



WINNING ON THE DOORSTEP

A Fourth Term Worth Fighting For

compass

DIRECTION FOR
THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT

Winning on the Doorstep

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Policies for Winning on the doorstep

- Make the banks safe again
- Make all votes count
- A living wage
- A new military covenant
- Tax junk mail
- Replace top up fees with a graduate tax
- High pay commission
- Close the gender pay gap
- Cap interest rates on unsecured credit
- Railways for people, not profit
- Ban advertising to children
- Introduce a Robin Hood tax

Winning on the Doorstep

It is now just a few short weeks before a general election. The polls have tightened. The Conservative Party has misread the mood of the public, who do not wish to bear the burden of savage public service cuts caused by a few bankers in the search for unfeasibly high rewards. As David Cameron loses his shine, all of a sudden there is everything to play for. However, beating the Conservatives is a necessary but insufficient outcome for Labour. The Party needs to win for a higher purpose. The nation is crying out for solutions that address the financial crisis, the sustainability crisis and the crisis of democracy. An election is not just a decision on which new government the country wants, it is the opportunity for a wider conversation to take place across the country on the road to renewal.

The question facing the country is a simple one: after 30 years of putting the needs of markets first (now with demonstrable and catastrophic results), do we as a public want to continue down the same path or take a different direction? Do we believe that society is a subset of the economy or that the relationship should be the other way round? To believe that the needs of people should come before profit is not anti-business, far from it. Sustainable businesses require a strong society built on trust, cohesion and solidarity. This was the basis for the post-war economic boom, a time when the needs of society and the economy were more equally balanced. The more that the 'needs' of the market began to dominate policy makers' decisions, the less profitable the country became. The cost was a more unequal society, which is now disfigured by the gap between the few at the top and the many at the bottom.

An election so soon after such a spectacular economic crash, in which the few felt so disconnected from the rest of us that they could disregard the consequences of their irresponsible behaviour, provides a chance to rebalance our politics in favour of what society needs. In so doing we could create the basis for more broadly based prosperity and a chance to find an alternative to the reckless growth that is destroying the planet.

If we want a future in which we can breathe, a future in which we are equal enough to be as free as possible, and a future in which we have time to do simple but vital things, like

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reading our kids a bed-time story, then this election must be a watershed moment to take back control over our fraught, anxious and insecure lives.

If we offer policies that make a real start at addressing the crisis of inequality and sustainability, policies that really make a difference to people's lives, we can make politics matter again. This way we can start to solve the third big crisis we face – that of democracy itself.

Of course we have to start where people are, with the real concerns of their everyday lives, and work with them to build a broader and deeper political picture. We need to take people on a journey, not just give them disconnected policy pledges. We need to pace ourselves but have a strong sense of direction to our journey. Sweden, like Rome, wasn't built in a day but over decades of purposeful and gradual reform. Building our version of the good society will take decades, but right here, right now, we have the chance to make a start on that journey.

So here is a short set of policy ideas to get us started and to ensure we have a fourth term worth fighting for. The ideas are not comprehensive. There is a host of good, workable policies that Compass and others have championed, cutting ID cards, developing a Green New Deal and putting a windfall tax on the unearned profits of the gas and electricity companies. Elsewhere Compass has set out comprehensive tax and public investment policy ideas to maintain essential public services and stave off a double dip recession.¹

These policy ideas were chosen because:

- they help make the world a more equal, sustainable and democratic place
- they start to address the causes of this triple crisis rather than the just the symptoms
- they can easily be explained on the doorstep
- they have proven popularity across society and are therefore the basis of a winning manifesto.

This is not a policy list for traditional working class voters or a mythical middle England. Instead the ideas will unite the vast majority of people in the country around a radical and progressive agenda.

By putting ideas like these before the British people we could fight and win a fourth term on the doorstep for a greater purpose.

