

FABIAN REVIEW

The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society

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WINNING WOMEN



*Melanie Onn MP and Bella Sankey respond to Gorton and Denton **p10** / Labour's offer to women, with Seema Malhotra MP, Sara Hyde, Paula Harriott, Anneliese Dodds MP, Jess Asato MP, Jade Azim, Marianna Masters, Evelyn Akoto, Liz Hind, and Daniella Jenkins **p14** / Mete Coban on access to green space **p24***

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FABIAN REVIEW

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FABIAN REVIEW

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

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Next chapter

A deeper relationship with Europe could solve problems on many fronts, writes *Joe Dromey*

A decade ago, the UK voted to leave the European Union. The British electorate was told that we could take back control, that we would be freed from Brussels bureaucracy, migration would fall, and that we would regain £350m a week to spend on the NHS – all while retaining exactly the same benefits that we had inside the EU.

It has not worked out that way. Brexit has proven to be an almost unique act of national self-harm. It has left us poorer, weaker and more isolated. A nation, not reborn, but diminished. A decade on, it is time for us to look afresh at our relationship with our continent.

Apart from anything, deepening our relationship with Europe is an economic necessity. The UK has suffered from nearly two decades of stagnation and the longest cost of living squeeze in modern times. The stall in growth has increased pressure on our public finances, and the decline in living standards underlies public discontent and the rise in support for populist parties. The Brexit deal has been a drag anchor on our economy. Most estimates suggest our economy today is between 4 per cent and 8 per cent smaller as a result. Even at the low end, that means our economy is £100bn smaller, with tens of billions of revenue for public services foregone.

The government has made unleashing growth and boosting living standards its central mission, and while we have secured some trade deals outside of Europe, their economic and fiscal benefits pale in comparison to the potential impact of a closer relationship with Europe. When it comes to trade, geography matters.

Deepening our relationship with Europe is also a strategic imperative. It is increasingly clear that Europe faces a grave threat in the form of a revanchist Russia. And it is increasingly evident, too, that we can no longer rely on the US for protection. The capricious and dangerous Trump regime sees our dependence with disdain. They treat Europe's reliance as a source of leverage, bullying and threatening their supposed allies. Our relationship with the US is not 'special'. Indeed, it increasingly looks abusive. Of course, the next president

may not be as bad. But the next president could also be JD Vance. And hope is not a strategy.

We can only reduce our dangerous overreliance on the US and stand up to the threat of Russia by working in partnership with Europe. We urgently need to deepen our partnership with the EU on energy security and critical supply chains, on AI and tech, and on defence and security. As Liam Byrne MP powerfully argues in our new edited collection *Pressing Reset*, we need an economic security union, which builds collective resilience in the face of a deeply challenging strategic environment.

Deepening our relationship with Europe would have real political benefits, too. There is broad public support for closer cooperation. The prospect of a youth mobility scheme made some in the government nervous, but it is wildly popular with the public. As new data from YouGov in our pamphlet shows, British voters support a deeper relationship with Europe by a majority of four to one. A plurality of voters back rejoining either the customs union or the single market, and a majority support rejoining the EU.

This issue could help Labour reunite its electoral coalition. The recent byelection in Gorton and Denton, and the previous one in Caerphilly, showed Labour's support is fracturing – but with many more voters leaving for populist parties on the left than for Reform. These voters are overwhelmingly in favour of a deeper relationship with Europe.

As Stella Creasy sets out in the pamphlet, real trade-offs accompany the different options. And as Patrick English argues, public support for a deeper relationship with Europe may be soft, as it has not had contact with an organised 'stay out' campaign. But neither have we properly made the case for a closer relationship with Europe.

A deeper relationship with Europe is an economic necessity, a strategic imperative, and it would be popular, providing a cause for Labour to rebuild its electoral coalition. We should have the courage of our convictions, and start building the case. ■

Shortcuts



A BETTER WAY

Tax wealth to build a Britain that works for the many
– *Richard Burgon MP*

For most people, Britain's economy is broken. Real wages are barely higher than before the 2008 financial crash, and even when pay does rise, the ever-higher cost of essentials such as food and energy too often outstrips it. One recent survey found that nearly half the population has just £25 left at the end of the week.

It is no surprise, then, that the cost of living remains voters' main concern, even as the far right tries to divert attention by scapegoating migrants.

Yet while everyday life is a struggle for millions, those at the very top are doing extraordinarily well. Since 2010, the wealth of British billionaires has more than doubled, increasing by an eye-watering £67m each day. This is no accident. The transfer of wealth from the many to the few was the goal of decades of privatisation, austerity, deregulation and attacks on trade union rights. The result is an economic model that concentrates power and rewards at the top, while insecurity spreads below.

The political consequences are clear. Governments elected on promises of change quickly become unpopular, lurching from crisis to crisis as people feel increasingly disillusioned. Just as Boris Johnson did after 2019, the Labour leadership has squandered the huge majority secured at the general election. Polls estimate that we have lost around half of those who backed Labour in 2024. It is easy to see why. In an era of weak growth and strained public finances, the Labour leadership has chosen to balance the books on the backs of the very people our party exists to represent. From the winter fuel payment fiasco to cuts targeting disabled people, decision after decision has

collided with voters' sense of what a real Labour government is for.

The Peter Mandelson controversy has only reinforced this sentiment, shining a light on much of what is wrong with our politics – including that those at the top of our party are far too close to the rich and powerful. Mandelson was clearly brought back into the heart of the party to help shift a Labour government towards the corporate interests he had long courted, and away from the reforms for working people promised during Keir's leadership election.

The result of this approach has been disaster. Labour's defeat in Gorton and Denton should be a watershed moment for the leadership – a warning that progressive voters will not be taken for granted. If it is not, there is a real danger that the legacy of this Labour government will be even worse than a failure to deliver the change people voted for: we risk ushering in the first far-right government in British history.

If Labour is to turn the situation around, we cannot duck the central question of who our economy is for. A strategy that avoids confronting wealth and power will not deliver the change people want, nor rebuild trust in politics.

This is why I have been relentless in campaigning for a wealth tax – not as a slogan, but as a practical part of a new economic settlement. A modest annual wealth tax of 2 per cent on assets over £10m would raise an estimated £24bn a year and affect less than 0.1 per cent of the population. It would be very popular: polls show three in four people back such a tax. It is also rising up the political agenda. Trade union leaders are increasingly calling for it, MPs are raising it in parliament, and former Labour leader Neil Kinnock backs it.

A wealth tax should be central to a wider package of measures to fund the changes people urgently need: large-scale social housebuilding, emergency measures to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, action on student debt, and properly funded public services. Equalising capital gains tax with income tax rates would raise another £12bn per year to help fund these vital measures. At present, income from selling shares or property is taxed at a lower rate than income from work. That is neither fair nor rational.

A windfall tax on the profits of the big four banks, set at the same rate as that on the

super-profits of energy giants, could bring in a further £14bn a year. With banks making record profits from the higher interest rates that have hammered households, clawing back a share of those windfalls is only just.

Such proposals are not historically radical. Britain has had far more progressive tax policies in the past. Nor are they technically unworkable. The real barrier is political will.

A wealth tax, as part of a package of progressive measures, is about rebalancing an economy too skewed towards elite interests. It is about funding the transformation people desperately need and highlighting whose side our party is on. If Labour is to recover, it must urgently show it stands with working people and break with an economic model that concentrates wealth and power in ever fewer hands. A wealth tax is an essential step in renewing Labour as a party that works for the many, not the few. ■

Richard Burgon is the Labour MP for Leeds East and the former shadow justice secretary.





SOLID GROUND

Affordable housing is key to achieving social justice in London

– *Brenda Dacres*

Somewhere in Lewisham this morning, a child is waking up in temporary accommodation. Their books are spread across a bed because there is no space for a desk. They share a bathroom with strangers. Their belongings remain half packed, because permanence is a luxury they do not have.

This is not an isolated hardship. It is a predictable outcome of systems that have failed to provide the most basic form of security: a stable home. In Lewisham alone, 2,495 households are in temporary accommodation, including nearly 4,000 children. These numbers are so large they can lose their moral clarity, yet every one of them reflects a family pushed into instability by choices taken – or avoided – at every level of government.

This is exactly the sort of challenge the Fabian Society has spent more than a century urging Labour to confront at the level of structural inequality rather than superficial symptoms. The Fabians have always argued that the state must be capable, purposeful and serious about delivery. Nowhere is that more urgently needed than in housing.

Yet across London, the debate has been distorted by actors who speak the language of social justice while campaigning against the very developments that enable it. Your Party and the Green party increasingly move as a single bloc of obstruction. Their rhetoric is radical, but their impact is regressive.

The pattern is familiar: they arrive late; they insert themselves into local groups that have spent years in dialogue; they amplify anxieties about change; and they exit before responsibility for the consequences reaches them. Lewisham is just the latest example.

In November, Zarah Sultana made Your Party's Question Time debut. She focused on poverty and injustice – issues which matter deeply. But too often, the radical left strategy separates moral outrage

from the material conditions required to reduce inequality. You cannot claim to tackle poverty while organising against the construction of secure, affordable homes. Housing is not peripheral to social justice. It is the foundation of it.

Fabians understand this instinctively. For decades, the argument has been the same: social progress requires the unglamorous work of building institutions, housing, infrastructure and services. You cannot redistribute opportunity if people do not have a stable place to live.

Labour in London is now aligned around that practical mission.

Nationally, the Labour government has committed to 1.5m homes. That necessitates planning reform, unblocking stalled sites and rebuilding state capacity to deliver social housing at scale. For the first time in years, national government is an active partner rather than an obstacle. In City Hall, Sadiq Khan has delivered more genuinely affordable homes than any mayor of London since devolution began – not to mention the London Living Rent, record numbers of new social homes, billions secured for council housebuilding, and a planning system that treats affordability as a requirement rather than an aspiration.

In Lewisham, this mission is well underway. Our Building for Lewisham programme is one of the most ambitious in the capital. Hundreds of council homes have already been completed. Thousands more are in progress. We are on track to deliver 2,000 homes by 2026. A council home is not only shelter; it is stability, schooling, access to services and the ability for a family to plan their future.

Permanent homes do more than end temporary accommodation. They allow communities to form as children play in shared courtyards, parents build support networks, and neighbours stay long enough to invest in each other. Housing is social infrastructure, and hostels are not homes.

The Lewisham Shopping Centre redevelopment is a practical example of this approach: 344 new social and affordable homes, a youth club, a music venue, a new park, a new shopping centre, and thousands of jobs and training opportunities. Nobody is being displaced, because the land provides no homes today. Under Labour, it will.

This is the choice: performance politics or delivery politics. Symbolic resistance or structural change.

Fabians have always argued that the state must be willing to act, not gesture. That poverty cannot be reduced through slogans. That inequality cannot be undone without building. That social justice is not achieved by protecting empty car parks but by constructing secure homes for families.

Today, London has a Labour government, a Labour mayor and boroughs like Lewisham ready to build. This is the alignment Fabians have long argued for: national, regional and local government pulling in the same direction.

The task is clear. The evidence is overwhelming. The moral duty is obvious.

There is no credible progressive politics without a commitment to build the homes people need, and no path to equality that does not begin with a stable place to live. ■

Brenda Dacres, Baroness Dacres, is the mayor of Lewisham and a Labour peer





OH, CANADA...

As Toronto's experience shows, simply building more homes is not always the answer – *Palma Oxley*

Yimbyism – a movement which encourages people to say ‘yes in my back yard’ to housing and infrastructure, in opposition to the more familiar nimbys – has increasing influence on British planning policy. Its central argument for ensuring we “build baby, build” is that if housing supply goes up, housing prices will go down. This seems like basic economics, but it is not the full story. We need to be intentional about what we are building and who we are building it for – or else risk failing to meet local housing need and flooding the market with new homes that people can neither afford nor want to live in.

There are many places in the UK and overseas which demonstrate this point, but Toronto provides particularly important lessons. In 2016, developers started building masses of new ‘condos’ – similar to what we would call flats in the UK. In 2024, a record 25,572 new units were completed in the city, and over the last decade, condos have accounted for more than half of all new housing built in Toronto.

Toronto has also seen the rise of the mini-condo: very small units, typically under 600 sq ft, which keep headline prices low in high land-value areas through a reduction in unit size. Mini-condos now account for 38 per cent of condos built in the city, up from 8 per cent before 2016.

Toronto has, in effect, “built baby, built”. But much of this supply has been designed to attract investors rather than to meet the needs of ordinary Torontonians. Condominiums are cheaper to build, but the quality is poor – 93 per cent of current condo occupants in the Greater Toronto Area feel that the city needs better-quality condos. And these condos are not aimed at families, but international students, digital nomads and other groups. According to Statistics Canada, investors own roughly 40 per cent of all condominiums in Toronto, and the majority of mini-condos in particular.

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Since the housing market in Toronto has been tilted towards small, investor-friendly units, rather than family homes or long-term, high-quality rental properties, it has been made vulnerable to demographic changes. Stricter immigration policies mean that in 2025, Canada experienced the largest decline in its population since the 1940s (outside of Covid). Now, thousands of move-in ready units are sitting empty across the city and the wider area.

House prices in Toronto are declining in response to an increase in supply, but this has not translated into a meaningful improvement in affordability. Even after price declines, homes remain far beyond the reach of median earners. At the same time, weaker prices have led to a sharp contraction in housebuilding and thus fewer choices for buyers in the longer-term, as developers delay or cancel projects that are no longer financially viable.

