



Our Labour Our Communities



EDITED BY LISA NANDY MP



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FOREWORD

By Arnie Graf

I am honoured to have been asked to write the foreword to this book of essays.

I know and have worked with a number of the authors. I know them to be people of integrity and strong beliefs in fully engaging with the people who live in the constituencies they are standing in for election. They understand that old way of top down politics needs to end. They know a new politics of conversation, engagement, and action needs to become the new norm.

The culture of politics, as practiced now, is pushing people's attitudes towards apathy, cynicism, and mistrust of all politicians. All of us have heard these attitudes expressed at the doorsteps.

These attitudes present a clear and present danger to democracy itself. To move from a top down remote politics, these candidates understand that we need to develop the practice of relational politics.

There are three definitions that are important to understand. The words are culture, politics, and engagement. The dictionary definition of these words are as follows:

Culture - The symbols, habits, and patterns of behaviour that people act on.

Politics - The total complex of relationships between people living in a society.

Engagement - An interlocking, something that engages to mesh together as gears, to involve, as in conversation.

In today's politics people expect politicians to be remote and dishonest. They expect them to say anything to get elected. This is the culture of politics and they look upon it as either, at best, as irrelevant to their lives or, at worst, something that is slimy.

People do not think of politics as the total complex of relationships in society.

Most people think of politics as election time and politicians. Their understanding is that their sole decision is whether or not to vote.

For most people, if they have any contact with a Party member, organiser, politician or candidate, it is at their door at election time. There is next to no on-going engagement. As the definition above states, engagement means to involve and to truly involve people you must be in conversation with them. You must develop meaningful public relationships with people to understand who they are and what they care enough about to act on.

The culture of politics needs to change from command and control to a culture of engagement. It must challenge people to act together on their common interests. This challenge can only be done if people are in relationship with each other.

The candidates who have written these essays understand this. They are running to better the country by transforming people's understanding of politics. They will do politics with people - not to or for them.

Introduction: The politics of community

By Lisa Nandy

As we approach the most important general election in a generation, Labour politicians face the fight of their lives to overturn a tidal wave of anger, disillusion and despair in communities across the country.

The next election offers a clear choice - but it comes in the context of a growing sense of disillusionment and disengagement and a series of scandals that have undermined trust not just in politicians but in politics itself.

For people motivated by a commitment to social justice, the toxicity of the political debate is the biggest threat to the future of this country. With Britain governed by a Tory-led government that has built its support on the politics of division and despair, and the advance of right-wing politics that preaches hate and fuels fear, Labour politicians have a huge task that only we can live up to, to offer the country the hope and unity to build a fairer, stronger, more equal country.

Labour candidates standing for Parliament next year face another challenge, not just to be elected, but to be heard, to win the trust of the communities they seek to represent and restore their faith in politics. One thing that has become clear to me as I've spent time with them, in their communities, is how much they understand this. They know that politics has to change and they're using their platform as Labour candidates to do something about it. Labour candidates from different backgrounds, areas and parts of the Labour movement are embracing a politics that is rooted in communities and committed to devolving power away from Westminster. They see themselves as representatives, not of Westminster, but of people, determined to beat down the doors of Parliament and force the growing concerns across of their communities onto the political agenda.

This generation, perhaps more than any other, understands that the command and control politics of the past is dead and that this country is only ever as strong as the sum of its parts. The candidates featured in this book are all, in their own ways, working alongside people, putting them in the driving seat of their own lives and communities, on their terms, not ours.

Seeing them in action has left me in awe, and inspired me to edit this collection of essays for LabourList. The wider Labour movement and the public deserves a chance to see how important this generation, collectively, is to our politics. Each of the ten candidates found time in their incredibly hectic schedules to write on the theme of community. Some chose to write about an issue that affects the area they hope to represent, others told the story of how they came to become active in their community. What emerges is a range of perspectives and opinions that are testament to the talent and dynamism of our movement.

A politics that draws on the widest strengths of grassroots action is a break from our recent past, but there is nothing new for Labour in this. We're a Party that grew out of a tradition of voluntary action: mutual aid, friendly societies, co-operatives and trade unions. In the last few years, one man in particular has come to represent the revival of that politics for Labour activists and organisers. When Ed Miliband took on Arnie Graf he made it clear that grassroots organising needed to be hardwired into our DNA again, that to rebuild trust with people we needed to rebuild our movement. For that reason Arnie, who knows and has worked with many of the authors of this book was an obvious choice to write the foreword for it.

The politics of community isn't about agreeing with each other. I don't agree with all the ideas in this book, and I would be surprised if all the authors agree with each other. Communities are messy, full of conflicting ideas and interests, difference and frustration. Building community is about reconciling these conflicting aims, to work for a common good based on the things that unite rather than divide us. For that reason, there is no better publisher for this book than LabourList, a place where all parts of the party have found a voice and a home, to engage in real debate about our differences and remind us what we have in common and what makes us Labour.

Changing times demand a changed response, with a state that works alongside communities as a partner, drawing on the potential people have, not the problems they pose. There is talent, strength and passion in every community and those communities desperately need a government with a plan to match the ambition and energy they possess. These candidates put forward a compelling case for why that government must be Labour.



The rise of the disposable employee

By Nancy Platts

He had fallen asleep at the desk.

‘You ok?’ I asked.

‘Bit tired’ he said. ‘They’ve got us doing 14 hour days – it’s too much.’

This wasn’t the first conversation of this kind I’d had, and for me it signified a turning point.

It was 1998 and I was working at the London Fire Brigade (LFB). The staff there – cooks, cleaners, security guards – had previously been proud employees of the London Fire Brigade but under the Tories ‘Best Value’ policy they had been sold out to the lowest bidder.

So, the contract was sold but the predominantly female and ethnic minority staff often stayed the same. However, there were key differences for employees. Their pay was dwindling and each time a contractor won a bid for providing the same service at a cheaper price, employees’ terms and conditions would change too. When I raised concerns with the Equal Opportunities Department, I was told it wasn’t my business. Yet, I’d come from a working class background, and so I thought the conditions of fellow workers was absolutely my business - I left the LFB and went to work for a trade union. This was my political route to change and how I joined the Labour Party.

