

Anticipations

"It will be a government
that seeks to restore
trust in politics in
this country."

Tony Blair's first speech in Downing Street, 2nd May 1997

Unity and values

Editorial by Emma Carr

The theme of this edition is, as if you didn't already know, Labour Party values. There were several reasons for choosing this as the theme for the edition. The first is that I like you and I wanted to give you something fun to argue about. The second is that I knew I was guaranteed to get tonnes of very good and immensely varied articles (on this point I would like to apologise to all those whose articles we didn't have space for in the end – they were almost invariably all of very high standard and it pained Angela and I to have to leave them out but, in the interests of the overall balance of the edition and of not running up a printing bill to match the current NHS deficit, we just had to do it). And the third reason, and undoubtedly the most important, is that I fancied having a bit of a rant in my editorial.

And so, here goes...

I joined the Labour Party after much humming and hawing. I was worried that if I joined I would be expected to support everything that Labour did and I'd never be able to dissent. Being stubborn and independent to way beyond reasonable measures, I held out and didn't join the Party. Until, eventually, I did.

And I was right to join. I was wrong to think that Labour Party members couldn't object to a Labour Government's policies (it seems to be our favourite sport). And I am pleased to be part of a Party that is always challenged from within and that is pushed by its members to always improve and never be content with what has already been achieved but to realise that there is always more still to do.

But that's not all I wanted from being a Labour Party member. While I do want to challenge some policies, I also want to look around me at other Labour Party members and feel that we are united by our beliefs. I want to know that the desire to make life better for those that need it most and the belief that a Labour Government can do that is what keeps us sitting in local church halls discussing politics and policy while the summer sun sets on an England full of picnics, barbecues and cricket. I want to know that we all have the same basic political values.

I think that this is what we have, really. It's just that we don't talk about the things that unite us. As a Party we are too busy talking about what it is that divides us. But we don't have to, it's about how we define ourselves.

I am bored of the internal Labour debate about who's more Left or more Central than whom. As long as Left and Right are unquantifiable and relative, this will not be a helpful argument.

Defining ourselves by our policies is a bit more useful but still not good enough. We are too inclined to rubbish an idea because it comes from someone we don't like, inside or outside of the Party – and I am as guilty of this as anyone. But this is ridiculous; Government isn't necessarily about having different policies from someone else; it's about having the best policies, no matter where they come from. Government is about the people, not the politics.

However, if we define ourselves by our values we are unlikely to come unstuck.

I am a Labour member because I believe in giving the most help to the people who need it most. Rather than picking society up from the top, as the Tories would do, which might stretch the middle rather than pull up the bottom, I think we need to lift society from the bottom. The way we reform need not be about equality, which is just giving everyone the same thing; it needs to be about equity, which is about fairness and justice. We need to help the most deprived in society and lift them out of poverty, give them the opportunity to have a better life. It's true that lifting from the bottom might not lift the top, it might just squash the middle, closing the gap between the best-off and the most deprived, but that seems right to me. And I think that's what Labour values are all about.

This is what I feel unites me and other people Labour Party members. This is what keeps me from the picnics and the barbecues on sunny evenings. And I'm not alone. All of the articles featured in this edition of Anticipations, including the ones that seem negative, seem to me to have this belief at their hearts.

And so, I hope you enjoy this edition. It includes some excellent articles from Young Fabian members, as well as a guest article from the Labour Party Chair, Hazel Blears MP, which I think you'll find very interesting. We also have an interview with Meg Munn MP and our latest book club book review.

If you have any feedback, please email me at ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk or Angela Green at agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

Spring 2006 - Contents

Where have all the values gone? 4	New Labour and social justice 16
Fred Grindrod, Young Fabian Party Liaison Officer, introduces the discussion on Labour Party values	Philip Wood explains how New Labour policies have improved social justice and suggests some next steps
It's the values, stupid 5	Interview - Meg Munn MP 18
Tom Flynn, Young Fabian Treasurer, explains why Labour Party members need to be more courageous in declaring their values	Rebecca Rennison, Young Fabian Social Secretary interviews Meg Munn, Minister for Women and Equality
Values not economics 6	The Middle East: Promoting democracy and creating peace 21
Oli de Botton tells us why the new political battles are about values not economics, and why we're losing	Mark Rusling discusses the way forward for the Middle East
Looking beyond modernisation 8	New Labour's Renewal 24
David Moon looks at the politics of Blair's New Labour and what should come next	Yue Ting Cheng explains why some voters are deserting the Labour Party in favour of the BNP
Islington Labour: A Fresh Approach 10	Labour and liberty 26
James Murray, a Labour Councillor in Islington, explains how Islington secured one of the few Labour victories in the recent local elections.	Richard Pond argues that there is a tradition of socialist support for civil liberties but the current Labour Party has forgotten all about it
Education, education, education 12	Events 27
Alex Barker argues the introduction of top-up fees will help not hinder poorer students	Women and children first 28
By the strength of our common endeavour 13	David Boot discusses the feminisation of poverty
Scott Lomax looks at what Labour has to do to restore public confidence and keep Cameron out of Number 10	At large in the shires 29
The Rt Hon Hazel Blears 14	Chris Wearmouth questions development programmes in Milton Keynes and the Tory dominance of Buckinghamshire
Hazel Blears MP explains how Labour government policy is and has ever been underpinned by strong Labour Party values and a set of enduring socialist beliefs	Book Club 30
	'The Road to Wigan Pier', by George Orwell is reviewed by the Young Fabian book club and written up by Samir Dathi
	P.G. Tips 32
	Chair's Column by Prema Gurunathan

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Where have all the values gone?

**Fred Grindrod, Young Fabian Party Liaison Officer,
introduces the discussion on Labour Party values**

So we are told it's soon going to be all over. The New Labour Project that began in 1994, following a decade of preparation, is likely to come to an end soon. Tony Blair is a lame duck leader, whose popularity continues to plummet, and although the inevitable succession of Gordon Brown is still on course, David Cameron is far more popular according to the opinion polls. After a disastrous set of local elections, and the ongoing problems with John Prescott and the Home Office, we are informed that 1 out of 4 current Labour voters would like to see Labour out of Government by the next General Election, as they need "a period out of office to rethink what they stand for and what their vision is for the future of the country".¹ And all this just over a year after a General Election victory that the great Labour leaders of the past would never have dreamed of.

The media bombards us with news and comment on how this Government is the equal of the Major years; corrupted by power, falling apart and tainted with sleaze. Without any significant rebuttal and while the problems continue (Iraq, cash for peerages and the rest) the public believes it. The prevailing view of politics seems to be that all politicians are liars, deviants and cheats, and there is no difference between any of them. Indeed the old quotes are wheeled out frequently to reinforce this.

And then, the line goes, there are the new Conservatives, new Labour for the new century, led by Cameron, far more Blair than Brown is, and the true successor, a different kind of Conservative: one who is compassionate, talks about social justice and rides a bike. He will continue all the good things this Government did, but he will do it so much better. There is no longer any difference between the Conservatives and New Labour (or the Liberals) anymore - indeed some incredibly deluded people would have you believe that Labour is the furthest to the Right of any of the major political parties.

All of this is rubbish, but it is now the prevailing view that is presented to the public. What is true is that we have a Government that seems to be sailing in the wind, no longer rooted in a continuous vision that enables it to explain what its purpose is. A Government under attack from all sides, undefended by a call to any core values. This Government has immersed itself in a meaningless

management politic, an arrogant method of control and action that does not listen, least of all the people who elected it. The results of this are chaotic policies that divide, unpopular actions that destroy and uneasy alliances that doom. Continuing on this route will eventually lead to the fulfilment of the prophecy, that this will be the last Labour Government we see for a while. Although there are those optimists who dispute this, history tells us that this period out of office could be a considerable one.

What, then, is the answer for those of us who want to see a continuing Labour Government, a sustainable progressive advance, not just for now, but for the next twenty years? How can we change the mentality in this country that the type of politics that the Conservatives represent has any relevance to a country moving forward in the 21st century? I believe that the answer is a return to those core principles upon which we built our political ideology and a rediscovery of a sense of vision and values. Such a vision must relate not only to today, but to tomorrow and beyond.

By seeking to understand our values and building an ideology upon them, we are forced to question what we are really here for. This becomes the motivation for our actions around which we write a narrative that clearly explains our policy decisions. By consistently developing this, we can develop an ideology that we can take to a wider audience - a community, a city or a nation - to explain our purpose. Because values are the core principles with which we demonstrate our understanding of how we view the world, they allow us to demonstrate to others our ethics and morality. Others can then judge our motives without the cloud of political and moral uncertainty. These values will bring trust and hope to people, in the turbulent circumstances that we face in everyday life. If the Left reclaims and proclaims an ideology based on values, and then remains consistent to that vision, we can begin to overturn that belief of politics being the domain of the deceiver. Shared values also bring about dedication and unite people. By creating a political view of moral consistency and understandable decisions, we have a basis on which we can inspire others to follow and build on what we do, bringing back the disenchanted and activating the disengaged.

1. Ipsos Mori Poll quoted in the Observer, 18th June 2006

It's the values, stupid

Tom Flynn, Young Fabian Treasurer, explains why Labour members need to be courageous in declaring their values

It may surprise and upset some of you to learn that I have been accused of ranting in my last article for Anticipations. Horrified that some readers clearly could not see the wit and wisdom of my words and my well supported arguments, I re-read the piece, hoping to confirm my suspicions that my detractors were mistaken or mad. Alas, it appears it was me who was wrong. My name is Richard Littlejohn and I have a problem.

I was clearly frustrated about something when I wrote the piece, but what had driven me to commit my moaning to paper for the delight and delectation of Young Fabians everywhere? If I am completely honest, it was partly due to the fact that I was a local election candidate at the time and was therefore in 'candidate mode' (dictionary definition: 'the deluded belief that you are right and that the world should know, even if you have to wedge your foot in their door to stop them going back inside to watch Coronation Street'). But I suspected that there was more to it than that. The more I thought about it, the clearer the answer. It's the values, stupid.

Despite a strong economy, low unemployment and stable interest rates, there was an obvious disaffection with the Labour Government which was clearly affecting our chances in May's local elections, eroding our core vote at an alarming rate and ensuring that life-long Labour voters simply stayed at home. This disaffection has since risen to a disturbing level of unpopularity suggesting that Labour will lose power at the next election.

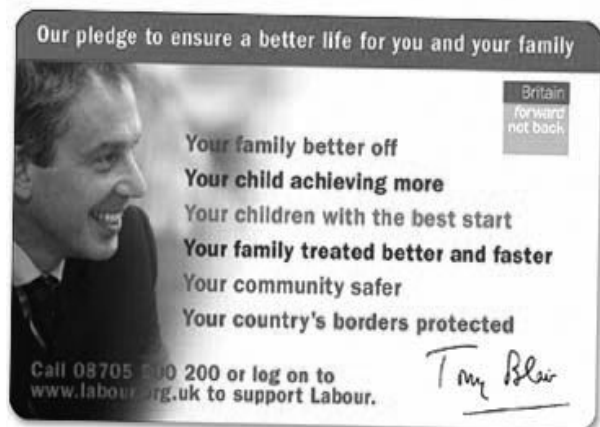
The Clinton presidential campaign in 1992

believed that economic competence was the Holy Grail in ensuring the rise to power of the centre left. The notion that a stable economy was sufficient for victory was thrown into doubt when Al Gore failed to take the presidency in 2000 but was overshadowed by the controversial circumstances surrounding the victory of George W Bush. As a result we are now feeling the consequences of failing to address the question of what occurs next. Once economic stability is achieved, maintained and eventually taken for granted, how does the left sell its ideas to a sceptical electorate?

