

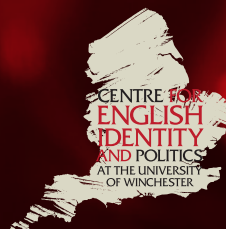
Labour's Identity Crisis

England and the Politics
of Patriotism

Edited by Tristram Hunt MP



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINCHESTER



LABOUR'S IDENTITY CRISIS

England
and the
Politics of Patriotism

Edited
by
Tristram Hunt MP

CENTRE FOR
ENGLISH
IDENTITY
AND POLITICS
AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF WINCHESTER



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINCHESTER

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	v
Profiles of Contributors	vii
Introduction – Tristram Hunt MP	1
1. Dagenham and Rainham - Jon Cruddas MP	9
2. Sheffield Hallam - Oliver Coppard	15
3. Ealing Central and Acton - Rupa Huq MP	21
4. Hazel Grove - Michael Taylor	25
5. Portsmouth North - John Ferrett	34
6. Copeland - Jamie Reed MP	39
7. Exeter - Ben Bradshaw MP	46
8. Harlow - Suzy Stride and Jacob Quagliozzi	52
9. Rochester and Strood - Naushabah Khan	61
10. Wigan - Lisa Nandy MP	67
Reflections – John Denham	71

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The production of this document wouldn't have been possible without the help of Christopher Mulvey at the University of Winchester, Alan Lockey and Katie Martin in my office, and Caroline Short, our copy-editor. I am incredibly grateful to them all for their support and patience.

Tristram Hunt

PROFILES OF CONTRIBUTORS

Ben Bradshaw has been Labour MP for Exeter since winning the seat from the Conservatives in 1997. He trebled his majority last May. Ben served in a number of Ministerial roles in the 1997 to 2010 Labour Government. He was raised in Norfolk and was a journalist before becoming an MP.

Oliver Coppard was the Labour Party's 2015 general election candidate in Sheffield Hallam, achieving a 19.6 per cent swing to the Party in the seat of the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg. Oliver is the Field Director for *Britain Stronger in Europe* for Yorkshire and the Humber, and until recently he worked in local economic development at the Sheffield City Region Local Enterprise Partnership.

Jon Cruddas has been the Labour MP for Dagenham and Rainham since 2001. Before entering Parliament he spent 12 years at the Labour Party, first as a policy officer then as Senior Assistant to the General Secretary and, following the 1997 election, as Deputy Political Secretary to the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, with special responsibility for liaison with the trade unions. He contested the Party's deputy leadership in 2007, and in May 2012 accepted Ed Miliband's invitation to join the Shadow Cabinet as Labour's Policy Coordinator with responsibility for the drafting of the Party's general election manifesto. Jon has an MA and PhD from the University of Warwick.

John Denham served as Labour Member of Parliament for Southampton Itchen from 1992 to 2015. He served in the Cabinet as Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills from 2007 to 2009, and as the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government from 2009 to 2010. He was the Shadow Business Secretary in Ed Miliband's Shadow Cabinet from 2010 to 2011. In 2011 he retired from the front bench to become Ed Miliband's Parliamentary Private Secretary. He is presently a Visiting Professor at the University of Winchester, and the Director of the University's Centre for English Identity and Politics.

John Ferrett was Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate in Portsmouth North at the 2015 General Election. He is leader of the Labour group of councillors in Portsmouth, representing the ward of Paulsgrove. John works for the Prospect trade union.

Tristram Hunt is a British Labour Party politician, historian and broadcast journalist. He has served as the Member of Parliament for Stoke-on-Trent Central since the 2010 general election, and was Shadow Education Secretary from 2013 to 2015. Hunt is a lecturer in modern British history at Queen Mary University of London. He has written several books, and in his work as a broadcaster has presented a number of history programmes.

Rupa Huq is MP for Ealing Central and Acton, one of the few Labour gains in the 2015 General Election. She has lectured at the University of Manchester and at Kingston University. She is author of several books including *Beyond Subculture: Pop, Youth and Identity in a Postcolonial World* (2006), *On the Edge: The Contested Cultures of English Suburbia* (2013) and *Reading the Riot Act: Reflections on the 2011 urban disorders in England* (2016).

Naushabah Khan was Labour's Parliamentary candidate in Rochester & Strood during the 2014 by-election and subsequent General Election. She is currently the Councillor, representing Gillingham South Ward in Medway, where she has lived her whole life. Naushabah works in Public Affairs for a small business based in London, specialising in property, infrastructure and transport. In her spare time she enjoys exercise and is a keen kickboxer and runner.

Lisa Nandy is a British Labour Party politician. She has been the Member of Parliament for Wigan since 2010. She graduated from Newcastle University in 2001 with a degree in politics and obtained a master's degree in public policy from Birkbeck College, University of London. She worked in the voluntary sector as a researcher at the homelessness charity Centrepoint from 2003 to 2005, and then as senior policy adviser at The Children's Society from 2005. She specialises in issues facing young refugees, and she is an adviser to the Children's Commissioner for England and to the Independent Asylum Commission.

Jacob Quagliozzi worked for the Labour Party as a campaign organiser in the key seat of Harlow in the run up to the 2015 General Election. He was also a District Councillor in St Albans from 2011 to 2015 and was born and brought up in the New Town of Hatfield. Today he manages external affairs and communications for a housing charity.

Jamie Reed is the Labour Member of Parliament for Copeland in West Cumbria. Prior to becoming an MP, Jamie worked in the nuclear industry. He entered Parliament in 2005 and served as PPS to Tony McNulty and later to Harriet Harman, and as Deputy Regional Minister for the North West. In October 2010 Jamie was appointed Shadow Environment Minister, and in September 2011 he became Shadow Health Minister. Jamie currently serves as a member of the Energy and Climate Change Select Committee, and as a member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

Suzy Stride works for City Gateway, a charity dedicated to tackling social exclusion in East London. She also stood to be Labour's MP in Harlow in 2015. She was brought up in one of the most deprived areas of the country, Tower Hamlets. Suzy has also worked as an adviser to Baroness Jan Royall, on Labour's policy review, *'What Makes Politics Count for Young People'*.

Michael Taylor, formerly an award-winning business journalist, stood in the 2015 General Election in Hazel Grove and increased Labour's vote by 50 per cent. Since then he has got on with his life, started work at Manchester Metropolitan University, and had his first novel published, a comic crime thriller set in Cheshire's Golden Triangle.

INTRODUCTION

Tristram Hunt
MP for Stoke-on-Trent Central

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall
Or as a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

There are few passages in our literary canon that are more frequently used to invoke a settled idea of England than the dying John of Gaunt's paean in Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Yet rarely do such quotations go beyond the bombast to cite John's more sorrowful conclusion. England, he decries, is 'now leased out [...] like a tenement or pelting farm [...] bound in with shame, with inky blots and rotten parchment bonds'.

There is much to regret about the modern condition of 'leased out', Tory England. And in the 2015 General Election campaign, the Labour Party lamented long about it. But whilst I encountered little enthusiasm for the Tories on England's doorsteps there was even more circumspection towards the Labour Party. Naturally, some of this was about policy. Some of it too, we should be frank, was about leadership. Yet operating at a deeper and more insidious level was a sense that Labour did not really believe in England or the English. Time and again, I heard our political motivations questioned as though the party were somehow hiding a secretive, anti-English agenda from the public's scrutiny. In short, we were seen as insufficiently patriotic. And because of that our ambitions to change the country for the better were simply swept away by a rising tide of anti-political cynicism.

At times this insight has made editing this book a deeply frustrating exercise. Because nobody who reads it in isolation would question for a second the Labour Party's love for England. Michael Taylor finds it in the eccentric entrepreneurialism of Stockport's vibrant civic culture; Rupa Huq sees a beauty and common decency in London's suburban sprawl; and Jamie Reed feels it in Cumbria's incomparable loveliness and its Empire-fuelling, democratic socialism-inspiring cultural inheritance. From his Copeland to Naushabah Khan's Rochester and Strood, Suzy Stride's Harlow to Ben Bradshaw's Exeter, the stories in this book see no conflict whatsoever between English culture and the Labour story. In fact, quite the opposite.

Neither can this book be squared with the equally common view that Labour representatives lack a connection with their respective communities. Whether it is John Ferrett's "Portsmouth 'til I die" collectivism, Lisa Nandy's pride in being "a Wiganer by choice", or Oliver Coppard's "Made

Labour's Identity Crisis

in Sheffield” political soul, each chapter shows how civic patriotism is the fuel that fires our social justice mission. Ultimately, this insight provides the book with its central message: that Labour must start showing its love and affection for the signs and symbols of modern England. For unless – like John of Gaunt – we are much clearer about our pride in both country and community, we will not be trusted to offer either critique or solution.

This is the uncomfortable truth of the 2015 election that we in the Labour Party must not shirk from confronting. Something as basic as our dedication to serve the country was questioned, and if we ignore that then we stand no hope whatsoever of succeeding in 2020. True, in England such accusations were not as terminal as they were in Scotland. Nevertheless, coming - as they so often did - from the working class people the party is supposed to represent, they were still excruciatingly painful. For this reason, far more than in 2010, the last election felt like a profoundly cultural collapse: as though our roots withered before our eyes. This book sets out to explore, confront and understand the precise nature of this disintegration in England. And, tentatively, to seek out some green shoots which might, one day, blossom into a Labour recovery. But more than this, I believe that embracing Englishness might be the only way to save the Union.

Democracy for England

A first step would be merely to recognise the problem. This is not the first inquiry into our defeat which has highlighted our inability to counter fears of ‘betraying’ England to the Scottish Nationalist Party via a post-election coalition deal. Certainly it was a dominant narrative of the campaign, both in the mass media and on doorsteps. And, though it is little consolation, I would also argue that this reflects something of a broader trend harming consensual, pro-European, social democratic and socialist parties across the continent. In European terms, despite high levels of support for the European Union, voters are demanding whole new levels of aggression when it comes to defending the national interest in Brussels – which, to a certain extent, explains the disunity we see playing out on issues such as the refugee crisis.

The despicable genius of the Tory election strategy was to refract these forces of ‘national conflict’ through our own domestic union. Labour was subjected to a shameless marriage of convenience between lion and unicorn – a tag-team effort by David Cameron and Nicola Sturgeon that pitted each as the protector of the English and Scottish national interest respectively. Scottish voters were told we would sell them out to the Tories, whilst in England voters were told we would sell them out to the SNP. In both countries the allegations were believed.

However, this inquiry is a little blunter on our own culpability for this situation. When the West Lothian question returned following the Scottish independence referendum our response, as Ben Bradshaw notes in his chapter, was ‘uncertain and flat-footed’. Frankly, he puts it rather kindly – it would be closer to the truth to say we buried our heads and hoped the issue might disappear. This crystallised a view in England already well established in Scotland: that when push came to shove the Labour Party would prefer to duck constitutional reform that might water down its own partisan interests. At a first principle level we looked - and were - scared of recognising legitimate English demands, scared of granting those demands a constitutional expression and, ultimately, scared of democracy itself. No progressive party can truly thrive without confidence in democracy - which is why I believe Labour, as part of its Constitutional Convention and the move towards a more federal United Kingdom, must now offer the English people a referendum on England’s constitutional settlement. Campaigning in the Scottish referendum was an extraordinary experience: to see a nation debate and debate again its culture, identity and every aspect of its future was to reconnect with the full power and wonder of democracy. If Labour

Introduction

could find the courage to aspire to that kind of democratic awakening in England then it may be pleasantly surprised by the results. This is, after all, a country with a radical, agitating tradition that is explicitly organised around self-determination for the voiceless – from the Tolpuddle Martyrs to the Chartists, Diggers, Levellers, Thomas More and John Ball's radical lament:

When Adam delved and Eve span;
Who was then the gentleman?

Nation-Building

Yet the truth is that Labour's English 'problem' is far more about identity than about constitutional reform. However dexterous and democratic our constitutional reform agenda it will not, on its own, convince the English people that Labour is on their side. This strikes at some fraught and thorny questions about who we think we are, who we think we represent, and what we think England expects from Labour.

In truth, this 'nation-building' aspect of politics, as Jamie Reed labels it in his chapter, is pretty basic stuff. Whether it is Roy Jenkins and multiculturalism in the 1960s or Tony Blair's modern social liberalism in the 1990s, the most successful Labour governments have always understood the need for a culturally compelling vision of who we are as a nation. Gordon Brown, too, understood this as he valiantly attempted to craft a new vision of modern British identity in the late 2000s. Yet around him the unifying blocks of Britishness - Protestantism, heavy industry, Empire, mass-member trade unionism – were receding into history. At the same time, New Labour's lopsided devolution settlement, the impact of globalisation on industrial communities, and a tide of consciously English motifs in fashion, literature, drama and sport all contributed to the growing cultural allure of Englishness. Pollsters regularly ask people whether they feel English only, English and British, or just British. And over the past decade the results portray a remarkable shift in the tectonic plates of our identity, with the English-only group expanding as the British-only group shrinks. More people now feel English-only than British, with over 70 per cent choosing English either as their preferred or shared identity (*ICM for British Futures*, 2013) In short, our sense of Englishness matters more and more and, as John Denham notes in the final chapter: 'The days when it didn't matter if you said English or British because they meant the same thing are over.'

As this book highlights time and again, the failure of the Labour Party to understand this emerging landscape of identity politics allowed our rivals to steal a march on us. Electorally, as the only coherent political party which represented the entirety of Great Britain, it hurt us more than our opponents. But culturally too it seems to have opened up a great rift, across a whole swathe of issues, between the party – its representatives, activists and members – and many of the communities it was formed to represent.

The lightning rod moment for this, mentioned in many chapters, was Emily Thornberry's infamous 'image from Rochester' tweet in the Rochester and Strood by-election. In her chapter, Naushabah Khan – Labour's candidate on that fateful day – argues that the tweet captured a view 'that Labour was a party for the Scots, for the EU, for migrants, but not the party of England'. Not only that, as Suzy Stride notes from her Harlow experience, a sense of Englishness directly connects to issues of class and Labour's cultural disconnection:

It seemed that Englishness did play an important role in Harlow, as a vehicle for nostalgia, dissatisfaction with a sense of decline in living standards and local area, and perceived threats to cultural identity around shared institutions, language, etc. Those self-defining as English tended to be white and working class, but Labour had little that resonated with these people.

Labour's Identity Crisis

Paul Kingsnorth of the *Guardian* has drawn an analogy between the increased visibility of St. George Crosses and the Confederate Flag in the South of the United States – a sort of unspoken defiance from ‘a people that lost’ which says ‘we are still here’. The analogy does not quite hold – though disgraceful organisations like the English Defence League still use English symbolism as a veneer for racism, it cannot compare to the turbocharged racial tensions of America. In fact, in 2000 the black journalist Gary Younge – who writes beautifully on both race and America – wrote that ‘the apparently seamless link between Englishness and whiteness has long since broken... From pop to politics, cuisine to music, fashion to business, the black experience is now intimately interwoven into the fabric of English daily life.’ This may be overstated but it is important – a lazy assumption that Englishness denotes ethnicity is one of the leading sources of squeamishness towards the former on the Left.

That said, as I toured the country during the general election it was impossible not to notice the same correlation Kingsnorth observed between St. George's flags and the boarded-up high streets, underachieving schools and closed factories of deindustrialising, ‘left behind’ England. In this sense, that flag in Strood found its target: its unspoken defiance was to say ‘We are not from London, we are not middle class, we are the people of England – we are proud of our roots’. But in solidly Labour heartland areas it also seemed to carry a vaguely threatening coda: ‘And don't you dare forget us’.

Mrs Duffy's England

Stoke-on-Trent is one such area confronting the challenge of globalisation. Working class, patriotic, economically deprived, politically disaffected and angry about immigration – it ticks many of the boxes in terms of the England it sometimes appears that parts of the Labour Party want to wish away. Indeed, you could say it belongs to Gillian Duffy's England – an England where Labour's historic grip on political loyalty is now threatened by the rise of UKIP. Labour will not – as is so often its instinct – rebuff this threat by developing micro-targeted policy solutions, even on such crucial issues as immigration. Ed Miliband's entirely sensible immigration policies are a case in point – in substance it was a relatively robust line, but that was not how it translated on the doorstep.

No, rather Labour needs to work much harder at understanding England as it is, not how Labour imagines or wants it to be. In his chapter Jon Cruddas draws a wonderful analogy between two recent films based in Dagenham – *Made in Dagenham* and *Fish Tank*. As he puts it:

‘The other film [*Fish Tank*] is a tougher watch – a modern dystopia of economic and social change. The barely visible scorched remnants of a class; a modern parable to globalisation, economic liberalism and the destruction of family. It is everything that we in Labour find too painful and difficult to confront – so instead we turn our faces from reality and channel hop back to the 1960s.’

But even this condemnation of our institutional conservatism contains a shred of hope. Much of England, particularly Mrs Duffy's England, could empathise with the idea that the past is a happier country. There is a palpable sense, as Jamie Reed puts it, that ‘the pillars of society are disappearing’. If we can diagnose the problem, begin to see the country through the same eyes as it sees itself, then there is no reason why we cannot begin to rebuild the trust needed to prescribe the solution. This book takes the view that this exploration is best undertaken from the bottom up; that like a pointillist painting we should peer into our communities first in order to build up a view of England's modern condition. We first need to understand, in a cultural sense, exactly what our communities have lost. And Stoke-on-Trent certainly has lost.

Introduction

The Potteries

‘Then why do they make things here?’ George persisted, with the annoying obstinacy of his years. He had turned the teapot upside down. ‘This was made here. It’s got “Bursley” on it.’ [. . .] ‘I’ll tell you how it is,’ [Edwin] said, determined to be conscientious. ‘[. . .] In the old days they used to make crocks anyhow, very rough, out of any old clay. And crocks were first made here because the people found common yellow clay, and the coal to burn it with, lying close together in the ground. You see how handy it was for them.’

As Edwin Clayhanger explained to the young George in Arnold Bennett’s rambling Edwardian epic, *Clayhanger*, it was the clay and coal which turned Stoke-on-Trent into ‘The Potteries.’ The Staffordshire soil and the Duke of Sutherland’s coal helped to turn the straggling Six Towns of Stoke-on-Trent into a world-famous global brand. Very few cities are named after their indigenous industries, but like ‘Motor City’ (Detroit) ‘The Potteries’ is one of them.

And what a history it is. Pottery was being thrown around Stoke-on-Trent from the late 1500s. Out of the brown and yellow North Staffs clay came butterpots and flower pots. In the sun kilns of Bagnall and Penkhull, local artisans started to glaze their earthenware and develop a reputation for craftsmanship. In the late 17th century came high-heat salt-glazing, then biscuitware and finally ‘creamware.’

On the continent, at Dresden and Delft, the Saxons and the Dutch were doing the same. But Europe’s ceramicists remained in the shadow of China, which had long mastered the magic of porcelain, the famous blue-and-white ceramic formed by kaolin clay. ‘China’ (Britain’s new word for pottery and porcelain) became the eighteenth-century rage.

Thanks to the breakthroughs of Josiah Wedgwood and Josiah Spode, it was in North Staffordshire where the English Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were born. Mass production accelerated, with the likes of Minton, Spode, and Johnson Brothers seizing the market. And the world came to know of Stoke. Catherine the Great of Russia was a devotee of Wedgwood’s enamel ‘Frog’ service; Minton’s tiles could be found on the floor of the Capitol Building in Washington, churches in Tasmania, the Singapore Terminal Station, and clock towers in Bombay.

In the process, Stoke-on-Trent turned into a great industrial city, with an economy built on ‘pits and pots’ alongside the steel industry and heavy engineering. It was a working-class city of Nonconformity and self-help; of tight-knit terraces and extended families, where ‘the apple never fell far from the tree.’ Of course, behind such wealth was a terrible social cost. Drawing on testimonies contained in the *Children’s Employment Commission’s Report* (1842), Friedrich Engels used the pages of his 1845 classic, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, to describe how children in the ceramics industry are, ‘with scarcely a single exception, lean, pale, feeble, stunted; nearly all of them suffer from stomach troubles, nausea, want of appetite, and many of them die of consumption.’ Today, in our GP surgeries, hospitals, and my own constituency surgery, we are still battling with the health legacy of these industries.

Then there was the cost to the environment. The Industrial Revolution transformed the North Staffs cityscape into a brick Manhattan of towering oven-kilns, pot-banks and chimneys. For some, it was a staggering sight. ‘If it were an old Flemish town, beautiful in detail and antiquely interesting, one would say its situation was ideal,’ wrote Arnold Bennett of Burslem. (*Journal*, 1897) ‘It is not beautiful in detail, but the smoke transforms its ugliness into a beauty transcending the work of architects and of time.’ Whereas the cotton towns of Lancashire and

Labour's Identity Crisis

the West Riding had an enormity and majesty in their mills and factories, the writer J.B. Priestley could find no grandeur to Stoke. 'The pottery manufactories have nothing big about them, no six-storey factories or towering chimneys. You see no huge warehouses, no high public buildings,' he complained. (*English Journey*, 1934) But, of course, the fundamental irony of Stoke-on-Trent was that out of such ugliness and filth came products of pristine beauty. The point to Stoke-on-Trent was what emerged from the kilns.

But in the final decades of the twentieth century, what had brought Stoke-on-Trent into being systematically collapsed. Mrs Thatcher and Michael Heseltine did for the North Staffordshire coal industry; globalisation undercut the steel works; and the entrance of China, Indonesia and Thailand into the global economy saw the numbers of jobs in the pots decline from 50,000 in the early 1980s to around 9,000 by 2010. Stoke-on-Trent suffered hammer blow after hammer blow as the very foundations of the city – social and communal as much as economic - were stripped away.

Needless to say, such economic earthquakes produced social consequences. With a relatively unskilled labour force, low levels of educational attainment, and a limited history of entrepreneurialism (thanks to traditional and highly stable employment models), Stoke-on-Trent was drastically unprepared for the impacts of globalisation. Family breakdown, poverty, worklessness, mental-health problems – all of the signals of civic collapse rocketed. These devastating economic changes – combined with ineffectual municipal leadership - fostered a widespread sense of anger towards the political classes, and a deep feeling of nostalgia for the lost certainties of the past.

When this was combined with an increasingly assertive Pakistani Kashmiri community – now confident enough, after some fifty years in Stoke-on-Trent, to build a city centre mosque – and a wave of East European migration, the ideal breeding ground for BNP politics was laid. Ignoring the complex macro-economic causes behind rising unemployment and de-industrialisation, the BNP operated a highly effective blame politics focusing on out-of-control immigration, Islamic fundamentalism, and the 'betrayal' of the Potteries by the political parties. At its peak, the BNP controlled one-sixth of city councillors and, at the 2010 General Election, the party polled 7.7 per cent of the vote within the Stoke-on-Trent Central constituency – amongst the highest vote shares in the UK.

As a local Labour Party, we worked hard to turn the tide on the BNP, and by the 2011 City Council elections we had eliminated them from the city. But the political battle bred an understandable fear within the party membership that excessive expressions of national pride – Union flags, St George's tops, and such like – were displays of racist sentiment. Our fight against the ugly fascism of the BNP had clouded our ability to recognise and support assertions of patriotism, and conversations about the impact of immigration and the changing nature of, for example, the multi-cultural communities of Shelton and Hanley still make activists nervous. For understandable reasons, we began to box ourselves in over legitimate concerns about the changing nature of England and Britain.

At the same time, the natural ecology of Labourism was fracturing. The Party's instinctive connections and networks into the working-class of Stoke-on-Trent – the working men's clubs; trade unions; chapels; and industrial work patterns – were withering and, with them, a sense of empathy with place. As traditional industries faded away, so went traditional political loyalties. People were angry that the heroic and world-historic cityscape of The Potteries was crumbling around them and they started to blame Labour. A sense of change, loss, and fear over reduced

Introduction

economic prospects – exacerbated by the nature of Scottish devolution and the impact of mass migration - found an outlet in a stronger sense of national identity.

Yet to suggest that a richer connection to Englishness is only a negative sentiment in Stoke-on-Trent would be profoundly wrong. From the Penkhull Mystery Plays, to the Etruria Canals Festival, to the deep cultural pride in the products of The Potteries, a positive and progressive identification with a more consciously English sensibility has been much more obvious in recent years. Personally, I have never felt any difficulty in putting myself on the same side as that cultural affiliation. To be ‘Stokie’, English, and British constitutes an escalating series of identities, of which none are in contradiction or competition. The challenge for the Labour Party now is to ensure that the public thinks that, in England, the Labour Party shares those demands for national recognition.

I Believe in England

To do that however, requires solutions and I hope this book advances the conversation. Certainly, there are many important insights. Oliver Coppard and John Ferrett rail alike against a remote and ineffectual centralism in the party’s campaigning that seems completely out of touch with the localist mood of contemporary politics. Rupa Huq, on living standards, and Michael Taylor, on devolution, try to channel this sentiment towards practical policy solutions. Jon Cruddas, Jamie Reed and Ben Bradshaw all stress the importance of understanding many of our voters’ socially conservative impulses, and begin to flesh out a Labour narrative that might return us to their side. And Nuashabah Khan and Suzy Stride zero-in on the need to confront the party’s toxic relationship with the politics of immigration.

