The Challenge for Labour

Autumn 2020
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Contents

Introduction ........................................... Page 5

1. Renewing democratic socialism ............... Page 8

2. Labour’s Polling Problems .................... Page 10


4. Problems in the 2019 general election ...... Page 17

5. What are the solutions? ......................... Page 26


References ............................................. Page 39
Note on Process

We would like to thank all those who participated in our No Holding Back Zoom tour, those who emailed in and those who took our online survey – you all made an invaluable contribution to this report. We read every submission and listened to every point made. We hope that your voices are reflected in this report.

To those who have not attended our meetings so far, we want briefly to explain the process we engaged in.

We invited members of organisations affiliated in some way to the broader Labour Movement to meet with us on Zoom. Our meetings typically included opening presentations by the three of us followed by breakout sessions in which participants were free to contribute. We then reported back to the full group the contents of each discussion group.

We also polled the views of the participants on a variety of issues. These polls are not meant to be wholly representative. They do, nonetheless, capture the opinions of a slice of the activists in the summer of 2020 and are therefore of interest in considering the direction which we should take.

Ian Lavery, Laura Smith, Jon Trickett
Introduction

Whilst some people seek to distance themselves from the membership of our Party and the trade union movement, we are clear that within these groups there is an incredible amount of knowledge born from personal experience. Not only that, we believe that to rebuild the Party – especially in the seats we lost in 2019, the so-called “red wall” areas – the unions and the membership need to be central to the Party’s renewal.

This is why we have led one of the largest listening exercises conducted within the Labour Movement in decades. We visited (virtually) over 50 groups right across the country.

We listened to the views of thousands: in CLPs; trade union branches – both affiliated and non-affiliated; Momentum groups; young Labour branches; Fabian sections; Labour activists in community groups; those with no particular political affiliation. These people have often walked miles, knocking on doors and talking to voters. Listening to their experiences and views is imperative.

Let us be clear, we do not fall into the trap that “red wall” seats are only in the North. Many of the problems Labour faces are not necessarily geographical; there are held back areas from Bournemouth to Bangor to Bradford to Bonnyrigg.

The discourse of North versus South is unhelpful and will not lead to solutions. We are clear that the underlying issue that connects all these areas is class.

This exercise is phase one of our No Holding Back project. We intend to build on our findings. We will continue to engage the people we listened to, support them in their local vision and expand the connections we have made.

So, why did we spend night after night in the earlier part of the lockdown listening to people?

We did it because we want Labour to win again. But we did it also because it is now clear that Labour faces a moment of real danger as to its future. It has been building for a long time, but this danger is now acute.

Earlier this year we published a pamphlet called “Northern Discomfort”. In fact, the pamphlet was written months earlier, prior to the thought of a general election. It was intended to be a wakeup call to the leadership and shadow cabinet about what was about to happen in the North of England, especially outside the big cities. We repeatedly raised this issue and pointed out that even if we had lost some voters to the Lib Dems and Greens, we would not have lost those “red wall” seats. Our view was, and remains, that the election should have been about putting a fair, hopeful and socialist vision for leaving the EU against a neoliberal Tory Brexit.

In 1992 Giles Radice MP produced a pamphlet for the Fabian Society entitled “Southern Discomfort”. The main thrust of the report was to stress the need to re-orientate the Labour Party towards what they described as “southern aspirational voters”. Blair did exactly this and “New Labour” was born.

Of course, we needed to win more voters to our cause everywhere. However, the reckless pursuit of one group without paying close attention to the effect on other groups who were already voting Labour turned out to be an enormous, yet predictable, political error. Almost three decades on we are feeling the repercussions of ignoring our Northern heartlands because there was an assumption that voters in those areas had “nowhere else to go” except to stick with the Labour Party.
Northern Discomfort was a direct response to this and the current landscape the Party finds itself in. The feeling among so many hard-working communities that Labour had turned its back on them has been a long time coming.

But we need to be honest about this. For the truth is that those in the Leadership of the Party who thought that they could ignore the votes of millions of Labour voters who wanted Brexit repeated the same miscalculation which was committed by New Labour.

Our argument, back in the summer of 2019, that seeking to overturn the referendum would lead to electoral disaster in the North and the Midlands was drowned out by other elements in the top ranks of the Party. It gave a fresh twist to the feeling in so many held back communities that our Party was no longer interested in their views. It gave us no pleasure at all that our predictions became reality in December.

Northern Discomfort clearly laid out the problem: many people in the held back communities felt that successive governments, the Labour Party, and policy makers had ignored them and worse, done little to protect them from the ravages of globalisation.

It was inevitable that they would make their frustration known. First in the referendum, then in 2017 when 40% of the electorate voted for a Labour Party that respected the referendum result whilst offering a bolder alternative to the status quo, and then again in the 2019 general election.

The vast gulf in the lived experience between the urban middle classes in metropolitan centres like London and hardworking communities in places like Mansfield were already becoming increasingly difficult to bridge in any event.

It is undeniable that the election saw the defection and abstention of Labour voters in held back communities just as we predicted. The question is, what if anything should we do about it?

We decided to explore the views of Party activists, trade unionists and many others in an effort to understand how they had experienced the election defeat and their views of its causes. This pamphlet builds on our work in our Northern Discomfort.

Before writing this report, we knew we did not want to repeat the mistakes of others. It is not enough to simply formulate solutions with carefully steered focus groups or top down policy announcements made in a vacuum. We wanted to listen and learn.

That is how our No Holding Back tour came about.

We have held interactive sessions with people from all walks of life across the whole country and our findings have been eye opening.

We have listened to thousands of people in over 40 areas across the UK. 66% identified as working class and 28% middle class, so we managed to reach a segment of the Party and union membership that we feel haven’t been listened to for a long time.

This is in contrast with wider membership, given that at present 77% of the Labour membership are from the ABC1 socio-economic classification1 ie middle class. And the largest number of members is in the South of England.2
To be clear, we do not begrudge middle class members at all. In fact, they are obviously a core part of Labour’s historic coalition with working communities. However, arguably an imbalance of members from one element of society can, and has, led us to a disconnect with others.

The Labour leadership (and not simply the current one) needs to be more sensitive to held back communities who often say that they feel taken for granted.

We also recognise that things have changed. The term “working class” is often contested. However, we note that when pollsters ask the British public, a significant portion classify themselves in this way. But the term clearly does not mean only those who get their hands dirty or who work in manufacturing – often in big factories in which unions can easily organise. That is why the Party’s constitution says “workers by hand or by brain”.

Some have tried to make the term “working class” something to be ashamed of, with the intention of breaking down class solidarity. However, communities up and down the country have expressed a nostalgia for a time of greater collaboration and socialising. The spirit of mutual support thrust forth during the current pandemic shows that it remains strong in our communities.

The term itself should speak to anyone who relies on a salary to pay their bills. It means call centre workers, cleaners, delivery drivers, retail staff, people working in tourism or hospitality, teachers, nurses, care workers amongst many more. The kind of people who we have rightly celebrated and have been called ‘key workers’ in the current Covid crisis.

As we will explore in this report, the nature of work might have changed but there are many unifying experiences which workers of the past and workers of the present share in common.

