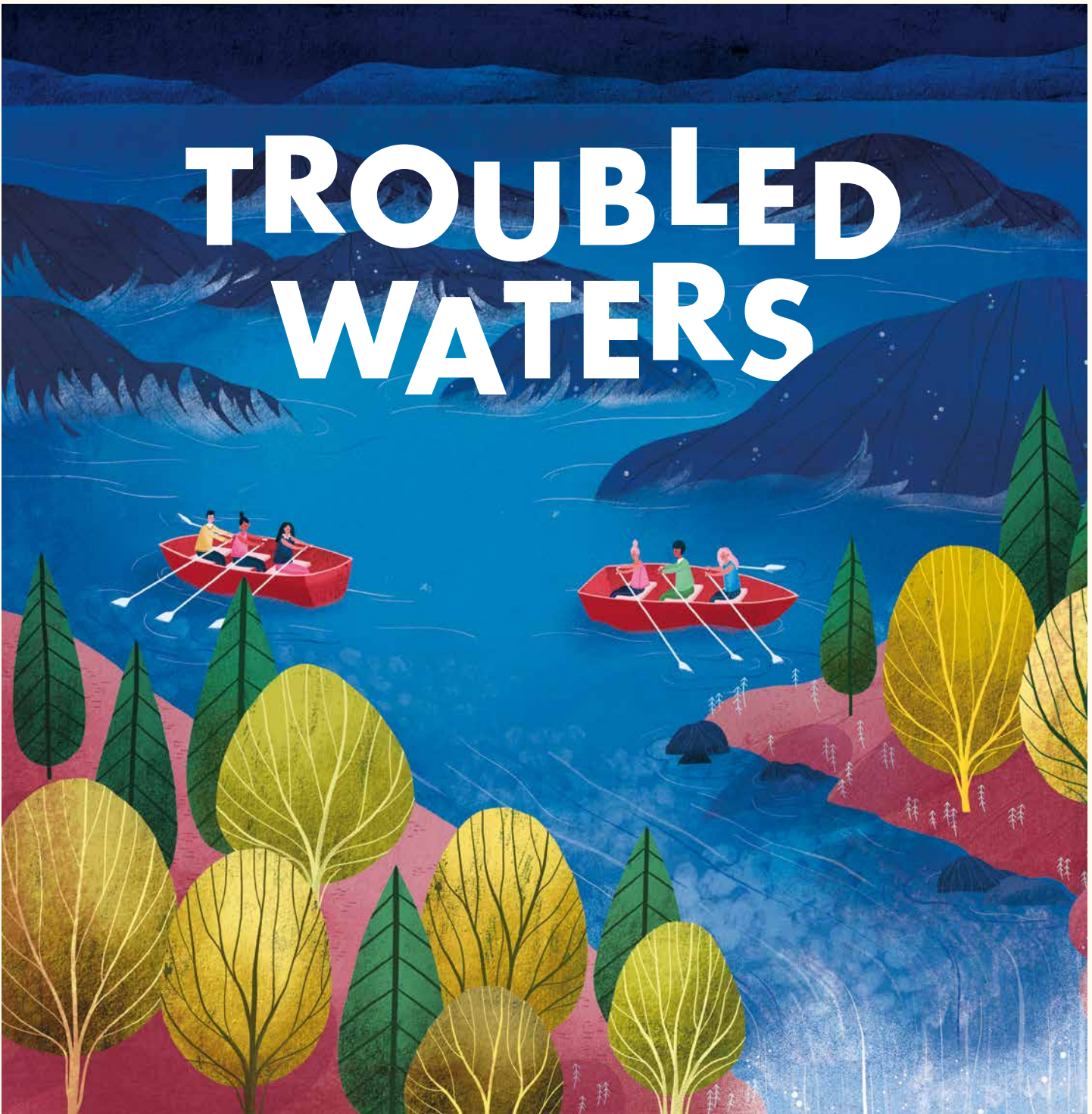


FABIAN REVIEW

The quarterly magazine of the Fabian Society

Spring 2019 / fabians.org.uk / £4.95



*Will Labour sink or swim after its biggest split in nearly 40 years? Dianne Hayter, Ben Bradshaw and Chris Clarke discuss **p10** / Anand Menon and Amy Longland on bridging the Brexit divides **p14** / Danny Dorling and Ann Pettifor take on the myth of Tory competence **p21***

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SOCIETY**

FABIAN REVIEW

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

Editor, Kate Murray

Cover illustration © Amy Grimes/hellogrimes.com

Printed by DG3, London E14 9TE

Designed by Soapbox, www.soapbox.co.uk

ISSN 1356 1812

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Drifting apart?

Labour has been right to seek a compromise on Brexit. But the divisions within the party and beyond now run deep, writes Andrew Harrop

IN DEMOCRATIC POLITICS you can't always get everything you want when other people disagree with you. So the pragmatic Fabian worldview has always accepted the place for compromise and accommodation. It was this spirit of compromise that led many remain voters with a Fabian mindset to accept the verdict of the 2016 referendum and to tolerate plans for soft Brexit as a second best to EU membership.

The same instinct has also guided how many Fabians have adjusted to the post-2015 changes within the Labour party. The society's membership encompasses all strands of opinion within the Labour family and the Fabian response to the democratic Corbyn revolution has been to build bridges, seek common ground and explore compromises across the left.

But there are times when an instinct to accommodate is sorely tested, as the demands for ideological purity mount. The Labour party remains bitterly divided along factional lines, in a way that is totally disproportionate to the mild differences between left and right on most economic and social policy questions. Too often Labour bridge-builders are being made to feel unwelcome within their own party.

The party's reckless mishandling of the poisonous antisemitism within its ranks has created another challenge. Some, like Luciana Berger, have been shamefully hounded from the party, but others have concluded they cannot morally justify remaining as a member. This ethical purity may be understandable, but it puts at risk the eradication of antisemitism on the left, which will only happen if enough people make a stand from within the Labour party.

On antisemitism and on Brexit, the formation of the Independent Group was a declaration of narrow purity in preference to the big tent. The breakaway is not a rebuff to Corbynism, but to the traditional Labour mainstream which sees a broad labour movement, with all the compromise that entails, as the only way to secure a government of the left in Britain. In abandoning pluralism, the TIGgers are a mirror image of those on the Labour left who want to drive away all but their own.

The allure of sectional purity – be it on the left, centre or right – is a reflection of how politics is being reduced to the expression of people's own strongly held commitments. The noble craft of representative democracy – to understand the diversity of others' beliefs, to bring people together and to forge compromises – is in retreat.

On Brexit, it was the nationalist right that initially refused to compromise. Our grave political crisis is the result of right-wing ideologues who will not take 'yes' for an answer and settle for soft Brexit. But the Brexiters' intransigence has now been countered by equally polarising demands from remainers, too many of whom seem contemptuous of the views of people who voted leave.

These leave and remain camps insist on the purity of their positions – no customs union on the one hand, and no Brexit on the other – and they pour their opprobrium on the compromisers in the middle, as much as on each other. It is sad to see the bitter attacks on politicians who are striving in good faith to find compromises to safeguard the economy, bring remainers and leavers together and achieve a parliamentary majority.

Having said that, even compromisers have to recognise that there comes a point where the search for accommodation must reach its limit. Soft Brexit is flawed because it means 'rule-taking' not leading within Europe. If it helped heal the deep divisions Brexit has revealed and exacerbated it would be a price worth paying – for a few years at least. But our politics are now so toxic that perhaps that will not be the case. Soft Brexit could end up being a compromise that pleases no one, with the public just as divided and embittered as now.

Or, given the entrenched support for both no deal and no Brexit, there might be no stable parliamentary majority for the middle-ground – either before or after a general election. We are deadlocked and the mid-way option looks precarious. Labour has been right to seek compromise but the party may end up having to make the case for remain. If it wants to be the party of the many however, it must first test to destruction the road to soft Brexit. **F**

Shortcuts



OFF THE TABLE

The failure of the Trump-Kim summit represents a missed opportunity for the world
—*Fabian Hamilton MP*

President Trump's summit with Kim Jong Un at the end of February was an abject failure.

Throughout his presidency, Trump's lack of diplomatic skill has consistently shone through – whether it be in his dealings with North Korea, Iran, or China.

The fact is that the nature of Trump's erratic presidency and Kim Jong Un's authoritarianism – and the bravado and playing to the gallery that lie at the heart of both – have made any substantial agreement unlikely, with little authority delegated to officials. So, although Donald Trump proclaimed a breakthrough after the first US-North Korea summit last summer, there is still absolutely no evidence that any meaningful and much needed progress on denuclearisation has been made.

The recent talks in Vietnam broke down due to President Trump entering into them without any concrete plan for peace. His dialogue with Kim Jong Un was only that – a series of conversations lacking the political will to ensure success.

The president believes that he is one of the world's top negotiators, but meeting the North Koreans without any meaningful offer resulted in the ending we could all have predicted. As much as he would like it to be, this isn't *The Apprentice* and President Trump's 'my way or the highway' approach won't work to resolve the world's most testing diplomatic issues.

In fact, since the summit in Hanoi, there have been reports that North Korea has restarted developing its rocket launch facility – which had initially been partially dismantled following the first summit.

These worrying signals of rearmament from Pyongyang mean it is becoming clear that President Trump's approach to North

Korea has achieved very little. The hostile rhetoric has been dialled down since the President pledged to annihilate North Korea, childish and undiplomatically referring to Kim Jong Un as 'little rocket man'.

But the name-calling has been replaced by a disturbing positivity toward the North Korean leader. The president has since referred to Kim Jong Un as his 'friend' and has praised him as 'intelligent' on several occasions. Acting with such blatant warmth towards a dictator who has no respect for human rights might suggest that Donald Trump has no respect for human rights himself.

North Korea's human rights record should also be particularly worrying for President Trump given the death of American citizen Otto Warmbier, who died in 2017 after his detention in North Korea for allegedly stealing a propaganda poster. It is sickening that this appalling breach of human rights seems to have been swept under the carpet in order to progress the president's unilateral dialogue with North Korea.

President Trump must not sell out on the United States' longstanding commitments



© Cage Skidmore

With both sides blaming one another for the breakdown of talks, it is difficult to see how either Trump or Kim could turn this around

to human rights and international law in exchange for the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula. Rather, these should be tied together into negotiations as a price North Korea must pay for the lifting of sanctions.

Sadly, the prospect of full denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula now looks increasingly distant. And with both sides blaming one another for the breakdown of the talks, it is difficult to see how either Trump or Kim could turn this around to achieve the permanent dismantling of North Korea's nuclear programme.

In abandoning talks, Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un have missed an unprecedented opportunity for disarmament as well as taking steps towards establishing a new nuclear weapons-free zone. Under the auspices of the UN, a successful denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula could result in a normalisation of relations between North and South, and also in the expansion of the UN treaty on the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapons Free Zone.

Binding treaties like this incorporate states into an anti-nuclear weapons umbrella, stabilising their region and encouraging movement away from a potentially catastrophic conflict. Multilateral agreements to disarm and move away from nuclear weapons really can be the difference between peace and nuclear wars.

Donald Trump's presidency has been defined by foreign policy decisions that have created greater global instability. For example, the decision to withdraw from the joint comprehensive plan of action with Iran has only made it more likely that Tehran will one day resume its efforts to develop nuclear weapons. All this was done so that Trump could fulfil an Obama-bashing campaign pledge. Playing politics in this way is wholly unacceptable when peace is on the line and millions of lives are at risk.

The Kim-Trump summit was abandoned as the table was being set for the pair's working lunch in Hanoi. And it's since become clear that Donald Trump's mistake is that while he managed to get Kim Jong Un to the table he hasn't managed to get him to eat. **F**

Fabian Hamilton is the Labour MP for Leeds North East and the shadow minister for peace and disarmament



FAILING TO PLAN

We need a change to planning rules for the sake of our high streets and housing

—*Roberta Blackman-Woods MP*

As Britain's high streets continue to dwindle and 'affordable' housing remains scarce and, frankly, unaffordable, the power of local authorities to manage these problems according to the needs of their local communities has been severely curtailed. Much of this is down to the government's expansion of permitted development rights.

These rights allow the use of a building to change and certain building works to be carried out without planning permission from local authorities. Since a planning application is not necessary, they bypass the local decision-making process. Permission is instead granted by government, supposedly cutting through red tape.

Back in 2013 as shadow planning minister, I objected to the extension of permitted development rights, though few people knew what I was talking about at the time. Labour stressed then, and continues to stress, that we are not against a change of use of buildings – but strongly believe it should be properly managed through the planning determination process. Especially because the extension of permitted development in recent years has made it very difficult for local authorities to plan effectively and in the interests of their local community.

It is fair to say that the permitted development changes that have caused most concern involve premises on the high street as well as the change of use of offices, launderettes, light industrial and storage facilities to residential accommodation. The government's expansion of change of use might have brought new housing forward more quickly, but there are significant downsides to this approach that are only becoming apparent now.

In a recent report, Shelter noted that since permitted developments do not go through the full planning process, there is no opportunity for local authorities to enforce space standards, housing quality

or design, as these areas do not come under prior approval.

Even more concerning is that the lack of community voice in the process means that developers have already developed a large number of flats in a relatively small space with poor quality design and in inappropriate locations. As a recent Guardian article revealed, permitted developments have allowed the creation of 'rabbit hutch homes', with studio flats as small as 18m² with no natural light, no private or communal garden space, located on a busy industrial estate with lorries coming and going from 4am to 11pm. As it noted, even our prisons do better.