The crucial importance of the last of these barely needs mentioning. We simply have to acknowledge that the post-2004 immigration influx is the biggest demographic surge in the history of England, creating the fastest growing population we have ever seen. And that the then Labour government estimated we would see between five and thirteen thousand immigrants arrive a year from Eastern Europe following the A8 accession, when the figure was around 120,000. At the same time, between 2005 and 2007, whilst over half a million incomers found employment more than a quarter of a million British workers lost theirs. (Tomb, 2014) Of course there is no direct link between the jobs gained and those lost – many of those gained were in booming London whilst our deindustrialising heartlands suffered the most. Nevertheless, this legacy has left a toxic political cocktail: communities - our communities - have seen their way of life change, and believe that their economic fortunes have suffered because of a Labour policy for which democratic consent was never sought – let alone given. Even worse, we sometimes seem – as Suzy Stride notes in her chapter – determined to delegitimise complaints and concerns about it. As well as building on the work Ed Miliband did in terms of policy solutions, Labour should offer some frank *mea culpas* about immigration. Ed made a decent start but in truth it never cut through.

Alas, this may run against the prevailing mood of the party. As, sadly, might any efforts to inculcate a progressive sense of patriotism. The latter of these is not a new problem – as far back as 1941 George Orwell wrote that England was ‘the only great country whose intellectuals are ashamed of their own nationality. In Left-wing circles it is always felt there is something slightly disgraceful in being an Englishman and that it is a duty to snigger at every English institution, from horse racing to suet puddings.’ (Orwell *The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius*) He was right too: in no other progressive European tradition do you find a similar reluctance to fly the flag. In France President François Hollande gives election addresses daubed in the tricolour, while even modish Podemos rallies in Spain fizz with a patriotic determination. If we are in any way serious about taking on anti-politics and reclaiming the cultural affinity of

Labour's Identity Crisis

the working class then such unnecessary metropolitan squeamishness is simply unacceptable – nurturing a civic English patriotism is now absolutely essential. This, in a nutshell, was the genius of Orwell's English socialism – to combine mission and motivation; the poetry of radicalism with the purpose of patriotism.

Of course, this patriotism must truly come from the heart or not at all. Authenticity is the political demand of the age – the English people will see straight through any attempts at confected sincerity. For my part I find it difficult to understand how the landscape, history, culture, humour, and literature of this country would not inspire. I was born a child of the Fens, in the university city of Cambridge; I spent much of my childhood exploring the wilds of Exmoor in Devon; and now I have the profound privilege of representing The Potteries – 'that rugged pot-making spot of earth' – of North Staffordshire. I adore the industrial landscapes of Stoke-on-Trent Pot-banks, Oldham mills, and Liverpool docks; the deep England of South Downs and North Downs; the wild England of Peaks and Lakes; the historic England of country houses, minsters and castles; the coastal England of Whitby, and Durdle Door and Margate.

However, most of all, I relish the sense of fairness, good-humour, and relative social ease in which England and Britain manage to thrive. As we stare in wonder at the visceral howl of anguish currently greeting the first throes of America's imperial decline, we should be deeply proud of our successful post-colonial relations as an open, confident, multi-cultural, multi-faith society. I know I am - as, quite clearly, are the other authors of this book.

As Orwell said 'we must add to our heritage or lose it, we must grow greater or grow less, we must go forward or backward. I believe in England and I believe that we shall go forward.' (Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*) The modern Labour Party needs to believe in England. And it needs to start showing that it does, too.

1.
DAGENHAM AND RAINHAM

Jon Cruddas MP

Dagenham is steeped in the economic and political experience of the English working class. In the names of its streets and in its public buildings this is a community that genuflects to East London politicians like Lansbury and Attlee, and union leaders such as Jones and Todd. The mighty Becontree Estate upholds the virtues of mass public housing and the evolution of English labour power. Dagenham Fordism remains symbolic of the post-war mode of production and its associated struggles for a social democracy built around growth, welfare capitalism and distributive justice.

As such, at the 2015 election we should have witnessed a significant battle against brutal austerity and a callous coalition government. Instead, the dominant election issue among my constituents was an unresolved stand-off with the GMB union - resulting in nine days of rubbish collection strikes preceding Election Day in a marginal seat.

The election period was therefore characterised by internal conflict around human labour and local solidarity. The strike became symbolic as to who and what the modern Labour Party stands for. It challenged our local history and traditions- the 'democracy of our dead' (to misquote Chesterton).

Two Recent Movies

Nigel Cole's *Made in Dagenham* was nominated for Outstanding British Film at the 2010 BAFTAs. A fraternal tale, familiar to our party, of class solidarity amongst a rehoused post-war generation and the fight for equal pay - some 187 Ford seamstresses on strike in 1968, receiving mixed support within the Wilson Government.

Andrea Arnold's *Fish Tank* (2009) is a prize-winning film set in modern Dagenham in which dance-obsessed 15-year-old Mia is chased around her estate by social services. Family hardly exists. Where it does there is little communion or dialogue. Plenty of day-time Special Brew and parading of weapon dogs. Mother and daughter finally communicate, not in words but through dance, as Nas raps 'life's a bitch and then you die'. We see very little in the way of fraternity or sorority.

Both films were shot within months of each other on the same streets on the same estate - the Mardyke - in my constituency. And yet the distance between the lives and lifestyles that the two films portray speaks both to the dramatic changes in the community, and to the crisis of today's Left. Within a generation mass production and consumption has been replaced by relational disintegration, worklessness and violence. And with that comes the decaying of political hope through class solidarity – literally Dagenham Fordism. In one film pride refracts through socialised housing and slum clearance, intergenerational advancement and material progress; through a class and a movement politics. In the other it descends into modern isolation, nihilism and mental decay. We in Labour, even today, think we live in one film - while many of 'our' people inhabit another.

Labour's Identity Crisis

One film is a slam dunk of *Full Monty* and *Billy Elliot* style working class nostalgia. As consumers we feel good - it has now re-appeared as a successful West End musical. As Labour consumers we feel especially good; a virtue signal for our political tradition. It refreshes what we understand ourselves to be. Yet this world no longer exists; nor do its remedies and solidarities.

The other film is a tougher watch - a modern dystopia of economic and social change. The barely visible scorched remnants of a class; a modern parable to globalisation, economic liberalism and the destruction of family. It is everything that we in Labour find too painful and difficult to confront – so instead we turn our faces from reality and channel hop back to the 1960s.

While each film falls on different sides of a hope/despair divide, both came out months after the 2008 economic crash. By then New Labour was essentially destroyed. Amongst the Left, Blair was by then despised. Brown had shown promise, but sank before we had even heard of Mrs Duffy. While Arnold's dose of social-realist commentary appeared as a natural fit with Cameron's talk of a 'Broken Britain', Labour was nowhere near this space - remote, technocratic, and broken internally. We looked to be managing our own decline.

Amongst the actual inhabitants of this slice of East London that I represent, there was sometimes anger, but more often a sense of resignation, loss and abandonment. It was on the move politically, recoiling from Labour's abstract, classless, benign globalizing. By 2010 the BNP had won twelve council seats by scavenging around this space, and they had their fall guy - the immigrant. Over time they were defeated by modern campaign techniques that ensured 51 out of 51 councillors were Labour for two successive rounds of all-out council elections. But did we confront what lay beneath?

The 1968 of *Made in Dagenham* was a very different place for the Left. Sure, Wilson's vision of a 'white heat of technological revolution' was in retreat after 1966, replaced with creative party management and the instrumental tactics of orthodox labourism. Yet in the slipstream of Crossland, Roy Jenkins was forging a rights-driven policy agenda. 1968 also saw the publication of *The May Day Manifesto* - a socialist counter-statement to Labour policies and explanations – which was Humanist Marxist in orientation with an emphasis on virtue and self-realisation.

In contrast to 2010, the Left of the late 1960s was alive and agile, reflected in this active contest between alternative models of justice - the utilitarianism of the economist Wilson, the rights agenda of Labour revisionism, and the ethical concerns of some within the New Left. The first two are very much in play within Cole's 2010 slice of retro labour. Even today we in Labour lap it up; the film takes us back to when we knew what Labour was for.

When *Fish Tank* hit the screens the Left was running on empty. European social democracy surfed a nineties growth spurt built on debt. By the time of the 2008 economic crash the music had stopped, and for some it now looked little more than a vainglorious punt.

Nationally the 2010 general election was bad for Labour - of a piece with 1931 and 1983 - but 2015 was worse still. Yet last May's results did not fall out of the sky; we festered after 2010 and wasted vital years of opposition. No real reckoning or consequent renewal; instead we settled for an inert unity as we gamed the electorate based on unearned poll leads that melted when we met real people.

Dagenham and Rainham

The rabbit punch of the 2015 election defeat – in reality a telegraphed haymaker - means we now sit at the centre of the greatest crisis facing the Left since its organised inception. Despair has now replaced hope. But it is an odd form of despair; one consistent with what Orwell described as the ‘self-righteousness of the Left-wing intelligentsia’. (Orwell, 1940 from a review of Malcolm Muggeridge’s *The Thirties* in *New English Weekly*, 25 April 1940)

Nationally we blame the voters - and in doing so turn further from the sentiment of people in communities like Dagenham and Rainham. Locally, we play fast and loose with different racial groups and their varying turnouts, Balkanise the landscape, and play the internal games of ‘turf and pork’ in the management of austerity.

And yet we don’t talk much about any of this. Instead we righteously protest or watch *Made in Dagenham* re-runs. It is therefore no surprise that after an epic 2015 defeat we abruptly headed back to the old religion by electing a decent man to lead us, but on an agenda that appears to predate even Eric Hobsbawm’s insight, offered decades earlier, regarding ‘the forward march of Labour halted’.

The Numbers

But we can no longer defer the long, hard conversations about where we are, and where we go from here. And this starts with the 2015 election defeat.

At first glance the results in Dagenham and Rainham looked pretty good for us. The Labour vote went up – albeit by just 17 votes - whilst the Tory number fell by 4691. The Labour majority virtually doubled to just short of 5000 - no bad outcome given that boundary changes had made it a key Tory target in 2010. So one response is to kick back and praise our ground game on what was otherwise a good night for the Conservatives. That would be the wrong response.

Sure the Labour vote held up, we retained the seat, and the Tories crashed. But the big winners were UKIP. Coming second they polled an extra 11,281 votes compared to 2010 - made up of some 5,000 ex-BNP votes, a big slice of former Liberal Democrat ones, and thousands upon thousands of ex-Tories going walkabout on the right.

One response is to dig even deeper into the demographics and the calculus. We call it being professional. So we might argue the following:

Look, the seat is where London hits Essex. On the eastern border sits Thurrock; to the west sits Barking and then Newham. The eastern part of the constituency contains 30,000 voters in a Tory London borough, Havering. The western part has 40,000 voters in a Labour London stronghold, Barking and Dagenham. So we can chop it up and do the maths and account for a classic Tory squeeze given UKIP momentum across Essex and strong Labour organisation in London. Add in what we know regarding BAME voting patterns, and the fact that over the past decade Dagenham has been the fastest changing community in the UK, and the numbers begin to take shape in terms of fracture on the right alongside increased Labour vote share. It looks good; what’s there not to like?

It all appears pretty reassuring, but what is happening behind the numbers?

The numbers don’t tell us that until a few years ago Labour used to run Havering; now it has one councillor across the whole borough. Much of the Havering part of the seat is solidly working

Labour's Identity Crisis

class - but is no longer Labour. In 1997 we won all three Havering Westminster seats - now we have part of one seat shared with another borough.

Moreover, the data ignore the toxic local political culture around Labour. Since the war, Dagenham has always been a Labour stronghold – recording some of the highest Labour majorities in parliament - yet by 2010 the BNP hoped to take the council, and Nick Griffin stood for parliament in the borough. The data tell us little about either the intra-class dynamics, or the resentments and cultural contests regarding the character of Labour within the community and the country more generally. We hide behind the statistics to avoid the necessary reckoning as to who and what we are - and might become.

Lessons from Dagenham and Rainham

Watching *'Made in Dagenham'* and *'Fish Tank'* should teach us that the Labour politics created by the Fordist model of production are dead. Many learned this in the 1980s; another generation has to learn it now. Conversely it also reminds us that our history lies in people organising to protect their families from dispossession and that this civic inheritance should be honoured, not abused. It is politics of work, family, home, and country and against all that threatens them: the arbitrary power of the state; the brutal, anonymous forces of Capital. The crisis consuming Labour - at local and national level - suggests that we need to remember this. We require a renewed conception of *justice* - the principles upon which our society should be built.

Our history and inheritance retains an instinct to protect our common life, our neighbourhoods and the landscapes; yet we need to rediscover this. If not, we will continue to appear to deny an interest in the things that people most care about.

This cannot just be dropped on Jeremy Corbyn - that would be what psychologists call transference. It speaks to the culpability of New Labour - although true to form New Labour has shown very little self-awareness on this point.

Class

Since 2005, voters who are socially conservative are the most likely to have deserted Labour. They value home, family and their country. They feel their cultural identity is under threat. They want a sense of belonging and national renewal. These small-c conservative voters are twice as likely to be from socio-economic groups DE as AB and represent the collapse of Labour's traditional working class base.

Added to this is the sense that since 2010 Labour has marched decisively away from the views of voters on issues that are fundamental to our electoral prospects: immigration, personal financial interest, welfare, public services, and business. In short, Labour is out of step with the wider electorate - and this divide is growing.

Consequently, Labour is now as toxic in the south as the Tories are in the north. Among the over 60s, 45 per cent say they will never vote Labour – and the significance of this age group will grow over the coming years. And Labour is more toxic amongst socially conservative voters than either UKIP or the Conservatives.

Instead of confronting this reality, our response is often to hide behind notions of false consciousness and imprecise, vague language regarding austerity - recourse to more abstract rather than concrete solidarities and political agencies.

Dagenham and Rainham

Economy

Yet this response ignores what we might call a paradox of economic radicalism. Many of my constituents would be both economically radical and fiscally conservative. The statistics confirm that the English electorate holds radical opinions on the economy. In the post-election review I commissioned, 43 per cent agree that, 'I am most likely to vote for the political party that redistributes wealth from rich to poor'. Some 60 per cent agree with the statement, 'the economic system in this country unfairly favours powerful interests'. This rises to 73 per cent amongst UKIP voters and 78 per cent amongst Labour voters.

But fiscal responsibility trumps economic reform. Voters understand that the Tories are unfair on the economy; there is no liking for them. But they do not trust Labour with their taxes and with the country's finances. Until that trust is restored they will never support Labour's radical economic policies.

This paradox could prove to be a major opportunity for Labour if we use this insight effectively. It would imply a little bit less of the virtuous, anti-austerity politics framed within the narrow echo chamber of social media, and a bit more cultural engagement with working-class English people.

England and Identity

In general, we avoid talking about culture and identity and instead talk about an instrumentalised economics - like the 'cost of living crisis'. Our failure has allowed UKIP to appear to speak for those who feel dispossessed and left behind. The real danger is that Labour now retreats even further into a Balkanised landscape of differential turnout and racial profiling in our communities. This is exactly the opposite direction to where it needs to go: towards a politics of social integration to rebuild a common life, recognising our different identities with a sense of mutual obligation and renewal; not silos, parallel lives and communities - and indeed countries.

The response to the SNP amongst Welsh and English voters reflects this. It might suggest that Labour needs a more federal politics to accommodate our national differences. A Labour politics of recognition that there is a space for an English Labour Party to represent the interests of the English people.

Moreover, this desertion of socially conservative voters heralds a broader trend of working class detachment from Labour in party membership terms. Labour is now overwhelmingly a party of the socially liberal and the progressively minded.

Finally, the idea that Labour can recover its lost voters by winning non-voters has no grounding in English political realities. To win, Labour has to take them from the Conservatives and UKIP.

Do we possess the will, the energy, and the political judgment to transform the Labour Party? Outside of a few urban centres Labour is in a state of political decay. The fantastic recent growth in our membership and supporters does not change this reality. Our structures are broken, our culture is decaying.

Justice

There is no one big idea or single grand reform that will rebuild the Labour Party and renew our politics, but all roads lead back to one word: fraternity. This is the cornerstone of a specific English socialist tradition - and wider ethical concerns so rarely discussed within Labour - about our duties and obligations to one another. Instead, today we talk about money transfers and

Labour's Identity Crisis

economistic concerns for distributional justice and an end to austerity. This can appear as over-rational, utilitarian, cold and technocratic, remote and bureaucratic.

Today we also talk a lot about rights; the need to confront economic and social disadvantage with codified redress to the law - often described pejoratively as the preserve of the 'Liberal Left'.

These two dominant frameworks within the Left speak to specific philosophical approaches to questions of justice, of how we should build our society. One approach is concerned with welfare and utility, the other with questions of freedom and rights.

But there is another tradition, one that is more ethical in orientation, which is concerned with nurturing the human characteristics upon which a good or just society is formed. It is the politics of Lansbury and Attlee incubated in the streets of East London, concerned with questions of virtue and fraternity, of contribution and obligation. This approach to justice lies deep within the history of English socialism and the fight against human dispossession, but today lies exiled from Labour thinking.

The Kicker

This crisis has been building for a long time. We have lost our language and existence in the everyday lives of the people. We can account for this historically - modern Left rationalism is not accidental. It expresses the victory of economistic and technocratic thinking. Ethical concerns have lost out to utilitarian and rights-based models of justice. In 2015 Labour woke to a country we could barely recognise.

And here is the kicker. Maybe it is within the notionally bleak world of Andrea Arnold and *Fish Tank* and the Mardyke estate that we might identify the beginnings of a renewed Left sentiment. For in reality the film is a truly redemptive story about the capacity for love and fulfilment and the need for family and fraternity. Less about fiscal transfers and predetermined liberal rights, more about human wellbeing and interdependency. A deeper, hopeful story about what it is to be human; of the dignity of labour; and a new politics of the Common Good. Here might lie the answer to Labour's future.

2.
SHEFFIELD HALLAM

Oliver Coppard

All politics are local. But ‘Born here, raised here, working to be your next MP’ - the slogan that provided the foundation for our campaign, adorned the front of our campaign office and led every piece of literature that we sent out - was not simply a statement of fact. This was a statement that was laden with an emotional appeal to the identity of local people, and a direct response to an underlying sense that Nick Clegg – the MP I was challenging – had failed to properly represent our community over the preceding five years.

As ideological or traditional bonds with political parties are increasingly loosened, and as the relationship between politicians and the public becomes ever more distant, so voters look for different cues to understand the motives of their political representatives. Increasingly, ‘why?’ forms the basis for the most fundamental of questions facing a candidate at any election. Why do you want to represent us? Why are you standing for election? Why do you want to be *my* MP? The answer to those questions provides the framework upon which a candidate must build trust with the electorate.

In my case, the answers to those questions were to be found in my local roots and my personal connection to the community I was hoping to represent in Westminster. I wanted to be the MP for Sheffield Hallam because it’s the place I call home. I’ve always felt an intimate sense of connection to this city, an innate understanding of its challenges and opportunities, and a responsibility to this community that comes from living in a place for over thirty years. At the General Election in 2015 we increased our vote by over 11,000 in Sheffield Hallam partly because, by the time polling day arrived, those voters understood *why* I wanted to be their MP.

The Story of Sheffield Hallam

Our campaign in Sheffield Hallam offers some important insights for the Labour Party when confronting the multiple challenges of an often jingoistic, if not xenophobic, UKIP in our northern heartlands, a resurgent SNP in Scotland, and a ruthless Tory party all too willing to ferment nationalism and exacerbate division in the pursuit of electoral success. The story of our campaign is centred around a political battle between a national identity and purpose built on individualism on the one hand, and one based on solidarity and community on the other.

Within the context of Sheffield and South Yorkshire, Sheffield Hallam is in many ways unique. Not only is it the only constituency in the region without a sitting Labour MP, Sheffield Hallam has *never* sent a Labour MP to Parliament.

Yet while Sheffield Hallam may have remained defiantly Conservative during years of struggle under Thatcher, and more recently may have elected affable Lib Dems, the strong industrial and social traditions that surround and underpin this community have always informed our identity, our values and our sense of pride in place.

Labour's Identity Crisis

'Made in Sheffield' is not simply a phrase engraved on the very best cutlery, but are words proudly ingrained on the heart and soul of people from right across the city - regardless of their position on the political spectrum. As seen in so many post-industrial communities, particularly in the northern parts of England that have yet to find a fully renewed sense of purpose or direction, Sheffield has a real and continuing pride arising from the industrial heritage that once made it great. In short, we have a real sense of identity founded upon a past that continues to bind people together in a common understanding of their present and their future.

When I was first selected as the Labour Party's candidate in June 2013, the Daily Mail labelled me 'Twit of the Week' for daring to suggest we could beat Nick Clegg - the Deputy Prime Minister, Leader of the Liberal Democrats and well-ensconced MP for Sheffield Hallam. Yet I was prepared to give up two years of my life to stand in this constituency because I always believed - and still believe - that Sheffield Hallam is a winnable seat for the Labour Party. This is because the values that form the foundations of this community are not just shared by the Labour Party, but are fundamental to our defining purpose - and they are values that appeal to the best instincts of an English tradition, rooted in solidarity and community.

Sheffield - like so much of South Yorkshire - is a city that was built on manufacturing, on steel and on coal; heavy dangerous industries that relied upon the endeavour of people working together for a common goal. It was that sense of shared purpose that saw Sheffield become the first city in the country to elect a Labour council; a council that, under David Blunkett's leadership in the 1980s, remained famously and furiously opposed to Margaret Thatcher. Sheffield and South Yorkshire have always been bastions of the Labour and Trade Union movements because of the values that first dominated the industries on which this city made its prosperity, its name and its worldwide reputation.

As I said to Labour Party members when I was seeking selection in June 2013:

In order to win we first have to be brave enough to ask questions, not just dictate answers. Campaigning can't just be a speech, it has to be a conversation. If we open up that conversation, we will find common goals across the community. We can build an inclusive campaign in Sheffield Hallam by talking about the issues and values that unite us, and that run through this community.

I believed then, as I believe now, that while the people of Sheffield Hallam may never have voted for the Labour Party in significant numbers before, that does not mean that they do not share a common sense of purpose and identity that can override traditional political allegiances. Like millions of people across England, they were seeking more from their MP and their government than resignation to market forces or an investment in the politics of grievance. That is why we built our campaign on an appeal to a positive sense of shared endeavour, of solidarity, and a sense of community rooted here in Sheffield Hallam.

That was the dominant identity I tried to connect to from the outset of our campaign.

The Campaign

Sheffield Hallam was not a target seat for the Labour Party, and so unlike the campaigns that were largely run from the centre we had the freedom and flexibility to take a much more community-led approach. While the national Labour Party machine - albeit relatively late in the day and for only a brief time - did ultimately decide to invest in our campaign, their approach differed so vastly from the path upon which we had embarked that we simply weren't able to agree even on a basic strategy.

Sheffield Hallam

That was largely because – rather than adopting the standard approach of simply delivering national Labour Party campaign messages locally - our priority throughout was to show that were I elected I would first and foremost be a representative of Sheffield Hallam in the Labour Party – and in Parliament – rather than a representative of the Labour Party in Sheffield Hallam.

So we relentlessly campaigned on disproportionate cuts to the funding Sheffield received from both the EU and central government; we highlighted the outrageous difference in infrastructure spending between London and Yorkshire; we showed that Sheffield schools were missing out on the money supposed to facilitate Clegg’s flagship free school meals policy; and we hammered home the point that Nick Clegg had time and again failed to stand up for the interests of the community he was supposed to represent.

Yet I never attacked Nick Clegg solely on the basis that he wasn’t from Sheffield. There are any number of great MPs from all parties who represent constituencies far removed from the places they were born, and who represent them incredibly well. Indeed, while his politics are not the same as mine, for the first five years of his tenure as the MP for Sheffield Hallam Nick Clegg had in many ways carried out his duties as a representative of this community effectively, and with an energy typical of a Liberal Democrat Party that knows it must fight tirelessly for every vote. But what marks out a good constituency MP from a bad one is their ability and their desire to embed themselves in their community, so that they can fully reflect the values and priorities of their constituents in Parliament.

Nick Clegg’s elevation to the office of Deputy Prime Minister, and the challenges of Coalition government, not only took him away from this constituency physically, but also challenged his political priorities - his response to which invariably saw his constituents in Sheffield – public sector workers and students in particular – miss out on funding and support.

So while it was the decision to raise tuition fees that damaged Nick Clegg’s reputation across the country, the decision that did the most damage to his reputation here in Sheffield was the cancellation of the loan going to the steel manufacturer, Forgemasters. Cutting the £80 million loan agreed by the previous government not only robbed Sheffield of an emerging nuclear supply chain, sending jobs and growth overseas, but it also undermined an industry central to this city’s own understanding of itself.

No MP who truly understood the psyche of Sheffield would ever have made the decision that Nick Clegg both supported and defended, a decision that seemed to wilfully trample on an industry that is fundamental to Sheffield’s heritage and understanding of its place in the world.

We may have lost on 7 May 2015 but we achieved the third biggest swing to Labour in the whole of the UK, chiefly because people here believed – rightly, I hope – that I would have been a more effective representative for our community, and our shared interests, in Parliament.