Remember 1997? There was so much to be proud of in those happy days of the first term. Then came the second term, with 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq providing an unfortunate distraction from the bold domestic reform programme. Labour lost its direction and was forced to scare its way to a third term with a campaign concentrating on the bad old days of incompetence under Major rather than celebrating the successes of its own time in office and laying out a bold plan for the third term.

It is time to be courageous, and to stick to our values in the face of public criticism. We must tackle the ridiculous media barrage of lies and half-truths about immigration, benefits, crime and anti-social behaviour by stating our case and sticking to it. Controlled immigration is beneficial to this country. Most people claiming benefits are in genuine need and we have a responsibility to them. Crime is down. Anti-social behaviour is best tackled by identifying the root of the problem, not just by clamping down and getting tough. Our values are the foundation for these beliefs and should be considered whenever any new initiatives are about to be unveiled or crackdowns announced.

By sticking to our values we maintain a clear dividing line between ourselves and the Tories, who, under the leadership of 'Dave' Cameron, will overturn any principle they hold in the desperate struggle for power at all costs. As Gordon Brown once said, we are at our best when we are Labour. Let's be proud of our Labour values and build upon them to create a vision for the kind of Britain we can be proud to inhabit.



Values not economics

Oli de Botton tells us why the new political battles are about values not economics, and why we're losing

A worrying trend has bedded into British politics. A trend that could see conservative values dominate and divide as they do in America. A trend that has virtually extricated elected Democrats from their liberal ideals and seen the Republicans unleash the 'forces of conservatism' on citizens from New Orleans to Baghdad. The problem: the changing and unstable world, where jobs are index linked to markets rather than politicians, has led us all to gasp and grasp for a new meta-narrative by which we can define ourselves. A paradigm of social and cultural values to replace (or replicate) the old class boundaries. The Right know all about this and have been carefully crafting their national portraits. But those on the Left, chuffed by our new found economic credentials, are staring at a blank canvass. Labour has forgotten to tell its own narrative about cultural as well as economic value(s).

The resurgent Right, both here and across the Atlantic, plays on commonly held fears of cultural dislocation and values erosion. Just look at the stories constantly churned out by the myth makers and moral 'guardians' par excellence: the rightwing press. In addition to the ceaseless dog-whistle messages about foreigners, last month we were being told that women were virtually having abortions on tap and wives should not expect any money from rich husbands who refuse to roll up their sleeves and actually bring up their children. All these stories, flashpoints in the increasingly contested terrain of who we are and more crucially, who we are not. We are not foreigners, we are not 'wasted' single mothers and we are not career women. So where is Labour's reply? Where is the strong defence of a women's right to chose, a woman's right to be equitably compensated and a foreigner's right to do all the menial jobs that no one else wants to? Buried under the tired lines about deportation figures, improved choice in the NHS and a strong economy. We are answering value laden questions with economic and technocratic answers.

Twenty years ago it was easy. We were talking about Thatcher's closing of the mines and plundering of public institutions, her selling off of state assets and the poll tax. All safe territory for the Left, we knew where we stood. We were for an economic collectivity (of sorts). But whilst New Labour has more recently been nullifying the economic arguments of the Right, we have neglected to

challenge head on the more insipid attacks on our vision of a liberal, open and tolerant society. In essence, we have failed to establish the arguments for a new social and values rich collectivity to succeed the economic consensus. This isn't to say we should turn to the Michael Foot years for inspiration, but rather we need to find new ways to articulate what it means to be a progressive in a society where economic policy is settled.

So how do we reclaim the values 'authority' from the Right? Of course we need to be more bullish about the things we stand for and who we stand with but there are also areas of public policy where we need to re-craft our message. The first one is Higher Education. It seems obvious to say, but Labour needs to be unequivocally pro-education. In favour of a knowledge rich society where intelligence is cherished and nurtured and where everyone's unique talents are developed to a high level. The 50% target for University entrants (which will probably remain unmet) should be a bare minimum and we should expand the choice and quality of courses offered post-18. Why? Because this is a clear statement of intent about who we want to be. We stand with those who want to challenge themselves and develop their abilities, in whatever subject or specialism. And since it is universally acknowledged that education is the best way out of poverty, then why not say so, loud and clear? We can even expose the arguments of the Right at the same time; ensuring societies' educational expectations match our highest aspirations, rather than our degrading Victorian cynicisms.

But what about the ubiquitous dustman who has to pay for all this I hear you ask? What about the financial burden? I reject the premise of these questions, based as it is on the assumptions of social elitists who want to maintain a system that privileges upbringing rather than potential. That same dustman also pays for NHS treatments he will never use, and roads he will never drive on. He will just have to live with it.

So what is the net result of this re-nuanced and confident message? We will no longer bow meekly to the Right's value heavy arguments about academic quality. Instead it will be the Left who sets a unifying and idealised agenda of aspiration and achievement.

Another area we need to focus on is the House of Lords. Nothing screams values like democracy and democracy means electing people and accepting their judgements. The Lords should become an elected chamber made-up of real people, leading real lives. Labour should commit to vastly opening up its selection processes for would-be candidates. Community leaders, nurses, businessmen and women, teachers, doctors, the full range. People who actually experience the day-to-day world should be encouraged to stand in a quasi-sabbatical capacity, returning to their jobs after a four year stint. This way the second chamber could become a highly representative reality check for the Commons. This system would also decisively wash away the centuries of inherited vested interest associated with high politics/society. So who do we stand with in this case? People who make our society work and who deserve an elevated status. Again, with these arguments we can expose the Right as supporting the undeserving rich rather than those who succeed on merit.

But surely someone must already be articulating progressive values like these? Talking about who we are and what we stand for? Yes. And his name is David Cameron

(well sort of). He is after all the man who talks about changing the world, about the society we want to live in and the benefits of multi-culturalism. Indeed it is unlikely that on the surface at least he would disagree with much that has been laid out above. So how is he free to pursue a prima facie progressive values agenda and we aren't? It seems the leader of the Tories can talk left, but secretly be right, and the Labour leader can talk right and actually be left. And therein lies the essential problem – both with politics and the current direction of the Left. Values are about who we are and where we want to be, they can't be hidden away under heavily political robes. Labour needs to set the agenda both economically and culturally, otherwise we are in danger of being over taken by the events of a dislocated world in a constant state of identity anxiety.

So as we look forward to establishing a new electoral coalition and debating the future of the Labour party, let's expose the myth that we can believe one thing and do another. We are progressives, with progressive values and instead of being scared about the Right's arguments about foreigners and meritocracy, let's take them on. Anything else is political timidity – and no one votes for that.

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Looking beyond modernisation

David Moon looks at the politics of Blair's New Labour and what should come next

As leader of a 'New' Labour Party, Tony Blair has sold his politics as the antithesis of those of an 'Old' and unelectable Labour Party, exemplified in his mind by an unnecessary social-democratic confusion between political means (social justice) with ends (in this case, nationalisation). Instead, the politics of Blairism has been based around a modernisation agenda, predicated upon the idea that, in terms of the means employed, what counts is what works rather than what is dogmatically correct – the ends remaining social justice as before. With this in mind, Blair has declared New Labour's politics as being "beyond Left and Right", the product of a post-ideological, pragmatic, anti-political age.

The need for this change in policy formulation is justified by references to economic and societal transformations caused by globalisation, deemed by Blair to be inevitable and desirable. It is argued that these 'New Times' mean "the rate of economic, political, industrial and social change" is "quicker than at any time in our history".¹ For Blair's Labour, the means to counter the instability wrought by swift economic and social change is through a program of continual and unceasing modernisation, of permanent revolution. Defenders of this Blairite world-view see no inherent contradiction or problem between this and the historic goals of the Labour Party, declaring that they still operate within the boundaries of Labour's reformist progressive tradition.

However, this author agrees with David Marquand that in fact "New Labour has 'modernised' the social-democratic tradition out of all recognition"² and what the modernisation rhetoric of Blair and his associates actually signifies is the absorption of some of the central tenants of neo-liberalism – that there is a single modern condition, embodied by the renascent capitalism of the present and that resistance to it is futile. Accordingly, New Labour's view of the role of government is that the most that public policy can do is to assist society and the economy to adapt to this modern capitalist condition as best it can, with as little pain as possible. Theirs is an unswerving belief in the market as a tool and an accompanying addiction to the mechanism of continual change – this principle having become both New Labour's end and means.



Thus, as Alan Finlayson describes the situation: "the New Labour mindset... does not believe anything so last century as that the ends justify the means". For New Labour, "the means have become the end" and "the end is nothing other than the continuation of the means". The outcome being that 'New Labour does not lack a programme. That is all it has. That is all it is.'³ New Labour's values are moulded and constituted by this programme, a vision which believes that the relentless pace of global and domestic transformations means Britain must continually adapt or die. This summation is echoed by Zygmunt Bauman who asks us to 'listen to our current and would-be ministers and their spokespeople', describing how 'they sing in many voices, but there is a common motif in all the tunes: modernize, modernize, change or perish.'⁴ New Labour's is an argument based around the essentiality of running on the spot to stand still, the upshot being a socially determinist rhetoric, described by Marquand as "designed to justify what might otherwise appear to be evils by an appeal to a higher power", offering "a route out of the painful realm of choice and moral argument, and into the comforting realm of necessity".⁵

As such, the rhetoric of the inevitable nature of modernisation through market led change can be seen as a reversal of social democracy's historic commitment to human autonomy – people's need to gain control over the conditions under which they struggle with life's challenges.

If Blair's politics are indeed beyond ideology then this is only because, to quote Bauman again, it is representative of a society which "has stopped questioning itself" and "no longer recognizes any alternative to itself and thereby feels absolved from the duty to examine, demonstrate, justify (let alone prove) the validity of its outspoken and tacit assumptions."⁶ New Labour has accepted the neo-liberal paradigm so all that is left now is technocratic tinkering; lacking any clearly extolled values beyond a belief in

modernisation and change, it has only the disheartening/uninspiring mantra of public service reform. Viewed in this light, the phrase 'what counts is what works', takes on a new image, one where a bogus idea of necessity trumps morality and "determinism stultifies the imagination, narrows the room for debate, impoverishes political language and closes off alternative futures".⁷ Labour's problem is that permanent revolution is a futile (and destructive) form of politics, and as Finlayson warns "when a house is built on sand it is always washed away completely."⁸ In place of the rhetoric of modernisation, therefore, a new vision of a social-democratic good life and good society is needed, alongside a re-politicised economy, the values of social justice and personal autonomy being re-emphasised and re-affirmed. This must be the direction of a post-Blair Labour politics.

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Young Fabian Members' Board

Given the extraordinary level of interest we have had in this topic, with many people unable to contribute to this edition because of space restrictions, we have decided to continue this debate via the Young Fabian Members' Board on the website - www.youngfabians.org.uk.

Please visit the site and join the debate. Following on from the points raised in in this issue, we have started the debate with the following question:

Are the current Labour Government's policy reforms underpinned by a set of traditional Labour values?

Islington Labour: A fresh approach

James Murray, a Labour Councillor in Islington, explains how Islington secured one of the few Labour victories in the recent local elections.

The result in Islington was one of the few success stories for Labour in the May council elections. More than half the councillors in the southern half of the borough – the Islington South & Finsbury constituency – are now Labour, up from zero in 2002.

Having to defend the national government during a council election is a frequent complaint of local campaigners. But by branding ourselves as Islington Labour and by campaigning with a mix of young people new to local politics, more experienced local members, and the recently elected MP, we were able to go forward as a genuinely local party. We targeted issues that mattered to us, rather than following the Daily Mail's agenda. We were able to largely sidestep the issues in the national press by being a convincing local party who would stand up for local people.

The members of Islington Labour spoke to residents about the basic values that unite Labour campaigners and our potential voters. The focus on values rather than on defending the national government's record allowed us to engage the voters – and invigorate the candidates and activists.

