



PROJECT ROME

# NORTHERN AGENDA

DECEMBER 2016 EDITION



## Editorial

---

Let's start this month to the west of the Pennines in the land of the red rose. Christmas ghosts of past, present and future haunt Andy Burnham as he prepares for the contest to be Mayor of Manchester which begins in earnest in January. Last Yuletide he was still licking his political wounds after being soundly beaten by Jeremy Corbyn in the Labour leadership contest. By Christmas 2017 will he be safely elected as the first elected Mayor of Greater Manchester joining Sadiq Khan in London and almost certainly Steve Rotherham in Liverpool as one of a new wave of Labour municipal titans?

According to the bookies he can enjoy his Turkey dinner this December 25th without much worry as they make him the clear odds on favourite to win in May. However, local Tories promise him a run for his money despite the fact that they currently hold only five of the twenty-seven parliamentary

constituencies contained within Greater Manchester. They argue they have several factors in their favour. In their candidate, Sean Anstee, they have a rising star. Still not yet 30, he was the youngest council Leader in the country when he took over the helm at Trafford Council at 26.

Whilst Andy Burnham was born within sight of the Grand National course at Aintree and is a graduate of Cambridge University Anstee grew up on a council estate in Trafford in a single parent family and left school at 16 to start an apprenticeship. As one Manchester Tory MP put it starkly 'Will Mancunians want an Everton fan like Burnham as their Mayor?'

'Moreover, the blue corner in politics in what is in effect England's second city, have high hopes that potential big differential turnouts in the more affluent suburbs compared with the inner city wards will aid their cause. Ultimately



**Andy Burnham prepares to compete for Mayor of Greater Manchester election**

they will be trying to link Andy Burnham firmly with Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. Unlike Sadiq Khan, in London, he has made little serious attempt to distance himself from the Corbynistas since they trounced him in his leadership bid.

Private polls of both parties in the North confirm that the Prime Minister is still riding high in the region, whereas the Leader of the Opposition has very little cut through. At 16/1 Sean Anstee is very definitely the outsider but has to be the only current value bet in the Manchester mayoral race. Sadiq Khan was of course the first Muslim to be elected mayor of a major European city but if Anstee wins his home city, by electing an openly gay Mayor Manchester will be following the example of Paris and Berlin. In a contest where after transfers, ultimately the winner has to achieve 50% of the votes cast, the intervention of a strong independent candidate could yet complicate matters further.

Three further topics for festive political conversation, over the mince pies amongst the Manchester comrades have also been

prompted by Mr Burnham. Firstly he recently mused to the IPPR North Conference that for the North of England a hard Brexit would not necessarily be a bad thing (one regional political correspondent was so startled that he was not sure if in the absence of any notes

**“ A hard Brexit would hit the poorest hardest and deepen division.**

**- Andy Burnham**

the Labour candidate had meant to set this particular hare running). The logic was that this would free both the local and national state from the constraints of state aid rules which would allow for more direct support particularly of manufacturing industry. It would also make it easier for Labour run councils and mayors in the North to insist on local suppliers for contracts. Interestingly as recently as October Burnham had been arguing that a 'hard Brexit' as advanced by some Conservatives would 'hit the poorest hardest and deepen division'.

Rumours abound that the Labour leadership nationally will adopt a similar Brexit stance to Burnham's IPPR speech in the New Year. They will attempt to give Corbyn a more cutting populist edge in the North even possibly implying that a Hard Brexit would also allow the £350 million promised for the NHS by the Brexiters to be delivered. Expect massive divisions in the Labour ranks if this strategy is pursued. The trade unions in the North for one are unlikely to be happy about the jobs implications of leaving the single market, regardless of promises over state aid, which they realise are unlikely to be realised any time soon.

