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Fast Forward

The next generation
of progressive
politics

Edited by David Chaplin
and Claire Leigh

Young Fabians | 56

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The Young Fabians

The Young Fabians are the under-31's section of the Fabian Society, Britain's foremost centre-left think tank. Set up in 1960, we remain **the only think tank run by and for young people**. Our Membership numbers over 1,400 and includes young professional, students, parliamentary researchers, political activists and academics. The Young Fabians promote policy debate through seminars, conferences, pamphlets, and online through our website and blog. To find out more about the Young Fabians, visit www.youngfabians.org.uk.

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Vote for
a Change

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UNISON
the public service union

CWU
The communications union

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Vote for a Change

Labour's first-time prospective candidates – its “class of 2010” – and the wider cohort of political activists of which they are a part, seem to instinctively get that the country has changed, and that the political culture has to change to keep up with that. People are now less tribal and want a Parliament and politics that better represents the diversity - in all its forms - of Twenty-First Century Britain.

The Young Fabians not just reflect but are testing this new politics: in the open manner of their policy debates and in their willingness to take a bolder approach in the policy recommendations they make.

Democratic renewal is rightly considered a priority. Reform is vital if politics is going to allow the voice of the people to be heard on the issues that matter. Outside of a handful of key marginal seats, general elections routinely bypass the majority of voters. If we leave in place the current system, how do we expect to influence the decisions our MPs take on our behalf? How else can we expect politicians to have the legitimacy to take the critical steps (such as those outlined in this pamphlet) necessary to combat the challenges this country faces and improve the quality of people's lives?

Fresh faces alone will not be enough to make the changes that we need to see. As the 1997 intake of new MPs discovered, a desire to modernise

Parliament can quickly give way to defending the status quo once they have joined the gentlemen's club. Politics shouldn't be left to the politicians. Young Fabian members recognise this, for example through the idea for a citizens' convention to debate and decide proposals for democratic reform.

As shown by the publication of this pamphlet, the rising generation doesn't need to wait to have its say. There is another way they can have an immediate impact too. Labour still has one final reforming moment this side of the election to seize, if they can show the vision and courage to do so. Holding a referendum on the voting system on the day of the next general election would be a historic opportunity to allow the people to decide how they want their MPs to be elected. If there's one thing that should focus Young Fabian minds, it is that First Past the Post could unfairly hand the Conservatives an exclusive grip on power for a generation, effectively shutting out - at least in Westminster - the progressive ideas they passionately champion.

Vote for a Change is the campaign calling for a referendum on the voting system to take place on the day of the next general election
www.voteforachange.co.uk



Supporting Partner Forewords

UNISON

UNISON welcomes the publication of 'Fast Forward: the next generation of progressive politics' as an important contribution to the debate on progressive policy making.

These unprecedented economic times require a rethink about the values our society is based on following the collapse of the financial system and trust in politicians.

As the UK's largest public service union, UNISON is determined that the current crisis is not used to undermine or destroy public services. Working with our members, service users and other progressive organisations the union has launched 'A Million Voices for Public Services' (www.unison.org.uk/million). We hope readers of this pamphlet join the campaign and add their voices in support of public services.

This pamphlet shows that young people are interested in politics and in UNISON we know this to be true. Our young members section is the fastest growing part of the union and it makes an enormous contribution to every aspect of the union's life (www.unison.org.uk/young).

The debates on economic and democratic renewal are vital and UNISON knows that trade unions must be at the very heart of the discussions. Trade unions, representing millions of people, bring a unique insight into policy making and we look forward to contributing to finding solutions to the issues raised in this pamphlet.

As Labour Party affiliates both UNISON and the Fabians have a key role to play.

James Anthony
UNISON National Executive Council and Young Labour
National Committee

CWU

Young people become members of trade unions for a variety of reasons, to protect their rights, for solidarity, but also to be represented on a range of policy issues, and for analysis of their place in a changing world.

The Young Fabians have put together their thoughts on the policy issues most important to young people in this pamphlet. Many of these issues are the challenges the TU movement will need to represent their young members on in the coming years. The ideas put forward in this publication will make an important contribution to the discussion and will stimulate a wider debate.

CWU are pleased to be able to be associated with, and to support the work of the Young Fabians in increasing the participation of young people in left of centre politics, and in encouraging young people to help contribute policy ideas to the debate on the big issues facing society today.



Introduction

David Chaplin, Young Fabian Vice Chair 2008/9

Claire Leigh, Young Fabian Policy and
Publications Officer 2008/9

Most Young Fabians were in their teens when New Labour came to power twelve years ago. Many were still at primary school. We are a generation whose formative political years have been spent under a Labour government.

Much has been achieved in that time – including the national minimum wage, vital investment in education and the National Health Service and policies to help society turn the corner on inequality and life chances – but much is left still to do, and we must be the generation to do it.

Our society continues to be one in which four million children live in poverty¹. Over 60,000 young workers under 22 earn less than the minimum wage in jobs with limited prospects of progression². It is our generation that must pick up the tab for a 200-year old carbon legacy and it is we who must seek to re-invigorate democracy both at home and internationally to find just solutions to manifold injustices. If we are to have any hope of addressing these and other challenges, we must move the progressive agenda forward, and fast.