The lesson from Toronto is that even a dramatic upsurge in certain types of properties will not resolve the housing crisis unless the right kinds of homes – made to a high standard – are built in sufficient numbers. The housing minister, Matthew Pennycook, is right to argue for market reforms that address planning constraints and incentivise the construction of housing that genuinely caters to local need, rather than relying on price movements alone to restore affordability, quality, and security of tenure.

If the government is serious about solving the housing crisis, it must move beyond simple headline supply figures. Our country must deliver 1.5m new homes, but ministers must focus on who they are for, how they are financed, and whether they are in places where people can build stable, flourishing lives. “Build, baby, build” may be a rallying cry. But unless it is paired with a commitment to build well and build for need, it risks failing to either reduce house prices or to improve lives. **F**

Palma Oxley is a researcher at the Fabian Society working in the Fabian Housing Centre.



TIME OUT

Improving paternity leave could help arrest the right's increasing hold over British masculinity – *George Gabriel*

Shifting attitudes among younger and working men are helping drive electoral outcomes for far- and alt-right parties around the developed world, from Trump in the US to the AfD in Germany. The UK isn't immune. Though younger people still tend to vote progressive, Reform's support skews male, and particularly so among those identified as ‘contrarian youth’ in Hope Not Hate's recent and authoritative segmentation. This segment, soon to be further empowered through the introduction of votes at 16, currently makes up 9 per cent of Reform UK's coalition.

It is increasingly clear that these shifts are being driven by a burgeoning new media ecosystem. “Men and masculinity” influencers now regularly reach nearly two-thirds of young men, advocating for a status-based masculine identity which pits winners against losers and calls young men to step up, start hustling, get ripped and get rich. And, in a context where many boys and men are struggling – rates of suicide, addiction, incarceration, unemployment and educational underachievement all skew male – it is finding its followers.

Netflix's *Adolescence*, released in 2025, prompted a plethora of polls on masculinity. The most exhaustive suggest that, while attitudes tend to stop short of a feared mass embrace of misogyny (only 6 per cent of British boys approve of Andrew Tate's views on women), a broader swathe of men from millennials on down are coming to adopt a masculine identity ill at ease with Labour's marrow-deep commitment to gender equality and tackling the scourge of violence against women and girls.

For Labour, this presents profound challenges, but also opportunities – because alongside these much publicised and worrying trends, there has also been a wholesale and less talked about ‘dad shift’



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among British men. Today's dads are the most active generation of fathers the UK has ever seen. Ninety per cent of dads across every social group and geography say they want to be a bigger part of their children's lives than their fathers before them, and 86 per cent of the public agree that it is better when parents can share care equally.

When the last Labour government introduced paternity leave, it was genuinely groundbreaking. The Dad Shift has calculated some four million families have benefitted since. However, during two decades of Tory rule, while society kept moving, policy did not. The UK's offer of two weeks on less than half the minimum wage, with nothing for self-employed fathers, is now the least generous offer in Europe and the Tory's flagship policy – shared parental leave – is taken by only 2 per cent of dads. With the cost of living at an all time high, 90 per cent of those who can afford to take the two weeks on offer are from the top half of the earning distribution. As a result, who gets to spend time with their kids has become a class issue.

Having improved British paternity leave would be a standout policy on which to fight the next general election. In a single year, over 600,000 families, equivalent to a city the size of Greater Manchester, would directly benefit. They would feel the support of a government that backs working families at one of the most important and challenging times of their lives. It is a change that would be visible in every park and high street, and would be talked about by the extended family and friends of every single couple expecting a baby.

Improvements to paternity leave have proven benefits for mums and babies as well as fathers. The upfront costs are large, estimated by JRF at around £1.15bn a year. In good news, though, there is also strong evidence of the impact paternity leave can have on improving female labour force participation – that is to say, women are able to contribute more economically if men share the care. JRF believes that about 80 per cent of the policy's cost would be mitigated through increased tax receipts, all while driving some £2.6bn of economic growth.

And crucially, with Reform wed to a culture war between the sexes, paternity leave can be a dividing line that is pro-men, pro-equality, and pro-growth proof of Labour's conviction that we are better off together. An opportunity like this is rare: a chance not just to try and push the culture war pendulum left or right, but to help the country move forward. It says to men: "your role as a father matters", and gives them an opportunity to tell a better story about what it means to be a man in Britain today. In an era of exhausted culture wars and urgent electoral challenge, that is not a small prize. **F**

George Gabriel is the CEO and cofounder of The Dad Shift, an organization of men, dads, and co-parents campaigning for improved paternity leave.



PEER REVIEW

A new kind of magistrate could get the court backlog down without compromising on principle

– Janet Carter

Reducing the backlog in our courts system is of the utmost importance. We can do so while retaining the principle of judgement by one's peers. Two of the Leveson proposals would go some way to doing this, but we should also consider a more novel change.

The first Leveson proposal is to maintain 'trial by peers' by sitting two lay magistrates with a judge in a new 'swift court'. The

second proposal involves increasing the workload within the magistrates court by increasing its sentencing powers to 18 months' custody, and removing the defendant's right to elect for trial by jury when being tried for 'either-way' offences. If the magistrates consider that the sentence for the offence falls within their powers, it will remain in the magistrates court for trial and sentencing. The defendant's choice of court for this type of offence will disappear.

We have some bland figures to assess how this second proposal may play out. Of the crown court custodial sentences imposed in the year up to June 2025, 23,059 were for 18 months or less. This constitutes a whopping 47 per cent of the total crown court custodial sentences (48,459). A small proportion of those cases will be indictable-only offences like robbery, and so will have to go to jury trial. But add in the figures for trial cases which lead to acquittal, and sentencing disposals other than forthwith custody, and it is clear that the magistrates' court will be taking more than half of the crown court workload.

Additional district judges in the magistrates court will be needed, particularly to help with the additional sentencing workload and case management.

For these proposals to work, more magistrates will clearly be essential. Yet there is already a shortage of magistrates, and recruitment of volunteers is not easy. The commitment of 13 sitting days per year for five years, and 10 training days within the first two years, is a big ask. In January 2022, there was a £1m recruitment campaign to recruit 4,000 new magistrates. Between April 2022 and April 2024 there was an increase of only 2,070. This doesn't bode well for a similar plea to the public.

Moreover, the recruitment criteria are understandably tight, and the application process can take a year or more. This fact alone can act as a deterrent. The success rate of applicants in the year ending March 2025 was only 22 per cent (894 out of 4112 applicants).

A different approach is therefore needed. I suggest a specialist 'trials panel' in the same mode as the youth and family panels. Volunteers would sit as two 'trial only' magistrates alongside a qualified presiding justice. The recruitment criteria would essentially be the same as for jury service, with no time-consuming extra hoops, because they will have no power to sentence.

In terms of commitment, one day of training would cover judicial conduct and trial process. The minimum sitting period

would realistically be 20 days within the year of application. This is a very different type of commitment, and would draw upon a different field of applicants. This could attract those with immediate, possibly short-term availability such as students and seasonal workers, in addition to those volunteering for the longer term.

It would certainly help to address the current diversity problem with applicants for the magistracy. Last year only 23 per cent were under 40 years old, 72 per cent had a university education, and only 1 per cent of shortlisted applicants were black.

The backlog must go and the court system must change to make that happen. Judgement by peers should remain, whether by a jury or by magistrates depending on the seriousness of the offence. However, it will be impossible to generate enough new magistrates to service both the additional work in their own court and additionally join a judge in the proposed 'swift court'. The 'trial-only magistrate' in the magistrates' court is a realistic role which carries the safeguard of legal advice in the retiring room, rules of judicial conduct, and a right of appeal for the defendant. It would require a new 'fast-track' option within the next recruitment campaign to apply for the 'trial only panel' within the magistrates' court. This proposal would get the backlog shifted efficiently and fairly. **F**

Janet Carter is a retired barrister and former legal training manager for HM Courts and Tribunals Service.



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CLEAN BREAK

Alignment with the US and Israel puts the UK at risk – *Iggy Wood*

The Dahiyeh Doctrine – named after Dahiyeh, a southern neighbourhood of Beirut – is an Israeli military doctrine that calls for the 'disproportionate destruction of civilian infrastructure' in order to put pressure on enemy leaders. It was developed by Gadi Eisenkot, an Israeli general who later became the IDF's chief of staff, during the 2006 Lebanon war, in which Dahiyeh was bombed extensively.

As I write this, Israel is once again bombing Dahiyeh, making 2026 the fifth year of the past 20 it has done so. It may prove to be the most destructive yet; Israeli leaders openly admit that they have been emboldened by the free reign the international community gave them in Gaza. As the Israeli finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, threatened, Dahiyeh "will soon look like Khan Younis."

Beirut is just one theatre in the increasingly regionalised US-Israeli war on Iran – which itself is just the latest episode in a steady breakdown of the international order. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Israel's genocide in Gaza, and the US's capture of Nicolas Maduro, the president of Venezuela, all suggest we are moving towards a world more explicitly governed by the principle of 'might makes right'.

In an era characterised by hard power, our first instinct may be to flee towards the arms of America. The Faustian bargain we have struck since the cold war is that, in return for participation in outrages like the Iraq war, the US will guarantee our security. Yet as the Arab Gulf states have found out, the security of American allies is easily traded for perceived US or Israeli advantage. As Ebtesam Al-Ketbi, president of the Emirates Policy Centre, told Reuters: "It is not our war. We did not want this conflict, yet we are paying the price in our security and our economy." Far from ensuring their safety, the reliance of the Arab Gulf states on America – and the American military

presence they host – placed them in the line of fire.

The question we must ask ourselves, then, is: are the US and Israel allies we want? Both countries have proven themselves to be reckless, unpredictable, and capable of unspeakable atrocities. Some mid-ranking officers in the US military reportedly see the war with Iran as the start of Armageddon (which, if you are a Christian Zionist, is a good thing), and plans for a 'Greater Israel' are becoming increasingly mainstream in an ever-more right-wing Knesset. Who knows what we will be asked to collude on next – and against whom?

Alignment with the US and Israel is particularly dangerous given the tailwinds for nuclear proliferation. In February, the New Start agreement, the most recent nuclear arms control deal signed between the US and Russia, expired. This could trigger an arms race between the two countries which in turn could fatally undermine the broader non-proliferation treaty in force since 1970. And, perhaps counterintuitively, the war on Iran has shifted the scales towards proliferation. The leadership of Iran was deeply divided over the question of nuclear weapons; now the perception may be that those who argued for expediting the programme have been vindicated. Looking not just to Iran, but also to Venezuela and Ukraine (which gave up its nuclear weapons in the 90s in return for American and Russian security guarantees), the conclusion drawn around the world may be: 'acquire nuclear weapons or else.' Notably, of George W Bush's original 'axis of evil,' North Korea is now the sole state to remain untouched by American intervention – the only one with a nuclear arsenal. This is particularly troubling for the UK because, while Trident is nominally an independent nuclear deterrent, foreign military planners are likely to treat it as closer to a US asset.

It is hard to imagine a British foreign policy that is not wholly dependent on alignment with the US. Pedro Sánchez's Spain provides a template, and surprisingly, he has seen some senior European figures rally around him. This is surely the direction of travel: collaboration and solidarity with Europe, with whom we share an interest in regional security, combined with increasing European independence from the US. **F**

Iggy Wood is the editor of the Fabian Review and the head of editorial at the Fabian Society

The future today



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In responding to Gorton and Denton, we should learn from Anthony Crosland, writes *Melanie Onn MP*



Melanie Onn is the Labour MP for Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes. She was previously the Labour MP for Great Grimsby from 2015 to 2019

In 1956, my predecessor as MP for Great Grimsby, Anthony Crosland, published *The Future of Socialism*, and forced the Labour party to confront an uncomfortable truth: socialism could not be a museum of inherited doctrines. It had to be a living argument, rooted in equality but responsive to the world as it is.

Crosland's central claim was disarmingly simple. Socialism is defined not by its means – not by nationalisation as ritual – but by its ends: a more equal, more democratic, more civilised society. That insight reshaped Labour in the second half of the 20th century. It must do so again today.

Labour's defeat in Gorton and Denton has shaken confidence. There is a temptation, in moments like this, to turn inward – to litigate old arguments or to offer critique as a substitute for strategy. But Crosland would have recognised this mood and rejected it. The capitalism of 2026, of course, is not the capitalism he analysed. We

must ask: where is inequality now generated, and how can it be structurally reduced?

First, we must confront wealth inequality directly. Income redistribution alone is insufficient in an age where capital gains, inheritance and asset inflation drive disparities. A Croslandian approach would not fetishise ownership change for its own sake – but it would insist that concentrations of wealth incompatible with democratic equality cannot be ignored.

Second, we must democratise the modern economy. Platform capitalism and AI are not passing trends, and leaving them solely to market logic will entrench power in ways that undermine both competition and democracy.

Third, we must renew the civic foundations of equality. Crosland understood that socialism was cultural as well as economic. Education, public space, the arts, local government – these are not luxuries but pillars of a civilised society.

So what should a Labour government do now – not in the abstract, but immediately?

