

# Path to power

The Fabian leadership essays

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**FABIAN**  
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## INTRODUCTION

For more than 130 years, the Fabian Society has been at the heart of the debate on the future of the left. Now, as Labour seeks to recover after its devastating rejection in December's general election, searching questions are being asked about how best the party can reconnect with the voters it has lost. How should it tackle the pressing social issues that scar our communities? How can it bring a divided country back together? How can it challenge the Conservative government and go on to win the next election?

As Labour members and supporters cast their votes for the person they most trust to meet the challenges ahead, we asked all three leadership contenders to set out their priorities for leading the party back to power. Here, Rebecca Long-Bailey, Lisa Nandy and Keir Starmer present their offer to the party and the country.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Rebecca Long-Bailey** is the Labour MP for Salford and Eccles. She has served as shadow business secretary since 2017.

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## Rebecca Long-Bailey MP

# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN

To win again, Labour must show it is ready to meet voters' hopes for a better future

There's an old saying that "the cause of Labour is the hope of the world". And as a Salford MP who grew up in the North West, that is the inescapable lesson of our history, from Peterloo to the Chartists, from the formation of the TUC to the birth of the suffragette movement.

Of course, history also teaches that the struggle to realise our hopes and aspirations was never easy. Sadly, the march to advance the interests of working people suffered a huge setback in December. I was devastated watching the results come in across Labour's 'red wall' and in the last few months we have mourned, we have got angry and we have gone through all of the stages of grief.

But now is the time to set our sights on a new horizon, and I would like to set out the four key elements of what I believe is our path back to power.

### **Aspirational socialism**

The first is aspirational socialism – addressing the hopes and dreams of the electorate, understanding how aspiration is blocked in mainstream Britain and setting out convincingly how a Labour government will enable people and communities to live the lives they deserve.

When I grew up, the future looked bleak. There were job losses, shops closing and high streets being run down. I know what it's like to be told you will never get there, that you don't have the right background or the right CV.

People from backgrounds like mine tried to escape the insecure lives our parents had. We tried to educate ourselves, to give ourselves choices, and some of us did well. But if we're honest, that success was probably down to luck. People no less clever and no less hard-working didn't enjoy the same success. If we lived in a world where how hard you worked or how clever you are translated into success, we wouldn't be on our 20th prime minister who went to the same school.

I know that for too many people, pay is too low, work is too insecure, bills are too high, housing is too expensive, too few jobs are rewarding and many feel they won't get the better jobs if they don't go to university and take on massive debts. Living standards aren't going up year on year and the next generation isn't set to have a better life than the last.

Our hope for a better future for our children is being stifled at exactly the time when we need to think and act big to face down the crises that confront our people. This is no time to be timid.

I believe we need to set out how, through collective and universal policies, we will enable people to make the most of their talent and enthusiasm to realise their aspirations. And here are just some ideas of what that means in practice.

I want every child to get the best start in life, with high-quality, universal childcare for all two, three and four-year-olds. Those children should then go on to well-staffed and funded primary schools, where they all eat free school meals together, and every school has in-house mental health support. The homes children live in should be fit for habitation, without damp and mould, and if they fall ill, they should be able to see a GP easily. As they enter their teenage years, young people should be offered choices in school and support in their community, with well-funded youth services – spaces to play, learn and hang out.

We should support our young people as they begin to enter adulthood with an education maintenance allowance, free education, high-quality apprenticeships or decently paid and secure work. Starting out in adult life is not always easy – but it does not have to be so difficult. Everyone should be able to afford decent housing, time with their friends and family, a holiday every now and again and some spare cash to pursue their passions. We can help make that a reality with a mass council housebuilding programme and rent controls, proper funding for public services, a real living wage, a huge expansion of rights at work and lower fares and bills through public ownership of transport and key utilities.

With that start in life, many more people will realise their dreams by the time they are in their 40s. Most people want to settle into a supportive community, with clean and safe streets, green spaces and places to eat, drink and socialise.

As people approach retirement, they should be able to enjoy their successes, but also those of their family. They should feel secure in the knowledge that their children and grandchildren will have an even better life than they had. They themselves should feel financially secure, with a decent pension, high-quality public services and secure housing. They won't have to worry about losing their home, as everyone will get free personal care when they need it. And with more public transport, local services, like libraries and community centres and a more cohesive society, loneliness will be on the retreat.

## **A Green Industrial Revolution**

The second key element of our path to power is rallying our members, trade unions, civil society groups and the wider public behind a plan to tackle the greatest challenge we face and that arguably any society has ever faced: the climate emergency.

I am proud to say that I led on the development of Labour's Green Industrial Revolution, setting out policies to create over one million good green jobs, bringing new investment and wealth to all the UK's regions and nations. I believe we can turn the climate crisis into an opportunity for national renewal, one that delivers social justice and repowers our economy while honouring our obligation to current and future generations.

But what we failed to do at the last election was to tell a concrete, detailed story in every constituency of what this change could mean and how the people in that community will be the ones driving and delivering that change. The Green Industrial Revolution will never take off if it is something done to people rather than done with them.

Let's take the example of Falmouth, a lovely town on the south Cornish coast. It is part of the Truro and Falmouth constituency that used to be a Tory-Lib Dem marginal where Labour is now a strong second. We targeted the seat in the general election, looking to take it off the Tories. We were right to do so. It's not just towns in the red wall that have been held back and need aspirational socialism. We need to win right across the country.

Our Green Industrial Revolution would have transformed Falmouth's fortunes – but we did not get that message out. Alongside local businesses, the community and energy experts, we developed plans to expand Falmouth's historic docks, which are a big part of the town's identity. We worked out how we would use public investment to crowd in private capital to create marine technology jobs and floating offshore wind farms.

We should have given our activists in the town a detailed vision to sell on the doorstep. The new high-skilled, high-tech jobs wouldn't just benefit those working in the docks. Those extra salaries would be spent supporting local businesses, helping revive the high street. The whole town could be renewed through the docks that help define its identity and give it pride and purpose.

Of course, rapidly shifting the way we power our homes, our businesses and our vehicles will bring new, skilled jobs and opportunities across the country. But it would be disingenuous to say there are no risks from disruption. The UK does not have a good record managing transition, and many communities are still living with the social consequences of the Tory deindustrialisation in the 1980s that shut down entire sectors, with no plan and no support for what should come next.

That is why tackling the climate crisis isn't just about developing great policies. We need to work with trade unions to develop concrete, detailed and place-specific plans that are worker-led and properly resourced. We need to win trust across the country, and build a movement that is fully inclusive and broad enough to propel us to power in 2024.

I have a track record of doing exactly this, bringing together trade unions, experts and climate campaigners at 2019 Labour party conference to negotiate the most ambitious climate platform of any political party anywhere.

## **Empower our movement**

The third key element of our route back to government is to empower our movement. We are not just a different team of politicians in Westminster, alternating power with the Tories. Our party was born out of a movement in communities like mine – and many of those we lost in the election. To win again, we need to look and sound like we're ready for power. And it's our members and our trade unions, on the front line in workplaces and communities, who will make that a reality.



That is why under my leadership, Labour will back workers in every dispute and strike against unfair and exploitative employers. And we will launch a mass trade union membership drive, supporting hundreds of thousands of young activists who have been inspired by our party to become active trade unionists in their workplaces. We will fight any Conservative threats to further restrict our trade unions and continue to fight for trade union freedoms and stronger employment rights that end insecurity and improve pay.

Labour's members don't just pay to keep the party going; they are our greatest organising asset. But let's face it: the pace of change to empower members has been too slow. We need to trust and support them. That means helping them organise: to raise up popular demands in their workplaces and in their communities.

But if we ask our members to do more, then we need to give something back, and open selections are a part of this; the chance for members to choose who represents their party, their efforts, on behalf of their community. I have heard the line about wanting to deselect Tory MPs, not Labour ones. But this is not about that. It is about creating a party full of motivated, engaged members who can then sweep those Tory MPs away.

## **A democratic revolution**

And that brings us to the fourth key element of our path to power – a democratic revolution, without which serious, lasting change won't happen.

I will always champion the idea that democracy takes power away from the offshore bank account and places it on the ballot paper. But Westminster feels as distant to many people as Brussels. We need a democratic revolution to break the hold of Westminster and the City over our politics and show people that they can and will have the power to achieve what they want to achieve.