Islington Labour values

It is not fair that when there are 12,000 families on the housing waiting list in Islington the Lib Dems are doing everything they can to get luxury flats built instead of affordable housing. It is also unfair that within the high parking charges in Islington, the people on estates are being charged double those on streets. And when the average income on council estates is just over £6,000, people were offended that the Lib Dem executive councillors had voted to pay themselves the maximum possible salary of £44,000.

At Islington Labour these were the sorts of

issues we campaigned on, and we justified our positions using Labour values. The focus on fairness and equality brought the candidates and activists of the local party together. By campaigning on our values we created a reason behind the policies we were proposing; we were not opportunistic, we were Labour.

We built a simple story of Labour fighting for a fair deal for local people in the face of an arrogant Lib Dem council. Our messages spoke particularly to our voters on estates, but they also appealed to Left-leaning voters on the 'leafy lanes' who were offended by the unfairness of many Lib Dem policies.

The strapline for Islington Labour, 'On Your Side', reminded people we will stand up for them. By doing this we were able to re-establish the trust of voters – and also of many activists – in the values of the local party. We gave people a reason to campaign for and to vote Labour.

Hard work

The campaign centred on an exhausting canvassing schedule in Labour areas, along with targeted mails to our Labour supporters. We used some leaflets and newsletters, but it was the doorstep contact and direct mails that drove the campaign. The Lib Dems had decided to focus their canvassing on Islington North, and so our colleagues in the north of the borough worked hard to successfully prevent the Lib Dems from making inroads there.

In the south, each of the eight wards had at least one candidate under 30, and our most successful local teams made good use of younger volunteers. Our teams of younger activists alongside more experienced members were energised by local super Saturdays and regular social events, and well as canvassing support by the MP Emily Thornberry.

The direct mail campaign opened with a letter from Emily which made it clear that at the time she was the only Labour representative in Islington South & Finsbury. The letter introduced voters to their local Islington Labour team and promoted the 'fresh approach' of the young people involved in the campaign. This letter set the context for the



campaign by featuring a localised Islington Labour message, by promoting the young members, and by highlighting the fact that in Islington we work together as Team Labour.

The MP's letter described how Islington Labour stands up for local people against the Lib Dems. It described the Lib Dems as greedy, not listening and out of touch. Two follow-up letters from candidates nearer the election repeated the greedy, not listening, out of touch message, as well as giving information to voters about how to vote Labour and where to find their polling station.

Typically in the last week of the campaign a Labour supporter in a key ward would have received two pieces of direct mail with polling instructions; a hand-delivered 'vote today' card; a phone call from Candidate or MP; and a hand-delivered reminder to vote Labour later in the day.

On Your Side

Our election campaign began by energising our candidates and activists to stand up for Labour values of fairness and equality. We then spoke to voters about our shared Labour values and gained their confidence that that we were on their side. Most of it wasn't rocket science – like the drive to build more affordable housing – but by focusing on our

shared Labour values we motivated young people to want to be involved in the campaign, and ultimately encouraged to people vote for us.

The 'On Your Side' approach was successful and centred on the fact that Islington Labour stands up for a fair deal for local people in the face of an arrogant Lib Dem council. By coincidence this slogan was also used in Lambeth – the other good news story in London on May 4th. This approach can be applied to other situations as well though. As Labour campaigners more generally we should remind people we are on the side of hard-working people against an ascendant Tory party; we are on the side of residents against the wasteful profiting water companies; we are on the side of people in need of affordable housing against ruthless developers.

These messages connect with our voters; but they also connect with our activists. It is not new to say that winning an election is a lot about hard work. But it can be forgotten that our message must engage our campaigners as well as voters. By focusing on local issues and values that we shared, we gave the members of Islington Labour the motivation and the confidence to campaign, and local people a reason to vote Labour.



Education, education, education

Alex Barker argues that the introduction of top-up fees will help, not hinder, students from poorer backgrounds

It is no overstatement to suggest that education is of central importance to the Labour movement. References to 'equality of opportunity' in education were first used in Labour party manifestos of the 1920s, and the most recent election document suggested that "education is still our number one priority", not to mention the ubiquitous soundbite of "education, education, education." More specifically, the party claims as its belief that "there should be no cap on achievement and no limit to aspiration."

With that in mind, this year marks the introduction of the much maligned top-up fee. From September, students will be charged up to £3,000 for each year of their study. The bill that introduced the new fee structure - the Higher Education Act 2004 - was not uncontroversial during its passage through parliament, and indeed was only approved with a slender majority of five votes. At the time, the bill's critics on the left suggested it was an affront to equality and would severely limit the ability of those from lower socio-economic groups to progress to the best universities, if not university at all. Top-up fees were viewed as a barrier to access, not an aide to it.

But such criticisms were misleading, and based on an age-old psychological problem that plagues the Labour movement: the intent dislike of anything mildly market-based. There was a fear that a market for higher-education would be an obstacle to the poor, whilst benefiting the middle and upper classes; the market-orientated design of the system was vilified as being too 'Conservative'.

In actual fact, the introduction of top-up fees not only ensures adequate funding of higher education, but is redistributive in many ways: it redistributes the burden of payment from cash-strapped parents and students today, to well paid graduates of tomorrow; it redistributes from those whose degree does provides a good 'rate-of-return' to those whose degree do not; it redistributes from the general taxpayer to those who get a greater benefit from their own higher education; and with a good bursary system one part of the measures being introduced, it redistributes

resources from those who can afford to pay to study to those who cannot.

The alternatives are far worse: the cost of a fully taxed higher education system means it would only serve an elite, or the quality of education would be sub-standard; and a graduate tax is inequitable because graduates could end up paying more than the cost of their degree, not to mention that such a tax fails to account for one's ability to pay.

It is troubling that mention of market-based solutions to problems in public service provision is still anathema to many on the left-wing. The market can, when properly used, be a force for good; it can enable more effective targeting of resources to those who will benefit most from them.

The introduction of the top-up fee will breathe new life into a beleaguered higher education system, and, if it works as it should, will ensure that as many students as want to study in the future are not only able to do so irrespective of family circumstances, but are able to do so at properly financed, world-class academic institutions. This is fully in line with our commitment to education.

The problems inherent in the Labour movement in assiduously working towards our core values do not seem so easily solved. The introduction of top-up fees serves as a timely reminder that progressive socialism works best when the ends to which we all work are not clouded by an irrational devotion to means.



By the strength of our common endeavour

Scott Lomax looks at what Labour has to do to restore public confidence and keep Cameron out of Number 10

Here we are again. The media has once more intensified its campaign of generating income through excessive criticism of mistakes made by Government ministers and problems that have arisen during our quest to build a better Britain. It cannot be disputed that the difficulties faced from the end of April, with the recollection of the war in Iraq, caused our Party to lose valuable support across the country and will continue to jeopardise Labour's future plans.

So where do we go from here in order to restore public confidence and, hopefully, restrain Cameron's ever-growing popularity to gain a fourth term in power?

It is a paradoxical problem; it is policies which bring politicians to the public eye and make them personalities in their own right, yet it is personalities which in turn overshadow the policies and can see the valuable programmes of social improvement destroyed because of issues in a politician's private life or mistakes they have made in their public lives. We need to change the emphasis from personalities and concentrate once more on the policies that can make Britain a better place to work, live and study in.

When university students look back on the Labour Government's record between 1997 and the year in which the inevitable political pendulum swings towards the Conservatives, we do not want their studies to be dominated by the scandals which have seen the political demise of the likes of David Blunkett and Charles Clarke.

Equally, if not more importantly, the recent scandals within the Labour Party, which have tarnished the reputation of the whole Labour movement, must not allow future voters to associate Labour with sleaze and 'illegal wars.'

Labour came to power with the promise of building a fairer, better Britain. The Government has made a pledge to halve child poverty by 2010 and eradicate it by 2020. Street for a decade or more.

Combating child poverty will be a monumental step forward in the history of our

society, if we can achieve it, and we must achieve it to show that Labour is the party which truly cares about the people in this country. We must not fail to meet our pledge because according to Government estimates, it affects one in five children and puts those children at a significant disadvantage to others, a disadvantage which usually exists throughout the child's life because it is difficult to break the cycle of poverty. Tackling child poverty cannot be underestimated and it would be a monumental achievement for Labour and one that will be looked back on as one of our greatest achievements, if we can achieve it. It will prevent future generations suffering in the way that many have previously, and how 3.4 million children currently suffer. By tackling child poverty we will see massive improvements in our society, making it a fairer, stronger Britain with power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many and not the few.

Great emphasis must now be placed on finding ways of ending inequality of wealth and giving children the opportunity to reach their potential, which is what the Labour Party believes in. We need to make sure that the Labour Government meets its targets in 2010 and 2020 through putting pressure on the Government to make funds available to those organisations which help take children out of poverty, to see the expansion of the Sure Start scheme so that it is accessible to every child and give funds and training to staff at schools and local GPs so that they can identify children who, with assistance from the right organisations, could be given a better standard of living. This funding can only be made available during the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review and so I am suggesting that every Labour Party member who reads this article, writes a motion to their local branch to call upon the Government to make the issue of child poverty a main priority during the formulation of the Review so that funds are made available to bring children out of poverty and give them the best possible start to life.

It has frequently been said that in May 2005 we won a historic third term but we must now ensure that we do not let it become historic for all of the wrong reasons.

common endeavour

The Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP

Hazel Blears MP explains how Labour government policy is and has ever been underpinned by strong Labour party values and a set of enduring socialist beliefs



If the Labour party was simply about winning elections or promoting policies, it would have long ago disintegrated. The reason the Labour Party has survived for over a century is because of the enduring nature of our values. Our values are what give us strength, vitality, and confidence. They are our connection with the people who built our movement in the past, and with the people who sustain us today. They give us hope for the future.

Consider how the world has changed since 1900 when the Labour Representation Committee was founded, or the Parliamentary Labour Party was formed one hundred years ago. It was a world of Empires, mass industrialisation, and poverty beyond our modern comprehension. A world where women didn't have the vote, where there was no free healthcare, and no decent pensions.

The policies and demands of the Labour Party reflected the concerns of the times. Some were specific to their times – action to tackle Chinese Labour, or demands for nationalisation of the canals, or protection for boys working in coal mines. Others were all too familiar: the Workmen's Compensation

Act 1906, which Labour forced the Liberals to put through Parliament, meant that six million workers became entitled, for the first time, to compensation for accidents and industrial diseases. One hundred years later, the Labour Government has taken action this month to speed up compensation for workers and their families affected by mesothelioma, a fatal disease caused by exposure to asbestos.

But unless these policies were underpinned by a set of enduring socialist values, times would have moved on and Labour would have been left behind. So what are our values, and why are they so enduring? We believe in the equal worth of all human beings, and that everyone should be able to fulfil their potential, regardless of their background. From the assertion of this basic truth, there follows the question 'how?' Not by leaving everyone to their own devices, or relying on the unseen hand of the market.

No, we believe that human potential can only be realised through a strong society, with mutual bonds of community and solidarity, where our individual rights and freedoms are balanced by our obligations and responsibilities to our neighbours. As the Scottish philosopher John McMurray put it 'we need one another to be ourselves'. Or as my mentor and inspiration Barbara Castle once said 'socialism is about the quality of human relationships'.

If you accept that premise – that individual advancement is reliant on collective security and collaboration – then you are led to the conclusion that society must be ordered in such a way to allow individuals to prosper. From that conviction comes the rich array of Labour achievements over the decades: the National Health Service, the Open University, the national minimum wage, the expansion of higher education, or action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Each policy can be linked back to our values.

I don't consider Labour's programme and policies in the abstract – I look carefully at what it will mean for my constituents, my friends, and my neighbours in Salford.