1. Introduce a net wealth tax and equalise capital gains. An annual tax on extreme net wealth, alongside full equalisation of capital gains and income tax rates, would signal that wealth derived from assets will no longer be privileged over wealth derived from work. Revenues should be hypothecated for regional investment and housing supply.
2. Establish a national citizens' wealth fund. Building on international models, the government should take equity stakes in key growth sectors – particularly green energy, advanced manufacturing and AI – creating a publicly owned investment fund to ensure that technological progress benefits the many.
3. Launch a green reindustrialisation programme for coastal and industrial Britain. Targeted capital investment in ports, offshore wind, green hydrogen and retrofit industries in places like Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes would marry climate transition with regional justice. Procurement rules should prioritise domestic supply chains and high labour standards.
4. Democratise work across the whole economy, legislating for sectoral collective bargaining – including in the gig economy – so that wages and basic conditions are not left to fragmented individual negotiation. Workers also need full algorithmic transparency, with rights to understand and challenge automated management decisions. And where AI drives job displacement, a dedicated automation levy should apply – with the proceeds ring-fenced to retrain, reskill and redeploy workers.
5. Empower towns for civic renewal, with elected Town Renewal Boards endowed with long-term funding and the authority to shape high streets, skills provision, cultural investment and local infrastructure. Civic renewal must mean government close to the people, of the people. By equipping towns with the tools to regenerate their own economies and public realms, we can rebuild democratic trust by ensuring that renewal is something done with communities, not delivered to them from afar.

None of these measures is revolutionary in the sense of tearing down markets. All are radical in the sense Crosland understood: they change outcomes, redistribute power, and narrow structural inequalities while preserving democratic pluralism and economic dynamism.

Some critics will say this platform is too ambitious. Others will say it is insufficiently ideological. Crosland faced similar crossfire. But his lesson was that



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The task of democratic socialism is to align the structures of our economy with these aspirations – to ensure that where you are born does not determine what you can become

socialism cannot be reduced to slogans or purity tests. It is a practical moral philosophy – concerned less with symbolic gestures than with measurable reductions in inequality and expansions of freedom.

In Great Grimsby and Cleethorpes, I see daily the consequences of an economic model that concentrates wealth and disperses insecurity. But I also see resilience, pride and aspiration. The task of democratic socialism is to align the structures of our economy with these aspirations – to ensure that where you are born does not determine what you can become.

Crosland challenged his party to adapt without losing its soul. We must do the same – not in retreat from adversity, but in response to it. ■

Blue in Green

The Greens are not progressive in practice –
Labour should attack them from the left, writes *Bella Sankey*



Cllr Bella Sankey is the leader of Brighton and Hove city council

Brighton and Hove has long experience of the populist Greens – and we have learned a thing or two along the way. The first Green MP in England and Wales, Caroline Lucas, was elected in the seat I was born and raised in, Brighton Pavilion, in 2010. The following year, the Greens took minority control of the council, their first. Their record during this administration, along with another unhappy spell in office between 2020-23, reveals much about their party's true values and priorities, and how they can be successfully challenged by the Labour party. Indeed, our thumping landslide in the 2023 local elections – which delivered a majority Labour council for the first time in 20 years – may be the only example of Labour successfully beating an incumbent Green-controlled council to date.

It is important to get this right. Labour's critique of the Green party must be consistent and persuasive, speaking both to the heads and hearts of the former Labour voters whom the Greens are currently tempting away. At a meeting of the parliamentary Labour party last autumn, Keir Starmer described the threat of Reform and the Greens as a dual threat, with the 'plastic patriots' on the one hand, and 'plastic progressives' on the other. This analysis of the Greens is accurate, and it is this approach that must be expanded to make the case that Labour is the true progressive party – one committed to values-based policymaking, rooted in the lived experience of our communities. What we must not do is attack the Greens from the authoritarian right – whether on drugs policy, refugee rights or LGBTQI+ issues. This plays right into the hands of the plastic progressives, allowing them to argue they are the rightful heirs to the progressive crown.

This analysis is key because, both ideologically and in practice, the Greens are neither progressive nor left. Our experience in Brighton and Hove has shown that, at best, they are totally ideologically incoherent; more often, they

are unable to make decisions or deliver anything; at worst, they are Tories on bikes.

Take housing, for instance. They make bold, eye-catching statements like 'abolish landlords' and 'housing is a human right'. Yet in Brighton and Hove, they failed to even bring in selective landlord licensing, something our Labour administration did within one year of taking control of the council. They also let HMO licensing lapse and allowed the council house repairs backlog to reach record levels, with over 9,000 repairs taking longer than 28 days. We have already cut that down to 2,600, and our target is zero. We have also reinstated HMO licensing. The truth is that the Labour party does believe that housing is a human right. But we don't just regurgitate slogans – we walk the walk as well.

Locally, we are unleashing an unprecedented boost to social and council house-building, directly purchasing houses to replenish those lost through right-to-buy and acquiring and converting council assets into temporary accommodation to end the scandal of rip-off landlords profiting from homelessness. Nationally, the Labour party has passed the historic Renters' Rights Act and major reform of the leasehold system, all while injecting £39bn into the economy to build new affordable homes.

The Greens do not really believe in housebuilding; they are anti-growth, and think we can 'abolish' our way out of the housing crisis. This is as stupid an idea as it is dangerous. And here's the rub: while they equivocate and ultimately serve the interests of the most powerful in our society, the Labour party rolls up its sleeves and protects the most vulnerable. It is not just housing and basic infrastructure they oppose. With no sense of irony, they also oppose the green infrastructure that will enable a just and fair transition to net zero. In fact, Adrian Ramsay MP, until last year one of their co-leaders, opposed wind turbines

The truth is that the Labour party does believe that housing is a human right. But we don't just regurgitate slogans – we walk the walk as well



in his own constituency – something Ed Miliband has rightly needed him about from the dispatch box. How can the Greens say they are serious and progressive on the environment when they do not support sustainable energy sources?

It was the same story in Brighton. Though their slogan was ‘Net Zero by 2030’, when we came into office, we quickly realised that they had no plan for the council to cut the 98 per cent of emissions that come from non-council sources. More recently, they have even spoken out locally against our expansion of the types of plastic that can be recycled, saying they are worried it will encourage the purchase of plastics. The truth is that the Greens are uninterested in systems change. Deep down, they want everyone to adopt their lifestyle, often only available to those with wealth. They are simply not willing to change the systems that underpin daily life to achieve social or environmental justice.

And this point – that in practice, Labour is to the left of, more progressive and greener than the Greens – does not get made enough.

We are the most significant force for progressive change in our country’s history. In the comparatively short period of time we have held office, we founded the NHS and established the Equality Act. Since 2024, we have upgraded workers’ rights and the minimum wage. This is an extraordinary track record.

The Greens have done none of this. They have never lifted a single child out of poverty and never passed environmental legislation. Yet take a look at their campaign slogans and you would be forgiven for assuming they were the party of radical change. Take their leader, Zack Polanski. He has certainly raised their profile, but the tactics and the cynicism are the same as we have seen from the Greens in Brighton. His messaging is dishonest: accusing Labour of austerity measures when we have initiated unprecedented increases in public spending, including real terms increases. As a former

Liberal Democrat, Polanski is more embroiled in austerity than any Labour politician will ever be.

Already under his leadership, the ideological cracks are beginning to show. In the Gorton & Denton byelection the Greens welcomed the decision of George Galloway’s Workers Party not to stand – tacitly accepting the support of a party whose leader is a homophobic climate change denier. For a party that usually seeks to enforce ideological purity, such misjudgement shows that they, unlike us, do not have firm roots, values or principles to draw on. Rather, it is vibes-based politics.

But critiquing the Greens is insufficient to truly take them on. To do that, we must respond to the existential challenge of Caerphilly and Gorton and Denton and be the true progressives. We have done many progressive and transformative things in government, from housing to net zero and putting rail back under public control, which we must communicate better. But we must also reflect on our errors and be truer to our values.

To take one example, we were too slow to call for a ceasefire in Gaza when it was already clear that the Israeli government was committing atrocities. That has allowed the Greens to argue that we are complicit in those atrocities. And when the Greens started levelling this attack, we did not effectively push back against it, despite the fact that we got aid into Gaza, imposed sanctions on Israeli ministers, stopped arms sales and recognised the State of Palestine. And it is wrong to assume that this has only hurt us with Muslim communities. It was the main issue on the doorstep in a recent council byelection, at which the Greens won a seat back from us.

And if we really want to stay true to our founding principles, then undermining the hard-won rights of refugees and tipping them into insecure work is not the way. We are already restoring order to the immigration and asylum system by processing cases again and ending the

use of hotels. We do not need to downgrade the rights of a vulnerable minority, when it is only safe asylum routes that will truly stop small boats.

When we beat the Greens in Brighton and Hove in 2023, we did so with a positive message that could unite the left and defeat the right: a focus on practical delivery on housing and the cost of living, local pride, and leading with our values on climate change, diversity and inclusion.

With an increasingly populist and aggressive Green party, which openly states it wants to replace Labour, we must respond by showing how our progressive vision cannot be extinguished by pretenders to the throne and highlighting that, in practice, abstract Green policies cannot live up to the socialist values they now lay claim to. If we can convey this message, we can unite the left at the next election – which may be the only way to defeat Reform. ■

We are the most significant force for progressive change in our country’s history. In the comparatively short period of time we have held office, we have an extraordinary track record

Step by step

The rise of the reactionary right has seen political space for equality narrow – our response must be inclusive and, above all, progressive, writes *Seema Malhotra MP*



Seema Malhotra is the Labour MP for Feltham and Heston. She is parliamentary under-secretary of state for equalities and founded the Fabian Women's Network

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the founding of the Fabian Women's Network. The launch happened at the end of January, in the hot and sweaty basement of the old Labour party HQ. We were worried about whether enough people would turn up, but we shouldn't have been: women not only filled the room but quickly spilled out into the corridor. It was a vindication of our case that women's voices – and indeed, women's leadership – mattered for the challenges we were facing.

This was true then and it is true now. As FWN comes of age, this article makes three arguments: that women are still not equal; that Labour must be uncompromising in resisting the backlash against women's rights; and that, in these fragmented times, women around the world must work together.

FWN has a hugely significant role to play. Fabian women – including the chancellor, the foreign secretary and the deputy leader of the Labour party – have led the charge to put the progress of women at the heart of Labour's missions. Our violence against women and girls (Vawg) strategy, for example, begins a decade-long, whole-of-government, whole-of-society effort to halve Vawg. Through our Plan to Make Work Pay, we are putting in stronger protections for pregnant women

and new mothers at work, improving the parental leave system and making flexible working more easily available. In addition, we are taking the first steps towards requiring employers to publish an action plan alongside their gender pay gap reporting.

Our minimum wage rises – the second of which will come into effect this April – will disproportionately benefit women. Removing the two-child limit will lift not only almost half a million children out of poverty, but also 150,000 adults – disproportionately women, who are described by the Women's Budget Group as the "shock absorbers" of household poverty. And the chancellor has backed the Invest in Women Taskforce, launching a funding pool of over £600m earmarked for investment in women-led businesses, including £100m from the British Business Bank. This is the largest fund of its kind globally, helping to address the enormous barriers to accessing finance women face.

Elsewhere, we are levelling the playing field in industrial strategy priority sectors through the new Women in Tech Taskforce, our TechFirst skills package, and our new target of 35 per cent women's representation in the advanced manufacturing sector by 2035.

The changing landscape of gender equality

But while this government has women's equality firmly on the agenda, the battle is not yet won, and the fronts we are fighting on have shifted immensely since FWN was founded. Most worryingly, we find ourselves facing a misogynistic insurgency determined to roll back women's rights. Instead of developing a policy agenda that can genuinely address the challenges faced by men, as our deputy prime minister is doing ahead of this summer's men and boys summit, this growing movement argues men's issues are caused by the advance of women.

Meanwhile, new technology now makes it possible for new digital forms of violence against women and girls to emerge. This includes horrendous child sexual exploitation and abuse, the escalation of violence and stalking online, and the sharing of AI deepfakes.



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Our party has always been a progressive champion of women's equality: of the 693 women MPs that have ever been elected, 405 have been Labour MPs. But with the challenge to women's equality now taking place on the international stage, our response must, too



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As a result, the political space for equality is narrowing. Speaking to fellow socialist equality ministers last year, I found they faced similar challenge across Europe: centre right parties turning their backs on the equality agenda as they sought support for populist agendas.

These views are informed by, and feed into, an increasingly sophisticated regressive right internationalism – fuelled by TV stations, newspapers, podcasts, YouTube videos and social media. The thinktank #ShePersisted describes gendered disinformation as “an early warning system for both backsliding on women’s rights and the erosion of democratic principles and institutions”, while analysts note that Russian disinformation increasingly centres on masculinity.

In the UK, this movement is increasingly influential. Kemi Badenoch said during her leadership campaign that maternity pay had “gone too far”, while Nigel Farage called influencer Andrew Tate an “important voice” for men. In September, I responded for the government in a Westminster Hall debate tabled by Andrew Rosindell, who has now defected to Reform. In that debate, he described the Equality Act as “fuelling... a corrosive culture of grievance” and called for it to be abolished – a view supported by the Conservatives’ shadow equality minister. This would include the rollback of the race equality legislation embedded in the act.

But it is not ‘grievance’ to recognise that a woman made redundant for being pregnant, or one who leaves work because her employer does not make reasonable adjustments for the menopause, leaves us poorer as individuals, as an economy, and as a society.

What Labour must do

Our party has always been a progressive champion of women’s equality: of the 693 women MPs that have ever been elected, 405 have been Labour MPs. But with the challenge to women’s equality now taking place on the international stage, our response must, too. In today’s increasingly fragmented world, voices that connect across national boundaries and strengthen our international institutions are needed more than ever.

