



**Socialist
Campaign Group
of Labour MPs**

WINNING THE FUTURE:

**SOCIALIST RESPONSES TO
THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS**

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INTRODUCTION

BY RICHARD BURGON MP, SECRETARY OF THE SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN GROUP OF LABOUR MPs

When the Coronavirus hit earlier this year, as one of the wealthiest countries on earth, we should have been well placed to limit the fallout. Instead, the government's response has been catastrophic. The UK not only has one of the world's largest death tolls but is set to be the worst-hit economically of any country in Europe.

The Coronavirus crisis has opened the eyes of millions of people to just how broken the system is. Weak public services, a failing social care system, a woeful lack of workers' rights, a dysfunctional housing market and a hollowed-out social security system have all left us ill-prepared to deal with both the public health and linked social and economic crises.

None of this is simply the failure of an incompetent PM though, of course, he is completely incapable of dealing with the challenges of the time. Instead, it's fundamentally the result of a sustained and determined stripping away of the progressive powers of the state over the past four decades, ever since Thatcher unleashed an era of neoliberalism and privatisation.

The systemic failings are going to become even deeper in the coming months as an unprecedented avalanche of jobs losses hits our communities.

Talk of historic moments is often exaggerated – but we really are at one now.

We should be in no doubt that the far-right will step forth with their so-called answers to the multiple crises we face: more racism and more scapegoating.

And the Tories will be telling people to “learn to live with” the virus whilst enriching the outsourcers who have pocketed billions while doing so much damage to our public services and exploiting mass unemployment to drive down wages and conditions. True to their purpose, the Tories will be working to ensure that the costs of the crisis are paid for by the many, while an elite few use it to enrich themselves further.

Given this, what are we, as the Labour Party, going to say about it? What are we going to do about it?

The crisis is happening now and we need to act now. The solutions that the Labour movement puts forward and our organising around them can make a real difference to people's lives in the here and now. We have a moral duty to fight for every concession possible. If we don't force the government to change track, I dread to think what the position of working-class communities will be by the next General Election in four years' time.

Spelling out the alternative policies that the government should be pursuing is also an essential part of preparing to win in 2024. If we are to rebuild trust with voters we lost, then we have to demonstrate, day in day out, that we are on their side and offer a better way forward for them.

So our party now needs to go beyond criticising the government's incompetence – which it has done well and has won the public argument over – and lay out the policies needed to defend people hit hard by this unprecedented public health and jobs crisis.

Many of the ideas were in our 2017 and 2019 manifestos – and Keir reflected many of them in his 10 Pledges. Our election defeat was not a rejection of those ideas, but a result of an election dominated by Brexit. Now is the time to build on those progressive policies – even to deepen them.

Following the defeats for the Left in the Labour leadership elections, many have asked “what does the left do now?”. For me, the priority for the whole labour movement must be to force the government to change track – through proposing bold, practical solutions and building the mass movements needed to win change.

The Left has a leading role to play in this. We have to generate and push a united programme of demands and action that we coordinate the whole left around: the left in Parliament and in the unions, the party membership and social movements. The Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs will play its role in building that alliance.

We can be confident that our core values are the only ones that can address the simultaneous crises in public health, the economy, inequality and climate.

Take the immediate priority – the Coronavirus public health disaster. The alternative needed to the government’s deadly failures is a ‘Zero Covid’ strategy. This is about mobilising the efforts of the state to effectively drive down the virus – as successfully done in New Zealand and much of East Asia. That will not only save lives but is essential to getting the economy going again.

It’s a progressive solution to the crisis based on mass testing and tracing at a local level with people getting a test and results back in 24 hours. That means investing in our NHS and local public health teams and kicking Serco and the like out of the failing system. It means ensuring people have the financial support, including sick pay at real living wage levels, so they can afford to safely isolate. It could involve offering free hotel rooms to people who can’t isolate as they live in cramped houses. It means creating smaller class sizes by rehiring all qualified teachers, turning community spaces into classrooms and ensuring all children have broadband access at home. Only progressives will fight for such an agenda.

More widely, there is no shortage of immediate issues around which we need to be organising to limit the damage of the social and economic crisis. We must be active in demanding the extension of furlough, challenging evictions, fighting freezes to the minimum wage and benefits, opposing “fire and rehire” practices becoming the new blueprint for the economy and we must be pushing for a programme of public works to create hundreds of thousands of high-skilled jobs through a Green New Deal and the rebuilding of our public services.

Some on the Labour Left may feel despondent at recent political events. I understand that. But we don’t have that luxury. People need to dust themselves down and get ready for a huge fight over the coming months to force the government to change track. Many lives and millions of livelihoods depend upon it.

This pamphlet is part of that process of mapping out an alternative. In their individual contributions, both new and well-established left Labour MPs outline some of their ideas on how we should respond to this crisis. Over the coming months, members of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs will be campaigning on many of these issues. I hope this pamphlet is read and debated widely in the labour and trade union movement and beyond and plays a part in building the campaigning movement we need to defend our communities during this crisis.



**Socialist
Campaign Group
of Labour MPs**

SECTION 1:

**FIGHTING FOR
ALTERNATIVES TO
THE JOBS CRISIS**

RADICAL ECONOMICS FOR RADICAL TIMES

BY JOHN MCDONNELL MP

We should never forget that behind every unemployment statistic published over the coming weeks will be a multitude of personal stories ranging from hardships being faced, stress and worry being imposed and in many cases dreams and hopes being shattered.

We are on the edge of a recession of unpredictable depth and longevity.

It is difficult enough having to deal with the impact of an external, unpredicted crisis on the economy but it is quite another thing to have to endure a crisis with a government of unprecedented incompetence and led by a proven liar, with no moral qualms about replacing the truth with a lie to suit his political ends.

Johnson's apparent congenital inclination to mendacity has led to the potential of putting future trade deals at risk as the very adherence of the UK to international law and treaties has been placed in doubt. No longer can it be said that the UK's word is its bond.

PRE COVID ECONOMY

It's also worth reminding ourselves that we entered the Covid crisis with an economy in a rancid state. The economic stats then were by any standard extremely poor and with little prospect of improvement in sight.

A decade of the Tories obsession with a bizarre combination of the worst ingredients of neoliberal economic theory of tax cuts for the rich and corporations combined with austerity for the rest, had produced an economy that was scraping along the bottom from month to month stagnating or barely growing.

Average weekly earnings were still below the pre-crash levels of 2008, business investment had collapsed and we were continuing to suffer from

the worst productivity levels amongst some of the leading economies. And all this was after an election victory for the Tories that had promised increased investment that was supposed to stimulate a record turnaround in economic performance and delivery.

PANDEMIC POLICYMAKING

When the pandemic hit it became rapidly obvious that the state had to intervene urgently and at scale. My advice in pre-budget speeches, in the budget debate and then subsequently in negotiations with the government was that support to the economy had to be fast and big. That included a furlough scheme with conditions on employers and direct real levels of financial support to workers, self-employed, the sick and those on benefits that would prevent anyone at risk of being throw into poverty or facing hardship.

The media has been full of high praise for the Chancellor for the unprecedented levels of state intervention in the economy. There is an irony first in that you can imagine the media reaction if that had been me as Chancellor borrowing and spending at these levels in this crisis but also that the policies that have been introduced are relatively half hearted attempts at introducing the policies we put on the table from the outset.

Half hearted, because the deep ideological resentment against any state intervention in the economy is deep within the Tory establishment. The result is that securing government action has been like drawing teeth and it has come late and not on the scale or long term that is needed. The government's approach has also been riddled with gaps in coverage with many suffering as a result from inadequate or no support at all.

NO FREE REIN TO EMPLOYERS

By failing to attach some basic conditions to state aid the government has given free rein to bad employers whose only interest is protecting directors' salaries and shareholders' dividends. The interests of their workers and the wider community are at best secondary or more often not even on their agendas.

With unconditional state aid many employers have been able to fall back on government resources to enable them to drive through long held corporate ambitions to cut wages and undermine terms and conditions of employment. Their primary aim is to cut cost and enhance profits to be converted into management bonuses and shareholder rewards. The motto for some has been “Never let a crisis go to waste.” The rapidly expanding practice of “fire and rehire” has demonstrated clearly that many are not letting the crisis go to waste.

DEMAND, CAMPAIGN AND SECURE RADICAL CHANGE

In the face of this immense potential economic hardship and personal suffering there is a responsibility on the Labour and Trade Union movement to stand up and demand, campaign for and secure a radical change in direction. It is critically important that we do, not least, because as we deal with the crisis caused by the pandemic we are facing the climate change crisis which as we know all too well now is a fast-arriving existential threat to our planet.

Our task is to build the case for a radical change in direction and to lay out a programme of immediate measures to address the problems our people are now experiencing but that also lay the foundations of the economy we need to tackle climate change.

RECESSION PROOFING MEASURES

Immediately we need to demand a set of measures to recession proof our economy and give our people the security they need.

Of course, the furlough scheme has to be extended for as long as it is needed but there is more that is required to recession proof our economy for the long term.

These are some of the early introduction measures that have been developed by the Claim the Future initiative I have launched recently to bring together policy experts and campaigners to reinforce each other’s work.

BOOSTING THE MINIMUM WAGE

Boosting the minimum wage is an essential way both to value workers properly and to assist in recession proofing people in work. Prior to the Coronavirus crisis the minimum wage was not a real living wage. Businesses may claim that increasing the minimum wage will place burdens on them at a time when they need to be supported. However, increasing the minimum wage is a way of injecting money back into the economy, since those paid the least are highly likely to spend these wages rather than save them. Raising the minimum wage could reduce in-work poverty, which has risen by a third since 1996/7. The Bakers Union has called for pay to rise to £15 an hour.

SECTORAL COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Sectoral collective bargaining is the single most important way to ensure that good minimum terms, conditions and pay are agreed across an industry. A clear first step demand connected to Coronavirus might be for sectoral collective bargaining in the care sector, and for it to be strengthened and extended in the public sector. The goal should be sectoral collective bargaining across all sectors, but the care sector could demonstrate the value of the approach.

RESTORATION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS

One important call is for the restoration of trade union rights and the creation of new rights and freedoms, exercised individually and collectively. This can only be done through repealing the Trade Union Act 2016 and overhauling earlier legislation restricting the rights to organise, strike, and gain access to workplaces for organising. The safety of workplaces, and the ability of workers to speak up and act where they are unsafe, is paramount if we are to seek to recession proof workers and the economy.

ENDING THE SCOURGE OF INSECURE WORK

Alongside the restoration and expansion of trade union rights, there is an urgent need to bring to an end the scourge of insecure work. Insecure work has been enabled by the development of multiple categories of ‘worker.’ Banning zero hours contracts and returning to one category of ‘worker’, with an exception only for the genuinely self-employed, will be a strong step towards ending the exploitation of insecure work.

BETTER WORK LIFE BALANCE

For many, in particular those who have not had to continue working, the Coronavirus crisis has highlighted the need for a better balance to be struck between work and rest. The government can play a role in supporting healthier working patterns, in particular through reducing working hours and increasing the number of bank holidays without loss of pay.

A MINIMUM EARNINGS GUARANTEE

To support those not in work, and the bargaining power of those in work, it is time for a Minimum Income Guarantee, increasing the minimum level that anyone is expected to live on if accessing social security. The New Economics Foundation has called for that minimum to be set at £221 per week – in line with the calculation by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation of a minimum income standard.

MARSHALL PLAN TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE.

If we are serious about tackling climate change we need a Marshall Aid style plan to rebuild our economy on a sustainable model, comprising a Ministry of Public Works and National Investment Bank investing at scale in green projects to lead the economy out of the post-pandemic slump. All premises whether a home, office, factory or public building, would be helped to go carbon-free through insulation, double glazing and renewable energy schemes, such as solar panels and mini-wind turbines. Flagship projects would include planting two billion trees, building 100,000 council houses a year, harnessing wave power and delivering a public broadband network.

Of course this is a radical programme but it is radical pragmatism that we now need in these times of unprecedented challenge.

TACKLE THE JOBS AND CLIMATE CRISIS WITH A GREEN NEW DEAL

BY REBECCA LONG-BAILEY MP

Our climate is in crisis. But what exactly is it that is holding us back?

Well it's not science. Scientists have told us we are in crisis with almost complete unanimity and increasing alarm, forecasting extreme weather, flooding and food insecurity, not just in far flung countries in the global south, but here in the UK.

It's not technology holding us back either. We have, as a society, the knowledge and the resources to tackle the climate crisis. We've had the technologies for years. US president Jimmy Carter put solar panels on the White House nearly forty years ago and since then we've seen pioneering projects from off shore wind and tidal technology, to carbon capture storage, to home heating solutions and electric/hydrogen vehicles. So it's not lack of solutions that's been stopping us and the possibilities are endless. For example, the energy produced from turbines in deep waters in the North Sea alone could meet the EU's electricity consumption four times over.

It's also not the economic cost that is holding us back. Tackling the climate crisis presents tremendous economic opportunities for the UK. It is steel from sites like Scunthorpe that could make those turbines. They could be manufactured and assembled across the UK, generating thousands of good unionised jobs. Indeed, there's even something to lift the spirits of the most ardent venture capitalists out there, with Goldman Sachs estimating that there is \$16 trillion to be made in just the next 10 years from new investments in renewable energy across the globe.

And yet, despite these three facts, we are not tackling the climate crisis at the required pace or scale.

Earlier this year all countries, including the UK, missed the symbolic 9th February deadline to strengthen plans to fight climate change under the Paris Agreement, and the Committee on Climate Change warned that the

UK Government was not going far or fast enough to reach net zero. It was hoped that the Green Recovery Plan announced by Rishi Sunak recently would address these concerns but so far it is a mere fraction of the amounts many other European countries have set aside.

The fact is, warm words are not enough to tackle this crisis. As Naomi Klein stated in her 2011 paper 'Capitalism vs. the Climate' *"Climate change is a message, one that is telling us that many of our culture's most cherished ideas are no longer viable."*

Naomi goes on to state that real climate solutions are ones that steer interventions to systematically disperse and devolve power and control to the community level, whether through community-controlled renewable energy, local organic agriculture or transit systems genuinely accountable to their users, and importantly, arriving at these new systems is going to require shredding the free-market ideology that has dominated the global economy for more than three decades.

Ten years on from Naomi's ground breaking paper we are now faced with a second stark message in the form of Covid-19. The pandemic has shown us that we simply do not have an economic system predisposed to support those who desperately need it in their ever increasing numbers. Three million people including many self-employed and new starters were excluded from the Chancellors Covid support schemes and day in day out we hear of job losses and businesses in financial difficulty. We are also constantly reminded that even the minimal government support provided so far comes with a hefty price tag, someone will have to pay for it eventually.

