

Women's Issues

Young Fabian
Women talk policy
and politics

Foreword by
Baroness King of Bow

Edited by Claire Leigh and
Marie-Noëlle Loewe

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FABIAN SOCIETY

YOUNG FABIANS



Young Fabian Women

Young Fabian Women was founded in March 2010 and is the feminist branch of the Young Fabians. Our goal is to support more young women to stand for elected positions, build a strong network of like-minded people and create spaces to make young women's voices heard.

The Young Fabians

The Young Fabians are the under-31's section of the Fabian Society, Britain's foremost centre-left think tank. Set up in 1960, we remain **the only think tank run by and for young people**. Our membership numbers over 1,700 and includes young professionals, students, parliamentary researchers, political activists and academics. The Young Fabians promote policy debate through seminars, conferences, pamphlets, and online through our website and blog. The current Chair of the Young Fabians is Adrian Prandle. To find out more about the Young Fabians, visit www.youngfabians.org.uk.

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The Fabian Women's Network was launched in January 2005 and is part of the voluntary section of the Fabian Society. It launched a mentoring scheme for young women in 2011 and continues to look for interested candidates. For more information, visit www.fabianwomen.co.uk.

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Foreword

Baroness Oona King of Bow

Our women's movement has a proud history, yet every time I sit in the Lords - surrounded by golden baubles, Coats of Arms, and aging men - I am struck by how few women's voices influence policy in 21st century Britain. You'd be forgiven for thinking The Suffragettes were a boy band. In Parliament today, men outnumber women by 4 to 1.

This lack of women's political representation not only mirrors, but also perpetuates, gender inequality in almost every sphere of public and private life. Sylvia Pankhurst recognised the link between political representation and wider equality, describing her East End women's movement as a campaign "not merely for votes but towards an egalitarian society."

In terms of gender, an egalitarian society remains a chimera. As the Fawcett Society recently pointed out, girls and women in Britain have drastically less access to power and opportunity than boys and men. Women are the majority of low paid workers, do the bulk of unpaid work and are more likely than men to live under the breadline in old age. Cuts to services disproportionately impact women. And however many times we hear the statistics, it remains shockingly inhumane that 1 in 4 murders in Britain is a woman killed by her partner or ex-partner, and two thousand British women are raped every week.

That's the ultra-depressing side of the equation. But the exciting news is an explosion in grass-roots activism and feminism that would make

Sylvia Pankhurst proud. Some of this is happening inside the Labour Party, and a lot of it outside the Labour Party. Those of us who believe the Labour movement is the best way to make Britain fairer, must ensure the Labour Party itself roots out inequality towards women. The proposal for Labour's Leader or Deputy Leader to be a woman is an example of how fairer structures should help deliver fairer policy.

Grassroots initiatives like Young Fabian Women should be accompanied by changes in Labour Party structures - so women have an equal chance to participate fully at all levels of the party, and throughout the Labour movement. As the essays in this pamphlet show, women have a lot to bring to the table in terms of innovative ideas and policy solutions. A representative and renewed Labour Party will only emerge if we harness the energy and creativity of all our members, including our women.

That's why I'm delighted that Young Fabians are setting out to change things themselves, and have created an exciting new platform for women to impact policy and politics. That's the only way we will address one of the great ongoing inequalities of our time: the under-representation of women among our thinkers and leaders, both inside and outside Parliament.

This first ever Young Fabian Women's pamphlet recognises the scale of the challenge we face, but also demonstrates that the grassroots are the most fertile territory for effecting change on the ground. These re-invigorated grass roots may yet storm the establishment; and they will at least make it less acceptable that in the 21st century Britain our Parliament listens intently to ageing men, while women remain locked outside.

Baroness Oona King of Bow



Introduction

Claire Leigh and Marie-Noëlle Loewe

Politics has been dubbed show-business for ugly people, which may be unfair (and Tristram Hunt fans would certainly disagree), but politics can often resemble an ugly kind of show-business. Meaningless exchanges of insults across the Commons floor and hyper-spun public communications seem to have more in common with satirical farce than political drama; more In the Loop than West Wing. This does not only apply to the current Government; the Left is just as guilty of indulging in political theatrics, behaviour which serves as a reliable fountain of inspiration for stand-up comedians and playwrights alike.

So perhaps it is not surprising that female representation within the political system is still comparatively low- after all, there must be better ways to make a serious point than to engage in this oldest of dramatic charades?

But despite all its flaws, politics is still the indispensable arena for the pursuit of the good, a means to consult and to empower, and ultimately to effect change. It's an arena where more female voices are sorely needed, and yet are still scarce. According to data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union comparing female representation in national parliaments, the UK is ranked at a very mediocre 49th place, with Rwanda, Sweden and South Africa taking the top spots.

Fair female representation will not happen overnight, and politics is by no means the only way women feel that they can transform society. Of the total UK voluntary paid workforce, 68 % are women. But the battering that women's charities in particular are taking under the Government's funding cuts shows that increasing the female percentage of political decision-makers is a crucial complement to the many other roles women play in public life.

Who we are

In order to provide a platform and entry point for young women on the Left, we at the Young Fabians created Young Fabian Women. Young Fabian Women is aimed at young women in the centre left movement looking to get more involved in politics. Our goal is to encourage more young women to stand for elected positions, create a strong network of like minded people and a space to make young women's voices heard. Young Fabian Women organises events, facilitates networking, gives access to training and links in to other relevant organisations, and provides more opportunities for women to discuss, debate and write about progressive politics in what continues to be a male-dominated sphere.

