

PARTY MANIFESTOS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION

**ANALYSIS BY DEMOCRATIC AUDIT,
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX**

Contents

- Part 1: Main Findings
- Part 2: The Manifesto Watch Project
- Part 3: Future Developments
- Part 4: Democratic Significance of Manifestos
- Part 5: The Party Manifestos in 2005
- Part 6: Comparing the Manifestos
- Part 7: The Historical Background

PARTY MANIFESTOS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE 2005 GENERAL ELECTION

**ANALYSIS BY DEMOCRATIC AUDIT,
HUMAN RIGHTS CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX**

PART 1 – Main Findings:

1 Democracy was not a first-order issue in the 2005 General Election campaign

Democratic issues – with certain exceptions – were not generally given great prominence in party manifestos (see part X). The parties did not promote them heavily during the campaign, and there was no substantial media coverage of them (see part X). While the invasion of Iraq became a significant issue, there was no debate on the implications of the process of going to war for democracy and accountability; how the powers of the executive might be made more accountable; or how the powers of Parliament to subject the executive to oversight might be improved. The leak of the Attorney General's legal advice gained prominence, but almost solely in the personal context of whether his arm had been twisted to come up with suitable advice. The constitutional implications were ignored. Democratic subjects were dealt with most by the smaller parties, having the effect of relegating democracy to the status of a fringe issue. This may be because democracy is regarded as an 'abstract' issue, which can appear remote from the everyday lives of voters, and is therefore most attractive to 'anti-system' parties.

2 Policies with democratic implications which achieved most prominence in 2005 were actually likely to erode, not enhance, democratic values. The possible impact of such proposals upon democracy was not sufficiently discussed

Immigration and asylum were a central issue of the 2005 campaign, and prominent in a number of manifestos. It is important that parties should be able to raise issues such as these, which are of concern to a considerable proportion of the population. But immigration and asylum were often merged together misleadingly as a single subject because they involve individuals of foreign origin. And the parties widely accepted – at least in part – the characterisation of outsiders entering the UK as a problem or threat that had to be guarded against. Many party proposals entailed curtailing the liberties of immigrants, asylum seekers, and sometimes the entire population in the process. In a number of manifestos there were broader attacks on the concept of 'political correctness', as manifested in such forms as the Human Rights Act and equal opportunities policy. The impression was created of a bureaucratic liberal establishment imposing an alien concept of equality from above. For Democratic Audit, democracy and human rights are interdependent – therefore erosions of human rights, such as those proposed in some manifestos in 2005, would amount to erosions of democracy, even if the party which put them forward received support enabling it to secure a parliamentary majority.¹ Much of the press shared – and thus implicitly

¹ Democratic Audit's framework for assessing the quality of democracy is founded upon two basic democratic principles – those of popular control and political equality: that is, that in a representative

encouraged – the approach taken by many parties towards immigration and asylum, paying little heed to possible encroachments upon democratic and human rights principles. Conservative policy on stopping unofficial traveller and gypsy encampments focused, like the supporting press campaign, on the grievances of residents troubled by the proximity of gypsy sites; the historical background of political and official neglect of the pressing need for provision was not seen as relevant.

A press/political party consensus existed around the supposedly self-evident need to place more police ‘on the beat’; and the necessity of using novel legal methods to combat ‘anti-social behaviour.’ The historical analysis of manifestos (see part X) suggests that the governing party always claims it has put greater numbers of police on the beat, while the opposition parties always claim there are not enough. The pattern was repeated in 2005. In some respects, Labour is less committed to the protection of civil and political rights than it has been in earlier periods. However, in 2005 it did promise a Single Equality Act and legislation to prevent incitement to religious hatred (though the latter measure has been criticised for its potential to undermine freedom of speech).

3 Certain democratic issues were dealt with by parties in 2005, but many others were overlooked by all or nearly all of them. Where issues were covered, there was not always a range of options

The future of the House of Lords and decentralisation of power from Westminster/Whitehall to nations, regions, councils, or local organisations, were common themes. The main parties chose not to promote their European policies. The variance of approach between Labour and the Liberal Democrats on the one hand, and the more Euro-sceptical Conservatives on the other hand was not, therefore, given a public airing. Of all the parties, small or large, only the Liberal Democrats referred to the Royal Prerogative. Yet its use had formally facilitated the most controversial policy of the 2001-5 Parliament, the Iraq war. Criticism of the decision to go to war became one of the liveliest aspects of the election and Labour lost both votes and seats over the issue (including the loss of Bethnal Green to the Respect Party). It seems likely that Labour had lost votes over this issue well in advance of the actual election campaign and the British Election Study at Essex suggests that the Prime Minister has lost considerable authority over it.

No party had proposals for entrenching the principle of collective Cabinet government. Freedom of Information, which is still subject to ministerial veto, was similarly neglected. Where issues were dealt with widely, there were sometimes different approaches offered – for instance over the House of Lords and devolution – but at others there was considerable convergence – for instance, the need to localise and democratise assorted aspects of public service delivery and decision making; or the desirability of slimming down the Civil Service – and it was not always clear what precisely the parties had in mind beyond their slogans. The most positive election pledge from the governing party (and by the Liberal Democrats) was for an Equality Act that would put protection of the rights of all minorities on an equal footing.

democracy, the people should control the political decision-makers who act in their name; and that every citizen should be equal in the exercise of that control. Political equality depends fundamentally on the whole spectrum of human rights (see *Democracy Under Blair*, Politico’s, London, 2002).

The historical analysis shows that at different elections, different democratic subjects have received varying degrees of attention (see **part X**). For instance, in 1945, there was much consideration of economic and social rights – though not always directly described as such. In later elections, political and civil rights became relatively more prominent. Since 1983, Labour has moved away from the basic welfare state approach of universal social, health and educational provision and has opened up much of the ‘old welfare state’ to private and voluntary provision. There has also been a major shift away from local state housing provision. Access to state services was never conceived of as a social and economic right, but the withdrawal from the basic protections that Labour previously offered its working-class base has been withdrawn and other Democratic Audit analysis suggests that the British National Party is one of the beneficiaries of this change. The main parties have consistently proclaimed themselves supporters of international organisations, especially the UN, but what this entails in terms of action is never entirely clear, and dependent upon many international contingencies.

The claim made by some parties in 2005 that they were breaking with a supposed long-term liberal consensus by promising tighter controls on immigration, and therefore providing the electorate with options they had not previously been offered, is false. In both 1970 and 1983 (as well as in other elections not assessed here) the Conservative Party proposed similar policies. It won both of these elections and therefore had the opportunity to implement such proposals – raising the question of why they are still needed now and allowing the BNP to ridicule their commitment to such policies.

4 The circumstances of a general election campaign are not conducive to the meaningful discussion of policy options, including those with democratic implications. Indeed, the atmosphere of the 2005 poll itself may have constituted an assault on democratic values in the UK

Elections are a fight to the death between parties, in which manifestos and policies are just two among a number of weapons, including negative campaigning, and personality promotion. They are not primarily geared to a deliberative and meaningful discussion of democratic or other policy options. Parties may even be willing to attack democratic values in order to secure political gain. Some of the smaller parties which referred prominently to democratic concepts, such as equality, did so in part as a coded attacks on rivals – such was the case in the Northern Ireland. The BNP claimed to represent democratic principles, but with a majoritarian twist aimed at indigenous white populations and scapegoating minorities, and especially Muslim communities.

Within such a battle, newspapers are prone to taking sides, or pursuing their own agendas on particular subjects. Therefore, the presentation and public discussion of proposals is subordinate to electoral strategies and often distorted single-issue campaigns. Policies and the issues surrounding them are often represented in an unbalanced way, both by the parties that put them forward, their opponents, and the media.

The integrity of the manifesto as a single document comprising a contract between voters and aspiring government is compromised by such tactics as advanced trailing of certain ideas – making the manifesto a jumping off point for a targeted campaign rather than a document to be presented as a coherent whole. Further, internal disagreements, such as within Labour on its proposals for House of Lords reform, are disguised by fudged drafting. The presentation of issues such as immigration, asylum and gypsy encampments tended to exploit feelings against minority groups and was associated with an increase in hate crimes against them.

5 Manifestos are a flawed means of providing the electorate with options for the functioning of democracy – but at present, they are the only means. Their value as a democratic tool is not entirely negligible at present, and is potentially immense

Labour's 2005 manifesto has a post-hoc value across the board as it contains a large number of policy proposals that can be monitored over the party's period in office. Of the two other larger parties, the Liberal Democrat manifesto contained explicit policies for which the party could have argued had they been in a governing coalition; but the focus-group driven collection of proposals in the Conservative manifesto were not suitable for a realistic programme in government or even in opposition.

From a democratic perspective, however, the very nature of the UK political system means that manifestos do not often provide voters with a satisfactory vehicle for democratic reform. Manifestos are devised in an undemocratic way, in that the process is dominated by the leadership. They are platforms for parties wishing to seize control of a centralised, executive-loaded form of government. As such they are unlikely to deliver reforms which might lead to a reduction in the power-base of the group that has just gained office. In 1997, Labour was pledged to a remarkable programme of constitutional reform, partly due to the efforts of the Scottish drive for devolution, and partly because devolution and a human rights act were legacies from the late John Smith, but largely overall because the Labour leadership feared that they might once again not win the election and therefore sought the makings of an alliance with the reform-minded Liberal Democrats.

The present Labour leadership has noticeably dropped democratic promises and reforms, such as the commitment in 1997 to hold a referendum on voting reform and earlier proposals, like reform of the Royal Prerogative, that the party had an interest in while in opposition. Independent manifesto enforcement by a legislature dominated by the executive is not possible. The discretion available to the executive, and its ability to dominate the political agenda, means that it can interpret its manifesto as it sees fit, or indeed ignore it. Our historical analysis shows that parties have long promised to deliver such objectives as more responsive, localised public services, but have seemingly never done so effectively, since they continue to propose doing so. The party which has (partially opportunistically) proposed electoral change, entrenchment of civil and political rights, and devolution of power the most consistently, has been kept out of office by the very system it sought to reform. These tendencies are suggestive of systemic weakness in UK democracy.

The public has a clear interest in manifestos providing them with a range of democratic options. They also have certain rights in this regard since, under the

Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, £2 million per annum of taxpayers' money is divided between parties specifically 'to assist the party with the development of policies for inclusion in any manifesto.' There is a lack of transparency as to how this money is used. It is the purpose of the present work and future activity we may carry out to audit, promote and enhance the status of manifestos, particularly from a democratic perspective; to assist ways in which manifestos may become more central to the political process, and to encourage political parties to regard them as more than just a campaigning tool at election time.

PART 2: The ManifestoWatch Project

The first goal of ManifestoWatch was to highlight the democratic proposals that the political parties were making and to enable the public both to focus on any particular party's democratic agenda and to compare the parties' proposals over a framework of democratic considerations developed by Democratic Audit. The main vehicle for this enterprise was the Audit's own website and we commissioned a special ManifestoWatch logo for the website, for links and advertisements. We set up links through the ManifestoWatch logo to the websites of Charter88 and the New Politics Network. Refresher 'news items' and the comparative tables were posted on Charter88's website. The original intention was to place a small advertisement on the election pages of the *Guardian* once we had the great majority of manifesto summaries on the website, but the *Guardian* advertisement department was unable to guarantee that our advert would appear on the appropriate pages. This is a disadvantage that could have been overcome through an appeal to the editor, but unfortunately we did not have time to do this.

Manifesto Watch on the DA website

A special ManifestoWatch section was constructed on the website, with the logo and its own home page, which contained a 'breaking news' section, referring to new items and new summaries of manifestos as they appearing on the site. A summary of the democratic proposals of each party manifesto was posted as they were published, plus other proposals that had democratic or human rights implications (e.g., a party's proposals on immigration and asylum). These summaries contained detailed analysis of the proposals and their context. We used the framework for democracy assessment developed by Democratic Audit and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) to ensure that our analysis was as comprehensive as possible.

The links section enabled viewers to access the websites of all the significant political parties so that they could read the full manifestos if they so wished, as well as other sites of interest.

Once the majority of manifestos had been published and summarised, the campaign, we posted on the site a series of tables describing party proposals across a number of democratic areas, enabling a comparison of the proposals and noting areas where there was an absence of proposals. Again we used the framework for democracy assessment to ensure complete coverage. This table was updated as the last few manifestos were published.

While the campaign was running, we carried out regular monitoring of print, electronic and broadcast media outlets. A media section on the website included analysis of pre-election coverage, press response to particular manifestos, and articles by the former BBC correspondent, Nicholas Jones. We posted details of opinion polls with findings of democratic significance taken during the campaign.

The original intention had been to make the site inter-active, using new techniques developed for similar enterprises elsewhere, but our comparatively late start on the project ruled out the use of these more advanced techniques. Nevertheless, we ran a section inviting the audience to submit their own comments and questions, which we

responded to when appropriate. Interestingly, one of these correspondents was Professor George Jones, of the LSE.

Manifesto Watch's current status

ManifestoWatch has now been re-edited as an ongoing feature on the Audit website, both as the first stage of an archive and as an immediate point of reference for those involved in seeking democratic reform in the UK. It contains the analyses of the democratic content of all significant party manifestos in the 2005 general election campaign, followed by sets of tables comparing proposals across a number of democratic areas. It covers the party policy development processes, the credibility of manifestos, limited information on the media, campaign issues as selected by the parties, and analysis of the implications of immigration and asylum as a major policy topic in 2005. There is discussion of the democratic role assigned to manifestos; and a brief description of the historical background to manifestos. This report sets out much of the information that is posted on the website.

The research and analysis for ManifestoWatch was carried out by Professor Stuart Weir and Andrew Blick, with advice and suggestions from John Bartle and Tom Quinn, of the Department of Government, University of Essex. Todd Landman, Joint Director of the Human Rights Centre, Essex, and a senior lecturer in government, oversaw the project on behalf of the University.

PART 3: Future Developments

We regard this project as a prototype for a more developed ManifestoWatch at the next general election, or even for similar projects at other elections.

Given suitable funding and a longer preparation period, a future ManifestoWatch could extend its work in the following ways:

- Generally, to promote the idea of the manifesto as a means of presenting the electorate with genuine options (particularly of a democratic nature) at election time – which the winning party is therefore bound to deliver over the Parliament which follows.
- Longer pre-election development and publicity for the ManifestoWatch website, to ensure it is a significant media, academic and public resource for the 2009/10 election.
- Monitor implementation of Labour's democratic proposals for 2005, and those of the winning party at the 2009/10 General Election.
- Carry out ongoing investigations of party policy development processes as they take place.
- Expand historical research of past manifestos, to include smaller parties and all general elections, as well as assessing subsequent implementation.
- Detailed consideration of proposals with implications economic and social rights, which we consider at present only in the historical comparative tables.

- Comparative studies with foreign countries and Scotland/Wales to determine the impact of different electoral systems and constitutional arrangements upon the role of manifestos in the democratic process.

PART 4: Democratic Significance of Manifestos

The UK's first-past-the-post system is often defended on the grounds that it leads to single party governments who have put their policy proposals to the electorate at periodic general elections and stand to be judged on their performance at the subsequent general election. As all the parties competing in the election present policy manifestos to the public, voters have a clear choice between the parties and their policies. By contrast, it is argued, PR elections lead to coalition governments of uncertain composition and fudged policies. Manifestos are important within such a theory, since they set out the proposed programmes of the contesting parties.²

It is supposed that the party which wins a general election therefore has a mandate for its manifesto and is under a duty to carry it out, as the manifesto is viewed as a political contract between the electorate and the winning party. It merges the legal sovereignty of Parliament with the political sovereignty of voters. However, there are some conceptual problems with the idea of the mandate.

It is difficult to establish how clear a mandate is. No government since the Second World War has been elected on more than 50 per cent of the popular vote. Therefore no manifesto has received a majority mandate. Voters only have the option of accepting or rejecting a manifesto in full – they cannot pick and choose the policies they vote for. Statements contained in manifestos are often vaguely worded. Very few people read them all the way through, meaning that voters learn of the contents of manifestos second-hand through the media, if at all. This is not an ideal arrangement, since newspapers in particular are prone to pursuing their own agendas in the course of their political coverage. The BBC and ITV provided detailed summaries of the manifestos, but on programmes for which audiences are declining.

A party may make an important commitment but, either because it chooses not to campaign on it, or for some other reason, it can receive very little coverage during a campaign. The Conservative proposal to replace local authority rates with the Community Charge (or 'Poll Tax') was included in the party's 1987 manifesto. But it went largely unnoticed by voters, many of whom were appalled when it was introduced; and it became an historic policy disaster. Similarly, the general ideological approach of a government may not be apparent from a manifesto. The 1979 Conservative manifesto was a deliberately mild document, not fully presaging the Thatcherite neo-liberalism that was to follow. Much of this agenda was contained in a document called the 'Stepping Stones' report which was never published. It included the recommendation that a Conservative government should fight and win public sector strikes.

The relationship between the parties themselves and their manifestos is a significant one for assessing their democratic function and the meaning of the mandate. One

² We have discussed the general theory and practice of manifestos in greater detail in *British democracy in Political Power and Democratic Control in Britain* (Routledge, London and New York, 1999), pp100-10.

question which could be raised is whether parties devise manifestos in order to win power, or they seek power so that they can implement the policies contained in their manifestos. From the perspective of parties, manifestos are just one of a number of elements in a general election campaign, alongside personality contests between leaders, negative campaigning, and defensive strategies. Elections, therefore, are not fought entirely on manifestos, weakening the concept of the mandate. Extremely general issues, such as 'trust' or 'the economy' usually prove more important than a specific programme, or a multiplicity of very small issues.

The wording of manifestos may be deliberately vague in certain areas, because parties have internal disputes over issues which cannot be resolved. Parties have a number of means of consulting members over policy, or even involving them in policy-making. However, the final say on the manifesto effectively rests with the leadership. And not all policy, even if officially adopted, finds its way into the manifesto, enabling the leadership to pick and choose the policies it wants and how it will present them. Manifestos do not only consist of policies. For instance, the party of government generally devotes substantial space to justifying its record in office.

Since 1997, Labour has employed the practice of issuing 'pledge cards' before its manifestos are published. On the one hand, this approach provides voters with a clear, simple, set of guarantees. On the other hand, it could be said to detract from the significance of the full manifesto, and may serve to draw attention only to the most populist of policies, rather than the more detailed ones contained in the manifesto. Labour's 2005 pledge card did not refer to democratic issues, except in so far as they had a potential impact upon economic and social rights. Its six proposals related to inflation and interest rates; home ownership; the New Deal; apprenticeships; the minimum wage; and education spending.