As with climate change, the protection and enhancement of all human life must be our priority and the Labour movement must be ready with the structures and economic plan to ensure we can keep people safe and support those who need it, both now and in the future. We need to show how our future economic plans will pay for the support people desperately need now.

What is profound however, is that at a time when the Labour party searches its soul for the values and policies it wants to present to the British public, the answer has been staring us in the face all this time.

A Green Industrial Revolution/Green New Deal would enshrine many of the principles our movement was established to champion. It would demonstrate that redistribution of wealth, fair taxes, greater government intervention, devolution of political and economic power, public ownership and robust workers protection, taken together in one comprehensive industrial plan would create prosperity, jobs and new industries. It would in essence display the true meaning of socialism for everyone to see.

What this means in practice is not incremental policy making but a rapid and far-reaching transformation of the UK's infrastructure, from our homes to our transport and energy systems.

Before the last election Labour set out thirty recommendations to meet these goals including upgrading every home in the UK with energy saving measures like insulation and double glazing, focusing first on damp homes and areas with fuel poverty; installing 8 million heat pumps; installation of 7,000 off-shore wind turbines, 2,000 more on-shore wind turbines and solar panels covering an area 22,000 football pitches, tripling the UK's current capacity; significant investment in research and development for marine energy and renewable or low-carbon hydrogen for heating and energy storage; investment in carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) for some heavy industries; and balancing the grid network to meet our future demands.

With an average required investment of 1.9% of GDP each year this would have provided a net benefit of £800 billion across the UK by 2030 and 850,000 new jobs across the green energy sector.

It planned to set out a clear and properly-funded plan for workers affected by decarbonisation, one that put workers themselves and their trade unions at the heart of delivering the transition.

And it began a strategy of shifting wealth and power back to communities, for example new windfarms would have seen the Government take a majority stake in these new companies who could then support local businesses in manufacturing the components we need, re-shoring thousands of jobs to towns and cities in desperate need of investment. And, revenues from these new part public companies could then be used to invest in the communities they served.

We have the technology to start the fight against climate change today. We have the people, the skills and the resources. What we lack is an economic system in which major decisions about resources are under democratic control. That is because we lack a political system in which decisions are made in the public interest.

If we don't use this moment to bring our movement together to instigate economic change on a massive scale, it won't just be our recovery from the pandemic that will be in peril it will be tackling climate change and any shred of trust we are trying to build in our communities that we have the answers to the real problems they face.

We've got a motto in Salford, the welfare of the people is the highest law. And we need to keep fighting for nothing less.

STOP THE JOBS MASSACRE!

BY MICK WHITLEY MP

The global pandemic led to a virtual shut-down of the world economy. The Coronavirus rampaged through an unprepared world and accelerated the drift towards an economic crisis on a scale not seen for almost a century. If the economists have got it even half right, the scale of the recession we are now in will make the crash of 2008 look like a stroll in the park.

The crisis will not be felt equally across society. The super-rich will be cushioned by the profits they have amassed over the years. Their pampered lives, in their palaces and mansions and on their private islands and super yachts, will carry on without interruption. Meanwhile workers' lives will be torn apart as unemployment spreads – a devastating economic virus that takes away livelihoods, homes, dignity and hope.

This economic crisis has been hastened by Covid-19, but its real cause lies in capitalism, the economic system that puts profit before need. The leading lights of that system are using the pandemic as cover for plans they had already made to launch mass redundancies, wage cutting and attacks on terms and conditions. British Airways boss Willie Walsh was leading the way, but a lot of others are doing the same.

The jobs massacre is underway. In the early 1980s every news bulletin listed the daily toll of job losses as Thatcher's economic vandalism wrecked every industry in the land. Today it is déjà vu. Sadly, as well as a new jobless total we also get a new death toll, both amongst the highest in Europe thanks to the policies of Johnson's government.

AN AVALANCHE OF MANUFACTURING JOB LOSSES

Manufacturing in the UK was already a pale shadow of its former self before the disease caused more mayhem in the workplaces. The long-term decline of British manufacturing, which in the 1970s accounted for 25% of the UK's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had fallen to 10% in 2018.

A 2016 IPPR report described the British manufacturing industry as one of the worst performing amongst developed economies, having shrunk twice as fast as other OECD countries since 2000.

Today manufacturing stands on the brink of extinction in our country. Despite the clear need for us to be able to create things – like ventilators, as the current health crisis exposed – we are witnessing the ravaging of the entire sector.

Rolls Royce intend to make £1.3 billion in savings with 9000 job cuts, leading Unite to warn that the Barnoldswick site was in “grave danger”; Safran Nacelles have proposed 250 redundancies; and 1000 redundancies have been announced at the Bentley plant in Crewe. On the 1 July, Airbus announced 1,700 redundancies in the UK.

The Guardian reported: “A survey by the manufacturers’ lobby group, Make UK, found that 25% of companies are already drawing up plans to cut jobs in the next six months. A further 45% say they are considering redundancies. Only 30% said they expect to emerge from the Coronavirus pandemic with all their staff on the payroll.”

Unite the Union stated that for every job lost at a prime aerospace company, four more are lost in the supply chain – and countless others in the wider local economy.

The crisis has also exposed significant vulnerabilities with just in time production and international supply chains. This has caused parts shortages which have directly affected the ability of the British automotive industry to resume operations during lockdown. Three decades of offshoring of industry also left Britain woefully unprepared to produce much-needed medical equipment during this pandemic.

The ability of other sectors, notably retail and service industries like hospitality, to compensate and provide alternative jobs has disappeared.

The shiny shopping malls and out of town retail parks – like the high streets before them – are becoming like ghost towns as retail giants queue up to call in the administrator.

Across retail the job losses are in the tens of thousands – 7000 at Marks and Spencer, 4000 in Boots, 4000 at Debenhams, 1500 at WH Smith, to name but a few. And as the tumbleweed swept through the retail parks so the restaurant chains that relied on them switched off their ovens and closed their doors for good. Frankie and Benny's, Wagamama, Pizza Express have shed thousands of jobs. And chains like Pret a Manger have started cutting jobs instead of sandwiches as 1000 of their staff face the dole queue.

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

There is a clear alternative to this impending economic, personal and social disaster. There is an alternative to forcing millions to wait for five weeks to get their money from Universal Credit only to have it snatched back again through the inhuman regime of benefit sanctions. There is an alternative to closure, to the loss of skills, machinery and future economic capacity. That alternative is unashamedly socialist.

In 1945 Britain emerged from six years of war. That war cost the people dear. They had endured terrible sacrifices, cities lay in ruins, houses had been flattened by Hitler's bombs, food was rationed and the economic forecasts were every bit as grim as they are today.

The Labour Government made a clear political choice. Britain would not be going back – it would not return to the misery of the 1930s. Instead of austerity the 1945 government faced its post war crisis with a massive investment programme to rebuild. And in doing that it shaped a world in which industries were brought under public ownership so that their profits could be used for the good of the country and in which welfare was a real safety net to stop people falling into poverty.

Labour founded the NHS, the jewel in the crown of its many achievements and without which Covid-19 today would have claimed many more lives than it so far has. It built top quality council houses, millions of them, which really were homes fit for heroes. It laid the basis for decades of full employment in which people enjoyed decent wages and conditions. In short it created a world that was more equal, just and in which the great majority of the population were able to live their lives free from insecurity.

Today we need the same political approach. We need investment not austerity. We need a regulated job market that gives people security and consigns the dark arts of the gig economy – zero-hour contracts, bogus self-employment status and the replacement of permanent jobs with agency workers and short-term contracts – to the dustbin of history.

INSTEAD WE FIGHT TO:

Save jobs and industries: In the short term we need to address the spiralling pandemic of unemployment. If dole queues grow the economy will shrink even further. The alternative is to ensure that an emergency budget enables industries to retain their workforce and that conditions are placed on those industries who have benefited from the Job Retention Scheme.

Any company that threatens redundancies after taking the money to furlough workers should be brought to account. Repayment of the money taken should be demanded by the government unless they agree to retain their workforce and hold back on redundancies. This can help keep jobs.

Any future government subsidies should either be tied to a no-redundancy agreement or should result in the government getting a public stake in the company.

And these subsidies are necessary. If industries are allowed to go to the wall then the road to recovery will be long and hard. If the government supports the retention of workers in those industries they are retaining a skill base that can be put to work to rebuild the health and vibrancy of those industries. This must be at the heart of a short term budget – jobs are the priority.

At the same time industries should restructure themselves on the basis of sharing available work across their existing workforce through the introduction of a four-day working week.

Labour raised this issue in the election and many voiced scepticism. Now it is looking like the good idea it always was. This can maintain jobs, which in turn can maintain tax revenue and, because of the well-being impact of shorter working hours can result (and where it has been implemented always has resulted) in increases in productivity.

If millions working from home during the pandemic has shown one thing it is that productivity is not dependent on the hours worked but the outcomes achieved.

And in addition to the four-day week existing industries facing a collapse in demand can and should put the skills of their workforce and the machinery at their plants to work making socially useful products which can prevent us from having to scramble around looking for PPE during a crisis, ventilators for people who are dying, kidney machines and such like.

Industrial Strategy: A long-term industrial strategy will be essential to leading a people-focused economic recovery. The lack of an industrial strategy comparable to those found in France or Germany has for too long stymied the development of British industry. With the Government already having rejected Unite's proposals for a National Council for Recovery, MPs must put pressure on the Government to develop a tripartite body bringing together Government, businesses, and trade unions. This body can then develop and implement an industrial strategy that promotes job creation, diversification, and sustainable development.

Socially Responsible Support Packages: In return for Government support, companies must commit to socially responsible practices. This must include a binding obligation to retaining jobs on good terms and conditions, recruiting and training new employees, and pursuing environmentally friendly development. Government support and loans should also be converted into equity, granting the public a stake in affected companies and ensuring that recovery packages put people at their heart.

Apprenticeships: Too often, companies have exploited apprenticeships as a source of cheap labour, with apprentices finding that there are no jobs at the end of their programme. This economic crisis presents us with an opportunity to create thousands of new, high-quality apprenticeships. In return for state aid, companies should invest in creating new apprenticeship schemes.

In accordance with the Labour Party's commitment to a National Education Service and the principle of life-learning, MPs must also push the Government for wide-ranging investment in Further and Adult Education to create a new generation of high-skilled training programs.

Green Industrial Revolution: This must sit at the heart of our blueprint for a more equitable and sustainable economy post-Covid. This radical plan to decarbonise Britain by the early 2030s has the potential to create a high-tech, high-skilled economy whilst reviving British industry and shifting the focus of manufacturing onto green technologies and other forms of socially useful production. In grappling with the existential threat of climate catastrophe, this green new deal offers hope to communities across the country.

This radical plan for ecological and economic justice moves beyond piecemeal policies, instead developing a cross-sectoral 'lens for economy-wide growth' that will transform every part of economic life: from energy production, to transport infrastructure, housing, agriculture and manufacturing.

The challenges we face are immense. To deliver the radical change that our country so desperately needs, we need to be fighting for radical change on three fronts: in Parliament, in local government and devolved authorities; and in our workplaces.

There is an alternative to austerity and economic ruin. It requires a government willing to borrow to invest, at a time when money is cheap. It requires a government that steps in to save industries not allow them to vanish forever. It requires a government that will work with communities to prevent them sliding into the desperate and crime riddled shells of towns that are left behind as the economy crashes.

And to get the government we need at the next election we need to build a coalition of MPs, local councillors, trade unions and communities in defence of jobs today that will do whatever it takes to ensure there is no going back.

OUR FUTURE MUST BE BASED ON SUSTAINABLE ECONOMICS

BY CLIVE LEWIS MP

The 21st century has more potential than perhaps any other in our brief evolutionary history. We stand on the cusp of computing, genetic and energy generation breakthroughs that were only recently the realm of science fiction.

But in striving to get here, we have destroyed, drilled and polluted our way to the very brink of ecological disaster. Our delicate biosphere is reaching the limits of its capacity to support a global civilisation. With billions hooked on fossil fuels, endless consumption and unsustainable agriculture, we're now in the red for three of the nine so called, 'planetary boundaries'. Excess greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere is the best known of them, but biodiversity as well as phosphorus and nitrogen levels in crops and eco-systems are also now in the red.

The reason for this is clear; for the past two hundred years no form of human economic organisation has managed to operate in a genuinely ecologically sustainable manner. Of these methods of economic organisation, capitalism, especially the current turbo-charged neoliberal variant, has been far and away the most destructive. Therefore, for any effective form of 21st century socialism, the only viable economic programme that can ensure humanity's survival, must be 'green' socialism. One with a programme of sustainable economics at its core.

The term, 'sustainable economics' originates from an emerging consensus within economics that humanity's 21st century priority economic challenge had to be to,

'meet the physical needs of the entire global population within the means (planetary boundaries) of the planet'.

"If this bold [sustainability] agenda is to be genuinely transformative, it must begin with an understanding the economy and ecosystem are interwoven and recognise that

concrete efforts to safeguard against climate breakdown necessitate a reimagining of the global financial rules. The radical task of ecological transformation to avoid irreversible climate disaster requires challenging misguided assumptions underpinning areas of mainstream economics: Without, for example, acknowledging that extractive financial networks undercut the tax revenue required for green job creation, that decades of hacking away at regulation has fuelled the dilapidation of our ecosystem, or that the default response to crises management undermines the capacity for state-led democratic ownership of a just transition, the Green New Deal will fall short of being truly transformative.” (Common Wealth: Reforming the Bretton Woods Institutions to support a global Green New Deal)

As the quote above alludes, for many socialists, progressives and environmental activists the ‘Green New Deal’ has now become the defining concept central to the many ways of imagining a progressive future. Like it’s 1930s Great Depression namesake, it centres on a wholesale reorganisation of the economy, putting it on a more sustainable footing. One where governments take a lead in organising the transition to a system of energy -production, transportation, manufacturing, agriculture and programmes of rewilding and social, economic and infrastructure resilience.

The key aim would be to produce very low or zero carbon emissions, while integrating this with a programme of social justice, welfare reform and wealth redistribution.

The thinktank, Common Wealth recently published a ‘Roadmap to a Green New Deal’, which brought together insights from civil society groups, policy experts, and academics, focused on six key areas for transformative change.