So much of what the Coalition government is doing now reminds me of my days at the LFB after it had been sold off. Bit by bit, they have picked up where the Thatcher government left off by driving down wages, increasing insecurity within the workforce and dehumanising welfare policy. In Brighton, we see working people queuing at food banks and more and more people sleeping on our streets, in our parks and on the beach.

This isn’t about abstract policies or numbers on a piece of paper, it’s real life for so many people who can’t get on no matter how hard they try or how many hours they work.

I want to tell you about one such person I met.

Rob is 22 and a trained actor. He moved to Brighton because he thought there would be more opportunities for work here. There are; he was cast in a play at the Brighton Festival. But the life of an actor is uncertain and his acting wage not steady enough to pay the bills.

He moved to Moulsecoomb and Bevendean, which is a bus ride away from town and one of the poorer areas of the Kemptown constituency; over 40% of children in this area live in poverty. He got a job at a large hotel on Brighton seafront on the catering and banqueting team. He was on the minimum wage and a zero hours contract but told that he could expect to work 35 hours a week. He had to buy his own uniform and provide his personal mobile number so VIP guests could contact him whenever they wanted. He wasn’t entitled to any annual leave nor could he book certain days off on the rota. It’s worth keeping in mind that he was working for a major global hotel chain – whose Worldwide Operating Income after taxes was \$460m in 2013.

I asked him to describe what life was like at that time and he said: “It was painful, physically painful – even when I worked as many hours as possible, 90% of my money went on rent, working just 35 hours it was a struggle to live – and that was in a house of five people.”

The last straw came a few months ago. Rob had been offered four shifts for the month, not enough to live on but he couldn't turn down the work. So he set off to his £6.31 an hour job by way of a £4.60 one-day saver return. When he arrived he was told that he wasn't needed that day after all. He'd lost money going to work and was down to three shifts for the month. Except the hotel had scheduled him to work on the day of a friend's funeral. When he asked to swap a shift they refused because they said he'd not given enough notice. He was down to two shifts and about £100 from which he had to pay his rent, bills and buy his food. This simply wasn't enough to survive on. He had a row with his manager and walked out.

That won't have bothered the hotel. They take on so many zero hours workers that if people like Rob kick up a fuss – or dare I say unionise their workplace – they have lots more people to choose from with little consequence. This government has essentially created the ‘disposable employee’.

What do we do about it? Low wages and insecure jobs cannot be the future of work. They don't benefit the individual, society or the taxpayer. We spend billions of pounds of taxpayer money each year subsidising poverty pay or on the revolving door from the zero hours/agency work contract to the Job Centre and back again.

A good start would be to implement a statutory living wage for those employers who can afford it and corporate tax credits for those who can't. Multi-national companies have no excuse for paying a wage that people can't live on. When they do that, the taxpayer is picking up the bill for shareholders. A statutory living wage for those companies would make working people better off and decrease the welfare bill at the same time.

However where a small or start-up business genuinely can't afford to pay a living wage (and we have to accept that is sometimes the case), they should be entitled to apply for a means tested benefit to top up their income. If we're going to subsidise low pay, we should at least treat it in the same way as benefits for individuals and families. This would be one mechanism for supporting small and new businesses whilst ensuring people can live on their pay.

Secondly, we should ban zero hours contracts. If employers want to make the case against a ban we should engage with them. However, the level of sheer exploitation that we're seeing right now makes it hard to believe that any other option will deter those who are determined to base their business model on the insecurity of their workforce.

Finally, we should ensure that there are workplace rights fit for the 21st Century. It is time to restore dignity at work and for Labour to end the concept of the disposable employee. That doesn't mean ‘a return to the 1970s’, it means looking at workplaces in the 21st Century and creating a system that is fair, gives security to working people and allows them to have control over their own lives. People in Rob's situation aren't able to exercise the rights that exist in theory because agency work and zero hours contracts have created loopholes that are no longer the exception but the rule in many cases.

The job of the Labour party and the Labour movement is to campaign locally and nationally to fight for those rights and ensure they exist in practise. If I get elected to Parliament, that is what I will continue to do.

Nancy Platts is the Labour PPC for Brighton Kemptown



Growing the economy outside London

By Josh Fenton-Glynn

How small businesses are the key to growing the British economy (especially outside London)

All politicians believe (or claim to believe) in certain things, from regional devolution to a welfare policy that works. However when it comes to stepping up and making the big changes that may lead to less power in Westminster (or an unpopular decision) that conviction wavers.

Over the next ten years our leaders will decide what kind of a country and economy we will have for the next fifty years. How will we respond to climate change? How do we compete with and trade with emerging economies? Will we be a country that tackles inequality or lets it get worse? All of these questions must be answered by the next government. This is why Labour must win the election and build a party not content to make small differences fiddling at the edges and hoping for improvements but one prepared to make major changes to change the way our country works.

Nothing typifies the failure of politicians to act more than the failure to address the economy outside of London.

Our regions matter

The area I grew up in – and hope to represent in Parliament - is a wonderful place located between Leeds and Manchester. It's made up of several smaller towns that all have different characters, and the small businesses in the area are just as diverse (indeed Calderdale council is one of the best in the country for small business start ups). These firms, which often deliver high end products, are the background of our local economy. From jewellery to washing machines, tech startups and established technology companies – and a healthy smattering of tourist enterprises – the area is booming. Indeed it has even been suggested by some that the Calder Valley become the UK's second city.

However even as one of Calder Valley's strongest supporters, I'd never argue that it's somewhere that's easy to travel to. Local train infrastructure hasn't received the investment it needs, and that's bad for business locally - not least because it's far too difficult for many local commuters. A small local project was recently completed, yet the trains never arrived as there was a need for the rolling stock in the South of England. Over 89% of commitments to spending on rail in the UK is currently committed to projects in London and the South East (Cox & Davis, Still on The Wrong Track 2013) whilst areas like mine fall behind.

And it's not just on infrastructure where Calder Valley lags behind. Whilst the average family is £1,600 a year worse off under the coalition Yorkshire and Humber families are £2,000 per year worse off. This inequality is not just bad for the North, it also drives people to London in search of work, contributing to the capital's housing bubble and subsequent ridiculous property prices.

