



Beyond the first 100 days

Building towards a fourth Labour term

Ed Balls • Hilary Benn • Hazel Blears • Ben Bradshaw • David Miliband • Jacqui Smith • Jack Straw



Progress is an organisation of Labour party members which aims to promote a radical and progressive politics for the 21st century.

We seek to discuss, develop and advance the means to create a more free, equal and democratic Britain, which plays an active role in Europe and the wider world.

Diverse and inclusive, we work to improve the level and quality of debate both within the Labour party, and between the party and the wider progressive community.

Beyond the first 100 days

Building towards a fourth Labour term

Published in October 2007

Honorary President

Rt Hon Alan Milburn MP

Chair Stephen Twigg

Vice Chairs Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, Chris Leslie, Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Baroness Delyth Morgan, Meg Munn MP

Director Robert Philpot

Patrons Wendy Alexander MSP, Rt Hon Douglas Alexander MP, Ian Austin MP, Rt Hon Hazel Blears MP, Yvette Cooper MP, Rt Hon John Denham MP, Parmjit Dhanda MP, Natascha Engel MP, Lorna Fitzsimons, Rt Hon Peter Hain MP, John Healey MP, Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP, Rt Hon Beverley Hughes MP, Rt Hon John Hutton MP, Baroness Jones, Glenys Kinnock MEP, Sadiq Khan MP, Oona King, David Lammy MP, Cllr Richard Leese, Rt Hon Peter Mandelson, Pat McFadden MP, Rt Hon David Miliband MP, Trevor Phillips, Baroness Prosser, Rt Hon James Purnell MP, Jane Roberts, Lord Triesman, Kitty Ussher MP, Martin Winter

Secretary

Patrick Diamond

Treasurer

Jon Mendelsohn

Honorary Treasurer

Baroness Margaret Jay

Director Robert Philpot

Deputy Director Jessica Asato

Events and Communications Manager

Tom Brooks Pollock

Events and Membership Officer

Mark Harrison

Assistant Sub Editor

Ed Thornton

Progress, 83 Victoria Street

London, SW1H 0HW

Tel 020 3008 8180

Fax 020 3008 8181

Email office@progressives.org.uk

Website www.progressionline.org.uk

Contents

Foreword	4
Making the most of all our talents Ed Balls	5
Taking responsibility, improving our environment Hilary Benn	8
Putting parliament and the public at the heart of our democracy Jack Straw	11
Protecting our citizens, safeguarding our freedoms Jacqui Smith	14
Equality in all of our communities Hazel Blears	17
A new direction for foreign policy David Miliband	20
Winning health back for Labour Ben Bradshaw	23

Foreword

Over the first six months of this year, Progress conducted a unique political exercise – allowing Labour party members to have their say on the priorities which they wanted our new leader and prime minister to undertake. Launched in January, our First 100 Days programme was fully interactive: offering the chance for the party to discuss the next stage of government not simply through the pages of Progress magazine, but also via our website and a series of events.

We held events on each of the seven themes – social justice and inequality; constitutional reform; health and social care; the environment; crime and security; education; and foreign policy – which drew large audiences and were addressed by ministers and MPs, commentators, policy experts, and representatives of pressure groups. This underlines, once again, Progress' commitment to reach out beyond the Labour party, to provide a forum for progressive debate.

We also conducted an ambitious online debate through our special First 100 Days section of ProgressOnline. You can read the views of both our invited contributors and grassroots members at www.progressonline.org.uk/100

Now, we're completing the First 100 Days exercise by publishing this pamphlet on Gordon Brown's 100th day in office. We've asked seven ministers – Ed Balls, Hilary Benn, Jack Straw, Jacqui Smith, Hazel Blears, David Miliband, and Ben Bradshaw – to set out their visions for the future. Each were also given, and asked to comment on, a selection of the ideas that you, our members, put forward.

But while our First 100 Days programme is drawing to a close, Progress' commitment to open and inclusive debate about Labour's future – as a party and a government – is not. Become a Progress member, join us at our autumn Westminster fringe programme and attend our annual conference later in the year to have your say.

Full details are available online at www.progressonline.org.uk.

Making the most of all our talents

As Labour party members we can be proud that we have successfully made the case for increased investment and reform in education – and we can be proud too of the decade of transformation that has taken place as a result.

Reversing the neglect and under-investment of the Tory years, today we have more teachers and support staff; new schools replacing crumbling buildings; pupils achieving better results than ever before; more young people staying on for further study; going to university or getting an apprenticeship; and adults getting greater opportunities to learn and train than ever before.

But despite all the progress that the Labour government has made, those of us who are passionate about social justice and tackling inequality know that our work is not yet done. We cannot be satisfied when only four in five children leave primary school having reached the required level in literacy. Nor can we be satisfied when 10 per cent of 16 to 18-year-olds are not in school, college, employment, training or getting an apprenticeship.

That's why 10 years in, as a party and a government seeking a fourth term, we must renew the argument for investing in learning and raise our ambitions even further in order to create a truly world-class education system and narrow the attainment gap between the poorest children and their better-off peers.

Parents rightly want us to focus on getting the basics right, so in schools our priority must be on standards, not structures. But raising standards for all does not simply mean bringing up the average. It means focused support for children who are struggling or falling behind in particular subjects or have special educational needs, as well as stretching the brightest, so that every child realises their full potential.

In the coming years, as we take forward this more personalised approach we will focus on the needs of the individual child and help teachers to monitor and mentor their pupils so they progress at every stage.