Working people have suffered more than other groups from austerity; globalisation has not delivered much to them; and the institutions that were once there to fight for them have been purposefully hollowed out. The focus shifted from collective relations towards the individual – let’s recall the Thatcher slogan “there’s no such thing as society”.

Nonetheless, as we noted in our Northern Discomfort pamphlet, it is these communities where we see a strong community spirit, principles of solidarity and social justice and people coming together to find solutions to problems governments ignore, or of which leaders are simply unaware.

That is why we started our tour with a simple question: why is the Labour Party no longer the home for so many working communities?
1. Renewing democratic socialism

To begin to answer this question, we must first address the elephant in the room: Brexit.

“It was like a slow motion car crash watching the GE 19 because of Brexit – we were mainly leave voters, so we could see it coming a mile off.” Member, Lewisham

Every single area we visited mentioned how Labour’s stance on Brexit in 2019 was a key reason why working people moved away from the Labour Party.

 Brexit was viewed by many as the vehicle to take back agency. People saw Labour as trying to block their attempts to take back control.”
Member, Stoke on Trent

“It was a big mistake to back it [a second referendum]. I have just finished school and would regularly have conversations with the bus driver who voted Labour his whole life but voted Tory in 2019.”
Member, Durham

“Even though people didn’t know who the Tory candidate was, people had already made their mind up because of Brexit.” Member, North West Durham

“Brexit focused the problem, but there is a deeper one as the Labour Party has been losing the working class for a long time. Take back control wasn’t about taking power back from Brussels but to get power back as it was in the 70s.” Member, Stoke on Trent

In the 2019 election, Labour lost 48 seats which it had previously held for many generations and which had voted to leave the EU. These were the same seats we predicted Labour could lose six months before the election was even called.

“Too many people thought the North was in the bag so we only needed to worry about fickle ‘Remoaners’ – taking people for granted. I’m from the North but live in London now – working class people from Tottenham weren't bothered about Remaining either.” Trade union member, London

“Brexit was massive & got to be the biggest reason why we lost.”
Unite member, Northern England

It is well known that we opposed the moves which were made to turn the Party into a remain-facing political unit. All three of us voted against the Labour whip on a second referendum, something none of us did lightly.
It is also well known that we predicted with considerable accuracy which seats were in jeopardy.

Our reasons for taking this stance were complex and we don’t propose to go into them now but our central point was that the density of leave voters in marginal seats made it impossible to find a route to a Labour majority by turning our back on these voters.

Those who pressed for the shifting position away from accepting the referendum result must explain why they did so. Theirs was a mixture of motives. Some were convinced Europeans, others wanted to remove the Left leadership, and others wanted to placate (rather than lead) the membership.

People who had supported remain were sold a falsehood that not only could the result of the referendum be overturned, but that every version of Brexit was disastrous. This discourse was relentlessly pursued by senior politicians despite there never being a realistic prospect of it happening. The debate was purposely polarised away from any nuanced position on leaving the EU.

Labour got on the wrong side of the Brexit debate and endless Parliamentary manoeuvres left people in our communities in no doubt about our opposition to their will. In the Party’s headlong rush to defend liberalism, it left behind its commitment to democracy. Never again should we forget that we are the Party of democratic socialism.

Some should have known better. They were right at the centre of the Corbyn project and said that they were agnostic on the question of leave versus remain without ever setting out a credible position based on that. In the end though, they joined in the pressure to shift Labour into a remain position fully aware of the consequences. They saw the same polling that we did.

What none of them can do, however, is say that they were unaware of the electoral consequences. They cannot use ignorance of the consequences as an excuse, if for no other reason than that we repeatedly told the shadow cabinet what would follow.

At the centre there were conflicts over how to interpret the data we were seeing. However, it was clear that in the end the concentration of leave voters in marginal seats would be decisive. It was even noted that by this point even remainers were sceptical of a second referendum and many simply wanted Brexit over and done with.

It breaks our hearts to see what is happening now with the Johnson government. It didn’t need to be like that. And it is no consolation to say, after a crushing defeat, that our analysis was correct.

We note that the leadership have reacted to the latest Brexit manoeuvres by the PM by saying in effect that he should “get Brexit done”. Now, where, we wonder, did we hear that argument before? And where would we be if we had accepted the referendum result as we had done prior to the 2017 election?
2. Labour’s Polling Problems

Firstly, it’s great to see Labour polling well. However, when you look at the detail of the data it shows that there is still a long way for the Party to go in order to win back working people.

Let's be clear. We want Labour to win. Our country desperately needs a Labour government. But for Labour to win Sir Keir needs to have the right strategy.

We do not believe that Labour's problems in the so-called “red wall” areas began and ended with Brexit. Jon Trickett has been writing about the growing working alienation from Labour since at least 2005, starting with his work on the "Missing Millions".

The question now is where is our Party under the new leadership?

In this report we are publishing figures drawn from opinion polling carried out since the election. And which include the period to date of Keir Starmer’s leadership.

Obviously, we are in politically unstable and therefore fluid times. Labour has drawn substantially closer to the Conservatives in national polls. This is extremely welcome to all of us who have spent most of our lives fighting for an end to Tory governments.

But, take a closer look at the polls. Beneath the top lines, it’s clear that Keir and the team have much more to do. The situation at present appears to be that the increase in Labour’s polling position has come about by the fact that we are attracting more remain voters – especially from the Lib Dems. This is of course welcome, but what is disturbing is the glacial pace of change among leave voters who are still overwhelmingly in the Tory camp.

This matters because in almost every single marginal seat, the leave vote was dominant. The geographic concentration of leave voters in marginal seats is the key fact in English voting.

We believe that remain vs leave are still signifiers for the broader alienation of working people from the Labour Party – and politics more generally – but that is for a different discussion.

Labour is not making the progress it needs to with working class voters. YouGov’s most recent (at the time of writing) polling shows that the Tories are ahead of Labour by 4 points with C2DE voters⁶ – ie working class voters. Labour has gone from 31% in April 2020, when Sir Keir was elected leader, to 38% amongst this demographic. However, the Party has increased its appeal to ABC1s by 12% in the same time frame.

Opinium’s September 2020 voting intention tracker shows that Labour is polling higher amongst white collar workers (35%) than blue collar workers (31%).⁷ This trend is also seen in IPSOS MORI’s polling in September, with ABC1s at 39% and C2DEs at 36%.⁸ In this latter poll Labour does the best with AB voters (41%) and worst with DEs (35%).

The graph opposite shows just how much Labour has increased amongst AB voters whilst the working class vote lags significantly behind.
The leadership must go further to win working people over and attempt to reconnect with the values of working class communities. At present Sir Keir Starmer’s leadership is yet to cut through.

Similar to working class voters, support for Labour among leave voters has hardly budged, rising to 14% in August, from 11% in March, as shown below, in opinion polls from Opinium.

Also, in the same poll 36% of leavers said Sir Keir Starmer was doing a bad job, compared to 24% who thought he was doing a good one – implying that there are 40% of leave voters who simply haven’t yet decided about Sir Keir. Clearly, the leadership needs to do more to speak to this group. The raw data can be found here.
Education has been an increasingly prominent predictor of voting behaviour, especially in the EU referendum. Whilst we reject snobbish assertions that the “better educated” voted remain it is interesting to breakdown Labour’s support along educational lines.