The progressive agenda is being challenged from new quarters of the political landscape, particularly in the run-up to the next election. In this context it's vital that we, the next generation of young progressive voters, activists, citizens and politicians, make our voices heard in the coming debate.

With this in mind, the Young Fabians set out to begin a conversation

with young people which ranged across the full spectrum of policy. It has been an opportunity for Young Fabian members to engage in an open and passionate debate about the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and the role of progressive politics in shaping our future.

Last year four 'Policy Forums' were established to theme our discussions. These covered:

- The Economy & Prosperity
- International & Security Policy
- Democracy & Communities
- The Public Realm

In this paper the chairs of the Policy Forums provide their summaries of each of the groups – the problems identified, the solutions offered, and real choices facing us. The contributors do not attempt to set out a single Young Fabian platform, but rather, as an organisation that exists to provide a forum for debate and discussion among young progressives, the essays reflect the need for serious thought about our choices and priorities at a time of global economic instability.

The economic downturn brings its own set of challenges for our society. It is clear that a debate around the future of public spending is essential in order to prioritise services that we value most. At present, that debate is caught in a pre-election void. We cannot allow that debate to be stifled; this will only serve those who want to cut funding for our public services by stealth and without public scrutiny. We should begin an honest and open debate with the electorate about where services will be prioritised and where we may need to cut back to control our current spending.

We have hugely enjoyed overseeing our Policy Forums for the last two years and we look forward to discussing the ideas set out in the following essays over the coming months. As we enter the pre-election period the Young Fabians will continue to facilitate thoughtful debate. We will continue to host a varied programme of events and seminars,

run by young people for young people, and give our members access to the thinkers and politicians who are leading the progressive charge.

To find out more about the Young Fabians or how to become a member, visit www.youngfabians.org.uk. From there you can also visit the Young Fabian blog and post your views on this pamphlet.

1 | Economy and Prosperity Policy

Nirmalee Wanduragala

It is essential for Labour to act bravely and decisively in policy matters relating to the economy and the prosperity of all in our society. The policy proposals in this chapter are broken down into four key areas, corresponding to some of the discussion sessions that were held to prepare this document. They are financial reform; the poverty gap; financial education and preparing for the upturn.

Financial Reform

International

There are many difficulties with attempting to address our current financial systems - as have been pointed out by academics, economists and in Government reviews. However we do believe that there is a strong need for some form of international regulatory body in order to oversee financial regulation on a macro scale, because of the interconnected nature of finance and banking. We therefore propose:

- An international body which is an over-arching macro prudential supervision body with a collegiate structure. Any regulatory legislation introduced by this body must be flexible to take into account the many different systems across the world.
- A clear separation of the macro from the micro level - placing

the micro firmly at a national level, the international organisation would provide macro-prudential supervision at a global level.

- A rejection of European level macro-prudential supervisory body. It is unnecessary and would be an added complication.

National

We believe that a clearer division between macro and micro prudential supervisor powers, with stronger cooperation between the three core financial regulatory bodies, is key to better financial regulation.

Banking

Systemic risk and bank size must be addressed as part of the future long-term regulation of the banking industry. By allowing the size of banks to expand unchecked we run the risk of expanding the size of any future public liability if a similar desperate economic cataclysm were to happen again. The focus of reform needs to be on raising the stability of the sector and protecting consumer

We therefore propose the introduction of a new banking accounts model. Whilst responsibility lies with banks and financial institutions to manage the deposits they hold and the risk they expose their customers' money to, we should ensure consumers can exercise an active choice in the risk and rewards their savings are exposed to.

Our model would allow for a bank to register 'safe accounts' where money deposited in these accounts would only be invested in gilts/government bonds or similar safe investments. Rates of interest would therefore be lower, but money deposited would be secure. Banks would then have to register the second 'high risk' accounts separately, so preventing money from the 'safe' accounts from being invested in more risky areas such as mortgages. Rates of return for the account holder would be potential much higher, but also riskier. The Government could then lower - or completely remove - the deposit protection plan from the higher risk account investors. In the same way

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that many people manage their pension investments, customers would switch between the two according to their personal circumstances i.e. a younger single person would be very likely to opt for the high risk account, yet those approaching retirement might chose the 'safe' option.

The Poverty Gap

Eliminating Poverty

With thirteen million people, including four million children, currently estimated to be living in poverty in the UK, it is clear that for many the recession is having a much more devastating impact than a shrinking investment portfolio. Tackling poverty must be the paramount objective of progressive government. As with the elimination of child poverty, targets should be set for the reduction of pensioner and total poverty, binding the next Government to a stretching but achievable set of actions to make real and steady progress towards a more equal society.

Employment is the best way out of poverty, but we need to ease the transition for those moving from unemployment benefits to employment, as this transition can cause people to have gaps in their income and turn to alternative forms of credit. We should ensure that a low income is not allowed to become an active discriminatory factor in accessing financial services. Access to responsible borrowing for those on low incomes is woeful, people currently have to turn to alternate forms of credit (such as illegal lending or borrowing at disproportionate interest rates - with rates of 180% APR common). We should therefore actively pursue increased access to micro-credit and; easier savings options.