It is easy to oppose the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), for example, on some purist, ideological grounds. It is hard to argue against new school buildings, health centres and hospitals for the most deprived communities.

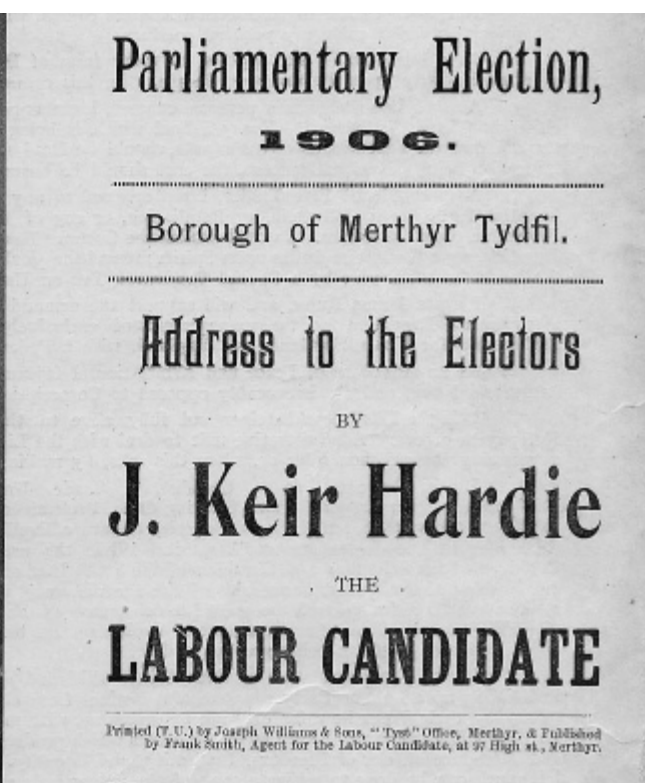
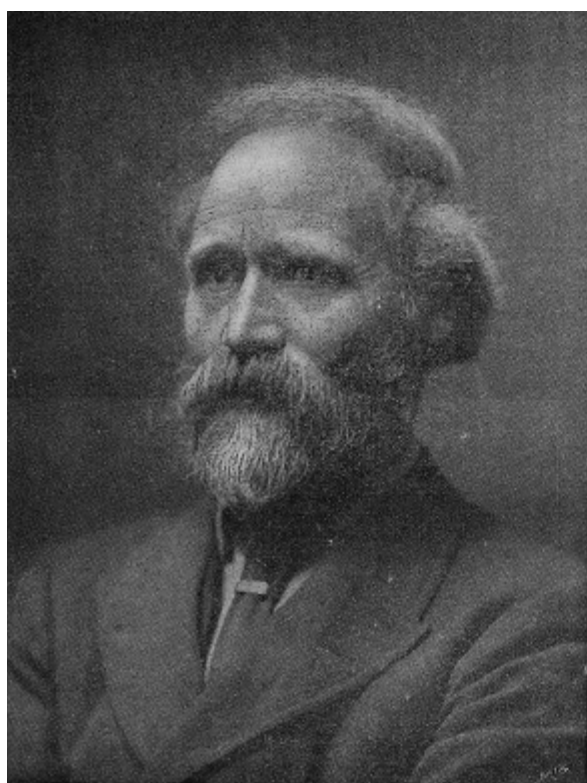
It is easy to oppose schemes like Sure Start or New Deal for Communities for not doing enough. It is hard to argue against the way these schemes are transforming the lives of local people. It is easy to say that the wiping out of international debts, the increases in aid, the Africa Commission, are too little too late. But how can you argue that these efforts are not making a difference in the poorest nations?

To those critics of the Government I say: look around you. Ask people. Talk to the office cleaner on the national minimum wage or the young mum with child tax credit. Full employment, backed by investment in public services, supported by low interest rates, and targeted relief of poverty, is transforming the lives of working class men and women. That's what we were founded to do.

But there is a further dimension. One of Labour's founders Keir Hardie said 'socialism does not come by shouting.' Values without practical application are sterile. So we need to organise as well as debate and discuss. We need to build a Labour movement which is capable, not just of winning elections, but of making progressive change. And it won't come by sitting in our armchairs.

No amount of philanthropy, altruism or wishful thinking can be a substitute for progressive political action, backed by the will of the people, articulated through a democratic system. Politics matters. It should never be considered inappropriate for polite conversation. We need to rehabilitate politics as a respectable and even admirable activity. Anticipations readers should be unashamed of their politics, steadfast in their values, and ready to roll up their sleeves for the organisational work of the Labour Party. That's the way we will continue to win and have the means to transform our communities and our world.

Hazel Blears is MP for Salford and Chair of the Labour Party.



Keir Hardie (1856-1915) was the first socialist MP, elected in 1892. He became the Labour Party's first leader in 1906.

"The moving impulse of Keir Hardie's work was a profound belief in the common people. He believed in their capacity, and he burned with indignation at their unmerited sufferings. He never argued on the platform the economic theories of socialism. His socialism was a great human conception of the equal right of all men and women to the wealth of the world and to the enjoyment of the fullness of life." Philip Snowden (1934)

New Labour and social justice

Philip Wood explains how New Labour policies have improved social justice and suggests some next steps

In 1998 Tony Blair declared, "The last government let poverty re-gain its hold in Britain, to an extent unseen since before the last war...To put that right we now face a task of reconstruction as intense as the one that faced the post-war Labour government and that's why we need an anti-poverty strategy of the same ambition and breadth."

However, tackling poverty in the UK is an enormous challenge. Between 1979 and 1997 poverty in the UK significantly increased. An audit carried out by the New Policy Institute in 1999 revealed that the number of households living in poverty (defined as households living on less than 60 per-cent of median income) rose from 4 million in 1982 to 10.5 million in 1997. Furthermore, despite the rise in general living standards since 1979 the number of pensioners living in poverty had doubled and the number of children living in poverty had trebled. Indeed, the UK had one of the highest child poverty rates in the European Union throughout the 1990s.

Does Poverty Matter?

Whilst the figures are shocking, statistics do not adequately convey what life is like for those individuals forced to live in poverty. The effects of poverty permeate all aspects of life. Research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation revealed that, "the struggle to make ends meet not only affects family life, but can result in poor diet, lack of fuel and water, poor housing and homelessness, debt, poor physical health, and stress and mental health problems. The poorer people are, the more likely they are to face these problems."

Moreover, the National Child Development Study claims that parents who had been disadvantaged as children were more likely than other parents to have children who were performing poorly in school at an early age. This intergenerational link means that children born into low-income households find themselves ensnared in a cycle of deprivation before they have even been given a chance. Poverty and inequality does matter since it diminishes an individual's chance to fulfil the potential with which they were born. In a meritocracy it should be the worth of an individual rather than birth that is the basis of personal advancement. As GDH Cole states, "It ought to be so obvious as hardly to need stating that it is an obligation falling upon any decent human society to give all its members a fair chance in life." Social justice is also

required on economic grounds. Denying individuals an opportunity to prosper is a huge waste of talent and therefore an inefficient use of human capital. This can ultimately restrict the nation's growth and lower prosperity.

New Labour Policies Towards Tackling Poverty
The Labour party was originally founded at the turn of the twentieth century to promote opportunity, fairness and social justice. New Labour is still committed to these ideals at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This commitment is demonstrated in both rhetoric and reality. Speaking at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Centenary Lecture Gordon Brown revealed the governments true colours. "Our objective must be to ensure not only dignity for the elderly in retirement and the chance for all adults to realise their potential but that every child has the best possible start in life. New Labour have enacted a range of measures that have made a considerable difference to many people's lives throughout the UK. However, traditional left-wing solutions to achieving social justice have been discarded.

Past Labour governments have focused upon progressive taxation as the means to fund the redistribution of income and to finance the welfare state. The political and economic realities of modern Britain have persuaded Tony Blair to dismiss any notion of a return to Labour's traditional 'tax and spend' policies. However, there is still a strong commitment to the values of opportunity, fairness and social justice and the 'means' of achieving these goals have changed.

This new approach can be summarised as:

- The utilisation of new terminology. New Labour now prefer the term social exclusion/inclusion to describe poverty and inequality. Social exclusion refers to the process of being shut out from any of the social, economic or political and cultural systems that determine the social integration of a person in society.
- A shift away from the promotion of equality of outcome for that of equality of opportunity. This has seen the government maximise employment opportunities rather than make major changes to the tax and benefits system. This 'work not welfare' approach is seen as the means to social inclusion.
- An emphasis on mutual responsibilities rather than on rights.

- A combination of curative, preventive and asset-based welfare policies have been adopted to combat poverty and inequality. These policies have provided a mixture of universal and targeted aid.

New Labour have implemented a range of curative policies that have been designed to either lower the rate of unemployment or increase the level of income for poverty-stricken households. These policies include the introduction of or increase in:

- National Minimum Wage
- Child Benefit
- Working Families Tax Credit and Income Support (replaced and enhanced by Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit)
- Childcare Credit
- Welfare to Work Programmes such as the New Deal
- Minimum Income Guarantee for Pensioners (replaced and enhanced by the Pension Credit)
- Winter Fuel Payments

New Labour have also developed a number of long-term preventive policies aimed at breaking the life cycle of poverty and the creation of an inclusive society. These measures include investing heavily in public services such as child-care, early learning, education and health in disadvantaged areas. These policies are epitomised by the 500 Sure Start Schemes that are currently benefiting approximately 400 000 children throughout the UK.

The government have also acknowledged that assets are linked to future success. Children from wealthy backgrounds frequently enjoy help from their parents throughout their lives whilst those from low-income backgrounds cannot expect such aid. The groundbreaking Child Trust Fund has the potential to rectify this situation and give all children the choice and opportunity that some were once denied. Have New Labour's Policies Been Successful? Unfortunately, the outcome of many of the government's preventive and asset-based policies will be unknown for at least a generation. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that the UK has become a fairer and more just society since New Labour came to power. Since 1997 the government have helped more than 2 million people out of poverty, many of them children. This is not occurring by chance but as a direct consequence of New Labour policies. The government should be proud of this highly significant achievement. However, as Polly Toynbee puts it, "it was social justice on tiptoe, fairness by stealth." If New Labour are to create an inclusive society they must

reshape the political landscape and win the argument for why social justice matters. If the government can win public support it could embolden them to take even more radical action. Perhaps then Tony Blair will see his vision of a country with "No forgotten people and no no-hope areas" fulfilled.

Recommendations

The government have already enacted an extensive range of measures that have made great progress towards alleviating poverty and inequality. However, even more radical and ambitious policies are required if the UK is to create a truly inclusive society. The following proposals are not intended to provide the definitive solution but to serve as a mechanism for stimulating future debate.

Curative Policies

- Regularly increase the rate of the National Minimum Wage so that it keeps rising with average earnings.
- Create an 'Employment Seekers Agency' that provides specific personalised support for lone parents, disabled, over 50s and ex-convicts attempting to re-enter the workplace. Furthermore, the agency must continue to support and monitor them for the first six months in their job.
- Move Civil Service jobs to areas of high unemployment.
- Raise the higher tax rate and redistribute the money to fund more long-term preventive policies. Taylor-Gooby's research reveals that people are concerned about poverty and inequality. Moreover, there is also a belief amongst the general public that those earning in excess of £100k should pay more tax to help the less fortunate.

Preventive Policies

- Major expansion of the Sure Start Programme.
- Provide extra funding for schools in areas with a high concentration of low-income households.

Asset Policies

- Increase the level of the Child Trust Fund. The inheritance system could be reformed to provide the substantial amounts of capital that is required to enable the fund to deliver genuine opportunities to its beneficiaries. After all, equality of opportunity is not compatible with the transmission of wealth from generation to generation.
- Introduce Savings schemes for low-income households and promise to match contributions made by the saver. Research suggests that if parents save then their offspring are more likely to save when they reach adulthood.