As we know, education has become heavily marketised and is not as accessible to working people as it once was, mainly due to the prohibitively high fees. It is worth noting that the abolition of tuition fees featured heavily in Labour’s 2017 and 2019 manifestos.

IPSOS MORI’s political monitor shows that Labour is doing well amongst those with degrees – 45% to the Tories’ 27%. Whereas the Tories lead Labour amongst those without any qualifications by 7% and those with other qualifications by 13%.

In those so called “red wall” areas it appears that Boris Johnson still has support. Johnson’s highest approval ratings, in terms of electoral grouping, are in the new seats the Tories won in 2019 (43%) and seats lost by Labour since 2005 (41%) – such as Cannock Chase and Nuneaton which, having been Labour marginals for decades, are now solidly blue. Sir Keir Starmer has 36% and 38% respectively. Clearly not enough for Labour to take those red wall seats back.

Labour has lost one point since May 2020 among Northern voters. To some this may not be significant. However, most of those “red wall” seats which we lost in 2019 are in the North, so we need to be making strides here.

Fortunately, the Tories have slipped further than Labour, but this is a cold comfort. We need to be making strides in Northern seats we lost in 2019, especially those with slim Tory majorities, such as Bury North, Blyth Valley and Dewsbury. Or those seats that we need to defend, such as Weaver Vale, Normanton, Pontefract and Castleford and Stockton North.

In terms of the leader approval ratings, in the North of England 40% support Boris Johnson compared to 38% for Sir Keir Starmer.

Nonetheless, Labour has made some gains among these three groups: remainers, the South (inc London) and middle class voters.

- Between March and August, former Lib Dems supporting the Party increased from 5% to 36%.
- Support for Labour among Labour remainers has increased by 10 points, to 82%.
- Support from Tory remainers has also increased, by 9 points.
- Labour has also increased its appeal to car owning professionals, since March their support has increased by 12 points.
- Support has increased by 8% in London (it has fallen by 18% for the Tories).

However, as this report lays out, these three groups alone will not be enough to form a majoritarian project that can win power in 2024, or whenever the next election comes.

Sir Keir has a big task ahead of him. As we stated earlier, Brexit voters in our former heartlands still do not trust the Party that took their votes for granted. Although it was a long time coming, we think that the first step in trying to win back trust is for the Party to apologise. Ultimately, we put liberalism above democracy and that cannot be allowed to happen again.
We must not forget the historic struggle working people fought to achieve democratic rights and it is important to consider our history, especially the fact that the Party was borne out of the trade union movement, when building a new vision for society.

That is not to say we buy into a backward-looking vision of the country, quite the contrary; we should be standing on the shoulders of our historical giants to see forward.

3. Does class still matter?

Britain is in the middle of another economic crisis, this time as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. It is barely a decade since we were in the midst of the last one, the effects of which are still being felt especially in areas of high deprivation, in communities that have been held back.

The response a decade ago was austerity for the majority and tax breaks for a wealthy minority. It is useful briefly to look at what happened once again.

In 2008 the banking crisis led to the nationalisation of collapsing banks and the injection of billions to secure the country’s economy. In total the estimated cost was £1.2 trillion.

When the Tory-led coalition came to power two years later, they told the British public that in order to pay for the banking crash all of us would have to grit our teeth and bear austerity cuts. Apparently “we were all in it together”. This however turned out to be the biggest con of the new millennium.

By 2017 nearly all of the money for the bankers’ ‘bailout’ had been paid back by the banks. Yet public services had been slashed, wages cut, and investment stalled, all under the pretence of paying off “the deficit”.

Armed with this myth, and the suggestion that Labour failed to fix the roof when the sun shone, the Tories, helped by the Liberal Democrats, engineered one of history’s biggest transfers of wealth from working people to the very richest people in our society.

It’s often said that Britain is one of the wealthiest countries in the world. And this, of course, is true. But where is that wealth? During our No Holding Back tour, we talked about this.

Since the 2008 crash the value of companies on the London Stock Exchange had increased their value by £1.4 trillion. The richest 1000 people in the UK increased their collective wealth by £588 billion. And by 2019 dividend payments were at £110 billion.

Over the same period of time, something else was happening. Workers saw their wages reduce dramatically by over £433 billion13, and by 2025 this is forecast to go up to roughly £610 billion14 – likely more now due to the Covid pandemic.

It is crystal clear now that “austerity” ought perhaps to be called a class war waged by the ruling class on all working people, whether they are in blue or white collar jobs. Austerity was the process by which one of the largest redistributions of wealth and income in British history took place. From working people to the big corporations and to the wealthiest.
Now, we have the Covid crisis. The Office of Budget Responsibility has estimated that the cost of Covid will likely be more than £300 billion in this financial year alone. If this is the case, who will pay for it?

As outlined above the country’s richest people and big corporations have enough wealth to bear the brunt of the cost without too much trouble. However, with a Tory majority in the Commons we can imagine who they will get to pay for Covid: working people. Indeed, in Rishi Sunak’s conference speech he underlined his commitment to free market ideology, declining to intervene to save jobs and vowing to “balance the books” despite the pandemic.

In spite of the fact that ten years of austerity has crippled the NHS and other public services, the Tory government is already talking about public sector pay freezes. It makes Boris Johnson clapping for the nurses, doctors and other NHS staff laughable.

Our worry is that another round of austerity will push more people into poverty, despite many of them being in work and will make the services people rely on – schools, hospitals, public transport, etc – crumble.

Of course, this is what Tories do. A disempowered working population and massive public service cuts help to serve the interests of the ruling class they represent.

This does beg one question, however: why did so many working people vote Tory in the 2019 general election?

In 2017 Labour won 72 of the 100 seats with the largest numbers of blue-collar workers. By 2019, we won 51. In contrast in 2017 the Tories won only 17 of these seats, whilst in 2019 they won 31.

As shown in the table below, the Conservatives won 48% of voters in the lower C2DE social grade in 2019, whereas Labour won only 33%. It is worth highlighting here that this figure is likely skewed by poor pensioners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vote by social grade</th>
<th>% of 41,995 adults who voted at the 2019 general election</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
<td>Lib Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AB</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>DE</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABC1</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2DE</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How do we explain this pattern of voting?

The answer is complex.

During our tour, we argued that Labour only forms a stable government when it successfully unites different social groups into an electoral majority. Gramsci might have called it ‘an historic bloc’. But the authors of our original constitution caught its essence in much simpler language. Labour, they wrote, must unify ‘workers by hand or by brain’. Blue collar and white collar. Wage earners and salary earners.

If the Party appears to tilt too far in one direction or another – moving too far in the direction of one part of our electoral coalition – our support base fractures. And we lose.

It is our contention that leading elements in the Labour Party moved us too far in one direction – away from our working class base and towards a more metropolitan middle class. In other words, away from communities that reliably voted Labour for generations, to a more mobile cohort who treat political support like choosing a branded product. It is a dangerous strategy.

In the place of a politics which sought to bridge the differences, and to provide a synthesis which could unite our voters, we had (over several decades) failed to unify the different interests which we wish to bring together.

Everyone who follows the debate knows that this is our view. What is perhaps more interesting is that we found widespread agreement amongst members during our tour.

