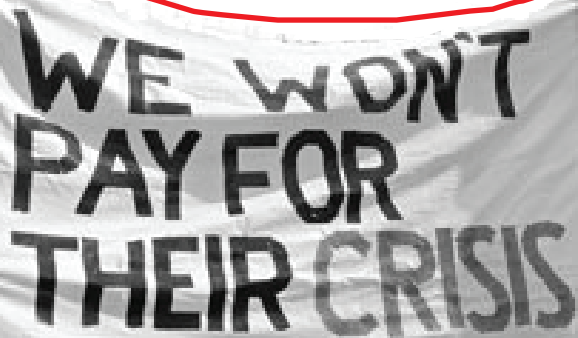


A black and white photograph of the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) in London, showing its intricate Gothic architecture and the clock face. The tower is partially obscured by a large red vertical bar that runs down the left side of the page.

# A P eople's Agenda

A pamphlet for the  
**General Election 2010**

A photograph of a white protest banner with the text 'WE WON'T PAY FOR THEIR CRISIS' written in large, bold, black capital letters. The banner is slightly wrinkled and appears to be held up by people, though they are not visible. The banner is set against a white background with a red outline.

**WE WON'T  
PAY FOR  
THEIR CRISIS**

## Introduction by John McDonnell MP

As we go into the 2010 General Election, it is clear that much of the electorate feels it has no choice – with all of the three major parties offering the same prescription for the UK: there will be cuts to your local services and to your pay – and quite possibly your job too. They argue only about the timing of such cuts: now or in a year's time.

People are rightly concerned about job security, their housing situation, their debts, the threatened closures and changes to their local hospitals and schools. People are also rightly concerned about the future of the environment and our continued involvement in foreign wars – yet no party is currently offering any solutions.

If you are unemployed, do not have a secure home, are in debt, are ill – you are increasingly told it is your fault, but it's not. You didn't cause this recession, you didn't fail to build enough housing for the past thirty years, you haven't cut taxes for the wealthiest and increased inequality.

We live in a society, in a community, but many people do not feel that they do. We have to recreate that sense of solidarity and take it into the political sphere. The problems faced by you are the same problems faced by thousands or millions of others and we must work together to argue for collective solutions.

The LRC believes that only a Real Labour Government can deliver the changes we need for our society to meet the challenges, but we can only get the Real Labour Government we need if we can win support for our ideas and build campaigns to implement them.

This document sets out some broad ideas for the society we want. But we want **your** ideas and responses too.

# An economy in whose interests?

When the UK economy first entered recession, Gordon Brown told us this was a financial crisis sweeping the globe. Now Brown, and all the major parties, tell us the solution is to cut public spending and freeze public sector pay. But UK public spending and public sector pay did not cause this crisis.

Global financial institutions, and the subservient governments that deregulated the world over, caused the recession. For thirty years now the UK Government has operated predominantly in the interests of global capital – liberalising markets, deregulating, and privatising. They have redistributed wealth on an unprecedented scale to the richest.

Inequality in the UK is now higher than at any time since the 1930s; 23% of the population now live below the poverty line. This is the society that New Labour inherited and has perpetuated. UK welfare benefits and pensions are among the lowest in Europe, but executive pay is the highest, trade union rights are the weakest, and corporation taxes among the lowest.

The economy we want cannot be detached from the society we want. The only way to deliver social justice is through an economy driven by delivering for people, not for profit.

We need an economy that will deliver:

Public and collective ownership of key industries: no one should profit from providing essential goods like housing, heating, water, transport and communications.

A decent standard of living for all: a living wage for all work, and an income that provides dignity to the unemployed, pensioners, students and the disabled.

The nationalisation of the banking sector to invest not in speculation but in the goods and infrastructure our society needs.

We need a redistributive tax system in which the wealthy and big business pay their fair share, and to clamp down on tax avoidance and evasion.

## Public services NOT private profit

Pro-market dogma now dominates the thinking of every major political party, and no part of the public sector has remained immune from this philosophy. No matter how inappropriate, no matter how inefficient, and no matter what the costs, our public services have been increasingly privatised and liberalised, with terrible results.

We want public services that people feel are theirs, that they control and that provide them with the necessary foundation for a decent life.

In the education sector we need schools that serve all their local community.

Schools should be run by those with a stake in them: parents, students, staff and the local community. There should be no selection by ability or religion: schools should be secular and serve all children.

