



LABOUR

the
original

Briefing

VOICE OF THE INDEPENDENT LABOUR LEFT • GENERAL ELECTION 2024 • DIGITAL EDITION



And it's
goodbye
from him



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We welcome contributions. All the articles in *Labour Briefing* reflect solely the opinions of the authors, writing in a personal capacity, unless otherwise stated.

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EDITORIAL



May the fourth (ok, July) be with you

After months of prevarication Sunak has finally bitten the bullet and we now have a General Election taking place. We are acutely aware that lots of our readers will be out, door knocking and electioneering. Others will be trying to raise vital issues and secure commitments on issues dear to our hearts.

So we are not bringing out a printed copy until after the election is over. Hopefully this will be the first issue since 2010 produced under a Labour administration.

Briefing is always clear that we want a Labour Government and whatever criticisms we have of the leadership and others, the real choice for the vast majority of electors is either Labour being voted in to office or the continuation of a Tory regime that has inflicted vicious cuts on so many, peddled racist nonsense and virtually destroyed many public services that people rely on.

However, for *Briefing* as a collective, the day Labour takes office is the start of serious campaigning and agitation. There are a few commitments we all support - scrapping the Rwanda outrage, taking parts of the rail network back into public ownership, legislating for clean rivers and coastlines, speeding up renewable sources of energy and a few others. This is fairly thin gruel but things we can legitimately demand are carried out.

There are also a whole list of things that a Labour Government could do and which are necessary for our supporters.

Building millions of new council homes, repealing the whole swathe of anti-trades union legislation, a massive programme of childcare, safer neighbourhood policing, more investment and ending private rip-offs in the NHS, abolishing student fees with free education for all, reinstating a full system of legal aid and so much else .

Briefing pledges to continue fighting for socialist solutions in the Labour Party and the trades unions. We are also internationalists and have regularly covered a whole range of struggles with demands for self-determination for people everywhere from Ireland to Kurdistan and from Catalonia to Kashmir.

We will continue to build solidarity and support for these causes, including for recognition and support for Palestine.

After reading this digital issue, please consider taking out a yearly subscription if you don't have one already. Also feel free to forward this to any comrades, friends or campaigners who may be interested.

Forward to the 4th July and a change for the better. Let's get the Tories out!

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Welsh 'blow ins'

A couple of months ago I warned that a Vaughan Gething victory would lead to the collapse of the Labour Plaid arrangement in Wales. Sadly, this has already happened and Welsh Labour is riven apart with a First Minister elected who has a minority of support within the Senedd Labour group.

A disgruntled sacked Minister, Georgina Blything, has been blamed for leaking details of funding from a company with convictions for breaking environmental legislation. As it is, investigative journalism by Will Heywood of *Wales Online* revealed that Gething's fund raising outspent Jeremy Miles by a factor of five to one.

His £250,000 election fund had 80% coming from the company mentioned earlier, while Miles' £50,000 was from a wider range of sources - both individuals and organisations. Miles' campaign was broader in support but I felt it lacked substance. Gething's campaign had begun as long ago as Mark Drakeford's victory in 2018 and had been ruthless and determined.

The auguries look poor for Vaughan Gething after losing a Confidence vote in the Senedd by 29 votes to 27. A recent Senedd poll shows Labour's vote falling by 6 to 30% and Plaid's rising to 24%. If Wales doesn't perform well for Labour I suspect Starmer will find VG a useful scapegoat.

There is clear evidence coming from the circle around Gething that there will be a watering down of Drakeford's policies on the 20mph speed limits, road building and environmental policies in general. In effect, a Blairite tendency has taken over Welsh Labour and the party is suffering. I suspect that recent events in Wales may well have a damaging effect for Labour between now and July 4th.

Clir Martyn Shrewsbury, Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe CLP, reports on the spate of candidates being foisted on Wales.

For comrades in Wales and the borders I would like to point out that an excellent left wing candidate, Stephen Witherden, is standing for the new seat of Montgomery and Glyndwr. The seat is notionally Tory but strong Labour areas coming in make it a three way contest. Of course, the 'Fib Dems' are playing their usual game of bar charts and manipulating maps to create their usual 'two horse race' trope.

