

**FABIAN  
SOCIETY**

**CENTRE FOR  
ENGLISH  
IDENTITY  
AND POLITICS**  
AT THE UNIVERSITY  
OF WINCHESTER

# WHO SPEAKS TO ENGLAND?

**LABOUR'S ENGLISH CHALLENGE**



Introduced by **John Denham** and **Michael Kenny**

With essays by **Polly Billington, Liam Byrne MP, Ruth Davis, Robert Ford, David Goodhart, Andrew Harrop, Paul Hilder, Eric Kaufmann, Ben Lucas, Tariq Modood, Mary Riddell, Emily Robinson** and **Julia Stapleton**

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Labour's English challenge

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Eric Kaufmann, Ben Lucas, Tariq Modood, Mary Riddell,  
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## CONTENTS

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Introduction	1
John Denham and Michael Kenny	
1: Why England matters	11
Mary Riddell	
2: Home is where the heart is	19
Ruth Davis	
3: A progressive patriotism	31
Polly Billington	
4: Inspiration and pragmatism	37
Emily Robinson	
5: A respectable Englishness	41
David Goodhart and Eric Kaufmann	
6: Whatever happened to multiculturalism?	47
Tariq Modood	



## CONTENTS

---

- 7: A Labour politics of localism of England 55  
Julia Stapleton
- 8: Time for Labour to take  
English devolution seriously 59  
Ben Lucas
- 9: Support for Brexit linked to  
uneven public spending 71  
Andrew Harrop
- 10: Here for good:  
Ukip and Labour after the Brexit vote 81  
Robert Ford
- 11: Let us face the future:  
the new English socialist project 91  
Liam Byrne MP
- 12: Seven steps for Labour to win in England 97  
Paul Hilder

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## INTRODUCTION

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John Denham and Michael Kenny

The soap opera of Labour's leadership election has absorbed a good deal of the party's emotional energy and political attention for the past few months. Above all it has distracted Labour from some of the increasingly important questions about nationhood and state that are now pressing on the UK in the wake of the EU referendum. These issues barely featured in the leadership debates, yet pose considerable threats to Labour's fragile support and may lead to the further reorganisation of the United Kingdom.

At first sight, ideas of nationhood and state may not appear as exciting or existential as Corbyn's battles with his foes, but these major issues are of greater long-term importance for the future of the country, the majority of its inhabitants, and most of the party's supporters. For while Labour faces off internally across a long-established left-right divide, it is increasingly apparent that neither side in this fight has much of a story to tell about the powerful national impulses and new forms of identity that are reshaping our society from below, and that are increasingly undermining the traditional bases upon which party politics in Britain has operated.

Over the past two years, the party's electoral base has been torn apart by identity politics. Huge numbers of Scottish Labour voters abandoned party loyalty to vote for separation and then to dump the party itself. In England, voters feared SNP support for a minority Labour government, and many

## Who speaks to England?

others turned to Ukip. In a further major blow, millions of former Labour voters, particularly those who felt mostly sharply English, backed Brexit. Faced with this tsunami of political rejection, the issue was simply airbrushed out of the leadership campaigns.

The essays in this book begin to define some of the issues that should engage Labour's attention in this area. Drawn from four 'England and Labour' seminars that were held in Westminster and Huddersfield during the early months of 2016, and an associated series of online essays, they highlight some of the cultural, political and electoral challenges facing the party. A complete set of all the contributions, together with transcripts and seminar contributions can be found on the [Centre for English Identity and Politics website](#).

The broader challenges include marked regional and territorial differences that were illuminated by the result of the EU referendum, the implications of the SNP's current dominance in Scotland, the possibility of a second referendum on that nation's future within the UK, and the further demands for greater self-government that Brexit has unleashed. These issues, and other vital, constitutional questions, such as the future of Northern Ireland and the possibility of a 'hard' border with the Irish Republic, demand careful attention from progressives.

The common focus of the essays collected in this book is the national question that has been off limits for most of the Labour family: the changing national temper of the English. The majority of people who live outside London voted for Brexit. A strong correlation between support for it and the likelihood of identifying with England as a prime source of national identity had been apparent in polling for some considerable while. Like the Labour party, the remain campaign preferred to ignore this evidence, and may have paid a high price for believing that 'Britain Stronger in

Europe' was the right message for voters who wanted to be recognised as English.

Brexit has a variety of different causes and meanings. One of these is that it offers a dramatic illustration of the impact of an emergent political identity upon political behavior. An increasingly insistent English dimension has been apparent in British politics for some time. The enhanced offer to Scotland in the vow made before the Scottish independence referendum was not universally popular in England. The claimed threat of SNP influence over a minority Labour government was a talking point throughout the 2015 general election, and may have influenced sufficient votes to deliver a Conservative majority. With the electoral battleground in each nation of the UK now contested by different parties, and with different victors in each of its constituent territories, the idea that England possesses interests of its own that are not always the same as those of the union is likely to grow.

Labour's need to respond to this trend is also borne out by the electoral arithmetic. Without a dramatic improvement in **Labour's fortunes in Scotland** – something that is unlikely unless Scottish Labour can find the right blend of progressive politics and an answer to the complex politics of identity in Scotland – Labour has a better chance of doing well in England. In a complete and ironic reversal of its previous position, it makes sense for Labour to prioritise its efforts to win an English majority that – however far away – appears more attainable than a UK majority.

This means holding off the rising threat of Ukip, especially in northern seats, and winning marginal seats where a decisive swing to the Conservatives resulted in victory in the election of 2015. It is now in the largest territory of the UK that the fortunes of the party will be decisively determined in the next few years. But in large parts of England, Labour

## Who speaks to England?

is struggling to be relevant to voters who, amongst other things, want a party that is sensitive to their English interests.

In her contribution to this collection Mary Riddell traces Labour's English dilemmas. The origins of Labour's deafening silence on England stretch back into the years of New Labour government. Gordon Brown made a spirited, but misguided attempt to promote a uniform account of progressive Britishness. But this was in a country where being British had long come to mean very different things in different national settings. Crucially, Brown's implicit message was that Scotland and Wales could only flourish if England was denied any political identity of its own. Labour proved fatally unable to muster any kind of response when David Cameron decided to pose the question of English devolution in the aftermath of the Scottish referendum. (Labour's strategists were aware that such a move was coming, but either thought it could be ignored or could not formulate a coherent response). Like the wider left, it assumed that it was somehow illegitimate of a mainstream political party to pose a question that seems blindingly obvious, and increasingly important, to most of the citizens of England. This discomfort was highlighted again during the 2015 election campaign. The Conservatives accidentally stumbled on the tactic of stressing the potential risks to English voters of a Labour government dependent upon the SNP. Labour did not prove able to respond quickly or coherently, and its final rejection of cooperation with the SNP came too late and was implausible.

While a gathering sense of national rebellion was only one of a number of factors that fed into the Brexit vote, the tenor of the campaign that led up to it illustrates the responsiveness of large numbers of the English – north and south, middle and working class – to the idea of self-government, to a political appeal that puts **scepticism about mass immigra-**

tion at its heart, and to the notion of putting one over on the metropolitan political establishment. The desire to take back control spoke to a complex mood of frustration, disappointment and anxiety; and it is this same sensibility that underpins the growing appeal of the stronger sense of English community and national identity that Polly Billington evokes in her contribution.

Critics from the left tend to sing two worn-out tunes in response to this issue. Britishness is an acceptable, multicultural patriotism, but Englishness is reactionary, **they repeat**. Others insist that people in the north cannot feel any affinity for a soft, southern Englishness – despite the welter of evidence against such a proposition. Both of these responses are the political equivalent of King Canute's last stand, and need to be junked if Labour is to have a chance in England. Britishness is an identity on the wane. Those who believe in the merits of a United Kingdom need to learn that allowing the various forms of place-based identity greater expression and democratic support is much more likely to secure the legitimacy of the UK than lecturing about the merits of Britishness. And the assumption that we are either northerners *or* Englanders reflects an inability to grasp the multiple nature of the different forms of attachment that ordinary people combine and value. Julia Stapleton's discussion of the links between the politics of localism and the current devolution debates grapples with these questions.

Left-wing critics of Englishness have one thing right. This form of patriotism is not the only game in town. It is only one, increasingly salient, face of a much more variegated phenomenon – the growing force of political arguments and appeals based upon collective identity. This is apparent in many different western democracies. Class is becoming weaker as the **basis for political loyalty**. Disaffection with the inability of the political mainstream to address some of

## Who speaks to England?

the concerns and fears of ordinary people is growing, as is deep disaffection with sharply rising inequalities. New challenges to the established traditions and ways of living of the majority are generating novel tensions and fears. Questions of culture and of belonging have made their way into the heart of democratic political culture. Often associated with particular, iconic issues, like immigration, identity-based politics percolates deeply into the wellsprings of our civic life, and increasingly demands responses and engagement from political representatives.

Labour's political opponents have been far more adroit on this terrain, as Theresa May demonstrated at her party conference. She made a clear play for voters that Labour has not only lost, but does not appear to want back. Robert Ford sets out how Labour should be responding to the voters lost to Ukip. Sadly, as the leadership contest revealed – in its avoidance of these questions – the party is unable to confront the tendency for its support to become increasingly confined to the key demographics of several large cities and university towns.

Without a major shift of focus, and a much fuller realisation that politics is now shaped by and configured around concerns associated with identity, belonging and territory, Labour will not get a hearing among the English voters it needs to reach. As the [Fabian Society's analysis](#) shows, Labour needs 104 additional seats in England and Wales and 40 per cent of the vote to win. In marginal seats in England, 4 out of 5 of the extra voters it needs to win are from those who voted Conservative last time.

There are signs, however, that the need to recognize the salience and political resonance of English national identity is starting to make its way into Labour's mindset, as the essays collected here – from figures associated with different parts of the party – attest. If they help to jettison some of the



canards that often feature in Labour's thinking – including the tendency to make a false separation between 'internationalism' and 'nationalism', and a visceral suspicion of home-grown patriotism – they will have done an important job. That it is possible to inflect nationalist sentiment in progressive ways is demonstrated by developments in Scotland, by the adoption of patriotic motifs in the rhetoric of radical parties like Syriza and Podemos, and indeed by the long and rich history of socialist patriotism across Britain. The essays here argue that Labour must take these issues seriously, and also go further. Ruth Davis argues that the left must renew links between progressive politics and our empathy with the English environment. David Goodhart and Eric Kaufmann, as well as Tariq Modood explore an Englishness that is equally accessible to English people of all ethnicities and faiths.

The left is significantly inhibited by the dearth of serious attempts to 're-imagine' England and different English futures – in both cultural and democratic terms. Ben Lucas and Andrew Harrop look at two of the vital elements of the democratic debates on devolution and finance. Previous essays – from **Peter Hain**, **Graham Allen MP**, **Craig Berry**, **Richard Hayton** and **Jim Gallagher** – for the Centre for English Identity and Politics and the Fabian Society have also looked in detail at these questions. To many who feel a sense of pride in their national tradition, the only political voices who seem to speak this language are from the political right. Until progressives begin to engage a battle for the English imagination, this situation will not change.

On one or two carefully scripted occasions Ed Miliband showed that he understood this issue and wanted his party to engage with it. But Labour did nothing under his watch to bring it into the heart of its political vision. Under Corbyn, there is no real encouragement for an agenda that the radical

## Who speaks to England?

left feels to be a distraction from the real engine of conflict – social class. And yet, during his leadership a concerted debate has finally begun to break out about Englishness, and some have begun to employ patriotic language: in his speech Corbyn notably remarked that “there is nothing more unpatriotic than not paying your taxes”. And, as Hillary Clinton recently suggested, patriotism can separate those who accept their obligations to the wider society, and those who think it is clever to avoid them. In English radical history, the recurrent notion of the common weal held that the measure of the powerful was how well they looked after the commons. Such thinking has a powerful resonance today and Labour needs to mine it more deeply.

At its best, progressive patriotism, explored here by Emily Robinson, can unite disparate interests and communities. It opens up conversations with people who would reject any particular political label. It can be a foundation for holding the powerful to account. England’s radical traditions (and their notions of political, social, religious and economic emancipation) can be combined with conservative traditions (of responsibility, service, respect for the rule of law, and voluntarism) to create a popular politics that would hold the powerful to account, and challenge the abuse of power, wealth and privilege of those working against the national interest.

Paul Hilder considers some basic steps that must be taken for **Labour to win in England**. Liam Byrne points out that any Labour Englishness must be relevant to the way England will be in 20 years time, not a simple appeal to the past. An English Labour will not be created by packing a boot full of St George’s flags to take canvassing in certain council estates, only to be quickly discarded. Nor is there a need to invent a brand new English nationalism and tame it for progressive ends. Very little in current manifestations of English nation-

hood is new. For most people this is about a feeling that insufficient respect and recognition have been afforded to an older sense of patriotism that quietly celebrates community, place, tradition and country. The number of people in England who identify with a politicised English nationalism, and envisage a break with the union, remains small. Rather larger numbers have always supported English votes for English laws or an English parliament, though not with any evident passion or insistence. Of course, in the circumstances of a future constitutional crisis, the mood on both these issues could change. But for the vast majority of English people, the English tradition is as much a liberal one – celebrating tolerance, freedom and fairness – as it is a conservative one – prioritising community, stability and carefully managed change. Until Labour people put aside the temptations to demonise or dramatise Englishness, they are unlikely to develop the kind of language, sensibility and policy prospectus that will be needed to make Labour a truly national party once more.

Who speaks to England?

## 1. WHY ENGLAND MATTERS

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Mary Riddell

Who are we? Not long ago, Britons thought they knew. Up to and beyond the close of the Brexit vote, a majority of the population assumed that the UK would opt, albeit by a narrow margin, to stay in the EU. If ever there was a case of mistaken identity, this was surely it. Politicians and citizens alike had misread the public mind, with consequences that look more alarming by the day.

In the run-up to the referendum, old warnings were aired. If the vote was for an exit, citizens were warned, then the pro-European Scottish government might make another bid for independence. That in turn would imperil a union that has held the United Kingdom together since 1707. While such anxieties have not dissipated, they have been eclipsed by other fears.

The government of Theresa May, untrammelled by any effective opposition from Labour, has embraced Brexit with a quasi-religious fervour. Brexiteers are exultant, and front bench remainers, no longer caring to air their past heresy, have opted to ignore the pitfalls of the 'hard Brexit' that – to many voters – offers no certain or desirable future.

With our deepest alliances at risk, we are further hampered by a lack of any clear idea both of what we want and who we are. Reluctant Europeans, at best, and lukewarm Britons, we have become a nation of unenthusiasts. That negativity has

## Who speaks to England?

taken root at an inauspicious time. With national security under threat from forces ranging from terrorism to climate change, international allies and cohesion at home are vital if we are to safeguard our future and help those, such as refugees, whose fates may turn on our resolve.

The shadow of fear under which we live now is nothing new. In the mid-17th century, Hobbes tried to dispel the terrors of the age by telling readers of *Leviathan* that they should not fear fairies, ghosts, goblins and witches. The death sentence for witchcraft lapsed some years later, as the optimism of the Enlightenment took hold.