Choices made by the postwar Labour government laid the foundations for the institutions that still form the way we connect and build peace across the world. We helped

pioneer the United Nations, and Ellen Wilkinson, the Fabian, trade unionist and education secretary, chaired the first conference of Unesco in London 80 years ago. She championed the idea that education, culture and inclusion could be powerful agents of peace and reconciliation – anticipating the women, peace and security framework that the last Labour government did so much to push forward.

We face parallel challenges now as new technologies transform our economy and our society. Which is why, as a Foreign Office minister, I make supporting women’s progress a key part of my visits across the world and my work with partners. In Bengaluru, for example, I announced the return of the British Council’s Women in Stem scholarships in South Asia – providing full funding for masters degrees at leading UK universities.

The foreign secretary has put Vawg at the heart of our foreign policy more generally. For instance, she has launched the All In coalition, which brings together global leaders to end Vawg and introduces new support to tackle the abuse faced by women and girls, including expanding the UK’s leading StopNCII.org, which works with victims and platforms to remove and block non-consensual intimate images.

Conclusion

FWN is just 21 years old. Yet even prior to FWN’s inception, Fabian women wrote pamphlets on child labour, school nurseries, women’s health and equal pay decades before governments took action.

The future needs us as much as the past did – with a renewed focus on leadership, impact and influence at home and abroad. Progress does not renew itself. Rights do not sustain themselves. They are defended, renewed and extended because people organise, argue, build coalitions and push.

The Fabian Society has always been a source of long-term thinking in a short-term political world, and our networks have always been networks for change. Together we must build new networks in our communities and with our sisters abroad, renew our determination and bring hope, leadership and change to a new frontline, resist the rollback of our rights and push for continuing progress for women and girls. ■

Long overdue

We know how the justice system can work better for women – it's up to Labour to make it happen, write *Sara Hyde* and *Paula Harriott*



Cllr Dr Sara Hyde, Baroness Hyde of Bemerton, is a Labour peer, the chair of the Fabian Society, and a former prison worker. Paula Harriott is the CEO of Unlock.

TWO DECADES AGO, Baroness Corston's landmark review set out a clear, evidence-based blueprint for a women-centred justice system. Now, the convergence of sentencing reform, the publication of the violence against women and girls strategy and the establishment of the Women's Justice Board creates an opportunity to finally bring the Corston recommendations to life in practice rather than merely in principle.

Women make up a small proportion of the prison population in England and Wales, yet the criminal justice system continues to fail them and the communities they come from. This is not a marginal issue. It is a test of whether Labour justice policy can align with public health, gender equality and social repair, and act to restore as well as sanction.

Women in prison

Women remain around 4 per cent of the prison population, but they account for a far higher proportion of prison "churn" – that is, people coming into and going out of prisons. Thousands pass through custody each year, often on short sentences for non-violent offences linked to poverty, addiction and survival strategies. These sentences are widely recognised as ineffective, destabilising housing, family life and access to medical treatment while doing little to improve public safety. This is especially true in the context of the wider prisons crisis. In 2023, leading criminologist Alison Liebling stated: "I have carried out research in prisons for 35 years... The current period is the most unstable and ineffective I have observed."

We welcome the provision in the recently passed Sentencing Act 2026 for the greater use of suspended sentences rather than short custodial sentences. Yet this will not ameliorate the stigma and discrimination experienced by women with criminal records. Early intervention and diversion, therefore, remain essential.

The evidence on women's pathways into the justice system is consistent. The majority of criminalised women have experienced domestic abuse, with many also reporting sexual violence, childhood trauma, mental

ill-health and substance dependency. Self-harm among women in prison has reached record levels, at 5,744 incidents per 1,000 prisoners, nine times the rate of self-harm in the male estate. Addiction, mental distress and unmet physical health needs remain endemic. Criminalisation intersects with gendered and racialised inequality, particularly for women affected by coercion, exploitation and care experience, long before police or courts become involved.

Motherhood sits at the centre of this picture. Around 17,000 children are affected by maternal imprisonment each year. When women are sent to prison, punishment is rarely contained to the individual: it ripples through families, frequently resulting in housing loss, care disruption and long-term trauma for children.

Tackling root causes

Prison is often described as a last resort, yet for women it too often functions as a holding space for unmet health and social need. This reality sits in sharp contrast to the ambitions of NHS England's women's health strategy, which recognises trauma, inequality and access to services as central determinants of women's health outcomes. Women in contact with the criminal justice system, who represent some of those with the greatest health need, continue to experience fragmented care, disrupted treatment and poor continuity on release.

Violence against women and girls (Vawg) is another core element of women's pathways to prison. Around 60 per cent of women in the justice system report having experienced domestic abuse. This is not background context: it is a main storyline. Labour's new Freedom from Violence and Abuse strategy commits to a 50 per cent reduction in Vawg over the next decade. The ambition is welcome, but without housing, specialist support and early intervention, abused women will continue to be criminalised for behaviours rooted in trauma, homelessness and coercion. Preventing domestic abuse is therefore not only a moral imperative; it is a crucial justice policy intervention.

Evidence-based reduction of (re)offending

The evidence on “what works” in terms of prevention and rehabilitation is no longer contested. Research since Baroness Corston’s 2007 report shows that women’s centres provide holistic, trauma-informed, community-based support that addresses the drivers of offending, significantly reducing (re)offending rates and enabling the protective maintenance of family and community ties. Yet the strength of the evidence does not always translate into concrete action. In London, for example, funding for a women’s centre on the site of the former Holloway prison is still lacking. We support the calls for the Ministry of Justice to work with NHS colleagues to fund the project.

Alongside women’s centres, residential alternatives are essential where imprisonment is driven by homelessness or acute vulnerability rather than risk. Hope Street in Southampton offers a trauma-informed residential community that prevents custody by providing safety, stability and intensive support – including, in some cases, for those with children – when there is otherwise nowhere safe to go. Evaluation indicates a significant reduction in reoffending compared with short prison sentences alongside improved engagement and wellbeing. Evidence from another residential unit, Willowdene, shows similarly strong outcomes. These models work because they address the conditions driving criminalisation.

Early diversion is equally critical. Liaison and Diversion services identify mental health need, substance use and safeguarding concerns at the earliest point of contact, enabling referral into support rather than prosecution. Women are disproportionately represented among those identified as victims within these services, underlining diversion as a safeguarding response, not a discretionary add-on.

Housing reform matters, too. In Wales, the homelessness and social allocations bill will abolish the ‘priority need’ and ‘intentional homelessness’ tests and strengthen prevention duties. It also explicitly includes people in prison and youth detention within statutory housing advice and support. This represents a significant shift, with clear implications for women leaving custody and for cross-border consistency.

Additionally, problem-solving courts make a difference, especially when they are embedded within a strong community ecosystem. Birmingham’s women’s intensive supervision court (ISC) has developed a trauma-informed model with high completion rates and reported improvements in self-worth, family relationships and substance use. In March 2025, 78 per cent of participants were in the process of completing or had successfully completed their order. Building on this success, a new women’s ISC at Liverpool magistrates’ court has been announced.

The evidence on what works in terms of prevention and rehabilitation is no longer contested. Yet the strength of the evidence does not always translate into concrete action



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What next?

This is a pivotal moment. Recent legislative and policy developments create a window for change. The Sentencing Act introduces a presumption against short custodial sentences, extends suspended sentence orders, and – critically – places a legal duty on courts to consider pregnancy and primary caring responsibilities when making bail and remand decisions. These reforms matter for women, but they will only translate into fewer prison sentences if credible community options exist everywhere, not just in pilot areas.

The government’s commitment to identify and support children affected by parental imprisonment is one of the most significant developments in this area. Supporting children is central to breaking intergenerational cycles of harm.

Women’s imprisonment in England and Wales is best understood not as a response to risk, but as a symptom of unresolved social harm. The evidence is clear: short custodial sentences do not work for the women they apply to, or to reduce reoffending; prison exacerbates health inequalities; and women-centred, trauma-informed alternatives deliver better outcomes for women, children and public safety.

The task now is not to generate more evidence, but to act on what we already know. With sentencing reform, a bold Vawg strategy, and the leadership of the Women’s Justice Board, there is an opportunity to stem the flow of women into prison and enable safer communities – but only if we invest in what works, and treat women’s justice as a whole-system responsibility. ■

A new threat

Reform UK is part of a global backlash against women's hard-won freedoms, argues *Anneliese Dodds MP*



Anneliese Dodds is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Oxford East. She served as both the women and equalities minister and development minister from July 2024 to February 2025. She was chair of the Labour party from 2021 to 2024

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY is, above all, a moment to celebrate the achievements of women and girls. With more women MPs than ever, and many British women at the forefront of science, business, sport and beyond, we should of course take the time to showcase their brilliance.

It also offers a moment to reflect and recognise progress. The government is clearly building on Labour's past achievements, like the Equal Pay Act of 1970, in the present day: consider the increase in the minimum wage, improved workplace flexibility, and action against exploitative zero-hours contracts and maternity discrimination. The last Labour government's then-revolutionary moves against domestic violence have formed a foundation for today's groundbreaking actions to halve violence against women and girls. And just as the last Labour government listened to women's calls to improve breast cancer treatment, today's is focused on renewing the women's health strategy, including the menopause in the 40+ health check and reducing gynaecology waits.

This year, however, International Women's Day is different. Because as well as celebrating change and pushing for more, we are faced with the need to protect what progress has been made. Until recently, our country's political parties all claimed that they shared the value of wanting to see fairness for women. That may have been through different policies, and in the framework of different philosophies, but none sought to suggest that women's equality had 'gone too far'.

Reform is, obviously, another matter. My colleague Sarah Owen recently wrote that, in her view, Reform is "fundamentally opposed to women's safety". I agree, but I would extend the point.

Labour is not perfect when it comes to gender equality, but recent years' progress speaks for itself. I was elected in 2017 as one of 119 female Labour MPs; now there are 190 of us, making up 46 per cent of the PLP. In local government, 47 per cent of our councillors are female. In contrast,

Reform has only two female MPs out of eight, and at last year's local elections, fewer than a quarter of their candidates were women. It is committed to abolishing the position of women and equalities minister and repealing the Equality Act. Reform's candidate in the recent Gorton and Denton byelection, Matt Goodwin, was revealed to have made comments about women needing a 'biological reality' check, and advocated in a 2023 blog post for taxing people without children more. His colleague Danny Kruger has asserted that we (presumably, women...) live in a "totally unregulated sexual economy". Nigel Farage has met with the American anti-abortion group the Alliance Defending Freedom, who believe that the UK is a soft target for the next leg of their war on women's rights.

Their message is part of a global rollback of the freedoms of women and girls.

Disturbingly, their claims are starting to resonate with some. International research from King's College London last year found 28 per cent of Gen Z men think a man who stays home to look after children is less of a man; 60 per cent of this demographic think men are expected to do too much to support gender equality. In many other countries (if not yet the UK), a yawning political gender gap has opened amongst young people, with young men increasingly drawn to anti-feminist parties.

So this year, let us celebrate amazing women – but let us also recognise that progress has been hard won, and sadly, must now be defended. Farage, Goodwin and Kruger cannot be allowed to shift the Overton window when it comes to how women use our time and our bodies or how we keep ourselves safe. Their sexist vision is an import into our country which we must resist. Yes, we should mark positive changes, and push for more – but we also need to consolidate, preserve and protect the work of feminists before us. ■

As well as celebrating change and pushing for more, we are faced with the need to protect what progress has been made

This article originally appeared on the Fabian Society website to mark International Women's Day.

A new frontier

AI cannot mean the freedom to abuse, writes *Jess Asato MP*



Jess Asato is the Labour MP for Lowestoft and a former chair of the Fabian Society

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES REPRESENT one of the biggest challenges to tackling violence against women and girls (Vawg). Often, rapid innovation outstrips our ability to fully understand it and its consequences and react accordingly.

Just as 2026 was beginning, so too was a trend on the social media platform X: users were asking the site's inbuilt AI tool, Grok, to create AI-generated 'nudified' or sexualised images of female users – including children. I was an early and vocal critic of this practice, and called for action by Elon Musk. As a result, I too became a victim – with hundreds of users generating images of me in bikinis or, in one instance, a video of me being chloroformed by a gang of men and prepared for rape. It was estimated that Grok produced more than 3m sexual images (overwhelmingly of women, as well as child sexual abuse material) before photo generation was limited just to paid users.

Of course, this has always been possible to some degree. A picture of my head could be pasted onto an underwear model cut out from a magazine by hand, or a skilled Photoshop user could try to blend two photos together. But AI is different in three key respects.



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First, the ease with which it can be used by any person: in January, simply replying to one of my posts on X with “@Grok put her in a bikini” sufficed. Secondly, the realism of the finished product. And thirdly, the ability for it to be instantly shared with a public audience on social media.

And yet, the capability of one person to instantly and realistically strip another for the whole world to see has its defenders. This is a case of freedom, they say. We should have the right to strip you, to humiliate and degrade you, they argue. They are, unsurprisingly, overwhelmingly men. Libertarian basement dwellers, who would have once been shunned by society, have had their voices amplified by the wild west of social media, and they are not afraid of using it to push women – or anyone they disagree with – out of the public realm and into silence.

A Conservative MP disagreed with my stance on X at the time. “We don't ban cameras because some are used to make illegal content,” they argued. But I am not looking to ban the camera-equivalent – AI – which, much like a camera, has many important uses. Nor am I arguing for a ban on AI photo generation in totality. I am simply asking what possible purpose, or for what social good, would we need the ability to nudy others easily and realistically against their will.