(Note: Many of the ideas came from the policy and ideas process Compass initiative with its members and supporters called 'How to live in the 21st century'²)

I. Make the banks safe again

Separate high street banks from casino (investment) banks to ensure secure and stable banking services for all

We need banks to process our money; they are an essential component of modern life, just like gas and electricity. So they should be regulated like other utilities. Crucially, we should end the practice whereby a handful of extremely large and politically powerful banking organisations take deposits from ordinary people and speculate on complex, risky products in the global market place. Currently, if the 'casino' part of a bank fails through bad judgement, rogue trading or unforeseen circumstances, it is the ordinary depositors or taxpayers who lose. The commercial and retail functions of a bank should be separated to keep ordinary depositors' money safe. This should also mean that the government does not have to intervene again and bail out the banks where risk taking has gone too far. The knowledge that the bank will be bailed out by the public encourages riskier choices; this cycle must end.

The commercial and retail functions of a bank should be separated to keep ordinary depositors' money safe

Banks then could re-focus their business models to ensure value for their customers and to perform better in their core functions such as lending to businesses and individuals. There would be an opportunity to create more specialised, smaller banks, some of which could be community based.

Banks used to be separated. The Glass-Steagall Act of 1933 was introduced after the last banking crises in the USA because banks had used depositors' money to fuel a stock market bubble, which burst and triggered the Great Depression. It was repealed in 1999, leading to considerable takeover activity where large firms gobbled up smaller ones, resulting in a few massive banks being at the centre of the global financial system. The same separation existed in the UK until the 1980s. While the system was in place, banks did fail, but they did not create systemic risk that would send shockwaves through the system. The collapse of banks such as Barings (investment bank) due to one rogue trader resulted in the shareholders being wiped out, but did not bring down the economy.

Polling shows that 68 per cent of the population supports the creation of a safe banking sector.³

There would be little if any cost to the government of enacting such a separation.

2. Make all votes count

Give real power to the people by letting them decide the future of the Westminster electoral system

It is a democratic scandal that a government can be elected with only 35 per cent of the vote but gain 54 per cent of the seats. The current first past the post system excludes millions from the decision making process, leaves many MPs with jobs for life and focuses all the attention on a few thousand swing voters in a few swing seats. This gives huge undemocratic power to newspapers like the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*. It leads to the politics of the lowest common denominator, which then stops those in the political system addressing the real issues our society faces, like poverty and climate change.

The next parliament should hold a binding referendum on first past the post versus AV+ (the broadly proportional electoral system recommended in 1998 by the government's own Jenkins Commission) as soon as possible after this election for implementation at the next general election.

This year a poll carried out by ICM showed 65% favoured changing to a proportional electoral system for Westminster elections. Only 13% disagreed.⁴

The cost of the referendum is forecast to be around £80 million.⁵

3. A living wage

Ensure that everyone is paid enough to live full and healthy lives

Everyone should be paid a salary that allows them to live comfortably in the community in which they work. If a company is paying less than a living wage it is not a viable or going concern but survives only because it is exploiting people. The minimum wage is not currently high enough for people to live comfortable and healthy lives. Some people have to hold down two jobs just to keep their heads above water; this has huge implications for their lives and their families. The burden of low wages has been shouldered by the government through tax credits and other measures; it is time that companies pay their fair share. Low pay is also a gender issue as more women than men live in poverty.

The government should enact legislation to make the payment of a living wage statutory. It should lead by example by starting with public sector employees and contractors to the

public sector. The rate could be set through a Commission, just like the minimum wage was, to determine a decent wage threshold.

The citizen group London Citizens has long campaigned for a living wage. Many organizations and local authorities are now paying the London Living Wage as a result of their members' efforts. From HSBC to Tower Hamlets Council, many organisations have taken the pledge.⁶

An independent study of the business benefits for organisations that pay the London Living Wage showed that they had lower staff turnover and recruitment costs, lower rates of absenteeism, and a better public image, which led to a higher quality of work.⁷

A YouGov poll this week showed 58% of people favoured increasing the minimum wage to a living wage.⁸

There is a cost to government of paying public sector workers a living wage but the current cost to government of tax credits is huge, as is the cost of the social and health problems caused by poverty and inequality.⁹

4. A new military covenant

Ensure all service personnel receive specialised health cover, job(re)training and affordable housing.

With Britain facing its biggest economic crisis since the Second World War and much debate on public spending levels and priorities, the country can ill-afford to be spending in excess of £76bn on replacing Trident with a new generation of nuclear weapons.

Britain's security needs are not met by nuclear weapons which can do nothing to combat the threats posed by terrorism or climate change. The more that countries such as Britain justify their retention and replacement of nuclear weapons on the grounds of an uncertain future, the more likely it is that non-nuclear states will seek to use the same rationale to justify developing their own weapons systems.