Building on the successful numeracy and literacy strategies introduced nearly 10 years ago, we will develop our Every Child a Reader and Every Child Counts programmes, which are helping children who have fallen behind in reading and maths through intensive one-to-one or small group support.

In secondary schools Labour's reforms to 14-19 education will see the introduction of new diplomas over the next three years in subjects such as engineering and construction – giving young people who prefer a broader education the opportunity to achieve a fully rounded qualification, which will combine theoretical and practical learning, including functional English, maths and ICT.

But we all know that learning does not begin or end in the classroom and so the traditional school, which opens its gates from 9am to 3.30pm,

Mondays to Fridays, 38 weeks a year, is becoming a thing of the past.

Labour's vision is for all schools to be at the centre of their local communities, with their facilities open to pupils, parents and the wider population. To make schools places of learning fit for the 21st century, we will rebuild or refurbish every state secondary school and half of all primary schools.

By 2010 every school will provide extended services such as breakfast clubs, out-of-hours tuition and after-school clubs in sport, music and drama. The National Council for Educational Excellence is looking at how schools can do even more to raise aspirations and broaden their pupils' horizons by encouraging all schools to have closer links with local businesses, colleges and universities.

And rather than setting schools against one another, we will encourage greater collaboration and mergers between successful schools and weaker ones because all the evidence shows that spreading brilliant leadership to more schools gets results.

But just as our drive to extend opportunity cannot begin and end when the school bell rings, nor should it start aged five and end at 16. Because children learn and benefit so much from play and interacting with other kids, Labour will continue investing in those crucial early years – whether it's by providing 15 hours of free nursery provision for all three and four-year-olds, introducing universal child benefit for pregnant mums or ensuring that every community has a Sure Start children's centre as part of our modern welfare state. We will redouble our efforts to ensure that early years and children's services reach the disadvantaged families who need them most.

And because we know that the physical, mental and emotional health of children and young people has a huge impact on their life chances and opportunities, we must intervene earlier to help children and parents when problems are on the horizon. To set out our priorities for children for the next decade, we are consulting with parents, professionals, children and young people themselves before publishing a national Children's Plan later this year.

At the other end of the age range we will raise the education leaving age to 18 so that every young person stays on at school, goes to college, gets an apprenticeship or starts in-work training. Under John Denham's leadership the new Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills is taking forward our expansion of higher education and implementing the Leitch review of adult skills so that by 2020 our workforce becomes one of the most skilled in the world.

While Labour is committed to helping everybody make the most of their talents, David Cameron's uncoded spending plans and commitments to a whole host of tax cuts would put our future investment in education at risk. That's why they cannot credibly match our ambitions.

On education, as on so many other issues, the Tories started off trying to appear centrist but ended up retreating to the right. Backed by his leader, David Willetts dared to say that ‘academic selection entrenches advantage, it does not spread it’. But within 48 hours there was a U-turn, and a few weeks later, Willetts was sidelined in the Tory reshuffle.

In a further retreat to the right, Cameron promised that ‘grammar streaming’ would be imposed on every school – a crude policy that would be as socially divisive as selection at 11.

Now the Tories want to force 11-year-olds who underperform to resit the final year of primary school – what they’ve called a ‘remedial year’. Like the old 11-plus, it would stigmatise the very children who need extra help.

And their attitude to children is encapsulated in a ‘back to basics’ family tax policy, which would penalise and treat millions of children whose parents are separated, widowed or divorced as second-class.

So if we are to deliver on our ambitions to raise standards, narrow the attainment gap, give every child the best possible start in life and extend opportunity to more and more young people we must defeat this rightwing Tory agenda.

At the next election we will once again need to make the argument for investing in children, education and learning as we seek to win the trust of the British people for a fourth term.

Creating a world-class education system is not just an end in itself, it is the means for delivering social justice and tackling inequality - because we all know that a positive childhood and a good education lead to greater chances and opportunities throughout life.

Our approach, which will create a culture of learning from cradle to grave, is the only one that will make the most of everybody’s talents and not just those of a privileged few.

Rt Hon Ed Balls MP is Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families

Taking responsibility, improving our environment

On my first day at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I jumped on a train to Doncaster with Ed Miliband to talk to people in his constituency affected by the devastating floods. Some had had their houses ruined, and did not know when they would be able to return home. Others were angry. But I will always remember the way people were working together, neighbours pitching in to help one another, collecting and piling sandbags at the doors of elderly people living nearby, and the enormous and selfless effort of so many thousands of people in the emergency services, in voluntary organisations, in local government and local businesses.

The same spirit helped has been evident throughout the recent outbreak of foot and mouth. With the assistance of the farming community across the country, we contained and then eradicated the disease.

Both of these experiences remind us how fragile our relationship with the environment can be. We know that climate change is going to make this even more stark. And as we look back on the last couple of years, I think we will see them as the time that the world finally woke up to the reality of a changing climate. Thanks to the Stern report, it is now clear that taking action at home and internationally is not only the right thing to do, but is a lot less costly than not taking action.

Our manifesto in 1997 promised to put ‘the environment at the heart of policy-making, so that it is not an add-on extra, but informs the whole of government’. More than 10 years later, we should be proud of what we have achieved together. Our beaches and rivers are cleaner. Our air is purer and healthier. Recycling has more than tripled. And we have broken the historic link between economic growth and greenhouse gas emissions; Britain now emits seven per cent less greenhouse gas than we did in 1997, despite being 43 per cent better off. We’re one of the few countries in the world that is easily on track for beating our Kyoto commitments, but we all need to go much further.