The Town and Country Planning Association summarises perfectly what needs to change, describing permitted development rights as 'probably the worst planning policy mistake in the postwar era'. It emphasises the need to 'bring back minimum standards in design for housing like rooms with windows, children having some play space, and basic standards of energy efficiency'.

Permitted development rights are allowing the development of poor-quality housing that is not fit for purpose today – and is likely to make up the slums of the future. And crucially, developing housing in this way means that local councils are not able to ask for developer contributions towards the provision of affordable housing. Research from the Local Government Association has shown that thousands of affordable homes have potentially been lost since 2015. There is also increasing anecdotal evidence about the adverse consequences of people being placed in substandard housing on their overall wellbeing and mental health. The developments created under permitted development also reduce contributions to the community infrastructure levy which is intended to enable local authorities to provide the infrastructure needed to support new development.

And if the situation wasn't already bad enough, the government has recently consulted on extending permitted development further.

The proposed new expansion would create a new permitted development right for the demolition and redevelopment of commercial buildings for residential use; creating a new permitted development right to allow the upward extension of buildings for the development of new homes (or extending existing ones); and creating new permitted development rights to allow change of use away from key town centre uses.

Organisations such as The Royal Town Planning Institute have openly opposed

any further extension. But Labour would go further. We believe that the use of permitted development should be stopped altogether, so community spaces can be effectively planned. Only then can local authorities deliver strong placemaking objectives, improve the quality of housing and build the affordable housing we so desperately need.

The government's approach to permitted development is reckless and needs to stop now, before further damage is done to the quality of our built environment and our housing too. **F**

Roberta Blackman-Woods is the Labour MP for City of Durham and shadow minister for planning and local government



STAND UP FOR WHAT'S RIGHT

The threat to Europe isn't at its fringes, it's firmly in the centre

—*Alex Mayer MEP*

The symptoms of Europe's apparently perpetual political crisis have steadily become accepted. Whether it is startlingly high youth unemployment in southern Europe or the rise of populist parties, trends which would have been unimaginable before 2008 have become the new norm.

Worryingly, the fact that mainstream Europe has accepted far-right populist political parties as the new normal has amplified the threat they pose to liberal democracy.

United by anti-immigrant rhetoric and a disregard for minority rights, these parties are 'populist' in the truest sense, claiming to stand for the majority, even if this means crushing minorities.

The supranational institutions of modern Europe were designed to protect the rights these populists oppose: individual freedoms, independent judiciaries and freedom of expression.

The Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights and later the European Union, were an acknowledgement by national governments of their failure to uphold key rights against fascism in the 1930s.



They recognised that nominal democracies could vote themselves out of existence. Having institutions independent of national politics was supposed to stop governments undermining the basic pillars of liberal democracy.

The EU ratified the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in 2000, affirming that European citizens enjoy certain rights including protection against torture, slavery and the death penalty; allowing freedom of thought, religion, expression and education, and enshrining the right to a fair trial with an independent judiciary.

However, the extent to which these fundamental rights are protected has now become part of the political calculations of certain European leaders. This has led to some mainstream conservatives and socialists absorbing, normalising and tolerating these 'populist' views to further their own short-term political interests.

Mainstream groups in the European parliament, the centre-right European People's party (EPP), and the centre-left Socialist and Democrats (S&D), of which the Labour party is a member, have both turned a blind eye to member parties which are threatening the principles of liberal democracy.

The Hungarian Fidesz party has moved steadily to the right, under its leader Viktor Orbán. It has attacked academic freedom, forcing the Central European University out of Budapest and threatened the independence of the judiciary. However the party's authoritarianism and anti-migrant message of today is not just tolerated in return for its support, but exploited by other members of the EPP to curry favour with

anti-establishment voters. Manfred Weber, now the EPP's candidate for presidency of the European Commission, supported Orbán, criticising those who 'point fingers' at the Hungarian prime minister. In return, Weber won Orbán's backing to be the EPP's candidate for the presidency.

The British Conservatives in the European parliament have also repeatedly undermined moves to rein in the Hungarian government, regarding Orbán as a useful pro-Brexit ally.

The mainstream's protection of Orbán is one reason it took until 2018 for punitive measures to be taken against Hungary in the European parliament. And only now has the EPP suspended - but not expelled - Orbán's party. Too little, too late.

Perhaps as concerning for those of us on the left though, is the situation with our own sister party colleagues in the Romanian Social Democratic party. They are part of the S&D group in the European parliament, and part of the governing coalition in Romania. Their Romanian government has held a (failed) referendum in an attempt to establish a constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, has cracked down on those protesting against government corruption and has threatened the independence of the judiciary.

Mainstream parties and groupings are tolerating the illiberal. It is one thing to be a broad church, but it is another to have no common faith. Moreover, these are not shadowy backroom deals, instead everyone can see the cowardice.

The EU's lack of action in the face of these threats is often seen by critics as an inevitable consequence of weak structures and institutions. However, such an explanation lets politicians off the hook. The reality is that it is politicians who need to call out those who cross the line, irrespective of the short-term political costs.

Accommodating populism is wrong, especially for socialists. Morally, as liberals and internationalists, we have a duty to stand up for fundamental rights everywhere and to fight wherever they are threatened. Equally, we know that tolerating far-right dog whistle politics is strategically flawed. It simply drags the centre of politics to the right. We see it in the language used about refugees 'swamping' Europe, which moved from the extremes to normal public discourse, and took opinion and policy with it. We see it in history too, and the ultimate horrors of the second world war. Pandering to those whose principles that we despise has never worked and never will. **F**

Alex Mayer is a Labour MEP for the east of England



HUNGRY FOR CHANGE

Millions of people across the UK struggle to find enough to eat
—*Emma Lewell-Buck MP*

In the sixth richest country in the world, one hungry person is a disgrace, but millions constitutes a national disaster. Yet, with each passing day of this terrible excuse for a government, more and more people are falling into poverty with little chance of escape. There are no second chances in Britain today.

Hunger is a clear consequence of this government's ideological assault on the social 'safety net' and the people who rely on it. Its inaction on low-paid insecure work has led to people working day in and day out trapped in poverty.

The United Nations estimates that up to 8.4 million people in the UK are 'food insecure' – either worrying where their next meal will come from or unable to afford sufficient food at all.

There are now approximately 2,000 food banks in the UK in operation that we know of. That charities and faith groups have become a permanent part of the welfare state is a damning indictment of this government's dereliction of duty towards its citizens. The Trussell Trust (which doesn't even operate all food banks) has reported handing out more than one million parcels in the last year alone. However, as food banks use is an indication of last resort, it is likely the number of those needing assistance is far greater. There are legions of 'hidden hungry' who do not go to food banks and do not ask for help, either out of shame or embarrassment, or because they simply do not know where to go.

The all-party parliamentary group on hunger, of which I am a member, has taken a deep look at the growing issue of UK hunger. We have found that austerity, punitive welfare reforms, benefit cuts, and inaction on low pay and insecure work, as well as the widening gulf between incomes and the cost of living, are the main drivers of UK hunger. We also found that 3 million children are at risk of hunger during

the school holidays and that 1.3 million malnourished older people were ‘withering away in their own homes’.

We are seeing rising levels of hospital admissions for adults and children because of malnutrition. Poor nutrition is leading to an obesity crisis and a resurgence of Victorian illnesses such as vitamin D deficiencies, scurvy, rickets and gout – all impacting on an already overstretched NHS.

For the first time in peace time we have a food supplies minister. Yet, despite the uncertainty around Brexit, Michael Gove’s flagship Agriculture Bill, currently going through parliament, contains nothing to address food insecurity, since agriculture, as the president of the National Union of Farmers states, is ‘always the last chapter in any trade deal to be agreed’. This is negligent in the extreme.

The trajectory of travel here is worrying. To mitigate this, we need robust and reliable statistics to inform policy, as what gets measured gets mended.

That’s why I introduced a Food Insecurity Bill asking the government to measure hunger. Belatedly, the government has agreed to go ahead with the change and to start measuring hunger as part of its annual family resources survey. It is a welcome move. But it should not be used as an excuse for government inaction while data is being gathered.

Hunger is political, it is and has been used as a weapon around the world. In the UK it is being used, as articulated by the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, as the cornerstone of an ideologically driven programme where “the driving force has not been economic but rather a commitment to achieving radical social re-engineering.” As the special rapporteur has said, poverty is a political choice and “austerity could easily have spared the poor, if the political will had existed to do so”.

As we negotiate new trading arrangements with Europe and beyond, as global populations rise, as conflicts spread and as more extreme weather affects food supplies globally and domestically, food security will become an even more important issue. We must use the move to measure food insecurity as a precursor to concerted action on the devastating levels of hunger in our communities.

As I write this there will be a distraught mother wondering how she is going to feed herself and her toddler today. There will be schoolchildren struggling to focus because their stomachs are rumbling, parents who have yet again skipped breakfast to ensure

that their children did not have to, families searching their cupboards for what is left, and elderly people who are unable to access fresh food.

We must do more to end hunger. We owe it to every man, woman and child who woke up hungry this morning and will go to bed hungry tonight, in one of the richest countries in the world, to do so. **F**

Emma Lewell-Buck is the Labour MP for South Shields



THE NEVER-FAILING SPRING

With public libraries closing, more must be done to make books available at school —*Ben Cooper*

Most families own at least one book – but the National Literacy Trust found one in eight children who receive free school meals do not. Poverty makes it hard for parents to afford the materials children need to succeed at school and that includes books. As a result, disadvantaged children lag behind their richer peers in vocabulary and literacy skills by the time they start school, with one in three children from poorer backgrounds starting without the language skills they need. The Children’s Commission on Poverty found that “a third of children who said their family is ‘not well off at all’ have fallen behind in class because their family could not afford the necessary books or materials.”

Every child should have access to a wide range of books, both for learning and enjoyment. As a public space open to all, libraries are crucial to this. More than a fifth of children aged 4 to 11 said visiting a library was most likely to encourage them to read according to a Reading Agency survey. Libraries, both in the community and at school, offer access to a breadth of literature and knowledge that can inspire creativity, imagination, and a lifelong love of reading. School libraries, in particular, increase academic attainment, support reading and writing skills, and enable pupils to become confident and independent learners.

From the founding of Britain’s oldest surviving public library in 1653 to today,

the guiding principle has remained the same: access, as its original founder Humphrey Chetham said: ‘should require nothing of any ... that cometh into the library’. This principle makes libraries important for tackling inequality, and social exclusion. By enabling children to overcome socio-economic disadvantage, libraries make a significant contribution to social mobility and life chances. Research from the US suggests that children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds ‘benefit more proportionally from stronger school library programmes than other pupils’. Industrialist and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie argued that a library ‘outtranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people’, describing them as a ‘never-failing spring in the desert’.

But since 2010, the ‘never-failing spring’ has run dry for many communities and schools. Across Great Britain, austerity has resulted in reduced public library funding and a decline in branch numbers. More than 125 public libraries closed last year in Britain, according to the annual survey conducted by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. After years of continuous decline, there are now 860 fewer public libraries in Britain than there were in 2010. For the libraries that remain, opening hours have been dramatically reduced. Data gathered by the Labour party shows that more than three-quarters of the 150 local councils that run public library services have reduced access.

Equally, school libraries have suffered under austerity: a report by the all-party parliamentary group on libraries found that up to 40 per cent of primary schools with a ‘designated library space’ had seen reduced budgets. While there are no official figures on the number of school libraries in England, 53 per cent of members surveyed by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers said their school had no library. After years of significant pressure on school budgets, school libraries are ‘at a critical juncture’ according to the libraries APPG. Campaigners have called the closure of libraries, both public and school, a social mobility time bomb.

The next Labour government should seek to reinvigorate library provision across England, giving every child access to their social mobility-boosting, inequality-reducing impact. Labour’s commitment to end cuts to local authority funding to support the provision of library services is welcome, but the party should also focus on school libraries, providing support to make them a core part of its proposed National Education Service.

While library provision is statutory in prisons, it is not in schools. This is a source of deep frustration for library associations across Britain. A coalition of organisations is campaigning to change this, calling for school libraries to become a legal requirement, fully funded and inspected by Ofsted. Labour's National Education Service should consider incorporating these proposals at its heart, and ensure every school provides their pupils with library access.

Indeed, school libraries will be crucial if the principles of the National Education Service charter are to be met. This charter commits 'to tackling the structural, cultural and individual barriers which cause and perpetuate inequality' and to ensuring 'learners receive a holistic and rounded education'. If the National Education Service is to tear down barriers in education, prevent childhood disadvantage turning into lifelong disadvantage, enhance social mobility and support equality, the 'never-failing spring' must run through every school. **F**

Ben Cooper is a researcher at the Fabian Society and author of Primary Colours, a recent Fabian report on arts education in primary schools



A BITTER PILL

Big Pharma is failing us. We need public control —*Heidi Chow*

Labour is unequivocally clear in its aim to ensure our health service not only survives, but provides a better quality of care. Under the Conservatives, chronic underfunding has resulted in such huge pressures on the NHS that it is often described as being on the brink of collapse. But access to public healthcare, free at the point of use, is more than just putting funding into hospitals and GP surgeries. A Labour government must also tackle the problem of pharmaceutical companies charging extortionate prices for medicines, which is leaving patients without the essential treatments they need.

For the past two years, the Conservative government has been negotiating with drug company, Vertex over the cystic fibrosis drug, Orkambi. The NHS cannot afford its



© Fabio Hofnik

hefty price tag of £104,000 and Vertex is refusing to lower its price. This is heartbreaking for patients, knowing there is a drug that could extend their life – and yet it is out of reach.

