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UK ELECTION MANIFESTO 2010

TO THE POINT

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Introduction

More is possible.

The opportunities for further development and growth are there for all to see. Advances in science and technology have opened the way for the conquering of disease, the opening up of global communications and the development of backward economies

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on a vast scale. Moral advances have led to the enfranchisement of women, recognition that we need universal education and gay liberation. Yet the human imagination has become cramped and narrow. As a result, many of these advances are experienced as problems rather than opportunities.

Who would join a political party today?

Politicians seem to have a hard time giving us reasons to vote for them. At best, voting has become about keeping the other lot out. Politicians prefer bashing the bone-headed British National Party (BNP) to convincing us that their own policies are worth anything. That's not good enough.

One way or another they all believe that the future is about less of everything. The prevailing intellectual currents are that the future will be the same as today... if not worse. The limits to development in scientific, economic, social and environmental areas – and a profound pessimism about the ability of humanity to overcome these limits – dominate politics.

A generation has lived through the experience of the disillusionment created by the eclipse of any alternative to the way things are. While it is understandable that humanity might want

time to lick its wounds and learn the lessons from the past, it is no longer acceptable to sit back and accept that things are as good as they could possibly be.

This manifesto declares:

that investment in the future must be increased because the world needs better transport, communication systems and energy sources; science and technology should be supported to advance further and faster in the conquering of disease and hunger; proper debate about the problems of the day is the only guarantee of democracy; education should prepare a new generation to build on the gains of the past; that human freedom is a practical necessity; that the state's intrusion into private life must be curtailed, and the autonomy of the individual to live, move and speak freely must be defended and advanced.

This manifesto is aimed at all who share with us the belief that humanity can rise above its current state, able to develop and learn to create a better society for everyone. Our aim is to fire the imagination with the endless possibilities of human progress.

“It is no longer acceptable to sit back and accept that things are as good as they could possibly be”

With those thoughts in mind, we have singled out five areas in which we felt it appropriate to formulate demands. These fall under the broad headings of prosperity, development, democracy, education and freedom. The realisation of any one of these demands would signal a significant change in the political culture of Britain today.

Conclusion

The future can be bigger and better than the present. We can all have more and shouldn't be ashamed of expecting so – but we need to fight for it.

None of the mainstream parties have an ambitious programme for change and instead seem to advocate more management of the everyday. We believe that politics needs to be regenerated and re-energised, not by swapping the familiar faces at Westminster with people who believe in the same old politics, but through the promotion of new ideas. For us, this manifesto is a necessity if we want to break out of the present gloom and pessimism.

Change is today viewed as something which simply happens regardless of individual action, and the word progress is viewed as controversial. But to bring about change has always required political action. The problems society faces today are not the result of too much economic growth or the inevitable result of human greed. It is that we have lost sight of the meaning and possibility of progressing beyond limits, and the elite have been left to squabble amongst themselves. This must change.

“We can all have more and shouldn't be ashamed of expecting so – but we need to fight for it.”

Join with us in debating and distributing this manifesto. Britain needs a new generation of activists who are not satisfied with what is on offer and who are prepared to think and argue over the future.

If you are prepared to think big we need you to work with us to transform the landscape of politics and put real change on the agenda.

Email: info@tothepointmanifesto.com for details about our debates and discussions around the election.

To get more involved in helping out with To The Point please email the same address

Abolish the EU!

Build to meet demand

Abolish the booze bans

Open the borders

Plan a productive economy

Let teachers teach

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EDUCATION

“Teachers need to be free from the tyranny of OFSTED, lesson plans and politicised funding goals.”

Education is about the cultivation of knowledge. At its best education can transform people. It challenges, questions and requires students to work hard to think beyond their own experience.

This is not how a typical student experiences education today. Classrooms serve as a tool for social engineering, training courses for business or simple containment centers. Meeting social policy ends trumps the transference of subject knowledge from the teacher to the pupil. Education has become a secondary goal to producing ‘good citizens’ who are happy to do as they are told. The aims of education have become to increase political participation, create emotionally-aware individuals, uncritically encourage environmentalist attitudes and practices, promoting community cohesion and so on.