A party can insert an item into a manifesto so that, if it wins, it can claim a mandate for a policy, even if such an assertion is spurious. This occurred in 1983 when the Conservatives included a reference to abolition of the Greater London Council in their manifesto. Some policies, it might be argued, cannot be included in a manifesto. In the Cold War era, parties could not state explicitly what their policy would be in the event of a nuclear attack. Particularly market-sensitive decisions might be difficult to announce in advance. The 1997 Labour manifesto did not state that the power to set interest rates would be transferred from the Treasury to the Monetary Policy Committee of a newly independent Bank of England, despite the fact that the policy had already been formed (at least in Gordon Brown's mind).

It could be argued that rather than choosing between manifestos at election time, voters are deciding who will govern. Manifestos are not legal documents. Where there are ambiguities it is the government, not the electorate, which interprets the wording. It is not clear whether a mandate means that a party must implement all of its manifesto, or parts of it. It is of course the government which decides which policies from within the manifesto to prioritise once in office – and these may not be the issues which received the most attention during the election campaign itself.

Political scientists have disagreed over the extent to which manifestos are an indicator as to the activities of a party once it takes office, as measured in terms such as

spending priorities or budget allocations.³ It may be that the big changes in policy take place mid-term and carry on into another party's term of office – for instance the move towards a policy of indicative planning, which began under Harold Macmillan and was continued by Harold Wilson, or the adoption of monetarism, which was initiated when Denis Healey was at the Treasury, but continued by Geoffrey Howe. An important factor here may be the continuity of official staff, regardless of election results. Even with the advent of growing numbers of special advisers, in international comparative terms, an unusually high number of civil servants retain office when a new party takes power, encouraging the persistence of certain policy ideas and outlooks.

Parties can do the opposite of what is in their manifestos. Famously, Labour promised not to introduce top-up fees for university students in its 2001 manifesto, but did so with the 2004 Higher Education Act (defending the move on the dubious grounds that the policy would not come into force until after the subsequent election).

Manifestos cannot be devised so as to anticipate shock world events which may have considerable impact upon a government's agenda. Shortly after Blair's second election victory, the terrorist attacks in the US on 11 September 2001 were followed by numerous internal security measures and foreign policy initiatives on the part of the Labour government. A government may be forced to make a 'U-turn', contradicting manifesto commitments because it has attempted to implement them and they have failed. This happened both to Harold Wilson with economic planning from 1964; and Edward Heath, with trades union reforms and economic liberalisation from 1970.

³ See: *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, p.105.

PART 4: The 2005 General Election Campaign

Taking into account the matters raised above it is possible to make a number of observations about the 2005 general election campaign, manifestos and mandates.

Policy development processes

As has been noted, manifestos are presented to the electorate as *fait accomplis*. Voters cannot pick or choose which parts to endorse. But if they did wish to influence the contents of a particular party manifesto, would they be able to do so by joining that party?

The main three parties at least claim to take the views of their members into account over policy, with mechanisms for doing so. Currently, Labour uses a process called 'Partnership in Power.' There is a Joint Policy Committee, chaired by the Prime Minister, overseeing the process. It includes ministers, members of the Labour's National Executive Committee, and members of the National Policy Forum (NPF). The NPF consists of 183 members, representing various groups within the party (see table below).

NPF representatives

Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs)	55
Regions	22
Trade Unions	30
MPs	9
MEPs	6
Government	8
Socialist societies	3
Co-operative Party	2
Peers	2
Black Socialist Society	4
Labour Students	1
Local government	9
National Executive Committee (NEC)	32
TOTAL	183

In January 2001, the Conservative Policy Forum (CPF) - formerly the Conservative Political Centre - was relaunched. Local CPF groups hold meetings discussing briefs put to them by the party. The party claims on its website that 'membership throughout the country is flourishing.' It goes on, 'members can rest assured that

their responses are all read and taken into account and a summary of members' views is passed on to the relevant Shadow Minister.'

The Liberal Democrats have a federal policy formation structure. Elected representatives from constituency parties establish UK policy twice a year at party conference. They elect a Federal Policy Committee (FPC), responsible for producing policy papers to be debated by conference, and for election manifestos. Elected constituency representatives debate and vote on policy motions and papers and conference (as well as motions submitted by local parties and conference representatives).

Of the three methods described above for involving members in policy formation, the Conservative one is the most informal – there may well be considerable influence by members upon policy formation, but it is difficult to quantify; while Labour's method is potentially loaded towards the leadership, in the sense that the Prime Minister chairs the Joint Policy Committee. But Labour's Partnership in Power requires the party to consult with bodies, individuals and organisations outside the party, which has entailed focus groups, market research and consultation – arguably a more democratic approach, though perhaps not empowering party members.

As has been discussed not all 'policy' is represented in the manifesto. Party leaderships control the manifesto drafting process. In the case of all three parties, responsibility was given to young rising MPs with the confidence of the leader: for Labour, David Miliband (formerly Blair's policy chief); for the Conservatives, David Cameron; and for the Liberal Democrats, Matthew Taylor. Leaders are usually able to veto a proposal they disapprove of. For example, Charles Kennedy was reportedly able to block a commitment to privatising Royal Mail emanating from the right of the Liberal Democrats. Moreover, implementation and interpretation of a manifesto once in office would be a matter for the government, not the party. Under Clause Five of its constitution, the Labour manifesto must be agreed by a meeting of Cabinet members, the NEC, and trades union leaders. On 5 April, on the eve of the meeting, Patrick Wintour of the *Guardian* noted that:

The so-called Clause 5 meeting has for the first time been extended to include all members of the cabinet and will have as many as 66 members present. Previously the Labour manifesto was agreed solely by the national executive and parliamentary committee.

In theory, the meeting can change the draft which has been written primarily by Matthew Taylor [not to be confused with the Liberal Democrat MP], the party's chief strategist at Number 10, but in practice only minor amendments, and changes of emphases are expected.

The party leaderships cannot completely ignore internal party views, for fear of splitting their parties or de-motivating voters. The Labour manifesto contained commitments on workplace rights as a consequence of the 'Warwick agreement' of September 2004 between trades union leaders and the party leadership. At the time there was speculation that some unions, disgruntled over policies such as private sector involvement in public service provision, were considering disaffiliation from the party (and thus withdrawing their financial contributions). Therefore, items can

be forced into the manifesto from the party or movement at large. However, Warwick, though significant in policy terms, was in some respects reminiscent of a traditional Labour carve-up between unions and leadership rather than a piece of democratic policy formation, though the unions were pleased with the result.

The Conservative Party was extremely unlikely to win the General Election. Its manifesto, therefore, did not seek to provide a serious programme for government. Rather it was devised to maximise their vote and to hold off the UK Independence Party and the BNP to their right. Presentational requirements took precedence over policy for the Conservative manifesto. The Conservative Party had been conducting a policy review since Iain Duncan Smith succeeded William Hague as leader in 2001. Since 2002-3 the Conservatives received approximately £500,000 per annum in state funding for the purpose of policy development 'for inclusion in any manifesto.' (The Liberal Democrats receive a similar sum, as do Labour. The various Celtic parties receive about a quarter of that amount). The Conservatives also instigated a high-profile review of public expenditure under the direction of the businessman, David James, whose brief was to eliminate waste, enabling tax cuts without damaging essential public services. Eventually, James's findings were diluted to make them more politically acceptable, raising the question of whether, to some within the Conservatives, there was a secret agenda, comparable to that set out in John Hoskyns's 'Stepping Stones' report for Margaret Thatcher in the 1970s.

Ultimately, much of the policy work begun under Duncan Smith was not used in the party manifesto by his 2003 successor, Michael Howard. Howard brought in a new team of aides, including the political strategist, Lynton Crosby, who had worked on successive election victories for the Liberal leader John Howard in his native Australia. Crosby was associated in Australia with running so-called 'dog whistle' campaigns, sending out subliminal messages to voters, motivating fear of a number of supposed threats, notably immigration. On a basis of focus group findings, the decision was taken to conduct the Conservative campaign around five themes: lower taxes; school discipline; cleaner hospitals; more police; and controlled immigration. While these themes were believed to resonate with voters, they did not amount to a comprehensive policy agenda, despite the attempt to encapsulate it with references to 'accountability.' Much of the policy the Conservatives had been developing could not readily fit into one of the five categories. Hence the manifesto presented immigration as an issue in its own right, as well as a health and law and order issue. Policy areas that did not fit were given little attention in the manifesto.

Credibility of manifestos

It seems there is a lack of trust on the part of some of the public that parties will implement their pledges in full. ICM carried out a poll for the *Guardian* over 10-12 April 2005. They spoke to 1,524 respondents. One question asked was about 'the promises political parties make in their election manifestos'. Only 2 per cent believed that they 'Always implement the promises'. A similar percentage were 'don't knows', suggesting feelings on the subject are strong. 60 per cent agreed that they 'sometimes implement their promises', while 35 per cent were of the view that they 'seldom do what they say they will do'.

The advent of devolution has made the process of promoting national policies more complicated – with greater potential for misleading the public. Writing in the *Scotsman* on 6 April 2005, Fraser Nelson recorded:

The battle for Scotland's hearts and minds began yesterday when all parties took their message to the country – and put the finishing touches to their manifestos. After devolution, it is a tough task. The manifestos for the Conservative, Liberal Democrat and Labour parties are designed in London for English consumption – and the television news. Tweaking them for Scotland is hard work. It is not uncommon for Scots to be given a manifesto which ignores the devolutionary boundaries – with parties mixing up what they would do if they won power in Westminster and if they won at Holyrood.

The credibility of manifestos can also be called into question when the government introduces policies which were not referred to in the document. Already, since its re-election, the Labour government has announced a proposal for road charging and it seems likely that a new generation of nuclear power stations will be built – but none of this was mentioned in the manifesto.

The media agenda

One factor which was important for manifestos and democracy in the 2005 General Election was the role of the media and the response of parties to it. Technological developments have meant a considerable expansion in outlets, operating 24 hours a day. Parties place huge emphasis on setting the news agenda. This urge is difficult to reconcile with the idea of a single set of proposals, devised through internal party consultation, according to set procedures, published at a fixed point in a single format. Various parts of manifestos are trailed in advance, and they may be presented in a slightly misleading fashion. Policies may be rapidly adopted in response to media events and therefore be absent from manifestos.

The Liberal Democrats published various policy statements in advance, as did the Conservative Party. Labour took the technique a stage further, using its position in government to include its policy proposals in published long-term departmental plans.

The *Daily Telegraph* noted on 6 April 2005:

For the past three months policy announcements have been pouring out of Westminster. The main parties have still not published their manifestos in full. But there is little that they have not already told the voters about the policies they would implement if they were to win the election. In an unusual step, the Conservatives have been releasing their manifesto in instalments. Michael Howard published the introduction in January, and since then has published at least six policy documents within the past month. In addition, government departments have been rolling out a series of “five-year plans” which look suspiciously like draft sections of Labour’s election prospectus. The Liberal Democrats published their “pre-manifesto” last autumn. Since then Charles Kennedy has been churning out reams of fresh policy material.

There is also a tendency towards rapid reaction to media events. Labour promoted a new school meals policy following Jamie Oliver’s successful Channel 4 series on the inadequacies of current provision. Ruth Kelly, the Education Secretary, was insistent that she had decided action was needed before being aware of Oliver’s campaign. Nevertheless, at the very least, her plan was given maximum prominence by the Labour Party because of media interest in the subject.

During the campaign, after the publication of their manifesto, the Conservatives announced they intended to cancel the Council Tax revaluation, presumably to gain publicity and entice voters, though they had not included this policy in their manifesto.

The removal of Howard Flight as a Conservative MP demonstrates the significance of the media agenda to election campaigns, and suggests a concentration of control over election programmes in the hands of party leaders. It further raises questions about the veracity of official party statements. Flight was targeted by the Conservative leader, Michael Howard, because he was reported in the *Times* as suggesting in a semi-open meeting that Conservative plans for reductions in the growth of public expenditure went further than publicly admitted. It is constitutionally significant that Howard, as party leader, was able effectively to eject an MP from the legislature on his personal initiative.

There were many complaints of negative campaign techniques such as the use of distorted representations of the policies of opponents, or personal attacks in the media. These can detract from the important democratic process of policy debate. They are not entirely new – Winston Churchill, for instance, alleged during the 1945 campaign that Labour would need to establish a Gestapo in order to implement its plans. However, negative campaigning was a strong characteristic of the 2005 election. Labour made much of Michael Howard’s allegedly disastrous ministerial record under Margaret Thatcher and John Major, while Michael Howard himself repeatedly described Tony Blair as a ‘liar.’ Designs of controversial Labour posters supposedly intended for use by the party in a paid-for campaign found their way into the press, but were never used by the party in an official publicity campaign. A similar event occurred before the 1997 General Election. One of the posters in particular could be taken as having anti-semitic undertones.

Within the parties some were unhappy with such tactics. On 6 April 2005, the *Daily Telegraph* profiled David Miliband and David Cameron, the

two men, both tipped as future prime ministers...in charge of the Labour and Tory manifestos. In many ways, they seem closer politically to each other than to the extremists in their own parties. Both hate the negative tone that has characterised the pre-campaign war, for example. Miliband admits that the advertisement depicting Michael Howard as Fagin was ‘not a great success’ and Cameron was clearly embarrassed by the latest Tory posters asking how voters would feel if a daughter were attacked by a prisoner on early release. Both prefer to talk about choice, opportunity and responsibility.

Campaign issues

An important way in which the three main parties can influence the media agenda is through their daily press conferences. The following table shows which issues they held press conferences on (or led on in the form of a leader’s speech) each day. Its significance is partly derived from the fact that speeches and press conferences were televised live by the three main 24 hour news channels (BBC, ITV, Sky), which generally allowed the subjects chosen by the parties to determine their agenda for the day, unless other major stories appeared (for instance Howard Flight’s sacking, or the leak of the Attorney General’s advice). The table covers Monday 18 to Saturday 30 of April, the crucial period leading up to the final week of the campaign. From 1 May onwards, the parties stopped leading on single issues and went over to general rallying messages. The issues with democratic implications figuring most prominently were law and order; asylum and immigration; international development (which all three parties chose for 24 April – perhaps because it was a Sunday, a ‘slow’ day); and local government finance. Iraq, chosen by the Liberal Democrats partly because of events related to the leaking of official documents, was an issue with democratic associations, both internal and international. Subjects such as Europe, constitutional and parliamentary reform, and human rights, were ignored for the period monitored.

	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem
18	Health	Health	Law and Order
19	Child Health	Binge drinking	Health

20	Children	Council Tax	Local Income Tax
21	Law and order	Stamp duty cut	University fees
22	Immigration and asylum	Law and order	Women
23	Rural issues	General	Rural issues
24	International development	International development	International development
25	Business	Tax	Iraq
26	Education	Health	Brian Sedgemore
27	Education	Scotland (tax and infantry regiments)	Education
28	Business	Education	Iraq
29	Economy	Immigration	Older people
30	Health	General	Health

Of the broadcast media outlets monitored, BBC Radio 4's *Today Programme* had particularly detailed analysis of each party manifesto as it appeared, including smaller parties. It also covered a range of democratic issues.

Print media coverage

A clear tendency can be identified by the print media to select and present stories according to their own partisanship or policy proclivities. Amongst the red and white top press, the issue of democratic implication receiving the most coverage was immigration and asylum. We were not resourced to carry out a comprehensive study of the press coverage. Spot reading of a selection of newspapers confirmed that trends in coverage remained more or less unaltered. The main trend is still to cover the election as a contest, akin to horse racing, and polls were heavily used to assess where the parties stood in the race, rather than trying to assess public views on their policies. Since elections are primarily power contests, the focus was often upon personalities not policies, who was winning, not what they proposed to do once in office. The relationship between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown won a great deal of interpretive attention as they stood together at the heart of the Labour campaign.

One tactic that the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* employed was to feature on their front as well as inside pages news stories about actual or alleged failures in the health service, immigration control and other public policy areas. But over the election period, they found it hard to maintain this focus and other more traditional news values asserted themselves. The *Sun*'s decision on which party it would support was something of a news story in its own right. Finally, on 21 April, its front page proclaimed, 'One Last Chance – the *Sun* says: Two weeks ago, *The Sun* said its mind was still to be made up. After taking a deep breath, *The Sun* backs Labour for a third term', though *Sun*-watchers felt that its page 3 the previous day indicated its political inclinations as well as more fixed pre-occupations: 'Nicola T is still way out in front in our saucy Page 3 poll... The Labour-supporting brunette showed off her election war chest as her party topped the polls.'

The *Sun*'s heavy-weight companion titles, the *Times* and *Sunday Times*, had mixed agendas as this table of their coverage indicates:-

<i>Date</i>	Times/Sunday Times
Tuesday 1904	Ft Pg Hd 'Howard faces flak as Labour stretches poll lead' Inside 'Mandelson faces sleaze claim over Caribbean hospitality.'
Weds 2004	Ft Pg Hd Pope Inside: 'Immigration is key issue for Tories but Labour lead holds.'
Thurs 2104	FPH: 'Secret Loans bolster £16m Tory election campaign.' Inside: 'Labour plans to look for "the best and brightest" at 4.'

