has shifted and Labour faces new battlegrounds in places where significant campaigns have not been fought for generations.

It is unlikely that simply pointing the existing electoral machinery in a new direction will be enough. We all need to understand what has happened, listen to the concerns of the electorate, and come together to communicate our vision of what a Labour government means for all our communities and, fundamentally, how it will make people's lives better.

This means we need to reconnect on the issues that matter to people like Usdaw members, their colleagues, their families and their communities. We need to understand the complexity of their lives and not reduce them to outdated stereotypes of the working class or what it means to be a 'Northerner' or a 'Southerner'.

This project is an important part of that process. Usdaw is pleased to be part of it and the various contributions offer a huge amount to think about. The key strengths of the Labour party and the wider labour and trade union movement are in our breadth of experience and our commitment to unity of purpose. Working together, we can understand all of our people and all of our communities better and we can make Labour a better, more effective champion for progressive change.

1. THE TASK AHEAD: A MISSION TO REBUILD TRUST

John Healey MP

We must shift our focus to the future if we are to win back the support of voters.

A decade ago, the writer Julian Baggini used demographic data to pinpoint the heart of England, before moving there to write a book about it – Welcome to Everytown. He ended up living in Bramley, in the South Yorkshire constituency of Wentworth and Dearne that I am so proud to represent.

Wentworth and Dearne has never before been a must-watch seat but after the 2019 election mine is now the most marginal constituency in the shadow cabinet. This Fabian publication is a collection of essays from MPs in former Labour heartland seats which have all been used to majorities of well over 10,000 and are now Labour's new marginals.

Despite the narrow margins, we all made it through the dreadful 2019 election for Labour. So we can speak up for our areas, confront the failings of Conservative ministers and challenge our own party to get to grips with the public loss of belief in Labour as a party fit for government. We have a duty as MPs who are still in parliament to do this, when many colleagues from similar seats across the country – from Workington to Wakefield, Bolsover to Bridgend and Sedgefield to Stoke-on-Trent – cannot.

I am very grateful to all who have written in this collection for their commitment to meeting this challenge. Ours are constituencies with a high proportion of working-class voters, in all their diversity. The starting point for this publication is that Labour cannot take for granted even the seats we hold, and to win again the party needs to rebuild its connection with working-class voters in every corner of the UK.

My brief to contributors was to ground their chapter in their understanding of the lives, values and sentiments of their constituents; to focus on Labour's standing in the eyes of local people rather than the specifics of future policy. The dimensions of Labour's 2019 election defeat have been analysed in detail for more than a year and I want to help shift the focus to the future, to developing the relationships, communications and values we must re-establish in order to win back trust and support.

Some of the chapters are hard-hitting in describing the dislocation between Labour and many long-time supporters who feel Labour left them before they left Labour. Together the contributions confirm how much Labour must do, with the challenge lying less in policy and more in public sentiment and perceptions about who we are.

Our enduring Labour commitments to equity, social justice and rights for all have for many voters become loaded by the belief that resources, services or opportunities are all so limited that for someone to gain someone else must lose. If society is simply seen as a zero-sum game, then resentments and divisions grow more readily. Common purpose and shared interests are harder to establish.

People have seen the Conservatives fan social divisions by staging 'culture war' rows, and before the 2019 election Labour kept walking straight into these political traps.

Expectations of Labour are consistently higher than of the Conservatives. Those who feel let down by Labour describe at best an unwillingness to listen, with no respect for their experience, and at worst a rejection of their views as ignorant or backward.

Brexit was both an effect of the dislocation between Labour and traditional working-class communities and a cause of further disillusion as leave areas – including many people who voted remain – came to believe that the party did not respect the democratic decision of the referendum.

However, the erosion of Labour's working-class electoral support pre-dates both the 2019 election and the 2016 referendum. We lost 87 seats to the Tories in 2010 and 8 in 2015; 83 per cent of these constituencies – 79 of the 95 – went on to vote leave. Even in 2017, when Labour gained a total of 30 seats overall, the Tories took six constituencies from us – Copeland, Mansfield, Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, North East Derbyshire, Stoke on Trent South and Walsall North. All were leave-voting seats in 2016, with an average of 67 per cent voting for leave. As Labour has lost these Commons seats to Conservative MPs over the last decade, there has rarely been any automatic bounce-back in the Labour vote; rather these constituencies have mostly moved further from us at subsequent elections and a loss of Labour council control has often also followed, as in areas such as Amber Valley, Cannock Chase, Stockton or North East Derbyshire.

So any electoral strategy simply directed at 'Red Wall' seats Labour lost in 2019 misses this longer-run trend and deeper damage to Labour.

Less than a year into Keir Starmer's new leadership, Labour has made real progress in re-establishing a serious claim to be considered an alternative government. This is a sound basis to build on, but this collection underlines the

scale of the task still ahead, a reality that Keir is the first to recognise and stress to his frontbench team.

The chapters in this collection also offer insights into the nature of this task and threads of fresh thinking that could help Labour regain the confidence of working people.

Taiwo Owatemi's personal account as a young black MP finding common ground to represent the mostly white older constituents of Coventry North West demonstrates how social divides can be bridged, especially by listening, rather than telling. Tracy Brabin's experience following Jo Cox's murder holds similar hope, as she stresses the importance of spaces and activities to bring unconnected communities together. Visible local Labour leadership recurs as a theme in many of these essays, including in Jon Cruddas's portrait of a traditional working-class area prospering with inclusive growth and change.

Yvonne Fovargue's challenge is to broaden our Labour concept of fairness beyond equality to blend in values that are also important and intrinsic to fairness for many working people – responsibility, just reward and respect for the law. While Abena Oppong-Asare pulls the party up for language which is often too remote and for citing cold facts and figures when making the case for things we feel passionately about. For Jonathan Reynolds, good work and good wages must be central to Labour's ambition, just as Bridget Phillipson argues that the language of security must be central to how we frame the challenges for the future of work. And Nick Thomas-Symonds draws inspiration from *In Place of Fear* in applying Nye Bevan's view that 'there is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual'.

However high they may rank in national deprivation indices, there is a strong sense of identity, ambition and pride in our traditional Labour areas. Emma Hardy vividly conveys this of Hull, as she reflects on how today's self-employed

workers and sole traders would have been in secure, unionised company jobs a generation ago and says Labour should champion their interests.

Dan Jarvis extends hometown pride to authentic love of country which he suggests is essential in defeating narrow nationalism. He warns Labour not to avoid the most difficult debates because we simply allow opponents to dominate the narrative. Toby Perkins reinforces this case from his experience in Chesterfield when a generation of local young people were denied thousands of new factory jobs by Sports Direct recruiting direct from Eastern Europe, while voters felt progressive opinion refused even to consider the problem, much less propose solutions.

Running throughout the chapters is the recognition of the damage done over the last decade of Conservative governments, which means Labour cannot allow Boris Johnson to create a Conservative year-zero from his arrival in Downing Street. Yvette Cooper writes on the further essential political task of exposing the spin and falsehoods in the current Conservatives' 'levelling up' pledges.

Luke Raikes of the Fabian Society provides a focus for action in analysing the 125 priority seats Labour needs to win in England and Wales to form a government. He looks at these areas through the lens of their working-class profile. The Fabians also argue there are 25 potentially winnable seats in Scotland but we set those aside both because comparable data are not available and because the political terrain is very different.

Around half of the target constituencies (61 out of 125) are in the top two quintiles for the proportion of working-class residents. The pattern has been clear since the 2005 election in these seats, with Labour doing less and less well, relative to its national vote share at each election. By contrast, the party has been improving its relative performance in seats with

lower concentrations of working-class voters. Furthermore, 78 of these 125 priority Labour seats are made up of towns, with more than half (68) comprising ‘stand-alone’ towns that are not part of a wider conurbation.

The Fabian analysis confirms it is ‘essential that Labour regains working-class leaning seats, as part of a broad one-nation appeal outside the big cities’.

For me, Labour’s priority must be Britain’s real middle. I first put the case for concern about under-pressure middle Britain in a cabinet meeting in 2009, before setting out the challenge of the squeezed middle in a public memo to our Labour leadership candidates after both the 2010 and 2015 election defeats.

Britain’s real middle is not the middle class that became New Labour’s fixation, nor simply the poorest for whom Labour will always care deeply but who in recent years we’ve given the impression are our sole concern. The median annual earnings for all employees is just £24,908 and it is the 10 million on ordinary working incomes either side of this average that should be Labour’s core constituency and central political concern. These workers – employed and self-employed – are the backbone of our economy and heart of our public services. Many are Britain’s essential workers, as our experience through the Covid crisis has shown.

As this collection of essays explains, a swathe of working-class and average income voters have been moving away from Labour for the last four or five elections. The English new towns – 14 towns comprising 16 constituencies like Stevenage, Crawley and Harlow – provide a different lens on the dislocation of the aspirational working class from Labour but the trend is the same. In 1997 Labour won all but one of these 16 seats. After 2010, we held just Telford and after 2015 we represented none. Whilst we then won back Peterborough in 2017, we lost it again to the Tories in 2019.

On the eve of the 2019 election campaign I discussed Labour's strategy with a senior director in our London HQ. We went into that election more concerned about losing liberal votes in inner and outer city seats than the risk of Labour supporters backing the Conservatives. General elections are a straight battle for a Conservative or a Labour government. We must never forget these Labour-Tory switchers count double: minus one in our column and plus one in theirs.

Our challenge is profound but can be simply stated: to convince those who voted Conservative in recent elections to go with Labour next time. I hope this collection of insightful and inspiring chapters from MPs in Labour's new marginals will contribute to this mission.

2. THE WORKING-CLASS CHALLENGE: THE VOTES LABOUR NEEDS TO WIN

Luke Raikes

The party will have a mountain to climb at the next election. It will have to understand more about the voters it needs to attract so that it can forge a common purpose to unite the nation.

Labour needs to win in Wycombe and in Telford, in Arfon and in Darlington – both in places it once held for decades, and in places that feel almost foreign to the party. Labour must cast aside clichés of ‘Workington Man’, ‘Essex Man’ and ‘Worcester Woman’; it cannot afford to be obsessed with the ‘Red Wall’, southern discomfort and any of the other sweeping generalisations that have been used to frame previous elections. There is no either/or: Labour needs to push back in its lost heartlands, while also leaning into demographic changes across the country.

As Labour steels itself to forge a majority from these disparate places, it must be sensitive to the values and the experiences of the different voters it needs to win. Working-class people form a major part of the coalition Labour needs to unify. New Fabian Society analysis shows that a disproportionate number of seats where Labour must win have high concentrations of working-class people. These places will be familiar to those who have watched recent, on-the-night election coverage in despair: most working-class seats used to be so-called Labour ‘heartlands’. Some were lost at the elections

between 2010 and 2017. But there is no doubt that 2019 saw the trend accelerate.

Understanding what these places look and feel like is crucial. Here, we take purely a data-driven approach that sketches out their political and electoral history and their geography (region, town, city or village). Finally, we analyse their experience of the pandemic to date. Based on previous Fabian analysis, we focus on the 125 priority seats in England and Wales Labour needs to win.¹ We look at them all through the lens of their ‘working-class’ composition.² For these purposes, we exclude Scotland, where Labour also need to win 25 seats, due to both data availability and the very different political terrain. It is important to note that there are also seats which Labour currently holds which it will need to retain in 2024 too – some of these have high concentrations of working-class people and are on a similar trajectory to those which have been lost in recent years, as we will see.

Electoral history

When we look at the electoral history of the seats Labour needs to win, their sheer diversity is the most striking feature, along with the massive changes that have occurred in recent years – not just in 2019 but before. As Figure 1 below shows, of the 125 seats in England and Wales Labour needs to win:

- 41 were long-term Labour seats – lost in 2015, 2017 or 2019, that had been Labour since at least the early 1990s and often for much longer (although a couple went temporarily to the Lib Dems in 2010). Thirty five of these were lost in 2019 alone – including places like Leigh and Bolsover, where even in 2015 Labour outper-

formed its national vote share by around 20 percentage points, and now does so by only 7 and 2 percentage points respectively.

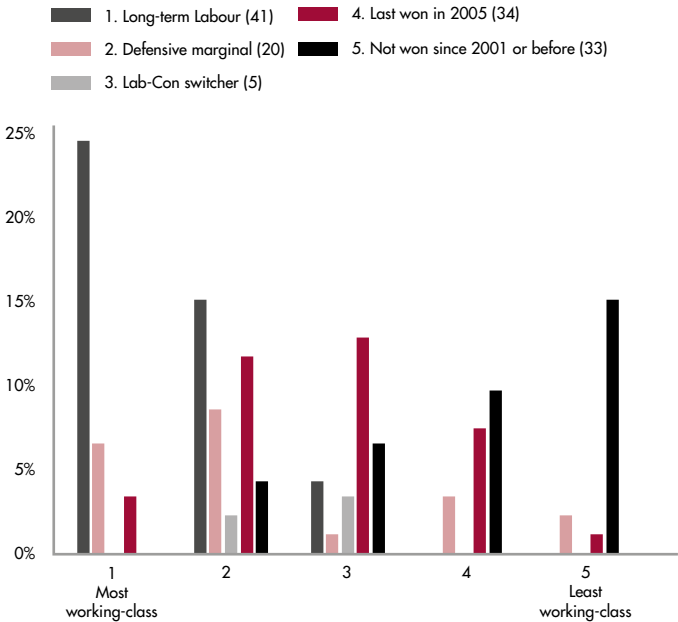
- 67 constituencies haven't been won by Labour since the 2005 election or before, but must now be considered, including places like Truro and Falmouth, Ceredigion and Southport. In these places Labour used to underperform its national vote share by around 24 percentage points, but now overperforms by between 1 and 5 percentage points.
- Of the 20 defensive seats Labour needs to retain, which have less than a 5 per cent Labour majority, 16 have been longstanding Labour seats – places like Stockton North, Newport West or Dagenham and Rainham.

If we analyse the 125 target constituencies by their 'working-class' concentration we find how different they all are. In Figure 1 we have divided the 573 seats in England and Wales into five (roughly) equal parts, of 114 or 115 constituencies each, and ranging from the most working-class quintile to the least working-class quintile. Around half (61) of the 125 priority seats are in the two most working-class quintiles, but there are others with varying class composition and electoral history:

- Recently lost seats are mostly working-class – 37 of the 41 that have been lost in 2015, 2017 or 2019 were in the two most working-class quintiles.
- Target seats not won since at least 2001 were the least working-class – 23 of the 33 were in the least working-class quintiles.
- The vast majority of priority seats are of neither extreme in terms of working-class concentration.

Hearts and minds

Figure 1: Labour's priority seats range from working-class, formerly long-term Labour seats to far less working-class seats not won since 2005 or earlier.



Priority constituencies by class and political history, England and Wales

Typology	Notes
Defensive marginal	Labour majority of less than 5% of votes cast
Lab-Con switcher	Changed Lab-Con hands more than twice 2005–2019 and Labour won in 2010 or 2015
Long-term Labour lost	Often since '92 at least. Includes '15 and '17 losses and some that went Lib Dem in 2010
Not won since 2005	–
Not won since 2001 or before	–
Lost in 2015 or 2017	–
Won in 2017 but not for a long time before	Includes 2005 wins

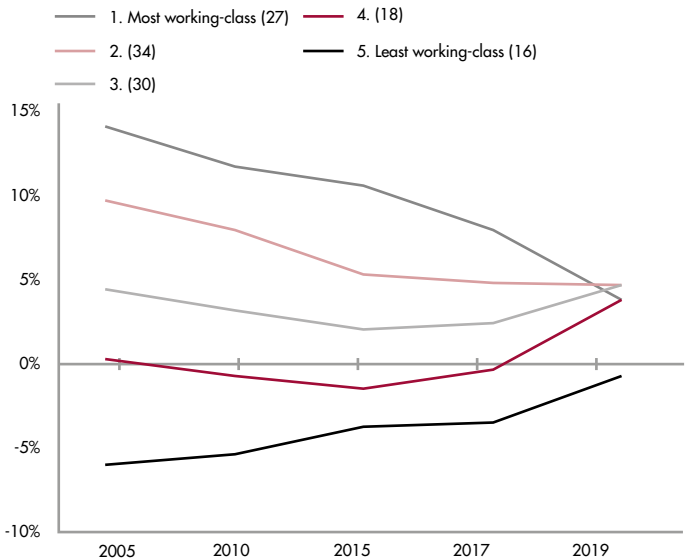
Since 2005 there has been a clear pattern in Labour's priority seats: the party has been losing relative vote share in seats with high concentrations of working-class voters, while gaining relative vote share in those with lower concentrations of working-class voters, as Figure 2 below shows:

- Taken together, in 2005 Labour had 13 percentage points more than their total England and Wales vote share, in their 27 most working-class target seats. While individual seats vary, on aggregate, Labour's vote share in these seats has been on a downward trend every election since and is now just 3 percentage points above their overall performance. This includes places like Bolsover, West Bromwich and Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland.
- The opposite is true for the least working-class seats where, in 2005, Labour was 6 percentage points behind their England and Wales vote share, they have slowly but consistently crept up to a smaller, 1 percentage point deficit. This includes places like Chipping Barnet, Chingford and Woodford Green and Hendon, where Labour actually overperformed its national vote share in 2019.

Hearts and minds

- Some of the most working-class defensive marginals show a similar pattern. Of the 20 that have a majority of less than 5 per cent, 6 fit the most working-class category and are on similar trends to the more working-class target seats described above. This includes, most notably, Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford; Hemsworth; and Kingston upon Hull East – which have all gone from a position where they outperformed the national Labour vote share by 20-30 percentage points in 2005, to a gap of less than 5 percentage points in 2019.

