



PROJECT ROME

NORTHERN AGENDA

JUNE 2017 EDITION



Editorial

Manchester is at the centre of the world's attention this week in the wake of the worst terrorist atrocity to occur in the North of England. As part of the response it somehow felt right that Manchester had an elected mayor in office and Andy Burnham was able to put into words the humanity and resilience of the people of England's second city.

As the General Election Campaign resumes of the 50 most marginal Labour held seats under threat from the Tories six are in the North West, four in Yorkshire and the Humber and four in the North East. It is assumed by organisers on both sides that anything

with less than a majority of 1500 has all but changed hands already. On that basis it will almost certainly be goodbye to the following standard bearers of the red team; Chris Matheson in Chester, Margaret Greenwood in Wirral West, Holly Lynch in Halifax, John Woodcock in Barrow in Furness, Cat Smith in Lancaster and Paula Sherriff in Dewsbury.

Indeed if any of these survive, a Tory landslide would be most unlikely. Theresa May would still be in Downing Street but Jeremy Corbyn's advisers, eager to prolong their own employment prospects, would be making the case that their man has not done too badly and should stay on. A prominent Corbynista like Shadow Secretary for Justice Richard Burgon in Leeds East would no doubt be expressing sentiments similar to those



advanced by the late Tony Benn following Michael Foot's defeat by Margaret Thatcher in 1983.

'The general election of 1983 has produced one important result that has passed virtually without comment in the media. It is that, for the first time since 1945, a political party with an openly socialist policy has received the support of over eight and a half million people. This is a remarkable development by any standards and it deserves some analysis...'

If the swing to the Conservatives is more substantial then, in order of vulnerability, the following former northern Labour MP's could soon be writing their CV's and receiving their P45's; Gordon Marsden in Blackpool South, Mary Creagh in Wakefield, Julie Cooper in Burnley, Helen Goodman in Bishop Auckland, Nick Dakin in Scunthorpe and Jenny Chapman in Darlington...

...In addition two former northern Labour MP's with a place in the most vulnerable 50 seats list, namely Tom Blenkinsop in Middlesbrough South and Iain Wright in Hartlepool, have already given up the ghost and stood down. If any former Labour MP not so far mentioned loses their seat, perhaps Judith Cummins in Bradford South, then the country will have given the Prime Minister a landslide victory with a majority of over a hundred in Parliament.

It is perhaps worthy of note that so far few of these Northern Labour MP's under threat have welcomed their Leader to their

Constituency on a campaigning visit. The earliest declared result from all these seats on the night is likely to be Darlington at about 1.30pm.

The Conservative manifesto made little mention of the Northern Powerhouse and there are rumours that before polling day Labour will issue a Northern manifesto to try and take advantage. It is significant that both main parties recommitted themselves to HS2 and both spoke warmly of the need for high speed rail across the Pennines although local business and local authority leaders complained about the absence of dates relating to the latter.





Meanwhile, the new Mayors across the North have been settling in and announcing details of their teams. Andy Burnham's appointment of Manchester Council Leader Richard Leese to oversee the business and economy portfolio is widely seen as a shrewd move to bring Greater Manchester's Labour municipal establishment very firmly in his tent. In regards to transport policy, it was noticeable that as the campaign developed across all the Mayoral contests in the North, the issue of air quality was linked explicitly with the public transport debate. Most noticeably Andy Burnham told The Mancunian:

"Oxford Road, nose to tail, buses of varying standards, throwing out all kinds of pollution at times. The Vice-Chancellor told me recently that the record that had been spotted, I think, was about 34 buses continuously on Oxford Road."

"It's like a free-for-all isn't it? And you know, it's the bus companies putting their own interests above of everybody else, and it's going to come to an end."

Up on Teeside local politicians are still coming to terms with the political earthquake which

resulted in 30 year old Tory Ben Houchen (and in FA Cup Final week it is worth remembering that his Uncle Keith scored the winner for Coventry City in the 1987 final) being elected to the Mayoralty. His signature policy slightly counterfactually is to take back Teeside Airport into public ownership in order to halt its long term decline. Politicians of all parties across the region will be scrutinising the opinion polls very closely in the coming days trying to work out where the big shocks on General Election night are likely to be.