The National Picture

For the more than 19,000 people who put their cross next to my name in the election, it was clear that their belief in my commitment to the local area, and their ability to connect with and understand my motivations, often overshadowed wider and sometimes persistent concerns about the Labour Party at a national level.

The profound problems we face as a party today are not simply going to be reversed by a more popular leader, a ‘new politics’ or a different policy platform alone. Rather, the solutions to the

Labour's Identity Crisis

electoral quagmire we find ourselves in require the rediscovery of an inclusive politics that has at its heart a compelling, authentic and unifying offer to the people we have lost, not just as individuals, but as friends, neighbours, members of their community and as citizens.

That challenge is no longer peripheral, it is systemic. Perhaps Thatcher's most marked achievement was to undermine the collective bonds of our communities. She saw traditional industries as purely economic functions rather than the foundations of a cherished way of life; defining success as a measure, not of combined endeavour, but against the heights of individual reward.

Thatcher's government wilfully dismantled industrial communities, ripped the heart out of the trade union movement, and by enthusiastically removing people's protections from the forces of global markets and neo-liberal economics, all too often shattered the anchors that tied them to their neighbourhood, their work, and their family. Globalisation, less secure work, migration, the failures of the housing market, weakened social security protections and technological change may have fostered or quickened economic growth, but they have also undermined people's sense of identity, purpose and connection to their community.

While the Labour governments of 1997 to 2010 undertook some important and much-needed work reversing the decline of our neglected communities, too often those efforts were peripheral to the real challenge of restoring meaningful trust in communities, and of reconnecting the idea of national pride with a sense of solidarity and shared endeavour. We all too readily accepted a vision of society that was atomised and individualistic, and failed to challenge the structural weaknesses of Thatcher's social and economic principles or restore the sense of pride and common purpose that was once such a defining feature of English – and particularly working class – identity.

The crowning achievements of the Labour movement have only been realised when we have been able to coalesce a majority of national support around a meaningful sense of 'we' rather than simply 'I'. Indeed, the origins of the Labour Party itself are to be found in a particularly English, working class understanding of the importance of standing shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm with your friends and neighbours; safe in the knowledge that we are better working together than apart. The victory of 1945, itself an unexpected achievement, and the huge social and political changes that were ushered in by the Attlee government, were built on the social contract forged by the Second World War. Our Party has always been at its best when we have been able to unite people, not divide them, to appeal to a common good and shared prosperity rather than narrow, individual or sectional interests. The NHS, the welfare state, international aid and debt forgiveness, the minimum wage, equalities legislation and the renewal of public services through huge investment were all created through a crucible of popular enthusiasm for a common purpose. The most enduring and most successful Labour policies have always aligned with the best of our Labour values with an appeal to the best of a peculiarly English sensibility: decency, compassion and a sense of fair play.

The challenge for the Labour Party now is to restore those ties that bind, rebuild the pride and prosperity of the communities we have lost, and to offer an alternative politics firmly rooted in place, in shared values, and shared common bonds. Despite the growing sense of individualism, the trend towards what Robert Putnam so famously called 'bowling alone', (Putnam, 2000) there remains an unmet desire for politics to reconnect people to a greater sense of community and a meaningful civic role.

The Importance of Place

Sheffield Hallam

Like so many others I watched with dismay the rise of UKIP and the SNP before the last election, the increasingly fearful and uncompromising reaction to increasing immigration, and the Tories' cynical but seemingly effective promises to ensure the financial and personal security of individuals and families. Yet those political changes can in many ways be traced back to the lost sense of collective identity that was once a fundamental part of what it meant to be part of a community; a very English sensibility built upon a complex interaction between place, class and profession.

The lesson of our campaign in Sheffield Hallam is that people want their politics and their politicians to offer something more than division, conflict and fear. While those siren calls will always find a hearing, particularly as the world becomes a more uncertain place and as the great English traditions and hallmarks break down or fall away, more and more people want a politics that through unity, offers strength and certainty in an uncertain and rapidly changing world. The danger is that if the Labour Party does not offer that positive, collectivist vision then the ideological space we vacate will be dominated by a more extreme politics that uses those fears to divide rather than to unite.

The challenge of responding to the desire for a greater, more collective identity is one that in 2015 we saw taken up and used eagerly, if cynically, by the SNP in Scotland, by UKIP in our working class communities and – to devastating effect – by the Conservative Party in England.

Here in Sheffield Hallam, Nick Clegg enthusiastically and effectively followed the Tories' lead. All too often when campaigning in the last few weeks of the campaign we heard previously committed Conservative voters saying they would be voting for Nick Clegg because they wanted to stop an alliance between Labour and the SNP that would disadvantage England. At the same time, too many people who once considered themselves Labour supporters told us they would be voting for UKIP because of what they saw as the divisive and alienating effects of immigration on their communities and the creeping powers of a distant, disconnected and bureaucratic EU machine.

In contrast to the easy answers offered by nationalism or xenophobia, the Labour Party cannot simply fall back on division and blame, or ever hope to authentically offer a small-minded politics of little England in the pursuit of electoral success. To do so would not only run counter to the very best of our values as a progressive party, it would go against both the proud history and the best interests of our country.

In a world that is more interconnected than ever, the future prosperity and security of the whole of the UK is to be found in offering a real alternative to a politics of grievance that sets communities against each other, trading on easy excuses and a sepia-tinged vision of a gloriously isolated England, Scotland or UK, untouched by a changing world; an alternative to a political vision that sets England against Scotland, or the UK against the EU, and yet does little to support or protect people left isolated within communities broken on the altar of globalisation and agglomeration economics.

If the Labour Party is to win back both England *and* Scotland, we must put forward a vision that both embraces and promises to lead a changing world – from global trade to emissions to immigration – while also protecting the identity and heritage of our myriad communities, recognising and strengthening the ties that knit individuals together as part of a collective endeavour for prosperity and wellbeing. It is all too easy to blame Scotland for England's problems, or England for Scotland's, to pit the north against the south, or to argue for isolation from the EU, rather than undertake the harder task of reforming it.

Labour's Identity Crisis

Rather, the Labour Party's answer must be to strengthen communities, to develop policies and political solutions that recognise and cherish the identity and heritage of cities, towns and villages, and to rebuild a resilient and robust society supporting limitless networks of citizens, offering strength and security to individuals through civic unity and solidarity. If we are to succeed in England – and therefore succeed at all – we must first of all offer a renewed sense of English identity that is built once again on those very English traditions.

3.
EALING CENTRAL AND ACTON

Rupa Huq MP

Readers of the *Hounslow Chronicle* learnt of the Lord Palmerston pub's imminent demise back in 2013 when the paper reported that, 'Last orders have been called on a Hounslow boozier which has already been the scene of nine assaults this year, one of which left a man with a fractured skull'. The building in Staines Road is now a Polski Schlep. The metamorphosis from the Lord Palmerston to the Krystynka Delicatessen serves as a powerful symbol of the shifting sense of national identity transformed – in part - by modern mass migration. And as a result of both this migration and changing market tastes, some seventeen pubs in England now close a week. (Rick Muir, 'Pubs and Places', *IPPR*, 2012)

These changes in the ethnic composition, demographics and consumer landscape of suburbia naturally spill over into its political complexion, something that became abundantly clear when I stood as the Parliamentary candidate in Ealing Central and Acton in May 2015. In that contest I won a Tory seat for Labour – thus defying political gravity - but our own elation had the edge taken off it by the terrible sadness about the broader national picture, which saw Labour suffer its biggest defeat for decades.

This chapter therefore focuses on the socio-demographic terrain of suburbs in modern England and what this means for electoral politics – and in particular on what I believe the Labour Party needs to do in order for us to be competitive in these sorts of communities in 2020.

Defining Suburbia

In George Orwell's novel *Coming Up for Air*, narrator George Bowling bemoans 'the inner-outer suburbs. Always the same [...] Just a prison with the cells all in a row. A line of semidetached torture-chambers'. Indeed the suburbs, located at the edges of the city rather than nuzzling its core, have long been treated with condescension for being 'far-flung', 'out of the way', and quite simply rather dreary and naff. Compared to either the lush rural idyll of the countryside or the inner cities with their buzzy, high-energy environments, social commentators have tended to see suburbia as neither-here-nor-there, making it in the words of Vicky Lebeau 'the worst of all possible worlds' - at best boring, and at worst a stifling habitat of social climbers trapped in a meaningless rat-race (Lebeau, 1997).

Despite – or perhaps even because of - their terrible reputation, the suburbs are often seen to encapsulate Englishness. Yet my constituency - which extends from leafy Ealing to the grittier Acton, taking in bits of Harlesden to the north and Chiswick in the south - demonstrates how suburbia is not a singular entity, and cannot be judged as such. Ealing Central and Acton has many different types of suburb within its boundaries: from streets of solid detached Victorian villas, to redbrick Edwardian terraces built for Pooterish clerks; and from 1930s 'ribbon' developments to post-war council housing and 1960s infill. There is also an increasing number of 'Grand Design' style, ultra-modern, new-build eco homes.

Labour's Identity Crisis

This huge variety of suburban styles can be seen across England. While classic suburban developments are associated with streets of speculatively built 1930s semi-detached houses, there is a real diversity of suburban types that reflect the way British society has developed. 'Corporation suburbia', in areas such as Dagenham in East London or Burnage in Manchester, was built as homes-fit-for-heroes. Suburban opulence can be found in privately built suburban Victoriana, for example in Didsbury in Manchester or at the three western termini of London Underground's District Line (Ealing, Richmond and Wimbledon). Indeed it was the Victorian house builders who christened Ealing, with its leafy, wide streets built for the carriage classes, 'Queen of the suburbs'. Yet all suburban varieties have something in common: they were conceived in optimism and seen as a site of aspiration, a step-up from the squalor of the inner cities from which so many inhabitants escaped.

Part of the allure of suburbia was cleaner air, lower local taxation and a better class of inhabitant. Implicit here was the idea that as ethnic minorities settled in the inner cities the white populations suburbanised out - a phenomenon traditionally known as 'white flight', originally a US term to describe the exodus from the decaying inner-urban districts of American cities to the leafy suburbs. Yet evidence shows that this post-war paradigm of suburbanisation no longer holds, and that ethnic minority populations have remained far from static.

Changing contours

Without any major governmental intervention or policy initiatives, indeed without anyone really noticing, suburbs have become a microcosm for the multiplicity of social processes at large in 21st century England. In recent years we have seen an ethnic 'embourgeoisement' in many of the suburban London constituencies that were key to the 2015 General Election, with increasing numbers of minority ethnic groups calling the suburbs their home.

As a seat, Ealing Central and Acton exemplifies the paradoxical mix of continuity and change we see across England; it is home to a constantly churning population as well as many settled communities. The 2011 Census demonstrates that the British are less likely to be married, and more likely to be mixed in racial composition – trends that I see first-hand in my constituency. The post-2004 accession of former eastern bloc states to the EU brought in around 500,000 Eastern Europeans to English suburbs and towns, far outstripping the last Labour government's estimate of 13,000. Areas now particularly associated with new Polish populations include Slough, a commuter town outside London, and Boston in Lincolnshire, but there have been long-standing links between Poland and the UK. London was the site of the Polish government in exile in the twentieth century, and the Polish community of Ealing in suburban west London long predates the 2004 EU enlargement – exemplified by the Our Lady Mother of the Church by Ealing Broadway station, where Polish expats have worshipped since the 1970s. The imposing grey stone structure in its prominent position is one of the UK's oldest-established Polish Roman Catholic churches.

And there are many such links between our English suburbs and immigrant populations. The large presence of South Koreans in the south London suburb of New Malden explains why its parent borough Kingston-upon-Thames is twinned with Gwanak-gu in Seoul - replacing a former link with Delft in the Netherlands. The borough website describes the February 2012 official visit of Mr Choo Kyu Ho, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea, explaining 'As Kingston has one of the largest Korean communities in Western Europe, Ambassador Choo was very keen to meet with the Mayor and discuss the excellent relationship and well-established links enjoyed between the local Korean Community and the Royal Borough.' In fact, the proliferation of South Korean restaurants in New Malden has mitigated against the High Street

Ealing Central and Acton

suffering a 'boarded up Britain' fate that has befallen other comparable shopping parades in the face of recession and shifts towards online transactions.

Other suburbanising trajectories can be traced often along familiar arterial roads or transport links; the southward movement of Afro-Caribbeans from Brixton to Croydon in London is analogous to the earlier relocation of Jewish settlers from inner city Cheetham Hill to Bury in Manchester in the last century. There is a famous mosque in London's Brick Lane currently worshipped in by Bangladeshis that was previously a synagogue, and prior to that a French Huguenot church. The geographer Peach had earlier speculated that Britain's Asian populations in particular were poised between the divergent poles of 'Irish future' and 'Jewish future'. Bangladeshis were seen as the former, set to remain in the inner city, while Indians were identified to be key populations ripe for suburbanisation as the British Jewry has done previously. Yet the reality is that things are more complicated than this: Bangladeshis are moving in suburban directions in our major cities, while gentrification is pulling some children of suburbia back to the inner cities.

What this means for Labour

What will the electoral implications of such trends be? According to much of the post-2015 election political analysis, it is the suburbs and small towns where for Labour the next election will be won or lost. The old calculus is shifting: inner city gentrification is now an established phenomenon which has lost Labour seats like Battersea as inward movement of largely white, upwardly mobile professionals – often the children of suburban parents - displaces older populations. And, as ethnic populations move further away from urban centres, this also presents a challenge for the Conservatives. In areas that were once fertile electoral territory for them, they will have to work harder for minority voters who historically have overwhelmingly voted Labour.

It is clear that no party should take any voters for granted: this applies to both Conservatives *vis-a-vis* the suburbs, and Labour in relation to BAME voters. Particularly as we saw that in 2015, the ethnic electorate did not all behave in a uniform manner. Ealing Central and Acton - with its multiple minorities, including large numbers of Somalis and Poles - was mid-table of the dozen London key seats Labour needed to win to take power. At the top of the table were three seats that did not return a Labour MP: Hendon, with its Jewish population; Croydon Central, including British blacks who'd migrated southwards from traditional inner city locations; and Harrow East, with its comfortably-off Indians. This trio of Tory victories represent different waves of migration to the UK, along with different phases of the outward drift to suburbia.

Population churn continues apace as evidenced at local government level too. The Labour Group on inner London Tower Hamlets council has included at least one Bangladeshi councillor for several decades, but more recently Bangladeshis have been elected in Redbridge and Barking and Dagenham in outer East London too. I am proud to represent the community I grew up in, even more so as it is not one associated with the ethnic background that I hail from.

Conclusions and solutions

Many of the old certainties associated with the commonly-presumed-to-be-stable entity known as suburbia are in flux. The suburban voter, who traditionally was assumed to be at least small-c conservative, now demonstrates a new volatility that reflects the changing nature of politics more broadly. It was always assumed that Britain could count on a two-party political system; the duopoly reinforced by winner-takes-all general elections that would always deliver strong one-party government. The inconclusive 2010 contest resulted in a cobbled together Coalition government between two parties that had until that point very little in common. The rise of

Labour's Identity Crisis

smaller parties, along with the dramatic decline in the number of people who consider themselves aligned with a particular party, points to an unprecedented fracturing of the political landscape in Britain. And with that fracturing, the old certainties disappear. In 2015, Ealing Central and Acton swam against the political tide. In their own way, suburban dwellers are revolting. Anger at austerity has taken various forms of suburban opposition: there have been vigorous campaigns against hospital and library closures mounted by the usually politically dormant whose main traditional involvement had been putting an X in a box every five years, but who are now manning demonstrations.

Labour must find a way to connect with these voters. There is a set of suburban issues that unite what Ed Miliband identified as the 'squeezed middle'. This includes commuting costs, quality of life issues, concern about public services, and housing. Labour's shadow housing spokesman, John Healey, has rightly said that insecurity now characterises these populations, despite suburbs traditionally being seen as zones of safety, not danger. As Healey has said: 'The squeezed middle seem stuck in no man's land. Too poor to get the best from the market, too well off to claim much in state benefits. Often not wealthy enough to get a mortgage, not sufficiently vulnerable for social housing.' He makes a plea to take suburbs seriously: 'We too easily allow a mobile, metropolitan class to skew our understanding of society. Too many of those in the media, political and public policy world take people earning 40 or 50 thousand pounds or more as typical of 'the middle'. The real squeezed middle are overlooked by the press, and overlooked by the modern Right.' (*The Independent*, 31 May 2015)

Political parties need to adapt to the shifting contours of suburbia. Contemporary suburbs encapsulate continuity and change. Labour needs to develop the policies and narrative that allow it to seize this ground - this is where elections now will be won and lost.

4.
HAZEL GROVE

Michael Taylor

In March 2015 Conrad Clitheroe of Woodley, Stockport, was arrested and jailed in Dubai on charges of espionage. He was a plane spotter, spending his holidays with his mates, Gary and Neil, who shared his hobby of looking for rare aircraft.

As Conrad lived in the constituency of Hazel Grove, in the prosperous south east of Greater Manchester, where I was Labour's candidate in May 2015 - and because a good pal of mine's band played at his wedding – I did what I could to help get him home.

This story has a happy ending so I'll skip to the end – Conrad, 54, was released without charge and into the arms of his distraught wife, Valerie, after eight fraught weeks in jail. But here's the point I want to make. Some of my colleagues looked at me a little strangely. 'Plane spotters? Really?'

The more I thought about it at the time, the more it became clear to me that there was something so lovably English about Conrad's hobby. Something of the character of the people that we English have - these hobbyists, these obsessives and thrill seekers that we don't know much about until they get locked up in Dubai. People whose concerns aren't particularly political either. But as the election went on, I'd spend time talking to allotment holders, music obsessives, choirmasters, canal barge dwellers, professional gamblers and all manner of niche and small business people.

What I want to do here is look at a number of different issues that arose from the campaign in Hazel Grove: How does Northern pride become political? What does Greater Manchester mean as a civic totem for a new identity within our own sense of our Englishness?

As Matt Rudd says in his book *The English: A Field Guide*, we English are a 'warm and friendly and funny' people for all of our eccentricities. Quirky and spirited, but often misunderstood and misrepresented as narrow and atomised.

Earlier, George Orwell said in the most profound and stirring political essay of my teenage political formation, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 'we are,' he says, 'a nation of flower lovers [...] stamp collectors, pigeon fanciers and amateur carpenters.' But he also tied that love of national habits and characteristics to radical expressions of justice, tolerance and fairness, not of a static preserved heritage, but a growing one. 'Nothing ever stands still. We must add to our heritage or lose it. We must grow greater or grow less.'

So I can't claim I got what Conrad and his pals were all about, but having spent time as a pre-teen lad on the end of station platforms collecting train numbers I have some empathy. And I still spend the occasional wet Wednesday night watching non-league football around Greater

Labour's Identity Crisis

Manchester, in new settings in order to chalk off new conquests in my quest to be a 'ground hopper' (I'm on 141, in case you were wondering).

And in 2012 I compiled a book called *Northern Monkeys*, an anthology of stories about the evolution of northern working class fashion and the myriad of influences from music and from the football terraces. I curated these tales from collectors of rare records, training shoes and folk memories.

I pondered endlessly during the campaign about the character of the people I sought to represent, and the composition of my share of those 4 million conversations I enjoyed.

And here's a big challenge. How can we ever gain consent while we're at odds with the things that are important in the lives of the people we seek to represent? Because at the most basic level, if we have a culture of the other, then we lose. If we cannot relate to, and communicate with, and empathise, and offer something to enhance what people do to make their lives better, then we won't even get close to pulling the levers of power. We are a party of government that needs to win the right to hold those levers. If we don't, then we simply become a continuation of the problem.

Character and Community

Right in the thick of that Englishness is a profound mistrust of another tribe of strange people who spend their leisure time in an unusual and misunderstood way - collecting data door to door about how the rest of the public intend to vote; writing leaflets, attending meetings and obsessively talking about politics and government.

Occasionally, as we found during the election, the innocent pursuit of the collection of aircraft photos in a faraway land requires the support and action of our strange tribe. Knowledge of the routes to power, the confidence to doggedly pursue bureaucracy, and a sense of whose responsibility it is to get an innocent man out of a foreign jail. Or rather, knowing someone who can.

My own journey to activism and candidature is an unconventional one. I've always been fascinated by our politics, by the theatre of public life – how we attempt to reconcile issues of how we distribute resources by a system of popular validation.

From 2000 to 2012 I worked as editor of a high-profile business magazine in Manchester. I retained my fascination in politics, but put my participation on hold. In that time as a campaigning journalist I would always put my readers and my own publication over my party political loyalty. But as my time doing that ended in the spring of 2012 something else happened.

I first moved to the Marple area, situated at the heart of the constituency I stood in, back in 2000 but my family links go back much further. Marple is a place popularised by Agatha Christie as she gazed out of a train looking for inspiration in naming her fabled female detective. It sometimes gets generously referred to as 'leafy Cheshire' but in reality it's a mixed community, in the Metropolitan Borough of Stockport, of working families and retired people, a mix of private and social housing. It is where Manchester meets the Peaks.

Hazel Grove

My friends and neighbours also include many self-employed people. And yes, blokes with white vans. And in 2006, we all flew a St George's Flag for the World Cup. And I'm very comfortable with all of that, by the way.

I'd already been involved locally in the running of our very successful junior football club, hustling for sponsorship, promoting good citizenship and looking to game the local planning system and find a permanent home.

But as well as my own personal circumstances changing in the early part of 2012, setting up my own business, it coincided with our local sixth form college trying to get out of a financial black hole by opting to sell one of its sites to a supermarket chain.

As news dripped out, people got busy and through social media word spread. Small teams divided up tasks to separate rumour from fact. They scrutinised minutes of meetings, they put in Freedom of Information requests. On one balmy evening 500 people turned up at the Local Area Committee meeting, where usually the councillors go through the motions to an audience you could count on one hand. One of the six local Liberal Democrat councillors was a governor of the local college and could have, should have - but didn't - speak out about this.

They said trust us, but we didn't. A group was born called Marple in Action. Reacting to this the local LibDems appealed to the local traders who led the group to 'tone it down'. We didn't. We turned it up. We gathered signatures on a mass petition. There was even a march of 1,000 people through the centre of Marple. We lobbied the leader of the council. He backed us and developed a spoiler scheme in the centre to spike Asda's guns. There was a further rally in the park for 1,000 people, where all the parties had a chance to speak, even a 'Yes' group who thought it might be good to extend retail choice.

It was exciting, it was empowering, it was our very own Marple Spring. People started talking about what kind of place we wanted to live in. And here's the rub. We considered standing candidates in the local elections, but as all the parties knew where public opinion stood, there would have been nothing to gain from this single issue campaign.

In turn Asda turned on the charm: they held a consultation and they made promises on how engaged they'd be in helping the community and complementing local businesses. But opinion held firm. It took a while but eventually, 18 months later, Asda gave up. The College did the sensible thing and sold the site to a housebuilder, using the proceeds to refresh another site.

Though bearing all the hallmarks of a radical and community-focused group, there was something conservative, preservative and very English about this particular Village Green Preservation Society. But that momentum never lasts forever. Single issue groups splinter and fizzle out; it is parties that continue to provide the organisational glue and ideological ballast to direct these expressions of popular will.

When it matters, when decisions are made that affect people's lives and which they feel they can change, it is to the tools of democracy that we turn. I was inspired enough by this community action to re-join the Labour Party, and committed myself to working locally to build and engage within a framework of progressive social democratic values.

And it's this grass roots campaigning and community leadership that can be so easy to talk up, but so painstakingly difficult to achieve. But it is truly at the heart of what we must be about. Some of it may seem like unpaid social work, but it is necessary for us to build a base and a

Labour's Identity Crisis

reputation and do what we came into politics for - to change lives and make a difference. In our constituency it is what the Liberal Democrats have identified themselves as – creating the persona that they are always about, deserved or not.

When I eventually rejoined the Labour Party in 2014 it was also with the General Election of 2015 in mind, to put my shoulder to the effort locally and regionally as a member of the campaign team, even though expectations in the constituency were incredibly low. But I had started to look at how we filled the void in ideas and campaign strategy and thought how we could set a number of different targets and objectives for the existing candidate - building the party, energising the membership and taking a different approach to how Labour does community campaigning.

At the 2014 conference I came across some great ideas. Liz Kendall talked about imaginative public service reform; and I went to a really inspiring talk by Maurice Glasman on community campaigning and facing up to the UKIP challenge.

Fired up by this we convened a street stall in the centre of one of our local towns, Marple, the following Saturday, where the intention was to start a conversation with the public. To ask, rather than tell. Listen, rather than speak. As Maurice said, the average amount of time it takes a Labour activist to interrupt someone in the flow of telling them something that is important to them is about eight seconds. The time where an intervention is in any way useful, is about forty-five seconds.

Anyway, the candidate never turned up and it later transpired that she'd quit the party altogether over a dispute I never understood and that had nothing to do with politics. I worried about what might happen next. It was likely a new candidate could be parachuted in from outside with no local knowledge, with the clock ticking towards May 2015. At the same time an Ashcroft poll had us in a poor fourth place behind UKIP.