Additionally, to break the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage, we must ensure that we continue to widen access to education, apprenticeships and lifelong learning, including providing 'second chances' to those who missed out first time round.

Microcredit and credit regulation

With the collapse of two out of three of the biggest doorstep sub-prime lenders, and tightening up of credit facilities on the high street, five million people no longer have access to affordable credit¹. To safeguard future generations from feeling the acutest impact of this, it is imperative that Government acts to prevent people entering into agreements with illegal lenders, loan sharks and other high-interest options with no real knowledge of the implications and of the other options available to them.

To combat this the Social Fund should be expanded and used to create a larger portfolio of low interest loans. Additionally, credit unions who provide affordable micro-credit should be widely promoted and supported, and local authorities should be encouraged to set up new credit unions where there is a lack of supply, working in conjunction with Post Offices.

The Post Office itself and similar local facilities should be used to provide access to micro finance, and as the Post Office is present in most communities and has the trust of local people, we support the campaign to establish it as a type of People's Bank, which could be managed along the lines of the Co-op.

While there is no lack of regulation of credit, there is a lack of enforcement of credit regulation that we believe should be addressed, including loan to value ratios, and the 'duty of care' that is required of financial services. We should look at interest rate caps similar to the Usuary laws which should apply to microcredit providers and doorstep lenders as well as to banks with limits to which credit interest rates can rise by over a 10 year period.

Developing a savings culture

We already recognise the important financial savings can make to life chances. We have set up child trust funds precisely to increase the opportunities of those not born to independent wealth. Savings also provide a buffer for households to meet urgent unexpected costs

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without having to appeal to potentially expensive borrowing.

We should broaden the Save as you Earn scheme to enable non-higher rate taxpayers to develop long-term savings. By enable employees to set aside a small proportion of their pre-tax earnings in medium to long term savings plans we can further ensure that being in work provides long term benefits.

Financial Education

Between seven to eight million people in this country have an 'over-indebtedness' problem². Debt is an issue which affects all levels of society, and can be a positive thing as it allows people to distribute their income more evenly across their lifetime, but it is normally those struggling with other types of exclusion that it affects most. Yet the biggest challenge is in getting people to access financial advice before it becomes a serious problem for them.

As a progressive party Labour should champion financial inclusion and access for all to good financial services, so as not to leave vulnerable people to the mercy of illegal lending and loan sharks. We propose addressing these issues through;

- Financial education for all children and young people. It is currently in the curriculum, but not compulsory. It should now be made compulsory.
- All first year university degree courses should include a compulsory additional module on personal finance.

Financial education for all

The introduction of pensions accounts³ could be used as an opportunity to further people's financial education. This could be boosted and supported by the introduction of mandatory training on finance for each person looking to take out a credit card. In the United States, those in financial difficulties are required to undertake some financial education. After just one missed payment, financial education should be

offered in an attempt to rectify the situation before things deteriorate further. Credit payback should be illustrated to customers using examples with exact costs rather than percentages so customers can get a better idea of payback and the costs.

It would also be a sensible and effective step for Sure Start centres to provide financial education classes to parents. We also propose introducing a 'save through your wage' scheme, similar in operation to the employee shares system.

Student financial education

The current student loan system gives an underlying message that debt is no problem, coupled with poor and infrequent information. Better and more frequent information should be given to students with the inclusion of a compulsory study module on financial management and economics to be passed within the first year of university.

Preparing for the recovery

Some areas of the country and the economy are seeing initial signs of recovery, with signs of recovery in the banking sector; a rallying stock market; and the value of the pound against the dollar back up.

However, the world economy has not yet returned to a pattern of growth and unemployment continues to rise, particularly for young people and recent graduates. It is predicted that for the UK the biggest change ahead will be less free credit. This will mean that growth will be more gradual in the future. The Government needs to help rebalance our economy to protect the life chances of future generations.

Skills and new businesses

The Labour Government must recognise and act on the need to build a new industrial policy, to protect and nurture key industries, and encourage the creation of jobs in those areas. To date, Britain has had success, notably in the defence and pharmaceutical industries. We need

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to be looking to advanced manufacturing, renewables, green technology and IT sectors.

Government must support new industries and work with them through measures such as:

- Developing skills clusters, along the lines of the Silicon Valley. At the moment we are over-developing some skills and the expense of other vital skills. We need to train people in areas where our economy is particularly lacking. This means, for example, encouraging training in nuclear and other key engineering.
- Providing more venture capital (which at the moment is not strong compared to private equity) through greater investment in a Government seed and venture capital fund on a large scale to help start-ups and SMEs. The Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation was a quasi-public venture fund that was extremely successful in the 1930s and 40s, set up as a partnership between the Bank of England and a number of British banks to fill a gap in Venture Capital funding for SMEs. We should perhaps consider the need to found something along the same lines again.