“We stopped being a Labour Party, dumped socialism to appeal to southern middle class voters.”
Member, Elmet and Rothwell

“Labour was seen as a Metropolitan London centric Party....as a member I just felt the North was ignored by the Party.”
Unite member, Northern England

“Working class people think the Party is very London centric.”
Member, Oxford

“The bigger overarching issue is that we lost touch with people in our communities. People perceive Labour to be a middle class liberal Party not in touch with working class people.”
Member, Elmet and Rothwell
An interconnected issue is geographical place – there was almost unanimous agreement in our meetings that Labour has a big problem in areas outside the big cities (see graph below). We argued in our Northern Discomfort pamphlet that neoliberalism has been more acute in towns and rural areas, whereas some big cities have had a less bleak outlook because they have maintained some social mobility.

![Graph showing percentage responses to the question: Does Labour have a problem outside the big cities?]

With the economic effects of Covid yet to be fully appreciated, we can already see that all working people – blue and white collar – are going to suffer under the Tories.

Half a million people are already at risk of losing their jobs, some companies are trying to engage in “fire and rehire” practices to cut costs and 20% of workers have already seen a pay cut since the pandemic began.

This is why class still matters. It unifies working and middle class communities who are suffering similar punishment from the Tories. And the only way Labour can stand up for these communities is by working alongside the trade unions and communities themselves.

“We need Keir Starmer to work with the trade unions if we are to defeat this Tory party. People were conned. Those people who voted for the Tories are paying a high price.” Trade union member, Midlands

“We also need to stop ‘doing to’ working class communities and working with and for instead – genuine, long term community development rebuilding trust and interest in our politics and values. Some activists act like missionaries for social democracy with no grasp of socialism.” Trade union member, Scotland

“We’ve gone too far down the identity politics route rather than class politics. I talk from a transsexual point of view too!” Trade union member, Midlands
87% of those polled in our meetings agreed that the Labour Party had drifted too far away from its trade union roots.

In the next chapter we discuss this and other factors.

Our purpose is not to impose our own views but rather to reflect the views of the people we met.

We will hear the opinions of working people in the labour movement – some Party members, some not – from all over the country. People who spend day after day speaking to voters in the workplace and on their doorsteps and who hear the real voice of the people. The new leadership of the Party needs to listen carefully and act accordingly.

4. Problems in the 2019 general election

We were struck by the ferocity with which many of our activists described their encounters with traditionally Labour-voting people. Many told us that they encountered real anger with the Party on the doorsteps.

“It was hard work on the doorstep. I feared hostility wearing a rosette.”
*Member, Newcastle under Lyme*

“I campaigned in Stockton South - knocking on Labour-voting doors to GOTV and people were angry and shouting at the activists.” *Member, North East*

“In the past you could have a transformative conversation on the doorstep, but not now. It’s almost become a social norm in working class communities to be anti-labour.”
*Member, Middlesbrough*
Why is this the case when the Tories imposed politically motivated austerity on working class people?

Listening carefully to the views of all the participants during our tour, a number of explanations were offered. We think these can be placed into two categories. There were those which were essentially short term in character and can therefore be changed quickly, which isn’t to say that they were unimportant. And then there were longer term issues, which are much more intractable but clearly need to be addressed.

We turn first to the contingent, short term issues and then will highlight longer term issues.

**A) Jeremy Corbyn**

Some say that Jeremy Corbyn himself was an issue on the doorstep, indeed this point of view heavily featured in the Labour Together report. It is true that Jeremy’s leadership style was unique, and as such created an opportunity for media pundits to go for him repeatedly. However, the change in attitude between 2017 and 2019 is worth noting. Even people who didn’t like him in 2017 thought he was sincere and authentic.

Also, as YouGov found in its polling of January 2020, one quarter of those who switched to the Tories cited leadership concerns, but nearly half of voters said Brexit was a bigger issue.

The issue of media smear campaigns against Jeremy Corbyn came up a lot in our discussions. Issues around his perceived lack of patriotism, which focused mainly on failing to sing the national anthem, were central to these criticisms.

“It wasn’t Jeremy who cost us the election, it was the disloyal people within the PLP who diluted our message on Brexit and tried to align us with the Lib-Dems.” *Member, Elmet and Rothwell*

“Media created a persistent narrative that demonises working class groups, lone mothers, unemployed. We need to challenge this narrative; they make the idea of working class seem inherently wrong.” *Member, Bournemouth*

“The working class have been pitted against each other for so long in the media and by politicians that it will take a lot of work to overcome the inherent mistrust within the working class.” *Member, Bournemouth*

“How can we combat the media relentlessly poisoning the minds of voters against left-wing politics, essentially working as a campaigners for the status quo?” *Member, Bournemouth*

It was perhaps a failing on the part of the leadership at the time that we did not re-interpret what patriotism really means in a progressive sense. Jeremy Corbyn was a solid trade unionist and his core principles of solidarity, social justice, anti-racism and community spirit were very much aligned with the British public. Unfortunately, we did not turn that narrative to our advantage.

We should have constructed a progressive patriotism that was not about bending the knee, but about strengthening workers’ and trade union rights, celebrating racial diversity and promoting equality amongst all identities. It is possible to love your country and learn and reflect on its history proactively and critically.
B) Policy

Many people on our calls said our policies in 2019 lacked clarity and failed to represent the interests of working people.

“2019 was policy on the hoof. There wasn’t a clear message of what we stood for.”
Member, Wetherby

“Totally confusing and chaotic messaging vs Get Brexit Done. Apart from free broadband, I can’t remember any of our policies. We need clear messaging otherwise we will never break through.” Member, Elmet and Rothwell

“Too many policies that made no sense – too complex. We NEED to counter the immigration arguments from the right, not pander to them. Especially in relation to our NHS.” Member, Wales

We had promised that no one outside the wealthiest group in our country would pay more tax. However, in the middle of the campaign it became clear that we were going to abolish the married person’s allowance. This would have penalised a lot of struggling married couples. In the interests of equalising the tax treatment of all households (surely the right thing to do) it would have been far better to level up the tax break to all cohabiting partners.

Some told us that this policy illustrated a blindness to the sensibilities of many millions of married people, underlining perhaps that tilt towards a cultural gap between metropolitan inhabitants and others, as well perhaps as a generational gulf.

In 2017 we had a much clearer policy platform that appealed to working people, but there were concerns expressed to us that the current leadership will roll back those ideas.

“I think my main concerns for the future of the Labour Party is that we don’t lose sight of the policies that drew me and many others to the Party 5 years ago.” Member, Durham

Many people in our sessions raised concerns about Labour’s failure to make the arguments. In 2019 our argument about the massive transfer of wealth and power from working people to the wealthy elite went largely unheard. We did go some way to give activists the tools to do this in 2017 with the manifesto and our tagline “for the many, not the few”.

This argument makes a coherent framework for otherwise quite different policy proposals. In the absence of an overarching narrative about our country and the world around us, our past as a people, the present and our future, a vital linking thread was missing.

“Obscenely wealthy gaining more all the time, normal people not getting anything, but Labour isn’t making the argument that most people have a commonality.” Member, Redcar

“We (Labour) haven’t transformed people’s lives when in power and it shows.” Member, Middlesbrough
Unfortunately, Labour does not seem to be changing tack on policy, preferring to stay silent on key issues. This hasn’t gone unnoticed.