In Swansea West the sitting Labour MP, a centrist, had been suspended last year over sexual harassment allegations. He has run out of time and now we hear that the Blairite Torsten Bell is imposed, upsetting the Leader of Swansea Council. My clinic in Swansea is next door to the old MP's office and several times I have noticed both him and others glancing up at the Palestinian flag flying from my clinic.

Boundary changes in general in Wales have reduced the number of seats from 40 to 32 and seats like the new Swansea East and Neath will see Stammer's former PPS Carolyn Harris replace Christina Rees as candidate. Christina was banned from being a candidate after allegations were made concerning bullying yet no one actually mentioned that throughout the election of 2019 she travelled Wales with Jeremy Corbyn.

This new seat has a former Labour Councillor as Plaid's Parliamentary candidate and the Reform candidate is a former Green Party member with a massive following on social media and a high recognition factor in the Neath Valley.

In Lanelli "Nato Nia Griffiths" is standing down and at the time of writing much speculation surrounds her successor. In Cardiff West, head of the dreaded Governance and Legal Unit at HQ, Alex Barros-Curtis, has been parachuted in. My own constituency becomes Brecon, Radnor and Cwm Tawe that is, according to simulations, a Labour-Tory marginal. The 'Fib Dems' are being a little disingenuous on this fact and again their geographical knowledge has become, shall we say, rather fluid ?

The Labour candidate for the seat is rowing backwards on the agricultural bill and the 10% requirement for farmers to grow trees. He is the Deputy leader of Powys Council ruled by a Lib Dem-Labour administration and little difference can be detected between him and the Lib Dem candidate. The Greens are running a first class candidate, strong on Palestine and Trade Unionism whilst the Plaid candidate has links with the farming lobby.

It is likely that the Tories will lose all their seats in Wales reducing them to the level of 1966. Plaid may win another seat and Labour will regain all their losses of 2019. The Labour posters have Union flags on them showing how little Starmer understands Wales. It's going to be interesting with many anomalies and outlier results. Look out for them on the night of July 4/5th.





UPHILL STRUGGLE

Kevin Flack



Over recent decades, Labour has not been great at outlining its vision for rural communities and the ten million people that live there. Most people who live in villages and isolated communities have the same concerns as any inner-city dweller – housing, jobs, health and, increasingly, climate change.

But here are ten brief points, in no particular order, that Labour could be addressing in its manifesto and in Government that specifically affect rural areas.

Communications

Improved broadband connectivity is the number one need, and, as in Labour's 2019 manifesto, it is now so essential for education, accessing health services and working from home, it should be free of charge. It should also be tied to a package of support for micro-businesses, an increasing area of rural employment.

Transport

Train and bus timetable integration needs to be improved, but first there needs to be an increase in what will have to be subsidised or preferably, publicly-owned bus services.

These could scale down to community minibuses and such like in more isolated communities. Bus tickets should be pegged at the current flat £2 fare for any journey.

Education

Further Education and Agricultural Colleges need to be more easily

accessible for all young people, especially those in isolated communities, whether by opening more or providing better transport – why not provide mopeds on cheap hire to those with no access to public transport?

Countryside

Increase nature protection and restoration, including tree planting and rewilding. It is increasingly clear that the only way to tackle river and sea pollution is to bring the water companies into public ownership. Speed up the stalled approval of beaver projects to reduce flooding and improve water quality.

Farming

Provide more county farms under the control of County Councils – these used to be the biggest single category of farm ownership.

Support for more sustainable farming and environmental improvements. Promote cruelty-free husbandry and re-establish the Agricultural Wages Board in England.

Crime

Crime is growing faster in rural areas than in our cities. Police funding needs to be increased to address fly-tipping, farm machinery and GPS theft in particular. In April, Labour launched its Rural Crime Strategy which is at least a recognition of the problem even if the launch wasn't exactly in a blaze of publicity – the test will be if this makes the manifesto.

Town Centres

Revitalising town centres and High Street shopping is also very important to those who live in the surrounding hinterlands.

Amenities

More protection and financial relief for village halls (suffering massive increases in energy bills), single village shops and pubs, with a strengthening of the 'Asset of Community Value' designation.

Community renewable energy should be available for every village.