Meg Munn MP

Rebecca Rennison, Young Fabian Social Secretary, interviews Meg Munn MP, Minister for Women and Equality



Unusually for an MP, and especially a minister, Meg Munn arrives perfectly on time and I have to murmur an embarrassed apology for being so engrossed in my book as to of missed her (although given the book was on the Suffragette movement perhaps it was pardonable). I'm instantly impressed by her confidence which is demonstrated by her (very) firm handshake.

Have settled down into a comfy green armchair in Meg's very compact office, I begin the interview, asking the Minister about her reasons for joining the Labour Party and what she feels its key values are.

Meg has been a member of the Labour Party since she was fifteen and even then she was motivated by a desire for equality, when asked why she joined the Labour Party her response was that it was a party with a sense of fairness, a party that would tackle the fact that 'girls didn't get to do the same things as boys'. For her, Labour Party values are ones of social justice, fairness, the opportunity for everybody to realise their full potential. "Our challenge is always to look at how we can ensure those values are translated into a new environment, into relevance for today."

When asked if she's ever found the need to question her allegiance to the Labour Party and the values it stands for Meg is adamant that she's never had cause to doubt that decision she took aged fifteen. She then proceeds to put this unquestioning loyalty in context: for much of her active life in the party, Labour's been in opposition which makes clear the importance of winning and being in power.

Meg recalls how when she first became a MP she found it a strange experience to always be under attack, to appear on a television programme and have to defend Labour against the other parties. Meg seeks to remind members though that "however hard it is and however much you feel that it's difficult because you've always got to defend positions, being in government isn't easy because it means making hard choices, but it's far better than not being in government and not being in power". For those people that think Labour isn't doing enough Meg advises them to go out into their local community and see how things have changed in the last nine years with new schools and new hospitals, things that weren't there before. Whilst there's no denying the need to keep renewing the party, being out of government isn't the answer.

When the interview shifts from disaffection at a grassroots level to trouble at the top the Minister for Women and Equality agrees that the public don't like divided parties but observes that the problem is that sometimes people within parties do like that. What's more, there can be no doubting that the press and media enjoy the personality side of politics. However, Meg reminds us that change can only come from within the party "It is up to us as a party to be more unified and to focus on not just what we have done, which of course we need to talk about more, but also to demonstrate that we still have a lot more to do, and that we know what we've got to do and that we've got a clear vision about how we're going to get there and if we did that more successfully we would have more people joining and more members being active."

Attempting to neatly bridge a discussion on the state of the Labour Party with Meg's role as Minister for Women and Equality I ask about the female vote and what Labour should be doing to court it. Meg explains that whilst in the 1980s there was a big gender gap with

more men voting for Labour than women, this has steadily decreased over the past two decades and at the last election more women actually voted Labour than men, but these votes are not being taken fore granted 'To continue that support is to demonstrate that the policies we have are the ones which are making a difference to women's lives' - childcare, better quality part time work, investment in the kind of services women use.' The Minister for Women is also quite clear on the importance of highlighting the difference between what David Cameron and the Conservatives talk about in terms of women friendly policies and their actions; fewer women are being selected for Conservative seats than before the A-list, "he's talking a good talk but he's not delivering".

This leads immediately on to a question over the importance of all-women short lists and whether they're a measure with long-term potential? The Minister is firm about the success of all-women short lists quoting statistics for 2001 and 2005-in 2001, when the lists weren't used, of 38 new Labour MPs only 4 were women, in 2005 when the lists were back in action, 65% of the new intake were women. The mountain still to climb is made all the clearer when it is considered that there have only ever been 291 women MPs, whilst there are over 500 men sitting in the House of Commons right now.

As for all-women short lists as a long term measure the legislation must be reviewed in 2015 to see whether parity has been reached and Meg agrees that "women should have the opportunity for a fair and equal fight on open short lists". However, "the problem is they don't. Until we can be sure that the in-built prejudices against women within our membership, are no longer there then we're going to have a problem with women being selected".

But moving onwards and upwards from women MPs what about women in government? Whilst we have had a female Prime Minister and women have headed up large government departments I want to know how long the Minister for Women thinks it will be before we see a woman head one of those departments that has traditionally been perceived as more 'masculine', such as the Home Office, the MOD or the Treasury? Meg is confident that these things will come in time as women are moving through the Parliamentary Labour Party and getting opportunities to get the range of experience that have allowed men into those positions. Meg is confident that whilst there are prejudices to be tackled, equality will come and also reminds us that already a third of the cabinet and the government are women.

Obviously the debate about getting more women into Parliament has over the past few years included the issue of working hours and I ask the Minister if she were not a little disappointed that during the recent debate over whether or not to return to the original working hours the emphasis appeared to be on family friendly hours to suit women - hardly a modern outlook as regards family roles. Meg denies that the debate was as bad as I described but acknowledges that family friendly hours is an interesting issue. She astutely points out that for those MPs from distant constituencies finishing a few hours earlier is going to make no difference in terms of getting home in time to see their children before bed. Rather this is an issue about sensible working hours in the Commons and working lives that are more like those of the people MPs represent.

Switching to another facet of the roles of men and women in the family I ask the Minister for her views on maternity leave and what else could be done to give families a fairer choice when it comes to deciding who should be the primary carer of their children. Meg's proud to tell me about the new Work and Families Act that extends paid maternity leave up to 9 months with the aim of reaching a full year by the end of this parliament. After a six month point that leave can be taken by either a man or a women, hopefully encouraging men to play a greater role in raising their family. However, clearly a master of her brief, Meg reminds me that the decision within a family as to which (if either) parent is to take a career break to raise their children is also strongly influenced by the fact that due to other in-built prejudices women generally earn less than their male partners. However, as this changes it may well become more financially viable for men to stay at home and raise their family.

Clearly this shortfall in pay and the career breaks taken by many women has a knock on effect on the quality of their pension provision and I ask the Minister what the Government is doing about this. Meg assures me that equality is coming with proposals in the current Pensions White Paper anticipating that by 2025 over 90% of women will have a full state pension. As for tackling inequalities in the private pensions sector this can be dealt with by a two-pronged approach. One clear solution is to close the pay gap, especially in part-time work and the other is the use of auto-enrolment which should see more women entering company pension schemes.

But I want to know what's being done to help those women already retired and facing poverty in their old age. Meg is a pragmatist and points out that there is always the issue of

cost, but at the same time reminds us that the pension credit has gone a long way towards alleviating the poverty of retired women and ensuring that they will at least get a minimum income.

Meg clearly combines a strong desire to improve equality between women and men with a level-headed pragmatism that enables her to take a calm, pragmatic approach to the issues. I therefore wonder how she feels about the term 'feminism' itself, with rumours that the 'F' word is banned in Downing Street how does the Minister for Women feel about it? As every Meg responds with a smile and a measured answer that whilst for many young women growing up in an environment that accepts the principle that women and men are equal they can feel that it is a battle that they do not have to fight, but entering the workplace and raising a family can change this perspective. This is a reassuring response, for Meg it seems is not going to get caught up in the branding of an issue, and is concerned more with tackling the substance that dealing with the style.

Finally, with the summer sporting season in full swing, I have to ask the Minister how she feels about the issue of equal prize money and the coverage of men's and women's sport. This prompts a smile and a wary reply that whilst she always supports the equal pay of men and women in any workplace it is the unequal treatment of women in lower paid jobs that is of more concern. In terms of coverage this she finds more interesting and feels that greater investment in sport and wider coverage of women's' sporting events will encourage more women into sport.

The Minister for Women has a clear idea of the challenges facing women today and this is coupled with a reassuring determination that leaves you convinced that she also has a keen notion of what to do to overcome these. Meg is not someone to get caught up with catch phrases and gimmicks but she is someone to get the job done and I thus feel reassured that it can indeed only be a matter of time a before we have a female Home Secretary or perhaps even a female Labour Prime Minister...

This interview is available to download as a podcast from the Young Fabian website. If you have any difficulties accessing the podcast, please contact the Young Fabian website officer, Sushil Pallen at spallen@youngfabians.org.uk.

The Young Fabian Trip to Edinburgh

Last year the Young Fabians had their first trip to Edinburgh for the annual festivals.

The trip was arranged to coincide not only with the fringe, book and international festivals but also with the first annual Holyrood Festival of Politics, held in the new Scottish Parliament.

During the political festival we were able to attend some events in the Parliament and were given a tour of the building by a Fabian who works for the Labour Party there.

On top of this we enjoyed the comedy, theatre and seminars of the other festivals, as well as some of Edinburgh's amazing night life.

This year the Young Fabians will not only be repeating this trip, but we will be putting on an event at the political festival.

The event will be on youth involvement in politics. There will be a cross-party panel discussion on this topic and a question and answer section so that the audience can take part.

As with all Young Fabian trips, places are limited however there are a couple of space left so if you would like to sign up or for more information (e.g. costs etc.), please email Emma Carr at ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk.

The Middle East: Promoting democracy and creating peace

Mark Rusling, Young Fabian International Officer, discusses the way forward for the Middle East

Labour's foreign policy thinking has always contained a healthy streak of idealism. We prefer to view the world in terms of universal values rather than through a prism of national interest, as narrowly defined by foreign policy realists. One of the most vital of these values is democracy.

Despite the willingness of some to use state sovereignty (and the supposed right of states to do as they please within their own borders) as an argument against the Iraq war, this is not reflective of mainstream British left-wing thought. Since the end of the Second World War, the majority on the British left has been comfortable with the notion that Britain should actively - but peaceably - promote democracy abroad, by rewarding democratic states and by penalising undemocratic states.

While such views are not confined to the left, Conservative foreign policy has more often been determined by a narrow view of British national interest than by ideals of universal values. Such narrow conceptions contrast with Robin Cook's speech ten days after becoming Foreign Secretary in May 1997. Cook declared that Labour would aim, "to secure the respect of other nations for Britain's contribution to keeping the peace of the world and promoting democracy around the world....Our foreign policy must have an ethical dimension and must support the demands of other peoples for the democratic rights on which we insist for ourselves".

Labour, or (possibly more accurately), the Prime Minister, has aligned itself closely with active attempts to democratise the Middle East. While many may doubt the motives for such campaigns, these efforts spring from, and appeal to, the idealism in Labour foreign policy thought, as represented by Cook's proposed ethical foreign policy. Yet, such idealist policies may thwart the very ideal they seek to create - a stable, democratic Middle East.

Pressuring the Arab states (and particularly Syria) to democratise, while simultaneously attempting to propose a viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, may prompt some Arab states to scupper any such solution. Without a solution, Arab democratisation is highly unlikely. Long-term democracy may require some short-term realism: the West's

current emphasis should be on proposing solutions to the conflict, rather than on encouraging the Arab states to democratise. If a viable solution was found, the conditions for reform and democratisation in the Middle East would be greatly improved. Actively promoting democracy may not be the most effective policy to achieve long-term democracy - an aim with which all on the left should sympathise.



As seen recently in Gaza and southern Lebanon, the source of much of today's unrest in the Middle East is the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The failure to agree on acceptable Israeli and Palestinian borders, and on a solution to the plight of the Palestinian refugees, poisons a region far larger than the little pocket of land west of the Jordan Valley.

Most notably, the Syrian Assad regime has sought to bolster its internal and pan-Arab legitimacy by posing as the only reliable defender of the Palestinian people, and by refusing publicly to contemplate any accommodation with Israel. Syria's support for Hizbollah's violent campaign against Israel, and the resulting disproportionate Israeli offensive against southern and central Lebanon, has contributed to Lebanon's inability to develop into a functioning, stable democracy.