Against all my business instincts I threw my hat into the ring and was selected as Labour's candidate. I felt as profoundly then as I do now, that in many ways Hazel Grove should be a good bellwether seat for the future. It is actually a winnable seat. If Labour organise better, and prepare to unseat the Liberals as the progressive choice, then anything is possible.

As it was, we increased our vote from 5,000 to 7,500 (at 17.5 per cent that represented the best ever share of vote in Hazel Grove) on top of a surge to 5,000 votes to UKIP from 1,000 in 2010, and of 1,000 new votes for the Greens, both of which undoubtedly hit us hard. Incidentally, we had nothing to address UKIP. No convincing way of confronting voters who are worried about immigration and think Labour doesn't speak up for them. Just a different way of telling them they were wrong. You don't change people's minds like that.

I'm not going to take you through a blow-by-blow account of what happened in our campaign, but that introduction provides an important context for how this all came about and how I came to be the candidate and how my ideas for the campaign developed.

I have had limited experience of political campaigning, but if this campaign was going to be about anything it was party building, and gathering the talents and creating the conditions for a Black Swan moment, if not now then in the future. As there is no such thing demographically as a Liberal Democrat safe seat – there certainly isn't now, the Conservatives won it for the first time since 1992 – then it equally stands to reason that a staunch Left-of-centre campaigning force can challenge the Conservatives on the terrain of this constituency.

Hazel Grove

In every council ward in the country there are probably 100 people who make a community tick. Sometimes they are known as community organisers – sometimes they would never dream that such a moniker could be attached to them. They are like the men and women who became good friends who I met on the committee of the junior football team, just as much as those who organised the campaign against Asda. They coach sports teams, manage kids' activities, turn up to run church events, carnivals and festivals. They may not be particularly political, but they care.

Sometimes when we bluster in with our Labour identity writ large, with noble intent and good faith that we can lead our willing public up the hill, they shirk. The brand of all political parties has become distrusted and disconnected. Sometimes the two are linked, sometimes with good reason one has followed the other. Nothing irks a local campaign group more than to see a political election leaflet with their achievements proclaimed and colonised by a candidate or a party.

But the best way to achieve respect and status is not to assume leadership but to be asked to lead, and support those who maybe can do it better. Not just to be the ones who knock, but the ones who are sought to solve problems. We have to be the people you go to in order to get things done. People in a spot of bother should know they can knock on our doors too.

A Nation of Shopkeepers and Hustlers

It's been said so many times before that the English are a nation of shopkeepers, but there is no doubt that an entrepreneurial spark in our culture has caught fire.

I've drilled into this trend, the sharp increase in the number of businesses formed, the increase in self-employment and running a business on the side. There's a trend towards 5-to-9ers, the gig economy, people running their own businesses after their day job, striking out on their own and taking a few modest risks. Some of these may be internet traders, eBay resellers of collectables, artisan craft businesses or the sale of a unique and rare service.

There are also a tragic number of doomed enterprises, shops set up with redundancy money and over-optimism that cry out for a helping hand, a mentor, a rooted community business support structure that dares to say 'no, not that' as much as to tick boxes on a checklist to achieve a business support target list.

Maybe this is a Northern thing too, but there's also a burgeoning social enterprise culture, a sound business-like way of attaining social gain through good organisational structure, and applying entrepreneurial principles to local problem solving.

Given I've got a business background and that I've campaigned with lots of businesses on regional infrastructure issues, it should have been really emboldening in the General Election campaign to take Labour's message that we are on the side of small business and that these entrepreneurs deserve better.

My Dad was a milkman who became self-employed in 1979 and voted for Margaret Thatcher. Once. That idea that you take control of a part of your life, take on the new challenges of running a business and therefore become part of the ruling class business elite is so outdated, and plays counter to the experience of so many small business owners and self-employed

Labour's Identity Crisis

contractors. But so much of what we had to say played to the 'us and them' rhetoric, which the Tories exploited by evoking the demons of Arthur Scargill and with hollow letters to the *Telegraph* from 'business leaders'.

Small business people I spoke to just didn't buy the argument that Labour was serious about them. We needed a different conversation altogether about what kind of relationship we have to business. We never looked at how a business grows and what are the barriers that prevent it doing so.

Government has an important role to play in defending and sticking up for small businesses in all kinds of areas of policy. As well as Labour's key commitments on skills, rates and infrastructure, the party has to go deeper in pushing the work Chuka Umunna did in his time as Shadow Business Secretary to push for a Small Business Administration to co-ordinate work across government, and to end the muddle of overlapping and ill-defined initiatives that the Department for Business Innovation and Skills presides over.

Access to finance is also a major factor. Labour introduced the Enterprise Investment Scheme, extended Entrepreneurs' Relief, and broadened the scope of Venture Capital Trusts - yet when did you ever hear a member of Labour's front bench team ever talk about that? Or enthuse party members and campaigners that this is a proud achievement of our vision and values that could be summarised on a pledge card or even a coffee mug?

We should have been more excited by new forms of funding, like peer-to-peer lending and crowdfunding.

But we were also dreadfully timid in the face of the task to reform the banks, at a time when our message of fairness chimed so loudly with plans for a British Investment Bank. This should have been the antidote to a system that is failing; taking on the banks to work for business, and for better financial regulation to get a fair deal for victims of mis-selling by banks.

It should have been a demonstration of Labour's ethos of being pro-business and pro-worker. Creating that circle of virtue and prosperity. All three of the companies I'm on the board of do this. So do any number of successful small and medium sized businesses that I visited in my time as editor of media company Insider, or in my 2015 research for the Institute of Chartered Accountants: the biggest problem for most good companies is access to skilled people who'll take one for the team if you treat them right.

Buried in our election campaign were the entrails of an ambitious and brave Labour agenda - one that hopefully could be there to form the start of a successful Labour partnership, one that will help businesses rise to the challenge of recasting a business landscape that works for everyone, allowing our dynamic entrepreneurs to take risks, to innovate, to grow and to provide opportunities. But it was nowhere to be seen.

City States – the Break-up of Britain or a New England?

Overshadowing so much of what social democracy can be in the next century is Scotland. Labour's destruction there, the surge of the Scottish National Party, is underpinned by three major drivers: economic justice, national identity and a statecraft to address the other two.

In the north of England, I'm convinced of the need to address the first. In fact, everyone is. Where I see an opportunity is through devolution, federalism and empowerment at the most

Hazel Grove

appropriate level that finds a way to tackle this imbalance. What are trickier to negotiate are the political and cultural structures that underpin this.

It hurts me to say Northern Powerhouse because it represents grand larceny. George Osborne's audacity of ambition. But it is our future - a federal Britain with a chance to redraft profoundly different needs in cities and counties. A fairer country where we build an alternative to London dominance. We shouldn't and mustn't attack the Devo Manc agenda because we see it as a Tory plot, but embrace it as an opportunity to change the country for the better.

At a pre-election forum at Stockport College, I was grilled by the students and staff. On reflection, in many ways it was my favourite meeting of the many I spoke at in the campaign, despite Labour getting a rough ride from some of the audience. Partly this was because I was asked probably the best question of the whole campaign, and it was this: 'why do you think there will be good jobs for people like us?'

The answer wasn't in the Labour manifesto, but it was the answer I was actually able to give with more conviction than any other. The answer is Manchester. It is laid out in the Manchester Independent Economic Review of 2009, and in the work of Greater Manchester's whole project of renewal since 1996.

These include, for starters, the BBC move to MediaCity, Spinningfields, Airport City, The Corridor, Graphene, Nanoco, Alderley Park, NCC Group, Laterooms, TalkTalk, The Shed incubator at Manchester Metropolitan University. These are all occurring in a city region with momentum and attraction; culturally confident, competently run, imbued with fairness and as at ease with the language of enterprise as it is with the need for a changing infrastructure and how we care for people.

And who was in charge locally, creating the benign conditions to attract this influx of investment? A Labour council. A *Labour* council.

The second best question I was asked at one of the early hustings was whether I was opposed to a link road that ran into the constituency and connected us to Manchester Airport. Lots of local people are opposed to it, including our Conservative MP. Some aspects of the consultation have been heavy handed and some of the mitigation is inadequate, but I actually don't think it was disruptive enough, and favour an extension right through our constituency to the M60 motorway. It's an expression of whether we're a suburb on the edge of the Peak District, or part of the outer reaches of an exciting and dynamic global city with a centre, pleasant suburbs and an international airport. Is it to be the kind of place I grew up in – a northern town I couldn't wait to leave – or somewhere I feel excited for my five children to grow up in and reach their aspirations and contribute to the growing prosperity of their community?

Yet somehow Labour nationally managed to mangle the issues, and then concede one of the greatest successes of a progressive Labour project, the Manchester Labour devolution strategy, by burying Andrew Adonis' *Growth Review*, clearing the way for George Osborne to seize his moment. In a cruel stroke, reducing a moment of magnificence to a tactical Tory sound bite.

It was on this issue that I was asked the very worst and most depressing question of my campaign. In a public meeting for Labour activists across the Stockport constituencies, our guest speaker Owen Jones, on the platform with me, was asked to join a 'fight back' against 'the imposition of American-style Mayors' by a Tory government, 'setting up Greater Manchester to fail, like the Welsh NHS.'

Labour's Identity Crisis

In truth, the compromise of an eleventh member of the Greater Manchester cabinet - effectively the power that a directly elected Mayor will have - isn't massively game changing. But the meeting spelled out the stark lack of buy-in for a devolution project that offers us an opportunity to shape our own destiny in ways that have never been granted before. Yes, it's flawed, and yes, there is too much emphasis still on a sequence of dismal caveats, summed up in eight binding words – 'at the discretion of the Secretary of State.' But it's a start. Just as Scotland was.

There is now a wide open window for some creative energy to be installed into the campaign for a Greater Manchester Mayor in 2017 that not only seeks to build on the incredible range of powers devolved to Manchester, but to start thinking about what else can be done. What brighter future can be imagined? What does a Manchester Health network look like? How do we encourage the values of co-operativism in the delivery of public services across the whole of Greater Manchester? And how do we encourage ambition, innovation and prosperity in a cold climate?

We still have a lot of growing up to do, but maybe we can build on our successes, not just wallow in our defeats.

But there's a weakness in the identity element here too, a massive deficit from the Scottish experience. Any regional English political project is inevitably tied to a weary Westminster culture where we're losing and seem hell bent on continuing to do so. If Scotland has taught us anything it is that the firm link between identity politics, aspiration and better governance has proved truly inspirational. Similarly in Catalonia.

There are pockets of surging civic flag waving but they are not a foundation upon which anyone is suggesting we can build a viable political project. But it could be. In this age of political easy answers it is not beyond the realms of the imagination that a popular, successful Mancunian, with no particular political ties, could emerge as a catalysing and insurgent force. What if Gary Neville thought he'd like a go? A Manchester Movement, led by a successful sports personality, a super-bright business achiever too, a well-connected property developer and savvy media performer. The more you game it, the more urgent it becomes to seize the opportunity to do a Greater Manchester version of our values in a bold, inclusive and distinctive way.

Much as I'd like it to be so, there isn't a strong Greater Manchester identity anything like as historic and emotional as that which drove the Scots' awakening and sustains support for some fairly poor statecraft under the SNP.

But maybe cities are different? More open, modern, globally focused and therefore less tied to a static view of nationhood. More English, in fact. For there has to be far more to a modern English identity than just Britishness with the Scots lopped off the top.

In conclusion, the experience of fighting a general election campaign, and the challenge of coming to terms with Labour's defeat, has deepened my sense of just how difficult it's going to be to conceive of us winning nationally again in my working lifetime (I'll be 50 this year). I see no coherent and viable plan under the present national leadership, but take great comfort from local innovators. It all leads me to the view that the example of Labour in government is going to be our cities, but also the suburbs that make up their glorious hinterland. Not just a set of local governance structures that our politicians can prove they can manage competently, but an emotional and visionary dream of the great urban centres where ideas, inventions and innovation can thrive.

Hazel Grove

But to achieve any of that we can't just wish it so. We have it within our gift to create it, to beaver away in our communities, inspiring, conserving, campaigning and getting to know a little more the people we seek to serve. Maybe then it won't be quite such a surprise when we get asked to help them.

.

5.
PORTSMOUTH NORTH

John Ferrett

On 6 November 2013, BAE Systems announced the closure of the only naval shipbuilding facility in England. Naval ships had been built in Portsmouth for over 500 years, but the decision to shut the facility brought this proud record to an end. However, the more profound consequence for the people of Portsmouth and the surrounding communities was the loss of 1,500 skilled manufacturing jobs and an equal number of jobs in the supply chain.

Unions and workers were told by BAE Systems that the closure was a political decision, whereas coalition politicians shrugged their shoulders and placed responsibility for the end of shipbuilding in Portsmouth with the company. However, it was clear that the decision to shut Portsmouth and establish the River Clyde as the sole location for naval shipbuilding was taken at the top of government. Indeed, ministers appeared unconcerned at the outcome of the Scottish referendum which was only ten months away – the initial reaction at meetings with unions and local politicians was ‘Scottish independence is never going to happen’. This reaction was, perhaps, explicable given the 30 per cent lead of the No campaign at the time, but the decision itself was less comprehensible in terms of the political exigencies in England.

The Portsmouth shipbuilding yard was located in the Portsmouth South constituency, one of the key Tory target seats for the 2015 election. Furthermore, Portsmouth North was deemed a marginal constituency, having been held by Labour between 1997 and 2010. Moreover, a substantial number of shipbuilding workers travelled to work from Southampton, having transferred to Portsmouth following the closure of the Vosper Thorneycroft yard at Woolston in 2003. Woolston is in the Southampton Itchen constituency, which was another top target seat for the Conservatives. Therefore, in November 2013 the decision to end shipbuilding in Portsmouth seemed political suicide for the Tories and their candidates in these key seats. The next eighteen months would turn this perception completely on its head.

Portsmouth – in the south but not ‘the south’

The huge swathes of blue that have always predominated on electoral maps of the south bear testament to the Tories’ grip on power in this part of England. Between the years 1997 to 2010 this map was punctuated with specks of red, and to a lesser extent orange, as the Labour Party was able to offer a credible alternative to a Tory government. From 1994 to 1998 the Labour Party in Portsmouth became winners in council wards they had rarely held, and built up huge majorities. In Portsmouth North the party won the seat in 1997 from Peter Griffiths, the former parliamentary ‘leper’ from Smethwick who had been able to rehabilitate himself in the city. In Portsmouth South the Tories were also usurped, this time by a Liberal Democrat, Mike Hancock, an extremely effective, if roguish, local machine politician.

Following the results of the 2015 elections in Portsmouth, where Labour were comprehensively defeated in both national and local elections, it is difficult to conceive that Portsmouth North had been held from 1997 to 2010. Furthermore, it seems equally astonishing that fifteen years ago Labour had twenty-three councillors and a majority on the city council, yet since 2007 have

Portsmouth North

not had more than five councillors at any one time. The lesson from these results is that when Portsmouth swings it tends to stay swung. Indeed, it swung to Thatcher and the Tories in 1979 and stayed there until 1997, in the same way that it swung to Blair for the subsequent thirteen years. This pattern has continued, with a swing to the Tories above the national average in 2010 and an increased Conservative majority in 2015. In other words, Portsmouth appears to be THE bellwether English city.

Looking at the results above you may be forgiven for thinking that the denizens of Portsmouth are capricious and prone to the influence of competing ideologies, but this couldn't be further from the truth. Like much of England the electorate in Portsmouth, or at least those who decide elections, appear to be small-c conservatives – they value trust and confidence in politicians far more than they concern themselves with ideological standpoints. Moreover, they want competence – they tell us that if you look like you can't run your own party then don't expect us to give you our votes to run the country.

This small-c conservatism is enhanced by the history of Portsmouth and the close relationship the city has with the Royal Navy. Despite the progressive run-down of the Navy, the Senior Service remains integral to the city's identity. As many as 20,000 people are still reliant on the naval base for their employment even post the closure of the shipyard. Furthermore, nearly everyone you meet on the doorstep either has a direct relationship with the base or knows someone who does. This makes defence policy incredibly important to political debate in the city. Therefore, woe betide a political leader who does not support the armed forces, and Portsmouth will most certainly be lost to any party promising to beat swords into ploughshares.

Despite the outward looking role of the Royal Navy, Portsmouth does appear to have an insular approach to relationships with the outside world, particularly the other metropolis in Hampshire and near neighbour, Southampton. Locals talk about an 'island mentality', born of the fact that the vast majority of Portsmouth residents live on Portsea Island, a patch of land separated from the mainland by a narrow creek to the north and measuring approximately four miles by three miles. Having been born on the island and lived there all my life I recognise this insularity and what may be the historical reasons for it, in that the dockyard traditionally meant that few workers had to leave the city for employment. Allied to a bustling and thriving city culture and, almost uniquely for an industrial city, a seaside resort at its southern end, the desire to seek work or pleasure off the island has always been mitigated to a large extent.

Geography clearly places Portsmouth in the south, but history and culture set it aside from much of rural southern England that surrounds it. Whilst the industrial base on the island has been significantly diminished over the past forty years because of the reduction in size of the navy, the dockyard still plays a major role in providing employment, and has helped to attract both aerospace and maritime businesses to the city. This self-contained military/industrial complex has meant that unemployment has remained relatively low in the city, notwithstanding the shocks that have been sustained after several rounds of defence cuts, including most recently the ending of shipbuilding in the city.

However, whilst unemployment has never been the spectre that has persisted in many northern cities, Portsmouth has pockets of deprivation that match those in Glasgow, Sunderland and Liverpool. Charles Dickens ward in the heart of the city is appropriately named, given that almost 50 per cent of children in this area live below the poverty line. I grew up in the ward, having been born in a council flat, and have witnessed how the area has changed. Gone are the institutions that helped foster community spirit in the area, including nearly all the pubs. For example, the city's capacious Labour Club and party headquarters, built by members in the 1920s

Labour's Identity Crisis

in the heart of the ward, has been sold because of the impecunious state of the local party and the lack of business generated from the local community. Similar levels of poverty can be found in Paulsgrove and Nelson wards, which contain large numbers of social housing, much of it built on the bomb sites left by Hitler's bombers targeting the dockyard. Finally, just as poverty has become endemic on the estates since the deindustrialisation of the 1980s, participation in civic life has also diminished considerably. Labour Party membership on these estates is negligible and turnout at local elections is catastrophically low and frequently below 10 per cent.

'Portsmouth 'til I die'

As a result of history Portsmouth has always had a strong identity and residents have always been able to identify themselves with the city. This identity with the city appears to have magnified in recent years and is, perhaps, best exemplified by the remarkable events surrounding the fall and rise of Portsmouth Football Club, known to its supporters as Pompey.

My first game at Fratton Park was in December 1973 when Pompey entertained a Preston North End side managed by Bobby Charlton and with another World Cup winner, Nobby Stiles, at centre-half. Both teams shared an illustrious history but at that time, and for much of the subsequent forty-two years, have languished outside football's top flight. For Pompey, one of their periodic crises was imminent. Having spent freely on players in an effort to buy success, the club almost went into liquidation. Supporters rallied round to raise £25,000 for the club as part of operation SOS Pompey, even paying considerable sums for patches of the Fratton Park turf. The club was saved but then saw a precipitous fall through the divisions, culminating in a brief period at the bottom of Division Four propping up a football league that thirty years before they had bestrode with two championship seasons in 1949 and 1950. History was to repeat itself on a far grander scale between 2008 and 2012.

In 2002 Pompey reached the Premier League. These were golden days for fans brought up on a diet of lower league football and journeyman players. Whilst the Premier League brought in huge amounts of money through TV revenue it also heralded the astronomic wages that go with it. Despite having one of the smallest stadiums in the country the club was frequently outspending and outbidding the traditional big clubs of English Football. Big fees for players such as Peter Crouch and Jermaine Defoe became the norm, whilst some players were rumoured to be earning £100,000 a week when the club won the FA Cup in 2008. Unfortunately, like the UK economy, the club could not defy economic gravity and 2008 saw the start of a catastrophic period, ending with the club entering administration with debts in excess of £250 million. Liquidation and the end of Portsmouth Football Club appeared inevitable in 2012, given the lack of credible buyers and the huge liabilities that would remain even after administration.

However, what happened next was testament to the strong affection supporters held for their club and to the power of community action. Quite simply, supporters refused to allow the club to die and not only saved it from liquidation, but essentially established the biggest fan-owned club in the country. A combination of a loan from the city council, significant contributions from local businessmen, and a share issue that saw thousands of supporters buying a stake in the club and raising over £2 million, saved one of England's most historic football clubs from disappearing altogether.

Following the glory of the noughties, post-2008 has been a grim time for the club on the pitch. Pompey has once again fallen into the basement of the football league and have flirted with the ignominy of relegation to the Conference. Remarkably, this fall from grace has not impacted at all on support for the club, and Fratton Park is close to capacity (19,000) for most home games in a division where gates for other clubs are closer to 3,000.

Portsmouth North

Tribal Loyalties

Reactions to the end of shipbuilding in Portsmouth and the saving of the football club are of interest when looking to analyse tribal loyalties and identity in 21st century England. The community's support, both emotional and financial, for Portsmouth Football Club showed that the power of collective action can still be strong. Conversely, the disappearance of shipbuilding with relatively little local protest indicated that collective industrial action and the power of the wider Labour movement had been neutered to such a degree that workers felt little was to be gained by opposing the 'inevitable'.

Following the announcement of the closure of the shipyard there was anger, not least at the decision to transfer work to Scotland. However, there was a political consensus in Westminster that this was the correct thing to do. For Labour, the flawed political judgement at the time appeared to be that defending a number of seats in the west of Scotland trumped the needs of workers in England. Indeed, before consulting any local politicians in Portsmouth, or the trade unions representing workers in the yard, a decision was taken by the Parliamentary Labour Party to give enthusiastic backing to the coalition government on their shipbuilding policy. Therefore the fatalism which very quickly took control in Portsmouth was hardly surprising, and when marches were organised in the months following the announcement of the closure the number of shipyard workers marching were vastly outnumbered by local trade union and political activists.

The decision of Ed Miliband to abandon shipbuilding in Portsmouth helped to accelerate the fracturing of political loyalties in the city. At the elections that followed the closure decision, in May 2014, the city saw UKIP not only top the poll across the city, but also win six council seats and four of those in areas that could be described as traditional Labour territory. Paradoxically, a party calling themselves the UK Independence Party did their utmost to exploit divisions within the United Kingdom, by accusing the coalition and Labour of betraying Portsmouth by agreeing to the closure of the yard. When allied to the incredibly toxic, but politically effective, arguments on immigration, their political success in the city was perfectly explicable. However, UKIP also appeared to tap into the fears and real economic insecurities of traditional Labour supporters in Charles Dickens, Paulsgrove and Nelson wards and could now add that the Scots as well as EU migrants were 'stealing' their jobs.

For Labour in Portsmouth the period 2010 to 2015 should have been a period of rebuilding the party following the terrible election result under Gordon Brown. Instead, the period saw the party's support in the city not only stagnate, but in fact go backwards, in a not dissimilar fashion to many of the other southern constituencies that had been won in 1997. The message on the doorstep was invariably that Ed Miliband was not seen as a credible leader; Labour could not be trusted on the economy; and, in the final days of the campaign, the fear of a coalition with the SNP. Whilst these were all contributory factors to Labour's poor showing in Portsmouth, a steep decline in tribal affiliation with the party was also noticeable.

An example of how far support had fallen with aspirational, skilled working class and lower middle class voters can be found in the Cosham ward of Portsmouth North. Indeed this is an archetypal middle Britain district that Labour has to win to form a government. It consists of a large 1930s estate of modest semis, and has a large swathe of former council houses, many of which are now owner-occupied. The residents may be working in the nearby Queen Alexandra Hospital, rebuilt and modernised by the last Labour Government, or for BAE Systems in Portsmouth Naval Base. Alternatively they could be working for IBM or one of the new technology businesses based at the Lakeside business centre in the ward. What was clear from

Labour's Identity Crisis

talking to people in Cosham was that they had been through a hard time since the economic crash in 2008. They now believed things had got better, however marginally, under the Tories and were not prepared to place this at risk with a party they did not trust on the economy, under a leader they did not see as a capable future Prime Minister.

In 1997 Labour had polled over 50 per cent of the vote in Cosham and had councillors in the ward throughout the 1990s and up to 2004. However, the 2015 election saw Labour poll only 23 per cent, a devastating result were you defending a record as an unpopular government, but an absolutely catastrophic outcome for an opposition party with pretensions of power. You could argue that in Portsmouth we saw this coming. The huge drift of Labour support to UKIP in 2014 was a harbinger of the loss of traditional Labour supporters at the General Election. In Cosham ward UKIP polled 21 per cent of the vote, despite not knocking on a single door, and putting out a negligible amount of campaign literature.

Can Labour Reconnect with Portsmouth?

In 'normal' conditions the portents for Labour in Portsmouth at the 2015 General Election would have been very good indeed, after five years of austerity from a coalition government that had increased taxes for 'strivers' and implemented massive cuts to the public services they rely upon. From a Portsmouth perspective, tough times had been exacerbated by the devastating decision to end shipbuilding in the city, with the loss of thousands of skilled jobs. Yet, on 7 May 2015, the Conservatives INCREASED their majority in Portsmouth North, in the same way they increased majorities across the south of England. Furthermore, on the morning of 8 May 2015, the nation no longer had a coalition government, but had elected the first Conservative majority government since 1992.

