

CHARTIST

NEW DEMOCRACY SUPPLEMENT FOR THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION

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Your call, Keir



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Where are we on democratic reform?

Cat Smith MP sets out the case for a constituency link

All my sympathies go to electoral administrators who were under enormous pressure because they were only given six months' notice of the new electoral arrangements for the 2023 local elections. The Electoral Commission and others are still analysing the effects of the 2022 Elections Act which insists on photo identification for in person voting in Great Britain. They are also facing the challenge of changing boundaries, unknown election dates and hopefully a spike of voter registrations which makes me worried about the administration of the next general election.

In March 2022, we lost the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, passed back in 2011 which removed the timing of a general election from the Prime Minister of the day - although in 2017 and 2019 that was overturned by Parliament. We are now back to the PM's choice with maximum five-year terms. This means that electoral administrators have to stand ready for an election at any time up to January 2025.

It is important to remember that a pro-PR motion was passed with overwhelming support at the 2022 Labour Conference. Before the National Policy Forum (NPF) met in July 2023, 44 of all the amendments called for Labour to back PR and two thirds for the relevant commission, Safe and Secure Communities. As a local MP it is clear to me how Labour members are increasingly committed to PR and keen to see it in the manifesto. Eighty per cent of Constituency delegates voted for PR in the card vote at Conference 2021

The question arises as to whether or not legislation for PR would require a referendum. I would certainly argue that it should not. The Elections Act, 2022 set a precedent when it changed the electoral system for Police and Crime Commissioners and mayoral elections from Supplementary Vote (a shortened version of Alternative Vote on one ballot paper) to First Past The Post (FPTP) without a referendum.

We had the recommendation for new Parliamentary con-

stituencies for England at the end of June 2023, The Government will draft an Order for all four Boundary Commissions. Once that is approved by the Privy Council, the new constituencies will be used for the next General election although for any by-election taking place before that the old boundaries will still be used.

Labour will be offering to review the franchise for votes at 16 and 17 years. The Brown Commission envisages reforms to the second chamber. We have yet to consider what voting system we need to ensure that Parliament reflects how the electorate votes, and everyone feels that they have a vote that actually counts. However, I value the constituency link. MPs do have a genuine link with the people they represent, and you get to know every single street. There are different models of PR. But what I

Labour members are increasingly committed to PR and keen to see it in the manifesto

would say is that I would never want to lose that constituency link.

I see no evidence that Keir Starmer is opposed to PR. There have been several occasions in the past where we set out a clear critique of FPTP and we have committed to reforming the political system. He has talked about new government and a new way of governing. He has said "PR is not a priority". That is very different from being opposed to it.

We cannot presuppose the outcome of the next general election or the political makeup of the parties but any party, which a minority Labour Government would be likely to go into a confidence and supply agreement with, would have a pro PR agenda. We are, however, fighting for a majority Labour government. I am not seeking to go into coalition with any political party. If we are

going to reform our electoral system, we need to make sure people feel engaged and their vote counts no matter which political party they vote for or where their ballot is cast.

I do not think that the electorate likes voting tactically. I do not like it as a candidate. I do not want to have to persuade people who are ideologically in a different place to have to feel they have to vote for me because they want to stop someone else.

Wouldn't it be more reasonable and democratic if they could cast their vote for the political party they believe in, rather than having this ridiculous and ubiquitous tactical voting where you vote for the party you dislike the least rather than the party you like the best. More positive politics - that's where I am trying to get to. We must have a Labour majority government with bold ideas of reforming and reinvigorating democracy and making it relevant for the 21st century and the next generation.



Cat Smith is MP for Lancaster and Fleetwood; she was Shadow Secretary of State for Young People and Democracy before resigning in November 2021. She introduced her own private members Bill, Elections (Proportional Representation) Bill 2022-2023 and is a parliamentary advisor to the Constitution Unit, University College, London

New Democracy - Labour should start delivering quickly

Labour's next general election manifesto should be full of promise especially on the state of democracy which does not cost money. The ground was laid at Labour's 2023 Conference, which adopted its National Policy Forum recommendations. It states unequivocally:

"Under the Conservatives, trust in politics and our democratic institutions is at an all-time low. Labour will clean up our politics and restore trust in our democracy, undoing the damage the Tories have caused through sleaze and scandal. Labour's new approach to democratic reform will restore confidence in politics."

There is a real opportunity under Keir Starmer's leadership to deliver and deliver quickly. There need be no doubt there will be enough votes in the House of Commons to legislate for change. **Cat Smith MP** reminds us of how the Tories changed the electoral system for Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners without consulting the electorate by means of a referendum. Labour in its policies agreed at Conference promised to review these anti-democratic measures. But, as **Nadia Whittome MP** points out the Electoral Commission has already reported that over 14,000 people were unable to vote in the 2023 local elections due to inadequate voter ID. Labour could use the opportunity to lay early legislation to repeal the requirement for voter ID and reinstating the supplementary vote for elected Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners. The same Bill could be used to enfranchise 16 and 17 year olds throughout the Union. Our contributors want electoral reform but not at this stage a systems debate, except the need for a constituency link.