Our country will only be able to punch it's weight when our regions are successful. However the strength of London as a city has led to a lopsided economy. In comparative economies with successful regional bases, the sec-

ond city is generally around half the size of the largest (for example, Frankfurt is around half the size of Berlin). Yet in the UK, London's ten million strong population dwarfs all other cities, with none even a third of its size.

Regions outside London and the South East don't have an advocate. While London has a Mayor and Scotland and Wales have a regional bodies who fight for investment, there is no person or body in the North that offers similar advocacy and strategic direction.

The more responsibility people in regions have for developing our own strategies the better for our economy. This government has taken us in the wrong direction with the closure of RDAs and Government Office Network. Councils need the power to run make decisions and regions need more control.

From training to industry and from education to transport, people who understand the local economy will be able to make the economy work for their area. By doing that, we can maximise the potential of the country as a whole as well as maximising the potential of communities like mine.

Josh Fenton-Glynn is the Labour PPC for Calder Valley



Stronger, safer relationships

By Sophy Gardner

On the 11th June 1987, I wore a red rose on my black denim jacket to school. It was election day and I wanted to show my support for Labour. I'd become more interested in politics during the 1980s, while I was a teenager, partly because of the Miners' Strike - seeing communities around the country being abandoned by the Tories. But also because I detested Margaret Thatcher's politics. I didn't know how to express my anger with a government that stigmatised the vulnerable and the weakest, while they also stoked a City bubble of excess and privilege. Little did I think that I would become a candidate for Labour more than a quarter of a century later.

After school, I went to university, determined to join the RAF as a pilot, which I did in 1991, just 2 years after women were finally allowed to apply for that role. During my time in the RAF I was the first woman in every position I was posted to, and promoted at the earliest opportunity in each rank. In the RAF, I did my best to ensure I helped those coming up behind me - doing my best to break down barriers where I could.

For a while, my career overshadowed my politics but when Labour lost in 2010 I felt I had to get involved. For that, I had to leave the RAF. Outside the RAF, I was able to participate in campaigning and politics, starting with attending Party Conference for the first time. By chance, I was walking past Manchester Town Hall and saw that the Labour Women's Network were holding an event there. I had never heard of them but in I went. That was the start of my journey to becoming Gloucester's candidate, supported by fabulous women who, like me, understood that you have to encourage and help those around you. Harriet Harman MP, Alison McGovern MP, Nan Sloane of the Labour Women's Network, and Baroness Jan Royall all played an instrumental part - along with many others.

In Gloucester, as a newly selected candidate, I was able to connect up my experiences at school - where I cared so much about the 1987 election, but was too young to vote - with my passion for women's rights. I made it my mission to speak to as many young people in the community as possible, which I did as part of some early school visits.

I spent these trips talking about voting at 16, employment and training for young people, the lack of part-time jobs for students (most taken by adults desperate for work), the unfairness of unpaid internships and the fundamental problems we have with housing. Then a young woman, Hollie Gazzard, was murdered by her ex-boyfriend in Gloucester.

I've had very close friends affected by domestic abuse - and I had personally experienced difficulties in getting advice and information at a time of crisis. I knew people who were close to the Gazzard family, but kept my distance as I didn't want to wade in as a political candidate, even though I cared desperately about the situation. When the family established the Hollie Gazzard Trust, campaigning for education in schools on relationships (and abuse), and I told our Shadow Equalities Minister in the Lords, Baroness Thornton, about the aims of the Trust.

From there, Hollie's dad contacted me and we soon established that we shared a common drive to fight for better education for young people. I already knew the Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS)

after attending an event they hosted about changes to practices in handling domestic abuse with the police.

GDASS and the Hollie Gazzard Trust were working together, and I have done my best to support their work since then.

I know because I've been close to this that domestic abuse doesn't just happen to other people or other families. Like rape - and most other crimes and abuses - it can happen to anyone. We need to make relationship education compulsory in all our schools so that all our young people learn their rights, about what sort of relationships are unacceptable, and about how and where to ask for help if they do need it.

The Tories have no answers. They preside over a fragmenting education system where Gove's 1950s view of curriculum forces our young people into academic straitjackets. They have no appetite amongst them for improving PSHE across our education system. Domestic violence reporting is on the increase, but conviction figures fall.

Organisations and charities that work in this area are facing cuts and uncertainty over future funding thanks to the Tories' austerity policies which are ideologically designed to attack the most vulnerable.

We need to make sure that young people are educated about their rights and about relationships. Two women die each week at the hands of partners and ex-partners, yet there is no national outcry. These are all reasons to care about politics and they are reasons why politics matter. And they are what motivates me to get up every morning and campaign for Labour as the candidate for Gloucester in 2015.

Twenty-five years after I wore my red rose to school, I am also trying to do my best for today's teenagers. Globally, the future is even more uncertain - for my generation the end of the Cold War ushered in a period of relative stability - but that's changing now. In the UK, this is the first generation who don't expect that their lot will be better than their parents - and we've had the longest decline in living standards under this current Tory government since the 1870s.

Sophy Gardner is the Labour PPC for Gloucester



The care we need By Matt Pennycook

If the litmus test of a civilised society is how it treats its elderly, then the daily battles of those struggling to fund, or in many cases even to find, appropriate and adequate care and support are testament to our collective failure to pass it.

The fact that something has to be done about our dysfunctional care system is not in doubt. Since the turn of the century, two commissions, five white or green papers and three consultations have sought to address the issue of how the non-medical needs of an ageing population can best be met. The 2014 Care Act, the first serious attempt to address the problem in a generation, undoubtedly represented progress but of a particularly languid kind that fell far short of the challenges we face.

Our social care system therefore remains in crisis. It is defective, chronically underfunded and for those attempting to navigate it, often byzantine in its complexity. There is insufficient focus on prevention and the early intervention support that would keep older people out of hospital and in the community. Tighter rationing – the inevitable result of meeting rapidly growing need with shrinking council budgets – has resulted in hundreds of thousands of older people with “moderate” needs (like help with getting up, washed, dressed and fed) without access to assistance. Care workers are demoralised, often poorly trained, paid the bare minimum or less, and likely to leave the sector as quickly as they entered it. The proliferation of rushed 15-minute care slots is dehumanising those who receive it and the hard-pressed, largely female homecare workers that deliver it. The list could go on.