Demand and employment equality

Current UK policy is focussed on the demand side, but we now need to strengthen demand within our own market as well as internationally. To generate extra UK based demand there must be both higher wages and a greater equality of distribution of wages. These sit very well with Labour's instinctive progressive principles and now they can both be argued for not merely on moral grounds but also on economic grounds.

We therefore propose:

- Addressing the need for greater equality through wages, looking at a steeper income tax - (50p for earners over £100,000 a year is welcome but there should be steeper rise), but a higher tax-free allowance, and a renewed focus on full employment.

- In order to address the bonus culture, bonuses should be on an equity or bond-based system.
- Childcare provision should be free for all.
- All new land developments should take into account the caring needs of those working and living in the area. Developments should provide childcare and other caring facilities where there are over 100 new residential properties or 100 new employment posts proposed.

Young people and unemployment

As Young Fabians we are particularly concerned about the disproportionate impact of high unemployment on young people and new graduates. We are keen for the Government to continue to prioritise the funding and support for apprenticeships. These should be targeted at young people as well as adults who are seeking a fast and reliable route into a skilled profession.

There also needs to be a better understanding of how businesses, particularly SMEs react to changes in educational structures such as new qualifications. The number of different qualification names and changes should be limited and better careers advice provided for young people to help them make the best choices for them in their future careers, and to widen their aspirations

The Government should act further to prevent mass unemployment amongst 16-25 year olds. The September Guarantee was also an important step, and the commitment to support internships for young people who do not traditionally have access to work experience should be indefinitely. The recommendations from the Milburn Review into Fair Access to the Professions should be accepted and its recommendations implemented by the government immediately.

2 | International and Security Policy

Brian Duggan and Marie-Noelle Loewe

New Labour came in to government in 1997 on a platform which placed human rights at the centre of its foreign policy; a new doctrine for intervention, trade and diplomacy grounded in an ethical framework. Yet in the practice of foreign policy since then, these noble intentions have too often been hard to recognise. They now need to be rediscovered.

This essay argues for a renewed commitment to the ethical dimension of Labour's foreign policy. It also acknowledges that the world has moved on and as a progressive movement, so too must our solutions. Rapid globalisation has broken down national boundaries and created a host of new transnational actors, threats and opportunities. Foreign policy in this new environment requires a more expansive sense of the 'national interest' and where the boundaries of social justice and responsibility lie, binding together consumers and workers from around the world. A global outlook in today's globalised world is a form of enlightened self-interest, and our responses demand internationalism in both vision and method.

Our approach must reflect a changed understanding of the world and Britain's role within it. It must put clear water between the progressive agenda and those who seek to turn back time on Britain's place in the world. For us on the left, it is not possible to speak of values and yet fail to act upon them. A 'Liberal Conservative' approach would result in a disastrous marriage of isolationism and inaction, a policy that leaves

Britain vulnerable and alone and the world a less fair place. For the Left, progressivism does not stop at our borders, and 'patience' is not what drives historic change.

The chapter makes observations surrounding four distinct areas of foreign policy:

- The European Union
- International institutions
- Interventions overseas
- Britain's role in the world

We propose bold reforms to global institutions to equip the world with the diplomatic, economic, and military tools to build a value-based approach to foreign policy. The institutions through which we enact our policy are often restrained by the institutional architecture of an era now past. There is now a need for a global governance system fit for the modern age and crafted towards building a fairer, more equal and more just world.

Democracy and the European Union

Whilst acknowledging the need to avoid neo-colonialism, foreign policy must be driven by a commitment to developing and fostering democracies across the world. However, we must also resolve democracy and legitimacy debates closer to home. This must start with the European Union.

The ever increasing rise of Euroscepticism in this country makes the need to win the argument on Britain being in Europe more urgent. We must be bolder and prouder about the benefits of European Union membership to both the British state as well as to its citizens. This is fundamentally a governmental issue before it is a party political one and a Labour government should urgently seek to better explain the importance of the EU to Britain.

Britain has achieved many intentions in European governance including the extension of qualified majority voting, the implementa-

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tion of the Lisbon strategy and we should not be shy where we have shaped a Europe that is good for Britain. We need to settle the misleading economic argument that 'EU membership costs Britain more than we get back in return' and defeat the political argument that the pooling of strength weakens power, not increases it.

We must also be proactive in public debates by mandating our Councillors, MPs and MEPs to lead regionally on strong political engagement with young people at schools, universities and Youth Parliaments. British media should be encouraged to take responsibility for accurate and responsible journalism to raise both the level of information and debate about Britain's work at European level. For example, a "European Coverage Quota" could be developed for publicly owned media such as the BBC.

Across civil society, schools, and through wider education we should look at new strategies for developing a confident approach to Britain's EU membership including language provision and access to accurate and high quality information. If we fail to provide this then inaccuracies will continue to be presented as fact, and future generations will continue to lose the argument and the political momentum in Europe.