About this pamphlet

Gender equality is beneficial to our entire society, and the fight for stronger representation in Parliament and in boardrooms, for better childcare support and more flexibility in the workplace must continue. But for this inaugural Young Fabian Women pamphlet, we have consciously asked our authors to focus on subjects which lie outside the areas traditionally regarded as 'women's issues'.

Debbie Moss takes a look at the new military entente cordiale between France and the UK and asks 'Could it have happened under Labour?'

Gillian Econopouly considers the opportunities young people will miss due to recent changes in the economic climate and warns of a “lost generation”. Ellie Cumbo discusses violence against young people in the UK and argues for a ban of the use of restraint, while Jessica Studdert calls on the Labour Party to adapt to the dynamic currents of society or else risk insignificance.

We hope that this publication encourages more young women to get engaged in the political arena, to debate thoughts and ideas, to ask questions and make their voice heard. We also plan to create opportunities whereby the issues raised in these essays can continue to be discussed, including through follow-up YFW events and on our blog (www.youngfabians.org.uk/blog/). If you have any ideas for events or activities inspired by what you read here, do get in touch with us through the YF website.

In the process of editing this pamphlet, one thing has become clear; Young Fabian Women have a lot to say, and deserve to be listened to.

1 | The new Special Relationship: Why Cameron may become a reluctant European

Debbie Moss

With British forces once again engaged in a military operation against a tyrannical leader, foreign policy has come to the fore for the first time since the Coalition Government came to power. So far, the decision has proved uncontroversial in terms of domestic politics. David Cameron has made demonstrably clear that Libya is not Iraq, and that he is not Tony Blair. Armed with the legitimising mandate of UN Resolution 1973 and even backing (in principle at least) from the Arab League, Cameron secured the support of an overwhelming majority of MPs.

The Arab Spring has not yet led us to revisit the bitter political divisions of Iraq. This is fortunate for the Government, since while the Iraq war divided Labour, the Conservatives were united in their support and the Liberal Democrats bellicose in their opposition, reflecting a broader divide in attitudes towards Blair's liberal interventionism/neoconservatism (depending on one's point of view).

We cannot know whether consensus in Parliament and among the international community regarding the intervention will last. Yet one interesting aspect of the legacy of military action in Libya is already

clear - it is, at least in inception, a European project.¹ British Prime Minister David Cameron and French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy were the initial advocates of action, and despite NATO command of the operation and the vital role of American forces, it is the British and French premiers who have taken the lead in stating that Gaddafi must go.²

So in his first war, Cameron is leading from the front, hand in hand with his French counterpart. Despite the Prime Minister's Euroscepticism, this may signal the start of a new era of European-led diplomacy and help to define a European doctrine and tradition of interventionism.³ In considering the implications for British politics and the Coalition, it is useful to examine the context of the Government's other key decisions on Europe. Is it possible that Cameron will in time be seen as a very European British leader?

Europe looked likely to be irreconcilably divisive for the Coalition

With notable exceptions, Conservatives, including Cameron's inner-circle, are staunchly Eurosceptic: they oppose joining the Euro, regularly lambast Labour for having "given away powers to Brussels" and promise a referendum on any future EU constitution. Cameron also removed the Conservative Party from the centre-right European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament and formed the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), isolating his MEPs from the mainstream to associate with what Nick Clegg referred to in one of the 2010 election leaders' debates as "a bunch of nutters."

Liberal Democrats by contrast are united in their pro-European stance. Early signs suggest that on Europe, as on so many domestic issues, Conservative policy is set to prevail. The Coalition's programme for government explicitly promises to "ensure that there is no further

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transfer of sovereignty or powers over the course of the next Parliament" and even references a "sovereignty bill".

Actions speak louder than words

In this context it seems surprising that in perhaps the most significant foreign policy decision of his first six months in office, David Cameron entered into an historic military agreement with France. On 2 November 2010, the prime minister signed two defence treaties facilitating extremely close cooperation across a range areas.

Under plans for a "combined joint expeditionary force", British and French troops are to serve in the same brigade, under one commander.⁴ Particularly controversial is the decision to share the use of aircraft carriers, provoking predictable alarm on the right that deployment of British airpower will be subject to French consent. Veteran Conservative MP Bernard Jenkins argues this would have proved problematic in the case of the Falklands war, which France opposed.

Arguably more striking is the decision to cooperate on nuclear technology. There will be joint research centres in each country, to research stockpiles of nuclear warheads, as well as joint development of new technologies such as nuclear submarines and military satellites. Britain and France will therefore be sharing the most precious of state secrets, though there is no suggestion of sharing a nuclear deterrent.

Practical, hard-headed cooperation

The military agreement may in future years take on great historical significance, perhaps becoming a symbol of the laying to rest of centuries of bloody rivalry. As the chair of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, James Arbuthnot MP put it, he has "forgiven the French for taking off the head of my great-great-great-great grandfather at Trafalgar". The question for now though, is twofold.

The new Special Relationship

What was the political motivation for entering into the agreement? And what will be the impact on British politics, European defence policy and public attitudes towards France and the EU?