“I expected Keir to put up more of a fight for workers. Our government is not properly being held to account by the opposition. Footballers are doing more than Keir.”

*Trade union member, London and Eastern*

“Do we even know what Labour intentions are under Keir with regards to austerity? Have to say, the optics are not looking good. Getting harder to stay enthusiastic with Labour at the moment.”

*Unite member, Northern England*

“The Socialist Group of Labour MPs need to offer a clear Socialist programme. The current leadership under Starmer will never do this.”

*Trade union member, London and Eastern*

We asked people on our tour what they thought of Labour’s response to Covid, the results of which are below.

**Labour’s response to Tory govt Covid strategy has been...**

Finally, there was frustration at how ordinary Party members were excluded from the policy-making process.

“One of the things talked about quite a bit in Unite by LP members is the lack of information and transparency and ability to be feed in to policy, strategy etc partially from rank and file members who do not sit on committees. There are a lot of members who do not feel their voices are being heard.”

*Trade Union member, London and Eastern*
C) Disunity in the PLP and Party HQ

It is a well known maxim that disunited parties don’t win elections. In the run up to the 2019 election, the disunity in the PLP was clear.

It is also clear that an element in Labour’s HQ had been opposing any hint of progressive leadership since at least the election of Ed Miliband in 2010 and had doubled down on their efforts to take out the leader on the election of Jeremy Corbyn. The activities highlighted in the leaked report on the actions of staffers in the 2017 general election shows this clearly.

When listening to people on our tour, the issue of disunity was hotly debated. It was at the very least partly blamed for our defeat, as was the increased alienation of members and voters.

“The PLP fighting against Corbyn was a big problem. Keir and Boris do not provide the representation people want. Labour leadership may have changed, but membership hasn’t – they still want more working class representation, socialist policies and clear leadership.” Member, Bournemouth

“Smearing and undermining from within the Party has been appalling. Not surprised people didn’t want to vote Labour.” Fabian Member, Reading

“I believe that one of the main reasons we lost in 2019 was certain people in senior positions were actively working against our leader, and to make it worse we are now forbidden to debate this in our branches and CLPs. Until we get back to being more democratic at member level.” Trade union member, North East

Inevitably the leaked Labour report which revealed that some senior Party staff were actively working against the leadership, came up quite a bit in our discussions, especially in the context of failing to support working class candidates in the election campaign.

“I stood in 2017 and 2019 and got our best result in four decades in a seat where we have never had a Labour MP. I am livid that despite giving all I had for the Party, staff stopped us getting what we so badly needed. The report has shone a huge light on people that apparently have no place in our Party.” Member, North East

“References to the leaked report are characterised as looking backwards but how can we go forward to win elections if we can’t trust some of our paid staff. How can we trust the advice and guidance of the Party’s legal department? How can we trust that regional officers are working for a Labour victory rather than spinning us for factional purposes.” Member, Wansbeck

“I don’t want to fight for a Party that fights against me.” Member, Lincolnshire
D) Communications and messaging

After the successful communications operation in the 2017 general election, many were expecting a similarly strategic and professional plan in the run up to the 2019 election.

Unfortunately, most of the people we listened to on our tour were highly critical of how we communicated our platform. Firstly, we did not develop a narrative that threaded our policies together and told a story about what Labour would do in power.

This is what the members we listened to said:

“We haven’t done enough. We allowed the benefits system to be used to subsidise rich people - eg volunteering/unpaid work which takes real employment away from someone else, housing benefits that subsidise expensive rents from landlords. 25% of top 1% have increased their wealth under Covid. The rich will become rich no matter what in this system. Success isn’t being rich. Labour never challenged the narrative of the ‘undeserving poor’. Yet allowed the super rich to buy private islands and multiple yachts.”

Member, Redcar

“We shouldn't be telling union members to campaign for Labour; it should be obvious. That it isn't, is the real problem.” Member, unaffiliated union

“We need to vastly improve messaging. Tories clearly don't care about the working class, but their message won the election and a vast majority with it.” Member, Elmet and Rothwell

“It is so difficult on the doorsteps to distil just how 'radical' policies can bring about realistic positive change, but actually engaging people over a sustained period will show that there is a better, different way of doing things. For example, so many lost voters who are actually working under poor conditions don’t connect that current government policy is what is keeping them in that way. Start working with those people to learn from their experience and highlight how Tory policy doesn't and never will support them, but also work on the positive solutions and those voters should return.”

Member, North West Durham

“We are losing the propaganda battle simply because we don’t have the millions to spend on Facebook ads that the right wing parties do. I constantly see posts from relatives sharing groups like ‘Let’s keep Labour out’ and I don’t think we can win that battle, we need to be out on the streets and in the community.” Member, Wakefield

There were also criticisms of the confusing nature of our messaging, often with the Party’s changed stance on a second referendum being blamed.

“The last election was a Brexit election and we were unable to get our messages across. However, Starmer's second vote message confused the electorate and I feel this lost us the election, not our policies.” Trade Union member, North West
E) Old fashioned campaigning

Many identified the key problems with Labour’s campaigning strategy. The focus on voter ID and cold calling failed to build meaningful relationships. For example, in 2015 Ed Miliband promised to have five million conversations with voters, but ultimately they were more akin to marketing calls.

One member on our Durham, Easington and Sedgefield session called out the impersonality of some of Labour’s campaign tactics and strategy, saying:

“I’m so over online organising!

Obviously, it has its place and can be very effective, but actually, the right have gone underground on social media and are more effective at winning hearts and minds in those arena’s unfortunately. We can do social media better, obviously, but we need to meet people and fight *alongside* people in communities.”

Our most direct connection to working people is through the unions. We agree that the unions need to do more to strengthen links with working class communities, but there is some fantastic work already going on. Labour needs to be bold and unafraid of reconnecting in communities that may have been hostile to Labour in 2019 but are historically Labour voters.

“A lot of people now are in this precarious employment and they feel disengagement and it links in with the community as well and a lot of these people will be poorly paid. This gives a background for the right wing where these people have moved away from the unions and the Labour Party and so we need to start campaigning in the areas where there are people on zero hours contracts and work precariously.”

*Trade union member, Midlands*
F) Culture gap due to unbalanced nature of Labour Party relationship with metropolitan vs non-metro communities

The Labour Together\textsuperscript{18} report, which reviewed the 2019 general election, says four in 10 of those who voted Labour in 2010 and leave in 2016 had already been lost by the Party in 2015, so clearly there is something much deeper going on. Brexit merely highlighted and accelerated the fracturing of our electoral base.

In 2017, Labour, led by Jeremy Corbyn, had its highest share of the vote since 1945; some Labour governments have been elected on less. This was partly due to Jeremy Corbyn being seen as a breath of fresh air and someone who would challenge the status quo.

However, it was claimed by a few momentum members in Redcar that Labour is seen as the “establishment” in the North of England:

\begin{quote}
“Massive impact disproportionately in the working class and regionally some have seen some cash splashed on infrastructure. Nothing here. Councils defunded. Job losses due to public sector. Shocking. How hard-working class hit. And even more the Northern working class. Labour seen as establishment in the North.”\textbf{Redcar Momentum member}
\end{quote}

We asked a question in our online polling about whether Labour stands up for working people. The answers were fascinating. 53% of people we polled (see graph below) in non-Labour affiliated unions said the Party does not stand up for working people.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{graph.png}
\caption{Do you think the Labour Party stands up for working people?}
\end{figure}
From our meetings with CLPs 78% agreed that it was a concern over two thirds of Labour members are middle class (ie from ABC1 social grouping) compared to a 60% national average.