This interference does not just damage the quality of education a state school pupil receives, it allows politicians to indoctrinate children rather than win arguments with the rational adults that form the basis of our democracy. Teaching ‘correct behaviour’ in school presents politically contested ideas as right or wrong, rather than something to be debated in the public sphere.

Nobody is convinced that the quality of education in the state sector has improved over the last few governments, no matter how much money is pumped into it or what the league tables say. While pupils in the private sector have so far suffered less from the degradation of education, state pupils rarely benefit from the kind of rigorous preparation for life a truly humanist education provides.

At its best education can transform people

Let teachers teach

Places of learning have been transformed from their stated purpose to ones where the government can pursue ulterior objectives. Teachers are undermined by increasing bureaucracy and the morphing of their role into police, social workers and surrogate parents.

All the parties at this election will make promises around education: that it should be used to achieve equality, that it should be playing a role in rebuilding Britain’s economy, making us better citizens, encouraging us to lead healthier and happier lifestyles. But this is not education.

Teachers are undermined by increasing bureaucracy and the morphing of their role into police, social workers and surrogate parents.

Rather than being used as a panacea for all of society’s problems, and having to submit to ever-greater scrutiny from ministers and inspectors, proper education recognises the duty of one generation to impart a canon of knowledge to the next. It is a vital end in itself. We believe that it is teachers – and not politicians, psychologists or policemen – who are best qualified to decide how to pass that knowledge on and so should be free to do so. Teachers need to be free from the tyranny of the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED), lesson plans and politicised funding goals. They must be allowed to teach.

Good education is not a far-off ideal or fantasy: many students receive one today. But as a society we need the conviction that every pupil deserves the opportunity to be stretched to reach the highest academic standards.

DEMOCRACY

Parliament has let us down, but not in the way that most people think. Allegations of dodgy expenses are a petty distraction. Politicians have let us down in a far more significant way: they do not represent us.

The authority of the public, the basis of our democracy, needs reaffirming. Public involvement in the decision-making process is treated as an inconvenience rather than the basis on which all decisions about the direction of society should be taken.

At the national and international level political decision-making has become less and less concerned about public support for new policies and initiatives. Accountability to the public is no longer a priority.

In the UK, key ministerial positions are now held by the unelected, like Lords Peter Mandelson, Shriti Vadera and Paul Myners. New Labour have stood out for their disregard for elected politicians, and in their willingness to hire whoever they like, bypassing any

need for accountability to the public. The Tories will be no different.

Political decision-makers increasingly move between political organisations, wielding power by internal negotiation rather than election. In November 2009, European leaders, not the European public, elected Herman Van Rumpoy as European President and Catherine Ashton to the position of High Representative. Who are they? Neither have a history of winning a democratic election. Ashton was a Health Authority chairman before being appointed to the Lords and then into her current position. Van Rumpoy was appointed to Prime Minister of Belgium by King Albert II, not elected. It is not just individuals who operate in this way; NGOs, QUANGOs and pressure groups are frequently involved in policy-making, where their viewpoints are incorporated without a public mandate.

Abolish the EU

We, the public, have no control over the EU. Policy which comes from the EU is unchallengeable and does not require public approval. It is an institution which offers no real representation and no accountability. The EU is a union of elites who represent themselves rather than the European people.

The EU has long been an excuse for Europe’s elites to get round having tough debates with the public about unpopular legislation on issues including the economy, immigration and security. Decision-making has been taken away from Parliament and handed over to the EU where, behind closed doors, elites decide between themselves what is best for us. The European Council, for example, which is made up of the EU member state leaders, takes decisions which override domestic legislation. This will not do.

EU decision-makers themselves are unaccountable to the public; we cannot remove them. Ninety percent of legislation in areas including foreign policy and justice pass through the hands of the Committee of Permanent Representatives who have ambassadorial status. What is discussed in these meetings is not even documented for review by other EU members. The European Parliament, which is elected once every five years by national publics offers some democratic control, but only over the individual representative rather than any legislation passed.