Labour has promised to engage with the public. An obvious mechanism would be to establish a UK Constitutional

Convention to report in sufficient time during Labour's first term to change the voting system for electing the next House of Commons and make a start on the whole democratic agenda. Our soundings suggest an early bill to reverse those Tory anti-democratic measures could include provisions to empower a Secretary of State to lay secondary legislation to create one and set it to work. That Bill could also be used as a vehicle to legislate for the vital public dialogue that must precede any democratic reform including the voting system for the House of Commons, and the replacement of the House of Lords with an elected Senate. Its terms of reference could include electoral reform campaigners' wish lists such as Citizens' Assemblies,

Citizenship Education, Automatic Voter Registration, Electorate and Boundaries based on the population not registered voters, the use of Single Transferable Votes for electing local government in England as in Scotland and Wales.

As **John McDonnell MP** concludes: *"This historic opportunity for change may be just around the corner."*

We have concentrated on making votes count, rather than cleaning up Parliament. The 19th century Chartists had a simple solution to encourage integrity and discourage corruption among elected representatives – oblige them to face the electorate every 12 months. Devolution with local, regional and national governments almost brings that about. The challenge of voting reform is set out vividly in First Minister

Mark Drakeford MS remarks to the Welsh Labour Conference 2023: *"The next Labour government must lead the task of democratic renewal"*. **William Bain** argues that Labour's recent electoral progress in Scotland strengthens the case for electoral reform.

Labour Leader Keir Starmer MP as Prime Minister just needs to agree to put a Democratic Reform Bill into the first King's Speech. It could be the starting gun for the greatest democratic reform in the United Kingdom since all women were granted the vote nearly 100 years ago.

Put a Democratic Reform Bill into the first King's Speech



Lest we forget

"I am not prepared to put up with a system which once every generation, every 30 years, gives us an opportunity to get in with a majority the way the Conservatives do and govern the same way. It is not we who pay the penalty, but the people we represent. When we win, let us seize the opportunity to change the electoral system so we do not have ever again to return to elective dictatorship of the kind we have experienced."

Robin Cook, Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform (LCER) pamphlet, 1993

Robin Cook was a Labour MP from 1974 until his death in 2005. He was throughout Labour's leading advocate of electoral reform. The last chapter in his book, *The Point of Departure*, is dedicated to the electoral reformers he worked with.

Our crumbling realm

Nadia Whittome MP sees an inseparable link between socialism and democracy

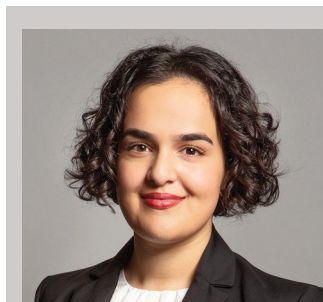
After 13 years of Tory governments, everything around us is crumbling. Whether that's record-breaking NHS waiting lists, school buildings that are literally falling apart, or the soaring demand for food banks - wherever we look, we see a crisis.

But it is not just our public services and working people's incomes that have been eroded by the Conservatives. So has our democracy. Since the last election, the Tories have repeatedly undermined our democratic freedoms. Rather than raising wages, they have further restricted the right to strike. They have stifled dissent, imposing draconian prison sentences for many forms of peaceful protest. Taking a leaf from the Trumpian playbook, they have also turned to voter suppression: the new voter ID laws stopped an estimated 400,000 people from casting their ballot in local elections.

They have been able to do all this and more without the backing of most voters - enabled by our winner-takes-all electoral system. In 2019, the Tories won a landslide 80-seat majority, despite the fact that over 56% of the public did not vote for them. It was far from the first time: in fact, in 19 of the last 20 general elections, most people backed parties to the left of the Conservatives, and

yet they have been in government for around two-thirds of that time. In 2015, only 37% of people voted for David Cameron's party, which did not stop him from continuing to dismantle our welfare state. How different would our society look today if we had not had a system where a right-wing party with minority support can hold 100% of the power? But the main reason why I campaign for Proportional Representation is not because I see it as one simple trick to get the Tories out. I care about PR because, in my mind, socialism and democracy are inseparable. I believe that power belongs in the hands of the people - and what is a more basic democratic principle than every person's vote being worthwhile.

That's not the case under First Past the Post. No wonder so many people - disproportionately young and from minority backgrounds - disengage from electoral politics. When people tell me that their vote doesn't matter, I always try to convince them otherwise. But when one sees the same MPs winning in their constituency over and over again, while parties focus their campaigning efforts elsewhere, it's hard not to feel powerless. Unsurprisingly, studies show that countries with Proportional Representation have a higher voter turnout. People are more enthusiastic about democracy



Nadia Whittome is the Labour MP for Nottingham East

when they feel that their vote can make a difference. Defenders of FPTP often claim that it leads to more stable governments, but this doesn't ring particularly true in a country that has had five Prime Ministers in seven years. Similarly, the argument that our voting system keeps dangerous, extreme ideas out of Parliament doesn't hold much water when we have Tory MPs spreading antisemitic conspiracy theories, attacking trans people and threatening to break international law to be cruel to refugees. Implementing Proportional Representation would not be a risky experiment: it's already the norm almost everywhere in Europe. In fact, the only other European country using First Past the Post is Belarus, a dictatorship.

