

# Spotlight

Thought leadership and policy

## Party Policy Special: Pathways to power

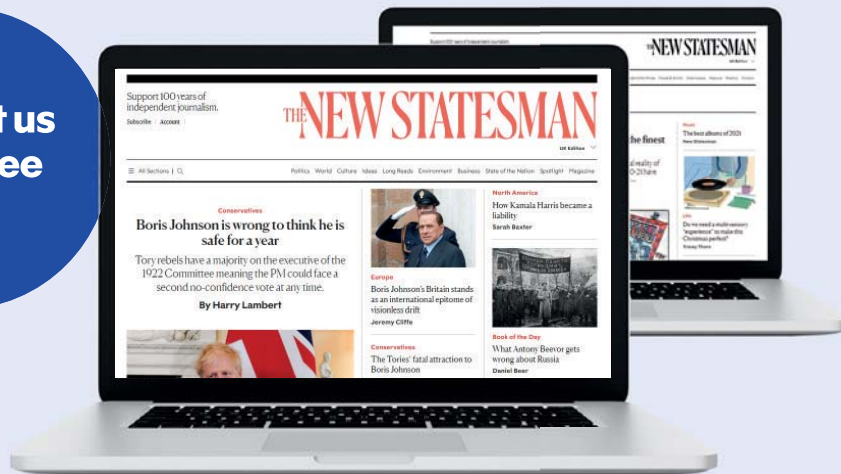
Michelle Donelan | Chloe Smith  
Jonathan Reynolds  
Alastair Campbell



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# From pledge to policy

A general election will take place in the UK no later than January 2025. In the lead-up to the vote, political parties will test the electoral waters with policy announcements, spending commitments, and potential manifesto pledges.

This is always risky. Poorly received ideas can damage a party's chance of victory, and policies can be borrowed by others. The childcare crisis is one such example. Last year, when the shadow education secretary Bridget Phillipson was talking up a storm about Labour's promises to overhaul the childcare sector, Rishi Sunak quietly dropped his predecessor Liz Truss's plans for reform. But then, in the March Budget, the Chancellor Jeremy Hunt pipped Labour to the post, announcing a Conservative policy on this vote-winning issue. And this month, Labour has confirmed its ambitions were never to introduce reform as bold as universal childcare.

Labour's pledge to invest £28bn a year in the green economy is arguably

another victim of the long preamble to the election. This month, shadow chancellor Rachel Reeves said the full target spend wouldn't be reached until 2027, prompting accusations of a "U-turn". Labour's mixed messaging on the policy makes it clear the party wants to signal, above all, that voters can trust it with public money. But a perceived lack of boldness on climate action won't necessarily help its chances.

Such vacillation will certainly continue until manifestos are set. This special edition of the *Spotlight* supplement, out ahead of the *New Statesman's* flagship Politics Live conference on 27 June, looks more broadly at policymaking in the run-up to the general election. We reveal the secret life of election manifestos, and speak to former cabinet and permanent secretaries – the most senior civil servants in the UK – to hear the untold story of government transitions.

What of the difficult challenges our politicians face? Alongside a symposium on how policymakers can make a "good" digital society, shadow business secretary Jonathan Reynolds outlines Labour's approach to industrial strategy.

And, returning to electoral politics, Alastair Campbell, the former Downing Street press secretary, gives his advice to Labour ahead of the next general election: take nothing for granted. ●

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## Spotlight

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# How do you build a good digital society?

## The tech sector needs guidance, not laissez-faire governance

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### TECHNOLOGY HAS TO WORK FOR US, NOT AGAINST US

**Michelle Donelan & Chloe Smith**  
Secretaries of State for Science, Innovation and Technology

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Consider the wealth of innovation we are seeing in the NHS today through digital technology: from telemedicine helping patients receive quality care in the comfort of their homes, to AI improving diagnostics and treatments for diseases like cancer and Alzheimer's. Whether it's with surgical robots or virtual GP appointments, medtech is driving delivery of the PM's pledge to cut waiting lists, while helping people live longer, healthier lives. And we want to see that same spirit of innovation applied to all our public services.

To build that thriving digital society, we need healthy competition so smaller start-ups have the space to innovate and get new services and products to market. Our Digital Markets Competition and Consumers Bill is making that vision a reality. It will ensure businesses relying on the biggest tech firms aren't strong-armed with restrictive contracts.

We must also ensure that reliable, high-speed internet is available to everyone when they need it, where they need it. We have made real strides towards this goal with 75 per cent of the UK now covered by gigabit-capable broadband. Almost 80 per cent of the country is covered by 5G, and we have just appointed a new rural connectivity champion – Simon Fell – to work with us on hitting nationwide coverage as soon as we can.

Tech must be accessible in its development and in its deployment, and the benefits of connectivity must extend to all – especially young people using the internet to learn, study and connect.

Alongside those freedoms, we must afford people safety, security and privacy. Our Online Safety Bill will force social media companies to up their game on removing illegal material and stopping children from seeing harmful content. And our approach to AI regulation will ensure that the right guardrails are in place to encourage safe, responsible innovation.

A good digital society is one in which technology works for us, and not against us, in creating a safer, happier, healthier country. That's what our department is trying to achieve. ●

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## NOTIONS OF THE DIGITAL GOOD ARE POLITICAL

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**Helen Kennedy**

Professor of Digital Society,  
University of Sheffield

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From algorithms introducing bias under the guise of fairness to policies designed to make social media safer that do the opposite, well-intentioned technologies can end up doing harm.

Because digital technologies are not always good for societies, we need to “imagine and craft the worlds we cannot live without”, as the US sociologist Ruha Benjamin says. To limit future harms, we need to think about how to build a good digital society.

But that simple word, good, is surprisingly complex. There’s no consensus on what it means. To understand it, we could draw on philosophical ideas. Or we could follow the guidance of computing ethicists on what should and should not be built. Or we could take account of ordinary people’s understandings of whether, how and for whom digital technologies are good (something that too rarely happens). Ideally, we would do all of these things, because bridging these differences is essential for advancing the good digital society.

Bridging differences is not straightforward. What a good digital society looks like is complicated. And it’s also political. If my politics aren’t the same as yours, then my good digital society might not be yours. Seeking a good digital society will involve hashing out our differences, standing up for our vision, disagreeing with each other, facing impasses. But this is better than oversimplifying the challenge.

On the Digital Good Network, we believe that addressing the following challenges is crucial:

- 1) sustainability, because our current digital technology use has serious environmental effects;
- 2) resilience, because digital innovations can play a role in providing support and infrastructure for individual and collective well-being;
- 3) equity, because of the myriad examples of interconnections between the digital world, access, and inequality.