What makes the government's motivation so intriguing is that Euroscepticism and what can be termed "muscular patriotism" are central to Cameron's political identity.⁵ Take, for example, the new Conservative party branding, launched at the 2010 annual conference, which features a (rather bizarre) union jack tree.⁶ The prime minister is aware that sending a clear message that under his leadership the Conservative party will be tough on issues such as Europe and immigration is vital to appease those on the right of his parliamentary party, but also those party members and supporters who fear that the coalition will mean giving way to liberal elements.

So how does the military agreement with France fit into this narrative? Announcing the deal, Cameron and Defence Minister Liam Fox were keen to couch it in commonsense terms, this was about "practical, hard-headed cooperation", the prime minister insisted, preempting inevitable outrage from the right, and not an "end in itself." Specifically, at a time of necessary budget cuts, it would save money, without compromising our security. Since before the election, Cameron has portrayed himself as a pragmatic, responsible leader, the grown up problem solver needed to sort out the "financial mess" bequeathed by "irresponsible" Labour. He explains the decision to enter into a coalition and almost every policy announcement since in similar terms. Accompanying the blue, red and white tree are the words "together in the national interest".

Of course, not all Conservative MPs accept this argument. Deficit reduction may be a priority, but for some, trusting the French with our national security (as they see it) is a step too far. Bernard Jenkin MP reminded Cameron that "there is a long record of duplicity on the French part when it comes to dealing with allies".⁷ It is hard to tell how widely these suspicions are shared among MPs, Conservative voters

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and the public at large. But certainly, anti-French jibes and Europhobic stereotyping are common in parts of British society and remain acceptable in a way that racism, for instance, no longer is.

It couldn't have happened under Labour

Euroscptics, then, are left with a dilemma: to pursue their traditional, visceral dislike and distrust of European (especially military) integration, or support their leader's preference for this and other prudent, if non-ideal arrangements. The announcement of the agreement was, on the whole, met with relatively muted criticism from the right. Those most likely to disapprove are broadly supportive of Cameron and probably try to ration their public displeasure. Perhaps even Daily Mail journalists are now deficit hawks first and Euroscptics second. Interestingly, though, significant anger was voiced over Cameron's "broken promise" on the EU budget.⁸ Much was made of the fact that the "slight" 2.9% increase was hardly a victory after he had unwisely raised expectation of a total freeze.

Cameron avoided serious criticism of a momentous military agreement with France because, early in the first term of the first Conservative prime minister in thirteen years, he could rely on good will and suspension of public disapproval. In other words, it could not have happened under Labour. When in 2008 the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown announced an agreement with French President Nicolas Sarkozy to cooperate on developing "European military capabilities" including a combined maritime strike capability, it was attacked by the then vehement Daily Mail as an "alarming" French plan for an EU intervention force to rival NATO.⁹ An irony of British politics, then, is that Conservative leaders may find it easier to carry out broadly pro-European policies than their (generally) less Euroscptic Labour counterparts.

The thin end of the wedge?

It is of course, too simplistic to say that the strength of criticism of pro-European policies is determined solely by which party is in power. There seems to be a difference between bilateral collaboration, such as the military agreement with France, and pan-European measures, such as the European Defence Force, mooted at the time of the St Malo declaration signed by Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac in 1998. In the November announcement, Cameron was no doubt mindful that a deal between two leaders, a pragmatic means to achieve patriotic ends, made clear it was not about a “European army”.

Yet the trend in EU history is that integration develops incrementally. The Common Market, the acorn of today’s 27 state EU, was established with the six-nation Treaty of Paris, and fundamentally it was intended to form economic ties between France and (West) Germany so as to make another war “materially impossible”.¹⁰ Other individual aspects of integration, such as free movement of labour, have also historically been piloted by a few members, with others joining gradually. So it may be that the November defence treaties between Britain and France come to be seen as an important milestone in the journey towards formalised European defence cooperation. Whether Cameron is convinced this is impossible, or whether, perhaps, he thinks it inevitable, we cannot know.

The legacy of the Prime Minister’s cooperation with France on Libya may have equally significant consequences. Former French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner has argued that British and French leadership on Libya could form the basis for a new European foreign policy framework.¹¹

The challenge is now to make the pragmatic palatable to the public

We have established that our Eurosceptic, Conservative Prime Minister

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embarked on far-reaching defence cooperation with France because it made good economic sense. It is not much of a jump to assume that his government's Europe policy more generally is based on a similar pragmatism. Notwithstanding attempts to appease backbenchers with the Sovereignty Bill, Cameron shows no serious signs of distancing the UK from the EU.

This is largely because, though he may wish it were otherwise, we live in a globalised and increasingly multipolar world and Britain's significance in this context is shrinking. The Economist aptly described the November agreement as follows: "Only by working much more closely together...can two medium-sized European countries hope to stay in the great-power game."¹² So, Cameron recognises that Britain (and France) must move on from our imperial legacy and cooperate to remain relevant in the international arena. This is illustrated by Britain and France's joint leadership over Libya. It is only by standing shoulder to shoulder that Cameron and Sarkozy can make a real impact on the global stage.

But can the prime minister hope to bring his supporters with him? Despite cross-party support in the Commons, polls suggest that less than half of the British public support military intervention in Libya.¹³ It is not possible to judge the response to British and French leadership on this issue, or indeed whether this has registered in the public imagination whatsoever. We cannot know whether there is more or less appetite for European-led interventionism than for an Anglo-American led operation such as Iraq. In all probability much of the public is instinctively sceptical of any apparently "optional" military operation, on the basis of distrust stemming from Iraq and a feeling that resources would be better spent on the services facing the Chancellor's determined axe.