The financial and emotional shock that millions of families up and down the country face when confronted by this system is profound. Instead of getting the help they need, many find themselves caught in a confusing, unfair and deeply flawed structure that too often is responsible for untold distress and despair. Without urgent changes to ensure that older people receive effective and sustainable care, not only will that suffering continue but the already fraying compact between generations will deteriorate further and our NHS will buckle under the strain as it attempts to pick up the pieces.

Creating a care system that is fit for the 21st century at a time when the nation’s finances are under severe pressure will require imagination and radicalism. It calls for action on a number of separate fronts, from giving individuals, families and communities a far greater say in, and measure of control over, the care and support they receive to ensuring that an expanding care workforce receives the decent pay, working terms and conditions that are essential to the delivery of quality care. On a more fundamental level, the creation of an effective and sustainable care system requires wholesale reform of the fragmented services currently tasked with meeting increasingly complex combinations of physical, mental and social need and a fundamental shift in what we as a society understand by care so that we are able to meet the long-term challenges of an ageing society.

Social care provision today is still essentially rooted in the historic separation between healthcare provided by the NHS (funded from general taxation, available to all, and free at the point of use), mental health delivered in secondary services on its fringes and social care provided by council-run services (means-tested and increasingly

restricted to those with critical or substantial needs). This postwar settlement no longer reflects the needs of an ageing population, the changing burden of disease, or rising patient and public expectations.

Overhauling that settlement requires an end to the false division between the NHS and social care and a move toward the provision of whole-person care in all settings – physical, mental, and social, from hospital to home. Such a change is necessary not only to make navigating the care system simpler – one point of contact, one care co-ordinator and one team – but also to reduce waste and inefficiency. The latter can't be achieved by simply transferring money between hospitals and councils to plug gaps in provision as the “Better Care Fund” has set out to do. It can only be secured through truly integrated budgets, teams and services.

I've seen at first hand as a local councillor in the Royal Borough of Greenwich how true integration can transform people's experience of care. Our award-winning Greenwich Coordinated Care model, developed by the Council in partnership with NHS Greenwich CCG, Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust and the local voluntary sector, has broken down old institutional silos so that care can be seamlessly ‘wrapped around’ an individual's specific needs. The model has not only improved the quality and efficiency of care but has helped reduce hospital admissions and delayed discharges thereby delivering significant savings for taxpayers. It's an example of what innovative reform focused on prevention, early identification, and care coordination can achieve.

Truly integrating care so that services are fully joined up is essential if we're to prepare our care system for the future. But we also need to more profoundly reassess what we understand by need and care if we're to shift the focus of services towards meaningful prevention. Crucially, we need to do more to address the worrying rise in loneliness and social isolation that is the inevitable by-product of a society in which growing numbers of older people live alone without extended family nearby. We too often mistakenly view social care simply as physical and health needs rather than social and emotional ones. Yet the loss of small, everyday interactions with friends, family, colleagues, neighbours, and passers-by can play a major role in deteriorating health.

We need to support innovative ways of addressing this problem, not simply by reaching for statutory services but by supporting communities and local networks in making a difference. There are already some outstanding examples of such practice around the country. For example, Leeds' system of ‘Neighbourhood Networks’ provides everyday help and social contact that keeps older people socially and physically active and reduces pressure on local NHS and social care services. Yet such initiatives are still too few and far between and many are extremely fragile. We need more of them and they require sustained investment and the support of government.

The crisis in our social care system is one of the biggest challenges we face as a society. We have both a responsibility and an opportunity to tackle it and build an effective and sustainable care system for future generations. If we seize the challenge we can make sure that for our families, and for us, old age is something to be looked forward to rather than feared as it too often is today.

Matt Pennycook is the Labour PPC for Greenwich and Woolwich



Reaching new communities By Sarah Owen

I am proud to be standing as the candidate for my hometown of Hastings & Rye, but I am equally proud to stand as a parliamentary candidate who is also half Chinese and half British.

My mother is Chinese Malaysian and came to this country 41 years ago to be a nurse in Hastings and continues to work at our local hospital. People like my mother, are part of the of the third largest ethnic minority in the UK; the British Chinese. We are also one of the fastest growing communities and contribute a lot to this country, so but there are no Chinese faces in our parliament. Until now, no parties have fielded candidates of Chinese descent in winnable seats, hHopefully this will change with both I and Rebecca Blake for Redditch working hard in marginal constituencies.

Over the last few years, Chinese for Labour led by Sonny Leong have done an incredible amount of work raising the profile of Chinese people in the Labour movement but during interviews, Chinese journalists often ask the same questions – Why aren't more Chinese Britons involved in politics? And the big one, what difference would it make to have the first Chinese MP? But with China's dominant role in the global economy, appalling record on human rights and the increasing British Chinese population, these are questions we should all be answering.

Outside of Asia there have been East Asian national politicians at the highest levels in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA for many years. In fact Germany recently had and France currently has a Cabinet member of East Asian origin. Labour used to blaze the trail with representation in London local government with fantastic councillors like Mee Ling Ng, Soon Hoe The and Ashton McGregor. This should have been a fantastic foundation to build on, but nationally we're slipping back and you can now count the number of Chinese councillors on one hand.

Why aren't more Chinese Britons involved in politics?

Some of that blame rests on the shoulders of the British political and media landscape, where the Chinese community is often left voiceless and ignored. The language used to define BAME and British Asian communities does not resonate with most Chinese voters; we do not see ourselves as 'Asian' in the sense that most political and media outlets portray us - we are British Chinese or East Asians and it is very important that we are spoken to and identified as such.

On the flip side, I have experienced genuine cultural issues when it comes to involving Chinese people in politics. One prominent British Chinese business figure highlighted some of those cultural differences during a recent meeting; being humble and showing humility is a cultural must, which goes very much against the characteristics of western politics. Strict traditional roots from the homeland still haunt many Chinese generations; for example, when one person nails their political colours or thoughts to the mast, their entire family are also held to those beliefs.