And that brings me to the politics of the future. To help us win the next election, we will have to show those concerned about climate change that we have the policies to deal with it, and persuade those not yet concerned about climate change that they should be.

Both tasks need ambition. Two hundred years ago Britain started the industrial revolution; in 2007 we should aim to lead the world in an environmental revolution. I wouldn’t like to bet on which will turn out to be more important in the end!

This environmental revolution needs a new kind of politics. The era of ‘Whitehall knows best’ is rightly dead and buried, and we know that the

most effective solutions come from listening and working with people to help solve their problems and meet their aspirations. That's why Progress' First 100 Days programme is so welcome, and why the debates about our future we held during the transition to the new leadership have been so good for our party.

In this new century, we want the government to help us, listen to us, and work alongside us. People rightly want their views and ideas to be taken seriously. And as a Labour politician, I want people to tell me what they believe Labour should do next. The sheer quality of ideas that came out of the Progress programme shows that our movement is thinking ahead in every constituency in the country. Rami Okasha is right to highlight the potential of new housing as a source of renewable energy, as is Colin Hodgkinson on the need to work with employers to encourage people to cycle, walk or run to work, and Stephen Hale on Europe's potential to be the catalyst to lead a global green shift.

The climate change bill is a perfect example of this new politics. We consulted and listened. We learned from what people were saying and changed our approach. And so we are leading the world, as the first country to put binding carbon targets into primary legislation, while also leading the world in arguing for a new global framework.

We must adapt our technology and skills to raise resource productivity – the amount we produce from one unit of energy or natural resource. We must build our relationship with business on both a strong economy and a low-carbon economy, competing in global markets. We must regulate to protect the environment, from zero-carbon homes to electricity generation to inefficient appliances and light bulbs, all the time balancing the need for a strong economy and social justice with environmental needs. And we must live by a 'green rule' as well as a 'golden rule', ensuring that we don't borrow too much carbon or other natural resources from our future.

Our plans for coastal access will mean that for the first time people will be able to walk along the shore of our country. Investment in environmental stewardship and CAP reform will mean farmers not only protect our countryside but earn a fair reward for their work. Our rural development programme will ensure that the strength of our economy is fairly shared. And the marine bill – a real first – will protect our seas and coast.

The immediate, and most important priority, building on this domestic effort, is to secure a post-Kyoto agreement on climate change, involving all the world's countries, that covers a global stabilisation target, commitments to carbon reductions, carbon trading, funding for technology development and transfer, agreements to avoid deforestation, and funding for adaptation.

In making all of this happen, one of the most fundamental problems we will have to face up to as a society is the lack of faith in the political process itself. At its worst it takes the form of a belief that everything is

the government's fault or that nothing can be done about a problem, impatience that it hasn't been sorted immediately, and an unwillingness to see the part that personal responsibility and involvement has to play in building and sustaining the thing we call society. The need for each of us to play our part is nowhere more clear than in tackling climate change; the choice we make about our own carbon emissions will have a huge effect on how the UK does in reducing emissions.

So as well as getting the policies right, one of the most important commitments we should make is that, with a Labour government, the people will help shape the future, including by playing their part in making it happen; just as the people of Doncaster did when the floods came. This will need us to reach out to communities and listen to what Britain wants because that's how we'll change our country together.

Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP is Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Putting parliament and the public at the heart of our democracy

Since 1997 the Labour government has delivered unprecedented and sustained economic growth, which has enabled us to lift 800,000 children out of poverty, reduce unemployment, raise pensioner living standards and transform the education and health services. We have succeeded in establishing devolved government in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, passed the Human Rights Act, the Race Relations Acts and made civil partnerships legal. In an era where political identities have weakened and parties are often caricatured as being 'all the same', these achievements bear witness to the fact that the outcome of elections continues to matter a very great deal, particularly to the poorest and most marginalised in society. Be under no illusions: only a Labour government would have pursued these policies, which have unquestionably improved the circumstances of the vast majority of people in our society.

We want to continue this work; but we realise that securing a fourth term is a tough challenge. We must convince the British people that we retain the energy, drive and ideas to carry on in government. I am encouraged that we are succeeding in this, and I am heartened that the public is beginning to contrast the depth and substance offered by Gordon Brown, with the shallow, PR-obsessed leadership of David Cameron. This is reflected in the opinion polls, which place Labour well ahead of the Conservatives.

However, we should not be complacent. Surveys of voting intention undertaken by Ipsos MORI, which factor in likelihood of voting, show that while Labour has a lead among all respondents who state a preference, any advantage narrows significantly when the responses are filtered to include only those who say they are 'absolutely certain to vote' in a future general election. This suggests that while we remain ahead on the first preferences of voters, more work is needed to bolster the strength of their preference.

Two elements will be crucial in that work: building trust and increasing engagement. We must show the public that we understand how to govern in a mature democracy. Today's citizens are no longer content to vote once every four or five years but then have little say over decisions in the meantime. They want greater power – and the challenges thrown up by globalisation mean it is essential that citizens are given greater power. There is now a general acceptance that interconnected issues such as environmental sustainability, energy consumption and global security are no longer soluble through the action of a central state; they require the involvement and cooperation of individuals at grassroots level. If the Labour government of today is to press ahead with its mission to make Britain a safer, fairer and more unified society, it must look to involve the public more immediately in the political, decision-making process.