Democracy

Directly elect rural governing bodies such as the National Park Authorities. The Association of Labour Councillors needs to admit town and parish councillors elected on a party ticket to increase resources available to them.

Animal Welfare

End the unscientific badger cull and properly fund wildlife crime policing including the National Wildlife Crime Unit.

Finally, Labour needs to rural-proof all Government action with a specific Minister empowered to intervene in all departments, not just Defra.

Kevin Flack has left the hustle and bustle of the Kent hop fields to report from the New Forest. Future articles may disproportionately mention broadband connectivity.



Labour: solve housing crisis

We are in the grip of a housing crisis which, due to a lack of any political will to address it, is spiralling out of control. Millions of people are suffering from the appalling consequences of the lack of decent secure and genuinely affordable housing.

Shelter has recently stated that one in three people are now impacted by the housing crisis. That's 17.5 million people across the country. There can be no resolution to the housing crisis without a government strategy to deliver a large scale council house building programme that will provide decent, secure and genuinely affordable social rented homes to meet the need in our communities. We are campaigning to ensure that the Labour Party leads the way in ensuring that delivery.

The Chartered Institute of Housing's 2022 UK Housing Review states, "the Right to Buy has become a strategic failure in England and, unless reconsidered, the policy will continue contributing to social disadvantage and exacerbating inequalities."

In response to Tory proposals to extend right to buy the Chartered Institute of Housing said, "We are at a point of crisis in this country, with over 1.1 million households on waiting lists for social housing. We need more, not less, affordable social homes."

The incoming Labour government should draw up a long term housing strategy backed by appropriate levels of government funding which must include: fully funding 150,000 social rent homes a year, including at least 100,000 council homes with secure tenancies; fully funding the retrofitting of all council housing to address fuel poverty, the climate crisis and to

The Labour Campaign for Council Housing sets out what an incoming Labour government must do about the housing crisis.

improve the quality of existing homes; invest in Direct Labour Organisations to create well paid, unionised jobs and apprenticeships to deliver this; ending the disastrous right to buy policy; reviewing council housing debt to address the under-funding of housing revenue accounts; giving power to councils to license and tax holiday homes and AirBnBs.

Labour's 2019 manifesto contained a commitment to build the council homes we need and we want the next manifesto to retain that commitment. The 2019 manifesto said, "The only way to deliver everyone's right to a good home is to build publicly funded social housing. Labour will deliver a new social house building programme of more than a million homes over a decade, with council housing at its heart.

"By the end of the parliament we will be building at an annual rate of at least 150,000 council and social homes with 100,000 of these built by councils for social rent" and "We will stop the haemorrhage of low cost homes by ending the right to buy".

Five years later, with a worsening crisis of affordability, it makes no sense to dilute that policy. So, why do we



need 150,000 social rent homes including 100,000 council homes? The outgoing government had a target of building 300,000 homes a year to meet demand. The rate of house building has increased significantly in recent years, but year on year there has been a failure to build genuinely affordable homes at the rate we need.

In view of that failure to deliver, we called for 50 percent of those 300,000 homes to be social rented. Our manifesto commitment was hugely welcomed when it was announced in 2019, not only within the Labour movement but by the general public, housing campaigns, housing and homelessness charities and the housing sector.

Any future Labour government should adopt a similarly ambitious pledge.



General election 2024

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE LABOUR BRIEFING CO-OPERATIVE

We're in the throes of a general election, and Israel's continued genocide in Gaza is very much on the ballot paper.

UK arms sales to Israel, the escalating war in Ukraine, the drive for more military spending, and the increasingly dangerous world we live in must all be central to the campaign.

Solidarity with Gaza is key to defeating the warmongers' agenda. Stop the War is clear, we will support candidates who are prepared to make it so.

#GE2024 Questions for Candidates

Do you support an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Gaza?

Do you support an immediate end to arms sales to Israel?

Do you support the immediate recognition of a Palestinian state?

Do you support the wider campaign of BDS in relation to Israel?

Will you oppose any increase in British military spending as a share of GDP?

Will you oppose the extradition of Julian Assange to the United States?

Do you believe British influence should push for a ceasefire and peace talks in Ukraine?



Stop the War coalition stopwar.org.uk

THE NEXT GOVERNMENT MUST GIVE OUR CHILDREN THE EDUCATION THEY DESERVE.