Over half of the residents of Jordan are Palestinian refugees, the majority of which are stateless and significantly poorer than King Abdullah's Palestinian Queen. Unrest,

and sometimes revolt, within the Palestinian population has frequently destabilised Jordan. The Iranian government has also frequently used the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to heighten its own popularity at home, if not abroad, through support for groups such as Hizbollah and Hamas' more militant wings.

Without a solution, the Syrian government will continue to use the conflict, often successfully, to enhance its internal standing. Syria's support for Hizbollah's recent campaign against Israel, and Israel's consequent anti-Syrian response, heightens nationalist sentiment in Syria (and elsewhere in the Arab world), thus increasing support for the Syrian regime.

With strong personal legitimacy based on his role as a bulwark against Israel and a defender of the Palestinians, President Assad may continue to feel confident in refusing to appease the calls from the US and EU for Syrian democratisation. This role, and the legitimacy associated with it in the eyes of many Syrians, also dampens the appeal of any home-grown Syrian democracy movement.



Hizbollah Secretary General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah

The hard-line policies and rhetoric of Syria and Iran, and of groups such as Hamas and Hizbollah, which exploit the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often resonate throughout the region, increasing militancy in Egypt, Jordan and in the Gulf. Such militancy provides leaders and regimes with the excuse to resist both indigenous and Western attempts to promote democracy, through posing as the defenders of the status quo against more militant alternatives. Egypt's President Mubarak has used this role to resist anything more than extremely limited moves towards competitive elections.

The continuing conflict, and the associated failure to achieve an acceptable solution to the

plight of the Palestinian refugees, creates constant tensions within the Jordanian Palestinian population. These tensions were partly responsible for King Abdullah's reversal of the nascent democratisation movement in Jordan, and the regime is unlikely to sanction any further democratisation while the conflict, and consequent tensions, persist.

It is not true that a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will automatically lead to democracy in Syria, Egypt, Jordan and other Arab countries. However, it is true that, without such a solution, the efforts of internal and external governments and groups to promote democracy in these states are unlikely to succeed. Yet, the active promotion of democracy by the US Government, supported by the UK Government, may prompt Arab states such as Syria to use their influence over the conflict to frustrate work towards a solution. If such a solution is not found, the aim of democracy in the Middle East is unlikely to be realised.

A viable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict requires six constituencies to be satisfied – the US Government, the Palestinian and Israeli political elites, the majority of the Palestinian and Israeli people and the Arab governments. The active support of the first five constituencies is necessary for any lasting solution. The US Government would almost certainly be required to provide a great deal of the finance for any settlement. Equally, the use of its military, political and economic influence over Israel would be essential to secure Israel's support for any deal that would be acceptable to the majority of the Palestinian people and politicians.

Any viable deal would require wide support among the Palestinian and Israeli political elites and people. No viable deal could be based only on the leaders and traditional supporters of the Israeli Labor Party and the more dovish sections of Fatah. Any lasting deal would need the support of many traditional Likudniks, as well as a significant number of those who voted and stood for Hamas in January.

The final constituency is that of the Arab governments, of which the most important are those bordering the conflict area – Egypt, Jordan and Syria. While these governments may frustrate any peace process, it is unlikely that their mere acquiescence (rather than active support) would derail any peace process. Of these states, Syria is in no sense a democracy and has been subjected to fierce US pressure under the Bush government. Jordan and Egypt have made limited moves towards democracy, but have been strongly

encouraged to take these moves further. Other Arab governments have been encouraged in a similar manner.

Democratisation would almost certainly require the political elites to relinquish their powers and privileges and, quite possibly, place them in acute personal danger. Faced with such a prospect, the elites have the option to appease the calls from the West, or to resist them. Egypt's close economic and military ties with the US prompted President Mubarak to appease the calls by allowing controlled opposition in Egypt's recent presidential election. However, Egypt has diplomatic relations with Israel, and thus has limited scope (or inclination) to frustrate any peace process.

The country with the greatest potential to veto any peace process is also the state most likely to reject Mubarak's appeasement, and to resist Western calls for democratisation - Syria. If pressured to reform, the Assad regime could use its leverage over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict effectively to veto any attempted solution.

Damascus hosts the political leadership of Hamas and actively supports Hizbollah - organisations whose 'host' territories effectively surround Israel. Syria's support for these groups accords the Assad regime an influence over the Palestinian government and people as well as, indirectly, over the Israeli people. Syria may be minded to use such influence to encourage Western governments with a stake in any peace process to refrain from calls for the Assad regime to reform.

The recent attacks by Hamas and Hizbollah on Israel - supported by Syria and Iran - have drawn a typically draconian response, with Israel re-occupying Gaza and parts of southern Lebanon, as well as threatening the Syrian and Iranian regimes. Such responses play into the hands of these regimes, which use Israel as a means of bolstering their own support, and thus their lack of willingness to democratise.

The current Middle East situation shows the extent to which states such as Syria can escalate and prolong the conflict. By actively promoting democracy, Western governments may increase Syria's willingness to do just that. Unpalatable as it may be, the Syrian regime's acquiescence is necessary for any solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such a solution is, in turn, necessary to create the environment in which calls for Arab democracy may succeed. Refraining from an emphasis on democratisation may be a

necessary price for the West to pay to secure Syria's acquiescence in any peace process.

Attempts to promote democracy have force only if they are pursued universally. It would not be possible to call for Egypt to democratise because the Egyptian elites are more likely to appease such calls, while easing the pressure on Syria because of that country's problematic impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because of this, the US and UK should not attempt a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the same time as pushing for the Arab states (and particularly Syria) to democratise.

This is not to claim that refraining from calls for democracy will of itself create a solution. However, attempting to promote democracy at the same time as trying to find a solution will make a solution very difficult to attain.

Thus, for Labour, the long-term ideal of a stable, democratic Middle East cannot be attained by idealistic policies. This is not in any way to denigrate the aim of democratisation, which has to be at the heart of Labour's foreign policy. In many ways, it represents the classic Labour revisionist separation of aims and means: the aim is democratisation in the Middle East; the means to achieve this are not the strident



Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert

pressuring of Arab states to democratise. Such pressure would increase the incentives for some Arab states, Syria in particular, to attempt to derail any Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Without a lasting peace, any active pressure for democratisation is likely to fail. Western governments should first concentrate on a solution to the conflict, both as an aim in itself, and as a condition to Middle East democracy. Robin Cook's aim of promoting democracy is alive and well; the means of achieving this in the Middle East lie in Israel-Palestine.

New Labour's Renewal

Yue Ting Cheng explains why white, working class voters are deserting the Labour Party in favour of the BNP, and how New Labour should combat this worrying trend

Margaret Hodge's recent claims that "eight out of ten working class voters would consider voting BNP" may have shocked a few of the political class, but the resulting success of the BNP in Barking and Dagenham in the local elections signals that many sections of white working class people no longer feel the Labour party represents them. During the local elections, I'm sure many of us found it difficult to defend some of the recent events in the world of New Labour - from the loans for peerages scandal, Prescott's rather unpalatable affairs, to the recent foreign prisoner release scandal.

In a recent interview, Billy Bragg remarked that places such as Barking and Dagenham "are economically quite similar to former industrial towns in the north". The collapse of industry has meant that traditional heavy industry workplaces, such as Ford, are no longer part of the local economy. Folk are resentful that they are not being given access to decent housing, or feel they have no opportunities to break out of the perpetual cycle of poverty in such areas. As Ken Livingstone pointed out at the recent State of London event: "The reason why white, working class folk are being denied access to decent housing is not that the foreigners have all come over and taken all the spaces, but its down to the fact that in 1979 when the Thatcher Government came to power, we started selling off housing stock whilst not replacing it. A policy which shamefully is being continued by this Labour government."

The recent local elections saw Labour suffering its poorest results since 1983 and should be the wake up call the Labour party desperately needs. Increasing numbers of party members and activists - along with huge swathes of the general public - feel the leadership is becoming increasingly arrogant, and is not listening to the very people that put it in power in 1997. As one local Branch Secretary remarked about Blair and co, "absolute power corrupts absolutely". The number of people I have met who have defiantly stated that they "will not vote for Labour again until Blair is gone" is not surprising. Likewise the number of former party members who have left in the last fifteen or so years - approximately 200,000 - should be warning enough to the leadership that they must make a radical change in policy direction if they are to remain in power, or to even have the manpower to campaign in the

next general election. Recently up in Scotland, whilst helping on a conservation project, I stayed with a couple from Glasgow who had joined the Labour party in 1970 and left in 1994 in protest at Tony Blair's decision to rewrite clause IV. "When we joined the Labour party we knew it wasn't a revolutionary party, but the atmosphere at the time gave us the feeling that we thought it could really change society. Back then when resolutions were passed at Conference they were also discussed at Cabinet level. Not all the ideas were necessarily taken on, but they would listen to the members. Today's Labour Party Conference under Blair has just become a media show."

In York, I met a former Party member and CND activist who is a friend of Bruce Kent. He had left even earlier, back in 1989 when Neil Kinnock decided that unilateral nuclear disarmament shouldn't be a mainstream party policy. In a conversation which included several other people he denounced Kinnock as a "sellout".

At a recent Stop the War meeting I met Walter Wolfgang, the 82 year old Labour party member, and Vice president of CND who was ejected at last years conference for shouting "nonsense" at Jack Straw. "This would have never happened under any other Labour leader", Walter remarked when talking about the way he was manhandled out of the conference by two men who, as it turned out, were also Party members.

So the big question is, just where have these 200,000 lost party members gone? They can't have all joined other parties, although I can imagine there is a small number in the SWP and Respect, Socialist Labour Party, Socialist party of England and Wales, amongst other left of labour groups, and maybe a handful in the Liberal democrats. Tony Benn says he gets letters every week from people writing to tell him they've cut up their Labour party cards "What else are you doing politically?", he asks them. Many people in left of Labour groups have said for years that "Labour has changed permanently into a monster" and is "unclaimable", and when you look at recent events you can see why they say that.

I find it quite astonishing that there are a number of Cabinet Ministers who continue to blindly defend the record of this government as if nothing bad has happened. Our Prime



Minister genuinely seems to think the public are behind most of his proposed reforms. Yet as anyone who saw Hazel Blear's performance on Question Time recently will know, the public disbelieves claims that "the record of New Labour is something to be proud of". Regardless of some significant achievements - such as the minimum wage, tax credits etc. - Blears was absolutely mauled left, right and centre by panelists and audience alike. "Iraq will be the one item that the public will remember Blair for", Piers Morgan said. Unfortunately a lot of people I know see it that way too.

So, where does the party go from here? Local parties are currently in meltdown with Councillors and MP's struggling to get enough activists out campaigning on the streets. In my local party, Hertsmere, there are only three other people active under the age of 30. "It's up to us to rebuild it together" the local youth representative agreed. Yet the only way Labour can rebuild is by arguing for more traditional Labour policies. That's not to say the party should go back to 1979 or 1983 - the Britain and the world has changed much since then - but the renewal of New Labour should focus on equality, greater redistribution of wealth and an independent foreign policy.

The party desperately needs to re-engage with young people again - where are the next generation of Cabinet Ministers and MPs? It's probably fairly safe to assume that the majority of the current crop of Labour MPs have probably never had a hard days work in a factory, cleaning floors, washing dishes in their life. So how can ordinary people expect to be able to relate to their elected representatives when they hail from the "political aristocracy" anyway?

The increasing authoritarian nature of this government is also alienating so many young people. Youths are now being criminalised

just for playing football on the streets, wearing hoodies and baseball caps. Ken Livingstone's own report concluded that "four out of ten children in London grow up below the poverty line". There are many youths growing up in the grey tower blocks of cities in the UK whose life chances will be minimal - meaning that there are more likely to turn to crime and drugs.