THESE WERE:

- Transforming and democratising finance to deliver a UK Green New Deal
- Restructuring the economy and work through a green industrial strategy
- Building public affluence in place of private wealth
- A decentralised and democratised state to drive decarbonisation
- Nurturing a 21st century commons in place of extractivism
- Developing a green and just multilateralism

But many of these policy ideas will struggle to see the light of day if the constraining paradigm of mainstream, incremental macroeconomic models are used as the basis for assessment and viability. They offer a poor guide to the kind of disruptive, transformative change that might occur under such radical programmes. Without a suite of sustainable economic policy approaches, this lack of analysis and imaginative scope will inevitably narrow the array of effective policy tools, politicians and (democratically accountable) central banks can deploy in any transformative programme.

One such example is the deeply embedded policy of economic growth, one the left, as well as the right, have become deeply wedded to. This short essay doesn't permit a detailed examination of heterodox 'post-growth' analysis – but it is a good example of where sustainable economics is beginning to challenge the fundamental underpinnings of current economic orthodoxies. As BBC presenter, David Attenborough wryly noted, "We have a finite environment—the planet. Anyone who thinks you can have infinite growth in a finite environment is either a madman or an economist."

But all of this is academic if the left cannot build the political alliances necessary to get itself into power to enact this transformative change. Unlike past eras where the inevitability of socialism was a given, the ticking ecological time-bomb we now face suggests otherwise. That means the left must reach out to a broader swathe of progressives, both inside and more importantly outside of the Labour Party. Its aim should

be two-fold; firstly, to build alliances with any movements or political parties prepared to weaken the power of capital. Secondly, it must consider the same alliances with those who want to see more democracy, not less. That means enhancing the power of people, as citizens and workers.

But even with such alliances, success is not guaranteed. The rise of authoritarian nationalism could make the Green New Deal the new Brexit for the left. Given the challenge such radical policies present to the power of capital there can be no doubt they will increasingly seek to make this issue a new front of the culture war.

We know many middle-class voters, those who have enough of a material stake in society to be worried by its (ecological) collapse, will become increasingly concerned at the lack of political leadership. At the same time, those who feel any political objective beyond immediate job-creation irrelevant to them, will also grow exponentially. Especially as the consequences of the 'post' Covid recession hits home. As such we should expect the authoritarian right to offer material concessions to working class voters in return for their assistance in blocking "middle-class" demands for drastic reductions in carbon emissions. It's also highly likely they will stoke nationalist and racist sentiments, especially given the need for wealthier countries to help poorer ones make transformative changes.

Therefore, building broad coalitions that can successfully neutralise these attacks from the right must be the main priority for socialists and progressives alike in the coming years. Humanity's future is at stake. There will be no second chances to get this right.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM WE NEED

BY APSANA BEGUM MP

People all over the UK are being let down by the Tories' patchy pandemic support measures resulting in unfairness, injustice and hardship.

This is despite people continuing to work hard – whether it is from home in cramped conditions with limited equipment balancing paid work with caring responsibilities or forced to work in unsafe conditions without the protections needed or supporting others around them unpaid.

On top of this, mass unemployment looms ominously in the not-so-distant future and workers are increasingly being subject to cynical “fire and rehire” exercises disgracefully aimed at imposing less favourable conditions.

Over and over again, the Tories have demonstrated a chilling disregard for people's suffering. Their economics have trapped too many in low-paid insecure work. The terror of their social security regime has persecuted the poor for being poor and the disabled for being disabled.

Scrapping Universal Credit is a first step towards a humane society with higher living standards for everyone and in which nobody lacks the means to survive or has to choose between life's essentials.

The Government must do whatever it takes to protect people from the economic impact of Coronavirus and at the very least extend support schemes so that no one is forced to work in unsafe conditions and that people's wellbeing is prioritised. This should include the expansion of universal basic services and the introduction of a Minimum Income Guarantee at a level that people can live on.

But this Tory Government continues to put big business above the welfare of people during the greatest health crisis of our generation, condemning many to struggle through without support: including insecure workers, homeless people, those with serious health conditions, people in prison, and migrants.

FOOD POVERTY

Too many are unable to access enough food - with meals being skipped and children not getting enough to eat as already vulnerable families battle isolation and a loss of income.

The outbreak of Covid-19 in particular, highlighted the urgent need for national action to stave off food insecurity- with widespread calls to maximise capacity and stimulate food distribution and essential aid by reducing barriers to accessing food. This is why I am proud that Labour's 2019 manifesto not only committed to free school meals children it spoke of a "right to Food."

Since, there has been a litany of evidence that the pandemic has amplified existing inequalities - with activists and campaigners calling for basic services, such as meals on wheels to be revitalised

Yet in my local area, we did have a Meals on Wheels facility that was cut in December 2019, just after the election. This is despite Tower Hamlets having one of the highest rates of pensioner poverty and that the service was a lifeline for elderly residents in the local area, who otherwise would not receive a warm or nutritious meal.

The Government U-turn on funding free school meals over the Summer was a welcome victory for the 1.3 million children who were at risk of going hungry this summer - including 7,532 children in my constituency, Poplar and Limehouse.

Marcus Rashford's powerful testimony of his own experiences of free school meals growing up in a single parent household has been particularly brave and emotive. It is however disappointing that we have all had to spend so much time campaigning and arguing for something that is so simple i.e. making sure children who need food, get it.

MEANS-TESTING AND EXCLUSION

We have all seen how means-tested and selective services can rob recipients of dignity, force people to jump through bureaucratic hoops to satisfy basic needs and deny others basic entitlements entirely - which during a pandemic especially, increasingly becomes a matter of life and death.

The Tories have been repeatedly been forced by the courts to change how they are treating disabled people and the decision to re-impose benefit sanctions and conditionality in July after a three-month pause because of Covid-19 was quite rightly greeted with anger and disbelief.

The way in which communities have stepped up to look after each other has been truly inspiring but in truth people shouldn't have had to be forced to cover the gaps.

Instead, social security should be seen as a way to reduce the stigma of poverty - providing enough for people to participate in society, without being reduced to charity. We urgently need an end to the cruel social security freeze and dehumanising and unreliable work capability assessments.

Likewise, restricting access to the NHS for certain migrants by introducing upfront charging has had disastrous consequences for both individual wellbeing and public health. At the same time many migrants are currently facing destitution without recourse to public funds - a cruel and unjust condition attached to certain immigration statuses that bars migrants from accessing state support.

COMMUNITY LANGUAGE SERVICES

Enabling us all to lead full lives and realising our potential is not just about tackling poverty. It's about being healthy, having access to education and skills training, living in a decent and safe environment, and enjoying life in all its wonderful cultural forms. In the discussions about universal basic services, one service that has not been discussed so much is Community Language Services. These are delivered locally. In some ways they form part of youth services or education services.

In Tower Hamlets, where I grew up, the Community Language Service was a huge part of my life and the life of people around me. It was how I learnt how to read Bengali. When people understand their community language, they understand their community – including their elders – better. It is also a hugely important service for social cohesion across communities.

Yet – at a time where people are worried about knife crime, radicalisation, and the lack of a sense of belonging for young people – this service is now being outsourced and the local authority is looking to introduce fees. And of course, the pandemic highlights how language barriers and inter-generational communication could put certain segments of the community at greater risk.

UNIVERSAL BASIC SERVICES

The Covid-19 crisis has emphasized starkly the need to make sure the essentials of life are never denied to people because of their circumstances.

Universal Basic Services – UBS – was one of the ideas at the heart of the 2019 Labour manifesto. It didn't just mean talking about protecting the free services we have but rather was a vision to extend the services we should all have access to – from bus travel free for under-25s to full-fibre broadband free for all, to free school meals for primary school children. In health, it filled the gaps we have in dental care. In social care, it addressed the crisis we have by pledging free personal social care. In education Labour promised an end to tuition fees and free post-school education.

Despite the criticisms reported by the right-wing media during the election, this never sounded like a wish-list to me but rather the foundation for a decent life for everybody in the twenty-first century.

Yet, years of neoliberal governments have drained so much hope and belief out of politics. People, far too often, are told that they only deserve the most “basic” of basic services and some not even this. It is therefore important to acknowledge the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Diane Abbott for their level of ambition and for saying to people: you deserve better than what you are getting at the moment.

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

This pandemic has laid bare the full extent of our interdependence - if somebody on the other side of the world gets sick, that can make any of us sick.

The labour movement has long upheld that many of the key things in life should be provided collectively, funded out of general taxation and free at the point of use for everyone. It is the idea that has underpinned our treasured public services - ever since Beveridge argued for state provision of “national minimums” for essentials.

Collectively provided services like our schools, libraries, parks and hospitals don't just bind us together as a society, they can transform lives. It is in this tradition, that we, as socialists, need to argue and fight for a structurally different economy that can provide a social safety net within a society based on shared public service provision.

We need to mobilise a movement, from the bottom up, that can defend what we have won and demand even more. To explain why the Labour Party can deliver for people. Because it has before. And it will again. It will take local campaigns as well as a national fightback. And it most definitely will take some challenging conversations, even within our own party. I am up for it - are you?



**Socialist
Campaign Group
of Labour MPs**

SECTION 2:

**BUILDING A SOCIETY
OF JUSTICE AND
EQUALITY**

RACE, CLASS AND BLACK LIVES MATTER

BY DIANE ABBOTT MP

The Black Lives Matter movement has sparked an important new conversation about racial inequality both in the UK and in the United States. The issues are not new, but the intensity and ubiquitous nature of the debate is, and BlackLivesMatter has brought a new generation of activists centre stage.

Racial inequality is very closely linked to class inequality. It is not possible to liberate working people without liberating black people. But the “colour blind” approach that some people on the left claim to believe in is not sufficient. Socialists have to be prepared to deal with the specifics of racial inequality itself.

The Coronavirus public health crisis is so damaging that it has created both an economic and social crisis. In turn, these crises have both exposed and deepened the existing inequalities in society experienced by Black and Asian people and others. The racism of everyday life has itself become a crisis and radical measures are needed even to begin to correct it.

We have already seen that there has been a hugely disproportionate number of Black and Asian victims of the virus, both in terms of cases and in deaths. This includes among workers in the essential services.

But the Coronavirus is not unique in this respect. Black and Asian people in this country are not just more susceptible to certain diseases they are also more likely to suffer worse outcomes, including death when contracting the same disease or condition as other ethnic groups.

Social conditions, including incomes, housing, type of employment and so on, all have an impact on the health of the whole population. The gap in life expectancy between women living in the richest areas and those in the poorest ones is 7.4 years and between men in those categories is 9.4 years. Black and Asian people are hugely over-represented among households suffering multiple indicators of deprivation.

It is this deprivation which leads to much worse health outcomes in general. This is an issue both of race and of class.

It is remarkable to see now these two trends coming together to resist the impositions of governments on both sides of the Atlantic who care little for equality or for decency.

The BlackLivesMatter movement is naturally bigger in the US than it is here both because the Black population and the broader movement of people of colour have a greater weight in politics and society. Whole cities and whole States are now 'majority-minority' populations and have to be reckoned with in consequence.

BlackLivesMatter is able to command broad and even majority support among the population because it coincides with a period of crisis. For all those fearful for their lives and livelihoods because Johnson and Trump have let the virus rip, the BlackLivesMatter movement is standing up for them.

KEY PRINCIPLES OF ANTI-RACISM

This also poses a challenge for all of us who want to address these crises and to end them. It requires detailed and bold policies based on three principles. It is important to state these because there will be no lack of people trying to engage in distractions and divisions.

The first is that Black and Asian leadership is decisive, and Black and Asian people must be allowed to organise independently so that we can select our own leaders and hold them to account where necessary. Black and Asian people will not be told what is permissible by others in the fight against racism.

The second is that against an entrenched racism the movement needs allies. As we have seen in Portland and elsewhere, BLM was joined by the 'wall of Moms' who defended them from police brutality. These were then joined by the 'wall of vets' (armed services veterans) who defended BLM and the moms, and so on. The fight against racism is a unifying one, potentially uniting the majority of society in the struggle.

Finally, we must accept that this is a prolonged fight. Brown versus the Board of Education ruled against racial segregation in schools in 1954. The 'Second Reconstruction' to pass civil rights legislation was not fully completed until after Dr Martin Luther King was assassinated in 1968.

BOLD POLICIES TO TACKLE RACISM

With those principles in mind many of the policy prescriptions have either already been formulated while Jeremy Corbyn was leader of the Labour Party, or readily suggest themselves. Black and Asian people need to be treated fairly and equally when it comes to jobs, to housing and education.

It begins with education. Generations of black children, and particularly boys, have underachieved in British schools in a way which is not just attributable to class. It is not just a question of exam results. The disproportionate level of black school exclusions also reflects institutional racism in our education system. Education funding should be based on need and the Tory policy of favouring richer areas reversed. The education budget must be substantially increased overall, to address the staff shortage and to make good the years of real terms cuts to pay and pensions. The curriculum needs to be decolonised and our real history taught, especially of the Empire and of slavery.

As part of an ambitious programme to create high-skilled, highly-paid future jobs (including through the Green New Deal) proper and valued vocational training must be introduced. We need to address the huge inequalities in employment with pro-active employment among young Black and Asian people leaving school, college or university.

A tough new regime against all aspects of discrimination in the workplace must be imposed, including hefty fines and criminal liability for offenders. The law should be reformed to enable local authorities and others to contractually oblige best equal opportunity practises. A massive public programme of house building must ensure the most overcrowded households and those in the worst accommodation are priorities. Even by itself, this measure alone would hugely improve both educational and health outcomes.

TRANSFORMING THE STATE

All of this requires a complete transformation in the relationship between Black and Asian people, especially young people, and the state. Our state bodies are in denial when they say there is no institutional racism. Macpherson rightly said there was when he produced his ground-breaking report and there has been no seismic shift since that time.

Stop and search is increasingly used disproportionately against young Black and increasingly Asian men. Policing is more militarised, with more harmful Tasers being authorised. The entire Prevent programme demonises the Muslim community and should be scrapped. We need to go back to policing by consent, which means community policing and an end to discriminatory and heavy-handed tactics. The demonisation and scapegoating of Muslims, refugees, migrants, and Black and Asian people must end.

Immigration policy should be based first on welcoming all those entitled to be here and their families. There should be no more splitting up families via deportations. The Windrush scandal can only be ended when all the victims are identified and fully compensated, and the legislation which underpins the 'hostile environment' is scrapped, particularly the 2014 Immigration Act. The detention centres should all be closed; there are much more humane ways of treating vulnerable people. The British government should recognise its responsibilities and work with others to establish safe and legal routes to come here.