Elon Musk and others argued that demands, like mine, to see an end to AI generated nudification are a politicised attack to suppress right-wing free speech. He argued that we should have faith in him and his site to self-regulate and determine whether our laws have been broken. But we cannot be laissez-faire about keeping women and children safe online – and I am glad that the Labour government will crack down on tools which have, as their sole purpose, nudification. That does not go far enough, however. AI product developers themselves must be required to take all possible steps to prevent this practice. Adobe Photoshop, for example, already prevents users from being able to ask its AI tools to nudy (though some dedicated users may still get around it).

If everyone has unlimited freedom, then no one is free. That is a simple and widely accepted idea. We do not permit murder or assault or rape for that reason. We constrict one man's freedom to sexually harass a woman to prioritise a woman's freedom to live a life free of such things. Why should we not do that online too?

Action against non-consensual intimate images (NCII) then, is essential. But we must also be conscious that this will not prevent the generation of images of women in bikinis or heavily pregnant, as they are not considered 'intimate'.

In Denmark, a law is being proposed that would enshrine a person's image or voice as their property. Individual copyrighting, with necessary caveats for satire and public interest, is a solution we must look at, as is watermarking AI-generated imagery, which would also have benefits in the creative sector.

We must act to ensure that women and girls online have the freedom to express themselves without the threat of having their own image weaponised against them. The freedom to abuse cannot be allowed to continue unchecked. ■

Left behind

Young women face a myriad of economic and social pressures –
Labour must treat them as a core constituency in its coalition,
writes *Jade Azim*



Jade Azim is head of policy and advocacy at the Good Growth Foundation

IN THIS MOST turbulent of political landscapes, the air is thick with the voices of authoritarian strongmen and the performative theatre of hyper-macho, combative politics. We have become accustomed to a discourse dominated by shouting matches, culture war rhetoric, and a brand of populist strength that dominates the headlines. Caught in this cacophony, young men have become the ultimate prize for progressives and conservatives alike, as article after article speaks to their increasing radicalisation and supposed affinity with the hard right.

But there is another, lesser-told story. While commentators remain fixated on this noisier epidemic, a much more contemporary force is being systematically overlooked: young women are emerging as a unique swing voter group. Even among experts, they remain largely invisible in the shadow of their more vocal male counterparts.

The data provides a stark illustration of a growing gender chasm that cannot be ignored. Among the 18-35 demographic, the divergence between men and women in their political loyalties is stark. Recent Good Growth Foundation polling shows that 29 per cent of young women now back the Green party, while only 11 per cent support Reform. Conversely, 30 per cent of young men in the same age bracket have flocked to Reform, with only 9 per cent supporting the Greens.

This asymmetry reveals two different versions of radicalisation occurring simultaneously. It is perhaps more appetising for the media to write about the radicalisation of young men because it is a highly visible, and even aggressive, phenomenon. It is almost cinematic, and slots neatly into the current mood of political combat. Yet the shift among young women is no less radical; it is simply quieter. Their radicalism is progressive and profoundly structural, making it harder for a noise-obsessed media to quantify – though no less capable of upending electoral politics.

This oversight is a dangerous game for any administration. The government currently finds itself walking a precarious tightrope, where any attempt to lean too heavily into macho rhetoric risks permanently alienating the young female electorate.

The problem lies in a fundamental misunderstanding of who the median ‘working person’ actually is in 2026.

For too long, policymakers have been haunted by a history-book picture of the working class, focusing on industrial ghosts while ignoring the young woman juggling a service-sector job and domestic labour. The reality of the modern economy is particularly torrid for young women, who are navigating a unique confluence of pressures. They are the ones bearing the brunt of a broken childcare system, a persistent pay gap, and an increasingly precarious housing market.

The top three issues for women in this age bracket, according to the same GGF polling, are the economy and the cost of living; health and the NHS; and housing. They rate poverty, inequality and unemployment far higher than the population at large. Young men, on the other hand, cite the economy, crime and immigration. It is unsurprising these issues register higher for young women than the more newsworthy issues of immigration and crime preoccupying men. But they should not be cast as ‘women’s issues’: these are core economic stressors that define the lives of the population.

Women are also working people looking for a state that provides security, not just through policing and borders, but through functional healthcare and addressing the cost of living. While male voters might be drawn to the disruptive energy of right-wing populism, young women are looking for a radicalism that builds rather than breaks. They have a lot more to lose.

Psephologists and policymakers are equally guilty of neglect. This is a profound miscalculation. Young women moving toward progressive alternatives is a direct response to a political climate that they feel has actively excluded them in favour of hyper-masculine posturing. If the establishment continues to play a zero-sum game, choosing to focus on white van man over the modern working woman, they are not just losing a vote; they are losing the future. The young female swing voter is no longer a peripheral figure to be courted with platitudes in the final weeks of a campaign – a pink van won’t cut it. She is the defining force of the new political reality, and her subtlety should not be mistaken for satisfaction. She is crying out for a politician that will treat her as a core constituency of their coalition. ■

Scaling what works

To tackle health inequalities for black women, the government should support community-led models, argue *Marianna Masters* and *Evelyn Akoto*



Marianna Masters is a Labour councillor in the London Borough of Lambeth and serves as chair of the Fabian Women's Network. Evelyn Akoto is a Labour councillor in the London Borough of Southwark

Black women in the UK live with some of the starkest health inequalities in the country. This is not new; neither is it accidental. The status quo is one of systemic racism, socioeconomic inequality, and a healthcare system that still struggles to provide culturally competent, relational care. If Labour is serious about closing this gap, it must stop reinventing the wheel and start scaling up what already works. Tried and tested solutions exist in communities across south London. We know because, as councillors, we have helped to deliver them.

The evidence that black women continue to face devastating health inequalities is clear. Black women are 3.7 times more likely to die during pregnancy or childbirth than white women according to MBRRACE-UK. As campaigners at Five X More have long warned, this is not biology, but bias. It is concerns dismissed. It is pain not taken seriously.

Through Southwark's Maternity Commission, we heard directly from Black women who described dismissal, stereotyping and fragmented care. The commission made clear that safety is not only clinical, but relational. In other words, continuity of care, cultural understanding and advocacy are not mere extras, but vital safeguards.

Maternal inequality is just the sharpest edge of a wider pattern. Beyond maternity, Black women experience some of the highest rates of long-term conditions in the UK, including hypertension, diabetes, fibroids, chronic pain and anxiety, often earlier in life and with greater severity. These patterns are shaped not only by genetics, but by poverty, insecure housing, racism and the cumulative stress of navigating systems that are simply not designed for us.

Poverty, in particular, exacerbates other inequalities. In 2024, 41 per cent of Black households were living in poverty, compared to 20 per cent of white households. Poverty shapes the food you can afford, the housing you live in, the stress you carry and the care that you can access. Health inequalities are the predictable outcome of inequality itself.

Labour's 10 year health plan has a welcome emphasis on prevention and tackling disparities. But it is lighter on how trust can be rebuilt in communities where it has been eroded. That is where south London's community-led models can offer a blueprint for the national plan.

Unless Labour builds with communities, not for them, inequalities will simply reproduce themselves. We learned this during Covid-19. Working together across Lambeth and Southwark, we saw how quickly trust collapsed when messaging was delivered from the centre. When we took health information into churches, mosques, food banks, hairdressers and WhatsApp groups, engagement shifted. People asked questions, challenged misinformation, and made informed choices.

In Southwark, this approach is now embedded through a network of over 200 community health ambassadors. Drawn from the community and trained in areas from blood pressure awareness to cancer screening and mental health first aid, they are trusted connectors rooted in estates, faith groups and local spaces. Far from a 'bolt on', they are a key part of the infrastructure of prevention.

We have seen this model deliver tangible results. At Corpus Christi Catholic church in Brixton Hill, parishioners recently received free blood pressure checks and wellbeing advice after mass. For some, it was the first clinical conversation they had had in years. Alongside health checks, they were also able to access housing and benefits advice and warm food in a designated Warm Space. That is holistic care in practice.

In Lambeth, a Black Communities Health and Wellbeing Day in 2022 took place at the height of Covid mistrust, when many Black residents were avoiding the NHS altogether. Yet 500 people attended. Around 200 medical checks were completed, more than 200 referrals were made, and five men were referred for PSA tests, one of whom has since been diagnosed with early-stage prostate cancer. This was not symbolic outreach. It was proof of concept, and it saved lives.

So, what must Labour do? First, root women's health hubs in trusted community spaces, not just hospitals. Second, guarantee continuity of care for high-risk pregnancies, with clear national standards. Third, introduce a national diagnostic standard for women's pain so that years of delay and dismissal are no longer normalised. Fourth, leverage economic policy, including through flexible work, occupational health access and menopause and menstrual health standards. Finally, tie NHS funding allocations to measurable reductions in disparities.

The blueprint is clear: deliver care in trusted spaces; prioritise relationships and continuity; and fund prevention that is culturally grounded and community led. The solutions are already here, in our estates, our parishes and our community halls. The government must scale what works, fund what works, and, above all, trust communities. ■

Hand in hand

Gender budgeting can tackle inequalities while aiding economic recovery, writes *Liz Hind*



Dr Liz Hind is a researcher, educator and activist. She is on the executive committee of the Fabian Women's Network and currently works for the Women's Budget Group

THE GOVERNMENT'S LASER focus on improving the economy may seem single-minded, but equality remains at the heart of its project. Indeed, the two goals are complementary. By analysing the roles that different groups of women and men play not only in working life, but in caring responsibilities, and by examining needs in transport, health and many more areas of public expenditure, we can ensure that economic renewal leaves a legacy of equality.

This is not mere wishful thinking. Sixty-two per cent of countries in the OECD are already using gender budgeting to improve the economic standing of women – and by 2060, they could add an average of 9.2 per cent to their GDPs as a result, by closing gaps in labour force participation. Leading countries include Austria, Mexico, Korea, Canada and the Nordic countries. Gender budgeting aims to improve economic empowerment, participation in decision-making, access to health and education, and the prevention of violence. It recognises that public spending is not gender neutral, and that public policy is frequently undermined by hidden inequalities and biases. In particular, women are more likely to provide unpaid care, experience gendered violence, and work in particular sectors of the economy. Moreover, outcomes for women experiencing multiple forms of inequalities along the lines of race, class, disability are often worse than for the population overall. All of this influences how government spending decisions affect them.

Importantly, gender budgeting is not about spending more money. Neither is it about creating separate budgets for men and women. Instead, it goes beyond traditional equality impact assessments and introduces tools that integrate gendered considerations at every stage of policy development and resource allocation, ensuring fairer distribution of public money and improving services for everyone. In places where gender budgeting has been

established for some time, legal frameworks now require equality considerations in budget setting. These include ex ante impact assessments and auditing post budget, creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

To illustrate what this looks like in practice, consider transport policy – a key concern for gender budgeting that, like many gender equality issues, is commissioned and administered at the local level. Safe and reliable public transport that connects places women want to go enables them to be more mobile, supporting access to good quality jobs. Because women take on the majority of care, their travel patterns can be different. They are more likely to make multiple, shorter journeys on the outskirts of population centres, for example – a pattern known as trip chaining. This might be because they are taking children to school before going to work, or dropping shopping to an older relative or neighbour on the way home. Transport systems, however, have historically been designed for radial commuting, which, if left unaddressed, can leave women with higher costs, longer travel times, and limited workplace options. Women also tend to feel less safe on public transport. Better lighting and clearer wayfinding can increase comfort, and expand the times and places women feel able to travel.

Countries that have adopted gender budgeting show the value of formally involving women's organisations, backed by high quality data, to shape priorities and guide spending. In the UK, many local women's organisations are ready to contribute. Establishing formal, two-way engagement structures ensures their insights influence budget decisions while respecting their time and expertise.

The goals of gender budgeting marry well with Labour's ambitions for devolved economies. Labour already understands that different regions need different solutions, and that real growth comes from the grassroots upwards. Fittingly, the devolved governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales are leading the way in gender budgeting. In Scotland, a Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment is published annually, and uses budget tagging to identify priorities. This is a positive step toward gender budgeting, although the Scottish Women's Budget Group recommends that further work is needed to assess how spending affects different groups.

In England, work is starting on embedding gender budgeting in local decisions. In London, the GLA recently published a report detailing how equalities should be embedded in transport planning, and recommended that transport is used as a pilot project on gender budgeting. The report outlines improvements in data collection and analysis and recognises that formally involving civil society speeds up effective understanding and implementation.

In its plans for devolution, Labour should use this tried and tested methodology to achieve its goals of increased equality and an improved economy. By formally embedding gender budgeting in devolution plans, we could ensure a better, more equal economy, not just for the duration of this parliament, but for generations of women. ■

Bridging the gap

To ensure economic prosperity,
Labour must meet women's
inequalities head on,
writes *Daniella Jenkins*.



*Dr Daniella Jenkins is the director
at the Women's Budget Group*

WE are often told that women's economic equality can wait for less serious times. This tendency stems from two things: the systemic undervaluation of women's net contribution to the economy, and growing numbness to the inequities we continue to face.

Women remain systematically disadvantaged in ways that compound over lifetimes: the impacts of lower pay, insecure work, part-time jobs, discrimination, and unpaid care all accumulate to leave too many women poorer and less financially secure. For example, by the time they are in their early thirties, women already face an eye-watering 56 per cent gender pension gap. On reaching pension age, women find themselves, on average, with £67,000 less in their private pension pots, and they account for 57 per cent of pensioners living in poverty. Sadly, this is a predictable outcome of an economy and labour market that still does not value women.

