

# Rachel Reeves MP Monthly Report

News from Rachel Reeves, Labour MP for Leeds West

May 2014

## RACHEL MEETS APPRENTICES AT ALLIED GLASS



Recently Rachel met apprentices at Allied Glass' manufacturing plant in Leeds. The British Glass Manufacturers' Confederation, the trade association for the UK glass industry, were also involved in the visit.

As well as touring the factory to see the molten glass being turned into bottles, Rachel learned how British Glass, through its Glass Academy training and skills

development initiative, is working to boost apprenticeship numbers at the company.

Rachel said, "We know that the best results for creating a skilled workforce come when employers and apprentices work together. It has been fascinating to meet young people who are just starting out in the glass industry and see the impressive work that Allied Glass do in Leeds."

## FANTASTIC NEW WORTLEY COMMUNITY FUN DAY

Rachel was delighted to attend New Wortley Fun Day at Castleton Primary School and New Wortley Community Centre this month with Armley local council candidate, Alice Smart (pictured with Rachel), as well as Cllr Jim McKenna and Cllr Alison Lowe.

Huge numbers of local people attended and got involved in the many free, fun activities, including bouncy castles, tennis, face painting,

balloon modelling and sunflower planting. Delicious free curry was served all day thanks to the Sheesh Mahal restaurant in Kirkstall.

Rachel said, "I very much enjoyed this well-attended and fun event. I would like to congratulate and thank all those who were involved in putting the day together for the local community".



## LEEDS WEST ACADEMY PUPILS DISCUSS WEB SAFETY



This month Rachel visited Leeds West Academy in Rodley to hear pupil's thoughts and ideas about staying safe online.

The visit was part of the 'Well Versed' initiative, a partnership between Google and The Parent Zone to help young people avoid the potential dangers of the Internet.

Rachel said, "With young people spending more and more time online, it is really important that we do everything to keep them safe.

"I really enjoyed hearing pupil's ideas about how to stay safe online. Many young people will know far more than their parents and teachers about the online world so it's vital we listen to their views and experiences."

## THE FINAL COUNTDOWN: ELECTION MAY 22nd 2014

With elections fast approaching we hope members and supporters will join us for some campaigning and delivery sessions, to ensure all our excellent Leeds West local candidates are elected on May 22nd.

### Armley Campaigning, **Candidate Alice Smart.**

Sessions meet outside the Co-op on Armley Town Street

Saturday 17th May, 12:30pm

Tuesday 20th May, 6:30pm

Wednesday 21st May, 2pm

### Bramley Campaigning, **Candidate Kevin Ritchie.**

All sessions meet at Bramley Community Centre, Waterloo Lane, Bramley.

Saturday 17th May, 10:30am

Sunday 18th May, 11am

Monday 19th May, 6:30pm

Tuesday 20th May, 6:30pm

Wednesday 21st May, 6:30pm

Thursday 22nd May, ELECTION DAY, various sessions, contact Roland Cross if you can help on: 0782 448 2550 or email: [r.cross@leedsmet.ac.uk](mailto:r.cross@leedsmet.ac.uk)

### Farnley & Wortley Campaigning, **Candidate Cllr John Hardy.**

Saturday 17th May 2:30pm, meet Five Lanes Primary School

Tuesday 20th May, 4pm, meet Asda, Oldfield Lane, LS12 4BP

Wednesday 21st May, Noon, Asda, Oldfield Lane

### Kirkstall Campaigning, **Candidate Fiona Venner.**

For further details contact candidate Fiona Venner via phone: 0113 268 4652 or email: [Fiona.Venner@kirkstallward.org.uk](mailto:Fiona.Venner@kirkstallward.org.uk)

Sunday 18th May, 11am, meet Station Parade

Monday 19th May, 6pm, meet Station Parade

Tuesday 20th May, 6pm, meet Station Parade

Wednesday 21st May, 11am and 2pm, meet 12 De Lacy Mount

Wednesday 21st May, 6pm, meet Station Parade, followed by drinks at The Bridge Inn!