Friday 2204	FPH: 'A mother, a victim...another crime statistic' Inside: 'Brown drags extra 500,000 earners into the tax net.' 'Rise and rise of violent crime.' 'how the Lib Dems plan to overthrow top Tories.'
Sat 2304	FPH: 'The two faces of top Tory's migrant campaign'; Inside: 'Women are more likely to be swayed by Iraq war.'
Sunday 2404	FPH: 'Campbell: "We're home and dry".' + 'John "bloody" Birt gets a verbal left hook from the deputy PM.'; Inside: 'Blair "misled" public on asylum'
Monday 2504	'Taxman grabs £9m tsunami cash' Inside: 'Battle on war opens with row on lies and law advice'
Tuesday 2604	'First fraud inquiry as millions vote by post' Editorial 'If [G Brown] could just utter the words "I love capitalism", some of his sins would be forgiven.'
Weds 2704	'Tories taunt "liar" Blair as battle gets personal.' Inside: 'Three manifestos and three weeks of campaigning. But nothing resembling an energy policy from any of the parties.'
Thurs 2804	'Blair ditches the Euro' 'Leak of Iraq war letter "shows attack was legal"'
Friday 2904	'Blair anoints Brown as the next Premier' 'Blair ends Tories' Lords majority by creating 16 peers.' Leader 'Lord Goldsmith was correct to insist that there was a "reasonable case" for war.'
Sat 3004	'Post vote hotline signals action on fraud.' "Liar Blair" tactic backfires on Howard as Tories slip in polls.' 'If Brown is the next Prime Minister, what does he actually stand for?'
Sunday 0105	'Blair hit by new leak of secret war plan.' + 'Galloway's wife seeks divorce on election eve.' Leader: 'Labour's arrogance needs to be curbed and the Tories need to be given a better platform on which to start building a genuine alternative. A vote for the Conservatives is the only way to achieve both of these aims.'
Monday 0205	Iraq hostage story. 'Leak shows "Blair set on Iraq war a year before invasion.' Peter Riddell 'Blair did not lie, but he was less than frank about invasion pledge.'
Tuesday 0305	Food dye scare 'Blair mounts all-out attack to kill Lib Dem protest vote.' Leader 'we have chosen Labour as our preferred government...The best result for Britain...would be a smaller but a viable Labour majority and a

	larger and renewed Tory opposition.’
Weds 0405	‘Fraud arrest as postal vote experiment brings chaos.’ ‘How Tory backer paid £250,000 for Howard poll guru.’ Story about marginals campaigning.
Thurs 0505	‘Blair set for third term as Lib Dems advance.’ ‘Tory arrested as postal-vote inquiries widen.’

Immigration and asylum in the 2005 campaign

Two issues which featured heavily in the 2005 general election campaign were immigration and asylum. They are in fact distinct subjects, but are often grouped together by some political parties and tabloid newspapers. The Conservative Party deliberately placed both issues on the political agenda, which were seized upon by some of the press, including the redtops (especially the *Sun*), the whitetops, and some broadsheets.

Labour’s strategy over these issues was a defensive one. The party did not challenge the assumption underlying Conservative policies: that extremist fears of an influx of foreigners were founded in reality. Rather, it noted the contribution made by immigrants, but promised tough measures to clamp down on illegal immigrants and supposed abusers of the asylum system.

Not only the Conservatives campaigned on the immigration issue: a number of smaller parties – UKIP, Veritas, and of course the BNP – did so too.

The Conservative decision to campaign on immigration and asylum – as well as the issue of unlicensed Gypsy sites – combined with its support from much of the press – contributed to an atmosphere in which the democratic rights of many citizens – such as the right to liberty and security of person, and the right to freedom from discrimination – were under threat. The Commission for Racial Equality expressed its concern over the overall nature of the 2005 election campaign. There was fear over a rise in racially motivated assaults.

A recent British Social Attitudes Survey has already shown that the proportion of the population believing that the number of immigrants should be reduced has risen from two thirds to three quarters over the past decade. In a MORI poll for the *Observer* of 10 April, 58 per cent of respondents believe that 'laws on immigration should be much tougher.' Another 11 per cent responded that 'immigration should be stopped altogether'. (Also 19 per cent felt that the immigration laws should 'remain as they are' and 8 per cent that they should be 'relaxed'.)

The nature of the debate around race may serve to make some citizens feel both targeted and excluded from the political process. An ICM poll published in the *Guardian* on 21 March showed that only 39% of ethnic minority voters see themselves as "fully British", regardless of how long they have lived here. More than half said they have been a victim of name-calling or verbal abuse. Nearly half said that when they hear people talking about immigrants they think they mean them, regardless of how long they have been in Britain. Intention to vote among ethnic minorities was 11 points lower than among other voters, with only 39% saying they are certain to vote, compared with 50% of the electorate as a whole. Only 14% of ethnic minority voters said they supported the Conservative Party. Running ethnic minority candidates – something the Conservative Party stressed it was doing widely – would make no difference to the way three-quarters of ethnic minority voters voted. The overwhelming majority had no expectation of there being a Prime Minister from an ethnic minority in their

lifetime (presumably, Michael Howard was not regarded as being from an ethnic minority – nor Benjamin Disraeli before him).

PART 5: The Party Manifestos in 2005

The party manifestos varied considerably in size and presentation, as the table below shows.

	Labour	Conservative	Liberal Democrat
Pages	112	28	20
Pictures	1	23	38
Words	23,000	7,000	16,000
Weight	0.096kg	0.178kg	0.07kg
Price	£2.50	£2.50	Free

There follows analysis of the democratic contents of significant party manifestos.

Conservative

The 2005 Conservative Election Manifesto is notable for its brevity and relatively narrow scope. In the sense that this enables the broadest possible readership to understand it quickly this is positive from a democratic perspective. On the other hand, many of the proposals are not clearly defined or explained, leaving unanswered questions and clouding the possibility of future accountability.

The manifesto is successful in providing voters with a version of possible democratic enhancement, particularly in the areas of decentralisation of power and greater government accountability, though subject to the lack of clarity referred to above.

On the negative side, it attacks certain principles of human rights and suggests removing measures for their protection, as well as withdrawing from international treaty commitments. It has six themes: 'More Police', 'Cleaner Hospitals', 'Lower Taxes', 'School Discipline', 'Controlled Immigration'; and 'Accountability.'

The success of Labour's five pledges of 1997 appears to have influenced this presentational approach. However, Tony Blair's pledges were for more tangible achievements, and were attached to a more substantial manifesto.

Decentralisation

In his introduction, Michael Howard advocates devolving 'power from the centre to our communities.' The manifesto proposes 'genuine local accountability' for the police through 'elected police commissioners.' It criticises the NHS as too centralised.

The Conservatives 'believe in devolving power down to the lowest level so that local people are given greater control over their own lives. . . Local communities will have a greater say over planning decisions.'

The manifesto proposes to 'abolish Labour's regional assemblies. Powers currently exercised at a regional level covering planning, housing, transport and the fire service will all be returned to local authorities.'

The Conservatives 'remain strongly committed to making a success of devolution in Scotland, so that it delivers for the Scottish people.' However, 'In Wales we will work with the Assembly and give the Welsh people a referendum on whether to keep the Assembly in its current form, increase its powers or abolish it.'

The promise to 'appoint a Homeland Security Minister to co-ordinate our national response' to terrorism, however, suggests the creation of highly centralised new authority.

Westminster, Whitehall and Europe

Arguing that 'The House of Commons needs to be made more capable of standing up to the executive' it proposes to 'strengthen select committees and make time for proper scrutiny of all legislation.'

Cutting the number of MPs 'by 20 per cent' is presented 'As part of our drive for efficiency

across Whitehall and Westminster' - a curious justification for such a step, but the only one offered.

The manifesto proposes that 'exclusively English matters should be decided in Westminster without the votes of MPs sitting for Scottish constituencies who are not accountable to English voters. We will act to ensure that English laws are decided by English votes.' There are some problems with this proposal. The definition of 'exclusively English matters' is not clear. Decisions not applying directly to Scotland may well have an impact upon it. It is possible that a future Labour government could have a minority of English MPs, meaning that the Conservatives could block policy deemed to be English. A de facto English Parliament would be created, one chosen - unlike the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly - through the highly unrepresentative first-past-the-post system. Finally, it is Members of the Scottish Parliament, not Scottish MPs, who vote on devolved matters, whereas the Conservatives are proposing that English MPs should vote on 'English' decisions.

The manifesto advocates 'a substantially elected House of Lords', but provides no more detail than that.

The Conservatives propose to 'freeze civil service recruitment, remove 235,000 bureaucratic posts, and cut or abolish 168 public bodies.'

There is little reference to reform of government communications, but it is stated that, 'If a Conservative Government ever has to take the country to war, we will tell the British people why. Mr Blair misrepresented intelligence to make the case for war in Iraq.'

There is no mention here of any measure to require parliamentary approval for engagement in armed combat, or indeed, to reform the sweeping royal prerogative powers that enable ministers to go to war, make treaties, and negotiate abroad with little formal parliamentary accountability or scrutiny.

Howard promises in the introduction to 'settle our relationship with the European Union by bringing powers back from Brussels to Britain.'

The manifesto opposes the EU Constitution and entry into the Euro and promises 'the restoration of our opt-out from the Social Chapter.' It also says a Conservative government 'will negotiate to restore national and local control over British fishing grounds.' Again, there is no hint that carrying out this pledge will be far harder than making it - or what his government would do if other member states rejected these proposals.

Crime and security

Howard's introduction says a Conservative government 'will tilt the balance in favour of the victim.' An expansion in the prison population is intended, along with 'tougher sentences for career criminals.' The party is promising 'robust anti-terror laws.' It is not clear whether it is felt the laws presently in place are not robust enough. As discussed elsewhere, elected police commissioners, and a 'Homeland Security Minister' are advocated. There is a call for 'Giving local people a say over police priorities.' Greater school discipline is also portrayed as a preventive measure.

Immigration

Immigration is central to the Conservative campaign. Howard's introduction refers to British values including 'a tradition of tolerance, a love of freedom . . . a concern for the underdog.' But he goes on to describe a supposed 'out-of-control immigration system.' The need for 'controlled immigration' is given its own section in the manifesto, but also referred to in the part dealing with law and order, linking immigration with crime. In the description of health policy, it is stated that 'We will introduce health checks for immigrants in order to curb the spread of diseases such as TB and to protect access to our NHS. It is, after all, a national health service not a world health service.' Anyone from outside the EU coming to Britain for more than 12 months 'will have to demonstrate that they have an acceptable standard of health and that they are unlikely to impose significant costs or demands on Britain's health system.' Immigration is thereby portrayed as a health issue, too.

The Conservatives portray immigration and asylum as part of the same supposed problem. They state 'This Government has lost effective control of our borders . . . Our asylum system is in chaos.'

The solutions the manifesto proposes for immigration include 'a points-based system for work permits . . . This will give priority to people with the skills Britain needs.'

For asylum, the Conservatives promise to 'take back powers from Brussels to ensure national control of asylum policy, withdraw from the 1951 Geneva Convention, and work for modernised international agreements on migration.' In future 'Asylum seekers' applications will be processed outside Britain. We will set an overall annual limit on the numbers coming to Britain, including a fixed quota for the number of asylum seekers we accept. Parliament will set, and review, that number every year.'

'Political correctness'

Apparently responding to tabloid coverage, the Conservatives have recently turned their attention to gypsies as well as immigrants and asylum seekers. The manifesto suggests 'new powers to help local councils to deal with those incidents, such as illegal traveller encampments, which breach planning laws. Together with clear guidance for police and our review of the Human Rights Act, this will ensure fairness for all, rather than special rules for different groups.'

'Political correctness' - though never defined in the manifesto - is described as though it is a tangible entity the presence of which in public life can be measured and if necessary removed. The party proposes to 'root out political correctness' from the education system. The law and order section promises 'Less paperwork and political correctness' - thereby linking what the Conservatives portray as an overly bureaucratic state with the values of a supposed liberal establishment and suggesting that 'political correctness' shackles the police. The campaign slogan, 'Are you thinking what we're thinking', provides an intangible opening for voters to assume that the Conservatives share potential prejudices; and being against 'political correctness' and for 'fairness for all' encourages this kind of identification. The idea that ethnic minorities in general and asylum-seekers in particular are unfairly given extra benefits and privileges by a liberal state is one of the under-currents that have fed into the appeal of the far right.

Tying this rhetoric into a 'review' of the Human Rights Act, which is portrayed in the tabloid press as a charter for unpopular minorities, seems to indicate an ominous slide into populist exploitation. However, the party makes it clear that it is committed to 'traditional liberties'. To that end, it says it will hold a free vote on the restoration of hunting with dogs.

Press response to Conservative manifesto

Following its publication on 11 April, the aspects of the Conservative manifesto with democratic implications which received most media attention were those related to immigration. Newspapers often conformed to their partisan prejudices in how they received the Conservative proposals and the way in which they were presented. For instance, the Daily Mail welcomed the Conservative approach while the Guardian was critical. Proposals for 'accountability' and on Europe were remarked upon, but not as widely.

12 April 2005, Simon Heffer in the *Daily Mail*

'bravest of all is the Tories' desire to confront the question of uncontrolled immigration head on.

For decades this has been the unmentionable issue. However, the Tories have now shrewdly identified the massive public concern at Labour's failure to impose anything approaching sensible border controls...

The party's commitment to accountability sensibly addresses the question of trust, especially concerning the Prime Minister, that is also at the forefront of many voters' concerns.'

12 April 2005, *Financial Times*

'on Europe, the Tory manifesto fails to recognise how the European Union is changing since the arrival of the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe. The EU is becoming the more flexible and liberal organisation the Conservatives want to see, but instead they are advocating a form of partial withdrawal. There is no explanation of how a Tory government could achieve this without leaving Britain on the margins of Europe - subject to EU legislation but less able to influence it...

the campaign slogan - "Are you thinking what we're thinking?" - will lead many voters to believe the Conservatives share their baser prejudices on issues such as Europe, crime and immigration.'

12 April 2005, Jonathan Freedland in the *Guardian*

'This [emphasis on immigration control but denial of the charge of racism] neatly casts Howard as the plucky underdog, prepared to defy the liberal establishment...but the other, disguised, message is more sinister. By planting the word racist in the voter's mind, doesn't Howard seek to speak to all these people who voice opinions that begin "I'm not racist, but...?"'

12 April 2005, *The Times*

'The document released yesterday is rather light on words, but is designed to convey certain central campaign messages.

Manifestos are never literary masterpieces. They are either criticised as too prescriptive or condemned as vague. Nor can they really serve as a comprehensive blueprint for government... That the Conservative volume is short does not mean that it offers nothing... On immigration... while it is certainly not "racist" to raise the subject, the tone is too harsh even if the underlying policy is not without merit...

There is a... philosophical contradiction within the manifesto. At different points in the space of a few pages, Conservatives appear to be in favour both of empowering the consumers of public services and allowing the producers of them new autonomy. Meanwhile, localism is endorsed enthusiastically, but most of the prominent policy pledges involve, by implication, national targets such as cleaner hospitals or extra frontline policemen.'

Labour

At 102 pages, the Labour manifesto is more than three times longer than the Conservative one. So it is unlikely to be read all the way through, but it does give voters more substance and policy detail. There are, however, some problems with a lack of clarity - for instance, the theme of balancing rights and duties is a prominent one, but it is not always apparent where rights end and duties begin - arguably a more general problem with social democratic thought. Since Labour is the party holding office, some of the space is taken up with justifications of its record. Labour has used its position in government to trail much of the manifesto in five-year departmental plans - a use of official authority for partisan purposes. Similarly the 2005 Budget was used to cost Labour's programme for a prospective third term.

The manifesto divides into nine chapters: Economy; Education; Crime and Security; NHS; Older people; Families; International policy; Quality of life; Democracy. Like the Conservative manifesto, the main proposals for democratic reform are at the end of the manifesto: perhaps a signal that neither party regards them as central to a bid for victory. Labour's lead theme is the need to 'embed a new progressive consensus'; one of 'economic progress and social justice.'

Central democratic reform

Amongst the proposals for Parliament, the most significant omission is that there will be no reform of the royal prerogative powers presently used by ministers to carry out a range of functions, such as going to war and making treaties, without the need to consult Parliament. Blair's decision to go to war against Iraq highlighted Parliament's weakness (though he did concede two parliamentary votes). In opposition Labour policy was to put these powers on a

statutory basis, guaranteeing a role for Parliament; and there is now growing political pressure for reform fuelled by an influential report by the Public Administration Select Committee. Labour 'will...continue to support [House of Commons] reforms that improve parliamentary accountability and scrutiny led by the successful Modernisation Committee.' But proposals for parliamentary reform are almost exclusively concentrated on the House of Lords, not the Commons.

The manifesto proposes the removal of hereditary peers from the Lords and promises a free vote on the future composition of the Lords - though a similar provision failed to deliver any agreement over reform in the last Parliament. The aim is to create a second chamber which is more representative, effective and legitimate than the current House, but which will not challenge the primacy of the House of Commons. Therein lies the rub - a return to Labour's previous commitment to an elected second chamber would create a rival to the popular House.

This may be why the manifesto suggests investigating 'alternative forms of scrutiny that complement rather than replicate those of the Commons.' Is that the cue for a reduction in the powers of the Lords? There's also talk of codifying the conventions of the Lords - one of these (not mentioned) was the famous Salisbury convention, by which the Lords traditionally did not vote down legislation promised in the government's manifesto. Some observers have suggested that this convention should no longer hold now that the Lords is more legitimately composed - which would clearly be problematical for the government, as it would amount to another check on the executive. Perhaps that is what Labour has in mind. It is clear that the government has become impatient with the check on its legislation that the more confident second chamber now applies. In the press launch for the manifesto, Blair reiterated his view that a mixed chamber comprising both elected and unelected members was not desirable - but he did not make it clear why. His implication when making such statements is that it should remain wholly unelected.

Labour continues to be 'committed to reviewing the experience of the new electoral systems - introduced for the devolved administrations, the European Parliament and the London Assembly. A referendum remains the right way to agree any change for Westminster.' But there is no commitment to holding such a referendum, even though this was one of New Labour's earliest proposals.

The party will 'continue to work with the independent Electoral Commission to explore how best to support the vital democratic role of political parties while recognising that campaigning activity must always be funded by parties from their own resources.'

Labour promises 'to explore new and innovative forms of public engagement' in policy issues and dilemmas. It is not clear how it intends to involve representative samples of the public in policy making.

Local and regional democratic reform

The manifesto proposes to transfer power to the most local level, through such measures as 'Community funds for local neighbourhoods to spend on local priorities' and 'New opportunities for communities to assume greater responsibility or even ownership of community assets like village halls, community centres, libraries or recreational facilities.'

The manifesto states that Labour will 'extend the right to establish parish councils to communities in London.' Central government and local authorities will be encouraged to work with mutuals, cooperatives, and Community Interest Companies. 'Social entrepreneurs' will be supported.

The approach to local government is contradictory, signalling an intention to shift power downwards, yet retaining all the powers to direct local government and set standards that successive governments have built up. Labour promises 'further freedoms to deliver better local services, subject to minimum national standards, with even greater freedoms for top-performing councils.' Whether a council is 'top-performing' will presumably be determined according to criteria drawn up at the centre. Reduction of bureaucracy and simplification of funding streams for local councils is promised. The party 'will...give councils greater stability by providing three-year funding.'