More than three centuries later, Britain stands poised again between angry dread and a sense, as yet unarticulated, that the world in which we live is both benign and improvable. Politics occupies the same limbo. The battles in which it engages are small and bitter, making citizens believe, with much justification, that it has lost any capacity to forge a better society. The most that can reasonably be expected (though never relied upon) is that our leaders – buffeted by forces over which they have little or no traction – contrive not to make things worse.

Hope and passion, the key ingredients of change, are not however absent from public life. At a time of uncertainty about who we are, the politics of identity offers an alternative to torpor. Across Europe, extreme movements of the right, and sometimes the left, are the torch-bearers for a different future. As such groups gain momentum, the Enlightenment vision has been exchanged for a pathology of progress.

It is in that context that English identity matters. Though support for Ukip has ebbed and flowed, its showing in the general election of 2015, when it increased its vote share by 10 per cent and garnered 3.9 million votes, suggests that Nigel Farage's party should not be under-estimated. In a campaign when many residential streets boasted barely a single elec-

tion poster, the St George flag draped over domestic facades became the symbol of grassroots political engagement.

In January 2012, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) published a report entitled: 'The Dog That Finally Barked: England as an emerging political community'. It argued that a deepening English political identity may come to challenge the workings of the UK more profoundly even than Scottish independence.

The IPPR conducted a follow-up survey in 2013, which appeared to confirm its conclusion that, although British identity remained relatively weak, people south of the border have a strengthening sense of being English. The English, in the think tank's findings, had begun to form a political community seeking some form of self-government.

This nascent movement appeared to be founded in dissatisfaction. Where British identifiers tended also to be Europhiles, those who defined themselves as English were much more likely to be Eurosceptics eager that Britain should leave the EU. The conclusion was unsurprising. More astonishing was Labour's failure to react to a trend that posed an existential danger to the party.

Labour had not only lost the votes of England. It had also forfeited its faith. The voters that it could most have relied upon in elections past defected in 2015 to the Conservatives and to Ukip partly because Labour had done little or nothing to harness and shape English identity. As the IPPR had pointed out in its canine metaphor, the warnings had been clear. In failing to heed them, Labour became the dog that did not bark.

For sure, some forces within the party understood how England was changing. Jon Cruddas, Ed Miliband's policy reviewer, addressed the issue in both philosophical and practical terms. Having taken the new leader to meet Billingsgate fish porters as part of a crash course in English heritage,

## Who speaks to England?

Cruddas later became the prime architect of regional devolution, under which money and power would be handed down to council groupings.

Miliband himself took on the English question, acknowledging in a speech that the left had not been clear enough about its pride in England and exhorting his party to “embrace a positive, outward-looking view of English identity.” Quite what this vision might be was less clear. The Miliband version ranged from England football fans through jubilee street parties to the “great Victorian visionaries like William Morris and John Ruskin.”

Rich though Labour’s English traditions surely are, the Conservatives of the 21st century had proved more adept at implanting the idea that England was a Tory country, headed by a Tory monarchy and presided over by a Tory God. Stanley Baldwin and John Major had both conjured up a land of cricket teas and women cycling to communion. And when that prelapsarian idyll faded, the Harlow MP, Robert Halfon, and the Renewal movement stepped in with a blueprint for a ‘white van conservatism’ designed to appeal to the 21st century worker whose view of England was steeped less in glory than in grievance.

The Labour leadership’s lack of a positive and counter-vailing story of English identity was undoubtedly a factor in its crushing 2015 election defeat. The reasons for skirting round the issue of identity were clear enough. Englishness has come to be seen by many on the left as either a patina of privilege assumed by a grouse-shooting squirarchy or as the dark and chauvinistic impulse of the poor and resentful.

That neither explains nor justifies the inability of many senior figures to understand the complexity of English identity or even to update its arcane touchstones. The red pillar boxes, the boiled cabbages and the oil-lit churches variously described by Orwell, Eliot and Betjeman are unlikely to stir



any chord in a generation weaned on email, takeaways and secularism.

As for the 'Blitz spirit' invoked by media sentimentalists (and by Ed Miliband in his speech on English identity), anyone wishing to recreate a kinder yesteryear might remember that the war years, though certainly an era of community spirit, generosity and sacrifice, were also a time of strikes, rising anti-Semitism and class antagonism.

What Labour has not cared to admit, for fairly obvious reasons, is that one distinguishing feature of English identity is dislike of most of what the party is supposed to stand for. Aloof, out-of-touch, welcoming to outsiders, hostile to its own people and headed by a metropolitan elite. That collective stereotype, applied to Tony Blair and those who followed him, has not been dispelled by Jeremy Corbyn.

Re-elected on a wave of almost unprecedented popular support, Corbyn can certainly claim to be elected by the people for the people. Whether he is of the people is another matter. While he is a well-liked and well-respected representative for his relatively poor constituency, it is not clear that he has any affinity either with the disaffected south or the north of the country.

His support, certainly within the metropolis, is not confined to the young or the less well-off. On the contrary, other London MPs admit that Corbynitees in their constituency are older, well-heeled and affluent enough to indulge their principles. Corbyn purports to speak for the disaffected everywhere, and it is true that his writ runs far beyond the capital. But the realm he commands is, in the words of David Runciman, is "a London of the mind".

The Labour left to which Corbyn belongs has traditionally favoured a centralised system and tight controls. While that hardly makes his faction unique in Westminster, Corbyn has shown limited enthusiasm for giving power to the regions.

## Who speaks to England?

Nor has he responded very positively to pressure from Cruddas, John Denham and others for the foundation of an English Labour party.

His initial support for a constitutional convention has not been repeated, leaving changes designed to boost England – such as English voting on English legislation – as a Conservative initiative. The devolution championed by Cruddas and Andrew Adonis before the election has been appropriated by George Osborne (and tweaked as a means to devolve government funding cuts). Labour meanwhile still lacks any coherent story about English identity.

The case for English Labour has been persuasively made by Denham and others. The difficulties in implementing such a change (considerable but far from insurmountable) have also been rehearsed. Suffice for now to focus on the national mood that such a movement could reflect and foster.

Relatively early in the last parliament, Labour thinkers in touch with the grassroots realised that, in an age of mass movement of people, of globalisation and security threats, voters felt a powerful identity with their street, their community and their town. I come from Boston in Lincolnshire, a byword for high immigration and social upheaval, and I have seen a little of how notions of belonging and estrangement evolve.

At first, many Bostonians turned against the Portuguese immigrants who came over in the initial wave of European migration to pick and package fruit and other crops. Families were shunned in public and housed in slum conditions. Public services were over-stretched, bigotry was rife, and the unease culminated in a riot.

But gradually (and unseen by the media) the mood changed. The Polish builder and his British counterpart felt an equal enthusiasm for a community made more vibrant by migration. They also experienced a shared anger that

they had to drive more than 70 miles a day to Peterborough, the nearest city, and back if they wanted a job with a living wage. By the 2015 election, when Ukip hoped (but ultimately failed) to win the seat of Boston and Skegness from the Tories, a solidarity had emerged.

When I interviewed indigenous Bostonians, a number told me that they had warmed to their mixed community. Many who planned to vote Ukip said they would do so not through any dislike of their migrant neighbours, whom they had come first to tolerate and then to value, but because they wanted to punish Westminster politicians.

Away from Lincolnshire, some in Labour realised that the key to electoral success lay in local involvement. Arnie Graf, the Baltimore community organiser briefly feted by Miliband, became the driving force of a new form of grass-roots politics which recognised and acted on an obvious truth. Speed bumps, playgrounds, refuse collection and clearing up dog fouling are a better conduit to social and political engagement than a thousand mediocre Westminster speeches.

Neither Graf nor his creed survived to the election, and Labour duly paid the price. It is vital, if Labour is to fare better next time, that it revives its interest in the politics of place. In an age when fear of the outsider drives intolerance, it follows that a sense of shared identity goes at least some way to addressing problems that seem intractable at national and supra-national level.

Fostering a positive English identity, through an English Labour movement, is not simply last year's discarded good idea. The project is more urgent and more necessary than ever, for two reasons. The first turns on the necrosis now afflicting politics, and Labour politics in particular. For good or ill, identity politics are a visceral force defining, at the extremes, what we live and die for.

## Who speaks to England?

It follows that identity is a crucial tool in the revival of a moribund politics. Other parties are already harnessing that instinct, for malign or at least negative purposes. Labour, if it chooses, is best-placed to help instil the positive impulses that might, in turn, drive a Labour revival.

But irrespective of narrow party interest, the politics of identity are the key to the future of the nation. Brexit has not only imperilled Britain's economy and its standing in Europe and the world. It has also shown that on the most vital question in many voters' lifetimes, the nation is split down the middle. The Labour leadership, disgracefully negligent on making a pro-EU case before Brexit, must help chart a way ahead if the party is to find a future for the country and ensure its own survival.

As part of that mission, it must also recognise that helping to instil a positive view of English identity is more vital than ever. We shall never trust our natural allies, let alone secure a role on the global stage, unless we first discover who we are.

*This essay is an updated version of an essay that first appeared in the Fabian Review online.*

## 2. HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

---

Ruth Davis

**A** month before the EU referendum vote, I sat down to write an essay about how a love of place, cemented through memory, can be one of the most powerful and beautiful forces in our lives.

I argued that in forgetting or disavowing our attachment to place, the environment movement had become estranged from many of its natural supporters – including those living in the countryside, and the worse off in society who bear the brunt of bad housing and poor air and have little or no access to green spaces.

The reality of that estrangement could not have appeared more stark than on the morning of 24 June, when it became clear that the country had voted to leave the European Union.

For the green movement, the vote was a major blow – leaving many feeling that decades of work to protect nature, public health and the climate were now at risk. But whilst that sense of hurt is understandable, giving it expression by attempting to challenge the legitimacy of the result, or blame leave voters, will serve neither us nor the country well.

Leave voters did not vote for shoddier housing, dirtier air or less wildlife. But neither did we offer them a shared language or a shared sense of endeavour, around which we could come together. And as long as we are staring at our fellow countrymen and women across a cultural chasm, we will all lose.

## Who speaks to England?

I now believe more passionately than ever, that it is through the recovery of a more generous politics of place here in England that we can begin to bridge the gap. The left has neglected a love of family, home, work and country that is central to most people's lives. We need to try to imagine an Englishness that speaks to our past, whilst involving everyone in owning and shaping our future. The urgency of doing so is now startling. The pleasures and rewards are yet to come.

### Thatcherism and the death of the post-war conservation movement

The division that became so obvious during the referendum campaign has in reality been decades in the making. To understand it we need to go back to 1979.

I was twelve years old and until then had lived most of my life in a condition of magical intimacy with my surroundings, tightly bound to the square mile or so that encompassed my friends' houses, our school, the sweet-shop, and the fields and streets where we played.

It was a world experienced at a height of four foot (or more if we climbed a tree) and filled with bright detail. But beyond this miniature kingdom trouble was brewing. I can recall the chilly exoticism of evenings lit by candles during the three day week and the unease that possessed the country as it struggled with economic stagnation and industrial unrest. As the general election neared, dread engulfed me. I had a feeling that something enormously important was ending. Until that moment perhaps it had been possible to believe we were a country with a sense of common purpose – that post-war solidarity was still alive. With the election of the Thatcher government, and the implicit declaration of industrial civil war, it died.

## 2. Home is where the heart is

Bitter strife followed, dividing north from south, police from civilians, workers from employers and financiers, town from country. For those who lost their jobs it was a disaster. It was only later, though, that the cultural impact of this schism was fully understood, as the habits, traditions, values and contribution of millions of English people were buried; not just by the economic policies of the 1980s, but by the response of the modern left.

Looking through the lens of environmentalism offers an insight into this wider story, because the trends that influenced green politics also contributed to the crisis of trust that now exists between Labour and its potential voters. These trends help to explain the reluctance of the progressive left to embrace and shape a resurgent sense of Englishness.

### Losing the English people

As we lurched into the 1980s the land itself became a battleground. Agricultural intensification was changing rural England beyond recognition. Hedges – the bones and sinews of our countryside – were being grubbed out. Walking through the fields at this time was a hazardous business, with crops sown to within an inch of every footpath and bathed in a mist of chemicals that made your eyes water. Green lanes and paths of custom going back thousands of years were blocked or went under the plough.

Alongside the growth of this prairie agriculture, other iconic battles raged between conservationists and the government. Road schemes proliferated. **The Twyford Down** section of the M3 desecrated one of loveliest hills in southern England and the infamous **Newbury bypasscut** through 120 acres of woodland.

The response was varied, and sometimes included direct physical opposition. The anti-roads movement was perhaps

## Who speaks to England?

the closest thing we had to an authentic, place-based politics of resistance, uniting concerned residents with artists and activists. Its protests had an anarchistic joy, manifested in the take-over of major highways, but for all their creativity they remained mired in the wider problems of the left at the time. They struggled to connect with mainstream society and were viewed with suspicion by more socially conservative and reticent parts of the labour movement.

Conservation bodies were painfully ill-equipped to respond to the crisis. The Nature Conservancy Council, established by Royal Charter in 1949 to protect Britain's wildlife and special places, took on Mrs Thatcher over tree planting in the Scottish peat-lands and lost. We have never again had such a clear-sighted constitutional champion of nature. Nor did the numerous amateur natural history societies fare any better. I can remember looking out over a desolate Northamptonshire field one summer's day and cursing the silent army of botanists and birders who cared enough to record the destruction of the countryside, but not to fight back.

My response was, I suspect, characteristic of many who later came to shape the New Labour project. The only things that seemed to matter anymore were money and the law. Long established customs, unwritten contracts, conservation delivered through benign neglect – all that was over. The free-market was at the gate. The public was disinclined to wrap itself in the flag of international socialism. We needed a modern, rational environmentalism. We didn't need love, we needed numbers.

Environmentalism in the new century:  
A flight from the politics of place

And so the contemporary green movement began to take shape. Conservationists like me embraced New Labour with



## 2. Home is where the heart is

alacrity. We developed an Action Plan for biodiversity with an attendant plethora of targets. The plan itself had some very impressive results. But almost by its very nature, it was indifferent to place. It didn't matter ultimately *where* you provided the 2.5 bitterns per hectare as long as you met your KPI.

And whilst conservation became more professional, green activism became more international. Environmentalists united with economic justice campaigners to protest about the impacts of globalisation. Then climate change rapidly emerged as a colossal threat to the life chances of future generations and of millions of people in the developing world. The zeal of green groups was directed against fossil fuel production and consumption. Less time went into protecting local water or air quality, or safeguarding green spaces – not least because our membership of the European Union meant that we could take some basic protections for granted, rather than having to fight for them at a national or local level.

I am in no doubt whatsoever about the urgency of tackling climate change and the need for sustained international co-operation to do so. I also believe that the quality of our environment was greatly improved through our membership of the EU. Yet I also worry that this collective shift in perspective left us with too little to say to people about the importance of place and the wonder of nature; or about the role of our sector in improving their everyday lives.

This estrangement helps to explain the difficulty we found ourselves in in 2008, and after the subsequent general election which brought the coalition government to power. Under pressure from the right and desperate to kick-start the economy, David Cameron quickly shed his erstwhile public enthusiasm for green issues. George Osborne was even famously reported as viewing Britain's bird-life as 'feathered

## Who speaks to England?

obstacles to growth.’ Their collective judgement was that much of the working class, as well as many voters in middle England, had come to see green policies as irrelevant or even alien to their interests.