Many pro-Europeans are attracted to the ideal of an institution which represents shared values and ideas that European people collectively hold. The reality is that the EU is a bureaucratic institution which has contempt for voters and pushes the process of law-making outside the realm of public debate. Pro-Europeans have

every reason to oppose the EU and its backing elite.

The current state of affairs dictates that the EU is threatened by democracy rather than supported by it. The EU is a safe house for a bankrupt political elite with nothing to offer the people it governs. We should abolish the EU and force decisions that affect our everyday life back into Parliament where we can have control over them. We should also look to build cross-border connections, so that a real union of Europeans can be born based on shared goals and aspirations.

FREEDOM

“We should dissolve the Border Agency and decriminalise the free movement of people.”

Open the borders

With nearly 3 million unemployed and many more forced to work part time, is now really the right time to call for open borders? Yes, it is more important now than ever.

The pernicious old myth that ‘Britain is full’ is still wheeled out. But the problem is not too many people; it is too little supply – of houses, schools, hospitals, jobs and opportunities. If public services are under strain, it is because the government has abandoned any idea of universal provision. None of these problems result from increased immigration.

Human creativity has not yet found a limit. Throughout history we have been able to make more and more of a finite earth by doing things in new ways. The only real limit is how productive society can be; criminalising free movement is a symptom of the elites’ lack of ambition. Immigration controls are bolstered by a sense of limits – the idea that there’s only so much to go around and so we must restrict the numbers entering the country.

With the new ‘points-based’ system the state tries to account for different skill levels the UK economy ‘needs’ and assigns people differential rights to

enter and remain in the UK. But this does nothing to boost economic growth or create jobs. It is bad for new immigrants and old – that is, all of us – and our prospects for a more free, equal and prosperous future.

The main political parties play off immigrants against those already here. They are either demonising immigrants as scroungers or idolising them as more hard working and civilised than what they see as a feckless, lazy, racist British working class. The result is the same – more clampdowns and controls on all of us.

Far from maintaining ‘out-of-control borders’ New Labour has introduced ever-tighter border controls, a system of detention centres, deportations and raids of workplaces and homes. Meanwhile, the Conservatives promise a more draconian approach and new Border Police Force.

Demanding open borders means rejecting the idea that by moving from one country to another, you are ‘toxic’ – a criminal or a terrorist. But neither are immigrants destitute, hapless victims. They are people, like you and I, seeking to better their circumstances.

Britain can hold many more people. We must reject the idea that only the ‘right’ sort of person should be admitted along with the absurd bureaucratic

Immigration controls are bolstered by a sense of limits – the idea that there’s only so much to go around and so we must restrict the numbers entering the country.

apparatuses that give force to these ideas. We should get rid of the ‘points-based’ system and the patronising citizenship tests. How many of us would pass these tests anyway? We should dissolve the Border Agency and decriminalise the free movement of people. That means opening the borders to our peers from abroad, and for ourselves.

Let everyone who wishes to be, become a citizen.

Most people in Britain don’t have nearly enough. The fact is we need to stand up for economic growth.

PROSPERITY

“All human progress, in health, education, science, technology, the arts and democracy has been built on material progress and rising living standards.”

All human progress, in health, education, science, technology, the arts and democracy has been built on material progress and rising living standards. The poorest countries in the world are not happy paradises. Their populations are often afflicted with disease, despotism, ignorance and the routine tragedy of the death of their children. They are exposed to the vagaries of natural disasters without the protections that advanced economies enjoy. Enforced austerity is something that no society should have to endure.

Dynamic economies produce dynamic societies, and vice versa. The economy in the UK has been stagnating for many years. Temporary prosperity for some was based on the growth of the UK financial services industry together with the vast expansion of credit funded by the Chinese and others. This may never come back in the same way.