The NHS is increasingly having to reject or ration drugs because of high prices, leaving patients without access to effective treatment. The NHS drugs bill was a staggering £18.2bn last year, an increase of 4.6 per cent from the previous year. Even with the financial boost announced for the NHS, the drugs bill is still rising faster than the NHS budget.

The Orkambi case and others like it, demonstrate that there is something seriously wrong with our health innovation model. Though we treasure the principle of public healthcare for all, free at the point of use, this is undermined by our system of privatised medicines.

Pharmaceutical companies defend high prices by claiming the need to recoup their research and development (R&D) costs. However, this ignores public contributions to R&D. Some estimates say that between one and two thirds of global spend on R&D comes from the public. And much of the early stage, riskier research that leads to breakthroughs is publicly funded.

Many pharmaceutical companies spend more on buying back their own shares, and marketing than on R&D. Investment is diverted away from researching genuine medical breakthroughs towards boosting short-term shareholder value. For an industry whose products are paramount for health and wellbeing, this is just not good enough.

So what can be done? We need to move away from the profit-driven model where decisions are made based on the areas of greatest financial returns rather than the greatest public health needs. In spite of the impending antimicrobial resistance crisis, there has been insufficient investment

into antibiotics as they are not profitable. This model does not treat health as a human right and is not delivering the health innovation that we need. Even when it does, it is at prices that governments can't afford.

We need bold reforms to enable the public to have greater democratic control over our pharmaceutical system. Right now, the industry is incentivised to develop new drugs by high prices. This could be changed so that innovators are rewarded with upfront innovation prizes rather than patent-based monopolies. The prizes would be awarded for addressing key public health needs and include stipulations that the innovation would be freely licensed to enable different manufacturers to compete and bring down drug prices.

We also need more public control over publicly funded medicines. Publicly-funded breakthroughs get licensed to private companies, which then set high prices and extract excessive profits. Taxpayers pay twice, first for the research and then in high prices. In the last two years, the NHS spent £2bn on drugs where public money had funded their research and development. To ensure public return on public investment, conditions should be attached to public funding that require drugs based on publicly-funded research to be affordable and accessible.

There is also a strong case for some form of public ownership of manufacturing capabilities.

The pharmaceutical industry already benefits from substantial public investment and is an industry of strategic importance for public health. The state could fulfil its obligations to ensure the right to health by taking on parts of the manufacturing and distribution process to supply affordable medicines to the NHS.

These proposals would lead to radical transformation in the longer term. In the short term, government could issue 'crown use' licenses on drugs where pricing is preventing patient access, as campaigners are demanding over Orkambi. This legal right effectively overrides a patent in the public interest by allowing other companies to produce such drugs at lower prices.

The crisis in patient access and spiraling prices means doing nothing is not an option. Instead, we need political commitment to reorientate the whole system. We need more public control to ensure health innovation meets public health needs and drugs are affordable and accessible to the people who need them. **F**

Heidi Chow leads Global Justice Now's pharmaceutical campaign

Backwards glance

The breakaway by the Independent Group is the most serious split in Labour since the SDP was formed. *Dianne Hayter*, who was Fabian general secretary at the time of that split, suggests big lessons need to be learned by the party from what went on then



Baroness Hayter was general secretary of the Fabian Society between 1976 and 1982 and later chair of the society. She is also a former chair of Labour's national executive committee and is currently deputy leader of the Labour Lords

WAS MARX RIGHT? Does history repeat itself “first as tragedy, then as farce”? When the SDP split from the Labour party in 1981, it was a very UK phenomenon. It drew on mounting anxieties from amongst the social democratic tradition in the Labour party that demographic changes were threatening the hitherto class-based appeal of the party, and also that internal fissions (largely between MPs and party activists) had produced unacceptable policies – mostly on security and Europe – as well as machinations to shift control from the parliamentary Labour party to trade unions and activists. The incursion of Militant into the party was also a factor, exacerbated by then leader Michael Foot’s initial reluctance to take it on.

These demographic and social changes weakening traditional voting allegiances did later come to impinge on our sister parties across Europe. They were compounded by the lack of a new left narrative to replace the post-war priorities of health, housing, jobs and pensions, and the progress in the 1960s towards greater equality, expanded education provision and higher living standards. In addition, the whirlwind changes following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, with the subsequent reconfiguration of defence, foreign and European policy, were not built into a left agenda for the 21st century.

Just as the SDP split was caused by internal party factionalism, a failure to respond to the changing demands of the electorate and policy issues, so the 2019 version also draws on internal party dynamics and a particular – albeit single – policy issue: Brexit.

Brexit – unlike the policy disputes of the 1980s – does not sit neatly on the left-right spectrum, either between or within the parties. It also – unlike the fissure over unilateralism of earlier times – is not a long-standing totem within the Labour party, having reared its head only in the summer of 2016. The failure to stamp out antisemitism is also recent, albeit of major significance to the 2019 breakaway.

It is for these reasons – that the new grouping is based neither on long-simmering issues, nor on academic or philosophical differences – that today’s split raises a bigger question than the SDP faced: what gap in the market has it identified?

Talk of “broken politics” is both nebulous and draws on no empirical evidence. At local and national level, most votes remain with the two established parties. Turnout in elections is not very different from other European countries, and participation in party activities has hardly changed and certainly not more so than involvement in other social groupings, all of which are affected by the internet and social media.

The new grouping has yet to set out what it wants from a realignment of British politics. If it is merely a response to the current ineptitude of the May government and Labour’s reluctance to oppose Brexit, this hardly makes a recipe for ‘breaking the mould’ as the SDP (unsuccessfully) set out to do. Indeed, once Brexit is “over” – that is decided one way or another – the cause *célèbre* might just fade away.

Importantly, the new grouping has failed to articulate a set of values (as the Council for Social Democracy, the SDP’s forerunner, sought to do). Neither has it identified its appeal, or “USP” – unique selling point – other than dissatisfaction with Labour and Theresa May. To date, it is not clear how the new grouping differs from the Liberal Democrats. In 1981, with a small, and ineffective Liberal party, there was undoubtedly some clear water in which the SDP could fish.

There are other differences between 2019 and 1981. The breakaway back then was led by some nationally recognised ‘big hitters’: four former cabinet ministers plus a dozen MPs. They had already worked together (albeit with some non-defectors) in the Manifesto Group – a parliamentary alliance of British Labour MPs – and earlier in the Fabian Society, had considerable support amongst local council leaders, and had the beginnings of a sizeable mailing list.



Today's grouping has few of these advantages save the 'second referendum' movement – and this will prove to be short-lived.

However, the biggest issue is not whether the two breakways look or feel the same. The real question is: did the SDP help Labour mend itself? And, if it did, will TIG do the same today?

Looking back from 2019, the SDP can appear to have been a damp squib. But without the intervention of the Falklands War, there might have been a different story to tell. Before that invasion on 2 April 1982, however, major developments in the Labour party had already meant a corner had been turned. One was the inept challenge by Tony Benn to wrest the deputy leadership from Denis Healey. Not only did this force MPs and others to decide which side they were on, but it also energised the new (secret) trade union caucus – the St Ermin's Group – to mobilise speedily to defeat him, and thus to set up the system and contacts gradually to change the composition of the NEC, build a majority to take on Militant and provide political backing for Neil Kinnock once he became leader in 1983.

Today, there is neither a war, nor a St Ermin's Group, to force the Labour party to use the shock of the breakaway to renew itself and cast out the scourge of antisemitism. Rather like Michael Foot – for too long in denial about Militant – Jeremy Corbyn, because he sees himself as a good person and free from racism, was reluctant to accept what was actually happening before his eyes. So whilst the Brexit issue might play itself out, the current intolerance in the party, with its desire to deselect MPs, remains and is all too reminiscent of what Militant did in the 1980s.

Did the SDP help Labour mend itself? And, if it did, will TIG do the same today?

Then the damage was done in general committees, today it is on social media as well as in party meetings. But the arguments for the activists on the left are similar: we, the party members, are the vanguard, the one true way, so their story goes, and all those who differ should be silenced (this, often, from people who have been in the party for a couple of years, addressed to those with a lifetime of dedication and work in the movement). These arguments are dangerous for the same reasons as they were in the 1980s: they are dismissive of parliamentary democracy and also of the views, the interests and indeed the rights of Labour voters (and the wider electorate).

Detailed scrutiny of the Brexit vote shows how many of the 'democratically dispossessed' voted leave, and how different the votes of university-educated or city dwellers were from the votes of people in towns and rural areas. Indeed, Scotland apart, the further from London you live, the more likely you were to vote to leave. Unless the Labour party thinks long and hard about this, and about the views of those our movement was created to serve, we will remain without a strong narrative and appeal. However, this is even more the case for the Independent Group. The more they are a pro-remain grouping, the less they are likely to appeal to core Labour voters outside of London and similar areas.

But while the Independent Group may not have a policy offer to appeal to the whole nation, there is no room for complacency. The group's effect on Labour will be driven less by what they do than by how the party reacts. If we hunker down as if nothing has happened, they can make hay. If we think about why they left and why they felt Labour was no longer their home, then perhaps we can be stronger rather than weaker for their departure. ■

Holding together

The Labour leadership must ensure all wings of Labour's broad church are listened to if the party is to win the victory the country desperately needs, argues *Ben Bradshaw*



Ben Bradshaw is the Labour MP for Exeter

THE LABOUR PARTY has succeeded when we have recognised and celebrated the fact that we are a broad church. The governments of Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson, Tony Blair and Gordon Brown had their internal tensions, but they all did significant good for the country because their ministers, from the different traditions in our party, worked together to deliver progressive policies.

If the UK had a different voting system, things might be different. The socialists, democratic socialists, Christian socialists, social democrats and the reds/greens who make up the Labour family might find themselves in different parties. But our first-past-the post electoral system forces us to work together if we want to be serious about winning power and changing people's lives.

The tensions in the Tory party are, if anything, even more acute. In a multiparty proportional system the Tories would already have split into English nationalists, Christian democrats and liberals (with a small L). As somebody who has always supported electoral reform and the political pluralism it engenders, I recognise that without it we are fated to live together in these broad internal party coalitions and, if you are on the progressive left, Labour is the only vehicle that can deliver the change we all want to see.

A number of my former MP colleagues recently reached a different conclusion. I fully respect and have considerable sympathy for their decision to leave Labour and form the Independent Group. All of them had their own individual reasons for leaving. Most of them had difficult relationships with their local constituency parties. This can never be easy and it is common for commentators or people outside politics to underestimate the importance and value that today's Labour MPs place on their relationship with their local parties. In Luciana Berger's case, this included the most hideous antisemitic abuse and bullying, which would make any MP's life intolerable, however tough they are.

The response of some in the party, including some shadow cabinet members who should have known better, was not helpful. Rather than call them traitors and demand they face by-elections – for which there is no historic precedent in British politics – it would have been more sensible to express regret and ask what we might learn, so as to avoid others following them. John McDonnell understood this, as did Tom Watson, our deputy leader.

The triggers for the Labour "TIGgers" were the failure of the leadership at that time to have committed to another referendum on Brexit and antisemitism. The week after the

defections, Jeremy Corbyn announced that we would now support a public vote on any Brexit deal.

There was increased activity on antisemitism too, with Tom Watson getting personally involved and Labour peer Charlie Falconer invited by the leadership to oversee the much-criticised complaints process. Some have credited the defections for these positive developments. The defectors may have played a role, but it was also surely inevitable that a leadership that has based its whole premise on party democracy and listening to Labour members would eventually have to honour our unanimously agreed conference commitment to another referendum when all other options have been exhausted. A growing number of influential figures close to Corbyn were also beginning to recognise the terrible and potentially terminal damage the failure to get to grips with antisemitism was causing the party.

But, in calling for a rebalancing of the shadow cabinet and for more voices representing the different Labour traditions to be heard, Tom Watson was recognising a deeper challenge. The shadow cabinet makes policy between conferences and election manifestos. Yet the current shadow cabinet is not representative of Labour's broad church. Some of its members come from different traditions in the party, but it is fair to say that many, if not most, are from the same tradition as Corbyn and have been appointed on that basis. Many of Labour's best brains and talents are on the back benches or chairing select committees. They are a valuable source of experience and knowledge not being fully utilised.

The backbench parliamentary Labour party (PLP) departmental committees have traditionally been the means of communication between the different shadow teams and the back benches. But these only work as well as the level of willingness by the relevant shadow cabinet member to engage. We might have avoided recent problems, like nearly abstaining on the government's pernicious immigration bill or the failure to deal with antisemitism, if backbenchers had been listened to sooner.

So, Tom Watson's initiative to ensure the full coalition of voices on the left, both inside and outside the PLP, is heard, should be welcomed by all who want the party to hold together, develop the right policies for the challenges we face, win the next election and succeed in government.

Whether Brexit happens or not, and I hope it doesn't, the damage it has already done to our country and our politics is so profound, that we will need both a superhuman effort and to hold all Labour's traditions together if we're not to cede the future to reaction and the right. **F**

A moral maze

Simplistic notions of good and evil in politics are to blame for many of the left's schisms. The latest breakaway is no exception, writes *Chris Clarke*



Chris Clarke is author of Warring Fictions: left populism and its defining myths

THE FORMATION OF the Independent Group (TIG) is the latest example of the left's historic tendency to split. Although the breakaway grouping contains three Tories, TIG's balance of members – and the values espoused – lean left far more than right. Early indications suggest Labour will take the biggest electoral hit.