Figure 2: Labour’s vote share among its most working-class target seats has been slipping for some time, while rising in the least working-class target seats.



Labour vote share in each working-class quintile compared to Labour’s England and Wales vote share – 125 priority seats only

But there is, of course, another political dimension that has dominated recently: leave and remain. Here, we have avoided a binary ‘majority leave vs majority remain’ categorisation of seats and instead measured the strength of the leave or remain vote. In this case, we divided all constituencies in England and Wales into five roughly equal sized groups of 113-117 seats, arranged in order of the strength of the leave/remain vote.³

Among Labour’s priority seats, there is a strong correlation between class and strength of leave vote, as might be expected. But the middle three, less extreme quintiles, account for 84 of Labour’s 125 priority seats, while there are 26 in the strongest leave category, and 15 in the strongest remain category. 20 seats are *both* in the most extreme leave category, *and* have the highest concentration of working-class votes, while 11 are *both* in the most extreme remain category *and* have the lowest proportion of working-class voters. The majority of Labour’s target seats are therefore of neither extreme, on either working-class or Brexit vote: 72 are within the middle three quintiles for *both* class *and* for the Brexit vote.

These seats have been on different political trajectories for some time and they align closely with trends in the working-class analysis above:

- Many of the strongest leave-voting seats that Labour needs to target were already slipping away between 2005 and 2010. Between 2005 and 2015, Labour went from outperforming its England and Wales vote share in these seats, on aggregate, by 14 percentage points, to 9 percentage points. This advantage then fell to 7 percentage points in 2017 and then collapsed to only a 3 percentage point advantage in 2019.
- The strongest remain-voting areas were shifting towards Labour since at least 2005, albeit more slowly. Between 2005 and 2019, Labour has gone from underperforming

Hearts and minds

its England and Wales vote share by 6 percentage points to underperforming by just 1 percentage point, in a similar pattern to the least working-class areas described above – the two groups are almost identical in composition. In places like Kensington, or Truro and Falmouth, Labour has gone from underperforming their national vote share in 2005 to outperforming their national vote share in 2019.

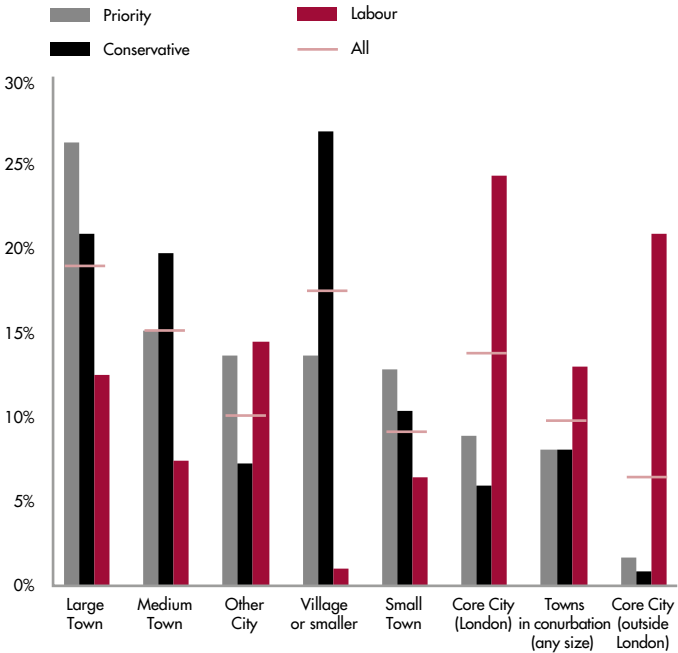
Region, town and city

Labour must win new seats in all regions and in almost all different kinds of area, but towns are a clear priority – particularly seats comprised of towns which *do not* form part of wider conurbations. This is in stark contrast to Labour's current seats, which are concentrated in London, core cities, other cities, or towns which do form parts conurbations. We looked at whether target seats were mainly made up of villages, towns or city (using a classification developed by the House of Commons library).⁴ Of the 125 priority Labour seats in England and Wales:

- 47 are in the north, 24 in the midlands, 15 are in Wales, 11 in London, 11 in the south east, 9 in the south west, and 8 are in the east. 44 of the 125 are both in the two most working-class quintiles and in the north, West Midlands and Wales – ie the 'Red Wall'.
- 78 are classified as town constituencies, including 39 in the north, 14 in the midlands and 7 in Wales. 42 of these town seats are in the two most working-class quintiles.
- 68 – more than half – of the priority seats, are in 'stand-alone' towns that aren't part of wider conurbations, with 52 of these in the north, midlands and Wales – places such as Darlington, Lincoln or Wrexham. Many

of these towns also have relatively high concentrations of working-class residents.

Figure 3: Labour's target seats are overwhelmingly in 'standalone' towns that are not part of wider conurbations.



Share of seats in each type of geography

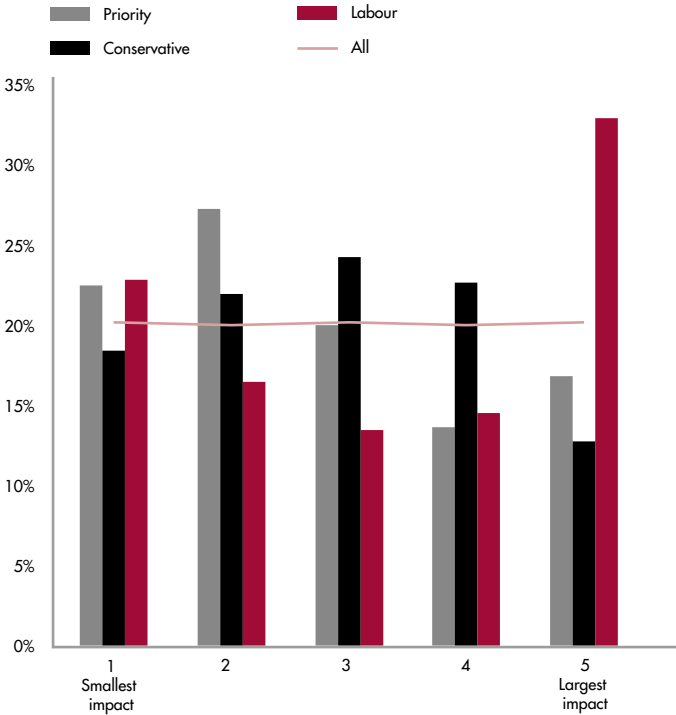
Hearts and minds

Experience of the pandemic

Much has already changed since the last election in 2019. The pandemic and the UK's exit from the EU will undoubtedly have a bearing on the next election in 2024. Labour must understand its target seats' experience in coming years, especially in places it does not currently represent. Our analysis of different seats' experiences of the pandemic in the last year found that many of the seats Labour currently holds have seen the worst labour market impact, in terms of furlough, unemployed claimants and self-employment income support claimants, as Figure 4 below shows. Many, but not all of these, are London constituencies, and their class composition is, perhaps surprisingly, quite varied: across all constituencies, there is no correlation between being more working-class and experiencing a worse labour market outcome during the pandemic – at least, so far.

But the experience of the places Labour currently represents – skewing towards major cities – is actually quite different from other places, particularly those places Labour needs to win. A disproportionate share of the seats Labour needs to win have actually been less hard-hit than average over the last year. This heterogeneity of experience is likely to become more acute as the country recovers, but in unpredictable ways: major cities, where Labour's MPs are concentrated, could appear to visibly 'bounce back' but also endure high unemployment for a long period. Many of the towns Labour needs to win have been less exposed to the immediate impact of the pandemic, but may be more vulnerable to the medium and long term economic impacts of the crisis and Brexit, and risk tipping further into long-term decline.

Figure 4: Labour’s priority seats tended to have been hit less hard by the pandemic than many of the seats they currently hold.



Share of seats with each level of labour market impact in 2020*

*This is calculated as the total of: claimant increase (Feb-Dec 2020), furloughed employments (Dec 2020) and SEISS claims (Dec 2020), as a proportion of the economically active population (Dec 2019)

Conclusion

The conclusions of this analysis confirm a somewhat depressing truth for Labour. Looking back on the 2019 election, and the elections before it, Labour has faced a combination of medium and long-term economic, social and cultural shifts which have created a huge electoral challenge, particularly in a first past the post political system. The challenges in Scotland, not covered in this piece, and the fact that the constituency boundaries are due to change, makes the mountain Labour has to climb even more intimidating.

The fact that such changes are, in a sense, 'structural' or long-term should not, of course, absolve Labour of responsibility for its losses: political parties are supposed to work with the electorate they have before them and the evidence shows that Labour has lost its appeal to working-class constituencies in recent elections. Clearly, Labour has been making some major political mistakes in government and in opposition. The party often seems to have turned a blind eye to the country outside its comfort zone and worse, it has often made the divide between the party and the country it seeks to represent even deeper. The Conservatives have, evidently, been able to attract voters from all different groups and have often done so against longstanding assumptions and expectations.

It is absolutely essential that Labour regains working-class leaning seats, as part of a broad, one-nation appeal to a diverse group of people living in places outside the big cities. The data confirms both that working-class seats are necessary for Labour to win, but also that they are not sufficient on their own. The Party must therefore tread a fine line between re-connecting with working-class seats, but without overcorrecting and failing to appeal to the other essential places, many of which are quite unlike them.

That said, every election is different, and one crumb of comfort for the party is that there are, in theory, more votes, and more seats, up for grabs now than ever before: implicit in this analysis is the fact that there are many more swing voters who have voted Labour previously and are not completely culturally averse to doing so. If Labour shows it truly understands the country it seeks to govern and sets out a vision to unify it in common purpose, then there is some hope it can climb this formidable mountain, or at least knock the Conservatives off the top of it.

3. THE RIGHT NUMBERS: WINNING THE BATTLE FOR ECONOMIC CREDIBILITY

Jonathan Reynolds MP

To win the next election, Labour must persuade the voters that the economy is safe in its hands. It will need to show how it can boost growth as well as divide the benefits of prosperity more fairly.

When people tell me they want to get involved in politics, there are three well-known political maxims I immediately direct them to. First, “All politics is local”, the motto of legendary US Speaker Tip O’Neill. Second, that when it comes to elections, emotion always triumphs over reason – the key insight of Drew Weston’s 2007 book *The Political Brain*. Third, and most importantly for this discussion, is the famous political adage: “Only Nixon could go to China”.

For those unacquainted with this phrase, it is the simple observation that a person’s reputation with the public can allow them to take actions that would otherwise draw criticism if undertaken by someone with different credentials. In other words, the test for a politician or political party on any issue depends not just on what you say and do, but also on the prior reputation you have on that issue before you say anything at all.

This is crucial in understanding the challenge for Labour on economic credibility. Quite simply, a significant proportion of the British electorate sees UK elections as a battle

between a callous but competent Conservative party, and a compassionate but less credible Labour party. These simple caricatures are of course grossly unfair on all counts, but unless we acknowledge this challenge, we have no chance of overcoming it. The corollary for Labour is that we always score highly amongst the public when it comes to which party would be best for the NHS and other public services. But unfortunately you rarely get a chance to prove that if people do not trust you enough on the economy to elect you.

The response to the coronavirus pandemic is a case in point. At every stage of the crisis, Labour's shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds has shown consistently better judgement than Rishi Sunak. On the need to extend furlough, improve financial support so people could afford to self-isolate and control the virus, and not cut universal credit just as unemployment peaks, Anneliese has either got there first or proposed the right solution whilst Sunak has got it wrong. This is important and should be recognised. However, it is clearly only the beginning of what we need to do.

Labour's frontbench team understands this and has opened up new fronts against the Tories on the value for money of some government spending decisions, the cronyism behind awarding of contracts to Conservative donors, and the questionable assumptions behind policies like freeports. But it will require the efforts of the entire shadow cabinet and frontbench if we are to make the progress we need to see.

Labour has met this test in the past. Prior to 1997, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown managed to significantly improve Labour's standing on the economy whilst also offering a radical programme including the minimum wage, the new deal for the unemployed, and a windfall tax on the privatised utility companies. It should be noted that we still narrowly trailed the Tories on economic competence in 1997, but we were able to open up a lead over the Tories

by 2001. However, many of the people integral to that era are the first to admit that politics today is very different from what it was in the 1990s, when the contest was mostly a straightforward two-way battle between Labour and the Tories. A decline in support for one party effectively meant an increase for the other, and the interventions by the opposition mainly came through the medium of getting on the evening news programmes. The UK had also been through two Tory recessions and the public had experienced significant economic events, such as Black Wednesday, when thousands of middle-class voters had their faith in the Conservatives shaken. Whilst meeting the economic test is never easy for Labour, it is fair to say it has got even harder since then.

In 2017, when I was a member of the shadow treasury team, Labour offered the electorate a set of fiscal rules drawn up by leading economists and a series of spending pledges backed up with costings and proposed tax rises where necessary. Whilst not sufficient in themselves to address our credibility issue, by 2019 we had unfortunately taken a step back from this position. Some key spending pledges were not in the costings document, and the large rises in public investment were not accompanied by an acknowledgement that day-to-day spending on debt interest would have to rise to reflect that increased investment (frustratingly, given the low cost of borrowing at the time this would not have been difficult to cover). Officially, the position was that the branded increase in public investment ('the National Transformation Fund') would cover both the investment itself and the costs of servicing the debt to pay for that investment, which is not wise.

How much did this matter? In all honesty not very much at all. The media never really challenged these detailed assumptions, and also ignored some of our better ideas such as a National Transformation Bank and an approach to government accounting that takes in a broader set of public

sector assets and seeks to strengthen the government's balance sheet. The biggest lesson we can take from this is that solving our competence problem goes beyond what we propose in a manifesto or policy document.

Some people believe the choice for us is between radicalism and credibility. The suggestion is we have to not offer very much in order to not scare the horses. I disagree entirely. The British economy has significant problems, especially on productivity, investment, and the creation of quality jobs. UK regional inequality is a severe problem, and since 2010 in-work poverty and outright destitution have got seriously worse with each passing year. The challenges of the climate emergency and the fourth industrial revolution loom large. We need a transformational government and only Labour can provide it.

I also believe Labour's historic relationship with the trade unions is an asset in this area. As well as representing their members, unions play a critical role in the long-term health of the sectors they organise in. The UK's need for higher paying jobs – which should be cast as an economic policy issue as well as one of social justice – requires a stronger union presence in most workplaces.

How then to make progress? First, we must demonstrate that we can both grow the economy as well as divide it up more fairly. Looking at the world today, there is no guarantee of the UK's future prosperity. This is even more pronounced when the disruption caused by a last-minute, thin Brexit deal is factored in. Labour must be willing to show we can compete on the world stage for jobs, investment and innovation. Whilst this might sound obvious, we have failed this test in recent elections. We have set out policy proposals that have been too easily characterised as wanting to ride roughshod over intellectual property rights and failing to understand the dynamics of individual businesses or the broader economy and as such have been used by our

opponents as compelling proof that we are not fit to govern. Some might think this unfair, but it is the truth.

Second, we should sort out our thinking on the business community and relationship with it. Too many people present a simplistic analysis of UK business, such as praising small businesses over 'big business', or manufacturing over services. It is not this simple. The steel industry is a big business and it is vital to the UK's future. Rolls-Royce is one of the most valuable manufacturing brands in the entire world, yet derives significant revenues from the servicing of its engines after it has made them. Big business can become remote from communities and abuse its market power, but some of the worst working conditions in the UK are found in smaller businesses and some of the best in the larger ones. Labour stands for good work and good wages and we should champion those where we find them and be fearless in challenging where we do not. If we are willing to engage with the business community on these terms, I guarantee we will find allies and endorsers beyond our natural support.

Third, Labour can embrace an agenda that is transformational and pro-business at the same time. There are huge issues to address in the UK in terms of competition law, monopoly power, the dominance of some technology companies and what this means for consumers and other businesses. Whilst changes to corporate governance and fiduciary duties are never going to be what we will write about on election leaflets, these are the building blocks to tell a story about a fairer, more prosperous and more successful economy. In 2015, too few voters understood the party's aspiration to offer a different sort of economy. Instead they felt we were either offering a crude anti-business agenda, or a tepid response to the austerity that had caused the country so much harm.

We must also talk about all sectors of the economy. As Rachel Reeves noted in her 2018 pamphlet *The Everyday*

Economy, too often the political economic debate in the UK is only concerned with the high-profile high productivity sectors, which are crucial but which employ only a relatively small number of highly-qualified people. We also need to address sectors like health and social care and retail, which employ a lot of people but too often pay low wages, employ workers in precarious situations, and suffer from low levels of productivity. We must also understand that for many people their perception of how the economy is doing comes not from official national statistics, but the state of their local high street or town centre. In my constituency, many of these areas have been severely affected by online retailing and yet the tools and funding to redesign them are not available.

The challenge for Labour is clearly vast. Unfortunately it will be further compounded by the need to address the long-term costs generated by the response to Covid-19. Labour must fight any return to austerity, but in doing so we must make clear this is not just about the impact on individuals and families of pay freezes and spending cuts, as important as that is. It is also that the policies of austerity suck demand and confidence out of our economy and prevent it from growing, a fact now acknowledged by the likes of the IMF and OECD. In 2010–15 we did not successfully communicate that the responsible path – for the economy as a whole, and crucially for the public finances – is to stimulate growth rather than reducing everything down to a difficult choice between spending cuts and tax rises. We must win the argument that a fairer economy will also be a more successful one.

By bringing these threads together, I believe Labour can combine proposing bold solutions to the country's problems and do so in a way which gains rather than costs economic credibility. No-one should under-estimate the scale of the challenge, but nor should we think it impossible.

