



PROSPECTS FOR A KEIR STARMER PREMIERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The Labour Party Conference in Liverpool in September 2022 was a profoundly relevant moment, when it became clear that, under the leadership of Sir Keir Starmer, the organisation had consolidated and become a strong contender to win subsequent general elections in the UK. The political debates held on the main stage and across many fringe meetings were a clear signal that lessons have been learnt and conclusions drawn, and there was an appetite to redefine progressivism that would fit with the members', supporters' and voters' expectations in the challenging context of the 2020s.

The signal of evident change has been received by sister parties and organisations with a great sense of anticipation. It is obvious that after 12 years of Conservative governance, marked with such regrettable developments as Brexit, there is strong hope for a change of direction and beginning of a new chapter. When it comes to relations with the EU, there is an expectation that a new Labour government will steer its international policies differently, and hence, will become a reliable ally in the tough process that should lead to the reconstruction of multilateralism as a doctrine of global governance. To that end, there is clearly much that would change domestically – from a socio-economic dimension – when it comes to defining the new growth and productivity model and fighting inequalities, but also when it comes to upholding the devolution project and reintegrating the country. The first years will certainly be difficult, as reversing the effects of the Tory policies is an agenda that needs more than just one mandate.

With that in mind, FEPS and the Renner Institute invited Lord Roger Liddle, who served as Chair of Policy Network, to offer a Next Left Lecture on “Prospects for a Keir Starmer Premiership: What he can achieve and what obstacles stand in his way”. Subsequently, we feel most privileged to present his main thesis and proposals for Labour in this very special edition of the Next Left policy brief.



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**Prospects for a Keir Starmer Premiership :
what can he achieve and what obstacles stand in his way**

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FOREWORD

by **Ania Skrzypek**, *FEPS Director for Research and Training*

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This exceptional FEPS and Karl-Renner-Institut Next Left Policy Study is published to celebrate an excellent lecture delivered by Roger Liddle, Member of the House of Lords and of the FEPS Scientific Council in Brussels, on 13 April 2023.

The event was organised in a hybrid format – with the in-person component hosted in the European Parliament (EP) by Andreas Schieder, Chair of the Next Left Research Programme and SPÖ Delegation in the EP. He opened the meeting with the words that serve as a foreword in this publication and moderated the subsequent debate, for which the first honourable respondent was Thijs Reuten, Member of the EP from PvdA. Furthermore, the audience consisted of representatives of the S&D Group (including colleagues working within the EU-UK delegation), PES, PES in CoR, EESC, PES Women, and many partner and sister organisations, as well as – importantly – members of the FEPS Next Left High-Level Conversation. The last of these had the chance to explore some of the Lecture's thesis in the context of debates about the future of social democracy in Europe subsequently held in the second, closed-door, session. The audio-visual material, also available via YouTube and other channels, has attracted the largest ever number of viewers in the shortest period, proving great interest in the material that FEPS and the Karl-Renner-Institut are delighted to present in the written form here.

It was an honour indeed to host Lord Liddle and to hear him elaborate on the history of the British Labour Party, its strength, its reformulation under Keir Starmer and its prospects when it comes to the upcoming general election in the

UK. With the political map rapidly changing internally and with the profound alterations of the external context, also in the dimension of EU-UK relations, the lecture was a rare moment of deeper reflection on what kind of scenarios might further unfold and what it would mean both for geostrategic deliberations and for the progressive movement itself.

The above-mentioned response to the presentation and to the idea of the event is encouraging for FEPS and the Karl-Renner-Institut, which have been partnering on the Next Left since 2009 and always keep in mind the necessity to perpetually innovate within this initiative. The Next Left Lectures is the newest addition and an attempt to offer the possibility of deeper and more instructive reflection on a selected theme, connecting the worlds of academia and politics more strongly. We are looking forward to hearing your feedback and would be delighted if you joined us for the next sessions.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE UNITED KINGDOM?

by **Andreas Schieder**, *Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group, Head of the Austrian Delegation, Chair of the Next Left Research Program*

The days of May 2023 in London offer spring weather, crowded streets and the atmosphere of the shining newly crowned. But what is going on beside these cover stories; what is happening in the real lives of the people in the United Kingdom?

From Sir Roger Liddle, Member of the House of Lords, we had the pleasure of getting the best possible insight and analysis. Roger Liddle served as an adviser on European affairs under Prime Minister Tony Blair, in the Cabinet of the EU-Trade Commissioner, as Chair of the think tank “policy network” and as a Labour Member of the British Parliament.

The current state of the United Kingdom is very fragile; it is in bad condition. It endures a socially and economically bad situation: incomes and purchasing power are shrinking; social pressure is increasing. The National Health Service (NHS), former proud centre of British social security, is underfinanced and overloaded with work. Nurses and others are on strike to express the exploiting circumstances of their work environment and their state of burnout. Shelves in supermarkets remain empty due to broken supply chains. And an above-average inflation rate makes households poorer.

On top of these things are the morally reprehensible conditions: the Tories are stuck on internal fights and leading politicians have had to resign because they did not respect the rules they made themselves. And it gets worse: the poor condition of the integrity and unity of the Kingdom, as Scotland’s independence wishes are getting stronger, as well as those of the

Welsh; and Downing Street is unable to handle the situation in Northern Ireland.

The list of problems gets longer and longer; many point to the EU to blame the Union and Brussels’ bureaucracy for everything. There is a strong need for change. How will Labour and Sir Keir Starmer tackle this dramatic situation? What are the chances for Labour to come back? And what does this mean for Europe and what does this mean for Europe from the perspectives of European social democracy?

Enjoy this book and Roger Liddle’s critical analysis.



PROSPECTS FOR A KEIR STARMER PREMIERSHIP : WHAT CAN HE ACHIEVE AND WHAT OBSTACLES STAND IN HIS WAY

by Roger Liddle, *Member of the House of Lords, Board Membr, Progressive Britain*

I am an optimist about Sir Keir Starmer. His achievement in masterminding Labour's recovery from its worst defeat since 1935 has so far been remarkable. His leadership of the party is secure; his potential premiership is still a work in progress. But he is well on the way to what would be an astonishing turnaround in Labour's electoral fortunes: to take the party in a single parliament term from the edge of the electoral abyss at the end of 2019 into government by 2024. This lecture is about the challenges he still faces in winning a credible and convincing electoral mandate, framing a mood of confidence and optimism about the change his government will bring, and governing within a broken Whitehall and "Westminster model" to ensure his Labour government proves more than a one-term "flash in the pan".

Keir Starmer has been Labour's leader for just three years. When he took over, Labour was 22 points behind the Conservatives in the polls. In the last three months, Labour's poll lead over the Conservatives has, at times, been over 20 points. When Rishi Sunak took over from Liz Truss's brief and disastrous premiership, psephologists estimated, based on Labour's extraordinary poll lead, a Labour landslide. Labour would win over 500 seats in a 650 member House of Commons. I am not going to dwell further on these fantasies.