The desire to inspire the public to become actively involved in the transformation of society, to be the agents of change, runs deep in Labour's soul. At one time it clashed with an alternative view, held by some, which said that 'the man in Whitehall knows best'. That vision, which reduced the public to passive spectators, encouraged the erroneous belief that politics is a kind of service. It is an outdated approach that permeated the entire political culture, and in some areas is still evident. Consider the regular advice sessions that MPs hold for constituents. These are described as 'surgeries' – and this is how they are treated. The 'patients' turn up with problems and look for their elected representatives to prescribe them a cure. It is a demoralising process for all concerned. It promotes the idea that politics is something 'done to you' by 'other people'. But politics ought to be a two-way process.

In fact, it is in the health sector that this cultural shift is now most evident. Not long ago healthcare was viewed in top-down terms. If you fell ill, you saw a doctor, he gave you medicine, and you hoped to get better. But now things are changing. People are less deferential towards doctors. The internet has given them more information; they are able to discuss treatment and state preferences. But doctors have changed as well. They are more assertive in asking what responsibility an individual is taking for their own health: What is their diet? Do they smoke? Do they exercise? This is changing the way people care for themselves and are cared for; it is becoming a more rounded and interactive process in which people acknowledge their own responsibilities.

Politics is now undergoing a similar transformation, and the programme of constitutional change that was outlined in the Governance of Britain green paper in July is a central part of the process. Many of the proposals outlined in the green paper focus on how government and parliament interact, and how power should be shared between them. In particular, there are proposals to surrender or limit executive powers over such monumental matters as the decision to go to war.

But power should not just be devolved from the national government to the national parliament: power should also rest with local communities. If we are to reinvigorate our democracy we need to help people become more engaged – to become more active citizens, more involved in local decision-making. Creating a more participatory democracy requires a healthy representative democracy at a local level. Therefore we will look to extend the right of people to intervene with their elected representatives through giving them the chance to 'call for action'. And to give people a greater say in major decisions through mechanisms like citizens' juries and increasing powers of redress to scrutinise and improve the delivery of local services and to ballot on spending decisions.

We want to know how best we can bring this about, as the process by which local people are involved in decision-making is every bit as

important as the outcome. The same principles that apply nationally should be reflected locally. We need to move politics on from being a spectator experience to a contact sport. This is how we will renew our constitution and strengthen our democracy by establishing a different form of governance in which the executive governs – it doesn't rule, it exercises power but it serves, and where realistic, it gets consensus and doesn't impose. This is how we will rebalance power away from the executive and into the hands of parliament and the people.

Rt Hon Jack Straw MP is Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor

Protecting our citizens, safeguarding our freedoms

The first 100 days of Gordon Brown's premiership have crystallised many of the issues we face in delivering that most fundamental of rights for our citizens – the right to safety and security. Safeguarding this right, and ensuring that we can all feel safe and secure – in our homes and local communities, in wider society and within our national borders – is one of the first duties of government, and in the last three months we have injected new vigour into the policies that will help us to deliver this responsibility.

In July, one of my first acts as home secretary was to announce a new four-year crime strategy to build on the success we have achieved in cutting crime by a third since 1997. After a decade of sustained investment and progress, the crime strategy moves us into a new phase of partnership between central government, local crime fighting agencies, and our communities.

We now have more people than ever before dedicated to making our neighbourhoods safer – record numbers of police, 16,000 community support officers, and an army of local authority community safety specialists. We also have a clearer understanding than ever before about what works in tackling many aspects of crime – from the most effective prevention and policing measures, to the importance of designing out crime, to how best to manage offenders and prevent reoffending – but there are still areas where we need to sharpen our focus.

We need to do more to help young people avoid becoming caught up in the vicious cycle of crime in the first place. We need to keep up the pressure on antisocial behaviour, and ensure that the measures we have made available to support acceptable behaviour and responsible parenting are applied and enforced appropriately. We need to do more to tackle serious crime, including the use of guns and knives, and I will set out our strategy on violent crime later this year.

Tragic events, like the death of Rhys Jones in Liverpool in August, rightly make us question whether we are doing all we can, particularly in tackling serious violent crime involving guns. But to suggest – as David Cameron has this summer – that Britain is a broken society, is wrong. Wrong, because the facts simply don't bear this out. Wrong, because such a broad-brush testament of despair prevents the focus from landing where action is really needed. Wrong, because it undermines the confidence of the very communities that we need to work with to tackle crime.

With the right measures, and the right people in place, I believe we are in a strong position to make further in-roads into these challenges. A key element in our task is to leverage local expertise in cutting crime wherever possible. The crime strategy sets out proposals for a new settlement

with local agencies – local councils, police authorities, health bodies and community organisations – that will cut red tape, deliver flexibility to focus on local priorities, and build public confidence through greater community engagement and accountability.

The latter point is crucial to efforts to protect our citizens' right to safety and security, and I am convinced of the need to communicate our achievements in tackling crime in ways that people find meaningful. While crime has been falling, and the risk of being a victim of crime is lower than at any time since 1995, fear of crime remains disproportionately high. This perception can in itself have a damaging impact on communities and individuals, weakening the social fabric by limiting the use of public spaces or fostering suspicion or intolerance of others. Helping to align perceptions and reality is a key means of delivering greater public confidence, and we have put in place a number of important innovations to meet that aim. By April of next year, every local area will have its own dedicated neighbourhood community policing, and by July we will ensure that everyone has access to local police statistics that present a clear picture of progress in their area.