### Thursday 22nd May, Election Day

Various sessions happening throughout the day in every ward. Contact your Branch for details.

To sign up to receive emails about campaigning and events contact Bryony King at: [bryony@rachelreevesmp.co.uk](mailto:bryony@rachelreevesmp.co.uk)

### Key-Seat Pudsey

Thursday 15th May, 3:30pm, campaigning with Rachel and Leeds West activists. Meet Tesco, New Road Side.

Pudsey are running various sessions each week. Contact Pudsey Organiser Charlotte Walker for more details at:

[charlotte\\_walker@labour.org.uk](mailto:charlotte_walker@labour.org.uk)

### Meetings and Events:

**Public Meeting, Coffee Afternoon with Rachel and Cllr John Hardy, Friday 16th May 3:30pm–5pm at Old Farnley Community Centre, Hillside Hall, Cross Lane, LS12 5AA. Come along to have your say on the Rising Cost of Living.**

### Post-election social & fundraiser.

Sunday 1st June, 12:30pm at Viva Cuba, Kirkstall Road. £5 entry.

Email: [rachel@rachelreevesmp.co.uk](mailto:rachel@rachelreevesmp.co.uk) to sign up.

Thank you all for coming, and thank you to University College for inviting me here this evening.

It is, needless to say, a big honour to have been asked to deliver this lecture.

The name of Clement Attlee is indelibly associated with what most people see as the inauguration of Britain's welfare state

– the implementation by his government of William Beveridge's plan for National Insurance, a Family Allowance, improved old age pensions, and the National Health Service.

For most people this moment marks the historic birth of a welfare settlement whose contours are still clearly recognisable, even after seventy years of social and economic change, and political controversy that rages still today.

As someone who aspires to be the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in a year's time, Clement Attlee's government is still somewhere to go to for inspiration and guidance.

But the focus of what I want to say today will not be the events of the 1940s.

Because I want to argue that to truly understand that breakthrough and what made it possible.

– and also to gain true historical perspective on the debates and developments of today

– we need to dig deeper, beneath the Acts of Parliament and civil service committees,

and look further back into Attlee's own life, and his involvement in what we might call the Edwardian pre-history of Britain's welfare state.

For Clement Attlee was himself formed by his experiences and activities in this critical time when Victorian philanthropy met and was forced to come to terms with working-class self-organisation in the crucible of London's East End.

I want to argue that revisiting this time, and the part Attlee played in it, gives us a richer perspective on the preconditions of the post-war settlement.

In particular, it reminds us that the welfare state was never intended to, and should never be expected to, stand alone as an institution

It depends for its stability and sustainability upon ethical, economic, and political foundations that were seen as essential by its Edwardian pioneers, and are no less vital in the twenty-first century.

For as we look now at how we renew and secure a decent social security system for the next generation, we need to be attentive to fundamental questions such as the values and principles the welfare state embodies, how it treats people and what it demands of them

- its interaction with the labour market and wider economic context

- and the need to engage and involve as many people as possible in the debate about its future so we can maintain and renew its popularity and legitimacy.

EAST END EPIPHANY

As Jon Cruddas showed in his Attlee lecture in 2011, Clement Attlee was a romantic before he was a politician.

He spent his years at public school immersed Tennyson and Browning.

Here at University College he admits to being distracted from his studies by “poetry and history”, becoming especially enchanted by the Pre-Raphaelites.

He showed little interest in political or social issues; his default allegiance was Tory but he was too shy to get involved in the debates at the Union.

It was, of all things, his old school tie that first took him to Stepney at the age of 22, for a stint at a Boys Club attached to his alma mater, Haileybury.

But unlike other young men and women of the professional upper middle classes who often did a stint of voluntary work in the East End in a manner akin to the “gap years” of today, Attlee stayed on.

In 1907, at the age of 24, he took over as manager of the Boy’s Club.

A year later, he joined the Independent Labour Party.