It is possible, though, that in the longer term there will be support for European-led foreign policy, or at least joint British-French initiatives. Recent research shows significant public support for European

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cooperation on issues such as fighting terrorism and international crime, tackling climate change and bank regulation.¹⁴ These popular areas of cooperation are facilitated by EU institutions and that much vilified Brussels bureaucracy.

Yet almost twice as many people (45%) believe Britain's membership of the EU to be a "bad thing", with just 25% calling it a "good thing". So, is the key to changing British attitudes towards the EU "detoxifying the brand"? Opposition to some integration is of course deep-seated, and not confined to Eurosceptics. The Euro and anything called a "constitution" will always be a hard-sell. But Cameron would do well to devote some of his PR expertise to making other areas of pragmatic cooperation more palatable, because like it or not, they are the way of the future.

2 | Squeezed Youth: Losing chances, missing out on choice

Gillian Econopouly

On what feels like a daily basis, headlines shout about the unprecedented levels of UK youth unemployment. With the number of young people not in education or employment creeping past one million, the redtop alarm bells about a ‘lost generation’ are for once all too accurate.

A ‘perfect storm’ in the labour market means gaining employment is harder than ever

Young people leaving school or even university are faced with a ‘perfect storm’ of unparalleled proportions. Many experienced workers have adopted a bunker mentality during the recession and stayed in existing roles, even when their skill set has outgrown their position. This has led to a lack of fluidity across the jobs market, with fewer opportunities opening up, including entry level roles.

At the same time, many workers, including highly experienced ones, have lost jobs which were once secure. The axe fell sharply in the private sector early in the recession, while public sector job losses that initially lagged are now coming through with a vengeance. Predictably, the Coalition Government’s promises to maintain frontline services are proving hollow, with staff cuts announced across the public sector. This means competition for public sector jobs is fiercer than ever, with young

people likely to lose out to experienced candidates for roles that could start them on the career ladder.

Meanwhile, the Government's anticipated private sector recovery, slated to create some 500,000 new jobs, is nowhere on the horizon, pushing young people even further down the hiring queue.

Higher education is for many no longer an obvious alternative

What are young people to do in such a hostile labour market? As last year's graduates still attempt to get a foot in the door via unpaid or voluntary roles, the latest crop of young people face even bleaker prospects. Their choices have narrowed enormously, and the options of joining the workforce or attending university can seem equally risky. With university fees climbing to £9,000 per year for many institutions, even excellent students whose families can support their education will think again about doing a degree.

The new fee levels are not only a financial barrier to qualified students but a psychological one, especially for young people from less affluent backgrounds. The new fees system risks eroding much of the excellent progress made under Labour to expand access to higher learning and to unlock the social mobility that accompanies it.

The Coalition is cutting important life lines

A significant number of the barriers young people now face stem directly from the exceptional economic conditions. But the decisions by the Coalition Government have also severed crucial lifelines.

For example, not only will university be out of reach for many, but the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) has left even 16-19 year olds out in the cold. This programme became means tested under Labour to support those from lower-income families. At £30 per week, the EMA is enough to help young people travel and purchase materials for their studies. Saving £120 per student per month may look like low-hanging fruit, but students around the country will struggle to carry on at college, let alone achieve a successful career. After taking this

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policy decision, the Government has since responded to pressure on this issue by establishing a replacement bursary scheme. But as this is just one-third the size of the EMA, many who would have received assistance in the past will no longer qualify.

Young people will also lose out on the Future Jobs Fund programme which created temporary but genuine job opportunities for those who have been unemployed for some time. Temping work or short-term contracts are an excellent way to build young people's confidence and exposure to the world of work and a tried and tested route to longer, sustainable employment. But this programme has also been deemed too costly to continue.

The wider overhaul of the benefits system will also have an impact. The housing benefit caps via the universal credit scheme will push poorer families further away from centres of economic and educational opportunity. Places like central London already face difficulty in spreading wealth and opportunity, but such centres will soon be out of reach for many families. This means that young people will face not only economic and social segregation, but geographic isolation as well – yet another example of squeezed choice.

The apprenticeship guarantee is being taken away

The Coalition Government claims it has not left young people adrift, but their plans look inadequate on further investigation. For example, the campaign to promote apprenticeships begun under Labour has worked exceptionally well among young people and parents, with the demand for apprenticeship places exploding in the last few years. Last year, competition for apprenticeships at certain large employers was fiercer percentage-wise than admission to Oxbridge, and the number of apprenticeship opportunities for young people still lags far behind demand.

Under Labour, apprenticeships more than quadrupled. But this resurgence has not been met with sufficient commitment by the current Government to ensure young people seeking an apprenticeship can find one. The guarantee of an apprenticeship place for every 16-18 year old who wants one is ending. The current policy of merely encouraging businesses to create apprenticeships is not enough. While it is encouraging to see procurement processes beginning to include the creation of apprenticeship places, there is a growing risk that the progress made in recent years on apprenticeships will slip away – along with young people’s enthusiasm.

Protecting youth employment carries social benefits that we can’t afford to jeopardise

Why is employment, particularly among young people, such a holy grail for policymakers? It isn’t merely the personal satisfaction and financial independence that stem from work. Instead, we know that employment is the key to preventing a range of social challenges. Complex issues around poverty, physical and mental health, educational attainment and family stability are all exacerbated by worklessness, but improved significantly by secure and sustainable work. And the earlier young people can join the workforce, the less likely they are to face such problems later on.