People repeatedly claimed that Labour had become too southern and too middle class. Although there was by no means a feeling that middle class southerners should not be in the Party, rather members wanted to see more regional, racial, gender, sexual orientation and class diversity within the Party.

There was general agreement that Labour does have a class problem.

“The working class – however you define it – has been left behind effectively since the 80s and Tony Blair did nothing about it to bring them on board and to win their votes, which is why Farage and the Brexit Party tapped into that feeling of being forgotten.”

*Trade Union member, Midlands*

“People perceive Labour to be a middle class liberal Party not in touch with working class people.”

*Member, Elmet and Rothwell*

Even middle-class activists had thought about class and realised they did not even know what working class communities wanted or thought because they didn’t know anyone from those communities.

One activist from Durham said:

“I’m profoundly aware of how unaware I am of class. I think there’s a tribal identity thing at work here – I probably identify with middle class concerns more than I realise, because to me that just feels normal.”

*Member, Durham*

It is perhaps unsurprising that working people feel alienated from the Labour Party when we look at the number of MPs there are from working class backgrounds over time.

From 1945 to 1970, 42 % of Labour MPs were from working class backgrounds. Prior to 2017, which is the most recent research that has been done, only 1.5% of Labour MPs are from manual work backgrounds.

This is compared to 49.2% who worked in politics (including as councillors, lobbyists or in the media) before they became MPs. 84% of Labour MPs have a university degree and 20% went to Oxbridge.

These figures are striking when we look at the difference in demographics between MPs’ backgrounds and those of people in red wall areas we lost in 2019.

Only 30% of people in red wall areas have an NVQ4 or above qualification (which is the equivalent to the first year of an undergraduate degree) and only 37% work in what is considered a “top job”.

65% of Labour MPs represent city constituencies, nearly double the number of whom represent town constituencies. Although Labour should be representing cities, it should also be representing smaller areas such as towns and villages.
There are substantial differences between Labour city seats and red wall areas. On average city seats tend to have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the country. Yet, there are more job opportunities, easier access to free cultural assets such as galleries and museums, and there tends to be more social mobility. In contrast, towns in the North are often trapped in a cycle of declining opportunity.

That is not to say there are not pockets of deprivation in cities; we know there are. The point we are trying to make is that if Labour is dominated by city seats’ interests, we run the risk of ignoring a critical part of our historic coalition.

### Table 1

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</table>

5. **What are the solutions?**

a) **Radical coherent policies - apology on Brexit?**

The 2019 general election was a hard lesson in how not to do policy – it was confused, contradictory in some places and was not believable to most voters – for example free broadband. Not to mention that the 2019 manifesto was much less radical than the one in 2017.

No narrative threaded the policies together. We failed to communicate them properly, often having multiple policy announcements in one day in the run up to election day.

That is not to claim that the 2017 manifesto was perfect. It certainly was bolder than previous Labour manifestos, with public ownership and workers’ rights correctly at its core. But it was social democratic in character and perhaps failed to conjure up a real economic alternative in a holistic way.

No one could have predicted Covid, but in response to it, only radical and coherent policies will cut through the monumental task our country faces. The status quo – ie neoliberalism – has shown just how useless it is at handling crises of this nature. The system simply is not set up to prioritise the health and wellbeing of the nation above profit and private interest.

If we are to truly rebuild our traditional coalition, we need to put aside the constitutional issues that have ripped it apart.
Leave voters were too often sneered at and remain voters were led up the garden path with a position – of overturning the referendum result – that was never seriously achievable. By doing both some senior members of our Party polarised the electorate, with some even suggesting that Labour was remain or it was nothing. To put this aside, leavers and remainers need an apology.

With this in mind, Labour’s approach to policy should be threefold:

● Humility in admitting the mistakes of 2019, in particular the Party’s commitment to a second referendum

● Active interventions are needed to change the current political narrative. Labour cannot be a passive opposition focused merely on issues of process.

● New ideas. Labour needs to stick to the values of socialism but bring in fresh ideas about our changing world. For example, what is Britain's future going to look like post Brexit and post Covid?

The trade unions, working people and local communities should be at the centre of any Labour policy.

**Recommendations**

● A full-throated apology from Labour to the people for ignoring the democratic principle for which the labour movement has fought for centuries and for treating both sides of the debate with contempt.

● Banishing austerity to history’s dustbin by supporting a wealth tax (with a de minimis) to pay for the Covid crisis. We do not propose a so-called garden tax on middle class people, rather we want the richest in our society to pay for this crisis.

● Strengthening trade union and workers’ rights, building on Labour Workers’ Rights Manifesto

b) Re-root the Party in held back communities – new ways of organising

As we have said before, the Party needs to embrace new ways of organising to stay connected and relevant to the communities we hope to represent.

To build on the shoulders of the giants who went before we need a renewed take on the traditional organising model of the Labour and Trade Union movement so familiar to many of our communities. This approach served the Labour movement well for generations and led to the formation of the Party and the development of radical ideas, such as the creation of the NHS.

The Party’s current organising model which mostly relies on centralised mechanisms and an ever-decreasing activist pool (alongside a declining number of Labour voters) is too old fashioned.

As well as in HQ, the regional offices need to be brought into the present with a massive expansion of community organising, a renewal of the trade union link and more power and resources for local grassroots members.
Trade Unions and Community organising

From the polling we did throughout our tour, it was clear that there was a huge appetite for community organising. Some 80% of those polled think that Labour should use community organising to reconnect with working class communities.

This means getting back into working class communities and organising from the grassroots up. Bringing people together over an issue – eg a shop closure, school funding cuts or the outsourcing of a local service – that matters to people beyond the Party and start to reconnect and build relationships with communities.

It was clear that members wanted to defend the Community Organising Unit in the Labour Party, especially in light of rumours about its future.

“Community organising definitely the way forward. Until recently I taught in Ashfield. Have taught in schools in the area for 35 years so have watched the disadvantage and deprivation grow. Have also watched the rise in racism and the blaming of ‘immigrants’ for the area’s decline despite schools working hard to try and combat this. More money needs to come to CLPs to support this.” Member, Newark

“Community engagement is definitely the way to encourage people to support the Labour Party and 2019 was very much a Brexit election and reminding people as well that it’s not about all of the national stuff, it’s about your community too.” Member, Hemsworth constituency

“Working class people need to see Labour as a party that will stand up for them in their day to day struggles. Two years ago our council in Salford was poised to close five council-run nurseries because of government funding cuts. Had they done so it would have confirmed what many already thought – that Labour was not with us. However, following a massive public meeting organised by my UNISON branch – supported by Salford MPs, including Rebecca Long-Bailey – our Mayor Paul Dennett decided to fight with us for the funding and refuse to close them. The unions, the community and the party came together. We held a march of 1000 people. We went to Westminster and lobbied the government together. Those nurseries are still open today. That came up on the doorstep in December. Some people who were thinking of voting Brexit Party or not voting, voted Labour because of that campaign. That’s what people need to see from Labour – a party fighting the battles they fight, not just with messages of solidarity, but with graft.” Member, Salford

The Party needs to work in partnership with the trade unions who are already leading the way with new ways of organising, such as the Bakers’ Union’s McStrike and Unite’s Community initiative, which brings those not in work into trade union membership with the aim of reconnecting unions with local communities.