4. A FAIR DEAL: THE ROAD TO PROSPERITY FOR OUR TOWNS

Yvette Cooper MP

Labour needs to debunk the Conservatives' claims that they will 'level up' communities in the north and midlands. It must offer its own bold and ambitious vision for places that have not had a fair deal.

In the 2019 general election, the Tories won the majority of working-class votes, pulling ahead in many of the northern and midlands industrial towns where the Labour party was forged over a century ago. Labour lost votes over Brexit, our leadership and more. But Boris Johnson now hopes to hold onto those voters with promises about 'levelling up' – seeking to tap into the frustration many people in northern and midlands towns feel that our communities are not getting a fair deal.

In practice many of those Conservative promises have already proved hollow as northern businesses have received less support than those in London and the south east during the Covid crisis, and inequalities continue to widen. The evidence already shows that the Conservatives' approach will not address the economic and social injustices that divide our nation – instead they are more likely to make those divides much worse. Much stronger action is needed to turn those inequalities around.

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But Labour has to face some difficult truths. Even though our party has long campaigned against regional inequalities, too many people in the places most in need of investment did not feel Labour was the answer in the 2019 general election. Towns that had been hardest hit by 10 years of Tory austerity chose a Conservative MP for the first time for generations. Earning back those votes and that trust will take humility and hard work.

So Labour's plans for the north and midlands need to be bold and ambitious – responding to the scale of the challenge, not tinkering at the edges as the Tories are trying to do. We need to tackle the growing divides not just between regions but between towns and cities. Our policies need to be rooted in Labour values to boost opportunities and tackle deep injustices. And we need to be optimistic – setting out a better vision of the future that celebrates the strengths of our northern cities and towns, rooted in local community pride.

Levelling places up or running them down

The Conservative manifesto promised 'levelling up' no fewer than eleven times. So far there is no sign of a comprehensive agenda; no proper plan to renew and empower our towns or to tackle the deeper causes of the regional divide. New capital funding has been promised through the Towns Fund and the Levelling Up Fund – focused particularly on marginal seats. But whilst the Conservatives clearly have a political project aimed at winning northern votes, there is no sign of a proper economic or social plan and nothing radical enough to meet the scale of the challenges we face.

Instead many policies are continuing to widen the divide. As Labour's northern mayors exposed powerfully in the autumn, the support available for northern businesses covered by Covid restrictions was woefully lower than the

support available when London and the south east were hit. When only northern cities and counties faced restrictions, furlough support stood at 66 per cent, when London and the south east were affected it rose to 80 per cent.

Meanwhile schemes like the Future Fund which is supporting innovative companies through the crisis have done little to support the north – 64 per cent of the firms they've helped are in London compared to only 3 per cent in Yorkshire and 3 per cent in the north east. And the new Build Back Better Council announced by the prime minister in January to promote job creation and “level up the whole of the UK” includes only one person from the north of England among its 30 appointed members, while 22 are from London.

The Towns Fund has at least pledged capital funding for northern towns – something our Labour Towns group campaigned for before the election. For those towns that are included, the capital investment is hugely welcome and often badly needed. But the problem is that most towns are not covered; the funding is not enough to reverse recent cuts; it only includes capital investment even though our local services have been badly run down and ministers have chosen to distribute much of the funding according to party political criteria rather than need. Beyond that ministers' plans focus mainly on deregulation – for example in the labour market and the planning system – even though that is likely to reduce the quality of jobs and the power of local communities.

At the same time, the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities that the government is failing to tackle or is making worse. Mortality rates have been higher in more deprived areas, while those on low income have been more likely to lose their jobs. Many northern local authorities have been hardest hit by lost classroom days with too little catch-up support from the education department. Foot-dragging over free school meals and the imminent

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government cuts to universal credit make it even harder for low-income communities to get on.

Far from levelling up it feels like our communities are still being run down.

Inequalities are growing

The reality is that the economic gaps between north and south, city and town, rich and poor are continuing to widen. London and the south east start richer and are growing faster than the north. Per capita economic growth in London over the last 10 years has been 17 per cent compared to 9 per cent in Yorkshire and 2 per cent in the north east. Nothing the Conservatives have promised or considered goes anywhere near turning that around. Quite the opposite.

Transport investment still hugely favours the south – transport spending in 2019 was two and a half times more per person in London than in the north. Meanwhile local bus services in our towns have been cut by £645m per year since 2010 and we have lost 3,000 bus routes across the country.

The education gap is growing too. Lower qualification levels in northern England inhibit business investment and growth. Yet adult education has been heavily cut back – so in a town like Castleford in my constituency the number of people in adult education has halved in recent years. Meanwhile too many young people are being held back: just 35 per cent of 18-year-olds go into higher education in the north and midlands compared to 50 per cent in London.

The gap between cities and towns is growing too. In the last 10 years job growth and business growth have been half the level in our towns of that in our cities. New, higher paid jobs have been growing in cities but industrial towns have seen skilled industrial jobs disappear. Ten years of

Conservative austerity has made things worse as public services have been withdrawn from towns and consolidated in cities in the face of major budget cuts. Technology changes may widen the gaps further. The Fabian's Commission on Workers and Technology found that the communities whose jobs were being hit by a double whammy from Covid-19 and automation were predominantly towns and villages.

Faced with these kinds of deep-rooted trends, the Conservatives' approach to levelling up is far too weak and superficial. Driven by political expediency not economic analysis or values, their policies are likely to continue to be sporadic, lacking in ambition and too often make things worse. Johnson has appointed a Cabinet that favours substantial deregulation rather than the active government intervention needed to shift these long-term trends, and even the industrial policy initiated by Theresa May has been narrowed and watered down. The huge strengths and potential of our northern towns and cities are being overlooked, and our communities aren't getting a fair deal.

In contrast, Labour's belief in active partnerships between government, business, trades unions and communities, our commitment to equality, hard work and to fighting for a fair deal for everyone, are the kinds of principles and policies needed to drive new prosperity for the non-metropolitan north and midlands.

Labour's challenge

But Labour has to face three challenges.

First, the scale and depth of the problem requires a much bolder and more substantial response. We will need a substantial increase in private and public sector investment in the north and midlands backed by regional development

banks and investment incentives. We need major changes to transport investment – waiting 20 years for Northern Powerhouse Rail just isn't good enough. And we must accelerate the digital infrastructure that northern towns and cities need if they are to compete.

Liam Byrne has rightly made green manufacturing a central pledge of his campaign to be West Midlands mayor – we need bold plans to make the north and midlands the heart of the zero-carbon revolution, just as we were at the heart of the industrial revolution. Active plans to support skilled job growth in green energy and manufacturing should be central to a northern industrial strategy.

We also need a major plan to upgrade skills, education and science. The last Labour government launched the London challenge to turn around London's schools that were failing. It worked. We need a similar but bolder project for schools that are falling behind in the midlands and north. Labour should be pushing for ambitious projects like an MIT for the north – active intervention to create a world beating science and technology university hub in the north of England, to break open the southern triangle of Cambridge, Oxford and London.

Devolution needs to go further and be stronger, giving our northern communities and businesses the power to boost prosperity and growth. We could also be far more radical about moving government and public sector jobs to the north – especially in a post-Covid world. Why not move entire government departments? If we were really serious about rebalancing the country, we would talk properly about moving parliament itself. Imagine it in Leeds or Manchester. It would shift jobs and shift perspective; it would change the way the government looks at the country and the country looks at the government.

Our second challenge is to make sure that towns, not just cities or regions, are at the heart of our plans. Despite our industrial town roots, Labour has been seen too often in the last few years as focused mainly on cities and Boris Johnson's Tories have taken advantage of that. We know the Tories' Towns Fund doesn't go anywhere near far enough. So Labour needs to be the ambitious and positive champion of our countries' towns with plans for major public and private sector investment and jobs, including devolving more power to towns as well as cities. Our towns have great strengths, but we need a fair deal.

Importantly, our towns need digital and transport connections. Normanton in my constituency has just one train an hour to cover the 13 miles into the centre of Leeds – were we to be a similar distance from the centre of London instead we would have six or eight trains an hour. Towns also need support for the foundational economy – increasing the status, pay and security of key worker jobs, including caring jobs based in every town that too often are undervalued and underpaid.

Third, we have to change the political debate. In 2019 Johnson managed to persuade many people in our northern and midlands towns that he offered change and optimism. The Tories blamed the damage done by their government's austerity programme on Labour councils. People who had been voting Labour for decades saw a vote for Boris Johnson as a vote for change despite the fact that the Tories had been in power for 10 years. We have to expose the Conservatives failings and dishonesty and show how only Labour has their backs and is on their side.

We have to demonstrate to those who have left us and those who have never been with us before why a Labour government is worth voting for and fighting for. Our plans

need to be credible, which many voters did not believe they were in 2019, but they also need to be bold and radical and rooted in northern pride. We need an optimistic vision that celebrates and makes the most of the amazing strengths and the huge potential of our northern towns and cities.

Rebuilding a stronger, fairer country after Covid-19 as part of a post-Brexit future depends on rebalancing our economy and restoring opportunity and security to our northern and midlands towns. Only a Labour government can meet the scale of this challenge, drawing on all the values that have always been at the heart of our movement – tackling inequality and injustice, wanting everyone to get a fair deal no matter where they live, making our country, as Keir Starmer has said, the best place to grow up and to grow old, and believing in the power of people coming together, backed by politics and government, to achieve it.

5. A STRONG STORY: WORK AND SECURITY

Bridget Phillipson MP

Labour cannot afford to seek solutions from the past for the challenges of today. Instead it needs to reclaim the language of security as it seeks to frame an offer to people about the future of their working lives.

If you represent a seat like mine, you get used to a particular narrative of change and decline. Heavy industries that employed thousands of skilled workers disappearing overseas, wages stagnating, trade unions slowly reducing in density, newer jobs that lack the social status of those they replace, tight-knit families, and fears and concerns about the changing society this new economy has brought. In the years after the European referendum in particular, I lost count of the number of occasions journalists visited Sunderland from London to pick up this story.

Much of this narrative is true, although taken together it can paint rather a misleading picture. There were still more than 4000 people employed in Wearside's shipyards when I was born in 1983, but five years later those jobs had all but gone; the last coalmine in my constituency closed when I was a toddler; and Labour's majorities in Sunderland have fallen – albeit with much fluctuation – from the 26,000 majority enjoyed by my predecessor Fraser Kemp in 1997, down to just over 3,000 in 2019. Newer work is often less secure, and

while the arrival of Nissan in the 1980s has – unusually for a big city in the UK – provided abundant skilled manufacturing jobs, the shadow of Brexit means people worry more about the future of plant than they did five years back.

The Nissan point is crucial, because one of the things this story tends to leave out is that many of the traditional industries were becoming more and more capital intensive, and employing fewer and fewer people, even when they still existed in the UK, as technology moved jobs from people and also made working life much, much safer. Coal production almost halved in the UK in the 50 years between 1930 and 1980, but the number of people employed in the UK coal industry dropped by almost three-quarters over the same period, with the amount of coal mined per employee in the industry more than doubling.⁵ Even before Thatcher, technology had changed the extent to which the labour requirements of coalmining structured our communities and our geography.

And that is important, because we need to shape the future and not merely bemoan our past. There is a version of this story which tends to stall, misty-eyed with nostalgia, at this point. It is the Labour version of John Major's warm beer and invincible green suburbs; the politics of the 1970s Hovis advertisement.⁶ In its defence, it usually correctly identifies the challenge that the combination of our electoral system and our economic model presents. Working-age people, and the jobs we associate most with the economic transformations of the last 50 years, have become increasingly concentrated in big cities. The Centre for Towns in particular has drawn attention very effectively to how the changing economic geography of our country has had dire electoral consequences for our party.⁷

What is sometimes missing, and what needs supplying in any narrative that can lead us to victory, is exactly what we do about it – both what we would do in government to

spread power, wealth, and opportunity around our country and how we set out a position over the parliament that engages with the electoral reality we face.

What we cannot do, because it will not work, is to simply seek to re-enact the terms of past victories in places where the composition of the population has changed sharply. We cannot have a policy position which solves the problems but is unattractive to the electors of these seats, or sulk that we need electoral reform first.

There is a wider danger that in focusing too narrowly on places, and on the striking spatial patterns UK general elections so often provide, we lose sight of one of the lessons we should have learnt from the referendum: people vote, not places, and while a focus on marginal seats is absolutely organisationally crucial, our political strategy has to be one that attracts support across the country. Many of the concerns and priorities of the people who we need to vote Labour in 2024 are not actually that different between Darlington and Dagenham, or – to use Faisal Islam’s contrast – between Hull and Hampstead.⁸

Furthermore, many of the solutions we need to explore and in time perhaps embrace do not have a strong spatial pattern: they do not simply help people in towns and not cities, or vice versa, a point implicit in Claire Ainsley’s analysis of what ‘working-class people’ really means today.⁹ The changes we need will benefit people in every community: but different people from those who are currently best served by our economic settlement. Martin Sandbu’s recent book, *The Economics of Belonging*,¹⁰ makes this point powerfully: an economy where people are rewarded well for being prepared to up sticks and move halfway across the country is not just rewarding (and disadvantaging) particular areas and particular skill levels, but particular mindsets and personalities. That is why Keir Starmer was right to call last year for

us to create “an economy that doesn’t force people to move hundreds of miles just to find a decent job”.¹¹

Like Claire, the way I prefer to consider these issues, and our response to these challenges is more analytic than nostalgic: it looks at the changes in who is getting paid for their working life, what sorts of workplace they are in, how safe their jobs are, how their concerns are changing, and which of these trends are still unfolding or accelerating.

To me there are five key challenges we need to have in our minds as we think about work. Each of these challenges needs an answer, and must inform the positions and offers we develop to the electorate ahead of the next election. In no particular order they are:

- The move across the world from physical labour to automation and digitisation, a tide now lapping at the shores of service industries;
- The move of employment in our country from spatially extensive manufacturing and extractive industries into city-based service industries;
- The change over the last two generations to a workforce where women can now be found at every level,¹² even if we are still not fully equal;¹³
- The slow move from employment towards self-employment and from job security to job precarity;
- And lastly our failure so far as a country, as jobs move out of manufacturing and extractive industries, to create jobs in high productivity and high wage industries.

None of these challenges have easy answers, but if we can build a thread of argument for each of them we have a credible story to tell on jobs and security across our country, in opposition and into power, even in the context in which

Brexit and its aftershocks continue to give us economic problems of this government's creation.

On the move to automation and digitisation, we need to see governments grip this change and its consequences – from the slow demise of traditional journalism to the risks posed by opaque automated government decision-making – urgently, and we need to learn from our prior failings. We – both Labour and the Conservatives – did not use the unexpected windfall of 1970s and 1980s North Sea oil to invest in creating a more prosperous future, but instead to defray the costs of our decline. Looking at the public finances today, it seems unimaginable that the next Labour government will inherit such a strong fiscal position, which makes the point all the more pressing. Our capital spending and investment must be focused on delivering the clean jobs not just to achieve our own transition to a clean economy, but to succeed in an international economy. Our urgent need to meet the vast challenge of retrofitting our own housing stock, for example, must never blind us to the need for an ambitious industrial strategy for the exportable, high value, goods and services of the future.¹⁴ We may need more than just the one hydrogen village.

Across our service industries and their spatial concentration, we need to learn the unexpected lessons of the pandemic – not in the expectation that everything has changed and will stay changed, but aware of the possibilities of change. Aware of how clear it has become that plenty of jobs can be done reasonably or even perfectly well without physical commuting over creaking transport infrastructure. Aware that the acceleration of the move to online retail means the role of high streets and town centres is probably going to change slowly from being primarily about procuring goods – doing the shopping – towards procuring services – cafés, community centres, and so on.

Our shadow chancellor Anneliese Dodds has already begun to set out some of the ways we need to start thinking about providing councils and communities with the powers to manage their high streets and town centres in future.¹⁵ There are going to be wider lessons to which we need to be alert as the restrictions from the pandemic end and we start to see exactly how far our prior 'normality' returns: how much city centres fill with people by day and empty by night. As that shift begins, we will need to have a clear story to tell about government's role in ensuring that the social and industrial changes which do endure see benefits shared by working people as well their employers. Smaller office footprints may mean lower fixed costs, but they also need to mean less time spent travelling. Flexibility cannot be just for the employer, but about time with families and loved ones for us all. And the pandemic cannot be an excuse for the government to resile from investing in improving infrastructure.

And the arrival of automation in service industries, and the steady move of a new wave of tasks away from people, needs to be a spur to do better – to look at the attitude to skills we have in this country, and why exactly generations of government efforts to improve technical skills seem to have had less effect in the UK than in many other advanced economies, and why government skills programme after skills programme stalls or fails. Because one of the lessons we need to learn from our failure to address this in the 1970s is that while service jobs may be more salubrious than manufacturing jobs, they are not necessarily any more secure. It is the skilled jobs in every sector which tend to be the more secure jobs, and a focus on skills need to be central to building our future economy.

For all of these challenges, the language of security must be central. In government, we talked of securing Britain's future. We were clear that security is social, industrial, and

economic, rooted in the outcomes that social democratic governments can achieve and sustain. But by 2019, the language and concepts of security had been recaptured by the Tories and used to point at our perceived less secure stance on defence, foreign affairs, and immigration.