Six of the 10 poorest regions in northern Europe are in the UK because for too long the fate of our regions has been in the hands of people who only visit them for a photo opportunity in a high-vis jacket. Power needs to be closer to people geographically, with meaningful new powers and funding devolved to local level to grow local economies, invest in communities and build council homes.

We spoke about the economy in the general election, but we had nothing to say to people who have lost trust in democracy. And after the Iraq war, the expenses scandal and the austerity lie that 'we're all in it together', who can

blame them? To follow our path to power, we will champion a democratic revolution. And just the first step would be scrapping the House of Lords and creating an elected senate representing our regions and nations, to scrutinise how every law impacts inequality, the environment and our people's wellbeing.

A democratic revolution can deliver a seismic shock to British politics, to prise it open at all levels to the people – their knowledge, their skills, and their demands. That way, we can show people how change can happen, with power closer and more open to them, with big money and other corrupting interests forced out of politics.

To win again, Labour must become a force capable of uniting the majority in our country to bring about a democratic revolution. The people's path to power is our path to power.





Image: Rwendland/Wikimedia Commons

## Lisa Nandy MP

# WINNING TOGETHER

We need the most radical reimagining of the relationship between the state and its people we have seen for decades

Labour is in retreat. Defeated in Scotland. Beaten back in north Wales and many northern, southern and Midlands towns. Communities that voted Labour for a hundred years and families that have Labour in their DNA said: “Not now, not this time”. The threat we now face is existential. If we refuse to recognise the scale of the challenge and change, then we will die – and we will deserve to.

However, I see hope where others do not. I know in my heart and my head that it is possible to win the next election. The people in the country who desperately need a Labour government need to know they won't have to wait 10 years for us to be in power. Our members need to know that playing it safe now so we can come back in 10 years' time probably means there won't be a Labour party to vote for at that point. It deserts those people who need us now. That is how stark this moment is, and that is why I say we need a leader who understands this.

Whilst the last election defeat was devastating, the result was a long time coming. For decades, the growing disconnect between the Labour party and the communities we seek to represent has left us unable to hear the clamour for change coming from out in the country.

In the days immediately after the election, I went to Ashfield to listen to lifelong Labour voters who felt that they could not support us. And throughout this leadership election, wherever I have been, my first priority has been to hear what people are trying to tell us.

Time and time again throughout this campaign, I've heard the same message. From Bassetlaw to Grimsby, people have told me they haven't left Labour – Labour has left them. We have lost the trust of communities across the country to deliver real change in their lives, and with it their faith that we are fit to lead.

Brexit exposed this disconnect with our voters. We completely failed to offer the leadership the country needs. While one part of our leadership pushed for a People's Vote, another part of the leadership pushed back against it. We let the Tories determine how we would become divided from our people and our voters noticed. Never again can our activists be forced to choose between being for Labour, or for their community. I promise you that under my leadership this will never, ever happen again.

Brexit also exposed sharp divisions in our society and my leadership will address them head on. I have written for many years about how our towns have slowly declined whilst our cities have performed better. This is because successive governments, including Labour's, have actively promoted our cities as the only engines of economic growth. Look back through budgets in recent decades and you see sustained and overwhelming investment in our cities.

Underpinning this economic model is the belief that if we simply load our cities with people and investment, the benefits will trickle out to the rest of the country. Not satisfied with investment in existing cities, we have now created city-regions from desks in Whitehall and applied the same model to them.

On its own terms, this model is failing. If, as I am often told, London is a successful model of economic growth, then explain to me record levels of air pollution, congestion, unaffordable house prices and the searing inequality we see in the capital. Who exactly is benefiting from this model? Because it doesn't appear to be the poor or young people looking for housing. If this model is successful, then why is economic growth in Greater Manchester city region concentrated entirely in Manchester itself whilst surrounding towns lag behind? A slavish, one-size-fits-all approach to economic growth, built on faulty regional measures and dictated from a desk in Whitehall is an entirely outdated and lazy approach to our economy.

What we need is an entirely new relationship between the state and the people it presumes to represent. Under my leadership, the country will hand power and resources to people in communities across Britain. Not in a piecemeal way, slice by slice, but in a comprehensive devolution settlement which fundamentally shifts power and money away from Westminster and into the hands of the best resource our communities have: the people who live in them. I want to start from the position that the role of central government is



to carry out those tasks which can't be performed locally. Not the other way around.

I have already announced during the leadership campaign that I will abolish undemocratic local enterprise partnerships and give the billions of pounds allocated to them by the Conservatives to local councils. Our local government has been decimated by the Tories over the last decade, and I am committed to not only putting this right but going further still.

I want power and money to go to local authorities, and I want those councils to be supported to build the capacity they need to deliver world-leading public services, good jobs and vibrant communities. I also intend to bring forward legislation which would enable local councils to raise revenue for themselves. At present, councils are seeing diminishing returns from council tax and business rates, particularly in ex-industrial and struggling coastal towns. Councils should have a battery of powers to raise revenue locally, if they so wish.

However, with this commitment comes a responsibility for councils to deliver for communities across Britain. Equally, and most importantly to me, people must themselves be empowered to deliver change in their communities. Some councils across Britain include local people in the strategies they develop, and the services they run, but I want this to become the norm in every community. People want agency and control over their lives, and for too long our political settlement has treated people as pawns in a game they control. Under my leadership, our politics will move from "we know what's best for you" to "you know what's best for you".

I am under no illusions. These commitments present a real challenge to the status quo. There are vested interests which will resist any reduction in their power. I am speaking here to all our political class, not just Conservative ones. The recent Marmot Review exposed startling levels of health inequality in our country. Tinkering at the edges of an economic model which helps to produce such an outcome simply won't cut it. And believing that the solutions must inevitably come from a desk in Westminster won't either. I am running to be leader of the Labour party so that I can preside over the most radical reimagining of the relationship between the state and its people for decades.

Barbara Castle once said: "In politics, guts is all." Now is not the time to steady the ship or play it safe. This is the moment when we up our game and recover our ambition. The leadership that is needed at this moment needs to be gutsy and brave, it needs to rediscover the empathy, stamina and courage that has driven big, deep lasting change in our country.

We have four years to be more ambitious than ever before. To come together to fix, repair and run local assets, from pubs to playgrounds. To share the expertise of Labour councils working with communities to break the monopoly of the big energy companies, and transition towards a low carbon, clean energy future. To work with unions organising in workplaces, providing the support and services people need, but this government will never provide.

And I want internal Labour party structures to reflect my approach to devolution. I want Labour headquarters to move out of London, and I want our regional conferences to showcase the difference we are making in communities and share best practice. I want our annual conference to take place in the communities we need to win back at the next election and spend conference week partly focused on that place; to go out into that community.

When we are rooted in our communities we are at our most powerful. The path back to power runs not along our red wall but by building a red bridge that connects our towns and cities and stretches from Dagenham to Fulham, Aberdeen to Glasgow, and Cardiff to Wrexham.

When Labour is at its best is when we are bridging and not reinforcing divides. When we can see the 'invisible chain' that George Orwell said binds our nation together. I am a visible link in that chain. I was born in the north, educated in the north east, started my working life in London and now live with my young family in Wigan. Throughout my life, I have kept open a bridge to my parents, as many of our young people do every day. One million people, mostly young people, made London their home in the last five years. They keep a bridge open to their place of birth and the families they left behind. If they can do it, Labour can too. Because, as opposed to some defeatists in the party, I believe it is possible to build a red bridge between those places we lost in 2019 and the places we won; between our towns and our cities; between the nations of our United Kingdom and between young and old.

Our job to tell a unifying story that takes the country forward together. For example, when activists in Balham talk about a green revolution, people in Bassetlaw, whose power stations are closing, hear that their job is being lost and their energy bill is going up. But what those Balham activists are talking about when they call for a green revolution is one that can create green energy jobs in towns, bring down energy bills, and a functioning low-carbon bus network. To tackle climate change we need new, cleaner, more reliable transport. This means the better buses that Bassetlaw needs.



Like every other candidate for leader, I believe in collective ownership. But I know that when at the last election we pledged to nationalise everything from rail to mail and water, from energy to broadband, people didn't believe we could deliver. My priorities would be to end privatisation in the NHS and bring transport into collective ownership so we can sort out the trains and start to rebuild the bus network.

Similarly, the Labour government I lead would keep its pledge to scrap tuition fees. But we would also be clear that our top priority would be to restore the education maintenance allowance, which is critical for so many working-class young people to be able to continue their education.