Each of us has views on crime, and on what can be done to tackle it. Whether these relate to our sense of safety in our homes and neighbourhoods, or to questions about Britain's national security in the face of global challenges, I want to listen to people's concerns and take action to address our common fears. By asking members to submit and discuss their ideas on where best we should focus these efforts, Progress has highlighted a number of important issues, and I welcome these views. These contributions send a useful message on getting the right balance on law and order and supporting work to tackle reoffending, as well as on the need to recognise the effectiveness of drug treatment services.

The Home Office is now running its largest ever public consultation on drugs policy, and I want to use the input we receive to determine how we can take forward the progress we have already made in addressing illegal drug use. We now have a coordinated approach that brings together local drug treatment, education, and tough action against dealers. There is now a real sense of partnership at national and local levels that simply didn't exist a decade ago – and this partnership is getting results. The number of drug users in treatment has more than doubled, drug-related crime has fallen by 20 per cent, and new powers to close crack houses and seize dealers' assets are working.

There is more to do to improve education and intervention for young people and families to make sure that we are getting the message across in ways that they will understand and respond to. I also want to see better treatment and support services for people who are trying to kick the habit and get their lives together – we know that for every £1 spent on treatment, nearly £10 is saved on crime and health costs.

Another important issue raised by an audience member at the Progress crime and security debate in London was the importance of making early progress on border management. Like many other countries in the past decade, the UK has had to deal with increased levels of migration as mobility has increased and people wish to come here to live and work. This has been a new challenge, and it is not one we can simply wish away. Otherwise we would leave our borders vulnerable, our public services vulnerable, and individuals themselves vulnerable as well.

As our economy continues to grow, there is no doubt that by managing migration properly we can fill job vacancies and boost the economy, while always being careful to ensure that we prevent illegal working and the abuse of the system. To get that balance right, we've set up the Migration Advisory Committee to advise on what skills we need in the UK, and the Migration Impact Forum to assess the impact of migration on our public services. Building on measures we've already taken, our plans for a new points-based system for immigration will give us a clear sense of the numbers of people entering the country and will help to match their skills with our needs.

We have also acted quickly in the past few months to strengthen our national security, with the early introduction of a unified border force to coordinate the work of our customs and immigration officials. This will provide a reassuring uniformed presence at our seaports and airports, as we move for the first time to a single primary checkpoint for passports and customs.

More generally, the balance we are striking on migration policy demonstrates how readily the impact of global factors can be felt by our local communities. The international aspect of criminality – through organised crime, internet crime and identity fraud – is an increasingly important element in Britain's efforts to protect our citizens. And as we have seen from recent terror alerts, we need to ensure that government and law enforcement agencies are doing as much as they can to prevent and tackle threats to our national security. As we work towards the publication of a comprehensive national security strategy later this year, we are also consulting widely on measures for a counter terrorism bill that will improve public protection by ensuring all available information is used to fight terrorism.

In this respect, as in the other areas I have outlined above, I believe we can take valuable steps in the coming months to engage the public with our work and enshrine a genuine sense of partnership between government departments, delivery agencies and local communities. My ambition is to build trust in our institutions – not just in the local organisations that uphold and support our laws, but in the civic framework of shared values, rights and responsibilities which we all hold dear, and in which we all have such an important stake.

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP is Secretary of State for the Home Department

Equality in all of our communities

One of my early memories is applying for over 200 jobs as a newly qualified lawyer, and being turned down for interview by most of them when they saw my postcode. One law firm offered an interview when they noticed that my father worked for a company that was one of their major clients. When the interviewer realised that my dad was a fitter in one of the company's factories, he closed his book and said: 'Miss Blears, I think this interview is over...' It was pure class prejudice, and it still goes on today.

Like most members of the Labour party, a core belief in fairness is what motivates me and gets me out of bed in the morning. I want a world where everyone has an equal chance to be the best they can be, and it is up to you to make the most of your opportunities – a world which owes you a start, but not a living.

Labour is the party of fairness, and the Tories are the party of unfairness. We believe in education for all, they believe in selection at 11; we believe in an NHS free at the point of use, they voted against it. We want full employment, they said unemployment was a price worth paying. We introduced a national minimum wage, they opposed it, saying it was 'immoral' and would cost jobs. After a decade in office, and the real prospect of a fourth term in our sights, how can our policy agenda reflect our values, and what does it mean to be the party of fairness in the 21st century?

People want their government, here and around the world, to provide three basic platforms for their lives: to be safe in their homes and streets, to be able to get on in life, and for the system to be fair, so no one gets an unfair advantage. The major issues of the day – crime, terrorism, immigration, anti-social behaviour – can be viewed through the prism of these demands. The coming election will be won by the party which best tackles these challenges.

I think there has been an important shift in attitude towards the scope of government action. Because people are more questioning and sceptical, and less deferential towards authority, government can no longer be about the top-down exercise of power. We have moved to less vertical and more horizontal lines of responsibility and accountability, with people working alongside government, rather than being dependent on it to solve their problems.

Our understanding of the nature of inequality in our society has developed from a simply class-based economic perspective. Although we must remain the party dedicated to ending material poverty, we also recognise that inequalities exist between men and women, between different races, between different parts of the country. Our socialism is influenced by the struggles for women's liberation, and by campaigns by minority groups for equality before the law.

I can understand why people are exercised by the statistics suggesting

that Britain is becoming a more unequal society, as incomes at the top rise faster than incomes at the bottom. No one wants a society where one class can live an entirely separate existence because of their income, with gated communities, tinted-glass cars, home shopping deliveries, private schools and hospitals, and privately funded security guards. Ghettos for the rich are as insidious as ghettos for the poor. All members of society should be able to come together as equal citizens in shared social spaces such as parks or high streets, use the same schools, shops, hospitals and public transport, and enjoy the same cultural and national events. We need to be able to experience and understand each other's way of life.