In 1909 he abandoned the Bar, where his father had lined him up a job, to take up a full time position as lecture secretary for Beatrice Webb’s campaign to popularise the Minority Report of the Commission on the Poor Law, a text which in his own later judgement “may be regarded as the seed from which later blossomed the welfare state”.

At the same time he became involved in the National Anti-Sweating League’s campaign for trade boards and minimum wages to be established in casualised sectors like tailoring and chain-making.

In 1910, Attlee became secretary of Toynbee Hall, and was employed by the government to give public presentations on Lloyd George’s National Insurance Act.

In 1912, he was appointed to a part time position at the London School of Economics, lecturing on what was then the emerging profession of social work – beating his future Chancellor Hugh Dalton to the job, perhaps as a result of Webb’s influence.

It was in this capacity that, after the first world war and before his final entry into full time politics as Labour Mayor of Stepney, he wrote a textbook on the subject, titled *The Social Worker*,

which gathers together many of his reflections and conclusions from this period of his life,

and gives us a fascinating insight into the impact that these experiences had on Attlee’s character and values.

It is clear that what, in the first instance, changed the course of Attlee’s life was the sheer shock of the daily hunger and precarious existence he encountered in the East End, and his humane and compassionate response to them.

Attlee tells the story of a small boy he met in the street. “We walked along together”, Attlee recounts.

“Where are you off to?” says he.

“I’m going home to tea”, said I.

“Oh, I’m going home to see if there is any tea”, was his reply.

“It is as well to keep clearly in mind”, Attlee observed, “if you are one of those whom meal-times come with almost monotonous regularity, that to others there is the question always present: Where is tomorrow’s dinner to come from?”

Attlee even attempted to express his feelings in poetic form,

“In Limehouse, in Limehouse, by night as well as day,

I hear the feet of children who go to work or play,

Of children born of sorrow,

The workers of tomorrow

How shall they work tomorrow

Who get no bread today?”

## ETHICS

Attlee’s early writings also reveal that his response to what he encountered was more complex than sheer shock at the squalor he witnessed.

This was a common enough reaction among people of his background who visited the East End at this time.

In the late nineteenth century East London had been the focus of waves of moral panics about segregated communities locked in self-perpetuating cycles of concentrated deprivation, financial irresponsibility, and what would today be called “welfare dependency”.

Orthodox remedies, promoted by the theorists of the Poor Law and the Charity Organisation Society, focused on tighter restriction of official poor relief and charitable “hand-outs” that were seen as barriers to the proper functioning of the labour market, and corrupting influences on the moral character of the local population.

Those of us here with an interest in today’s welfare debates might find such attitudes depressingly familiar.

Attlee himself acknowledges that such attitudes could be found among the philanthropists and social activists who came to live in places like the East End as part of what was known as the “Settlement Movement”

But in his own case the commitment to sustained cohabitation and cooperation with working people seems to have generated its own dynamic.

In Attlee it led to a profound appreciation of and respect for the dignity, solidarity and morality of the people he came to know that cuts directly against Victorian presumptions that the East End represented a case of moral, cultural, even biological “degeneration”.

In 1920 he wrote “we are struck by the amazing charity of the poor to the poor, the readiness with which one poor household will take into their home and support a friend who is out of a job, and the ready response to whip round for a widow left penniless, or for similar cases of misfortune”

Attlee rejects forcefully the prevailing notion of the time that providing income support for the poor was dissolving their commitment to work.

He wrote: “The right to receive an income from the ownership of property has not apparently proved very degrading to those to whom it is conceded”.

“On the other hand the unemployed cry of ‘damn your charity, we want work’, was a profound protest against the idea that charity is a substitute for justice”.

Attlee’s appreciation of the moral fabric of the poorest working class communities – what we might today call “social capital” – reinforced his rejection of the orthodox liberal view that the only solution to poverty and unemployment was for labour to respond to market forces like any other commodity.