As a party we must tackle the stain of antisemitism in our party. The hostility and abuse Jewish members have been subjected to has been inexcusable and exacerbated by failures in leadership. We cannot pick and choose between the types of prejudice we take on. Labour must urgently change its rules so that we root out all antisemites from our ranks and create a hostile environment towards those who deny the existence of antisemitism. We must change the culture that has allowed antisemitism to thrive. That is why I have published a plan with specific moves to tackle antisemitism. It is the product of listening to Jewish colleagues and friends. It focuses on adopting in full the EHRC recommendations, a new independent disciplinary process, comprehensive training but also transparency.

I come from a family that spans the broadest political tradition, from Liberalism to Marxism, and it's that that makes me understand that you take on your opponent's argument at the strongest, not the weakest point, or you do not defeat it at all. It demands that you run towards trouble. That lesson has been reinforced throughout my political career, from my battle against the last Labour government to get child refugees out of Yarl's Wood or to take homeless teenagers off the streets of Soho and as the vice-chair of Labour Friends of Palestine, standing up for Palestinian children and against antisemitism, for the right of both Palestine to be recognised and Israel to exist. I have learnt that progress is not inevitable. If you want a better country you have to go out and fight for it.

The road ahead is steep, but it need not be long. By listening to the communities that left us, becoming rooted in them, empowering them and rediscovering our national story we will be back in government again. Not in 10 years' time, but at the next general election. So let's get started. When we are prepared to go out, take on the argument and do so from a place of hope and not anger, we always win. Together.



## Keir Starmer MP

# UNITING OUR MOVEMENT

Our shared values should bring us  
together to tackle injustice

It was 120 years ago this month that 129 representatives of the British working-class movement, socialist societies and disparate left political groups met at Memorial Hall in London to create a united and common force.

They came together in support of a motion proposed by Keir Hardie to create a distinct group in parliament dedicated to “promoting legislation in the direct interests of labour.” It was the birth of the Labour party. The Fabians were there, standing shoulder to shoulder with trade unionists and fellow socialists in common determination to break the grip of Tory and Liberal rule and put an end to the great injustices faced daily by Britain’s working class.

Since then, the Labour party has become the greatest force for good our country has ever known. Our movement founded the National Health Service, introduced the Equal Pay Act, transformed education, created Sure Start, decriminalised homosexuality, established the national minimum wage and helped to deliver peace in Northern Ireland. We fought for workers’ rights, environmental protection and equality.

It is a proud history, but the sad truth is that it should be prouder. We have only been in government for 33 of those 120 years. The vast majority of our time has been in opposition.

In government, we can change lives. In opposition, we can’t. That is why the election result was so devastating. It was devastating for our movement, our party and for the millions of people who so desperately needed change in December – and still do.

We are now facing the most right-wing government in recent history. A prime minister and a cabinet utterly lacking in principles or conviction.

Within weeks of the election, Boris Johnson abandoned the UK's commitment to family reunification for child refugees after Brexit. Dominic Cummings declared war on the BBC. New immigration rules have rebooted concerns about the 'hostile environment'. And the government is ploughing ahead with a post-Brexit trade policy that will rupture our economic relationship with Europe and risks decimating manufacturing and undermining essential rights and protections.

Meanwhile, austerity continues to chip away at the foundations of our society: schools and hospitals unable to cope, record numbers of people sleeping rough on our streets and child poverty on the rise. That's the cost of losing four elections in a row.

The question for our party is how we get from where we are now to where we need to be in four years' time. For me, that starts by uniting our movement.

Labour has always been a place where different traditions come together: trade unionists, social democrats and radical democratic socialists. And over the decades Labour has expanded its coalition and become a home for feminists, environmentalists, campaigners for a fairer society for disabled people, LGBT+ movements, anti-racist campaigners, internationalists and many more.

Our plurality is a strength—broadening our potential electoral appeal as well as enriching our understanding of the issues facing Britain. But too often in recent years we have focused on our differences, rather than our shared values and common beliefs. If we are to win the next election, we have to put rancour, division and factionalism behind us. We must embed into our culture and actions that all members are equal and should be treated with respect.