The journey from Corbyn's election in 2015 to TIG's formation in 2019 essentially follows a well-trodden path, whereby the left turns on itself. To prevent a full-on fragmentation, we need to understand why this happens.

The resigning statements from TIG MPs offer some answers. Brexit aside, their problem was more with a non-inclusive style of politics than a set of manifesto pledges. The MPs cited the ultra-partisanship, abuse and policy dogma which they felt was represented by the Corbynite left. They suggested that approaches based on class war, cold war and culture war had made Labour a non-progressive party: anti-internationalist, institutionally racist, sympathetic to authoritarianism, and at odds with the interests of Labour voters.

Precisely how correct they were about this is for another day. But their diagnosis is important.

For many on the left, the political spectrum is a moral spectrum. The right is seen as spiteful, selfish or both. Individuals, countries, institutions, parties, and even religions are arrayed by the left along a scale – from victims to villains and from benign to malign.

This is less pronounced on the right and is, I think, central to the left's tendency to split. More moderate Labourites – those regarded as closer to the 'bad' pole – have their motives and principles traduced. And, as soon as a distinction is drawn and someone ends up on the 'wrong' side, it becomes a clash of good and evil: left-wing White Knight against right-wing Dark Knight. A narrow difference about nationalising water ends up as a Manichean struggle, with abuse and double standards entering the debate as a result.

Of course, most of us believe our values represent the fairest and most sensible way to run the country: as someone on the left I certainly do. But once you make this a moral question, deeper cleavages open up. So, while the values espoused by the right – personal responsibility, tradition, individual choice – are, in my view, harmful in their consequences, they are not malevolent in their intentions.

The case against 'Dark Knight' thinking is both ethical and electoral. For starters, the notion that 'left equals moral' encourages tribalism over pluralism. Humans are complex, and an individual can simultaneously be working-class,

a Tory, a gay rights campaigner, a banker, a climate change denier, and a supporter of higher taxes. But the Dark Knight mentality asks us to condemn the whole based on a part. As well as being a gateway to extremism, this prevents a 'broad church' appeal at the ballot box.

Moreover, the notion that the political spectrum is a moral one contradicts the idea that people are, in significant part, products of nurture. It's no coincidence that older people disproportionately hold socially conservative views. Or that those from Tory families are more likely to vote Tory. Or that those drawn to the far-right are often out of work. We can deduce who's right and who's wrong through trying to disentangle ourselves from our own lived experience and vested interests. But why let this bleed into moral judgements?

Lastly, the Dark Knight analysis causes the left to invest specific policies with moral worth. Methods like public ownership or non-intervention abroad become de facto good. As well as creating policies that often contradict Labour values, this too has a knock-on effect on electability. The public's hunch is that the ability to say 'this far but no further' is absent from the Labour left; that the emotional attachment to nationalisation or pacifism is so strong that the party would pursue them come what may.

The Dark Knight mentality is most pronounced on the hard left, where politics is defined by 'my enemy's enemy is my friend' positions, and by the 'no enemies to the left' mantra. In 1930s Germany, this led to the dismissal of everyone even a notch to the right of the Communist party as 'social fascists', interchangeable with the Nazis. In the age of social media, it has created a new set of caricatures – 'centrist', 'Blairite', 'neoliberal' – which cast ideological neighbours as sworn enemies.

However, the issue goes beyond the vices of the hard left. Milder Dark Knight assumptions have historically been common throughout the Labour movement. Like a 'Tories are lower than vermin' mug, sitting harmlessly in the cupboard, a spirit of moral partisanship runs deep. A tacit acceptance of the Dark Knight prism is part of the reason why, for moderates, the 'red Tory' accusation is so offensive.

In light of the breakaway TIGgers, the approach among some is to double down on Dark Knight approaches, accusing the newly independent MPs of Toryism and self-interest. This is suicidal for Labour and will only shrink the tent. Instead, the party must challenge the Dark Knight, us-against-them instinct and ask ourselves whether it is either effective or true. **F**

A game plan for the left

Politicians are struggling to attract support in a nation where how you feel about Brexit matters more than anything else. *Anand Menon* believes there is a way of overcoming the tribalism



Anand Menon is professor of European politics and foreign affairs at King's College London and director of the UK in a Changing Europe

I WAS CHATTING RECENTLY to a Brexit-supporting school friend who, apropos of nothing, declared that “Brexit is like football.” Prompted by me, he went on to explain. “Remember when Leeds were rubbish? And the only pleasure in life was watching Manchester United lose? Well ...”, and he smiled, counting the names off on his fingers, “Blair, Miliband, Clegg, Cameron, Osborne. We’ve pissed them all off, haven’t we?”

The story came back to me when pondering this article. Our country is profoundly divided, with faultlines as deep as those between fans of rival football clubs. The referendum of 2016 and its aftermath revealed a series of divisions which our electoral system had either blurred or prevented from clearly emerging. And they are numerous: between our various nations; between young and old; between rich and poor; between towns and cities. In addition, and perhaps most strikingly, the referendum seems to have generated another, deep and bitter divide, between leavers and remainers. This is hardly an ideal state of affairs. Equally, however, it provides opportunities for the centre left. And, unlike in sport, when it comes to politics there are ways of surpassing, or at least sidestepping, tribalism.

While the post-war era of British politics was defined by strong party loyalties, we have, since the 1970s, witnessed a marked decline in the numbers of people identifying with political parties. The evidence is there, visible in falling turnout, fewer people joining political parties and increased voter volatility. In 1970, 90 per cent of voters opted for Labour or the Conservatives and 98 per cent of MPs were aligned with one of the main parties. In the last election pre-referendum, these numbers had fallen to 67 per cent and 88 per cent respectively. The instinctive emotional connection with party politics appeared to be in terminal decline.

Subsequent to the referendum, however, there is strong evidence to suggest that new, Brexit-linked identities have emerged. Data from the British election panel study reveals that only 6 per cent of people did not identify with either

leave or remain in mid-2018. Meanwhile, the percentage of people with no party identity increased from 18 per cent to 21.5 per cent between the start of the referendum campaign and mid 2018, by which point, while only one in 16 people did not have a Brexit identity, more than one in five had no party identity.

Recent research by HOPE not Hate, moreover, underlines that Brexit polarisation remains as stark, if not more so, than it was at the time of the referendum itself. There are few, if any, moderates in this game. Academics Miriam Sorace and Sara Hobolt have shown that leave voters are more eurosceptic now than they were pre-referendum while remain voters are now far more supportive of European integration. Politico, for its part, devoted a whole article to the phenomenon of the ‘Brexit anxiety disorder’ that has afflicted middle class remainers.

Partisanship, in turn, has spawned a polarisation redolent of the terraces. We have evidence from the London School of Economics and University of Oxford that while leavers and remainers attribute a series of positive characteristics to their own side (intelligent, open-minded, honest), they associate more negative ones (selfish, hypocritical, closed-minded) to the other. Indeed, only a third of those with a Brexit identity would be happy about a prospective son or daughter in-law from the other side. Some 11 per cent of remain voters say they would mind a lot, and 26 per cent would imagine a little, if one of their relatives was to marry a leave voter (I’d struggle with a Liverpool fan, to be honest).

Nor should we assume that the actual impact of Brexit will serve to bring people together. The research by Sorace and Hobolt has indicated that new Brexit identities have triggered biases in evaluations of the current state of the country. The long and the short of this is that leavers and remainers have distinct perceptions of the same economic and immigration reality.

Indeed, perhaps the only thing that unites people is dissatisfaction with the performance of politicians. HOPE not Hate found in their regular polling and focus groups

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that, while the referendum itself was profoundly divisive, the prime minister's subsequent handling of Brexit has deepened those divisions. By January 2019, ComRes were discovering that only 6 per cent of respondents felt that parliament is emerging from Brexit in a good light, while 75 per cent felt that the current generation of politicians are not up to the task.

So what is to be done? In February, YouGov asked people what they thought would help fix the malaise that has taken over British politics: at 73 per cent – and the most popular answer by some distance – was MPs trying harder to work together to reach compromise in the national interest.

Fair enough, you may say. However, polling now consistently finds Theresa May's compromise Brexit deal – and whether you like the contents of it or not, it bears all the hallmarks of a grudging compromise – is pretty unpopular. In other words, those hoping that some kind of Brexit compromise might do the trick and, as some people are fond of saying, 'bring us back together,' seem destined for disappointment.

It is also striking (though perhaps no surprise) that the main thing that could feasibly incentivise greater cross-party dialogue and cooperation on a permanent basis – a change in the electoral system – was way down the list of solutions that voters think might fix British politics. Even fewer thought a new political party is the best solution, so maybe it is not quite the popular cure-all that many of the breakaway MPs would like it to be.

Indeed, there are other reasons to suspect that the creation of political groupings intended to take advantage of the new divisions in our society is not likely to be effective. This is clearly the ambition of the newly created Independent Group of MPs, lacking anything approaching a viable policy offer, yet anxious at any opportunity to emphasise the clarity and centrality of their 'values.'

Yet there are several problems inherent in this approach. In the first place, of course, are the problems inherent in launching a successful new party in a first past the post

system in which the two large parties have achieved a dominance unparalleled in recent times (they have not between them garnered such a large vote share since the early 1970s). Second is the danger of emphasising a values divide that, as we have seen from American politics, may spiral out of control, and which threatens to undermine debate about real policy alternatives addressing the precarious economic situation in which too many people find themselves.

Finally, on a very practical level, it is far from clear that the kind of pro-European social liberal approach propounded by the TIGgers is the most fertile ground for any new grouping. YouGov has examined the areas where the public feel least well represented by the major parties. Their findings suggest that leave voters are more likely than their remain equivalents to feel their views are unrepresented. Moreover, popular ideas that people felt have no resonance among existing parties include the notion that the justice system is not harsh enough and that immigration controls should be tighter – hardly Chuka Umunna's pet projects.

So what should the left do? A clue is provided by the 2017 general election. Certainly we saw some perturbation because of the Brexit issue. Younger, educated, remain supporting voters plumped for Labour, while the Tories attracted older, more socially conservative voters and far more leave voters (73 per cent of 2015 UKIP voters voted Conservative in 2017).

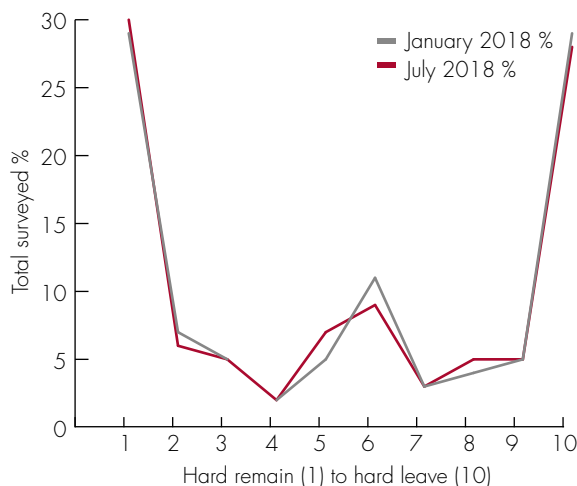
Nevertheless, far from being simply a 'Brexit election,' the events of June 2017 revealed that classic left-right attitudes remained the primary driver of voter choice in Britain. And it is here that the left must focus. While all politicians are tainted with the brush of what the public see as a bungled Brexit process, there is an appetite, driven not least by what the referendum revealed, to address the drivers of discontent.

This was true to such an extent that even the Tory party, via its newly elected prime minister and its 2017 manifesto, saw fit to challenge its own economic orthodoxies, and point to the numerous injustices that characterise the workings of British politics and the British economy. Jeremy Corbyn's anti-austerity platform proved singularly popular, to the point of confounding pollsters and the political class alike.

This is a pointer to the kind of direction in which the left needs to go. Tory concessions aimed at winning support for May's Brexit deal have rolled the pitch for policies targeted at less well-off communities and those labelled by the prime minister herself as the 'just about managing.' Public resentment at the failure of politicians has been engendered in part by the farce over Brexit, and in part too by the fact that a focus on Brexit has meant that parliament has done little or nothing to address the real problems confronting the country. The widening of the so-called 'Overton window', in other words, has created an open goal for the left.

The crowds that have ebbed and flowed around parliament, like fans immediately before the big match, are perhaps a symptom of something. But banner-wavers around College Green are so far from the cause of the current political crisis that they provide little indication of what we could actually do to solve it. Convincing people, whatever side they're on, that politics is aiming to work in their interests would be a start, and the left is ideally placed to put forward policies designed to show just that. **F**

'I think of myself as a remain voter' vs 'I think of myself as a leave voter'



Source: HOPE not Hate 'Deepening Divides: How to Resolve the Brexit deadlock', 2019

Politicising the people

We must turn the divisions exposed by Brexit into an opportunity to effect real change in decision-making, argues *Amy Longland*



Amy Longland is chief operating officer of My Life My Say, a charity which seeks to empower young people to participate in democracy

SINCE THE MOMENT David Cameron announced there would be an in/out EU referendum in early 2016, Brexit has become all-consuming. Trust in politicians and public figures has never been particularly high in the UK. The political 'Westminster bubble' has managed to create a reputation for itself that embodies everything the representation of the people really should not be: seemingly out of touch with normal people; opportunist and self-interested; imbued with sex-and-sleaze scandals and incapable of doing their jobs properly. Only 21 per cent of Britons say they'd trust an MP to tell the truth. It is against this backdrop that the unashamedly opportunist move by the ex-prime minister set wheels in motion that will continue to turn long after the Brexit question is settled.