Those who “talk glibly of the mobility of labour”, he wrote, and are “impatient with those who are unwilling to go away and find work in distant parts of the country” forget, he said, “how great is the wrench of migration to those on the border-line of poverty”.

Because tough times are even tougher, he points out, without shopkeepers willing to give credit, friends ready to “come to the rescue with a whip-round”, and a worker’s “intimacy with the customs and arrangements of the place to which he belongs”.

The insistence of the laissez faire economist that the solution to all ills were liberalised labour markets was, for Attlee, inhuman and destructive.

He wrote: “The economist did not seem to realise that the abstract concept of labour consisted of a number of human beings who were in fact the greater part of the nation”.

Attlee says that the experience taught him that “my whole scale of values were wrong”. His description in his memoirs of this epiphany in the East End is worth quoting at length

“I found abundant instances of kindness and much quiet heroism in these mean streets. These people were not poor through their lack of fine qualities. The slums were not filled with the dregs of society. Not only did I have countless lessons in practical economics but there was kindled in me a warmth and affection for these people that has remained with me all my life. From this it was only a step to examining the whole basis of our social and economic system. I soon began to realise the curse of casual labour. I got to know what slum landlordism and sweating meant. I also understood why there were rebels.”

Attlee’s profound respect for the working people he lived among forced him to think hard about the character and ethos of welfare services, whether they be public or voluntary.

Ed Miliband reminded us in his Hugo Young lecture earlier this year that the “unresponsive” state can be just as much of a problem as the “untamed market”.

And I know as a constituency MP that, despite the best intentions of its planners and the hard work of its staff, the welfare state can feel unresponsive and demeaning to those who interact with it.

Attlee was acutely sensitive to the power relations and risks to dignity inherent in such interactions, and what Richard Sennett calls charity’s power to wound and compassion’s link to inequality.

The critique of condescending charity was central to the call of Beatrice Webb’s Minority Report for minimum standards of living to be secured as a right of social citizenship.

Attlee writes that “charity is infinitely more degrading than public assistance when that charity comes from those in a superior economic position”.

On the other hand, “a right established by law, such as that to an old age pension, is less galling than an allowance made by a rich man to a poor one dependent on his view of the recipient’s character and terminable at his caprice”.

Yet Attlee was far from rejecting the role of the voluntary sector, seeing it as an essential support and complement to public provision.

And one of its critical functions is to correct or compensate for the tendency of state services to become bureaucratic and inhumane, and develop what we would today call a more “relational” interface with the citizen.

Attlee wrote:

“In all social work there is the great danger that must be avoided of treating people as cases, and grouping them in categories and statistical tables, so that one forgets that all the time one is dealing with individuals.”

Ultimately Attlee points toward a conception of social services as an equal partnership between professional and citizen, anticipating today’s notion of “co-production” by almost a century.

Although the emphasis of Attlee’s work and writing of this period was to correct the overly punitive and moralising outlook of the Victorian Poor Law, he was far from endorsing an approach that robbed those in need of support of responsibility for their position and prospects.

It was true then, as it is now, that ordinary working people were as keen as anyone to ensure that systems of support were not being abused or failing to put people back into control over their own lives.

Attlee warns the social worker of the need to “steer between the pitfalls of over-sentimentality and self-righteousness” when dealing with those looking for support, including those he refers to as “cadgers”.

He supported a tough regime for the long-term unemployed, endorsing schemes then run by the Salvation Army to provide intensive training, work experience and “moral suasion” to counteract the “demoralisation” and demotivation that prolonged unemployment could result in.

It is striking to me how alive and relevant these debates about the ethos of the welfare state seem today.

A key challenge for the next Labour government will be to improve people’s experience of the social security system

- so that jobseekers feel that the system is there to help them into work, not just get them off benefits,
- so that people in need are not forced to wait weeks or months for benefits to which they are entitled, and then forced to queue at food banks or into the arms of loan sharks
- and so that disabled people can trust and feel ownership of the procedures for assessing what kind of work they might be able to do.