The question raised by the 2015 result is not so much *how* will Labour win again in places like Portsmouth in 2020, but a case of can it *ever* hope to reclaim such seats in the south of England? The current prognosis is not good. Labour has chosen to elect a leader who is even less likely to connect with middle England than did Ed Miliband. Indeed, Jeremy Corbyn's apparent disdain for the defence sector is particularly toxic for Labour in Portsmouth. A leader who is on record as asking 'why do we need aircraft carriers?' is hardly likely to inspire confidence amongst the thousands of workers and their families whose future economic well-being is dependent upon the two new super-carriers that will be based and serviced in the city's naval base. Moreover, the city has a proud record of supporting the nation's armed forces and a not inconsiderable number of ex-service personnel living in the locality.

The message the party received from electors in bellwether seats like Portsmouth, during the 2015 campaign and subsequently, is that it must be credible on the economy, credible on the deficit, credible on defence and firmly rooted in the centre ground. This may be an uncomfortable truth for many of the new members of the Labour Party, but it is a truth nevertheless.

6.
COPELAND

Jamie Reed MP

Landscapes have always had the power to shape political attitudes, cultures and national identities. Blake's dark satanic mills illustrated the grinding realities of the industrial revolution that gave birth in Britain to a form of enlightened social liberalism, before giving way to democratic socialism. The cultural political staple of both major American political parties remains that of the intrepid pioneer, shaped by the conquest of the hard land.

From the scree and shale shores of Wastwater to the summit of Scafell Pike, you can find people of all nationalities, religions and races making the trek to England's highest point. And from the remote tranquillity of the Ennerdale Valley, to the wind-blasted sandstone of the west Cumbrian coast, the impression of the terrain upon the culture of the west Cumbrian inhabitants is inescapable. The men, women and children who built the drystone walls that scale the mountainsides are the progeny and progenitors of those same people pressed into service to create the hand-hewn slate, coal and iron ore mines upon which an Empire was built and sustained.

Under leaden skies and beneath the ground a culture of solidarity, independence, community self-reliance and ambition was forged. Over time this culture of solidarity became more than a virtue that bound together the individuals who made up these communities - it became a quality that also bound together the industrial communities of every English region, Scotland and Wales. In the run up to the 2015 General Election, the Scottish independence referendum tested this solidarity to the limit. Labour, simultaneously seeing yet disbelieving the evidence before it of a rapidly changing United Kingdom, failed to respond and paid a devastating electoral price.

Surveying the defeat in June last year, Peter Kellner wrote that, even after such a crippling election defeat, 'Why should we think that Labour has hit rock bottom?' Kellner wrote, 'Labour's big task is to make itself relevant [...] to place itself on the side of history rather than turn the clock back: to show how prosperity, fairness and security can be achieved in an open, flexible, rapidly changing world without raising taxes that hurt middle-income families or drive away investors.'

True enough, yet Kellner didn't address the burgeoning sense of 'Englishness' that caught flight in the aftermath of the Scottish independence referendum. He continued:

One way for Labour to challenge for power in 2020 is to ask this question: If the party did not exist, and were to be invented from scratch, what would it look like? What would be its purpose, its structure and its programme? [...] How much would it look like today's party?

To answer these questions in turn, if Labour were to be invented today, its structures would be federal; it would be home to a discrete English Labour identity in the same way that it is home to discrete Scottish and Welsh identities. Its purpose would be 'nation-building' (more later) and, in

Labour's Identity Crisis

an age where social change is rapidly driven by technological innovation, it would look nothing like the ponderous, monolithic, overly centralised structure that it has become.

Kellner completed his assessment of Labour's electoral defeat with a warning applicable to every British political party today:

'Labour has no automatic right to prosper, or even survive.'

This warning should occupy every Labour party activist, supporter, employee and representative at every level.

As the Member of Parliament for Copeland, England's most remotely accessible constituency from Westminster, I know more than most that the Labour Party needs to learn serious lessons from our catastrophic election defeat. Principally, Labour's approach to peripheral areas and non-metropolitan communities must now be fundamentally reassessed, as must the Party's approach to England. London is not England, and Labour must listen to the marginalised, peripheral communities of our country in a way in which it has not done for decades as the United Kingdom risks disintegrating before us.

During the Scottish referendum campaign, a deliberately insulting insinuation was developed and deployed by the separatists: that to be English was to be Tory. The ugliness of a political narrative that seeks purposely to conflate national identity with political ideology has no place in a modern liberal democracy – yet it exists. Still, Labour fails to respond.

The effect that this narrative had upon the English, particularly (in my experience) those who would identify as being traditionally and culturally working class, has been profound. Anecdotally and - for the moment - without detailed empirical research, the referendum campaign changed more than the attitudes of many Scots towards the United Kingdom; it changed the attitudes of many English, too. In particular, those culturally working class bonds of solidarity between English and Scottish communities have been stretched to breaking point: the pain of betrayal and abandonment amongst those communities just as fearful and resistant to Tory rule as so many Scottish communities is something that may never be erased.

However, contrary to what many nationalists in these islands would have you believe, England has a progressive beating heart and a deeply embedded progressive tradition.

England, the country of the Tolpuddle Martyrs, Clement Atlee, George Orwell, William Morris, William Blake, Percy & Mary Shelley; the country of Emmeline Pankhurst, George Byron, Charles Dickens and countless other figures whose lives shaped left wing thought, not just throughout Britain but the world. In Cumbria, a landscape filled with wrath and wonder fired the imaginations of Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Romantic Movement that continues to inspire international progressive thought from social reform to environmentalism. The critically important eighteenth century port of Whitehaven was north west England's most important centre of early Methodism as John Wesley used the town as the starting point for his travels to Ireland and the Isle of Man. Before Marx, English Methodism was establishing the culture that would not only fuel England's radical traditions but which would later inform the creation, and enable the success, of the Labour Party. In Whitehaven too, the apprenticed John Paul Jones – a young Scot - would learn his seafaring trade before becoming the founder of the American Navy and leading an attack upon the town during the American War of Independence in 1778 – reputedly the last successful invasion of England. This overlooked corner of England, through its people, its industry and its landscape, has long been part of England's radical heritage.

Copeland

The Labour Party will always care as much about the life chances of people in Whitehaven as about those in Wick. We are a Unionist party – perhaps the last – because we believe that we are bound by common bonds, that our greatest victories have been shared victories, and that meaningful progress is achieved together not apart.

A successful Labour Party must always seek to reach beyond the Labour base – a core vote strategy is no strategy at all.

In addition to working to ensure that power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many and not the few, we must now add ‘nation-building’ to our party’s historic purpose. This mission should consist of two elements: the preservation of the United Kingdom as the oldest most successful political union in the world, and – following the new constitutional settlements for Scotland and Wales - the radical devolution of power to England’s towns and cities as part of a new approach and a new offer to the communities of England.

In many places, the fabric of the local community is being destroyed and the pillars of society are disappearing. The decline of the high street is well known. Local newspapers are shutting down in increasing numbers – stripping out local identity as a consequence. Town halls, courts, police stations – symbols of permanence, community strength and civic identity – are closing. Daily life looks and feels very different in our deindustrialised towns, struggling rural villages and smaller cities and these communities are now engulfed in a quiet crisis – not just in the north of England, but in every part of our country.

These communities require progressive government and are as much part of Labour’s natural constituency as are our major urban centres. Labour must ensure the empowerment of these communities as part of our central mission. This represents more than the correct policy response in an atomizing society, and more than a recognition of the shortcomings and inefficiencies of our suffocatingly centralized machinery of government, but failure to do this may ensure that we never govern again.

So nation-building must begin with the devolution of power to England’s towns and cities, and a new constitutional settlement for England far beyond the superficial lip service of the ‘northern powerhouse’.

Central to achieving any of this is an understanding of how England currently is and not how we would want it to be. Some hard questions must be asked, and these require detailed answers. English devolution must never fall victim to the same pitfalls of Scottish nationalism, in particular the refusal to ask and answer the tough questions.

For Labour, this means tackling the deep conservatism that exists in some ‘solid’ or traditional Labour areas. For these communities to flourish again and for local and regional economic growth to take hold, attitudes of grievance and dependency need to be challenged. In Labour’s heartlands, even given the disproportionately levied misery of austerity by the Conservatives, the party must seek to lead these regions with a vision based upon new ambitions, not by wallowing in historic industrial decline and injustice. This means being the advocate for local business and industry as much as for NHS workers and public sector workers. It means being as passionate about helping people to create jobs in our communities as much as it is about helping people in our communities to keep their jobs.

Labour's Identity Crisis

The communities we represent are equal to this task; so is our movement. Unless the Labour Party is equal to this task then we will fail our constituents, our communities, our party and our country.

Nation-building, in essence, means the strengthening of England's regions by every metric. Not just in terms of economic growth, but in terms of world-class education and health care. It means empowering communities with the ability to provide their citizens with economic and other opportunities comparable to those in London and the richer parts of the south east. It means growing and retaining 'social capital' – essentially those people who start businesses & become employers, those whose voluntary efforts fill the gaps that the state either does not fill or does not want to, those who want to become high-achieving professionals – so that communities not only become more resilient, but less reliant upon centralized support and so that, crucially, a sense of purpose and of place can be allowed to flourish outside of London, the self-styled Hollywood of our economy.

Yet again, Cumbria can help illustrate the value of such an approach to much of the country. Faced with becoming an isolated outpost based upon a burning platform of shrinking public expenditure and a changing state, Cumbria (the west in particular) has reimagined itself as Britain's Energy Coast. The Sellafield nuclear facility isn't a simple or straightforward task of decommissioning; instead it's a policy laboratory, and beachhead for accessing the international nuclear decommissioning market place worth hundreds of billions of pounds. Additionally, new nuclear reactors in the area will provide tens of thousands of jobs providing 7 per cent of the country's electricity in the process. Nearby proposals for the world's largest tidal lagoon means that this small corner of England should be able to provide 15 per cent of all UK electricity demand. Drawing upon a proud past as an historic coal mining area, and understanding the modern world and responding to it before central government was able to, means that Britain's Energy Coast is set to become one of the fastest growing parts of the British economy in the near future. Moreover, the sense of place, pride and purpose is assured. Cumbria, by becoming strategically unique, has very much become part of the national conversation. Can every area make claim to the same?

And it's this sense of purpose that will drive other social progress, too. The opportunities made available by the Energy Coast will attract the social capital the community needs, whilst ensuring much of what exists stays. More importantly, given the requirements of the area's economic base, there is a clear need for high-quality education, high-quality skills, and high-quality training. New economic opportunity means that there is a driver, 'a market', for all of these. It is likely that only this approach, or a derivative of it, is capable of limiting the drain of social capital from our regions.

In January 2016 the Social Market Foundation's Commission on Inequality in Education found that the geographic area school pupils came from was a bigger determinant upon their educational outcomes than any other factor – with London's performance surging beyond the regions. Unless we address this as a nation, committing to the 'hard yards' that nation-building requires, then London's dominance of the national, economic, cultural and social landscape will accelerate, our economy will never be rebalanced, and our regions will become enfeebled.

The political reality of 2016 and for the remainder of this Parliament is that Labour must think the once unthinkable. Those political parties that best understand the future are those that are most in tune with the country and, as a result, those parties are best placed to govern. No political party has a divine right to exist and Labour has always secured power when it proves to the country that it best understands the challenges that the future poses.

Copeland

Labour requires a renaissance, not a reboot. Only by rediscovering our purpose can we reconnect with those communities who need a Labour government but who, at the last election, didn't think it was worth voting for one.

Labour's radical English heritage is something to be uniquely proud of and something to be built upon, more now than ever before. To do this, and to change our country for the better, Labour needs to change its attitude towards England.

Labour has to Listen and Change

Nowhere is this need for change more visible than in the emerging relationship between the party and traditionally Labour non-metropolitan areas, particularly in England - in our rugby league towns and lower league football cities, in the places most people have heard of, but never been to. These areas need Labour (ever more so as the state retreats) but a cultural divide has been allowed to open up between the party and far too many of those people for whom it exists to serve.

The same happened with the Democrats in the US. Once the party of the working class in the southern states, millions of working class Americans in these states now vote overwhelmingly against their own economic best interests by voting Republican in every US election. Why? Because they connect 'culturally' with the Republicans in a way in which they no longer do with the Democrats. So much so that the collapse of the Democrats in the southern United States, particularly amongst white male voters, is now the subject of long-standing academic study. In 2011, Michael Forster and Tim Rehner of the University of Southern Mississippi asked *'The White Male Southern Democrat: Endangered Species or Already Extinct?'*

In *'Deer Hunting with Jesus: Guns, Votes, Debt and Delusion in Redneck America'*, Joe Bageant chronicles the collapse in the support for Democrats in the southern states in a visceral way. Taking the re-election of George W. Bush as his starting point, Bageant writes:

On the morning of November 2, 2004 millions of Democrats awoke to a new order. Smoke from neo-conservative campfires hung over all points southward and westward [...] Democrats sank into the deepest kind of Prozac-proof depression. What, they wondered, happened out there [...] And why had the working class so plainly voted against their own interests?

That Labour's liberal elite risks becoming like the Democrats described by Bageant seems, in this age of the Islington Installation, beyond doubt. He continues:

the one thing the thinking Left and urban liberals have not done is tread the soil of the Goth – subject themselves to the unwashed working-class America, to that churchgoing, hunting and fishing, Bud Light-drinking, provincial America.

On the edge of the Empire, in Cumbria and elsewhere, there is a growing awareness of this cultural dissonance, not just on the Left of British, particularly English, politics but within the Labour Party itself. Writing in and about Winchester, Virginia, Bageant states that it could be:

any of thousands of communities across the United States. It is an unacknowledged parallel world to that of educated urban liberals – the world that blindsided them in November 2004 and the one they will need to come to understand if they are ever to be politically relevant again.

Labour's Identity Crisis

The parallels for the Labour Party could not be more accurate. The warnings could not be more stark.

It's a toxic development, but an avoidable one. The tide ebbs and flows, but the danger for Labour is real. Between 2010 and our 2015 electoral defeat, the Labour leadership was aware of this deepening disconnection but failed to address it in a vocal, energetic way. The real tragedy? We went into the election with policies designed to heal the divide, in the shape of comprehensive proposals for English devolution, yet seemed unwilling to tell the people who we sought to govern that we were prepared to give them what they wanted, despite intending to do so – not as a sop but as a matter of belief. Why?

A London-centric Labour Party, armed with the evidence of our electoral defeat, cannot continue to wilfully ignore the English question.

Nowhere can London Labour's discomfort with a burgeoning growth of English sentiment be witnessed in more excruciating detail than during the infamous 'white van' debacle that provided the backdrop for the Rochester by-election in November 2014. When Emily Thornberry tweeted a picture of a house with a white van parked in the drive and English flags being flown from the house windows, with the comment 'Image from Rochester', the embarrassed sensitivities of the Labour leadership were such that Thornberry was sacked from the Labour front bench.

This was a clear overreaction, dreadful political judgment, and a 'process' story of the worst kind. Nonetheless, the white van episode laid bare, in the most brutal and damaging way, Labour's tin ear to those people who increasingly expect an English focus from their political representatives.

Faced with the reality of the SNP surge – the result of a similar disconnection between the party and its base in Scotland – this failure is even more bewildering to understand. In years to come, the Scottish independence referendum will prove to be an important part, potentially definitive in some regard, of Labour's history. The referendum was a formative political experience. Bruising as it was, it also reaffirmed some core principles.

The lessons are plentiful. First of all, the politics of big ideas is alive and well. Irrespective of differing views on the break-up of the United Kingdom, it is certainly a big idea, a change from the often monotonous nature of British politics and, whatever your opinion, clearly something worth fighting for. Big ideas are engaging, they cut through, and they stimulate civic engagement.

But the big idea was flawed. The economic arguments beneath separation were a false prospectus. Politics is hard and getting harder. The complexities of modern politics are increasing, not receding, so progressive politics needs to learn quickly how to communicate complex arguments and solutions in a different way from how it currently does so - particularly in the face of big ideas based upon simple messages. This is the second lesson.

Third, ultimately the politics of gimmickry and easy answers are bound to fail. The principle gimmick of the separation 'Yes' campaign was that a Scotland outside of the United Kingdom would be wealthier. This claim never withstood any meaningful scrutiny and the 'Yes' campaign refused to answer any of the difficult questions, eventually sealing its defeat.

Politics is an art as much as it is a science. The science is often straightforward, the art much more difficult, much more subjective and often much harder to appreciate. It may be that the Scottish referendum had as much of an effect in England as in Scotland. Art has the power to stir the emotions in a way science has not. So in a pub on the outskirts of Cumbernauld, I

Copeland

understood the rational explanation of the retired ex-prison guard and lifelong SNP voter who told me that he would be voting for Scotland to remain part of the Union. For him, the protection of his savings and pension was his primary consideration. An understandable application of a scientific and empirical approach to political questions; for him separation would threaten his life's work.

Just over the border my constituents, many Scots, many (like me) with Scottish ancestry, described a different series of emotions. For these people, the early stages of the referendum campaign were of genuine interest. Early support for independence, at around the 25 per cent mark, was to some degree anticipated and regretted. The feeling expressed was overwhelmingly one of sympathy and sorrow: that people like us, facing the same challenges and difficulties that we face, should want to leave the family we had created together. Towards the end of the campaign, the sorrow had turned to acceptance and the sympathy that informed the desire to keep the family together had gone. As one constituent told me, 'If they don't want to stay, it's better they go.'

There are no easy answers in modern politics. No silver bullets. Fundamentally, politicians who pretend that there are will continue to be found out and punished by the electorate, just as those politicians who fail to listen to the electorate will also be dispatched.

In surveying two consecutive and progressively worse election defeats, Labour cannot afford to ignore the lessons from Scotland; and these lessons must be applied to England. Formative lessons: there is a real appetite amongst the electorate for big ideas; there are no easy answers; political gimmicks can be seen from space. Observe these lessons, become the party of nation-builders, and Labour will win again.

At the last election, despite the catastrophic failure to address the demand for, and the social, cultural and economic wisdom of addressing, English devolution, Labour still won most of its seats in England. How different, then, it could have been if the English question had been publicly acknowledged and addressed? English fears of an SNP stranglehold on a Miliband government were facilitated by Labour's refusal to talk to the English about England.

Never Again

Labour's support in Scotland has the best chance of recovering when the Scottish electorate is presented with clear evidence that Labour can again win in England. England, not London. Until that point, it's understandable that many Scottish voters will not believe that Labour will protect them from the punitive policies of Conservatism.

For the sake of the Union, for the Labour Party, for Labour England, and for all those people whose interests we were founded to serve, we must not delay in creating a discrete English Labour identity, committed to the nation-building that England's regions demand.

In his analysis of the 2015 General Election defeat, Jon Cruddas observed that Labour 'lost everywhere to everyone'. The evidence is inescapable - without embracing England, Labour risks becoming a party without a country.

This would surrender our historic purpose, and desert those millions in our country who need progressive government. Worse still, it would betray the memory and the example of those who strived in penury and despair, on mountainsides and underground, in the hope of a better tomorrow and of a political party capable of achieving it.

Labour's Identity Crisis

England and its people need Labour, and Labour needs England.

7.
EXETER

Ben Bradshaw MP

Canvassing recently on one of Exeter's more solidly working class estates I came across a window sticker that will be familiar to anyone who has done much campaigning in such places in recent years. It is a simple cross of St George - the red cross on a white background - with the wording below: 'If this flag offends you, why not consider moving to another country.' Harsh, perhaps, but this window sticker contains a simple and important message to the Labour Party if we are serious about ever being a party of government again.

There was a time when a Labour canvasser coming across this sticker might have been all too prepared to be offended, because of the mis-association of the English flag with far right groups. Even today an inexperienced canvasser, or one who allowed their judgement to be clouded by liberal prejudice, might assume the household was Tory, UKIP or worse. But, no, this was a household of solid Labour voters, who always vote, and who voted Labour again last year. Sadly, far too many people like them in the rest of England didn't.

On 7 May 2015, Labour won just twelve out of the 198 seats in the three southern regions outside London – the east of England, the south west and the south east. In 1997, our historic high point, we won fifty-nine seats in these regions. In 2005 we still won forty-five. Last year we had a net gain of one seat, thanks to the collapse of the Liberal Democrats handing us Bristol West and Norwich South. Our only gain from the Tories was Peter Kyle in Hove, and we lost Labour seats in Southampton and Plymouth. In most of the seats where we need to beat the Tories to win we went backwards. In Kent, where we had ten seats until 2010, the Tory majorities in all of those seats are now all in five figures. The picture wasn't just bad in the south; it was bad almost everywhere in England and Wales where we were fighting the Tories. But it was particularly bad in those Middle England seats we need to win to ever get into government again, and there are predominantly more of them in the south.

In Exeter, which used to be solidly Tory, we nearly trebled the Labour majority. We also increased our tally of seats on Exeter City Council to a record twenty-nine out of forty, and became the first ruling group on a local authority to have more women than men.

So How Did We Do It?

Exeter wasn't Labour even in 1945. Before 1997 we'd won the seat only once – narrowly - in 1966, under better boundaries than now, with the redoubtable Gwyneth Dunwoody. Labour achieved majority control on the city council for the first time in 1996.

There is nothing peculiar or exceptional about Exeter. It is much like other southern English university and cathedral cities, and county towns like Norwich or Gloucester. It has a mixed economy with some manufacturing, but its main strength has been as a services and administration centre for the surrounding sub-region. A casual visitor wandering round our picturesque city centre with its stunning Norman cathedral and bustling shops might be surprised to learn it's a Labour stronghold. My husband's first reaction on visiting when I told him I was thinking of standing to be the Labour candidate in 1996 was: 'Are you sure this is

Labour's Identity Crisis

winnable for Labour?' And when I meet not very political strangers who don't know who I am or what I do and I tell them I'm MP for Exeter, they assume I must be a Lib Dem or a Tory. Other Labour MPs may sit on rock-solid majorities but none spends their weekends in a constituency as nice as Exeter. Two hours by train from London, close enough to be accessible, but far enough to have retained its own very distinct identity. From almost any point in the city you can see Devon's green hills or the sea or both. This helps make canvassing and leafleting a pleasure. Dartmoor, Exmoor and stunning coastlines are on our doorstep. We have the second highest sunshine quotient in Britain. I could go on.

Of course we have our share of common social problems including, since 2010, growing homelessness and food-bank use, but overall the city has a happy, confident and affluent feel. Unemployment is close to zero. In fact, we have a growing skills and labour shortage. Between 1997 and 2010 no other city in the UK increased its productivity faster, except oil-rich Aberdeen (and that was before the collapse of the oil price).

Like other university cities and administrative and service centres, Exeter's demography has probably been shifting gradually Labour-wards in recent decades. The NHS, education and the Met Office, which Tony Blair's government moved from Bracknell to Exeter, are big and growing employers. But this can't account for Exeter Labour's impressive success. Exeter University students are amongst the most Conservative-voting in England, and having a university has been no guarantee of Labour hegemony in other cities.

As an urban centre with some industry Labour has had a presence in the city since the Party's inception. But the foundations for the success of today's Exeter Labour Party were built in the 1960s by a group of visionary railwaymen and councillors, frustrated by their inability to fund campaigns to compete with the Conservatives who had dominated the city for years. The cards were further stacked against us by the old rules that allowed council aldermen, who were overwhelmingly Tory, to vote. These railwaymen mortgaged their own homes and ran trains to London at the weekends for the local population for £1. With the money they raised from selling food and drink on the trains they bought a plot of land and built a Labour club. From the profits of this Labour club, they built a second, even more successful one. Their sacrifice and entrepreneurship has ensured that ever since, we have been able to fight the Tories on a level playing field.

Building the successful Exeter Labour brand from these foundations has been a long-term project. It's been done through a combination of sensible centre-Left positioning, good organisation, and what I'll call 'patriotism of place'.

First, Positioning

Exeter's Labour Council was, dare I say it, New Labour before the term was invented. We've always worked closely and effectively with the local business community and others for the common good of our economy. The Tory administration that went before was unambitious, unimaginative and, too often, anti-growth. The two top 'endorsers' on my general election address this May were two of Exeter's most successful and popular business people. They are Labour supporters but not the usual party hacks.