It isn’t just the young people who are nervous about their future. Among adults, less than one in ten believe that life will be easier for their children than it was for them, whilst seven in ten think it will be harder. Unfortunately, these fears seem to be well-founded. Even those young people who manage to complete their education and find paid work will struggle to achieve the independence their parents and grandparents enjoyed. Purchasing a house, for example, is out of the reach of many well paid professionals in their 30s, let alone those on lower wages. Even renting a flat is extremely costly in many areas. And

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as wages lag behind rising living costs, more young people will have no option but to remain at home, even if they prefer to live independently. The end result is a continuing path of limited choices, even if the hurdles of education and finding a job are overcome.

What is to be done?

Against this backdrop, what are the options for policymakers? First of all, this Government must heed the lessons of history – namely, that short-term cuts may lead to enduring problems. Our country is still living with the legacy of drastic cuts to social programmes, made under the last Tory government in the 1980s, and the social poison of mass unemployment. Replicating this among the current generation of young people must be avoided at all costs.

The Government must also avoid false economies. For example, from a purely fiscal perspective, the Institute of Fiscal studies says that the cost of EMA is 'completely offset' by its benefits. In short, the cost of this programme is a drop in the ocean compared to a lifetime of income support for those who have been left out of the workforce, so scrapping it seems foolhardy.

Beyond preserving successful programmes, what new options are available? Crucially, we must not underestimate the tough business climate. Therefore financial incentives like national insurance holidays for firms taking on young people merit exploration. While NICs revenue will be lower, young people in work still contribute income tax and are adding to the economy rather than receiving benefits. And beyond their impact on the Exchequer, they are participating in society, developing their potential and developing the confidence to make the best choices for their future.

The rules around internships should also be reviewed. While ideally all internships would be paid, current economic realities mean that making all such roles subject to NMW legislation has actually reduced

opportunities. Many companies have withdrawn opportunities that were offered as 'expenses-only' or within their CSR programmes.

With a shrinking pool of internships available, young people often rely on family or other connections to get this valuable experience. And many simply cannot afford to work for free, even if they find an opportunity. These circumstances limit, rather than widen access overall. A solution such as defining internships within employment law, to avoid exploitation of young people, and allowing those on JSA to continue claiming their benefits while working in an unpaid internship would make a big difference. The Coalition Government has recently announced that young people on JSA can do unpaid work experience placements, so extending this flexibility to internships is a sensible next step.

The benefits system overhaul should also focus on increased flexibility as a route into the jobs market. It is unrealistic to expect that those who have been out of work for some time can directly enter a full time, permanent role. This is even less likely given the competition for jobs at present. However, if benefits were flexible enough for people to take on shorter roles, for example a few weeks of temporary work, they would more quickly develop the experience and skills required to eventually secure sustained employment.

At present, the complexity and risk of giving up benefits for a short term role prevents many who would like to work from doing so. This is a classic example of a benefits trap, and creating a 'pause' mechanism for benefits (perhaps of 4-6 weeks) would allow young people and others to get valuable experience.

These initiatives represent a few ways that policy levers could help young people, wider society, and the Exchequer alike. Ed Miliband has helpfully spoken out about the crisis facing young people, but the Labour movement must present practical solutions and alternatives. It is our responsibility to secure for young people the choice and opportunity they deserve.

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There is no doubt that we are in uncertain and economically testing times. But making policy decisions that drastically limit or even erase young people's ability to choose their own futures is unacceptable. The wrong decisions come at the expense of the next 40, 50 or 60 years of a young person's life. And that is far too high a price for us – or them – to pay.

3 | Child punishment: Where the Nanny State doesn't go far enough

Ellie Cumbo

In March 2011, the Office of the Children's Commissioner published a report into the use of restraint techniques in secure juvenile centres across the UK. Restraint, which involves the deliberate use of pain against those in custody, is only sanctioned in cases of last resort, for example to avoid danger to themselves or others. The report found that it is instead being widely used as a punishment, and called for an explicit and immediate ban on this misuse.

This is in fact not the first indication of the heavy-handed approach often taken towards children in custody. In January 2011, an inquest into the death of Adam Rickwood, the youngest person ever to die in custody in the UK, found that the use of unlawful restraint against him had contributed to his suicide.¹ Adam had refused to go to his cell and had resisted when four care officers picked him up and carried him there; to stop him biting, one of them delivered a karate-chop-style blow to the base of Adam's nose that left him still bleeding half an hour later. That night, he hanged himself with his shoelaces.

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Home is where the heart of the problem is

It may be tempting to dismiss both Adam's story and even the Children's Commissioner's report as nothing more than an argument for better training in institutions. But this would be to ignore a strange anomaly exposed by this growing condemnation of disciplinary violence against children. It does not address the same issue in the very place where most abuse of children in fact occurs- the home. It remains apparently uncontroversial that adults in the UK have the right to use a degree of violence against a child, however slight, that would not be permitted against another adult.

Moreover, while restraint is at least theoretically confined to cases where there is no other choice, hitting children remains legal in any circumstances that adults consider "reasonable". In other words, far from being preserved in law simply as a last resort, our law in fact allows the deliberate hurting and humiliating of children as a first resort.