It is time to level up democracy and, regardless of where you live, make every vote count.

PR keeps the right-wing at bay

Lynne Armstrong tackles a myth about PR

Where Proportional Representation (PR) produces right wing government, it is the first-past-the-post non-proportional part of the system that gives the right the advantage, and in recent elections in Spain and Poland the PR element kept the extreme right out of government. In Switzerland, the right-wing Swiss People's Party regularly gets the most votes (25-30%), but PR keeps it out of government.

In Italy in 2023 Georgia Meloni's right-wing Fratelli d'Italia, a name blatantly lifted from the national anthem, gained power through a

strengthened FPTP element in their newest voting system (repeatedly changed from regional list to Mixed Member PR (MMP) and back over the last 30 years). The PR part will help defeat Meloni next time.

In New Zealand, the Labour Party has done very well under MMP. Their hybrid system, like Scotland's and Germany's, even produced majority Labour government and gave New Zealand two Labour women prime ministers. In the 2023 elections, their mixed PR system prevented the Labour party from doing worse than it would under FPTP. This also works in Scottish parliamentary elections when only

two of our MSPs came from the FPTP election and the rest of them are elected on the proportional list.



Lynne Armstrong, is a former LCER women's and systems officer, former Labour councillor and candidate for MP and MEP. Her career roles included head of statistics at EFTA and an official translator of European Parliament debates

FPTP – Tory salvation?

Only First Past the Post can save the Tories – **John McDonnell MP** explores the irony

The latest date possible for the next General Election to be called is five years after parliament met after the 2019 election on 17 December. By then Labour will not have won “the only poll that matters” since May 2005, nearly twenty years before. The opinion polls show Labour miles ahead. Working together across the Party, Labour is clocking up the byelections where we are the clear opposition, won the seat before or came a good second in 2019. We have lost our deposit where the LibDems manage to persuade the electorate on a low turnout that they were the main opposition to the Tories with tactical resourcing by the main parties indicating which party thought they had the best chance of winning the anti Tory tactical vote.

Despite all the favourable signs for Labour, we can’t take the election of a Labour government for granted.

The state of the world is uncertain following Ukraine and what is happening in Israel and Gaza. This may help any incumbent government. In times of uncertainty people have a tendency to stick with the political devil they know. The cost of living and inflation may go down through actions outside government control but for which they will claim the credit. The Chancellor has fortuitously been given a fair amount of budgetary headroom to bring in a budget that could provide for additional spending on services and tax cuts in a desperate attempt to restore a feel good factor. The Boundary changes will slightly favour the Conservatives, losing eight seats in Wales, two each in the North West, North East and West Midlands. It seems as if the only thing that can save the Tories is the current voting system, hence their manifesto promises and legislative actions to get rid of alternatives.

So it is good that Labour Annual Conference 2023 voted through unanimously to support the National Policy Forum policy platform decided in Nottingham in July 2023. Electoral reform is not and never has been a Left-Right issue. We as a party have

recognised the fact that distrust and alienation in politics have their roots in our electoral system. How and when we tackle that will depend on Labour’s majority at the next general election.

We have to be realistic about the scale of the problems Labour will face. Its in tray will be the most toxic political inheritance of any Labour government over the last 70 years. There is a genuine fear that inheriting a disastrous state of the economy and with few sufficiently radical policies to address the broken Britain the Tories leave behind them the electorate will soon become disillusioned with Labour in government and even begin blaming Labour not the previous government for the state of our public services and the economy.

It is at that stage Labour will be forced to reassess its policy programme and the prospects of maintaining in office a government with a progressive majority. That could be as early as mid-term and that is when Labour should consider legislating for electoral reform at the subsequent election. The next election should be the last fought using first past the post.

We need a new politics, born of uniting MPs where agreement can be found, rather than first past the post’s adversarial blame game. Alternative Vote is not the answer as we saw in the 2011 AV Referendum. We need a more proportional system, with a serious information campaign about making votes count. A majority of MPs supporting PR would provide a route to changing the way we elect our representatives in the House of Commons.

The Labour arguments for change are not about party advantage, not even about arithmetic and proportionality. They are completing the task undertaken from Peterloo by the Trade Unions, the Chartists and the Suffragettes. The Unions seem to be taking a lead as they did in the early part of the 20th century when the General and Municipal Workers’ leader, Will Thorne, said at the TUC: “it is difficult to understand why a proposal so pronouncedly democratic should



**John McDonnell is
Labour MP for
Hayes and
Harlington**

ever have been regarded with any coldness by members of the labour and socialist movements”.

The arguments are to give everyone a vote and a voice in politics no matter where they live. Emancipation or enfranchisement, if you like. Along with those other powerful words, devolution and subsidiarity, which means people will be given power to influence decisions made in their name at the nearest decision-making body.