However, we must also recognise that reform of the EU is also necessary to meet the challenges of the 21st Century. We must reach a final agreement on significant reductions in Common Agricultural Policy subsidies and increases in social funds aimed at boosting the poorest EU regions. We should extend preferential trade access to our nearest neighbours, including to African states. We should take the political lead on the campaign for one home for the European Parliament and scrapping the Strasbourg parliamentary sessions.

Democracy and international institutions

Beyond Europe's borders it is increasingly clear that the UN requires new tools to tackle the challenges of the 21st Century. Young progressives should begin to lead on a debate about the role of the Security

Council and the General Assembly; a Labour Government must act with greater urgency on this area.

To create a more modern and representative UN, serious consideration should be given to expanding the permanent membership of the Security Council to Brazil, India and Japan. The soft power of the General Assembly should be increased to include economic sanctions and where appropriate moves towards qualified majority voting should be proposed to weaken the ability of states to veto action.

The UN should strengthen its ability to draw together influence from regional political structures such as the EU, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and the African Union. A debate needs to be had about the role of Europe's representation on the Security Council. For example, the EU states may be better represented by scrapping the permanent seats of Britain and France and replacing them with an EU seat under the new Lisbon rules.

The British Government should lead on challenging low representation of the Islamic world within the UN. Given Turkey's geopolitical importance, the means to strengthen its international role must be explored.

Serious consideration should be given to developing new vehicles to address areas where the UN and Breton Woods institutions so often fail. For example, this process could include demoting the G8 as the main informal forum for global governance, promoting the G20 as a more inclusive, effective and democratic vehicle for informal governance.

International institutions should follow Barack Obama's lead by working towards multilateral nuclear disarmament. More focus should also be placed on better targeted international aid, the establishment of globally fair and responsible trade laws, and combating the causes of instability and terrorism in the form of poverty, economic and political exploitation and conflict.

Interventionism

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New Labour's unofficial doctrine of liberal interventionism – or 'muscular interventionism' – seems muddled and unclear in the context of the unpopular long-term military commitment to Afghanistan and the withdrawal from Iraq.

There is a need to reassess how and when interventionism occurs and place it in a consistent framework based on when to intervene and why. This should be founded upon a clear relationship between morality and the rule of law. Interventionism cannot be founded upon hubris, neo-colonial ambition or economic aspiration.

Guidelines for interventionism should be established to give greater legitimacy to any British action undertaken in the name of human rights or international security, allowing decisions to be taken more consistently and speedily than in the past. This 'rulebook' could contain a scaled response of liberal interventions as part of a charter for intervention to promote stability, guarantee standards, uphold the rule of international law and the right to live in peace¹.

Increased regionalism should empower regional solutions to regional problems. Regional governance bodies should have the ability to support the rule of law and economic and political sanctions through new structures. These would sit within existing international bodies which would allow for internationally legitimised regional action.

Britain's role in the world

The rapid globalisation of international markets, the labour force and financial capital, and the inherently cross-border nature of emerging challenges such as climate change and terrorism, requires a more expansive sense of the 'national interest', and the boundaries of social justice and responsibility. A foreign policy which recognises the bond of responsibility between global citizens towards one another is imperative.

The rise of new powers in the form of India, China and others, and the

relative decline of the influence of established players, Britain included, also demands better prioritisation of our international aims and activities. Our focus should be on what we are good at, where we can add most value, what our top priorities are and which institutions we can most effectively work through to achieve our goals. We must identify mutual benefits to build strong relationships with these emerging powers.

Conclusion

In foreign policy, like domestic policy-making, progress will not happen naturally or by itself. A 'hands-off' approach to international relations will exacerbate problems rather than solve them. Bolder reform of the institutions through which we act is needed, acknowledging that global, value-driven, and institutional solutions are the most progressive way to meet the foreign policy challenges of today.

3 | Democracy and Communities Policy

Cllr Matt Cooke

Since 1997 our communities have experienced a sustained expansion in control and influence over the institutions that govern on their behalf. Many local communities have experienced participatory budgeting and other means of being actively engaged in decisions affecting the local environment; often via an increasingly interactive and innovative use of online systems of communication. Many voters in Scotland, Wales, London, and the North-East have been offered a new way to vote and be represented.

But there has also been a growing sense of urgency about the need for ongoing reform at all levels of government. A new democracy agenda has clearly been endorsed by young progressives in recent years, with more young people now calling for the right to vote at 16 than ever before¹. There is also a growing disparity between those communities whose leaders and institutions understand the benefits of decision making with local people, in stark contrast with those who remain content 'doing at' them.

In this context, the Democracy & Communities Policy Forum was tasked with discussing a broad policy area including electoral reform, community integration, the role of national and local government in place-shaping and instituting a new sense of civic pride and raising aspiration in our communities.

There has been a rich context for our discussions over the last few

months. We began meeting shortly after the 'Baby Peter' case in Haringey had cast a shadow over the ongoing national debate on the role, duties and quality of Local Government. Whilst in Westminster the MPs expenses scandal had just begun to rock the political establishment. These events brought a sense of keen relevance and sharp focus to our discussions on electoral reform, the re-casting of the first and second chambers, the work of local authorities and people's expectations of politics and politicians in the UK.