Yet this is a reactionary government, which has demonstrated it cares little about ordinary people of any ethnicity. It is backed up by another reactionary government in Washington. Even excellent pamphlets, speeches and resolutions alone will not change that. But they are a part of building the movement that can lead to change.

We should remember that the US civil rights movement did score enormous victories, even though there is much unfinished business. The troops were brought home from Viet Nam. Women did win equalities legislation and abortion rights. We have to keep our eyes on the prize.

DEFEND MIGRANTS' RIGHTS TO DEFEAT THE FAR-RIGHT

BY BELL RIBEIRO-ADDY MP

Over the last decade we have seen a sustained and chilling rise of far-right nationalism across the globe. From the growing violent pro-Tommy Robinson EDL movement in the UK, to the Ku Klux Klan and the Trump effect in the US with his notorious 'build a wall' pledge and ban on Muslim countries, the electoral success of Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán whose party promotes antisemitism, and Bolsanaro in Brazil embracing nationalist populism, the far-right is more emboldened than it has been for generations. And with the likes of Steve Bannon touring Europe to fund and create common purpose between far-right groups, their international links have become their greatest strength.

To challenge this far-right street movement, we need to understand its foundations and how it exploits issues in society to perpetuate its ideals. Recent emanations have been borne out of the normalisation of anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hatred.

Unfortunately, mainstream politicians and the media have bought in to these ideas. The Islamophobia that this promotes is often the focus of far-right extremism. We saw groups like Britain First spring up across the continent, their primary aims unashamedly clear – to campaign against immigration, multiculturalism and what they see as the Islamisation of the UK. Following their worrying rise and the murder of Labour MP Jo Cox, the Government finally accepted this and proscribed the organisation with an admission that that far-right terrorist activity was on the rise.

The growth of the far right is dangerous to us all, without exception. In Norway Anders Breivik took inspiration from the EDL. His 69 victims were young social democrats whom he believed were to blame for the modern, diverse Europe.

REMEMBERING THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

We must never forget the lessons of history. The Holocaust, which saw six million Jewish people murdered along with millions of other victims, is a permanent reminder that we must always challenge the rise of the far right and fascism.

The Nazis came about in a climate of hatred and division that saw Jewish people targeted, attacked and blamed for the economic crisis of the time, which of course was not of their making.

Divide and rule and scapegoating are age old tactics that allow this hatred to spread. A decade of economic stagnation and a catastrophic fall in living standards, has created a fertile ground for fascist ideals.

SCAPEGOATING MIGRANTS

This Tory government has imposed austerity, and aided by a vitriolic right wing press, seized on the nearest scapegoats – migrants.

Left unchallenged anti-migrant discourse has become so normalised that it is even entertained in democratic socialist parties like our own.

The belief that people's legitimate concerns about migration are not addressed is often bandied about. But those who say this cannot truly be listening to these concerns. They are almost always based around the myths that migrants are directly to blame for society's ills. But we know that migrants did not cause a shortage in jobs and housing, or cuts to health care and education. Government policy did this. And only a Labour government with progressive policies can reverse this.

There are no electoral advantages for the Labour party in leaning to the right on immigration. In both 2010 and 2015, we became resigned to the idea of not being 'tough enough' on immigration. We even had the mugs to prove it! But the fact is we simply cannot out Tory the Tories.

To our shame, some Labour MPs have been supportive, or complicit by abstention, in some of the most reactionary immigration legislation we have ever seen, and the 'hostile environment' that followed. The same policies that saw British citizens - the Windrush generation - dehumanised, detained and even deported. This further exposed the truth, that immigration has always

been synonymous with race. But it cannot escape our attention that the Tories are set to subject three million EU nationals to the same inhumane policies.

We know as well as the Tories that the inflammatory rhetoric we hear so often has no basis in fact. At the height of the Coronavirus crisis, it was refreshing to see some of the regular scare stories about migrants displaced by positive splashes about migrant key workers. But it was short lived, because as soon as the Tories mismanagement of the pandemic was widely exposed, it was back to business as usual. Refugees were to blame – as if blame were just another thing to be outsourced.

Whether it's sending Naval ships to chase dinghies in the channel sea, stripping back refugee children's rights, or effectively slamming the door in the face of migrant key workers, this Tory government has shown us time and again that it's always willing to go one step further to seem tough on immigration, even to our economic disadvantage.

We're living through an age of mass displacement, driven by war, poverty and climate breakdown. Under the Refugee Convention, we have an obligation to help those seeking safety. Now is not the time for any government to dodge their moral and legal obligations to accept their fair share of refugees.

Far from being swamped, as the Nigel Farage's of this world would have us believe, you would find it hard to argue Britain's overwhelming generosity to asylum seekers. According to Home Office's own data we are below the European average for asylum applications and below countries like Germany, France, Spain and Greece. We must also remember that the number of refugees settling in Europe is tiny compared to the 85% of all refugees living in developing countries.

As the late great Tony Benn pointed out, "the way a government treats asylum seekers is very instructive because it shows you how they would treat the rest of us if they thought they could get away with it". And if the past decade of bitter austerity has not taught us that, then the looming recession will.

DEFENDING MIGRANTS RIGHTS

It is clear, we cannot oppose the rise in far-right activity without explicitly defending migrants rights. So, we also have to confront those amongst our own ranks that would use the idea that migrants drive down wages as a way

to entertain anti-migrant sentiments. We have to be clear that it is not migrants that drive down wages, but predatory employers, weakened trade union rights and an austerity government. Socialist movements have never won by conceding on their values, therefore we can never concede on our support for migrants rights.

There is an alternative, outlined in Labour's approach to immigration over the past five years. Ending the hostile environment; safe and legal routes for refugees; closing immigration detention centres; scrapping no recourse to public funds and the arbitrary immigration health surcharge. Policies rooted in human rights, compassion and with full recognition of the economic advantages of immigration.

Although we did not win the General Election in 2017, our gains were part and parcel of this progressive agenda. Moving forward we have to accept that the result of the 2019 election was about different views on Brexit, not a rejection of our policies – and so not an excuse to fall into the traps of the past.

This unequivocal opposition to austerity and racism, cemented under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party, is the path we must continue down. It is ultimately the remedy that our society needs.

When our movements defeated fascists in Germany, Italy, Spain and Oswald Mosely's black shirts in the UK, we were able to build a fairer post-war society. The product of this was our NHS, the welfare state, free education and trade union rights. To achieve the socialist transformation of society we so desperately need our movement must step up the fight against the far right and defend migrants.

FOR GLOBAL RIGHTS, PEACE AND JUSTICE

BY JEREMY CORBYN MP

On September 10th, in one day, dramatic news in three different subject areas neatly encapsulated the problems facing our planet today.

The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) report on the loss of our natural world presented a frightening prospect of the loss of species, habitat and bio diversity, a resulting damage to agriculture and over-fishing leading to a growing problem of loss of stocks. Alongside this dramatic report from a respected organisation came dramatic film of the huge fires on the west coast of the Americas - more burning of the Amazon Rainforest for the greed of multinational Agri-business of Brazil, now reaching record levels.

On the same day, the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, explained the magnitude of the Covid-19 Crisis, the testing regime called for in January of this year, and the danger of a free for all in vaccine supplies when and if one has been tested as safe. A free for all will, once again, leave the poorest people and the poorest countries the most vulnerable and least protected. The WHO's task in this regard is significantly hampered by the bizarre decision of President Trump to withdraw from the world body altogether, one which his far-right ally Bolsonaro in Brazil is also keen to follow.

Finally, on the Greek Island of Lesbos 13,000 refugees from Afghanistan and other places became totally homeless as fire swept through the already over-crowded camp. Their fate as victims of war and the blatant refusal by some European states to accept any refugees provides a micro shot of what has become known as the fourth world, with 65 million people as refugees or internally displaced across the globe, the largest number in recorded history. There is regular publicity and media attention to those in Europe but the one million in Bangladesh fleeing from Myanmar get scant attention.

The background to all these crises, and how we formulate responses to them, is that human rights around the world are under threat. In the UK, despite claims in the last election to the contrary, is now preparing to tear up the 70-year-old European Convention on Human Rights.

REAL SECURITY

For Labour and socialists today then the issues of global poverty, hunger, environmental disaster, and the systemic denial of rights, are the issues that should dominate our international thinking. Real security is not from a power to destroy others but of knowing food, health, education and housing will be available for all citizens.

Covid has demonstrated that none of us are secure from the infections and poverty of our neighbours. Our health is as secure as the disease control anywhere in the world. The World Health organisation alerted the world to the Covid crisis in early January. Their warnings were not taken seriously and the assumption was that somehow it was a Chinese-only problem as it was first located in Wuhan. The alert of contagion became an epidemic and in short order a pandemic.

Various leading right-wing figures around the world claimed it was just a form of flu and delayed taking action. Governments that took it seriously such as South Korea and New Zealand fared better by taking early urgent action.

The lessons of Covid internationally are clearly that we need a stronger, not weaker, World Health Organisation and that the demand for a public health service, globally, with free and universal access be delivered and that our aid budget is directed accordingly. The US withdrawal is appalling, and one hopes an incoming Biden administration will reverse that. The Prime Minister was intent on UK withdrawal and then, under pressure, changed his mind but only donated minimally to the WHO's desperate appeal for funds.

Additionally, the pandemic has taken the lives of the poorest in the most vulnerable places and shown in stark relief what global poverty is.

CLIMATE CHANGE THREAT

When it comes to the existential threat of climate change, the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference is due to be held in Glasgow in 2021. It will be faced with some stark decisions.

One in eight of all species on our planet have become extinct since 1970. Rachel Carson in *Silent Spring* warned in the 1950's that the economic process was even then destroying at an unprecedented rate. The loss of species, bio-diversity and habitat over decades has had a devastating impact on soil

health and ultimately of food production and security. Pollution and over-fishing will deplete marine harvests thus exacerbating the dangers.

We have seen all around in the recent years how air pollution and global warming have already led to huge and extraordinary weather patterns, floods, drought and extreme temperature changes.

Cop 25 in Paris was a huge step forward as it did pledge for net zero by 2050, and did, at least nominally, involve the entire world in the process, but this is now unlikely to be met. COP 26 must be much bolder and the UK, US and other similar economies must commit to net zero by 2030.

The huge changes cannot and will not be achieved by threatening those who work in polluting industries and services. The huge changes mean supporting people and communities and promoting the Green Industrial Revolution we worked so hard on to develop Labour policies for the 2017 and especially 2019 election manifestoes. We should be proud that our manifesto was voted the greenest of all parties, including the Greens. In the same vein the Green New Deal in the United States has the same aims.

Environmental justice and change are huge unifiers around the world. The environment, whilst at one level an aggregation of policies, is also a state of mind. We must see resources as finite and, with every policy development, the consideration of the impact on the environment must be centre stage.

In this regard, trade policies are a huge issue in terms of future deals with the EU, the USA or anywhere else. These must not be based on increasing pollution by shipping or exporting pollution by paying no regard to work or environmental regulations in countries we trade with.

If climate change continues at this rate, we will see more and more climate refugees and within this context, it is worth noting the hysterical reaction of most media to the movement of refugees across the English Channel in recent weeks. This – and the accompanying Tory scapegoating – has taken place without ever discussing why people would put themselves at enormous risk and danger in a rubber dinghy in some of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

The numbers in Europe are small when compared to the one million Rohingya in Bangladesh and the sixty-five million refugees around the world, but again this is often not mentioned at all.

Nobody ever willingly becomes a refugee, they are forced into it by political, humanitarian and economic circumstances. Palestinian Refugees were located in camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Gaza in 1948. Now they house the great grandchildren of the first arrivals, with still no prospect of returning home. Their plight and that of millions more refugees must be addressed and will not be solved by more wars.

A STRATEGY FOR PEACE

A policy of peace can only be developed if we begin to redress the imbalance between spending on aid and humanitarian work compared to military spending and get real control over arms exports. Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE and other Middle Eastern powers have been poured on to the heads of the civilian population in Yemen creating the world's current greatest humanitarian disaster.

A strategy for peace throughout the region requires the focus of all Governments to recognise the rights of all peoples, full recognition of Palestine and an end to the occupation. A foreign policy dominated by arms sales and the geo-political game between Iran and US allies in the rest of the region will not bring peace, just another conflict. We should also remember that we are still living with the consequences of the Iraq war and the disastrous subsequent events.

In other parts of the world the failure to observe human rights norms and international law has led to huge tensions, as between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Again, the failure to observe the UN decision of 1948 to bring about a peace by involving all the people of Kashmir has been a catalyst for the arms race of the region and decades of injustice.

In Latin America, the continent has too often been dominated by the US Monroe doctrine and military intervention either directly or by proxy through military coups such as Chile in 1973 and more recently in Honduras.

The strategy of the Right across that continent has now developed a novel concept of "lawfare" where a progressive Government is put under relentless pressure and creates the space for a new form of coup. This happened in Brazil and Bolivia and is a new norm. The winners in this are always those who want a return to inequality and global profiteering; the losers are the poorest who had hoped their Government would deliver the housing, education and health they craved.

To conclude, Labour thinking on global affairs has always faced in two directions. One is of a natural feeling of solidarity with the poorest, and support for their own political solutions in all parts of the world. The other has been the dominance of Atlanticist thinking and thus the military alliance of NATO and with it a continuation of cold war mentalities in relation to Russia and China.

Our starting point for relations in the world has to be one of peace and with it respect for human rights and the urgent environmental needs the planet has. Indeed, our armed forces and diplomatic forces (when allowed to do so) have shown how efficient they can be on peace keeping missions and relief in disaster. Their skills have saved lives.

Looking forward, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference in 2021 is a chance to change direction and make strides for a nuclear free world. The Treaty has in many ways worked with the development of nuclear weapons free zones across Africa, Latin America and much of Asia. Trump wants to turn his back on this. Our task is to strengthen and extend it.

Covid has shown just how vulnerable we all are to health inequality and injustice. At the same time, extreme weather and rising sea levels have shown us what the priorities really are across the world.

The killing of George Floyd propelled Black Lives Matter movement centre stage in the USA. Equally significantly all around the world the most oppressed people saw something of themselves in George Floyd and this has become a global uprising. It is that global movement that excites and mobilises that Labour should be part of. It is that spirit that has given us solidarity across the planet that the Covid crisis has shown is more vital than ever.

We are at a turning point. The forces of the Right promote racism and militarism to protect a failed status quo. Labour needs to promote the alternative – namely stronger links with progressive groups across the world and reflecting the hopes of the generation that has done so much to educate on equality, justice and human rights.