The whole culture of politics needs to change to rid us of the “plague on both your houses”, distrust and alienation among many voters and spectacularly among non registered people, what political pundits call “the missing millions”. In our current system, the registered voters makes the decision. They are the low hanging fruits, the easy to tie down, easiest to find.

We need to respect difference and not automatically reject ideas coming from outside our party. We need to recover from the winner-takes-all attitude to life, living and politics which emanates from the voting system. We need to move from a take it or leave it attitude to political hierarchy. We need to seek informed consensus on the way forward. Labour cannot impose solutions, it needs to involve people. Labour rarely has the establishment behind us. This historic opportunity for change may be just around the corner.

Voices for electoral reform



Sharon Graham

General Secretary, Unite the Union (2021 – present) says:

“The Unite Policy Conference in 2021 voted against the current FPTP voting system. At the 2022 Labour Conference the Unite delegation went further and supported Proportional Representation (PR) in Westminster elections for the first time in our

history. Working in Labour's National Policy Forum we all agreed, and this was ratified at the 2023 Annual Conference, that our current system had led to distrust and alienation. Our political class has failed working people and our system is broken. It is time to change our democracy.”



Ann Black

National Executive Committee member is unequivocal about priorities:

“Electoral reform is a first-term priority. If we had had proportional representation (PR) in 1992 Neil Kinnock would have

been prime minister and the railways would never have been privatised. If we'd had PR in 2010 we could have avoided the pain of austerity. If we'd had PR in 2015 the divisive Brexit vote and everything that followed might never have happened. The late great Robin Cook said that parties in power never change the system because they think they don't need to. And when they lose, they have no power to change it. We should have learned that lesson after 1997 – let's not make the same mistake again.”



Mark Serwotka

General Secretary Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) (2000 to 2023) writes:

“PR can be the catalyst for much greater levels of political engagement, which is not limited to putting a cross on a ballot paper every five years. A system that means every vote really does count will encourage people to get

more involved in the political process and this can only be a good thing for the health of our democracy. Adopting PR for future general elections would make every vote count in all parts of the country. It would force parties to change how they behave, as well as how voters cast their ballot and stop them taking the majority for granted. What we want to see is a progressive politics which more closely reflects the spread of views of the public. From the Chartists pushing for universal suffrage to the Scottish TUC campaigning for a Scottish Parliament, trade unions have often been at the forefront of demands for a better democracy that puts working people at the centre.”



Clive Lewis

MP for Norwich South makes a link between economic and political inequality:

“There is a crisis of democracy. A proportionate response requires an acknowledgement from progressives that this crisis is

as much about our economy as it is about our political institutions; that soaring wealth inequality depends on the deprivation of democratic ownership and worker power in the economy, and that concentrated wealth is wielded by the few to exert increasing power and influence over politics. Economic inequality begets democratic erosion. A 21st century democracy would benefit from all those features we know enhance public engagement and accountability - such as proportional representation, and new models of governance that fuse direct and representative democracy.”



Matt Wrack

FBU General Secretary and TUC President (2023-2024) says:

“Trade unions have been involved in discussions on democratic reforms and the franchise throughout the last two hundred years since Peterloo and the Chartists. Their conferences and democratic structures are clearly

moving to electoral reform, both affiliated and non-affiliated trade unions. They and many others are concluding that politics needs to change. They look forward not only to “a new government but a new way of governing”. If we are going to change the way we do politics, individually and collectively, trade unionists need to be part of that conversation.”



Josh Russell

of The Movement Forward (www.mvtfwd.com) sees tactical voting going mainstream:

“Tactical voting is going to be a mainstream action so big it'll be a part of the national general election narrative. But we're using that attention to make the point that we'd prefer not to have to vote tactically, we actually want electoral reform, our votes to count, Proportional Representation. So, in future we can vote for things, not mostly against them.”



Former MP Martin Linton states why FPTP must end:

“Under our voting system an incoming Tory government can repeal and reverse everything a Labour government has achieved over many years in a week and without even having the support of a majority of the voters. That seems to me to be a major cause of the instability of our system and the disillusion and distrust of voters. It's not much to ask to have a system where the Government must represent a majority of voters.”



Peter Kellner

in KellnerPolitics.com shows how millions of missing voters benefit the Tories:

“We have known for some years that electoral registers across Britain miss out millions of eligible voters. What the new data show is where the missing voters live. They are concentrated far more in Labour seats than Conservative seats. This affects the way constituency boundaries are drawn. This in turn significantly affects the numbers of seats each party wins... Eighty years ago, British democracy lost its way. Parliament should seize the opportunity as soon as possible to find it again.”

Wise words from Wales

The following quotes from First Minister **Mark Drakeford** MS highlight his support for electoral reform

In his 2021 Aneurin Bevan Memorial Lecture, he said:

"Now, let me make a confession: I have been a supporter of the Labour Campaign for Electoral Reform for the whole of my political lifetime. How anyone clings to the notion that a system which delivers, so consistently, majority Conservative governments on a minority of the votes cast is best for working people simply baffles me."