Exeter's Labour council prides itself on its sound financial management, boasting one of the lowest council tax rates in England. It's done this while building more new council homes than any other local authority in the south west and doing a valiant job in difficult circumstances

Exeter

protecting front line services from Conservative cuts. We invest in arts and culture, recognising their importance in making our city an attractive place to live and work. Our recently redeveloped municipal museum recently won the prestigious national Arts Fund prize. The council is about to embark on a multi-million pound redevelopment of our rather sad looking 1950s city centre bus station, including a major new swimming pool and leisure centre. In all our public comments and communications we try to reflect pride and optimism in our city, and tell a positive story about Labour locally and, when we can, Labour nationally and Labour's role in Exeter's success

Second, Organisation

We're an all-year-round campaigning party and had the second highest contact (canvassing) rate of any constituency Labour Party in the UK for the 2015 Election. Between January 1st and May 7th 2015 we spoke to 38,000 voters. Only Wes Streeting's Ilford North beat us. We don't canvass just as a data harvesting or voter intention ascertaining exercise, but as part of an on-going quality relationship with the public. We don't treat people who don't vote Labour as though there is something wrong with them. We want them to vote for us and quite a lot of them do. We offer them a service, respond to their concerns and, if we can, resolve their problems. During the six-week short 2015 General Election campaign we dealt with hundreds of pieces of case work and sent out thousands of target letters from me based on canvassing data. Some of these were to people intending to vote for the Green or Liberal Democrat parties, with arguments as to why they should vote Labour instead. But most were to Labour voters who said they were thinking of voting UKIP. We spelled out what UKIP's policies were on things like the NHS, taxes and workers' rights, and took UKIP's arguments on Europe and immigration head on. These letters worked. We know, because people told us and because of the result. UKIP inroads in our working class areas were minimal and the Green Party, which can be an irritant in places like Exeter, was again held down. Anyone who raised a concern about Ed Miliband got a letter from me. Our campaigning and our literature completely ignored the national party and leadership and was based entirely on the Exeter Labour brand, me, our local council candidates, our collective local record and a strong sense of place.

This leads me to the third strand of our winning strategy and the one most pertinent to this essay - patriotism of place.

Most Exonians (as Exeter residents are known) have lived in the city all their lives and those who haven't have just as much pride in it. They want their local politicians, yes, to address its problems and challenges, but also to celebrate its successes and offer a positive vision for an even better future with a clear programme of how to get there.

As Labour's national messaging and literature became ever more miserable and pessimistic between 2010 and 2015, we did our own thing. Of course we criticised the Tories (always politely because we want soft Tories to vote for us) but we focussed on the positive. Instead of apologising for Labour's record, we robustly and repeatedly defended it. People's memories are short. If we're not prepared to defend Labour's record, who will, and why should anyone trust us to deliver in future? We reminded people time and time again what the Labour Government between 1997 and 2010 had delivered for Exeter, including five brand new high schools, a new medical school and maternity unit, and much more.

It's striking that some of the other seats where Labour bucked the trend, including Hove, also tore up the national script and ran highly local campaigns based on the candidate and a strong sense of place.

Labour's Identity Crisis

The analysis of why Labour lost the 2015 Election has rightly focussed on the main reasons: economic credibility and leadership. But, as all the research has shown, not far behind as a reason people didn't vote Labour came identity politics. Too many of our traditional voters, like the ones with the flag of St George sticker at the beginning of this essay, felt that Labour was embarrassed to talk about Englishness, or fight for England's interests. They felt this particularly acutely in the context of the nationalist surge in Scotland. Our leadership's vacillation in ruling out a deal with the SNP fed into voters' pre-existing anxiety about us, and was ruthlessly exploited by the Tories' electoral machine.

It's not as though we didn't have any warning about the rise of identity politics in England. Led by my former Cabinet colleague, John Denham, whose Southampton seat was one of those we lost to the Tories on 7 May 2015, some of us had been trying for years to get our party to take Labour's predicament in England seriously. And in the first half of the last parliament, a major piece of work undertaken by the Left-leaning think tank, the IPPR, should have rung alarm bells. Under the title *'The dog that finally barked'* the IPPR showed, using the most detailed polling on the subject done for years, that English identity or consciousness that had lain undisturbed and slumbering for decades was waking, and rising in salience among English voters. This was being driven by a number of factors, including the perception, accurate or not, that England had lost out financially and politically from the devolution settlement. The IPPR report's most striking finding was that for the first time, when forced to choose between their English and British identity, most English voters put English rather than British first. The English have traditionally been comfortable with their multiple identities. Remember the school-age answer to the question where are you from? Exeter, Devon, England, Britain, Europe, Earth, Galaxy, Universe and so on. But for the first time, asked to choose our national identity, a majority were choosing their Englishness over their Britishness.

This shift was apparent to me canvassing in Exeter in the months leading up to the referendum on Scottish independence. I was surprised by how often the subject was raised, instead of the usual complaints about potholes and dog poo. But people were raising the referendum, not to express the anxiety of most of the political class about the potential break-up of the United Kingdom. No, the public's overriding emotion seemed one of indifference, combined with irritation that the question of Scottish independence was dominating the media. "They get more money than us but never stop complaining. Why don't they just get on with it and run their own affairs?" was the sort of thing we heard commonly.

Labour knew what English voters were saying, but we didn't talk about it for fear of giving succour to the Scottish Nationalists and their independence campaign. It reminded me of an incident when several years earlier, as a health Minister (for England), I drew attention to the superior performance of the NHS in England compared with Scotland, thanks in part, I argued, to the reforming policies pursued by the Blair/Brown governments - reforms eschewed in Scotland (and Wales). I was upbraided by a Scottish colleague. Please could I avoid doing or saying anything that might upset the sensibility of the Scots. This approach has since been developed into a fine art by the Scottish Nationalists themselves, who respond to any criticism of their performance in government at Holyrood as 'doing Scotland down.' We saw another example of this recently when we had the Orwellian spectacle of Labour MPs being whipped to abstain on our own party's policy on Trident. One of the reasons given was fear of upsetting the Scots. It is folly to think the way to beat the nationalists is to ape them (Labour's poll rating in Scotland has fallen behind that of the Tories since the Scottish Labour Party voted to follow the SNP down the unilateralist cul-de-sac) But, also, what about England? There are more Labour Party members and Labour MPs in the south west of England than in Scotland. We had

Exeter

important elections in May too, including in Plymouth, where thousands of jobs would be lost if Trident were scrapped. Were we not to speak for them?

The sense of irritation and low-level resentment felt by English voters before the Scottish referendum in 2014 only grew in its wake. The SNP lost, but behaved as though they'd won. 'Who will speak for England?' is a question we tend to ridicule when it comes from the mouth of John Redwood, as it does regularly. But it was exploited ruthlessly and effectively by David Cameron and the Tories the morning after the referendum result and right up to and beyond the May 2015 election.

It was Labour's uncertain and flat-footed response to the gauntlet thrown down by Cameron on EVEL (English Votes on English Laws) that prompted a group of us - MPs, Peers and Labour local government leaders - to convene an emergency meeting at our 2014 Labour conference in Manchester, which immediately followed the referendum result, to try to formulate a response more in tune with English sensibilities. That was the birth of English Labour.

But as the 2015 General Election approached and the polls showed a potential Labour wipeout in Scotland, we shut up again, for fear of doing anything that could make our Scottish colleagues' task more difficult. In the General Election campaign itself, Scottish independence was not an issue in England, but with the polls pointing to a hung Parliament, the possibility of the SNP pulling the strings of a minority Labour government at Westminster was.

There's an on-going and as yet unresolved debate about how far this impacted on the election result. It had no discernible impact in Exeter (more of which in a moment) but down the road in Plymouth, with its strong dockyard and Trident interests, it almost certainly did. We lost our excellent incumbent Labour MP, Alison Seabeck, and failed to win the second Plymouth seat - our top target in the south west - in spite of having a superb candidate in Luke Pollard and a mediocre Tory incumbent. I still feel that most of the people who told us on the doorstep they wouldn't vote Labour because of fears we would make a deal with the SNP were using it as an excuse. They were probably already inclined not to support us anyway, because they didn't trust us on the economy or didn't rate our leadership, but they were more reluctant to give those as reasons rather than the visceral one - their dislike of the SNP.

Whatever the real impact of the Tories' SNP scare, most Labour people now agree it was a mistake for us not to have ruled out immediately and categorically any sort of pact or deal with the nationalists, if only because it fed the prejudice against Ed Miliband as a weak leader, and gave people the impression we would be willing to do anything to get into power whatever the cost. In Exeter we, or rather I, did rule it out. As I have felt the need to do increasingly in recent years, I departed from Labour's national script in order to reassure my voters and bolster Labour's position locally. In my public statements carried by the local media and in our local election literature I made it clear that I would countenance no deal with the SNP. As a backbencher I had little or no power to deliver this promise, but I felt the need to reassure my constituents about where I, personally, stood. I reminded Exeter voters for good measure that the SNP and Labour were mortal enemies in Scotland and that the only party that had ever done deals with the nationalists were the Tories, when they helped prop up the first post-devolution SNP-led minority Executive in Scotland, and in 1979 when together they brought down Jim Callaghan's Labour Government. Anyone who raised the SNP issue on the doorstep or wrote to me got an equally robust response.

Labour's Identity Crisis

Analysis of the election nationally confirms that even if it wasn't specifically because of the SNP scare, it was among traditional Labour voters for whom cultural identity is most important, that we did particularly badly.

Polling organisations divide the population into three broadly equal-sized groups. 'Pioneers' – socially liberal and altruistic. They make up the majority of Labour Party members, and this was the group that stayed most loyal to Labour in the 2015 Election. 'Prospectors' – who are acquisitive and aspirational. They vote with their pockets, and Labour's toxicity among this group rose from 28 per cent to 39 per cent between 2011 and 2015. We lost them on the economy. But our toxicity among the third group, the 'Settlers', rose from 35 per cent to 43 per cent. Settlers are concerned with home, tradition, community and cultural identity. A large proportion of Labour's traditional working class voters are Settlers, and they are the Labour voters most vulnerable to UKIP.

So Labour needs to develop a new narrative on Englishness, both in response to the nationalist tide in Scotland and to the rise of UKIP in England. If we don't there's a danger of years of Tory hegemony in England. This doesn't need to be conservative or nostalgic – John Major's village widows cycling through the mist to Church. (Though an element of English Romanticism that includes landscape, music, culture and folk tradition wouldn't go amiss). England has a proud radical and progressive tradition to draw on, from the Levellers to the Tolpuddle Martyrs; the slavery abolitionists to Rock against Racism; from the Arts and Crafts Movement to the Transition Town Movement. We need a new English patriotism similar to the one captivated so brilliantly in the London Olympics' opening ceremony – optimistic, progressive, forward-looking and not taking itself too seriously.

With the loss of Scotland, Labour has to be aiming to win a majority in England. Individual voter registration and any boundary changes will make that task harder. To get a majority in 2020 we will not only have to regain most, if not all, of the English seats we won in our hey-day under Tony Blair, but also prevail in places we've never won before like Basingstoke.

Without a clear story for and about England this can't be done. My friend and former Cabinet colleague, John Denham, has set up a new Centre for English Identity and Politics at the University of Winchester. That's a welcome start, and can help inform the thinking, but this is a pressing political challenge for Labour as a whole. To have any chance of recovering in England and ever getting into government again, it must be a collective endeavour for us all. Labour must learn to speak for England.

8.
HARLOW

Suzy Stride
and
Jacob Quagliozi
Campaign Organiser for Harlow

The 2015 General Election result in Harlow mirrored that of the country, as it has done every general election for the last seventy years (with the exception of 1979). The Labour Party was roundly defeated, with our Conservative opponent, Robert Halfon, increasing his majority from 4,500 to more than 8,000.

Losing on such a scale and after so much effort is not easy, but even more difficult is accepting why you lost. Part of this is an uncomfortable realisation that a defeat so large - in Harlow and in the country - can never just be because of one individual at the top, or one debate. All of us in the Labour movement have a degree of responsibility, and only by understanding and accepting it can we rebuild the most powerful movement for change in our country's history.

In Harlow the 2015 Election was a tale of two deficits. First, an economic one; Labour never convinced people we had a credible strategy for dealing with the current economic challenges. And second, an identity deficit; a deficit that was felt by a particular group of voters with whom Labour has lost touch, and whose concerns we did not sufficiently understand.

Pram Town

The New Town of Harlow was designated on 25 March 1947 as part of the government's scheme to relieve overcrowding in London resulting from bomb damage in the inner city. It was a visionary experiment. The town was built to house 60,000 people, with cutting-edge innovation such as the first all-pedestrian shopping precinct and the first high-rise residential tower block.

By the 1960s and 1970s Harlow was flourishing, proving especially popular with young families, which earned it a memorable nickname as one former resident and current editor of the *New Statesman*, Jason Cowley, recalls:

It seemed to offer everything an energetic young boy could want in those days: department stores, an Olympic-size swimming pool, a hi-tech sports centre, a dry-ski slope, a skating rink and a golf course set in a landscaped park through which a river meandered. It even had its own water gardens, at the gateway to which was a Henry Moore sculpture of a family - which, my father told me, symbolised all the new families that had started in the 1960s when Harlow was known as 'pram town'

(Cowley, 2002)

The young families who came to Harlow from the inner city came not just to escape the overcrowded slum housing of the East End; there was the hope and the realistic prospect of modern living, stable, well-paid jobs, a better life. A strong sense of civic pride resulted from the sense of a community that people had (sometimes quite literally) built together.

Labour's Identity Crisis

By the 1970s public policy focus had begun to shift to urban regeneration. Over the course of the next quarter century things became more difficult for Harlow, and because a lot of the infrastructure had gone up around the same time it would experience the problems of middle age at similar times too, which created regeneration pressures.

Harlow is a fantastic place, in many ways incomparable to any other. It has an unquestionably rich civic fabric, with a multitude of church groups and local organisations made up of committed local people who really care about the local area. Heart for Harlow is a local ecumenical group brimming with some of the most committed and varied people I have met. The local schools and FE college have exceptional leaders and staff teams doing excellent work. The local council has some exceptionally talented people who really want to push Harlow forward and realise its potential. Most of all Harlow is an honest place, its residents would often be frank about what they thought of me, of Labour and of our political opponents, but would always do so in good humour.

This of course does not mean Harlow is without its challenges. It suffered considerably during the recession, from which local employment rates took considerable time to recover. There has been a significant growth in self-employment, now more than the east of England average. But there is also a problem with creaking infrastructure, much of it dating from Pram Town's conception. The housing stock is being updated but money is tight, and the many public spaces in estates provide on-going maintenance issues for local councillors. The local hospital, Princess Alexandra, has been experiencing capacity problems and has had to cut beds because of a lack of staff. Cars are almost a necessity as the town retains a rural feel on its outskirts and so petrol prices are a key concern.

Labour's Bill Rammell held the seat between 1997 and 2010 (holding on in 2005 by just ninety-seven votes). Conservative Robert Halfon won the seat in 2010 and quickly established a good reputation in the town and a formidable reputation in parliament as a campaigner on issues such as petrol prices; in 2014 he was made PPS for George Osborne. Labour re-took control of the council in 2012 and has held it since.

Harlow is much more complex than its marginal constituency status allows time for outsiders to understand. It is full of some really hardworking people, who see themselves as playing by the rules and just want to have a fair chance to look after their families and live their lives.

'You're all the same'

Without doubt the most frequent thing people said to us on the doorstep was 'you're all the same'. For a political party that often views itself as taking on the establishment, this was hard to accept. Some characterise this as being solely about policy, and sometimes it was. However, there was a more general perception about how we looked, sounded and the things we cared about. It would often be necessary for instance to point out to residents that no, actually Ed Miliband had not been to a public school.

Increasingly as time went on, we realised that 'You're all the same' really meant, 'You're nothing like me' or 'You know nothing about my life' - and to an extent they were right.

As Professor Tim Bale discovered in a survey of party members at the time of the election, just over two-thirds of Labour Party members could be categorised under the social grade definition ABC1; middle class administrators or professionals. Meanwhile just under a third could be classified under the social grade definition C2DEs, skilled and unskilled workers and non-earners

Harlow

(Bale, 2015). While post-election post mortems tended to focus on the failings of the leadership, there were some serious things for us as members to examine too.

Labour's supposedly superior general election ground game saw organisers ship activists into the marginals from safe seats. The result was some impressive social media photos and five million conversations (predominantly with the same people). In some ways this activist transfer intensified the disconnect between the socially liberal canvassers and those they were canvassing. This also combined with a sustained erosion of our grassroots activist base between 2003 and 2010, which had largely been forgotten about by 2015 but which was still important. Where grassroots campaigns were required, organisers were deployed to provide Astroturf.

Among our activist base manual workers were small in number, and increasingly the Labour Party was viewed like middle class Ryanair passengers having to stomach a couple of hours' flight with people they shared little in common with; it could be uncomfortable, but it got you where you needed to go.

Two brief anecdotes help illustrate this. First, in a meeting of around 100 Labour organisers a party official asked what papers everyone read. He started with *The Guardian* - cue lots of hands - then did a couple of others until he said 'and *The Sun*, who reads *The Sun*?'. Two hands went up, others booed, and there was some laughter. Much to his credit the speaker responded 'two million people read *The Sun*. But 98 per cent of us in this room don't know what the people we want to represent are thinking, and worse, we're mocking them?'

Second, on Thursday, 20 November 2014, in Rochester, Kent, Emily Thornberry, Labour's shadow Attorney General, tweeted a photo of a white van and three England flags draped out of the windows of a semi-detached home. The tweet was immediately perceived as Thornberry being 'snobbish' towards working class voters, and she resigned later that day. Neither episode ultimately influenced the outcome of the 2015 Election but they are symptomatic of a huge difference in attitude between Labour and a section of the public many thought should be naturally inclined to vote for us.

Harlow is sometimes said to be the home of 'White Van Man'; it is no coincidence that Robert Halfon's 'White Van Conservatism' and 'Blue Collar Tory' thinking have their origins in Harlow. Go back ten years and you'll find articles by him arguing that the Tories had to be more appealing to this demographic. In 2015 a common complaint on the doorstep was that Labour no longer represented the concerns of the 'working man'. One of the quirks of campaigning against Rob Halfon is that some of your most memorable moments are by the side of the A414 early on weekday mornings. In past years he has made a niche out of sitting at the side of the road with 'vote Rob Halfon' signs. In 2015 we joined him with our own signs. Harlow folk tend to not hold back and beeps and words of encouragement, or occasional insults, were forthcoming. By the end of the campaign we were keeping tally of the smiles versus the swear words. As everyone who held a sign by the A414 noted, Labour did well with ethnic minority drivers and women, and badly with white males.

As a party Labour had little to say to White Van Man. In particular white, working class men perceived the 'system', and in particular the Labour party, as viewing them as 'privileged'. One mid-forties former Labour voter opened the door to one of our canvassers just a few days before the election and said 'I'm a white working class, heterosexual Englishman who isn't on benefits, Labour aren't for people like me'. Tory policies such as English votes for English Laws and the EU referendum appealed here.

Labour's Identity Crisis

In truth Labour had a bizarre view of identity in 2015, too linear and heavily metropolitan liberal influenced. It focussed heavily on the Gordon Brown legacy of a 'Britishness' agenda, but didn't provide enough answers for people who felt left out of definitions of 'Britishness'.

'You let all the immigrants in'; 'You're the party of benefits'

The two things that put us most at odds with a majority of attitudes in Harlow, were the perception of Labour as a party for benefit cheats, and of having allowed an un-ending tide of immigration.

Ever since the Parliamentary selection in Harlow in 2011, it had been clear that the party establishment in Westminster was in a very different place on the issue of immigration to that we were finding on doorsteps in Harlow. The initial reluctance to talk about the issue at all caused a considerable amount of damage, which we did not recover from even when a policy offer was forthcoming.

Harlow had particular issues around immigration. In 2012 a large employer in the town had closed a depot, relocating a few miles down the road and hiring an apparently predominantly immigrant workforce. A new depot elsewhere in the town was thought to have been hiring from abroad over local workers. There was competition for jobs and evidence of an undercutting of wages locally, particularly among the self-employed or those in blue collar jobs, as a result of EU immigration. There can be little doubt that issues such as this helped UKIP to the 7,200 votes it received in 2015.

Our policies actually went down quite well around immigration when we had a chance to present them. As a general rule people thought it was a good idea to restrict access to benefits to economic migrants for the first two years, to employ more border guards, and to ban agencies solely advertising abroad for jobs in the UK. As the think tank British Future has noted, our problem was not a lack of policy on immigration, it was that we lacked confidence in finding our own authentic voice to tell voters about it. (Katawla and Ballinger 2015) Many of our socially liberal activists were uncomfortable when talking about it, and often not 'on message' when delivering our line on the subject. In Tim Bale's survey of party members, eight out of ten thought that immigration is good for the economy, with the same number believing that it enriches Britain's cultural life. This was categorically not the case for a majority of people we were meeting on the doorstep.

Some who had been directly affected raised concerns about economic impacts, but a good deal of our doorstep conversations centred on cultural concerns. Women considering voting UKIP would often talk about the pressure on services, and different languages in their child's school or the doctor's waiting room. Many middle class Labourites scoffed at such views; 'where would the NHS be without immigrants?' was a common response from canvassers.

Ed Miliband was right to talk about the root causes of people's concerns: housing, healthcare, job security and wage stagnation. But we didn't do enough to create a sense of shared place or shared mission as an alternative vision to nationalism - a real vision of identity which went beyond the well-meaning metropolitan notions of 'Britishness'. A greater focus on civic identity and local renewal would have been a powerful tool.

Anecdotally, where it did come up on the doorstep, those with more liberal social opinions tended to define as 'British' while those with more social conservative views tended to define as 'English'. To this extent, it seemed that Englishness did play an important role in Harlow, as a

Harlow

vehicle for nostalgia, dissatisfaction with a sense of decline in living standards and local area, and perceived threats to cultural identity around shared institutions, language etc.

Those self-defining as English tended to be white and working class, but Labour had little that resonated with these people. Our campaign literature spoke of 'working people'. But many people we spoke to didn't view voting Labour as being in the best interests of those who were working and struggling to get by. Sometimes even those receiving welfare themselves perceived Labour as encouraging too many people not to work. Similarly when Harlow experienced a series of illegal traveller encampments over the course of eighteen months, a majority of people blamed Labour, not the Tory county council (responsible for traveller sites), the Tory Police and Crime Commissioner or the Tory government. The specific statements people would make were also telling - 'these people drive their vehicles all over the public spaces, if I did that I would be fined'.

The sense that if you played by the rules and worked hard Labour wasn't for you was incredibly damaging, and meant that some people tuned out from the Labour party long before the 'short campaign' had begun.

'I don't want to be ruled by the SNP'

The Saturday morning after the first television debate our first direct mail hit doorsteps and the feedback was positive. People were stopping us in the street all day; 'I wasn't sure about Ed but I think he won me over last night'.

It was not until the final debate that the SNP became a notable obstacle on the doorstep, featuring more and more in canvass returns, particularly among older voters, and more evident in our phone canvassing than in our doorstep work - perhaps evidence that people were holding back from us face to face. It is also notable the scale to which the SNP were an issue in that we were picking this up late in the campaign; the entire trajectory of a short campaign is built to eliminate all but your supporters from the data by the time polling day arrives, meaning many of those expressing concern about potential for a Labour / SNP coalition had been identified as Labour at some point between January and April. A billboard of Alex Salmond with Ed Miliband in his pocket was on display in Old Harlow and the SNP featured on Tory literature.

The SNP presented two problems to us. Primarily, it engulfed us in an ideological war on two fronts. The SNP appealed to those on the Left because of its embracing of left wing totems on defence and economics - when we went over canvass returns I would often see the note 'would vote SNP if candidate stood'. At the same time it motivated the centre and the right to cast a 'stop the SNP ballot'.

There was also evidence of an almost Hegelian paradox of awakening self-consciousness around Scottish identity. English identity has become difficult to define in modern settings, however, with the re-emergence of Scottish nationalism, English nationalism found a helpful 'other' against which to define itself, and it re-affirmed notions in the minds of many of our target voters that a Labour government would not be for them.

That sense of identity was important, probably in motivating higher turnout among those more likely to vote Conservative than Labour, and persuading some undecided voters that the Tories offered a safer and more secure future than that offered by Labour. While we focussed relentlessly on 'switchers' between January and May, stepping up our work significantly to focus on this group by polling day, it felt like they were breaking for us. It is clear in retrospect that some of those people changed their minds again by the time they arrived at the polling station.

Labour's Identity Crisis

The longer the TV debates went on the less helpful they were for us on the doorstep, the 'insurgent debate' raising the SNP question, and the final debate highlighting issues around economic competence.

Identity issues did play a role, particularly as the Tory onslaught of PR around the SNP intensified. However, equally important on the doorstep was a belief that the SNP would offer a set of policies that were alien to a core group of voters (some of whom were previous Labour supporters). These concerns centred around perceptions of an SNP-influenced Labour government as economically extravagant, and dove-ish on defence and foreign policy.

'Nothing ever changes'

'Nothing ever changes' represented perhaps the deepest problem for us on the doorstep. It underlies both a disregard and distrust for Labour's 2015 'offer' to the electorate, given that a considerable chunk of that electorate has at best forgotten the positive change thirteen years of Labour government brought.

Harlow, like many of the first wave of new towns, had fallen on harder times since its heyday as Pram Town. A parliamentary report under the last Labour government cited decades of underfunding and neglect. Its infrastructure had aged, and young people aspired to move out of town. Housing was in short supply and a number of estates needed repair or in some cases demolition. Among some there was a sense of decline, others called it decay; 'This used to be a great town, a great place to live, but not now...' older residents would tell us.