“

**Dual powered trains are the best thing that has happened to Hull since they got the capital of culture and got promoted to the Premier League and the benefits are likely to last a lot longer.**

**- Yorkshire Tory MP**

Secondly at the recent consultation regarding Mr Burnham's transport policy the most memorable remarks came from Labour's Councillor Andrew Fender who currently chairs the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee, made up of 33 councillors from the constituent councils of the combined authority. He was quick to remind the Mayoral candidate that there already was a transport plan in place and by implication there was no need for another one. In truth Labour's establishment

in the city have not forgiven Mr Burnham for beating one of their own Tony Lloyd for the Labour nomination.

If he is successfully elected he will need to keep on side at least some of the leaders of each council, who by law will make up his cabinet. In that regard he will have much less of a free hand in appointments than the Mayor of London does. Still he will have pretty well complete control of the transport budget and of the decision as to whether to go for bus franchising so long as he avoids the two thirds blocking majority in his cabinet which is defined in statute.

Finally, speculation mounts as to whether Mr Burnham will resign his Parliamentary seat of Leigh in the run up to the Mayoral election, as Sir Peter Soulsby did in similar circumstances some years ago in Leicester. This would allow the byelection to be held on the same day as the Mayoral contest on May 4th. The general view is that this would reduce the chances of new Ukip leader Paul Nuttall taking the seat but if things went horribly wrong with the Mayoral contest it could leave Mr Burnham without a political roof over his head next Christmas.

Meanwhile, across to the east of the Pennines where the White Rose rules both the Government and Leeds Council have been feeling political heat over recent big ticket transport decisions. The former has come under fire for dropping Selby to Hull electrification whilst the flagship Labour authority of Leeds is being criticised for its transport strategy which puts light rail on the back burner.

The general consensus amongst Yorkshire transport pundits is that Rail Minister Paul Maynard has made a good fist of defending his corner calmly setting out his case for dual use trains from London to Hull capable of being powered by both electricity and diesel. Why disrupt the track and journeys for months in pursuit of electrification he asked? One rural Yorkshire Tory commented 'Once regular passengers think about it for a minute or two it becomes a no brainer. I get badly delayed three or four times a year on journeys to the capital when the electric lines come down. Dual powered trains are the best thing that has happened to Hull since they got the capital of culture and got promoted to the Premier League and the benefits are likely to last a lot longer'.

In Leeds media attention has not really focused on the radical plans for improvements in bus services. Rather as well as the absence of light

rail plans critics have focuses on the proposed sighting of a new Leeds Bradford railway station a mile or so away from the airport itself on the existing line to Harrogate. One local Councillor pointed out that Teeside Airport Station was opened in the 1970's about the same distance away from its airport and is now one of the least used stations in the kingdom.

The new Park and Ride planned for the new station should help Leeds/Bradford avoid that fate but for air passengers and staff it is hard to see any real improvement on the existing bus services. Regarding light rail the Council has been stung by repeated attacks from Leeds Liberal Democrat Greg Mulholland and Leeds Tory Stuart Andrew. They have yet to fully get across their basic argument that having been forced back to the drawing board this will by necessity now be very much a long term

ambition. Expect a Light Rail Summit in the New Year as the Council tries to galvanise business support around its plans.

2017 will also bring a renewed focus on the case for an All Yorkshire Devolution Settlement with an elected Mayor in the New Year. The Yorkshire Post plan a fresh campaign on the issue and under the auspices of the Yorkshire and Regional TUC Labour General Election supremo Jon Trickett will be discussing the issue with Labour council leaders. Cockney author, Hull MP and adopted Yorkshireman Alan Johnson MP has let it be known he would be interested in running for any vacancy which at some stage may occur.



Mary Creagh meeting, Leeds 27 October 2014. Pictured (L-R): Cllr Andrew Fender (Greater Manchester); Mary Creagh MP; Cllr Frank Lott (North East Combined Authority); Cllr James Lewis (West Yorkshire); Cllr Bill Mordue (South Yorkshire); Cllr Liam Robinson (Merseyside).