- 1** Reverse cuts to schools, colleges and nurseries and increase education spending to five per cent of GDP.
- 2** End child poverty, starting with the removal of the two-child benefit cap and guarantee a free, nutritious school lunch for every pupil.
- 3** A broad, engaging and inclusive curriculum, which embeds anti-racism and guarantees all pupils access to a broad range of subjects, including the arts and PE.
- 4** End Government tests in primary schools and overhaul 14-19 assessment to stop the exam factory culture.
- 5** Provide appropriate special needs support quickly and without unnecessary bureaucracy.

6 Recruit enough teachers and school staff to fill soaring vacancies, by making pay competitive again.

7 Abolish Ofsted and replace it with a collaborative and supportive system, focused on giving good advice and feedback to schools.

8 Keep teachers, leaders and school staff in the profession by listening to us on how to tackle unmanageable workloads.

9 Increase non-teaching time for professional development, collaboration and planning, especially for early career teachers.

10 Tighter regulation of social media companies to protect children from online harm and prioritise their welfare.

**IF YOU VALUE EDUCATION,
VOTE FOR EDUCATION.**



Organise and fight back

Matt Willgress



A column today on what approach the new Government should take to foreign policy. It must lead with Palestine - and recognise Britain has been increasingly isolated on Gaza, in terms of both the Government and Labour leadership responses, at a time when UK weapons are making possible what the ICJ regards as potentially a plausible case of genocide.

The priority must then be to seek to shift the new Government's approach, not only to support an immediate and lasting ceasefire – but also to address the fact that Israel continually flouts international law.

The reality is it will continue to do so, unless there are consequences for its actions. 'Labour & Palestine' argues that consequences "means an immediate arms embargo, leading to a full cessation of arms trade if Israel fails to comply with international law."

It also means joining the majority of countries internationally – including Ireland, Spain and Norway recently – in immediately recognising a Palestinian state, as voted for by the UN Assembly.

This is the response needed based on putting people, their rights and international justice first – rather than slavish adherence to the US' agenda.

It is widely known Labour's leadership has consulted with US govern-

ment figures over their stance on Gaza and, as a former Shadow Minister said in response, "We don't have an independent foreign policy, a Labour policy... We have outsourced it to the US administration."

But this is also the case way beyond the issue of Palestine, and this 'Atlantacist' approach refuses to recognise the world is a very different place to 25 years ago.

We live in a time of multiple crises globally, and the foreign policy agenda of a Government needs to address these seriously and in a different way to the US position, recognising that numerous economies and economic blocs are growing to be both more independent of the US and weightier in the global economy.

In response to this, the US Empire – which remains in comparative decline economically – is lashing out through permanent interventions to try and re-assert dominance in different parts of the world. But it is failing – as Latin America shifting to the Left again and the isolation of Israel at the UN illustrate.

It is because they are desperate to continue subordination to the US' agenda, that the ruling-class has sought to lock-in Britain's high and rising levels of military spending for years – and the current Labour leadership has backed this, whilst avoiding any serious discussion internally on the issue.

Yet spending levels in this area are incredibly high already, with 2021 figures making the UK the fourth highest spending country globally, and highest in Western Europe. Then in 2022, Liz Truss pledged to spend 3 per cent of GDP on this area by 2030. Since then, both Labour and the Tories have committed to increasing it to 2.5%.

Furthermore, renewing Trident nuclear weapons will cost at least £205 billion but Labour's leadership has signed-up to this even though they regularly say the money available in Government will be extremely limited.

With the climate catastrophe, the starving of resources for public services and the cost-of-living emergency needing to be addressed, these militarist public spending priorities will be a disaster both electorally and in human terms.

Instead, a forward-looking approach must involve refusing to get involved in a costly new arms race – and see Labour seek to engage with the majority of the world to advance the causes of peace, self-determination and social progress.

The disastrous alternative is to continue to slavishly follow the US – at a time when Trump may return to the Presidency – at great cost to people, planet and peace.

- Matt Willgress is the National Organiser of Arise – A Festival of Left Ideas.