Because these are major challenges, maybe we won’t arrive at a good digital society, but as web accessibility advocates say, it’s the journey, not the destination, that matters. ●

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## WE NEED ACTIVE GOVERNMENT

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**Lucy Powell**

Shadow Secretary for Digital,  
Culture, Media and Sport

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The digital revolution is radically altering the way we live, work and play. Now the rapid development of AI brings this age of change into profound focus.

Digital technology has opened up huge and exciting possibilities, connecting people across continents, widening job and education opportunities, and offering new markets for businesses. It also has the power to transform healthcare, scientific discovery and productivity. With the right approach we can grow the economy, transform public services and open up opportunity.

But for too long the government has stood on the sidelines, letting tech disruptions run amok rather than shaping and harnessing them for the common good. We’ve seen huge increases in online scams, children vulnerable to predators online, bricks and mortar businesses squashed by huge online competitors, and now workers at the mercy of decisions made by machines without any recourse.

The key question facing those of us ambitious for a good digital society is who will benefit from the disruption? Will it leave some behind, or can it help build a society where everyone is included and inequalities are narrowed not widened?

Labour is ambitious for the future. To build a digital society and economy that works for everyone we must get the foundations right. That means action to ensure families and firms can access digital infrastructure; that people have the skills to engage, with affordable broadband for those on low incomes; and a government that uses digital applications to improve public services. It also means an active industrial strategy that has data and digital at its heart, unlocking productivity with responsible regulation that drives innovation and growth.

Labour will be an active government working with business, civil society, workers and our public services to use digital and tech advances to deliver for the common good, ensuring the right guardrails and protections are in place, while making the UK the country of choice for tech investment. ●

The key question for a good digital society is a simple one: who benefits?



# Britain's banks can drive prosperity everywhere

## Support for international trade underpins growth

By John Carroll

In association with



It would be an understatement to say that the economy has been through a tough time over the last few years. Despite the recent internal challenges and macro shocks, the UK financial services sector has stayed resilient, using innovative ways to support our customers facing financial difficulty, as well as helping the wider recovery.

At Santander we are particularly passionate about restoring economic growth during this period of instability. One of the ways we do this is by proactively supporting businesses to prosper, especially internationally. We want to encourage businesses to make new connections as we believe business isn't just about the people you know, but also the people you don't.

The UK has several million small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and those that export globally play a disproportionately critical role in economic growth. We know that these companies grow much faster than purely domestic-focused companies and in difficult times are much less likely to fail. So we've spent time understanding what SMEs that want to export really need. Every six months we conduct the Santander Trade Barometer poll, going in-depth to understand UK businesses' opportunities and concerns.

Our Spring Trade Barometer again confirmed that UK businesses trading internationally are outperforming those limited to domestic trading: 59 per cent of international companies report improved performance over the past year compared to 46 per cent that are solely domestic. International companies were also more confident of growth than their purely domestic counterparts.

The barometer tells us what businesses need to thrive internationally, too. They need access to new buyers; access to new and trusted suppliers; support understanding regulatory hurdles, which differ market to market; access to the cheapest and most sustainable logistics rates; and support on payments and financing trade. They also need help with finding new skilled staff and upskilling existing employees.

Last year we built a digital trade platform that aims to address these issues – Santander Navigator. The platform brings together Santander's expertise, our knowledge and our global network to allow UK businesses to identify international markets,

understand the opportunities for growth, and overcome barriers. It is personalised to a company's specific needs, providing end-to-end support across the entire international journey, covering the vast majority of UK trade corridors with all major partners.

The platform is designed to help these crucial SMEs grow internationally, in the most cost-effective way but also to assist them in saving what is probably their most precious commodity as business owners – time. To do that, we can help customers identify which markets have the demand for their specific product or service and aid them in accessing that market.

In India, the increase in the number of whisky consumers each year is equal to the entire population of Australia. So, in February this year, we organised a unique opportunity for UK alcohol manufacturers to connect with both consumers and distributors in India. We took 14 businesses to Mumbai, New Delhi and Gurugram, where we organised a programme of activities to bring together UK spirit producers and discerning Indian buyers. Businesses got invaluable feedback and insights directly from the Indian market, as well as support in understanding the regulatory framework and what they should consider.

For the businesses involved, the programme has forged connections with India's leading importers, retail trade, and influencers – opening doors to new opportunities. In fact, we expect the first contracts resulting from this trip to be signed imminently.

Europe continues to represent an opportunity for growth for specific UK sectors. For example, the e-commerce market in Poland is expecting to see double-digit annual growth for the next five years, as Polish consumers continue to move towards digital channels for their everyday needs.

That said, there are hurdles, and this is where we draw on our global support network. We recently supported UK companies by facilitating introductions to Poland's largest e-commerce platform. As part of the programme, we provided a range of tailored solutions to support each company with their trade compliance requirements and logistics needs, including an introduction to the UK's leading barcode provider and help



**Santander is providing the tools and finance to help SME exporters to market**

with understanding the complexities of labelling requirements.

However, we haven't forgotten that Santander is first and foremost a bank, and financing is core to how we support growth, especially via our market-leading growth capital proposition and our full suite of banking solutions. We're working innovatively to drive growth, but government can also do more to support internationally growing companies.

There are three areas that we think government should focus on. Firstly, it needs to negotiate with foreign governments to help overcome the biggest obstacle for SMEs that want to trade internationally – bureaucracy. Yes, this should include new trade deals, but it should also work to reduce the barriers that are currently in place when trading with our biggest economic partner, the EU. Secondly, the government should continue to build on the excellent work done by UK Export Finance to come together with banks to finance new

exporters and trade with countries with a complicated risk profile, as has been done through the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme. Finally, it should continue its work on legislating for electronic transferable records to free up the 4 billion paper documents that are currently underpinning the international trade system, creating inefficiencies for SMEs looking to grow internationally.

So, although we're going through a challenging time as a country, at Santander we're working hard to ensure that our sector stays strong through innovation, leveraging our extensive global network to create leading products such as the Santander Navigator. The key to recovery is economic growth and, by working together, government and banks can deliver sustainable growth across the UK and build a resilient economy. ●


*John Carroll is head of international and transactional banking at Santander UK*

