

HAVERING **FABIAN** SOCIETY

HAVERING FABIAN

Volume 2 Edition 37 December– 2018

**Havering
Fabian Society**
Covering recent
meetings with
Grace Blakeley
and Joseph
Croft, articles on
welfare reforms
and current
opinion polls
and details of
future meetings

Contents

Introduction	2
Grace Blakeley	3
Joseph Croft Labour campaign for mental health.....	6
Opinion Polls.....	9
What do we want from the benefits system?	11
Future Speakers	15
We value your input!.....	17
Local Fabian Society Contacts.....	17
Future Editions	18
Links.....	18
Havering Fabian Society is affiliated to	19
Havering Fabian Membership.....	19
Havering Fabian Society	20

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VOLUME 2 EDITION 37 December 2018

Introduction

Welcome to the new edition of the Havering Fabian Newsletter.

This edition contains details of the recent meeting with Grace Blakeley and Joseph Croft Director of Labour Campaign for Mental Health.

Our presence on social media is bringing us closer to a number of new organisations; we now have over 1,162 followers on twitter. Keep up to date at our twitter site @haveringfabians for the latest news. We are affiliated to the four local Labour Parties, and will do all we can to support their campaigns. Havering and Dagenham Young Labour are on twitter @HavAndDagYL and hope they reflect a growing interest in Labour politics in Havering.

As opinions are the lifeblood of politics, we welcome a reply to any of the articles. The Fabian Society exists to promote political debate, both within and outside the Labour Party. Progressive politics extends beyond the Labour Party and contributions from the Labour Movement as a whole are welcome.

Attendances at recent meetings have remained good and the quality of speakers remains exceptional. We are glad to see a number of new people attending the meetings, and have an ever increasing number of followers on Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.



Our website address is <http://haveringfabians.org> - a little different from the previous one so please update your Favourites. As you are no doubt aware GDPR means we need to keep our mailing list up to date. If you

are not on our mailing list (we use MAILCHIMP – please check your spam folders!) contact us via the website and we will add you in.

Grace Blakeley

Grace Blakeley was the speaker at October meeting, which took place in a new venue, the Gallery Studio at Fairkytes. We had a packed audience and Grace proved to be an excellent speaker.

The subject of her talk was the financialising of the British economy, and the issues Labour would face as a result. The post war consensus had seen a sustained period of economic growth. The Thatcher break with this had seen neo-liberal politics and economics dominate the agenda.

This had seen the demise of much of UK manufacturing industry, with a disproportionate regional impact. Manufacturing had been replaced by an increase in dependence of financial services as a source of wealth. An agenda of privatisation had seen public assets transferred to the private sector. With public services delivered by PFI contracts, financial transactions became critical to the “success” of the UK economy. Wealth was distributed unequally to those who already had it.

The consequences were on going austerity and a broken economic system. The level of real wages has been static for the subsequent decade for large numbers of the working population. While employment levels appeared high, the growth of the gig economy and zero hour contracts combined with low productivity levels, meant large numbers of the population faced reductions in living standards, while growth levels remained low.

Labour has an opportunity to reverse this. Regional imbalances need to be addressed. There is a need for infrastructure investment; survival of the planet requires significant levels of “green” investment. Britain has an opportunity to be a world leader if it meets the challenge.



Grace expands on a point

Labour rode this bandwagon, as the increased tax take paid for more public services. Finance institutions operated at a level above government influence and in their own interest, with limited and often ineffectual regulation.

However, the financial crash in 2008 ended the ability of the economy to deliver.

Banks in America had been grouping mortgages together and selling them on as a package – in effect toxic assets, worth far less than the buyer was paying for them. When banks sought to recover their debts, the edifice fell and Lehman brothers collapsed and the banking crisis began.

Britain had similar issues (Northern Rock), and globally massive government intervention was needed to keep the world economy functioning. Britain had become dependent on exporting financial services, which was (and is) exposed to variations in the global economy.



Grace focuses on the detail

Grace then answered a number of questions, no doubt helpful for subsequent appearances on *This Week* with Andrew Neal (although we did not ask her to explain the difference between democratic socialism and social democracy).

The City of London remains largely ambivalent about Brexit – there will be some disruption but the ability to adapt will minimise the disruption. The issue may well be whether the City operates in the interest of the Country or the institutions. Although not discussed at the meeting, Grace was implying the left case for Brexit, which she has subsequently written article on.

(<https://novaramedia.com/2018/06/24/financial-globalisation-has-been-a-disaster-brexit-gives-us-a-chance-to-resist-it/>).