Labour 'will ensure that councils are organised in the most effective way to lead and support local partnerships and deliver high-quality services. We will explore giving people a more direct opportunity to express a view about whether they would like to have a directly elected mayor. We will also consult with city councils on the powers needed for a new generation of city mayors. And we will examine the case for simplifying the current local government election cycle by moving towards "whole council" elections every four years.'

The manifesto proposes to 'continue to invest in local services with year-on-year increases in grants to local councils, and will not hesitate to use our capping powers to protect council taxpayers from excessive raises in council tax.'

Labour is 'committed to reforming council tax and will consider carefully the conclusion of the Lyons Review into local government finance.'

Labour hints at certain decentralising reforms without fully spelling out what they might entail. More powers are promised for regional bodies though the latter are unelected and there is no mention of further referendums on elected regional assemblies after the no-vote in the North-West last year. A review of the powers of the London mayor and GLA are promised, and the Welsh assembly will get greater legislative powers. But there is a certain vagueness here. The manifesto says: 'In Wales we will develop democratic devolution by creating a stronger Assembly with enhanced legislative powers and a reformed structure and electoral system to make the exercise of Assembly responsibilities clearer and more accountable to the public.' How is the electoral system to be reformed? By strengthening the first-past-the-post element of it (to make it 'more accountable to the public')? The manifesto does not say. (The current AMS electoral system, with 2/3 of AMs elected by first-past-the-post in constituencies and 1/3 on regional lists has not quite delivered a Labour majority in the assembly - a small tweaking upwards of those elected in constituencies would achieve that.)

Equality

The most significant new pledge in this area is to introduce a Single Equality Act that would put the protection of all minorities on an equal statutory footing (as the Liberal Democrats, the SDLP and Sinn Fein also propose). Government ministers have consistently resisted proposals for such a measure, such as the private members bill introduced in the House of Lords by Lord Lester. This would represent a real advance towards a more equal society. Labour 'will introduce a...duty to promote equality of opportunity between women and men, and will further extend protection against discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief. We are committed to improving the rights and opportunities of gays and lesbians.' Importantly, the party intends 'to give people of all faiths the same protection against incitement to hatred.' Such a measure would close the present loop-hole enabling racist groups to disseminate anti-Islamic propaganda, since Muslims are defined as a religious not ethnic group, while, for instance, attacks on Judaism or Sikhism could fall foul of legislation preventing incitement to racial hatred. However, it has been argued that the new measure constitutes a dangerous assault on freedom of speech. It is proposed in the manifesto to 'continue the dialogue we have started with faith groups...about how best to balance protection, tolerance and free speech.'

A promise is made to 'continue to bear down on abusive or frivolous claims' under the Human Rights Act.

Labour will establish a Commission on Equality and Human Rights.

'Safe communities, secure borders'

Law and order is an area where the requirement to provide security for citizens potentially clashes with other human rights. The manifesto states 'We prize the liberty of the individual; but that means protecting the law-abiding majority from the minority who abuse the system.' Labour proposes measures to combat anti-social behaviour that will give greater power to police and local authority officials; it will also change rules on evidence, allowing it to be given anonymously by victims of such behaviour. It is not clear how this will work when the accused represent themselves. There will be an increased use of electronic tagging for

criminal offenders who have been released from prison. The manifesto states that 'we will test the use of compulsory lie detector tests to monitor convicted sex offenders.'
Labour claims, 'It makes sense to provide citizens with [a] secure identity card to protect them at home from identity theft and clamp down on illegal working and fraudulent use of public services. We will introduce ID cards, including biometric data like fingerprints, backed up by a national register and rolling out initially on a voluntary basis as people renew their passports.'

Lately, measures taken against international terrorism - including restrictions on the freedom of suspects, without trial - have eroded certain human rights. There is evidence that aspects of Labour's approach to terrorism have been not only unfair but futile: since 11 September 2001, there have been 702 arrests under the Terrorism Act, mostly of Muslim males, but only 17 convictions. However the police argue that the method is effective at disrupting terrorist networks, and it is more satisfactory than the US approach of mass incarceration. The manifesto proposes 'new laws to help catch and convict those involved in helping to plan terrorist activity or who glorify or condone acts of terror.' After the 7 July 2005 London attacks, legislation along these lines is being rapidly progressed, with cross-party support – but it seems likely to create very broadly drawn offences.

While there are positive references to migration in the global economy, Labour has obviously felt unable to ignore the attention which the supposed problem of immigration and asylum has attracted. Overall, Labour is keen to emphasise the benefits to Britain of skilled migrants, but it knows it is vulnerable on immigration, so it has balanced these positive remarks with tough measures to deal with abuses of the system. It will introduce 'a points system for those seeking to migrate here. More skills mean more points and more chance of being allowed to come here.' It goes on, 'By 2008, those needing a visa to enter the UK will be fingerprinted. We will issue ID cards to all visitors planning to stay for more than three months. Over the next five years we will implement a new electronic borders system that will track visitors entering or leaving the UK.'

There are tough words for unfounded asylum claimants. Labour will 'Fast-track all unfounded asylum seekers with electronic tagging where necessary and more use of detention as we expand the number of detention places available.'

International organisations

Labour's manifesto makes a number of proposals with implications for international co-operation, the international rule of law, and human rights and other treaty obligations. While they are frequently admirable, how they will be delivered in the absence of support from other major world powers such as the US (or China and Russia) is unclear.

Labour describes the EU Constitutional Treaty as 'a good treaty for Britain and for the new Europe' which it will 'put...to the British people in a referendum and campaign wholeheartedly for a "Yes" vote to keep Britain a leading nation in Europe.'

During the UK's European presidency, Labour promises to 'work to promote economic reform; bear down on regulation; make progress in the Doha development trade round; bring closer EU membership for Turkey, the Balkans and Eastern Europe; and improve the focus and quality of EU aid so it better helps the poorest countries.'

On the EU, the manifesto promises to 'maintain our common-sense policy...The five economic tests must be met before any decision to join can be made. If the Government were to recommend joining, it would be put to a vote in Parliament and a referendum of the British people.'

Labour 'will work actively to secure an international treaty on the arms trade' and will continue participating in international efforts against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The manifesto iterates support for 'the universal principles of human rights and democracy' contained in the UN Charter. It states that Labour will seek 'reform of the Security Council so it becomes more representative and has a stronger focus on conflict prevention. We support the recommendation of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel for a Peace-building Commission to assist countries emerging from conflict and to develop mechanisms to enhance conflict prevention. We will press for more radical reform of

the UN humanitarian system, so it is better equipped to save lives.'

Labour supports 'reform of the World Bank and IMF to improve transparency, give more say to developing countries, and, with the EU better focus their efforts on the poorest countries', particularly in Africa.

Labour promises to use the UK position as chair of the G8 'to lead internationally on climate change...and promote an international dialogue to reach agreement on the long-term goals and action needed to stabilise the level of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. We will also work for effective international action to adapt to the impacts of climate change.'

The manifesto states that G8 chairmanship will enable the UK to continue to press for 'a doubling of aid backed by getting agreement to an International Finance Facility as supported by the Commission for Africa.' Since 'aid will not be successful without conflict prevention, good governance and zero tolerance of corruption' Labour supports 'faster repatriation of stolen assets from UK financial institutions, ratification of the UN Convention on corruption, and more open and accountable reporting of revenues from oil and mining.' The manifesto promises to 'press for an international agreement on universal access to AIDs treatment...and for all people in poor countries to have access to free basic healthcare and education.' Labour will 'press for the conclusion of an ambitious trade deal that will completely open markets to exports from poorer countries; for further reform of rich countries' agricultural subsidies.'

Press response to Labour manifesto

A detailed analysis of Labour's constitutional and electoral plans appeared in the *Financial Times* on 14 April. There was criticism of the manifesto for its length and sombre tone. The London Evening Standard used Labour's proposals for change to regional government as a basis for further pursuance of its quarrel with London Mayor Ken Livingstone.

14 April 2005, Jean Eaglesham in the *Financial Times*

'Tony Blair has set his party on course for confrontation with the Lords over changes to its composition and powers. The proposals could prove a significant headache for the attempt by a third-term Labour government to drive through its parliamentary business.

The prime minister only agreed to the manifesto commitment to giving MPs a free vote on Lords composition after protracted cabinet argument...

But he appears to have accepted this is a price worth paying to meet the concern of many of his ministers and backbenchers that Labour has broken its previous manifesto vow to make the Lords more democratic.

The free vote promised in this manifesto is likely to result in most of the House of Lords being eventually elected...

The manifesto also commits Labour to evicting the 192 hereditary peers left in the Lords after Labour's initial cull.

As a quid pro quo for allowing the Lords greater legitimacy – through a more democratic base – Labour plans new controls on its ability to oppose the Commons. Long unwritten conventions...will be codified.

The proposals will be seen as revenge for the relatively high number of defeats inflicted on the government in the last Parliament by the Lords...

the manifesto also promises a review of the first-past-the-post system, with change subject to a referendum.

At least two cabinet ministers are understood to have opposed even this equivocal commitment to consider reform.

But Mr Blair is wary of a public backlash should the current skewed electoral system give Labour a far greater number of seats than its share of the vote would appear to warrant.'

14 April 2005, *Daily Star*

'The General Election is dying on its backside...Yesterday Labour had a golden opportunity to reignite interest when they launched their manifesto.

But Tony Blair blew it.

His 112-page booklet is almost unreadable with a glut of meaningless phrases such as "power

devolved, citizens empowered’.

It’s also simply unbelievable, containing 273 promises, many of which he’s made and broken before.’

‘A manifesto composed by control freaks’, 14 April 2005, *Daily Telegraph*

‘The overall impression was of a government that has run out of ideas, but retains its desire to tell us how to live, what to eat and how to bring up our children...

Voters, at least, now have a clear choice between the two main parties...the Tory message has the advantage of simplicity.’

14 April 2005, *The Times*

‘The package on crime is robust, although the Tories deserve a degree of credit here for forcing Labour in this direction. Much of the section on foreign policy — bar a naive embrace of the flawed EU constitution — is difficult to disagree with.’

14 April 2005, Paul Waugh in the *Evening Standard*

‘A new “Robin Hood” tax could be imposed on Londoners under plans by Ken Livingstone to gain extra powers from the Government.

The *Evening Standard* has learned that the Mayor wants to levy a capital-wide local income tax to redistribute cash from the rich to the poor.

His plans emerged after Labour’s manifesto pledged yesterday to look at new powers for Mr Livingstone and the Greater London Authority.

Liberal Democrat

The Liberal Democrat manifesto is more detailed than the Conservative one, less than the lengthy Labour programme – but its proposals are generally firmer, especially on democratic matters. The manifesto divides into eleven sections: Health; Education and Skills; Justice and Crime; Economy and Business; Pensions and Benefits; Local Communities; International Affairs; Rural Affairs; Transport; Better Government; Environment.

The main chapter dealing with democratic reform is the penultimate one – as with the Labour and Conservative manifestos, arguably tucked away at the end, reflecting a perceived lack of importance. However, the Liberal Democrats, as discussed elsewhere in this report, have a record of raising important democratic reform issues for as long as the modern manifesto has existed. They continue to do so in their latest publication, though remaining open to the charge that they are seeking to alter the rules of the political game in such a way as to favour their own party.

Electoral Reform

The Lib Dems maintain their long-term commitment not only to electoral reform, but also to the Single Transferable Vote (STV). They propose to introduce STV for elections to the House of Commons, for all local elections in Britain, for the House of Commons, the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly for Wales. Thus they would abandon elections under the proportional Additional Member Systems (AMS) for devolved elections in Scotland and Wales. There is no mention of a referendum being held before the change. Quite how far they would be open to negotiation on the principle of PR and systems is not clear. Under Paddy Ashdown, they were being prepared to accept AV-Plus, the partially proportional system advocated by the Jenkins Commission, for elections to Westminster; and there were suspicions that the leadership may have been open to persuasion on accepting the non-proportional Alternative Vote that would have benefited them.

The Liberal Democrats ‘will review the European electoral system so people can choose their MEPs personally, rather than just vote by party list as at present.’ Their manifesto proposes that ‘At the age that people can marry, leave school and start work, [presumably 16 years of age] they will have the right to vote.’

The Liberal Democrats support ‘a predominantly elected second chamber’, but do not say what the electoral system would be.

Central democratic reform

The manifesto notes that ‘In recent decades Prime Ministers have exercised a growing domination over the political system, insufficiently accountable to Parliament or the people.’ It proposes to ‘curb this excessive concentration of power.’ But while Liberal Democrat plans would serve to limit executive power, they do not propose to introduce a written constitution nor any plan to codify the position of prime ministers within the executive and with respect to their cabinet colleagues. That might be achieved by providing for independent ownership of the Ministerial Code, which refers to principles such as the need for collective decision-making, but is presently controlled, interpreted and enforced by the premier. One of the proposals the Liberal Democrats do make is to ‘cut back [the Prime Minister’s] powers of patronage, in particular through our plans for a predominantly elected second chamber.’

In accordance with suggestions by MPs of all parties and a number of observers, the manifesto pledges to ‘make the Royal Prerogative powers which the Prime Minister exercises – such as decisions over war and peace – subject to parliamentary accountability.’ The Liberal Democrats advocate ‘a War Powers Act to require Parliament’s authority before a government takes Britain to war.’ They reiterate the belief – which all the main parties in theory share, but only the Liberal Democrats mention in their manifesto – in a Civil Service Act, as ‘a barrier to politicisation of the civil service.’

The manifesto promises that ‘We will...strengthen the powers of Parliament to scrutinise the actions of the Government, enhancing the Select Committee system.’ It offers no detail on how this will be done.

In order to ensure that the BBC is free from political influence and is properly regulated, the manifesto proposes to ‘scrap the current government-appointed Board of Governors, and introduce a new, independent external regulator appointed by Parliament.’

Another Liberal Democrat objective is to ‘cut the excessive number of government departments and reduce the number of government ministers by over a third.’ The Department of Trade and Industry would be abolished. The party will ‘move government bureaucracy out of London, saving money on office rents and spreading wealth and jobs more equally through the UK.’

National, regional and local democratic reform

The manifesto promises to ‘strengthen the powers of the Northern Ireland Assembly and extend primary legislative powers to the National Assembly for Wales. In consultation with the Scottish Parliament, we will consider how to extend its role.’

The party plans to replace Council Tax with a Local Income Tax, ‘based very simply on the ability to pay.’ The manifesto states that ‘We will free local councils from many of the stifling controls of central government so that they can innovate and deliver services that meet local people’s real needs.’ The manifesto argues that councils should ‘become genuinely accountable to their local communities rather than being agents of Whitehall.’ In order to ‘cut bureaucracy and increase effectiveness’ the Liberal Democrats propose to ‘cut the burden of inspections, merging eight government inspectorates into one, a streamlined and independent Audit Commission.’

The party proposes to shift ‘The powers of many unelected regional and national quangos and administrators...to cities and counties, including returning to County Councils their strategic planning role.’ In addition, ‘The healthcare planning role of Primary Care Trusts will be given to elected local social services authorities.’ There is a possible contradiction between enhancing the powers of local authorities but at the same time creating new bodies with their own democratic mandates – perhaps blurring accountability in the process.

At regional level, the manifesto advocates placing ‘remaining regional functions into a single agency, increasing accountability to the local community through an executive comprising councillors elected from the cities and counties, rather than appointed by the Secretary of State.’ There will also be ‘a new system for dividing up government funding fairly within the UK’ – presumably devised at and co-ordinated from the centre. This proposal could shake up

the existing allocations of central funding to the disadvantage of Scotland, but to the advantage of northern regions in England.

International organisations, international rule of law and treaty obligations

Arguing ‘we should not have gone to war in Iraq’, the manifesto states ‘Britain must never again support an illegal military intervention.’ It says, ‘The best way to achieve security and to tackle the threat from terrorism is through international action. Britain must work through the United Nations, as a committed member of the EU, and with the US to promote international law, democracy and respect for human rights.’ This is a general rather than specific statement and skates over the awkward issues that arise, such as the evident need for the international community to devise ways in which action could be taken to halt genocide or mass slaughter in particular countries. Perhaps this issue is covered more circumspectly in their advocacy of ‘reform of the UN and the EU to make them more responsive to international challenges.’

The Liberal Democrats remain convinced Europeans. Their manifesto supports the EU Constitutional Treaty, with British membership subject to a referendum. With the aim of achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, ‘Liberal Democrats will increase British aid spending from 0.35 per cent of Gross National Income today to at least 0.5 per cent by 2007-08, and set out detailed plans for it to reach 0.7 per cent by 2011 at the latest.’ They will work through the EU and the World Trade Organisation to bring about fairer terms of trade for developing world countries.

Environmental issues are given prominence throughout the manifesto. The Liberal Democrats promise to ‘make sure that Britain achieves its targets from the Kyoto Protocol...well before the deadline.’ It calls for Britain and the EU to ‘take the lead on negotiations for the next set of targets for greenhouse gas emissions

Justice and crime

The manifesto proposes a generally more liberal approach to law and order than either Labour or the Conservatives, in some ways reminiscent of Blair’s old ‘tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime’ slogan. However, the Liberal Democrats have bought into the idea that an increased police presence, unhindered by supposedly excessive procedures and regulation, will inevitably reduce crime. The Liberal Democrats propose ‘getting rid of Labour’s expensive, illiberal and ineffective ID card scheme’ – claiming this will ‘pay for 10,000 police on top of Labour’s plans.’ The party supports the existing plan for 20,000 more community support officers, backing up police. Similarly to the Conservatives, the Liberal Democrats promote the idea that the police are tied down by unnecessary paperwork – ‘We will give the police the technology they need, and simplify the bureaucracy they face, to allow them to spend more time on patrol and less time tied to the desk.’ The manifesto opposes ‘criminalising people possessing cannabis for their own personal use.’

The Liberal Democrats support the more extensive use of community work – as opposed to prison sentences – for non-violent criminals. Community Justice Panels will give ‘local people...more say in the punishment offenders carry out in the community’ – an example of direct participation by citizens in the criminal justice process. And, like its counterparts produced by the other two main parties, the manifesto advocates measures to reduce anti-social behaviour. They include ‘cracking down on licensees who serve people when clearly drunk or underage.’ So-called ‘Acceptable Behaviour Contracts’ will be used to stop noisy and offensive behaviour, ‘agreed between the individual, their family, the police and the local authority.’ There is a vague reference to the need for ‘appropriate measures to tackle underlying causes’ of anti-social behaviour.