The huge amount of money saved from not replacing Trident could ensure that every member or the military personnel be guaranteed specialized health cover, job(re)training and affordable housing.

A poll last year found that 63% of respondents opposed Trident renewal.¹⁰

5. Tax junk mail

Cut down on junk mail by taxing direct mail marketing

Unsolicited mail is annoying and environmentally damaging. These mailings are also ineffective as the vast majority of people throw them away without reading them. We see more than enough adverts and get more than enough inducements to buy more and more things.

The government should place a levy on each item of junk mail item to reflect its full environmental cost and dissuade frivolous or excessive use of marketing material by direct post. This money could be re-invested into the Royal Mail network.

A YouGov poll this week revealed that 78% supported this policy¹¹

It is estimated that 4 billion items of junk mail are posted every year; we can therefore forecast that a 1p levy tax would raise around £40 million annually.¹²

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6. Replace top up fees with a graduate tax

Replace tuition fees with a progressive tax to ensure everyone can afford a university education

Everyone should be able to consider higher education without fear of debt. Variable top up fees turn the public good of education into a serious financial calculation, putting off those from families with modest incomes. It also increases the pressure on graduates to find highly paid employment (in a very difficult labour market), sometimes at the expense of more socially useful jobs.

Instead of variable fees leaving students with debts of between £20,000 and £30,000 when they leave university, graduates would contribute towards the public good of higher education according to their income. A new People's Trust for Higher Education would be established. This would prevent variable fees and an open market within undergraduate higher education. Former students would make contributions to the Trust for a fixed period

of 20 years after they complete their courses, instead of paying fixed fees when they start their courses. This would abolish tuition fees for both full-time and part-time students. The total contribution a person could make would be linked to the benefit they obtain from higher education, leading to a much higher contribution from very high earners. The proportion of earnings sought in graduate contributions would be variable and progressive – rates of contribution would range from 0.3 per cent for the lowest fifth of the graduate workforce to 2 per cent for the middle fifth and 2.5 per cent for the highest fifth of earners. A lower threshold would be put in place to ensure no contribution at all would be sought from very low earners.

YouGov polling shows that a majority of the public would like to abolish top-up fees and find alternatives, while 88 per cent do not believe those currently reviewing top-up fees should even consider higher fees.¹³

There would be three years of transition while the 2008 cohort completed their studies under the current system, and during these three years the government deposits would grow by £1.5 billion each year to compensate for the loss of fee income. After around 15 years of operation, the personal contributions would have grown to the point where they can replace entirely the revenue from fees, and government support would then end.¹⁴

7. High pay commission

Set up an evidence and fact based commission to come up with sensible measures to tackle excessive pay and the excesses of the super-rich

Greed at the top led to risk taking, which led in turn to the biggest economic crash since 1929. According to the Treasury Select Committee, the 'bonus culture' in the City of London, particularly among those involved in trading activities in investment banks, contributed to excessive risk-taking and short-termism and thereby played a contributory role in the banking crisis.¹⁵

The actions of those at the top have affected everyone, and hit those at the bottom hardest in the shape of job losses, pay freezes and public spending cuts. This must never be allowed to happen again.

To ensure this is the case the government should set up a High Pay Commission to examine the link between high pay, risk taking and economic performance. It would make

recommendations to the government on the action needed to stop high pay impacting on the rest of the country. The Commission would sit for a year:

- gathering and analysing existing data
- commissioning new research
- calling witnesses and holding hearings
- testing the analysis with interested parties
- testing recommendations with interested parties.

Polling shows that 65 per cent believe that a High Pay Commission should be established.¹⁶

The cost would be minimal. The Low Pay Commission has an annual budget of around £800,000, enabling it to fund research projects, pay salaries, pay the cost of producing an annual report, hold written and oral consultations and a programme of visits, and pay running and administrative costs.