Now we need to ask what can take the place of financial services as the dynamo for our economy. What happens if the credit has dried up for good?

The main political parties offer us austerity in different shades. Austerity politics and the widespread cuts in public spending now expected will not do. The austerity approach reveals the bankruptcy of ideas about what we could do to get things moving again. There are even people who now argue that economic growth is a bad thing, that we should rein in growth and redistribute what we already have.

Even during the boom years there were those who proclaimed the pointlessness, misery and environmental damage created by materialism. Now that we have economic problems, the same people are arguing that it is a good thing that we have less. This is reality turned on its head. Most people in Britain don’t have nearly enough. The fact is we need to stand up for economic growth.

Plan a productive economy

Economic leaders in the UK do not like taking risks. They even blame the financial crisis on unnecessary risk-taking. It is hard to imagine an innovative and dynamic economy coexisting with this culture of risk aversion.

The government should help ‘rebalance’ the economy away from financial services. Industries worthy of government support include pharmaceuticals, energy, aerospace and biotech, all of which Britain is good at. Yet each

of these industries is viewed negatively. The pharmaceutical industry is often seen as a conspiracy to damage our health, the energy and aerospace industries as damaging the environment, and GM crops were rejected to soothe fears about new technologies. Timidity caused the UK government to delay giving the go-ahead to building more nuclear power stations, creating a probable energy shortage in the future.

The very industries that could dig us out of this economic hole are judged unfairly through the prism of risk. Instead of reacting

to public nervousness with regulatory clampdowns, we need political leaders to take a lead in supporting new industries.

DEVELOPMENT

We need new infrastructure. Everywhere there is a need for new investment – in housing, airports, public transport, roads, energy, fibre optics – we find excuses not to build. Expectations today are founded on the idea of limits, most significantly environmental limits. We're told we must trim our expectations to live within available resources. That's not true. There have always been limits, and people have always found ways to transcend them.

What's different today is that we question the worth of human desires.

The more pessimistic greens are blunt: the things we want cannot be supplied, certainly not without climate catastrophe, so 'luxuries' such as holidays and imported goods have to go. More optimistic sounding attempts try to spin the same message: if we just think about it a little, perhaps we do not really need all that stuff we consume. In fact, perhaps we are better off without it. Saving energy can be fun!

Build to meet demand

Everything people do uses energy. Without it we could not eat or keep warm, let alone travel the world. The consensus now is that we should all do with less energy, or 'manage demand'. We disagree. Instead, energy supply should meet public demand, so that people can lead the lives they want to.

The world has been getting more energy efficient for the last 200 years. But that's not enough. We are also using more energy. People are always finding new uses for energy, in travel, medicine, entertainment and elsewhere. As people get richer they can afford to try out new things, like patio heaters. And why not? To continue meeting these aspirations means increasing energy supply.

Saving energy through lifestyle choices is not easy. Smarter gadgets with longer battery life and well insulated new homes are great.

But what are we to make of 'smart meters' that demand your attention for a minute-by-minute readout of how your every move is affecting your carbon footprint? This is not how we want to spend our precious time.

The official government website, Act On CO2, advises sharing our cars, keeping our mobile phones an extra year and buying clothes for durability rather than fashion. They claim that "make do and mend might sound like an expression from a different era, but in fact it's as useful today as it ever was". This is surely an admission that make do and mend is a step backwards.

In any case, lots of petty sacrifices add up to petty results. To really fix pollution problems means re-engineering power stations, not people's lives.

There is no shortage of technological possibilities for expanding energy supply while reducing pollution. Many of these need to be pursued in both

Britain is living off past investments in infrastructure. Over the last decade house building has slumped to such low rates that it cannot even replace existing stock, let alone meet expanding demand. But a shortage of homes is no more sustainable than an economy built on rising house prices.