Yet to suggest that "some people are born yobs and need asbos to control them" is not only ignorant, but also fails to address the root causes of antisocial behaviour - namely poverty and lack of opportunity. If the only solution we can think of is to "tag people, fine people, and lock them up" then it truly is a dim view of humanity. Likewise the recent "90 days internment" and "Incitement to Cause Terror" Bills were akin to some sort of Kafka-esque nightmare. The fact that Hazel Blears blithely stated on Question Time that "7/7 would have happened regardless of Iraq", to turn one of Blair's own phrases on its head, simply "beggars belief". Quite how there are still individuals within this Government who just will not accept that their methods may have been wrong - regardless of whether or not they did it in good faith - and who refuse to accept responsibility for the inevitable consequences of these decisions.

Quite simply, the party needs more than ever to talk to both its own members and the trade unions without treating them like an embarrassing older relative. They need to talk to the young people who are being victimised in an unsympathetic society bereft of much opportunity for them to improve their lives. They need to talk to the pensioners who are facing increased hardships and they need to talk to the disaffected working class of all races. It needs to be inclusive in its decision making process, rather than just a media show of solidarity. Then, if this happens, we may begin to see a change.

Labour and liberty

Richard Pond argues that there is a tradition of socialist support for civil liberties but the current Labour Party has forgotten all about it

The idea that socialism emphasises the power of the state at the expense of individual freedom is a common misconception. It is hardly surprising that this misrepresentation of the left's ideals should be promoted by the political right. What is more worrying is that many people on our own side believe it. Recently, a leading member of my CLP said that he didn't care how many liberties were sacrificed in the fight against terrorism, because he was a "socialist" and this meant that the state had the right to protect its citizens in whatever way it saw fit. Unfortunately, he was in step with our party's national leadership in this respect. But the tradition of socialist support for civil liberties is much stronger than some on both left and right now contend.

In 1900, one of Labour's few commitments was opposition to compulsory vaccination. Eighteen years later, democratic socialist philosophy had developed further, and the party's manifesto stressed the need to repeal "all war-time measures", to abolish conscription and to release political prisoners. So strong was the belief that conscription constituted "an abandonment of democratic rights" (as Bevan put it) that in 1938 the right and the left of the party were united in opposing the National Government's proposal to reintroduce it. Labour rightly shifted its stance when the war started, and it could possibly be argued that it should have done so earlier, but the strength of feeling is illustrative.

Anti-authoritarian opinion was invigorated in 1934 by an incident at the British Union of Fascists' rally at Olympia: when stewards forcibly ejected heckling delegates, there was outrage, particularly when the police sided with the stewards. Labour's distrust of the police was heightened, and the party opposed the National Government's subsequent Incitement to Disaffection Bill, especially the extension of stop-and-search powers. The National Council for Civil Liberties (later Liberty) was formed to oppose the same bill; much later, Harriet Harman and Patricia Hewitt were leading members.

Labour stalwarts consistently denied that Labour was anti-liberal. Attlee wrote in 1937 that the party was "determined to preserve the liberties [we have]... and to extend them"

and that "the aim of socialism is to give greater freedom to the individual". (He rightly conceded, though, that so-called "economic freedom" often means the freedom of the rich to exploit the poor.) Richard Crossman, writing in 1970, warned: "Freedom is always in danger: the majority of mankind will always acquiesce in its loss."

Of course, there has always been an authoritarian element on the left, but Labour defenders of freedom can draw on a wealth of leftwing tradition to support our case. The second Socialist International was founded on 14th July 1889 – quite deliberately chosen as the 100th anniversary of the French revolution, to which socialists regarded themselves as the heirs. "Liberty" is the very first of three revolutionary values in the French motto. Edouard Bernstein stressed that "there is no really liberal conception that does not also belong to the elements of socialism". Even revolutionary Marxists claimed to believe in the eventual withering away of the state.

Democratic socialism is not about elevating the collective above the individual. Rather, it is through collective action that individuals' full potential can be realised. Freedom and equality are complementary: to put it at its most obvious, if people live in a system of rigid class stratification, their real freedom is limited. In an unequal society, freedom of the press works in the interests of the rich (those who own most of the media and who have easiest access to it), but this is an argument for equality, not against freedom. Much less does the essence of socialism lie in statism: the word "socialism" was first used to refer to the mutualist philosophy of Robert Owen. We may, in practice, accept that substantial state power (democratically controlled) and a measure of public ownership are either necessary or desirable, but they are not the core of what socialism is about and our other values should not be subordinated to this statism. If statism were the definition of "left", fascism would be a leftwing philosophy (as, in fact, elements of the right sometimes claim it is); but this is not the case, because socialism is about freedom, equality, justice, and the interests of the masses (working people and the poor) above those of the elites.

Rather than examine in detail the threats that Labour's current policies pose to individual freedoms, I wanted to highlight the important connections between democratic socialist values and liberal (or civil libertarian) values. We neglect these at our peril. Of course, only an anarchist argues that individual freedoms must always and everywhere take precedence over collective security (although Benjamin Franklin, the American revolutionary, argued that those who would sacrifice liberty for security deserved neither). Many of the Labour government's measures can be justified when taken

individually, but when one looks at their collective impact over a decade – coming on top of many new authoritarian laws during the 1980s and 90s, most of which Labour voted against on explicitly civil libertarian grounds – the picture becomes frightening. Labour has arguably managed to become, for the first time, the most authoritarian of the major parties. It is vital that Fabians understand the importance of freedom as a socialist value and hold ministers to account.

Events Diary

Much done...

17 May - New Members Reception

14 June - 'Reforming Legal Aid - At what cost to Social Justice?'

19 June - Turkish Embassy

28 June - Young Fabian Book Club

11 July - Party Funding and Voting Reform

14 July - Young Fabian Annual Summer Boat Party

Much still to do...

22 August - Young Fabian Book Club

The next book club meeting will be Franz Kafka's 'The Trial' at the Sanctuary pub in Westminster. For more details please contact Angela Green at agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

24-28 August - Young Fabian Trip to Edinburgh

This trip coincides with not only the fringe and book festivals but also the Holyrood Festival of Politics at the Scottish Parliament. Unlike last year, this year we will not only be attending the political festival but we will be putting on an event at it - we will host a cross-party debate on how to encourage youth involvement in politics. Please email Emma Carr on ecarr@youngfabians.org.uk for more details.

31 August - Young Fabian Summer Quiz

For more information contact Rebecca Rennison at rrennison@youngfabians.org.uk

13-18 September - Young Fabian trip to Sweden

We are organising a Young Fabian trip to Stockholm to help the Social Democrats during the Swedish local, regional and national elections. This is set to be the closest general election in years, with a long-lasting centre-left government battling a resurgent right wing under a young and charismatic leader - sound familiar? Flights go from Luton and Stansted, and we are staying with members of the young Social Democrats. If any member would be interested in joining this trip, please email Mark Rusling on mrusling@youngfabians.org.uk for more details.

10 October - Spanish Embassy

25 October - Estonian Embassy

For more information please contact Mark Rusling at mrusling@youngfabians.org.uk.

Women and children first

David Boot discusses the feminisation of poverty

What are your proudest achievements of this Labour government? The National minimum Wage, perhaps? Sure Start, maybe? Pensions credit? Lifting 700,000 children out of poverty, I bet? The common thread that runs through all these is poverty. Tackling poverty is what Labour governments do. What Beveridge termed 'want' and New Labour broadly views as 'social exclusion,' has been a key pillar of the Labour lexicon for over a century. Since 1997, the Labour Government has begun to tackle child and pensioner poverty but has overlooked the biggest and most heavily affected group; women.

The term 'the feminisation of poverty,' which originates from research in the US during the 1970s, is a somewhat misleading one, suggesting a process rather than an enduring state of affairs. The fact is that women have always been the worst affected by poverty. A United Nations Development Report in 1995 estimated that 70% of those in poverty throughout the globe were female. Put simply, it stated that 'poverty has a female face.'

Reebohn Rowntree, an eminent early pioneer of research into poverty, identified a 'life-cycle of poverty' evident in three stages; namely childhood, parenthood and old age. Whilst the Fabian Society's Commission on Life Chances adds to the child poverty debate; the focus must begin earlier as the report implicitly suggests. It states that 'low birth weight is linked to poorer life chances in each of the three major domains of child development,' namely health, cognitive ability and emotional and social behaviour. The quest to eradicate child poverty starts in the womb. Pregnant mothers living in poverty will invariably give birth to children in poverty, blurring the lines between child and adult deprivation.

A concerted effort to eradicate child poverty must address the poverty of mothers. Professor Ruth Lister of Loughborough University identifies the 'compulsory altruism' of mothers which actually alleviates the worst effects of child poverty. Mothers in poverty will often 'go without' to ensure children in the household are adequately cared for. Debates about child poverty must therefore include the poverty of parents.

The low take up of the Sure Start Maternity grant, a lump sum of £500 to help with the costs of a new baby, must be tackled by Labour if it is to have a chance of making headway into combating child poverty. With a

rise in recent decades in the number of Female Headed Households (FHHs), this one-off payment has been given an even greater significance. Maternity payment has also risen up the political ladder. Women, as the sole providers in some families, rely heavily on this payment and yet it is more affluent mothers that will get the most out its increase. Although these changes are welcome, an audit of how the poorest benefit must be undertaken.

More women earn the National Minimum Wage (NMW), currently £5.05 an hour, than men. The low paid roles performed have often been some of the most vital, including carers and hospital cleaners. During 2003-4, the average median total individual income for women in Britain was £161 per week, 53% of men's (at £303.)

The Office for National Statistics has just reported a sharp rise in the number of women looking for work; those of working age not seeking employment fell by 93,000, or almost 2% during the first quarter of this year. The Equal Opportunities Commission reports that the employment rate for mothers with children under 5 has doubled in the last 30 years. It becomes evident that a rise in the NMW, to the Council of Europe decency threshold of £7.40 an hour, would cut the number of women living in poverty. 6.5 million, men and women, would benefit from this.

The predominance of women in part-time jobs, most notably in the caring and service professions, is also attributable to low overall pay. This is also, partly, linked to the flexible working practices and shift work available in these sectors and, despite a fashion for talk about work-life-balance, from Cameron's Conservatives in particular; this is not evident in the higher reaches of many sectors. Consequently, many women are trapped in the low pay sector.

The third poverty 'trough' in Rowntree's cycle is old age. Although women save a higher percentage of their income than men (6.84% to 6.37%) Help the Aged reports that 31% of women aged 24-35 plan to rely on their partner for a pension. The average a single female pensioner has to live on is £153 per week; the average male £194. Although Labour has begun to tackle pensioner poverty through the Pension Credit system, more should and will be done.

The Pensions White Paper states that from 2010, people will have to contribute for 30 years to qualify for a full basic state pension; down from 44 years for men and 39 for women. The claim of carers is to be recognised. This will ensure more women receive pensions in their own right; removing the penalty for taking time out for caring duties. This is a huge step forward and an important move to narrow the gender gap in pension provision.

Labour has taken an insular approach to child poverty. The distinction between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor' must not be reinforced. The inclusion of women in government poverty targets must be the first step of recognising a bigger phenomenon; 11.4 million people, a fifth of the population, still live in poverty. Women and children first is what the Labour Party must proclaim. Anything less shows a more insidious form of poverty; a poverty of ambition.

At large in the Shires

Chris Wearmouth questions development programmes in Milton Keynes and the Tory dominance of Buckinghamshire

In the new city of Milton Keynes an issue is troubling the population. Children are crying, no one is sleeping. Well, when I say troubling I mean mildly annoying. And when I say that what I really mean is that the few people who read the front page of the local rag a couple of weeks ago will have read that certain parts of the city are in line for demolition as part of the greater programme of development.

For a town in which the majority of building has sprung up in the last thirty years this news came as something of a surprise. Sure, there are suburbs in dire need of regeneration but by and large Milton Keynes is fine as it is – unless you get lost between some of the famous roundabouts.