The referendum exposed deep divisions in the social fabric of the UK and demonstrated the divided nature of the two main political parties. It also gave a voice to huge numbers of the British populace who have felt left behind and overlooked for decades. None of these phenomena are new: they were all simmering under the surface, and just needed a binary issue such as Brexit to bring them boiling to the top.

People's distrust in politics

The EU referendum was the catalyst that enabled British people to mobilise, to understand what political activism was really about and to realise that they could actually influence decision-making. Importantly it gave young people, such as myself, an incentive to become more politically engaged. The challenge now is to channel this mobilisation into something positive and empowering for future generations. Otherwise the toxic political pantomime that is British politics risks turning away our nation's youth irrevocably.

Britain stands at a precipice: either the nation comes together with a renewed sense of purpose and ownership, feeling empowered, politicised and closer to decision-making than ever before. Or the political engagement that we have seen among young and old alike will peter out and we will end up with a more deeply entrenched sense of disillusionment.

There is no denying that Brexit unveiled an ugly side of politics in the lead-up to the referendum, during the

campaign and the fallout since. It has the potential to make or break the social contract between government and people irreparably.

The mud-slinging

Almost immediately after David Cameron announced that he would be holding the referendum, the leave and remain camps were formalised, with the resources to build ammunition, recruit foot-soldiers and to court the media. The ensuing campaigns needed simple, powerful and memorable messaging so that vast swathes of the population could be rallied to turn out to vote when many had never done so before in their lives.

Vote Leave began at an advantage, born against a backdrop of rising far-right sentiment that saw UKIP succeed in creating a brand centred on anti-establishment and consequently, anti-EU sentiment. The leave campaign tapped into the ingrained fears of those who felt overlooked and left behind: suspicious of the sharp hikes in immigration in their local areas, baffled by globalisation and confused by technology that had robbed many of them of their jobs. These people felt lost in a nation that they no longer recognised. And the mantra of Vote Leave – 'take back control' led their supporters to believe they had an opportunity to take ownership of an issue that they believed directly affected them and influence the outcome in a way that would give them a sense of purpose again.

Conversely, the remain camp struggled to find a similarly strong message on which to lean their campaign for Britain to remain in the EU. The fact that multiple politicians, public figures and experts all came out with various arguments over why Britain should stay only perpetuated the anti-establishment argument of the opposing side. Ultimately, the Stronger In campaign was arguing for the maintenance of status-quo – something that many people were hungry to reject. It lacked a message that people could get behind.

And while the EU referendum mobilised a huge number of people and saw a record-breaking turnout, most people who went to the ballot box on that fateful day in June 2016 were hugely misinformed or ill-informed, acting predominantly on emotion. A lot of voters did not feel

as though they could trust the media, the campaigns or the politicians – and ended up plumping for the option that seemed the loudest and most sure of itself.

The ensuing chaos

The Brexit negotiations since the triggering of Article 50 have been a shambles – and many politicians seem quite overwhelmed by the chaos.

Of course, the negotiations have been a legislative battle that would have been hard for anyone to win. With so many factions, inside our main political parties and beyond, there was no outcome that would please everyone. Theresa May's withdrawal agreement was too much of a compromise. Yet the biggest sticking point – the Northern Irish backstop – and the differing standpoints of those opposed to it show clearly how multiple groups can oppose the same thing for entirely different reasons and, at the same time, fail to agree on an alternative.

Yet the Northern Irish backstop means little to many voters, who instead see government basically disintegrating in front of their eyes, polarised and paralysed, over an issue which seems distant and confusing. And we've had the spectacle of the prime minister yo-yo-ing back and forth from Brussels, attempting to placate the rebels and suffering record-breaking defeats.

For the British layperson attempting to make sense of a government which appears to be completely imploding, this does not inspire confidence in our political institutions. For young people who have historically felt overlooked in the decision-making processes, the pantomime taking place in parliament seems to compound their lack of faith that politicians are actually working for their benefit. Meanwhile, important legislation on other big issues affecting their daily lives is not being discussed let alone passed. Brexit has had a huge effect on general trust in the efficacy of political institutions to deliver, be held accountable and to get things done quickly.

For those on both sides of the Brexit divide, the future they envisioned is slipping away: for leavers, a delay to Brexit is a betrayal of their democratic will to leave, while remainers – including those who were too young to vote back in 2016, are dismayed by the continuing threat of leaving.

What happens now?

The deep divisions in this nation – young and old, rich and poor, north and south, graduates and non-graduates will only become further entrenched if people do not stop yelling and start listening. Unless people start having genuine forward-looking conversations about the future of Britain, and unless we start trying to move forward from Brexit there is a very real danger that people will be turned away from politics altogether and become completely fatigued not just by Brexit but by the ideas of political engagement and community activism.

Our democratic processes may be well-entrenched and mostly effective, but that does not mean that Britain's democracy is failsafe. In fact, we need to take a long hard look at the way that decision-making is carried out. At the moment, it seems ineffective: embedded in tradition,

archaic and serving only the individual purposes of MPs or parties. Many politicians seem to forget the total exposure of their debates on TV and the availability of footage. They forget too the shareability of videos or memes and the instantaneous nature of backlash on social media. When they are heckling and pontificating and shouting each other down they are validating a form of debate that focuses on who shouts the loudest rather than on respectful listening to opposing points of view. The politicians in the Houses of Parliament need to take a step back and begin championing innovative, respectful and inclusive ways of deliberating and making decisions.

There should be a renewed focus on civic education in schools. We must learn from the grave misinformation that characterised the referendum campaigns, and advocate for critical thinking and the importance of open and honest debate and discussion. Instead of shrinking the pot further, there should be sustained support and increased funding for organisations that deliver this kind of outreach – bringing people together to discuss the key issues of the day – and not just because of specific events or milestones such as a general election or the women's centenary. This would kick-start discussions about the future of the country that are issues-based rather than ideology-based.

Members of the British public – young people from underrepresented communities especially – should be embedded within the decision-making structures in a meaningful way. The government should utilise all-party parliamentary groups, give those affected a seat at the table, or enable young people to make a meaningful contribution to the process. Campaigns, marches and petitions must not fall on deaf ears: they must be adequately listened to and acted upon. These tools are the cornerstone of democracies and if the people are using them then they must be heeded.

Healthy and honest discussion between divergent groups needs to be facilitated, by maintaining and protecting the safe spaces that these communities frequent: community centres, youth clubs, independent local cafes, for example. By utilising members of those communities to conduct the outreach, gather insight into those groups, and feed it back to decision-makers, more effective conversations will take place that trickle down to other members of the community. This in turn will lead to a longer lasting sense of community cohesion, helping to build a country that everyone wants to live in.

The ripple effect of Brexit will be felt for decades if the two entrenched extremes of leave and remain are not able to enter into dialogue and discussion. There is deep-seated anger and resentment among voters on both sides, who are now sitting on the sidelines watching the world's oldest democracy near-on implode. But instead of bemoaning the state we are in, we should seize the opportunity to tap into this political turmoil and drive the country towards a renewed sense of purpose.

Brexit is the double-edged sword of modern politics: both a huge danger to political engagement across the UK and an unprecedented opportunity to effect real change in decision-making. ■

The government should give those affected a seat at the table



AGAINST

Since the referendum was announced through to the Brexit negotiations, politicians and commentators have failed to predict which way the wind is blowing. Is Richard Corbett the exception? *Kate Murray* talks to Labour's leader in the European parliament – a man who knows a lot, but whom few know much about

THE

ODDS

IF RICHARD CORBETT ever tires of the fight to keep the UK at the heart of Europe, he could do worse than take up a career as a tipster. For, unlike the vast majority of politicians and pundits, the Brexit referendum result didn't come as a surprise to him. "A month before the referendum, we had a little bet among some Labour MEPs and I was the only one who predicted we'd lose. I said we'd get 49 per cent," he recalls. "There was an awful lot of complacency. David Cameron himself said to [former president of the European Council] Herman Van Rompuy that it would be '60/40 no worries'."

Interviewing anyone about Brexit for a print magazine right now is a tricky business given the rapid pace of events. I talk to Corbett, the leader of Labour's MEPs, either side of a tumultuous period punctuated by the million-strong 'people's vote' march, the petition to revoke article 50 which attracted some 6 million signatures and a series of dramatic Commons votes to try to thrash out a way forward.

And while all this was going on, he was overseeing the closure of his office and the departure of staff, a period he describes simply as 'awful'. It's not surprising that it is a painful time for Corbett, who has devoted most of his life to the European endeavour. As well as two stints as an MEP, he's worked as a political advisor in Europe and has been in both capacities deeply involved in some of the most significant European reforms of the past three decades. His contribution when he was an advisor to Van Rompuy in 2012 saw him voted the fourth most influential

Briton on Europe – ahead of then prime minister David Cameron and foreign secretary William Hague. But he's never been a household name, which surely has much to do with the ambivalence in this country towards the EU.

It's that complicated relationship with Europe which is largely to blame, Corbett underlines, for the mess we now find ourselves in. Even when we had supposedly pro-European governments, he points out, they were half-hearted about the EU. "It is true across Europe to a degree that if something is agreed at European level that governments say: 'that's all thanks to us'. If it turns out to be less popular they say: 'oh that's all because of Brussels'."

On top of that, he adds, Britain has a written media that is unique in Europe in its hostility to the EU. "From the Times to the Sun you get – and have done for 20-odd years – a diet of stories designed to make the EU look either silly or sinister," he says. "Sometimes they're funny – there's the one that the European Commission was going to standardise the measurements for the size of condoms across the whole of Europe but the size they proposed was too small to cater for British assets. Everyone had a good laugh but there was no truth in it. In this case, it makes the EU look silly but more often these stories are designed to make the EU look dangerous."

Since the vote, Corbett has worked hard, both while attending shadow cabinet and beyond, "trying to nudge the party along in the right direction" on Brexit. Labour, he insists, faced an 'understandable difficulty' straight after the

referendum. “We’d campaigned to remain – but we were faced with a result that was not what we’d campaigned for so what do you do? There was a debate where on the one hand people said we are a democratic party, we respect the will of the people. But others said when we lose a general election we don’t immediately give up on everything we stood for and say whatever the Tories want to do is fine, they’ve got a mandate from the people. We continue to fight, especially as this was a narrow result in an advisory referendum based on a pack of lies with a questionable franchise.”

Whoever was in government would have faced the same unpalatable choice over Brexit – either take a huge economic hit with a hard Brexit or stay inside the single market and customs union but no longer have a say on the rules. “Anyone in government would have faced that choice,” he says. “But when you have a government that’s split down the middle in a civil war and with some of the most incompetent ministers we’ve ever seen, it’s a recipe for disaster.”

Labour, Corbett adds, has – through its six tests on any Brexit deal – finally got to a point where it has been easier to unite around the position of a second referendum. But does he understand those Labour members and supporters who feel frustrated by what they see as timidity in opposing Brexit? Corbett has little time for those who have left the party over Brexit – or ‘vacated the battlefield’ as he puts it. And he demolishes the argument that Labour must respect the result if it is not to be punished at the ballot box. “Even in leave seats a majority of people who identify as Labour voters remain,” he says. “Since the referendum that proportion has, according to polling increased. The biggest single group of voters swinging from leave to remain are people who had been Labour leave voters because they now see it as a Tory Brexit.”

“Labour now has far, far more to lose by annoying remainers than it does by annoying leavers.”

The ‘Lexit’ position – that remaining in Europe would hinder much of what Labour would want to do in government – doesn’t stand up, Corbett adds. “It’s the neoliberal right, Rees-Mogg, Boris Johnson and Farage and so on, who want to take us out of the European Union because they dislike the fact that the European single market is a market with rules – rules to protect workers, rules to protect consumers, rules to protect the environment. They are significant enough to make the neoliberal right go apoplectic because they want a free for all, Trump-style corporate economy. From a left point of view you are facilitating that agenda if you back Brexit.”

But is Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn himself a Lexiter? Corbett has a careful reply. “I meet him every week and he sticks quite religiously to the party conference resolution and that resolution does envision the possibility of another public vote. There are others around him at various levels in the party who are pushing hard to row back from that,” he says.

In 1975, when he was at university, Corbett co-ordinated the Oxford student ‘yes’ campaign in the referendum that saw Britain join the European Economic Community. Back

then, he recalls, Labour suspicion over Europe was perhaps more understandable. “I’ve spent most of my adult life working at the European level trying to improve European structures not without some collective success,” he says. “The European Union now is a very different animal from what it was 30 or 40 years ago. The policies are better, the single market is a market with rules and it is more transparent and more democratic.”

“The European Union has its faults, just like the UK has faults but because the UK has faults I don’t start saying Yorkshire should leave the UK.”

Corbett’s defence of our place in the EU is threefold: idealistic, pragmatic and selfish. “The idealistic [reason] goes back to what it [the European Union] was originally about in the aftermath of the second world war. A continent where every generation from the fall of the Roman Empire to 1945 had gone out to slaughter each other had to find a better way of doing things,” he says. “The pragmatic – whether we like it or not we are a group of neighbouring countries who are highly interdependent, economically, environmentally, in all kinds of ways. The selfish – we are now discovering how vital it is for our economy, our manufacturing, our agriculture, our services. They are all part of an integrated market, with supply chains crossing borders and the number of jobs that depend on that is enormous.”