This situation is not inevitable. Labour has recognised the problem, and since coming to power, has started to take action on multiple fronts.

With a 13 per cent gender pay gap, more women are classified as low earners, and nearly three quarters of part-time workers are women. The government's landmark Employment Rights Act, including mandatory gender pay gap action plans for large employers, is poised to benefit women. The act also guarantees day-one rights to request flexible working, access to statutory sick pay without a lower earnings threshold, and strengthened parental

leave rights, which will all help improve many women's material living standards and narrow the gender pay gap.

The urgency of the need for reform is most evident in adult social care. Women make up around 90 per cent of the 1.84 million workers in the sector in England, where median pay is just £11 an hour and more than one in five workers are on zero-hours contracts – six times the rate across the wider economy. As the backbone of adult social care, women, particularly Black, Asian and minority ethnic and working-class women, have for too long seen their labour undervalued. This situation reflects chronic underinvestment in our social care infrastructure. At the Women's Budget Group, we have calculated that if the UK invested 2 per cent of GDP into social infrastructure, it could create 1.5m jobs, almost twice the returns from investing in construction. This should remind us that deep-seated gender biases remain locked into economic thinking and, as a result, we are failing to recognise the true social and economic value of care.

The introduction of social care negotiating bodies and fair pay agreements could transform this picture. Alongside the Casey Review, which will set out a plan to implement a long-promised National Care Service, a policy the Fabian Society has championed, Labour has a historic opportunity to recognise the value of care work. A National Care Service would not only improve pay and conditions for a largely female workforce but also ease the burden on unpaid carers, most of whom are women. It would further help the estimated 30 per cent of women who are currently underemployed by unlocking skills and bringing capacity back into our labour market.

Parental leave reform is another crucial lever. Day-one rights to parental leave are undoubtedly a huge win for parents, but they are just the beginning of the story. Statutory pay rates remain too low, and paternity leave remains far too short. We know the gender pay gap widens significantly once women become mothers. The government's current review of parental leave is therefore a vital opportunity to support more equal sharing of care responsibilities and to prevent women from bearing long-term career, earnings, and savings penalties.

Equally important is childcare. The expansion of state-funded childcare hours is a welcome recognition that childcare is not just a family issue, but an economic one. Without adequate funding, however, the government risks undermining both its delivery targets and its promise to make the economy work for parents. Affordable, accessible childcare remains one of the most powerful tools available to expand women's choices at work and to close gender gaps in pay and progression.

Labour has taken important first steps, but must remain brave, particularly as we confront questions around the future of work and the impacts of AI. To build strong foundations, we must be prepared to rethink how we define work to include care and the important work of raising healthy and resilient future generations. Tackling women's economic inequality, then, remains fundamental to building a fairer, stronger economy for everyone. ■

Green room

Green space is fundamental to wellbeing, writes *Mete Coban*



Mete Coban is the deputy mayor of London for environment and energy



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When people talk about access to green space, they often imagine it as something extra, a nice bonus – somewhere to take a stroll on a Sunday or walk the dog after work. But for many of us growing up in London’s estates, it was far from an afterthought – not least because it was almost entirely absent.

Where I grew up, we didn’t have the luxury of a garden. The “green space” we knew was the patch of concrete between blocks where we played football until someone shouted at us to stop. And the message this sent – quietly, consistently – was that our wellbeing simply mattered less.

This is still the lived reality for too many Londoners. Access to nature is determined by the inequalities that already define our city along the lines of race, class, income, and disability. The communities that contributed the least to the climate crisis now live in the neighbourhoods most

vulnerable to its consequences – including overheating and air pollution – while at the same time suffering from a chronic lack of green infrastructure. This is why, for me, the green agenda has never just been about the environment. It has always been about fairness, dignity and justice.

If our green transition is to succeed, it must first confront this inequality. We cannot build a fairer London by treating climate action and social justice as two separate agendas. They are one and the same. That’s why I am proud of the work we have been leading with the Green Roots Fund – an investment explicitly designed to ensure that the benefits of green infrastructure reach the communities that have been denied them.

At its core, the Green Roots Fund is about rebalancing the scales. It funds projects that bring nature back into the heart of London’s most underserved neighbourhoods:

new pocket parks, community gardens, greener estates, and biodiversity projects that restore wildlife to places from which it has been absent for centuries. One of the most exciting examples is the reintroduction of white storks to London for the first time in more than 600 years. This isn't just about wildlife; it's about hope. These majestic birds are a potent symbol that nature can flourish in our city again, and that every community deserves to see that happen on their doorstep.

My commitment to this work is not academic. Indeed, it is deeply personal. When you grow up without access to green space, you internalise a sense of neglect. I remember being embarrassed to invite friends around to my estate – not because of the people, but because of how the environment looked and felt. The broken benches, the cracked concrete, the lack of colour or greenery. These things shape a child's sense of what they deserve.

And we know the consequences. Children who grow up without nature have worse mental health outcomes. Communities without green space experience higher rates of chronic disease. Families without safe outdoor spaces to unwind carry heavier emotional and financial burdens. When you can't step outside and breathe clean air, or take your kids to play amongst grass and trees, you feel the city's inequality at its starkest.

Which is why the question we must keep asking is this: what does it mean for every Londoner, regardless of postcode, to have the right to a healthy, liveable environment?

One of the most transformative aspects of London's journey in the last decade has been our ambition to become the world's first National Park City – a recognition that urban nature is as vital to our future as housing, transport, or jobs. Since 2016, London has created more than 900 hectares of new green space. This is equivalent to thousands of football pitches' worth of new parks, restored habitats, and community gardens. It did not happen by accident. It required political leadership that recognised that clean air and green spaces are the foundation of a fair society.

The progress we've made on air pollution is one of the most powerful examples of this leadership. Under Sadiq Khan, London is on track to meet legal air-quality standards 183 years earlier than predicted. That is extraordinary. It is the result of bold choices: expanding the Ultra Low Emission Zone, investing in public transport, and redesigning our streets around people rather than cars.

Our efforts to give every Londoner access to green space could have similarly dramatic effects. Green space is not just about grass and trees; it is part of a wider

ecosystem of health and fairness. You cannot talk about nature without talking about air quality. You cannot talk about parks without talking about safe streets. And you cannot talk about children's wellbeing without talking about their right to breathe clean air and play safely where they live.

One of the most exciting shifts happening across London is the reclamation of streets for communities. Whether it is through low-traffic neighbourhoods, School Streets, or pocket parks, we are gradually reshaping the city around people rather than vehicles. This is about restoring dignity to areas long treated as afterthoughts – creating child-friendly neighbourhoods where kids can play outside without fear, where families can walk safely, and where public space strengthens, not erodes, the social fabric.

For many communities, this shift feels revolutionary. When an estate gets its first community garden, a grey courtyard becomes a green playground, or a polluted road becomes a safe walking route, you see the pride emerge. People begin to imagine new possibilities for their neighbourhoods – and, most importantly, for themselves.

The future we are trying to build is one in which nature is a right, not a privilege. A London where every estate has access to biodiverse spaces. Where every child grows up seeing trees from their window. Where the benefits of the green transition flow first to the communities who have been excluded longest. And fundamentally, where climate action is shaped by justice – racial, economic, and environmental.

The Fabians have long argued that social democracy thrives when policy is rooted in fairness. Nowhere is that more important than in our

approach to the environment. We cannot tackle the climate crisis without tackling inequality. And we cannot tackle inequality without investing in the spaces that shape daily life.

The Green Roots Fund is just the beginning. London is leading the country, and the world, in demonstrating what a just green transition looks like. But we must remain ambitious. We must keep centring the voices of communities who have been overlooked and underestimated. And we must continue building a movement that understands that a greener London is not simply a nicer London. It is a fairer, healthier, more prosperous London for everyone.

Ultimately, this agenda isn't about storks, or parks, or even trees. It's about people. It's about rewriting the story of who gets to thrive in our city. And it's about ensuring that the next generation of Londoners don't feel embarrassed to invite someone home, because theirs finally reflects the dignity they always deserved. ■

Since 2016, London has created more than 900 hectares of new green space. It did not happen by accident. It required political leadership that recognised that clean air and green spaces are the foundation of a fair society

State of repair

The government cannot rely on growth alone to make life more affordable – it must intervene directly, writes *Jeevun Sandher MP*



Dr Jeevun Sandher MP is parliamentary private secretary in the Department for Business and Trade and the Labour member of parliament for Loughborough

Life today is more unaffordable than during austerity, Brexit, or the pandemic. People cannot afford the basics – and see no way for their children to do so, either. This is fuelling the fear, frustration, and fury we are seeing on our streets and through our screens.

But life did not suddenly become unaffordable in 2022. The end of mass-production manufacturing created economies with a limited number of good jobs and many more low-paid ones. At the same time, we failed to build enough houses or clean energy infrastructure, driving up costs for everyone. Our affordability crisis has been decades in the making.

Crucially, economic growth alone does not create good jobs; nor does it necessarily reduce costs. Consequently, it is the role of government to actively make life affordable by creating good jobs, investing to bring costs down, and even giving cash directly to households.

The roots of the affordability crisis

In the postwar era, young people could, by and large, leave school and get a good job in their local factory which provided a wage that could support a family.

Advancement in IT and robotics in the 1980s, however, brought automation. This led to economic growth, but it made only some people and places more prosperous, while others were left worse off. Automation meant machines replaced middle-income manual workers who previously worked on mass-production manufacturing lines. New machines could now do repetitive tasks that humans used to. Where a human used to drill a car door, a machine could do it faster and cheaper, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

With the rise of manufacturing powerhouses abroad, including Japan, Korea, and then China, mass-production manufacturing ended in Britain and other high-income nations. The age of leaving school and getting a good job in the local factory disappeared alongside the factory itself.

It was not all bad: automation and the IT revolution did help workers who used computers to make them more

productive. High-earning graduates used computers to do their jobs more efficiently. They no longer needed to write out tables of data manually; Excel did it for them. At the same time, automation didn't change many lower-pay non-graduate jobs like bartending. Robots are terrible at pouring drinks (especially when the glasses are all different sizes).

Put it all together, and changes in automation and global trade created a divided labour market, with high-earning graduate jobs clustered in major cities and many low-paid non-graduate ones everywhere else, alongside a few non-automatable, middle-income jobs in sectors such as construction.

Will growth make life more affordable?

But perhaps there's a silver lining: automation should lead to growth, and growth should make us better off, right? Sadly, economic growth leads to rising wages for all only if all workers are producing more. With the decline of industry and the destruction of good non-graduate jobs, many workers became less productive, with accompanying lower wages. The industries that produced more after the 1980s (services like law, finance, consulting) overwhelmingly employed higher-paid workers with degrees. They saw their wages rise faster than everyone else during the era of automation. In the two decades leading up to Brexit, wages for high-pay workers grew 40 per cent faster than for average workers.

These new jobs were more geographically concentrated, because what mattered was not being near a port or a railway to export goods, but being near like-minded people and businesses to generate and share ideas. As a

result, London and the south-east grew two-thirds faster than the rest of the country.

If economic growth continues to be generated by well-paid graduates working in major cities, then these are the people and places that it will benefit. The growth of the past 40 years did not automatically benefit every person and place; we shouldn't expect future growth to do so.

If economic growth continues to be generated by well-paid graduates working in major cities, then these are the people and places that it will benefit

Learning to earn?

Reading the above may lead you to believe that getting a degree is a ticket to economic security. A solid 2:1, a desk job in the City, and you'll benefit from economic growth. Think again. Because while the labour market was changing, so was the housing market.

High-paid jobs were now found in major cities where graduates could work together, which meant there was higher demand for housing in and around these cities. But we failed to build enough. Add in low interest rates and quantitative easing, and housing became astonishingly unaffordable. Renters today spend 30 per cent of their income on housing costs, triple what they did in 1970. The average house price is now around eight times average earnings – twice what it was 30 years ago. This pattern holds true across high-income nations that have failed to build.

If you are a young person who does not own a house or have a degree, how are you supposed to afford a decent living? Even if you do get a (good) degree, how are you meant to buy a house when there simply aren't enough of them? To get ahead as a young person, you need a rare combination: a good degree, a decent job, and rich parents.

Skyrocketing costs

And then, in 2022, the cost-of-living crisis came along. Britain was the worst hit of all high-income nations. When Putin invaded Ukraine, the cost of energy shot up as Russian supplies came offline, increasing the price of everything. Food was no exception, with price inflation compounded by the war's disruption of fertiliser supplies and failed harvests caused by climate shocks. Prices rose fastest here because we had not invested in clean power to protect household bills, and our post-Brexit food regime raised the cost of imports.

The cost-of-living crisis came on top of a long-term affordability crisis. Today's despair and anger was decades, not years, in the making.



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What we can do

Economic growth alone will not make life more affordable. To do that, government needs to pull the three affordability levers it has. Creating good jobs, getting incomes rising, and getting costs down.

Good jobs

In our post-industrial era, if we want good, non-graduate jobs paying a living wage across the country, then the state must step in to create them. Currently, around 7.5m full-time jobs pay less than the £35,000 threshold needed to raise a family and afford the basics. This is a challenge, but we can create hundreds of thousands of good non-graduate jobs in the green transition and construction, as well as many more jobs in education and healthcare. The government is even creating work directly, as New Labour and FDR did, through the Youth Guarantee.

Social security

Good jobs raise incomes for those that have them. But we can also raise incomes for those that do not through social security: direct payments to households from the government.