Small wonder, then, that the most recent research suggests that nearly 60% of parents in this country smack their children in any given year, and 71% do so in their child's lifetime.² It seems that many adults in households up and down the country are struggling with the same question posed by one of the care officers at Adam Rickwood's inquest: "When it's time for the children to go to bed, if they all turned around and said 'no', what are you going to do?"

A very British flaw

Our apparent attachment to physical discipline places the UK in a minority among our European neighbours, most of whom have banned smacking as a legal form of punishment; More than half the 47 countries in the Council of Europe give children and adults equal protection, and of the 27 which are also member states of the European Union, we are in a minority of 10.³ It even places us at odds with countries we are not

accustomed to seeing as more socially liberal. 2010 saw full prohibition of corporal punishment in Kenya, Tunisia and Poland.

The British, however, remain not only impervious to this trend, but at times openly hostile. In April 2010, Thomas Hammarberg, the European Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe, wrote in favour of an outright ban on smacking in the *Guardian*:

"I have often been asked how one is supposed to make children obey if one cannot hit them. The answer is: with words. We should not teach children that it is acceptable to "resolve" disagreements with violence. Instead, they should be taught by example to listen and discuss."

The reaction from commentators was a perhaps predictable role-call of British bugbears: the end of discipline, the nanny state, and, of course, EU bureaucrats in Brussels (despite the fact that Hammarberg and the Council of Europe are nothing to do with the EU, and are based in Strasbourg).

The experts for once agree

In fact, Hammarberg's arguments are overwhelmingly supported by professional experts right here on British soil. These include not only the 400 organisations who are members of the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance, who range from the NSPCC to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, but even the celebrity childcare experts who take up increasing space in our TV schedules and magazine pages.³

Smacking, they agree, risks teaching children the wrong messages about violence, instilling fear instead of meaningful consideration of right and wrong, and damaging children's relationships with their parents. It may even stunt psycho-sexual development. And as all point out, even if these dangers are preventable in loving homes where childcare manuals presumably line the walls, there are plenty of alternative methods of discipline available, from the naughty step to *Supernanny's* "Reflection Room", that simply do not carry the risks in

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the first place. We do not need to smack, so why does the right to do it remain so carefully preserved in our law?

In legal terms, the historical defence of “reasonable chastisement” applied to any act against a person under 16 that would otherwise qualify as an assault, from common assault to causing grievous bodily harm. The Children Act 2004 changed the law so that the defence, now called “reasonable punishment”, only covers the level of injury associated with common assault of a child. In other words, a “transient or trifling” injury that causes no more than “reddening of the skin” is now the only form of physical punishment that UK law allows.

Politicians are playing catch up

Even getting to this position was an epic tale of individual determination and mealy-mouthed resistance by the authorities, although an Erin-Brockovich-style film adaptation seems unlikely given the prominent role played by that most powerful of public bogeymen, the European Convention on Human Rights. In 1993, the stepfather of a nine-year-old boy known as A was prosecuted for assault occasioning actual bodily harm after A's school rang social services. 'A' had been repeatedly beaten with a garden cane, causing injuries that would count as actual bodily harm, since he was at least three years younger, and had even been on the Child Protection Register. Nevertheless, the stepfather claimed a defence of reasonable chastisement and was duly acquitted. A and his father then decided to pursue a case against the UK under the European Convention, arguing that A's Article 3 right not to suffer degrading treatment had been violated.

The Strasbourg Court ruled in A's favour, on the basis that UK law had failed to give him a remedy against unacceptable violence, but they did agree to the government's request not to make any statement about the use of physical punishment in general. Tony Blair's Labour government duly delivered on the commitment to changing the law in 2004 by introducing the Children Act, so that actual bodily harm to

children in the name of discipline became completely illegal – for the first time in our history.

In this way, offering even partial protection to children like A was not in fact a political choice, but a legal obligation that the UK tried to resist or at least qualify at every single turn. And perhaps with good cause: as with the most recent battle over voting rights of prisoners, this was a subject that seemed to range all the forces of tradition, perceived common sense and national sovereignty against a few sappy liberals.

In fact, however, hidden away in the House of Lords was a reservoir of political will not only to criminalise more severe violence, but to end physical punishment altogether. The Parliamentary debate among peers showed an astonishing level of consensus from a diverse range of viewpoints, such as the Bishop of Oxford citing the “extraordinary respect and high regard” that Jesus had for children. Even the minority who insisted the defence should stay accepted the undesirability of smacking, believing that the right approach was to educate parents to use alternative techniques instead. As self-described libertarian Conservative Lord Lucas observed: “Why do we smack children? Because we do not know a better way of communicating at that moment. Why do we not know one? Because most of us have never been taught.”

It may be argued that, just as one swallow does not make a summer, so a few peers do not make a public. But in fact, when the Government consulted on this part of the Act three years later, the vast majority of respondents, including parents as well as childcare professionals, agreed that the protection for children had not gone far enough. Yet neither this, nor the Parliamentary effort, nor any subsequent lobbying has been enough to persuade a British government into fully protecting children.

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The law is an ass

We are therefore left with a law that can legitimately be criticised in several ways. The first flaw is that legislating about the injury caused, but not the actual form of the violence, leaves many disturbing options open. Slapping is not the only form of assault that leaves a “trifling or transient” injury such as “reddening of the skin”; kicking, pinching and even Chinese burns are also presumably in the clear. The law also offers no protection from extra humiliation, such as nudity or being assaulted in public.