**Socialist
Campaign Group
of Labour MPs**

SECTION 3:

**TOWARDS A NEW
ERA OF RIGHTS**

FOR WORKERS' RIGHTS FIT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY CLAUDIA WEBBE MP

The unprecedented economic impact of the Coronavirus has laid bare the weakness of UK labour protections. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in my home city of Leicester, where a resurgence of media reports has highlighted the severe exploitation in sections of our garment industry.

Yet, whilst the pandemic has heightened the impact of corporate malpractice, this is not a new phenomenon. Exploitation in Leicester's garment industry has been widely reported and studied for at least a decade. The scandalous mistreatment of workers' in my community is best understood as an extreme microcosm of the national and global decay of worker's rights during the failed neoliberal project of the last forty years.

Only by understanding the crisis in workers' rights can we illuminate a path to improving employment conditions for everyone across the UK.

THE NEOLIBERAL LEGACY

Leicester's garment industry was once a jewel in the crown of British industry, so much so that, in 1936, we were the second richest city in Europe. Yet today's industry could not be further from this proud heritage.

HMRC reported that, over a six-year period, a quarter of all UK textile factories caught failing to pay the minimum wage were based in Leicester, with some textile factories offering less than £3.50 an hour.

It comes as no surprise that Leicester is known as the 'sweatshop' of Europe when employers routinely under-report hours and where the ever-present threat of being laid-off or redundancy hangs like the sword of Damocles.

The exploited labour of Leicester residents is also helping to finance extravagant corporate salaries. Sales of clothes made by suppliers in Leicester have helped reward Boohoo's bosses with bonuses worth £150 million. The obscene wealth of the few can no longer be built on the exploitation of the many. Whilst it is particularly shocking, Leicester's garment industry is indicative of the abrupt decline in workers' rights and living standards since the neoliberal deindustrialisation revolution which began in the 1980s.

The result of this has been the biggest squeeze on wages since the early 1800s, with pay for the average worker still lower, in real terms, than a decade ago. In the fifth richest country in the world, 14 million people are living in poverty - 9 million of whom live in households with at least one person in work.

The fact that a job no longer provides a route out of poverty represents an unforgivable breakdown in our social contract. This is not an economic inevitability, but rather the result of a deliberate upwards transfer of wealth and power away from working people.

Our workers need a radically fairer offer. That means raising the minimum wage to at least £10 an hour and investing in our communities and infrastructure to aid the necessary transition to a Green economy.

Ultimately, it means an end to the destructive, ideological attachment to neoliberalism which has defined UK politics for nearly half a century.

THERE IS POWER IN A UNION

This crisis in Leicester's Garment Industry has demonstrated the need for unionised, accountable workplaces that prioritise employee wellbeing. Many of the workers I have been in contact with have had to show uncommon bravery to step forward and share their stories despite threats of redundancy without pay from their employers.

Trade Unions are the best line of defence against workplace exploitation. Yet, the collective ability of workers to organise has been systematically eroded by decades of anti-trade union legislation - most notably the appalling 2016 Trade Union act.

The latest Global Rights Index from the ITUC placed the UK among the worst violators of trade union rights in Europe. Poland, Hungary and Belarus are the only other European countries that were classified as committing “regular violations”.

Forty years ago, eight out of every ten workers enjoyed terms and conditions negotiated by a trade union. Today, less than one in four workers have that benefit.

The 2016 Trade Union Act must be repealed, trade union autonomy and sectoral collective bargaining must be restored and the right to take industrial action - in accordance with international law - must be re-established.

GOOD, SECURE JOBS

One of the most recurring issues in Leicester’s garment industry is that sweatshops routinely under-report hours. Some companies also defraud their workers of holiday leave, and even force employees to use the back door to enter, whilst keeping the main entrance locked to avoid detection and suspicion.

This is an extreme example of one of the most nefarious downward trends in labour protections; employers exploiting the legal status of workers.

Some companies, have increasingly adopted more casual forms of work as a way of keeping costs down. Research by the TUC found that 3.7 million people – one in nine of UK workers – are in insecure work, including people on zero-hours or short-term contracts, agency workers and temporary casuals, and those in low-paid, often bogus, self-employment.

Every job should be a good job – one that provides security, dignity and a fair wage.

We must crack-down on toxic ‘casualisation’ by calling for a single legal status of ‘worker’ for everyone who works – except those who are genuinely self-employed. Zero hour contracts must be eradicated, and hours should be regulated so that each worker gets guaranteed pay for a working week.

END INSTITUTIONAL AUSTERITY

One of the main reasons why workplace exploitation in Leicester has been able to exist unchecked, is that ten years of austerity has severely downgraded our regulatory institutions.

The local authority in Leicester has had its central government grant funding cut from £289 million in 2010 to £171 million in 2019. The government have also slashed the budget of the Health and Safety Executive by £100 million, or 46%, since 2010. The budget of HMRC, the body which is meant to enforce the minimum wage, was 40% less in 2016 than in 2000, and staffing levels were reduced by approximately 50% over the same period.

Rights are meaningless if they are not properly enforced. The government must urgently reverse the funding cuts to regulatory bodies to ensure the safety and fair pay of those at work.

We on the left must go further, by honouring Labour's manifesto commitment to create a stand-alone Ministry for Employment Rights. From guaranteeing breaks at work, to proper notice for shift changes and increased flexibility; it is crucial that our rights are expanded and enforced.

PROTECTING ALL WORKERS

Whilst most of the workers in Leicester's Garment industry who have approached me for help are British Citizens, there are also a significant number of migrant workers who are either undocumented or have "no recourse to public funds". These workers, who are predominantly women, are often particularly vulnerable for exploitation.

Far from myths of 'the white working class', the modern proletariat is a diverse mix of nationalities, ethnicities, genders and sexualities. Workplace rights must reflect this, and the Trade Union movement must remain a welcoming place for people of all backgrounds.

The scandal in Leicester's garment industry is in many ways the logical conclusion of the neoliberal project, which has for decades slashed away at our social safety net since.

The Tories and sections of big business argue that the mistreatment of workers is inevitable - that rights, fair pay, and dignity in the workplace are an unacceptable cost to their bottom line. Yet their free market race to the bottom has normalised poverty, hopelessness and exploitation in our communities.

Now is the time for us on the left to fight for a society built around the principles of solidarity and in which all of us, regardless of our job, can live in dignity.

LET'S FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO FOOD

BY IAN BYRNE MP

“Children are showing up at school with empty stomachs, and schools are collecting food on an ad hoc basis and sending it home because teachers know that their students will otherwise go hungry” - Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

We are living through a humanitarian crisis affecting millions of our citizens every day. A crisis of food poverty born out of the political choices and systemic failings created over the last four decades which have now reached a tipping point for so many in our communities.

The Trussell Trust reported a soaring 81% increase for emergency food parcels from food banks in its network during the last two weeks of March 2020, compared to the same period in 2019 – including a 122% rise in parcels given to children, as the Coronavirus pandemic continues to unfold.

The question we must pose is how can we reverse this shameful growth in food insecurity and how as socialists can we effect the change our class and country so desperately require post Covid to shape a society that can reverse the damage so future generations do not face the same callous environment.

The problem of escalating food poverty in the UK can be fixed. There is a clear correlation between reduced government spending on welfare for families and the huge growth in food bank usage.

Like austerity it is a political choice not a pre-determined occurrence. But it cannot be fixed without concerted effort by the government of the day to take clear responsibility in developing solutions and policy to eradicate the problem at the root cause.

We cannot tinker around the edges of poverty; it must be addressed head on by political courage and a morality lacking over the last decade. Ensuring that people in society do not go hungry and that their basic rights, including their right to food, are protected is a moral duty and should be a legal right.

The Labour Party Manifestos of 2017 and 2019 offered the courage and vision of a different society and they should provide the ideological lodestone we use to build on post Covid-19. Labour's 2019 manifesto contained many radical policies, building on the 2017 programme. Almost every one of the policies advocated in the manifesto would make a huge difference to people's lives. The focus on tackling the economic and social inequalities in society at a structural level would have begun to offer the solutions required.

Two elements of the manifesto are of interest in tackling food poverty at root level, enabling both a parliamentary focus and the building of a grassroots movement of education and solidarity.

A RIGHT TO FOOD

The 2019 manifesto included a welcome commitment to introduce a Right to Food, as part of a commitment to end the scandal of hunger and food banks.

Enshrining the Right to Food into law would make clear the government's obligations, create mechanisms to set positive targets and monitor progress, and introduce avenues to hold government bodies accountable for violations. It would ensure that the government was required to tackle hunger, whoever was in power, and to refrain from policies that would violate this right, as well as take positive measures to progressively fulfil it. It could allow individuals and organisations to seek remedy in the courts in cases of violation.

We could use the Right to Food as the foundation for a re-building of the welfare safety net in the aftermath of the Covid crisis. The pernicious policies which have formed the foundations of the welfare reforms since 2010 that have caused so much damage, misery and driven food poverty may not have been enacted if we had had this protection in legislation.

But the right to food should not be seen in isolation. Hunger is a symptom of broader social inequalities and rights violations, not least low paid, insecure jobs and a broken social security system. Recognising a broader set of economic and social rights in law would provide a more comprehensive way of tackling hunger and poverty in modern Britain.

The solidarity shown during the Covid epidemic has been heart-warming and is one of the positives we can draw from this period, at odds with the ideology of Thatcher and her infamous quote on society.

Here in Liverpool the community reacted far quicker and effectively than government in combatting the added food insecurity that Covid brought

This was exemplified by Fans Supporting Foodbanks who pulled together a consortium of community groups, sporting institutions and the City Council to create and supply thousands of emergency food parcels delivered throughout the city during the pandemic. The model created through solidarity not charity used local ethical businesses and suppliers. The funds stayed in the local economy sustaining local jobs and supply chains, providing a safety net for people ensuring everyone had the ability to access nutritious food.

We need as a community and class to build on the solidarity and collaboration shown across the nation.

With this I feel we have an opportunity to look at another 2019 manifesto pledge with added urgency and importance.

COMMUNITY FOOD PLANS

The Right to Food is not just about having enough to eat, but also the quality. The lack of affordable nutritious and healthy food has a direct devastating and widespread impact on health and wellbeing.

People with limited resources often find it difficult to access food which is healthy or nutritious as processed foods are more affordable. People in deprived areas are significantly more likely to become obese or suffer with diet-related ill health - prevalence of excess weight is 11 per cent higher than the more affluent areas, something which is contributing to widening health inequalities in this country.

Locally developed community food plans would help to improve community based local food systems, supply vital food education and aid the supply of nutritious foods in our communities.

Plans would establish local food markets, community gardens, community shops and kitchens, and improve allotment management and educate and train local people on healthy diets, household food management and food cultivation skills.

Local food networks are by no means a new phenomenon. We know that there are thousands of small-scale and localised food initiatives and micro-producers across the country, in urban and rural areas alike. They differ in scale and approach but reflect local conditions, needs and opportunities. They offer great potential as the foundations for local food production, distribution and access networks.

In my constituency of West Derby, detailed work is under way to create and support the local food networks, linking allotments and home growing with foodbanks, local food pantries, school kitchens, community enterprises, community kitchens and community centres together with a coordinated holistic approach providing education and in turn empowering people through engagement, offering a solution and access to food with dignity and humanity. By encouraging the development and growth of these networks, they provide the potential for local people to move from being passive consumers of (retail or donated) food, to being active participants in local food economies.

This is crucial – we want the Right to Food to embody this shift from charity to solidarity, from donations to collaborations.

Secondly, food networks will encourage wrap-around and integrated welfare support in local networks. People can connect to their local food networks in order to improve food security, but this is a gateway through which other support – advice, health, wellbeing, housing – can and should be provided, truly organic hubs.

Finally, local food networks offer a fantastic context within which learning and community participation for all can take place. We should invest in programmes of learning that will improve the quality of food that ordinary people can access and prepare, these skills are absolutely crucial in tackling food insecurity, that will encourage new skills acquisition and that will draw people into the mutual aid activities that we will need in our communities.

Some of the finest achievements of the Labour Party have been to embed human rights into UK law and the Right To Food must be the first step in listening to the call from bodies like The Labour Campaign for Human Rights to enshrine into domestic law all of the economic, social and cultural rights set out in the international treaties that the UK has ratified, in particular those in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR). These include the rights to food, housing, health, education, work and social security.

The locally developed community food plans are for me the embodiment of socialist values and something we should build on in all our communities.

As a nation we cannot continue to fail millions of people with life expectancy rate differences of 10 years in the same city and with people simply existing not living. Our children are being raised with parents in survival mode due to food poverty and only radical socialist policies will offer the answers to fix our broken society.

MAKE HOUSING A PUBLIC RIGHT

BY KATE OSAMOR MP

We all have a right to safe and secure housing. It must be the goal of the next Labour Government to make that right a reality. For decades, successive Governments have deregulated the housing and rental markets, sold off social housing, attacked tenants' rights and failed to build enough homes.

The consequences of this market first approach are evident today. Social Housing is largely unavailable. Rent is unaffordable. Thousands live in unsafe or unsuitable accommodation and homelessness has skyrocketed.

This is all the result of housing being treated like an investment opportunity rather than a public right. To end the crisis, we need to reverse this and recognise that first and foremost housing is a public right and that collectively we must ensure everybody has access to safe, secure and affordable housing.

HOUSING CATASTROPHE

The Covid-19 Pandemic threatens to turn a housing crisis into a catastrophe. The impact of lockdown followed by the worst recession on record has left many unable to pay their rent, with arrears building up. Thousands face homelessness once the 'Eviction Ban' ends unless something is done. Nobody should be homeless or facing the prospect of homelessness during a pandemic and it is the duty of Government to do everything it can to prevent that.

We cannot simply kick the can down the road and leave thousands with huge amounts of rent arrears which they will never be able to pay back. Rent Relief has to be a vital part of the Covid recovery. It is essential that any tenants who incurred rent arrears during the pandemic can apply for rent relief and to have those arrears written off. The ban of eviction must be extended for as long as this pandemic continues. We should implement a permanent ban on evictions as a result of rent arrears accrued during the pandemic so that nobody is ever evicted as a result of Covid-19.

The ban on evictions must be strengthened so that any eviction notices issued during the pandemic are invalid.

We also need to take urgent action to protect those who are experiencing homelessness while we fight Covid-19. Local Authorities need to urgently be given the funding they need to provide self-contained accommodation to anybody who presents as homeless. Local charities, like Crisis, who tackle rough sleeping, must be given funding so that they can locate and house as many rough sleepers as possible. These protections must be in place for as long as the pandemic lasts.