An incoming Labour government will need to use the tax system to address inequality, and deal with issues of ownership – nationalisation of the railways is a popular policy, so there is already support for this in some areas of the economy.

At a local level, Labour Councils should look to follow the Preston model, where the Council tries to increase the amount of the council budget spent within the local area.

Since the meeting Grace has been a regular presence on TV, featuring on Andrew Neil, Sky, and the Daily Politics. She is a contributor to the relaunched Tribune, and will start a regular column for the New Statesman in January. It is good to see an alternative economic agenda being given

exposure on the mainstream media by such an effective advocate. Her forthcoming book will be an essential read.

Joseph Croft Labour campaign for mental health

Mental health is rising up the political agenda, and a number of people asked us to ask a speaker on the subject. We asked the Director of the Labour Campaign for Mental Health, Joseph Croft and this formed the basis of our November meeting.

. He has worked as a clinical psychologist since 2008, and changes in government policy had seen his workload expanding. Waiting lists had increased and this meant a number of problems remained untreated. Austerity had made life more difficult for potential clients as government cuts have withered away pillars of support such as Sure Start. The pressure had increased with changes in employment patterns and the benefit system. This had made Joseph more politically active, although he found navigating the Party structure difficult.

Joseph began by explaining mental health was a human right

The Labour Campaign for Mental Health had been founded in 2013, with Victoria Desmond Joseph's predecessor, with Lucinda Berger MP as the campaign president. The campaign is affiliated to the party via disability Labour, campaigns on a cross party basis and with the Socialist Health association. The campaign has a small core group and lobbies on Party policy submissions.

The recent campaign had been Target 21, a campaign for all the London Labour Councils to appoint a mental health champion, had been successful with all 21 appointing a lead in 2016.

The campaign exists to raise mental health awareness and participates in world mental health day.

More MPs are talking about their own experience, but there is still a stigma involved. The campaign is branching out to a wider audience and widening discussion.

At a practical level there has been lobbying of parliament and cross party campaigns, enabling Croydon MP Stephen Reed to pass legislation on the issue.

There had been a campaign “where’s your head at” and publicity around Mental Health first aid and ensuring that it’s available in all workplaces.

It is estimated that the loss to industry is £35 billion. A 200,000 plus online petition and a national campaign had put pressure on the government, which had none the less sought to defer any decision.

The government launched a children and young people’s green paper which has mental health as a key issue, and the campaign is seeking to raise the profile of mental health as this is mentioned in the first sentence.

There is a need to shake up the approach, and participate in consultation events and feed into this.

Secondary care services are being reduced and this is having an adverse effect. The campaign is seeking to ensure properly funded services. The restoration of funding from the current government (where it is occurring) is piecemeal. This is reflected in other areas of healthcare, and Joseph was encouraged by John Ashworth who is linking the opposition approach and thinking long term and cross department.

This approach builds in the last Labour manifesto, which was rushed (but positive) - there is a need to flesh out the thinking.



Joseph starts his presentation

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Joseph brings his talk to a conclusion and prepares for questions

In respect of workforce issues, there has been a significant increase in people leaving the support services. Bringing back into mental health employment those who have dropped out of the service is essential if this trend is to be reversed. The lifting of the one per cent pay cap for NHS workers is good but needs to be sustainable.

Care jobs are not valued sufficiently - are they really low skilled? How do we alter the thinking, and move on from zero hours' contracts?

Ring fencing funding is one option, although CCGs (Clinical Commissioning Groups) currently use funding to address shortfalls elsewhere. The use of Freedom of Information requests has identify a whole range of issues particularly in child and adolescent's mental health.

Adverse childhood events have an impact and the first thousand days are important. Reduced funding is therefore something which has a lasting effect.

The numbers of children and adults using the services has doubled, although the service itself is seen as the Cinderella end of a Cinderella service. Funding is not proportionate, and this needs to change. Public Health funding may be the answer.

Mental health needs to be a component of all policy, with an impact assessment across all departments. An advocate in each department would be more effective than just one. Labour needs to hit the ground running after the general election. Mental health is in a crisis, and Labour can afford to be bold. Funding is an issue, but we need to think long term.

Opinion Polls

The current opinion polls show Labour and the Conservatives more or less on the same level of support. This is subject to the usual margin of error, so if an election were called, anything could happen.

With the May government in seemingly ever deepening chaos, there is concern amongst many Labour supporters as to why the Party is not showing the sort of lead that used to happen mid-term.