The town needed substantial investment in its travel networks, the motorway needed a new junction to deal with rush hour traffic, the train line required four tracking, and the local bus network needed near wholesale reconfiguration. The town centre would come up again and again in conversation with local residents on the doorstep; it underpinned inward and outward perceptions of the town, and led to an undermining of civic pride and civic identity among some residents.

Another by-product of the lack of regeneration in Harlow was a strong sense of nostalgia, an inbuilt conservatism to protect what was good about the old. Immigration was caught up with all this, as was welfare.

In political terms, the disaster for Labour was that we had been in government for thirteen years and the town had not improved to the extent that many had hoped. The people who had moved to Harlow in the 1950s had a positive experience of the Labour Party making a positive, tangible influence on their lives; their children or grandchildren often struggled to find local examples of how Labour had improved things.

Many newspaper columnists and commentators visited Harlow during the campaign and almost all of their articles mentioned Harlow as a place where 'aspiration' was a key concern. But few really understood it. When I talked to young people in Harlow their aspiration was often to move out of town, and there was at least a significant minority of under-45s who considered that moving out of town would be 'to do better'. What national Labour policies truly lacked in Harlow was a convincing message for how people could do better and still have the sense of belonging that comes with living in a place where you have friends, family and cultural links.

In the wake of the 2015 Election defeat, some in Labour have begun to examine the alienation from Labour of its traditional working class support. Some of this analysis has centred around identity politics, usually in the form of Labour approaches to 'Britishness' or 'Englishness'.

Harlow

However, we agree wholeheartedly with Jessop (2003) that instead of being ‘nested in a neat hierarchy [senses of identity] co-exist and interpenetrate in a tangled and confused manner’. Local identity is just as important as other forms, but Labour did not articulate well enough the threat many felt to local identity, and had little to say about how to solve it.

Losing faith in Labour

It is briefly worth mentioning here Labour’s approach to faith-based identity. Harlow has vibrant and varied faith communities. In 2015 Labour barely engaged with faith communities, while David Cameron fell over himself to appeal to them (much to the consternation of metropolitan liberals). Few people believed Cameron to be a person of strong personal faith, and actually it is of little consequence if he, or indeed Ed Miliband, actually is; the undeniable truth was that faith communities do play a significant role in civic life, but Labour seemed reluctant to engage with them. Faith continues to be something that holds people together and provides common traditions that form an important part of identity. Somehow, a party built by Methodists and supported by working class Catholics in its inner city heartlands over more than 100 years, had driven some members of faith communities to voting Conservative. These are the people who run the food banks, homeless shelters, and asylum-seeker befriending services, and have been left to pick up the pieces of a retracting state. They should be the bedrock of a Labour coalition, but increasingly the Labour Party is perceived as ‘anti-faith’, looking down on it and not understanding or valuing the role that faith groups play in civic life. If the Labour Party cannot learn to be proud of its own faith roots, and the faith roots of England, it will forever have a disconnect from these voters, but more importantly it will show again its inability to understand local communities and what makes them tick.

We met people of just about all faiths and none along the way on the doorstep. In particular I remember a conversation with a traditional Labour voter, a working class practising Catholic ‘I always voted Labour, but I won’t now.’ When asked why, the resident responded that Labour had moved too far away from her - not in policies but in its general approach to faith.

During the short campaign one of the spikes in messages from members of the public was following David Cameron’s appearance at the Festival of Life, a cross-denominational meeting of Christians. ‘Where was Ed Miliband?’ read the dozens of messages following that event.

Beyond Harlow

So far we have outlined the role of identity in the 2015 Election in Harlow; now we turn to the implication for further afield. Harlow was one of ten New Towns designated between November 1946 and April 1950. Electorally they were barren places for Labour in 2015.

There are twenty-two constituencies where new towns form a significant part of the parliamentary constituency. Of these seats, Labour hold just four, which are all in the party’s traditional heartland in the north east or north west. It is also notable that the main New Town conurbations do not make up as much of these constituencies. In the seat of Bracknell, and the seat of Basildon and Billericay, there is little history of a Labour vote with the balance of the new towns being offset by different demographics. The remainder, then, are sixteen seats Labour does not hold. Of these Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Hatfield both have hefty Tory majorities but were won in 1997 and held until 2005. Fourteen of these are marginal constituencies to varying degrees. Labour has held all of them in recent history, and held all but Peterborough and Northampton North in 2010; two, Corby and Telford, fell from Labour to the Conservatives in 2015. Labour has to win a majority of these seats to get back into power.

Labour's Identity Crisis

But electoral necessity should not be Labour's sole or even its prime reason for re-founding itself in the new towns and suburbs. It is a moral imperative that goes to the heart of Labour's modern mission.

Why does the national Labour Party, with all its middle class indignation about poverty, say next to nothing about poverty outside its heartlands? The poorest council ward in the country is not in Hackney but Jaywick, Clacton according to the *Indices of Multiple Deprivation Index 2015*, yet Labour came third there in 2015 and was not in touching distance in the by-election in 2014. Labour's metropolitan comfort zone was out of kilter with a changed reality; 57 per cent of those in poverty live in the suburbs. (Smith Institute 2014) Moreover, between 2001 and 2011 the number of suburban areas with above-average levels of poverty rose by 34 per cent.

During its time in office New Labour was city-focussed, both because cities tended to have high levels of deprivation, and because they were the biggest potential spur to growth. Social Democratic governments across Europe did likewise. To get back into power Labour has to have a varied focus on deprivation and it needs to take regeneration and poverty in suburban areas seriously.

It is not the intention to argue here that Labour should give up its interventions in the inner cities. These will prove to be a lasting achievement of the New Labour years which changed many lives, and there will be renewed work to do when Labour returns to office.

But nor can Labour ignore the rise of poverty outside of the inner cities in places such as the new towns and seaside towns, and the complex issues of identity, regeneration and economic growth that go with them. But poverty and regeneration in areas such as Harlow will require different interventions and strategies from those in the inner cities. Even within the group of 'new towns' there are diverse needs and a one-size fits all solution would never work. The diversity of the new towns requires truly local responses to regeneration, which in turn would have a positive impact on shared senses of community and place, and begin a more positive alternative vision to the narrow nationalism of UKIP and the empty rhetoric and damaging policies of the Tory party.

In 1997 New Labour commissioned Lord Rogers to lead an Urban Task Force to map out a regeneration strategy. Today, Labour commission a suburban task force (including local government leaders) to share experience and plan a route ahead for regeneration in new towns, seaside towns and other areas out of the inner city.

Labour's membership is growing wildly out of kilter with the people who we want to represent. Labour has always been a coalition between middle-class intellectuals and the working classes, a party of Clement Attlee and Nye Bevan, Tony Blair and John Prescott. It has never been the case that ideology has been in control of the Labour movement; it has always been a pragmatic party seeking to advance the interests of working people. However, as working people have moved out of the party membership and key positions, so ideology has moved in. 'Existential crisis' has been an overused term since the election, but if there is one, it has developed because the party that claims to represent 'working people' does not contain enough of them. We need to raise up leaders from these social groups within the party, and we should investigate positive discrimination and specific recruitment drives to address these ends. We also urgently need to address the dearth of private sector employees among our membership. Our opposition in Harlow, Robert Halfon, is now the Deputy Chairman of the Tory party. His pitch to be a 'different kind of Tory' presented many big problems for us in Harlow. The biggest of these was

Harlow

that his style of Toryism requires the Labour Party to hold a mirror to itself and ask painful questions.

Conclusion

The conversations in this essay do not tell the complete picture of the 2015 General Election, but they do deserve to be heard, and the Labour Party must develop strategies to deal with the issues they raise if we are to be a relevant movement and party of government again.

We have spoken about identity in much of this essay, but in 2015 in many ways it was Labour who was experiencing an identity crisis. We were too obsessed with nostalgia and our past achievements. Most people really weren't that bothered about who set up the NHS. Who Labour was in 1945 was fine, but it was where we were and where we were going in 2015 that was the problem.

Labour has always existed as a coalition of middle-class, ideological socialists and social democrats and pragmatic working people working to improve their circumstances through collective endeavour. In Harlow it was clear that people thought that this coalition had become unbalanced. Labour's job to renew itself in the country must begin with convincing working people in places like Harlow that the Labour movement is the best vehicle to achieve positive and meaningful change. To do so, pragmatic working people will need to play a bigger role in the movement.

Having had some time to reflect on the disastrous result of the 2015 General Election, many have come to the realisation that it should not have come as a surprise; although analysis of why Labour lost the election largely focuses on the catastrophic losses we suffered in Scotland while mildly acknowledging our poor results elsewhere. But the reality is that it was Labour's failure to secure a victory in an England suffering at the hands of UKIP that ultimately resulted in the major defeat we suffered in May 2015. As a parliamentary candidate in Rochester and Strood, one of our Kent seats that we had previously held for thirteen years, I was given the task of taking the Labour message to the doorstep. In doing so it became apparent that there was a mood in the country that the party had failed to capture, a mood that had led many to believe that Labour did not understand their lives or share their values, and ultimately encouraged them to lend their support to UKIP or the Conservatives. The warnings were there as I knocked on the doors of previous Labour voters who told me that they were 'not sure' how they planned to vote minutes before going to the polling station. But I do not believe those warnings were heeded.

My experiences as a parliamentary candidate in the lead up to the 2015 General Election however, were not my first encounter with the attitudes of the public. Only a few months earlier, in November 2014, the Rochester and Strood by-election, triggered by the defection of Mark Reckless from the Conservatives to UKIP, had brought some of these concerns to the forefront. The by-election, as well as being a useful political case study, was also an early indicator of how the 2015 General Election would play out; not only revealing just how out of touch the electorate perceived Labour to be, but also questioning notions of identity, belonging and nationalism. Made ever more significant to me because of my own personal experiences and background as a British Asian, born and brought up in the UK but ultimately a second generation migrant. Unfortunately, Labour only managed to gain 6,713 votes while UKIP stormed ahead, with the Conservatives following closely behind with just over 13,000 votes. The prediction had always been that UKIP would win this election despite the Tory's throwing 'the kitchen sink' at it, but to see Labour struggle in third place was not only bitterly disappointing but also a red signal in a seat that, under slightly different boundaries, we had represented for over a decade. This result was made even more worrying by the reaction on the doorstep as I was told by person after person that they no longer felt that Labour understood their hopes and dreams, or even their lives.

Perhaps the most infamous example of the perceived disconnect between those communities Labour sought to represent, the party and its leadership was an event that occurred during that by-election. On polling day, I was faced with the news that Emily Thornberry MP, then Shadow Attorney General, had tweeted a photo that was trending across social media. The photo was of a house in Medway with three St George's flags hanging outside with the simple caption 'An image from Rochester.' The accepted interpretation of the tweet was that Emily assumed this display of national pride to be automatic support for UKIP and an underlying xenophobia, ultimately suggesting that such views were symptomatic of the working class way of life. In one image Labour had almost destroyed its foundations, displaying a growing detachment from our

Rochester and Strood

roots. The irony was not lost as, having grown up in an Asian household where the St George's flag could be found hanging out of the window during any sporting event, I had also spent the day with my team driving around the constituency in a white van as part of the campaign. For me the tweet itself was difficult to comprehend because its connotations were so out of sync with my own understanding of Labour values, having been motivated to join the party by the belief that it was Labour that truly understood my background, and was the only party that would strive to open up opportunities for those who had not been born into privilege.

Although Emily apologised and attempted to explain her intentions behind the posting, it was used by the press to highlight Labour's continuing detachment from some of our less affluent communities, and fuel the argument that we did not value the English identity. It eventually led to Thornberry's resignation from Ed Miliband's Shadow Cabinet, but the damage was already done and the implications followed us into the May 2015 General Election. The tweet represented a deeper problem - the growing view that Labour was a party for the Scots, for the EU, for migrants, but not the party of England. Although it is not as entrenched as often suggested, there is a reluctance amongst some in the party to embrace patriotism and promote national pride. These concepts do not always sit naturally with our social democratic or socialist principles, but the reality is that to a number of potential and existing Labour voters they are of utmost importance. An aversion to the institutions and traditions people hold dear has helped to create a perception that the Labour party is anti-English and does not share the values of the nation. This perception, while unfair, must be challenged if Labour is to win back hearts and minds.

To get a further understanding of why we failed to do well in places like Rochester and Strood and why Emily's tweet was of such pertinence, it is important to understand the nature of the constituency. Rochester and Strood are both towns that make up the unitary authority of Medway; other settlements within its jurisdiction include Gillingham, Chatham and Rainham. When people are asked to conjure an image of Medway those who have never visited are likely to imagine a picturesque Kent town - the Garden of England - with a rich history, large houses and affluent population. And indeed they will not be disappointed. If you visit Rochester High Street on a sunny summer day you will be greeted by Dickensian-themed quaint tea rooms, cobbled streets, a beautiful Cathedral and looming Rochester Castle - one of the oldest in the country - where people gather for picnics and concerts. The area has changed considerably over the years and has over time become home to the creative arts and an increasingly bohemian culture. In contrast, cross the bridge over the River Medway and you are in Strood where you will find industrial estates hosting a variety of small and medium-sized businesses, and hoards of commuters making the journey to the capital every day; without a doubt the towns have increasingly become home to those travelling on a daily basis into London, attracted by low house prices as well as the first high-speed trains in the country. Traditionally however, Medway has been a military area with a rich industrial history, and until the 1980s, when it was closed by the then Tory government, hosted a naval base at the Chatham Dockyard. Generations of families worked at the dockyard, with young boys leaving school in order to follow in their fathers' footsteps. My own family, Kenyan Asians, first moved to the UK in the 1970s, migrating to Gillingham because of the offer of work in the dockyard. As expected its closure, which overnight caused thousands to lose their jobs despite a cross-party effort from local councillors, had a lasting impact on the Medway Community.

Chatham Dockyard closed before I was born, but growing up in the area I experienced the aftermath and the effect on Medway's economics, and on the families who lived there. It has taken the towns almost two decades to begin recovering from the impact of having their industrial heart ripped out, leaving the area with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the

Labour's Identity Crisis

country, lower levels than the national average going into higher education, and comparatively poorer health. It was regeneration led by a Labour government, and heavy investment into colleges and universities, that has seen Medway begin to manage the impact. Medway now hosts the Universities at Medway, made of up of satellite sites for the University of Kent, Canterbury Christchurch, and Greenwich, focusing on training nurses, care workers and physiotherapists. But there is a long way to go before the area will fully recover and the figures speak for themselves. Recent government statistics show that 22 per cent of children under the age of sixteen are born into poverty and, while employment opportunities have improved, those lost blue collar jobs have never been replaced. Medway may host some of the most affluent wards in the country, but some of the area's poorest wards are challenged with high levels of deprivation, crime, failing schools and child poverty. The contrast is so stark that simply by travelling from one postcode to another in Medway the average life expectancy can drop by up to seven years.

Although with a gradually changing local economy the nature of the towns has also started to change, the continual decline of industry started by the closure of the dockyard has had its toll, leaving many people feeling disenfranchised and disillusioned. It is no surprise therefore that when it came to the voting in the 2014 Rochester and Strood by-election, UKIP successfully managed to harness support in areas that had been directly affected by diminishing industries. Typically, these were also the places that felt they had been ignored by successive governments and that over the years Labour had labelled as 'no go areas.' Waning numbers in local party membership and the number of elected councillors had hindered our ability to campaign across the constituency, but there was also a reluctance amongst the party faithful to speak to people in certain areas, knowing that we would not necessarily receive a favourable response. When the by-election hit however, it became all too apparent that these communities had the same concerns as others in Medway - with jobs, education, housing and the NHS at the top of their list of priorities. Crucially they also felt a sense of abandonment, that they had been let down by both recent Labour and Tory governments, and wanted to use this opportunity to show their frustrations by voting UKIP.

Time and time again people on the doorstep told me that this was a protest vote against the 'establishment', and an opportunity to finally have their voices heard. It was their belief that little difference remained between the two major parties and that we had become clones of one another. This was surprising given that going into the last election Labour and Conservative policies could not be more distinct - we were campaigning on introducing a living wage, and getting rid of the bedroom tax and zero hour contracts, while the Tories focused on the economy, their ability to reduce the deficit, and Labour's perceived economic incompetence. Yet despite the stark policy differences the widely held view was that Labour, like the Conservatives, represented an 'elite' that failed to understand the lives of the majority of the public. Although the political reality told us otherwise, it was felt that UKIP offered something unique and fresh and, with a charismatic leader at their helm, had more affinity with some working class communities than did Labour.

It would also be difficult to talk about the 2014 Rochester and Strood by-election without reference to the one issue that underpinned much of the debate, and was used by UKIP throughout the campaign to harness support - immigration. Standing in an election where UKIP were the favourites to win it is no surprise that concerns about our borders became central to the discussion. Predictably, Labour's approach to immigration was seen as weak, with the comment often made that we would 'rather put foreigners first before our own.' This belief was largely fuelled by how significantly the area had changed in the last fifteen years, and perceptions that the previous Labour government had a lax approach to immigration, a view that was not helped by our failure to discuss the matter in the first few years of opposition. Many referred to

Rochester and Strood

unlimited migration from Eastern Europe, which had placed pressure on jobs and the housing market, meaning that British-born citizens were left behind. Others talked of how they could no longer hear English being spoken as they walked down their high street or see a 'single white face.' Ultimately however, it was a sense that the world around them had changed rapidly, had become unrecognisable both structurally and visually, and had left them questioning their own identity. Historically residents in Medway, like other industrial towns across the country, were part of close-knit communities, often working together and socialising in the same local pub. This way of living has significantly changed over the years as globalisation and a declining industrial economy has transformed our family and working lives. And it is this sense of a changing world that has been one of the greatest factors in not only lending support to UKIP but in pushing notions of nationalism across the country.

As a British Asian standing in an election of this nature, on a personal level it was, without a doubt, an enlightening experience. I was born and brought up in the Medway towns and like many others of my background, I have rarely questioned my sense of belonging, identifying myself as British and, for the sake of argument, as English. The migration debate during the by-election, however, brought my own identity into question. As my family background was explored and scrutinised in detail, I found myself having to prove that integration can work, using my own experience as an example. Growing up in Medway I was used to being amongst a minority; although the area has a sizeable Asian community (many of whom arrived in the towns in the '60s and '70s), this is comparably small to other parts of the country. Despite this, I had always felt a sense of belonging, managing not to lose elements of my heritage while feeling a part of the community I grew up and lived in. But the by-election challenged this balance, as it became apparent that many did not believe that multi-culturalism could thrive in the UK and wanted to see those coming to this country conform to the 'English way of life.' Although when asked to define exactly what this was people found it difficult to provide further clarity; often it translated into examples of language, dress and attitudes towards work. I distinctly remember talking to one gentleman on the doorstep who was frustrated by immigration levels, which he felt were too high and placing undue pressure on the economy. I gently reminded him that I myself was the daughter of Asian migrants, he responded 'yes but I don't mean you, you can speak English.'

Despite, however, the heavy focus on migration and issues of race, identity and culture, people in Rochester and Strood showed their tolerance and unity when Britain First decided to march on the town. The right-wing, fascist group had a candidate standing in the by-election and they opted to use an opportunity in the middle of the campaign to protest against Islam through Rochester High Street, shouting racist and Islamophobic comments. As they arrived at Rochester station, largely from other parts of the country, they were met by hordes of local people telling them to turn back. After numerous failed attempts to make their way through they had no choice but to do exactly that. For me the Britain First march was fascinating for two reasons. Firstly, having lived in the Medway Towns my whole life I had never experienced anything of this nature, but clearly nationally there are underlying racial tensions that have led to the creation of such groups. These tensions, if left unaddressed, could lead to serious social unrest. Secondly, it gave a very useful and comforting insight into local feeling. We are a cohesive community and while many may have concerns about immigration they are not willing to accept racism and intimidation on their doorstep. This rejection of the type of methods right wing groups such as Britain First use to promote their agenda is a clear indication that there is an opportunity to have a moderate and coherent debate about migration and its impacts without subscribing to racist ideologies. In the past Labour has failed to recognise this, perhaps best exemplified by Emily Thornberry's tweet, consequentially leading us to ignore the issue rather than tackle it head on.

Labour's Identity Crisis

Finally, one other key theme that remained consistent throughout the election period was the public's desire to elect a government that promoted 'fairness'. This was not, however, fairness defined in Labour's terms, which largely focused on economic equality - ensuring big business paid its way. On the doorstep it took on a different meaning. Numerous people I spoke to told me how they felt migrants got a better deal than they did. How despite working two jobs they were struggling to make ends meet while 'outsiders' were being given the support and opportunities they needed. Many people were concerned about future generations and particularly how their children would get a job or if they would get on the housing ladder. Most were largely misinformed on the reality of migrant rights and felt that Labour were intrinsically linked to this system of welfare dependency. Unfortunately, as a party we did little to tackle the myths surrounding migration, although we did seek to address some of the welfare concerns people raised. During the by-election we announced policies to limit benefits to EU migrants until they had lived and worked in the country for two years, to not allow child tax credits to be claimed for those dependants not living in the UK, and to ensure people in public-facing jobs were able to speak English. Some of these policies were pure common sense, others felt like a reaction to the growing support for UKIP. For the majority, however, it simply felt like too little too late. The Labour party had failed over the years to set a coherent strategy on managing migration and it would be difficult to counteract that view overnight.

The 2014 Rochester and Strood by-election therefore provides an interesting insight into the ideas of Englishness and how these played out electorally. Although UKIP lost the seat in May 2015 to the Conservatives, those voters did not return to Labour and we were pushed into third place in a seat we had previously represented. Clearly we had failed to get our message through and failed to show how we could have a real and lasting impact on people's lives. In the lead-up to the 2015 General Election there were also fears that Labour would end up in a coalition with the SNP, conceding more 'English resources to the Scots.' Surprisingly even in Medway, five hundred miles from Scotland, I was asked time and time again if the rumours were true, 'would Ed Miliband form a coalition with the Nationalists?' And herein lies the challenge. If we want the Labour party to win elections once again, we must address the perception that we are not a party for England or a party that understands the English psyche. This does not compel us to abandon our broader social democratic principles but it does expect us to have a sense of pride in our national identity and the ability to relate to people's lives.

Such a challenge will firstly require an honest appraisal of our strategy at the 2015 Election. Given the scale of our defeat I expected this to have been our first response in May, a time of quiet reflection, using the opportunity to regroup and work out exactly where we had gone wrong. The party, however, launched into an immediate leadership contest that offered no scope to consider the election result but instead, despite Harriet Harman's best efforts, became one of the most inward-looking campaigns I have experienced. The contest is now over and we have a new leader who has energised and enthused many to join the party. But before we allow the momentum to carry us we must consider exactly what went wrong in 2015, with recognition that we lost votes not only to the Tories but also to UKIP. It will be this self-reflection that will allow us to address our weaknesses and respond accordingly.

Another area we will have to address is our approach to migration. People's concerns about immigration are not likely to disappear, and in fact have been exacerbated following the increasing threat of global terrorism and the Middle Eastern crisis. Progressive politics dictates that it is important to react to an ever-changing world, and that it is now necessary to have a coherent and measured approach to the issue. This does not mean that Labour must move away from its values or adopt UKIP policies in managing migration, globalisation and free movement

Rochester and Strood

across the EU, but we must not be afraid to lead the discussion. It is right that we challenge the myths that often surround the debate and refrain from scapegoating, but we must also understand people's concerns as they see their communities change around them. Rather than allowing UKIP to set the agenda, we should be the creators of a fair but firm approach that recognises the challenges for the modern world, striking a balance between the economic benefits of migration and the social challenges that it brings.

Furthermore we must look at how we present ourselves as a party and how our own internal structures operate, seeking to move away from the managerial style of politics, perhaps symptomatic of the previous Labour government. It is important that the party maintains its ability to manage messaging and offer moderation in its approach, but in doing so we should not lose authenticity or passion in our values and beliefs. People are desperate to see politicians they can relate to, who they feel understand their lives and as a party we should not shy away from a bolder, more open approach. Finally, while the issue of a Labour English identity makes for difficult consideration, it is essential that we begin to explore the options. Although in the past I may not have considered the notion, there is now a growing case for the establishment of an English Labour party, similar to the other devolved nations, progressing the aims and objectives of Labour in England under a broader umbrella party. While this is a proposal that is certainly open to debate it should be an approach that we seriously consider, rather than immediately dismiss.

Labour faces a number of challenges going into the next general election. Not only will we have to contend with boundary changes, having to win an additional 106 seats in 2020 to secure a majority, but also contend with a strong SNP in Scotland. If Labour makes no gain in Scotland, the party would need to perform better in England and Wales than at any time since 1997. This makes ever-important the need to understand the English psyche, and question the perception of Labour values and our self-imposed prejudices that social democratic principles cannot sit alongside notions of nationalism and identity. The challenge is a serious one and one that the Party cannot afford to take lightly.

10.
WIGAN

Lisa Nandy MP

This chapter is an edited transcript of a talk given by Lisa Nandy, MP for Wigan, to a seminar on 9 February 2016 at the House of Commons. The seminar *Does England Matter?* was one in the England and Labour Seminar Series.