Prospects of Conservative recovery?

The Sunak government is *somewhat* restoring the Conservatives' reputation for governing competence after the havoc of Boris Johnson and Liz Truss. I put the emphasis on "somewhat". The ground Sunak must make up is enormous. Sunak himself strikes one as, at his core, a right-wing, free market, low-tax Conservative, which, after 13 years of austerity, is probably not where the majority opinion of the British public is today. Also, Sunak appears to accept the view of his political strategists that he must combine a steady hand on the tiller with a strident, populist, social conservatism. This is leading the government into a morass of undeliverable pledges and barefaced problematic assertions, calling into question the very essence of Sunak's strengths: his claim to decency as well as competence.

Historians may come to see the date of 22 March 2023 as a turning point in Conservative history. Boris Johnson's reputation suffered a huge double blow. He stumbled as a witness before a Parliamentary Privileges Inquiry into whether he lied to the House of Commons over "partygate". He and his allies were only able to muster 22 Conservative MPs to vote against the Windsor framework that resolved the extreme tensions between the EU and the UK over the Northern Ireland Protocol, though there were many more deliberate abstentions. And who knows who will win the great factional and ideological struggle that awaits the party thereafter if they lose?

The underlying economic position for the Conservatives is little short of disastrous. While the annual rate of inflation is forecast to come down from around 10% to around 3% by the end of the year, the “cost of living” crisis will intensify for most working families throughout 2023, as living standards fall at their fastest rate since the Second World War. As the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) puts it, “real household income per person falls by 6% between 2021-22 and 2023-24... the largest two year fall in real living standards since ONS records started in the 1950s”. The rise of the foodbank, on which many working families have become dependent, is the most telling symbol of the failure of Conservative values to govern the country successfully.

The Conservatives will go into the next election claiming the worst is over and economic growth is returning; it may well be, but at a very modest rate. Since Brexit, Bank of England estimates of the underlying growth potential of the economy have become particularly pessimistic. The government is presently engaged in a desperate attempt to find the fiscal space for a tax-cutting pre-election budget. Yet, for all the limited room for manoeuvre the Conservatives can find in the short term to restore their electoral popularity, the government can do little to mask the reality that most families will have seen little growth in their disposable incomes since the 2008 financial crisis. At the same time, the state of most public services is dire: nothing works as it should. Such is the dismal legacy of 13 years of Conservative government.

Mistrust of Labour in the past

Against this background, why, you may ask, should any voter want to grant the Conservatives a fifth term?

Labour should continually pose this question. The answer, of course, is one that many Labour people are reluctant to face up to. Mistrust of Labour runs deep. It goes back to the 2008 banking crisis, and the Tory success in blaming it on the Labour government. Then came the Ed Miliband leadership, which gave voters the impression that he was ashamed of what Labour had achieved in its 13 years of government but offered little clarity as to his alternative. Thirdly, the Jeremy Corbyn “experiment”. Eventually, the public got to understand all too well what Labour under his leadership stood for – and millions of former Labour voters refused to back it. Today, many voters say they do not know what Keir Starmer stands for. That is a problem Keir must urgently address. But, frankly, that is an advance on where Labour was under Corbyn and an overhang of his legacy.

The Corbyn legacy

The 2017 general election result, in which Labour polled 40% of the vote, led some to believe that a political project well to the left of New Labour could chart a path to socialist transformation. For me, the Corbyn project was always problematic. Its central proposition was to build a British state far more extensive, more powerful, and more directing of the British economy than we have today, in the belief that by these means the great injustices, which Corbyn and his supporters consistently railed against, could successfully be addressed. What Corbyn offered was a *national* vision of left-wing populism that I never thought feasible or, for that matter, desirable. Corbyn saw himself as an internationalist but without any clear conception of what that would mean in an ever-more interdependent world of rampant global capitalism, astonishing technological advances, rapid climate change, and fundamental



and dangerous shifts in the international order. Corbyn might have somewhat redeemed himself had he vigorously defended Britain's membership of the European Union (EU) in the 2016 referendum. But he didn't, for the simple reason he never really believed in a united Europe. Corbyn did have a global vision, but it was to view the USA as the source of most global problems. When it came to highlighting global injustice in this world of multiple tragedies, no injustice in his eyes compared to Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Of course, there is much to criticise in the actions of recent Israeli governments. Yet, unbalanced criticism of Israel itself, and implicit support for terrorism, attracted new far-left members to the party and explains why, disgracefully, it became home to antisemitism.

In 2017, Labour never came as close to power as Corbyn's fervent disciples imagined. Labour was the principal and somewhat undeserved beneficiary of widespread Remainer grief at the Brexit vote. Also, the Conservatives under Theresa May fought one of the weakest campaigns in Britain's electoral history. Corbyn's clear message on ending austerity did strike a chord, as the underfunding of public services since 2010 began to be evident in cuts to school budgets and lengthening hospital waiting lists. He attracted huge crowds of enthusiasts, as the incorruptible prophet returning from the wilderness.

By the 2019 election, the public mood had shifted decisively against Corbyn. The electorate had grown weary of Parliament's inability to settle the Brexit argument. In Boris Johnson, the Conservatives had a Leader who pledged "to get Brexit done", promising a mythical land of milk and honey that lay beyond. He also claimed to be anti-austerity and pro-levelling up. His lies were believed, with no credible opposition to challenge them. Disillusion with Corbyn had by then well and truly set in. His reaction to

the Salisbury poisonings had demonstrated a naïve willingness to take Vladimir Putin at his word. (Under Corbyn's leadership, what would have been Labour's position on Putin's invasion of Ukraine?) Labour's failure to tackle antisemitism mired the party in scandal and disgrace. The Corbyn leadership was the dominant issue on the hundreds of working-class doorsteps which I personally canvassed. Labour duly crashed and burned. In this context, the Starmer leadership was born and explains the demons he has had to slay.

Sorting out the party

Starmer's first task has been to clean out the Augean stables of the Corbyn Labour Party. In this, he took his first big decision, whether consciously or not I do not know. He would *not* prioritise maintaining the unity of the 2019 party above what needed to be done to give Labour a realistic prospect of power at the next election. Starmer supporters secured an impressive majority on Labour's governing body, the National Executive Committee. The Shadow Cabinet has been completely reconstructed, with credible new faces to the fore. Antisemitism is being systematically rooted out. Of the hundred plus Labour candidates so far selected by constituency parties for winnable seats, only two are firm Corbyn supporters. Jeremy Corbyn himself has been debarred as a Labour candidate at the next election. In three short years, the party and its culture have been transformed.

Starmer deserves great credit for forcing through these internal changes against a difficult background. The Boris Johnson of 2020-21 was feted as the deliverer of Brexit and then (or so he claimed) of the COVID-19 vaccine. Labour suffered the catastrophic loss of Hartlepool in the May 2021 by-election. Starmer's leadership would

have come under challenge if Labour had lost the Batley and Spen by-election a month later; Labour held the seat by a mere 300 votes. Yet, ignoring again the pressure to prioritise party unity over all else, Starmer courageously pressed ahead with rule changes at the September 2021 conference, without any certainty that he would win the conference votes. These rule changes embodied the Equality and Human Rights Commission findings on antisemitism, strengthened the role of the national party in parliamentary selections, bolstered the position of MPs in the election of the party leader, and gave Labour MPs extra protection from the threat of factional deselection in their constituencies. These victories were critical in turning the page on the Corbyn era.

Yet, throughout all this turmoil, there was still considerable doubt over what Labour's strategy for electoral victory was to be. The 2019 election result was a huge shock for Labour. Could it ever win? Would it even survive? Labour's 32% may sound respectable enough by Continental standards of proportional representation in multi-party systems. Under first past the post, it spelt disaster. At no election for the last 90 years have fewer Labour MPs been elected to the Commons. Put it another way: to win an overall majority of one, Labour must gain 127 seats at the next election, a feat Labour has only achieved twice in its history, under Clem Attlee in 1945 and Tony Blair in 1997.

Yet, what is the coalition of voters Labour should aim to build? 2019 was not only a disastrous defeat but resulted in a revolution in Britain's electoral demography. Labour piled up huge votes in London, the big English cities and university towns based on its new electoral coalition of the progressive graduate middle class, the younger precariat, students and ethnic minority voters. But there are not enough seats with this demographic profile to take Labour anywhere near the winning line.

The Red Wall: myths and realities

At first, the challenge facing Labour was framed – in my view misleadingly – in terms of winning back the so-called “Red Wall” of old industrial seats in northern and midlands towns that Labour had lost spectacularly for the first time in generations. These defeats in the once Labour strongholds of the industrial working class retain a mystical hold over the party. For party members, Labour cannot be truly “Labour” without winning back what were its old industrial and mining heartlands. Yet, the facts about these seats are not what they seem. Red Wall voters are often characterised as “left behind” or the “losers from globalisation”. True, the old industries that were the economic backbone of these communities, such as mining, textiles and basic manufacturing, have gone. Yet, statistically, these are not the most deprived parts of Britain, which tend to be found in London, the big cities and badly neglected, declining seaside towns. Levels of owner occupation in the Red Wall, for instance, tend to be high. Red Wall seats are also diverse in themselves. For example, some mining districts of half a century ago are in the attractive countryside that has become home to suburban commuters with jobs in the cities, while the cities themselves are, in turn, home to large student and ethnic minority populations. Some Red Wall seats contain areas of great deprivation but are also home to good, well-paid jobs, such as in the defence and nuclear industries in my native Cumbria in what are now the Conservative held seats in Barrow, Copeland and Workington.

Red Wall constituencies do tend though to a greater preponderance of older voters and pensioners who often lack further or higher educational qualifications and are disproportionately Brexit supporting. Also, throughout the years of austerity since 2010, their older electorates benefited from the fact that social benefits for pensioners have been protected, while those for



young families have been held back in real terms. Red Wall voters do feel a sense of psychological loss. The once predominant world of tough male manual jobs that characterised their communities engendered feelings of social value, pride and solidarity, which have disappeared, alongside the strong trade unions that once thrived with them. Children who do well at school go off to college and often don't come back. Nostalgia for a better past is symbolised by the much-lamented decline of local shopping centres.

The policy challenge is to replace lost industries with new jobs and new sources of economic strength. The New Labour governments of 1997-2010 tried hard to do this, but perhaps not hard enough. They had considerable success in reviving the northern cities, such as Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Newcastle, as great service, educational, cultural and sporting centres. Regeneration was less successful in the smaller towns, and Labour has paid a political price for this. Policy was too dependent on new public sector jobs that disappeared with austerity, while the extraordinarily difficult challenge is to foster new clusters of enterprise in old industrial towns and mining districts.

Nostalgia for a past that will not return is a poor basis for a viable political project. The Johnson government poured levelling-up money into town centre revival in response to Red Wall grievances. The long-term impact on economic regeneration will in all likelihood be marginal, although it will give the 2019 generation of Conservative MPs something to boast about. Shopping has been revolutionised by the internet and that will not change. Town centres need to be reimagined and repurposed: as homes for the elderly and single, as locations for specialist retailers, as affordable workshops for business start-ups, and as places of creativity and culture. Business rates reform is crucial, as Rachel Reeves, the Shadow Chancellor, has promised. A high priority for social democrats might also be to ensure that

the new generation of delivery drivers and warehouse workers enjoy decent terms and conditions of work, and that shopping online is made more accessible for the elderly and vulnerable. There is no future in attempting to recreate most declining shopping centres as they once were. Labour has always won elections when it has been seen as a "party of the future".

Winning in the south

It is also an electoral reality that winning back the Red Wall is necessary, but not sufficient, for a Labour victory. The collapse of public faith in Boris Johnson, together with disappointment at the practical results of Brexit, has done much of Labour's work for it in these seats. Labour's electoral strategy needs to be broader and more inclusive. Fundamentally, this means gaining seats in the new town, suburban and settled urban communities of southern England. There has never been a Labour government when Labour has not won a string of north Kent constituencies along the Thames estuary – in places like Dartford, Gravesend, Faversham down to Dover. Similarly, Labour has always depended on picking up seats in Hertfordshire to the north of London in towns like Watford, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage and Welwyn. Yet, in this type of seat, the Conservatives have built up huge majorities since Labour lost office in 2010. Indeed, Labour's target list now includes constituencies that have never been won by Labour in the past, such as the once-fashionable seaside resorts of Bournemouth and Worthing.

In the Labour campaign, there are welcome signs of a shift of emphasis. The new report from the Labour pressure group, Labour Together, has correctly identified that Labour's focus should be on winning over the "Stevenage

woman”, not the “*Workington man*” – the target voter for the Conservatives, who in 2019 symbolised the Johnson effort to destroy Labour’s position in its heartlands. In truth, I find these stereotypical explanations of target voters, and the fascination of many electoral studies with different ways of dividing up the electorate into segments, unhelpful and a gross over-simplifications. True, in 1997, there was much chatter about winning over the “*Mondeo man*” and the “*Worcester woman*”, but I am not convinced Tony Blair paid that much attention to it. He saw his task as building a broad coalition – a “big tent” – regardless of class, gender and region – based on shared values and interests.

Yet, in understanding the concerns of the “*Stevengate woman*”, Labour strategists could do a lot worse than rereading Giles Radice’s brilliant analysis of southern discomfort that he produced for the Fabian Society after the 1992 election. Then, the public strongly supported Labour’s ambitions for decent public services and greater fairness. The issue for Labour was one of lack of trust to deliver these shared goals, particularly on questions of the economy, tax and the unions. Not much has changed in my view.

Scottish revival?

And then, of course, there is Scotland, culturally something of a special case, but hugely important to British Labour. Previous Labour leaders could rely on a solid Scottish phalanx of 40 or so Scottish Labour MPs: today there is one. As a result of Nicola Sturgeon’s sudden and unexpected resignation as Scotland’s First Minister, the bitter leadership election for her successor and the arrest of Peter Murrell, Sturgeon’s husband, thought to concern allegations of mis-handling of the Scottish National Party’s (SNP’s) finances, cracks in the SNP’s hold over Scotland

are opening up. A forthcoming by-election in the Glasgow suburb of Rutherglen may prove sufficient to break the nationalist mould. The prospect that Labour might gain 15 or 20 seats from the SNP in Scotland, possibly more, could be decisive in securing a working majority for Labour.

It is not much remarked upon, but it is nonetheless true that a narrow Commons majority would award significant leverage to the 30 or so members of the Socialist Campaign Group who remain Labour MPs. The Tories may well seek to exploit this legitimate fear, as they did in 2015 when the Tories argued effectively that an Ed Miliband government would be in the pockets of the SNP. In recent Westminster elections, the SNP could credibly argue that a vote for them was the best way of standing up for Scotland against the dominance of the Conservatives in London. Now Labour can argue in Scotland that Labour has a credible chance of removing the Tories from power in London altogether. The greater that seems a real prospect, the more Labour can rid itself of the charge that it will still be dependent on Corbynite votes.

Culture replacing class? The lessons of Brexit?

Constructing a winning coalition, however, is not just about demographics. Political scientists point to *cultural divisions replacing class* as the dominant factor in determining voter choice. Of course, if class had historically been the main determining factor in voting behaviour, Labour should have won every general election since the introduction of universal suffrage! Millions of working-class people have always voted Tory. Labour’s problem has been the decline in the size and class consciousness of the *organised* working class because of the disappearance of the most heavily unionised sectors of the economy. For decades, Labour has struggled to come to terms with the collapse of Labourism.



People point to Brexit as an example of how a cultural preference led millions of working people to vote against what experts argued objectively, on all the evidence available, was in their economic self-interest. Brexit did prove a trigger for detaching a significant segment of white working-class voters away from Labour. As a passionate pro-European, the vote for Brexit came as no surprise. Support for Britain's EU membership was always fragile. By 2015, it hung by a thread.

Why was the referendum lost? In Britain, Europe was always an elite project without a united elite behind it: one of the paradoxical consequences of the 2016 referendum was to create a mass pro-European constituency in the country that the EU had never enjoyed before. Both Labour and Conservative governments had rarely made a strong pro-European case. The core of the Brexit identity argument – that Britain was at its strongest when it stood alone (as against Hitler in 1940) – was never directly challenged; the argument for pooling sovereignty as the answer to the problems of growing interdependence was rarely made. The referendum came at a point of particular vulnerability. The Euro-crisis had undermined the argument that Europe represented the hope of a brighter economic future. The refugee crisis of 2015-16 heightened the toxic profile of immigration as the key factor in the Brexit vote. Of course, there was a broader element of alienation from the governing class that contributed as well. In the 1975 referendum, the overwhelming support of businesses for “Yes to Europe” was thought to have been a key factor in persuading working people that Europe was where their best interests lay; by 2016, public respect for the views of business was in sharp decline. Britain was living through an age of austerity, following the banking crisis of 2008, for which Labour had been successfully pilloried, while the bankers, of course, continued to enjoy fat bonuses. Corbyn in 2016 had none of the appeal to traditional Labour voters that Harold Wilson still enjoyed in 1975.

After 2019, Brexit became the great unmentionable in Labour's dialogue with the voters. Keir Starmer persuaded most Labour MPs to back the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in December 2020, on the basis that the alternative was the disaster of “no deal”. As a committed European, who has spent much of my political life campaigning for Britain to be at the heart of Europe, I found this episode excruciatingly difficult. But Keir Starmer was right. Labour could not keep campaigning against a Brexit that was a fact of life. There was, and still is, no public appetite to reopen the most divisive debate in Britain's post-war history. That is why Keir Starmer and Rachel Reeves took the decision that not only was “re-join” off the agenda, but that Labour would also reject the halfway houses of the Customs Union and Single Market.

These decisions will not change before the next general election, but Labour is becoming more vocal in its criticism of Johnson's “botched Brexit deal”, as public opinion becomes ever more sceptical of whether Brexit has been worth all the hassle it has caused. The first opportunity to seek major change will come immediately after the election in the planned review of the TCA. Labour has put forward a sensible agenda for the changes it will seek in general terms. The question will be whether any feasible adjustments to the TCA will provide enough stimulus to growth and business investment given the dire economic consequences of Brexit, which become more evident every day. Radical changes in Britain's terms of trade with the EU will be difficult to secure if the European Commission sticks to the doctrine that “third countries” cannot pick and choose which parts of the single market they wish to sign up for. But Britain is not Mexico or Brazil! In or out of the EU, it is a leading European country that shares the same challenges that the rest of Europe and the EU face.

The trump card Labour has in its hands – as opposed to the Conservatives, a strong section of whom are deep-seated opponents of any closer

relationship with the EU – is that Labour can be active and committed pro-Europeans from where we currently are outside the EU. Under Labour, Britain will be a committed partner, ally and friend of the EU in all the challenges we as Europeans collectively face. Take the need, for example, for much strengthened cooperation on energy and climate change if we are to exploit fully the potential of wind power in the North Sea. The key is interconnection and a common electricity trading system between Britain, on one hand, and France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark, on the other. There is also a self-evident need for a comprehensive foreign policy, security and defence procurement relationship with the EU, which Ukraine makes compelling and where Britain has much to offer. Closer economic ties are a logical consequence of the shared multi-faceted political challenges that Britain and the rest of Europe face together.

A new era of cultural politics?

Behind Labour's caution on Europe lies a fear that Brexit has ushered in a new era of cultural politics. In my view, there are dangers for Labour here in overinterpreting this trend. Comparisons with Trump are especially misleading. Johnson is not Trump, but now he is gone, no one can play the tunes of social nationalism as well as he once did. Most British voters, whether they supported Brexit or not, are not fired up by establishment conspiracies, religious fanaticism or extreme social conservatism. The national unity shown throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in supporting unprecedented restrictions on personal freedom, or the unity of grief at Queen Elizabeth's death, does not suggest a country permanently at war with itself. Polling suggests that, by far, the most important issues for voters across the country are the cost of living and the state of public services, especially the NHS.

The Conservatives clearly believe they can bolster their core support by playing to an agenda of social conservatism. They are attempting to portray Labour as being in the pockets of "woke" activists on issues like asylum, gender recognition, sex education in schools or a refusal to acknowledge the alleged role of men of Pakistani heritage in child abuse gangs, despite the evidence that overwhelmingly white men commit this type of crime. Rishi Sunak sees commitments to get tough on criminals and "stop the boats" of illegal asylum seekers as policy areas where the political advantage lies. That is why it is legitimate for Labour to highlight in stark terms that can shock how the Conservatives under Rishi Sunak bear responsibility for a broken criminal justice system and a totally dysfunctional asylum and refugee policy.

I see little evidence that social conservatism and dog whistles that border on being racist will work for the Conservatives at a time when concerns about living standards and public services are so high. While Labour must avoid self-inflicted own goals, it is not self-evidently in the Conservative's self-interest to drift into sounding like the "nasty party", as Theresa May warned them 20 years ago. Labour should be more confident that its core values of fairness, social justice, tolerance and respect for the rule of law are in touch with the values of the British people.

The post-Corbyn policy agenda has changed

On policy in general, Starmer has moved the party onto the centre ground. A substantial section of the 2019 party would have been content with a policy stance that amounted to "Corbynism without Corbyn". In his leadership campaign, Starmer gave partial credence to this dream by including ten left-wing-sounding policy pledges in his personal manifesto. This proved an unnecessary



mistake, which will give some substance to the inevitable Conservative charges of “flip-flopping”. Of course, the same could be said of the manifesto on which Rishi Sunak lost his leadership election to Liz Truss, on which he feels vulnerable. Defenders of Keir Starmer should point out that, to win the post-Corbyn leadership election in the Labour Party as it was in 2019, it was necessary to reflect the policy positions which party activists had come to accept as normal under the previous incumbent. Social democrats like me should not be high and mighty about this. We should recognise that no candidate of ours would have been able to wrest the party from the Corbynista grip unless they had served in Corbyn’s Shadow Cabinet.

Since 2019, events have completely changed the policy agenda Labour has to address:

- Firstly, the UK has left the EU and post-Brexit Britain faces huge new economic challenges. A new strategy for economic growth, from which every part of Britain can benefit, has never been more urgent. The Conservatives quite evidently don’t have one: a “free port” or an “investment zone” here or there, mostly diverting and not adding significantly to business investment; a bit of financial deregulation, which may in the present fragile banking environment carry more risks than benefits; trade deals that deliver less than 0.1% additional growth and that only after a decade. Devising a new growth strategy is Labour’s big opportunity.
- Secondly, COVID-19 both inspired us with the heroism of public service and exposed the tattered fabric of our society. It falls to Labour to renew and reform the NHS and social care and, at the same time, bring back respect for the values of public service. We face a crisis of confidence and basic efficiency across all public services: the court

system; the integrity of the Metropolitan police; passport delays; border checks; inability to process asylum claims; thousands of couples who offer to be foster parents but can’t get their applications processed, etc. Labour must be the great restorer, reformer and re-invigorator of efficient, caring public service.

- Thirdly, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine Britain must come to terms with the harsh consequences of Putin’s aggression, changing all our comfortable post-1989 “after the Berlin wall” assumptions. Joe Biden has been magnificent on Ukraine. NATO and the transatlantic alliance have once again shown formidable power. But in a world of Donald Trump and his acolytes, we can no longer take the USA for granted for all time. To be stark, the new challenge is European rearmament.
- Finally, amid all these disruptions, climate change and new technologies have continued to advance at breakneck speed.

Labour has been sensibly cautious about the specific commitments it has made, especially to additional public spending. Specific pledges have been costed, and the party has gone to considerable lengths to demonstrate how they will be paid for. This is how the game of opposition politics is now played. However, caution is not simply a matter of political prudence: it reflects the despairing realities of the British economic situation.

Britain has a huge growth problem – creating a huge “tax and spend” problem

The failure to grow the economy – the fact that since COVID-19, in the G20, no country other

than Russia has suffered a worse economic performance – ensures that the post-election picture for public finances will be truly dire. For the three post-election years of 2024-27, the present government is assuming a fiscal tightening, in which the growth in current public spending will be held back to 1% per annum in real terms. As a result, the OBR forecasts that public spending by departments (excluding social security, debt interest, etc.) will fall from 16.4% of GDP in 2023-24 to 15.6% by 2027-28.

In this year's March budget, the Conservatives themselves have made new pledges to increase spending on childcare (the OBR estimates an extra cost of £5.2 billion a year by 2027-28) and defence (where the additional promised sums look too low), for which no provision had previously been made in these years. And the spending pressures from the pensions triple lock (spending on pensioner benefits is forecast by the OBR to rise from £116.8 billion in 2021-22 to £160.4 billion in 2027-28, a staggering increase that is little commented upon), the need to clear the NHS backlog, and the demographic realities of rising health and social care needs will eat heavily into any additional resources available. Also, it is simply not sustainable for public sector pay to be held back to levels that lag behind private sector pay for any significant period, without gravely impacting the quality of public services that can be delivered.

The Conservatives would have little chance, in my view, of sticking to their spending targets for these three years, were they to be in government, without drastic cuts. On public sector investment, on the other hand, they might succeed – but at what cost? The Johnson ambition – and here he was right – to sustain investment at 3% of GDP, principally as a major instrument of levelling up, has been abandoned: public investment is now being squeezed down. As the OBR points out, “net investment spending

declines steadily from a peak of 2.9% of GDP in 2023-24 to 2.1% of GDP in 2027-28”.

The Tories and tax

The Conservatives have one simple target in mind: to cut the UK tax burden, which, according to the OBR, is set to rise from 33.0% of GDP in 2019-20 to 37.7% in 2027-28, up 4.7% since the 2019 general election. The Conservatives are now signalling to forget growth-enhancing public investment; forget social care; forget the children from deprived backgrounds who've fallen behind at school because of COVID-19; forget the widespread chaos across Britain's public services; forget the need to restore the 0.7% aid target, at a time when apparently a third of the current reduced aid budget is being spent within Britain on meeting the costs of housing refugees and asylum seekers; forget the compelling need for rearmament in Europe. The Conservative party's top priority is to find the money for tax cuts as their last throw of the political dice.

Labour must not be intimidated by this prospect. It is a matter for careful political judgement on how Labour should respond to Tory promises of tax cuts. Labour should argue that the nation cannot afford unfunded giveaways, given the desperate position the country finds itself after 13 years of Tory stagnation. It is fundamentally their failure of policy on economic growth that must change. My instinct would be to support some tax relief for the lower paid, funded by closing some of the tax reliefs that top taxpayers enjoy on capital gains, dividends and pensions. But I would make the argument that any more general reduction in taxation would be dependent on a return to robust economic growth. And Labour should set out a path as to how to achieve this.



Two key principles for Labour policy: “invest to grow” and “invest to save”

For invest to grow, Labour has already committed itself to a significant programme of investment in climate transition. At a pledged £28 billion a year, which represents an annual investment of something between 1 and 1.25% of annual GDP, this is almost double the annual spend on the Home Office budget. The hope is that this would help create in Britain a new generation of industries at the forefront of the clean energy sector. Furthermore, the climate revolution has the potential to create a new generation of tens of thousands of highly skilled, decently paid jobs in every part of the UK, as we meet the challenge of home insulation, phasing out gas boilers and exploiting the new potential of hydrogen fuels and heat pumps. At present, this is more of an aspiration than a costed programme. But the policy faces two major problems: one political, the other practical.

The political problem was brought home to me by meetings with an Australian Labour Party (ALP) delegation at last year’s party conference. The slogan emblazoned across our conference platform was Labour’s mission to create a “fairer, greener future”. The ALP delegation argued that, while the emphasis on climate change was correct in policy terms (and they had just won a famous election victory against Australian Liberal climate deniers), the Australian electorate did not make the link between, on one hand, tackling climate change and, on the other, higher growth and improved living standards. Their voters saw climate policy as a cost, not a growth opportunity, and they did not understand the link to better jobs. The ALP visitors felt UK Labour had much to do to explain their policy, particularly as the economic challenge Britain faces is so much deeper than Australia’s. Ed Miliband has made powerful arguments that investments in green power, such as windfarms, will bring down electricity costs, and thereby, support

living standards. He has made the case that green investment can transform the competitive position of the British steel industry (though the consequence would inevitably be far fewer jobs in steelmaking). But we are still, in my opinion, some way short of convincing voters that our green policy thrust is about growth and jobs.

As for the practical issues, Labour needs to explain better how it would manage a programme of climate investment successfully in the UK context, much of which would need to be financed by additional public borrowing. That requires plans that will carry the confidence of the financial markets. Public subsidies and public investment will have an important role to play in kick-starting “green” investments and supporting the growth of new green consumer markets, as is planned in the United States Inflation Reduction Act and the EU plans for incentivising climate transition. Similarly, subsidies and public investment will be necessary in the UK to support the creation of new British jobs and new British-based businesses. But the reality is that we will be doing this in a European and global market, where Britain lacks critical scale and, at present, is woefully short of the necessary industrial capacities. Inappropriate protectionist rhetoric that all our ambitions for climate transition can be achieved by supporting “British firms” and “British jobs” should be avoided. In practice, a pro-European Labour government should seek the closest possible alignment with Europe’s developing plans. It would not make commercial sense for Britain to invest in all aspects of climate transition, given that companies in other countries have already established a substantial first-mover advantage over any UK start-up. Public investment should be conditional on demonstrating how a new British-based company can achieve the critical mass to become a successful exporter: the scandalous failure of Britishvolt should be a lesson to us all.

At Labour's autumn 2022 party conference, Labour pledged to establish a new publicly owned Great British Energy (GBE) company. As one would expect, this was received with huge enthusiasm in a hall packed with Labour activists. Under the right circumstances, a new body with the capacity to invest public money on the taxpayer's behalf could be extremely useful in mitigating private sector risk. However, private sector companies may be nervous about entering into government partnerships in these new markets until the role of GBE is better defined. Keir Starmer does not see GBE as a vehicle for nationalisation: that is progress.

Invest to save

For invest to save, the litmus test is whether upfront additional ring-fenced spending on public services will make their provision cheaper in the medium term and reduce pressures for future spending. The best example is social care, where an effectively functioning system would both help keep the elderly and frail out of hospitals and prevent long delays to their release once they are there: which would lead to huge strides forward in NHS efficiency. Other examples of upfront spending to save money in the medium term might include more effective practical help for troubled families, which would reduce the need for numbers of children to be taken into care. The recent government commissioned review by Josh Macalister demonstrates how an upfront investment of £2.8 billion over four years could reduce the spiralling long-term costs of institutional care, at the same time leading to happier outcomes for children at risk.

Invest to save is also a justification for comprehensive support for better early years provision in overcoming educational disadvantages. Yet another area would be radical reform of our

system of further education colleges to raise the quality of provision. Invest to save might equally apply across all areas of public service reform, particularly the police; the criminal justice system and coping with problems of rough sleeping, drug abuse and alcoholism.

Partnership with business

Keir Starmer has been right to emphasise that partnership with business will be one of the driving themes of his government. That applies to other "industries of the future" in sectors like AI, new material technologies, and biotechnology and pharmaceuticals. The promotion of new industrial strengths should be as high a priority for Labour as climate transition because in these sectors Britain already has considerable strengths. An incoming Labour government will need to draw on the best industrial and commercial advice available: the expertise of private equity should play a significant role. Mechanisms and advisory machinery with real teeth must be established so that advice on potential projects can be presented to ministers, fearlessly and regardless of inevitable political logrolling. A major critique of the Conservatives is that they have failed, with any consistency, to develop a modern industrial policy for Britain, except perhaps for Greg Clark's tenure as Business Secretary. Labour must make a success of industrial policy, by showing how all projects will be subject to objective analysis and maximise the value of public investment.

Partnership with business must be a key principle of Labour's way of working. The free market left to its own devices will not provide the new industrial capacity we need, but nor will an all-directing state. Some sectors need more of an element of planning than others. For example, the cheapest possible supply of



renewable energy depends on having a plan for the development of the National Grid and interconnectors across the North Sea with our Continental partners. The speed of take-up for electric cars depends on a plan for reliable and widely available charging points. Partnership requires formal structures at national, sectoral and city region levels. The challenge is to achieve this in the least bureaucratic but effective way.

Breaking out from stagnation

In devising Labour's prospectus for the election, ending the calamity of a decade and a half of economic stagnation and broken public services must be at the centre of the Labour programme. A modern industry policy and comprehensive public service reform must be at its heart. This will require big changes in the way government works.

Government at all levels – national, city region and local – needs to be open to new talent. Starmer's Britain needs to draw in the best ideas, the best thinkers and the best doers; pioneers in the charitable and voluntary, third sector; innovative and successful managers of public services; those from the private sector who combine strong social commitment with a genuinely entrepreneurial mindset. This task should be a priority for the new generation of Labour ministers, and there needs to be a high-level task force in advance of the general election to work out how this can be done. This is not anti-civil service, as too many Conservative ministers presently are. Rather, we need to raise the morale of public service, if Labour is to achieve substantial change. And this needs an injection of new talent to work alongside the best of the civil service, who have been denigrated and bullied for far too long.

Decision-making needs to be devolved to the maximum possible extent. Big investments

should rightly remain matters for decision at UK level. But for the rest, the centralising and stifling grip of government departments and the Treasury needs to be released. For 50 years, governments have talked about devolution. The Brown Commission has set out a set of radical proposals. Labour has promised that one of its first measures will be a "Take Back Control" Bill. But these are commitments of high generality. If there is to be "Action This Day" (as Churchill wrote in his wartime memos), the details must be worked up now and involve an open process of deliberation.

There must be a determination across the whole of government to rebuild trust in our relations with the EU and its member states. Lack of trust has become a barrier to practical cooperation in pursuit of progress across multiple fields of endeavour. Europe cannot be ignored.

What should be Labour's core message?