There are any number of explanations for this that mean Labour does not have to be overly concerned. Labour has maintained a level of support significantly greater than it had prior to the 2017 election.

The 2017 election saw Labour add many millions of votes and almost 10 per cent to its vote share. In a volatile environment, the party could increase support further.

The 2017 election saw the two main parties take over 80 per cent of the vote for the first time since the 1970s. The squeeze on the Lib Dem's and UKIP support means a straight comparison of opinion polls that cover a three or four party era are not like for like. There is a choice between two parties as a potential government. The Lib Dems have done considerable harm to their voter base by going into coalition with Cameron and votes

show no sign of returning despite being the natural home for Remain voters.

The polls also reflect the political reality that there is every prospect of an election at short notice, and wavering Conservatives may be less inclined to support another party. The base Tory support is also more inclined towards Brexit, and they are most likely to achieve their vision of Brexit under May or her successor than under a Corbyn led Labour. If Labour is ever to capture any of this vote, it's going to be on issues other than Brexit.

Elections are won by voters who did not vote for you last time to vote for you this time. There are several groups this applies to

- The young voting for the first time.
- Non-voters - perhaps the hardest group to reach as their reasons for not voting are many and varied. Corbyn led Labour offers a very different vision of the future to previous Labour leaders and it is hard to sustain an argument that Political choices are not available to the electors "you're all the same" has never been less true.
- Voters who previously voted for other parties. While there is a degree of churn in the way people vote, and reasons are always rational in the view of political experts, there are floating voters who will vote on their perceived view of the world. This is inevitably different to those who have firm party based political opinions, and it's often hard to relate to these people. For example, during a TV debate or prime minister's questions, who did well and who didn't in your view is frequently viewed subjectively by the viewer, who will judge the winner to be the one with views closest to their belief. In effect, you can summarise the winner before hearing the discussion. Objective analysis is difficult if you have party loyalty.

The last category of voters moved to Labour in 1966, drifted to Thatcher in 1979, Blair in 1997 and while they have drifted away from Labour since, have begun to move back, but not in sufficient numbers to give Labour a lead in either June 2017 or in polls since. The "Corbyn" effect

means Labour can achieve a majority with swings that are historically achievable.

If and when politics moves on from Brexit, these are the groups Labour needs to win over to get a majority. There are lessons from 2017- while Labour did well in London, votes and seats lost in the north and midlands suggested the movement of floating votes was not one way. While primarily a vote over Brexit, it's complicated the picture, as Labour's and for that matter the Conservatives, have to appeal to both leave and remain voters to secure a majority.

The other unknown is whether the Scottish Labour Party will be able to breakthrough and win seats from both SNP and the Tories. There are a number of highly marginal seats where Labour could break through (or slip back). The Tory revival in Scotland appears to be based on an element of tactical voting to remove the SNP, which benefits Labour as well. It's hard to judge from London how this will play out, and the realistic prospect of a Labour government may persuade former Labour voters to return.

So not being ahead in the polls does not mean a Labour government is not possible. Although being ahead is still prefer to trailing the worst government in living memory.

What do we want from the benefits system?

Labour has a problem with the benefits system. We know what we don't want - Universal Credit, or at least the current incarnation of it.

What is not on the table is an alternative that will modernise the current system without unforeseen consequences.

This is essential if Labour is to make a difference. It's not easy and requires a great deal of thought and some difficult decisions.

The starting point is clarifying what the benefits system is for, and perhaps what it's not.

The intention is to ensure that those who are unable to work are able to live a satisfactory life. This includes those who are physically or mentally unable to work, those acting as carers, and those who cannot find employment. For these groups, benefits should enable them to function as independent individuals.

It does make sense that work should be worthwhile. The situation where millions of working people are in recipients of benefits is an indication that the system is breaking down.

We do need to define work - this is not just paid employment, but acting a carer.

The gig economy means many people drift in and out of employment often but not always on low paid employment at or close to the minimum wage. The current system would mean constantly changing income and almost consistent recalculated benefits. Nearly all those involved will remain poorly paid, but their position made worse by the complicated benefits recalculation time they change employment. This is mirrored in the tax system where the tax payable will alter often dramatically from week to week, month to month.

Universal credit is an attempt to address these issues but has failed as there is no understanding of life on minimal income. Reduced funding led to author Ian Duncan Smith leaving the Cabinet- volunteering to do so when really a sacking would be more appropriate. Ironically he invested significant time and political energy making Universal Credit reality. It has for failed- the system remains complicated with every case different.