ENDING HOMELESSNESS

The number of people experiencing homelessness has increased by more than 250% since 2010. More than 280,000 people in England are homeless with thousands more at risk of homelessness. This is a humanitarian crisis caused by decades of neglect of social housing as well as the Tory's Welfare Reforms, deregulation of the housing market and the weakening of renter's rights. Housing, like Health and Education is a human right. We need to make that right a reality and ensure who is at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness is able to access safe self-contained and permanent accommodation. If the political will exists, we have the resources to end homelessness within a short period of time.

We need to reform the process by which people make applications to their local authority for help if they are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This means lowering the incredibly high bar that individuals need to pass in order to be given help. Councils regularly refuse to help homeless individuals if they decide that they are 'intentionally' homeless' or not 'priority need'.

We need to end that practice and guarantee that anybody who is homeless or at risk of homeless is owed a duty to be housed in self-contained and safe accommodation by their local authority, without exception. What is more, Local Authorities need to be given the funding needed to conduct pro-active outreach to the street homeless, and anybody at risk of homelessness so that they can be safely housed before they find themselves homeless.

EMPOWERING PRIVATE RENTERS

As houses prices have risen and our social housing stock has been neglected, the number of people renting privately has increased dramatically while rent itself has increased to unsustainable levels leading to social cleansing across many parts of the country. At the same time, the rights of renters have been shredded while property developers and landlords have been allowed to neglect their responsibilities in the pursuit of profit.

That has to change. We need to radically shift the power balance between landlords and tenants. Tenants need a new deal, new rights and a way of enforcing those rights. They need security to know they won't face eviction at a moment's notice, and they need to be able to hold landlords to account when they fail to meet their responsibilities.

Landlords need to be made more accountable to tenants. By funding Renters Unions and ensuring that all landlords recognise those unions we can make sure that when landlords abuse their position tenants have recourse to their Union for support. A national register of landlords needs to be introduced.

We must also introduce rent controls urgently and freeze rent caps until average rents are at an affordable level as a percentage of average income. We need to end no fault evictions and strengthen security of tenure for all tenants by introducing 5-year fixed term tenancies for renters and extending eviction notices to at least 3 months. We must also reverse the criminalisation of squatters which has taken place under the current Government.

Radical action is needed to fix the broken rental market. It is vital we take action to tackle monopolies of big property developers in our largest cities which results in many properties being left empty. A limit needs to be placed on the number of properties which any one landlord, agency or property developer can own. Local Authorities need to be given powers to expropriate properties when that limit is breached.

For decades successive Governments have neglected and sold off our social housing stock. This has resulted in increased homelessness, increased house prices, increase rent prices and increased inequality and a breakup of communities.

MAKING SOCIAL HOUSING A REAL ALTERNATIVE

We need to reimagine and relaunch social housing in this country. Social Houses shouldn't only be available as a safety net for a vulnerable few. Social Housing must be promoted as a viable alternative to home ownership and a way of creating thriving communities.

We must end right to buy and re-introduce lifelong tenancies for social housing tenants. We need to start a mass programme of social housing building, giving local authorities more powers and money to build the housing they need. We need to give tenants more of a say and build a new generation of green social housing.

Existing housing stock needs to be radically improved. Too much of our local government's housing stock has been allowed to fall into disrepair and neglect. Local Authorities need to be given the money to ensure they housing stock is fit for habitation and up to the standards we should expect in the 21st Century, including retrofitting homes with low embedded carbon.

Three years after 72 people died in the Grenfell Tower Fire, the Government has done nothing to prevent a similar catastrophe occurring tonight, tomorrow or in a year. Thousands of people go to sleep every night in properties clad with flammable material. This is a national emergency and it must be treated as such. Action needs to be taken to force private landlords and local authorities to remove flammable cladding where they have not already done so. Private Landlords who have put their tenants at risk by being slow to act must be prevented from renting out properties in the future.

It is immoral that thousands of homes are empty all year round while some families are waiting up to a decade for permanent housing. Local Authorities need to be given greater powers to requisition homes that are left permanently empty by private landlords and property developers. Property developers who sit on empty properties or land waiting for prices to rise should be forced to build or give up the land to local authorities.

It's time to recognise that housing is a human right and take the actions necessary to end the housing crisis and in doing so make safe and affordable housing available to everybody.



**Socialist
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of Labour MPs**

SECTION 4:

**FOR PUBLIC
OWNERSHIP AND
DEMOCRATIC
ACCOUNTABILITY**

OUR BATTLE TO KEEP THE NHS PUBLIC

BY ZARAH SULTANA MP

“The backbone of the response”, the Director General of the World Health Organisation explained about Coronavirus in March, lies in “testing, isolation, and contact tracing”. The “key message”, he said, is “test, test, test”.

Ten months later – after the UK has experienced the highest excess death toll in Europe and just as we are hit by a second wave – the Government’s test and trace system is failing. Tests are consistently unavailable, tracing is woefully inadequate, and the recording of the data beset with errors.

The Prime Minister calls it “NHS Test and Trace”, but more accurately it would be called Serco Test and Trace.

Because this vital instrument for combating the pandemic has largely been outsourced to Serco and other private companies, who have racked in contracts worth hundreds of millions of pounds for a system that has let us down just as we need it the most.

Serco and Sitel were handed contracts worth £108m and £84 million respectively for test and tracing, while Deloitte was handed out contracts worth millions, only to be found to be selling separate contact services directly to local health officials.

There is little to show for these eye-watering sums. The Government’s top scientific committee, SAGE, have said that 80% of contacts need to be traced for the system to be effective, but the private companies running it have consistently missed this target. Latest figures show only 61% of close contacts were reached since its launch. But this has not stopped lucrative contracts being handed-out, with Serco awarded an additional £45 million contract in September.

The system is failing and privatisation is to blame. Private companies put profits before public health – and the people pay the price. This is just the latest example of how privatisation has systematically undermined our National Health Services.

PRIVATISATION BY STEALTH

The NHS was founded on the principle of universal healthcare, with access according to need, not ability to pay. It was a radical break with the past. No longer would people have to fear healthcare bills if they fell ill or had an accident; they would be cared for – no matter their class, race or nationality. Instead of a system run for the profits of the few, an institution was built to meet the needs of the many. Healthcare was decommodified, with private profit banished to the margins and public good reigning supreme.

It is from these socialist principles that the NHS became the envy of the world and is one of our most loved institutions.

But since the rise of Margaret Thatcher and dominance of neoliberalism, the NHS has been steadily privatised by stealth. This has ranged from Private Finance Initiatives – first introduced by John Major’s government and then turbo-charged by New Labour – to the Coalition Government’s 2012 Health and Social Care Act, which enforced competitive tendering and raised the income threshold NHS hospitals could generate from private sources from 2% to 49%.

Now, many “NHS” services are carried out by private providers, whose key motive is profit, not public health. In the last 5 years, contracts to private providers have soared by 89%, with contracts totalling nearly £15 billion handed-out in that time.

The combination of privatisation along with underfunding has had a scandalous impact. PFI payments in health and social care alone account for £82 billion in annual payments, while nearly a decade of underfunding meant that by 2018 the UK was spending 22% less per head on health than France and 47% less than Germany.

An effect of this has been a decade of falling pay for NHS staff, with nurses’ and doctors’ pay having fallen by more than 8% and 9% respectively. Staff morale and retainment has collapsed.

We have become accustomed to the ‘NHS winter crisis’, which reached such extreme levels in 2017 that the British Red Cross declared it a “humanitarian crisis”. Patients were left to die on trolleys as they waited for care, with an A&E doctor pleading that the system was “on its knees”.

Social care has fared no better. Largely run by private providers, the majority of care workers earn less than the real living wage and many are on precarious, zero-hour contracts. In a pandemic, all too often this meant staff have not been able to afford to self-isolate, forcing them to work even if that risked spreading the virus.

This was the state of the NHS and social care as the Covid-19 pandemic hit Britain in March. It is little wonder that NHS staff resorted to fashioning PPE from bin bags, that ventilators were in critically short supply, and that care home deaths would become a disaster.

Six months in and at least 620 NHS staff and social care workers are estimated to have died from Covid-19, with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staff the worst affected.

Through the grim weeks of the spring, as daily deaths neared the thousands, the public showed an incredible outpouring of gratitude to the NHS staff, care workers and all key workers who were battling on our behalf. Boris Johnson stood at the door of 10 Downing Street to applaud the doctors and nurses that had saved his life.

But in spite of their incredible sacrifice – in spite of withstanding a decade of underfunding, understaffing, and increasingly intolerable working conditions – in spite of all that, when the Chancellor announced a new public sector pay deal in July, nurses, cleaners, porters and other vital NHS and care staff were ignored. Conservative Ministers were happy to clap for them while the cameras were rolling, but they weren’t willing to give them the pay rise they deserved.

This crisis has shown like never before the value of the NHS, but the threats it faces have never been greater. The Conservatives and their allies in the private health industry will not want to let the crisis go to waste. Their privatisation agenda is not yet finished. And this summer Conservative MPs voted against legal protections for the NHS in a trade deal with the USA, leaving open the prospect of it being opened up to US health corporations.

Generations of working class people fought for the NHS, sustained it, and passed it down to us. It is our responsibility to restore it and pass it on to future generations.

The 2019 Labour manifesto promised to give the NHS the funding it needs, to end privatisation, and to extend care to include free prescriptions for all and free basic dentistry. We need to build on those commitments.

We need to fight for NHS staff and care workers to get the pay rise they deserve – 15%, to make up for a decade of lost pay – and not to give Serco or other private companies a penny more to run test and trace. The system should be brought into public control, run by the NHS and local authorities with public health its guiding aim, not private profit.

The NHS is Labour's proudest achievement. It is socialism in action. Our job is to lead the fight to restore the NHS and to expand the socialist principles that underpin it to every area of life.

FOR PUBLIC OWNERSHIP OF SOCIAL CARE

BY PAULA BARKER MP

The crisis in adult social care is one of the most serious and urgent issues facing our country. If we did not know before, Coronavirus has brought home to us the enormous problems in adult social care and the key role of care workers. Too long underpaid and undervalued, the pandemic has shown that we need to rethink our priorities and judgment as to who and what is important.

Issues around funding social care have dominated media discourse during the Coronavirus health pandemic. For local councils, the dominance of social care funding, as a budget issue, is decades old. The prism of the pandemic has brought the precarious state of social care funding and its current fragmented market-driven delivery models to the fore. As much as public values have been recalibrated to understand the importance of health investment, and looking after society's most vulnerable people, so too we see a more discerning public that now recognises that care services are every bit as important to national well-being as the NHS.

A FRAGMENTED SERVICE

A hugely fragmented provider landscape has been one of the major problems in the social care sector. Hundreds of providers are operating in some areas, and most councils have experienced provider failure or the return of contracts. The Government's fears about providers going out of business may explain their reluctance to clamp down harder on companies that are failing to fulfil their minimum wage obligations.

Britain's four largest privately-owned care home operators have built up debts of £40,000 per bed, which means that their annual interest charges alone absorb eight weeks of average fees paid by local authorities on behalf of residents. Despite that, many of the biggest home care providers have still managed to pay out millions of pounds in dividends in recent years.

A report produced recently by the Centre for Health and the Public Interest demonstrates just how much money is allowed to leak out of the social care sector in the form of, for example, profits, rent and interest payments, with the level of leakage far higher among for-profit providers. Any funding boost for social care must therefore be accompanied by meaningful reform of the sector which moves away from the failing markets and, instead, embraces a vision for care that puts a public sector ethos and core ethical requirements at its heart.

A PROPERLY VALUED WORKFORCE

A critical part of social care must be to produce a workforce which is rewarded and properly valued. Care workers have been absent from much of the discussion about implementing the NHS long-term plan and developing the final NHS people plan, although the future vision for the NHS is one that brings health and care closer together.

As the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee pointed out: “The care workforce needs a career structure which better reflects the skills required to be a good care worker and the social importance of the sector.”

The Nuffield Trust recently stated that: “a realistic and comprehensive workforce strategy is needed to combat the chronic recruitment and retention crisis that that is affecting the social care sector.”

Recent work by the Institute for Public Policy Research has begun to point the way towards the development of a workforce strategy for the sector, with a focus on proper pay, professional registration, and improved training and development.

Working in care needs to become an attractive career choice if social care is to shed its unwanted reputation as a low status, high turnover sector. My trade union, UNISON, recently launched the Care Workers for Change campaign, which calls for a real living wage as a minimum, fair contracts, no zero-hours contracts, and enough time to care and a safer working environment for our incredible caseworkers.

For too long, care workers have been treated like a Cinderella service and it is imperative that we bring about meaningful change to ensure not only those receiving care are treated with dignity and respect but those who are providing care are treated with dignity and respect.

CREATING 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC OWNERSHIP BY LLOYD RUSSELL-MOYLE MP

What does public ownership mean in the Labour Party in 2020? In our last manifesto we laid out plans to nationalise or mutualise certain industries and to give workers greater controls of large private industries. It can seem, however, that public ownership boils down to nationalisation.

In fact, much of the debate does not seem so different from the 1947 Keep Left Group of MPs, who were an ideological, if not direct, predecessor to the Socialist Campaign Group. In a 1947 pamphlet, and again in their 1950 manifesto they stated: “This nationalisation programme has been carried out vigorously and needs to be continued to embrace every industry which has a hold over our national economy, or which cannot be made efficient in private hands.”

But 1947 was a post war economy, much property and industry had already been expropriated for the war effort. Now that nationalisation programme, which had been so vigorous, is a faint memory, with many industries sold off or shut down.

Of course Labour Party Socialists hold public ownership dear to our hearts, it was hard wired in our party constitution: “...upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.” (Clause 4 1918-1994)

Even the current constitution states: “...power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many, not the few...” (Clause 4 1994 – present)

Power and wealth in the hands of the many and common ownership are not automatically the same as Nationalisation. The 1945 government was able to nationalise as much power was already in Whitehall, but is power in Whitehall actually power in the hands of the many?

As Tony Benn pointed out in 2001, “The British Labour movement has a fine tradition for arguing for greater industrial democracy”.

In 1910, the Northumberland miners speaking to the Sankey Commission said: “Any administration of the mines, under nationalisation, must not leave the mine worker in the position of a mere wage-earner, whose sole energies are directed by the will of another... He must have a share in the management...”