# The secret life of an election pledge

Manifesto writers on the untold story of this vital policy document

By Samir Jeraj

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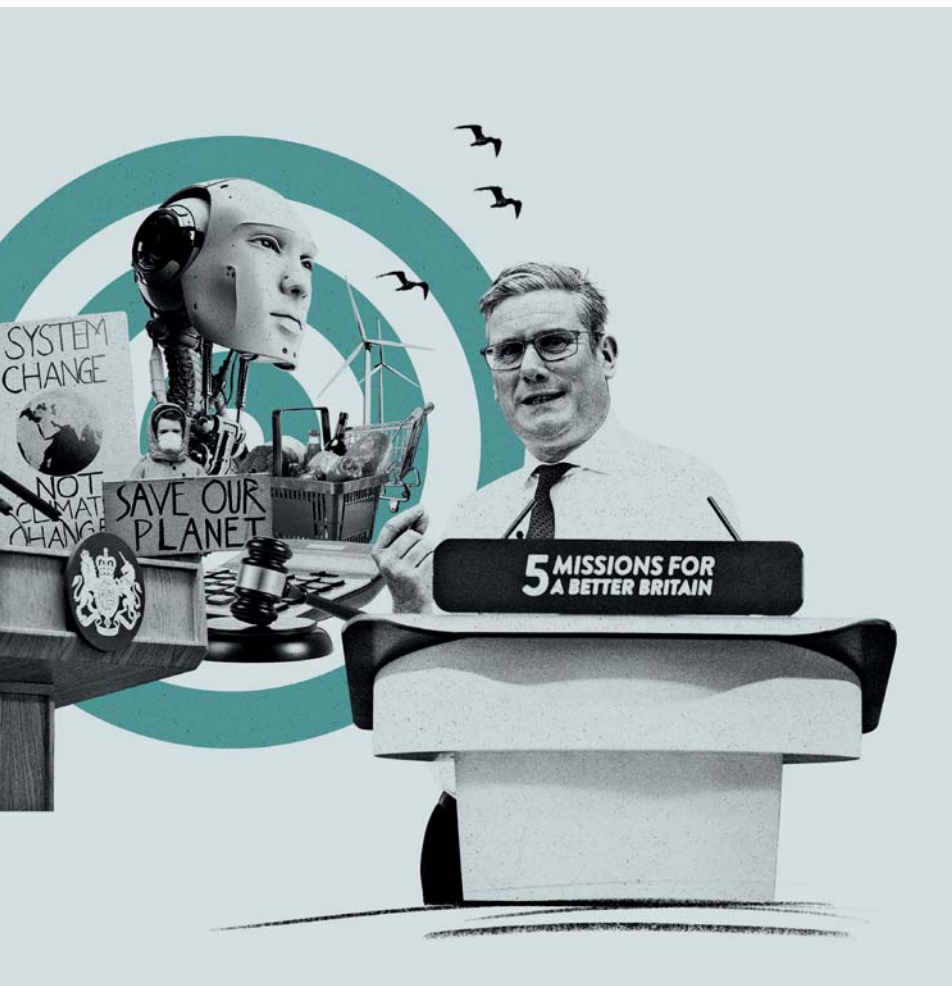


Only a few years before New Labour pledged to introduce a minimum wage, the idea was widely dismissed as utopian or catastrophic. Even the leadership of some major trade unions thought it was a step too far. But by the 1997 election the policy had appeared in New Labour's manifesto, and it became a flagship reform of the Tony Blair government.

What had changed? Part of the answer is that campaigners had convinced the unions of the merits of setting a floor on salaries. When some, such as Usdaw, which represents retail workers, adopted the minimum wage as policy, this led to its absorption into the mainstream.

The process for deciding on a party's election pledges can be tortuous and unpredictable, as the story of the minimum wage illustrates. Party manifesto writers need to balance the interests of ministers, MPs, party functionaries and policy wonks,





A strong manifesto can set the tone and policy direction of the country for decades

lobbyists and interest groups, the party membership and finally – maybe most importantly – the public. A strong manifesto can set the tone and policy direction of the country for decades, but a forgettable manifesto – worse still, a bad one – can leave a political party weak and open to attack, or hostage to fortune in government.

“A manifesto is not a policy document, it’s a political document,” John McTernan, a former special adviser to Tony Blair, tells *Spotlight*. “It’s a document which gives you a high-level sketch, which is sufficiently structured to give you a mandate, but sufficiently free to allow you to determine the way in which you implement it.”

For civil servants a party’s manifesto – particularly if the opposition is expected to win – is one of the few guidelines to what the next government may expect from them. Even then, things are never entirely clear. Blair’s chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, complained that

the civil service had taken parts of Labour’s 1997 manifesto too literally. As per a 2009 Institute for Government report, civil servants did not understand “that pledges in the election manifesto and in earlier documents had been drafted in part for internal party and electoral reasons, and were compromises and deliberately fudged”.

In practice, McTernan says, a manifesto is not read beyond journalists, interest groups and academics, but it sits behind promises made during an election campaign. These pledges are symbolic – they show intent, not detail.

“It’s all quite opaque,” says Paul Richards, another former Labour special adviser, “but there is an overt process and there is a behind the scenes process.” Manifestos often leave the details vague on purpose, Richards explains. “Then the details can be filled in when you actually start to bring the legislation forward.” Take the 2007

smoking ban. A vague promise to outlaw smoking in public places in the 2005 Labour manifesto ended up being much tougher and more far-reaching than intended, mainly because of pressure from interest groups.

A manifesto shows intent to “the system” – meaning government, business, and the voluntary sector – but it also forms the basis of a government’s “contract with the people”, says Kirsty McNeill, another former Labour special adviser and now a parliamentary candidate. It is the justification for spending public money. Recent governments (particularly Boris Johnson’s) ended that convention by routinely breaking manifesto promises, she claims.

Policy is a nebulous term for McNeill because it covers “myriad” things, but manifesto pledges serve six very specific purposes, she explains. The most fundamental of these is to present the kind of policy that sets out the terms of a party’s project over a decade, such as national renewal. A second type of policy shows that a party is “capable of delivery” on those aspirations, for example reform of the public sector.

Then there’s illustrative policy, or “stuff for the [comms] grid” as McNeill describes it. Such policies are “beacons” on the way to that bigger project (such as national renewal, or GDP growth). They are not transformative in themselves, but part of that cumulative impact. Smaller school class sizes are one example.

Fourth is “defensive policy”, which shores up those areas where a party is traditionally perceived as vulnerable. For Labour this has often included crime and the economy; the Conservatives, on the other hand, are usually weak on healthcare and education. Fifth is policy that is about “owning the future”, explains McNeill. It’s not going to make headlines necessarily or be a big part of the manifesto, but it signals to concerned groups and experts that you’re a serious party of government. Action on anti-microbial resistance is an example of that.

And finally, there’s a new category of policy that she described as user-designed. Such pledges have come from outside the party through people who have experience of what the policy is meant to address. “It’s a sign that real ▶



Jeremy Corbyn holds a copy of the 2017 Labour manifesto at a campaign rally

◀ experts have finally had their say," says McNeill.

An unexpected election can upend the process of manifesto development. In 2019 Boris Johnson had only been in power a few months when a snap election was called. Time was short, but Rachel Wolf, co-author of the Conservative manifesto, recalls that the basic policy approach had already been decided months before the polls opened in December. The banner pledges were in place by the Conservative Party conference in October, "Get Brexit Done" being the most memorable.