The benefits system has the effect, intentional or otherwise of keeping those without poor. Life on benefits is no picnic, as the spread of foodbank's has illustrated.

Ideally, we should, try and alter the debate and what we are trying to achieve. Benefits as a stepping stone should be the norm, appreciating that for some they will never gain employment.

Ensuring that the benefit system aids aspiration requires significantly altering the activities of the state. This means providing a support network that enables all to readily contribute to society. This requires

child care, crèche facilities as a norm, and ensuring provision is skewed in favour of the poor rather than the articulate middle classes. Policy has edged this way but never quite achieved a breakthrough.

Public support for any reform is essential. Labour lost the welfare debate after 2010 when the party vote for the Tory reforms in the wake of the election defeat. That decision has been well documented, and while seemed logical at the time handed the moral high ground to the coalition.

That the grounds for support were more tactical than policy based is telling. What did not follow was also a problem. The lack of a fundamental reappraisal of welfare left a vacuum so the Tories could progress universal credit without meaningful opposition. The 2015 election came and went without the party advancing fundamental reform. Owen Smith said at the Fabian conference that followed the election that the party needed to rethink welfare for when it would regain power (which at that point seemed likely to be 2020), reflecting the economy it would inherit on entering government.

This looked likely to be (and this is still the case) growing zero hours' contracts, greater labour fluidity with many people in more than one job, weak unions, and a shattered support network. As the reductions in public expenditure bite harder, public confidence in the state will suffer. When Labour are elected, there would be some expectations from the electorate that change would be coming.

Three years later, we are not there in thinking through what this would look like. We need to work this through, and the London School of Economics series of lectures on Beveridge 2.0 (see Claire Blakemore's article in newsletter 34 for example), attempted to do this.

Labour has suggested scrapping Universal Credit, but something needs to take its place. As previous changes have shown, amendments to the benefits system need to be thought through or there can be unanticipated consequences- Universal Credit was not intended to drive thousands to food banks, housing benefits were not intended to distort the housing rental market and drive up rents and private property prices at no benefit to the overall public purse.

Welfare benefits are the reflection of a mature society that it prepared to support all of the community. There should be no deserving and undeserving poor, but a range of public policy initiatives that enable people who are able to do so to find employment. There are a range of things the government should do - training opportunities, support for carers, enhanced apprenticeship opportunities linked to wider industrial and regional strategies.

Government IT projects have a history of failure, but there is a pressing need to have systems that can adapt to modern working patterns that change on a weekly basis. These will take time to introduce, and need to be suitable for further adaptation as working patterns continue to change.

Changes to the benefit system risk winners and losers if they lead to redistribution between claimants. This has been the main impact of Universal Credit, and will happen again if any changes are not thought through. A Labour government need to hit the ground running on this, as changes will take time to implement and many of the current inequities will continue until a new system is in place.

Future Speakers

25th January 2019 – 7.30pm AGM and 8pm **Lord Roy Kennedy**
Fairkytes Billet Lane Hornchurch.



Lord Kennedy is a Labour & Co-op Peer, Shadow Minister for Housing and Local Government Minister, and a supporter of Millwall, Surrey cricket, Dulwich Hamlet and Fabian Executive Member.

27th February 7.30 St Joseph's Hall St Marys Lane Upminster – **Louise Haigh MP** shadow Policing Minister



Louise Haigh MP Speaker on February 27th Labour MP for Sheffield Heeley and Shadow Policing & Crime Minister

25th March **Ashley Dalton** PPC for Rochford and Southend East – venue Saffron House Romford



Ashley Dalton the speaker on 25th March - Labour candidate for Rochford and Southend East, subject to be finalised.