Proclaiming ‘It’s time to make prison work’, the manifesto calls for ‘increased resources for education and training’ for prisoners, ‘so that they learn the skills to acquire a legitimate job.’ Commitment to educational improvement ‘will be one of the factors used when considering [prisoners’] release date, as part of our emphasis on tackling the causes of crime.’

The Liberal Democrats ‘oppose moves to reduce or remove rights to jury trial.’ The manifesto notes that ‘Liberal Democrats achieved substantial amendment of the Prevention of

Terrorism Act, but it still has serious flaws, and we will repeal it.’ They agree with the widely-voiced call to ‘admit evidence from communications interception.’ This will make possible the use in courts of intelligence information that is presently inadmissible. As a consequence, they assume that it may be possible to prosecute terrorist suspects – a better course of action than imposing restrictions on their liberties without trial. However, that would depend upon the intelligence information on which suspicion is founded being sufficient to convince a court, something which at present we cannot know, since it is secret. Slightly confusingly, the Liberal Democrats believe that control orders may still be needed, stating that ‘they must be granted by a judge, be time-limited and be subject to a high standard of proof.’

The manifesto praises Britain’s ‘proud record of granting safe refuge to those fleeing persecution.’ It proposes ‘a dedicated agency’ for better, quicker asylum decisions. The Liberal Democrats will ‘work within the EU to develop common standards so that all EU countries take their fair share of refugees.’ Significantly, the party proposes to ‘end asylum seekers’ dependence on benefits, allowing them to work.’

Immigration is dealt with in the ‘Economy and Business’ section – in other words, it is not treated as a problem in its own right, or lumped together with asylum. The party notes the long-term value of migrants to the British economy. It advocates consultation with business and the public sector to establish the number of work permits that should be issued.

The Liberal Democrats support ‘a Single Equality Act to outlaw all unfair discrimination...thus giving equal protection to all’ (a welcome proposal that also finds its way into the Labour manifesto). They ‘will establish hate-crime investigation units in each police force to co-ordinate information and action against racism, homophobia and other hate crimes.’

British National Party (BNP)

The BNP launched the largest and most comprehensive manifesto in its history on 23 April - St George's Day. The large and wordy document, which runs to 54 pages on the PDF file on the BNP website, is intended to demonstrate that the BNP is neither a single-issue party nor 'an ephemeral protest group'.

The manifesto, entitled *Rebuilding British Democracy*, is divided into 18 sections that explain BNP policy not only on EU withdrawal, control of immigration and 'Britishness' but for policy areas such as taxation, public spending, education, transport, the environment, etc. On taxation, the BNP proposes to abolish income tax and replace it over time with a consumption tax.

But the emphasis is on traditional BNP themes which colour its policies in these other areas. British democracy, the manifesto asserts, is 'a sham and an illusion'; its parliaments and assemblies are merely 'rubber-stamping closed shops for rule by diktat from Brussels and Strasbourg', which rarely considers the interests of the majority of the British peoples. Instead, for 30 years there has been a raft of repressive legislation to stop multi-culturalism from 'falling apart'.

The BNP would return power to 'the men and women of Britain', restoring security and freedom and giving them 'genuine ethnic and cultural diversity and the right of all peoples to self-determination' - including the 'indigenous peoples of these islands'. The ruling regime has abandoned the concept of 'Britain' in its pursuit of globalisation and nears totalitarian rule in its determination to impose multi-culturalism by politically correct laws that outlaw free speech.

Leaving the EU

Withdrawal from the EU, an aspiring super state, would be 'the single most important foundation stone of our rebuilt British democracy'. European nations such as Norway achieve higher standards of prosperity than the UK outside the EU which costs Britain about 2% of GDP. But the greatest single threat the EU poses comes with plans to expand into Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and further still, opening up western Europe and the UK to more gypsies and muslims. The political and media deceit that has taken the UK into the EU will

end 'on the day the BNP win a general election and ceremoniously tear up the Treaty of Rome on the following morning'.

Rebuilding democracy

The section on democracy begins with the ahistorical and inaccurate claim that, 'This country is the birthplace of modern democracy'. The BNP goes on to portray itself as standing in the tradition of Magna Carta, the Peasants Revolt, the Levellers, Chartists, 'early Labour movement' and suffragettes who previously fought for liberty and political association. 'Now our dearly-bought birthright of freedom is under mortal threat once more'.

Political and civil rights

The section draws attention to the power and reach of the surveillance state, suggesting that other BNP policies rejecting mass immigration and introducing the death penalty for terrorists will make unnecessary the monstrous and un-British growth in state power to stop terrorism. But an underlying theme of the whole section demonstrates BNP anger with official and other attempts to counter its policies and ideas. Many of its proposals are driven by the desire to outlaw such initiatives.

Thus, the government's initial proposal to introduce postal voting across much of north England to increase turnout and so 'stop the BNP' is roundly condemned. Citing also the recent case of electoral fraud in Birmingham, the manifesto warns that while the BNP won't be 'driven into any kind of illegality', New Labour's contempt for democracy invites 'the angry young men in multi-cultural cities to conclude that violence pays'.

Giving people 'a real range of genuine alternatives' is the answer to low voter turnout. Instead persecution of the BNP, collectively and individually, is taking Britain down the slippery slope to being a fully-blown totalitarian state. The BNP pledges to dismantle the 'repressive state' with the following measures:

1. Repeal all laws against free speech, starting with those on race and religion;
2. Guarantee rights of individuals and organisations who espouse unpopular causes to organise and campaign free from interference by the police, state authorities and organisations such as trade unions, employers' bodies, etc
3. Guarantee the rights of individuals to join and organise, according to their political beliefs, in trade unions and other bodies;
4. Protect political parties by making violence used for political purposes a criminal offence;
5. Disband all government-sponsored attempts to 'exploit ethnic minority voters' by programmes such as Operation Black Vote;
6. Ban postal voting except for the sick and elderly; keep the traditional ballot box and ban electronic alternatives;
7. Instruct the Electoral Commission to stop organisations which are not contesting elections to denigrate the parties or candidates standing (thus circumventing rules on campaign spending);
8. Ban opinion polls in the last three weeks of an election campaign;
9. Outlaw state, corporate, pressure group and trade union funding of political parties, obliging them to rely on their own supporters to fund their activities;
10. Reject ID cards.

Democracy and the media

The BNP will pass laws to dismantle 'the dictatorship of the media over free debate', as the party stands for the 'revolutionary principle' that the press and broadcast media must tell the truth. To avoid the dangers inherent in expropriation, on assuming power they would first negotiate with proprietors to end abuses; they would replace the compromised Press Complaints Commission with a 'truly independent' body; and would create a new criminal offence to prevent the 'deliberate dissemination of falsehoods' about an individual or organisation for financial or political gain.

Immigration

The manifesto claims that immigration threatens Britain's 'very existence', arguing that immigration increases the crime rate, unemployment, welfare dependency, educational failure and 'other social pathologies'. It pledges immediate action to deport illegal immigrants and to take 'sovereign physical' control of Britain's borders by a 50% increase in budgets and personnel (even including troops redeployed from Iraq by a new BNP government). If Japan, 'that other great island state,' can secure its borders so can Britain.

Immigration needs to be regarded as a matter of National Security, as the existence of Islamic terrorist cells in Britain plotting mass murder here shows.

The BNP would abide by Britain's obligations under the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, but since refugees must seek and be given refuge in the 'nearest safe country', Britain's obligations would extend to refugees fleeing from Denmark or France. As for refugees and illegal immigrants, there would be 'no blind eyes turned to violations, no amnesties to reward law-breaking, and no extensive system of appeals against legal decisions.'

The BNP calls for

- 'an immediate halt to all further immigration'
- 'the immediate deportation of all bogus asylum seekers, all criminal entrants and illegal immigrants'
- 'the introduction of a system of voluntary resettlement, with generous incentives for immigrants and their descendants and for their countries 'of ethnic origin'.

The party would abolish the 'positive discrimination' schemes that have made white Britons second-class citizens.

All illegal immigrants would be removed under a two-phase programme. There would first be a voluntary registration scheme which would allow skilled and key workers to remain while they benefit the UK economy and until British workers could be trained to replace them. All other illegal immigrants - over-stayers, casual workers, ex-students - would be entitled to free flights home with their possessions during this one-year registration period.

Under the second phase, national border authorities and the courts would deal with those who had failed to register. They would be arrested and deported and they would not be entitled to remove property from the UK. If they had children born in the UK, they could apply to be 'tagged' in their own homes until the citizenship status of their children could be determined. There would be no provision for appeals.

Green Party

The key themes of the Green Party's manifesto are sustainability (economic and environmental), redistribution of wealth, localisation, democracy and peace. Overall, the manifesto recommends a statist approach to political, economic and environmental problems, with confidence in the ability of government to improve citizens' well-being, whether through taxes that alter the behaviour of economic agents or regulations and directives that control corporations and polluters. There is little faith in the ability of markets or firms to achieve socially acceptable outcomes by themselves.

Rather surprisingly, there is not much in the manifesto about civil society and popular participation. There are demands for more local democracy (though nothing on falling turnout and the problem that presents), but it is noteworthy just how government-oriented the manifesto is - the emphasis is on the government as the solver of problems rather than voluntary groups or other elements of civil society. Despite the calls for localisation, there is an important tension between that goal and the reality of an economic and environmental framework heavily dependent on government regulation, whether at the national or international level.

Most of the ideas in the manifesto are fairly vague and lacking in detail, e.g. the party wants to promote human rights and tackle hate crimes by 'implementing strategies', but says nothing about the content of those strategies. The most detailed proposals, predictably, concern the environment and pollution.

Localisation

The Greens want economic activity oriented towards local communities and less reliance on international trade, which they believe benefits big corporations. They want government support and protectionist measures for local production. They prefer 'fair trade' to free trade. They also want to reform, and eventually replace, the WTO.

Democracy

At national level, the Greens want the adoption of proportional representation in local elections and for Westminster elections. They propose the possibility of recall elections at the local level and local referendums. The manifesto advocates an elected House of Lords (again, through PR). They also want a 'written' (i.e. codified) constitution for the UK.

At the international level, they want an end to veto-powers and permanent members of the UN security council, with decisions taken by majority vote. They oppose the EU constitution, but would like to see more powers for the elected European Parliament.

Peace

The Greens support an ethical foreign policy, with respect for international law and international institutions (but also a reform of the latter). They want more aid to the developing world and the writing off of much Third World debt.

Overall, the Greens are supportive of more democracy in general, with a shift in decision-making power away from corporations to local and national government. They also support a strengthening of human rights, for example by opposing ID cards and improving rights (and welfare benefits) for asylum-seekers.

Plaid Cymru

Plaid Cymru's traditional purpose as a party is independence for Wales.

Independence

The manifesto refers to 'independence in Europe' for Wales, subject to 'the support of the people of Wales expressed through a referendum.' But this is a manifesto for elections to the Westminster Parliament. Moreover, independence has now been relegated to an 'ambition' rather than an immediate objective, one not dwelt on here. The difficulties inherent in reconciling the long-term hope of separation with a desire to wield political influence under existing arrangements are reflected in the document.

The party describes independence as involving 'full national status for Wales within international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union.' Yet an assumption seems to have been made that the admission of an independent Wales into the EU would be automatic and immediate - presumably jumping the queue of other, longer established nations which wish to join. Moreover, the UN has not always recognised states seceding from larger ones as a matter of course.

Devolved and local government

In proposing reforms for devolved government, Plaid Cymru shows a willingness to operate within the existing settlement. But it notes that, were Wales independent, it would have 'full primary law-making and taxation powers.' Plaid Cymru states that 'The establishment of the National Assembly was a vital step forward in the way Wales is governed.' It supports 'primary law-making powers on devolved issues' for the Assembly. Plaid Cymru wants full legislative powers on education for the Assembly, to which it also believes responsibility for the criminal justice service and police should be devolved.

While endorsing 'a fairer voting system' for the Assembly, it does not state what this would be. It is also vague about what is meant by 'fair voting for local councils', simply referring to 'proportional representation', but not indicating the type of PR it favours. At local council level, the manifesto endorses votes for 16-year-olds and 'Effective public consultation, particularly for young people and other politically marginalised groups.' The party wants

'Recruitment of candidates for local council seats from as wide a range as possible of the local population' and 'Increasing autonomy [for] councils, especially over expenditure priorities.' The party wants to 'scrap council tax' and replace it with local income tax. It advocates 'local democratic accountability for public services.' Like other parties, including Labour, it seeks to involve the voluntary sector fully in public service provision.

Equality and rights

Plaid Cymru calls for 'a written Bill of Rights to end discrimination in all walks of life.' The party supports 'stronger enforcement of equal pay legislation and employment rights protecting the position of part-timers.' It advocates property, pension and inheritance rights for 'unmarried partners' who register their partnership. The manifesto states, 'Ethnic minority communities must be fully represented on local authorities.'

Plaid Cymru supports abolition of 'the 8-week rule which currently limits the protection from being sacked for going on strike.' The party opposes ID cards. It has a variety of policies to promote the Welsh language, including pressing for its recognition by the EU. But it also notes regret at the 'recent decline in English language broadcasting originating from Wales.'

Central and European government

Plaid Cymru calls for abolition of the Barnett formula by which government spending is allocated amongst the nations of the UK. It supports 'a broad-based independent commission...to...make detailed recommendations for a needs-based formula for the allocation of public money.' But, it might be asked, if it is possible to achieve a better deal for Wales within the UK, why is there a need for an independence movement?

Plaid Cymru draws support from rural Wales and makes a parliamentary reform proposal for the creation of a parliamentary 'Milk Ombudsman.'

Another central government change it seeks is for the establishment of 'a separate civil and public service for Wales.'

Citing the examples of Catalonia in Spain and regions in Germany, the manifesto calls for better representation for Wales 'within EU structures' - but does not iterate what this arrangement would entail.

International law and treaty commitments

At the international level, Plaid Cymru states 'We will not support UK military action which has not been approved by the United Nations under international law.' It will continue to press for the impeachment of Tony Blair for his actions over Iraq. Plaid Cymru advocates fairer international trade and reaching the UN target of 0.7% of national income directed towards international aid. It will press to ensure commitments on reducing greenhouse gas emissions are met by the UK.

Respect

Respect was set up in January 2004, formed out of the Stop the War Coalition. Its manifesto proclaims that the party is 'Against war and privatisation.' Much attention is devoted to human rights, including economic and social rights and minority rights. The publication contains slogans that do not amount to full detailed policy proposals and/or are ambitious to the point of self-parody, such as 'An end to all forms of economic exploitation and social oppression.' And despite the party's opposition to war, it does not call for abolition of the royal prerogative under which the executive can commit troops to military action without a need for consultation with Parliament.

Electoral reform

Respect opposes the 'First past the post election system [that] works against new, smaller parties getting established.' The manifesto argues that 'proportional representation is a far fairer system' which should be used in 'all elections.' But it does not state its favoured form of proportional representation. 'Votes at 16' are advocated in the manifesto.

Equality and human rights

Respect promises, vaguely, to 'End the attacks on civil and human rights' and 'Oppose Islamophobia and the demonisation of Muslim communities.' The manifesto advocates 'Full employment rights for all workers from day one.'

Respect argues for 'Migrant workers and asylum seekers to have the right to work with full protection of employment laws and regulations.' The party promises to 'Defend the rights of refugees to political asylum.' It is opposed to the 'policy of dispersal' and the 'use of detention centres for asylum seekers.' Asylum seekers, Respect argues, should be given 'the right to food and shelter...access to education, health and social services.' The manifesto proposes to 'End the White List of "safe" countries and end deportations.'

The manifesto advocates 'Full employment rights for all workers from day one' and The party demands an end to 'workplace discrimination on the basis of age, ethnicity, gender or life style choices.'

Respect proposes to 'Purge racists from the police and prison services.' It seeks 'Urgent action to address the underachievement of black children and others in schools' and to bring about 'Full involvement of teachers, parents and pupils in tackling inequality in education.'

International organisations, co-operation and treaty commitments

Respect supports 'Self-determination for the people of Iraq' and an immediate end to the occupation. It opposes 'detention without trial or charge in Guantanamo Bay or elsewhere.' The party opposes 'the EU's "Fortress Europe" [immigration] policy.' Respect does not support the EU Constitutional Treaty, which it argues would 'set in stone the anti-working class character of the European economy' and undermine the power of 'elected parliaments (with all their limitations).'

Amongst its international policies, Respect wants to 'Cancel the third world debt' without conditions, and to bring about 'a major increase in aid spending.'

Security and law and order

The manifesto supports 'the right to trial by jury' and promises to 'Repeal...all the anti-terrorism legislation.' The latter commitment perhaps overlooks some of the less contentious elements of laws such as the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, which introduced new offences for crimes where religious hatred was an aggravating factor, and tightened up the rules on bribery of foreign officials - perhaps measures Respect would in principle support.

The party's advocates 'A serious attack on the causes of crime' - deliberately echoing Blair's old slogan. In the manifesto, the party calls for 'The scrapping of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.'

Respect supports 'An end to police harassment and racist stop and search.'

Scottish National Party (SNP)

The SNP supports Scottish independence. Unlike the Plaid Cymru manifesto, the SNP manifesto concentrates on the form an independent nation would take. Like the Welsh nationalists, the SNP seems to treat full, immediate EU and UN membership following independence as guaranteed.

Independence, constitutional reform and rights

The manifesto, similarly to that of Plaid Cymru, supports a 'written constitution that clearly enshrines the rights and responsibilities of all those who choose to live in Scotland.' In the constitution, equal opportunities will be guaranteed for all. The SNP advocates that the composition of a national parliament should be as far as possible representative of Scotland as a whole in such terms as gender and ethnicity. Scottish citizenship will be available to all living in Scotland, born in Scotland, or with a parent born in Scotland. Anyone else would be free to apply for Scottish nationality. Voting would be allowed at 16 years of age.

'Citizen Debates' would be held in the independent Scottish Parliament, initiated, participated in and led by members of the public, with ministers and MSPs present. The Scottish Civic Forum would be asked to convene quarterly 'Civic Debates', involving MSPs, members of the public and various organisations. 'People's Business' in the Parliament would involve public polls to select a topic for debate by MSPs, with ministers obliged to respond. The SNP notes that independence would give Scotland control over its own immigration and asylum policies.

Local government

The SNP believes that 'decisions should be taken as close to those they affect as possible.' It aims 'to put citizens in control - to give individuals the confidence and the power to change their communities and the country for the better.'

The manifesto supports devolving - but not in a uniform fashion - greater budgets and responsibilities onto Community Councils.