What I am about to write might not be popular, but it has a lot to do with upbringing, including my own. For many Chinese families, there is still a strong focus for their children to succeed in life and to progress - whether you see that manifesting itself in the tokenistic 'Tiger mum' behaviour or just a supportive, loving family who want the best for their children is a separate argument. But if you wanted the best life, in terms of status and earning capabilities, then why would any parent of any ethnicity encourage their child in to the current political environment? Journalists and the general public hold little respect for most politicians and the average earning potential is usually less than that of the highest achieving lawyers or doctors. This attitude towards our democratically elected lawmakers seems almost unique in the world. I hold our British cynicism and ability to mock the highest powers very dearly as it keeps our feet firmly on the ground and is often rightly funny, but the level of disdain is palpable. This level of public criticism heightens any cultural fears and instinct to stay out of the limelight, leaving us largely unseen in politics and the media.

What difference will it make?

With over half a million East Asians living in the UK we should have more than just one MP in parliament, the fact that we have none is an indictment on British politics and the Chinese community. I think we should recognise that the East Asian population in the UK is diverse, with an ever increasing population of Malaysians, Singaporeans, Indonesians and Filipinos adding to the wonderful mix. There are well established China Towns which tend to have a city centre focus, as well as those communities spread across the country that see themselves as more part of the UK mainstream society who also want their community to improve and succeed.

The announcements from Labour on rate relief for small businesses, the increased staffing for the NHS and apprenticeships should be welcome news to the thousands of Chinese small business owners, NHS workers and families here in the UK. That isn't necessarily because they are Chinese, but because they care about where they live.

No one can tell you the changes that having more Chinese people involved in our local, national and European politics might make, but the damage of not having representation can be seen right here, right now - We have heard of increased racial attacks on members of the Chinese community, East Asians have lost out in terms of business, studying and family relations because of the Coalition's immigration policies and yet we continue to be silent on these matters, without a voice around decision making tables. The British Chinese community have made great contributions to our country through successes in business, arts, civil society and science, so there should be less fear about having our voice heard in politics.

We need a parliament that is truly representative of the UK electorate. We need more women, more diversity and more working class people in Parliament and getting East Asians involved in politics, will see us further down the road to achieving that.

Sarah Owen is the Labour PPC for Hastings and Rye



Ambitious for the new generation

By Wes Streeting

‘Britain is on the brink of becoming a permanently divided nation’. The words of Alan Milburn, the chair of the Government’s Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission are a fitting epitaph for the legacy David Cameron’s government. Nothing better demonstrates the iniquity of the Coalition’s policies than the fact that absolute child poverty will be higher when the government limps to its end than it was when David Cameron and Nick Clegg stood in the Downing Street rose garden and promised to ‘take Britain in a historic new direction’.

Intergenerational inequality has broken the historic social contract, which says that opportunities for the next generation will be better than the last. There is nothing inevitable about the wealth of our nation and our place in the world - it’s the Labour Party’s job to instill hope, ambition and opportunity into future generations who will shape the next century.

The best start in life

Unlocking the talents of the next generation requires us to break the seemingly intractable link between our circumstances at birth and our life chances thereafter. An incoming Labour government will need to take up the challenge presented by the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission. We will have to reset the targets to eradicate child poverty and challenge every arm of government to align their policies towards that goal, while mobilising business and civil society so they play a part in this plan.

We know that the best route out of poverty for families with children is for both parents to be in work, but we also know that the biggest influence on childhood development is parenting. We need to give parents time, support and protected income to make sure that they can provide for their children - not just financially, but also emotionally. Labour’s offer of 25 hours of free childcare for three and four year olds, as well as measures to increase pay through a higher minimum wage and incentives for employers to pay a living wage will help. But any reforms to the welfare system need to strengthen, rather than undermine, support for parents and carers on low-incomes. The Office for Budget Responsibility should assess the impact of all government policies on poverty reduction.

Targeted early interventions, working through local authorities rather than top-down central government initiatives, should aim to make sure that every child is school-ready by the age of 5. At present, two thirds of children from low-income families arrive at school ill prepared, and many never catch up during their time in formal education.

Following the roll out of free school meals for 5, 6 and 7 year olds, the next Labour government should look with urgency at school breakfast provision. It’s estimated that over 700,000 children are turning up to school too hungry to learn, with one in three skipping breakfast. This has serious consequences on their learning and health. Free school breakfast clubs were extremely successful in Wales and Blackpool; they should be made available in every school across the country.

Meeting the dreams and aspirations of all

The next Labour government will need a relentless focus on tackling child poverty. But we'll also need to tell a bigger story about how we'll meet the dreams and aspirations of children from all backgrounds in a rapidly changing world.

Globalisation presents challenges, yet it also provides the next generation with a world of opportunity that the baby boomers could have scarcely imagined. Social justice is an economic necessity as much as it is a moral imperative.

We must make sure that children from all backgrounds have access to high quality teaching in the sciences and creative arts. So computer science should be made a fourth 'core science'. This is critical to ensuring that children are given the chance to develop their talent in areas that will enable them to thrive in the 21st century.

Moreover, following the success of the London Challenge initiative on improving attainment for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the next Labour government should launch a 'Digital Challenge' that encourages partnerships between schools, industry and the third sector. This would improve the digital skills base of pupils and teachers and nurture creativity in the curriculum.

World-class teaching and personal development

The last Labour government made huge strides in restoring the status of teaching and attracting new recruits into the profession through a range of pathways, including Teach First. Under Michael Gove, constant centralisation and demoralising diktats from Whitehall, combined with an unbearable workload, sees people leaving the profession in droves.

Labour's commitment to continuing professional development for teachers is welcome. But we must go further, by giving schools with high levels of deprivation the funding and freedom to recruit the very best teachers to work with pupils falling behind. Our goal should be to end illiteracy and innumeracy for primary school leavers within the next decade.

We also need to invest in high quality, professional careers advice, extra-curricular activities and enrichment opportunities to develop rounded characters with a good understanding of the options available to them in the wider world.