Electoral reform and democratic renewal

Electoral reform is a necessity; there is an urgent need to link constitutional reform with big issues and big ideas in order to capture the imagination of the next generation of voters. In the context of the debate over the rights and privileges of the current Parliament, there is clearly a particular moment to be seized. The Government should proceed with this now, and demonstrate a commitment to its progressive and reformist instincts.

A sensible way forward which meets this urgent need for action, is a 'Citizens Convention'²; a large panel of experts and citizens picked at random from the electoral register to debate and formulate ideas for electoral reform. We believe that this should include the voting system, open primaries for parliamentary candidates, election of the House of Lords, funding of political parties and the function and role of Select Committees. The Government should resist the temptation that the future of our democracy to be debated and decided 'in house' without a genuine voice for people to be directly heard.

The means of appointment to the House of Lords is untenable and creates an impossible conflict between a sense of entitlement on the one hand, and genuine desire to perform a public duty and public service on the other. Similarly to wider electoral reform, there is now a unique window of opportunity for the Labour Government to act on this issue.

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The second chamber should be an advisory chamber, and any reform of its make-up and powers should see a reduction in the number of Peers.

There is a clear need for a general commitment to better political education in the UK. Politics is complex. The division and allocation of resources is complex, and we need citizens to recognise and understand this in order to be fully engaged and empowered. If we are serious about empowerment and individuals meaningfully taking part in society, then more needs to be done through education to give people the tools they need to have a stake in the debate.

There is a clear role here for political parties themselves. The Labour Party, for example, needs to be better equipped and more committed to political education and this should be considered as an inherent part of membership and support for political parties. This should be a statutory provision as a condition of state funding.

There needs to be a genuine conversation with citizens about how they want to be represented, and as part of this, an open and informed conversation about how much representation should, and does, cost.

Open primaries should be taken up. The preferred model is one in which local party members put forward a shortlist of candidates which in turn goes to the wider population for selection. There would not necessarily be a requirement to register their support for a particular party in order to participate in the process but this should be up for discussion. However, the trialling of primaries will be of less value if the party funding question has not yet been resolved, as it would still remain too easy to 'buy' candidacy by pumping money into specific campaigns in particular geographical areas and seats.

There is a need for a new powerful Parliamentary regulator to assess an MP's performance. This information could be used in some way to help inform the electorate around the time of elections.

On Select Committees, being a Chair of a Select Committee should feel more like a credible alternative to a ministerial career with real power to amend and develop policy. Membership of a committee should be promoted and supported by parties much more as a legiti-

mate progression rather than a less preferable alternative to a ministerial role.

Sustainable communities

Currently there is no tangible commitment from central government to tell the story of what local authorities do nor to find new and innovative ways to promote their work. The duty to promote democracy put forward by Hazel Blears MP, when Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government³, had the potential to drive a culture change in local authorities and have a really beneficial impact on local communities. But ideas brought forward into legislation should be radical and bind local authorities, not provide a menu to adopt or reject.

Government and local authorities need to enable constant participation from residents who want to be involved in decision-making. We should strive for constant participation from citizens and should explore incentives to encourage involvement including Council Tax rebate or reductions in return for local volunteering. There also needs to be a commitment to enabling communities and individuals to participate in order to offset the 'those who shout loudest, get the resources' effect.

There needs to be a challenge to the emerging Local Government political class – particularly in metropolitan areas. Local Government cannot be a closed shop and the Labour Party should better celebrate the role councillors play and urgently find ways of recruiting a more diverse spread of local people to stand for selection as councillors, particularly younger people.

There needs to be a transparent, cross-party debate about remuneration, training and expectations for councillors nationwide. The Labour Party should lead that debate, and should work to improve representation of talented and diverse councillors. Councils should also be obliged to publish a variety of information on councillor performance including attendance records and other indicators for citizens to be able to judge

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value for money and effectiveness of their local representatives.

The Department for Communities and Local Government must press on with reforms to enable local communities to have more influence on local decision-making. More work is needed to ensure local authorities stop doing things 'to' communities and start doing 'with' them. Evidence is mounting from good practice and research that this leads to more people being involved: feeling empowered and that they have a local voice; and that the taxes they pay are justifiable.

The gap between local authorities moving in the right direction with the implementation of such measures - especially online services and interactivity - and those not engaging and involving local people is unacceptable and the Government should legislate to oblige local authorities to introduce measures and new ambitious targets in these areas as soon as possible. This could also include supporting better communication between councils and citizens, enabling better signposting and access to local councillors and information about how councillors can help with problems.

The policy commission agreed that:

- The Government must press on with double devolution using the best practice of local authorities and a growing evidence base to inform minimum standards for local authorities and devise new measures and targets for local authorities to involve local people.
- Councils must better signpost access to councillors and disseminate more and better information about how local councillors can help with citizen's concerns

There is an urgent need to reduce the perception and actual practice of a 'tick box' culture within local authorities and shift the focus to the quality of services. This is linked to the imperative of ensuring new, talented and diverse candidates stand for local councils at elections. Additionally, a new nationwide provision of councillor training should be in operation at the member/officer interface. Specifically:

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- All new Councillors should be given training on the need for delivering quality services to diverse people and challenging the information given to elected members by civil servants.