BACK FOR GOOD

Keith Veness



Usually my column consists of either a rant against an outrageous injustice, a satirical take on events or an interesting bit of history. However this time we are concentrating this special issue on the likely result of a Labour victory and to spell out what a change of government could mean. My assigned area is the one dearest to my heart and one I have been closely involved with for many decades, local government.

Councils large and small have been the vehicles for real improvements in the lot of most of the population - and in my case an integral part of my childhood, my employment and much of my political activity. *Labour Briefing* itself was originally set up as an instrument to help Ken Livingstone and the left get control of the GLC in 1981 which was our first huge success story.

From that we moved on to Target 82, the cross London campaign to get control of as many London Boroughs as possible. The results of this were more patchy but in my own Borough of Islington we won 51 seats out of 52 and thereby created the famous *Briefing* headline of 'Fortress Islington'.

Any genuine socialist should support handing power and decision making down to the lowest practical level. However the last forty years have seen exactly the reverse process as

successive Governments, whether Thatcherite or Blairite, sought to accumulate as much finance and decision making into Whitehall departments and away from any local decision making as possible.

I haven't got space here to go into the calamity of the Tories Right To Buy policy and this has been covered in some really good articles we have run recently but suffice to say that currently any capital receipts from sales go straight to central government. The first thing a Labour administration could do on day one would be to return these monies to local councils' Housing Revenue Accounts.

The outgoing Tory regime have strangled and destroyed large chunks of local government, resulting in Conservative councillors being unelectable in whole swathes of England. The Boris Johnson idiocy was to launch the Levelling Up scheme where councils queue up like kids out of *Oliver Twist* begging central government for money for various schemes.

No council anywhere could refuse any cash available but some schemes were frankly crackpot and local electors had no say about whether they had these things as their priority. The new Labour Government should make an early commitment to return any such decisions back to the relevant councils.

At one stage local councils delivered some services via grants to local community groups or voluntary organisations. The council oversaw what was done and often had local councillors on management committees or elected boards. Years of savage cuts have virtually destroyed the voluntary sector but the new government should make a firm commitment to reinstate it.

Lastly of course is the issue of finance that underpins everything. The current system of council tax plus Government grants plus fees and charges is a total mess. Thatcher bought in rate capping coupled with centralised control. Labour needs to commit to scrapping this and return real power over fundraising to local government. A commitment to a radical review would be great but with a definite time limit.

I was born in a council flat, grew up in a council house and worked most of my adult life in local government - two years for Harrow, eight years in Islington and then 32 years for the London Borough of Hackney. I retired at the age of 63 and a half. I was an elected member at different times on the old ILEA and for the London Borough of Islington - so there is little about local government I don't know. I just hope some of the new Government's leading lights have this knowledge!



If I was Home Secretary

As Home Secretary, my priority will be to restore public trust in Policing and the Criminal Justice system. The public has lost confidence that the police can deal with offences such as burglary and personal theft.

Over 50% of the population believe the police are doing a worse job than thirty years ago. The Criminal Justice system is failing, with approximately 60,000 cases waiting to be tried at Crown Courts.

Police officers answering 999 emergency calls have the most critical role in an investigation. They are not there to report a crime but to investigate it. If they do not do so, no matter how skilled, subsequent investigators will not be able to retrieve lost evidence. Victims of crime have an absolute right that Police Officers who respond to them have the skills necessary to investigate their crime thoroughly.

Knife crime continues to rise in our cities with tragic consequences. Young lives are being lost. Steps must be taken to reduce this. Increased funding will be made available to Youth Offending Teams to provide support and guidance for young people who have been found in possession of weapons.

The Police use of their Stop and Search powers can create mistrust amongst some communities; however, they are a valid tactic in the fight against knife crime. Officers must have accurate intelligence, thorough training, and effective supervision. They need to understand when to use Stop and Search and, equally importantly, when not to.

There are currently too many Police officers deployed in office jobs. This is a legacy of the austerity measures that saw Police Services reducing costs by

Tim Evans, retired Metropolitan Police Inspector and life long Manchester City supporter, has some advice for an incoming Home Secretary.

making Police staff redundant and filling those posts with Police Officers. Police officers should be deployed where needed, in and amongst our communities—a visible presence, able to respond to crimes in action and personal emergencies.