Greater equality for a good society

A relentless focus on tackling poverty and reducing educational inequality should be Labour's defining mission. Education doesn't rank as highly in the polls as other issues, but it's the closest thing to a silver bullet that politicians have available to create a better society for everyone.

At a time when people lack faith in politics to provide the big answers to the 21st century, a vision for the future of our children – tied to the future of our country – might just do it.

Wes Streeting is the Labour PPC for Ilford North



Crossing borders: Choosing hearts and minds By Amina Lone

“I am not voting as you are all the same.”

These are the words of Mary, a 67-year-old woman who shared this with me when I asked who she was going to vote for.

Mary’s feeling about party politics - and those of thousands of others like her - are a testimony to the disengagement running through our communities and the crisis we face within our political worlds. This sense of isolation creates environments where sores fester, leaking the nothing-to-lose pus. Not engaging becomes a powerful motivator because in a vacuum where does one turn?

For many like Mary, the choice will be to stay at home, not participate nor give legitimacy to a system that they feel has failed them. The ‘none of the above’ argument is not necessarily about informed choices but a feeling that the established elite is not interested in listening to their voices.

For others, it will be the draw of a new outfit in town - one that thrives on waxing lyrical through a haze of the politics of despair by giving the impression that they’re listening. The ridicule and stigma attached to showing support for far-right parties is deflected by the belief that at last someone is listening, even if the price in small print has yet to be cashed in.

The political elite’s failure to stem the sheer hopelessness from our communities is a fundamental one. One that I believe will change the political landscape permanently.

These are uncomfortable truths for the powerful, for many of our politicians, our media, our policy makers and our academics. There are no easy short term answers to reverse this trend and reactive clinical methods cannot stem the flow.

The unwelcome truth is this is about hearts not minds. For example, Mike, a neighbourhood manager told me “a community that has become atomised and fragmented is going to find it much more difficult to have a collective voice.” In a society that sells heart to us through a permanent cycle of advertising, bombarding us with material goods to fulfil our lifestyles choices, it is now falling short. Unable to translate those hearts tugging strings to our political and policy work - this is revolutionary.

This is the state of play of modern day politics and unless we immerse ourselves in the coffee, bathing in it until we are cappuccino hued and the stench radiates from us, party politics, as we know it is in terminal decline.

To start understanding the wider malaise, we must firstly look inward and ask why people get involved in formal politics. For me this is not a job, it is an actualisation of my values. I believe in people. I love the human race. While humans can be the worst of beasts, we can also be the best of beasts. And it is with some of those best I share my home within the Labour Party, whom I knock doors with week in and week out.

The reality is, if I as a working class woman who left school at sixteen, left home at seventeen, was pregnant by eighteen, had two children by twenty and was a single parent of four children by thirty can still fight, then any-

one can. The difference between pedalling hope and fear is demonstrated by the fact under the Tories I would have been classed as Broken Britain. But under the Labour Party I am a parliamentary candidate.

Giving up on people is not an option.

Instead, as Harry Leslie Smith explained, it is “hope, decency and empathy” that “are the building blocks for our civilisation, and every human being shares those character traits.”

In that context the policy backdrop we offer has got to be right. Labour is the only party creating policy that protects the many and is indifferent to the privileged. We know fighting for the NHS cannot be an abstract notion. It is about an elderly person going to see their family doctor with the security that even if they haven't got a pound in their purse, they will be seen.

It's about remembering that when I was giving birth as a twenty year old and my son came out blue (not quite Tory blue but not far off) there was a room full of midwives and doctors there to save his life.

It is about having localised integrated transport networks that mean people outside the cities can catch the bus to work. It is creating employment markets that pay a living wage with secure employment. It's about the letting go of power for individual gain and placing it in the middle of our communities for all people to shape.

We need to discard the emperors' new clothes and don Joseph's Technicolor dreamcoat.

However the policy context cannot happen unless reform takes place within politics and our relationship with the electorate. The heydays of blind faith and tribal loyalty are quickly eroding. The answers lies in politicians across the board changing and renegotiating this relationship. Especially with the poorest, the voiceless and the left behind - for it is those groups who are changing the landscape at an unprecedented rate. The chattering classes have had their time and need to sit quietly while Set three gets some attention and reluctantly bask in the streetlight.

What's its going to take?

It is changing the way we behave. We need to listen more, get out more, be more open and direct. At times it is saying sorry, we got it wrong and most importantly we are with you and we will hear your voice equally. Often these are the hardest things you can ask someone in power to do. Moral conviction is not measured through KPIs that can be scored on balance sheets. Rather the voting public measures these KPIs and the score sheet is not up for compromising.

Secondly, politicians need to be more diverse and change the way they do things. The Fabians found that “in 1979 over 90 MPs came from working class backgrounds and by 2010 it was less than 20 with more former university lectures than blue collar workers.” We have a political electorate that is not representative of the country in terms of class, race, gender or experience. The majority of the traditional parties come from an increasingly narrow gene pool and are seen as inward looking, London-centric and out-of-touch. Opening up the system so it is more reflective is a necessity if politicians are serious about engagement.

Adopting a candidates contract for all elected representatives, very common in the Labour Party, would allow all parties to be transparent and accountable. MPs should have a publicly available contract, laying out the basic requirement of their job. Most good Local Government leaders sign up to these and many of them manage budgets and make decisions carrying far more weight than backbench MPs.

Thirdly, let's change the way parliament operates both in its form and function. Reforms have already taken place and need to be built on. An MP's role needs to be strengthened so it is focussed on legislating and holding

the Executive to account. Alongside that the practical week needs to be reformed to be a Monday to Wednesday week in parliament, with the rest of their time spent in constituencies. Not only will this stem the rot from setting in, it would actually give MPs a better work/life balance, encouraging more diverse applicants.

In many ways this last point is the most important. Politics is fundamentally changing in the UK. We need a new model that reflects a less centralised state, a more accountable national executive and the possible reality of coalition governments more often.

In this vein, it is not only prudent but vital that our national politics becomes less partisan and works more in the national interest. There needs to be significant policy areas where parties work together for the common good whilst setting aside the areas they disagree on. This is not revolutionary but entirely possible as has been demonstrated in combined authorities like Greater Manchester. The image of some of our national politicians scrapping like public school boys is a disgrace and entirely improper for a mature democracy like the UK.