Community cohesion & equalities

There is little in terms of statutory duties for local authorities to truly promote community cohesion and equalities other than a handful of Local Area Agreements which are essentially optional. The positive engagement and involvement of local people in shaping their area, the use of resources and their shared future will become more important over the coming years and a local authority's effectiveness and transparency in enabling this should not be optional, but statutory and measurable.

In a post 7/7 Britain, one of the key investments available to local authorities to promote community cohesion is the 'Preventing Violent Extremism' fund. Many believe the 'Preventing Violent Extremism' agenda is outdated and represents a blunt instrument which needs to be re-assessed and dramatically re-thought. The title - of what is essentially a fund for local authorities to spend as they see fit on specific ethnic groups within a geographical location - is misleading and needs re-branding to focus on building inter-community links.

The provision of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) teaching is a key component of community cohesion, but provision is notoriously inconsistent with numerous providers, of varying quality, operating in different areas. The Government should urgently consider allocating the entire ESOL budget to local authorities to commission bespoke local services and monitor effectiveness and quality.

When local authorities, Government, the third sector and others create new bodies, groups, agencies and action plans, much more thought needs to be given to creating institutions that people want to be actively involved with and that are easily accessible. Local authorities are generally poor at presenting policy in ways which are easily accessed by local

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people. So although policy is reached and decided upon by locally elected representatives, this is rarely communicated, if at all, and is often obscure to the local electorate.

Decisions made at a local level are often divisive and divide communities. The way local authorities present locally contentious issues could be improved and undertaken in a way which allows full public involvement in decision-making.

Conclusion

The moves since 1997 to increase localism and devolution of power to local authorities and communities should not be allowed to wither and fade, they must be celebrated and we shouldn't be afraid to talk of our successes. While there will be a significant challenge for Labour in the coming years to reinvigorate its grass roots, a renewed focus on political reform and placing power into the hands of individuals, local government should feel like our natural territory.

4 | The Public Realm

Conor McGinn

I was very pleased to be asked to Chair the Young Fabians' Policy Forum on the Public Realm. From the outset, in consultation with those who had expressed an interest in being involved, I tried to encourage a new and slightly different focus on debates that, in my view, have had a preoccupation with the minutiae of public services and the way in which we deliver them.

There was also a danger of us being overwhelmed by one issue – social care is a good example – because of the complicated nature and range of opinions on specific topics within different areas of the public realm. I felt that many of the debates and discussions about the public realm, particularly on the left, have neglected a bigger challenge: the need to ensure that a new generation of political, civic and community activists, as well as a new generation of Britons, understand why public services exist and what they exist for.

Finally, I wanted to use the opportunity to look at other aspects of the public realm that are often overlooked in debates and discussions about public services. For many people, public services mean health and education, and even within that we tend to focus on specific areas of the wider topic. I thought a group of young, talented and intelligent Fabians would be an ideal group to shine a light on some of these darker places.

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A re-emergence of ideology: how does the left defend and improve public services?

Since the end of World War II, the public realm has played a mandatory and intimate role in the life of every UK citizen, from birth to death and everything in between. That we debate, discuss, and can determine the future of our public services demonstrate their acceptance in mainstream political thought as an integral part of what Government does. In many respects, the debate around healthcare reform in the USA shows just how ingrained public services are in our national consciousness, given how totally incomprehensible many British people find the attitude of American – and some home-grown – conservatives in their rather frightening and vicious opposition to state involvement in providing healthcare.

Yet for all of this history and great public affection for our national public institutions, and the extent to which public services are embedded in our society, Labour came to power in 1997 after an eighteen-yearlong assault on the public realm. The Conservative government left a crumbling health service, an under-resourced education system, a decimated public housing sector and huge swathes of the country written off and left without employment and opportunity.

Since 1997, massive investment in public services has taken place, and Labour has done much to draw the Conservative Party into political territory where education and health, in particular, stand strong as key public services that need to be adequately funded. Discussions about public services and the public sector have consequently been much more nuanced, focussing on reform, efficiency, spending levels, service delivery and practicalities.

The financial crisis, however, has brought about a re-emergence of the big ideological divides between Left and Right, Labour and Conservative, on spending and borrowing, taxation, the role of the market and the role of Government. In recent months, we have seen major cleavages between left and right over what the public realm is, to

what extent it should provide services, and, most importantly, what it is for and what it can achieve. The left needs to have coherent and comprehensive answers to those questions.

Starting with the 'five giants' that the welfare state was founded on, and adding a sixth element of the public realm, I begin to examine how Labour can continue to deliver excellent public services.

Want or the need for an adequate income for all

Labour's introduction of a minimum wage was certainly aimed at addressing this, and attempted to end the exploitation of those in low-paid employment. The financial crisis, though, has posed a question as to whether the word 'adequate' should be replaced by 'fair'. The policy forum proposes that:

- Regulation and proper scrutiny needs to be introduced into the financial sector to ensure that greed, risk and excess never again are allowed to put in jeopardy the lives of millions of ordinary people who, through not fault of their own, could lose their jobs and homes because of the recklessness of a wealthy and irresponsible few.