With hindsight, we can now see that these very same groups of voters thought that the European Union was alien to their interests, and voted against it in great numbers last month.

For the green movement, the unavoidable conclusion must be that our politics has become entangled in the public imagination with a broadly metropolitan sensibility that is culturally alien to much of England, and is of little of relevance to the poor.

For a movement founded to protect the countryside, and to help ordinary people fight off land-grabs and pollution, this is a parlous state of affairs. Indeed without action it could become an existential threat. So what could be done?

Thankfully, the seeds of an answer have already been sown. For almost a decade now, the National Trust, Woodland Trust and RSPB have been investing carefully in re-building the foundations of their support by connecting people to places and nature. Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace have begun to use their substantial clout in campaigns against air pollution in our cities. Anti-fracking protests have united local people with activists in towns from Sussex to Lancashire. Slowly but surely, the green movement is starting to remember how to tap into public concern.

Where we come from matters:  
Re-connecting with English voters

But any authentic politics of place must listen to people when they describe where they come from; and huge numbers of

## 2. Home is where the heart is

our people call themselves English. They are proud of their country and its rich artistic and political traditions which are often intimately linked with its land. The support of these people, many of whom feel their Englishness has been neglected or belittled by the left, and who voted in droves to leave the EU, remains critical to the environment movement if we wish to renew our political legitimacy.

If green campaigners fail to respond to the concerns of working people struggling with poor housing, meagre employment prospects, and a degraded local environment we cannot realistically think of ourselves as 'on the side' of the disenfranchised. If we don't find common ground with England's rural and coastal communities, our hopes of protecting our land, natural resources and workforce from exploitation in a post Brexit world will founder.

People up and down the country are making and re-making their local identities and creating a generous Englishness. What is stopping us being a part of this renaissance?

The answer is that we are the problem. Parts of the left continue either to reject any form of national identity as regressive, or see Englishness as a coded endorsement of colonialism, or worse, an accommodation with racism. In green circles this manifests itself in a fear that love of the English countryside is part of a cultural project that undermines diversity and protects privilege. This view has even been used to question the worth of contemporary artists who document rural life or English history – including (for example) **Adam Thorpe** and **Geoffrey Hill**.

Such a narrow and defensive approach to our cultural life is unworthy of the left. We can do better and imagine our kind of England, proud of its land, language and culture, and open to its diversity. A patriotism that is welcoming to all who wish to contribute our shared life and common good. We have a long history of English radicalism to call

## Who speaks to England?

upon. The wanderings of Thomas Hardy's Tess were, after all, those of an abused peasant woman exiled from her home. And if anyone wishes to feel the bones of resistance poking out from under England's chalk soils, they have only to read W H Hudson's masterpiece *A Shepherd's Life* and weep at the sentences of death and exile handed out for stealing a sheep.

Labour and the green movement have much to gain by weaving such stories into a modern sense of Englishness, not least because they give us some precious clues about how we might renew our bonds with each other, and with the natural world.

Innumerable English writers and artists have understood that by walking over the land and working on it, by being fully present in it, we can come to know it intimately, and claim it as our own. An English politics of nature that draws on Jon Cruddas' ideas of earning and belonging, would be something worth fighting for. Its heroes and heroines would be the custodians of our parks and pavements, as well as our seas, mountains and rivers. They would be botanists and ornithologists, farmers, builders, mechanics and inventors, anyone who participates in the poetic and practical business of walking on and working for the land.

Building such a movement would be a shared civic endeavour, in which green groups and wildlife societies, local co-operatives, clubs, schools and faith communities all played their part.

### An English politics of nature – Four acts of renewal

We could begin by promising to help the children of England visit and spend time in the countryside, working alongside farmers, foresters and fishers to learn about and appreciate nature. There are already brilliant people making this

## 2. Home is where the heart is

happen, including the author Michael Morpurgo and his wife Claire, who run the ground-breaking Farms for City Children. But we could multiply this a thousand times if it was the core of a new politics of nature, and we actively recruited people up and down the country to help. Yes, we must make sure that biology and natural history are properly taught in the national curriculum, and that children get fresh air and access to nature during the school day. But let's not wait – let's show how it can be done, and in doing so help rebuild bonds between our towns, cities and countryside.

Next, let's reignite the community of amateur naturalists and citizen scientists that built the conservation movement, and whom we need now more than ever. The erosion of the independence and expertise of bodies such as the Nature Conservancy Council might have begun under Mrs Thatcher, but it has continued ever since with vengeance. Every day more pressure is placed on government scientists to say less about the state of nature. In the world after Brexit, when many of our existing nature and public health laws may come under pressure or need to be re-written, our civic power will become our most powerful and necessary defence. We can record the presence or absence of wildlife in our gardens, fields and hedges, or the presence of dangerous chemicals in our food and water, and share this information as never before. We can monitor the air quality on our streets when government fails to do so. We can build the case for British nature and environment laws based on publicly owned and independent sources of information, and designed to protect the health of our population and our countryside. **One example of this kind of project from the US**, where universities are helping volunteers monitor levels of herbicides in their bodies, shows what can be done through civic effort.

## Who speaks to England?

Using modern mapping tools, we can also start to protect the places that we love – whether meadows, allotments, parks or playing fields. By describing what we want to preserve or change in our communities and capturing these things in neighbourhood plans, we can lay the foundations of a new English Commons. And when government or private capital threatens to destroy or enclose them, we can organise around their defence and come to each other's aid. As a statement of our intent, let's set up parish and neighbourhood walks, marking out the boundaries of our special places and laying out where we want to see decent, affordable homes.

And last but not least, let's back ourselves to lead a new English industrial revolution, inventing and manufacturing the kinds of goods and technologies that heal rather than harm nature. This wouldn't just make our homes warmer and our air cleaner; it would also see our products being sold all over the world, in a booming global market that is already worth trillions. As we seek to re-establish our economic place in the world, we can own concepts like the northern powerhouse, using them to make us world beaters in technologies like electric vehicles.

If we were to do only a part of this, we would immeasurably strengthen our ability to remodel a political economy that pits people against nature and nature against progress. We would also provide ourselves with a powerful foundation for renewed international leadership on issues such as climate change, where our withdrawal from the EU creates the need for a fresh start. But whatever the ideals we work towards, and whatever the global solutions we seek, let us remember that home is where the heart is. Humans are sticky creatures; like burs, they cling to where they land, the hooks of their affections burrowing deep into things that strangers would scarcely notice, like a single tree or a napkin of land at the end of a street. The places we live in, the country we

## 2. Home is where the heart is

live in, is crossed over and over by invisible trails of love and belonging. When we forget this, we forget ourselves.

It is the young and old who see this most clearly and whose dreams and memories we hold in trust. My father is 92 now, and he remembers the last country fair held in his Hampshire village. It was a ramshackle affair, run by a farmer who was selling up and wanted enough money for a last night in the pub. The prize attraction was a ride on a bad-tempered pony, and the reward for staying on its back a goldfish kept in the local stream. I am there when he tells me this story, longing to ride the horse and pick out a shining fish from the water. And I am filled with pleasure when I watch him telling this same tale to his grandchildren. He and I understand that by walking in the garden together or down the lane with the dog, by talking over the past or picking out the birds and flowers we love in the hedges, we are bound to one another and to the earth. This is an affirmation of the meaning and value of his long, fruitful life; and a blessing beyond price.

*A shorter version of this piece appeared in the **summer edition** of the Fabian Review.*

Who speaks to England?



### 3. A PROGRESSIVE PATRIOTISM

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Polly Billington

I was a parliamentary candidate for Thurrock but the place which I currently call home is Hackney, London. This distinction is worth explaining because these questions – what exactly is the English problem that we’re trying to solve, why do we need a progressive patriotism, does it already exist, if not why not and if we had one what would it look like? – are, above all, questions of identity and place. We are here to build a patriotism that includes and resonates with residents of both Hackney and Thurrock. Currently they are very far apart.

Thurrock was Ukip ground zero last year; 12,000 people voted for Ukip in a general election for the first time, added on to the three and a half thousand that had voted for them before in 2010. Most of those 12,000 people had either not voted before or had voted Labour.

But I’m also the little girl who sat on her dad’s shoulders to wave a flag at Princess Anne’s first wedding. And I was also, like Sadiq Khan, waving a flag at the Silver Jubilee in 1977. I’m an ex-Catholic, I’m a Londoner, I’m English and I’m a woman, and all of those identities are important although not necessarily equally so and not necessarily all of the time.

But I’m also a member of the Labour party, not only as a candidate, but now as an activist in Hackney. And that is where I see the difference very strongly between Hackney and what I experienced in Thurrock.

## Who speaks to England?

This isn't just about being in two different places, or not necessarily. Sometimes it feels like more than being in two different countries, it's almost like being on two different planets. And the reality is that large swathes of Labour's members and supporters don't identify as patriotic, fundamentally because patriotism has been seized and colonised by the right. And we need to understand that by allowing them to seize it we are losing an opportunity to be able to reclaim our past.

We do not have any legitimacy to talk about the future of our country unless we can talk about our past in a better way. We have tried but our efforts have been half-hearted. Take One Nation Labour, which ended up amounting to a washed-out Union Jack as a visual for our brand. It could have been so much better – an opportunity for an intellectual rebranding and a seizure of Conservative territory for our own ends. But it wasn't and when it was used people thought we were talking about something like One Direction. Note to the top of the party: don't assume everyone knows anything about nineteenth century history, and get to know your boybands. Because this needs to be about modern England, not just the past.

Ultimately One Nation Labour was a slogan and not a project. Behind this half-heartedness were problems that exist in relation not only to Jeremy Corbyn but to large swathes of the left: they have a distinct discomfort with the idea of pride in country because they have swallowed the right wing myth that England's successes have all been Conservative ones. This is a lie and it has spread very effectively. The left's swallowing of it means that we are still sitting in a Thatcherite paradigm. The reality is that it was the likes of Airey Neave and Margaret Thatcher that seized on Churchill's romantic vision of Britain and reshaped it for their own purposes from the 1970s, 1980s and for a part of

### 3. A progressive patriotism

the 1990s. And therefore they seized all of that iconography, they seized our story and they took it for themselves.

And this is where progressives end up sounding like a grump, but here's the list. When we were racist and imperialist, when women were barefoot and pregnant or transferred as assets between families, when education was something for the elite and not for the rest of us, when lesbianism didn't exist, when gay men were beaten up and arrested, when child abuse was swept under the carpet and when poor people had the shadow of the workhouse across them. That was actually the great country that Airey Neave and Margaret Thatcher were talking about, but it was wrapped up in a Churchillian myth and so they were able to sell it to us, and then we wondered why we were sold a pup.

So there's no wonder progressives revolt at the idea of patriotism when the right's ideas of duty and authority quash our ideas of ambitions for equality, opportunity for all and challenging injustice.

But we risk denying our successes by allowing the right to define Englishness and what success in our nation looks like. The Conservatives make history to suit them and we should make history to suit us.

It's England that helped establish the principle of the right to vote, the rule of law, equal suffrage, and under our auspices we became a community that fought racism.

Now this needs to be about not just our history as a party but also about our predecessors from before our movement existed. We know about the Levellers, we know about the Diggers and so forth, but we also need to be able to claim other parts of that radical tradition.

There were more women involved in our movement than just the suffragettes. The public service reforms of Miss Beale and Miss Buss, of Elizabeth Fry, also need to be able to sit in

## Who speaks to England?

that pantheon of good English reformism, and that is something that we should own.

If Englishness is going to mean anything in modern England, it needs to be as important for those who feel that perhaps they aren't English as it is for those who feel that they definitely are. And a place must be reserved for those who, though technically English, don't see their own story within the Conservative myth of Englishness.

Although this reclaiming is electorally essential it is not an electoral gimmick, it's fundamental to who we are. Even if we didn't need it to win I would be arguing for it. Because I can't live in a country where so many of my friends feel anxious about their relationship with the country in which they live, where people who come here and people who are born here find their determination to contribute rejected by elites who care more about hoarding assets than about unlocking talent.

While this question is widely talked about as a working class issue, it is also a gender one. When we talk about a crisis in English identity there is a fundamental link between that and a crisis in masculinity for a lot of men, because post-industrial Britain doesn't need men to haul coal, beat panel or make ships anymore. And therefore the security of work and the dignity of work and being able to raise, look after and protect your family are now much more difficult than they were before. If we don't acknowledge this, the vacuum is filled by those who claim 'equality' is a zero sum game, and men inevitably lose out. By pitting working people against each other and harking back to traditional working and social models, conservatives channel the angst of those who have been the victims of globalisation, without any interest in shaping a new, more just approach to work and family life. Supporting people to adapt to new circumstances

### 3. A progressive patriotism

must surely be as important as ensuring those new conditions are shaped to increase social and economic justice.

Which brings us to the question of who is represented in a modern Englishness. Those of us who are not white and are not male must be represented, because the problem with progressive patriotism is that it still has many of the characteristics of conservative patriotism: it's still male, it's still pale and it's still a little bit stale. So let's think about what that would look like.

We need to make sure that it reclaims the visual language that the Conservatives use to dress up their regressive patriotism. Not only is it about the fact that women need to be in the pantheon of the radicals, it is also about where women sit in the visual identity of Englishness. We women tend to either be there by birth or by marriage, or we are abstract manifestations of ideals like 'justice' or 'truth' – as seen on city halls and civic buildings across the country. But we do need to be real, rather than just ideal, and we need to be visible and vocal in the stories of Englishness.

When we talk about that visual language this needs to be about connection and locality. Our landscape is important to us and we should be unashamed of using our cultural icons and our baggage and we should be true to our nature. Because the most patriotic crowd I experienced in Thurrock – and I saw the British Legion and I went to Remembrance Sunday year in and year out – was the one on the Golden Jubilee weekend at a Pentecostal Church. The choir were dressed almost like British Airways stewards and stewardesses from the 1970s, singing all of the verses of the national anthem. It was something new and unique about Englishness which can be shaped and that everybody can own. Englishness does need to be focused on place and connection and it does need to include Mary Wollstonecraft and Sylvia Pankhurst as well as Wat Tyler and Thomas Paine.

## Who speaks to England?

And I use Paine deliberately because he managed to export the Declaration of the Rights of Man to France and to America, but we did things differently here. Our approach is less formal. We have an asymmetric patchwork constitution, we make do and mend: that is our nature and we need to go with the grain of who we are, weave together our own romantic myth of who we are and remember who we are if we want to be able to own the future again.

We can't pretend that we're always right. The most patriotic thing you can do is to admit sometimes that you're wrong, so that your country can be better. I love my country, for all its faults. But I do not live with them. I try to make my country better. That is progressive patriotism. And I know all of us who want to be part of this can be part of it.

*This essay is based on a talk given to the England Labour seminars held in parliament earlier in 2016.*

## 4. INSPIRATION AND PRAGMATISM

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Emily Robinson

Labour needs to find a way to speak as a party of England, as well as of the United Kingdom. I want to focus on Labour's response to that – the way in which it has been formulated and could be formulated.

There are two different kinds of conversations about English patriotism and the Labour party that need to take place. One is inspiring and the other is pragmatic. The first is about telling and creating a national story that resonates with the party that Labour is, with its history and with its aims for the future. It's about creating a progressive patriotism which can be part of a transformative political project.