"Our process was relatively open and collaborative," Wolf says. This contrasted with 2017, another surprise election, when the manifesto was closely guarded and the former prime minister, Theresa May, suffered as a result. Several manifesto promises, including on social care and repealing the fox-hunting ban, were then torn apart by the press and civil society groups when they became public.

For Andrew Fisher, the nightmare scenario of the 2017 election was that Labour's manifesto was leaked before it had been finalised. "We knew what policies we wanted to be the core of the manifesto – broadly what Jeremy [Corbyn] stood on in 2015, when he became leader," Fisher says. The process

began properly once Corbyn had seen off a leadership challenge in September 2016. Fisher took the lead as executive director of policy, working under the assumption that an election would probably take place in 2020.

Fisher's team conducted opinion polls and consulted with shadow ministers to ensure they were onboard with headline policies. Then, he says, there was effectively a "lull" up to the point when May called a snap election in April 2017. "I pretty much started with a blank sheet of paper, except for these ten policy idea frameworks that we had polled on," he said. The advantage was that his team knew what played well with the public, including Conservative voters, on issues such as public ownership, tax reform and welfare spending. From there, the shadow ministerial teams drafted their chapters with Fisher's team coordinating.

**"All that matters is approval from journalists and experts"**

In the Labour Party, a manifesto needs to pass a "clause five" meeting, where members of the party's National Executive Committee, shadow cabinet and senior trade union representatives agree that the draft complies with party policy (even if there are areas of disagreement). In 2017 Fisher's draft manifesto was leaked before that meeting, which he remembers as being "incredibly stressful". However, the leak turned out to be quite positive, with the extra media coverage of key policy proposals and scrutiny registering well with the public. "I guess whoever did leak it, thanks!" says Fisher.

Alongside ministers, MPs, and advisers, think tanks are major sources of policy thinking, influencing ideas throughout the manifesto process.

"We probably had about 20 or 25 people from the wider conservative think tank world sitting around the cabinet table," recalls the MP Danny Kruger, who was involved in drawing up the 2019 Conservative Party manifesto.

"Everyone had the opportunity to pitch in their ideas, and I believe that was the first time it had ever really been done in that way, which is surprising," he says. They also fielded suggestions from ministers, MPs and party members through the Conservative Policy Forum (CPF). "It's all done quite fast and getting the CPF, getting the parliamentary party and then all of these other stakeholders like ministers and think tankers – it was quite an exercise," says Kruger.

This work, says McTernan, is for one thing, and one thing only – the manifesto launch. It is a "document for one day", he says. All that matters is approval from journalists and the experts they call to see if the policies add up.

In any case, whatever goes into a manifesto is not binding, notes Catherine Haddon from the Institute for Government. "There's been a lot of talk, particularly around Brexit issues, about how binding they are as a mandate from the people, but actually there is plenty of room for manoeuvre," she says. The key question is how parties can make those pledges mean something in the long term. "What we haven't really figured out," she adds, "is how to translate manifesto commitments into a programme for government that allows government to work effectively." ●

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## The View from the Opposition

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**Jonathan Reynolds**  
**Shadow Secretary for Business**  
**and Industrial Strategy**

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# “Britain is being left behind in the race for the jobs of the future”

Britain's lack of industrial strategy is a huge gap in our economic arsenal. While other countries run ahead, this government isn't even in the race, and it risks Britain being left in the changing room without a change of course.

Under the Conservatives the UK economy has underperformed significantly on growth, productivity and wages. Turning this around, while forging a prosperous post-Brexit future and capitalising on the net zero transition, is at the heart of the economic challenge facing the next Labour government.

We will have to do so in a world where the US's Inflation Reduction Act, and the EU's Net Zero Industry Act and Green Deal Industrial Plan, will have radically altered the relative competitiveness of rival investment destinations. The UK is already bottom of the G7 for business investment. We in the Labour Party do not underestimate these challenges. But nor should anyone underestimate our determination to meet them.

Labour's growing platform is credible and ambitious. It will refocus our economy and get Britain ready for the race to begin.

The first pillar is a new Industrial Strategy, with national missions addressing clean energy, data, care in an ageing society, and greater national resilience. Industrial Strategy is not about propping up failing companies, or “picking winners”, but about providing opportunity for British business.

And it must be a corollary to the short-term, inconsistent approach we have seen in recent years, providing stability, clarity and consistency so that businesses have the confidence to invest. And we won't just publish a document that sits on a shelf in Whitehall, we will bring in an Industrial Strategy Council on a statutory footing to hardwire long-term economic thinking into the British economy.

Underpinning our industrial ambitions is the Green Prosperity Plan, rising to the challenge laid down by the US and EU in the race to capitalise on the economic and human, as well as environmental, benefits of the green transition. Greater public investment is crucial, but Labour's plan is to crowd in greater private investment in new industrial capacity, and use our new National Wealth Fund to manage public assets and investments.

We also need to make Brexit work. With the UK crying out for greater investment, and business crying out for stability, the level of uncertainty that would be created by reigniting old Brexit arguments would be counterproductive.

Labour's plans to help food producers via a new sanitary and phytosanitary agreement, to remain a member of the Horizon Science Programme to assist our brilliant scientists, and to negotiate touring rights for our creative industries, are effective measures that would vastly improve our trading relationship with the EU without reopening old wounds.

We'll also introduce a New Deal for Working People. Good work and good wages will be the driving mantra of everything Labour does on the economy. There will be no scandals under Labour like “fire and rehire” at P&O ferries.

Labour will also implement new plans for small business. The *Start-Up, Scale-Up* report, co-authored by Jim O'Neill, is full of ideas to ensure the UK becomes the best place in the world to start and grow a business, such as replicating the French “Tibi” Scheme, which brought institutional investors and venture capital funds together. Alongside reforms to business rates, more flexibility over the apprenticeship levy, and action to tackle late payments, we are serious about real reforms that will make a difference.

Labour will pull all levers needed to drive forward jobs and growth in Britain. We'll invest to rebuild Britain's industrial strength. We'll harness the ambition and hunger of British business, the skills and talents of our workers, and create tens of thousands of high-skilled jobs, growing vibrant economies in all parts of the UK. ●



# Supporting staff and bolstering skills

Apprenticeships are crucial for business and the economy

In association with



“With apprenticeships, these days you have to be quite proactive, and you have to go out and find what you’re looking for,” said Ethan, a recent graduate of Amazon’s apprenticeship programme. His searches led him to apply for a digital marketing apprenticeship. “I did a few of the virtual interviews and tests which you do just before they get through to the final stage, did well in the assessment centre and ended up at Amazon,” he said.

“We’ve got a diverse offer for skills and jobs of the future,” said Nicola Drury, UK apprenticeship lead at Amazon. She works with the many different businesses that comprise Amazon, including Alexa, Prime Video and IMDb, to understand their current and future skills needs. Apprenticeships are the means to create that funnel of talent and skills into the business and are also a way to diversify Amazon’s workforce.

Any business in the UK that has a payroll bill of more than £3m annually pays in 0.5 per cent of that into an apprenticeship levy. “We’ve got apprentices on about 40 different schemes across the UK and Ireland,” Drury said. That is around 1,000 learners in a given year. “For anybody who’s wanting to do an apprenticeship, there’s something for everybody regardless of your background,” she said. Entry-level apprenticeships can start at GCSE equivalent; advanced apprenticeships can lead to degree-level qualifications and full-time education if that is what people want to do. “The social mobility side is great, because you can create that journey, as we’ve done,” said Drury.

Evalina joined Amazon in an entry-level role and was encouraged by her manager to apply for the apprenticeship programme. “The first one [apprenticeship] that I started was in business improvement techniques,” she said. Evalina moved on to apprentice in team leadership and is now going into a level seven senior leadership programme as an operations manager. “The most important thing that I took away from it is the fact that you’re literally improving all of your skills and seeing the progress when working. It’s literally giving you that motivation,” she said.

“I’m also a part of The Apprentice Ambassador network for the government,” Evalina said, which entails visiting schools and talking about being



Amazon provides around 1,500 apprenticeships in any given year on 40 different schemes across the UK and Ireland

an apprentice at Amazon, and hearing about how apprenticeships are a much more common route for young people.

“You’re given full responsibility, which is a perk that you don’t get in many other companies,” said Ethan, “you’re actually given the full reins to jump and be able to take control.” For him, that meant working with millions of Amazon customers across Europe using Alexa, “basically making sure that you understand how Alexa can be helpful in your day to day”, he said. That included working on big events and promotions such as Prime Day. “You’re like, ‘did I really just send this to millions of people?’ So, it’s quite nice to be able to see the impact in real time,” Ethan said.

In addition to its own apprenticeship programme, Amazon also works with combined authorities to transfer some of its apprenticeships levy to support local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to create apprenticeships. Over the next year, Amazon will fund 300 such apprenticeships, working with 250 SMEs. “So, if they [the SME] wanted to

hire an apprentice, or give an opportunity to an existing employee to upskill them, and want to use an apprenticeship to do that, we can transfer some of our levy funds to them to cover those costs,” Drury said.

The specific skills needed differ from place to place, so in the West Midlands Amazon has supported apprenticeships in construction, in Greater Manchester it was digital skills, while in other localities care skills were more in demand.

For employers with a large footprint, it is an important way to play a role in supporting skills that aren’t necessarily linked to their own needs, but meet the local needs for skills and improve the local economy. “I think that’s a big call to action for other employers who have got the [apprenticeship] levy to transfer what they’re not using,” Drury said.

The apprenticeship offer is an attractive one and an increasingly competitive role, essentially being paid to study part-time while working and earning a good salary.

Employers like Amazon provide support for travel, accommodation and other costs to help apprentices who need to travel during their programme. An apprenticeship is also an opportunity to study a much wider range of skills, from engineering to software development to production. “Apprenticeships do drive a lot of benefits for both the individual and the business,” Drury said.

Ethan has finished his apprenticeship and is working at Amazon as a marketing manager, but he is exploring his options in how to progress within the organisation. “I’m getting to try some new different things just to see how I find them, whether it’s something I want to do in the future,” he said.

“I would love to stay at Amazon and potentially have a team of my own and see how I can also improve apprenticeships going forward – considering how big they are now, how we need to keep making them a route which is available to everyone,” Ethan said. ●



# A drinks industry for net zero

On our journey we've made progress – and learned many lessons

By Jim Fox

In association with



The environmental impact of plastics rocketed up the public and political agenda following David Attenborough's 2017 TV series *Blue Planet II*, prompting action from individuals, businesses and government to take better care of the planet.

Coca-Cola has a public commitment to reach net zero carbon by 2040. Central to that is our ability to control and reduce the impact of packaging, which is about 40 per cent of our carbon footprint.

Our factories are working full-time on reducing the use of plastics and moving to net zero. All of our investment to justify new production lines depends on whether it furthers our achievement of the net-zero goal.

For example, all our mechanical handling equipment is moving towards electric, and we have used 100 per cent renewable electricity for more than ten years.

Our site at Morpeth is the company's first in Great Britain to be certified as carbon-neutral. We are taking the lessons from how we achieved that and applying them to our factories in Wakefield, Sidcup, Edmonton and East Kilbride. We're also working with suppliers to help them work towards these goals with us.

We have already made significant progress, most recently with introducing plastic caps that stay attached to the bottle to reduce litter and make the bottles easier to recycle.

In responding to concerns about plastic pollution, we removed plastic straws and introduced paper straws over two years ago to minimise our products' impact on the environment.

Our entire range of plastic bottles is already recyclable, and all 500ml and smaller bottles sold in the UK are made from 100 per cent recycled plastic (excluding caps and labels).

Currently, the biggest barrier is the availability of high quality, recycled plastic. We are trying to work upstream to make sure that we get a system that delivers on this and that creates circularity in the use of resources in order to be truly sustainable.

One of the key things we would like to see for Great Britain is a well-designed deposit return scheme (DRS), where customers can



Coca-Cola's factories are working full-time to reduce plastic use and move to net zero

return their used bottles and get money back. We remain fully supportive of a well-designed DRS scheme.

The evidence from Europe shows that this can be really effective in reducing litter and providing resources that can be reused and recycled, whether that means rebottling or processing it into other high-value materials, which can have a significant impact in reducing carbon emissions.

We were also the first large multinational company to come out in

## The Morpeth site is our first UK carbon-neutral factory

support of Scotland's decision to develop a deposit return scheme.

The journey since then has been more complex, but there are important lessons to learn for the rest of Great Britain. We will now work closely with industry groups to ensure we make good progress towards schemes going live in England, Scotland and Wales in October 2025.

However, a deposit return scheme is never going to solve all the packaging problems our industry faces. We're also looking to the future and trailing things such as refillable glass, returnable glass, and refillable PET plastics in different marketplaces across Europe.

For example, we're trialling the delivery and collection of refillable Coke Zero Sugar bottles to and from customers' doorsteps with online grocery Milk & More. Customers will be

able to order one-litre glass bottles of Coke Zero for delivery, which can be left on their doorstep for collection once emptied and rinsed.

There will be different ways forward, and we are always keen to be at the forefront of such initiatives.

The journey to net zero is a long one. We are proud of the progress we have made and continue to make, including a 47 per cent reduction in our carbon footprint since 2010.

The scale of change that we need to make as an industry and a society will take years.

The lessons we have learned from our own journey and in our work to introduce a deposit return scheme can help take those next steps together with government, our customers, and our suppliers. ●

*Jim Fox is head of public affairs at Coca-Cola Europacific Partners GB*

# View from the top

## How do the UK's most senior civil servants get ready for transitions of power?

By Samir Jeraj and Harry Clarke-Ezzidio

It was election night 1992, and all eyes were on the seat of Billericay in Essex. Robin Butler, now Baron Butler of Brockwell, was anxiously watching the results come in. As chief secretary to the Cabinet Office, the most senior civil servant in the country, it had been Butler's job to prepare the civil service for an incoming Labour administration. In case the opposition won, Butler sent the Labour leader Neil Kinnock and his chief of staff questionnaires and matrices to get information on everything from living arrangements to the number of ministers he could expect.

But the Conservatives held on to Billericay, a signal that Kinnock was on course for defeat and John Major would remain at No 10. All the preparation for a change of government "was wasted labour, and a very sad moment", the 85-year-old recalls.

Back in 2023, a general election is expected in the next 18 months, and polls indicate there will be a change at the top of government, from Conservative to Labour. If that happens, whether the result is a Labour majority or hung parliament and coalition, staff in the UK's impartial civil service will play a vital role in ensuring there is as little disruption to the business of government as possible.

In 1997, only five years after Labour's loss of Billericay, Butler saw Tony Blair's New Labour win a landslide victory after 18 years of Conservative government. As in 1992, months before Labour's win, Butler had already been discussing policy matters with the soon-to-be new PM in "access talks", which can take place as early as 15 months ahead of an election.

Those talks enable the opposition to give the civil service advance notice (or warning) of their policy priorities before taking power. "It's not the civil service advising the opposition," explains Butler, "it's receiving rather than transmitting, so that if, the opposition party wins the general election, the civil service can help them to hit the ground running."

Those preparations cover both the substance and the delivery of policy, explains Terence Burns, who was permanent secretary of HM Treasury, the most senior civil servant in that department, from 1991-98. The 79-year-old worked through the





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Four former cabinet secretaries: (left to right) Richard Wilson, Andrew Turnbull, Gus O'Donnell and Jeremy Heywood



The former head of the civil service Gus O'Donnell, far left, addresses civil servants with David Cameron and Nick Clegg in 2010

◀ transition of Major to Blair.

“The potential government should do its best to give information to the Treasury,” he says. “That will enable it to get off to a good start, and to be prepared to spend the first few days, heads down, and really sorting out some major issues.”

Policy announcements, speeches, and manifestos in the run-up to polling day also give civil servants an indication of what to expect. Ahead of the 1997 election, for example, Burns remembers how the Treasury worked up its own version of Labour’s manifesto commitment to a windfall tax on privatised utility companies.

The advanced work paid off. When Gordon Brown took office as chancellor, Burns and his team had four days over a bank-holiday weekend to prepare how to implement policies such

as the Bank of England’s independence, tax credits and the windfall tax, the first of which had not yet been announced. “It was completely frantic,” Burns recalls, “but we were able to do it because the Labour Party was very well prepared – Ed Balls [then an adviser to Brown] was very well prepared – and had been able to communicate to us the sorts of things that we needed to be warned about.”

Not that civil servants don’t have

“You’re not to give advice, but you can use eyebrows”

personal views on the feasibility of a particular policy. During the access talks before the 2010 election, the former chief secretary to the cabinet, Gus O’Donnell, now 70, was not convinced by David Cameron’s pledge on limiting migration. “I was thinking, how on Earth do you get migration down into the tens of thousands,” he tells *Spotlight*. “You’re not supposed to give him advice on policies, but you are allowed to use your eyebrows.”

Personal relationships add layers of complexity to access talks. “Sometimes, you’ll know [an] individual very closely,” begins Nick Macpherson, 63, who was permanent secretary of HM Treasury from 2005-16. “In 2015, Ed Balls was the shadow chancellor. I had worked with him very closely between 1997-2004, when he’d left the Treasury having previously been chief economic adviser there.”

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Macpherson was appointed permanent secretary by Gordon Brown, and worked with Balls again when the latter became economic secretary to the Treasury in 2006 after being elected as an MP. So, Macpherson admits, it “would have been perfectly reasonable” for George Osborne, then shadow chancellor, to consider him a “Brown stooge” ahead of the 2010 vote. “Obviously, I wasn’t,” he quips.

Osborne and Macpherson didn’t know each other very well, but they would soon get acquainted. “Those talks were an opportunity to decide, I guess, on his part whether I’m the sort of person he could work with.” But the two “got on very well” for six years and are now friends.

“What tends to happen is when governments have been in power for a long time, as has happened on both the last two transitions of government... it is possible that [civil service] officials have... lost touch with what the main opposition party is about,” Macpherson adds. “But also, on the politicians’ side, especially if they hadn’t been in government before, there might be a level of distrust.”

There will be an “interesting” dynamic, Macpherson says, at the Treasury access talks with Labour for next year’s election, as “I suspect quite a few Treasury officials will know Rachel Reeves, because she [previously] worked out in Washington at the IMF”.

The briefs civil servants prepare for potential incoming governments cover all eventualities. Since the formation of the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition government in 2010, more work has been put into potential coalitions, according to O’Donnell. “Probably more junior staff are put on the idea of writing the incoming brief for a majority Lib Dem, or Green government, but it’s actually quite an interesting exercise,” he says.

Prior to 2010, the then-head of the Joint Intelligence Committee Alex Allan developed four scenarios for a hung parliament. “We then role-played this and completely failed to come up with a solution,” O’Donnell recalls. Civil servants had assumed politicians would steadfastly stick to their manifesto promises instead of compromising to work together.

But the day after the date for the 2010 election was announced, Macpherson reveals, Osborne asked him to visit. “He wanted to implement a programme of £6bn in-year cuts to pay for not going ahead with [Labour’s proposed] National Insurance increase. I attached a lot of priority to us getting that right,” Macpherson says of the Treasury’s planning. “And indeed, during the election campaign, we drew up a menu for the longer term of: ‘Do you want to have £30bn worth of cuts? £60bn of cuts, or £90bn of cuts?’”

“Once you’ve got to £90bn [worth] of cuts, you did quite serious things like abolishing the Navy.”

With the Conservative-Lib Dem coalition, the key challenge for O’Donnell was that, while there had been similarly formed governments in the devolved nations, and lots in Europe, there was no one alive in the UK who had worked or served in one at a national level.

“One of my brilliant concoctions was to think about a coalition committee, which would look at and manage the possible disagreements between the parties,” he says. In the end it was unnecessary, meeting just a few times as the respective political leaderships found a way of working together. “The politicians decided they could do it better, and they were right,” he says.

O’Donnell has a lot of praise for the leaders of all the main parties – Brown, Cameron and Clegg – following the 2010 election. Brown stayed on as prime minister until the new government was formed, despite Labour’s defeat at the polls: “I keep telling people, but they don’t want to write it: they all behaved incredibly well.”