8. Close the gender pay gap

Enforced equal pay through compulsory pay audits

It is outrageous that many women are still not paid the same as men for doing the same job. This has gone on long enough and all companies should be given a deadline by which to comply. Women working full time earn on average 17 per cent less per hour than men working full time. For ethnic minority women, the gap is even higher at 20 per cent. Women working part time earn 36 per cent less per hour than men working full time, and 45 per cent less per hour if they are in London.¹⁷

Best practice from Sweden and Quebec shows that pay equity legislation has revolutionised the workplace and brought a culture of transparency that has empowered employers to tackle pay inequalities head on, resulting in a reduction of gender pay gaps.

All firms should be forced to undertake a pay audit and given two years to stamp out pay discrimination, or face being closed down.

A poll in 2008 showed that 88 per cent of respondents believe it to be government's job to close the gender pay gap.¹⁸ In 2009, 85 per cent of those polled supported mandatory pay audits.¹⁹

A survey of local authorities has suggested that the cost of back pay and pay audits is around £4 billion but the TUC calculates that under-utilisation of women's skills is costing the economy in excess of £11 billion a year.^{20,21}

9. Cap interest rates on unsecured credit

Rein in legal loan sharking with a cap on interest rates for credit cards and personal loans

At the moment the poorest pay the most to borrow money. Yet right through the social spectrum people are paying over the top prices for loans and credit card overdrafts. The cost of a £300 loan with a company such as Provident Personal Credit can be £246 – nearly 100 per cent of the amount borrowed, with a typical APR of 272.2 per cent.²² A loan from a payday lender costs even more; to borrow £100, lenders charge £25 for one month – an annual percentage rate of nearly 1300 per cent.²³ High cost lending is estimated to be worth a staggering £35 billion per year.²⁴ This is the amount taken from people who can least afford it.

There are no price caps on the cost of credit in the UK, but both Germany and France have price caps in place. In Germany, 'usury' is defined as the interest rate being more than twice the market rate and lending above this limit is considered predatory, and constitutes a criminal offence. Credit agreements where this ceiling is exceeded are void and the client does not have to repay the interest. The level of the ceiling can float up and down. In practice, maximum APRs are usually around 28–30 per cent.²⁵ The government should enact similar legislation using Germany as a model.

A YouGov poll this week showed 89% thought there should be a cap on the cost of credit.²⁵

There would be little if any cost to government of limiting such interest rate payments.

10. Railways for people, not profit

Bring back the train companies into public ownership to ensure profits are reinvested in the service

The privatisation of the railways has been a disaster in terms of cost, safety and the quality of travel. We should place low carbon transport as nothing other than an essential public service.

The renationalisation of the railways would increase investment, safety and punctuality. Privatisation has meant that the risk has been transferred on to the government, which has been forced to intervene in failing franchises while investment has been increasingly siphoned away as profit. When the government has been forced to step in and temporarily renationalise rail franchises such as South Eastern trains, performance has increased.²⁷ The railways are a natural monopoly so the enforced separation of track infrastructure and trains is inefficient and there is little competition between service providers.

The tracks, stations and signals are already in public hands. All the government has to do is not renew the franchises when they expire.

A 2009 poll shows that 70 per cent of people would be in favour of renationalising the railways, with just 23 per cent supporting privatisation.²⁸

There is currently a yearly £5 billion subsidy given to the railways while fares have doubled.²⁹ Cheaper rail travel would lessen the burden on Britain's roads – perhaps even eliminating the need for new ones – and help lower carbon emissions. Renationalisation would come at no cost.

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11. Ban advertising to children

Allow children to be children by freeing them from commercial pressures

Children's minds are not fully developed and cannot tell when they are being sold to; they accept all information at face value and marketers play on this vulnerability. It is our duty to protect children from unnecessary commercial pressure, especially as much advertising is intended to encourage pester power and to influence parental purchasing. The Children's Society and many child psychologists have linked excessive advertising to mental health problems.³⁰ There is also evidence to suggest excessive commercialisation leads to physical health problems such as obesity.

In Sweden the government has banned television advertising to all children under the age of 12. This slows the pace of commercialisation, allowing more time for children to be children, and crucially makes a moral point about their protection.

The government should enforce a ban on all adverts aimed at children on domestic, print and broadcasting media, in shops and wherever possible through the internet.

A YouGov poll this week found that 77% agreed that there should be a ban on advertising specifically targeted at children under the age of 12.³¹

There would be no cost to the government.