Secondly, in choosing to maintain a loophole that legitimises assault of children, the Government makes no distinction between responsible parents who occasionally smack, often out of panic or frustration, and parents who hit excessively often or for very little reason. Removing the reasonable punishment defence altogether would be unlikely to criminalise the occasional heat-of-the-moment slap, which would not meet the public interest test for prosecution, but would root out the borderline abusers who will otherwise never be compelled to stop.

This is already the case when adults hit each other: the vast majority of minor, instantly-regretted instances of lashing out during a row fail to cross the threshold for any kind of intervention from police or prosecutors. But with violence to children, society tolerates any reason, any context and any degree of frequency as long as the skin isn't bruised. Provided you don't hit too hard, there's apparently no such thing as inappropriate use of physical punishment.

Finally, and perhaps most worryingly, it is difficult to see how children are expected to identify and report illegal abuse when a lesser form of deliberate violence has the full backing of the state. The current position effectively requires a child to know the difference between common assault and actual bodily harm, not an absolutely clear-cut concept even for lawyers. This is absurd and irresponsible for any country that takes child protection seriously.

Social progressivism means protecting the most vulnerable

Social progressivism means focusing on the most vulnerable against more powerful interests, but in fact there is nobody who does not stand to benefit from an end to physical punishment. Not only would children be protected from violence but parents and indeed all adults would be empowered to respond to young people in more positive ways.

Beyond these principles, there are also sound practical arguments: alternative forms of discipline do not yet seem to have led to the breakdown of civilisation in any of the countries that give children equal protection from assault. Finally, there is the political case: despite the obvious risks, there is considerable support from a wide range of actors for legislation that puts children's safety and dignity first. It's unlikely to be easy, but is necessary and long overdue.

It's time to show that the adults of Britain can tell the difference between right and wrong.

4 | Opening up and reaching out: Reforming the Labour Party

Jessica Studdert

To be an effective force for good, equality and the pursuit of social justice, the Labour Party must draw its strength from the dynamic currents of our society. Internal party debates about reform of process and structure will always rumble on, and waves of opinion will ebb and flow. Interpretations of Labour Party history, experience of previous initiatives, individual preferences and contemporary policy priorities all inform a wide range of individual opinions about party reform – often strongly held and bitterly defended. But while we indulge in naval gazing, the world keeps turning. And the most radical right-wing government this country has ever shouldered embarks on full-throttle attack of left wing policies, values, institutions and progress.

We must ensure that the current wave of discussion about party reform is based on a clear end goal: building a coalition of support to win back national government. Only then can we once more seek to put Labour values into practice, however messy and unsatisfactory the reality of that may be for some people. The question before us now is therefore how our party can best be constructed to attract broad support, encourage participation and present a strong, persuasive policy platform to build the momentum needed to take back power.

Rethinking our approach to participation

The Labour Party sets very high barriers to participation, is rigidly hierarchical and is governed by the 'three Rs': rules, rules, rules.¹ Notwithstanding short term fluctuations reflecting electoral tides, the Labour Party's membership has been falling gradually since its early 1950s peak of over a million people. This trend is not unique to us: social democratic parties across Europe have been experiencing steady decline – both in membership and share of the electorate.²

The world is changing and to avoid irrelevance, the Labour Party must adapt. Consumerism means that people expect more choice, instant gratification and a high degree of personal efficacy from their interactions. Longer working hours and busy social lives put a high premium on time. Greater mobility means that people feel less attachment to geographic communities than they do to communities of interest, and increasingly people live more isolated lives without wider participation with their neighbours and locality.

Responding to these changes need not involve morphing into a hollow, virtual party without substance. But it does mean Labour must be more creative and offer different opportunities for participation that match people's lives and expectations. It must allow people to become involved in different ways than simple membership.

Shocking as it may seem to some of us, not everyone wants to attend branch meetings, become a Conference delegate, or has aspirations to EC officer status. Some people are interested in being broadly associated with a progressive political movement that they can dip into as they wish. If football club season ticket holders, supporters and armchair fans can co-exist happily for the good of their team, there is no reason why this should not be the case for the Labour Party. If we don't make room for this diversity then soon maybe nobody at all will turn up to watch the match.

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Revive the Supporters Network

The Labour Supporters Network was trialled in 2006 and seems to have died a quiet death – it is time to resuscitate it, promote it, and pursue an active supporters drive. To be successful and retain credibility with party stalwarts, the distinction between membership and supporter benefits would need to be clearly defined. Internal democracy should be reserved for members only - supporters would not get voting rights at GCs or Annual Conference and they would not be able to participate in internal Labour Party elections. Free training opportunities run by the Party would be reserved only for members, available to supporters perhaps for a fee.

But supporters would be invited to events and campaign-related activities. They should certainly be able to participate in policy forums, since they represent a broader section of the public than members alone and so their views are of value. This is not a question of 'dilution'; it is simply recognising the importance of being relevant to the wider public. Within the policy-making process, those CLPs that can demonstrate broad engagement with supporters and their wider community should carry greater weight, since their positions have more credibility and legitimacy.

Focus on retaining new joiners

Over 60,000 new members have joined Labour since the Tory-led Government assumed office. These new members by definition are not motivated by tribal attachment to the party, but by the potential it offers as a vehicle to express their progressive views. The Labour Party must devise and pursue a clear member retention strategy, with a focus on these new joiners. A new members survey could help identify why people signed up, what they expect from membership, and what other causes they support – information that could usefully inform future reforms to the party's membership 'offer'.