As socialists we should also be ready to address inequalities within the public services that we champion, rather than shelter behind the postwar rhetoric of comprehensive schools or the NHS. The comprehensive school system did not deliver equality of education across the classes: middle class children did better at comps than working class children. So we need radical solutions such as academies to bring up standards for the poorest families.

In the health service, the standards of treatment vary in different parts of the country, with the poorest areas getting the poorest services. For example, until recently hip replacements were 20 per cent lower for the poorest, despite 30 per cent higher need, heart grafts or angiography following a heart attack were 30 per cent lower for the poorest, and GPs were spending less time with poor patients than affluent ones. This is the 'inverse care law' – poor people with greater health needs getting a poorer service from the NHS, leading to a seven year average difference in life expectancy between the top social classes and the bottom. This shameful inequality is what Labour's health reforms, and measures such as the smoking ban, are designed to address.

I am always more interested in practical outcomes, and while a widening gap at the top of society is a cause for concern, the rising standards of living at the bottom of society is a cause for celebration, with the people I represent in Salford experiencing a better standard of living thanks to more jobs, improving school results, better training and enhanced opportunities. Even that great British revolutionary George Orwell demanded that incomes at the top should be no more than 10 times those at the bottom, rather than a demand that we should all earn exactly the same. Equality is not a synonym for same-ness.

So how can Britain continue to become a fairer society? Power must be devolved to the lowest practical level. That means more powers for local authorities, and as communities secretary I am determined to see that happen. It also means more powers for local communities to exercise control over their local services and environment. Looking through the submission from Progress readers to the First 100 Days initiative I was struck by Martin Tiedemann's suggestion of new co-op ventures such as childcare and housing. I believe we need a significant expansion in the cooperative

sector, and that our government should create the conditions for co-ops to thrive. Cooperatives are founded on the idea of equality – everyone has an equal share and an equal say. There are already some thriving cooperatively-owned Sure Start centres, leisure centres, housing associations and even post offices. These little islands of democracy are the way forward.

William Norton raises the issue of corporate social responsibility. I am not sure I agree with his policy ideas, but I absolutely agree with the main point that companies have a duty to enhance social justice. I would like to see more businesses allowing their employees to serve as school governors or magistrates, to organise mentoring and outreach programmes, and to work closely with their local communities.

I also note Jo Coles' points about the red tape involved in running schemes to get people into work or training, and will raise this with ministerial colleagues. Good ventures must not be stifled by bureaucracy. Taking a step back from the detail of policy, what should be the main thrust of the fourth term to tackle inequality? The answer lies in work. Access to fulfilling work is the best ladder out of social exclusion and poverty that we can build. A life on benefits is no life at all, if someone has the capacity and desire to work.

President Clinton told the Democrat Convention in 1996: 'I want our nation to take responsibility to make sure that every single child can look out the window in the morning and see a whole community getting up and going to work. We want these young people to know the thrill of the first pay cheque, the challenge of starting that first business, the pride in following in a parent's footsteps.'

This should be our ambition for Britain too. We have created over two million extra jobs since 1997, and made real strides in defeating long-term and youth unemployment. But in pockets of our society, especially cities such as London, unemployment is still a blight. Three million people of working age have been on benefits for more than a year. Over a million children are growing up in workless families. There are still roughly one million 16 to 24-year-olds not in employment, education or training, the so-called NEETs. These concentrations of workless youngsters are where the conditions for crime, antisocial behaviour and gang culture can take hold. They must be tackled as a priority.

If we want a more equal society, everyone must have the means to get a decent job. That's why I welcome the thrust of the Department for Work and Pensions green paper *In Work, Better Off* which aims to raise the employment rate to 80 per cent, and to help disabled people, lone parents, people from ethnic minorities and people with low skills into a life of fulfilling work. If we can achieve full employment in Britain, in all parts of the country, and across all ages and backgrounds, we will have done more to tackle inequality than any previous Labour government.

Hazel Blears MP is Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government

A new direction for foreign policy

Foreign policy can advance a progressive agenda at home and a progressive agenda overseas. In our interdependent world, the two are increasingly interconnected. But a shifting distribution of global power requires a new direction for foreign policy and a new diplomacy.

Once our security concerns were primarily about excessive and expansionist state power. Today, some of the greatest threats emerge in countries where state power is too weak – in failing or fragile states. At the same time we have seen the re-emergence of China, India and Russia. Within 20 years political, economic and military power may be more geographically dispersed than it has been since the decline of the Chinese empire in the 19th century.

Equally significant is that the power to coordinate at scale no longer depends upon the hierarchies of bureaucracy; coordination can occur through networks. In benign forms, this can be seen with Linux challenging Microsoft Windows or political campaigns such as Make Poverty History and Stop Climate Chaos. The malign counterpart to that is the increasing capacity of extremists and terrorists to coordinate their disparate activities without the vulnerability of a single point of control.

If we want a progressive foreign policy – one that combines domestic growth and social justice with an international activism that tackles poverty, injustice and oppression around the world – then we have to understand and respond to this new reality. That means making the most of the four main tools at our disposal.

The first tool is intellectual leadership – winning the battle of ideas. This means being clear about questions of principle. For example, rejecting the false charge that our foreign policy is targeted against any one set of people or countries. Or – as this government has done over the past decade – leading from the front in terms of increasing development aid and cancelling the debts of the poorest countries in the world. We also need to be clear about values. For example, that the international community does indeed have a ‘Responsibility to Protect’ vulnerable communities: and that such a responsibility requires us to look again at how we balance human rights and national sovereignty. And leadership means being clear about facts and evidence – the Stern report, for the first time, marshalled the data on the potential damage to the global economy from an unstable climate.