Infrastructure, whether houses or wind turbines, will change the way the land looks and who inhabits it. But people have been doing that for centuries, from cutting down forests for firewood to ploughing up land for farming, to the enactment of the enclosures and building pylons of the National Grid. Every change of this kind has transformed and improved society as a whole in ways we can barely imagine but all benefit from today. To create better infrastructure requires us to think of the world we want to inhabit and have the confidence that we can achieve it.

the short and long term: nuclear, clean fossil fuels, bio-fuels, wind, solar, geothermal and tidal.

Yet all parties have been reluctant to back serious investment in energy infrastructure. Instead of Tory plans for microgeneration, we need a grid which connects up to Europe and beyond that to Africa. We need a well-planned expansion of wind energy so that prices can fall as the market expands.

Above all, the failure to back nuclear energy shows that all sides have lost confidence in the ability of large scale technological solutions to contribute to development. It is here, where the questions are most clearly constrained by the politics of low expectations that government must most urgently give a lead.

The expansion of energy supply will be central to power an expanding economy – and allowing people to lead the lives they would like.

FREEDOM

Freedom is under attack. Classic civil liberties such as freedom of assembly, freedom of speech or right to trial by jury are being eroded. At the same time, more informal freedoms such as our freedom to have a pint in the park or to pack our children's lunchboxes as we see fit are being regulated. We must reassert ourselves.

The litany of authoritarian laws passed by New Labour stretches to 60 new powers in over 25 Acts of Parliament. Habeus Corpus – the protection from detention without due process – has been all but eliminated; we can now be detained without charge for 28 days. The creation of the National DNA Database means our DNA sample can be taken and preserved by the authorities without our consent, regardless of whether we have been charged or convicted for a crime. New police stop-and-search powers mean we can be harassed by authorities without reason, and our right to protest has been seriously restricted.

Try to cross a border and the weighty imbalance between the state and the individual is most keenly felt. Our freedom to move is tightly controlled.

Over the last decade our behaviour has been subject to more petty regulation and micro-management

than ever before. Lighting up a cigarette or cracking open a can of beer in the wrong place can lead to a criminal conviction. If we want to work with children we must submit to insulting CRB checks: everyone, even children, is guilty of child abuse until proven innocent.

We have become inured to round-the-clock CCTV surveillance and even regulation of what we can photograph.

Our civil liberties should be fought for and extended. They limit the state's power to do with us as it pleases. Our everyday freedoms also need to be defended and new regulations around our personal habits challenged. This is because interventions into our private lives breed mistrust between all of us; policy increasingly tells us how to engage with one another rather than leaving it to our own sense of judgement.

The state has no place in our free spaces – be it street, pub or park. It is here that we should be free to behave as we see fit, articulate political demands and decide what we want for society, between ourselves.

Abolish the booze bans

Activities which are perfectly legal for us to partake in as adults are increasingly subject to police discretion. Like naughty teenagers we are subject to supervision by the authorities.

In the UK there are now over 700 alcohol control zones, where we must refrain from a perfectly lawful activity – drinking alcohol – simply because the government decided that it would help to curb anti-social behaviour.

If a policeman asks us to throw out our booze, we have to, or risk having it confiscated. No crime has to have been committed: they do not even have to

log the incident or explain it to others. Giving police officers the same status as finger-wagging teachers makes a mockery of both the law and personal freedom.

In London, Mayor Boris Johnson's first act was to ban drinking on public transport. A ridiculous and barely enforceable policy, it criminalises us for a legitimate, enjoyable and harmless activity simply on the basis that Boris deemed it 'unpleasant'. If we're drunk and disorderly, and behaving in a threatening manner, the police already have powers of arrest.

This over-zealous legislation is continually being extended, unopposed and encouraged, by all the major political parties. There is no end in sight with proposals for bans on 'happy hours', police in pubs and limits on how

many drinks we can buy in one visit to the bar.

These restrictions punish all of us, no matter how sensible and law-abiding, for what we might do, what we look like and how somebody in a uniform thinks we might behave. Worst of all, it encourages us to take less care, deferring to authority rather than keep a sensible eye out for each other. Abolish the bans: take the first step to reclaim public space and assert the right to act like adults.