Corbett believes that opinion across the country has shifted significantly in favour of remain since the referendum – even if it is alarming that leave still registers some 45 per cent backing. But beneath that headline figure, he says, there is much lower support for any of the options that leaving actually entails. “It’s leave voters in particular who are entitled to say this isn’t what I voted for, there’s no resemblance to what was promised. They said it would be easy, when it’s difficult; they said it would save lots of money that would all go to the NHS, when it’s costing us a fortune, and they said there would be no economic difficulties, there patently are. I’d go so far as to say that to deny the right of the public to vote on the actual deal is tantamount to saying to the public you had your say three years ago, now shut up and accept whatever we come up with.”

Some have argued that it will be up to the next generation to sort the UK’s future, possibly by applying to rejoin the EU after a period outside. But, as Corbett points out, that’s not a straightforward option. “You need an accession treaty ratified by every member state so you won’t just face collective demands like ‘you can come back in but you can’t have your rebate any more’ but individual demands. Greece might say give us the Elgin marbles back – fine I would understand that – Spain might have some demands on Gibraltar. It’s a much taller order to rejoin than to stop Brexit.”

Corbett says he has not considered what he will do next if or when the European question is settled. “I’m still fighting Brexit,” he says. And he remains optimistic that the UK can have a future in Europe. With his record as a tipster, don’t rule anything out. **F**

Kate Murray is the editor of the Fabian Review

Labour now has far, far more to lose by annoying remainers than it does by annoying leavers

The wreckers

The crises which have engulfed this government should not blind us to the fact that the Conservatives are supremely successful at what they do best, argues *Danny Dorling*



Danny Dorling is a professor of geography at the University of Oxford. His book A Better Politics was published in 2016 and is available to download free at www.dannydorling.org/books/betterpolitics. Most recently he published 'Rule Britannia: from Brexit to the end of empire' in cooperation and collaboration with Sally Tomlinson

AS A CHILD I used to make sandcastles whenever I could get to a beach, which was usually just once a year in the summer. The beach was most often in Wales: Whitesands bay, on St David's head. It is a very good beach for making castles. The sand is just about the right texture and there is a clean stream. During the summers of the 1970s, hundreds of families would camp in the valley above the beach. They still do today. Each morning the children would run down to the sea. And there, newly cleaned by the tide, was a flattened beach upon which to build new sandcastles.

It takes a certain degree of competence to make a good sandcastle. To make a great sandcastle requires much more than that. It requires teamwork. No single child working on their own can make a series of sandcastles on a beach that people stop and stare at in wonder and say: "How were they ever made to look like that?" Often a few adults, secretly wishing they were still children, will have played a part (it helps to have some bigger spades). But for the best results, to build a sand sculpture of hundreds of small castles and outbuildings, with the stream winding through them and much else besides – and to do this all before the tide comes in – requires great cooperation with many other builders and the spreading of competence as children learn from each other.

Very occasionally there was a child who did not like to share, or a small group of such children egging each other on, and they would wait until no one was looking and then try to knock the castles down. I never really understood their motivation, why they felt the need to destroy, why they hated what so many others had made by working well together. But, in just a few minutes, a tiny few could destroy what it had taken a much larger number of others to build up over many hours. Smirking and for some odd reason satisfied, the wreckers would leave a wasteland behind.

As I grew up and watched the Conservatives tear down so much of the industry of Britain, so much of the welfare state, and so much solidarity, I was often reminded of the look on the faces of some of those aberrant, angry, antisocial children. It was hard to work out what might drive someone to take apart what others have so carefully built up in a society and to replace it with nothing but a wasteland. What pleasure could you get from doing that? And then I began to realise that they thought they were actually making something through their destruction. They were showing that cooperation was folly. And they were convincing themselves at least that they were more powerful and more successful; destined to have their way.

Essentially, their policies promote division, competition and fear in place of the norms of cooperation and coordination of provision we see elsewhere in Europe. And yet, they have a reputation for competence, for being 'a pair of safe hands' as it were, and continue to do so in spite of the chaos that we can see all around us today. So, while the U-turns, the bungled general election in 2017 and the mishandling of Brexit certainly display incompetence, attempts to portray the Conservatives as such ignore the party's undeniable success.

The Conservatives in Britain are the most successful right-of-centre party in Europe, not just in having been in power so many times and for so long, but in having successfully pursued the most right-wing agenda of any mainstream European party. During the 1980s and 1990s they succeeded in changing hearts and minds. They were to transform the UK from being one of the most equitable countries in all of the continent in the 1970s, to the country which now consistently tops the OECD league table for income inequality in Europe. A league table shift of such great magnitude does not happen by accident.

For a time, the Conservatives succeeded in deflecting Labour away from seeing issues such as inequality as



so crucial. Only a decade or so ago, the huge disparity between the super-wealthy and the rest was portrayed by key Labour figures as “not a great problem, so long as the rich pay their taxes”.

On education too, the Conservatives have been remarkably successful in shifting the parameters of the debate. In no other European country is so much money spent to give an unfair advantage to such a small number of children as the money spent on private schools in the UK. In every area of social life, Conservatives promote evaluative voluntary individualist logic as the alternative to generous omnipresent ordered delivery. On their watch, pre-school education became a private business opportunity; state schools were progressively underfunded and selection at age 16 was introduced via academies.

They have continued to prioritise grammar schools because each grammar school creates so many losers for each winner. Their mentality assumes that only a few can win and most people deserve to be losers; grammar schools are especially dangerous because they imply that the future winners can be identified in early childhood through a test! The Conservatives repeatedly decimate further education and have turned higher education into a marketplace with loans for the many and free entry for the few. Those few who now go to university essentially for free are mostly their own children who will emerge with no student debt thanks to their affluent parents paying their fees upfront.

On housing, the Conservatives have determinedly destroyed – through right to buy, stock transfers and a lack of funding – much of our social provision. One in four children in England now lives in a home from which they can be evicted with just two months’ notice at the whim of their private landlord. Conservatives fix the housing market, constantly intervening in it to prop it up. George Osborne’s

various ‘help-to-buy’ schemes now leave future governments with the most enormous financial liability should house prices fall by more than 5 per cent (a relatively mild scenario given that Mark Carney, governor of the Bank of England, has predicted falls of 30 per cent could be possible). Those schemes were introduced to mask what was happening to the majority who could never get a mortgage to buy a home. Osborne’s measure of success was house prices. The higher they were, the better he thought he was doing.

On health, Conservatives succeeded in moving the UK from being one of the best ranked in the world in the 1960s and 1970s through to one of the worst countries in Europe for health outcomes after their period of hegemony. The UK used to have one of the very best rates of child health in the world. However, by 1990, following 11 years of Tory underfunding, six countries in Europe had lower neonatal mortality rates than the UK. But that was just the start of the decline. By 2015 the UK ranked 19th for neonatal mortality across Europe. Most recently the situation has become far worse, as infant mortality in the UK has risen year after year from 2015 onwards. Nowhere else in Europe has it risen.

Similarly, but for separate reasons, overall life expectancy across the UK peaked in 2014 and has fallen since. Again, nowhere else in Europe has a record of change as bad as this. And again, such an extreme record does not happen by chance. It requires a huge amount of work to shift a country from being so successful in terms of comparative health outcomes, to so unsuccessful over such a short space of time. They are indeed competent – at making life much worse for most people.

How should Labour respond? How do you respond to wreckers who have such a different view of what is right and fair and decent?

Labour's answer on education is to offer a National Education Service, which is laudable, but which has echoes of the 1940s in its title, implying that Whitehall operating benignly from above will somehow create a situation in which your child – and since the 1980s it's all about 'you and your family' – will prosper. If it's all about *you* and if *you* don't have children, or if you have the money to live in the good catchment area, or send your children private, then evaluative voluntary individualist logic tells you to vote Tory. In fact, for your children to get ahead, you need less spent on the education of the 'competitor' children or grandchildren. A very large minority of the British population have been taught not to share well in recent decades. Because of this it is perhaps not surprising then that in 2019, around 40 per cent of adults have still been saying in opinion poll after opinion poll they are happy to lend their support to the Conservatives.

In the face of Tory individualist logic, Labour needs to be far bolder. Working with Michael Davies recently I wrote a paper for the Progressive Economy Forum titled Jubilee 2022: Writing off the student debt. In it we explained why it was both right and practical for Labour to include a promise in the next election manifesto to cancel the vast majority of outstanding university student debt for all those students who went to university in 2012 or thereafter. The policy makes good economic sense as well as being fair. And, in a country where half of all young women now go to university, and where people have been made to think so individualistically, it also makes brilliant political sense. Almost everyone who went to university between 2012 and 2018 and those who will go in 2019, 2020 and 2021 (and those thinking of going in future, and their families) would have an obvious extra incentive to vote Labour at the next general election – as would their parents and grandparents – but only if Labour promises to cancel most of the outstanding unfair debt.

We don't just need to unravel the recent errors of Conservatives. That is just a first step to make a promise that if you vote Labour it will be as if the introduction of £9,000 a year fees by David Cameron and Nick Clegg never happened. Labour also need to offer something so much more enticing than a 'national service'. I have many ideas, but so do you, and so do many others. You don't build a good set of sandcastles on the beach alone; and you always have to be wary for those who would try to destroy what you have made. Jubilee 2022: Writing off the student debt is a small castle that I built recently with Michael and the help of a few other experts on student finance, I'm quite proud of it. Would you like to make a castle to go next to it? Perhaps suggest a better pre-school policy or housing policy, to add to all the beautiful landscape of all the proposals that are already being suggested?

On housing, Labour has to stop being polite. Conservative policies are taking a huge human toll. In early 2019, as the headteacher of what had been Marston Middle School in Oxford in the 1980s, Roger Pepworth, explained so clearly after the death of a former pupil who had most recently slept rough on the streets of Oxford: "I do not have solutions. I only know that the dreams that Sharron,

a lovely child, had until her death, have perished in the wreckage of an austerity programme that has literally killed her and her like."

Sharron's death will not be forgotten in Oxford for a long time to come. Decades ago the Conservatives dismantled the social provision that, had it been in place, could have helped Sharron when she was a young girl in the 1980s. The Tories ensured later that when Sharron most needed help as an adult, it was not there. Millions live in fear of how they will pay the rent or cope with the mortgage payments. Millions more live with the misguided belief that the homes they own are worth a fortune now and will fund a luxury retirement for them (as long as they keep voting Conservative). But top Tories don't have mortgages. They buy and sell in cash and have property around the world – they dupe other people into voting for their party. Top Tories care not one jot that homelessness rises when they are in power.

In the UK today, even just within London, we still have more bedrooms within residential homes than there are people who need a bed. We have not built enough where the need is great enough; but the fastest way in which we will better house ourselves again is to repeat what we did for the whole period from 1921 to 1981; for those 60 years, each year, we better used the stock we had than the year before. We built more but more importantly each year we shared better. Growing income *equality* meant that the rich did not buy second homes so often. People increasingly moved into housing of the size their families needed; and a third of all housing was allocated on the basis of need, not greed. History will repeat, but the mechanism will be different in future. On Whitesands Bay each summer today new and different sandcastles are being built with each new tide.

The solution for all of our public services in future will not be a return to the 1970s. That tide went out long ago, and many tides have come in since to wash the solutions of those days away. Just like social policy of the past, new castles are made of sand, they always melt into the sea – eventually. You just have to keep on building more. The better health system of the future will not simply be a return to what we had before the 2012 privatisation act. To be better, it has to be different.

For the last four decades, there have been more social wreckers on the policy beach than social builders, but that time has ended: evaluative voluntary individualist logic has had its day. The alternative of generous omnipresent ordered delivery is becoming more obviously and urgently viable again. Well ordered, for everyone, delivered to time, to where there is most need, and generous, not skimping. Achieving this will mean more investment, but it will also mean more ideas and above all more cooperation. For too long a party with a reputation for competence has been trusted with our social fabric and services. Those politicians who, as teenagers, joined the Conservative party in the late 1970s and 1980s did so because they admired Mrs Thatcher's policy of wrecking – so-called 'creative destruction'. They are and were very competent, but only at breaking things – we must ensure they are never trusted again. ■

For the last four decades, there have been more social wreckers on the policy beach than social builders

On the rocks

The Conservatives have steered the economy into one disaster after another. Now Labour must chart a different course, writes *Ann Pettifor*



Ann Pettifor is the director of Policy Research in Macroeconomics (PRIME) and a council member on the Progressive Economy Forum

ON 4TH MARCH 2019 the New York Times published The Curious Case of ‘Failing Grayling’ – the Conservative government’s transport minister. Soon it issued an embarrassing retraction: “Because of an editing error ... this article misstated the amount that ... Chris Grayling’s misadventures had cost British taxpayers. It is 2.7 billion pounds, not 2.7 million.”

Chris Grayling’s outrageous blunders have surely forever blown the Tory party’s reputation for competence. And yet the myth prevails. Its power must be addressed, because the evidence of Tory party economic *incompetence* is sound and goes back a long way. The myth reflects the lack of confidence many have in alternatives to the dominant economic orthodoxy; and in Labour’s own record of economic management. That, in turn, may reflect the excessive deference shown by Labour governments to conservative economic orthodoxy. A brief look at the history of Tory and Labour economic policies shows this.

One of the most incompetent of Conservative chancellors was Winston Churchill. In April 1925, egged on by the City of London, and against the strong advice of John Maynard Keynes, he made the decision to resume convertibility of pound sterling at the pre-first world war rate. This triggered a catastrophic and prolonged economic crisis. Deflation and a massive rise in unemployment followed.