Ending the two-child limit means poorer working families will now get more money in their pockets. But social security can make life better for struggling middle-class families, too. Child benefit and the 2022 energy bill support scheme, for example, both represent forms of social security. In the aftermath of Covid-19, Biden sent cheques worth \$1,400 directly to every American earning less than \$75,000, reaching a majority of the population. Giving social security payments to all families who need it, not just the poorest, will allow it to endure.

Costs

Raising incomes is only half the story. We also need to get costs down through investment and regulation. Investment will include building social homes and clean energy. In terms of regulation, we are already reducing the cost of food by reducing trade costs with the EU.

Conclusion

The affordability crisis did not begin a few years ago – it began five decades ago. The decline of manufacturing and the increasing advancement of the computer meant good, high-paying jobs for some and lower-paying jobs for everyone else. At the same time, we did not build enough houses for those who needed them. Add in the recent cost-of-living crisis and you end up with a toxic combination. The end result is that people cannot afford a decent life and see no way of being able to do so in the future.

Growth alone cannot fix these problems. Without state intervention, it will not create the good jobs we need where we need them; it will not get costs down; and it will not top up the wages of low-pay workers. The government must step in. If it does not, the result could be disastrous. ■

More tea, less vicar

Christian nationalism seeks to turn back the clock on social progress – the government must make the case for a secular state, argues *Andrew Copson*



Andrew Copson is chief executive of Humanists UK

CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM SEEKS to fuse politics with Christianity and have the government promote or actively enforce religious interests and policies. It is opposed to the separation of church and state and to pluralism, including learning about other beliefs and cultures in state schools. Christian nationalists advocate ultra-conservative Christian social policies, opposing the human rights of women, LGBT+ people, and rights to bodily autonomy in areas like abortion and assisted dying. Many British progressives feel horror at the movement's many policy successes in the US: not just abortion bans and library censorship, but a broader philosophical victory reflected in official rhetoric casting the US as a Christian nation, alongside a global security strategy that aims to export Christian nationalism. But should our horror now turn into domestic apprehension?

In September 2025, at Tommy Robinson's Unite the Kingdom rally, marchers hoisted crosses and flags proclaiming "Christ is King" while ceremonially destroying a banner inscribed "humanism" and "no religion". Weeks later, the King's Army, a 'spiritual army' founded in 2024, marched in black shirts through Soho, central London's LGBT+ district. The group frames its activism as a war against cultural decay.

This street agitation has its partner in high politics. Reform MP Danny Kruger has called for Christians to "destroy" and "banish" a modern creed that he characterizes as a mix of paganism and heresies. The National Conservatism movement, currently hoarding a new generation of right-wing activists, is drenched in Christian nationalism, and its UK chairman is the new head of policy for Reform UK, which is leading voting intention polls.

There is substantial funding behind this shift. As reported by openDemocracy, American evangelical groups have poured hundreds of millions into European advocacy. Domestically, figures like Paul Marshall, owner of the Spectator, argue that British liberalism has lost its way by abandoning the "Judeo-Christian understanding" of humanity as fallen creatures. He has invested in

organisations explicitly dedicated to the "evangelisation of the nation" and the "transformation of society."

Will the UK follow in the US's footsteps? When contemplating the old US religious right, we always said: "It couldn't happen here. Britain is different." And in some important ways, of course, we are different. While the US is becoming less religious each generation, most people do still identify as Christian. By contrast, Britain is not a Christian country in any meaningful way. Surveys show that over 90 per cent of people don't attend Christian services; over 70 per cent of people don't have a Christian belief system; and over 60 per cent of people don't have a Christian identity. Our national culture, though shaped in part (for good and ill) by Christian ideas and values, has also been shaped by pre-Christian, non-Christian, and post-Christian ideas (with the latter category having done more than any other to shape our modern social democracy). We have some of the lowest levels of religious belief, practice, and identity in the free world, and far lower levels than the US.

On paper, of course, we are a Christian state that an American Christian nationalist would give their right arm for. Our head of state has to be Christian by law; our national ceremonies are presided over exclusively by Christian priests; most of our state schools are mandated by law to have Christian worship, and a third of them

can show preference to the children of Christian parents in admissions; state hospitals and prisons have Christian chaplains at public expense; and the law mandates that most school curricula about religion and philosophy must give priority to Christianity. Every day, the proceedings of our national parliament begin

with Christian prayers presided over by the state church. That same parliament contains voting representatives of the state religion – a constitutional outrage mirrored only in Iran.

But in spite of our theocratic constitution, the trajectory of our recent history has been in the opposite direction to the US. British 'pragmatic lawlessness' means that rules on worship in schools and others are mostly flouted.

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Moreover, while maintaining its staggering wealth and elite influence, over the last 150 years or so, the state church has largely bowed before a progressive secular tendency that has created a space for increasing freedom of conscience in practice.

This complacency, however, is dangerous. Christian nationalism is not primarily a theological project; it is a political one based on identity and culture. The background conditions for it exist in the UK precisely because of our state religion. In Matlock in Derbyshire, Reform councillors reintroduced Christian prayer to council meetings on the basis that the UK was a ‘Christian country’. Despite progressive dismay, one could ask: how is this different from the Christian prayers every day in the House of Commons?

In Northumberland, a Reform councillor on the council’s religious education committee said he wanted exclusively Christian RE in schools because this was ‘a Christian country’, calling any other approach to RE ‘brainwashing’. Again, one could ask: how can we deny this when our national law requires Christian worship in all schools?

The risk in Britain is a top-down, elite-formulated nationalism that weaponises “Christian identity” against modern pluralism, and demands conformity not to belief in the resurrection, but to Christianity as a cultural fortress. It claims that British liberty and rule of law are the exclusive property of Christian heritage, neatly categorising non-Christians as suspicious outsiders. When politicians argue we must protect “Christian culture” from immigrants or “cultural Marxists,” they are using the cross as a bludgeon in the culture wars.

For Fabians, rooted in the patient accumulation of facts and the application of reason to social problems, this identity-based politics is particularly dangerous. The Fabian tradition relies on the belief that good governance is the product of rational inquiry, evidence-based policy, and expert administration. When dogma and identity replace data as the basis for policymaking, the project of gradual amelioration becomes impossible. We see this in attacks on the “administrative state” or the “blob,” where civil servants are denigrated because their technocratic neutrality – a product of the secular state – is seen as an obstacle to reshaping society.

Furthermore, Christian nationalism strikes at the heart of Fabian universalism. The welfare state depends on a shared citizenship that transcends private beliefs—a

social contract where every citizen is equal. Christian nationalism fractures this solidarity by introducing a hierarchy of belonging, suggesting the “true” citizen is the “culturally Christian” citizen. By elevating sectarian identity over universal need, it undermines the collective ethos necessary to sustain public services.

The left’s response must be a robust, unapologetic commitment to secularism, a position that progressives have been squeamish about for far too long, fearing it appears anti-religious. We must reclaim the term. Secularism is not atheism; it is a framework for ensuring equality in a state where no one is privileged or disadvantaged on the basis of their beliefs.

This approach will encompass constitutional, policy, and cultural responses. Constitutionally, we must finish the work of disestablishment. The link between church and state leaves the door ajar for Christian nationalism. Severing it would signal that power in modern Britain flows from the people, marking a transition from “tolerance of others” to “equality for all.” We should recentre human rights and equality law as quasi-constitutional in our system.

In education, we must end state-sponsored segregation. This means closing loopholes that allow faith schools to discriminate in admissions and employment. The curriculum must evolve to offer an objective “Religion and Worldviews” subject, as recommended by the Commission on Religious Education. We must repeal the archaic legal requirement for daily collective worship, replacing it with inclusive assemblies that celebrate shared values. Most of all, citizenship education must be revived to emphasise the secular basis of our democracy.

Culturally, we must offer a compelling alternative to the “Christian Nation” narrative. We need to build a national identity based on shared democratic values. This will require a state-supported cultural shift – through the BBC, national museums, and public ceremonies – to reinforce a civic patriotism that represents the reality of modern Britain rather than a mythological past.

Christian nationalism in Britain is an attempt to turn back the clock on social progress. It seeks to divide citizens by culture, in part to distract from the economic inequalities it cannot solve. Many of its aspects were familiar to the first Fabians as elements of 19th-century conservatism, but today we must recognise this threat anew, and act to forestall the reoccupation of our still-Christian state by the enemies of progress. ■

New Britain

Harold Wilson envisioned a Britain defined by modernity and social democracy – a model Labour could still learn from today,
writes *Paul Richards*



Paul Richards is treasurer of the Fabian Society and deputy director of Labour Friends of NATO

On 31 March 1966, Harold Wilson defied political gravity by winning a landslide victory from a position of perilous incumbency. With a parliamentary majority dwindling towards zero, and only 17 months into his parliamentary term, Wilson delivered the country a simple message: “give us a clear parliamentary majority”. Labour’s manifesto reiterated this appeal, declaring it was “time for decision”.

In the end, the decision was clear: people wanted a Labour government. Labour won 364 seats, a majority of 98, and 48 per cent of the popular vote. This is Labour’s third highest ever vote share, and second highest number of actual votes. By comparison, Labour’s landslide in 1997 delivered a vote share of 43.2 per cent, while in 2024 it was just 33.7 per cent. Over the following seven general elections, Labour would win a majority only once, in October 1974. It was Harold Wilson’s finest hour.

It is easy to retrofit Labour’s victory into a narrative of a changing Britain. The Kinks, the Who, Small Faces, and Dusty Springfield were in the charts. A month before polling day, the *Evening Standard* reported that John Lennon thought the Beatles were ‘bigger than Jesus’. Pickles the dog became famous for finding the previously purloined Jules Rimet Trophy in a bush in Upper Norwood

ahead of England hosting and winning the FIFA World Cup. In the west end, Carnaby Street filled with modish youngsters; to the east, Bethnal Green hosted A-list gangsters. Alfie was at the flicks, and the Frost Report on the box. The economy was growing at a rate of more than 6 per cent. The times truly were a-changing.

Yet however swinging the sixties may have been, the Labour victory was not an expression of youthful exuberance. The teens listening under bedsheets to Radio Caroline couldn’t vote.

The story really starts two years before, during the lead-up to the 1964 election. The campaign was conducted against the backdrop of a Tory government mired in the Profumo Affair: teenage ‘call girls’ procured by manipulative, powerful men; a strong whiff of Russian espionage; a minister lying to parliament and resigning; and a wave of public prurience and fascination. In September 1963, people queued outside the parliamentary stationers to get the first copies of Lord Denning’s report into the affair. More than 100,000 copies were shifted within a matter of weeks.

Labour, though, did not overwhelmingly benefit electorally from this Tory scandal. The result was so tight that the Queen was briefed overnight on about what to



do in the event of a tie. During the campaign, the aristocratic, cadaverous Conservative leader, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, even gained ground. A couple of weeks more campaigning, and the Conservatives might have won. In fact, if they had secured 900 more voters in eight seats, they would have claimed victory. Labour won a majority of only four, despite the Beatles, Profumo, the miniskirt, and the white heat of change.

Once in government, Labour performed poorly at the local elections in May 1965, as well as in the parliamentary byelections between 1964 and 1966. The augurs for success in a snap election were poor. Wilson recalls in his autobiography: “a decision on election is a lonely one. Whatever the consultations, it is one man’s decision and if things go wrong he is as likely to be criticised for missing a favourable tide as for plunging in too early.”

Only after January 1966, when Labour’s Kevin McNamara won the Hull North byelection with a majority of over 5000, and with the prospect of a fresh electoral register, did Wilson brilliantly gamble on a snap general election.

If Labour’s landslide in 1966 was not inevitable, how was it won? Simply, Wilson’s argument was that Labour government worked, but the job remained unfinished. His plea was to allow Labour to continue, and finish, the job it had started. This was identical to Blair’s pitch in 2001 (‘a lot done, a lot still to do’) and can be summed up in the aphorism attributed to Lincoln that it is unwise to change horses mid-stream. This should form the Labour’s central line at the next election.

Sixty years on, what else can Wilson teach us?

The first is that you need a clear project or strategy. For all its faults, and ultimate failure, the National Plan launched in 1965 was a coherent, social-democratic blueprint for the New Britain. It sought to mobilise the vast resources of the democratic state, to correct market failure, to redistribute wealth and opportunities, and most importantly, generate economic growth. In other words, all the social-democratic greatest hits, as familiar to Attlee as to Rachel Reeves.

This plan was backed by a new government department – the Department for Economic Affairs (DEA), designed to marshal resources across government and challenge Treasury dominance. It was probably a good idea, but was led by the wrong person: George Brown, a man who was mostly on the right side of the argument but always on the wrong side of sober.

When you’re a government with £1.4tn to spend, it is a good idea to have a national plan. And when you’re prime minister, you have monarchical powers to shape the ‘machinery of government’. You can mould Whitehall to the shape of your priorities, values, and ambitions for the country. That’s what Wilson did between 1964 and 1966, with a sliver of a majority.

Second, you need unity. A clear sense of direction and purpose helps to sweep up doubters and galvanise loyalists. In 1964, Wilson said “the Labour party is like a stage-coach. If you rattle along at great speed everybody inside is too exhilarated or too seasick to cause any trouble. But if you stop everybody gets out and argues about where to go next.”

Harold Wilson believed in bringing in talented ministers, regardless of their place on Labour’s ideological spectrum. This was a government of Callaghan, Healey, Crosland, Jenkins, and George Brown; and also Crossman, Gunter, Cousins, Greenwood, Benn, and Castle. Steve Richards writes that “Wilson became neurotically obsessed by the need to maintain unity.” Partly this was expediency, partly his genuine belief that Labour needs two wings to fly. There are always malcontents and saboteurs inside every incarnation of the parliamentary Labour party; there are also talented people with different perspectives who can, and should, be co-opted to the great purpose at hand.