The Labour leader has been subject to some mockery for his various attempts to define Starmerism from the "under new management" of the summer of 2020 to the "work, care, equality, security" of the 2021 conference to the "security, prosperity, respect" of New Year 2022, the "fairer, greener future" of the 2022 conference and the "build a better Britain" speech this spring. In truth, these criticisms of slogans and soundbites are trivial. The five missions for his government that Starmer set out in March are all perfectly serious:

- enabling the economy to grow and create new jobs in every part of the country;
- a secure and cheaper decarbonised energy supply;
- revitalising the NHS;

- the creation of new educational opportunities at every level; and
- bringing local communities together and making them safer.

These missions will offer a medium-term focus to his government, in contrast to the inconsistency and comprehensive policy failure of the announcement-driven “sticking plaster politics” of Conservative rule. What Keir Starmer now needs to do is give the electorate more of a feeling of what in Britain he is passionate to change. And he needs to explain to the sceptics what it is about him that makes him different to the Conservatives. In other words, he must answer the question, *what kind of social democrat am I?*

In terms of both strategy and communications, there is still something lacking. Let me illustrate with a bit of history. Every time Labour has won an election in Britain, it has done it on the back of recognisable governing principles.

- The Attlee government of 1945 was about public ownership and economic planning to prevent any return to the mass unemployment of the 1930s and build the Beveridge welfare state.
- The Wilson government of 1964 was about the modernisation of Britain by marrying science to socialism: a new meritocracy based on equal opportunity would sweep away the dominance of the old school tie.
- The Wilson government of 1974 emphasised social partnership with the trade unions as the only means to control rising prices and maintain social stability.
- The Blair government of 1997 promised not to reverse Thatcher, but to build a New Britain on what she had neglected: public

services; education; and the NHS. Labour’s strategy was to invest and grow with social justice and economic efficiency marching hand in hand.

How should Keir Starmer describe his government to be?

I would suggest a message along these lines:

The Starmer government will end 13 years of Conservative economic stagnation, public service neglect and political chaos. It will be a breakout government, with a consistent and coherent plan for investment in the restoration and renewal of what makes us feel proud about Britain.

This new investment will be costed, affordable and in full keeping with the missions we have set out.

Labour will invest to grow the economy from the bottom up in all parts of Britain, to secure Britain’s place in the industries of the future and to meet our transformative climate and energy goals.

Labour will invest to save in public services and reduce the costs of societal failure by upgrading social care, reforming our NHS to avoid preventable illness, supporting young families, extending opportunities for education and skills at all levels, and cutting the costs of crime.

We will end top-down government; work in close partnership with business; and devolve power and responsibility to our nations, regions and communities to the maximum extent.

This, of course, is far too long for a marketing professional, which I am not. It may not either be a complete or satisfactory answer to the question of what a Starmer government would be about. But it is a workable brief.



More than a one-term government?

Starmer's Labour Party is a work in progress, but necessary work if Labour is to fight a convincing general election campaign and succeed in government. No one expects overnight miracles. But Labour must have ambition and demonstrate a coherent long-term strategy to be the kind of social democratic government that, inch by inch, tackles the hard boards of injustice in our society.

The Blair government, in many ways, had it lucky. It came to office in 1997 on a rising economic tide that created the underlying conditions for Labour to win two successive elections. It was not just improved public services that voters liked about the Blair government, nor the massive help for the poor elderly and children living in poverty that the Brown Treasury delivered: the average living standards of working families rose constantly through this period.

That is why Starmer Labour must achieve a "break out" from Britain's present stagnation. That is the only way to ensure it can be more than a one-term government.

FIRST RESPONSE

by **Thijs Reuten**, *Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group,
member of the EU-UK Delegation in the European Parliament*

Thank you so much,
Baron Liddle,
Dear Roger,

- For your unabashed pro-Europeanism. For your optimism. For your clarity, as regards the direction Labour should take. And, of course, thank you so very much for being here with us today.
- These are exactly the exchanges we need. To maintain our strong ties. Our UK friends may have left the Union – many of whom, like you yourself, unwillingly. But that’s not where this story ends.
- We need to keep on coming together like this. Exchange ideas. Help each other out. Strengthen those bonds. Not just because we are close in proximity, history and philosophy. Not just because Russia’s war raging in the heart of Europe has refocused minds on the absurdity of the notion that any European state should be able to go it alone. But because I find it very hard to believe that there would never, in the future, be the possibility for us to restore that terrible mistake of 2016.
- Now this needs to stay between us. It is true that each of us in this room cannot wait for Sir Keir to win the elections in a landslide, despite this week’s predictably alarmist headlines that Labour’s lead in the polls is shrinking. And Labour’s leadership has made the very clear decision not to focus on rejoining the EU in any shape or form.
- I see this “great unmentionable” of Brexit not as a full stop. But as a medium-term decision not to alienate potential voters. An attempt

to leave the Brexit debate, which has led to so many years of utterly destructive politics, firmly in the past. No sense fighting yesterday’s battles when the country itself is in such dire need of a future.

- And I appreciate Labour’s outreach across the Channel, regarding the big cross-cutting items you have mentioned: climate change; energy cooperation; and, especially, cooperation on foreign policy and security. We see that, here in Brussels, and we look forward to working on those items.
- Let’s look ahead. We know one thing for certain. In 2024, the British public will have more to choose from than the leadership wasteland presented by Johnson and Corbyn in 2019.
- When Sir Keir won the leadership contest, Labour needed reconstruction. And, after a decade and a half of Tory rule, so does the UK. So do public services. It’s very clear that the bread-and-butter issues that many UK citizens are rightly concerned about are all Tory responsibilities. Those should be, and in many cases already are, the focus of Labour’s early campaign efforts.
- I appreciate the outline you provided of the quadruple disruption after the 2019 elections. I would add to that last year’s remarkable Tory implosion, which, for a few months, peeled away any semblance of competency the party had retained throughout years of Boris bluster – and then the boon of another implosion in Scotland. And I fully agree on the necessity of Labour presenting clear governing principles.