The second tool is influence within institutions and networks. Britain acting alone does not possess the power or legitimacy to effect change. Acting with others we can make a difference. Britain must use its strength as a global hub, financially, culturally, and politically. Multilateral action is not a soft option. Just look at Afghanistan; our forces are deployed as part of a NATO operation, backed by a UN mandate. And the military operation

is backed by a comprehensive approach including EU and UN investment in development and humanitarian assistance.

Nor does multilateralism replace the need for bilateral relationships. In practice, multilateral action requires the participation of the major world powers. The US is our single most important bilateral partnership because of shared values but also because of political reality. Engaged – whether on the Middle East peace process, climate change or international development – it has the greatest capacity to do good of any country in the world.

We have a bilateral relationship with the US, but we are in the European Union. And we must ensure that membership is an asset in foreign policy – not substituting for nation states but giving better expression to the common commitments of nation states. That includes rising to the new challenges of a new century. Not least among those is tackling climate change. Creating an Environmental Union is as big a challenge in the 21st century as peace in Europe was in the 1950s.

The third tool – incentives and sanctions – represent harder power. History suggests that the attraction of becoming members of ‘clubs’ such as the EU, the WTO or NATO is a powerful one.

So, for example, the prospect of EU membership has built a bridge to Turkey: in recent years it has abolished the death penalty, and improved the rights of women and minorities. A balanced package of incentives and sanctions are also required to apply pressure to particular countries and regions. So Iran has every right to be a secure, rich country. But it doesn’t have a right to set off a nuclear arms race in the Middle East and it doesn’t have the right to undermine the stability of its neighbours. That is why we are taking a dual-track approach. We are continuing to discuss further sanctions with our international partners while, with those same partners, at the same time offering a comprehensive package of incentives including help with a civil nuclear power programme and measures to support Iran’s access to international markets and capital.

There are times when incentives and sanctions will need to be combined with, or replaced by, a fourth tool: direct intervention. It was right in Kosovo in 1999 to deal with the terrible ethnic cleansing going on there. Today, it is right that the UN and African Union work together to put a strengthened force into Darfur to protect vulnerable civilians there. And it is right too that in Iraq we fulfil our international obligations and our obligations to the Iraqi people.

But a new direction in foreign policy is about more than what we do. It is also about how we do it. In the new diplomacy we need to tap into the expertise, insight and influence that lies beyond traditional diplomatic circles. That means asking questions of ourselves and others.

First, priorities. Where should the UK concentrate its global effort: where are we most needed, and where can we most effect change? Two months into this job and I believe that if we are to succeed at anything we

must succeed at tackling radicalisation and terrorism, building a European Union that is a force for good within its borders and outside, and shaping the global drive for the transition to low carbon prosperity.

Second, cooperation across UK government. The Foreign Office is a unique global asset. But diplomacy has to be allied to other assets across government, in particular, aid, trade, financial institutions, and military intervention. How can we improve coordination across the FCO and other departments on particular countries and challenges?

Third, how can we engage beyond Whitehall, with faith groups, NGOs, business and universities. The new diplomacy is public as well as private, mass as well as elite, real-time as well as deliberative. And that needs to be reflected in the way we do our business.

Those of us committed to a progressive foreign policy face real challenges. We confront scepticism and fatalism. John F Kennedy got this right. He said foreign policy should be based on 'idealism without illusions'. I am under no illusion as to the challenges and the difficulties. But the idealism is still there – above all about Britain's ability to be a global hub for discussion and decision making about the great economic, social and political questions we face.

Rt Hon David Miliband MP is Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

Winning health back for Labour

Ten years into a Labour government and the party of the NHS faces a serious political challenge on health. In spite of record investment and real achievement the public has recently felt less convinced of our ability to deliver on health than almost any area of public policy and incredibly the Tories have overtaken us as the party most trusted on the NHS, or to be more accurate, the party less likely to do more harm to it.

How could this be and what needs to be done to put things right? First, the objective balance sheet. Labour has virtually trebled health spending since 1997 – from £3bn to £90bn. The money has not been ‘wasted on bureaucrats’, as the Tories and the NHS’ detractors claim. Good managers are vital, but in fact, a smaller proportion of health spending goes on managers and administration than in 1997. We have increased the number of doctors and nurses by more than a quarter and have the biggest hospital building programme ever. We have also quite rightly increased pay for NHS staff.

This has helped achieve huge improvements in the quality of healthcare and in people’s health. Long waits for a GP appointment or hospital operation are things of the past. We are confident that next year, the 60th anniversary year of the NHS, we will achieve our historic target of a maximum 18-week wait from GP appointment to treatment, including surgery. In some parts of the country this is happening already. We have also achieved significant improvements in survival rates for our major killer diseases like cancer and heart disease.

On public health, teenage pregnancy has been reduced to its lowest level for 20 years; the fruit in school programme has significantly increased children’s fruit consumption. We have the lowest smoking rates ever and the British Medical Association described this year’s smoke-free legislation as the most important public health measure for 60 years. Recently we have insisted that the deadly effects of smoking are put as graphic images on cigarette packets.