Uniting our movement does not mean silencing debate. Those discussions are what keep our movement alive and relevant. It is about changing the culture and the manner with which those discussions take place. The future of our party must be built on a new, more inclusive, more democratic culture of dignity and respect. I have argued in this campaign that we need our party to function like friends round a table, where each of us can be confident that our ideas are valued while we work together to find a way forward that is founded within our principles.

We are the party and the movement that oppose austerity and cuts to public services. We are a movement that believes in common ownership, with public services in public hands. We stand up for human rights, peace and justice around the world. And we will stand in solidarity with the most vulnerable in our society.

My socialism is rooted in a burning desire to tackle inequality and injustice, to stand up for the powerless against the powerful. I see a society riddled with inequality and injustice and my first instinct is to try and put it right. I know that same drive is shared by the hundreds of thousands within our movement.

We see that in a typical classroom of 30, nine children are living in poverty. We are determined to put that right. We see that the climate crisis is already with us in extreme weather events and the toxic air in our children's lungs. We are determined to put that right. We see that life expectancy is stalling and health inequalities are widening. We are determined to put that right too.

That is why there can be no going back from our core principles and it is why during the leadership contest I have made the moral case for socialism; a socialism which is relevant to people's lives and looks ahead at tackling some of the defining issues of the coming decades: economic justice, social justice and climate justice.

On economic justice, the free market has failed. The myth of trickle-down economics has been busted after years of growing inequality, insecure work and stagnant wages. We need a new economic model which tackles inequality, gives people a real voice in their place of work, and spreads investment and wealth across every nation and region.

We also need a tax system that can allow us to properly invest in our public services. Labour didn't lose the last election because we promised to raise tax on the highest 5 per cent of earners or to make corporations pay their fair share. Those are the right principles. We should be asking those with the broadest shoulders to pay more in tax and we should be arguing for a clamp down on tax avoidance.

Economic justice cannot be delivered without a fundamental redistribution of power. That is why I have argued for a radical devolution of power under a federal system. We need to end the monopoly of power in Westminster and spread it across every town, city, region and nation of the United Kingdom. We need to give communities power to invest and build an economy that works for them.



However, the idea that economic growth alone will solve society's ills and make us all prosper is wrong and outdated. We need to create a healthier society where everyone can thrive, with government, employers and citizens all playing our part together.

The UK is the sixth largest economy in the world. And yet, millions of people are suffering because of the deep inequalities that have become so ingrained in our society. The recent Marmot report into the country's health has exposed the human impact of a decade of austerity. For the first time in a century, life expectancy has stalled, with communities in the north east of England seeing it fall.

We can only begin to improve the nation's wellbeing if we treat wellbeing equally to economic growth. GDP alone does not measure the health of our children, the quality of the air we breathe or people's quality of life. Prosperity and a sound economy go hand in hand.

That is why in this campaign I have spelled out my vision for a just society. A society where all of us have the opportunity to prosper and are supported by strong public services.

We can no longer accept that a child's life chances are determined at the moment of birth. We must seek to prevent problems from happening in people's lives, rather than seeking to manage them once they have happened. We need a new approach to public policy that helps and supports people as early as possible.

Finally, a new socioeconomic model must go hand-in-hand with how we approach the climate crisis. There is no issue more important to our future than the climate emergency; it should be hardwired into everything we do. The argument that something can be good for the economy, but bad for the environment is over. If it is bad for the environment, then it is bad for the economy. It is as simple as that.

The case we made at the last election for a green new deal was the right one. But we lost that election and we must now face up to the fact that we will not be able to tackle this issue at a national level for four more years. We can take action at a local level. There are councils across the country which have the chance to demonstrate how Labour in power can protect the environment. We must learn from these examples and use them to inform our approach going forward.

We must stand up for internationalism too. The Paris Agreement took a step in the right direction, but it is not strong enough. The government should be seeking to forge an international alliance to end the climate crisis, give justice and sanctuary to climate refugees and support developing economies to build their own zero carbon economies.

Our vision for the country must be more than a shopping list of policies, though. We have lost four elections in a row. The public has lost trust in Labour as a force for good and a force for change. We have to turn that around. We have to win back votes, but also people's trust.

I believe another future is possible for our country and our movement, but we have to fight for it. We have to harness the energy from our alliance of different traditions behind the single goal of winning the next election. We must raise our sights with a vision that matches the ambition of the British people. United, with the whole movement pulling together, we can, and we will, win.

