



PROJECT ROME

NORTHERN AGENDA

APRIL 2017 EDITION



Editorial

Donald Trump has probably never heard of Doncaster but his successful Presidential election campaign slogan has certainly made an impact amongst the town's burghers. Labour Mayor, Ros Jones, is running for re-election under the mantra 'Putting Doncaster First'. None of her opponents have yet countered with 'Making Doncaster Great again' or Brexit style 'Taking Back control of Doncaster' but there is still plenty of time between now and polling day on May 4th. Whether she gets re-elected in a town which has twice voted for an independent mayor could make a big difference as to whether and how the Yorkshire devolution proceeds.



Ros Jones

Labour is very nervous about these local elections which of course also involve Mayoral fights in Tees Valley, Manchester and Liverpool as well as contests for all seats in the rural counties.

Manchester candidate Andy Burnham's face was a picture as he listened to a Castro style address on socialist history from Leader Jeremy Corbyn at a sparsely attended fundraiser at the People's History Museum in Manchester. An insider at the Greater Manchester Combined Authority said they were preparing to welcome the new Mayor but predicted a power struggle from Day one between the successful candidate and the leaders of the council who will make up his cabinet. He commented 'If Andy wins he will have to deal with the fact that his defeated

First up is Manchester Gorton on May 4th which is the late Gerald Kaufman's seat. This is going to be a real political circus with George Galloway putting himself forward and Labour choosing a British Asian candidate in a seat which has an electorate which is nearly one third from the BME community. If Andy Burnham and Steve Rotherham win in Manchester and Liverpool, respectively difficult by-elections will then follow later in the Spring in their old parliamentary seats of Leigh and Liverpool Walton.



Andy Burnham MP



Steve Rotherham MP

Conservative opponent, as Leader of Stockport Council, will be sitting opposite him in his Cabinet. I am not sure he realises yet that the Mayor can only make 3 appointments a personal assistant, a political adviser and a deputy police commissioner.

To get things done bluster will not be enough, he will need real skills of diplomacy.

A prominent Northern Corbynista told Northern Agenda that if the Party could win the four Mayoral contests in the region, that will be enough of a victory for socialism for Jezza to limp on to the Party Conference. 'What we most fear though' he confessed 'is the three parliamentary by-elections coming up in the North West'.

Meanwhile in the White Rose County, March has seen a lot of news about Buses and Trains. The Yorkshire Post is the county's paper of record sold mainly in market towns, villages and suburbs across the broad acres. The Yorkshire Evening Post has a much smaller target area and is given away free to commuters heading home from work in Leeds and sold at newsagents mainly within the city boundaries. Both papers now have a common Editor in Chief and share stories and even features to cut costs but such are the different readerships that very rarely does a bus story make it into both titles.



Interesting too is the difference in style that local politicians are currently adopting on either side of the Pennines to deal with the bus issue. Under the pressure of Mayoral elections in the North West the default position is to bash the bus companies. In West Yorkshire, the approach tends to be to illustrate how working in partnership with the bus companies will lead to a better future. In this regard, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority has promised to publish a strategy later in the year which ambitiously aims to give the area the best buses in Europe by 2036 (probably just in time to see Leeds United get promoted to the Premier League according to one contributor to the Letter's page!) In the meantime, there will be a series of quick wins possibly including phone based ticketless travel.

Leader of Leeds City Council Judith Blake unveiled a far-reaching vision for the redevelopment of Leeds station to put it on a par with London St Pancras. She also defended the plan for a Parkway station near Leeds Bradford Airport acknowledging that it would be predominately used by commuters not air passengers but ruling out other alternatives on grounds of cost and likely time delays.

Business and political leaders across the North were disappointed by the relatively paltry additional £90 million promised in the Budget for transport schemes to be allocated



on the basis of a competition controlled by Whitehall officials rather than by the devolved bodies. Much faith is being put in Transport North's strategic plan due in the Autumn after the evidence base is published in the Spring.

A consultation will follow in the coming winter with a final plan expected to be adopted early in 2018.

One sage observer commented ' The publication of the plan is the big test for Transport North. Can they devise a strategy which keeps everybody on board? The prize if they can do so is that within 12 months the North could have a transport plan vying for funding with Crossrail 2''

Transport North is fully aware of what is at stake and is making a series of high paid communications and stakeholder relations appointments as well as identifying potential cheerleaders for its cause.

No word yet about what they think of the surprise initiative unveiled this month by London based Direct city networks to build a Shanghai-style "magnetic levitation" railway that could connect Hull and Liverpool in less than half an hour. ' That sounds like a bridge too far to me' said one Yorkshire Councillor only to berated by his colleague that ' What's good enough for Shanghai is good enough for God's Own County!'