We need to take this language back. Security is the crucial frame for the challenges around job precarity and also around women's growing involvement in the paid workforce. Security, at home, in the community and at work, is what enables personal freedom, empowers us to make meaningful choices and means concerns about the future are in the space of things we choose – as individuals and together – and which we can affect. It means aspiring to build a society where the future is something we build together, not something that happens to us as individuals.¹⁶

By way of example, talking to self-employed workers in my constituency, and talking to unions who have worked hard to organise them, not just the GMB but also Prospect and Community, I am often struck by how – almost by definition – few successful politicians are self-employed, by quite how many women are self-employed (and how that has gone up¹⁷), and by the means with which people deal with the challenges of self-employment. Intermittent cashflow, poor contracts, sharp practice, proper personal pension provision, and banking costs are questions of security which concern people deeply, but for which they turn not to unions and politicians for collective solutions, but to money expert Martin Lewis, to lawyers and other sources for (admittedly excellent) individual answers and for campaigns. There is a growing space for collective solutions in the increasingly diverse world of working people's lives, which as a movement and as a party, we all need to be in.

For over a decade now, our tendency as a party has been to focus on things that have got worse since 2010, on the need

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to reverse them, and on using the state's power to spend public money day-to-day to draw a clear contrast with an ideologically driven small-state Conservatism. As it becomes clear that the Conservatives' approach to public spending might make that approach alone less adequate in the years to come, we need not to desert that focus, but to couple it with a clearer picture of how the state's other powers – of regulation, of investment spending, and of persuasion – can help us make an offer to people about the future of their working lives which gets not merely their approval, but their vote.

6. FOR OUR COUNTRY: BUILDING A NEW PATRIOTIC STORY

Dan Jarvis MP

Labour can create a new narrative around patriotism: one which celebrates our shared connections and is built on the principles of fairness and cohesion. In this way, we can rebuild our relationship with the voters who feel we no longer speak for them.

“Done! You’re done! Labour is done is this town!” Having these words shouted at me in the street was one of several unnerving experiences during the last general election campaign. On that occasion, they were delivered by a former miner, incandescent with rage because I had knocked on his door.

Time and time again, Barnsley residents expressed their disdain for the party to which they had once given their unwavering support. There were four instances during the campaign where I was confronted with such visceral anger that I was prepared for a physical altercation. I am not trying to elicit sympathy – I was one of the fortunate MPs who clung on – but I want to convey how tenuous our relationship with voters is in our once heartland communities.

A myriad of reasons were cited for the fracture. For many, it was our leadership and Brexit stance. For some, it was a general malaise which had been simmering for years that had now boiled over. To them, Labour no longer

represented the working-class, the town, the north, or the country any more.

That last point came up repeatedly on the doorstep. Like it or not, if Labour is going to win back what we lost and form a government again we will have to prove we are the party that will stand up for our country.

We simply cannot shy away from this debate any longer. That does not mean we have sound to like an insipid version of the Tories. Instead, we need to better understand how notions such as patriotism, sovereignty and national security relate to people's lived experiences and, crucially, to tell our own story.

The road to Brexit shows why a political party cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. In the end, you will pay a price for it.

From the Leave campaign's fraudulent commitments on buses, to state-sponsored meddling and unscrupulous social media algorithms: Remain was not short of excuses it could use to explain why it lost. Of course these factors all influenced the result but what is surprising is how little analysis is dedicated to the decades preceding the referendum, during which the European project was subject to continuous onslaught.

In this period, a coherent argument outlining the benefits of a supranational organisation was never communicated and the entirely valid criticisms about its democratic legitimacy were never addressed. The 1999 European Parliament elections are a prime example of what should have served as a wake-up call.

The Tories focused on attacking the single currency, Labour chose to dodge it. We went on to lose more than half our seats on a 24 per cent turnout – the lowest for any national election. In the postmortem, the party line was that Euroscepticism would cost the Tories in the long run. Spoiler alert ... it didn't.

In truth, it was always believed our membership of the EU would endure regardless of what the tabloids had to say about bananas and bureaucrats. Anyone who raised concerns was dismissed as a little Englander, longing for a past that never was. The lesson is obvious. Once you avoid difficult conversations, your opponent gets to dominate the narrative.

When it comes to standing up for our country, if we do not assert ourselves the result will be to open the door to xenophobia and isolationism. The place to start is patriotism, an ideal from which many in Labour have long sought to distance themselves.

George Orwell once wrote that in “left-wing circles it is always felt that there is something slightly disgraceful in being an Englishman and that it is a duty to snigger at every English institution.” We are now 80 years on from *The Lion and the Unicorn* and for some in the Labour party, very little has changed. But why are elements of the left – particularly in England – so reticent about the notion of patriotism?

Fundamentally, a love of your country is about shared purpose and connection and these are ideals the left should champion. An inconsistency I fail to understand is that local and regional pride is accepted, celebrated, even encouraged, but when the discussion moves to national pride, many in our party begin to feel uneasy. This reaction is not shared in Barnsley, nor in towns across the post-industrial north and midlands. And with good reason.

I do not believe that patriotism is a reactionary principle, nor do I accept there is anything antithetical about socialism and patriotism. The problem is that if we have nothing to say on what it means to be a patriot, the discourse becomes governed by, at best, jingoistic caricatures and, at worst, violent nationalism.

Part of the issue is the left’s reluctance to embrace our history. Too many see only the bad: the Britain of empire

and conquest. But what about the Britain of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, the Chartists and the miners' strike? These were all working-class movements founded on the belief that their lives, communities and country would be advanced through unity and co-operation.

And what about the Britain of the second world war generation? Surely it represented the textbook definition of what it is to be a patriot. They fought and defeated fascism then elected the most radical government in our history.

On a personal level, I find it galling that the right in our country enjoys a near monopoly on patriotism. It is a source of deep frustration that by brandishing Union Jack emojis they can lay claim to be 'on Britain's side' while simultaneously paying our key workers a pittance, dismantling our public services and selling off our critical national infrastructure.

We need to be acutely aware of the dark side of patriotism. At both home and abroad, the far right is on the rise. There can be no complacency and any move to legitimise them must be resisted. I want patriotism to spur us to confront our deepest problems and injustices, not to divert attention from them. We must remember that we seek to represent working-class communities, not pit them against each other. That means patriotism can never be at the expense of minority communities. As the Black Lives Matter movement highlights, we have a long way to go to achieve racial equality in Britain.

Developing our story on patriotism will take time. It will not be easy and there is no blueprint for success. We have no Cool Britannia wave to ride this time around and occasional flag-waving in a post-Brexit landscape will be rightly dismissed as too little, too late. Our patriotism must be one that incorporates everyone, still centred on working toward a national project but – in contrast to the right – based on the principles of fairness and cohesion. None of this means we

cannot be self-critical. We are not perfect so when necessary, we must find the courage to address our failings.

The simplest way I can describe my beliefs is this: I love my country and its people, but I know we can be so much better. I'm extremely proud of being British and of our traditions but our political and economic settlement is not delivering for the working-class. Much of the so-called 'Red Wall' feels the same and no one in the labour movement should feel ashamed to agree with them.

There can be no excuse for unease on the left when discussing sovereignty. Our party's reason to exist is to devolve power, wealth and opportunity to everyone in Britain. Once again, there is much to learn from Brexit and in particular, Vote Leave's highly emotive and astute 'let's take back control' mantra.

Faith in our political system is now lower than in the aftermath of the MPs' expenses scandal, with more people than ever feeling they have no voice. While this is cause for tremendous concern, it should come as no great surprise. We operate under an archaic system. We have one of the most centralised governments on the planet and we have some of the highest levels of regional inequality in the developed world.

It is little wonder Barnsley voted against the status quo in the 2016 referendum. After Thatcher's assault on coal-field communities unemployment skyrocketed. Well-paid, unionised work was eventually replaced by more precarious jobs in the service economy. Then austerity arrived and decimated public services and the high street. The Remain campaign slogan, Stronger, Safer and Better Off, did not reflect how the town felt.

That disenfranchisement has not gone away. It is why Labour was entirely right to commit to a UK-wide constitutional commission at the end of last year. Some might

question whether this is the ideal time to be proposing change – but it is not out of choice. A decade of crippling austerity, Brexit wrangling and a ruinous handling of Covid-19 has pushed the UK to the brink.

In the time since the prime minister appointed himself ‘minister of the Union’ he has failed to outline a strategy – beyond trolling the SNP from the despatch box – to reverse the damage done. And the government’s plans for constitutional change do not seem to extend beyond relocating, rather than reforming, our deeply flawed upper chamber.

I ran to be the mayor of South Yorkshire, not just because I believe devolution is right in principle but because I know it works in practice. While I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved, my experience has been mixed. Devolution undoubtedly has the power to renew local economies and change people’s lives but on both funding and powers, the government simply has not gone far enough. It has meant too much time and effort is spent tinkering, not transforming.

In contrast, Labour’s offer must be bold. We need radical change that delivers real power and real resources to all our nations, regions, cities and towns, while preserving the ties of solidarity and co-operation that unite us. This is how we will achieve sovereignty and take back control, not by eroding workers’ rights and flogging off what is left of our public assets.

Our role in a post-Brexit UK must not just be to ameliorate the worst of the government’s policies. We have got to seize the opportunity now available to reshape our political system. Municipal socialism changed the course of history for the working-class in Britain last century, it can do the same again.

Last but by no means least is national security, an issue that occupies an idiosyncratic space in Britain. On the one hand, the priority of any government is to keep its citizens

safe. The integrity of our national security should be the first consideration when making any decision. On the other, it is not at the forefront of the minds of the electorate.

That juxtaposition should not be used as an excuse for Labour to remain silent on these matters. Firstly, while we are not likely to win an election leading with defence and security, it can help us lose one – as shown following our self-defeating response to the 2018 Salisbury attack. Moreover, I'm always moved by the reverence Barnsley shows for our armed forces. The town, like many others, expects its political representatives to feel the same.

Secondly, and more importantly, the government's record is extremely poor. Let's not forget they led the disastrous 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review, performed a calamitous U-turn on Huawei's involvement in our telecommunications infrastructure, and have left our armed forces woefully under strength. Despite these failures and many more, they hold a commanding lead over Labour in public trust on defence and security.

We need to turn the tide. Our first step should be to provide an honest analysis of how we got ourselves into this position, including the legacy of the last Labour administration. We are rightly proud of the leadership we showed over Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone and Kosovo. But we cannot shy away from the mistakes, most notably the decision to invade Iraq and the strategy we pursued in Afghanistan.

For my part, I'm bringing legal action against the government following its refusal to establish an inquiry into torture and rendition during the 'war on terror'. Putting our own house in order and making amends is the patriotic thing to do. The long-term hope is that by learning the lessons of the past we can install some much-needed accountability into our foreign policy.

As well as looking back, we must redouble efforts to working toward a more peaceful and prosperous future. Despite recent failings, Britain still has the potential to wield great influence. That influence is needed more than ever.

It is estimated that 10 million children globally may never go back to school as a result of Covid-19 and by 2030, around 620 million people across the world will live in insecure conditions. Those numbers are deeply disturbing – not only are we failing the most vulnerable but we are preparing the way for greater global instability.

It beggars belief that in the run up to the UK assuming the G7 presidency and hosting the COP26 climate change conference, the government reneged on its aid commitment. Long seen as a ‘culture war’ issue, the public health crisis has helped shift opinion on aid. The overwhelming majority of Britons now see disease prevention – both home and abroad – as a matter of national security. Now is the time for Labour to finally dismantle the false ‘us and them’ dichotomy on international development.

All of the issues I have outlined here will demand much more scrutiny. But to conclude, I’d like to share my ‘Red Wall’ perspective more than a year on from our traumatic general election defeat. We would be naïve to think that changes at the top of the party and an end to the Brexit wars mean an automatic return to business as usual. The political landscape has shifted, we must adapt or risk fading into obscurity like some of our sister parties on the continent.

There is a huge amount of work for us to even hold on to what we have, let alone reclaim what we once had. The challenge is herculean but there is cause for hope. Despite everything, Labour is not done in Barnsley, nor in any ‘Red Wall’ community for that matter. But we must prove to working-class voters that we care about them and that we have the courage of our convictions.

We have no reason to be timid. We are still the best vehicle for social and economic change and the only party that will stand up for our country in a meaningful way. Let's be confident and proud about saying so.

7. AMBITION FOR CHANGE: JOBS AND PROSPERITY FOR OUR TOWNS AND CITIES

Emma Hardy MP

Constituencies like Hull West and Hessle saw major decline as their traditional industries fell away. Now residents are hungry for new opportunities. Labour needs to provide them.

Fifty years ago, Hull was one of the world's biggest fishing ports. Hessle Road, in the middle of the constituency of Kingston upon Hull West and running parallel to the Humber shoreline and behind the fish docks, was the heart of the fishing community. The Boulevard running north was lined with grand houses, home to trawler captains and others doing well from the wealth fish generated, its length punctuated with ornate cast iron fountains. Now these houses are partitioned into flats or have become houses of multiple occupation. Hull's once prosperous past is further evident in the monumental 'Guild Hall,' headquarters of Hull City Council, now moonlighting as a wedding venue. If you walk through Hull city centre and look up, you'll see beautiful buildings which testify to Hull's wealthy maritime past and power. However, at eye-level the shop units are emptying at an increasing rate.

Although the EU Common Fisheries Policy is commonly held responsible for the decline of fishing, the major blow to Hull came with the Cod Wars of 1975 when Iceland extended its territorial rights to 200 miles. The permanent loss of these

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fishing grounds the following year saw many trawler owners make no effort to find new areas or catch different fish. They were happy instead to tie up their boats in the dock and hold out for decommissioning compensation from the government, leaving their fishermen high and dry. Around 3,500 jobs were lost as a result.

Hull is divided into east and west by the river of the same name which flows from the north into the Humber. This is a cultural as well as physical divide. Hull Kingston Rovers are the rugby league team of the east, Hull FC of the west. The docks in the east have always handled goods. They are still busy but employ nothing like the numbers of the past due to the rise of containers and the creation of the large roll-on-roll-off ferry terminal at Killingholme on the south bank.

While the east-west rivalry is very real, Hull has always seen itself as a place apart. From the start of the English civil war when Hull citizens prevented the king from entering the city, to creating the only successful UK municipal telephone company in the early 20th century (now Kcom and the reason our phone boxes are white and Hull West and Hessle is ranked number two for ultra-high speed connectivity in the country) that sense of proud independence is deeply felt.

Local economics and the people

The recession of the late 1970s and 80s arrived hard on the heels of the decline in fishing and the city has struggled since then. There was no major industrial development to replace the fishing loss, no new identity for the area. My grandparents are from Rothwell, near Leeds, and when I was young, we used to go and visit them fortnightly and pop into Leeds. As I grew up I saw that city undergo a transformation. Major companies relocated their headquarters and the town centre became a thriving high-end shopping destination. In the

same period, Hull has seen city centre decline and falling living standards. Many of the people I went to school with have left and not returned.

This seems to be the story of many of the former Labour strongholds of the midlands and the north. Feeling neglected by those they had assumed would look after their interests, the older sections of the population looked back nostalgically on better times: times before the UK joined the EU. Unemployment and poverty in Hull have remained stubbornly high. Unemployment currently stands at 10.8 per cent compared to 6.7 per cent nationally and 30.6 per cent of children live in poverty compared to 18.4 per cent. Fertile ground for Vote Leave then, amongst people for whom the threat of economic damage from leaving the EU seemed meaningless. The retort from one constituent to Keir Starmer, when he visited the constituency two years ago, of “It couldn’t be any worse, could it?” neatly summed up their attitude. The city voted by 67 per cent to leave the EU.

Politics and voting

Why then did leave-voting Hull return its three Labour MPs when nearby Grimsby and Scunthorpe voted in a Conservative? This is a difficult question to answer. People were very angry in the last election and the issue of ‘honouring’ the referendum result came to symbolise so much more than just leaving the EU. It became about the perception of an elite denying ‘the people’ what they wanted. Labour was effectively painted as in cahoots with that elite and the Conservatives managed to reposition themselves as the party of the ordinary man and woman in the minds of some.

But in Hull this anger, although very certainly present, did not result in Conservative gains. In my seat there remains a lot of love for Alan Johnson and his victory in securing the trawlermen compensation. A sense of loyalty to the Labour Party remains because of that. The trade unions have always been active, and we also have a very loyal BAME community and a real and genuine sense of community – people look out for each other. The demography of Hull West and Hessle is also changing. Thirty years ago, it was overwhelmingly white British. Now there is a strong representation of EU nationals, a Muslim community whose growth began with the arrival of Kurdish refugees in the early 90s, a smaller Sikh community and while the proportion of the BAME population remains lower than the Yorkshire and Humber average the presence of white Europeans gives the constituency a more diverse mix than the rest of the region.

Turnout in the 2019 general election was 52.1 per cent – third lowest in the country, with neighbouring Kingston upon Hull East bottom of the turnout list with 49.3 per cent and Kingston upon Hull North fourth bottom with 52.2 per cent, making the citizens of Hull the most disinclined to vote in the UK. This suggests that what saved the Labour MPs here was that rather than vote Conservative, disenchanting Labour voters either stayed at home or voted for the Brexit Party, which gathered 17 per cent of the vote across Hull; considerably more than Great Grimsby (turnout 53.9 per cent, BP 7.2 per cent) and Scunthorpe (turnout 60.9 per cent, BP 5.4 per cent) where traditional Labour seats were lost. It may also be that the historically independent bent of Hull people came to our aid: the people of Hull's tight attachment to a unique identity kept those who had voted Labour all their lives away from the Conservatives.

Challenges

On the doorstep the two main issues with Labour divided more or less evenly between our perceived failure to honour the result of the EU membership referendum and the unsuitability of Jeremy Corbyn to be prime minister.