This is just part of the objective balance sheet. Subjectively, too, people are overwhelmingly positive about their own experience of the NHS. More than 80 per cent describe it as good or excellent and better than in the past. But if they are asked about the national picture they are much less positive. More people think the NHS will get worse than better over the next few years. The ‘optimism index’ is worse on health than on education, crime, public transport and the environment. We also have a real problem with staff morale. In spite of more people and better pay, many of those working in the health service feel undervalued, overworked and not listened to. If those who work in the NHS and have daily contact with patients do not feel they can be ambassadors for health we have little chance of convincing the public about the real improvements.

Part of the public's negativity is a reflection of their general view of the government, certainly before Labour's recent recovery in the polls. Public attitudes towards the government's ability to manage public services tend to rise and fall with their attitude towards the government in general. Also the old adage that 'good news is no news' is truer for health than any other public policy in which I have been involved. The Tory press, which has always hated the socialist principles of the NHS, is relentlessly negative, holding up the exceptional – medical errors, poor management, and financial deficits – as the universal. Newspapers which spent years campaigning against the 'postcode lottery', in which some drugs were prescribed in some parts of the country but not in others, now fulminate against almost every decision by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. This is in spite of the fact it has gained an international reputation for its medically driven judgements to ensure fair, effective, value for money and consistent prescribing. But even the non-Tory media finds it hard to be positive about health issues. Perhaps it is true that bad news sells, but it is odd that the incredible advances in medical science – which feature regularly in the mainstream media in other countries – is almost invisible in the mainstream media here.

As a former journalist, one of the things that has struck me in the time I have been in this health job, is how bad we have been at communicating what we have been doing and why – both to staff and the wider public. The language of the NHS is too often impenetrable, riddled with management-speak. I have come across so many bad examples that I've felt tempted to submit them to the Campaign for Plain English. Much of the language used on a daily basis by healthcare professionals – commissioning, reconfiguration, care pathways, primary/secondary care – is meaningless to most people. We must de-managerialise and re-politicise our health language. Everything we do needs to explain how it improves people's health, improves the quality of the care they get and helps NHS staff do their job better – thereby improving the quality of life of individuals and communities. If we cannot demonstrate the massive improvements we have made to the NHS we are doing a major injustice to NHS staff, clinicians and indeed ourselves.

Take the arguments over hospital reorganisations. Fortunately, David Cameron's 'summer offensive against hospital closures' backfired – partly because the Tories got their facts wrong. However, we know from Labour's loss in 2001 of Wyre Forest to a local doctor standing as an independent that unpopular NHS reorganisations can have fatal political consequences. We also know that change is inevitable and desirable in the health service. Medical science and technology are improving constantly. That means that treatments that used to require hospital attendance are now carried out by GPs or even by people in their own homes. Equally, some hi-tech and complicated operations need round-the-clock specialist doctor and

nursing expertise that is best made available in specialist centres. The Tories, by advocating a moratorium on all change, have put themselves in the extraordinary position of opposing measures to improve patient care and save lives. But Labour and health professionals need to do a much better job at explaining that reorganisations locally are not about cost cutting, because invariably they are more expensive, but about better, safer health care, usually closer to where the person needing it lives.

None of my emphasis on communication means that we have got every policy right or that we yet have all the right policies in place to meet the challenges of the next 10 years, but the NHS is on a journey and it is certainly going in the right direction. Of course this has not been without difficulties. Top-down targets were necessary to improve the overall standard of NHS care but we do not need a plethora of them now.

This year's problem with junior doctor training was deeply damaging. Waiting in the UK – even when we achieve a maximum of 18 weeks – will still be longer than in most comparable developed countries. Our survival rates for cancer, heart disease and stroke are still worse than comparable EU countries and in some public health areas – notably alcohol-related disease and obesity – we are heading in the wrong direction.

In spite of big improvements in pay in recent years, such as 'Agenda for Change' which saw many ambulance staff receive a 25 per cent pay increase, NHS staff feel uncertain about some of the structural changes we have made to the health service although they recognise the positive impact of increased investment.

The Tories' focus on health and their abandoning – in public at least – of their traditional hostility to the principles of the NHS is a major element of David Cameron's attempt to decontaminate the Conservative brand. It is an achievement of 10 years of Labour that the main opposition now accept the principle that the NHS should remain free at the point of need.

However, a significant proportion of Tory MPs continue to favour privatising the NHS. Recently their Treasury spokesman Phil Hammond said that there should be no limits to the role of the private sector in the NHS. And the party has yet to explain how it can match Labour health spending while promising £20bn of tax cuts to 'share the proceeds of economic growth'. However, we cannot assume all Tory campaigns will be as cack-handed as Cameron's August offensive. I have no doubt that the NHS will be a major battleground at the next election. The 'big clunking fist' against the 'bare knuckle' fighter.

Labour must hold firm to our historic vision of a health service free at the point of use based on need, not the ability to pay. But we also need to learn to let go and accept that we cannot run everything from Whitehall. We need more local decision-making and better engagement and empowerment of the public and staff. We need to meet ever-increasing public expectations by continuing to extend choice while driving home

the need for people to take more responsibility for their own wellbeing. Reducing health inequalities further will require constant and consistent effort. We will need the courage to defend and the right language to explain difficult decisions that improve care and save lives.

If we can achieve these things we will restore public optimism about the future of the NHS, regain the confidence of staff and restore trust in Labour. We founded the NHS and Labour remains the only party able to defend and continue to improve it.

Ben Bradshaw MP is Minister of State for Health Services



83 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0HW
Tel 020 3008 8180
Fax 020 3008 8181
Email office@progressives.org.uk
Website www.progressonline.org.uk