In 1947 the Keep Left Group (who at its peak included giants such as Michael Foot and Aneurin Bevan) said: “Industrial democracy is not so much a matter of machinery as of attitude. The joint production committees set up during the war operated in most factories in the letter, but in only a few in the spirit, of the agreement setting, them up. Nevertheless, it would give a tremendous fillip to organised labour if the joint production committee system were extended.”

One of the great failures of past nationalisations was that the joint production committees’ model was not adopted or extended, and instead national boards of these industries were appointed by the government and not workers. Whilst some union involvement remained it was often limited representation, and those that organised in that relevant sector were often the unions that were kept at bay, far from the boardroom door.

In 1971 Tony Benn speaking to the Engineers’ Union, stated that his time in government led him to realise that we had replaced one set of managers with a set of “new grey-flannel brigade in shiny offices”. Whether these offices are in Whitehall, or now the centre of capitalism in Canary Wharf they often are the same class of people running industries from the top down.

For the worker the difference is slight. One set of Oxbridge graduates replaces another set of Oxbridge graduates, who are often friends. CEOs running rings around shareholders is replaced with mandarins running rings around politicians. Labour must not be a party for the managerial civil servant, we are the representatives of the people fighting against the concentration of power for the few in all its forms.

DEMOCRATIC PUBLIC CONTROL

Moreover, from the public's perspective, whilst doctors and teachers are not viewed as civil servants, their main interaction with recognisable government officials is rarely perceived to be positive. It may be the parking attendant giving them a ticket, the police officer stopping and searching them, or the bureaucrat losing their forms, sanctioning them on benefits or the housing officer who lets them rot in damp, dangerous accommodation.

We know much of this is because of underfunding and we must bring trust back into government, and pride into those front-line public services, but we must also understand that government control of industries has not always filled the public with confidence. In the 1980s polling by the Labour Party often showed that public ownership was a far more popular concept than national ownership, and at any rate many areas of our lives need local accountability.

When Engels said we needed industries “established in a democratic constitution and through this the direct dominance of the proletariat”, what does that mean today? You would expect me as a long-standing co-operator to offer you co-operatives and mutuals (non-profit, member owned and democratic) as a solution.

THE CASE FOR CO-OPS

Utopian socialists, who predate Marx and Engels can of course be criticised for their theory of change, but they raised an important distinction that the workers must have control not just via government, but in directing their work. Both Robert Owen's workers' co-operative ideas and Rochdale Pioneers consumer co-operative, respectively 30 and four years before the Communist Manifesto, must equally be held up as part of our common heritage and modern answers for socialism.

Some co-operatives have, however got themselves a bad name, in part because the collapse and failure to secure a government bailout led to the privatisation of the Co-operative Bank, and the corporatisation of many nationally recognised co-operatives means that people struggle to tell the difference between a Tesco Clubcard and the dividend.

More fundamentally however, the undermining of real workers, consumer and multi stakeholder co-operatives with the “third sector” has led to confusion and mistrust. There has been the transfer of publicly owned housing stock to “third sector” sometimes even “co-operatives,” only for people to find their rents increased, their accountability reduced, and repairs still not done.

Instead of putting non-profit or benevolence at the heart of public ownership it must be true democratic ownership, and true democratic power.

Power is nothing unless it means that the mutual owners can discharge their power by getting rid of managers and requiring them to take certain actions.

It is not only for a lofty ideological ideal or for democracy, or an attempt to reduce the excess of the monopolistic characteristics of late state capitalism, that we Socialists should seek public ownership. It is for efficiency too.

The case is easy for natural monopolies where competition is just a fraud, and profit just a bounty payment. The electricity wire to your home, the sewage pipe down your street or even the bus that drives down that same street are all areas where competition is so impossible the capitalists have had to create pretend markets to hide their extraction of wealth.

In these natural monopolies the state (local or national) must always play a role. It might be in being part of a multi-stakeholder cooperative such as Labour’s plans in 2020 for water, or a state-run reseller supporting more cooperative, mutual and non-profit suppliers in a state-run national grid as we proposed for energy sector.

In industries where there is some market, for example the travel industry or home removals, it is not clear cut that the government should have the controlling stake. In these areas a user can walk away, and small providers are no less efficient and already predominate.

New platforms like Airbnb or Uber cannot be wished away even if we wanted them to (which I certainly don’t), but they are currently extractive with poor regulation. What must happen here is a democratisation of these sectors for the seller, the consumer and the local community who have a stake as the neighbour and road user.

These industries not only need regulation, but they need support to become multi-stakeholder co-operatives which can be more efficient than their current one-sided capitalist model. This requires a proactive set of measures that give tax, regulatory and practical help to those co-operative ventures, which rewards those who feed their profit back into social value and democracy.

At the same time, we must strengthen the laws on Co-operatives, and not allow them to be weakened by overly managerial control and ensure that they can be the model of our new economy.

Just as the Conservatives in 1977 wrote the Ridley Report (The Report of Nationalised Industries Policy Group) which outlined in what order, how, and in what manner each privatisation should take place, we need our own Ridley equivalent. Between 2015-2019 much of that work had been started. It is incumbent on us to make sure that we prepare the way to what is now not only publicly popular and practical, but also an economic necessity.

Two years ago, left wing trade unions in Australia did just that. In their report "Taking Back Control: A community response to privatisation" they outline the dangers of current privatisation, and the principles, steps and framework for each key area to be brought back into public control. They established people's commissions for each area, and we should do the same. Communities around the world are realising that they cannot just be run on the accumulation of capital alone, and the bulwark against crony capitalism is democratic socialism and its core tenant democratic public ownership.

As Benn in his 1971 speech points out, over a century ago we removed power over national government according to who owned land, now we must remove that power over our nation by who owns industry. If we are to have a true democracy it must start in the workplace and in the community.

A PROGRAMME FOR RADICAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT REFORM

BY TAHIR ALI MP

Local government is the branch of government that most people have contact with. But few understand how it work. Fewer still understand how it is constrained from working for the public good, by outdated controls imposed by central government. For those that have some understanding of local government it is clear that it is under resourced to do the things necessary to support the people of its local communities. This needs to change and change radically.

Local government has evolved in a way that is confusing to those who try to use its services or hold it accountable. There are Unitary Authorities with elected Mayors, Metropolitan Districts, London Boroughs, County Councils, District Councils and Parish Councils. There are Combined Authorities, Joint Committees, Police & Crime Commissioners and Metro Mayors. There are also locally operating central government departments, Quangos and privatised utilities. How are people supposed to make any sense of this?

I think we should move to a system of unitary authorities, based on the principle of subsidiarity and focused at the most local level. Where these Council are too big, as in the current city and county governments, local democracy should be enhanced at the local level by power welding Parish or Community Councils

Local government needs to be freed from heavy handed controls of Westminster and Whitehall. We should abolish the concept of ultra vires. Subsidiarity should be the key principle with councils being enabled to lawfully carry-out any decision that they have the resources to undertake. This goes to the heart of the concept of local democracy.

Local government should be able to develop local strategic plans that inform local development planning decisions with minimal interference from central government. There should be a directive oversight of all utilities and access to the data held by central government departments, via open data systems.

PROPERLY FUNDED COUNCILS

In order to exercise powers, Councils need to be properly resourced. Local government should receive a Fair Funding Settlement, based on the size and needs of its resident population; and the duties and functions that individual councils have agreed to accept. Such a settlement would need to reverse the direction of funding over the last decade as a starting point.

Enhanced provision should be made for strategic transport and economic development. If central government failed to adequately fund local government, based on formula, then Councils should have powers to levy a local income tax. The setting of Business Rates should be returned to local government, as a means of promoting local economic development and to compensate communities for social and environmental damage. Councils should be enabled to match-fund the money raised by Business Improvement Districts and local business groups using a dedicated grant fund, which would be funded by central government.

Local government should have the freedom to borrow against its own asset base in order to fund infrastructure and house building. This should be free from Treasury controls. Ring-fenced financial accounts within Local Government Finance should be ended. These are historical anomalies that have been used by Conservative governments to limit the actions of local government. An overdue change would be to scrap the Housing Revenue Account and allow other funding and borrowing powers to be freely used to fund Council House building.

FOR REAL LOCAL CONTROL

It is also vital that the control of local public transport be returned to local government. Adequate provision of public transport is necessary for local economic growth, without undue damage to the environment. It has been repeatedly demonstrated this cannot be provided by the private sector. This would include buses and trains and local stations, together with telecommunications infrastructure. Councils could choose to run these services directly or control them through local franchises and licences.

Councils should have ultimate control of all transport infrastructure within their areas, but most importantly sole roads. This should include moving traffic powers to control dangerous driving practices, including speeding. Penalties should be used to fund highways infrastructure, including segregated cycle lanes and local off-street parking schemes.

There are other services, which have traditionally been run by local authorities that have been moved away from democratic control in recent decades. These include: Education, Health, Police and Emergency Services. Steps have been taken to integrate local government services, with those provided by the NHS, but much more needs to be done. Local authorities need to occupy a majority position on NHS trusts. However, this is only half the picture, as there cannot be a properly functioning NHS without an adequate Social Care System. Local government should have the oversight of a nationally funded Social Care System, including local licencing and inspection.

Another group of services that need the oversight of local government is the operation of Central Government Departments' local offices. The offices of all government departments based within a local government area should be operationally answerable to their local Council.

These steps would form the basis of a system of local government that is effective, coherent and most importantly, democratically accountable. We need to commit to these changes to ensure that local government is fit for purpose, both now and in the future.



**Socialist
Campaign Group
of Labour MPs**

SECTION 5:

**BUILDING THE
MOVEMENTS TO
WIN CHANGE**

OUR VALUES AND THEIRS

BY JON TRICKETT MP

How does our party win the next election? This ought to be our sole preoccupation.

It's often said that losing an election and being in the opposition is the hardest gig in British politics. Even when the governing party is making mistakes, it's not easy.

As the new term started in the Commons in September, Keir Starmer laid out his thoughts to the PLP. "Professional, credible and responsible" were his watchwords with the addition that the Tories are "holding Britain back".

This is a good start, but that there is much farther to go. There are three distinct processes which you need to go through when you lose an election.

You need to come to terms with the lost election, understanding why it happened and work out how to come back. You need to be sharp in pointing out the mistakes which the government is making. And you need to show that you can make an effective alternative government when the time comes.

These three trains of thought and action look as though they are quite separate. In reality, though, they are interlinked. The reasons for your defeat need to be understood in order to oppose effectively for example. And your aspiration to form the next government needs both to be rooted in learning the lessons of the defeat, together with a forward facing dynamic capable of taking you into office.

Let's start with reflecting upon our capacity to build an electoral majority in time for the next election. The party's polling position is far from that, as you would expect given the fact that we are only a few months into Keir's leadership.

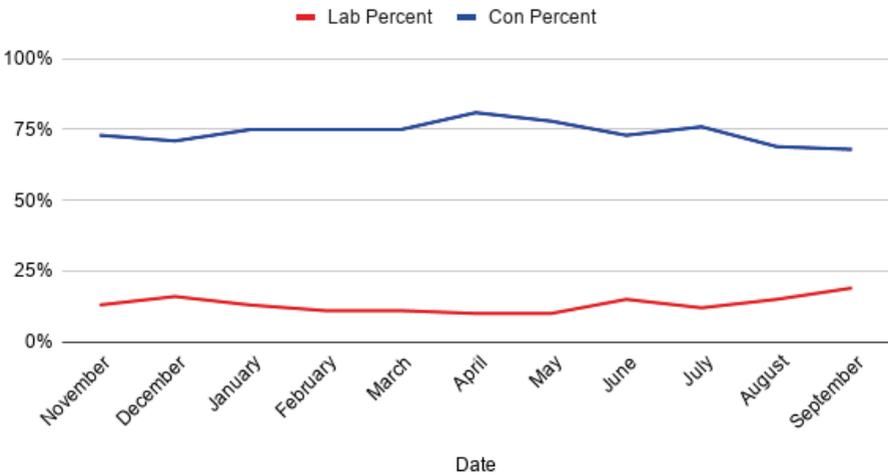
But, already alarm bells ought to be sounding in relation to one matter which needs urgent attention. This relates to that section of Labour’s traditional electorate which defected to the Tories following the EU referendum.

The opinion polling shows that Labour has barely recovered at all in what became known as “red wall” areas. These are hardworking communities which have been hardest hit by de-industrialisation. For generations they stood by us. Indeed they helped build and sustain the Labour movement throughout our history. Labour must not consider them to be a lost cause. Indeed it is noticeable that Starmer has been visiting these areas. But the change in attitudes towards our party in these communities is glacial.

Chart 1 below shows the party preferences expressed by leave voters. As of the beginning of August 2020, the Tories still had a staggering 54% lead over Labour.

CHART 1 VOTING INTENTIONS LEAVE VOTERS.

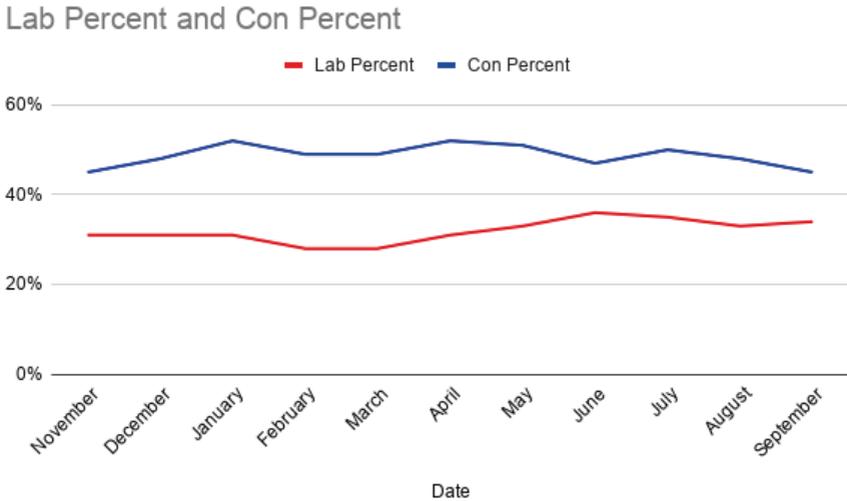
Lab Percent and Con Percent



In Chart two which measures the views of working class voters (C2,D and E) the Tories maintain an unacceptably high 15% lead.

CHART 2

VOTING INTENTIONS C2,D, E SOCIO ECONOMIC GROUP



These figures are drawn from the YouGov monthly tracking polls. It should be noted that there was no poll in March 2020 presumably because of the pandemic so we have maintained a straight line between Feb and April.