At the 2023 Welsh Labour conference 11 March, he said:

"The next Labour government must lead the task of democratic renewal. I hear what the critics say: that first past the post produces strong government. Well, I've lived and seen at first hand for most of my adult life the results that strong Tory government brings. If Labour is to save the union, we can't do that by defending the status quo — by nervously hoarding power at the centre."

On a Labour for a New Democracy zoom event, July 2023, he said:

"It is a principle for me that the votes that people cast for a political party should be broadly reflected in the result of those votes cast. That seems to me to be a pretty basic democratic principle. I have been on Labour Party platforms arguing for proportional representation since the 1980s. ... We have seen in Wales how corrosive it is to democracy if there is no fighting chance that the votes that you cast will result in the governments that you get. ... In November 2023 we celebrate the centenary of Labour winning a majority of seats in a general election. It happened first in November 1922 and we have never not done it since. ... Election after election, Labour wins in Wales and people who vote Labour don't get a government. ... People are beginning to lose faith that their votes will deliver a Labour government. Under a different electoral system, I am quite sure that the corrosive effect of the current system would not have taken place. PR is the right thing and without it in somewhere like Wales people's underlying confidence in the democratic system is being chipped away at."

Finally in October 2023 he reminded Labour Party Conference:

"We're creating a Senedd (Welsh Parliament) fit for the future, fully elected by proportional representation, where every vote will count."



Sea change in Scottish politics

William Bain argues this strengthens the case for voting reform

Scottish Labour's extraordinary victory in the Rutherglen and Hamilton West by-election with a 20.4% swing from the SNP together with its continued surge in Scottish opinion polls offer the prospect of sweeping gains at the next UK General Election. Scottish Labour's list of target seats in Scotland is now 24 strong and may lengthen still in the coming weeks. Polls have converged on a clear picture - that it is a virtual dead heat between Labour and the SNP, meaning that in seat-rich Central Scotland, Labour will be ahead. As Keir Starmer said in his Labour Conference speech in Liverpool there is no room for complacency. For every 8 Scottish seats Scottish Labour can win next year, the GB-wide lead Labour requires over the Conservatives to secure a majority falls by one per cent.

Since the Holyrood elections in 2021, Scottish Labour has regained support from 2019 Conservative voters before and after the brief Truss

premiership, and now increasingly from SNP supporters. In 2019, Scottish Labour had the support of fewer than one in five Scottish voters. Now it is regularly polling around 33% or higher. The shift is particularly pronounced among young and middle class voters. Key voter groups who first moved to the SNP in 2007, in Scotland's suburbs and new towns, are now flowing strongly to Scottish Labour. Voters top concerns are the economy and the NHS. The new First Minister, Humza Yousaf, is failing to match the electoral appeal of his predecessor. For the first time since 2010, Scottish voters are looking to their economic prospects and the state of public services, rather than their positions on independence or devolution as the main factors in determining their vote in a Parliamentary election. Furthermore, in terms of the next Holyrood elections in 2026, the real prospect now exists of the SNP being ousted from power after 19 years in Government.

Support for independence

remains around 47-48%, showing that voters are prepared to park their position on that issue for now, given the more pressing priorities of the cost of living crisis and rebuilding public services. If a sea change is coming in Scottish politics, it is important to understand why. It is also important to recall that Scottish Labour suffered a near death experience during the last decade with proportional voting systems for Holyrood and local government providing a key foothold for the strong recovery taking place now under Anas Sarwar's leadership. In 2015 Scottish Labour lost 40 Westminster seats. It retained just one MP, despite the support of one in four voters. PR ends the scandal of wasted votes and better represents the will of the electorate. It meets the ambition that Scottish voters have to change not just the Government and policies at Westminster, but also how it is elected, and in doing so, to show how the Union can be reformed from within.



William Bain is a former chair of LCER and was Labour MP for Glasgow North East (2009 – 2015)

Labour's policies for a new democracy

- Labour will deliver a new politics
- Labour will reform the political system and its institutions so that it works for everyone and re-engages people in the political process
- Labour will introduce votes for 16- and 17-year-olds, in line with Scotland and Wales, so that young people feel empowered and can fully engage in our democratic processes
- Labour will review the voting system for directly elected Mayors and Police and Crime Commissioners
- Labour will review and respond to the evidence of the impact of Photo Voter ID in elections
- In welcoming the report of the [Brown] Commission on the UK's Future, Labour will build upon its recommendations and deliver the biggest ever transfer of power from Westminster to the people of the UK and across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Labour is committed to abolishing the House of Lords
- No legitimate voter should be locked out of democracy

National Policy Forum Report

https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/WR-366_23-NPF-final-report-for-Conference-v10-UPDATE.pdf

See section on Safe and Secure Communities

Labour Party must mend Westminster

The 2023 Labour Party conference marked the moment the Labour Party formally adopted criticism of First Past the Post as official policy. The party programme - which was formally ratified by an overwhelming conference vote - warns that "the flaws of the current voting system are driving the distrust and alienation that we see in politics".