If the polling is accurate, Labour will again win by a landslide at the next election – this time after 13 years of Conservative rule. The change of

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“These are exciting times in the civil service”

government would happen after the slow souring of relations between the Tories and Whitehall. Many ministers have, among other things, accused “the blob” of being “woke”, lazy and soft when it comes to aggressive work cultures, and there have been accusations of bullying – as well as denunciations that civil servants have a left-wing bias.

“Problems [between politicians and civil servants] have increased more recently,” says Macpherson. “So the question is: is this some aberration? Is it justified? Has the civil service failed to deliver? I don’t know what the answer is.”

And it’s not as if civil servants will be able to rest easy under another party. “A Labour government will have a very active agenda; it will want to achieve a lot very quickly. I don’t think anybody should assume just because it’s a Labour government that somehow it’s going to be easier,” he warns.

Civil servants will doubtless face many difficulties under a potential Labour government that will have to grapple with rising prices, Brexit, the UK’s unbalanced economy, artificial intelligence regulation, climate change, among other challenges.

There will also be the independent inquiry into Britain’s Covid-19 response to deal with. The Cabinet Office has sought a judicial review into the investigation’s demand to see the unredacted correspondence between the former prime minister Boris Johnson and ministers, government officials and civil servants.

If Labour does win the election, Macpherson hopes the new government “will recognise and respect” the civil service’s “duties to previous administrations”. He is sure that Sue Gray, who will become Labour’s chief of staff in the autumn, “is a woman of integrity [who] will support whoever the cabinet secretary is in making that [smooth transition] happen”.

Nonetheless, Macpherson believes government transitions, though hard work, can be the highlight of a Whitehall career. “My advice to anybody who’s in the civil service is: ‘these are exciting times,’” he says. “You join the civil service at least once or twice in your working life – and if you stay around long enough, there’ll be a change of government.” ●

# The opportunity cost of net zero

Great Britain has one chance to decarbonise the economy – let's take it

By Claire Dykta

In association with



Great Britain needs a net zero energy system within the next 12 years. If we get it right, we will reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and breathe cleaner air. If we get it right, we will reduce our reliance on gas, enhance our energy security, and make electricity more affordable over the long term.

But if Britain gets it wrong, we will miss the opportunity to unleash the growth that decarbonisation can deliver, and we will fall behind other global superpowers in the race to net zero. Low-carbon energy generation and the infrastructure to deliver it won't get built, pushing up bills for consumers. Energy storage won't be there to fill the gaps when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine. Burgeoning green industries for carbon-capture technology and hydrogen production won't make the progress they require, pushing thousands of green jobs abroad.

The collective initiative to date across the government, regulation and industry to meet the challenges of net zero has been impressive. But our landscape has changed significantly. Along with the rest of the world, I watched in horror as Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves across the globe. Vladimir Putin's weaponisation of energy spiked costs and exposed the link between natural gas and electricity prices. Putin's decision was not only an act of war; it was a wake-up call to the world to accelerate the journey to net zero and break the reliance on imported fossil fuels.

As Great Britain's Electricity System Operator, we sit at the heart of the energy system. We don't own assets such as pylons or wires. We keep the electricity system in balance and ensure that power gets safely to consumers and customers on a second-by-second basis. We are driving change in the energy industry, transforming our approach to system operation and energy markets to make sure that, by 2025, we can run a net zero electricity system for short periods, and to do this every second of the day by 2035 – a goal the government committed to in 2021.

But achieving a clean energy system is only one piece of the net zero puzzle. The energy we use must not only be clean, it must also be secure and reliable. How can we maximise Great Britain's

incredible renewable energy resources if we do not have sufficient low-carbon technologies to back them up when their output is low?

Even then, clean, secure energy will only help if it is affordable. The recent rise in consumer energy bills is the most poignant demonstration yet that the costs of energy cannot be ignored. If we want to encourage the fourth industrial revolution in Great Britain and secure future investment, access to low-cost clean energy is paramount.

Balancing energy costs and security while chasing down a net zero energy system is not going to be straightforward. There are difficult choices to come. The nature and scale of these choices necessitate a new, fully independent body that can provide impartial advice to the government and to Ofgem at those critical junctures for Great Britain – the Future System Operator.

A net zero energy system cannot be planned in isolation and the way we plan it must evolve to be smarter and more strategic. We need to think about where the optimum location is for new, large-scale electricity generation, reducing the distance that electricity has to travel to reach its final destination. We need to consider where flexible technologies can best be deployed to soak up excess renewable energy at low cost.

The Future System Operator will take a view of the whole energy system across electricity, gas, their networks, other low carbon sources of power and flexible technologies such as interconnectors and energy storage. This holistic approach to the future energy system can deliver £3bn-£4bn of cost reductions, ultimately impacting consumer bills over time.

The government's intention to make the Future System Operator

## We are driving change from the heart of the electricity grid

## A net zero system can't be planned in isolation

fully independent as an arm's length body, free from commercial interest, is central to its added value to the industry. With the government as the sole shareholder, the Future System Operator's expert advice can be considered impartial, paving the way for accelerated decision-making in the best interests of Great Britain.

I am immensely proud that the government and Ofgem decided to place the Electricity System Operator at the heart of this new body, building on our world-leading expertise in zero carbon system operation and our outstanding track record in system reliability. Our transition is fully underway and we are collaboratively developing our plans for how the Future System Operator's roles will expand over time.

Great Britain has one opportunity to

make net zero happen. We do not need to strive for perfection, which is the enemy of the good. We do not have the luxury of time. The government, the regulator, the Future System Operator and the energy industry need to build on the monumental decarbonisation efforts so far and seize the moment before it is too late. If we blink, we will miss it. ●

*Claire Dykta is head of markets at the Electricity System Operator, the organisation that ensures that Great Britain has the essential energy it needs by making sure supply meets demand every second of the day.*

*Over the past 20 years, she has worked in a diverse range of regulatory, commercial and operational roles and has been at the sharp end of changes in the UK power sector, including being responsible for optimising the power grid for the first UK coal-free day.*

*Claire has previously been named in the @rise\_utils list of the top 25 UK influencers in the energy industry, in the top 1,000 @SustMeme global influencers on Climate & Energy and recognised in the 2020 HERoes women executives list. She sits on the advisory board for the Oxford University-run UK Centre for Research on Energy Demand.*



Great Britain's Electricity System Operator ensures power gets safely to consumers

# Alastair Campbell: “Boris Johnson and his kind should never be allowed near public life again”



The journalist and former Downing Street press secretary on populism, Brexit, and the need for a Political Reform Bill

### How do you start your working day?

I'm up at 6am, have a quick coffee while checking emails and, if it's one of the three days a new podcast episode of *The Rest is Politics* or *Leading is out*, I send these out to people via social media. I'm then in the swimming pool by 7am.