- Because right now, today's run-up to the campaign is, more than anything, a competition for competence. But if Sunak turns out to demonstrate a reasonable level of competence over the next year and manages to keep the wilfully extremist gaffes of some of his cabinet members in check, Labour's platform needs to be more than the promise of a stable investment government.
- We know that many people will swiftly vote against their own interests. Voting behaviour is emotional more often than deeply rational. Very few ever benefited from a decade and a half of Tory rule. Fewer even from Brexit. But politics is not just about the plans. Nobody reads 100-page election manifestos. It is about the psychology of *feeling* seen, heard and understood. Boris Johnson knew how to do that. We can hate that – I certainly do – but there might also be something there we can learn from.
- Social democrats are, as a rule, excellent at crafting plans on what would be the right thing to do. But when we fail to present our case clearly, to outline how the conservative self-enrichment of the right directly affects the individual voter, to demonstrate that we hear and understand lived concerns, we will always risk losing to those populists who are not afraid to capitalise on those sentiments.
- That does not mean we should step into the trap of copying their culture war concerns. Nor should we do the opposite and lend our unwavering support to the diametric opposite of whatever their culture war concerns are. But we should make it very clear that they lied to each of their voters. That every instance of economic stagnation and NHS underfunding is squarely on them. That a very few, very rich folks benefited from their choices, while everyone else suffered. That they try to hide their betrayal of their own voters by manipulating emotions over symbolic bills designed to create and capitalize on fears, such as the Illegal Migration Bill.
- More than anything, people – and thereby voters – hate being lied to by politicians. But that's exactly what the Tories do. They weaponise this very real sense of psychological loss to which you referred. Labour should take a page from their book – but with sincerity: recognise the psychological loss; point out how the Tories lied to their voters; and *then* present a competent Labour government that would *never* do so. That is a plan. Only when the problem is clear does competence come in as a solution.
- Quick detour to the Netherlands. Two weeks ago, an upstart party called the Farmer Citizen Movement won a plurality of votes in every single of our 12 provinces. While known as the “farmer party”, they won votes all across the country. From voters who felt acknowledged and respected. Let's not dwell on their platform, with which I mostly disagree very strongly. But they managed to capitalise on the voters' desire to feel acknowledged. Not lectured to.
- This is the challenge for the Next Left. We must demonstrate that not only do we have a plan, but that we see, feel and acknowledge the *individual* voter concerns that *necessitate* that plan. And then we must repackage that into appealing action points. With a clear vision of the future that's better for each of our voters.



←NEXT LEFT→



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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Roger Liddle is a Labour member of the House of Lords. He was a Special Adviser to Tony Blair on European Affairs 1997-04, and to the European Commissioners Peter Mandelson and José Manuel Barroso 2004-07. A former Co-Chair of Policy Network and Pro-Chancellor of the University of Lancaster, he has served on Oxford City Council, London Borough of Lambeth, and Cumbria County Council. He is the author of *The Europe Dilemma: Britain and the Drama of EU Integration* (I. B. Tauris, 2014).



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Thijs Reuten is currently a member of the European Parliament, part of the PvdA Eurodelegation. Reuten was a director in East Amsterdam for eight years and before that he was a member of the Amsterdam city council for many years. From 2018 Thijs worked as an independent consultant and the last year until March 1, 2021 as Head of Policy at Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)



Maria MALTSCHNIG

Maria Maltschnig serves since 2016 as Director of Karl-Renner-Institut, which is the political academy of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. She graduated from Vienna University of Economics (having a degree in socioeconomics), and she has extensive political experience, having started her involvement in VSSTÖ (Federation of Socialist Students) – of which organisation she also was elected a chair of in 2008 -2009. Subsequently, she worked as a consultant for the Chamber of Labour and for the Federal Ministry of Finance, after which she was appointed as the Head of the Cabinet of the Austrian Chancellor in 2016. In parallel with the diverse responsibilities, she also was a member of the supervisory board of the publishing house “Facultas Verlags-und Buchhandels AG” in 2014 -2016.



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Andreas Schieder is a member of the European Parliament and the Head of the Austrian SPÖ-EU-Delegation. Before that, he served as parliamentary leader of the Social Democratic Party in the Austrian Parliament. He was also state secretary in the Ministry of Finance from 2008 to 2013. Andreas Schieder holds a master's degree in economics from the University of Vienna. In the European Parliament, Andreas Schieder is Chair of the Delegation to the EU-North Macedonia Joint Parliamentary Committee, a Member of the Conference of Delegation Chairs, the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Special Committee on Foreign Interference in all Democratic Processes in the European Union, including Disinformation, the Delegation to the EU-UK Parliamentary Partnership Assembly, the Delegation for relations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo and Substitute Member in the Transport Committee and the Delegation for relations with the United States. Additionally, his engagement for a progressive way forward brought him to being Co-Chair of the Progressive Forum and Chair of the FEPS Next Left Program.



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Ania SKRZYPEK, (Skrzypek-Claassens), PhD, is Director for Research and Training at the Foundations for European Progressive Studies (FEPS). She obtained her Ph.D. cum laude in political sciences from the University of Warsaw, her thesis "Cooperation of the socialist and social democratic parties in uniting Europe. From Liaison Bureau to PES. 1957 – 2007." (also published in book format in 2010).

Before joining FEPS in 2009, A. Skrzypek worked as a PhD researcher and taught at the Faculty of Journalism and Political Sciences at the University of Warsaw (2003 – 2009). In parallel, she served as twice consecutively elected Secretary General of Young European Socialists (ECOSY, 2005-2009). She was a co-founder of the united youth organization FMS (in 2001) and was a co-host of the TV studio of SLD-Unia Pracy 2004 European election campaign.

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About the Karl-Renner-Institute

The Karl-Renner-Institute is the political academy of the Austrian Social Democratic Party. It is a forum for political discourse, a centre for education and training and a think tank on the future of social democracy.

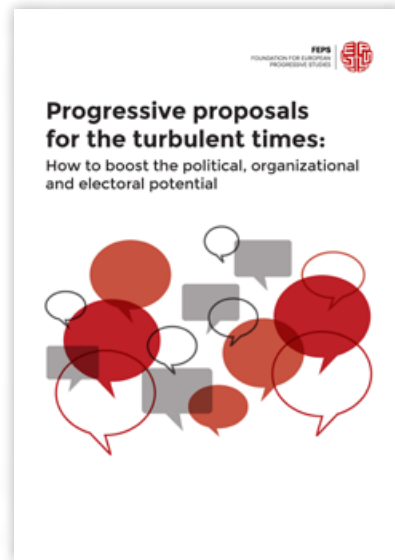
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About Next Left

The Next Left Research Programme began in 2009 as an initiative founded by FEPS together with the Renner Institut. It is a unique project when it comes to longevity, influence and richness of output. Since its inception, the focus of Next Left has remained on connecting diverse threads of studies and debates regarding ideological, policy-oriented, organisational and electoral renewal of social democracy. Throughout the years, the programme has consolidated a network of academics and experts (gathered nowadays in the Next Left Focus Group and Next Left High-Level Conversation); established a number of flagship events (with the Annual Oxford Symposium and Next Left Lectures being among the most prominent); resulted in numerous publications (with 14 volumes of Next Left books and several Next Left country case studies); held numerous academic seminars and contributed to external colloquiums (at universities in Barcelona, Warsaw, Gothenburg, Lisbon and Ljubljana – to name just a few); provided supportive advice to leaders and sister parties and connected thousands of members of diverse audiences in Europe (via round tables), the USA and Latin America. Since 2020, the programme has been chaired by Andreas Schieder, Leader of the SPÖ Delegation to the European Parliament, who has been supported in his work by the steering committee with Laszlo Andor, FEPS Secretary General; Maria Maltschnig, Director of Renner Institute and Ania Skrzypek, Director for Research and Training (in charge of the initiative since its first days). In their endeavour, they heavily rely on invaluable organisational support from Céline Guedes, FEPS Project Officer.

ON SIMILAR TOPICS



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**Prospects for a Keir Starmer Premiership :
what can he achieve and what obstacles stand in his way**