Keir Starmer said during his 2023 conference speech, "the walls of Westminster are so high". A system that makes every vote

count is essential if we are to lower them. While First Past the Post remains in place, it will continue to feed the alienation instead of the national renewal Britain needs.

By addressing our flawed voting system when Labour is in government, we can show we are ready to rebuild trust between politics and people. By putting an end to Conservative governments elected on a minority of the vote, we can safeguard the improvements we make to society and to people's lives for years to come.

Labour is not - and never will be -

a party content to allow alienation and distrust to fester in our democracy. When we win the Labour government Britain so desperately needs, it's time to restore trust in politics by giving everyone a vote that counts.

Labour for a New Democracy will be campaigning into 2024 and beyond. Join LAND to get involved in the campaign at www.l4nd.org.uk and join LCER to ensure a Labour voice in our democratic renewal, <https://www.labourcampaignforelectoralreform.org.uk/pages/join>.

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**LABOUR
FOR A NEW
DEMOCRACY**

This New Democracy Supplement was edited by Mary Southcott marysouthcott@hotmail.com (former LCER Parliamentary Political Officer (1990 to 2020, Chartist's representative on Labour For a New Democracy (L4ND), and author of Make Votes Count (Profile Books 1998) and Peter Kenyon.

Cartoon by Martin Rowson. Production: Ferdousur Rehman.
Published by Chartist Publications, PO Box 52751, London EC2P 2XF.
Printed by People for Print Ltd, Unit 10 Riverside Park, Sheffield S2 4B



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Safety first

Don Flynn says we need a rights-based system of immigration management if we are to move beyond the permanent sense of ‘crisis’

Discussion about immigration in the countries of the Global North too often degenerates into hyperventilating anxieties about refugee ‘crises’ and flows of ‘illegal’ migrants.

More sober analysis of the evidence suggests that much of this is unwarranted and that meeting challenges to the rational management of people movement in the world today is within our grasp. Everything would be helped by an appreciation of the fact that movement across national frontiers is a perfectly normal activity and has its place as one of the drivers of progress in the affairs of human beings.

Today 3.6 percent of the world’s population – 280 million people – live outside of the country in which they were born. The largest segment of this group – 169 million – is made up of migrant workers who occupy productive places in the countries where they reside. Around 34 million are forced migrants (refugees) who have moved for reasons of persecution and personal safety. The remaining 77 million is made up of groups like international students, dependent children of other migrants, and others residing abroad for periods of 12 months or more.

It has long been the hope of the



various bodies working as agencies of the United Nations and experts associated with treaty and convention organisations such as the International Labour Organisation and human rights bodies that the movement of people can be managed within a framework on law that balances the rights of individuals with national state governance.

In reality we are not only a long

way from establishing this system but in recent years have been marching in exactly the opposite direction. The willingness of national governments to stand by their obligations under such instruments as the Convention on Refugees has been eroded across many regions, with the UK’s outright repudiation of its obligation to consider applications for refugee status on its own territory under

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Managing Editor
and ex director
of Migrants
Rights Network**

the terms of the Illegal Immigration Act being one blatant example.

When people in need of asylum can no longer rely on the consistent application of law in the countries where they hope to find safety then the way is opened up for the movement of desperate people to be guided by people traffickers out to make profits from human misery. Identifying a place of safe haven means relying on the promises of cynics who have studied the unevenness of border controls across a range of countries and who seek to sell a package which claims that country A is, at this point in time, the most likely candidate for refuge.

The result is a race to the bottom on the part of governments who wish to project that message that they are the least 'soft option' when it comes to receiving

refugees. Permeable borders are replaced by 10 metre high razor wire fences. Armed soldiers are set to patrol remote crossing points with orders to repel anyone seeking entry without regard for their condition of life.

When the country's border is a coast travellers can be opposed on the high seas themselves, with the terrible risk of death on the scale of the June 14 confrontation between the Greece coastguard and a refugee vessel which resulted in its sinking and the loss of hundreds of lives.

We need a complete break with immigration policies which have been sold to the public as a means to keep supposedly unwanted people from entering. How the movement of people is safely and humanely managed in the coming years will be critical to the world's success in facilitating economic

development and curbing global inequalities. The effects of climate change on vulnerable populations will need to be mitigated by facilitating the movement of people away from regions with reduced capacity to support them.

Policies aimed at facilitating labour migration have a role to play here, allowing people to identify opportunities to move into sustainable livelihoods as a part of a well-considered and timely approach to changes in the world and thereby avoiding a panic stricken rush when local ecosystems reach the point of collapse.

If immigration policy is to move in this direction it will require progressive, social democratic parties to begin the work to shift public opinion to support the changes which will be needed. For the Labour Party, that work must begin now.

Human rights, refugees and Channel crossings

The second half of the twentieth century saw an exponential increase in regulation of migration by national states. A practice which had started as far back as the 1860s with the Californian Anti-Coolie Act, which aimed at restrictions on migration from China, and the 1905 Aliens Act in the UK, directed against Jews fleeing persecution from the Czarist Russia, became, during the later decades of the twentieth century, a generalised system of control which targeted virtually everyone from countries outside the privileged metropolitan elite nations.