We were asked to consider whether England matters, so I'm going to start by saying 'yes, it does'. And the reason I'm going to start by saying that so clearly is because in the 2011 Census 70 per cent of us in England said it did; 70 per cent said that we identified as English or English along with other identities. That's something that in Labour and Left circles was largely missed at the time. I know the IPPR picked it up and did a piece of work on it, but it's an issue that presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Labour. Not just in England but across the whole of the United Kingdom.

Much of the debate that we've had in Labour about Englishness has centred around the political problem that we face: the immediate electoral problem in the last few years being the rise of UKIP. While we're right to focus on that when you've got elections constantly, you've also got to think about its wider implications. The electoral politics is a symptom and not a cause; this is a social and cultural phenomenon that we're dealing with. This is quite a dramatic rise in the number of people who feel, who self-identify as, English. And to start with the politics, and who votes for whom, is to put the cart before the horse. I worry that in the rush to have this debate about English Votes for English Laws (it's not been prompted by Labour but it is where the energy has gone in the political debate) in the rush to talk about UKIP, or structures and the need, perhaps, for an English Parliament, or about English Labour, we haven't really stopped to consider what it is that we're dealing with.

We should pause for a moment to consider that, alongside that very dramatic rise in Englishness, young people in particular still identify very strongly as British, as do many other people across the age spectrum. Over the course of the last parliament, especially in the run-up to the Scottish referendum, I felt very, very strongly that people were still very attached to the Union, to the notion of being British. As I knocked on doors, especially in Wigan where you very often find a St George's flag flying above people's houses, what I would hear was that people felt that they had much more in common with people in the city of Glasgow than they did in the city of London.

At first sight it feels like a contradiction: there's a St George's flag flying and yet people are worried that Scotland might vote for independence. I don't think it is a contradiction. I tried to make sense of it by thinking about my own experience of being very, very comfortable to hold multiple overlapping identities. I was born in Manchester and am proud to be a Mancunian by birth. I'm proud to be a Wiganer by choice. I made my home there and my baby was born there. I'm proud that I was born in the city that gave the country its first free library and where the Battle of Peterloo was fought. In that city that has benefited from waves of immigration that has helped to shape Manchester and in turn Manchester has helped to shape this country. I'm proud too to have made my home in the Wigan that gave the world Gerard Winstanley - the Wigan

Wigan

Diggers Festival is still alive and well to this day - and stood up in the 1980s to Margaret Thatcher, and is yet again standing together collecting money and volunteering at our local food banks, pulling together to feed and support the community where the government won't.

I'm proud of those identities; that doesn't stop me from feeling English and proud to be English. And it doesn't stop me from feeling British and proud to be British too. Maybe it's because my Dad's from India, born and raised in Calcutta, that I'm so aware of how many aspects of our language, our food, and the oddities of our national character have been shaped by the role that we've played in the world and the impact that the rest of the world has had on us - through our membership of the United Kingdom, through our membership and leading role in the Empire, and through the influence of others today.

In the past we may have been uneasy about those aspects of identity in Labour and on the Left; we may have misunderstood or even sought to deny their importance. But there's another risk, which is that we end up pitting those loyalties against one another rather than seeking to see them as part of the messy multitude of conflicting, overlapping identities that we all hold within ourselves.

In the end identity is a search, for belonging and for inclusion; we find our identity through the things that we have in common, whether it's at the football match or the election rally or in the workplace; whether it is through our teams, our friends, our families. It's the fact that we're all Aristotle's political animals: we're deeply social with a human need to belong.

In the face of that search for inclusion and belonging, if Labour were to respond with a response that is one of exclusion, it would be a tragedy both for Labour and for the country. That is especially now at a time when, I feel, the thread that connected people across class, race and geographical boundaries was this feeling of anxiety about the future. There is this feeling, this lack of rootedness. It's no surprise to me that when people feel deeply insecure we're searching once again for what George Orwell called the invisible chain that holds the nation together.

It's partly a consequence of deep-rooted changes in British society, industrialisation and then the War. That decline of heavy industry and manufacturing has led to roles being much less rigidly defined, society becoming much less hierarchical and much less fixed. And there have been enormous benefits from that. I speak as somebody who's half Indian, female and northern - for me the benefits of those changes have been profound. But for many people those changes have also been incredibly difficult. Right in the middle of Wigan stood, until a couple of years ago, a Labour club. Labour clubs like those were dotted all over Wigan. Upper Morris Street was where people used to go, after work on the railways or down the mines, for a pint with their friends, their co-workers, their colleagues, their neighbours. That Labour club was a busy, bustling heart of the community. Two years ago it became a MacDonalld's and it employs young people on zero hours minimum wage contracts.

To me that speaks of something that is quite important for Labour. We were quick to grasp but then slow to act on the economic uncertainty caused by global capital and what it's done to people and their working lives. We were perhaps also able to understand but unwilling to tackle to its full extent the political uncertainty that comes from living in a world where multinationals have global reach, where Wal-Mart is the twenty-fifth largest economy, where nation states have struggled actually to determine the political agenda.

But where we have really fallen behind is in the ability to comprehend the social uncertainty that that movement of global capital has caused: the isolation, the uncertainty, and the anxiety that's

Labour's Identity Crisis

come with the demise of that Labour club. We understand low pay, we understand the zero hours, but do we understand that those institutions like Upper Morris Street Labour Club helped to shape us as we helped to shape them?

Our problem in the 2015 General Election was that while we had some really strong policies - talk about the work that we were doing on agency workers, and zero hours contracts, and small businesses and the self-employed - we had no bigger story to tell. Ian Watson has just published a book called *Five Million Conversations*. I'd urge you to read it. Unless you were involved in the election campaign, in which case I'd say don't - at least not without a gin and tonic.

In that book it sets out so starkly what all of us felt as we were knocking on doors. We took to the doorsteps armed with a factual, a statistical and an economic response when what people were demanding from us was an emotional response. And I think this is a problem for Labour if we think that Englishness competes with our Britishness. I think one of the drivers for the rise in English identity is the constant questioning that we've had about the future of the Union and the uncertainty that that presents. I think it's very difficult for people in Wigan to think through what being British would mean if there's no Scotland in Britain, and that's when Englishness becomes much more salient.

But we have had an unease with this notion of Englishness and we can't afford it. It's an unease perhaps that is tied to the experience of seeing those far-Right groups appropriate British symbols to their own ends. But we should have learned from that experience; we should have learned that if we don't shape this narrative it will be shaped for us, it will be shaped in the image promoted by right wing parties of xenophobia and racism and hierarchy and patriarchy and individualism. As Orwell said of Moseley, his brand of patriotism was as hollow as a jug. If Orwell were alive today and could see Nigel Farage I'm sure he'd have something stronger to say.

But there's the patriotism of Michael Gove and his British values that seeks to whitewash our history, not to understand it and learn from it. The patriotism that celebrates jingoism but doesn't seek to admit of the sort of raw honesty and patriotism of the likes of Wilfred Owen who speaks for us much more than Michael Gove.

I think if we got on the front foot with this we could tell a different story, a completely different story. The one example that I can think of in recent times, and I'm sure you've all thought of it yourselves, is Danny Boyle and the story that he tried to tell around the Olympics. That was a messy, different story that didn't seek to airbrush the past, but sought to expose it, and embrace it, and learn from it so that we can retain what's valuable but also change and do better.

It's that history of Peterloo, it's that history of the Levellers, it's that history of the Diggers, of that common endeavour. In the end this is our challenge in Labour: to give expression to that national story, to create that living, breathing bridge between the past and the future, to be what Paul Kingsnorth said was a nation without the worst of nationalism, to be comfortable with our identity and history without withdrawing into them. And for me that is about respecting what we've learned from other countries, cultures and traditions, and it's about understanding also what we have to offer to the outside world. I've never been so proud as to see the Foreign and Commonwealth Office campaigning against the death penalty overseas, I've never been so proud as to see British embassies flying the pride flag on LGBT rights day, being, as Ben Chifley, the former Australian prime minister, said, that light on the hill for people right across the world in an hour of darkness.

Wigan

And I think we could tell this different story, this story not of kings and queens but of ordinary, extraordinary people that only a small few like Eric Hobsbawm have ever really sought to tell. The story of waves of immigration that have shaped this country and the pursuit of different values like solidarity and common endeavour. Wherever I go I still see people across class and race and geographical boundaries who are fighting to realise the ideals that we hold to but we've never quite lived up to. Like freedom of speech, like the right to a fair trial, like the rule of law. This is what is going to determine the future for Labour: the extent of our ability to grasp, embrace and shape this search for identity. To ignore it will consign us to irrelevance, but to try to use it to divide people will be ultimately incredibly destructive both for the country and for us. Our job is to unite us in a story about ourselves that weaves together this messy multitude of allegiances into a national story. I don't say this as a substitute for economic and political change, but because this is the only way that will convince people not only that we must change this country but that they can trust us to do it.

REFLECTIONS

John Denham

On 18 January 2016, the Centre for English Identity and Politics hosted a seminar “*English issues*” and the 2015 General Election’. Academics, pollsters, commentators, strategists and activists gave different perspectives on the campaign. These and the subsequent discussion provide some analytical context for the essays in the earlier part of this book. Full details of the participants and their presentations can be found on the Centre for English Identity and Politics website (www.winchester.ac.uk/ceip) Contributors to the seminar are named in the text or referenced as (author/ceip).

In the closing weeks of the 2015 General Election, one issue dominated much media coverage and many doorstep conversations. Would a minority Labour government be propped up by an SNP that was predicted to have a sweeping victory in Scotland? And would that government be too weak to resist further demands from Scotland for power and resources? Labour politicians were constantly challenged to rule out any level of agreement - a promise that was both late in coming and pretty implausible to many when it did. Conservative billboards featured former SNP leader Alex Salmond with a hapless Ed Miliband in his pocket, and Nicola Sturgeon controlling an Ed Miliband puppet.

The Conservatives cleverly exploited the issue, using sophisticated voter identification and stratification to reinforce the posters’ message to reach those voters most likely to be swayed by the issues. (2015, and Ross/ceip) However, the Conservatives did not create the initial public concern, and nor was it an agenda artificially sustained by the media. Candidates of all parties, including contributors to this book, reported this to be a live, genuine issue of popular concern and discussion. (It is worth noting that none of the other ‘English’ issues in the election such as English Votes on English Laws, or English devolution, achieved any significant salience with voters.)

Close observers of the Conservative campaign, such as Tim Ross, political correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph* and Paul Goodman, editor of *ConservativeHome*, report that concern about the influence of the SNP began to be raised spontaneously in Conservative focus groups at some point after the Scottish referendum. Ever since the initial devolution settlement, English voters had reported concerns about its impact on England. (See John Curtice, ‘*How Popular is EVEL?*’, (4 September 2015) What Scotland Thinks: www.whatscotlandthinks.org) The perceived unfairness of the Barnett funding formula, and the ability of Scottish MPs to vote on English domestic policy, may never have been embraced by English voters, but these concerns had never previously become major political issues.

Following the referendum these long-standing murmurings of discontent seem to have emerged as much more potent political concerns. The referendum itself made many English voters think about their own position in the Union, and the closing stages were marked by desperate attempts by UK party leaders to sway Scottish voters. Gordon Brown described ‘the Vow’ - a promise of further powers to Scotland - as ‘a modern form of home rule’. These promises were made without any discussion or engagement with English voters who, as Jamie Reed writes chapter 6,

Reflections

were commonly saying 'we would like them to stay, but if they don't want to, they should go'. Finally, David Cameron's immediate response to the referendum was to confirm his party's manifesto commitment to English Votes on English Laws, with the clear implication that English voters would be disadvantaged by the devolution settlement unless further changes were made.

We do not know how these different events interacted to produce spontaneous concern about future SNP influence but there seems little doubt that they did.

Despite the prominence of the issue during the campaign, the hard evidence about its actual electoral impact is limited and mixed. There was no discernible spike in Conservative support during the campaign that can be linked to increasing prominence of the issue, as Labour's pollster James Morris of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner (Morris/ceip) showed. Two leading analysts of the election describe the issue as a 'red herring'. (Jane Green and Chris Morris, *Learning the Right Lessons*' IPPR (17b September 2015): www.ippr.org) However, Philip Cowley and Dennis Kavanagh say 'it seems unlikely that it did not have an effect from which the Conservatives benefited - even if a necessary condition for that effect to exist was Labour's own weakness - and it at least seems plausible that without that effect, there would have been no Conservative majority government in 2015.' (Philip Cowley and Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 2015*, 2016)

Tim Ross told the seminar that those involved in the Conservative campaign believed that their campaign did influence small but significant numbers of UKIP and LibDem voters who were so concerned about the possible election of a Labour Government that they were prepared to switch their votes to the Conservatives. Certainly the Conservatives, for whatever reason, attracted back a larger share of former UKIP supporters than did Labour. (Jane Green and Chris Morris, *Learning the Right Lessons*)

In a book that reflects the Labour experience, it is worth remembering that the Conservatives largely won the election by taking Liberal Democrat seats - Labour made small net gains in England - and these LibDem seats were heavily targeted with the SNP fear message

The dominance of the issue in the broadcast media certainly meant that little scrutiny was given to the Conservative record or their future plans. It limited the ability of Labour to argue its case as an alternative government, and the Liberal Democrats to justify their role and achievements in coalition. It can't be taken for granted that either party would have won more arguments had they had more opportunity, but it was certainly a frustration for party strategists. It did mean that the prospects of a majority Conservative government were never countenanced nor fully explored.

Having said all that, for most voters with SNP concerns, the evidence suggests that this became just one more reason why they were not going to vote Labour. Labour had fundamental weaknesses in the eyes of voters on economic competence, immigration and welfare. People could only be afraid of the SNP propping up a Labour Government if they had already decided that a Labour Government was an unattractive proposition.

In many ways, the emergence of this very 'English issue' in 2015 was the outcome of a sequence of events that is unlikely to be repeated. It required a high profile referendum on the future of the Union; consistent (and inaccurate) opinion polls predicting a hung parliament; a broadcast media prepared to take its agenda uncritically from those polls; a Labour Party and leader widely perceived as weak and unsuitable to govern; an SNP leader seen as arrogant and overbearing;

Labour's Identity Crisis

Liberal Democrats tainted by years in coalition; and a large pool of UKIP supporters who could be wooed back to their original party. Take any one of these away and the impact of the SNP fear would have been reduced.

If relatively few voters were actually swayed by the 'SNP threat' and the salience of the issue was the product of a unique set of circumstances, should we expect 'English issues' to return to the largely peripheral role they have previously had in English politics?

The evidence presented to the Winchester seminar suggests that this would be a mis-reading of events. For a start, other remarkable circumstances may arise - at the time of writing, the UK was weeks away from an EU referendum with potentially far-reaching consequences for the UK, national identities, and party politics. More fundamentally, three features of the 2015 Election campaign were distinctly English, and they are likely to be present in the future:

The 2015 UK general election was actually four distinct electoral contests in the four nations and provinces of the UK; English national identity is showing a significant correlation with voting behaviour, those with the most exclusive English identity voting more strongly for parties to the right; and significant parts of the electorate identified distinct 'English interests' in the election that could not be simply equated with what was best for Britain as a whole.

We should examine each of these in turn.

The English General Election

In the 2015 General Election different political parties won in each nation and province of the UK. Dr Rob Ford of Manchester University (Ford/ceip) highlighted that the main contests were between different parties - between the SNP and Labour in Scotland, between Labour, Conservatives and Plaid Cymru in Wales, unionist and republican parties in Northern Ireland and, primarily, Labour and the Conservatives in England.

It seems most likely that the next general election will also be fought as distinct contests in different parts of the UK. Without a dramatic change in Scottish politics, it seems unlikely that we will soon return to elections in which, in mainland Britain at least, the election is contested in most places between the major UK parties of government. Even though EVEL and devolution attracted little attention during the 2015 Election, their actual implementation, with the direct election of more mayors to large and more powerful local authority bodies, will continue to develop the sense that English politics is distinct from that of Wales and Scotland.

The outcome of the English part of the next UK general election is again likely to provoke debate in England, and in other parts of the UK. The Conservatives essentially depend on England for their current majority; for as long as this remains the case, tensions will continue to build between an England-based Conservative government and the other parts of the UK that will largely have elected different parties to power in their own parliaments and elected MPs from non-Conservative parties to represent them in Westminster. According to election analyst Lewis Baston ('Labour must win England with a bigger swing than 1997 to win power', *LabourList*, (1 February 2016): www.labourlist.org) it now looks - psephologically at least - easier for Labour to win a majority of English seats than a majority of UK seats, meaning that anything other than a spectacular recovery in Labour's fortunes would leave Labour needing to work with other parties to form a UK government. A plausible outcome, where Labour can form a government with the support of parties from other parts of the UK but lacks a majority even in England, will raise difficult questions about the legitimacy of policy-making for England. These

Reflections

uncertainties will continue to fuel the rumbling debate about a different long-term constitutional settlement for the UK.

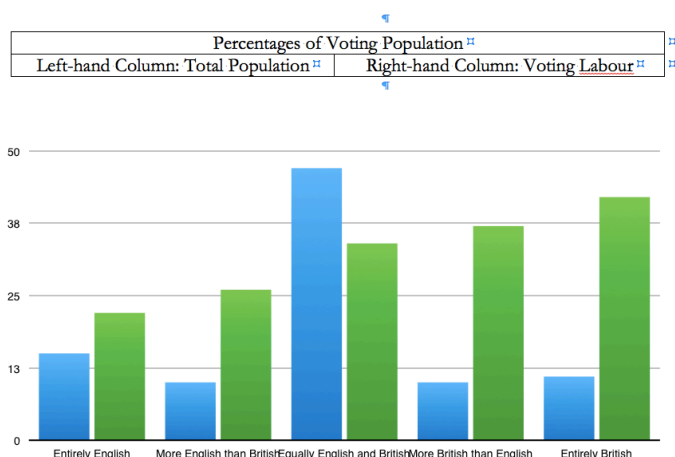
And the electoral context in England itself is also complex. Labour had little presence across large parts of southern England, the Tories had little influence in many parts of the north. UKIP, despite winning only one seat, came second in nearly 120 seats, faring worst in graduate-heavy cities and university towns. According to Ford (Ford/ceip), Labour was most successful in London, emphasising a cultural gap between the metropolis and much of the rest of England.

To Gerry Stoker (Stoker/ceip), Professor of Governance at the University of Southampton, the divergent nature of England's electoral contests also reflects the widening economic and cultural divide between cosmopolitan citizens - more socially liberal and open to change, and citizens in 'shrinking areas' - more socially conservative and more fearful of immigration and distrustful of the EU.

The fragmentation of the English electoral map highlights a difficult truth for the political parties: all are so limited in their ability to appeal across social backgrounds and in all parts of the nation that their claims to speak for England have to be heavily qualified. Of course, parties of different ideology will always have stronger support amongst some voters than others, but the inability of parties to reach even core voters whom they believe they should be representing is marked.

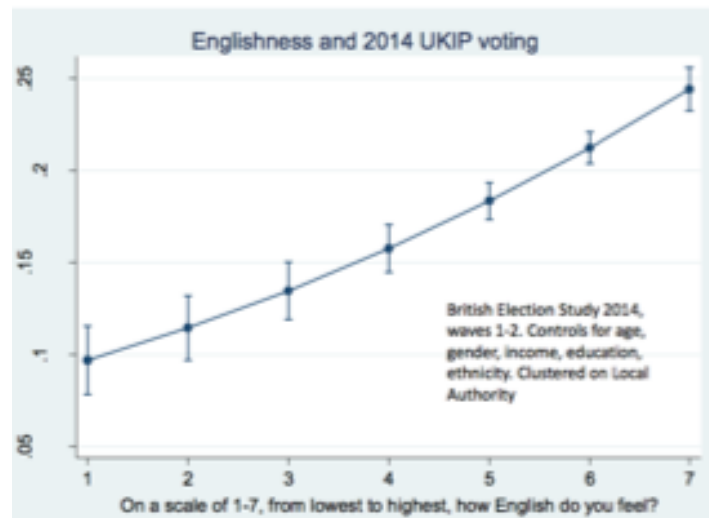
English National Identity

Whatever the impact of the 'SNP' threat, the 2015 Election showed that national identities in England correlated strongly with voting intentions. (*British Election Survey*: www.socialsciences.manchester.ac.uk) Those most likely to call themselves 'English only' were much more likely to vote UKIP or Conservative, while those who were 'only British' showed the strongest inclination to vote Labour.



Prof Eric Kaufman (Kaufman/ceip), from Birkbeck College, University of London, highlighted a similar pattern in the 2014 BES, which showed a correlation between the strength of English identity and support for Britain leaving the EU. Englishness itself is stronger among working class/poorer/less educated white voters and remains a more ethnic identity than British, which is perceived as more civic.

Labour's Identity Crisis



However, it is important not to make a crude equation between English identity and a particular part of the white working class voters. Seventy per cent of respondents to the 2011 census describe themselves as English, perhaps with another identity, and far more voters report themselves as being English and British than exclusively English or exclusively British. The evidence suggests that those who describe themselves as strongly English may also describe themselves as strongly British - in other words, they are strongly patriotic for both nation and union.

We know very little about what sort of 'English' people have in mind when they describe themselves as English. Labour may have lost support amongst these voters for reasons that were not, or only tangentially, related to national identity, such as welfare, the economy and migration. It certainly is not possible to say that voting for parties of the right is a political expression of Englishness. It is safer to say that those parts of the electorate with the strongest tendency to vote for UKIP or the Conservatives in 2015 were those with the strongest inclination to describe themselves as exclusively or primarily English (Ford/ceip). Nick Pecorelli of the Campaign Company (Pecorelli/ceip) showed that socially conservative voters were more likely to support both parties of the right and express an English identity.

Labour did particularly badly amongst these voters, enjoying support primarily in more middle class, more cosmopolitan voters and ethnic minority voters. In past general elections, Labour victories have been built, in part, on solid support amongst socially conservative working class voters (*The New Electorate*, IPPR (2013): www.ippr.org) and there is no evidence as yet that English national identity is a bar to voting Labour. Nor is it inevitable that parties appealing to national identity politics are based solely amongst socially conservative voters. In 2015 the SNP, with a broadly centre-Left narrative, was able to draw strongly on socially conservative voters, and a Scottish national identity is widely shared across groups with different social values in Scotland (Pecorelli/ceip).

Labour clearly faces the biggest challenge to regain support amongst these voters, and the essays in this book highlight the gulf between the party and this section of the electorate. Both the Conservatives and UKIP will want to consolidate their recent support here. The 'Blue Tory' initiative pioneered by Robert Halfon MP and the think tank 'Renewal' which has been reflected in a number of policy decisions by Chancellor George Osborne suggest that the Conservatives have understood this challenge much more clearly than has Labour.

Reflections

English Interests

'Fear of the SNP' reached well beyond the alienated white working class. As Labour's internal review put it 'SNP threat messaging had a strong impact with middle class families in England'. John Harris (Harris/ceip), a *Guardian* journalist, described it as 'an ingrained idea that the current shape of the devolution settlement has somehow allowed Scotland to have its cake and eat it – it's running its own affairs at the same time as its MPs are still influential in Westminster, and that puts England and the English at a disadvantage.'

The idea that there is an English interest that is not identical with the British interest was felt on other issues. The Portsmouth South LibDem candidate Cllr Gerald Vernon-Jackson (Vernon-Jackson/ceip) described the political impact of the closure of the warship yard in Portsmouth. Formally, this was a British company – BAE - that was building ships for the British Royal Navy, deciding which British shipyard to build them in. But, as John Ferrett writes in chapter 5, this was seen locally as an English issue, and one in which English interests had been sacrificed for those of Scotland.

Since the initial Scottish and Welsh devolutions, general elections have had distinct English consequences. English public services including the NHS, schools, social services, universities, and local government policy, have all been determined by the outcome of UK general elections, not by the choices of English voters. But the constitutional anomaly was more apparent than felt, particularly when Labour won in England as well as in the UK. Whether voters liked it, they were not particularly vocal in demanding change. Concerns only occasionally sharpened when, for example, Scottish Labour MPs voted to impose tuition fees on English students that their own constituents would not have to pay.

In 2015, English interests played a major part in the popular conversation. Does this mean that the genie is now out of the bottle and that English interests will always feature strongly in future general elections?

If UK politics reverted quickly to a two party system in which the major UK contest was also reflected in the battle for an English majority, English voters might learn to live with it again. But the more likely outcomes are ones in which English election results interact uneasily with the outcomes in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Faced with this uncertainty, English voters are more likely to ask what, precisely, is in this for us?

Conclusion

Political prediction is always fraught with danger, but prudent English political parties will respond to the 2015 Election in three ways at least.

They will recognise the need to aspire, at least, to speak for and represent the whole of England. In this the Conservative Party is currently doing far better than Labour. Whatever the limits and contradictions of the 'northern powerhouse', the Conservatives at least speak with ambition for northern England, while Labour has little to say about swathes of southern England.

Political parties will need to engage with those voters with the strongest English identities. It will take more than empathy with Englishness or adopting trappings of English identity to win their support, but without that point of connection they are unlikely to be listening.

Labour's Identity Crisis

And finally, political parties must be able to articulate and respond to clear English issues where these arise, ensuring that policy, delivery and governance meet England's needs. The days when it didn't matter if you said English or British because they meant the same thing are over.