In the case of both Leave and working class voters, however, we can see only the slightest improvement in Labour's polling relative to the Tories since the election, and also since Keir Starmer became leader. This is not to launch a loud critique, but simply to issue a careful warning to the party about the scale of the task in hand.

Perhaps the most useful place to begin then is in the Labour Leadership's assertion that the Johnson Government is incompetent. The shadow cabinet have clearly developed a common line on the issue of "incompetence" that Boris Johnson ought to be judged.

There is much to this accusation. Whether it is the handling of the pandemic, or the exam system or the return to the classroom or the approach to the NHS, the government have proved time and again hopeless at handling the details.

A recent poll has put us in a strong place in the public mind on the issue of competence. This is a notable achievement which we can celebrate.

Showing that the opposition party is more competent/professional is a necessary condition for being re-elected. But it will not win the election. This is especially the case if the Labour Leadership too often focuses purely on competence as our central critique.

A VISION FOR A BETTER COUNTRY

The truth is that the government's failure is rooted in a value system which is not shared by the British people. These two things together can win an election: a vision of a different kind of country, rooted in values of fairness and social justice, together with a plausible and competent offer.

It's still early days for the new leadership team and we will have to see how they roll out their strategy. Nonetheless, we can offer a number of thoughts as to how to proceed.

The first is that Boris Johnson and his Cabinet simply assume that they are born to rule. They don't need to do detail. They think that their inherited position gives them the right to govern.

This idea resonates very strongly in the public mind and could be used by our party. Equally, there is a corollary to the "born to rule" assumption and this is that they think of the rest of us as plebs who are there largely to be governed. Again this argument resonates in the country as a whole. It raises the notion of a divided society ruled from a closed circle: a privileged elite in Westminster and the City of London.

There is an obvious link between the "born to rule" assumption and the lack of competence. Labour therefore can and should pivot from incompetence into this wider argument which then lays the ground to say that we will construct a society built on entirely different values.

To focus simply on governmental credibility alone, separated from a new and differing vision, turns Labour's offer into a technocratic and managerial Party; one which cannot inspire.

CHALLENGING THE TORIES

The Johnson Government may be full of bluster as well as blunder. But they are not without a vision of their own. And they are not wasting the national crisis around the pandemic to divert themselves from changing the way in which the country works.

There isn't the space here to provide all the details to support this thought. But when you reflect on some of the decisions which have slipped through, it is clear that they are making progress with their own philosophical purposes. Think about:

- The abolition of Public Health England,
- The privatisation of so much of the response to Covid,
- The assault on the planning process
- The whispering against ofqual in the exams fiasco
- The attempt to transform the civil service by surreptitious means using political appointees
- The softening up of the BBC
- The plans for another even more vicious round of austerity
- Suggestions that they will remove layers of local accountability

These are a few steps which are being taken decisively to weaken the public realm. But strong public institutions have been a hallmark of Britain for decades and - in spite of the fact they ought to be reformed to make them more democratic and accountable - they have been one of the principal ways by which our country has sought to secure social justice.

To merely confront the Boris Johnson administration with its inefficacy, is to miss the main point, when you reflect on the scale of the PM's ambition. We ought not to be like the bull which is mesmerised by the red cape of 'incompetence' without recognising it is being manipulated by a matador as he goes in for the kill.

Though Keir has clearly been effective at the despatch box, Labour is not yet cutting through in the vital demographic groups. “Forensic” questioning at PMQs or beating the drum at competence will not hack it unless these tactics are anchored in a strategic vision.

Communities which helped create and sustain the Labour Movement didn’t desert us lightly. They came to the view that Labour had turned their back on them. Our whole party needs to show some humility, to listen and to learn from the working men and women who ought to be at the very core of any future Labour majority. It will be tough and demanding, and it may be that we will have to swallow our pride and even apologise for mistakes made.

There is a mountain to climb. Let's be clear, we have a country in danger of lapsing into sullen despair.

So many people feel like that the system is broken, as is clearly demonstrated government failure on Covid, and the fact that we are hurtling almost out of control to a no deal Brexit. Talk of using the army on British streets to deal with fractured supply chains gives an additional spin to the feeling that we as a country are out of control.

What the country needs is inspiration. Labour's task is to widen our assault on the nature of Tory Britain beyond commenting on admittedly woeful ‘process’ issues. We should deepen our understanding of the communities which we left behind. But above all we need to show that there is a way through to a better country, based on our values of social justice, and building a productive dynamic economy in all the regions of Britain.

BUILDING A PARTY ROOTED IN EVERY COMMUNITY

BY IAN LAVERY MP

Labour has only ever formed a government when voters from across the working and middle classes have put their collective trust in the party to make their lives and their country a better place. This historic coalition has been threatened as the Tories have driven a wedge into British society with Brexit.

To win again Labour needs to rebuild the coalition that it has always relied upon to deliver governments. Labour must have a compelling vision of the future that taps into the desire for change that vast swathes of our county yearn for and articulate policies to match this ambition. But it must also regain the trust of these communities to deliver this change.

Over more than four decades the Labour party has seen its industrial base eroded. As traditional occupations left regions, the infrastructure they built around them weakened and, in many cases, disappeared. Combined with a move away from what for generations had been the cornerstone of Labour's policy platform, solidarity, has left our party seriously vulnerable in what were once bastions of the Labour vote.

When I left school, after a short period in a government unemployment scheme in the construction industry, I went to work at Ellington Colliery, extracting coal seven miles under the North Sea. There I joined the National Union of Mineworkers. My time working underground and my time working on behalf of my fellow miners solidified my values of solidarity, of equality and of fairness. This was what led me to the join the Labour Party and to becoming a representative of my community.

I have always believed that in collective action and that in working together we can achieve so much more than if we try to go it alone. Whilst much of the heavy industry that marked the workplace of my youth has now gone, I firmly believe that the vast amount of people in communities up and down the country like mine share these values.

Labour's greatest challenge is to rebuild that trust in us as a party to deliver the change that our communities so greatly yearn for.

How we do this has to be a key task of the party in the next few years. The Tories have a Parliamentary majority that for at least the next four years is unassailable. But that does not mean we are without the power to change things positively as a party. Labour still has power, we run a national legislature, regional mayoralities, and still control councils. Even where we are out of local power we have people. People and campaigns can win.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY ORGANISING

During the last few years our community organising unit has tapped into the energy of people doing extraordinary things and supported them to build power and to win.

We must ensure this model of organising is rooted in our communities once more. Because it was embedded once, only not directly through the Labour Party. In 1984 I went on strike and ended up out for a full year. The Union was strong and a key part of our communities and whilst we ended up defeated, we could have won. The victory of the strike was from the struggle itself with a generation of highly politicised men and importantly women. But we couldn't have lasted as long as we did, without the support of our communities who we were deeply ingrained in, through organising alongside them for a better world over generations.

A VISION OF A BETTER COUNTRY

To win again Labour needs an irresistible offer alongside the trust of the public to deliver it. It is not good enough to be seen to be sitting on the side lines critiquing on competence the most incompetent Prime Minister in living memory. By doing so we almost accept the direction of travel of the government but they have failed in terms of policy as well as competence. It is Labour's job to articulate a vision of the future that sets us apart from the failures of the past decade of austerity.

We need to ensure that the British people are given a fair deal at work. Covid has exposed the fractures already present in the economy, with key workers often being the least valued in the workplace. We need to continue working hand in glove with trade unions to ensure that this is put right.

We need to look at new working practices too with millions of people now found able to work from home it brings challenges as well as opportunities. In doing so we must look at workers successes through their trade union organising. We should support and celebrate these struggles and successes if we want the credibility to fundamentally change the workplace when in government.

The current emergency has fundamentally changed the workplace and given rise to what is now possible. A key principle of our platform should be how we make the places we live better. High streets can be hubs of the community once more but their focus is changing and we should be embracing modern technology to re-site workers closer to where they live in smaller digitally connected hubs. We should be looking at the impact of people working closer to home and asking questions like “Will rushing people back to the office harm smaller towns and villages where they live?”.

As a member of the Labour and Trade Union movement I have learned that the only things we ever win, indeed have ever won, have been born out of struggle. Even to stand still and keep the hard earned rights we have we have to fight and we have to organise. If it isn't difficult when you're in the Labour and Trade Union movement you aren't doing your job properly.

It is these ideas and more that Jon Trickett, Laura Smith and I have been discussing in our project No Holding Back. Working class people and working class communities can be held back no more.

LESSONS FOR THE LEFT FROM WALES

BY BETH WINTER MP

One of the lessons that we all should learn is represented by a quote from one of the great black American thinkers and writers, James Baldwin who said “we are our history”, because we carry our history with us, as individuals and as a nation.

Wales can be proud of its radical and socialist tradition – from the raising of the red flag at the Merthyr rising in the Chartist era, to our commitment to international causes and the birth of the National Health Service taken from Tredegar to the UK by a Welsh MP, our own Nye Bevan after whom I named my first son.

Wales can remain proud of its international commitment with its determination to be a country of sanctuary. It has protected the NHS from much of the privatisation that has affected England and maintained free prescriptions in accordance with the principle of universality. Our First Minister supported the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn and was involved in producing the “clear red water” speech during the Blairite era, which emphasised the vision in Wales that services should be free at the point of use, universal and unconditional.

DEFENDING DEVOLUTION

Devolution is not an “academic” matter – it has very real consequences for people. Wales’ devolved parliament was the first in the world to pass a Climate Emergency declaration, and we have the best rates for domestic recycling in the UK. We were first with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) which was instrumental in preventing the building of the M4 relief road in Newport and, in the spirit of that legislation, the Welsh Government passed a bill allowing 16- and 17-year olds to vote in Welsh elections.

This has been done against a background of a complete lack of adequate funding. A decade of brutal austerity has stripped Welsh councils of £1.6bn from their budgets.

The Barnett formula is ill-equipped to meet Wales' funding needs. Throughout this pandemic, an estimated £526m of Welsh Government revenue spending has not been covered by Barnett consequentials.

Wales is also taking a social partnership approach to promote fair work that safeguards workers' rights and conditions, encourages locally based procurement policies and promotes the principle of public investment and employment.

It has strong objections to the proposed Bill on an Internal Market in its present form precisely because it endangers these public service objectives that Welsh Government holds dear. We also have high standards for agriculture and the environment – all of this is threatened by this Bill. But above all – the Bill threatens the very principle of devolution and local control and democracy. Wales understands these principles as being central to being able to develop a society, an economy and a country that is able to identify, understand and meet the needs of its people.

This year marks the 21st anniversary of the establishment of the National Assembly for Wales - now the Senedd. Throughout this time Wales has consistently had a Labour-led Government. It is the only nation in the UK that currently has a Labour Government. That in itself is an achievement. But will it last? We have elections in May 2021. In Scotland this could lead to a further strengthening of the call for independence, and the same could happen in Wales.

Ironically, the very fact that the Welsh Government under the leadership of Mark Drakeford acted in a far clearer and more decisive way than the UK Government during the Covid-19 pandemic to protect the health of the people of Wales, has led to many people feeling that Wales would be better off going it alone. An additional factor has been the way the UK Government has largely acted as the government of England and has failed to adequately consult and take on board the needs of the devolved nations. The nationalist parties could gain ground in both nations at the expense of Labour.

What this lesson teaches us is that we cannot be complacent and that we must always be reaching out to the people we represent. As the great mining leader Mick McGahey said when he visited my constituency in Cynon Valley, *“The problem with the Labour Party is that it is a resolutionary party and not a revolutionary party”*. A Scotsman speaking to a Welsh audience! We need what we are doing as politicians to become more relevant to the daily lives of people, and give them the opportunity to be a part of the political process.

FOR A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Constitutional reform and devolution are not remote, side issues. This is an integral part of the discussion we need to be having on the left of the Labour party about how we increase public and community involvement in the political world. How we stop Westminster being remote from the people of Wales, or Liverpool or Belfast or Glasgow. So I am calling for Labour to establish a Constitutional Convention to create a new structure for the UK based on a union of nations – a union of equals, a federal structure which recognises that the present structure is no longer relevant (if it ever was) and needs urgent reform to take into account the needs of all 4 nations of the UK on an equal footing.

But we also need to look internally and assess how democratic our structures are within the Labour Party. We have a centralised party structure with very much a top-down approach. The Labour party too needs a federalised system that has proper representation from the four nations of the UK! Welsh Labour Grassroots (Momentum in Wales) continues to argue for greater democracy within the party, and has had considerable success in achieving this in Wales. We can learn too about how we work with other political parties to counter Tory Government policies – and Wales has had its coalition arrangements.

We need to be building the Labour Party into a campaigning organisation. During the last 10 years of austerity cuts it has been a Welsh Labour Government and often Welsh Labour local authorities who ended up implementing those cuts. Yes, they objected and made public statements. But did they organise? Did they build a movement? Did they get 100% behind the People’s Assembly? We should have been in the vanguard of the push back against the austerity policies that ended up leaving us ill-equipped to manage this pandemic.

And campaigns do not begin and end at election times. They need to be a constant feature of our work – whether it is campaigning alongside climate change protesters or trade union colleagues arguing for proper sickness benefits for our workers. We need as politicians to get outside “the bubble” – whether that is in Cardiff Bay or in Westminster – and join the movements that are building out there to change society. Stop being a resolutionary party and take clear red action to change our society. Wales still suffers from the problems of poverty and deprivation that afflict other parts of the United Kingdom, and we too have our billionaires!

As an example of this, we can take comfort in Wales – and justifiably so – that Welsh Government continued to provide free school meals for our children during the summer holidays without being forced into an embarrassing U-turn. And it is right that we do provide that kind of support to avoid children suffering hardship. But it is also a disgrace that in the fifth richest country in the world, such child deprivation exists at all. So one lesson that we on the left have to learn is how to move the debate – and the action – from the care and support that we currently need to provide to an understanding and promotion of the class argument that such divisions in society should cease to exist – that another way is possible.

So yes, there are lessons to be learnt by the left, and by the Labour Party as a whole – about how we engage with people, about how we explain the alternatives to them, how we campaign on issues that matter to them, how we can build a movement and how we show them that we really do care. For me, there is also the lesson that devolution can provide a system of government that is able to identify, and given adequate funding, meet the needs of the people. We need more devolution – not less, considering the needs of the regions of England too.

At the same time, it is crucial that in Wales and across the UK we are united in standing up and campaigning against the damaging policies of this regressive Tory Government. We need that clear radical red action now more than ever as we fight to give future generations across the UK a fairer, greener, socialist future.

WINNING THE FUTURE:

SOCIALIST RESPONSES TO THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS

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