For much of the time the structural racism of the system was hidden beneath a liberal rhetoric of state management that maintained flows at levels which claimed to allow the peaceful integration of the people subject to these controls. But any calculations of what this meant in practice was disrupted by the advance of the neoliberal economy, with its integration of wage earning workers into planet-spanning supply chains wherever they happened to live.

This has proven to be an intensely disruptive process, with fluctuations in economic growth producing poverty-generating joblessness and underemployment as well as the sorts of political instability which has generated repression and outflows of refugee-seeking people in an often desperate search for a better life.

What is now being presented as a crisis of irregular (or 'illegal') migration across the world is a predicament entirely bound up in the dilemma of state-directed

immigration controls mandated by the wealthy nations and the struggle for existence that exists across two-thirds of the countries of the world. Whether the issue is boats crossing the Mediterranean or the English Channel, or the relentless movement of people moving up through Central America to get to the borders of the United States, these forms of non-state sanctioned movement of people have become epochal and an integral part of the wider crises of the global capitalist system in these early decades of the twenty-first century.

Avowedly right wing governments address the policy dilemma by calling for the evacuation of any notion of human rights from their dealing with refugees and labour migrants: a stance which is increasingly approved by the leaders of social democratic parties in Europe, including the British Labour Party. Sir Keir Starmer's immigration spokesperson has set out a full programme of ideas on how movement across the UK borders is once again to be made subject to rigid control without any commensurate interest in meeting the humanitarian needs of people who have been forced into mobility as a survival strategy.

'They' are coming here because 'we' were over in their lands and are often still the ones calling the shots. Immigration policies fit for the twenty first century will need to be constructed out of policies aimed at overcoming chronic inequality and underdevelopment across the world. And racism – don't forget the need to confront racism.

Saving the planet needs activists

As the Tory government moves even further from net zero commitments **Julie Ward** says embracing green activism is essential to saving the planet

At the end of July the residents of Kirby Sigston, a hamlet in North Yorkshire, awoke to find themselves at the centre of the climate debate as newsrooms all around the world shared images of Rishi Sunak's constituency home draped in hundreds of metres of 'oil-black' fabric. The Georgian Manor House was purchased by the Sunaks for £1.5m in 2010, adding to their already extensive property portfolio. They made it their constituency home following Sunak's election as MP for the safe seat of Richmond (Yorks) in 2015. Despite a £400,000 makeover, which includes the addition of swimming pool, gym and tennis court, the Sunak family are hardly ever at home. This was confirmed by Greenpeace on the morning of August 4th before a group of protestors scaled the building armed with ladders, ropes, the oil-black fabric and a placard bearing the words "NO NEW OIL". They remained on the roof for 5 hours as part of an action to draw attention to the government's decision to open up the floodgates to ravenous fossil-fuel prospectors.

Sunak's announcement to grant 100 new North Sea oil and gas licences came shortly after the Tories weaponised Sadiq Khan's determination to press ahead with the ULEZ scheme, putting London air quality at the top of his mayoral priorities, even for those in the leafy suburbs. The Tories narrowly held Uxbridge in a by-election with a majority of 495 (down from 7210) spinning a media narrative before and after the contest in Boris Johnson's former seat that Labour cares more about the environment than ordinary working people. Of course, the truth is more complex - it's not an either/or issue, and a reduced majority is hardly a cause for celebration.

Greenpeace is no stranger to headline-grabbing actions, from gate-crashing a business dinner where the Chancellor of the Exchequer (Philip Hammond) was making a speech in July 2019, to occupying a BP oil rig, committed,



Julie Ward with Greenpeace activists

knowledgeable and highly trained environmentalists demonstrate that direct non-violent action remains a powerful campaigning tool.

Greenpeace know the dangers inherent in taking a stance against the vested interests of governments in hock to large corporates. The sinking of Rainbow Warrior by French agents in the Pacific in 1985 with the loss of photographer Fernando Pereira shocked the world. From small beginnings in 1971 as a north American anti-nuclear organisation Greenpeace has grown to become a huge international organisation with offices in 40+ countries, and supported financially by donations from more than 3 million people including celebrities such as Leonardo DiCaprio. In a recent quarterly YouGov poll that tracks the popularity and fame of charitable organisations Greenpeace was no 68 on the list with a 'fame' rating of 95% (of respondents). The same poll revealed that Greenpeace was liked by 49% (of respondents) with only 19% actively disliking the organisation. When this data is broken down by age, gender and political affiliation the figures weigh heavily against the Tories with many more young people, women, Labour and Remain vot-

ers giving Greenpeace a thumbs up.

Analysts and climate activists were quick to sound the alarm on the government's plan and debunked Sunak's assertion that maxing out on home-produced oil and gas will result in cheaper energy bills; 80% of the fuel produced will likely be exported to refineries abroad. Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg has her finger on the pulse. Along with other young women campaigners she had already staged a protest outside the Department for Business and Transport, aping the hit movie Barbie, in a song and dance routine raising awareness of the long running campaign to stop the other controversial development at Rosebank off the Shetland Isles.