Non-warranted personnel should be recruited to support operational officers and be embedded in the investigation process. The enhanced status of Police staff will make the Police Service a more attractive career for those unable or unwilling to participate in the 24 hours a day, seven-days-a-week aspect of Policing. Efforts will be made to encourage recently retired officers to return and counter the loss of experience.

The College of Policing will be tasked to review three aspects of Police training urgently. Recruit training to establish if it is designed and delivered in a way that provides new officers with the skills and knowledge required to provide a high level of service. The initial investigation of crimes will be a priority in recruit training. The investigation processes involved in rape and sexual offences need to be urgently examined, victims' charities and representatives consulted, and best practices identified to increase conviction rates and confidence. First and second line supervisors, Sergeants and Inspectors, must be provided with the professional tools to support their officers where appropriate or identify and be able to deal with those unsuitable to be Police officers.

There is currently a log jam in the Criminal Justice system; victims, wit-



nesses and those charged with offences face unacceptable delays in cases going to trial. The capacity of the Prison Service is constantly stretched. Time limits will be imposed on investigators and the prosecution to prepare their cases reasonably.

The capability of courts to manage and deal with their workloads will be reviewed. A revision of the definition of 'each way' and indictable offences will be undertaken to ease the burden on Crown Courts and their need to recruit juries. In addition to investing in youth offending teams, finance will be made available to enhance the use of therapeutic communities within prisons to provide high-quality support to offenders, enabling them to break the offending-prison-reoffending cycle.

These initiatives will cost money. Some will be recouped by changes in the Police workforce, and reducing reoffending will reduce costs in the Criminal Justice system. However, the cost should be seen as an investment in building a better, safer, and more just society.



General election 2024

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Restore democracy in our NHS

I've just returned to the Council of Governors of a Health Trust and the mental health world has changed for the worse, though no worse than the NHS in general. Last month *Briefing* printed an article by Coral Jones, a friend and former Hackney GP, who chairs the Socialist Health Association. She outlined the dire state of the NHS and in SHA's Mental Health subgroup I have contributed to SHA's Mental Health proposals for reform.

I want to describe the machinations of the NHS grandees in destroying the Mental Health service. If you thought your loved ones would be safe in a Mental Health Trust service think again. As a member of Camden Carers I hear stories of patients being disrespected and made to wait months for what should be an emergency. A delayed diagnosis results in a deterioration of the condition.

On my return as a governor I was shocked to find a Chair of Governors imposed on us by NHS England and with other friendly governors led a protest. We asserted our rights and recruited another Chair though she is dividing her time between us and another Trust in Hampshire. She has that right although it leaves us with less than the hours we need. Rules need to be made and hours monitored.

I find that careerism among governors takes precedent over commitment to patients. A democratic election of members is a safeguard and a handful of the governors are carers and experts by experience. Our Lead Governor was the widow of Eric Gordon, the former editor of the *Camden New Journal*, which has won so many awards for being a loved local paper, supporting just causes. She made herself available for governors to discuss any concerns and make contributions to the agendas, which made

Mental Health Trust governor Ruth Appleton describes the dire situation which the Tories have left in the NHS.

her unique and popular. It was a welcome shift in culture but also made for conflict as not all governors or management welcomed this shift.

In 2024 governors were presented with a fait accompli of NHS England requiring our Trust to merge with Barnet Enfield & Haringey Mental Health Trusts which are not Foundation Trusts. That means they have no governors and no democracy. As a Foundation Trust we had to achieve standards to acquire our Foundation status. We're not about to give that up without a fight.

I attended a subgroup meeting at which the latest Governors' Newsletter was criticised for having no articles written by Governors, so I volunteered to write. I wrote that mental health users are affected by the obfuscation of mass media regarding the genocide in the Middle East and that staff should approach with caution since many users come from conflict-torn countries. Trauma is caused no less by geographic displacement than by loss of loved ones and violence. The managers claimed my article used words which do not reflect the values of the Trust! It was rejected.

I applied for funding from the Trust's Charity for Patient Improvement. I run a Refugee Project and was encouraged to apply as many of the trust's patients are refugees and seek support from our Project's Befriending service. It supports traumatised people who are isolated and vulnerable. Unfortunately, the panel rejected my application and when I requested reasons I was asked strange questions which indicated the



ignorance of panel members as to the basic needs of refugees. I therefore offered to give a presentation. This again was refused. There's a basic intransigence.