SNP policy is for the abolition of council tax and its replacement with a local income tax.

Law and order

The SNP opposes ID cards. It wants to invest in more police officers and reduce the prison population through such measures as dealing with fine defaulters by non-custodial means. The party advocates a 'unit fine' system, taking into account ability to pay. It intends to seek out new alternatives to prison, and introduce flexible sentencing, such as 'weekend prisons.'

International organisations and treaty commitments

The SNP describes itself as supporting a 'confederal Europe.' It is opposed to the EU Constitutional Treaty in its current form, mainly because it 'claims exclusive competence over fisheries resources.' The manifesto advocates a drive towards the UN target of 0.7% of national income being devoted to international aid. To make trade fairer, it supports 'radical reform of international trade bodies.' The SNP believes it essential that 'public policy issues such as health, education, culture, workers' rights, food and water security be protected wherever commercial trade agreements are made.' It would strengthen controls on arms exports. The SNP is committed to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions as agreed under the Kyoto protocol.

Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)

The SDLP is an Irish Republican party, with a tradition of non-violence. As for the other Northern Ireland parties, resolving the Troubles, while protecting a particular sectional interest, is the central issue - one of significance from the democratic perspective we take.

Good Friday Agreement

The SDLP presents itself as the party of the Good Friday Agreement - 'stronger for each and every one of its key agreements. Inclusion. North South. Policing. Equality. Human Rights. Victims. Community relations. Demilitarisation. Peace.' The long-term objective of the SDLP is 'a United Ireland.' Under the Agreement, such an outcome requires support from referendums in the North and South. In that United Ireland, the 'SDLP believes that all the rights, protections, and inclusion that nationalists sought within Northern Ireland while it is in the United Kingdom, must equally be guaranteed to unionists within a United Ireland. We are emphatic that unity must not be about the entrapment of a new minority.'

Equality and human rights

For the SDLP, given its historical experience as a representative of the Catholic community, there is emphasis on human rights and equality - but, to the SDLP's credit, not just to protect the Catholic/Republican community. The manifesto refers to the objective of a 'Single Equality Bill, to harmonise protection against discrimination upwards and guarantee equality for all groups.' The party wants to 'Outlaw discrimination in all land sales...Impose tougher

penalties on persistent discriminators...Eliminate the differential in unemployment rates between the two main communities by 2011.' It will 'Vigorously oppose any dilution of fair employment.' There will be an end to 'discriminatory rules restricting eligibility for key civil service posts to UK nationals only.'

In the manifesto, the establishment of an 'Equality Tribunal to hear all discrimination complaints' is advocated. The SDLP is opposed to 'proposals to put Justice and Equality into the one department' of the Northern Ireland Executive. It supports the introduction of 'equal pay audits to eliminate the gap between men and women's earnings' and 'a comprehensive gender equality strategy.' The SDLP manifesto pledges implementation of the 'remaining recommendations of the Disability Rights Taskforce, in particular to ensure access to transport.' It wants to 'Ensure full rights for children with special educational needs through new legislation...Ensure the delivery of the new race equality strategy...take a firm stand against homophobia...Provide training for party representatives against all forms of intolerance...Ensure proper accommodation for travellers...review and address the range of needs of migrant workers...Campaign for the UK government to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers.'

The party supports 'a comprehensive and forward-looking Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland by agreement between political parties and civic society.' It wants to 'Ensure that the Government honours its...commitment to give powers of inquiry to the Human Rights Commission.' In the manifesto, 'Credible appointments to the Human Rights Commission' are advocated. So too is 'an All-Ireland Charter of Rights to guarantee the highest standards of human rights protection throughout the island.' This latter agreement is something groups such as Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party would surely want no part of, making its introduction in present circumstances implausible. The 'zero-sum game' which characterises Northern Ireland politics, meaning neither side is prepared to make meaningful concessions, is further illustrated by the manifesto's support for 'A new Sectarian Hate Crime Act.'

Amongst other measures, the law would prevent 'bands that promote hate language or use paramilitary symbols from parading', and ban 'flags and graffiti on public property, including repeal of laws requiring the flying of union flags from government buildings.' 'Outlawing sectarian chanting at football matches' is perhaps another somewhat optimistic objective.

Law and order

The SDLP has a general commitment to 'the rule of law - not people acting like they are the law.' It argues it is 'the only nationalist party working to deliver this.' It is opposed to control orders as introduced by the Labour government to detain terrorist suspects, on the grounds that 'People should not be deprived of their liberty without a fair trial.' The SDLP 'Favours the creation of an all-Ireland sex offenders register.' It wants justice and policing to be devolved to Northern Ireland within 18 months. It will 'Defend police primacy and oppose any role for MI5', and seek 'a single new Department to deal with both policing and justice issues.' The SDLP wants 'cross community safeguards so that there can be no return to the days of a unionist dominated Ministry of Home Affairs.' There is support for 'a new generation of North-South bodies including...an All-Ireland Criminal Assets Bureau...an All-Ireland Law Commission.' The SDLP advocates 'Radical demilitarisation over 9 months to be completed no later than Easter 2006.'

International organisations and treaty commitments

The manifesto notes that 'The SDLP is committed to global co-operation...Since our formation the party has been a member of the "Socialist International" and has campaigned against injustice and conflict across the world.' The SDLP supports 'accelerated progress in the achievement of Millennium Development Goals.' It will 'Campaign for fair treatment of asylum seekers, including an end to the use of prison for those awaiting hearings.' The party supports 'the creation of a Palestinian state, while firmly opposing terrorism in the Middle East and elsewhere.' The SDLP manifesto promises support for 'building a global framework for labour mobility and developing a global environmental framework to tackle environmental issues.' It advocates reform of international trade rules, to the benefit of

developing economies. There is SDLP support for 'the democratisation of global institutions including the UN, World Bank, IMF and WTO and strengthening of international capability to protect victims of aggression.'

The SDLP describes itself as 'the only major and consistent advocate of EU membership amongst all the parties in the North.' It will 'continue the campaign for entry to the Euro zone... Work to develop an all-Ireland position on reform of the Common Fisheries Policy.' The manifesto does not refer to the European Constitutional Treaty.

Sinn Fein

Sinn Fein is a radical republican party which contests elections in the North and the South, traditionally linked with the Irish Republican Army. In the introduction to its manifesto, the leader, Gerry Adams MP, describes Sinn Fein as 'the united Ireland party... the party of radical social and economic change... the party of equality.' The manifesto is substantial, more so than that of the two main unionist parties in Northern Ireland, but appeared curiously late in the campaign (on the Friday before polling day), giving voters little time to digest it.

Peace and cross-border co-operation

Sinn Fein describes 'Defending and advancing the peace process' as its 'primary focus.' The manifesto goes on to state that 'The Six-County statelet has been characterised since its inception by injustice, inequality, repression and conflict.' The mere existence of a partitioned Ireland is anathema to Sinn Fein, while a united Ireland is equally unpalatable to the Unionists. Sinn Fein does not explicitly explain how the two positions might be reconciled. Unionist groups have cited the failure of the IRA to disarm as the reason for their refusal to participate in power-sharing with Sinn Fein, thereby leading to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Executive. The manifesto notes Gerry Adams's recent speech in April 2005 calling upon the IRA to 'commit itself' to peace through 'purely political and democratic methods.'

In its manifesto, Sinn Fein calls for 'Full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement' and 'Transfer of powers on policing and justice.' The party advocates 'A ban on the use of plastic bullets' and wants to establish the 'Truth on state violence and collusion.' There is a contrast here with the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which seeks truth for the victims of terror, not on the activities of the state.

The manifesto argues that the Irish government should commission a Green Paper on Irish unity, 'to be published within one year.' It states that 'The 18 Westminster MPs' should be 'automatically accorded membership of the Dail, with consultative and speaking rights.' It is hard to imagine Ian Paisley or any other unionist making use of such entitlements if presented to them, and the attitude of citizens in the South to such a development might not be entirely positive. Similar doubts could be raised over the policy that 'Voting rights in presidential elections should be extended to citizens in the Six Counties, beginning with the next such elections.' Sinn Fein supports an expansion in the remit of the All-Ireland Ministerial Council and the 'integration of systems, infrastructure and services... for people living within the Border Corridor.'

Equality and rights

Sinn Fein advocates 'Ensuring that the Single Equality Act is harmonised and provides the fullest anti-discrimination protection for all citizens and sectors in society.' The manifesto calls for 'Effective measures to eradicate the unemployment differential between Catholic and Protestant males within five years.' It supports 'More powers and resources for the Equality Commission.' The manifesto proposes 'Anti-discrimination legislation to tackle the growing gender pay gap.' Sinn Fein argues for 'an all-Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People' and 'an action plan to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.' It would 'promote the right of the child to be consulted on all matters concerning them' and 'Provide awareness training to all elected representatives on children's rights issues.' The party calls on 'All political parties to sign an anti-racist pledge.' It supports a 'Commissioner for Senior Citizens.'

Sinn Fein seeks 'an Irish Language Bill for the North which will give Irish speakers at least the same rights as those on the rest of [the] island.' It wants 'The rights of Irish language speakers to be recognised, protected and promoted' in law. The manifesto argues for 'The creation of a Commissioner for the Irish language in the North.'

Ireland and Europe

Sinn Fein would establish a 'Minister for Europe in any future Assembly.' The All-Ireland Ministerial Council would be expanded 'to include the respective Ministries for Europe to ensure effective all-Ireland co-ordination on EU policy matters.' Support is given for 'The main-streaming of EU scrutiny into all Assembly Committees.' The 'opening of a European Parliamentary Office in Belfast' is advocated. While the Assembly is not restored, Sinn Fein argues that 'an all-party ad-hoc working group on European Affairs' should be set up.

Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

The DUP is a radical unionist party, which has supplanted the more moderate Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) as the most widely-supported loyalist party in Northern Ireland. The manifesto is for the joint purpose of parliamentary and local government elections - underlining the fact that the DUP focuses on a relatively narrow range of issues at all levels of representation. The DUP presents itself as tougher in negotiations than the UUP, using the slogan 'Unlike the UUP, when we set demands, we mean them and adhere to them.'

Peace process

The DUP argues that Sinn Fein should not be admitted into the currently-suspended Northern Ireland Executive before 'Complete visible, verifiable decommissioning [of the IRA]...A total end to all paramilitary and criminal activity...The community is convinced the IRA has been stood down.' The latter two conditions are especially vague, and could be interpreted in such a way as to veto Sinn Fein participation in the Executive under any circumstances - perhaps the intention. The party goes on, 'If executive devolution cannot be set up on a satisfactory basis, then the only option is to make Direct Rule more accountable and acceptable. We will work with the Government to provide the maximum accountability in these circumstances and attempt to integrate Northern Ireland more firmly within the United Kingdom.' The DUP 'believes the Union Flag should be flown over Local Government buildings.' It argues that local government should be 'more streamlined and efficient...In the event of devolution, we believe the Assembly should have responsibility for most local services.' This proposal seems to imply centralisation of power within Northern Ireland into the devolved government. The DUP also advocates, very vaguely, that 'Councils should be sufficiently close to the community to permit people a sense of identity in their local area.'

Other democratic issues

The DUP manifesto emphasises the importance of the constituency role of MPs. It argues, 'The amount of time at Westminster devoted to Northern Ireland or other business of specific relevance to Northern Ireland is relatively limited. It is essential that an MP's contribution at Westminster is backed up by delivering for their constituents at a local level.' The party boasts of '41 DUP offices, backed up by satellite advice surgeries held at weekends mainly in outlying areas, which constitute a network of DUP representation that cannot be matched by any other party.'

The DUP is opposed to membership of the Euro and signing the European Constitutional Treaty. It supports 'the war on terrorism' and presumably the legislation, including provision for control orders for terrorist suspects, that goes with it. It criticises what it describes as 'unnecessary constitutional change' but does not make it clear what this phrase means. In the manifesto, the DUP states 'We have supported legislation to deal with racially motivated attacks and believe it is important to keep legislative provisions under review.'

Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) Manifesto

The UUP is the longer-established unionist party in Northern Ireland which has of late been eclipsed electorally by the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). It is opposed to Sinn Fein participation in the currently suspended Northern Ireland Executive. In contrast to the DUP, which emphasises the constituency role of its MPs, it boasts of the fact that 'Over the last 4 years, our MPs have asked more questions in the chamber of the House of Commons, participated in more Parliamentary debates and represented you in more Committees than all the other political parties in Northern Ireland put together.'

Equality and human rights

The UUP manifesto refers to the value of 'British democratic values...of tolerance and respect.' The use of the word 'British' is a presumably quite deliberate signal. There is a complaint in the manifesto that these values are 'threatened by racism and bigotry, by the cultural intolerance supported by the Parades Commission, and the partisan agenda pursued by some in the Human Rights Commission.' As with a number of other party manifestos, including the Conservatives, UKIP and the British National Party, the impression is created of a politically correct establishment serving to undermine traditional freedoms. The UUP supports 'a Northern Ireland anti-racism strategy.' It advocates 'freedom of peaceful assembly' and abolishing the Parades Commission, establishing 'a rights-based framework that protects the right to parade.' The manifesto argues 'that the greatest threat to human rights comes from paramilitaries and terror groups...not the state.'

Policing and law and order

The UUP manifesto supports more police officers and to achieve that goal advocates 'keeping the Full Time Reserve and abolishing the 50-50 recruitment rule.' Both proposals are of these would be contentious moves in the sectarian atmosphere of Northern Ireland. The UUP wants Anti-Social Behaviour Orders to be 'strengthened.' It supports a statutory charter for victims of crime. The manifesto calls for 'a UK-wide ID card scheme...making criminal activity much more difficult, [to] assist in the fight against terrorism, reduce electoral and welfare fraud, and help prevent illegal immigration.' UUP policy is for 'strong laws to fight terrorism, with special criminal courts to try terrorist suspects, and expanding the surveillance powers of the security forces to combat terrorism.'

International co-operation, organisations and treaty commitments

The UUP supports firm action against international terrorism, linking this with its opposition to Irish terrorism. It is opposed to the European Constitution, 'yet another attempt to create a European super-state.' The manifesto iterates a vague commitment to 'supporting the developing world.'

United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

The UKIP manifesto proclaims once again the party's Five Freedoms - freedom from the EU, from crime, from 'overcrowding', from bureaucratic politicians, from political correctness. But once again withdrawal from the EU is at the heart of its proposals. Strangely given the general perception that UKIP is a middle class and more educated alternative to the BNP, its proposals are far less coherent and sophisticated than those of its *doppelganger*. UKIP declares: 'The EU is a one-way street towards European government. It is undemocratic, corrupt and unreformable. . Only outside the EU will it be possible to begin rebuilding a Britain which is run for the British people, not for career politicians and bureaucrats.'

Europe and immigration

The party proposes to repeal the European Communities Act 1972 to release the UK from its obligations under EU treaties; to re-establish the precedence of UK over EU law; and to free the UK to participate independently in international bodies like the WTO. The party envisages a two-year period in which a UKIP government would disentangle the mass

of British laws that have originated in Europe - 70% of UK legislation - amending or replacing them if necessary with laws which are in British interests. They would abolish all 'common' policies, such as for farming and fishing.

Ending 'overcrowding' is code for a total ban on economic immigration, except in exceptional circumstances. However UKIP states that it would maintain the honourable British tradition of offering political asylum 'for genuine refugees'. It is a heavily conditional gesture however. They would accept:

- no request for asylum from refugees for whom the UK is not the first 'safe port of call'
- no request from people from 'other multiparty democracies'
- no request from countries where UN, UK or other peacekeeping forces are active.

A UKIP government would give the authorities the resources to check all people entering Britain at the point of entry. Asylum seekers would be held in 'humane but secure' accommodation; their cases would be processed within two weeks. No late claims nor any other than at a point of entry would be considered. Successful applicants would be given help on entering the country; others would be returned.

British governance

UKIP believes unreservedly in the institutions of British government and singles out the House of Lords for protection. They would resist 'any further dilution' of its powers and are not convinced by proposals to introduce an elected element. 'The virtue of the Lords is their independence from government and this would be reduced if they had to seek re-election.'

UKIP would reduce government targets and remove unelected advisers from ministerial offices. 'Elected politicians together with professional civil servants should have enough talent between them to run the country.'

UKIP is in favour of referendums at national and local level. At national level citizens could secure a referendum if 5% of the electorate signed up for it within a six-month period.

On devolution, they say the Scottish Parliament and National Assembly of Wales have caused 'deep disappointment', but it is up to their own populations whether they survive. While they do continue in existence, UKIP would consider establishing 'English days' in the UK Parliament in which English MPs alone would debate legislation that applied only in England. Regional assemblies and quangos would be abolished.

Counties and boroughs would be freed to respond to local communities rather than obeying orders from central government. They would also become more transparent and secretive 'cabinet-style' decision-making would end. They would receive business rates and 'transfer duties on houses' to reduce their reliance on central funding. UKIP would scrap all politically-correct appointments and encourage recycling waste.

Civil and political rights

UKIP recognises that the right to free speech carries responsibilities to others, but these responsibilities have become 'codified into a bizarre and extreme set of beliefs and behaviours by those in authority' – that is, 'Political Correctness'. UKIP would re-structure the law to ensure that 'free speech again means just that'.

UKIP expresses the view that British society has to move away from 'regulatory culture, dependency culture and compensation culture', and over reliance on the state. They would repeal the 1999 [sic] Human Rights Act and restore British custom, common law and the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights, which they say, 'is based on individual freedom from state control' (apparently unaware that the HRA incorporates the ECHR into British law). Outside the EU, Britain would not be affected by the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

They also express concern about the 'hysterical wave of anti-terrorist legislation', on the grounds that effective border controls would give the British people more protection. They would not introduce ID cards and would repeal the Hunting Act - 'the government has no business legislating over such matters'.

Veritas

Immigration and asylum are the key issues on which Robert Kilroy-Silk's Veritas Party manifesto concentrates and form the prism through which its basic policy of EU withdrawal is presented. Taking back control 'of our borders' takes pride of place in its EU policy.

The manifesto promises to end the government's 'open door' policy to admit only migrants with skills. They must also be able to speak English, pass health tests, have no criminal convictions and integrate into 'the British way of life'. The manifesto consistently links dangers to health and criminality to immigration and presents highly selective information on health.

On asylum, the manifesto states that 'we will only take our fair share of refugees' and pledges £500 million from its projected savings of £2 billion to assist refugees abroad.