These two issues allowed the Conservatives to be able to persuade many former Labour voters that Labour was not listening to them and did not share their interests. This is where, despite all the achievements of the previous Labour government in reducing child poverty and investing in education nationally, the failure of those policies to significantly lift up areas like Hull during the largely finance-based boom of the 90s, came home to roost.

At the same time at a local level, the Labour led council was often held as responsible for the decline in services of the last ten years, rather than the austerity-led cuts to council budgets. As the council struggled to pay for the increasing adult social care bill and looked after children, they were blamed for unfixed pot holes and cuts to library opening hours. The line, "they are all as bad as each other" was a particularly effective one for our opponents to push, as increased voter apathy and cynicism hurts Labour the most.

Target voters

The Conservative party and their supporters have been pushing the narrative of life in this country as a zero-sum game. That is, there is a limited amount of any resource to go around and for someone to win, someone else must lose. They have used this to pit parts of society against one another who otherwise share the same problems. Labour's concern for equity and social justice has been weaponised against it. I would identify two groups in the constituency for whom this tactic has been successful and where we can work to gain (or regain) voters.

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In the case of white British in precarious and low-paid employment, those most reliant on council services and benefits, Labour taking up the cause of minorities is framed not only as a snub to their problems but one which means they will lose out. The narrative of 'reverse discrimination' is one that crops up regularly with constituents in one form or another, most commonly 'queue jumping' for council housing of which Hull has a very large stock of over 23,000, but still finds itself oversubscribed.

Another significant group is the growth in sub-contracting out skilled and semi-skilled jobs that were traditionally viewed as working-class occupations. This has fuelled the growth of the self-employed and sole trader. In the past they would have been employees as part of a firm or local authority. As such they would have been able to see directly the benefits of collective bargaining and identified common cause with other workers more easily. They would generally have been regarded as natural Labour voters. Now they are mostly non-unionised, individualistic and in direct competition with others in their occupation. Like the previous group, their world too can look very much like a zero-sum game, although for different reasons. These people can be earning good money and rely on the jobs to keep coming in, so it is easy for them to see the Conservatives, held to be the party of low tax and economic competence, as representing their interests. They too, are susceptible to the 'culture wars' rhetoric employed as part of Conservative divide and rule tactics.

Bringing them over

Labour councils need to be seen actively making a real difference in the communities where it has power, not just managing decline. There is a huge variation in membership activism and participation across the country and the change needs to

start with us. Labour should never take any votes for granted and when we are asked: "What has Labour locally done for us?" we must have clear and concrete answers. At all costs we need to avoid navel-gazing.

We have to persuade the disenfranchised that Labour cares about them and demonstrate we have the policies which will answer their problems and those of the city. As highlighted, far too many constituents are unaware of the huge cuts to council budgets – Hull has lost £120m a year – and on the doorstep will blame the Labour council for the deterioration in services. The national party is doing the right thing in attempting to make sure that any council tax rises are pinned on Johnson and his administration. Further, we need to persuade them of common cause with minority groups – that their problems come from the same sources and have the same solutions. The divide is class not culture.

The sole traders rely on a healthy economy. We need to persuade them that Labour is competent to run the economy and that the important issues beyond that, such as the climate crisis and environment, the NHS and education, can only be properly addressed by a party that genuinely believes in finding solutions to them. They need to be convinced Labour is that party.

We need to show how Labour will bring power and opportunity home and support Hull in carving out a new identity it can be proud of. Rather than be framed as the party of 'handouts' we must be seen as the party of justice, fairness and opportunity. We must not be seen to be looking down on areas like Hull – some of our previous election ads looked more like adverts for charity appeals – and instead focus on the identity, strengths and talents of the area and how they can be nurtured.

We should too bring power home to people by looking again at devolution. This means just a combined authority

but offering real scale and power in the same way as seen in Greater Manchester. People in Hull and elsewhere voted to “Take back control” so let’s ensure a future Labour government gives them that control.

And we must bring opportunity home by recommitting to Labour’s election pledges from the 2019 manifesto for a regional investment bank and the relocation of government departments to the area, taking full advantage of Hull’s link to the sea and exploiting the revolutionary change to the way we work and where we work.

The University of Hull has a high proportion of students from the city. But on graduation many must leave the city to find graduate employment. Constituencies like Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle lose their most highly educated young people, meaning those voices and talents are absent from the community. Covid-19 may have fundamentally changed place-based work and this is a huge opportunity to rebalance communities, especially in Hull, where thanks to KCom, access to ultra-fast broadband is the best in the country. We need to break the link between social mobility and geography. Why can’t you live in Hull and work for a big organisation based in London?

In Hull and the Humber area, the green industrial revolution also has an important part to play, Siemens built a marine wind turbine manufacturing facility in the city, which opened in 2016 bringing 1,000 jobs and the prospect of a new identity for the area. Huge windfarms have been created off the east coast with Hornsea One the world’s largest. The Zero Carbon Humber project, headed by energy companies Drax Group, Equinor and National Grid Ventures, aims to make the Humber a net zero carbon economy while providing the foundation for the roll-out of low carbon hydrogen as a fuel for industry, power, heat and transport across the region and is. Hull’s identity can once

again be shaped by the sea but now as the green energy capital of the UK.

As the fourth industrial revolution accelerates, we need to have answers to how we will support people to retrain and reskill to ensure no one is left behind. Of course, I will continue to argue that a full-funded lifelong learning entitlement must be part of the solution.

Austerity choked off Hull's development and we've seen continued stagnation and decline. Labour need to provide a big, bold and clear vision. One that speaks to the past and provides solutions for the future – a future shaped around working people. We need to consider how we move the Overton window and make Labour's vision for a fairer, more equitable society the answer. We must look too at how we can build this new narrative through social and mainstream media.

There are huge opportunities for Labour to harness a real appetite for change. The Tories will try to capture this with 'Build Back Better'. We must convince enough people that the change they need is not 'building back' to the failed Conservative policies and values, but to 'build for the future' a future in which only a Labour government can deliver the justice and the fairer society in a Britain that we are all proud to grow up in and grow old in.

8. BEYOND THE BINARY: WHY INCLUSIVE GROWTH IS KEY TO LABOUR'S RENEWAL

Jon Cruddas MP and Darren Rodwell

Too much of the debate on Labour's renewal concentrates on how to appeal to distinctly different pools of voters: leave or remain, town or city, non-graduate or graduate. Communities are more complex than this and only a strategy which focuses on long-term growth and jobs will win their support.

Almost 30 years ago, in a series of highly influential Southern Discomfort pamphlets for the Fabian Society, Giles Radice MP examined attitudes towards the Labour party in the south of England after the traumas of the 1992 general election defeat.

These studies focused on the concerns of voters in marginal constituencies over Labour's lack of economic credibility. The pamphlets were significant in directing attention towards gaining support outside of the party's traditional heartlands and were landmarks in the creation of New Labour and its rise to power. In 1997, Labour increased its tally of southern seats outside London from 14 to 59 and retained many of these gains for years. Yet by the time of the next election it will be half a century since Labour won a majority with a leader who was not Tony Blair.

There is little thinking around Labour's modern southern discomfort today. Southern voters outside of urban or university settings appear excluded from the conversation.

The political debate around Labour feels truncated. On the one hand, we remain overconcerned with a few dozen 'Red Wall' seats in the midlands and north and how to win back these disgruntled traditional voters. On the other, we seem to speak too narrowly to younger graduate remain voters in urban areas and to those in social classes ABC1 who some believe will form the new long-term base for the left. Yet this dual focus ignores huge swathes of the electoral landscape and leaves the party in a perilous position.

We should not forget that the Conservatives won 174 southern seats outside London in 2019 – almost half their Commons total. Yet this is hardly ever acknowledged yet alone debated in Labour circles. We ignore these areas at our peril. On the face of it there should be grounds for optimism about our prospects. The Tories have been in power for over a decade. We should remember that in 2017 Jeremy Corbyn increased Labour's southern vote. Moreover, in a general sense a changing southern electorate – with significant migration from London to the suburbs and southern towns – offers real prospects of future Labour success. Yet over the last few years we have gone backwards; the 2019 defeat was an epic loss. We desperately need to reset the conversation and move beyond pitching a traditional Labour vote in the red wall against young hipsters in the cities. For that to happen we need a new economic story.

The obvious danger for Labour is to continue to view communities through a Brexit era prism of age, education, class and geography; one that tends to balkanise the country and which is well-captured in the popular political shorthand of 'left behind' places. Within such an analysis, voters appear devoid of complexity in terms of their political character and the values they hold: they are either the citizens of 'somewhere' or citizens of 'nowhere' to echo the popular couplet. This view suggests two discernible tribes with fixed,

readily identifiable value sets which are incapable of change. Communities and individuals appear static, inert categories; there is little discussion about how both can change and the role politics can play in such change. If we remain incapable of moving beyond these binaries – leave and remain, young and old, educated or not, town and city – there appears no way back for the party. We desperately require a new conversation to confront Labour's southern discomfort today, with a new economic model that can appeal to all classes across all regions at its heart.

Barking and Dagenham

Barking and Dagenham is a good place to start thinking about how we might reset that economic conversation. On the one hand, the borough is very much a traditional working-class, leave-voting area with a history of BNP and far-right activity. Yet it is experiencing significant demographic change – for many years it has been the fastest changing community in the country – and on the ground we have witnessed a Labour party rebuilt. Most significantly we have a Labour local authority pioneering new forms of economic and social innovation new forms of inclusive growth, intervening in the local economy and building thousands of new homes, that could become the hallmark of a future Labour economic strategy.

Historically the popular caricature of Barking and Dagenham is one synonymous with deindustrialisation – in the shape of the collapse of Dagenham 'Fordism', of struggles against the BNP which by 2010 held 12 local council seats, of recent electoral support for UKIP and of Brexit landslides. Based on a series of indicators such as age, patterns of work and education and race the community would be perceived to correspond to the stylised image regularly deployed in

identifying the 'left behind' in 'traditional' Labour seats. As such, it would be easy to write off in Labour's binary debates. Yet on closer inspection there are organisational, economic, demographic and Brexit-based reasons to think again.

Organisationally, over the last decade Labour has retained all 51 council seats in three sets of all-out council elections having resisted the threat of both the far right and UKIP through successive elections. The borough was one of the very few leave-supporting areas where Labour defeated the Brexit party in the 2019 European elections. Over recent elections, local results have consistently bucked national trends. In 2019 Dagenham and Rainham stayed Labour as the 'Red Wall' fell, despite it being the top Tory London target with a 70 per cent leave vote and a key marginal seat since 2010 boundary changes. Labour held on to 95 per cent of its 2017 vote. So the national party might investigate how in some heartland seats innovative organisational renewal, when the 'Red Wall' was first challenged over a decade earlier by the BNP, helped forge more resilient local parties which were better placed to respond when Johnson targeted them in 2019. Rather than writing off these 'traditional' communities, Labour might instead focus on organisational reconnection within them. In terms of an economic story, academics Will Jennings and Gerry Stoker have suggested that the 2017 election revealed a long-term material divide between those residing in parts of the country that are connected to growing knowledge and cultural economies and those that are not. Using data from 2005 to 2017, they suggest the Brexit vote was related to a long-term class and geographical realignment but did not cause it. This theory is posited on a long-term tilt toward a 'cosmopolitan axis' and a more complex dynamic of class composition and its geographical distribution than any inevitable shifts brought on by the 2016 referendum. We await their updated work following the

2019 results, but their approach appears relevant to Barking and Dagenham today, especially in terms of the economic strategies of the Labour local authority. It suggests that rather than writing off so called 'left behind' or 'Red Wall' areas, the key is to identify the factors that can economically rebuild these communities. We should focus our attention on successful growth strategies deployed by Labour in its recent civic renewal.

The Harvard economist Dani Rodrik has recently argued that the only route for the left is to contest the crisis in modern work, target its energies on the creation of good jobs and invest in technologies that augment rather than replace labour. Yet in Labour circles over recent years we have heard too little talk of how to stimulate decent jobs and sustained employment and too much talk of inevitable automation, the case for a universal basic income and the end of work. As we emerge out of the pandemic a Labour party reclaiming its role as the party of decent work could offer a way out of the post-Brexit binary game we remain trapped in.

Economic and political renewal today in Barking and Dagenham is being constructed on the desire for human dignity through purposeful labour. Through council-led regeneration, primarily in reclaiming older automotive, chemical and energy sites, massive housing development and infrastructural rebuilds are underway, creating tens of thousands of decent local jobs. The community is literally being rebuilt through reimagining an economic future which is different from its past – but equally ambitious. It is a future built on work. Housing and infrastructure projects are being aided by new organisations coming into the area, including re-locating universities, major high-tech film and digital investments, new green technologies and cultural interventions, with the local authority investing in and brokering these decisions.

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It is a story of economic transition and massive investment nurtured by an innovative local state which retains local memory: it is an ongoing renewal of labour. Over the next few years a major part of London guild history – Billingsgate, Smithfield and New Spitalfields markets – will be relocating into the borough bringing many thousands more new jobs and with them new vocations and training centres which will dramatically reset the local demand for labour and patterns of skill formation. On the Ford estate, a future beyond the combustion engine embracing an electrical future is being fashioned. We have more in-house companies running local services where we are the only shareholder than anywhere else in London and possibly the country. We have set up Be First, a wholly owned council regeneration company, to accelerate the pace and scale of housebuilding across the borough. Every penny the company makes is ploughed back in to protect frontline council services. We are also expanding our local housing company, Reside, from 900 homes to 3000 by 2023 to let, manage and maintain new homes built in the borough, providing an alternative to private landlords, with more affordable rents, more secure tenancies and higher quality landlord services. And by investing more than £750m to build over 3,000 new council-built homes over the next four years (drawing on grant funding from the GLA and making use of our Right to Buy receipts) we are filling the investment gap which the private sector alone cannot meet.

Expanding the borough's business base and improving job density by supporting SMEs and start-ups is also a priority. Our approach focuses on offering a new deal with decent jobs for everyone who can work by connecting people to job opportunities, upskilling through local colleges, and making sure that skills provision is devolved down and links in with key employers. Cumulatively we anticipate some 50,000 new homes, many billions of inward investment and over 20,000

skilled jobs over the coming years, all anchored around the local state.

Once again 'Made in Dagenham' is becoming a reality after decades of deindustrialisation. It is a Labour authority that is driving this future – and this could be a blueprint for Labour's revival nationally.

Arguably, the binary debate in and around Labour tends to underplay the party's own successes in transitioning local economies and the ways such innovation can sustain the party and resist national swings. It also provides a counter to the Tory 'levelling up' agenda.

On the demographic front, over the last decade or more outer East London has become one of the fastest changing communities in the country given the relative cheapness of its housing stock. This challenges the popular tendency we highlighted earlier in this chapter of viewing political communities as static reified objects. Binary thinking within Labour offers limited insights into dynamic, shifting political environments and how political alliances can be forged and retained both within and between parties.

Finally, despite Labour's national tendency to 'pick sides' between leave and remain voters and prioritise the latter over the former, it might be worth investigating whether local attempts to respect the votes both sides equally led to any derived political utility for the party in tightly fought contests in December 2019. Certainly in Barking and Dagenham, we were able to appeal to Labour leave voters more successfully than the national prioritising of remain voters managed to achieve.

Recent political history in Barking and Dagenham provides some much-needed correction to the national tendency to rigidly segment voters and communities. Political complexity might be a virtue as we search to rebuild a political coalition across classes, generations and communities in order

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that Labour might once more gain and retain power at the national level. The simplistic alternative of shrinking our electoral pool into two categories should be systematically challenged in the months and years ahead. The message of economic reassurance that was successfully communicated in the Southern Discomfort series of 30 years ago might be best replaced today by a modern, jobs-first Labour growth strategy as we emerge from the pandemic.

9. GREEN VISION: MAKING CLIMATE CHANGE EVERYONE'S CONCERN

Abena Oppong-Asare MP

We have to take the country with us as we strive to meet the global climate challenge. Our policies should make people feel the green transition will benefit them and the places where they live.

At its peak, the floods reached halfway up her front window. A wooden train track – a recent birthday present for her son – floats in a corner. He has been asking to play with it, she adds. “There were quite a few toys and DVDs, which are all replaceable, but it is that thing of explaining to a three-year-old why he can’t have his Thomas the Tank Engine DVD or his train.”¹⁸

One resident said she and her husband had to leave their home on Thursday night with little more than the clothes they were wearing. “We need to go and buy some clothes because we just dashed out with overnight things not expecting this devastation this morning. We’ll just have to stay at my daughters and try and emotionally deal with it really, it’s just devastating.”¹⁹

Two personal stories from the floods in Yorkshire and Cumbria. But we see these stories all over the country: in Somerset; Worcester; Aberdeenshire; Shropshire; Powys; Derbyshire and beyond. Year in, year out. Flooding that was once considered a once in a generation event now arrives with brutal regularity.

The impact of climate change in these communities is stark. It brings anxiety, grief, loss. It affects neighbours, family and loved ones. It causes anger and frustration and despair.

As a movement we often find it difficult to talk about the issues we care passionately about. We quote facts and figures and rely on detailed policy. Time and time again over recent years we have argued with reason and numbers against emotion and feelings. The results have too often gone against us. We cannot afford to make that mistake on climate change – the stakes are too high.

To win the argument we must do more to shine a light on the experiences of people all around the UK. Too often the language we use about the need to tackle climate crisis is either international or remote – we talk of ice caps and polar bears, or carbon and global warming. Given the global disaster unfolding, that is understandable. But we must build upon the message by emphasising the anger and anxiety we see closer to home and offering meaningful, relatable solutions to address those concerns.

