



PROJECT ROME

NORTHERN AGENDA

MAY 2017 EDITION



Editorial

Although last month's Northern Agenda failed to predict the General Election announcement the emerging trend amongst Labour candidates, in borrowing President Trump's campaign slogans, was clearly identified. Melanie Onn in Grimsby is one of the many Northern Labour MP's who will be fighting for their political lives in the coming weeks and she will do so under the ambitious aspiration of 'Making Grimsby Great Again'. Her fate, like many of her colleagues in the region, is unlikely to depend solely on the number of Labour voters that transfer their allegiance to the Tories but rather whether large numbers of pro Brexit UKIP voters decide to support the Prime Minister. One Labour insider likely to be selected as the candidate in a key Tory/Labour marginal relates that party officials have told her that there will be no



Melanie Onn MP

party staff or union funding coming into her Constituency. All such resources are being directed to seats which Labour narrowly holds already such as Dewsbury, Halifax, Blackpool South, Wakefield and Darlington.

“ Last time around I thought I was preparing for ministerial red boxes and cars. This time I have a feeling that I am preparing for the Guardian jobs page.

- Labour MP

One of the recipients of such largesse, a Labour MP of many years standing, simply commented ‘Last time around I thought I was preparing for ministerial red boxes and cars. This time I have a feeling that I am preparing for the Guardian jobs page’.

Both major parties are scrambling to get candidates in place. In Labour’s case, under the people’s champion Jeremy Corbyn a sub committee of the Party’s National Executive advised by regional officials will make all the decisions. The Conservative local associations are made of slightly sterner stuff and will in the case of the target seats choose from nationally determined shortlists of three.

Eight and a half Northern MP’s have declared that they will be not be attempting to get re elected on to the green benches. Labour’s lost Leader Alan Johnson will be leaving Hull West and Hessle with a burgeoning TV and writing career to look forward to. The widely regarded Chair of the Business, Innovation and Skills Select Committee Iain Wright will not fight the marginal seat of Hartlepool but should not be short of job offers. Other Labour MP’s picking up their P45’s will be Michael Dugher in Barnsley East, Pat Glass in North West Durham and Tom Blenkinsop in Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. Meanwhile the two Labour mayoral candidates have adopted rather different approaches. Andy Burnham showing growing confidence in his likely victory in the race for the Manchester mayoralty has announced

his intention to stand down from his parliamentary seat in Leigh. Steve Rotherham has caused a certain amount of confusion by saying it is his current intention to restand in Liverpool Walton although he will rethink this if he is declared to be Liverpool’s first Metro Mayor sometime on Friday May 5th just six days before the close of nominations for the General Election.

Only one Conservative MP in the North of England former Chancellor George Osborne will be retiring in Tatton . He is still going to be straddling the North South divide combining editing the Evening Standard with his continued patronage of the Northern Powerhouse Think Tank. The future of the latter was confirmed this week with the appointment of various staff including Yorkshire Building Society’s public affairs chief and former Labour councillor Henri Murison . The final retiree from Westminster from the North is Liberal Democrat John Pugh in Southport who as a keen remainder



and Liverpool supporter will be hoping at least to see the Reds, if not the United Kingdom, re enter Europe with Champions or Europa League football.

As mentioned one Labour Politician who is actually preparing for power is Andy Burnham in Manchester. Officials are preparing first day briefs for the area’s new first citizen. Basically he will have three sets of powers. In a number of areas he will have



the right to call the shots on issues such as bus regulation (the Bus Services Bill cleared all its remaining stages in the Lords and received Royal Assent before Parliament was prorogued) although the existence of current contracts means that any change is likely to be a couple of years away.

These formal powers will be reinforced by effective control over some budgets including transport capital spending. In addition the Mayor will in certain areas have the power to initiate policies subject to support in his cabinet made up of 10 local authority leaders. In the case of the annual budget of the Manchester Combined Authority a two thirds majority of the cabinet will be needed whereas unanimity will be required for the spatial plan.

One shrewd official close to the centre of power in what all outside Birmingham recognise is England's second city observes; 'In reality whatever the legal framework an effective Mayor can make the political weather. The greatest power may well be the power to convene. Nobody is going to say no to an invitation from the Mayor'.



Lisa Nandy MP

In Leeds there is a great deal of relief that before they headed for the hustings Ministers signed off the City's £173 million transport plan.

The package of improvements will eventually include a rail-bus link to Leeds-Bradford Airport, new park and ride schemes and investment in bus services.

Business and political leaders in the White Rose County have noticed that nobody has been talking about bringing the Commonwealth Games or Channel 4 to

Yorkshire in recent weeks whereas Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham have featured heavily in such discussions. The reality of devolution in the West Midlands and the North West and the lack of it in Yorkshire is beginning to strike home.

All eyes will be on the publication of the party manifestos expected in the week beginning May 8th regarding the future of the Northern Powerhouse, Devolution and much else besides.





Powers of the Manchester Mayor

The Mayoral Election for Manchester will take place on 4th May 2017. This paper outlines the powers (official and un-official) the successful candidate may wield.

Direct powers

Budgets - The headline budget figure under the “control” of the Mayor of Manchester is a round £1bn per year. The Direct Powers are continuing to grow even as the financial envelope to support them is not. The list is (currently) as follows:

- a new housing investment fund of up to £300m, with the aim of building up to 15,000 more homes over 10 years
- welfare-to-work programmes, with a budget

of £100m, to help up to 50,000 people back into work

- responsibility for local transport, including power to run franchised bus services and provide Oyster-style integrated tickets

- control of existing health and social care budgets, which have been pooled by local authorities across Greater Manchester (a power not granted to any other part of England including London).

- The new mayor will become the head of policing as well as taking on ultimate responsibility for the fire and rescue service.

- greater responsibility for business support and further education

- up to £30m a year for the growth generated by its economy

- The budget of the Mayor (annual budget of the combined authority) will need a 2/3 approval from the cabinet.

Indirect power

- The Mayor will have “effective control” over some budgets such as Transport Capital Spending where it will be the office of the Mayor will be *Primus inter pares* and difficult to “organize” against.

- The Mayor can initiate policy with the support of his cabinet.

- The Mayor will be “high-profile” and most probably the single most identifiable politician in the city this in itself will give him/her power beyond their remit.

Perhaps a more powerful weapon is the ability call the shots. The new mayor will have overall responsibility for Planning for example, but this convening power is not

matched by legal force - On the spatial plan for the city for there will need to be 100% support of the cabinet before any change can be made (so are saying this is impossible to achieve).

Politics

There are some very vocal local figures in Manchester’s councils and in Parliament. There are 2.7 million votes up for grabs across Greater Manchester, but the expectations are that less than a third of the electorate will bother to vote in the election on 4 May. If that figure is low (less than 500K) then legitimacy becomes an issue.

Some MPs worry that outside of the shiny city centre, devolution could suck the strength from the “satellite boroughs” into “King” Manchester. MPs who have worked alongside Burham (the favourite) have a very similar tone about his new power summed up by Lisa Nandy (Labour, Wigan) “What happens if we replace one set of men sat in a room making decisions in Whitehall, for another set in Manchester Town Hall?”

In reality whatever the legal framework an effective mayor can make the political weather. The greatest power may well be the power to convene. Nobody is going to say no to an invitation from the Mayor.