Offer a wider variety of opportunities for members

To encourage people to increase their activism, the Labour Party must build in a sense of empathy to its approach. People are motivated to participate for a number of reasons, in isolation or in combination, including: pure values, single issues, personal experience, social and community involvement, individual ambition, professional development.³ The party must understand what it is that drives an individual to prioritise leaflet delivery on a wet Saturday morning over socialising, shopping or sport. People need opportunities that are meaningful to them in order to properly engage.

This understanding of different motivations to action can then inform a participation 'offer' to members that is both broad and deep. A wider variety of opportunities should be available alongside the staple meetings and canvassing sessions: local policy forums, debates open to local people, campaigns and social evenings organised jointly with other community groups. More training opportunities run by regional offices would give people the chance to gain transferrable skills and accredited qualifications.

Encouraging and giving CLPs the tools to run focussed, issue-based campaigns would potentially increase participation around particular local concerns. Results-oriented involvement is most attractive to some people who might have more patience and motivation for particular issues, or who want to commit themselves on a more selective basis, for a limited time and on a given project, or who may simply want to make their voice heard.⁴

Devise a sophisticated strategy to deepen participation over time

As well as offering multiple opportunities for engagement with a diverse range of people, we need a sophisticated strategy to deepen participation over time. Too often with the Labour Party it is all or

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nothing: many people either find it difficult to get 'in' with a cliquey local party in the first place, or they turn up and get bombarded with requests to leaflet, canvass, stand for elected position immediately. Both scenarios can have the effect of turning people off. Instead, we must seek to develop people's attachment to the party over time, building trust and reciprocity so that people form valued relationships.

To achieve this, the party must prioritise ensuring the quality and capability of CLP officers – since they coordinate local members, activity and community engagement. CLPs must be flexible and responsive to the concerns of local people and to develop a local reputation as a good vehicle through which to express activism and concern. Since the effects of this Government's policies will be felt by individuals and communities most palpably, it is at this level the Labour Party needs to intersect with the public. To properly enable this, Labour must rebalance the centre of gravity of the party from the centre to the locality.

Rebalance the party: local-regional-central

From its inception as the Labour Representation Committee in 1900, which first brought the broad spectrum of working class and left wing organisations together, the Labour movement was built on grassroots momentum. More recently the Party has responded to declines in membership by centralising campaigns, selections and having narrow top-down measures of effectiveness such as voter ID volumes. Control is highly concentrated at the top, and CLPs have little demand of them but to fulfil procedural requirements and meet centrally defined targets, enforced by regional offices who are in turn answerable to Labour HQ. We now find ourselves in the peculiar position of having to bring in an outside organisation to rediscover the spirit and skill of 'community organising', but this will potentially replace one form of top-down management with another.

Opening up and reaching out

There is no point in reinventing the wheel, especially when there is a vast range of committed activists, members and councillors across the country who have been campaigning to win elections for years. To get the best from them, they do not need rigid diktats and orders imposed unilaterally from above. Instead they need to be enabled to build local capacity, allowed the space to innovate and trusted to adapt to local circumstances.

Particular electoral successes such as Birmingham Edgbaston evolved as models that responded to local need rather than following directly centrally defined priorities. But the results spoke for themselves. Their focus on building substantive qualitative relationships with volunteers as an early priority, led to eventual quantitative gain from a greater capacity to gather relevant data - a completely fresh voter-ID was completed in just a few weeks - and turnout. Within the Party, strategic oversight should be rebalanced from the centre to the regional offices, which are better positioned to oversee and support CLPs to be effective campaign units. They in turn need to nurture and encourage, as the best currently do, rather than command and control, in order to allow a flexible and appropriate response to local circumstances.

The change needed as a party should not be beyond us

The Refounding Labour process has been a constructive opportunity for members to make their voices heard and influence the future shape of the Party. A wider range of views are also important - those of people who left us, or who identify as broadly left of centre but never joined up in the first place - if we really want to engage beyond our core. We need to learn from other organisations that successfully capture people's enthusiasm and motivation to achieve progressive outcomes – such as the Hope Not Hate campaign.

Certainly, the structural and cultural evolution from a bureaucratic and centralised party to one that values the personal and the local will

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not happen overnight, and involves trust and 'letting go' on all sides. Above all, we need to rediscover a sense of community, reciprocity, and empathy, which should underpin both our collective approach and the demands we make of individual participants.

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“Shaw said, at the foundation of the Fabian Society, “We determined to use the available power of democracy to extend it.” That just about sums up the modern Young Fabians and, best of all, their determination recognises no limits.”

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Young Fabian Women talk policy and politics

Gender equality is beneficial to our entire society, and the fight for stronger representation in Parliament and in boardrooms, for better childcare support and more flexibility in the workplace must continue. But for this inaugural Young Fabian Women pamphlet, we have consciously asked our authors to focus on subjects which lie outside the areas traditionally regarded as 'women's issues'.

We hope that this publication encourages more young women to get engaged in the political arena, to debate thoughts and ideas, to ask questions and make their voice heard. Young Fabian Women have a lot to say, and deserve to be listened to.

"I welcome this pamphlet, the first written by Young Fabian Women. It is an important platform for young women in our movement to debate and write about politics. Fabian women have long been at the forefront of the arguments for women's representation, and our progressive agenda on equality. I strongly support the next generation of young Fabian women taking up the mantle and pushing these arguments forward."

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- Baroness Goudie

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