At the moment, we are falling short. Late last year polling from YouGov²⁰ showed just how aware the public are around issues relating to climate change: 80 per cent had a ‘good’ understanding of carbon footprints; 88 per cent global warming; 87 per cent climate change; while comfortably more than half – 61 per cent – backed more government investment in renewable energy. These are reassuringly high numbers, but while that groundswell of understanding is welcome, it has not always translated into support for ‘green’ policies.

If we are to get people out of cars and planes, then high speed rail must be part of the solution – but HS2 has seen protests, both from local residents, but also environmental groups angry at the destruction of local habitats.

Recently, we have seen the introduction of low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) designed to create 'living streets' by preventing cars using residential streets to rat run, and to improve air quality, making neighbourhoods safer for pedestrians and cyclists. Whilst polling has shown these schemes are supported by a majority of residents, LTNs have also seen significant opposition including direct action by car users.

The furore over both HS2 and LTNs are alarm bells that we cannot ignore. Given the scale of the challenge we face to decarbonise the economy and build a sustainable future, this level of opposition to green policies is a major cause for concern. If we are to deliver meaningful change, then we need to find a way to communicate effectively with people – to set out a vision for a new economy that provides meaningful employment and protection against the changes and challenges we will face.

Debate within the trade union and labour movement – both at home and internationally – is vibrant and significant intellectual heavy lifting is underway. Last year Ed Miliband and Anneliese Dodds began to set out a Labour vision for a green economy, offering a glimpse of how the next Labour government would begin to tackle the crisis.

"Future generations will judge us by the choices we make today," their statement at the time said. "That's why we need coordinated action to support 400,000 jobs of the future today, not tomorrow. Now's the time to build it in Britain."

If the fight for a green future is to be won, it will come through marrying the offer of economic security and prosperity with the need for change. In our communities up and down the country we have seen secure employment become a thing of the past: as a share of the UK's economic output, manufacturing fell from 27 per cent in 1970 to just 10 per cent in 2018. Coal mines, steel works, shipyards – entire

industries and the opportunity that came with them have been lost. A green economic recovery can begin the rebuilding of those communities.

This can only happen if the state intervenes in the market. For a start, that should mean a green-focused investment bank, designed specifically to get money into schemes that push us towards net-zero. Crucially, this has to mean investment regionally, not just at a national level – there is no solution to the climate crisis that is delivered in one community alone.

Another example of the need for state intervention is charging points for electric cars. We know that petrol and diesel only cars are being phased out by 2030 – a decision that will affect households up and down the UK. But the pace of infrastructure delivery on charging points is woefully short of where it needs to be. Currently there are fewer than 18,000 charging points in the UK, with fewer than 3,500 ‘rapid charging’. This kind of universal and easy to understand issue is crucial to wider public ‘buy-in’. How can we ask our communities to make the changes needed to reach net zero emissions if basic infrastructure is an afterthought? People want to step up and we must give them the tools to be able to do so.

We must also be honest about what a decarbonising will mean for some industries and actively work with trade unions and businesses to plan for a ‘just transition’ to a new economy. Nobody knows the toxic legacy of deindustrialisation better than the labour movement. Whole communities were told to ‘get on their bike’ to find work and entire generations were left without meaningful hope of sustainable employment only to be pilloried as workshy or benefit scroungers. That cannot be allowed to happen again.

In July 2019 the TUC published a new set of principles, A Just Transition to a Greener, Fairer Economy which provides the roadmap for how this change can

happen fairly. The principles call for transition agreements, with guarantees on job numbers, pay skills and equal opportunities.

Nobody is saying this transition will be easy, but sustainable change is possible and is happening elsewhere. Germany closed its last 'black coal' mine in 2018 and will close both its remaining 'brown coal' mines and carbon emitting power stations by 2038. Government, businesses and trade unions have signed up to this vision, which comes with the guarantee that no worker is sacked. It means a lead-in time for businesses, buy-in from trade unions and meaningful funding and commitments to new jobs from government – where the vision and the political will is there, sustainable change can happen. Imagine the difference in our communities if this approach had been taken by the Thatcher government in the 80s.

Here, the government has announced the creation of ten 'free ports' around the UK that would act outside of normal customs rules. Without a focus on green infrastructure this is a huge wasted opportunity. Ports can play a unique role – especially when it comes to offshore wind farms – but that will only happen with vision and commitment from central government. It has to step up. Whitehall procurement is a major lever when it comes to transforming our economy and to continually miss opportunities because of silo working and a lack of imagination would be a travesty. Philosophically this is where our socialist and cooperative values are key: we understand the power of the state to be an enabler and to provide the financial power and intellectual leadership that will meet the climate crisis challenge.

Local government also has a meaningful role to play. We have a government that since 2010 has sought to destroy the concept of social housing and shrink the role and scope of local authorities, attempting to drive through privatisation

and outsourcing by stripping away funding. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the folly of that project and even the government has come to accept local democratic institutions are vital to delivering at a local level.

We must make the case for local government to play a significant role in tackling the climate crisis. Our focus should be the retrofitting of council housing from ground source heat pumps, and a faster roll-out of solar panels and insulation. The last Labour government delivered the decent homes programme that transformed the quality of social housing. The next Labour government must do the same, with a focus on green, warm, secure homes.

A fund to transform council-owned buildings and more powers for councils to extract environmental commitments from big developers will also help to drive change at a local level. We have seen a decade of the planning system being stacked in favour of big developers and against local communities. New powers for councils, combined with central government funding would revolutionise the delivery of a new generation of green housing.

Local councils are also on the front line of the fight to mitigate the impact of climate change – especially when it comes to the nuts and bolts of flood management. Local communities need sustained and lasting financial support – not visits from politicians after the fact.

From Wilson's 'White heat of technology' to Blair and Brown's New Deal, Labour is at its best when we have a bold vision for the country. The move to a new economy is a huge challenge. But it is one that our party is uniquely well equipped to face. Our passion for social justice, our belief in the power of the state and institutions to be a force for good, our commitment and bond with the trade union movement – we will need all of these and more as we build the future together.

10. A FAIR APPROACH: RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND ENTITLEMENTS

Yvonne Fovargue MP

The roots of the Labour party lie in the concept of fairness. That is why we should listen to the voters on issues such as social security and immigration when they say they want everyone to be treated fairly.

The British people have an innate sense of fairness. Unfortunately, in the Labour party we do not always fully appreciate what this means, when it comes to appealing to our traditional core vote. We are far happier talking about equality and rights – but that is not the same thing as fairness, which includes notions of responsibility and proportionality. And because we don't appreciate how most people think about fairness, and its importance, we sometimes despair at the perceived social conservatism of our traditional supporters when we should not.

Labour's roots are in fairness. The party was founded more than 100 years ago to make life fair for working people when their lives were anything but. On so many levels we succeeded. We have helped to raise incomes, improve working conditions, establish free at the point of use health care, expand social security and secure education for all. We can be proud of what we have achieved for people whose forebears had so little. They now rightly have a bigger slice of the pie and what could be fairer than that?

What we forget, however, is that fairness is not simply about equality or treating people in the same way. It is also about ensuring that people are rewarded for what they do and get what they deserve. Many of our supporters are not interested in freebies or in equal shares. They want what they are entitled to, no more, no less.

This is the reason why, in my view, the concept of a universal basic income is a non-starter. It is mooted as being more equitable, since everyone gets something. Some even say that it will boost the economy. But UBI falls down because it fails to pass the fairness test. By not making a distinction between the need of individuals when making payments, it offends most working people, who do not want to reward those who have an adequate income. Personal responsibility is central to fairness and the universal basic income is irresponsible.

The question of responsibility is central to debate about social security generally. Too often we are trapped into thinking that everyone should get the same, when we should be thinking more about what they are entitled to and what they need. That is how the system used to work, but we have moved away from that approach in recent decades.

That is not to say that I am not in favour of higher levels of state benefits. It is vital that people who are out of work or on low incomes in work are able to pay their bills and to avoid crippling debt. Social security benefits play a crucial role in this regard.

Of course, we should support disabled people who are unable to work or those who are too sick. What kind of society would we be if we did not? But those who can work should work and we should ensure there are opportunities for people to retrain throughout their working lives. Training should be high quality and lead to improved prospects in the job market.

Moreover, we need to return to a system where what we get in state benefits reflects what we put in. How is it right that someone who gets ill and loses their job at 60 after working since they were 20, gets the same benefits as a 25-year-old? It may be deemed a success in terms of equality but it is not fair.

We need to return to the contributory principle when it comes to social security. There will be some people in the Labour party who flinch at that, but they should not. The contributory principle used to be central to the welfare state: it was there at the outset, but over the years the principle has been eroded. Restoring the link between what you put in and what you get out would make for a far fairer system, would reduce stigma, and would be better supported by those sections of the population whose trust we need to win back.

We should ensure that those who have not contributed, for reasons of age or disability, are not penalised through their benefit levels. Indeed there is a compelling argument that they should be increased as far too many have found themselves in debt, unable to make ends meet.

We also need to be fairer in other ways, not least when it comes to immigration, another issue close to the hearts of many of our traditional supporters. We have for far too long been seen as the party of unchecked immigration, of open borders and of providing a haven for the world's oppressed and dispossessed. For too many of our members, immigration and asylum are solely a moral issue, a kind of touchstone for how on message you are – and hang the consequences.

But the consequences are real and far too often those consequences hit working-class communities the hardest. Many asylum seekers, for example, end up concentrated in poorer urban areas where support mechanisms simply are not available, and they can end up disadvantaging both the local population and the asylum seekers. To ensure this does not

happen, local councils need proper resources from government to support people settling in their areas.

Some people may even feel as if they have become a stranger in their own country. I have a trade union member in my constituency who found that he was the only English-speaking person in his canteen. That is not good, and not fair on him. It is too easy to portray being concerned about this – or even remarking on it – as prejudice, but it is nothing of the sort. It is an understandable reaction from someone whose community has changed very fast and who can no longer properly communicate with people around him. If we simply condemn it, we drive away those supporters who have traditionally looked to us to be their voice. Some of this is the fault of employers who use immigrants as a source of cheap labour and we should strengthen enforcement and penalties to ensure everyone is treated fairly and not exploited.

When it comes to asylum seekers, in many ways we should be more accommodating. We should ensure that they are settled in areas where they can be properly supported by the local authority and do not put unsustainable pressure on local schools or health centres or other amenities. In particular there needs to be more support for schools that are unused to dealing with a number of different languages. One school in my constituency went overnight from having English as the only language to having 14 languages spoken by pupils.

Furthermore, we need to ensure that anyone settling in an area is able to integrate properly and that certainly cannot happen when English as a second language lessons are being cut.

We should also be tougher as a party about insisting that failed asylum seekers are sent back and that illegal immigrants are returned quickly to their country of origin. I support a diverse society, and believe we should treat

people with dignity, but we also need to respect the rule of law and should support its robust application. Furthermore, we should never give the impression that any discussion of this issue is inherently prejudiced; not only is this not true but it drives a wedge between ourselves and the communities we wish to win back.

Because while we should all welcome people who come to the UK from other countries and support the economy, we are entitled to be worried about illegal migrants crossing our borders, or becoming a drain on our resources. As I have already said, working people often feel strongly that you get out what you put in and this must surely also apply to people who settle here as much as it does to those who are born here. Many of my constituents also worry that immigrants might undercut wages and rely on benefits that their taxes pay for. That is an understandable concern, even if it is sometimes a baseless one. But too often as a party we spend our time condemning the people who express it rather than looking for a way to address it.

I have avoided using the word 'woke' in this chapter as it is seen as pejorative by many in my constituency. There is nothing wrong, as a party, with supporting LGBT or BAME rights or on campaigning on climate change or in discussing identity politics, and I hope this continues. But we must not forget that our core communities are more concerned with more mainstream issues which affect their everyday lives.

We like the idea of putting clear blue water between ourselves and the Tories and this is clearly easier with some of the more progressive issues, which our party has rightly long championed. I welcome the fact that social attitudes of people from all backgrounds have changed for the better. But we must accept that many of our core supporter base in this country are conservative with a small 'c' on many social issues, and so are some in our party. We should embrace this

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and accept that we do not need to be radical or different on every issue.

Where the traditional view is the right one we should support it, even if it means looking back to our earlier positions or sharing the clothes of our opponents. We will be doing a disservice to the voters of this country if we ignore or criticise their views on immigration, family, patriotism or self-reliance; more than that we could also be shooting ourselves in the collective foot if we wish to win back those seats we lost in 2019.

11. STITCHED TOGETHER: MENDING THE FABRIC OF OUR COMMUNITIES

Tracy Brabin MP

To overcome divisions in our society, we must rebuild a sense of belonging. Offering new opportunities for people to come together and safeguarding the community assets that people value are crucial to this mission.

As you are likely aware, I became the MP for Batley and Spen in the most tragic of circumstances, when my predecessor Jo Cox was killed.

The words 'More in Common' will be rightly forever associated with Jo, and through her, Batley and Spen. Building unity, as well as pride and a sense of belonging, has remained the calling of many locally.

From our council and charities to businesses and the 'More in Common' organisation itself, we have all played our part in trying to bring people together and to push back against the hatred that killed her.

I wish I could report that everything has gone smoothly in recent years, but that would not be a fair representation of the truth.

In the by-election that I stood in 2016, the other major political parties sensitively stood aside due to the circumstances in which it came about.

Sadly, not everyone felt they could do the same and I was faced with a smattering of independents and obscure parties,

including some, such as the BNP and Liberty GB, which were connected to the far right. Nasty allegations flew about with an overwhelming focus on 'them and us'. It was a narrative aimed at dividing white British and British-Pakistani, predominately Muslim communities.

The Labour party won the by-election convincingly and I knew then I must focus on building bridges and bringing people together. For all the success that we have had – and I will explore some of that later on in this chapter– there have been setbacks.

A small but seemingly obsessed group on social media incessantly shared pictures of me with members of the British-Pakistani community with negative connotations, usually insinuating that I was 'beholden' to one group or another while the actions of the Labour-controlled council were treated with conspiratorial suspicion.

Social media and local community groups on social media became no-go areas with bitter arguments being played out on local forums and I found myself blocking more and more people from social media pages for racism. Sadly, this also meant those constituents who wanted to connect to their MP chose to stay silent to avoid the inevitable pile-on.

Some might feel that this has to be accepted as part of the job, as the normal 'cut and thrust' of politics and that abuse isn't limited to one particular party or only women. But that was not how it felt here. It felt planned and organised, not just a few disgruntled individuals behind a keyboard, but a connected group with a unified intent to disrupt and sow division.

Fast forward to the 2019 general election and a local independent candidate stepped forward and the individuals on social media now had someone to coalesce around. Hustings changed from being robust to uncomfortable, and sharp 'no-thank yous' on doorsteps were too often replaced by hissed insults, abuse and slammed doors.

Members of the community, particularly the Muslim community, were worried about the campaign and the darkening of the political debate coming out of it.

While Labour held the seat, my majority was slashed from nearly 10,000 to little over 3,000 votes. By the standards of independents running in general elections, the independent did surprisingly well, receiving nearly 6,500 votes. Every single one of those voters had found something to get behind in his divisive manifesto and 'them and us' approach.

In the face of those intent on dividing us, on setting groups of people apart to vilify and blame for the troubles in their own lives, it can be hard to keep optimistic and focused on a brighter future. When we win, when for example hundreds of women from across my community came together for my annual International Women's Day celebration, it feels good.

Like many communities in the north and north west our industrial heritage is part of our success as well as a challenge.

Batley and Spenningsdale can be characterised as 'post-industrial'. Known as the 'heavy woollen district' for its manufacturing of wool cloth, today many commute to desk-bound, or service industry jobs in Leeds, Wakefield and Huddersfield as well as working locally.

The wonderful and impressive cotton mills and other industrial buildings which once filled the air with noise and sucked in local workers for their shift are still there but now serve a different purpose. Some are now luxury apartments, storage centres, shops, and garages with many carrying on the industrial tradition by way of bed manufacturing.

There is a good chance the bed you will sleep on tonight was made in Batley's factories, the paint on your wall produced in my constituency by PPG, the biscuits dunked into your tea made by Fox's in Batley and the fire engine you see in the street made by another local company, Angloco.

The shoddy and mungo which once came out of the mills may no longer be sold locally, but we are still producing things in Yorkshire that we can and should be proud of. Post-industrial does not mean no manufacturing at all.

Today, in the shadow of those mill buildings are communities from all sorts of background and cultures. The predominant ones are white British and British-Pakistani. Having these rich cultures offers so much to our area, in particular opportunities for learning and growth.

However, the honest truth is that there are those do not want to see the benefits and the possibilities. I have lost count of the times that I have trodden home from a canvassing session having been left disheartened by something I have heard on the doorstep, which is either overt, or gets close to racism.

Of course, it does not have to be that way. For change to happen we must be creative and think differently and look at new ways to engage across age groups and across ethnic backgrounds. A personal mantra has always been 'if you build it, they will come' and I have rolled this over into my role as MP.

One of my proudest achievements was to become patron of the Batley and Spennings Youth Theatre. Our first production was a tribute to Jo and her love for musicals.

Approached by West End director Nick Evans and producer Donna Munday with ambition to put on a professional, West End standard production of *Les Mis* in a local warehouse with mentoring from the talented volunteers at the top of their game, I knew this could be a life-changing experience for young people in my community and decided we must make it happen. Working hard in the community through school workshops and parent meetings we were delighted to have a diverse group of youngsters in our 100-strong cohort. Over Easter and the summer, with a three-week residential

period at Leeds University's halls of residence, these young people got to know each other as friends and colleagues, no longer seeing each other for their faith or how they dressed but as equals with a common goal.