Third, with a plan and purpose, you need to make real changes. Labour between 1964 and the election in 1966 governed like it had a majority of 40, not four. A slew of parliamentary legislation was passed, from independence for Gambia to a registration scheme for hairdressers. New laws established New Towns, raised the school leaving age, criminalised cannabis, protected tenants against eviction, protected birds and animals, recruited more police, and introduced corporation tax.

Certain legislation spoke to modernity particularly clearly. The landmark Race Relations Act, for example, piloted by home secretary Frank Soskice, made it illegal to deny service in public places such as hotels, pubs, restaurants and transport on the grounds of race. This small but significant step forged the idea that governments can shape public behaviours and tackle hate. In 1965, a bill was passed to abolish the death penalty for murder. This was Sydney Silverman’s private members’ bill, supported by Wilson and given government time in parliament. It provided a model for further private members’ bills to be given a nod by home secretary Roy Jenkins, which liberalised society on issues such as abortion and homosexuality.

So another lesson from 1966 is that Labour governments can make progressive change in myriad, imaginative ways, not all of which require stacks of cash. Judging the public mood, which is often ahead of parliament, can yield results. Labour’s ‘University of the Air’, later the Open University (OU), is an instructive example.

Harold Wilson’s Labour won in 1966 because it was viewed as competent, ambitious, and imaginative. The election brought a generation of Labour talent into the commons for first time (including prominent Fabians): Jack Ashley, Donald Dewar, Frank Judd, Joan Lester, Evan Luard, John Macintosh, David Marquand, and David Owen.

Labour captured the zeitgeist as surely as the glittering Post Office Tower which Wilson and Tony Benn, then postmaster general, opened in October 1966. Labour had a big plan for the country. It could show practical change. It could go to an electorate, 92 per cent of which voted either Labour or Tory, and say stick with us – don’t risk the other lot.

Times change. Wilson would not recognise today’s electoral topography nor the challenges facing today’s Labour government. Yet I like to think he would have some advice on how to lead a divided party, how to govern a country in flux, how to apply timeless values to recurring problems, and how to win. ■

Safe and sound

Labour can head into the next election having made historic progress on housing, argues *Martin McCluskey MP*



Martin McCluskey is the parliamentary under-secretary of state for energy consumers and the Labour MP for Inverclyde and Renfrewshire West

Every person in Britain deserves a safe, warm and affordable home. This basic right has motivated every Labour government, with each iteration taking strides to bring the vision closer to reality. The Wheatley Act of 1924 subsidised the construction of more than half a million council homes. The 1949 Housing Act backed grants for private owners and landlords to modernise homes with indoor toilets, hot water and basic standards of decency. In 1969, Harold Wilson's government went further again, extending improvement grants to bring millions of older homes into the modern age. In 2000, Labour introduced the nation's first proper decent homes standard.

A little over 100 years from Labour's first Housing Act, this mission has been renewed. After 14 years of neglect under the Conservatives, housing policy is once again front and centre of our project of national renewal.

Our policy agenda is not just about building new homes at pace and scale, important as that is. It is also based on the belief that every home needs to be a good one – safe, affordable, warm, and with proper rights for the owners and tenants who live in them.

Our ongoing work to build 1.5m homes before 2029, the introduction of the Renter's Rights Act and the passage of Awaab's Law all represent crucial steps in improving housing across the country. Taken together, the agenda we are delivering seeks to transform our housing stock, guaranteeing every household the rights and high quality housing they deserve.

As we look towards the next quarter century, and our commitment to reach net zero by 2050, we must also recognise the major role that decarbonising housing will play in the transition. Around one-fifth of the UK's carbon emissions come from heating homes, partly because Britain has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe. Around a third of our homes were built before 1945, and nearly a fifth before 1920. It follows that much of our housing is leaking heat and carbon into the atmosphere.

This also leads to significant and ongoing costs for families in the context of an affordability crisis driven, in part, by the cost of energy. Before the Iran war, the government took direct action in the budget to reduce the cost of energy, the impact of which will be felt from April. Moving 75 per cent of the costs of the renewables obligation – a government support scheme for renewables projects – to exchequer funding, and scrapping the failed energy companies obligation (ECO) scheme, will save households around £117 in the price cap – a reduction of around 7 per cent.

Directly reducing energy costs gives families relief now, but we need lasting, sustainable change. The price cap will protect consumers for the coming months – but international volatility once again makes the case clear that there is no energy security for a country dependent on fossil fuel markets.

Our commitment to clean power by 2030 will drive down the price of energy for good. Every turbine we build, every solar panel we deploy and every nuclear power station we bring online reduces our dependence on volatile fossil fuels. This gives us more control over prices, and increases our energy independence by making us less reliant on energy supplies controlled by dictators and petrostates.

The new energy system we are building gives our country more control, but it also means that families can have more agency over the energy they use. Over the past decade, the technology on offer for people to decarbonise their homes and to reduce their energy bills has significantly advanced.

The British people are already showing record demand for clean energy in their homes, with installations of heat pumps, solar panels and home batteries are at a record high. We know that this combination of technology can reduce household bills by hundreds of pounds, but for too long they have only been accessible to people with deep pockets. The warm homes plan seeks to change that.

The new energy system we are building gives our country more control, but it also means that families can have more agency over the energy they use

The plan matches government funding of £15bn with new regulations, ensuring that homeowners have a route to upgrading their home and ensuring that new builds and rented properties meet the highest modern standards. We are setting a target of 5m home upgrades by 2030. This a programme in the tradition of the landmark Labour housing reforms of the past – setting ambitious and stretching targets that will make a lasting difference to people’s lives.

The whole plan is underpinned by a universal offer, meaning that no matter who you are and where you live, there will be support available to you. We will ensure this in three key ways.

First, the plan contains one of the biggest investments in schemes targeting fuel poverty in British history. £5bn will be invested in supporting people on low incomes through local government schemes. These schemes are already proving successful and popular, and the funding available through the warm homes plan will allow us to go even further. That is why we are able to say that the plan will lift one million households out of fuel poverty.

Second, we are extending the popular boiler upgrade scheme so that everyone can take advantage of grant funding to electrify their home heating with a heat pump. Last year, we saw record demand for heat pumps in the UK, and we know that over 90 per cent of people who make the decision to switch are satisfied with their choice.



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By investing £2.7bn in the boiler upgrade scheme, more homes will be able to make the transition, and we can reduce the cost of installing a heat pump to close to that of a gas boiler.

Alongside this, the clean heat market mechanism is developing a market for heat pump manufacture by incentivising boiler manufacturers to produce heat pumps. Over time, this will increase our domestic manufacture – further strengthening our energy independence – and drive down the costs of the technology.

Finally, we are reducing the upfront cost of technology by introducing low- and zero-interest loan options. We know that technology such as solar panels and home batteries can provide an immediate energy bill saving for households, but the upfront cost often acts as a barrier. Consequently, we are developing new financing routes to enable people to spread the cost of technology and take advantage of lower bills more quickly.

I am under no illusions that asking people to change the way they heat their homes and to install new technology can be a major ask, which is why we also need to use regulation to design out cold, leaky homes.

We are also ending the absurd system overseen by the Conservatives which has meant that, since 2016, more than a million new-build homes have been built without solar panels. From this year, new build homes will come with solar by default. This will be achieved through the Future Home Standard by ensuring that every new home is built to the highest standards of energy efficiency with the most modern technology.

But to make real inroads into fuel poverty, we also need to tackle the private rented market. More than one and a half million children live in cold, damp or mouldy private rented properties. This is completely unacceptable. We will change the law to ensure that all private rented properties in England will have to meet minimum energy efficiency standards by 2030.

This generational shift in housing standards will demand a workforce capable of delivering five million home upgrades by 2030. I am clear that these cannot be low-paid jobs with employers who fail to invest in their workforce, which is why we have established a workforce taskforce, jointly chaired by government and the TUC, that will deliver the changes we need to see in the home retrofit sector.

Labour has chosen to prioritise housing quality alongside housing quantity because we know that there is no route to national renewal without safer, warmer, affordable homes for our people. In every type of constituency, voters tell MPs like me that there are not enough homes, too few rights for renters, and too many families struggling with high bills, damp and mould.

Our agenda is not without contestation. Reform UK has pledged to scrap our Renters Rights Act, a move that would rob renters across the country of protections from abuse by bad landlords. Reform also opposes our warm homes plan, no doubt motivated by a bogus right wing propaganda campaign against heat pumps and solar panels – the very technologies that can help cut bills.

Labour is up for this fight. We will be proud to head into the next election with new homes fitted with solar panels, thousands of families seeing lower bills as a result of homes upgrades, and millions of renters enjoying new rights. The work we do in this parliament can help define a new era of good housing for our country.

Every time that Labour in government has pushed for higher standards in housing, there have been sceptics who have told us it is impossible. This will be no different. For this generation, the prize is not just warmer, safer, healthier homes – it is a major step forward in our journey towards clean power, energy independence and lower bills. We all have a role to play in bringing Labour’s clean power mission home, and the warm homes plan is there to help us make it happen. ■

Right direction

'Entrepreneurial municipal government' holds the key to local growth, argues *Stephen Cowan*



Cllr Stephen Cowan is the leader of Hammersmith & Fulham council

AS THE GOVERNMENT grapples with the UK's growth challenge, one truth is becoming impossible to ignore: skills investment alone will not deliver inclusive prosperity. In Hammersmith & Fulham, we believe that Britain does not suffer from a shortage of talent but from a failure to connect people – especially young people – to the opportunities being created in our fastest-growing sectors.

Local government and its leaders must build routes from education into work. We are uniquely placed to achieve this. At the intersection of people, place and markets, we can shape and plan regeneration, and have to ability to convene the employers, colleges, universities and community organisations that national policy struggles to reach in a joined-up way.

As leader of an administration that has successfully built a globally-recognised innovation district, I am determined to ensure that the growth we are creating is inclusive and that the prosperity is shared and sustainable.

We began to develop this vision in 2009, while in opposition in Hammersmith & Fulham. We studied how local governments could design growth deliberately, curated from the outset to benefit local communities. On taking office in 2014, we deployed our new economic strategy, focusing on the sectors set to define the coming decades: science, technology, engineering, maths, medicine and media (Stem).

In 2016, we set out our vision to build Hammersmith & Fulham into an 'innovation borough' and a global economic hotspot. A year later, we launched the White City Innovation District in partnership with Imperial College London as the epicentre of what we envisaged would become a broader 'WestTech' corridor.

We defined our approach as 'entrepreneurial municipal government', rooted in agility and creativity. As we set out in a recent white paper, EMG is about councils moving beyond being solely focused on the delivery of statutory

duties, to proactively initiating and shaping their place-based economy. Mirroring the private sector and social entrepreneurs, municipal entrepreneurialism obliges local government to produce a thoughtful, aspirational economic vision which excites people and stakeholders alike.

Early on, we benefited from the wisdom of one of the UK's leading entrepreneurs, Greg Jackson CBE. A local resident and the founder of Octopus Energy, he volunteered as our business commissioner. On his advice, we reformed planning policy to ensure 20 per cent of new office and laboratory space must be affordable and flexible – conditions essential for start-ups and scale-ups. Since 2017, this pro-growth planning regime has approved over 190,000 square metres of commercial space.

Our inclusive growth strategy, Upstream London, exemplifies this approach. Built in partnership with Imperial College London, it focuses on long-cycle growth sectors – life sciences, climate tech, digital, creative, defence tech, space tech and advanced engineering – that will define the economy for decades.

Since 2017, the industrial strategy has helped to attract over £6bn in high-growth business investment and created more than 17,200 skilled jobs in STEM sectors in the borough. Our employment rate now exceeds both the London and national averages, and our economic growth has outpaced the rest of the capital.

But that success raised a crucial question: who would these jobs go to? Too often, education and employment operate in parallel worlds, leaving young people locked out of opportunity even as employers report skills shortages. Our answer was the Pathway Bond, a first-of-its kind civic contract between the council, innovative businesses, schools, hospitals, universities, and other key organisations.

Businesses that sign the Bond commit to providing structured opportunities that deliver real value for local residents, including mentoring, work experience, apprenticeships and access to facilities and paid roles. In return, we coordinate schools, colleges, youth services and careers support to ensure that young people receive guidance at every stage of their education, from early exposure to industries through to sustained employment. Our local economy is becoming more resilient because opportunity is built into its foundations.

Over 100 organisations, including L'Oréal, Novartis, Disney and the BBC, are now part of the Pathway Bond. We are seeing degree apprenticeships with world-leading employers and young residents moving into sectors that previously felt closed to them. One sixth-form student, Ely, recently described how meeting bio-tech researchers and entrepreneurs through the programme transformed his sense of what was possible. That shift – from abstract aspiration to tangible opportunity – is what inclusive growth looks like in practice.

We must not underestimate the crucial role national government has in setting direction, funding skills and backing local leadership. But delivery happens locally. If we want growth that raises productivity and widens opportunity, we must empower councils to act entrepreneurially and normalise this innovative way of working. ■

Listings

BIRMINGHAM AND WEST MIDLANDS

Meetings at Birmingham Friends
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THE FABIAN QUIZ

The Fabian Quiz is taking a
brief hiatus. It will return in
summer 2026.

Thanks for playing!