Finally, I'd like to outline a gross miscarriage of justice regarding our incredibly hardworking Lead Governor who is a Consultant Ophthalmologist. She has been suspended under investigation for crimes she has not committed and has decided to resign as it is clear she will not receive a fair hearing. As Governors we have been excluded from the process and have no recourse to correct the situation. She is a scapegoat for the misdeeds of the managers.

Meanwhile the Council of Governors is required to rubberstamp the merger (renamed as an acquisition) of the five Trusts and forget we ever became a Foundation Trust with all the resources that brings. We will then have to share our funds, staff, new buildings and land with the three Trusts which have no democratic structure. Welcome to the Empire of the Damned!



BEHAVING BADLY

Christine Shawcroft

If you wanted a Socialist Labour government, you wouldn't vote for Keir Starmer. Even if you only wanted a middle of the road, slightly reformist, teensy bit to the left of centre Labour government, you wouldn't vote for Keir Starmer.

However, last time I looked we weren't actually living under a Presidential system of government. This country is, allegedly, a democracy. That means 'rule by the many'. Political parties vie for power, and the leaders can be removed by the members or by the MPs, as Teresa May, Boris Johnson and Liz Truss all discovered to their cost.

I've been a Party member for 48 years, and I've been through eight Labour leaders in that time. It would have been nine, but I missed Harold Wilson by a few months. So I know they come and go. And very few of us will actually be voting for Starmer. One's heart bleeds for the unfortunate citizens of Holborn and St Pancras and the terrible dilemma they find themselves in, but I don't have to vote for Starmer.

I'm voting for Apsana Begum (and what a relief that was). There are several good candidates still standing in this election, so if yours is a head office clone, you can go and help whichever one is nearest. Diane Abbott, Apsana, Olivia Blake, Richard Burgon, Clive Lewis, Rebecca Long Bailey, Zarah Sultana, Stephen Witherden and Nadia Whittome are all deserving of our help and support. There may be more who I don't hap-

pen to know about. Those in areas with a high Muslim background electorate may need extra help, as the genocide in Gaza is turning a lot of erstwhile Labour supporters away in disgust and despair.

Even the Labour Party is now cottoning on to the electoral consequences of the leadership's servile subservience to the US government. 16 Labour seats, some of them with what look like, on paper, enormous Labour majorities, have been designated as 'battleground seats' and the local activists have been told to ignore previous instructions to go and help in nearby marginals and instead stay put and work hard in their supposedly 'safe' seats.

I say this just to show how parties eventually have to take note of their members and of public opinion, however much they really don't want to. Blair didn't want to hand over to Gordon Brown, but the reputational damage he sustained as his lies over the invasion of Iraq came to light meant it was inevitable - he had to go.

Several years beforehand, my CLP was very active in the campaign to link pensions to average earnings. For several years running, we sent resolutions to Annual Conference about it. Blair and Brown were determined to resist. One year, Brown was at an important G7 meeting during Annual Conference, and had to fly back in a hurry to oppose the pensions composite. Yet in the end, public and party feeling was so strongly in favour of index linking that they had to

give in. Campaigning works. It might take several years, but eventually even the most pig headed opposition can and will be overcome.

I used to campaign for public ownership when it couldn't get arrested. Thatcher and Major merrily sold off everything that wasn't nailed down, and Blair and Brown carried on with the process. It was generally accepted common sense that public ownership was an expensive, inefficient, terrible way to run anything.

Now that we have an NHS on the brink of collapse, profiteering energy companies, trains that constantly break down and rivers full of poo and even die hard Tory voters (both of them) think that public ownership is the way forward. People have learned the hard way what privatisation actually does to our services and utilities, and they don't like it one little bit.

So all of this is a rather roundabout way of saying you should hold your nose and vote Labour. And if you've left the party you should rejoin! It's not so easy if you've been expelled, but it's not a life sentence, you can apply to rejoin. As long as Labour is in power, no matter who the leader is, we have a chance to put forward the policies we really want. Indeed, we have a chance to put forward the leader we really want. Never mind about the Rule Changes that have been brought in, we can start chipping away at those. It often feels like pushing a boulder uphill but don't forget - a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.