When miners were told their wages would be cut as a result of deflation, they prepared to strike – and were threatened with a lockout by mine owners. That in turn triggered the prolonged 1926 general strike. Exports

fell, and the run on the Bank of England’s gold holdings forced Britain to bow to the fate of ‘vassalage’ to the United States. The deregulation of finance associated with the international gold standard led to a vast international debt inflation, which in turn led to the deflation of the stock market bubble of 29 October 1929 – accelerating the global economic collapse now known as the Great Depression.

Six years of job losses, bankruptcies and deflation had followed Churchill’s great blunder. His failures led to the election of a Labour government. But the 1929 Labour government’s deference to the ‘May Committee’ and its proposals for fiscal consolidation, made things worse. Austerity led to a party split and was followed by the election of a national government headed up by Ramsay MacDonald. Soon after, in September 1931, speculative attacks on sterling forced the austere ex-Labour chancellor and fierce opponent of Keynes, Phillip Snowden, to finally release Britain from the Churchillian ‘fettters’ imposed by the gold standard.

Fast forward to the extensive economic failures of the ‘Barber Boom’ in the early 1970s – financial deregulation failures that played a leading part in the great financial crisis of 2007 to 2009 – or to the ‘Lawson Boom’ in the late 1980s – which included tax cuts and low interest rates that blew up a massive property bubble. But attention too must be drawn to John Major’s decision as chancellor to sign Britain up to the European exchange rate mechanism (ERM) in October 1990 – at a deflationary exchange rate designed to keep interest rates high, exports expensive and unemployment rising.

The evidence of Tory party economic incompetence is sound and goes back a long way

The consequence of ERM membership, as academics Werner Bonefeld and Peter Burnham detail in an important paper, were catastrophic for Britain's economy and for millions of people. Between 1990 and 1992 unemployment rose by 1.1 million to 9.8 per cent of the total workforce. Bankruptcies increased dramatically, from 9,365 in 1989 to 35,940 in the first nine months of 1992. During the same period, company liquidations rose from 9,427 to 24,825. Manufacturing output contracted and the volume of retail sales declined dramatically. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth dropped from 2.1 per cent in 1989 to minus 2.2 per cent in 1991 until it 'recovered' to minus 0.6 per cent in 1992. "High real interest rates, pressure on public spending and loss of revenue intensified the fiscal crisis of the state," wrote Bonefeld and Burnham.

The then chancellor, Norman Lamont explained that rising unemployment and business failures "were a price worth paying" for the defeat of inflation. Neil Kinnock's Labour party appeared to concur – when Labour backed Lamont's ERM strategy. The political consequence of this effective collusion between the two political parties was reflected in the results of the 1992 general election. A post-election analysis, by amongst others professor John Curtice, spelt out clearly what the consequences were.

"From the beginning of the campaign on 11 March, the parties were neck and neck in the opinion polls, with Labour fractionally ahead. The commentators predicted a hung parliament; the only question, it seemed, was whether

Labour or the Tories would be the largest party. Even the exit polls suggested a hung parliament.

The result, when it came on 9 April, was one that nobody, not even the Tories, had expected. The government had 42.8 per cent of the vote, Labour 35.2 per cent. The Tories had lost only a fraction of the vote they recorded in 1987. Labour, admittedly, was well up on its 1987 vote; but its share was still lower than it recorded in 12 consecutive elections between 1935 and 1979.

When later that year sterling crashed out of the ERM on 'Black Wednesday', 16th September 1992 – the Labour party's already damaged 'ship' was beached alongside the wreckage that was the Conservative party. Despite the damage, the Tories went on to enjoy five more years of power.

A similar fate awaited the Labour government of 2007 to 2010. A determination by both the Blair and Brown governments to placate the City of London and echo Conservative calls for 'light touch financial regulation' led ultimately to the defeat of Labour in 2010.

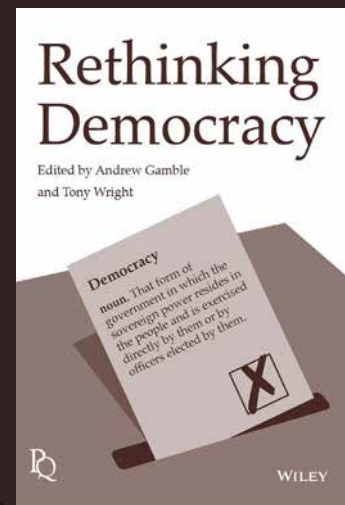
There are lessons in this history for today's Labour party. Neoclassical economic policies may serve the interests of the ruling classes, but they inflict painful losses on the majority. If Labour is to win a general election then collusion with 'Failing Grayling' and his colleagues in the Conservative party will invariably lead the public to conclude, as they have done in the past: "Better the devil you know than the devil you don't." **F**

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Turning left

The shift leftwards among younger people is an international phenomenon. *Keir Milburn* explores the reasons why



Keir Milburn is a lecturer in political economy and organisation at the University of Leicester. His new book Generation Left is published by Polity

IF YOU TOOK a trip to the newsstands in mid-February this year you might have glimpsed the phrase ‘The Rise of Millennial Socialism’ emblazoned across the front cover of the centre-right Economist magazine. Coinciding with a prominent article on UK ‘millennial socialists’ in the New York Times, it revealed a growing acceptance by the centre and the right, despite early attempts at denial, of one of the most remarkable political phenomena of the last few years; young people’s dramatic turn to the left. Yet, while the general trend has now been recognised, its dimensions and political implications are poorly understood.

Discussion in the UK was sparked by the stark age divide in voting at the 2017 general election. For every 10 years older a voter was, they were every nine percentage points more likely to vote Conservative. The political generation gap revealed was indeed astounding.

Yet the timing of the Economist front cover was provoked by political events on a different continent. In the United States 28-year-old Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has had a dramatic impact on political debate since her election to congress last year. Most recently Ocasio-Cortez, more than anyone else, has pushed the idea of a Green New Deal to the front of US political discussion. Support for those policies, which aim to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition in just ten years, is deeply segmented by age. The strongest backing comes from millennials – often defined as 18 to 37-year-olds – who exhibited 30 per cent net support, even when the associated costs of the policies were specifically highlighted. Testament to the impact that Ocasio-Cortez – and before her Bernie Sanders – has had is the finding of a poll last September, in which 48 per cent of Democrat-supporting millennials declared themselves either socialist or democratic socialist. This is unprecedented in US history.

The international dimensions of this political generation gap have profound implications for the discussion of Corbynism in the UK. Any explanation of the Corbyn

phenomenon based on the characteristics of Corbyn as a person, the peculiarities of Labour party history, or specific policies in the Labour manifesto, such as suggesting that young people were bribed by the offer on tuition fees, are clearly inadequate.

If the geographic spread of the trend demands proper explanation, then so too does its near simultaneous emergence across different national contexts. The political generation gap opened up very quickly. The 2017 election saw a startling 97 percentage point gap in voting intention between youngest and oldest voters. At the 2010 general election that gap had been just 15 points. It is a sudden and dramatic shift that has been mirrored in polling on political

attitudes: While research on youth attitudes before and immediately following the 2008 financial crisis showed harsher attitudes on welfare spending among the young than older cohorts, this has dramatically reversed in recent years. The latest iteration of the British Social Attitudes survey dates the beginning of this reversal to 2014 and concludes that in 2018: “On average, younger people appear to have more sympathetic attitudes than their older peers when it comes to topping up wages, are less

concerned about the concept of welfare dependency, and are more concerned that cuts to welfare would damage people’s lives.”

It is not difficult to see why young people are disillusioned with the current situation. They have suffered an unprecedented decline in their living standards and prospects. In the UK, millennials are likely to be the first generation for hundreds of years who will earn less than the two generations who came before. This is not just a prediction. It is already evident.

By 2016, the average millennial working through their twenties had already earned £8,000 less than the average of the preceding generation. The huge increase in house prices through the 1990s and 2000s were of benefit primarily to older cohorts.

Young people have suffered an unprecedented decline in their living standards and prospects

Declining wages, which have hit the young more severely, along with post-crisis tightening of borrowing conditions, have put home ownership well out of reach of most young people. The result is a Generation Rent, who will spend an average of £44,000 more in real terms on housing in their twenties than the Baby Boomers did. To make matters worse, young people are taking on huge sums of student debt only to discover a chronic shortage in graduate-level jobs.

Some of these effects are the result of long-term trends. As conditions of work have become harsher over time, they have affected later cohorts more severely. Older generations were employed on better terms and conditions, retained better pension rights, and benefited from rising house prices that followed neoliberal reform of the housing market. Yet the situation has been massively accelerated by the economic crisis that began in 2007 and reached a peak in 2008. As a 2016 Resolution Foundation report explains, in the UK “all of the £2.7tn increase in aggregate wealth recorded since 2007 can be accounted for by the over-45s, with two-thirds accruing to the over-65s.” In contrast, wealth has fallen by around 10 per cent among those aged 16 to 34.

As asset prices have grown far faster than earnings, any increases in the wealth of working people have tended to come from these assets, primarily through home ownership, although pension funds invested in stocks have also played their role. In this way, the interests of older cohorts have become increasingly aligned with the performance of the financial sector. The predominant government response to the crisis of 2008 has been to lavish the financial

sector with what is in effect an ocean of free money paid for by public spending cuts and wage restraints. As this has kept asset prices high, the older generations have benefited. It is therefore no wonder they are tending to vote for more of the same. But that does not mean all is rosy for the elderly.

For a start, a quarter of pensioners do not own their own home, while 1.6 million pensioners live in poverty. Even those who do own property have found themselves trapped. With state supported elderly care drastically reduced most older people see high property prices as the only way they can guarantee access to care in old age. In this way, older people are incentivised to vote against the interests of their younger relatives.

The young, on the other hand, have little to gain from an alignment with the interests of the financial sector. Yet they cannot simply opt out of a relation with it. Where debt was once tied to viable prospects of increased consumption in the future, now the intrusive monitoring and rent extraction that goes along with debt increasingly seem like an imposition on the young which disciplines and limits the lives they might hope to live.

It is this ‘combined but uneven’ collapse of the pre-2008 conception of the future – a collapse which climate change massively accelerates – which has predisposed the young to radical change and opened up space for the left.

We are part way through an extended period of crisis, the outcome of which is far from clear, but there is one thing on which we can be certain: there is no path back to the pre-2008 conception of the future. It is, therefore, the elderly who are at odds with reality, not the young. **F**



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Books

Public privileges

An account of independent schools underlines the clear case for reform, writes *Sally Prentice*



Sally Prentice is a former member of the Fabian Society executive committee

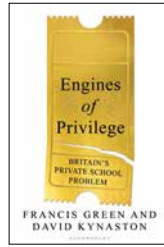
Engines of Privilege – Britain’s Private School Problem is an important and challenging book – challenging because it addresses a question that politicians have sought to avoid asking, let alone answering, since 1945. Francis Green and David Kynaston are to be congratulated for writing an authoritative account of the impact of independent schooling on British society, but more significantly, for proposing practical solutions to the problem.

The authors explain why successive ministers have failed to get to grips with private schools. Labour ministers’ ambivalence was, according to one senior civil servant, because they could not decide whether ‘these schools are so bloody they ought to be abolished or so marvellous they ought to be available to everyone’. Tony Blair is characteristic of the latter perspective, Roy Hattersley the former, and Tony Crosland couldn’t decide. The politician who jumps off the page is Churchill, who wanted public schools to use their endowments to benefit poor pupils.

Private school alumni dominate British society, with terrible consequences for social cohesion: more pupils from Westminster School have gone to Oxbridge than pupils qualifying for free school meals from everywhere in Britain; privately educated men earn 7 per cent more than their state-educated counterparts with the same qualifications. Green and Kynaston make a compelling case for reform.

But their book will anger many on the left because they do not advocate abolition. They accept that well-off parents have the right to spend their money on their children’s education rather than expensive holidays; that private schools provide an excellent education; and that many parents will object to paying higher fees to subsidise bursaries. They are sceptical about whether removing charitable status or tightening up the definition of ‘public benefit’ would make a significant difference.

Instead, the authors propose reforms. Business rates relief could be withdrawn, but the impact would be marginal. Another option would be Labour’s 2017 manifesto proposal to charge VAT on school fees which could raise £2.5bn. An open access scheme would involve ‘needs-blind admissions’ whereby places would be allocated following an entrance exam. Families would be means-tested



Engines of Privilege: Britain’s Private School Problem
by Francis Green and David Kynaston
Bloomsbury, £20

and would pay full, partial or no fees. According to the Sutton Trust, more than 90 day schools would participate, so the impact could be significant. The Fair Access Scheme would require private schools to accept a minimum of 25 per cent of pupils chosen by the state: pupils would be funded at the same rate as in the state system, with the schools making up the difference from their bursary funds. Kynaston and Green think this scheme would be more *politically* acceptable but acknowledge that independent schools would resist involvement in admissions. Education union NAHT proposed that 10 per cent of places should be allocated to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with places funded from pupil premium money and bursaries.

All these reforms are better than the status quo. However, what is required to *deliver* reform – as opposed to simply *talking* about it – is an overarching public purpose. Ministers will need to articulate a vision of greater opportunity for low-income families, and how the reform of private school admissions will contribute to achieving that vision. Achieving social change is more motivating for protagonists than simply being on the receiving end of criticism, however strongly argued.