The time has come for people who hold power and influence to step up and none more so than our elected representatives. In these changing and troubled times, people need hope and inspiration. We need to be bold and step outside our comfort zones. To lead and bring people with us.

I need my leaders to inspire me. I want them to give me hope. I want them to fight for all of us, believe and deliver on the values that brought me to the Labour party that I love. We must put the heart back into politics otherwise we become extinct.

Now, more than ever, we should take a leaf out of Mo Mowlam's book: "Bloody well get on and do it, otherwise I'll head-butt you."

Amina Lone is the Labour PPC for Morcambe and Lunesdale



Banking reform from the bottom up

By Clive Lewis

Like most people of my generation my first memory of banks wasn't a bank but a Building Society. But those soon disappeared after the deregulation reforms of the 1980's. After that they weren't something I paid much attention to other than moving between them as a student to get the ever larger overdraft facilities they each offered. Then the financial crisis hit, and I found myself trying to understand what derivatives were and how they had almost led to the economy collapsing. Several years on and people across Norwich are still living with the effects, like most communities outside London and the south East, we struggle to get access to finance.

It's probably stating the obvious to say banks are the engines of our economy. We learned pretty quickly what happens when they break down. The IMF calculates that the total cost of bailing out the UK financial system was £1.3 trillion, more than ten times the budget for the NHS. Since then, there's been a lot of talk about reforming the big banks to stop them doing more damage in future and to get them to kick start our recovery and some limited action.

But much less has been said about the other thing IMF researchers found – that the UK had to pledge more support to its banks than almost any other advanced economy. Our £1.28 trillion bailout represented about 88 per cent of GDP. That's more than twice the US equivalent and accounts for almost one fifth of the £6.8 trillion used to bail out banks globally.

Why did the banking bail out cost us so much? Because in Britain we have an abnormal banking system dominated by a small number of very big banks. Three quarters of people with bank accounts have them with Barclays, HSBC, RBS or Lloyds, the big four commercial giants that were too big to fail. These banks answer to global shareholders not local communities. They lend where there is easy money to be made, not where investment is most needed, and they make decisions about risk based on maximising their profits. In the last two years, the coalition has offered £23 billion of support to the big four to get them lending to the rest of the economy, but we've barely got any bang for our buck with only £3.6 billion worth of new loans. We know too well what has filled the gap for some. Since 2010, the top payday lenders have more than doubled their revenues in Britain. In Norwich there are 5 branches of these legal loan sharks for every 100,000 people, disproportionately located in poorer parts of the city.

In January 2014, Ed Miliband called for a “reckoning” with our big banks, and committed the next Labour government to cap the share of the market any one bank is allowed and to create new challenger banks to reduce the power of the big four. Alongside plans to create a British Investment Bank which will have six regional branches, there is a big picture plan for the banking industry. But we also need to think small, and revitalise the community banking that once thrived across Britain.

In Norwich part of the answer lies in our credit unions. They're a real example of the kind of finance system we need to build – one that prioritises people over profit and makes sure no one is left behind. The West Norwich Credit Union has been operating for 22 years as “a financial co-operative that is owned and democratically controlled by its members and run solely for the benefit of its members.” In that time it's saved the community

it serves more than £1 million in reduced borrowing costs alone. But nationally only two per cent of people in Britain are a member of a credit union, compared to Ireland where it is 72%.

This is a huge challenge for the grassroots of the Labour Party. To match our commitments to reforming the big banks with a movement to rebuild our community banks from the bottom up. To boost membership of credit unions and campaign for them to have more power to lend locally.

It's not enough to create new banks that are going to behave like the old ones. It's time to build a movement for better banks from the bottom up and grow the institutions in our communities that offer much more than commercial banks.

Clive Lewis is the Labour PPC for Norwich South



The case for responsible capitalism

By Louise Haigh

To win elections, political parties must undeniably demonstrate that they can handle the economy. Labour did this in 1997 on a ticket that protected the well-off, that reassured we would not return to the tax-and-spend of the 1970s; we were the new Party of Business and we would get out of the way so that they could create wealth.

In 2010, we attempted to do the same by promising fiscal restraint: to cut public spending but not quite as viciously as the Tories would. This is almost certainly one of the factors that allowed the Tories to win – they presented a more compelling version of the same economic narrative.

And since the election, the labour movement has grappled over the question 'how can we be progressive with less money?'

Yet, talking about the cost of living and about spending cuts sees us simply examine the consequences of an unfair economic system - rather than outline the type of economy we want to see.

So why aren't we talking about changing it?

In his 2011 conference speech Ed Miliband kicked off the debate with the term 'responsible capitalism' - a phrase which was then quickly adopted by the Lib Dems and the Tories. Who, they asked, would advocate irresponsible capitalism? The answer of course is the political establishment. For over four decades.

The concept of 'responsible capitalism' is an interesting one that should be examined and pushed to its limits. Can capitalism be responsible? Is there any morality in markets? What policies would be necessary to create an ethical capitalism – for workers, businesses and customers?

Disappointingly few voices on the Left have engaged in the debate.

In order to win elections and, more importantly, change society for the better, we must develop a distinct, alternative narrative to the Tories and the Lib Dems. Time and time again I hear on the doorstep 'but where is the money coming from?' I retort wearily that it's a matter of political choices where money is spent; we have the money to bailout the banks, why aren't we bailing out the hundreds of small businesses that have gone bankrupt in Sheffield? Why are we spending money replacing Trident and not on creating jobs and helping the long-term unemployed into work?

Imagine if the question wasn't 'where will the money come from?' but 'how can we distribute the money that's there?'

Let's change the system.

People cannot understand, nor should they have to, why the bankers have been left untouched whilst nurses and teachers suffer. But we need to look beyond the banks towards the entire financial system.