### What political figure inspires you?

Nelson Mandela, because he said – and proved – that “everything is impossible, until you make it happen”.

### What is the most politically challenging period you remember?

I think now. Populism, polarisation and post-truth politics are challenging the very foundations on which we believed our democracies to be built. In the US, the UK and elsewhere, we have

had politicians who should never have made the bottom of the pile, let alone the top, and policies that have little to do with the real needs of people, and everything to do with exploitation of those three Ps.

### What one thing would improve our political culture?

Accountability for the liars who gave us Brexit and conned people into voting for it. I am not convinced our politics will recover until that has happened. It's why the Privileges Committee investigation into Boris Johnson is so important. He and his kind should never be allowed anywhere near public life again.

### What policy is the UK government getting right?

They are getting an awful lot wrong, and the damage done by the past five prime ministers over the last 13 years has been considerable. Rishi Sunak got a lot of credit for the hard graft needed to agree the Windsor Framework, but in truth he was simply seeking to repair one part of the damage done by Brexit. Added to which, it has failed to see the Stormont institutions up and running again.

### What policy should the UK scrap?

There are so many, but a good start would be the nonsense of sending refugees to Rwanda (or not, as the case may be). It is classic populism – a policy designed not to solve a problem, but to exploit it.

### What policy or law are you most looking forward to?

I would love to see Labour bring in a major Political Reform Bill, focused on lowering the voting age, compulsory voting, citizens' assemblies, political education and oracy in all schools, further devolution to the regions and nations, a totally new second chamber, and a review of the voting systems we use. We need more than a change of government – we need big change in how we do politics.

### What piece of international policy could the UK learn from?

Every government in the world should be reacting to the US government's Inflation Reduction Act, not to ape it all, but certainly to learn from it and adapt.

### If you could pass one law, what would it be?

Put the ministerial code on a statutory footing, and apply it to all MPs as well as ministers, because we must repair the enormous damage done on that front by populism, particularly by Johnson. Unless we re-establish the basic principle that politicians who lie to parliament can no longer take their place there, our politics will not restore itself.

### What advice would you give Labour ahead of the next election?

Fight it like your life depends on it. Wake up every day determined to do whatever it takes to win, and whatever it takes to avoid losing. And take absolutely nothing for granted.

### Looking back at your career, what one thing would you do differently?

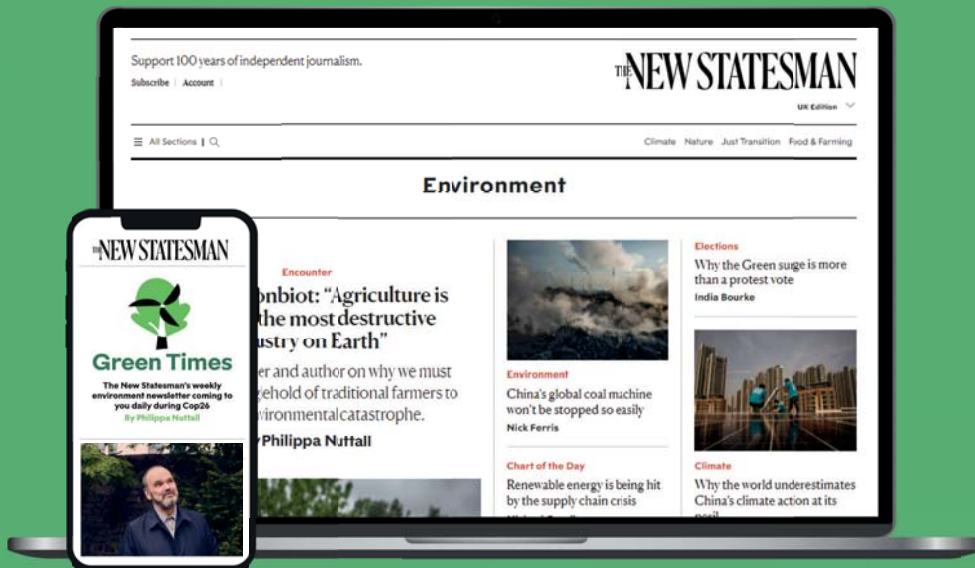
I probably would have stood for parliament around the time that David Miliband, Ed Balls and other special advisers were doing it. Then again, if I had done that, I might not have had as varied and interesting a time as I have had since then! ●

*“But What Can I Do?” by Alastair Campbell is published by Cornerstone*



# Green Times

The *New Statesman's* weekly environment newsletter



The politics, business and culture of the climate and nature crises

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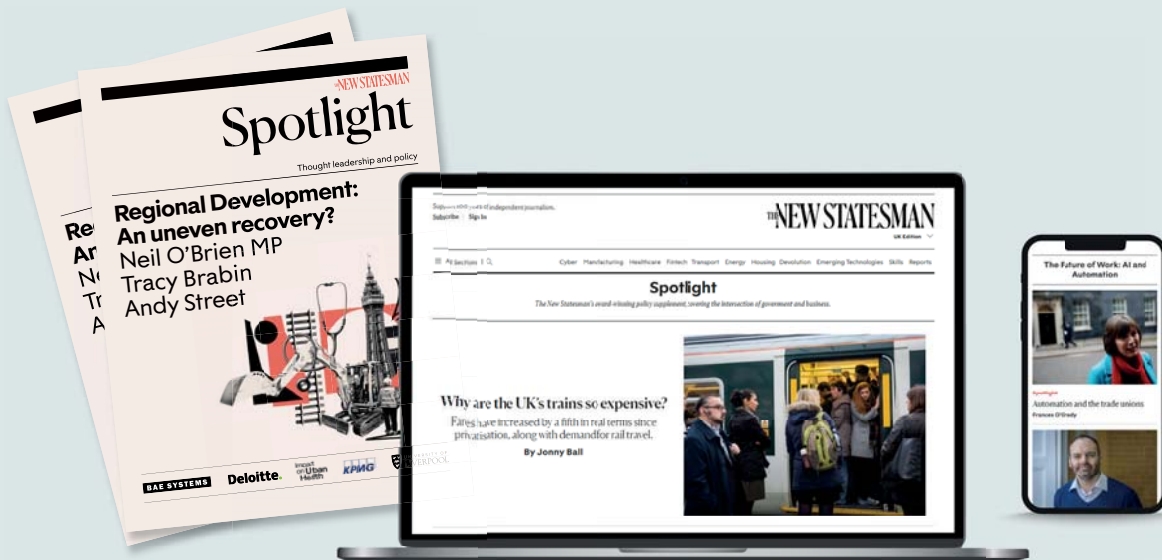
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# Spotlight

Economic Growth ● AI ● Sustainability  
Regional Development ● Healthcare ● Tech & Regulation



The *New Statesman's* award-winning policy supplement, providing the latest insight from government ministers, parliamentarians and business leaders