The subsequent sold-out production in Oxfam's recycling warehouse in Batley blew the community apart. Not just because it was a brilliant, sell-out show with rave reviews but because of the impact the process had on these young people. They were more confident, more inclusive and open-hearted than before.

Parents beamed and even cried, new lasting friendships between adults and children alike were made and you could see before your very eyes new confidence emerging from within the children.

I still hear from the young people involved, and those who took part in subsequent shows, about how they never imagined they could perform or how they had believed that the arts were not for them. Perhaps more precious still are the times I am told that they've made their first 'Asian' or 'white' friend.

I am also an active supporter of Batley Poets, a welcoming and diverse, all-age poetry club that welcomes all – from the white British male biscuit packer to the young South Asian schoolgirl – to regular poetry readings and events. Difference is obliterated by a passion for words and performance.

Creativity is a tool to foster social cohesion and celebrating difference must be at the heart of our Labour values.

This approach is centred on the belief that we are better, stronger and happier when we work together. Even if it feels at times that we are taking baby steps towards progress, we are making progress.

We need to stop seeing schools, high streets, neighbourhoods and religious centres as belonging to certain 'groups':

it is only when we pull together as one community that we can have meaningful and lasting cohesion.

But coming together needs a venue whether it is a library, a community centre, a pub, dance studio, youth centre, a church hall or a room in a mosque. These are all places where we can share food, ideas, hobbies and conversation. But it is these spaces that we are at risk of losing in our towns and villages and this is something we cannot afford to happen if we are to bring people together.

Growing up, our little library in Birstall was a haven for me. It was a place I could read, learn and write. There were untold books to read and stories to discover. It was a place where I could study in peace, away from the chaos of a small flat and crowded family life.

Safe and welcoming, the library was available to everyone, no matter your background: an opportunity for all children (and adults) to access books their families may not have wanted or been able to provide.

Protecting our local libraries was one of the campaigns I worked on with Jo before her death and it is something I will continue to do. The power to change society is in a library and we must protect them at all cost.

A library is also the only place where no one will ask: "What are you doing here?" It is a refuge for the curious, the lonely and the ambitious. It is also a place where those without tech or access to the internet can be connected. Many have suffered from the absence of library space during this protracted lockdown.

Thankfully our local campaign was successful, and our libraries stayed open. This is not the case in so many places across the country. Towns and villages have been hollowed out and the places for people from all walks of life to mix have been reduced.

It is particularly concerning is that – despite local campaigns when community assets like libraries are under threat – there is little evidence to suggest that the loss of local services is changing habits at the ballot box, either locally or nationally.

Yet community spaces are vital to our local heritage and many are now facing the real possibility of never reopening after the Covid-19 pandemic.

I am currently running to be Labour's mayor of West Yorkshire and a lot of my thinking is consumed by how we build back better.

Home working and shielding have meant many will have spent almost a year in their homes. Some will have been connected via the internet, others will be isolated and lonely.

Once lockdown restrictions lift, we can then make it our mission to bring people back together. Only 6 per cent of those surveyed in a New Economics Foundation survey said they wanted things to return to how they were before the pandemic, so we know this is a perfect opportunity for change.

As mayor, working with charities, government, councils and stakeholders I will support those venues which want to get back up and running – the community spaces, the music venues and bars, the sports facilities and pubs. Working with Community Foundation partners, the Jo Cox Foundation and others, we will put in place support for the third sector to reach out to the isolated and alone.

On top of this, the mayor has opportunities to increase provision for walking and cycling, expanding green spaces and building homes that work for the people who live in them, giving them opportunities to meet their neighbours and create strong communities.

My plan for a 'Creative New Deal' supports social prescribing – using the talents of musicians, dancers and artists to support those with long-term health conditions and poor mental health as well as ensuring our creatives are able to

earn a living whilst the sector gets back up and running. I also know the work housing associations do in bringing communities together is invaluable and I will be amplifying and supporting their work.

The Labour party has an important role to play in delivering real, meaningful change for communities.

The 2019 general election was a painful and dispiriting experience. We lost thousands upon thousands of voters and some excellent MPs. We also lost the faith of people. They no longer looked at Labour and saw a party that held the same things dear as they did. Labour has a mountain to climb if it wants to rebuild trust.

That process has got to start from the community up. In this chapter I have explored some of the challenges we face. While there is much to do, I embrace the task ahead. It is too important not to.

12. KEEPING US SAFE: TACKLING CRIME AND ITS CAUSES

Nick Thomas-Symonds MP

Crime often hits the poorest and most vulnerable in our society hardest: addressing it is an issue of social justice. Labour should respond to the concerns of our fellow citizens by standing beside the victims of crime, as well as properly resourcing those who work to keep us safe.

My constituency of Torfaen stands testament to the industrial heritage that gave birth to our labour movement and the Labour party. The place I am proud to have been born in, and spent my life in, has a sense of togetherness that makes real the principle, enshrined in our party constitution, that we achieve more together, by our common endeavour, than we achieve alone. Today, my hometown of Blaenavon is a Unesco world heritage site and its deep mine, Big Pit, is the National Coal Museum of Wales.

The former coalfields of the Welsh valleys – like those across the country – are working-class areas, built on the importance of close community and family. My mother, Pam, worked in a local factory; my father, Jeff, was born in “Stack Square” within the local ironworks, and worked in the steelworks – it is a background shared by so many of those voters we lost. These areas – like the mill towns of the north of England and industrial heartlands of the West

Midlands – have been the beating heart of the Labour party throughout our history.

We were united in opposing the way Margaret Thatcher's 1980s governments damaged our communities and brought together in our determination to build a better future at a time when heavy industry had closed. However, at the last general election, Labour lost the trust of people in too many communities like this – long-held Labour seats such as Blyth Valley, Darlington, Don Valley and Wakefield fell to the Tories. These losses must be a cause of deep reflection for the Labour party. They give rise to a demand for change that must be heeded.

Under Keir Starmer's leadership, Labour is showing that it is listening to the message we were sent by people in communities like mine. We are committed to changing so that never again will voters who have always been our natural supporters feel that the party does not speak for them. Keir's words at the 2020 party conference were powerful: "Never again will Labour go into an election not being trusted on national security, with your job, with your community and with your money."

One of the key issues on which we have to rebuild trust is in addressing crime. It is a fundamental misunderstanding to suggest this is at odds with Labour's historic mission to tackle social inequality. The reality is – as anyone who has grown up in a working-class community will tell you – that tackling crime is a social justice issue. It is the poorest and most vulnerable in our communities who suffer disproportionately from crime. Labour stands for preventing crime and bringing those responsible for it to justice.

On both these counts the Tories have failed. Not only have they slashed police numbers, but they have also systematically undermined so many of the vital services that divert people from being caught up in crime in the first place. Communities

across the country have seen the impact huge cuts have made to frontline policing: the neighbourhood officers no longer on the beat, anti-social behaviour making lives a misery, the horror of knife crime.

Under the Tories violent crime has risen by 150 per cent – with increases in every police force area of England and Wales. It is little wonder that this has happened as the Tories cut 20,000 police officers across England and Wales. The Labour government in Wales has shown how we need to address this, funding police community support officers to try to fill the gaps. The Tories are now trying a new recruitment drive, but this must be properly funded and not cause cuts elsewhere in the police service. Labour will recruit the officers needed, and will not do so whilst putting at risk the numbers of police civilian staff as the Tory programme of recruitment does.

At the same time, attacks on frontline police have increased by 50 per cent over the past five years. This breaking of a contract of trust with those that put themselves in harm's way to keep us safe shows the Tories' flawed values. This is compounded by a lack of competence. Take the UK government's flagship serious violence taskforce: it was set up with a flurry of promises, to have ministers working with police and other vital services to tackle the awful rise in violence. However, that group was disbanded, having not met for over a year. Violence continued at unacceptable levels, whilst services for young people were decimated with hundreds of youth centres closed.

In early 2021, it was revealed that 400,000 police records have been deleted in error. This included offence records, arrest records, fingerprints and DNA records. Some of these should, it seems, have been kept indefinitely. This catastrophic mistake will lead to criminals going free, victims missing out on justice and, ultimately, our communities being less safe.

Families around the country who have been victims of crime have too often waited too long for a police visit or not had a visit at all. This is not the fault of our overstretched police, but the consequence of a Tory approach to crime that does not put people first. Victims of crime have been failed and denied justice. Domestic abuse continues to be a stain on our country, made even worse by lockdown. “Stay at home” was a vital public health message that Labour supported, but the Home Secretary was too slow to act to support those for whom home was not a safe haven.

Addressing domestic abuse is a top priority for me. That is why I am proud that we forced the government to commit £76m in emergency funding for domestic abuse services during the first UK-wide lockdown. However, that will not address the systematic failure to support domestic abuse services or give the police the necessary tools to bring perpetrators to justice.

At the same time, rape conviction rates remain appallingly low. In 2019–20, police recorded 55,130 rapes, but there were only 2,102 prosecutions and 1,439 convictions. Throughout my period as shadow solicitor-general from 2016, I raised this issue, yet conviction rates have continued to fall. A terrible situation has got even worse: the 2019–20 figures for the numbers of people prosecuted and convicted is the lowest since figures started being compiled.

The truth is that this Home Secretary is quick to try and talk tough, but when the going gets tough, Priti Patel is nowhere to be seen. In contrast, Labour will stand beside victims. Labour will address the causes of crime, knowing that the services and support infrastructure that have been taken away from our communities by successive Conservative governments were vital in diverting people away from crime. Labour will also act to ensure that those who commit crimes in our communities are caught and face

justice. We will back our law enforcement agencies in tackling terrorism, working to keep people safe across the UK.

We will build a fairer society and address the deep-seated injustices that the Tories only ever pay lip service to. The Black Lives Matter movement has been a powerful force for change. We must listen to those voices from our Black communities who have expressed how deep-rooted the systemic racism is in our society and why so much more remains to be done. I am proud that Labour has committed to implement a new Race Equality Act to tackle structural racism and inequality. Labour will introduce a Windrush compensation scheme worthy of the name; the current system is just piling injustice upon injustice. Labour will also implement the Lammy review, driving change throughout our criminal justice system. We would improve diversity in police recruitment and training – so our forces look more like the communities they serve.

Indeed, for many young people in working-class constituencies like mine a career in policing represents a life-changing opportunity. Torfaen, like other areas, has a proud record of workers going into frontline public service, be that the police, NHS, armed forces or education. I will always be grateful for the service police officers and staff give on the frontline, keeping us safe. This pandemic has acted as a powerful reminder of this bravery, in the countless acts of service of our frontline workers on a regular basis, running towards danger on our behalf. To reward this with a pay freeze is wrong and economically illiterate.

Demands for justice must be met by deeds. Yet with this Tory government, these deeds never come. We recognise that the broken status quo is failing people in every part of the country and we are all less safe as a result. Labour is building towards the next general election in 2024 at a moment of unprecedented challenge, as we respond to the

Covid pandemic. A moment of national crisis such as this shines a penetrating light on how the world has been; how we live today; and what our futures can hold. That is why such moments can be real catalysts for change.

As a proud biographer of Clement Attlee and Aneurin Bevan, I am clear that the values and vision that drove them in responding to the period of collective sacrifice in the second world war must shape the way our party responds today. Our party has a great responsibility in moments of crisis, with people relying on Labour to offer direction and moral leadership.

Bevan summed up this approach in his book, *In Place of Fear*, when he said we can never “excuse indifference to individual suffering. There is no test for progress other than its impact on the individual.”²¹ The baton now passes to our generation to find a way to make these timeless values real. Crime under the Tories continues to cause such individual suffering for so many people: being true to our values means that we must regain trust on these issues, win power and effect change. We will develop policy, working closely with the police, communities, charities and local government; and, crucially, we will listen and act on the concerns raised by the people in areas of the country whose trust we have lost.

Growing up in, and representing, a proudly working-class constituency, in an industrial heartland, I am clear that the values that must underpin our approach to crime must be the importance of community and respect. We know the changes we need to see can only be achieved through investing in the police, but also investing in services that divert people from a life of crime, reversing the decline that the Tories have overseen. Labour has done it before, driving crime down to record lows. We can, and we will, do it again.

13. LIFELONG PROMISE: DEVELOPING THE OFFER FOR OLDER VOTERS

Taiwo Owatemi MP

Labour has lost the support of many older voters. If it is to win them back, it must be open to genuine dialogue which extends beyond election time. But it is not just about older people's concerns: we need to campaign on issues that matter across generations.

Labour has always had the best interests of Britain's older constituents at heart. Our party has fought for dignity in retirement by creating a raft of benefits, advocated for improved access to social care, promoted neighbourhood policing, safeguarded our NHS, and more recently, called for earlier lockdowns to stem the spread of Covid-19. Notwithstanding this, Labour cannot rest on the strength of its policies alone to maintain the support of older constituents.

Traditionally, constituencies like mine in Coventry North West have been assumed to be safe seats for Labour. This has been in large part due to generations of support amongst our older, working-class communities. In recent years, the strength of their backing has waned, culminating in the collapse of our 'foundation' seats in December 2019. The election signalled a warning from voters that even party loyalists will vote on issues and back the party they believe has the political will to address them.

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The UK's population of people aged 65 and older has increased by 16 per cent between the last two censuses and continues to grow.²² The over-65s constitute 18 per cent of British voters, 17 per cent of voters in my constituency, and 18 per cent of party members in my constituency.²³ Labour cannot win back a majority in the next election without the support of older voters. And we cannot gain the majority support we need without first rebuilding relationships with those constituents. This will require open and continued dialogue, not fleeting electoral engagement.

In this chapter, I draw from experience running my campaign and serving as an MP in a newly marginal seat with a significant population of older voters. I argue that in order to build and maintain those relationships, Labour must be diligent in listening and responding to the dynamic needs and voices of our older constituents. This approach must characterise both our ongoing efforts to reach out to older voters and the policies we choose to champion.

Candidate selection

A discussion of what Labour can offer older voters must begin with candidate recruitment. The Labour party has the most culturally, ethnically and vocationally diverse group of politicians in British history. It has elected more women and Black and minority ethnic MPs than all the other parties combined. This fact, however, should not preclude efforts to increase diversity in candidate representation. Diversity in political candidates is viewed as a positive phenomenon but too often we fail to adequately explain why.

Having spent much time with my older constituents, it has become clear we share profound commonalities that have equipped me to understand and engage with them more deeply. As a young black woman, I have had to prove

that I belong in spaces made less accessible to me, and that I deserve the right to compete and succeed. The way I have needed to demonstrate I have the skills and qualifications necessary to compete is not unlike the struggles that some of my older constituents have faced. Just as Black, Asian and minority ethnic voices are not always heard, so too with older voices, particularly in a world that is becoming more exclusionary to those who are largely offline.

Many of my older constituents have a proud heritage in the UK automobile and aerospace industries, which have been increasingly marginalised and offshored by global supply chains. This industrial workforce has been displaced by a shift from manufacturing towards precarious gig economy work and zero-hours contracts. My older constituents who grew up and worked in a world dominated by manufacturing are at the forefront of advocating against further deterioration of job security, reskilling opportunities and working conditions.

Having experienced marginalisation in my own life, I have sought to understand my older constituents who have felt sidelined in the overhaul of the labour market and the cultural identities that manufacturing industries once represented. This shared experience of facing uphill battles bridges race, gender and age divides and has allowed me to speak with my older constituents with empathy. The wider party should avoid unilateral messages that patronise or tokenise these voters, but instead actively listen and engage in dialogue within their own communities. In short, there should be more talking *with*, rather than talking *to*.

The Labour party should continue to recruit candidates from diverse vocational backgrounds who can best relate to the everyday issues their constituents face. As a cancer pharmacist, my medical background has not only better prepared me to listen to others with an open mind and better empathise

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with their circumstances, but also to more readily converse with older constituents on issues that are important to them.

At a national level, it is crucial that Labour recruit ambitious candidates who are legitimised not only by their political beliefs, but by their ability to inspire confidence. In particular, we should be recruiting candidates who come from professional, vocational or volunteering backgrounds that voters trust and identify with. Our deputy leader Angela Rayner, a former careworker, has recently announced a drive to encourage other key workers who have kept the country running during this pandemic – such as teachers, healthcare assistants, and public transport workers – to run for office. I look forward to watching the PLP become more representative of this country's workforce. A more vocationally diverse PLP with MPs who have experience of connecting deeply with people every day will bring us closer to achieving our constitution's aim – that we exist to be in government, whilst serving the people we were founded to represent.

Building trust

Forging relationships with older constituents is a process that first requires building trust. During an election short campaign, an MP will spend most of their time reaching out to community members. But trust is built over time; high level of outreach and community engagement must extend beyond the general election.

To build trust, representatives should start by meeting as many constituents as possible and listening to them with an open mind. I have heard horror stories – and this is not the province of any one party – of volunteers knocking on doors and assailing those inside, especially older people, with strident opinions contrary to their own. One of the most basic lessons for an aspiring politician to heed is never to

interrogate their constituents about voting history or intentions. Instead we must listen actively to understand people's concerns. Again, this demonstrates the value of politicians with empathy and people skills. We must make ourselves open to dialogue with people who bring their deepest concerns and problems with us. And when they share their opinions with us, we must remember they are entrusting us with their deeply personal beliefs, so making themselves vulnerable to our judgement.