The second is about recognising where we are, accepting that the politics of Englishness matters in ways that haven't always been obvious or comfortable to socialists, and attempting to formulate an acceptable response to that. This is about finding a way to come to terms with a range of different forms of patriotism, some of which we might find less comfortable than others.

Of course there are overlaps between the inspiring and the pragmatic: questions about fairness and justice and standing up for people in desperately difficult situations cut across both of those categories but the two projects do pull in slightly different directions.

The first story, the inspiring one, is more comfortable for many on the left. But this might be cause for concern.

## Who speaks to England?

Quite a few readers, and others on the left, will have been to Levellers' Day or the Tolpuddle Martyrs' Festival. These are great and inspiring events; they speak to a whole tradition of radical history. And they allow us to rethink and rework what it means to be English, and to contest the idea that patriotism and nostalgia have to be conservative.

But this is also the problem. These kinds of stories challenge rather than affirm wider ideas of nationhood. That's precisely their appeal and it's an important thing to do, but it makes them difficult to mobilise in ways that make sense to people who are not interested in rethinking what it means to be English, who are not looking to have their ideas challenged, but who instead are just looking for something they recognise straightforwardly as patriotic.

The second story, the pragmatic one, is more in tune with what we might think of as this new politics of Englishness which is often – but not always – anxious and fearful. This pragmatic patriotism may be worried about the future and can be resentful that attention and possibly resources often seem to be focused elsewhere. In response to this, Labour needs to meet people where they are, to show that we understand their concerns, and that we're seeking to represent their identity rather than trying to transform that into something else. But in a situation where we see a rising politics of nationalism that is insecure, anxious, maybe even angry, that can be quite difficult to square with an optimistic, transformative political project.

Blue Labour's attempt to grapple with these problems got caught between these two different forms of patriotism. The really difficult question is how to do something that answers the problems thrown up by this second set of questions, but in a way that resonates with the ideals of the first.

This isn't to say that pre-existing forms of Englishness are necessarily conservative, either with a big C or a small. There



#### 4. Inspiration and pragmatism

is an open, optimistic, inclusive, diverse side to English identity and we can make a really strong case for Englishness defined by virtues like tolerance, justice and solidarity. But the question is how to tell this story in a way that sounds specifically English, when none of these values are exclusive to this country. And also how to tell it in a way that goes beyond reassuring the left that they have nothing to fear from English patriotism, and instead starts to win English patriots over to the left.

Starting with local stories and identities, in the way that John Denham's been doing in Southampton, seems a good way to go about this. Though again we need to think about what you do with the stories that such a project reveals that don't sit very well with Labour party values. It would also have to be brought into a bigger project in the end.

The final tension that Labour needs to address is about its relationship with Westminster and the institutions of government. On the one hand, Labour's story has always been about winning a place inside that system. And we know that it's tended to do best electorally when it can tell an optimistic, confident story about the state of the nation. The Attlee government, the Wilson government and the Blair governments are all good examples of this – although of course the national identity that they were appealing to was British not English.

But for those people who feel alienated, disenfranchised and angry with the whole set-up, Labour's resolutely parliamentary approach is part of the problem. Even proposals to radically devolve power and reshape the relationship between communities and the state run the risk of seeming like a technical fix to an emotional problem, particularly if they're being suggested from above rather than demanded from below. Here Labour's tradition of being radical outsiders could come in useful – although we can't end up telling

## Who speaks to England?

a story in which winning power becomes in itself a betrayal of Labour's ideals.

Finally, it is worth dwelling on Jeremy Corbyn and where his leadership might fit into this story. On the one hand he's really clearly rooted in the kind of radical English narrative associated with events like the Tolpuddle Martyrs Festival and Levellers' Day. And he's demonstrably not part of the New Labour governing elite. So on the face of it, it looks as though he would be very well placed to construct the kind of romantic narrative of Englishness which could resonate with the anti-establishment aspects of the new English nationalism. But his approach is stronger on the radicalism than the Englishness and he has expressed no interest in a project of renewing radical English identity.

So the problem we are left with is how to reconcile these two sides: the inspiring and the pragmatic? How can we embrace the desire to be progressive and transformative, to reclaim Englishness, while also responding to those who are perfectly happy with their existing understanding of what it means to be English, but anxious and resentful about the way it's been treated both by left politics and by the Westminster system?

I don't have an answer to that, but we could perhaps start by defining certain kinds of behaviour – offshore tax arrangements, for instance – as unpatriotic and working towards a workable model of civic patriotism from there.

*This essay is based on a talk given to the England and Labour seminars held in parliament earlier in 2016.*

## 5. A RESPECTABLE ENGLISHNESS

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David Goodhart and Eric Kaufman

The emergence, or rather re-emergence, of England and Englishness continues apace. The Brexit vote was in part inspired by Ukip (a sort of English national party), and supported most decisively by England (53.4 per cent to 46.6 per cent). 72 per cent of those who think of themselves as English voted out compared with 43 per cent of those whose primary identity is British.

If we are from England, it is increasingly there in our language – the English NHS or English schools – and in our sense of ourselves. This identity shift has been overwhelmingly bottom-up and socially conservative, even nativist, though not unambiguously or permanently so.

It is an emergent property and as it grows it will become more mainstream, more respectable and more liberal. The gradual ‘Englishification’ of two groups will hasten this, though both processes will be slow and faltering: the educated middle class and ethnic minority England.

But first a word of warning. Englishness is not sweeping all before it in the way that Scottishness (alone in the United Kingdom) has become the overwhelmingly dominant identity in Scotland. About three-quarters of people in England still describe themselves as a combination of British and English and this figure has not changed in 20 years.

It is nevertheless true that when people are forced to choose which identity they are more attached to, Englishness

## Who speaks to England?

has gained ground over Britishness. The British Social Attitudes Surveys show that in both Scotland and England, 'small nation' identities gained substantial ground over Britishness between 1992 and 1999. In 1992 over 60 per cent of English people selected British as their most important national identity against just 30 per cent for English. The ratio of British to English then declined steadily across four survey waves, from over 2:1 in favour of British in 1992 to 1:1 by 1999. But this ratio has not altered in any clear way since, despite increased Scottish political assertiveness.

In 2011, a question on national identity was included in the census of England and Wales for the first time, but this should not be considered a barometer of declining Britishness. It asked 'How would you describe your national identity?' Respondents were asked to tick 'all that apply' from a list that read 'English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British and Other.' Over 60 per cent of people in England only ticked English. However, the format of the question, in which English is the first option and is juxtaposed with other sub-state national identities, biases the results in favour of English only responses.

One thing, however, is crystal clear: identifying as English is much more common among poorer, less educated, more working-class people. People who identify as English are far more likely to vote Ukip and oppose immigration and EU membership than the average voter. They are also far more likely to be white. Indeed in many parts of the country with significant ethnic minority populations, saying you are English is the same thing as saying you are white. And the survey evidence shows that white British people are more likely to identify as English in areas of high ethnic minority settlement.

This ethnic version of Englishness is apparently in sharp contrast to a more civic version of Scottishness. The latter

has adopted this political frame because of the independence debate and, crucially, thanks to the fact that a large section of the liberal, progressive middle class in Scotland has shifted from Labour to the SNP and has been central to shaping the messages of modern Scottish nationalism. Nothing like this has ever happened in England. However, just because the Scottish progressive middle class claim to eschew ethnicity it doesn't, of course, mean that the Scots as a whole follow them in this.

Frank Bechofer and David McCrone, in their recent book, *Understanding National Identity*, discuss the most popular reasons for English people saying they are 'English not British,' or 'more English than British.' Among English people who give these responses, the most popular reasons are that they are born in England (88 per cent), identify with its history or culture (82-86 per cent) or that 'in having to be British, English people too often downplay being English, and I think that's wrong' (66 per cent). And 35 per cent said they felt more English after Scottish and Welsh devolution.

The connection between Britishness and more liberal political views is evident in the fact that English respondents who identify more strongly with Britain than England agree that Britishness is important because 'all parts of the United Kingdom are included' (86 per cent) and 'being British brings us together because it includes all ethnic minorities and people of different cultures' (72 per cent).

However, importantly, *Understanding National Identity* offers conflicting evidence on the inclusiveness of English and Scottish identities. While English respondents are 15 points more likely than Scots to claim that continued Muslim immigration would threaten their (English/Scottish) national identity, English respondents are about 5-7 points more likely than Scots to accept that a non-white person can be a member of their (English/Scottish) nation.

## Who speaks to England?

As we have noted, white people are far more likely to identify as English than non-white. Over 70 per cent of White British people in England identify as English only, but this falls to just 8-15 per cent for the main African and South Asian minority groups in England. It rises again to 26 per cent among African-Caribbeans and Englishness is also more popular among mixed-race groups: English identification is around 40 per cent for mixed white-Asians rising to 63 per cent for mixed white-Afro-Caribbeans. 54 per cent of Jews in England identify as English, not far behind the 65 per cent figure for Christians.

Increased ethnic minority identification with Englishness will help to provide it with more legitimacy in the longer run and although there is clearly a long way to go – especially in the more polarised places such as the northern mill towns – there is some movement in the right direction. Several prominent minority figures in the media, including Gary Younge and George Alagiah, have recently declared themselves to be comfortable with an English identity.

After all, ethnicity simply refers to ancestry and myths of ancestry – once you have been in a country for a generation or two you can choose whether or not to identify with the dominant ethnicity of your adopted country. Englishness has historically been a relatively open ethnicity – consider two of the leading lights in Ukip, the French ancestry Nigel Farage and the Irish ancestry Patrick O’Flynn. It is obviously easier to blend in with the dominant ethnic group if you look the same but there is no reason in principle why looking different to the majority should be a barrier, especially as the majority becomes so used to mixing with people who look different to them (but sound the same) that they scarcely notice it.

In any case there are many different ways of identifying with a country. Just as the resonant symbols of Englishness

## 5. A respectable Englishness

are not identical for working and middle class people they will differ between majority and minority English. And as England's ethnic minority population hits almost 25 per cent of the total and we grope around for a post-multicultural story for expressing our collective existence, a form of pluralistic nationalism is the most likely direction of travel. That means that most ethnic minority people living in England continue to identify primarily as British, whilst not regarding the Englishness of their white English neighbours a threat, and vice-versa.

There are several reasons for suggesting this benign trend will prevail. Although the word multiculturalism will continue to be used (or rather misused) to mean the acceptance of a multiracial society, support for its more substantive meaning – coined recently by Maajid Nawaz – of “diversity between rather within groups” has largely faded outside parts of academia and the ethnic minority intelligentsia. As anxieties about immigration and lack of integration in many places have increased so the *laissez-faire* ‘come here and be yourself’ version of multiculturalism has given way to a more integrationist ‘British values’ story.

The rise of Englishness can sit comfortably inside this new story as part of a loose, pluralistic nationalism and, moreover, as part of a new acceptance even among the educated middle class of the benefits of moderate nationalism in an otherwise fragmented and individualistic social landscape. A lack of overt patriotism among the influential and respectable classes has been one of the features of English post-imperial (and even arguably imperial) life noted by George Orwell, especially of the left-wing intellectual classes, but more recently by Jeremy Paxman and Geoff Dench.

The Brexit vote, notwithstanding an unpleasant flurry of overt xenophobia on the fringes, was in part an expression of respectable English national feeling. National feeling, in

## Who speaks to England?

particular English national feeling, has been 'normalised' by 70 years of relative decline and is now an expression of specialness rather than superiority or dominance. Hiding English dominance, within Britain and the empire, was one of the reasons for the shyness of Englishness in the past but it is now no longer necessary to hide itself and can speak its name quite openly.

The new Anglo-British nationalism is also underpinned by a substantial liberal shift on race, gender and sexuality, so meticulously observed by the British Social Attitudes Surveys, since the early 1980s. It is true that the strongest English identifiers, the old and the poor, provide some residual resistance to this liberal wave but there are now just too many people who sign up to most liberal attitudes and who sign up to Englishness for there not to be a substantial overlap.

One other trend that may help the normalisation of Englishness is the clipping of London's wings. The Brexit vote was in part an English provincial rebellion against over-weening London, both economically and culturally. (Englishness does exist in the capital, often strongly held in places like Romford and Bexley, but it is now an increasingly minority identity.)

So expect to hear more from English radicals such as John Denham and activist Paul Kingsnorth, who has been bravely flying the flag for a left-wing Englishness as he tries to save pubs, orchards and independent shops and stop dual carriageways and airports. As he puts it: "It is time to reclaim both England and the proud tradition of radical nationalism, rooted but not chauvinistic, outward-looking but aware of our past, attached to place not race, geography not biology."

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## 6. WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MULTICULTURALISM?

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Tariq Modood

To many, multiculturalism, not just as demography or social description of a town or city but as a political idea, suffered a body blow in 2001. In the shock of 9/11 and the analysis following riots in Leeds, Oldham and Bradford that in some northern English towns the white and Pakistani working classes were living parallel lives, many forecast its days were numbered. If these blows were not fatal, multiculturalism was, it is believed, surely killed off by the 7/7 attacks in London in 2005 and the terrorism and anti-terrorism measures that have followed. This view is far too simplistic.

Multiculturalism is the idea that equality in the context of difference cannot be achieved by individual rights or equality understood as sameness, and has to be extended to include the positive inclusion of marginalised groups marked by race and their own sense of ethnocultural identity. The latter is reinforced by exclusion but may also matter to many individuals as a form of belonging. Multiculturalism therefore grows out of an initial commitment to racial equality, the elimination of white discrimination against non-whites, – of the kind that Labour governments outlawed in the 1960s and 1970s – into a perspective that allows minorities to publicly oppose negative images of themselves in favour of positive self-definition and institutional accommodation. The 1980s saw this transition, spearheaded by black pride movements

## Who speaks to England?

but in the main as vehicles for South Asian minority group claims. One of the most significant pivots in this transition was *The Satanic Verses* affair of 1988-89, which launched a Muslim identity mobilisation which ultimately grew to overshadow other multiculturalist and anti-racist politics. It is significant to note multiculturalism in Britain has had this conflictual and bottom-up character, unlike in say Canada or Australia, where the federal government has been the key initiator.

### Labour and Multiculturalism

Nevertheless, anti-racism and multiculturalism requires governmental support and commitment. The first New Labour term (1997–2001) has probably been the most multiculturalist national government in Britain – or indeed Europe. It abolished the primary purpose rule in relation to immigration. It introduced Muslim and other faith schools on the same basis as Christian and Jewish schools. Muslims (in particular, the Muslim Council of Britain at the national level) were brought into governance on the same basis as other identity and interest groups. The Macpherson report was published, initiating a high-profile discussion of institutional racism and requiring an appropriate programme of action from the London Metropolitan Police and other state bodies. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 strengthened the previous equality legislation, especially in relation to the duty of public bodies to actively promote racial equality. It selectively targeted disadvantaged groups such as Bangladeshis, Pakistanis and African-Caribbeans in relation to education and employment policies, while recognising that other minorities such as the Chinese and Indians were not disadvantaged relative to whites in these policy areas – it moved a white/non-white divide lacking in nuance.

## 6. Whatever happened to multiculturalism?

Holocaust Day was instituted in 2005. Religion was added to the census in 2001, acknowledging the multi-religious makeup of modern Britain.