And that also, beyond the state, the voluntary sector will always have an essential role in complementing and challenging state provision.

I disagree with those who argue today, as many did in Attlee’s time, that the provision of soup kitchens and food banks corrupted the poor by making them dependent.

But I do believe that, feeding the poor should not be the role of charities, but of a functioning welfare state safety net, so that voluntary organisations can fix their sights on higher goals than ensuring people have something to eat.

But also at the same time it remains important that the system holds people to their responsibility to work if they can, as a matter of principle and as a precondition of the system’s legitimacy and affordability.

## ECONOMICS

Another essential issue of today that we can see precedents for a century ago is the interrelationship between the social security system and the labour market.

As we see today, the reliance of many people on benefits is the result of the failure of the economy to provide secure and steady work that pays enough wages to cover the cost of living.

It is because unemployment and underemployment are still stubbornly high, and the number of people stuck on low pay, or part time and zero hours contracts, is rising, that the benefits bill is set to grow in real terms over the years ahead.

OECD figures analysed by Professor Wendy Carlin of University College London show that the UK has to spend more on “redistribution” of income to achieve the same levels of equality as other countries because it has a more unequal “predistribution” of market outcomes.

Of twenty-one countries, despite ranking tenth in the amount of redistribution we undertake through tax and spend, the UK has the seventeenth highest Gini coefficient for disposable income because our economy generates such an unequal pre-tax income distribution in the first place.

Attlee’s writings reflect the view of most in the labour movement at that time that welfare provision must be part and parcel of a wider programme of economic reform.

The welfare state is a way of alleviating poverty but it cannot be our only means of creating a fairer economy.

Revisiting this period of Attlee’s life reveals a rich and lively debate about the relationship of welfare and social policy to the labour market and wider questions of political economy, as demands for the right to work and better wages grew up alongside those for public services and social security.

Indeed many in the labour movement were highly suspicious of proposals for social security, arguing that strong trade unions ought to be able to bargain for high enough wages to cover all family costs and provide for all contingencies.

Others argued that this was neither realistic nor desirable - notably those closer to the most exploited workers, and women such as Eleanor Rathbone and the Fabian researcher Maud Pember Reeves.

They called for the state to take a share of responsibility for the conditions in which children were raised – an argument which ultimately led to the creation of Family Allowance and today’s Child Benefit.

But all these campaigners saw far-reaching economic reform, not just better welfare provision, as essential to tackling poverty and advancing social justice.

Indeed, the Minority Report on the Poor Law devoted the second of its two volumes to “The Public Organisation of the Labour Market”, and opened with a stark diagnosis of the social costs of unemployment and exploitation.

It says, and I quote, that the “morass of under-employment and sweating in which the bottom stratum of the population is condemned to live ... is draining away the vitality and seriously impairing the vigour of the community as a whole”.

It goes on to say that it imposes “heavy charges” on the rest of the community in expenditure on poor relief, as well as on hospitals, police and prisons.

The young Attlee is clear on the need to tackle the deeper economic drivers of poverty and need for welfare provision.

“Unemployment”, he writes, “is a disease of an industrial society in our present stage of development, and ... no amount of provision for individual men and women will take the place of the removal as far as possible of its causes”.

Also at Toynbee Hall in this period was a young William Beveridge, later the architect of the welfare state that Attlee oversaw. His early study of unemployment informed the establishment of the first official labour exchanges by the Liberal government.

In 1920 Attlee judged that “our present system of Labour Exchanges is very far from perfect” and recommended a greater role for the voluntary sector, local employers and trade union representatives in developing approaches to improving training and employment opportunities, especially young people.

Attlee was involved in promoting a similar “partnership” approach to the other major problem of the early twentieth century labour market, extreme exploitation and low pay, with two of his other Toynbee Hall contemporaries, J.J. Mallon and R. H. Tawney.

All three were involved in formation of the National Anti -Sweating League, a cross-party and multi-faith coalition whose driving force was the Women’s Trade Union League.