Where I disagree with the authors is their view that the private school problem is a *separate* issue from addressing the inequalities in state education. A future Labour government should ensure pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds receive the best education. That must include opening up access to top-performing grammar and comprehensive schools as well as fee-paying schools. Every independent school would participate in an access scheme; grammar schools would be required to admit ‘pupil premium’ pupils who passed the 11-plus; and comprehensives would give priority to pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds ahead of those who live nearest. Such policies would be transformative. The children of accountants and teachers already receive an excellent education, whether in the private or state sector: the real prize is increasing access for disadvantaged children to the best schools. Green and Kynaston’s book opens up a debate on how the reform of independent schools could contribute to this major policy priority. ■

Setting sun

An analysis of the UK's place in the world after Brexit only strengthens the case for remaining in the EU, writes *Jessica Toale*



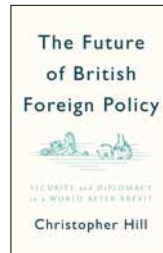
Jessica Toale is a political and international development consultant and former political advisor to two shadow secretaries of state for international development

The UK has been suffering from somewhat of an identity crisis for some time now. As a former global power, we have struggled to come to terms with our role in an increasingly multipolar world, with fewer resources at our disposal.

The UK undoubtedly has a unique position in global affairs – a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a place at the heart of the Commonwealth, the world's fifth largest economy, one of the largest overseas aid budgets and a raft of soft power institutions like the BBC and British Council. But since the end of the second world war, our ability to wield influence and project power has steadily declined, unless in congress with others.

This question of Britain's place in the world has been given new life by Brexit. To some, leaving the EU offers an opportunity to revive the image of a pioneering Britain taking to the high seas. For others, it represents a surefire way to diminish our global standing. Leaving the EU has the potential to alter the scope and target of our foreign policy radically.

Into this debate steps Christopher Hill with an analysis of the likely effects of Brexit on the UK's foreign and security policy. He takes a historical look at Britain's relationship with the EU and explores what he identifies as four alter-



The Future of British Foreign Policy: Security and Diplomacy in a World after Brexit
Christopher Hill
Polity, £15.99

native options that have the potential to secure Britain's interests and status in the world. But despite his attempts to be even-handed, the book will make tough reading for Brexit enthusiasts. All options are found wanting.

The UN is too much of a behemoth for the UK to matter much – though Hill does recognise the value of our diplomatic corps to the institution. The Commonwealth is too diverse a grouping of countries. The 'Anglosphere' (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the US) is a 'nostalgic fantasy' with no teeth.

He also pours cold water over the fantasy of a hyper-networked Britain of strategic partnerships. While this will be necessary and possible, he admits, it is cumbersome. He explains that as a strategy it is limited by appetite from others and the resources we have to enact it. Further, he believes it exposes our vulnerability and would put us in thrall to key economic and political powers regardless of ethics.

Proximity and geography do matter. And if we have to work with others on most issues, the question is with whom? Britain will always have a global orientation and set of obligations, but Hill's underlying premise is that given the UK's history, geography and culture, the EU will always be the UK's most natural and effective ally – regardless of the legal outcome of the Brexit discussions. The UK's most natural place is now as a regional power – rather than a global one.

The EU has long been a contentious issue in British politics. But even if we leave, we will likely continue to associate with common foreign and security policies of Europe. Now, however, greater efforts will be required to liaise with former partners on common processes.

Amid a flood of writing about Brexit, this book is an important contribution to the question of the future orientation of our foreign policy. It gets to the heart of the question 'what do we want our place in the world to be?' and provides a good overview of Britain's entanglements with Europe, the US and the UN. It demonstrates that we have benefited from and quietly relied on common positions generated within the EU. For me, it settles the question of whether we should be in or out. And from a foreign policy perspective, all signs point to in. **F**



True faiths

An unexpected encounter in an Indian village put *Deborah Stoate* on the trail of a Fabian pioneer

IMAGINE MY SURPRISE when, a few weeks ago as I was strolling through the village of Bawali in West Bengal, I saw an advert nailed to a lamppost advertising the Annie Besant Day School, complete with a picture of Annie circa 1900. I knew of Besant's connection with India, but was nonetheless still delighted to see this advertisement in the jungle. For it was Besant who, in 1897, came up with the idea of Fabian local societies, proposing to the executive committee that alternate Fabian meetings be devoted to carrying socialism to the unconverted in different parts of the metropolis and even further afield, for 'local propaganda'. She was effectively my predecessor.

Annie Besant put her whole being into whatever cause she became involved in, her motivation simply being to make the world a better place. As she wrote in 1886 in her essay *Why I am a Socialist*, she felt deeply 'the failure of our present civilisation to solve the problem of poverty and thereby eliminate a situation in which a section of society had access to art, beauty, refinement – all that makes life fair and gracious', whereas the rest were condemned to 'drudgery, misery, degradation'.

Besant was born in London in 1847, to Irish parents. At 19, deeply religious, she married Reverend Frank Besant, later admitting that they were 'an ill-matched pair'. Over the next few years she had two children, lost her religious faith and left her husband, moving to London in 1874 with her daughter. She became a fervent women's rights campaigner and in 1877 published a pamphlet on contraception entitled *The Law of Population* which, her estranged husband claimed, made her an



unfit guardian for their daughter and so he took her from Annie. No wonder she eschewed religion. She took over the leadership of the National Sunday League, which campaigned to lift the ban on cultural and recreational activities on the sabbath, and advocated that Westminster Abbey be turned into a 'peoples' palace' dedicated to humanity where it 'should echo the majestic music of Wagner and Beethoven and the teachers of the future shall there unveil to thronging multitudes the beauties and the wonders of the world'.

Besant was a fervent believer in action

Her philosophy, coupled with her practicality, led her to take a leading role in the matchgirls' strike of 1888, the Fabians trailing in her wake. This was in the teeth of press derision, the *Times* printing an interview with a Bryant and May director who said: 'I have no doubt that they (the strikers) have been influenced by the twaddle of Mrs Besant and other socialists', after Besant had compared

them to slave owners. She helped win, however, a stunning, well-organised victory and was elected the first secretary of the Union of Women Matchmakers.

Besant was a radical who grew frustrated with endless Fabian discussions which she described as 'a mere Friday evening entertainment committee'. She was a fervent believer in action and the workers' need for direct parliamentary representation. Her arguing over three years finally convinced the society to alter its code – the 'Basis' – to read 'The Fabian Society consists of socialists', whilst still believing in the gradual spread of socialist opinions producing social and political change.

Besant was also a practical business woman and the Fabian falling out, when it inevitably came, was over money. In March 1890 she wrote to the chair: "If we (Besant's Free Thought Press) are to continue to publish for the Fabian Society, it must be on a business footing, and not in the amateurish, happy-go-lucky way that was harmless enough when a few penny tracts were concerned but which is really injurious to

our reputation as publishers with a book like the *Fabian Essays*."

The rows continued and with her final royalty cheque, she also sent in her resignation from the society – a resignation reluctantly noted in the minutes of a meeting in November 1890 with the words that Besant was 'gone to theosophy'. Which is where the poster in Bawali comes in. She had gradually been reassessing her beliefs and had rejected atheism, reversed her position on contraception and had been convinced by Madam Blavatsky, the Russian co-founder of the Theosophical Society to join them. Theosophy was an occultist philosophy drawing on palmistry, spiritualism, paganism, magic and various aspects of established religion.

It may seem surprising that Besant could swap socialism for spiritualism so suddenly. But her old comrade George Bernard Shaw noted that she was a woman who could change her colours with breathtaking speed: "She came into a movement with a bound and was preaching the new faith before the astonished spectators had the least suspicion that the old one was shaken."

Besant settled in India, adopting Indian dress and in 1917 became the first woman president of the Congress party.

The many iterations of Annie Besant aren't as strange as might first appear – to 21st century eyes they merely demonstrate that she was a hugely influential figure in whichever field she chose. GK Chesterton wisely said of her she 'stopped believing in God and started believing in everything'. She moved on with a vengeance but without acrimony it seems. Edward Pease wrote that: "She joined her old (Fabian) friends at the dinner which celebrated the 30th anniversary of its foundation, but in the interval her connection with it completely ceased."

Happening upon that advert in Bawali made me very proud of my connection to such a remarkable woman. **F**

Deborah Stoate is local societies officer at the Fabian Society

Listings

BIRMINGHAM

& WEST MIDLANDS

Details and information from Luke John Davies at bhamfabians@gmail.com

BOURNEMOUTH & DISTRICT

26 April: Sandy Martin MP
31 May: Jim McMahon MP
28 June: Chris Evans MP
All meetings are at 7.30pm in the Friends Meeting House, Bournemouth BH5 1AH. Contact Ian Taylor on 01202 396634 or taylorbournemouth@gmail.com for details.

BRIGHTON & HOVE

All meetings at 8pm at Friends Meeting House, Ship St, BN1 1AF. Contact secretary Ralph Bayley at ralphfbayley@gmail.com

CENTRAL LONDON

10 April AGM
Re-forming with a new cycle of meetings on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. Meetings at the Fabian Society, 61 Petty France SW1H 9EU. Details and enquiries to Michael Weatherburn – LondonFabians@gmail.com

CHISWICK & WEST LONDON

9 April: John Stroud-Turp on drone wars – myth and reality'. 8pm in Chiswick Town Hall. Details of meetings from Alison Baker at a.m.baker@blueyonder.co.uk

COLCHESTER

Meetings in the Hexagonal Room, Quaker Meeting House, 6, Church St, Colchester. Details from Maurice Austin at maurice.austin@phoncoop.coop

COUNTY DURHAM

All meetings, 12.15–2pm at Lionmouth Rural Centre near Esh Winning DH7 9QE. £4 including lunch. Details from Prof Alan Townsend 01388 746479

CROYDON & SUTTON

50 Waverley Avenue, Sutton SM1 3JY. Future speaker: Seb Dance MEP. Information from Emily Brothers – info@emilybrothers.com

DARTFORD & GRAVESHAM

For details of all meetings, contact Deborah Stoate at deborah.stoate@fabians.org.uk

EAST LOTHIAN

Details of meetings from Mark Davidson at m.d.davidson@me.com

FINCHLEY

The Blue Beetle, Hendon Lane, N3 1TR. Contact Mike Walsh on mike.walsh44@ntlworld.com for details.

GRIMSBY

Regular meetings. Contact Pat Holland at hollandpat@hotmail.com

HARTLEPOOL

New society forming. Contact Helen Howson at secretaryhartlepoolfabians@gmail.com

HAVERING

Contact David Marshall for details at haveringfabians@outlook.com

HORNSEY & WOOD GREEN

Meetings on 23 May, 15 July, 12 September and 11 November. Details from Mark Cooke at hwgfabians@gmail.com

ISLINGTON

Regular meetings. Contact Adeline Au at siewyin.au@gmail.com

NORTH EAST LONDON.

For details of speakers and venues, contact Nathan Ashley at NELondonFabians@outlook.com

NEWHAM

For details of regular meetings, please contact Rohit Dasgupta at rhit_svu@hotmail.com

NORTHUMBRIA AREA

For details of meetings, please contact Pat Hobson at pathobson@hotmail.com

OXFORD

Monthly discussion meetings on 2nd Tuesday of the month at different venues around Oxford. Regular meetings and events. Contact David Addison at admin@oxfordfabians.org.uk

PETERBOROUGH

All meetings at the Dragonfly Hotel, Thorpe Meadows PE3 6GA at 8.00. Details from Brian Keegan at brian@briankeegan.demon.co.uk

PORTSMOUTH

Details of meetings from Nita Cary at dewicary@yahoo.com

READING & DISTRICT

Details from Tony Skuse at tony@skuse.net

RUGBY

Details about future meetings from John Goodman at rugbyfabians@myphone.coop

SOUTHAMPTON AREA

Regular meetings. Details from Eliot Horn at eliot.horn@btinternet.com

SOUTH TYNESIDE

Details of meetings from Paul Freeman at southtynesidefabians@gmail.com

SUFFOLK

Would you like to get involved in relaunching the Suffolk Fabian Society? If so, please get in touch with John Cook at contact@ipswich1-labour.org.uk

TONBRIDGE

& TUNBRIDGE WELLS
Regular meetings. Contact Martin Clay at martin.clay@btinternet.com

WALSALL

If you're interested in getting involved in relaunching the Walsall Fabian Society, please contact Ian Robertson at robertsonic@hotmail.co.uk

YORK & DISTRICT

Details from Jack Mason at jm2161@york.ac.uk

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday 9 July 2019.
Annual House of Commons meeting and House of Lords tea. Details to follow. Please contact Deborah Stoate – deborah.stoate@fabians.org.uk

FABIAN QUIZ

CLEAR BRIGHT FUTURE: A RADICAL DEFENCE OF THE HUMAN BEING

Paul Mason



How do we preserve what makes us human in an age of uncertainty?

Thanks to information technology, vast asymmetries of knowledge and power have opened up. Through the screens of our smart devices, corporations and governments know what we're doing, can predict our next moves and influence our behaviour. We, meanwhile, don't even have the right to know that any of this is going on.

This book explores how the system reduced us to two dimensional consumers, genetics stripped us of our belief in humans as agents of change, and now the dystopian forces of the authoritarian right are pushing the world towards a premodern understanding of the human being.

Will we accept the machine control of human beings, or will we resist it?

Penguin has kindly given us five copies to give away. To win one, answer the following question:

Who is the world's largest smartphone maker?

- a) Apple
- b) Samsung
- c) Huawei

Please email your answer and your address to review@fabian-society.org.uk

Or send a postcard to Fabian Society, Fabian Quiz, 61 Petty France, London, SW1H 9EU

ANSWERS MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN FRIDAY 3 MAY 2019



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■ General Secretary: Paddy Lillis

■ President: Amy Murphy

■ Usdaw, 188 Wilmslow Road, Manchester M14 6LJ