Then at the end of June we had further news that a report commissioned by a Commons Select Committee recommended that the number of houses to be built in the South East of England be raised to 46,000. Milton Keynes has been earmarked as one of the centres of this extra growth: indeed, the chair of the commissioning committee is Dr Phyllis Starkey, MP for Milton Keynes South-West.

One of the symbols of this anticipated growth is rising in the city centre at the moment and is known as The Hub. You might have seen it on the news recently because 12 stories-worth of scaffolding attached to the side of a hotel collapsed in spectacular fashion. The Hub itself was not held back by this and building work has been remorseless. I'm not one to shirk development when it's needed, but some of what is planned is regeneration for regeneration's sake. For example, at least one of the suburbs in line for 'regeneration' is one of the more well-to-do areas of the city and has found the attention of the planners simply because it lies on the 'V7 Corridor'.

Furthermore, the focus on Milton Keynes is coming at the expense of the rest of

Buckinghamshire. Having said that, the rest of the county isn't exactly screaming out for development, and with large portions falling within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty extensive building work would be hard to come by anyway. And while The Hub's apartments, shops and restaurants will no doubt shine and sparkle, you cannot escape the fact that at the moment the existing restaurants and bars in the city struggle to fill themselves and the shopping centre has several vacant units. With this the present situation, can we really say that further development is worthwhile?

Way back in the early 1990s, following a local election, Clive Anderson made a jibe on his talk show that if the Tories re-drew the county map Britain would be one large Buckinghamshire. The blue dominance in my neck of the woods continues – John Bercow was re-elected to the Commons with an 18,000-plus majority last year – and is likely to carry on until the end of time.

Yet Bucks County Council remains one of the most progressive in the country, demonstrated in no small part by the building of a 10 million flagship special needs school in Aylesbury. Nothing so progressive in that, maybe, but what makes this particular project stand out is that none of the funding has come from private investment.

Yup, you heard me right. The Tories may have been at the vanguard of private involvement in public projects, but this bluest of blue counties is funding 70 percent of this school from its own pockets, with the remaining 3 million coming from the Department for Education, and that support came as a complete surprise to the councillors involved in getting the school establishment off the ground.

Book Club

The Road to Wigan Pier, George Orwell (Commissioned by the Left Book Club 1936)

Reviewed by the Young Fabian book club and written up by Samir Dathi

I write this article on behalf of the Fabian Society book club which met on 28 June 2006 to discuss George Orwell's 'The Road to Wigan Pier'. In this brief article I will analyse what Orwell believed it was to be a socialist, a belief he expounded in 'The Road' back in 1937, as Hitler prepared for war and fascism was on our door step. I will consider how credible his definition of socialism was in the 1930s and conclude by considering how relevant it is in today's England.

In 1937, Orwell was commissioned by a left-wing publisher, Victor Gollancz, to report on working-class life in the industrial districts of Yorkshire and Lancashire. In typical Orwellian fashion, he threw himself into the job: he slummed for months on end with working-class families, he mingled with coal miners and even went down a coal mine himself. He documented his findings in 'The Road to Wigan Pier'.

Part 1 is a purely descriptive account of the places he visited: a lively but heart-breakingly bleak description of the impoverished conditions Northern families endure from day-to-day; and also the gruelling conditions in which coal miners work.

Part 2, in contrast, is a prescriptive account: after having described in Part 1 the 'kind of mess we are in', a mess caused by the economic inequities of class, Orwell suggests in Part 2 that socialism is the only remedy. In fact, he goes so far as to say that if 1930s England cannot attain socialism as a nation, it risks being taken by fascism. Orwell asks why the then English people find it so hard to embrace socialism,: Orwell submits, among other things, that your average socialist is a middle-class snob who jealously seeks to retain all his financial and cultural privileges and who's idea of socialism is spouting Marxist theory; who, habitually extols the virtues of the proletariat, but secretly hates all working-class men.

Let me quote an extract from Part II which gives just a taste of Orwell's attack on the middle class socialist:

'A middle-class person embraces Socialism...How much real difference does it make?...is there any change in his tastes, his habits, his manners, his imaginative



background - his 'ideology'? Is there any change in him except that he now votes Labour?...It is noticeable that he still habitually associates with his own class; he is vastly more at home with a member of his own class ... his taste in food, wine, clothes, books, pictures, music, ballet, are still recognisably bourgeois tastes; most significantly of all, he invariably marries into his own class... Why should a man who thinks all virtue resides in the proletariat still take such pains to drink his soup silently? It can only be because in his heart he feels that proletarian manners are disgusting. So you see he is still responding to the training of his childhood, when he was taught to hate, fear, and despise the working class.'

One remedy Orwell suggests is for the middle-class to forget the cultural differences between themselves and the working-class, and instead remember the financial similarities. For example, there are legions of individuals who cling to their bourgeois upbringing, but financially, are no better off, or are worse off, than many working class folk.: small shopkeepers driven into the workhouse, the village grocer, the lower-grade civil servant, the engineer, the legal aid

lawyer, the journalist (like Orwell himself) all may earn no more than a common labourer. Yet the former spurn the latter because they believe they are superior; because they 'pronounce their aitches'. Orwell insists we should see ourselves less as middle-class and working class, and more as oppressed and oppressor; only then will our similarities emerge.

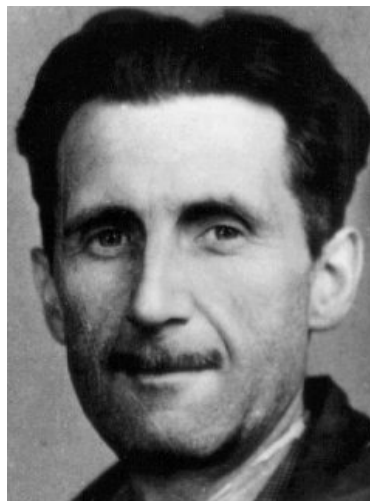
Another remedy Orwell suggests is for the 'tract-writing type of Socialist', the priggish middle-class intelligentsia type, to stop turning off those potential socialists (often of the working-class) just because they do not understand the niceties of dialectic materialism, or other sterile academia. Orwell submits that it is 'a waste of time to insist that acceptance of Socialism means acceptance of the philosophic side of Marxism.'

Instead he suggests one monolithic and essential mark of a real Socialist:

'the real Socialist is one who wishes – not merely conceives it is desirable, but actively wishes – to see tyranny overthrown.'

So what does this mean? wanting to see tyranny overthrown? Orwell does not really elaborate; but extrapolating from Orwell's own life, he certainly contemplates taking up arms, as he did with the Republicans a year before in the Spanish Civil War; he certainly contemplates activity of a revolutionary nature.

Orwell concludes that if 1930s England cannot heed his advice on the true nature of the socialist and socialism, and embrace them both, then fascism may win. I believe that, to some extent, he was right in his simplistic views of socialism, that is, socialism equals fighting tyranny, and nothing else. His was a world without a welfare state, where Victorian capitalism still ran riot, where the European empires still existed. His was a very different time, when the English people faced the impending threat of physical force from fascism and where the prospect of fighting tyranny was very real. All these evils, all these tyrannies, were products of the right and required a very powerful left-wing force to balance them out. So logically, he equated socialism with the fighting of tyranny, and



Eric Arthur Blair (A.K.A. George Orwell)
25th June 1903- 21st January 1950

nothing else. And indeed, following World War II, socialism swept over the Western world and many inequities were cured as a result.

But how credible is Orwell's definition of socialism in today's England? Much, much less so than in the 1930s, in my respectful submission. Today, England, like most other Western countries, has an economic consensus between left and right: capitalism tempered by socialism. The balance, many will argue, is more or less correct. We have an NHS, Income Support and Job Seekers Allowance, social housing, legal aid, a regulated labour market; but we also have free enterprise. Mainstream parties across the board tend to be in agreement that a mixed economy is the way to go; a 'Third Way', if you like. We are not so oppressed by powerful right-wing forces as many were in England in the 1930s, and it would sound very naïve to say today that we desperately needed socialism in order to fight tyranny and that this was all socialism entailed.

I conclude by saying that, in my submission, Orwell's view of socialism was a creature of its time and has less meaning today. During times of peace and third way economics, terms such as 'socialism' and 'capitalism' mean less in practice, and (in contrast to what Orwell says) more about theoretical niceties. You do not need to be a socialist to fight tyranny today; all you need is a good heart. Balance is what we need; not heroics.

Young Fabian Book Club

The next book to be read by the Young Fabian book club will be *The Trial* by Kafka. The club will be meeting on Tuesday 22nd August at The Sanctuary in Westminster. If you are interested in attending or would like to submit your comments for discussion by the group, please contact Angela Green at agreen@youngfabians.org.uk.

P.G.Tips: A word from our leader

Prema Gurunathan, Young Fabian Chair

Sultry summer nights make sleep difficult, so spare a thought as to the even more restless nights Lord Levy and other alleged wrongdoers must be experiencing. Still the weather meant a lovely evening for the annual Young Fabian boat party, attended by more than 100 people. The evening's entertainment was provided by The Playthings, a brilliant covers-band whose howling impressed even those in the floor above the basement where they were playing. A big thanks to Social Secretary Becky Rennison for organising!

Our new members' welcome in May almost turned into a walkout when it appeared we'd not secured a working TV to broadcast the European Championships. Thankfully the bar manager proved handy at technical stuff. One newbie later charmingly emailed Membership Officer Richard Messingham to check that the "small hyperactive Asian girl" he'd given his form to was actually going to hand it in. Clearly I made an impression, if the wrong one. It's gravitas next time.

At the Turkish Embassy in June, we discussed Turkish entry into the EU. The panel, which included the Ambassador, concluded that this will be a good thing, as did the audience, though two Turkish members in the audience bemoaned the double standards applied by the EU to existing member states and aspirant ones. A close friend of mine recently married a Turk. Meeting him for dinner, I asked his views on the matter. Vehemently dismissing Turkish entry into the EU, he did so not on religious grounds but geopolitics. Turkey, he felt would be better off in an alliance with Middle East countries. It's a moot point but reflects that even amongst Turks, the EU is not necessarily a prize worth pursuing. Mid-June saw our joint seminar with Young Labour Lawyers. Our original speaker Lord Falconer had to be on Question Time but his deputy Vera Baird, ably stood in for him.

My first article for Anticipations 5 years ago was on party funding and recent events have once again thrown this into the limelight. Right now, two simultaneous inquiries are being led by Hayden Phillips and the NEC. We organised a seminar to examine both party funding and voting reform. In a heart-felt speech, Martin Linton MP, a life-long advocate of reform, said that constitutional affairs are too often neglected even though they are the basic structure of our democracy. Andy Bagnall, special advisor to Hazel Blears, also spoke in a personal capacity, providing us with

a good analysis of why the Tories had put forward the proposals they had. The average Tory donor gives £75k, the average Labour donor a good deal less. Little wonder that Tory proposals set a cap of £50k when the remainder can easily be provided by the state.

We're off to Scotland in August. Last year's trip was a great success, so I'm confident that having tested the waters (literally), organiser Emma Carr will have even better whisky pubs planned. From Scotland, we head to Sweden in September to help our socialist friends with their election - thus fulfilling a promise made by the last YF chair, Kevin Bonavia during a drunken night in Stockholm. That said, the Swedish (political) model is admired, and Swedish hospitality, unlike their weather, is warm. For more details, please email Mark Rusling at mrusling@youngfabians.org.uk.

So that's us till the autumn - do pencil in our conference reception on 27th September, with guest MPs, Jack Straw, Meg Munn and Martin Salter. Have a great summer!

To contact the Young Fabian chair, please email her at premag@youngfabians.org.uk.