The manifesto states that the EU costs the UK £40 billion a year and pledges to withdraw from the EU and come to a free trade agreement instead. It claims that 'unelected and unaccountable' EU commissioners now make 70 per cent of 'our law' and proposes that the British should govern 'ourselves' with our own Parliament.

Veritas has its own vision of a pluralist society. It is opposed to the multi-culturalism imposed on British citizens by the liberal elite. 'We believe in a society of many colours, many faiths and many ethnic backgrounds - but one culture.' Its manifesto promises 'zero tolerance' on crime, with a sprinkling of punitive measures. The party also makes scapegoats of travellers, promising that those who settled on illegal sites would be made to move to legal sites or face 'immediate eviction'.

This is a manifesto founded on popular prejudices and unrealistic propositions. It shares the 'truth-telling' populism of the Conservative campaign strategy and the long-term rhetoric of the British National Party, tempered by an evident desire to proclaim a liberal attitude on race.

PART 6: Comparing the manifestos – diversity of democratic options

The following tables compare the proposals of different parties according to a number of different themes, to give an idea of the scope of democratic options on offer.

1. Proposals for Parliament

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>House of Lords</i>	Remove hereditaries; free Parly vote on composition; 'codify' key conventions; time limit on scrutiny of bills	Seek consensus on 'substantially elected' House.	Replace current 'botched' House with a 'predominantly elected second chamber.'	<i>Green Party:</i> Fully elected body chosen by PR <i>UKIP:</i> Keep Lords unelected.
<i>Elections to Parliament</i>	Basically no change; still reviewing experience of PR for other elections; no change without a referendum	No mention.	Introduce STV for elections to Commons; no proposal for elections to Lords	<i>Respect:</i> PR.
<i>Voting at 16</i>	No mention.	No mention.	Yes.	<i>Plaid C; Respect:</i> Yes
<i>Parliamentary reforms</i>	Continue to support proposals by Modernisation Cttee that improve scrutiny and accountability.	Strengthen select committees; English MPs only to vote on English matters; reduce MPs by 20%.	'Strengthen the powers of Parliament to scrutinise Government, enhancing the Select Committee system'; set up select committee to monitor UK arms sales.	<i>Plaid C:</i> Parliamentary milk ombudsman.

2. Constitution and machinery of government

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>Royal Prerogative</i>	Not a word on what was an area of reform when in opposition	No mention.	Put on statutory basis, with War Powers and Civil Service acts.	<i>Respect:</i> Despite anti-war stance, no mention.
<i>Civil Service and structure of government</i>	Reductions in size of Civil Service, in accordance with efficiency proposals set out in Gershon Review. No mention of Civil Service Act, despite recent publication of draft bill.	Reductions in size of Civil Service as set out in James Review, outstripping Gershon. Appoint 'Homeland Security Minister.'	Civil Service Act to protect political impartiality; reduce government departments, scrapping Department of Trade and Industry, and cut ministers by a third; dedicated asylum processing agency.	<i>Plaid C:</i> 'A separate civil and public service for Wales.' <i>SDLP:</i> 'Single new Department to deal with both policing and justice issues.'
<i>Freedom of Information</i>	No mention.	If Conservatives 'take the country to war, we will tell the British people why.' No reference to	No mention.	<i>SDLP:</i> Introduce 'Truth Body' for victims of terrorism.

		statutory framework to ensure this.		
<i>Written Constitution</i>	Not specifically referred to, but greater formalisation, for instance of House of Lords practices.	No mention.	Not referred to, but reform of Royal Prerogative would mean greater formalisation.	<i>Plaid C</i> Bill of Rights <i>SNP</i> Written constitution. <i>Green:</i> Written constitution.

3. Plans for equality and human rights

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>Equal Citizenship</i>	Introduce Single Equality Act and set up new Commission on Equality and Human Rights	Opposed to 'political correctness' imposed on police and educators; will 'review' Human Rights Act.	A Single Equality Act.	<i>BNP:</i> End positive discrimination <i>Plaid C:</i> Bill of Rights <i>SNP:</i> Written constitution. <i>SDLP:</i> 'Single Equality Bill'; Establish 'Equality Tribunal.'
<i>Asylum policy</i>	Continue to cut asylum numbers and remove failed applicants faster	Parliament to set annual fixed quota.	Create a dedicated agency for quicker better decisions.	<i>Veritas:</i> 'We will only take our fair share of refugees.'
<i>Immigration policy</i>	Introduce points system for migrants; English tests for those who stay; end 'chain migration'; no more appeals for non-family migrants	Parliament to set fixed annual quota. Points system. Health checks for immigrants.	Work out an appropriate number of work permits in conjunction with business and public sector.	<i>BNP:</i> End to immigration. Voluntary repatriation. <i>UKIP:</i> Opposed to 'over-crowding'. Repatriate policy from EU.

<i>Cultural Identity</i>	English language tests for all immigrants who want to stay in Britain permanently.	‘There should be popular consent for further demographic change.’		<p><i>Veritas:</i> Diverse society, but ‘one culture.’</p> <p><i>Plaid C:</i> Promote the Welsh language, including pressing for its recognition by the EU.</p> <p><i>DUP:</i> Government should promote Ulster-Scottish culture.</p> <p><i>UUP:</i> Abolish Parades Commission protect ‘right to parade.’</p>
<i>Media Freedom</i>	BBC governors to be replaced by ‘BBC Trust’ to ensure accountability to licence-fee payers; Channel 4 to remain publicly owned; ITV and Channel 5 retained in public service system; modernise copyright so ‘appropriate for the digital age.’	No mention.	Independent regulation and governance for BBC.	<p><i>BNP:</i> Legislate to prevent media disseminating ‘falsehoods.’;</p> <p><i>Plaid C:</i> Regrets decline in English [sic] language television production in Wales.</p>

4. Democracy below Westminster

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>Political parties</i>	Explore ways to support the ‘vital’ democratic role of parties, but not their ‘campaigning activities.’	No mention.	No mention.	<p><i>UUP; DUP</i> Parties not renouncing violence to be excluded from NI Executive.</p> <p><i>BNP:</i> End all state, corporate, trade union, pressure group funding for political parties.</p>
<i>Non-Parliamentary elections</i>	‘Committed to reviewing the experience of the new electoral systems...for the devolved administrations, the European Parliament and the London Assembly.’	No mention.	STV for local, Welsh, Scottish elections. Review closed list European electoral system.	<p><i>Plaid C:</i> ‘Fairer voting’ for Welsh Assembly; PR for local councils.</p> <p><i>Respect:</i> ‘Proportional Representation...in all elections.’</p> <p><i>Green:</i> PR in local elections.</p>

<i>Devolution</i>	Enhanced legislative powers and reformed structure for the Welsh Assembly. Review the powers of the London Mayor and the Greater London Authority. Further devolution to regional bodies.	Abolish regional assemblies. Welsh referendum on future of Assembly.	Enhanced powers for Welsh, Scottish and Northern Ireland devolved bodies.	<i>Plaid C:</i> If no Welsh independence, 'primary law-making powers devolved issues' for the Assembly. <i>DUP; UUP:</i> No Sinn Fein in NI Executive
<i>Local government</i>	More 'freedoms' for local councils, subject to national standards; even more freedom for successful councils; new push towards mayors	Abolish regional assemblies. Planning, housing, transport, fire services returned to local authorities.	Less central controls on councils; 'cut the burden of inspections'; shift powers of quangos to cities and counties	<i>DUP:</i> Union Flag should be flown over local govt buildings. <i>SDLP:</i> No obligation to fly union flag
<i>Communities</i>	Community ownership of assets such as village halls; service delivery by Community Interest Companies.	Local communities to have 'greater say over planning decisions.'	Regional functions placed in single agency comprising elected councillors.	<i>SNP:</i> Greater budgets and responsibility for Community Councils.
<i>New democratic forms</i>	Explore 'new and innovative forms of public engagement' (cf, NICE).	Elected police commissioners. Communities to influence police priorities.	Elected local social services authorities.	<i>SNP:</i> 'Citizen Debates' and 'People Business' in the independent Scottish Parliament. <i>Green:</i> Local referendums. <i>UKIP:</i> Local/national referendums.
<i>Council tax</i>	Reform Council tax after review; go ahead with revaluation.	Various remissions in council tax; no mention of subsequent promise to cancel revaluation.	Replace with local income tax.	<i>SNP; Plaid C:</i> Local Income Tax.

5. Rule of Law

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>Anti-terrorist measures</i>	'New laws to help catch and convict those involved in helping to plan terrorist activity or who glorify or condone acts of terror.'	'Robust anti-terror laws'; appoint 'Homeland Security Minister.'	Admit intelligence evidence presently banned from trials of terrorists; repeal Prevention of Terrorism Act which introduced control orders	<i>Respect:</i> Repeal all anti-terrorism legislation. <i>UUP:</i> Special criminal courts for suspects; more security surveillance <i>SDLP:</i> Opposed to control orders.
<i>Combating Anti-</i>	More power for	More school	Crackdown on	<i>Respect:</i>

<i>Social Behaviour</i>	police and local authority officials; anonymous evidence from victims.	discipline.	irresponsible licensees; 'Acceptable Behaviour Contracts'; attack on causes of ASB.	Scrap Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.
<i>Criminal Justice System</i>	Electronic tagging for released prisoners; pilot lie-detector tests for sex offenders.	More police; expansion in prison population; longer sentences for 'career criminals'; less 'political correctness' for police.	More police; more non-custodial community sentences; reduce bureaucracy for police.	<i>SNP:</i> Fines reflect ability to pay; no custodial sentences for fine defaulters; alternatives to prison. <i>SDLP:</i> Police, not MI5, responsible for law and order
<i>Introduce ID Cards?</i>	Yes.	No mention.	No.	<i>UUP:</i> Yes. <i>SNP; Plaid C; Green; UKIP</i> No.
<i>Hate Crimes</i>	'Give people of all faiths the same protection against incitement to hatred.'	No mention.	'Hate-crime investigation units' in each police force.	<i>BNP:</i> Repeal all laws restricting free speech, starting with those covering race and religion. <i>UUP:</i> 'A Northern Ireland anti-racism strategy.' <i>SDLP:</i> Outlaw 'sectarian chanting at football matches' and prevent 'bands that promote hate language or use paramilitary symbols from parading.'

6. International democracy

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Lib Dem	Other
<i>Europe</i>	Argue for 'yes' vote on Constitutional Treaty in a referendum; seek 'yes' vote for Euro when five conditions met.	Opposed to Constitutional Treaty and Euro entry; will restore opt-out from Social Chapter; 'bring back powers from Brussels'; restore control over fishing.	Supports Constitutional Treaty and working to create conditions for Euro-entry, both subject to referendum.	<i>Veritas; UKIP; BNP:</i> Withdrawal from EU. <i>SDLP:</i> Pro-EU Constitution. <i>Respect:</i> Anti-Constitution <i>SNP; Plaid C:</i> National independence within EU.
<i>International Co-operation and organisations</i>	As chair of G8, press for reform of international trade; more action on climate change; more transparency for IMF and World Bank.	Withdraw from 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees.	Reform of UN and EU to be 'more responsive to international challenges'; reform international trade rules. Emphasis on Kyoto.	<i>Respect:</i> Oppose globalisation <i>DUP; UUP:</i> Support war on terror. <i>SDLP:</i> Global framework for labour mobility and environmental problems. <i>Green:</i>

				End veto powers and permanent members for UN Security Council. <i>Plaid C:</i> No military action without UN approval.
--	--	--	--	--

<i>Aid</i>	Meet UN target for UK of 0.7% GDP by 2013. Double global aid. Stop aid being tied to privatisation and unwanted trade liberalisation	Meet UN target by 2013.	Meet UN target by 2011.	<i>SNP:</i> Independent Scotland 'will contribute to the UN target of 0.7%.'
<i>Trade</i>	Press for changes to global trade terms to allow poor countries to build their ability to compete; for 'special treatment' in the Doha development round trade talks; for ending export subsidies to rich farmers by 2010 and reform of EU's CAP	Equip poor countries through advocacy fund to press their case in world trade negotiations. Press EU to reduce farm subsidies and end export subsidies.	Break down tariffs and quotas that prevent poorest nations' exports to richest nations. Reduce agricultural subsidies and reform CAP.	<i>Green:</i> Reform or replace the WTO with General Agreement on Sustainable Trade that focuses on local over global.
<i>Debt</i>	Has cancelled debts of poorest countries and pushing others to offer 100% relief on debts to IMF and other global organisations. Pledge of extra funds for debt relief, not from existing aid budgets.	Want 100% relief on debts and to ensure that the international credit of receiving countries is not compromised.	Want 100% relief on debts and against imposing privatisation or trade liberalisation as conditions for debt relief. Bankruptcy procedure for nations that cannot repay debt.	<i>Green:</i> Push for high priority to cancelling the debts of the 52 poorest indebted nations. <i>Respect:</i> 'Cancel the third world debt' without conditions.
<i>Corruption</i>	Pledges to ratify the UN Convention on Corruption and to work for faster repatriation of looted funds lodged with UK banks. Will press UK-based oil and mining companies to issue more open accounts.	Will encourage UK-based companies to publish accounts of their international activities. Focus on African nations to act transparently in the interests of their people.	Reform UK laws to meet obligations under the UN Convention. Enforce OECD Convention on Bribery. Seek EU agreement on transparency for EU-based companies.	
<i>Arms Trade</i>	Pledge to work actively to secure an International Arms Trade Treaty which sets common standards regulating arms trade.	No mention.	International Arms Trade Treaty and making EU voluntary code legally binding; set up select committee to monitor UK arms sales.	<i>Green:</i> Also for International Arms Trade Treaty. End subsidies and credits for arms sales, close DESO and ECGD. <i>SNP:</i> Tighter controls on arms exports.
<i>Human Rights</i>	Support UN Security Council focus on conflict prevention; formation of UN Peace-building	Review Human Rights Act, an enactment of European Convention on	Work with international organisations and US 'to promote international law,	<i>SDLP:</i> 'Advocate withdrawal of support for regimes that flout human rights'; 'an All-Ireland Charter of Rights.'

	Commission; 'radical reform of the UN humanitarian system.'	Human Rights; withdraw from 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees; 'work for modernised international agreements on migration.'	democracy and respect for human rights.' Support 'reform of the UN and the EU to make them more responsive to international challenges.'	<i>UKIP:</i> Outside EU, UK not bound by European Charter of Fundamental Rights.
--	--	--	--	---

PART 7: The historical background

The practice of parties issuing a policy programme to the country as a whole at the time of a general election developed out of the nineteenth century but only became firmly established in the period after 1918.

Traditionally, prospective MPs, however senior within parties, addressed their prospective constituencies, not the country as a whole, since the latter practice was considered inappropriate. In 1834 the Conservative Sir Robert Peel was appointed Prime Minister and secured a dissolution of Parliament. He effectively went to the country on the basis of the 'Tamworth Manifesto', a statement approved by the Cabinet, though formally delivered only to his (prospective) constituency. William Gladstone was, in the words of Ivor Jennings, 'the first to create "issues" for electioneering debate.' Lord Salisbury, since he was a Peer, had no constituency and was therefore more able to address 'the electors of the United Kingdom' in 1892. The practice of addressing the country as a whole began to take hold fully from 1918 when David Lloyd George and Andrew Bonar Law jointly issued a coalition election manifesto to the whole electorate. Since then this practice has become the norm for all parties.

Manifestos are now seen as a central element in democratic accountability. They should provide voters with a clear choice at election time. This is especially important given the UK's centralised, 'winner takes all' political system, which heightens the significance of elections for central government.

In the tables that follow, we compare the manifestos of the three main parties in the key general elections of 1945, 1970 and 1983. One point worthy of note is that the Liberals/Liberal Democrats/Alliance have consistently offered voters a far reaching programme of democratic change. As early as 1922 they proposed 'the introduction of Proportional Representation...Political and legal equality for women and men...Peace and disarmament made secure through the League of Nations.' In 1929 devolution of responsibility to the nations of the UK was proposed. The 1935 manifesto promised not to 'cease to resist the constant attempts to transfer powers from representative bodies to irresponsible boards.' In 1950 the Liberals called for the elimination of 'heredity as a qualification for membership' of the House of Lords; and wanted 'to restore the authority of Parliament and the status of its individual members by reversing the trend towards supreme Executive power.' To that end, they said they 'would give more time in debate and more independence of action to the private Member seeking to bring in non-Party legislation.' Furthermore, in order to make 'domestic and colonial administration conform to' the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, 'All Ministerial Orders would be made liable to challenge in the Courts and subject to amendment'.

Those who voted for the Liberal programme, however, were victims of the same system they wished to reform – first-past-the-post elections ensured the party was consistently and hugely under-represented in Parliament.

1945 General Election

The 1945 General Election was held at a time when there was a popular mood for far reaching social reform – hence the emphasis of the parties on social and economic reform – with Labour, the largely unexpected victor, far more committal on issues such as health services for all. The power wielded by the central executive to generally good effect during the conflict perhaps explains the limited attention devoted to parliamentary reform, or decentralisation of power. Labour emphasised the social and economic aspects of the United Nations in addition to its peacekeeping role, while the Conservatives were only interested in the latter. The Liberals gave more attention to political and civil rights than the other two parties. There was general convergence over the fact that the UK would continue to act as a global player in its own right, with the Commonwealth orientation vital. Voters were therefore not offered a different option, for instance a European orientation, at this vital time in national history. The idea of becoming subordinate to the US in foreign policy – which started to become a reality by the end of Labour’s 1945-51 term of office – was not put forward by any party. Labour suggested dissatisfaction over the power of the House of Lords. The Liberals proposed state funding for political parties election costs.

It is often argued that Clement Attlee’s Labour government returned in 1945 was exceptionally effective in implementing the manifesto upon which it was elected. The fact that its proposals for a welfare state and nationalisation were in its manifesto made them harder for future governments to reverse.

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Liberal
<i>Parliament</i>	‘We will not tolerate obstruction of the people’s will by the House of Lords.’		‘Members of Parliament should be chosen in such a way as to represent fairly the number of votes cast’; electoral reform to ‘give electors the opportunity of expressing an additional choice or choices’; Parliament a bastion against abuse of civil liberties.
<i>Civil Service and central government</i>	Set up: Ministry of Housing and Planning; National Investment Board; public ownership of: Bank of England, fuel and power; gas and electricity; inland transport; iron and steel; ‘The better organisation of	Rejects specific programme of nationalisation, favouring pragmatic approach; set up central fuel authority; retain wartime controls over transport for time being.	No blanket commitment to nationalisation; public ownership for: railways, coal; equal opportunity of entry into the public service for women.