Meanwhile, Tory MP and former net-zero Tsar Chris Skidmore is reading the runes. He warned that the North Sea move was on the wrong side of a future economy that will be founded on renewable and clean industries and not fossil fuels, adding, "It is on the wrong side of modern voters who will vote with their feet at the next general election for parties that protect, and not threaten, our environment." Many of us are wondering if Labour is keeping up with the kids?

Julie Ward was a Labour MEP for North West England and a member of Chartist EB

Labour must build solidarity to win

Christopher Ford outlines the vital work of the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign

The protracted struggle of Ukraine to defeat Russia's effort to impose neo-colonial rule continues as does the horrific consequences of this aggression. There have been an estimated 26,400 civilian casualties, at least 502 children killed and 1099 wounded, there are 20,000 documented cases of the sinister policy of deporting children to Russia.

Ukrainians are also paying a heavy price to liberate their country. US officials estimate casualties close to 70,000 killed and 100,000 wounded. All this in a context where Russia in practice has abandoned commitment to the Geneva Conventions, with 104,370 registered war crimes.

This barbarism is an expression of the nature of Russian imperialism itself, acting not only as heir of the Tsars but of a new form of appearance of fascism. Those struggling to face this reality should consider the warning of French historian Pierre-André Taguieff: 'Neither "fascism" or "racism" will do us the favour of returning in such a way that we can recognize them easily.'

Russia's war is one expression of a wider attack on democracy occurring globally. If Ukraine is defeated, then this reaction that we see growing will be strengthened.

With such stakes, it is vital that Ukraine wins this battle for democracy, and the Labour Party must help Ukraine to win.

The Ukraine Solidarity Campaign (USC) has set out four priority areas for solidarity – direct aid to the Ukrainian labour movement, campaign for the weapons to win, a progressive reconstruction and justice for the war crimes.

Solidarity should not be left to the choice of those active individuals. The Party needs to mobilise our membership, CLPs to organise activities, such as direct aid for the Ukrainian trade unions, medical aid, vehicles for the front and winter resources, support for local events.

USC supporters have delivered an array of pick-up trucks for union members at the front, medical aid, equipment for soldiers and PPE for rescue squads. We are supporting the Medical Workers Union in their appeal for the rehabilitation of soldiers.



A vehicle delivered to the 80th Air Assault Brigade where members of KVPU are serving. Paid for by trade unions in UK

There is also a need for regular information from the Party to members to equip them with the case for Ukraine and to counter propaganda of appeasers designed to undermine support for Ukraine.

Where the Party could provide leadership, it has failed. Such as on the first anniversary of the invasion there were widespread appeals to the Mayor of London to call a demonstration. This would have provided an opportunity for a mass show of support, but the Mayor refused.

Against all the odds Ukraine has mounted heroic resistance; rallied 500,000 troops to face a superpower with triple that number. Forcing Russia onto the defensive Ukraine has proven that Russia can be defeated. With sufficient weapons greater progress could be made. Yet the Tories and other Western powers have failed to provide what is needed.

In January Clive Lewis MP submitted an Early Day Motion which exposed the hypocrisy of the Tories, showing the sale of 1,105 vehicles, and availability of 79 Challenger tanks yet only 14 were given to Ukraine, an array of fighting vehicles and aircraft available but not being supplied. Yet the EDM received support of a mere nine Labour MPs. If Labour comes to government, it will require its own policy. But Ukraine cannot wait, we need an independent policy to win now.

We have seen a similar political passivity over reconstruction despite a Party policy for a progressive reconstruction involving unions. Yet at the Ukraine Recovery Conference held in

London, Ukrainian civil society and unions were excluded. A narrow profit led reconstruction in the interests of global capital was envisioned. The Party needs to give voice to a social-democratic alternative, to those inside Ukraine being silenced such as the KVPU (Confederation of Free Trade Unions) who as a minimum demand 'the economy and labour relations must comply with ILO Conventions and EU Directives' with the participation of trade unions.

The outcome of this war must involve a just peace, there is a need for something similar to the Casablanca Declaration of 1943 when the allies committed to a goal of 'unconditional surrender' of the Axis Powers and punishment of their 'barbaric leaders'.

In contrast repeatedly there have been calls from various quarters which envisage a peace by which Ukraine conceded territory. Such an outcome would be disastrous for Ukraine and democracy globally. In response, Ukraine's parliament adopted a resolution in August that excludes any territorial concessions for the sake of ending the war and for restoration of all occupied territories including Crimea.

Labour should give a commitment to this liberatory goal combined with an international commitment to help Ukraine secure this outcome.

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This supplement has been compiled by Julie Ward, Mike Davis, Don Flynn and Glyn Ford.
Production by Ferdousur Rehman. Published by Chartist Publications, PO Box 52751. London EC2P 2XF Website: www.chartist.org.uk
Printed by People for Print Ltd. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the EB.

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