Schools have been forced to compete with each other through league tables and Ofsted performance ratings. We want schools to co-operate with each other, to share best practice and receive funding on the basis of student need.

Higher education has undergone a massive change in recent years. Just over a decade ago there were no student

fees, and there was a maintenance grant. Students now leave university with debts that take a generation to repay and most cannot afford to leave home to go to university. This is robbing young people of a vital opportunity to gain independence.

All people who want to should be able to go on to university and do so without fear of debt.

**There should be universal maintenance grants and no fees.**

Housing has also been subjected to the market. This has led to housing become increasingly unaffordable and an explosion of buy-to-let landlords making profits from the basic need of people to live. There are nearly two million families on council house waiting lists.

Housing is a basic right, and should not be dependent on the market.

**A massive council housebuilding programme (which would also provide thousands of jobs) is needed immediately.**

Rents should be managed by democratic councils and private landlordism phased out.

Despite billions more in investment going into the NHS in the last decade too much has been spent on employing administrative staff to manage contracts and local market mechanisms. Administrative managers have increased at more than twice the rate of doctors or nurses, as the NHS has become increasingly fragmented and privatised. Hospital cleaning must also be taken back from for-profit contractors.

**The NHS is internationally-respected for its founding principles of universal provision, free at the point of use.**

But public investment in healthcare has been wasted in profits for private companies, and on administration of internal markets.

The rest of the UK should follow the example of Wales where prescription charges have been abolished. The pharmaceutical industry should be brought into common ownership – people’s health and lives should not be subservient to patents and private profit. We should work towards a fully free health service with free dentistry and optical care.

The privatisation of public transport has been a disaster. On the railways, buses and London Underground fares are the highest in Europe, and investment has been creamed off by private companies. More public subsidy is going in, yet services are expensive and often overcrowded and unreliable.

Public transport is an essential service and cannot be run for short-term interests. Investment in public transport projects such as high-speed rail is a vital part of tackling climate change, and would create jobs.

## Care

Any civilised society ensures a decent standard of living for all: whether retired, unemployed, suffering ill-health or disability.

Current levels of benefits such as unemployment benefit, employment and support allowance, carers’ allowance and others are an affront to human dignity. Everyone has the right to a decent minimum standard of living that provides for basic needs such as housing, food, fuel, clothing, telecommunications and other necessities to be part of

society.

The UK also has appallingly inadequate levels of affordable childcare. We as a society have a role to provide the best possible start in life for future generations.

We need to invest in universal publicly-funded childcare.

Personal care should be universal and free, no one should have to suffer in old age.

People need security in retirement, and this can only be guaranteed by collective provision – not by the insecurity of the market. It is also wrong for people to be means-tested, pensions should be universal, not contributions-based, to reflect the caring work that many people – especially women – do throughout their lives.

The UK state pension is among the lowest in Europe and 2.5 million pensioners are living below the official poverty line. For over a generation now people have been told to invest in market-based personal pension schemes, but the recession has wiped billions from their value.

Just as pensions cannot be left to the market, neither can employment policy. We need a society which guarantees meaningful employment for everyone, but for those without a job or those unable to work – whether temporarily or permanently – a decent standard of living above the poverty line must also be universally provided.

# The World of Work

Discrimination in the workplace is endemic: men are paid 17% more than women (rising to over 35% for part-time

work), young people and agency workers can be paid far lower wages for doing the same work, and due to EU policy, foreign workers can now be paid less for the same work.

**Mandatory pay audits would expose institutional discrimination.**

There is no correlation between the value to society of the work done and the pay workers receive. The massive wage disparities that exist in the UK are obscene and mean that the richest 10% are more than 100 times as wealthy as the poorest 10%.

**There should be a minimum wage that provides a decent standard of living, as well as equal pay for equal work. All workers should have the right to holidays, pensions, flexible working, and trade union membership.**

**The anti-trade union laws must also be repealed** so that workers can organise collectively and democratically, including the right to strike without dismissal and the right to take secondary and sympathetic action. Trade union reps can play a vital role on a whole range of workplace issues including equality, health and safety, the environment and these roles should be given legal status.

Dignity at work is not just about pay, but also about the work that is done. Menial and repetitive tasks need to be integrated with other tasks to provide a varied and stimulating work experience. The long hours culture must be addressed to allow everyone the opportunity to have a full social life outside of work.