What makes this package of measures 'multiculturalist' is that they are directed in different ways to addressing the inequalities that (primarily, non-white) minorities experience, without limiting such a conception to that of black-white racial equality alone. It goes beyond that colour dualism in recognising a related ethnoreligious pluralism, and extending anti-discrimination beyond colour to include ethnicity and religion, to meeting specific disadvantages suffered by self-identifiable groups, supporting such groups to be active civil society players and to bringing them into governance. Contrary to the glib 'death of multiculturalism' view this agenda continued, to some extent, in the second and third New Labour governments as well, primarily in the extension of religious equality in law, culminating in the Equality Act 2010 which put religion on a par with all other equality strands and therefore made it part of the strongest anti-discrimination legislation in Europe. Wanting to bring organised Muslims into forms of community co-governance was another strand of continuity, even though such partnerships were prone to breakdown and mutual recrimination.

### Multiculturalism and Common Citizenship

Yet, after 2001, and especially after the bombings of 2005, there were significant departures from the earlier multiculturalism too. It is, however, not accurate to understand those developments as the end of multiculturalism. They mark a 'rebalancing' of multiculturalism so as to give due emphasis to commonality as well as respect for difference. At a local level this consisted of a new discourse and accompanying programmes of community cohesion, which were prem-

## Who speaks to England?

ised on the multiculturalist idea of plural communities but designed to cultivate interaction and cooperation, both at the micro level of individual lives and everyday experience and at the level of towns, cities and local government.

At a macro level, this consisted of emphasising national citizenship. Not in an anti-multiculturalist way as in France but as a way of bringing the plurality into a better relationship with its parts. Hence the definitions of Britishness offered during this period, for example, in the **Crick report**. While they referred to the English language, to the history of the emergence of parliamentary democracy and the rule of law, to values such as liberty and fairness, they also stressed that modern Britain was a multinational, multicultural society and there were many ways of being British and these were changing. As ethnic minorities became more woven into the life of the country they were redefining what it meant to be British.

Hence the idea that an emphasis on citizenship or Britishness was a substitute for multiculturalism is quite misleading. Indeed, it is often overlooked that the theorists of multiculturalism have regarded citizenship as a foundational concept, and explicitly developed multiculturalism as a mode of integration, albeit a difference-respecting integration, rather than assimilation or individualistic integration. Moreover, they have tended to emphasise not just minority identities per se but also the inclusion of minority identities within the national identity. This is also how the Canadian and Australian governments have understood multiculturalism and continue to do so (if the Australian government under Howard gave up on that idea it has been revived subsequently). If we look at what multiculturalists have argued (as opposed to the caricatures presented by their critics), this has been the dominant interpretation in Britain too.

## 6. Whatever happened to multiculturalism?

Take the report of the **Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000)**, better known as the Parekh report after its chair, the Labour peer Bhikhu Parekh. It made national identity and 'retelling the national story' central to its understanding of equality, diversity and cohesion. This involved a critical engagement with top-down and simplistic ideas of national identity, but also argued that a shared national identity, no less than the elimination of racism, was important in giving all citizens a sense of belonging. It argued that citizenship, and especially the acquisition of citizenship through naturalisation, was – in contrast to countries like the USA and Canada – undervalued in Britain and it was the first public document to advocate the idea of citizenship ceremonies.

Also evident from the Parekh report is multiculturalism's focus on socio-economic inequalities and the way they can particularly affect some or all non-white groups. Here Britain does not have the record of countries like Canada, Australia and the US in enabling immigrant communities to be upwardly mobile, but its record is much better than that of other EU countries, especially anti-multiculturalist ones like France and Germany. In relation to 'ethnic penalties', the extent to which membership of an ethnic group means that one's socio-economic location is worse than it is for whites, the overall picture is patchy. There has been good progress on ethnic minorities into higher education and achievement of degrees; some progress on getting ethnic minorities into the most prestigious universities; limited progress on ethnic minorities getting jobs appropriate to their qualifications; and the least amount of progress on reducing the disproportionate rates of ethnic minorities in low paid jobs and in unemployment.

## Who speaks to England?

### England and Labour

The point of the above is that multicultural Britishness continues to have a pertinence as an ideal, and its ethos is present in elements of law and policy and in a form of governance closely associated with Labour governments. Hopefully, this will be true of future Labour governments, in contrast to Conservative efforts to displace it with a more top-down, mono-nationalist and establishment 'British values' perspective.

Yet over the last couple of decades a new set of identitarian challenges have become apparent, initially in Scotland but latterly throughout the UK. In none of the nations of the union does the majority of the population consider themselves British, without also considering themselves English, Welsh, Scottish or Northern Irish. The 2011 census is not a detailed study of identity but it is striking that 70 per cent of the people of England ticked the 'English' box and the vast majority of them did not also tick the 'British' box. This was much more the case with white people than non-whites, who were more likely to identify as British only or British combined with English.

Multiculturalism, then, may actually have succeeded in fostering a British national identity amongst the ethnic minorities. The challenge now is to relate those who primarily think in mono-nationalist terms with those who think of themselves in bi-nationalist terms – e.g. English and British – or whose sense of Britishness is a union of multi-level and crosscutting differences. Multiculturalism here offers not only the plea that English national consciousness should be developed in a context of a broad, differentiated British identity but ethnic minorities become an important bridging group between the English mono-nationalists and the English-British. Paradoxically, a supposedly out of date

## 6. Whatever happened to multiculturalism?

political multiculturalism becomes a source from which to think about not just integration of minorities but also how to conceive of our plural nationality and give expression to dual identities such as English-British. It is no small irony that minority groups who all too often are seen as harbingers of fragmentation could prove to be exemplars of the union and a source of differentiated unity.

The minimum one would wish to urge upon a centre-left taking English consciousness seriously is that it should not be simply nostalgic, exclusively majoritarian and that it should avoid ethno-nationalism ('Anglo-Saxonism'). More positively, multiculturalism, with its central focus on equal citizenship and diverse identities and on the renewing and reforging of nationality to make it inclusive of contemporary diversity, shows how we can be equally sensitive to internal diversity, multiple identities and the need to strengthen an appreciation of the emotional charge of belonging together.

*This essay was first published in the Fabian Review online.*

Who speaks to England?



## 7. A LABOUR POLITICS OF LOCALISM FOR ENGLAND

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Julia Stapleton

A priority for the Labour party should be the transformation of the localist agenda that has assumed pride of place in the government's plans for devolution in England. Concentrated heavily on metropolitan areas – 'city-regions' – particularly in the north of England, this agenda lacks both democratic legitimacy and the capacity to enhance local and national identities. Further, it threatens to exacerbate the north-south divide, which has always been a major obstacle to a shared sense of Englishness.

In effect, the government's localist agenda has empowered local elites at the expense of the wider population. If Labour is serious about becoming the party of England, it should seek to reverse the fragmentation that has resulted from the Localism Act of 2011 and related legislation, much of the impetus of which came from the New Labour years. Only then will it be possible to address the question of how England as a nation is best represented in the era of devolution.

The government's narrow economic perspective on regional devolution is apparent in the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act passed earlier this year; the act is primarily intended to reinforce the northern powerhouse idea, with HS2 as its backbone. On the second reading, Jon Trickett commented that it seemed as if much of the bill had been "shaped by no. 11 rather than being created in the great

## Who speaks to England?

cities, counties and villages of England". This is because economic growth is central to the new metropolitan mayoralities the act has opened up.

The concept of the mayoralty is itself problematic; as an American import, it lacks organic roots in English local government. As Fraser Nelson noted in the Daily Telegraph recently, only 15 out of 50 mayoral referendums since 2001 have backed establishing a mayor; but this has not prevented mayors being imposed on local populations, whether in cities, towns, urban districts (as in Tower Hamlets, notorious for the corruption centred on the office of the mayor), or even counties.

The mayoralities are designed to strengthen the combined local authorities that have continued to emerge from the enabling legislation: the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act of 2009. But as creations of secondary legislation given little parliamentary scrutiny, these authorities lack a popular mandate. The combined authority for the Tyneside area was established by the Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, North Tyneside, Northumberland, South Tyneside, and Sunderland Order of 2014.

Like HS2, the 2009 Act was a product of the last year of the Labour government; and like HS2, it has not been popular. This is especially so in the north, where various attempts to devolve power to regional bodies since the 2004 referendum in the north-east of England – all with a strong business edge – have failed.

Local authorities have already been incentivised to attract local business by the Local Government Act of 2012, under which they now retain 50 per cent of business rates. Further pressure to attract investment under mayoralty schemes will sharpen divisions in England as competition between the new authorities intensifies. But the mayoralities at the heart

## 7. A Labour politics of localism for England

of the recent act have the potential to generate division *within* the areas they encompass, too. The problems of rural areas remote from the regional capital are unlikely to be high on the mayoral cabinet agendas.

How should the Labour party seek to enhance local autonomy in England? First, it should recognise the opposition in England to the new powers that have been given to local politicians through backroom deals with the government. These deals take the form of the promise of projects and cash in return for implementing the government's localist agenda. City elites – Labour as much as Conservative – seem eager to work with a Westminster government intent on leaving the regions to find their own economic feet in the aftermath of recession in exchange for more power; but how far this enthusiasm is shared is unclear.

Second, the Labour party needs to broaden the localist agenda, away from a primary concern with economic growth and towards the enhancement of civic engagement – particularly in the delivery of public services. Labour can learn much from the shortcomings of NHS Scotland and Wales, for example, where the service has declined markedly through control by politicians and managers in Edinburgh and Cardiff.

Third, Labour needs to pursue policies that will strengthen the richness and diversity of regional England, while at the same time integrating England into a national whole. This should be addressed at the level of resources, on the one hand, and the democratic structures of representation, on the other. A more even distribution of resources would be possible if plans for showpiece transport and infrastructure projects, such as HS2, with questionable public benefits were shelved. Likewise, the subsidy to Scotland through the Barnett formula should be reviewed now that Scotland has been given the power to set its own rate of income tax.

## Who speaks to England?

At the level of representation, a federal solution to the future of the United Kingdom would give institutional recognition to England's distinctiveness as a nation, however complex its identity relative to its partner nations; it would also provide a basis for devolving power to genuine English communities rather than to agencies of local rule created by legislative fiat.

The Labour party should also become more sensitive in the candidates it fields in parliamentary elections, favouring those with local rather than metropolitan connections, and English as well as wider affinities. The success of this strategy was apparent in the by-election last December in Oldham. Local and national partialities are not the enemy of larger sympathies but their foundation.

More than a century ago, G.K. Chesterton was at a loss to explain how anyone could profess to love humanity while hating something so human as patriotism – devotion to the well-being of a particular place. This is a truth that Labour needs to recognise if it is to recover the ground it has lost in England to the 'modernising' trends of New Labour and the present Conservative government.

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## 8. TIME FOR LABOUR TO TAKE ENGLISH DEVOLUTION SERIOUSLY

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Ben Lucas

Several years ago Giles Radice coined the phrase 'Labour's southern discomfort' to describe the party's difficult relationship with southern voters. This condition has worsened to such an extent that it could now be diagnosed as 'Labour's English discomfort'. Labour has been brutally routed in Scotland and is hanging on in Wales, so to find itself with such a problem with English voters risks looking terminal. As a national political party, Labour looks distinctly uneasy with England. It is wary of national identity issues and where this may lead to, particularly in relation to immigration. It has not been attentive enough to changes affecting working class communities across England. And it has been tone deaf to the clamour to 'take back control' which the Brexit campaign targeted on Brussels, but which could easily apply to a remote Westminster.

One manifestation of this has been Labour's hesitant response to English devolution, where the party has been caught badly off guard. At one level this is distinctly odd, as it was the Blair government in 1997 that started the process with Scottish and Welsh devolution, and the establishment of the Greater London Authority and mayor. Labour ought to have been prepared for where this was going. But the truth is that devolution was never central to 'the project' of New Labour. Rather, constitutional reform, including devolution, was a set of policies that New Labour inherited from the

## Who speaks to England?

John Smith era. There was little strategic thinking about the politics of devolution because it was seen as a second order issue. The strategic priority for New Labour was economic competence and public service reform, with the objective being to create a governing majority through combining pro-business growth with full employment and generous funding of public services. Labour's unexpectedly large majority meant that the constitutional and devolution reform outlined in its manifesto had to be implemented, but this was never regarded as a central priority. And the regional element of this in England, along with mayors for cities, was hobbled from the outset by having few new powers, and yet still requiring a positive vote in local referendums – turning it into a local political squabble, rather than a serious plan for devolution.

Nearly 20 years later Labour is reaping the consequences of this indifference. 13 years of power in Westminster generated a culture in which too often it seemed as if the only thing that mattered in government was running Whitehall. During this time there were of course some very important achievements, but there were also some major blind spots. Labour paid insufficient regard to the material and cultural factors that continued to erode working class communities. This was a process that had begun in the wrenching upheaval of industrial restructuring in the early Thatcher years. New Labour's mistake was to believe that all communities would ride on the coat tails of growth, meritocracy and diversity and would benefit from these trends. Instead, from the early 2000s, wage levels for too many people remained stubbornly low and working class English identity felt denigrated and under attack.

Labour's prescription was sometimes wide of the mark, overly paternalistic and far too centralist. The unwitting message was that it was people in working class communi-

## 8. Time for Labour to take English devolution seriously

ties who were the problem and government ministers knew what needed to be done to improve people's lives. Not surprisingly, this grew to be resented as a form of political correctness and metropolitan elitism. One major institutional victim of this centralist mindset was local government, which was progressively infantilised. Instead of being a means by which representative democracy could enable local people to run their own communities it was turned into a delivery arm of central government, held to account for its success in implementing national policy.

Moreover, having devolved power to Scotland, Wales and London, Labour nationally never gave the impression that it regarded these devolved administrations as anything more than sideshows. We know how this has ended up in Scotland. Labour has been replaced as the progressive voice by the SNP. Outside London, Labour has been caught in a pincer movement between the SNP in Scotland and the devolution agenda in England. Labour has been ambivalent at best about city region devolution and the 'northern powerhouse'. And, following the European referendum, Labour appears out of touch with its own voters.

In the 2015 election Labour said some of the right things, mainly because of the hard work done by Jon Cruddas to oversee a radical policy review that did put its finger on the nub of the issue. But there was little sense that the Labour leadership had grasped the significance of the shift in position that was required. Comparing the party election manifestos is instructive. Labour's section on devolution to cities was in a chapter about democratic renewal, whereas devolution was at the heart of the Conservative's message on the economy. This says a great deal about relative priority, for the Tories it was central to political economy, for Labour it was a democratic adornment.

## Who speaks to England?

Given that Labour was in opposition you would have thought that its leadership would have been close to Labour leaders in English towns and cities, seeking to learn from and build on their experience. Unfortunately not. Labour nationally gave the distinct impression of trying to block 'Devo Manc'. One prominent Labour leader told me that he had heard by group email that Ed Miliband was campaigning in his city; no direct contact had been made to discuss with him the key local issues or to seek to share a platform with him.

Thankfully, Labour in local government has chosen to steer its own course. Labour councils have decided to engage with the government's devolution agenda and to do everything that they can to bend it to their ends. Popular and imaginative policies have been developed that have engaged with people's biggest issues – on wage levels, jobs and apprenticeships, debt, obesity, fuel poverty, transport accessibility and cost. And in all of these areas the emphasis has been on the creative use of local power and authority to find innovative and practical solutions.

### English city region devolution

The world is changing very rapidly and urbanisation is one of the biggest trends. When Labour came to power in 1997 the majority of the world's population still lived in rural areas, but by 2004 rural dwellers were in the minority and by 2050 75 per cent of the world's population will live in urban areas. Driven by this trend a new pattern of growth is taking shape led by cities, not nation states. 60 per cent of global growth comes from just 600 cities. In Britain our city centres are unrecognisable from where they were a generation ago. Pretty much all of them have transformed their physical appearance. Services and quality of life is improving. And for the first time since the second world war, population



## 8. Time for Labour to take English devolution seriously

growth in cities is outstripping the national average. London was the first city to start this trend in the late 80s, early 90s, but since the early 2000s our other major cities have also grown faster than the country as a whole. And the city with the fastest population growth has been Manchester.

But this trend masks a major challenge which the EU referendum has brought centre stage. Growth in Britain is dangerously unbalanced both between and within cities. Outside London only Bristol has a growth rate in line with the English national average. All of our other cities are lagging behind. Devolution to city regions and the northern powerhouse are designed to address this by encouraging agglomeration and the benefits that accrue from economic activity clustered close together. Globally the fastest growing cities are mid-tier and mega cities with populations of 2-5 million. In that context the problem in Britain is not that London is too big but that our other cities are too small.

Two complementary initiatives are addressing this. First devolution to city regions, based on functional economic areas (ie travel to work areas). These are bigger than individual towns and cities; Greater Manchester comprises 10 local authorities across a population of more than 2 million, while Liverpool City Region and the North East comprise just under 2 million people and the West Midlands is much bigger still. These city regions operate at a spatial level at which policies for labour markets, skills, transport, housing and investment can best be coordinated. But in addition to this, these more autonomous city regions can then collaborate with their neighbors to form strategic alliances that can further accelerate agglomeration benefits through better transport connectivity, science, research and innovation strategies. This is what the northern powerhouse is based on. The Great Western Cities, which involves collaboration

## Who speaks to England?

between the Cardiff Capital Region and Bristol and the west of England, is another example of this.

However, what this has so far failed to address is the second major challenge, which is the lack of inclusive growth within cities and city regions. Agglomeration on its own cannot address this; indeed left to its own devices it will exacerbate the problem. As our cities grow, driven by globalisation, the risk is that inequality within city regions and their urban hinterlands will grow more stark.

So the question for Labour is how to engage with this new world of devolution, unbalanced growth and an increasingly insecure and angry working class?

Labour needs to face up squarely to what is happening in England and to develop a distinctive position on devolution. But this will involve a challenge to its theory of power and to all of its learned behaviour about the efficacy of the state at national level. For Labour to be convincing on this it would need a Clause IV moment, only this time about the balance between national and local, as opposed to the state and markets.

If Labour is able to rise to this challenge then there are four major opportunities that devolution can offer.

### Political revival – mayoral elections.

In May 2017 all those city regions that have negotiated devolution deals will have mayoral elections, barring a major U-turn from the new prime minister. These mayors will lead combined authorities with substantial new powers on investment, growth, transport, housing and public services including, in Greater Manchester, health. Labour stands a good chance of not only winning most of these elections, but also of using these as the foundations of its political revival. So far Labour has failed to grasp just how significant

## 8. Time for Labour to take English devolution seriously

this opportunity could be. But you only have to look at the mayoral elections in May 2016 to get a sense of how big the prize is. The most contested mayoral elections in London and Bristol both saw record turn-outs of 45 per cent. In both cases Labour won, and we saw the election of the first ever Muslim mayor in London and the first black city mayor in Bristol.

16 million people will be eligible to vote in these mayoral elections next year. Labour's instincts so far have been to try and close the process down by running quick and low key selection processes. But this is to miss a major opportunity; to enable local people to do what the Brexit campaign offered: 'take back control'. These are going to be hugely important positions and they should be hotly contested. But beyond picking strong candidates through an open and engaging process, the other thing Labour needs to do is to build strong local policy platforms for the mayoral elections. This should be an opportunity to develop a powerful vision of the social and economic future of cities and how this will improve people's lives.

### Policy renewal – inclusive growth

At the heart of Labour's response to devolution should be a renewed focus on how to develop more inclusive growth, so that economic prosperity is more fairly shared across urban England. Even a cursory review of the voting data from the referendum shows that the communities in the north and midlands who voted to leave, are very often those who have least benefitted from globalisation. We have seen significant growth not only in London, but also in some of the major metropolitan hubs of our major city regions. But too little of this has spread to towns and communities on the periphery. The big city regions have negotiated devolution investment funds which could offer the prospect of starting

## Who speaks to England?

to tackle some of the endemic challenges facing underperforming areas. But if this opportunity is to be seized then it will require new thinking. Local economic strategies have tended to oscillate between three approaches: orthodox models of value maximizing investment, physical and place based regeneration, and human capital development policies linked to skills and education. A creative challenge for Labour would be to explore ways in which these could be integrated at local level into one strategy.

Labour's flirtation with 'predistribution' was based on good policy instincts and bad politics. The language was wrong and the policies vague and too nationally focused. The actual problem of inequality and the externalities of globalisation, plays out as an experience in the divided and damaged labour markets of the places where people live. They urgently need to be addressed both through local and national policy. It is fortunate and timely that the cities have come together to support the RSA in running the Inclusive Growth Commission, the successor to the highly influential City Growth Commission, that paved the way for city region devolution.

What is needed now are some big and imaginative ideas, allied to innovative local practice that can make a breakthrough on inclusive growth and re-connect Labour with the communities it no longer has a relationship with. This will involve a combination of refocused local economic strategy, public service reform and re-energised social policy. The ideas may take a number of forms – some will be straight forward and interventionist. These will include ensuring that the huge pipeline of infrastructure projects across Britain is matched with the creation of training and then construction jobs for local people. This cannot be simply left to a market that has failed to make this most basic connection, and will

## 8. Time for Labour to take English devolution seriously

require determined and focused local public action, led by city leaders.

Similarly, public procurement should be used as a lever to create more local jobs and apprenticeships – one positive side effect of the referendum is that the trope that EU rules prohibit this can no longer be used as an excuse for inertia. The aim of these measures must be to put a higher floor of decency and basic wage levels into work, so that there is dignity and value in local employment. The living wage is an important trigger for this, but it needs to be linked to industry and sectoral strategy designed to grow the value of local businesses and the skills they can utilize.

There will also need to be longer term interventions designed to deal with some of the more fundamental roots of inequality in skills and education – such as large and concentrated local initiatives in early years education and in targeted support for children who are struggling at school. There is a strong argument for categorising these prevention programmes, as forms of investment, which could then be subject to rules more like those that apply to capital programmes. The pay back for this should be measured over the long term, and not just in terms of savings elsewhere in the system, but also in productivity growth and net economic impact. What's needed is investment in social infrastructure on a similar scale to that which is planned for our physical infrastructure.

### Completing English devolution

It's also clear that devolution in England is unfinished business. Whilst millions of voters will be covered by devolution arrangements, that still leaves half the country who don't yet have similar local power. Labour should lead the charge on completing the task. Some very big and important urban

## Who speaks to England?

areas have not yet got full devolution arrangements and it may be no coincidence that these cover parts of England that voted heavily in favour of Brexit. West Yorkshire and Nottingham and Derby are the most striking examples of this. And then there are smaller cities that don't fit easily into the city region pattern, such as Hull, Plymouth, and Southampton. And there is a wider question about the applicability of city region models for county areas, which is a particular issue in the south of England. Labour has the opportunity to champion a form of devolution that extends to most of England, bringing social and economic policy together at local level to improve jobs, skills and opportunities for local people. One way of demonstrating its intent would be signal that it wants to go further than the government by extending devolution to Whitehall departments such as DWP and DfE that have so far resisted the process.

### Making England and Britain whole again.

This in turn feeds into a wider constitutional question about how to put the broken pieces of what's left of Britain back together again. It is clear that there will need to be a constitutional settlement based on something like a federal model, with mayors represented in the second chamber and possibly some of them sitting in the cabinet, as happens in France. In the interim, Labour should back the call of cities for city leaders to be included in the Brexit negotiating team, as city regions stand to lose significant EU funding as a result of the referendum outcome. Labour will also need to get its own organisational structures in order, including establishing an English Labour party, alongside the Welsh Labour party and the Scottish Labour party.

## 8. Time for Labour to take English devolution seriously

### Conclusion

Labour needs to learn the lessons of its recent past. Searching for neat constitutional and governance geometry, that seeks to answer all problems in one go, is one habit Labour needs to drop. This has too often been a recipe for inaction. Instead, Labour needs some emotional intelligence, to show that it understands English working class voters and their desire for respect and dignity. This is about valuing work, family, cultural identity and social institutions, and working out how these can be supported and strengthened. It requires local and national leaders who are authoritative and representative of their communities and who can credibly provide economic and social leadership. Labour needs to once again become a player in the debate about the future of England and that means embracing devolution.

*This essay was first published in the Fabian Review online.*

Who speaks to England?



## 9. SUPPORT FOR BREXIT LINKED TO UNEVEN PUBLIC SPENDING

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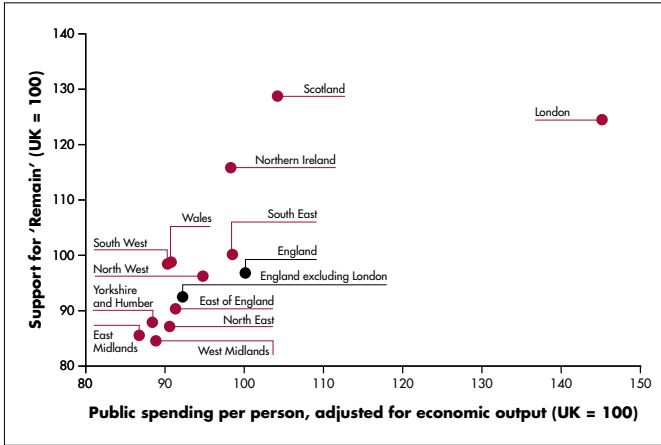
Andrew Harrop

Since the early hours of 24th June there has been a mountain of comment and analysis on the causes of the leave victory and the polarised attitudes which the EU referendum revealed. However, one issue has so far attracted little attention: the relationship between Brexit sentiments and the UK's fiscal geography. Fabian Society analysis shows that those regions and nations which have been 'winners' when it comes to public spending were also the most pro-remain. The allocation of government expenditure may therefore help explain what happened in June, and suggest answers to where politics goes next and how the left should respond to the 'English Question'.

Figure 1 maps the relationship between public spending and Brexit voting patterns. The y-axis reflects the degree of support for remain in each nation or region, and the x-axis is a measure of regional public spending per capita, weighted to take account of economic output. On this measure the East Midlands does badly because it is below the national average for both spending and economic performance; while London does (very) well because it is significantly above for both. The strong correlation between parsimonious public spending and support for leave is striking. And the result for the one outlier, London, is still consistent with the overall pattern (the straight-line relationship breaks down, because

the capital's economic output per head is so much greater than every other region's).

Figure 1: Support for 'remain' in the EU referendum compared to public spending per head, adjusted for economic output (2014)



Sources: Electoral commission, HM Treasury, ONS; Note: x axis is the mean of (1) public spending per capita relative to the UK average; and (2) Gross Value Added per capita, relative to the UK average. A region which has the UK average for both spending and economic output per capita scores 100, as does a region with 90 per cent of UK average GVA and 110 per cent of UK average spending.

Importantly, the relationship is a good deal stronger than the one linking voting differences and economic performance, which is not statistically significant at regional level (even though many commentators have identified geographic variation in prosperity as an explanation for Brexit attitudes). The relationship is also stronger than that which links EU sentiment with public spending levels

## 9. Support for Brexit linked to uneven public spending

before adjusting for economic output (here the correlation is statistically significant). It is the interaction of expenditure and economic success which seems to matter – ie the extent to which a region's spending is higher or lower than what might be considered 'fair' given its prosperity.

Of course, correlation is not causation, and data is not available to assess whether the same relationship exists at a local level. Thinking conceptually, any chain of explanation linking geographic variations in public spending with attitudes to the EU must be fairly indirect. Indeed, some other unobserved variable might be driving both factors independently. Nevertheless, we can speculate that many years of 'unreasonably' low expenditure might help to explain why communities and regions came to be and to feel left behind and under pressure; and that this in turn drove political disaffection and amenability to Brexit.

If there is any substance to this hypothesis, politicians may need to think a lot harder about the geographic allocation of public resources than they have traditionally. Egalitarians have always cared about the spatial distribution of expenditure as a technocratic question of fairness, and have supported efforts to make spending allocations more rational. But they have never cared enough to introduce reforms that would stir the passions of the 'losers'. As a result, historical spending patterns have tended to trump empirical evidence of need.

But now, the evidence from the Brexit vote suggests that the price of our failure to allocate resources fairly may be high, in terms of political psychology as well as material demands. The way we allocate public expenditure seems to be a more foundational, visceral issue than we previously thought – one that gradually influences political solidarities, identities and culture. After all, having enough money helps households feel confident about the future and open

## Who speaks to England?

to change; perhaps the same is true when it comes to places and public resources.

Public awareness of fiscal geography is starting to increase, especially when it comes to the financial relationship between England and Scotland. English nationalist voices are seeking to stoke up a new ‘fiscal populism’ with respect to the Barnett formula, the convention which regulates much of the allocation of spending between the four nations of the UK. The formula is a good example of ‘path dependency’ trumping empiricism, because it is only used to distribute annual changes in expenditure and does not assess the suitability of the initial baseline. Since 1978 the system has remained untouched for fear of Scottish nationalism, despite everything else that has changed in the relationship between Scotland and the rest of the union.

In 2014 Lord Barnett, the architect of the formula, called it a “terrible mistake”. Nevertheless its legitimacy has not been the subject of significant political debate until recently – and there is even less public disquiet over the allocation of spending within England. This means that any link between fiscal geography and political disaffection cannot be explained only as a product of the politics of grievance. It must be the underlying effects of spending allocations – as well as discourse about them – which are driving attitudes. In other words, the left needs to take the fairness of spending allocations seriously as a substantive issue, and not just worry about *the debate* about spending. In the face of fiscal populists, just ‘changing the subject’ without addressing the underlying reality, is not an answer.

However this is not a narrow issue of ‘England versus Scotland’. The x-axis of Figure 1 shows that Scotland does better than the UK average, and Wales worse, when looking at spending weighted for economic performance (note, that the data includes social security as well as Barnett formula

## 9. Support for Brexit linked to uneven public spending

spending). But, on the basis of this measure, England as a whole is not the victim of injustice: its prosperity-weighted spending per head matches the UK average. The real issue is the equity of allocations within England. People in the East Midlands are entitled to feel resentful about how little public money they receive, but it is London not Scotland that should arguably be their target. In the sphere of finance, the 'English question' is as much about the institutional arrangements within England, as the relationships between the four nations.

We therefore need a more strategic approach to the geography of funding across all the nations and regions of the UK. The current distribution of funding is the messy outcome of thousands of individual policies – grant formulas, investment decisions, social security rules – with history being the single most important factor informing our fiscal geography. Fragmented, bottom-up reform is unlikely to change much. Instead politicians should look through the other end of the telescope and ask if today's allocations make sense, when viewed as a single public expenditure 'pot' for each nation, region, county or city.

This is not to say that spending should be allocated precisely in inverse proportion to economic success. There is a legitimate debate to have on the balance between flat-rate allocations, demographic-weighting and deprivation-weighting in fields like health and education. Meanwhile London does have high labour and land costs, and close to a million daytime commuters; services do cost more in rural Scotland; Northern Ireland does have special security needs. But none of these justifications are good enough to explain why five English regions (Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, East of England, South West) are below the UK average for *both* economic prosperity *and* public spending per head.

## Who speaks to England?

As things stand, outside of London, elected authorities do not even exist in England to ask these questions. As devolved administrations start to emerge from next year, regions, counties and conurbations will for the first time be able to behave as if there is a single public spending budget for their territory – and challenge national government if their allocation appears manifestly too small. To start with, new authorities might have to seek sweetheart deals, outside the existing funding formulas, but over time their goal should be to win the reform of the allocation rules as well.

Gradually, we could do away with the thousands of criteria for allocating money in England and move towards streamlined rules for distributing single public service budgets. For the logic of devolution is that cities and counties should have the freedom to decide for themselves how public resources are spent in their area. And a single pot does not need to be constructed from hundreds of subsidiary elements. In this context it would be possible to introduce a neutral institution to weigh the evidence, along the lines of Australia's Commonwealth Grants Commission.

This would also create the context for an evidence-based settlement on the distribution of funding between the four nations. If a single calculation is to be used to work out the 'pot' for public services in Birmingham, Greater Manchester or London, why not for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland too? Scotland would no longer be able to present itself as standing up to the might of the combined UK/England government. Instead it would need to make its case to a host of English regions, cities and counties nearer to its own size, many of whom would be both poorer and less well funded than Holyrood.

Treating England as a series of fiscal communities, and Scotland as one territory among many, is the way to defuse fiscal populism and work towards fairer funding allocations.

## 9. Support for Brexit linked to uneven public spending

The trick would be to reimagine the public finances; to see each region as a territory with its own resources – the product of a horizontal distribution between peers not a seigniorial relationship with the centre. The question would become what money does the Westminster government still need for national functions like social security, against a presumption that money should be in local and regional budgets?

There is a complication, however. This roadmap towards horizontal fiscal solidarity presumes that revenue is raised on a UK basis and distributed according to need. But that strong presumption is starting to unravel, and perhaps it is the logic of English devolution that it will unravel further. London has already published proposals to keep the additional revenues it raises from property taxes in future. And Scotland now has responsibility for setting income tax. The danger for egalitarians is that nations and regions come to see revenue raised locally as ‘theirs’, with richer communities questioning the legitimacy of geographic redistribution.

Such a fully-fledged federalism could usher in a UK version of the Eurozone’s current fiscal impasse. So far this is not happening, because Scotland has had the chutzpah to argue for local tax raising powers *and* the continuation of a funding system which gives it more money than is warranted on the basis of either its needs or the revenue it raises. London fiscal populism would be a different story, however. We have already seen that London spends far more than would appear justified, on the basis of the relative prosperity of the different UK nations and regions. But despite this, there is a risk that the capital will grow resentful about raising more than it spends. This risk would be exacerbated if politicians attempted to introduce financial rebalancing without ensuring that budgets were still rising for everyone (we may be about to get a taste of this, as the Conservative

## Who speaks to England?

government embarks on a fundamental reform of the spatial allocation of schools funding).

The cat is out of the bag, however, and there is no prospect of returning to the fiscal centralism of the mid-1990s. The answer is not to ignore the threat of fiscal populism but to address the causes. In particular, following the Brexit vote, we need to consider how to renew the bonds and affiliations tying London to the rest of England. Many parts of England are entitled to question the equity of the current fiscal settlement. But if the capital defines itself as a European or global city-state, in contrast to a more parochial inward-looking England, then tensions within England will grow. On fiscal questions, answering the 'English question' means addressing the 'London question' too.



## 9. Support for Brexit linked to uneven public spending

Figure 2: National and regional differences: economic output, public spending, support for remain (UK = 100)

	Gross value added per head (1)	Public spending per head (2)	Combined Average of 1 and 2	Support for Remain
North East	74	107	91	87
Yorkshire and the Humber	81	96	88	88
West Midlands	82	96	89	85
East Midlands	83	90	87	86
North West	85	104	95	96
South West	91	90	90	99
East of England	94	89	91	90
South East	110	87	98	100
London	173	117	145	125
Wales	71	110	91	99
Northern Ireland	76	121	98	116
Scotland	94	114	104	129
England	103	97	100	97
England excluding London	90	94	92	93

Sources: ONS, HM Treasury, Electoral commission

*This essay was first published in the Fabian Review online.*

Who speaks to England?

## 10. HERE FOR GOOD: UKIP AND LABOUR AFTER THE BREXIT VOTE

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Robert Ford

**T**he referendum on Britain's EU membership on 23 June was a triumph for Ukip. The issue the party was founded to address – Britain's membership of the EU – was finally put to the country, and a largely unexpected mandate for Brexit was the result. A party which just a decade ago barely registered as a footnote in British electoral politics has helped to trigger the biggest change in Britain's constitutional and international political arrangements in living memory – the outlines of which we are only just beginning to see.

This achievement caps a remarkable decade for Ukip. In Westminster elections, its support grew from 600,000 to nearly 4 million from 2005 to 2015. In European parliament elections, the party rose from 2.7 million and 3rd place in 2004 to 4.4 million and first place in 2014. A party which had virtually no representation in local government as recently as 2012 won more than 100 councillors in three successive sets of local elections from 2013. The party which Conservative leader Michael Howard dismissed as “cranks and gadflies” in 2004, and his successor David Cameron derided as “fruit-cakes, loonies and closet racists” in 2006 are now firmly established as the third party of English and Welsh politics, and the most successful new entrant in British politics since Labour's arrival on the scene a century ago. Only the workings of the British electoral system, which severely penalises

## Who speaks to England?

parties with evenly spread support, have prevented Ukip from having an even bigger impact on the national political scene. Under the proportional representation electoral systems employed in many European countries, Ukip could have won 80 or more MPs in 2015.

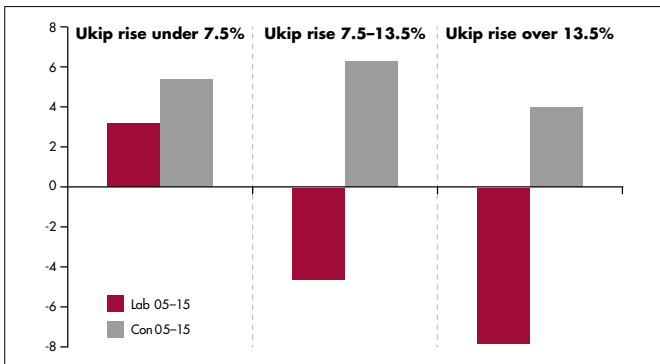
Ukip's rise represents an unprecedented rejection of politics as usual by the British electorate – or more accurately the English and Welsh electorate (in Scotland, politics has been shaken by a different earthquake). Ukip's support is clearly drawn in demographic and attitudinal terms: the party does best with 'left behind' voters – older white British voters of relatively modest means and few educational qualifications. Ukip's best performances came in poorer, whiter, economically stagnant areas, often places where traditional industries collapsed years ago and nothing has come to replace it since. Farage's voters express deep disaffection with traditional politics, which has delivered nothing for them, but strong attachment to British, or more usually English, nationalism and identity. Immigration and the EU have become the twin lightning rods for these voters. Immigrants as both a scapegoat to blame for their marginalised and declining economic and social position and a threat to the traditional identity and values they treasure. The EU as a symbol of the distant, alien and unaccountable political elites who run their lives yet ignore their concerns.

The rise of Ukip reflects a fundamental shift in bases of vote choice away from class and economics and towards education, identity and social values. Labour has benefited from this shift with some groups (graduates and ethnic minorities) and in some areas (London and other diverse urban areas). But the shift has also produced steady erosion in Labour support with other groups and in other areas (older, white socially conservative non-graduates in traditional Labour strongholds. The underlying divisions in values and iden-

## 10. Here for good: Ukip and Labour after the Brexit vote

tivity which have fuelled Ukip (and, at the other end of the spectrum, the Greens) remains even as the EU referendum sound and fury begins to fade. Two statistics illustrate the lasting challenges Ukip's rise poses for Labour. The first, illustrated in figure 1, is that Ukip's rise over three elections has coincided with Labour decline in the same places. In the seats where Ukip has grown least – by less than 7.5 per cent – Labour was stronger in 2015 than in 2005 (increasing its vote on average by three percentage points). In the seats where Ukip has grown most – by 13.5 per cent or more – Labour is on average almost eight points below its standing in 2005, when the party won its last majority. These include seats such as Clacton and Rochester and Strood, where Labour has collapsed to a distant third place in seats they had held in the early 2000s.

Figure 1: Conservative and Labour performance 2005-15 by strength of Ukip surge

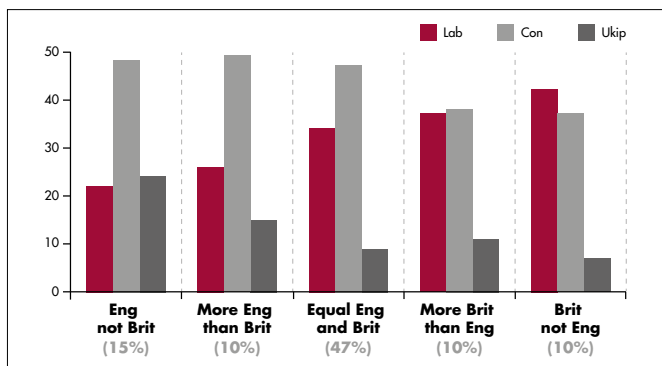


Source: British Election Study 2015

## Who speaks to England?

The second statistic, illustrated in figure 2, is the powerful link between English national identity and 2015 support for both Ukip and Labour. The more English voters feel, the more they incline towards Ukip and away from Labour. Conversely, Labour does best among English voters who identify as British. Among the 15 per cent of voters who describe themselves as ‘English, not British’, Labour on 22 per cent falls into third place behind both a dominant Conservative party (48 per cent) and Ukip (24 per cent). This is not simply a matter of Englishness – a whole range of social values are connected to these identity orientation – but it illustrates the power of the new values and identity divides that Ukip has mobilised in England.

Figure 2: National identity and party support in England



Source: British Election Study 2015

The clashes over the referendum have most likely deepened these divides, but may also have weakened Ukip's ability to mobilise them politically. Labour's consistent – if not always vocal – pro-EU campaign position remains a sore

## 10. Here for good: Ukip and Labour after the Brexit vote

point with some leave voters, while at the other end of the spectrum more passionately pro-EU Labour activists remain angry about half-hearted support for remain from the party's current leadership.

Ukip and its backers are obviously happier with the immediate result of the referendum. But what now? Ukip has to decide which stance to adopt towards the exit negotiations, and what to focus on next. Deciding on both a stance to Brexit and a new focus is likely to occupy, and divide, Ukipers for several years. The current turmoil within the party is a reflection of this search for a new organising purpose, as well as being the latest example of the party's tradition of fractious internal politics. However, although Britain's departure from the EU deprives Ukip of its original *raison d'être*, Brexit has not resolved the structural problems which drove Ukip support up in the first place, and may end up making some of these worse. For example, the older, less skilled workers who find Ukip most attractive could be the hardest hit by any Brexit-related economic turmoil. Once Ukip resolves its current internal disputes, there will still be a large pool of voters interested in what it has to say.

However, while Ukip, or something like Ukip, looks set to remain on the scene, recent evidence suggests it will struggle to repeat its exceptional 2004-14 surge in the next decade. Both the 2015 and 2016 election results point to Ukip hitting a ceiling. The party failed to win any of its 2015 target seats – the only seat it has was a successful defence by a Conservative defector (Douglas Carswell) with a strong local profile (and he is now semi-detached from the party). The party won fewer than 30 local council seats this year – its worst showing since 2012 – and has been declining in the BBC 'projected national share' calculations every year since 2013 (falling from 23 per cent that year to 12 per cent in 2016). Direct ward-by-ward comparisons highlight the

## Who speaks to England?

same pattern – Ukip won fewer votes on average in 2016 than in the same wards a year earlier, despite the agenda in 2016 being tailor made for the party. While the party's breakthrough in Wales was impressive, a comparison with 2015 Westminster voters reveals the same pattern of decline.

In the longer run, Ukip is also on the wrong side of a number of social changes. Its support is concentrated among non-graduates, white people, the working class, and social conservatives. All these groups are gradually declining through generational changes – young English voters are far more educated, liberal, ethnically diverse and middle class than their grandparents. The pool Ukip fishes in is shrinking.

Such demographic changes are relentless, but they are also slow. Ukip is likely to be attractive to a large chunk of the English and Welsh electorate for many years. How can Labour respond? To begin with, any response needs to recognise that Ukip is not a transient expression of public anger, or a passing political fad. The party's emergence reflects deep structural divides in values and outlook in many areas between different segments of the electorate, divides which have changed the way voters perceive the parties and decide between them. These divides are particularly evident when we compare the views of the voters Labour has lost to Ukip (and to the Conservatives) and those loyal to the contemporary Labour party, in particular those who have joined or remained as party members under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. Survey research by Ian Warren shows that on issues such as immigration, identity, defence and welfare, Labour's members and loyalist voters are often poles apart from its lost and potential voters. This gap is itself a reflection of the same trends which have driven the rise of Ukip – young graduates are attracted by Labour's cosmopolitan liberal stances on such issues just as older, left behind voters are attracted to Ukip by its conservative stances on the same



## 10. Here for good: Ukip and Labour after the Brexit vote

issues. The first step Labour needs to make is to recognise the nature and importance of this value divide.

The second step is to recognise that, in a value conflict as deep as this, the views taken by voters on the socially conservative side of the argument are as legitimate as those held on the liberal side, which are vastly more popular among current Labour supporters. Passionate social liberals – thick on the ground in the current Labour membership – are prone to seeing their position as both intellectually enlightened and morally superior. But implying or assuming that voters who take opposing views on these issues are ignorant and intolerant is not a good way to win their sympathy. It frames the discussion as “I’m right, you’re wrong”, and reinforces such voters’ belief that the current Labour party ignores or dismisses their concerns. That is not a sensible strategy with voters who express exceptionally high levels of political disaffection and distrust.

Yet there are also risks if Labour leans too far in the other direction. For example, manifestly insincere displays of patriotic pride, or implausible promises to address cultural concerns about immigration, from people who clearly do not share such values and impulses ring a false note. Ukip-leaning voters know their concerns are not shared by socially liberal graduates, so when members of the latter group feign interest it can often look like condescension or pandering.

A better approach might be to recognise and accept the difference in views and values and look for a productive compromise that respects both outlooks. For example, on immigration voters know that claims from liberal graduates to want to deliver big cuts are insincere – not least because many liberal activists will invariably attack such pledges as pandering to xenophobia. Instead of insincere promises and undeliverable policies, Labour should focus on explaining its own position on the positives of immigration, while looking

## Who speaks to England?

for compromises which credibly address the pressures associated with it. It should set out honestly what it feels can and cannot be done to address the issue, and what it feels should and should not be done. An honest discussion with voters about what is actually feasible on immigration, and what it as a party wants to do, will never win round all immigration sceptics but it is at least consistent and principled. If some voters conclude Labour's perspective is wrong for them, perhaps that is a price worth paying to win back broader credibility.