Their highly effective campaign to highlight the shocking working conditions in casualised sectors of the economy led directly to Winston Churchill’s 1909 Act creating Trade Boards to set minimum wages in the most notoriously exploitative industries such as tailoring, paper box-making, lace and chainmaking.

Attlee played a key role in investigating conditions and assembling information about the tailoring industry, then concentrated in Stepney, that fed into the campaign for the Bill.

And he contributed to a study of the initial impact of the legislation on the tailoring industry that Tawney published in 1915.

Tawney’s assessment of the impact of the new regime on the tailoring industry, much of which will have been based on Attlee’s research, was that it has raised wages for significant numbers, especially women, without pushing up prices or adding to unemployment.

This debate repeated itself in the 1990s as it was alleged that a National Minimum Wage would cost jobs and harm businesses.

And it is an argument we face again today as we look for solutions to help the more than five million British workers now paid less than a living wage.

But as we find evidence today that boosting wages for the lowest paid workers can raise productivity and strengthen business models, Tawney found that the impact of the trade boards on tailoring had been to raise the morale and commitment of employees while encouraging innovation and investment on the part of employers.

“The effect of the advance in wages”, he wrote, “has been to increase the efficiency of workers, and to cause employers to introduce improvements in organisation and machinery, which those of them who had been able to obtain cheap labour had hitherto neglected.”

Attlee wrote of his direct involvement with making the system work when he was asked to chair a meeting to nominate workers’ representatives.

Four rival organisations were competing to represent the mostly Jewish workers in the sector. Much of the heated discussion was conducted in Yiddish, which Attlee did not understand.

At one point a man “in a top hat and a long black coat and beard” leapt onto the platform, shouting and waving an umbrella, and Attlee had to forcibly remove him.

But at the end, to his surprise, he found that the meeting had reached a satisfactory conclusion with nominations to the board agreed.

## POLITICS

This image reminds us of the other essential ingredient of Attlee’s career and the origins of the British welfare state: practical politics.

Attlee was critical of an older tradition of charity work that, however well-intentioned, saw symptoms but not causes – or mistook the former for the latter.

Instead Attlee wrote in 1920: “Every social worker is almost certain to be also an agitator.”

Honest confrontation with social conditions was almost bound to drive anyone beyond efforts at amelioration to campaigning and organising for the political change and economic reform needed to tackle the causes of poverty and deprivation.

As a constituency MP I face this every week at my surgeries.

Of course I do all I can to help those who come to my surgeries with the problems they are experiencing – from people facing homelessness or food poverty, benefit delays or unexpected gas or electricity bills.

This means putting them in touch with people and organisations who can help, chasing up bureaucracies that aren’t responding, using what influence and access I can as a Member of Parliament to get their case heard.

But all too often I know that the only way of tackling the fundamental reasons for their distress is through the social and economic reforms we need a majority in parliament to achieve.

A year after Attlee’s own conversion to socialism and his decision to join the Independent Labour Party, he was witness to another conversion of sorts – that of Beatrice Webb to political campaigning.

For the rejection of her Minority Report by the Liberal establishment was pointed to by Attlee decades later as the limit point of the Fabian strategy of permeation, and Webb’s realisation of the need for popular campaigning and engagement with the labour movement.

It is here that Attlee’s distinction and unique contribution to the cause of a just society comes through most clearly.

For one who we are so often told had no talent or evident enthusiasm for public speaking, he certainly did his fair share of it.

As the historian John Saville wrote in an otherwise quite critical assessment of Attlee’s career and character, “of all the Labour prime ministers of the twentieth century Attlee had the most sustained experience of grass-roots politics”.

Attlee spoke every week at street corners, collected money at dock gates during transport workers strikes, led protest marches to across London, and worked hard to build links between the ILP and local trade unions.

At the end of his 1920 book on social work, he quietly subverts his own starting point by arriving at the conclusion that the most effective form of social work was the self-organisation of working people themselves.