The PLP must apply this approach to conversations with voters over Britain's cultural identity. It is important to denounce and discourage xenophobic discourse. However, in the effort to do so, we must not villainise enthusiasm for our institutions and pride in being British. Of course, 'Britishness' is not an immutable term and can often hold deeply personal connotations. We must strive to discuss what it means to 'be British' openly, without ire or insult – secure in the knowledge that expressions of patriotism are not inherently negative. We should learn from how the Biden administration has started to handle similar issues of identity in the face of unprecedented national divisiveness. In the same breath, President Biden will lionise America's veterans and denounce America's unfair taxes; he will express pride in the 'American spirit' and condemn the presence of racially motivated police brutality; he will applaud American traditions and champion diversity and compassionate immigration policies. So too must Labour recognise the importance of national pride whilst addressing structural inequalities in our systems.

Such open-minded responsiveness, however, must not simply be performative. In 2017, Conservatives overestimated the resilience of the trust their party had cultivated amongst older voters by falsely assuming they could ignore the priority older voters placed on social care policy.

In the midst of levying more cuts to vital public services, the Conservative party effectively announced a tax on this key voting group. The 'dementia tax' took a sledgehammer to their prospects of an increased majority, costing Theresa May the confidence of older people and dozens of seats she needed to form a majority. Her party claimed to listen to the needs of older voters and was punished for doing the opposite.

An important part of building trust is not just the having capacity to engage and empathise but creating the opportunity to do so. Arms-length representation is anathema to developing a rapport. In my constituency, workers in manufacturing once had a trade union shop and, traditionally, a Labour office where they could discuss their issues in-person with elected officials. Despite the rise of online communications, speaking face-to-face (when pandemic rules allow) is still the most powerful form of engagement. Labour politicians and activists should strive to meet people where they are, with office spaces that are accessible by public transport and hosting regular listening sessions.

I live in the constituency I represent. The issues my constituents face daily, be it lack of parking or delayed GP appointments, are the issues I face too. Being accessible to my constituents means running into them in the high street, peering over each other's trolleys in the supermarket and stopping by each other's homes to check in over a cup of tea. MPs can continue to make themselves accessible to their older voters just by being physically present. Moving forward, Labour should continue investing in local high street offices so that constituents can readily access their MP.

Policy coalitions: Abolishing Labour's either/or myth

The Labour party cannot win the 326 seats necessary to form a government without building an inter-generational

coalition of voters. We must appeal simultaneously to the interests of older and younger voters. Of course, baby boomers and members of Generation Z have grown up under very different circumstances. However, issues that younger and older voters champion often have significant areas of organic overlap. Labour must therefore develop policies which mediate the traditionally practical interests of older voters and the traditionally post-materialist interests of younger voters.

Environmental sustainability, for example, has been polled as the British people's top concern, overtaking housing and terrorism.²⁴ Liam Byrne MP, Labour's West Midlands Metro mayor candidate, has directly and effectively responded to this phenomenon with his green manufacturing plan – a policy which has found enthusiastic support amongst my older constituents. The programme simultaneously responds to the 'green' concerns of younger voters through public works investment whilst responding to the 'traditional' interests of older voters in the West Midlands. As longstanding residents of this important industrial hub, they have an ingrained appreciation for issues of transport and industry and are supportive of making these sectors more resilient. Although climate change most acutely affects the next generation, my older constituents have immense pride in the industrial heritage they helped to build and maintain. They are invested in fighting for this legacy – reinvigorating it sustainably and passing it on to their children and grandchildren.

Liam Byrne has efficaciously avoided buying into the 'either/or' myth between younger and older voters. His policy appeals to our traditional working-class base in its ambition to nurture jobs and transport investment whilst responding to the genuine threat of existential climate change. The robust coalition of older and younger voters who have united in support of the green manufacturing plan

teaches us the power of adopting policies which offer a natural partnership between these two groups.

Similarly, during the early months of the pandemic, we witnessed the mobilisation of mutual aid groups, where young people coordinated efforts to collect food and prescriptions for more vulnerable older members of their communities. Interest in social care policy has traditionally been dominated by older constituents but has more recently engaged the attention of the UK's youngest voters. Perhaps losing relatives in the initial wave of the pandemic or seeing friends who work in social care lack sufficient access to PPE struck a nerve with young people. These mutual aid groups have highlighted a joint interest between younger and older voters in social care policy reform, which Labour should recognise as an electoral strength.

Older and younger voters not only have mutual policy interests but they are also affected by similar social issues. One prominent sphere of overlap is mental health. Older and younger adults are the two age groups which suffer most from loneliness and feelings of neglect.²⁵ The need to stay socially isolated during the pandemic has only exacerbated these issues.²⁶ Labour has long lobbied the government to fund more after-school programmes where students can socialise safely and explore new skills and hobbies, an issue I advocated for during my own campaign. Labour should expand this idea to include hubs where older constituents can meet as well. Over the last few decades, my constituency has seen a decline in places where older people can gather, such as working men's clubs and even our community pubs. By directing resources to the development of community centres, Labour will be combating an issue which affects older and younger people alike.

Older voters are among the most politically engaged groups, and have supported Labour for decades, but as we

saw in the last election, the issue of 'getting Brexit done' changed that picture considerably. I went from holding one of the safest seats in the country, to one of the most marginal seats, largely because of how older working-class constituents felt about settling Brexit and which party had the political will to do so.

The lesson we should take from the shift in votes is that older people cannot be treated as a monolithic group who will always vote in the same way. This highly engaged heterogeneous section of the electorate does not automatically vote along party lines, even when they have been party members. They vote on issues of importance to them. We need to have an open and interested dialogue with older constituents to understand their circumstances, and advocate for the issues closest to them. We should never become complacent: trust is one of the hardest commodities to attain, and one of the easiest to lose. What then should Labour's offer to older voters be? The answer is do not just treat them like a cross in a ballot box. Treat our elderly communities like the friends, neighbours, and advocates that they are. and speak to them with empathy, openness and understanding.

14. SKILLED APPROACH: EDUCATION AND TRAINING FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES OF THE FUTURE

Toby Perkins MP

Voters who turned away from Labour too often felt shut out of the jobs market. Labour must demonstrate the role that a progressive approach to skills can play in allowing them and their children to thrive in the modern workplace.

Electorally, Chesterfield has always been different. It was of course the seat in which Tony Benn re-entered parliament in a 1984 by-election after his defeat the previous summer – just in time for the miners’ strike, but too late for the Labour party leadership election a few months before.

It was also one of only two seats to see no swing to Labour in 1997, and in 2001 on a night remarkable for how few remarkable results there were, it swung to the Lib Dems as Labour lost it for the first time in 70 years.

In 2010 it was defying the trends again, as I managed to wrestle it back for Labour. It was the only seat Labour gained from a major party, on the same night that we lost 94 others. And it was the only seat in the country we held in 1983 and lost in 2001 and the only seat we lost in ‘01 and held in 2010.

Still it defies the odds. In 2010 every similar local seat was held by a Labour colleague, but over the last two elections Mansfield, Ashfield, NE Derbyshire, Bassetlaw and Bolsover

have gone over into the Tory column. Some of those seats are must-wins to get a Labour government in the future whilst others, sadly, look to be way off for Labour.

The 2019 election was disastrous for Labour in areas like Chesterfield. But the disillusionment felt by the traditional, post-industrial former council house tenants who make up a significant proportion of the electorate, while exacerbated by the party leadership, had been growing over a decade or more.

Whilst generalisations are always trite, voters in seats like mine value hard work, patriotism, pride and community. They are proud of their country, their county, their town and their community. They value family and work, they value the heritage of the pits and the factories but they do not romanticise about a return to those tough days.

They expect a Labour party that shares and respects those values and shows that it knows the value of hard work.

In a changing world, Labour must plot a path that helps our communities to access the opportunities of the future.

A wise man once said to me: "The starting point of moving from losing to winning is truly understanding why you are losing."

Keir Starmer's stance on the EU – no return to the question of membership but an argument in favour of close links and cooperation – is a strong basis to start reforming our ties with these communities, but only a true understanding of the motivations behind the Brexit vote and what Leave voters were trying to get away from, is likely to see the Labour rose rise higher than the Tory tree.

For all the fact that the EU vote saw a wide vote discrepancy between younger and older voters; we must understand that those older voters were voting for the future as well as the past.

I have lost count of the number of older leave voters who said: "I voted Leave, it won't make much difference to me, but I did it for my grandchildren. Kids these days don't have half the chances we did."

Before Labour dismisses sentiments like that, we should at least pause to question why the voters felt that globalisation and EU membership might not have been helping the grandchildren they loved.

And whilst some people lazily claim that the EU vote was 'just about immigration' I think that it was at least as much about work, although immigration played a role in that calculation too.

When Sports Direct announced that it would open a giant new factory employing around 3,500 people on the former site of the old pit at Shirebrook, local people were delighted. A decade or so later few local people feel like they have benefited from this jobs harvest.

Sports Direct not only seemed to set out to mine an apparently endless seam of Eastern European workers who were willing to move to North Derbyshire, live six to a house, and work in conditions most UK workers would consider oppressive and underpaid. The very vulnerability that these workers experience as newly arriving immigrants means they are in no position to stand up to work practices that have been widely criticised.

It has been an attractive but incomplete policy response to suggest that these concerns can be met by stronger workers' rights or minimum wage enforcement, but the company already broadly follows the laws. The reality is that the endless supply of labour distorted the market forces that should have meant competitive wage levels and conditions in Shirebrook.

This recruitment of overseas workers, employed by agencies, also hugely restricted trade unions' ability to prevent the practices that have been exposed.

I have also heard it suggested that 'immigrants shouldn't be blamed for taking jobs that British people don't want'. But voters in my constituency are not blaming the immigrants, nor is it true that local people do not want the jobs. If a company is able to staff a factory of this size with very few local employees local people are likely to conclude that freedom of movement is not working in their interests, and as the workers' party that should always be intolerable to us.

For a community that has a history of working with hand and sinew in dark and noisy environments, the mirage of thousands of jobs that a new generation of workers could do disappearing like an autumn frost was a cruel blow.

Whilst there are specific issues with Sports Direct's operating model that Labour has rightly highlighted, the broader lesson about the impact on working lives and opportunities for local communities should not be lightly dismissed in seats like mine.

But alongside making sure that job opportunities are attainable for the next generation, there is an equal need to ensure that this is a generation that can see a path to acquiring the tools they need to be successful in the modern workplace.

And ensuring that people at all levels are equipped to take advantage of the opportunities that exist helps make Britain a more attractive place for employers.

That starts with a commitment to the early pre-school years. SureStart was a groundbreaking commitment to young children and their families, with centres sited in more deprived areas and it is a tragedy that the Tory government has allowed them to disappear.

One of the great successes of Labour's approach to school education was making school more relevant to more children

for longer. Whilst literacy and numeracy remain key foundation stones, children should also get opportunities to explore vocational and practical routes alongside academic ones.

In schools across Chesterfield, children with practical skills see that these are viewed as secondary to languages and sciences. The E-Bacc rewards schools which narrow student choices, leading to a more limited offer for children today.

Labour knows that it is a false dichotomy to suggest that students are 'academic' or 'vocational', and parity of esteem for a vocational path will only come when it is considered a worthwhile option for children who could also follow the academic route. Indeed, a mixed approach that allows children to pursue academic and vocational disciplines would be preferable.

Our further education colleges should be at the heart of a lifelong approach to skills that recognises that in a world where many have had eight or more jobs by the time they are 30, we may need to re-train more than once to remain relevant in the modern workforce.

There also needs to be a joined-up approach that recognises the barriers that our welfare system places in the way of people who need to retrain. In towns like Chesterfield, our FE Colleges are rightly seen as the starting point of vocational education, yet once people enter the workplace they often consider their classroom learning to be over.

One of the biggest barriers to people returning to education once they have familial responsibilities of their own, is affordability, so a future Labour approach must ensure that parents can put food on the table whilst developing their skills.

The government's recent announcement of a lifetime skills guarantee, which is not available for a worker who has studied to level 3 in one subject and wants to move into another is a great example of how to badly introduce a good idea.

There was nothing wrong with the aspiration of the previous Labour government to see half of all our population studying for a degree, but there needs to be a plan for the other 50 per cent and a recognition that higher study can follow not precede an introduction to the world of work. Apprenticeships which ultimately lead to a degree should be more widely available and employers incentivised to create those opportunities.

The government's introduction of an apprenticeship levy was supposed to 'put employers in the driving seat'. Yet in practice, it has led to a big reduction in the number of apprenticeships for 16 to 19-year-olds and has seen SMEs shut out of the apprenticeship regime whilst seeing £330m of apprenticeship funding sent back to the Treasury last year alone.

Labour must recognise the value of place. The skills needed in West Sussex or in West Yorkshire job markets are different and no Whitehall designed and delivered scheme will recognise that context. As the Tories resile from devolution, a gap exists for a party that recognises the power of devolved decision-making rooted in its local economy.

We need to bring together employers, colleges, independent providers and devolved power-holders and address local labour needs from both the perspective of employers and workers.

For example, a recent report by Homeserve found that Britain's construction and home improvement industries were producing 44,000 too few apprentices each year. If an employer-led approach was sufficient, the industry would be addressing this shortfall – but it isn't. Therefore, ensuring that local communities have the responsibility for locally addressing these shortfalls will be valuable from Accrington to Ascot, but will have particular resonance in

red-wall areas with concerns about the world of work in the future.

Recognising the role of attainable work forms part of the opportunity to restate the values that we should naturally share with voters in the North Midlands and beyond.

Many of my constituents were bewildered that some on the left got into such a lather over our leader recently making a speech with our nation's flag in the background. It had not occurred to them that there might be anything remotely controversial in a leader appearing to be proud of the country he hoped to lead.

There is much about our country that my constituents take pride in. From our military history to the British Army of today; from the NHS, to our historic industrial base and from our life-changing inventors and scientists to world leading athletes and artists, our country's historic and present-day contribution is a remarkable one.

Voters, therefore, take a dim view of those who argued against leaving the EU on the basis that our country 'isn't good or big enough to go it alone'.

A Labour party that wishes to win back voters in these areas must combine the values of fairness and solidarity which are intrinsic to our principles, with confidence, optimism and pride in our nation's prospects and a plan to deliver, which seemed missing from the somewhat gloomy countenance we have displayed in recent years.

The Labour party is not dead to Red Wall voters by any means, but the leadership of the party will need to show these voters that the outlook the party took into the 2019 election has changed if the Red Wall is to be rebuilt.

3. The working-class challenge: the votes Labour needs to win

- 1 Andrew Harrop (2019) Another Mountain to Climb
- 2 Due to data availability, we use the 2011 census and take the technical definition of working class to mean as follows: lower supervisory and technical occupations; semi-routine occupations; routine occupations; and never worked and long-term unemployed (NS-SeC groups 5-8)
- 3 Estimates drawn from: Chris Hanretty, Areal Interpolation and the UK's referendum on EU membership, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 17 March 2017
- 4 Details on how the House of Commons categorised these places can be found here: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8322>

6. A strong story: work and security

- 5 UK government statistical data sets, Historic coal data: production, availability and consumption 1853-2019
- 6 For an excellent study of the problems the Labour Party's fascination with nostalgia causes, see Jobson, R. (2018). *Nostalgia and the post-war Labour Party*. Manchester University Press, Manchester
- 7 Warren, I. (2018). What happened in the 2018 local elections. Centre for Towns, Bolton
- 8 This was said on television on 28 September 2016, and was picked up at the time by a number of people on Twitter
- 9 Ainsley, C. (2018). *The new working class*. Policy Press, Bristol
- 10 Sandbu, M. (2021). *The Economics of Belonging: A Radical Plan to Win Back the Left Behind and Achieve Prosperity*. Princeton University Press, London
- 11 Keir Starmer's speech to Labour Connected, 22 September 2020
- 12 Very thoroughly covered in Roantree, B, & Vira, K. (2018). *The rise and rise of women's employment in the UK*. Institute for Fiscal Studies, London
- 13 I have written in more detail for the *New Statesman* about this before – see *Labour loves nostalgia*. But we succeed when our politics is about the future, 23 October 2019

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- 14 The Labour party's October 2020 report, on a green economic recovery), makes these points well
- 15 See for example, Anneliese Dodds' coverage in the Daily Mirror 24 February 2021)
- 16 More than seventy years ago, Aneurin Bevan, in his column in Tribune, used the concept of 'serenity' to make a not dissimilar set of points: "The background and pre-requisite of this personal liberty implies that the serenities of private life shall not be invaded and disturbed by disharmonies arising from maladjustments in the economic machine" – Bevan, A. (1950) The people's coming of age. Tribune, 3 February, pp. 3-4
- 17 The rise in self-employment being driven by an increase in selfemployed women is apparent from a number of Office for National Statistics publications, usefully summarised in their 2018 note on Trends in self-employment in the UK 7 February 2018

10. Green vision: making climate change everyone's concern

- 18 BBC News website, UK Floods: stories from the devastation in Cumbria, 11 December 2015
- 19 BBC News website, East Yorkshire flooding worsens as residents evacuated from home, 28 February 2020
- 20 Yougov: https://docs.cdn.yougov.com/2lhk9n9so1/OVOEnergy_Climate_201104_W1.pdf, 4 November 2020

13. Keeping us safe: tackling crime and its causes

- 21 Aneurin Bevan, "In Place of Fear" (London: Quartet Books Ltd, 1990 reprint), p.200

14. Lifelong promise: developing the offer for older voters

- 22 ONS, "Is 70 the New 65?" (2019)
- 23 ONS Census (2011)
- 24 BritainThinks "Priority Poll" (2019)
- 25 NHS "Loneliness in Older People", (2018); Lancet Health "Loneliness in Children and Young People in the UK" (2020)
- 26 Razai, Oakeshott, Kankam, " Mitigating the psychological effects of social isolation during the Covid-19 pandemic" (2020)

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