A second way Labour could rebuild bridges is by broadening its debate about representation. Labour has made great strides in improving ethnic minority and female representation at elite level, and is justly proud of this. Yet working class representation has collapsed, and the Westminster party is increasingly dominated by university graduates, even though more than half of the electorate never attended university. This generates a particular credibility problem on social issues, as education is the strongest predictor of views on these – university graduates tend very strongly to liberal views, non-graduates tend to conservative stances. University is also increasingly the gateway to social status, prosperity and social mobility. Voters are well aware of the class and education deficit in representation, and it affects their behaviour: research by Oliver Heath has shown that working class voters regard Labour as more credibly left wing and are more willing to vote for it when it fields more working class candidates nationally and locally

Fielding candidates who share the background and life experiences of left behind voters would be a powerful way to rebuild trust and credibility with such voters. Politicians who have faced the same economic struggles will have more authenticity communicating with such voters, and that authenticity may also help them bridge the gaps on social

## 10. Here for good: Ukip and Labour after the Brexit vote

issues where Labour has diverged from these voters' social conservatism. Serious, co-ordinated and resourced action to recruit more working class and non-university candidates at local and national level would also send a clear message to left behind voters that the party values their perspectives and wants to ensure they are properly represented in the corridors of power. Such action would also be in keeping with the oldest traditions of the party itself, which was founded to provide a political voice for the working class and would help to draw contrasts with Ukip.

Labour could also bolster its appeal to disaffected Ukip-leaning voters by delivering tangible results through effective local government. Labour has a strong presence in local government, with control of many large cities, and therefore stands to gain from the new devolution of powers to city regions. The party should fully exploit the powers of both big devolved administrations such as London and Greater Manchester and smaller local government authorities to show disaffected and distrustful 'left behind' voters that they can deliver meaningful improvements in their lives. The focus should be on clear and regular two-way communication with such voters to establish priorities and deliver on them. Ukip's growing presence in local government provides an opportunity for Labour to draw contrasts, as many of the initial wave of Ukip councillors have proved rather ineffective at governing. Ukip groups in Basildon, Tendring and Thanet have split acrimoniously – the last costing the party control of the council – while numerous Ukip councillors have resigned or been driven out by scandal. Labour should point to these disappointments as evidence that Ukip are better at voicing problems than solving them.

These are modest suggestions, and I do not claim they represent a complete strategy for Labour to compete with Ukip, nor that they will be sufficient to win back the voters

## Who speaks to England?

the party is losing. Many more ideas and initiatives will be needed. Although there are reasons to think Ukip has hit a ceiling for now, and does not present an immediate threats to many incumbent Labour MPs, the party cannot afford to be complacent. Social democratic parties are in an unprecedented decade-long slump all over Europe, and competition from populist radical right parties is one of the factors in this. An ability to reconnect with the disaffected voters flirting with Ukip will be essential if Labour is to rebuild the broad coalitions necessary for a governing majority. Ukip may have peaked, but Ukip politics is not going away.

*This essay was first published in the Fabian Review online.*

## 11. LET US FACE THE FUTURE: THE NEW ENGLISH SOCIALIST PROJECT

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Liam Byrne MP

“It’s tough to make predictions”, said the great baseball sage, Yogi Berra, “especially about the future”. But in politics there are great prizes for a political party with a sense of how the world is changing, the new risks and opportunities on offer – and a plan to make the future work for ordinary families.

When Labour has been most visionary, in 1945, 1964 and 1997, we have won big. That’s why the debate about renewing Labour must start with some proper thinking about the forces reshaping England in the years to come.

And it is England in particular, not just Britain in general, that needs special attention. A passion for a distinctly English identity has grown stronger in recent years and the vote to leave the European Union was led by English voters – and particularly those identifying primarily as English. Labour must respond to these sentiments – not dismiss them out of hand.

These coming changes may be *more* profound than any change we have seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Since the 1980s global life expectancy has risen by some 20 years – a change that before took from the Stone Age until the 1980s to achieve. 300 million people have been lifted out of poverty. 65 nations became democracies, radically reshaping the world order while violent non-state actors like ISIS began to rise in influence. Four and a half billion new connections

## Who speaks to England?

were made as the world wide web spread across the earth, while a vast global marketplace connected six billion people. So, what of the world to come – and England's place in it? Five new trends will be key – and it's our response to these forces that should shape a new English socialism.

First, Labour needs to offer new economic hope to a country that wants to leave the EU without losing out. That inevitably means turning east, where 'emerging' economies are likely to grow 3-5 times faster than in the west. Much is made of China's slowdown but it is still a \$17 trillion economy growing at 6 per cent a year (that's \$1 trillion each year – about 40 per cent of the size of the UK economy). By 2050, new rising powers may make up 70-80 per cent of global growth. Yet we will not compete in this new world without fixing our terrible productivity. The productivity gap with our G7 competitors is now the worst since modern records began. What the G7 on average finish making on a Thursday night, takes us until the end of Friday to get done. This partly explains why we've run a persistent trade deficit since 1998. Our competitors in the east are snapping at our heels, driven by vast investments in science and innovation. China will become the world's biggest science spender by 2019; it is increasing science spending 17 times faster than us every year.

Second, the new English working class will face extraordinary challenges from the rise of the robots – and the retired who choose to stay on at work. New technology and demographic shifts will transform the world of work, creating the risk that millions of England's low paid workers will be locked into low-pay, low-skill sectors of the economy, unable to earn their way to a good life.

But new jobs *will* emerge as technology and trade accelerate – and Labour's task is make sure that England is equipped with new institutions to help workers adapt,

## 11. Let us face the future: the new English socialist project

thrive and advance as the jobs market quickly changes, like a world-class technical education system, and contributory social security that retrains workers as old industries fall and new firms rise. As the party of labour, our mindset will need to adapt as we seek to represent the changing English working class. We must be the natural party of workers in developing technological fields, whether in medicine, computing, fintech, engineering, agri-tech, or manufacturing, and of the self-employed and returning retired workers staying on in work.

Third, for each of us to thrive, we will need some crucial new *collective* solutions: new national assets that can become a 21st century public realm, strengthening the ties that bind us. Some are already well understood – like the need for an NHS which must modernise for the new age of personalised medicine and cell re-engineering, and a social care system that helps a country where by 2030 there may be an additional two million adults with a mental health problem. We know we need a new revolution in housing, and a second pension system that is genuinely universal. But some new assets are not well debated: like the infrastructure of personal and public data which will soon need new solutions. Just as the Factory Acts of the Victorian age made the world of work safer, so Data Acts for the 21st century will be needed to safeguard our data.

Fourth, Labour will need to champion the better instincts of a big-hearted England, not an inward-looking England, in a world that desperately needs our engagement. The world is no less safe as China and Russia multiply defence spending and where violent non-state actors will soon acquire drones capable of delivering biological weapons. And that's before we contemplate ocean level rises of 1-2 metres as the planet warms.

## Who speaks to England?

So, the key challenge for Labour will be finding new answers and mobilising new majorities in a country that is perhaps more divided than ever before, dominated by older voters (over half of voters at the next election will be over 55) but where the next generation urgently needs collective solutions. This is the challenge for a new English socialism. Labour is ultimately a 'we' party. We believe we each do better when we act together. But we get elected when we show how the 'we' helps the 'me'. Ultimately, no matter the rhetoric, the Conservatives tend to offer solutions that leave individuals on their own. A cursory glance at the future is enough to show that such an approach is not the way to unlock the extraordinary potential of the years to come, or safeguard our country from the threat of unprecedented new inequalities.

The new English socialism must therefore seize the crisis that Brexit brings. We need to understand that this revolution – led by the English working class – had at its heart a patriotic, Churchillian self-confidence, that we could look the world in the eye and thrive. It's an instinct long in the making. In his *Plan for English Commerce* written on the eve of the Industrial Revolution, Daniel Defoe marvelled at the transformation of the country around him and pinpointed the root of our success: "trade is the wealth of the world", he wrote, and trade has "two daughters...namely Manufacture and Navigation". The English public sensed that we could prosper as traders as we did once before.

That sense of history is not misplaced. But not many Brexiteers understand it. They think trade flourishes with a sort of minimal 'nightwatchman' state. They ignore the critical role of our magnificent public institutions in the great English miracle. Without institutions like the Royal Exchange, the Royal Navy, the Royal Mint, parliament, the Royal Society, or the Royal Courts of Justice, our great entre-



## 11. Let us face the future: the new English socialist project

preneurs could never have invented new ideas, invested in them, made them, traded them, or kept them safe from free-loaders and avaricious monarchs.

So at the heart of the new English socialist project must be a sense that the future is changing fast; that new risks and opportunities confront us. And unless we build a new constellation of institutions, fit for the 21st century, the future will leave us behind.

*Liam Byrne's new history of English capitalism, Dragons, is published by Head of Zeus. You can download Red Shift's report, England in 2030 from [www.redshiftlabour.co.uk](http://www.redshiftlabour.co.uk)*

Who speaks to England?

## 12. SEVEN STEPS FOR LABOUR TO WIN IN ENGLAND

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Paul Hilder

Six months before the 2015 general election, **some of us identified** the question of “how can Labour win in England?” as an existential challenge. MPs like John Denham, Jon Cruddas and Steve Reed, PPCs including Polly Billington and Rowenna Davis, local government leaders, and key Labour organisers were all actively advocating a proactive strategy for Labour in England. We saw Labour being squeezed on all sides – by a ruthlessly pragmatic Conservative party, by a populist Ukip appealing to older voters and the left behind, by an idealistic Green party enlisting young and progressive voters. Anticipating wipeout in Scotland, we argued that Labour needed to present a better offer to English voters.

We were ignored – but we were right. Labour won less than 32 per cent of the vote in England, while the Conservatives received 41 per cent and won more than half as many seats. Remarkably, the Conservatives made more gains in England than Labour did. Labour did best in safer seats with diverse populations, high levels of public sector employment, lower average income and higher-than-average unemployment. But in most of the key marginals, where it needed to surge, it suffered.

As the battleground shifts further against it, the Labour party will never again win a UK parliamentary majority unless it can transform its relationship with English voters.

## Who speaks to England?

Here is a brief sketch of seven essential steps toward renewal – first written earlier this year in the run-up to the referendum, and updated only slightly to take account of recent events. Our hole has deepened, and the warnings sounded back in March have been painfully validated.

First, an English Labour movement must be established, to help renew our identity and how we connect in our communities. I argued previously for an English Labour party. But as this crisis has deepened, so has the risk of internal party machinations dragging us down. At its moment of inception, the English Labour movement must be free to build a broad campaigning network, to face outward to the country and to engage the publics it most needs to reach.

English Labour could grow rapidly into a key pillar of the wider Labour movement, perhaps as a 21st century socialist society. It should demand the right for local candidates and parties to stand under the banner of English Labour, and help develop the ideas, networks, campaigns and organising practices that will become the building blocks of victory. But it need not force itself into the shackles of already creaking party bureaucracy. Turning outward to our communities and the electorate matters far more.

Second, I sounded the alarm over the European referendum, calling for a distinctive English Labour voice in the campaign, and warning that Labour risked ceding the ground of patriotism and opening itself up to an undertow that could last a generation. I wrote that the cosmopolitan case for Europe was complacent and insufficient.

So it proved. Our English revolt saw every region except for London voting out. The undertow is already fierce – polls show more than half of Labour leave voters are drifting away. After this shock, many more are now recognising the need to reground their values and reconnect with the public. But too much of the response thus far has been reactive or

## 12. Seven steps for Labour to win in England

triangulating. English Labour can best respond to the Brexit shock by building a positive, progressive agenda for Britain in the longer run.

Third, English Labour must be a plural movement. It must bring together its increasingly diverse constituencies in a bigger tent, unite them through far-sighted policy, shared values and projects, and lively and constructive discussions, and open itself up to allied movements and forces.

Labour cannot win in England without the suburbs, shires and market towns, as well as the cities. It cannot win if it alienates either leave or remain voters. It cannot win without the white working class; urban and cosmopolitan progressives; ethnic minority voters; or the striving middle classes in marginals. None of these constituencies can be taken for granted or ceded. An increasingly diverse coalition demands a far more open, pragmatic and plural way for Labour to manage its conversations and doctrines. Even and especially if it still aspires to majority rule, Labour cannot avoid some form of coalition politics in the 21st century.

Fourth, English Labour must be an open movement. It needs first and foremost to build a deep and authentic conversation with the English people whom it seeks to represent. Labour today is mired in tribal divisions, obsessed with various dying pieties, and failing profoundly to connect with the public. English Labour must turn outward again to understand and reconnect with its fellow citizens. Strategies like participatory assemblies, online engagement and open primaries will help to renew the party and turn it outward. Only then can it win. Only then will it deserve to win.

Fifth, English Labour must be a networked movement. I know from personal experience how platforms like 38 Degrees and Change.org have been able to tap into and channel the democratic energies of millions more people than have joined the Labour party, even after recent influxes.

## Who speaks to England?

I spent time recently with the Bernie Sanders campaign in the US, which is powered by millions of small donors. It has taken networked campaigning to a whole new level, empowering hundreds of thousands of volunteers.

Labour's failure to embrace these 21st century politics is chronic and shameful. Unless the party wakes up soon, other populist forces will take its place. This is not a matter of bolt-on techniques; it is a matter of fundamental political identity and strategy. Labour needs a swift DNA transplant: an evolutionary leap, rather than a factional tug-of-war. Its best hope is to anchor itself back into our diverse society by renewing its movement pillars, with a new English Labour at the forefront.

Sixth, English Labour must be a populist movement. The desiccated, technocratic language and behaviour of too many in Labour during the last two decades has left them looking like the few, rather than rooted in the many. English Labour must be unashamedly popular and populist – engaging with culture, with identity, with anger and passion. It must start to seriously challenge entrenched elites in the City and Westminster, while occupying and defining the radical centre rather than painting itself solely into a left-wing corner.

Populism need not mean dumbing-down, compromise or appealing to people's baser instincts. It can be one of the most positive and transformative forces in politics, as we saw in America's Roosevelt presidencies. Good populism begins with the apparently simple step of taking the people's feelings and experiences seriously. It does not end there. It draws us into a collective journey, giving us agency so that together we can transform our society, institutions and values for the better.

The seventh and final step is this: English Labour must be a movement of radical common sense. Left-right ideologi-

## 12. Seven steps for Labour to win in England

cal battles tacitly accept the status quo and turn off a wide swathe of the public. Common sense and radicalism are two of the strongest values and traditions of England, and they have never been so needed. If we harness them together, we can build a new political economy which is on the side of the people, and which deserves their passionate support. We must be fiercely for enterprise and human invention. We must reinvent an entrepreneurial and enabling state, and craft a new settlement for care and social needs.

People everywhere deserve a better life. But we have forgotten how to connect with them, how to serve them, and how to win. This is the challenge of 21st century politics. The stakes have never been higher.

It is increasingly clear that unless we do a better job of rising to this challenge, populist elites will seize power and hold sway – and we will have let them. They are growing stronger by the day, but they are growing into the space that we have left for them. So let's take back our democracy and our future. Let's start today.

*This essay is an updated version of an essay first published in the Fabian Review online.*

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