Trade union membership is now increasing after years of decline, with nearly a quarter of workers now in a union. New unions are also establishing themselves – for example United Voices of the World who organise in precarious, often migrant, jobs.

The emerging strength of workers, especially with the government’s pitiful response to the Covid crisis, is something to be hopeful about.
The community organising team needs to focus on piloting these new ways of organising, what many have called “the Broxstowe model”.

We, as No Holding Back, want to trial three pilots in each region in held back communities. Working alongside our trade union partners, we believe that even a small organisation like ours can make a difference through community organising.

**Recommendations**

- Community Organising Unit should be expanded to include political education and embedded within regions and communities.
- Reorganise Regional Offices to focus on community organising and strengthening trade union links
- Community Organising officer to be elected for each CLP
- Implement Community Organising and political education Pilots across key “red wall” seats

**c) Rebuild party membership in held back communities**

Labour’s membership is concentrated in the South and London, which obviously needs to be rebalanced. The Party must be the voice of the whole of Britain, not just certain sections of it. We don’t think this is controversial.

How we build the membership in held back communities, however, is a different question. Firstly, we need to get to the bottom of why we have fewer members in the North. Partly it is because of the structures and processes of CLPs.

“I hate Labour Party meetings. It’s the same people arguing over procedure. The recent stuff over Zoom has been much friendlier and interesting. We need to speak to the public more but I’d often be embarrassed if they saw the tedious rule checking nonsense that goes on.”  
*Member, Elmet and Rothwell*

“Too many CLP and branch positions are held by people with the biggest, loudest voices and not by people who would actually be good at the job.”  
*Member, Stoke on Trent*

“I’m new to Labour. Felt that politics was a minefield. No political education to give confidence to get involved. I got involved in the community first and then felt more comfortable to get into politics, join a union, etc. Working class people find politics so daunting.”  
*Member, Bournemouth*
Recommendations

- Trade union branches and CLPs to launch a union recruitment drive amongst Labour members, supporters and the wider local community
- Devolving more funding (and funding decisions) to CLPs and BLPs
- A development fund specifically for CLPs with low density membership in areas of multiple deprivation
- Make membership fees more accessible for working people
- New digital funding and training for members to allow more effective reach into communities
d) New leaderships at local level

Let’s be clear, the only way Labour can start to rebuild itself in working class communities is through nurturing and encouraging new local leaders. People who are from, and deeply embedded within, the communities they lead.

The old days of parachuting political professionals the into working class communities that they have no connection to must now end in totality. Labour needs to reverse its thinking; encouraging the grassroots to grow rather than imposing candidates on high.

“We have to think about local leadership. We can’t have southerners moving up North to be MPs, parachuting in.” Member, Oxford

Recommendations

- Strategic talent spotting that does not operate in silos, by bringing together communities, unions and the Party
- Working with the unions to train potential candidates
- Set up joint political education programmes with the unions

e) Increase the number of working people in parliament and the party

It is very expensive to be a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate (PPC) in the Labour Party. It often means taking extensive time off work, which is nearly impossible for people who work outside politics and don’t have their own resources.

“I live in Bournemouth and arrived at 18 with nothing. I worked in zero hours low paid jobs and paid other people's mortgages by renting. Not easy to be a working class person running for Parliament and I'm still facing problems now, 6 months after the election. Volunteering full time for the Party. I wouldn't take it back but wouldn't recommend it to a friend. Threatens house over your head. Most people in Parliament are not from that world. They do not represent the people.” Former PPC, South West

“Too many working class people feel that they are excluded from involvement in politics. This is for many reasons including: other pressures on their time due to working all hours to make ends meet, too little space to analyse how to fix the problems, childcare and caring responsibilities, access to meetings, especially if single parents/carers/shift workers etc. As a Party we need to become far more inclusive and offer huge education.” Former PPC, London

“The selection process for PPC is often not based on competence, rather political views and very few people get involved.” Member, Elmet and Rothwell
There was anger at the “parachuting” of candidates into safe Labour seats they had no community connections with. A good few people we spoke with thought this long term trend of “career” politicians in the Party is part of the reason why our red wall crumbled.

“There was anger at the “parachuting” of candidates into safe Labour seats they had no community connections with. A good few people we spoke with thought this long term trend of “career” politicians in the Party is part of the reason why our red wall crumbled.

“Party forgotten working class. Safe seats used as a career path. Lost working class touch because of that. Need financial support to get working class MP’s into position. Not everyone can take two years off work.”

Momentum and Labour member, Redcar

“We can’t have people parachuted in; we need to build up communities. We need to be relevant in people’s lives.”

Trade union member, London and Eastern

“Thinking about the East Midlands and the political culture there, one of the things that has gone wrong is that you don’t have MPs who have come through the trade unions and one of my heroes is Harry Barnes who was replaced by Natasha Engels who was parachuted in there by New Labour. Harry Barnes was from Durham and Natasha Engels was a health care lobbyist and then went on to become Theresa May’s advisor on fracking.”

Trade union member, Midlands

There was also some concern over the loyalties of some Labour MPs.

“How do we stop big business and individuals hostile to the working class from buying influence over Labour MP’s, candidates and leadership candidates?”

Member, Northumberland

Unfortunately, we listened to a number of people sharing their experiences of how intimidating getting involved in the Labour Party can be. It is heartbreaking to hear that one member in Durham had to go through this:

“At my first meeting I was eight months pregnant and got screamed at by a couple of other members because they thought I was there to rig a vote. I almost never went to another one. The atmosphere needs to be more inclusive.”

The Party hasn’t done enough to give working class members the support needed to give a voice to their concerns. For example:

“I think the biggest miss in working class communities, compared to what they were in the 70’s and 80’s – and before that – is confidence. In our history, the unions tended to give that confidence. Nye Bevan said this – they gave him education and confidence. He used to stay up, all night reading, so when he got the chance in Parliament, he attacked Churchill in his maiden speech. We have a huge job to make the Labour Party the route for that kind of confidence. Getting in amongst working class communities is the start. Listening, and picking up on their issues.”

Member, Durham
This ties in with another point that was raised in a number of areas: that people should not be made to feel ashamed of their accent or class. In fact they should be proud of it and the Party should celebrate it.

“I remember as a university student, I was so ashamed of my accent, affronted that people thought my Teesside accent was a Geordie accent and now my shame is that it took until I attended your session on Class at People, Pits and Politics in Durham to really open my eyes on why I should never be ashamed to own my class status!” Member, Redcar

Recommendations

- Working class quotas
- In all selections there must be % that have to live in the constituency they are standing in. Whilst we recognise good candidates don’t always live in marginal seats, we need to redress the balance that has seen too many candidates parachuting in from other areas.
- A new fund to support candidates who otherwise cannot afford to stand
- A future candidates programme for prospective parliamentary and council elections
- Buddying system between MPs and candidates
f) Local government

“People see their towns falling apart and they blame the Labour Council and not the government.”
Member, Crewe and Nantwich

“Sadly we’ve seen our terms and conditions eroded and outsourcing happen at Labour councils. How can we convince trade union members that Labour is going to stand up for them when this is happening?”
Unison/Labour member, North West

“I am a Labour voter and used to be a member. People do not get that the cuts from government have destroyed council services. They just see their council tax increase and their services decrease. If Labour don’t sort it out they will lose more elections. It is tragic.”
Former councillor and member, Hemsworth

It is clear from our listening exercise that local government really matters and the crisis it faces today means that this area must be a major priority for the Labour leadership.