The most important “movements of social advance”, he wrote, do not come from above but

“as the expression of the aims of those who feel that their conditions of life need alteration; and without waiting for a lead from those in better circumstances, they endeavour to work out their own salvation, and in doing so produce new forms of social machinery.”

Attlee’s practical involvement with building the Labour Party into a force in the land was then just as important as his intellectual formation by Fabianism.

And his final and critical contribution, was his recognition of the need to carry through the political struggle that was necessary to make social progress.

It couldn’t be achieved by academic experts and detached bureaucrats.

It took long years of grassroots campaigning, local organising, and slogging through the ups and downs of electoral and parliamentary politics.

And by playing his part in the growth of the Labour Party through the 1920s,

helping to hold it together in the wake of the crisis of 1931,

orchestrating its contribution to the war effort,

and uniting the country around Labour’s vision for peacetime reconstruction,

it was Clement Attlee who turned the ideas and ideals of Edwardian reformers and campaigners

into the basis for a new progressive consensus in this country that remains the starting point for the debates about the welfare state today.

## 1945 AND AFTER

The lessons of these early years in East London seem to me to have been indispensable to the achievements and legacy of the 1945-51 government.

Attlee’s respect for the dignity, capabilities, and fundamental equality of all working people - as well as his success in chairing meetings and handling egos, of which there were many in his cabinet – shines through in his leadership style, and is reflected by his success in uniting the nation in the aftermath of the war.

His government combined the introduction of new rights to social security with policies to secure full employment and stamp out exploitation that marked a huge leap forward for the living standards and life chances of working people in Britain.

And the Labour Party that Clement Attlee led from near permanent marginalisation in the 1930s to its first majority government in 1945, remains today I believe the most powerful force in the country for economic justice, democratic politics, and the empowerment of working men and women.

For me today a particularly important lesson is the need for welfare reform and economic reform to go hand in hand.

The successful launch of the Beveridge plan depended on economic expansion, job creation, and industrial investment.

Indeed, as Jim Tomlinson points out in a recent article in *Renewal*, buoyant demand for labour in this period was a key reason why expenditure on social security rose much more slowly than had been budgeted for even as new entitlements were created.

The Trade Boards Attlee had helped to campaign for before the First World War were modernised and expanded as Wages Councils as the Second World War drew to a close, at their peak protecting and improving the wages and conditions of 3.5 million workers

– even if, as Frances O’Grady argued in her Attlee lecture last year, the labour movement missed an opportunity to embed partnership working more widely across the economy.

Introducing the legislation to Parliament, Ernest Bevin made a virtue of the fact that they combined autonomous negotiation between employer and employee representatives with state backing and enforcement.

Wages councils did not survive the Thatcher and Major governments – apart from the Agricultural Wages Board abolished in 2013.

But the partnership-based approach to wages pioneered in the tailoring industry before the First World War underpinned the success of the Low Pay Commission created in 1998 and will remain at the heart of Labour’s approach to strengthening the National Minimum Wage in the period ahead.

The General Election next year will mark 70 years since Clement Attlee became Prime Minister.

The policies and methods of 1945 are not the right ones for today.

But the underlying principles, and some of the challenges, endure:

- the need to ensure our social security system works with the grain of the values and ethos of British people
- their belief in fairness, solidarity and the dignity of work.
- the importance of government working together with employers, employees and communities to conquer unemployment and tackle low pay, so that spending on benefits does not become a substitute for good jobs paying decent wages.
- the lesson that the rules and institutions of a fair society cannot be imposed from the top down by experts, professionals and administrators, but must be built and continually renewed from the bottom up, involving the citizens who use them and pay for them.
- the indispensable role of the Labour Party, organising in local communities and opening up our politics to ordinary men and women, to building a better Britain in which everyone has a stake and prosperity is fairly shared.

It is when these insights have been forgotten or neglected, by governments of whatever colour, that the welfare state has run into difficulties, financially and politically.

It is these insights that I hope to be able to put at the heart of the reform and renewal of the social security system if a Labour government is elected next year.