Firstly, we, as taxpayers, are major investors both through government bonds but also through, for example, public sector pension funds and have enormous leverage as procurers. So let's start by investing that money for the

long-term, demonstrating that long-termist investment decisions represent a better return on investment whilst supporting a more productive and sustainable economy. That means diverting capital away from the oil, gas, energy and mining companies, all of which sit permanently on passive indices because they provide stable, short-term returns and towards manufacturing, construction and the emerging green sector, which will create jobs right here in the UK.

Secondly, let's shake up the way we do business. Most of the problems described above derive from the fact that the shareholder is king. This hasn't always been the case and is not the way it has to remain. Government should explicitly require companies to consider their employees, their customers and the communities they operate in alongside shareholders when making business decisions. This wouldn't be a burden, far from it, it would free directors to make decisions that benefit the company in the long-term and therefore the shareholders that are in it for the long haul as well.

And finally, let's take a serious look at industrial relations. When Tony Blair boasted that we had the most restrictive trade union laws in the Western World, the reality was this situation didn't benefit anyone. Our current system has led to a situation where workers don't have a stake in their companies, union relations with business are fractious and we have one of the lowest levels of collective bargaining in the world. Compare the UK with Germany, where unions work hand in hand with business, in the interest of jobs, productivity and better living standards for all. We need to improve collective bargaining rights and put workers at the heart of our economy by putting them on boards and promoting different business models such as cooperatives.

Ultimately we must reflect on whether and how we can become responsible capitalists, how we can alter the landscape of the economy towards supporting all in society, creating long-term jobs, rebalancing the economy towards long-term, productive uses. It is only then that we will reduce the benefit bill and increase our tax revenue, allowing us to fund our NHS and our world-class schools.

Without getting the economic policy right, all other discussion is practically moot.

Louise Haigh is the Labour PPC for Sheffield Heeley



Change in our communities By Polly Billington

Tilbury in Thurrock has a glorious history. It was once a place of defence, where Henry VIII built a fort to protect the realm, and Elizabeth I rallied the troops against the Spanish armada. More recently it has been a gateway to the world: a port built by mainly Irish immigrants where global trade thrives. It is where the Windrush docked and where cruise liners now drop off tourists bound for London.

Concern about immigration means different things in different parts of Britain. In my community it is rooted in the rapid and unrelenting change that globalisation has brought to the area. Not all of this change has been bad, but much of it has left too many people behind.

Thurrock's dockers and retail workers have felt the brunt of casualization over the last few decades. They have seen secure jobs being replaced by agency work, decent pay and conditions disappear as relentless "restructuring" and "flexibility" eat into their ambitions for themselves and their families. This pace of change makes people who have fought hard for security anxious and fearful for the future. Suddenly modest expectations for a holiday, a car and a better life for your kids, have become harder to achieve.

At the local elections, many people in Thurrock chose to vote UKIP. Writing them off as either racists or non-voters is morally hollow, and ignores the fact that some were Labour voters who felt we had let them down on immigration. Those who look at the place they grew up and feel it has changed beyond recognition, who see local services under pressure are asking understandable questions. Like is it right that people who have lived somewhere all their lives are treated exactly the same as people who have just arrived?

People aren't stupid. They recognise there are different kinds of immigration. They know there are people across the country whose livelihoods depend on UK businesses that need skilled people to come here to work. Our history is filled with examples of how people moving to this country have enriched and shaped the success of our islands. Very few people don't want their football team to sign a star striker because he's Spanish, or refuse treatment if an NHS surgeon wasn't born in Britain. But that doesn't mean immigration never causes problems, and we need to be ready to have a sensible conversation about how to make it work for the UK and address the real concerns people have.

The anxiety that has grown in communities like mine is real. It stems from everyday experience, rapid changes that have destabilised peoples lives. And that anxiety is being exploited by UKIP.

Labour is and always has been the party of decency for working people, and that means we need to be clear about the practical, achievable things we will do that will create opportunity and security. UKIP want to say to people the only way to protect you from those risks is to turn your back on the world, with no thought to the horrendous economic consequences of becoming a small-state free-market island, a low-rent sweatshop on the edge of Europe.

Establishing a system of social security that you can trust should be a priority for Labour. That way people can feel confident in a system that reflects your contribution, where we know and respect our neighbours and their

efforts to get on, rather than live suspecting all around us of working a system that doesn't work for us. Changing the welfare system to require contribution before benefits can be claimed speaks to the worries of many, and reflects our own Labour values of decency. We have never been a party that has as a principle that benefits are available to all who rock up. There are a number of other practical things we could do, from introducing social insurance cards to European citizens that move from other member states, to making sure EU funds are available to local authorities that feel pressure on their public services because of migration. These reforms would probably require changes to EU rules, and we should be able to have those conversations in a constructive way, one that eludes David Cameron.

UKIP is peddling simplistic answers that we should counter: not by spending our time factually correcting people, but by having a conversation based on hope. UKIP's politics of despair is based on a zero-sum games of jobs, public services and homes – where the country doesn't just freeze but turns the clock back. Or, depending who they are talking to, would introduce a flat tax rate for all, charge you for your GP, and abolish many of our hard-fought-for employment rights like paid holidays and maternity leave. Like the Tories only more so. More and better jobs, homes and quality public services is the right mantra that will build on our cost-of-living message and counter this despair. But we also need to show we “get it” when it comes to the disjuncture between the risks the world poses and way our current system protects people – or not.

My community has changed rapidly over the last 15 to 20 years or so, and the anxiety that can grow from that is being exploited by UKIP. Labour is and always has been the party of decency for working people, and right now that means connecting people to their own ambitions through practical, achievable things that will create opportunity and security. Things like making sure people can earn a Living Wage, a chance to progress in skills and learning, affordable childcare and security at work.

People are choosing to move to Thurrock because it continues to be an area that offers hope and opportunity. That is something to be proud of, that our community is a place where you can settle, bring up your children and make a life for yourself. We should always be comfortable to welcome those who work hard, pay their taxes, learn to speak English and contribute to the society they have chosen to be a part of. The ambition and drive of many in Thurrock can benefit the whole community. These ambitions cross the boundaries of race and language (and indeed class), they enable us to bring people together to build solidarity based on our shared values. But only if we reject the politics of despair and division and describe a future we can build together.

Polly Billington is the Labour PPC for Thurrock