	Government departments and the Civil Service' to achieve objectives.		
<i>Political parties</i>	'by and large Britain is a country of two parties.'	Churchill – 'I had hoped to preserve the Coalition Government...until the end of the Japanese war.'	Place 'essential costs of elections on the State, subject to suitable safeguards against frivolous candidatures.'
<i>Regions and nations</i>			'The Liberal Party recognises the desire of the people of Scotland and Wales to assume greater responsibility in the management of their domestic affairs, and has long been in favour of suitable measures of Devolution.'
<i>Political and civil rights; equality</i>	Committed to 'freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom of the Press'; will restore civil liberties sacrificed in the war	Portrays socialist economic policy as 'permanent system of bureaucratic control, reeking of totalitarianism';	Continue to 'safeguard and enlarge civil liberties', right to appeal to courts when 'a Minister or an official exceeds his authority'; Supports 'for women equality of opportunity and status...equal pay for equal work.'
<i>Social and economic rights</i>	Promises 'food work and homes' for all; high and rising standard of living, social security for all; educational opportunity for all'; National Health Service; freedom of unions to be restored; state intervention in economy to secure objectives.	Government to maintain 'a high and stable level of employment'; 220,000 permanent new homes in 2 years; compulsory universal national insurance; vaguer than Labour on universal healthcare;	Commits to implementation of Beveridge plan for full employment and social security; 'separate dwelling for each family at a reasonable rent'; no clear commitment to NHS.
<i>New democratic forms</i>			Works Councils; Joint Industrial Councils; profit sharing
<i>International democracy and</i>	'We must consolidate in peace	Stresses purpose of UN as being 'to	Preserve alliance with USSR and US;

<i>cooperation</i>	the great war-time association...with the USA and the USSR.' Supports United Nations to prevent war, but also stresses its social and economic purposes.	prevent future wars of aggression.' Fairly pessimistic about chances of achieving this; suggests that if necessary will override Bretton Woods commitments to trade liberalisation.	support UN – 'Nations...must come to acknowledge the rule of law and of impartial arbitration in their dealings with each other'; support for international free trade;
<i>Empire and Commonwealth</i>	Cooperation with Dominions; 'the advancement of India to responsible self-government'; 'planned progress of our Colonial Dependencies.'	The 'Mother Country must act in the closest possible concert with all other parts of Commonwealth and Empire'. Grant India 'a fuller opportunity to achieve Dominion Status.' Review imperial defence; foster imperial trade. Bind empire closer together. Lead colonies 'forward to self-governing institutions.'	Encourage colonies 'economic development and political self-government in association with the Commonwealth'; 'break the deadlock in India' to enable 'a democratic Constitution for complete self-government';

1970 General Election

At the time of the 1970 General Election, all three parties were committed in their manifestos to seeking membership of the EEC. The UK joined on 1 January 1973. The electorate were therefore given no effective choice in 1970 over a decision of major democratic implication. Moreover, the issue of Europe was not given prominence in manifestos or in the campaign. The question of immigration had become a significant political one. The three main parties proposed stronger local or regional government. Once again, Labour complained about the power of the House of Lords, a problem it had obviously not resolved in its 1945-51 and 1964-70 terms of office. The Conservative anti-bureaucracy programme pre-figured its similar campaign of 2005. In foreign policy, the Conservative approach was presented as potentially unilateral, while Labour and the Liberals were more clearly supportive of international organisations such as the UN. The Conservatives proposed positive legal regulation of industrial relations and working with the voluntary sector in housing and other social services. The Liberals advocated a Bill of Rights and a statutory minimum wage. In sections on media policy, Labour opposed a 'growing concentration of private ownership' while the Conservatives championed the right to 'an alternative radio service'.

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Liberal
-----------	--------	--------------	---------

<i>Parliament</i>	'We cannot accept the situation in which the House of Lords can nullify important decisions of the House of Commons and... veto measures the last year before an election.'	Parliamentary approval necessary for further nationalisation of industry.	PR to reduce power of whips.
<i>Elections</i>		Accuses Labour of politicising decisions over parliamentary boundaries.	Proportional representation by single transferable vote.
<i>Machinery of government and Civil Service</i>	Implement Fulton Report, meaning: wider recruitment, more specialist skills, more movement in and out of Whitehall; abolition of 'class structure.'	Reduce number of ministers and civil servants; abolish Land Commission; functions of all departments and government agencies 'systematically rationalised.' More efficiency, lower spending.	
<i>Local/regional government</i>	Major reorganisation to create 'Larger and stronger local authorities'; abolish post of alderman; more power for elected representatives; encourage 'setting up of Local Councils to give people a greater say in local problems'; reform of local government finance after consultation.	'Increase the independence of local authorities'; maintain right of local councils to decide whether to introduce comprehensive schools	12 regional assemblies in England
<i>Scotland and Wales</i>	New local authority structure for Wales, elected council for Wales; 'complete our work of abolishing... the feudal system of land tenure' in Scotland. No separate assembly for Wales or Scotland.	Continued economic support to development areas. 'We will publish separate manifestos for Scotland and Wales.' Scottish Convention in Edinburgh – no mention of one for Wales.	Parliaments established, united with England by a Federal Parliament.
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	Reform of local government to proceed; Central	Continued financial assistance to the Northern Ireland	Civil rights legislation.

	Housing Authority to be set up; 'British troops will remain...so long as they are needed'; 'every citizen of Northern Ireland is entitled to same equality of treatment.'	Government. No change in constitutional status of Northern Ireland without 'free consent' of Parliament of Northern Ireland. Provide military support, use RUC and UDR.	
<i>Europe</i>	Have applied to join EEC – negotiations due to start in a few weeks time.	'If we can get the right terms, we believe that it would be in the long-term interest of the British people to join the European Economic Community.'	Join EEC as possible prelude to 'similar unity in foreign policy and defence'
<i>International democracy</i>	Seek ban on testing nuclear weapons, outlaw biological weapons, use of 'depths of the sea' for 'warlike purposes'; NATO to be more than defensive alliance, working for relaxation of tension; examine establishing permanent UN peace-keeping force, firm financial basis for UN; no recognition for Smith regime in Rhodesia; comply with UN ban on arms to South Africa; support expansion in Commonwealth Secretariat.	'full, constructive but no uncritical support' for the UN; reserve right to withdraw control of nuclear weapons from NATO 'if supreme national interests are at stake.' Foster links with Commonwealth.	Strengthen UN. Settle Middle Eastern crisis on UN lines. Continue with NATO membership until a European security agreement takes place. Support US withdrawal from Vietnam and Cambodia.
<i>Aid</i>	Increase aid budget by a third over next five years. 1% of GNP by 1975; larger proportion to multilateral agencies.	'We will ensure that Britain helps the developing countries', will increase aid 'as prosperity returns.'	Greater freedom in international trade to assist developing world; supports 1% GNP target for aid.
<i>Criminal Justice</i>	Persist with 'penal reform...transforming our approach to the young offender...democrati	'We will strengthen the police force.' Criminals obliged to compensate victims. Measures against	'Strengthen the police.' Controls on shotguns. Compensation from criminals to victims.

	<p>sing the magistrates' bench.' Systematic codification of criminal law.'</p> <p>Ensure that 'people with modest means can obtain legal advice and be properly represented.'</p>	<p>'the demonstrator who uses violence.'</p> <p>Inquiry into law affecting trespass.</p>	
<i>Political and civil rights; equality</i>	<p>Give Race Relations Board powers of discretion to take up complaints.</p>	<p>Examine ways of protecting rights of citizens more effectively, in face of growing state; remove remaining inequalities for women under the law.</p>	<p>Bill of rights;</p>
<i>Social and economic rights</i>	<p>Wider participation in education; accelerate housebuilding; abolish poverty in old age through new pensions scheme; legal protection against unfair dismissal; right of recognition for trades unions.</p>	<p>Industrial relations bill providing 'proper framework of law' for industrial relations; house the homeless; increased resources for social security and health.</p>	<p>Pensions to be half average national earnings; non-selective secondary education; a minimum statutory earnings level; rent assistance for those in private sector;</p>
<i>Immigration</i>	<p>'With the rate of immigration under firm control and much lower than in past years, we shall be able still more to concentrate our resources in...securing good race relations.'</p>	<p>'We will establish a new single system of control over all immigration from overseas.' Tighter controls on permits. No further mass immigration. Assistance for returning to country of origin.</p>	
<i>Local participation</i>	<p>Parents and teachers in closer partnership running schools; area Health Authorities involving local representatives service staff.</p>	<p>Work with voluntary sector on housing and other social services.</p>	
<i>New democratic forms</i>	<p>Encourage workers' participation in running private sector companies.</p>		<p>Individual workers to be entitled to similar rights enjoyed by a shareholder. Works councils in every</p>

			plant.
<i>Cultural identity</i>	Encourage bilingual schools in Wales; support publication of books in Welsh, and Welsh Arts Council; review the law relating to citizenship.	No further mass immigration.	
<i>Media and broadcasting</i>	Raises problem of 'growing concentration of private ownership' and 'domination by commercial values' in the media. Establish 'high-powered Committee of Enquiry to report on the Future of Broadcasting.'	'We believe that people are...entitled to an alternative radio service'; local newspapers could have stake in local radio; avoid too high a levy on income of independence television.	

1983 General Election

In 1983, an especially diverse set of manifesto proposals was on offer in the most genuinely three-party election since the 1920s. The Conservatives proposed free-market Thatcherism; the Alliance restoration of the postwar consensus; Labour a non-nuclear defence policy, EEC withdrawal, and economic interventionism.

Labour by now wished to abolish the legislative powers of the House of Lords. The Liberal/SDP Alliance wanted a 'significant elected element' to it. The Conservatives favoured the *status quo*. Labour sought parliamentary accountability and a select committee for the intelligence agencies – something not yet fully achieved. The Liberals/SDP once again advocated state funding for parties. Local government was another battleground, with the question of whether central government should impose spending caps important. There were clear divergences over Europe, Scotland and Wales, and Northern Ireland. The Conservatives presented international aid as a means of boosting UK exports. They sought to amend emergency legislation to take in peacetime emergencies – presumably riots, demonstrations or strikes. Once again, the Conservatives opposed mass immigration.

Significant parts of New Labour's programme were foreshadowed by the Alliance in 1983, from educational maintenance allowances to incorporation of the ECHR into domestic law, to Regional Development Agencies, to a Freedom of Information Act. Labour's 1983 manifesto came to be seen as a harbinger of electoral disaster. Peter Shore famously described it as 'the longest suicide note in history.' Its long-term impact upon Labour was to discourage extensive manifesto commitments which could be used against the party. The next manifesto in 1987 was a far thinner document. In 1997, emphasis was placed in part upon the fact that Labour would continue Conservative policies on spending, and on renouncing Labour's extremist past – in that sense, a programme for continuity, not change.

Plans for	Labour	Conservative	Liberal/SDP Alliance
<i>Parliament and constitution</i>	Abolish legislative powers of House of Lords; 'improvements in legislative process and procedures' in Commons; 'Overhaul the outdated honours system'; parliamentary accountability and select committee for intelligence agencies.	Committed to maintaining 'supremacy of Parliament' by keeping 'rules and procedures in good repair' to keep check on executive; 'continue to pursue sensible, carefully considered reforms' where of value; maintain House of Lords.	Reform 'operation and procedures' of Parliament, making government more accountable; reform powers/composition of Lords: 'significant elected element representative of the nations and regions'; select committee of London MPs to oversee Metropolitan Police.
<i>Elections</i>	All but most senior local authority officers allowed to be elected to local authorities.		'Replace the existing electoral system with a system of Community Proportional Representation.'
<i>Political parties</i>			State funding for parties.
<i>Machinery of government and Civil Service</i>	Create Department for Economic and Industrial Planning; tri-partite National Planning Council; re-establish separate Ministry of Overseas Development; appoint Cabinet minister for gender equality; decentralise services; define intelligence services in statute.	Privatise Rolls Royce, British Airways; British Steel, etc.; put central government services out to tender;	Single ministry of Education and Training;
<i>Regional government</i>	Establish Regional Development Agencies		Devolution to English regional assemblies 'as demand develops'; regional economic development agencies, accountable to reformed Lords.
<i>Local government</i>	Local economic plans; clear legal competence for authorities; council workers to participate in policy decisions; no rate capping; more rate	Legislate against 'grossly extravagant Labour authorities' to 'curb excessive and irresponsible rate increases'; 'require local authorities to consult' local	PR for local elections; abolish tier of local government, including GLC (but not ILEA); local income tax; extending right to set up Parish or

	support for areas in need; democracy for City of London; 'proper' allowances and staff; unitary responsibility for most services.	industry and commerce before increasing rates. Stop rating of empty industrial property. Abolish Metropolitan and Greater London Councils.	Neighbourhood Councils.
<i>Scotland and Wales</i>	Directly elected Scottish Assembly, with Executive, with legislative and tax-raising powers		Scottish Parliament with tax raising powers, but not right to run budget deficit; framework for assembly for Wales if 'demand develops'.
<i>Northern Ireland</i>	'Labour believes that Ireland should, by peaceful means and on the basis of consent, be united'; establish devolved assembly; repeal Prevention of Terrorism Act and reform Diplock courts; equal rights for women, access to abortions; integrated education;	'Highest priority to upholding law and order'; continue economic support; 'no change in Northern Ireland's constitutional position... without the consent of the majority of people there'; close working relationship with Dublin; continue with Assembly.	Support Northern Ireland Assembly and return to devolved power; favour an Anglo-Irish consultative body at parliamentary level.
<i>Europe</i>	Withdrawal from EEC 'well within the lifetime of the Labour government';	Portrays party as assertive within EEC but supportive of membership.	Play 'full part in the European Community'; support common electoral system; join ERM; European initiative to register sales of arms to developing world;
<i>International democracy and cooperation</i>	'Ban arms sales to repressive regimes'; 'sustain and fortify' UN; support for Commonwealth; reintroduce exchange controls, possibly use import controls; fudges issue of unilateral nuclear disarmament; press to suspend dictatorships from NATO;	'The strength of the Western Alliance has kept our own freedoms secure'; nuclear weapons have deterred war; 'full support' for UN and Commonwealth.	Committed to NATO; support multilateral disarmament; strengthen UN peacekeeping role; no arms sales to repressive regimes
<i>Aid</i>	Increase % of GNP to 0.7, in line with	A 'generous but carefully controlled	Increase % of GNP to 0.7 in 5 years;

	UN target; concentrate on poorest people in poorest countries; no aid for persistent human rights violators, but to victims.	aid programme' – aimed particularly at Commonwealth; notes that most of aid money is 'spent on British goods and services' so it 'helps us'; no mention of UN target.	concentrate on poorest people in poorest countries;
<i>Criminal Justice</i>	Review procedures for victims of rape and crimes against women; police on beat; new rules for searches and custody; independent police complaints; disband special patrol groups; more law centres and legal aid; reduce prison population, improve conditions; prohibit unauthorised security surveillance.	Prison expansion; compulsory attendance centres for 'hooligans'; independent prosecution service; extend exclusion from jury service for those with criminal records; community – including teachers and parents - to take responsibility for enforcing moral standards	Police on the beat; independent police complaints
<i>Political and civil rights; equality</i>	Positive action programme for ethnic minorities; numerous measures for gender equality; strengthen Race Relations Act; protect homosexual rights; appointments to public bodies more representative.	Amend Civil Defence Act 1948 'to enable civil defence funds to be used in safeguarding against peacetime emergencies as well as' hostile attacks.	Incorporate ECHR into domestic law; commission of human rights.
<i>Social and economic rights</i>	'Repeal Tory legislation on industrial relations'; statutory collective bargaining; no firm commitment to minimum wage; increased spending on benefits and social services; no selection in secondary schools; strengthen equal pay act; no-one out of work for more than a year; aim for pension age of 60 and 35 hour week; ensure 'right to health care';	Ballots on union elections, strikes and political funds; possible ban on strikes in essential services; Youth Training Scheme for school-leavers; emphasis on ownership of home.	Create a million jobs in 2 years; compulsory ballots for unions; 'Employee's Charter' of union and workers rights; benefit increases and creation of single benefit; preschool education for all; educational maintenance allowances; lifelong learning; equality of access to social and health care; restore housing stock;

	‘a decent home for all’;		maintain ‘right to buy.’
<i>FOI</i>	‘New priority to open government at local and national levels’; Freedom of Information Bill; data protection legislation; abolish ‘D’ notices.		Public right of access to official information;
<i>Immigration/ asylum</i>	Immigration laws which do not discriminate against women, blacks or Asians; ‘Take action to protect status of refugees in Britain’; right of appeal against deportation on security grounds; no deportation if facing arrest or death.	Effective immigration control needed for ‘good community relations; Refers to introduction of British Nationality Act and ‘lowest level...of immigration from the Commonwealth’ for two decades; continue to be ‘strict but fair.’	‘Immigration controls will be applied without discrimination on grounds of sex, race or colour, and rules on dependents will be revised to promote family unity.’
<i>Local participation</i>	Set up Cooperative Investment Bank with development agencies and local authorities obliged to support cooperatives and local enterprise boards; firmer public involvement in planning inquiries; community police councils; public services decentralised.	Seek ‘ways of widening parental choice and influence over their children’s schooling’.	Involve teachers, parents and local people in running schools; greater tenant involvement in housing; larger community element for Police Authorities.
<i>New democratic forms</i>	‘Industrial democracy’ meaning workers to have say in running firms and influence on economic planning; right to convert firms into cooperatives.	Promote employee share ownership and profit sharing;	Schemes for employee participation in the workplace; profit sharing and employee share ownership.
<i>Cultural identity</i>	Introduce citizenship laws which do not discriminate against women, blacks or Asians.	Immigration control for good community relations; set up National Heritage Memorial Fund for dead of world wars; Commission for Ancient Monuments	‘All those born in Britain are entitled to British Citizenship.’

		and Historic Buildings.	
<i>Media and broadcasting</i>	Creation of new broadband cable network 'under firm public control'; British Film Authority, National Film Finance Corporation; assistance for new publications; stricter rules on ownership; stronger, more representative Press Council; wholesalers to accept any publication; public access broadcasting.	Prevent 'dangerous spread of violent and obscene video cassettes'; those responsible for enforcing moral standards include 'television producers.'	Ensure that new technologies do not become 'vehicles for pornography and violence.'