11th April Venue to be confirmed **Jannike Wachowiak**



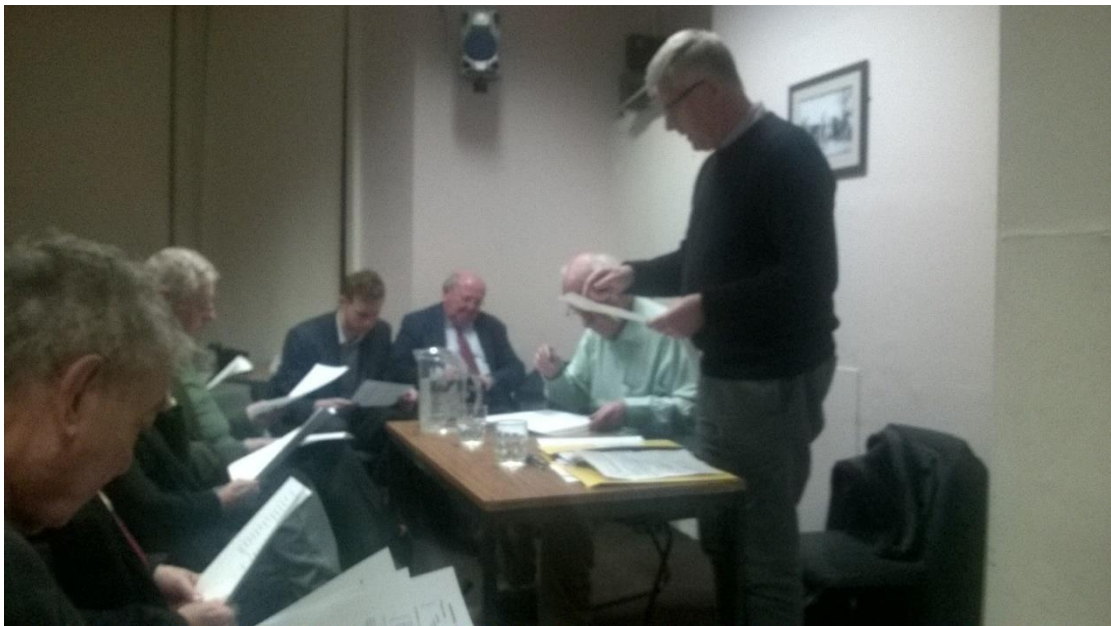
Jannike Wachowiak is a project manager at the London office of the German Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and a mentee with the Fabian Women's Network mentoring programme. She will talk on her recent Fabian Review article on the future of the SPD in Germany.

We value your input!

The Society invites speakers on a range of subjects; if you would like us to invite speakers on a particular subject let us know and we will try to oblige. The Society has a policy of rotating meetings around the Borough; if you need or can offer a lift or if you know of any suitable venues we could use, contact David Marshall.

Local Fabian Society Contacts

		Contact
Chair Councillor Keith Darvill	Secretary David Marshall	David Marshall
Membership Secretary		31 Vicarage Road Hornchurch RM12 4AS 01708 441189 david.c.marshall@talk21com
Vice Chair Sam Gould	Treasurer Dave Baldock	
Committee Members		
Cecile Duerinckx	Graham Lane	Sanchia Alasia
Mike Flynn	Ed Glasson	Hannah Dixon



Chair Keith Darvill reports ...

Future Editions

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome. The Fabian Society exists to promote progressive ideas from within and outside of the Labour movement. As such we are happy to publish articles in keeping with this broad ethos, but reserve the right not to include all or part of any material which falls outside of this parameter. Our next edition will be in March 2019, and given the speed with which politics changes at present, topical issues could cover any subject.

Links

The following links should be useful in keeping up with the debate in the Labour movement

National Fabian Society www.fabian-society.org.uk

The Labour Party www.labour.org.uk

Jon Cruddas MP for Dagenham www.joncruddas.org.uk

Twitter @joncruddas_1

Barking Labour Party www.barkinglabour.org.uk/

Twitter @barkinglabour

Romford Labour Party www.romford-labour-party.org.uk/

Twitter @romfordlabour

Hornchurch and Upminster Labour Party

Website <http://hornchurchandupminsterlabour.org.uk/>

Facebook Hornchurch-Upminster-Constituency-Labour-Party

Twitter @HULabour

Havering Fabian Society is affiliated to

- National Fabian Society
- Dagenham and Rainham Labour Party
- Romford Labour Party
- Upminster and Hornchurch Labour Party
- Barking Labour Party
- Havering and Dagenham Young Labour

Havering Fabian Membership

To join Havering Fabian Society, please complete the following and send to David Marshall. You can also join the Society nationally; David has more details. You do not have to be a member of the Labour Party to join Havering Fabians, but you will need to be a Labour Party member to take part in Labour Party selections and elections.



Havering Fabian Society

Founded in 1974, the Society promotes progressive political thought in Havering and beyond. Membership of the Society is not necessary to attend meetings, and neither is membership of the Labour Party.

However, to participate in nominations to the Local Labour Parties or in selection conferences, membership of both is required. The Society meets regularly throughout the year, apart from the summer and during election campaigns. Local Membership is currently £10 waged, £5 unwaged.

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I\ we wish to join Havering Fabians

Name

Address

.....

.....

.....postcode.....

E-mail.....

Phone number

02030Waged (£10) unwaged £5