We spoke to many who felt frustrated by some of their local councillors and their Labour authority. They believe in order to win a Labour government we must tackle this problem together and head on.

“Here, we have a Labour one Party state and it’s not about what you know, it’s about who you know so in terms of running for councillor, it’s difficult if you’re on the left and that’s the barrier you need to get past first of all.” Trade union member, London and Eastern

We know that many of the public’s day-to-day needs fall to councils, especially those things that tend to frustrate people most. From social care to public health, education to bin collections and the maintenance of much of our public space. If Labour politicians hope to be popular with the electorate then they need to deliver at local level.

We know the reality of the central government cuts to local council budgets and the desperate impact that has had on communities, especially post-industrial towns. We also know that there are Labour councils who are delivering progressive solutions despite huge financial pressures.

We concluded from our conversations that there must be a national strategy across the Labour Party and the trade unions, to confront the crisis facing local councils in the face of years of government cuts. Whether it’s the question of how to respond in policy terms, or a narrative explaining how the Tories have been responsible for the cuts which impact the services Labour councils provide, the bigger picture has been lacking. This has no doubt contributed to us losing former ”safe“ Labour seats at local and national level.

The reality is that, for many living in areas of high social need, having a Labour mayor or council promise fiscal autonomy has meant little more than permanent austerity and underfunding.

Outsourcing has falsely been regarded the most cost-efficient method of delivering services, something that Labour should boldly demand an end to. Even Tory councils have been insourcing services – in 2017 a third of Tory-run councils insourced services.22
The Tories know that they can try to avoid blame and responsibility by attacking local politicians, something they will no doubt ramp up as they try to dodge the public anger over their Covid-19 failures that will grow in the coming months. Councillors must receive more help from the Party to counter these claims.

Many who we spoke to, including councillors themselves, felt that if Labour representatives at local level could develop solutions to tackle the bread and butter issues for ordinary people, as well as engaging productively with local organisations and businesses, maybe we would stand a chance of turning the tide.

We must also state that participants acknowledged that there are countless councillors doing what they can to tackle the injustices that we see on a daily basis.

Councils are often the Party’s first point of contact with the world outside of politics and they deserve to have the support and resources available to them to do the job well. The Labour Party must use their skills and expertise, as well as share good practice, whilst offering training and support to make sure councillors are constantly improving. It’s time to build a campaign that can revive local government and its relationship with the communities it serves.

**Recommendations**

- Draw a line in the sand over outsourcing. Labour Councils across the country must use the example provided by the disastrous Serco and Sitel test and trace system, or the care home scandal that preceded it, to make the case that outsourcing is irresponsible, damaging to our communities and must be consigned to the past.

- Find, develop and support local members to represent their community in local councils at all levels.

- A national and united long running campaign highlighting the real impact of cuts to councils and the need to stop outsourcing work. This should be bold and visible using advertising, technology and campaign days.
g) Challenging the Tories’ economic priorities

Due to the ongoing economic impact of Covid-19, and the government’s ideological commitment to protect the wealthy above working people, we want to suggest a few radical policies that challenge the economic priorities of the Tories.

**Covid profiteering tax**

As well as a tax on the very wealthy, we propose some kind of Covid profiteering tax so the likes of Amazon are paying their fair share in this crisis.

**Outsourcing tax**

In the same vein as the Covid profiteering tax, those who are making money from Covid related government contracts should pay a tax on the profits they make. This is in order to attempt to recoup public money to invest back into public services, rather than going into the pockets of shareholders and company bosses, who are already wealthy.

This could include a retrospective Covid contribution tax on those who have already profited from contracts.

**Cronyism watchdog**

Set up a ‘cronyism’ watchdog, made up of a jury-like board who are selected from the electoral register by lot. We would prohibit anyone in a political job or in a public office from being selected eg MPs, Lords, senior civil servants, quango bosses and senior army officers, etc.

**Protecting public money watchdog**

Set up an independent pressure group that ensures public money is spent on the public. This would include scrutinising government contracts, reviewing policies where public money is being used to uphold the wealthiest in society (eg the low rate of corporation tax, tax avoidance, etc), and prioritising the spending of public money on the public, rather than for profiteering.
6. What next? Concluding remarks

We hope that this report is helpful reading to the Labour leadership. Clearly there is a great deal to do, but we have a valuable asset that most political parties do not: a mass membership. But the only way to start to harness that asset is to listen to members from all parts of the country and all walks of life.

We would like to offer some comradely advice to the new leader.

Firstly, he should not bury under the carpet his role in Brexit. It will come back to bite him and Labour. Building trust is critical.

Secondly, to win back working people, he needs to listen. Focus groups only tell you what you want to hear.

If he did listen, he would hear some of the things that we have heard from working people as we have run the biggest listening project amongst members and trade unionists since the election across the country.

These are their thoughts and ours about how Labour can rebuild trust and build back the red wall in a genuine way.

• Values are critical – But Covid 19 has taught us that cooperation, mutualism, social justice, solidarity and care are values that are still the beating heart of Britain’s communities – let’s build on that.

• Policies need to reflect these values and be bold and transformational. At a time when ordinary people are being hit hard – this is not the time to hold back. That is why we think the country needs a National Recovery Plan in the style of the post-war Marshall Plan that transforms Britain with good jobs and decent pay for working people through massive investment in people turning our held back towns into places that build again: electric cars, wind turbines, solar panels and jobs in the care sector, NHS and schools. That’s why investing in a national social care system is critical and an education that banishes Etonian elitism and invests in all children to thrive. And Labour councils already under enormous pressure should not be left to shoulder the burden of Covid.

• But to do all of this we need to organise. Now is not the time to rely on focus groups. Focus groups are fine for testing messages – but they don’t build trust, relationships and win social justice.

The Covid crisis has shown us how communities come together around values of solidarity, care, community and social justice – from CLPs like Broxtowe organising around Covid, to unions organising around furlough.

The Labour movement must invest in its best asset – its mass membership. Every CLP cross the country should be organising with communities around the big issues that they face locally. That doesn’t mean looking inwards, it means building a movement of confident, skilled activists that won’t just knock on doors every five years but will win and work with communities everyday.
It is essential that we work hand in hand with the trade unions to organise together in every town. And that means we need to re-commit and re-strengthen Labour and the unions to organise up and down the country to ensure every trade union member not only votes Labour but communities know that Labour is on their side.

That means investing in developing leaders, training our members in organising and supporting them to organise from Motherwell to Mansfield to rebuild.

It is through organising we will find talented and diverse working people. Nurses, teachers, delivery drivers. Social care workers that can re-root the Labour Party in working class communities and together we can rebuild our political representation across the UK.

There can be no holding back. This is how we will build back trust. This is how we will build back the Red Wall. This is how we will win.
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