12. Introduce a Robin Hood tax

Introduce a tax on the banks to tackle poverty in the UK and abroad

Billions are traded every day in the City; much of the trading – as Adair Turner, Chair of the FSA, has said – is ‘socially useless’. Meanwhile millions live in poverty here and in the developing world. A tiny tax on these financial transactions, such as a Robin Hood tax, could eventually raise tens of billions annually.³² It would only need to be levied at a rate of 5p on every £1000 traded. In addition it would damp down speculative trading and help rebalance the economy.

It is argued that this tax has to be internationally agreed otherwise domestic financial markets might suffer, but the UK is especially vulnerable to the City as its financial sector is larger (relatively) than other countries. The government has already unilaterally imposed a tax on bankers’ bonuses and other countries followed our lead.

In the UK a 0.5 per cent stamp duty on share transactions raises more than £3 billion each year. In Belgium a financial transactions tax on the transfer of shares, bonds and other securities, at a rate of 0.5–1.7 per cent, raised €147 million in 2005.³³

A YouGov poll suggests that 53 per cent would support this policy, with only 23 per cent opposed.³⁴

A limited version of the Robin Hood tax based on the CHAPS system levied at the level of 0.05 per cent would have raised £37 billion in 2008.³⁵

Britain is an incredibly rich country by almost any international standards. But its wealth is concentrated in the wrong places and spent on the wrong things. The accumulation of more wealth by a tiny minority has been given far too much political preference for far too long. Too many people and too much of the planet has suffered from this lack of balance

between a strong society and an out of control economy. The general election of 2010 is the chance to change that. But it requires policies like those outlined above to be put before the people on the doorstep – otherwise choice is just about the rate of national decline. It is time for something better, something with a purpose.

Endnotes

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	Gender		Age			Social Grade			Region				
	Total	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55+	ABC1	C2DE	London	Rest of South	Midlands/Wales	North	Scotland
Weighted Sample	2111	1014	1097	626	745	739	1160	950	270	686	452	520	184
Unweighted Sample	2111	965	1146	527	680	904	1313	797	266	656	363	510	316
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
49	51	48	47	44	56	50	49	50	48	50	49	52	
29	27	31	30	32	26	28	30	24	29	30	31	27	
78	79	76	82	78	74	77	79	74	77	80	80	79	
10	8	12	11	10	9	11	9	13	10	9	9	9	
5	6	4	4	6	4	6	4	8	5	5	2	8	
4	5	3	3	5	3	4	4	4	4	3	6	2	
9	11	7	7	11	7	10	8	12	19	9	8	10	
3	3	3	5	2	1	2	4	1	4	3	2	2	

A "living wage" is
 It is estimated that 4 billion items of unsolicited or junk mail are posted every year.
 Some people argue that an additional levy of 1p should be added to the cost to
 discourage unsolicited or junk mail. Any revenue gained from this 1p levy would
 be reinvested back into the Royal Mail.

To what extent would you support or oppose such a levy?

Strongly support the levy
 Tend to support the levy
TOTAL SUPPORT
 Neither support nor oppose the levy
 Tend to oppose the levy
 Strongly oppose the levy
TOTAL OPPOSE
 Don't know

About Compass

Compass is the democratic left pressure group whose goal is both to debate and develop the ideas for a more equal and democratic society, then campaign and organise to help ensure they become reality. We organise regular events and conferences that provide real space to discuss policy, we produce thought-provoking pamphlets, and we encourage debate through online discussions on our website. We campaign, take positions and lead the debate on key issues facing the democratic left. We're developing a coherent and strong voice for those that believe in greater equality and democracy as the means to achieve radical social change.

We are:

- An umbrella grouping of the progressive left whose sum is greater than its parts.
- A strategic political voice – unlike thinktanks and single-issue pressure groups Compass can develop a politically coherent position based on the values of equality and democracy.
- An organising force – Compass recognises that ideas need to be organised for, and will seek to recruit, mobilise and encourage to be active a membership across the UK to work in pursuit of greater equality and democracy.
- A pressure group focused on changing Labour – but Compass recognises that energy and ideas can come from outside the party, not least from the 200,000 who have left since 1997.
- The central belief of Compass is that things will only change when people believe they can and must make a difference themselves. In the words of Gandhi, 'Be the change you wish to see in the world'.

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Positions held

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