Disease or the need for access to health care

There has been massive investment in the NHS since Labour came to power. Debate still rages as to the involvement of the private sector in delivering services, but increasingly the public are focussing on the quality and accessibility of services. The policy forum discussed two key ideas regarding healthcare:

- The perception that the NHS is 'free' needs to be challenged. NHS users should be issued with an annual summary that outlines their treatment during the course of the previous year, with estimated costs. This may explain and enforce the relationship between

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taxation/national insurance and the UK's ability to provide a health service free at the point of need.

- In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, prescription charges have been abolished. This should now be introduced in England.

Ignorance or the need for access to educational opportunity

Improving education has been a primary focus for this Labour government and there have been significant successes since 1997. It is important to build on the record investment in education by supporting those most in need of help with their learning. The Policy Forum therefore highlighted two priorities for the progressive left:

- In the current economic climate, it is important to ensure that the country's long-term interests are protected. This includes guaranteeing that university funding and the number of places for students entering higher education is maintained, alongside ensuring wider access to those who are entering full-time education in later life, such as those in full-time employment, carers, and parents.
- Education is about more than academic achievement. There needs to be a significant increase in the number and quality of apprenticeships available. This needs to be done alongside an increase in parity between academic and vocational qualifications, which requires cultural change and a new emphasis on the achievements of those who work in different ways. Early identification of young people who show promise in vocational areas should be used to encourage them in their chosen career path.

Squalor or the need for adequate housing

Housing is amongst the most important issues for young people, who

are at a stage in life where they are establishing households of their own. Much has been promised over the past twelve years, including a massive increase in the supply of social and sustainable housing in the wake of the Barker Review. However, despite the talk, radical action has failed to materialise. The policy forum thought that:

- The impetus for creating much-needed housing needs to come from national Government. There should be a national house-building programme, involving social, part-owned, private and co-operative housing.
- There needs to be a fresh examination of the regulations on the buy-to-let sector. The Government should consider limits on the number of properties owned, and prohibitive taxation to ensure that those who have property empires do not have a monopoly on the market, particularly in areas with limited property availability. The Government should also create conditions where first time buyers and families have priority for certain types of properties, prioritising their needs above those who already own a number of properties.

Idleness or the need for gainful employment

The dramatic increase in unemployment over the last year is a huge cause for concern, particularly given its effects on young people and those in communities who have suffered disproportionately in previous recessions. The policy forum highlighted two key areas for urgent action:

- There is a need to examine what sort of labour market we want, and involve the wider public in this. The hope is that jobs will return after the recession, but serious questions need to be asked about the sustainability of many areas and types of employment before the recession. The UK has historically had high employment levels, but

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also high levels of short term, insecure and low -paid jobs. There is a need to ensure that a correct balance is reached, and this can only be determined by a close examination of what did and didn't work in previous recessions.

- In the short-term, it is vital to ensure that people don't leave employment due to the recession without adequate support. This is particularly important for young people, who need to return to the labour market in as short a timeframe as possible. The Government must further reduce the length of time the young can be out of work by guaranteeing jobs for under-25s if, after six months of unemployment, they are still without work.

The sixth giant: Isolationism or the need to get around

The Forum also spent a lengthy session looking at one vitally important public service that is often overlooked. Transport, despite its ability to create huge opportunity, employment and creativity in communities, is often left off the agenda when it comes to discussing public services. There is no doubt, however, that transport is not just about building roads, railways or runways, but is also vital to building a better, more inclusive society with a higher quality of life for all.

We believe that the current plans for high-speed rail should be prioritised by this Government, and future ones. The benefits of which include a strengthened economy both nationally and regionally.

Endnotes

Introduction

1. End Child Poverty, <http://www.endchildpoverty.org.uk/>
2. National Statistics,
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=591>

Economy and Prosperity Policy

1. <http://www.nlgn.org.uk/public/wp-content/uploads/circling-the-loan-sharks.pdf>
2. According to Credit Action - www.creditaction.org.uk
3. The Government is introducing a scheme of personal accounts in 2012.

International and Security Policy

1. An example of this is the Prime Ministers' Governance of Britain initiatives which included a vote for Parliament when going to war

Democracy and Communities Policy

1. Votes at 16, <http://www.votesat16.org.uk/>
2. Also backed by the think-tank Progress:

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www.progressonline.org.uk/consultations/reform

3. Commons Debate, Hazel Blears: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmhansrd/cm090601/debtext/90601-0004.htm>

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David Chaplin and Claire Leigh

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“The Young Fabians provide a unique way for young people to become engaged in politics. Through debate and discussion, they offer a dynamic and powerful voice for the next generation of Labour’s political thinkers and activists.”

- Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP, Prime Minister

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- Rt Hon David Miliband MP, Foreign Secretary

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-Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP, Chair of Labour Party National Policy Forum

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Edited by David Chaplin and Claire Leigh

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