**Vital industries should be in common ownership,** not run for private profit, and managed co-operatively by the workforce, consumer and community representatives.



# Politics for all

Democracy should mean more than signing away your vote every four or five years. We should feel a sense of ownership about the decisions made in our workplaces, in our communities and in our nation. The current lack of accountability and choice is turning people away from politics.

We need a politics in which everyone participates and feels that they have a voice. Under-representation of young people, women and minorities must be addressed.

Communities have been robbed of a local voice by privatisation and centralisation. Local authorities should be encouraged to provide their own services without involving private companies. Councils should also be supported in major capital works such as building new council houses.

## Treasuring our Environment

Climate change is the key challenge for humanity in the 21st century. The climate crisis is a socialist issue: within the UK and elsewhere, the most deprived are hit hardest by its consequences and face the highest adaptation costs. New Labour has put the UK on the wrong side of nearly every environmental debate in recent years: the dash for nuclear power; airport expansion at Heathrow; and so-called 'clean coal'.

We should promote local and decentralised energy projects run along co-operative lines.

Our power generation has to switch away from fossil and nuclear fuels and be based upon renewable technologies – investment in which would create thousands of new jobs. We must also invest to convert the construction and

engineering skills and resources from polluting industries into the technologies needed to avert climate catastrophe.

There is no need to expand aviation, road and other polluting forms of transport. Instead we must encourage the use of modern technologies to communicate globally, and encourage local provision to avoid the unnecessary shipping of goods.

## Peace

New Labour took the country to war in Iraq on the basis of public deception and against mass public opposition. We should also immediately withdraw from the war in Afghanistan, and make reparations to the peoples of both countries. The guarantee of mutually assured destruction means nuclear weapons can never be used. Therefore Trident replacement is a waste of money and resources.

Our society should not be launching wars of aggression against other countries and should have a foreign policy based on human rights, co-operation and justice.

The UK continues to supply arms across the world and maintains its own weapons of mass destruction. We need to fight to withdraw the UK from the international arms trade, in conjunction with the workers and trade unions to develop alternative technologies, converting the skills and resources currently devoted to arms manufacture.

## Freedom for All

Our civil and legal rights here in the UK have also been eroded. Peace and environmental protesters are regularly stopped using 'anti-terror' laws. Police powers under these laws to detain suspects without charge should be repealed. Identity cards are gradually being introduced yet they serve no new purpose. The police are stopping and searching, and even taking DNA samples from people

not even suspected of an offence. In the courts, the right to a jury trial has been eroded and access to legal aid has been tightly restricted.

There are now more people in prison than at any time in British history, yet crime has fallen overall in the last decade. Only those who are a danger to the public should be kept in prisons – which could then concentrate their resources on rehabilitating and educating people to reintegrate them back into society.

The prohibition of alcohol did not work in the US in the 1920s and such policies do not work now. We should consider decriminalising all drugs, and dealing with their effects through the NHS (as we do for alcohol and tobacco) rather than through the courts and prisons.

The UK has benefited from immigration economically, socially and culturally, yet the fear of terrorism, made more real by our foreign policy, has created a climate of hostility and suspicion. The criminalisation of migrants, subjecting them to the same kind of police raids and detention that is usually reserved for terrorist suspects, is racist, inhumane and perpetuates racist attitudes towards them.

Overcrowded housing and unemployment has also been blamed on immigration, yet the real problem is the failure of Government to build the housing and create the jobs that we all need.

As a society we also need to challenge the discrimination that blights some people's lives and prevents them from playing a full role in society. We should challenge discrimination against people based on gender, race, sexual orientation, disability and age. Everyone should have a right to live free from prejudice.

This short pamphlet,  
distributed in advance



commissioned for  
of the 2010 General  
Election is designed to generate a debate about how we  
organise our society – a debate that will be lacking from the  
party political pantomime of the election campaign.

The Labour Representation Committee is a socialist organisation which believes in fighting for an alternative to the current unsustainable consensus.

Debate further at [www.l-r-c.org.uk](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk)

For more detailed policy ideas see [www.l-r-c.org.uk/policy](http://www.l-r-c.org.uk/policy)

**Any questions?** Email [info@l-r-c.org.uk](mailto:info@l-r-c.org.uk)

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We wish to affiliate to the LRC

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I would like to join The Left Women's Network

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Please make cheques payable to 'Labour Representation Committee'  
**LRC, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU**