

# THE NEW FRONTIER

**WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF  
PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN WALES?**

**Kevin Morgan and Gus Williams**

**Compass**

## About the Authors

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## About Compass

Compass is the pressure group for a Good Society, a world that is much more equal, sustainable and democratic. We mobilise the progressive majority of ideas, parties and movements to help make systemic change happen. Our strategic focus is to understand, build, support, and accelerate new forms of democratic practice and collaborative action that are taking place in civil society and the economy, and to link those with state reforms and policy. The meeting point of emerging horizontal participation and vertical resource and policy we call 45 Degree Change.

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# Introduction

**Lena Swedlow, Deputy Director**

Gramsci's 'the old world is dying and the new world struggles to be born' is an overused quote in political circles, but as we count down the days to the 2026 Senedd Election it strikes an alarmingly poignant tone. Now could be the time of monsters, as Gramsci follows on with, should it be allowed to happen. This is where we felt we could intervene.

There is a proud history of progressivism in Wales. This has often been conflated with the hegemony of the Labour Party. Welsh Labour is one of the most electorally successful political parties of the last century. Even in the more recent dominations by the Right - Thatcher's landslide in 1983 and Boris Johnson's re-election of 2019 - Labour still won a majority of Wales' Westminster seats, and there has been an overwhelming majority of votes and seats for centre- and left parties in every Senedd election since its inception in 1999.

But things have changed.

The history of Labour's staunch, dependable hold in Wales looks to be over. Insurgent, populist and nationalist forces on the right and left are gaining popularity and legitimacy, with voters in Wales moving to Reform, Plaid Cymru, and the Greens. The most recent YouGov polling, at time of writing, has Plaid ahead on 33% to Reform's 27%, and a combined Labour-Green-Lib Dem vote of 30%. Welsh voters are not endorsing Reform's divisive rhetoric in their majority and the progressive majority in the voters remains.

But that majority no longer supports Labour. In truth, that loyalty to Labour has always been overegged by English commentators. Though there has always been a Labour First Minister, as Kevin Morgan points out, there never was a majority government in 27 years of devolution. But our voting system papered over the complexities of Welsh voting patterns, and delivered Labour a permanent place in the Welsh Government.

So the change coming to the Senedd is, in our opinion, not one about Reform's rise, but a multi-party, complicated view on the Left. The new world struggling to be born at polling stations across Wales on May 7th is the rejection of the idea that 'Labour has had a few bad years but can recover'. Instead, it's that politics has changed. The two 'main' parties are potentially absent from the next Welsh Government, and new political movements and demands are taking their place.

Despite the scale of the potential Labour loss, this is a seismic opportunity for progressive politics. Wales is the frontier of the new politics that we want to and need to build. Plaid's [First 100 Days](#) plan is rife with bold-but-pragmatic ideas to sculpt a new settlement in Wales. With social liberals such as Jane Dodds in the Senedd and the likes of Anthony Slaughter as leader of the Greens in Wales (who is also likely to win a seat) there is a basis for a very progressive alliance in government. But it will take leadership, imagination and generosity on

all sides to make it happen.

A new proportional representation system will be in use for the first time and it is our duty as progressives to show that deeper democracy is not a detriment to governing effectively. This will take compromise, curiosity, professionalism and, above all, humility.

We care about this for its own sake. For the sake of delivering change, as Gus Williams outlines, to the economic settlement that has left too many Welsh people and places behind.

But these next four years in Wales precipitate the next decade in Britain at-large. England now exists in a five-party system, and Wales (and Scotland) in a six-party one. Fragmentation will stop being a novelty and become a very difficult reality by the next General Election; we have to be prepared for that.

Be it through a formal coalition, a confidence-and-supply agreement or a minority government seeking mutual consent, this next period has to be the story of the governing for the progressive majority by the progressive majority. Wales already has set the precedent for new, innovative and collaborative ways of governing, through the Co-operation Agreement and the Co-operation Agreement Unit.

But as the authors of this paper point out, the Welsh Government has been an expert in commissioning as opposed to doing. And whether it be economic prosperity, transport efficiency, the affordability crisis or social outcomes, there are things that the progressive majority in the country wants that only a progressive majority in government can do. It is the challenge of the next Senedd to negotiate their future, and deliver it **together**.

This is the primary reason why Compass convened the discussion that brought about the creation of this paper. With attendees like Mark Drakeford, Jane Dodds, Professor Rick Delbridge, Professor Richard Wyn Jones, and Steffan Evans there was a wealth of knowledge in the room and an admittance that not only does the policy platform for a Good Wales need to be built but so does the political infrastructure - mechanisms of cooperation, new institutions to ensure the flow of good government, and structures to enable the reporting back of this work to the people who put you there.

This isn't a paper just for 2026. It addresses the political frontier this country is on across all four nations. It is through working together, not at odds or at arms' length, that we know that we can avoid the time of monsters.

# **After the Quake: The Future of Progressive Politics in Wales**

**Kevin Morgan**

**@mpass**

## The New Political Era

If the opinion polls are correct, one of the biggest political earthquakes in British electoral history will be recorded in Wales on 7 May 2026, when Labour Party dominance finally comes to an end. Commentators are wont to say that Labour has dominated Welsh politics for 27 years, ever since the creation of the Senedd. But this doesn't begin to do justice to such a momentous occasion.

The truth of the matter is that Labour has dominated Welsh electoral politics for more than a century, ever since it displaced the Liberals at the 1922 General Election. Richard Wyn Jones, the director of the Wales Governance Centre, captured the real historical significance of the occasion when he said Welsh Labour "is by some distance the democratic world's most successful election-winning machine"<sup>1</sup>.

But in a recent poll, conducted by More in Common between 15 February-3 March, Plaid Cymru and Reform were tied with 28 seats each, followed by Welsh Labour (26), Welsh Conservatives (7), Greens (5) and Liberal-Democrats (2)<sup>2</sup>. The performance of Plaid and Reform are the most striking features of this poll, confirming the underlying trend of recent polls.

According to More in Common, a combination of defections from Labour and a widespread desire for change, suggests that Plaid Cymru looks likely to lead the next government of Wales. The party's support base has changed significantly because 'disillusioned Welsh Labour voters are switching to Plaid Cymru, meaning progressives now make up more than half of its supporters, while many of its former right-leaning populist voters have moved to Reform UK'<sup>3</sup>.

The Plaid Cymru leader, Rhun ap Iorwerth, says he would prefer to run a minority government than enter a formal coalition after the Senedd election. 'We'll look at who we can work with, issue by issue, policy by

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1 Davies, Daniel, *Welsh Labour has longest winning streak of any party in the world*, BBC Wales News, 15 November 2022 (Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-63636856>).

2 Jones, Ciaran. *Reform and Plaid neck-and-neck in Senedd race while Greens double support in new poll*. *Wales Online*. 6 March 2026 (Available from: <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/reform-plaid-neck-neck-senedd-33544482>)

3 More in Common, *Is Welsh politics at a turning point?: More in Common research for the Plaid Cymru Spring Conference* (Available from: <https://www.moreincommon.org.uk/media/ri2bokox/more-in-common-plaid-cymru-briefing-2.pdf#:~:text=As%20the%20party's%20support%20has,switching%20to%20Plaid%20Cymru%2C%20meaning>).

policy, budget by budget and so on', he added<sup>4</sup>.

This sounds all well and good in principle, but in practice it can sap a party's energy and stymie its ambitions because it is such a time-consuming endeavour, where a longer-term perspective can easily fall prey to precarious day-to-day bargaining.

As for Reform, the easiest (and perhaps laziest) explanation for its recent polling success in Wales, especially in the South Wales Valleys where voting Labour was second nature for generations of families, is that it is simply a protest vote. It's also true that many of Reform's most recent councillors and supporters in the UK are defections from the Conservative Party, making it harder for Nigel Farage to claim that they are a totally fresh force in British politics, unencumbered by the failures of the mainstream parties.

But progressives in Wales would be fooling themselves if they assumed that Reform supporters were simply Tory defectors. Speaking with family and friends in the Cynon Valley for example, I can say with confidence that some lifelong Labour supporters are now planning to vote for Reform in May and they are doing so for two basic reasons: (i) because they feel that Labour has done too little to ameliorate the quality of everyday life, particularly with respect to good jobs and public services and (ii) because a vote for Reform is deemed to be the strongest way to signal their disgust with the political establishment, which in Wales means the Labour Party.

## **The Compass Roundtable**

Compass convened a Roundtable discussion in Cardiff, chaired by Neal Lawson, to understand the causes and consequences of this radical change in political attitudes and to frame a progressive response. Many participants concurred with the above analysis. Union members shared their experience of colleagues not only planning to vote for Reform but also offering to campaign for the new party. This raised the spectre of Reform gaining traction in the trade union movement in Wales, which would enable them to consolidate their presence in key institutions.

Other participants made the point that former Labour supporters were really expressing a "rage against the machine" rather than identifying with the Farage policy agenda. In purely materialist terms, the most glaring contradiction in the populist right's policy agenda is between Reform's ideological orientation, which extols low taxes, deregulation and the small state, and the needs of working-class communities like the Valleys, which depend on a fully funded welfare state and a properly regulated economy. This is not the only bizarre

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<sup>4</sup> Davies, Cemlyn, *Plaid Cymru would take minority government over coalition, leader says*, BBC Wales News, 16 January 2026 (Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c4grqnr1qxo>).

aspect of Reform in Wales.

Another bizarre aspect of Reform's Welsh polling success is that it has been achieved by being virtually invisible - without a leader in Wales, without a manifesto and without any candidates. In the absence of the usual party apparatus, Welsh voters only knew two things about the Reform brand - the highly confected Farage persona and its anti-immigration platform.

Even so, the roundtable agreed that progressives should focus less on the personalities of the populist-right and more on what a progressive agenda looks like and how it might be delivered. In other words, it is not simply a matter of progressive parties making common cause on the key policy priorities after the May election because that would do nothing to address the *Policy-Practice Gap*. Several speakers stressed that this was the most important shortcoming of successive Welsh Governments since the founding of devolution in 1999.

## A Progressive Agenda - what it might look like

Compass invited me to suggest what a progressive policy agenda might look like, one that could command cross-party support from progressive parties in the Senedd. While everyone will have their own priorities, I drew on conversations I'd been having in the Valleys, a Labour heartland for generations, where the same things kept cropping up - childcare, free school meals, a reliable bus network, affordable housing and more apprenticeships to retain young people in Wales. I said these conversations reminded me of Zohran Mamdani's mayoral campaign in New York City where he retained a forensic focus on the affordability crisis, stressing his flagship priorities from start to finish: rents, buses, childcare and groceries.

But I was also reminded of something closer to home: the innovative three-year Co-operation Agreement that Welsh Labour and Plaid Cymru signed in 2021, when Mark Drakeford and Adam Price were the party leaders. Although this never received the attention it deserved in the UK media, the experience has important lessons for the future of progressive politics in and beyond Wales. The Co-operation Agreement contained 46 joint policy commitments, some of which were admittedly more arcane than others. But it began with a section called Radical Action in Testing Times and it's worth noting the progressive policies that featured on the very first page:

- Free School Meals
- Childcare
- Future of Social Care
- Second Homes/Unaffordable Housing

These flagship priorities appear in Plaid's election manifesto, [The First Hundred Days](#), which I think all progressives in Wales could support

whatever their party affiliations or voting intentions.

Apart from flagship policy priorities, the Roundtable also discussed two wider themes: public service reform and economic renewal. Some progressives in Wales have been reluctant to criticise Labour's approach to public services because they were relieved that, in contrast to the English NHS with its emphasis on internal competition based on quasi-market relationships, Wales had opted for collaboration and a citizen-centred approach rather than a consumer-driven approach. Whatever the political merits of the Welsh approach, the performance of public services in health and education in Wales continues to lag behind England as a recent IFS survey has found<sup>5</sup>.

Like it or not, Welsh Labour governments have managed these public services since 1999, when devolution began, and voters will rightly feel that the buck stops with Welsh Labour.

On the economic renewal front, it was agreed that we have to confront some home truths because the Welsh economy continues to dwindle at the foot of most economic league tables. One of the effects of poor economic performance is that places like the South Wales Valleys, the former coalfield area that remains one of the most deprived regions in Western Europe, is now facing the anniversary from hell: a century of relative economic decline. Clearly a bolder and more ambitious strategy is required to make a difference, especially in some of the 'left-behind regions' where most of Labour's traditional voters are concentrated.

One of the institutional innovations that Plaid has proposed to inject more urgency and energy into the economic renewal debate is a new National Development Agency, modelled on the Welsh Development Agency that Welsh Labour abolished in 2006. If it remains focused, and if it's empowered to innovate without being encumbered by civil service protocols, such an agency could help to coordinate the patchwork quilt of business support services and help to plug the Policy-Practice Gap. Several speakers stressed that this was the most important shortcoming of successive Welsh Governments since the founding of devolution in 1999: policy aspirations were laudable, but policy delivery was often lamentable because the institutional capacity within government and the wider public sector was either unable or unwilling to translate good intentions into good practice.

A new agenda for the public sector in Wales has been circulating in progressive circles for some time and now is the time to act on it. What might it involve? Let's take three examples.

An obvious target is *public procurement*. The Welsh public sector is the

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5 Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2026, *Public service spending and performance in Wales*, IFS. Available from: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/public-service-spending-and-performance-wales>.

largest user of goods and services from both the private and voluntary sectors in Wales, spending over £10 billion a year. It has enormous potential to deliver social, economic and environmental benefits, but this money needs to be deployed more effectively. With more robust social value clauses, it can be used to upskill the workforce, train young apprentices, ensure fair working conditions, and enhance the environment among other things. Ethical public procurement clauses can ensure that big firms are not allowed to bully their smaller suppliers through late payment, a problem that destroys some 50,000 firms a year in the UK according to the Federation of Small Business. A progressive agenda could demand that the public procurement profession itself needs to be upskilled and given the competence and the confidence to tap the full potential of the power of purchase.

*Co-production* is another area where progressives should be able to cooperate to ensure that good policy intentions become translated into good practice in our communities. But co-production needs to begin with the Welsh Government itself, especially within the Cabinet, because too many ministers have been allowed to do their own thing. With a more cohesive administration, the Welsh Government can become a more effective partner for the range of intermediaries with whom it works in the private, public and civil sectors.

Co-production offers a double dividend: it will produce more effective policy outcomes and it will help Welsh Government cope with its horrendous capacity constraints. But to tap the potential of co-production, the civil service will need to become less self-referential and more porous in working with external partners. Foundational Alliance Wales – which brings together engaged academics, reflexive practitioners in the public sector and civil society bodies like housing associations – has found that the Welsh Government is most effective and consequential when it works in concert with its partners in a network rather than when it works at arm's length in the traditional civil service manner.

A final example can be more challenging for progressives because it involves a more *performance-based* approach to public sector reform. Wales is knee-deep in policies with good intentions, but good practice has been a bad traveller. Too often in the past 27 years Welsh Government has treated leaders and laggards the same, with the result that there are no consequences for poor performance, and this has been very evident in the field of public procurement, health and education for example. A progressive government should have no difficulty in justifying why it discriminates in favour of good practice when it dispenses contracts, grants and loans because this delivers more public value for public money.

Enhancing the capacity of the state in Wales was one of the most interesting proposals at the roundtable and it revolved around the idea of a National School of Government. This would create a new cadre of

civil servants where the ethos would be on policy delivery and not just policy design. Although this is clearly not an issue that crops up on the doorstep during elections, it is nevertheless critically important that progressives address the Policy-Practice Gap in Wales. As it happens, 'Better Government' is the top item on the list of Plaid's priorities for its first 100 days, when it commits itself to a new National School of Government to develop the skill sets for a more impactful public sector.

## A progressive agenda – how to deliver it

While the first half of the roundtable was devoted to the progressive policy agenda (the *what* question) the second half focused on how centre-left parties could cooperate (the *how* question). The options for cooperation range from full coalitions at one end of the spectrum through formal cooperation agreements to tacit agreements at the other end. We were lucky to have Mark Drakeford at the roundtable as he was able to draw on his unrivalled experience over many years, initially as a special adviser and more recently as a First Minister when the Co-operation Agreement with Plaid was negotiated.

Mark introduced the discussion by highlighting two challenges: voting systems and cooperative politics.

*Voting systems:* the Welsh electorate tends to vote in two blocs – roughly two-thirds vote for progressive parties and one-third for parties of the right. While political pundits were focusing on inter-party rivalry, the polling suggested that, while the parties were in different positions, the voting blocs appeared to be the same. The new electoral system, he argued, protects Wales from Reform because, if they get 30% of the vote, they only get 30% of the seats. Looking ahead, one of the first tasks of a progressive government should be to ensure that local government elections are run on a PR basis because this would also prevent Reform from consolidating their position in local councils.

*Cooperative politics:* far more cross-party cooperation occurs in the Senedd than people realise, he said, simply because there has never been a majority government in twenty-seven years of devolution. Drawing on the experience of the 2021-24 Co-operation Agreement – the most significant example of cross-party cooperation in recent years - he said three layers had been involved in the negotiating process: special advisers dealt with 85% of the negotiations; designated politicians dealt with 10% and party leaders dealt with the remaining 5% of the issues that needed to be resolved.

In retrospect, he said, two factors proved to be crucial to the success of the negotiations: personal chemistry and an agreed machinery for monitoring progress. Good personal chemistry between the two designated members – Labour's Jane Hutt and Plaid's Sian Gwenllian – leavened the whole process. Mark said that, in his experience, women were better than men at forging cooperation agreements because they

are more inclined to find common ground. But a written document with agreed machinery for managing the process was also essential because, with the best will in the world, disagreements can emerge about the process unless the monitoring machinery is codified and agreed. To ensure that this happened, a new civil service unit was created, known as the Co-operation Agreement Unit, to keep the process on track. This was led by a senior civil servant whose line management continued to be through the usual civil service channels. However, the Unit was designed to work even-handedly with the two partners to ensure effective delivery of the agreed work programme. Should these mechanisms be needed in the future, it is worth noting that the functions of the Co-operation Agreement Unit covered the following activities:

- Support joint decision-making as described in the Co-operation Agreement.
- Provide logistical and organisational support.
- Support effective delivery of policy commitments under the Co-operation Agreement.
- Provide administrative support.
- Serve as a gateway into the Welsh Government civil service and the provision of advice by officials in relation to the Co-operation Agreement.
- Promote dispute avoidance through effective communication and governance structures, at official and political levels.
- Ensure that agreed processes are respected and followed.
- Oversee communications of joint policy announcements arising out of the Agreement.

Although the Co-operation Agreement was terminated shortly before its three years had expired, both sides believe it was a successful example of cross-party collaboration. It ensured that the Welsh Labour government had the stability it needed to deliver its programme and it marked a moment ‘when Plaid Cymru transformed itself from an opposition party into one that was working at the heart of government to deliver a programme that included much that was in its manifesto. It created a bespoke model of inter-party relationships that stood somewhere on a spectrum between full coalition and one-off budget arrangements. There was no precedent for it in the British Isles’<sup>6</sup>.

### **Shaping the future: the day after the election**

How to cooperate after the election was the main theme of the roundtable discussion after Mark had reflected on the lessons of the Co-operation Agreement. Two key challenges were discussed: (a) how should progressive parties react if Reform emerged as the largest party and (b) when should progressive parties start talking about

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6 Osmond, John, 2024, *The Politics of Co-Opposition: The Inside Story of the 2021-24 Co-operation Agreement Between Plaid Cymru and Welsh Labour*, Welsh Academic Press, p.187.

cross-party cooperation?

If Reform emerged as the largest party on 8 May, and if a majority of voters had voted for progressive parties, some people argued that we should have no qualms about promoting a coalition government or cooperative agreement among the centre-left parties. Others were more sceptical, fearing that this would allow Reform to take the democratic high ground and accuse progressives of forming a 'coalition of the losers.'

The question as to when progressive parties should start talking about cooperation was another fraught issue. While everyone agreed that the answer was 'as soon as possible', they also recognised that parties that did this before the election were laying themselves open to the charge that they had thrown in the towel and didn't expect to win. As a result, serious discussions will probably begin immediately after the election, even though this is the hardest time in some respects because parties have spent months demonising each other to get an edge. But it was widely recognised that needs must and the sooner cross-party talks began in earnest the sooner a progressive alliance could emerge in the Senedd.

## **Time to be Radical: The Raymond Williams Test**

The roundtable discussion may have been focused on the prospects for progressive politics in Wales, but it is equally pertinent to the future of progressive politics in the rest of the UK. The challenge facing centre-left parties in the Senedd after the May election is precisely the same challenge facing progressives more generally – how to forge cross-party cooperation around a reforming agenda for inclusive development, social justice and ecological integrity.

If the polling success of Reform in Wales translates into seats it could jeopardise some of the hard won 'little victories' of the past 27 years of devolution – like the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act, the Senedd's Net Zero goals and Universal Free School Meals, where Wales is the only nation in the UK to have rolled out its UFSM scheme to all state-funded primary schools.

Labour voters who are tempted to use Reform as a protest vote should be wary of the law of unintended consequences if the Farage enterprise succeeds. Voting for Brexit was to some extent a protest vote against austerity in parts of Wales, and it turned out to have incalculable economic costs.

Some progressives in Wales have failed to support electoral reform because it is seen as a nerdy governance issue that diverts attention from the 'bread and butter' issues of everyday life. But what this fails to

appreciate is that governance and liveability issues are two sides of the same coin and there is no better illustration of this fact than the Trump regime in the US.

US Democrats have been ambivalent about how best to attack Trump: should it be on democratic governance grounds or on liveability issues? The truth of the matter is now manifestly clear because democratic backsliding on the part of the White House, and a Congress that is missing in action, have together enabled some of the most egregious acts ever witnessed in domestic American politics. In terms of its effects on human wellbeing, Trump's most harmful acts would include the abolition of USAID, reduced healthcare insurance and the cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, all designed to fund tax cuts for the wealthy. This assault on decency should serve as a sobering reminder that defending democracy and defending welfare are one and the same fight – so-called 'bread and butter' issues and governance issues are not mutually exclusive issues for progressives.

This is why electoral reform in the UK is no longer a nice-to-have issue but an urgent item on the progressive agenda. It is sad to report that the Labour Party leadership has refused to embrace electoral reform when it has such an enormous majority in Parliament. Such a majority should in principle be a cause for celebration, but in practice it is tarnished by the fact that it was won in such an unfair manner – on the basis of a First Past the Post System that resulted in the most disproportional general election result ever in 2024, when Labour won almost two-thirds of seats with just over one-third of the votes. This is manifestly unfair and undemocratic. The UK urgently needs a new proportional voting system and it's shameful that the bill currently working its way through Parliament – the Representation of the People Bill – does not include such a voting system<sup>7</sup>.

If the Labour leadership sets its face against a democratic voting system because it can occasionally win big, perhaps it will become less enamoured of FPTP when it suffers a big defeat. This is precisely what could happen in Wales if current polling holds up on 7 May. With big defeats also predicted in the next General Election, it is surely time that Labour joined other progressive parties to campaign for a democratic voting system to promote a fairer, greener and stronger country for all. Only then will it have passed what we might call the Raymond Williams test: 'To be truly radical is to make hope possible not despair convincing'.

Voters up and down the country are no longer waiting for the Labour leadership to do the right thing and embrace a more democratic voting system. The elections in Caerphilly, and Gorton and Denton

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<sup>7</sup> Simpson, Ian, *Latest UK polling: As voters spread their support, our voting system can't keep up*, Electoral Reform Society, 4 March 2026 (Available from: <https://electoral-reform.org.uk/latest-uk-polling-as-voters-spread-their-support-our-voting-system-cant-keep-up/>).

demonstrated that tribal party loyalties are becoming a thing of the past as progressive voters are engaging in tactical voting to keep Reform out of power. They are, in short, making hope possible for themselves and not waiting for Labour to do it for them.

# **The Future of Progressive Politics in Wales: Principles and Policy**

**Gus Williams**

**Compass**

## The Political Ecosystem

To be successful, progressive politics needs to set out a narrative that motivates the electorate to be engaged, energised, and most importantly vote. That narrative must also deliver positive outcomes.

At the heart of the electoral dominance of the political right in the 21st Century, and the resulting political fragmentation and division, is a failure of progressive politics to define the political narrative in a way that balances electoral appeal and policy outcomes. If this can be achieved in Wales, the positive feedback loop created can enable progressive politics to establish itself as the natural form of Government, reflecting the nation's inherent progressive electoral majority.

### Every Vote Must Count

The growing shift towards proportional representation should be fully embraced by all progressive parties. Political disengagement represents as great a risk to progressive politics as the rise of the populist right. The populist right depends on disillusionment, disenfranchisement and disengagement for electoral success. The populist right can only achieve a majority and succeed electorally if a large proportion of voters stay away from the ballot box and it convinces a significant enough minority to be enraged by the status quo.

First Past the Post (FPTP) elections can be argued to have benefits when there is a broad political consensus and two-party domination around the centre ground, as there was for much of the 20th Century. The benefits being political stability and a system that ensures gradual political evolution rather than electoral revolution.

FPTP served the UK well during most of the 20th Century as the political ground gradually shifted from a system of Government serving a political and economic elite to a Government that was more reflective of the broader population. This came alongside consensus around economic and social liberalisation, human rights and the role of government in providing a welfare safety net. However, the political ground has now shifted beyond this point.

Demographic, economic and social change means that FPTP represents a burden that weighs heavily on UK politics. When there was broad political consensus, feeling that your vote doesn't count didn't generate much resentment and anger. When there is political division, the fact that people now feel their vote doesn't count leaves them disengaged, disillusioned or disenfranchised and social media amplifies that anger. FPTP also disenfranchises the highly concentrated progressive urban vote by leaving them underrepresented while enabling

wealthier, suburban/rural and more conservative electorate to be overrepresented.

FPTP has led to a politics that seeks to serve the needs and demands of specific groups and voting blocks, not the needs of the greater population. This is most visible in the ways policy has been bent to serve older, wealthier voters at the detriment of the young and economically deprived.

In short, FPTP has inherently driven policy preferences that serve the needs of those over-enfranchised wealthier, older voters, helped drive inequality, and created the feedback loop that has driven disillusionment, disengagement and division. All progressive parties should embrace and hasten the shift to proportional representation across the political system, down to the local level.

The historic fear of proportional representation was based on a fear of the fragmentation of the progressive vote. To some extent that fragmentation has always existed and helped keep the Conservatives in power for 14 years. Further voter fragmentation is happening anyway and inevitable, and disengagement is now a far greater risk to progressive government.

Progressive political parties in Wales should embrace proportional representation in a way that creates a far healthier political ecosystem, where those parties compete for ideas and hold each other accountable but can come together in different forms of coalition government when necessary and required. Progressive politics will only succeed if there is a healthy ecosystem of innovation, ideas and competition. The strength of progressive political parties should lie in the shared progressive principles of inclusion and collaboration and genuine democratic representation, all fundamental principles of any progressive politics, and a willingness to both compete and collaborate on policy.

The paucity of ideas and innovation on the political right has been exposed over the past 20 years. All the right can offer is the rebranding of its failed politics under the new banner of Reform. Under proportional representation progressive governments can become embedded, allowing for a longer term policy outlook.

### **Complexity and Simplification**

The public sector in Wales is a maze of UK Government departments, Welsh Government departments, Local Government, public bodies, quasi- and arm's length-public or publicly funded bodies, initiatives and umbrella organisations.

Understanding the division of responsibilities, priorities, funding, capabilities, remits and roles within the public sector is almost impossible, not just to those outside the public sector but often to

those within it too.

The result of this is a threefold problem: a dilution of political executive power throughout the different levels of government that slows decision making and change; a political landscape that is difficult if not impossible to navigate, and; the perception that, since devolution, a significant proportion of the Welsh Government's discretionary spending goes to support a cottage industry of publicly funded bodies and initiatives that have failed to deliver noticeable outcomes and impact for people or places.

Progressive parties in Wales have responsibility to work together to address the complex and fragmented nature of internal Welsh politics. Parties need to overcome the tendency to prioritise individual local party power, control and incumbency.

Any attempts at Local Council reform and amalgamation have failed or been suboptimal, including the establishment of capital regions that tried to address some of this by establishing an extra layer of governance for economic policy.

Council population sizes in Wales range from 55,000 to 365,000 and the average size is below the average for the rest of the UK. Failure to address this risks Wales being left behind the rest of the UK as England makes the move towards larger unitary authorities.

Local government reform should be focussed on solving the questions of:

- Concentration of and **more clearly defined boundaries for executive power** at the Welsh Government level – for example transport, infrastructure, planning, discretionary spending.
- **Driving economies of scale in delivering public services** and a **reduction in wasteful duplication** of local functions.
- **Standardisation of Local Government structures**, civil service roles and responsibilities.
- **A new political map for Wales** based on economic and social hegemony to facilitate and promote long-term economic planning and growth. An example would be the western end of the M4 covering Bridgend, Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, and Llanelli, a region that could be better served being treated as a single economic corridor and conurbation.

The overall aim must be to address duplication and dilution of efforts within the system and structure, facilitate better decision making and address political intransigence.

The preponderance of Welsh Government to create complex quasi-public governance structures as part of policy development, public engagement and delivery needs to also be addressed. The increasingly limited nature of discretionary funding means that any funding that

does not directly reach and impact communities should be very carefully considered.

## Shifting the progressive narrative from people to places

A major failing of progressive political thinking and policy in Wales has been the focus on people groups and not places.

It is instinctive for progressive politics to want to talk about and focus on groups of people perceived as disadvantaged – poor, jobless, low-paid, ethnic minorities, elderly, disabled, young people.

Focussing policy on specific groups of people has contributed to political division and resentment. Politics fails if people feel that the government is prioritising or giving preference to specific groups. A significant aspect of the Thatcherite neoliberal project was to ensure that individuals don't instinctively associate themselves as being part of a broad and poorly defined group of people.

Labelling encourages division, the politics of us versus them. Voters can much more easily identify themselves with place than with amorphous groupings. If progressive policy wants to unite people in common cause then policy needs to be rooted in terms of place and community. Economic, social and health issues are rooted in place. Transport issues, public service access, education, opportunity are all specific to places not groups of people.

This section will focus on the need for policy to bend to the differing needs of cities, towns and communities, before moving on to the focusing central Governmental departments should undertake.

### Place

#### Cities

We need to recognise that cities drive prosperity and opportunity. Wales needs to grow its cities; make them hubs and catalysts for economic growth. Urbanisation is a key driver of economic growth. People and talent leave Wales primarily to relocate to larger cities. Policymaking should recognise that Wales needs to attract and retain the best talent and grow our cities as places that young people and families want to live and work.

The reality is that many rural and semi-rural parts of Wales are suffering declining and ageing populations. Any long-term economic strategy that seeks to solve the problems of ageing and declining populations must be, similarly to the above, based around rapidly growing our cities and then improving connectivity to those urban centres across the rest of Wales.

This urbanisation and urban connectivity is a major driver of the relative wealth of regions such as the south east and north west of England. Most studies show that future economic growth is going to be dominated by urbanisation and the growth of city service economies.

## **Towns**

The challenge for many towns in Wales is that the economic purpose on which they were established and grew no longer exists. Towns need to serve a purpose and reviving these places requires policy that recognises them either as economic hubs or spokes.

Hub towns should be regenerated as just that – social, educational, economic and cultural hubs. Growth centred on town centre regeneration, professional and business services, public service access and local transport connectivity. Focus on solving local issues such as addiction, health, crime, the built environment and anti social behaviour, improve amenities, and improve ageing commercial infrastructure such as office and light industrial space.

Spoke towns should be seen as good places to live with good access to economic, educational and cultural hubs.

## **Communities**

A plan for community rebuilding needs to:

- Ensure every community has a hub and access to amenities and funding.
- Expand and increase the use and functionality of existing community assets such as sports clubs and not-for-profit centres.
- Ensure the benefits of public service and government are present and noticeable and beneficial in every community.

## **Central Approaches**

### **Housing and the Cost of Living**

The cost of living is consistently the top issue for voters today. The levers available to the Welsh Government to address the cost of living are limited. However, the root cause of affordability issues is the cost and availability of housing.

There are many challenges to expanding housebuilding in Wales and these need to be addressed as a priority. The only way to improve housing affordability is to greatly expand supply. Focus on 'affordable housing' creates an anomaly and reinforces the notion that most housing should be unaffordable. A different approach is required.

Town planning is treated with scepticism because of the historic town

planning failures of the 20th century. That failure is entirely rooted in two issues – prioritisation of the car, and design failure based on the disconnect between expensive design and cheap building.

Understanding of town planning has greatly advanced and improved. The Welsh Government needs to re-embrace strategic town planning and take a more proactive role in creating ambitious blueprints to build new housing and communities in the places people want to live and work.

## **Planning Reform**

Planning reform is central to increasing housing supply and therefore reducing housing costs. A lot of the issues around planning in Wales are well versed – the statutory consultation role of Natural Resources Wales, the availability of planners, the duplication of pre-planning conditions between bodies, lack of planning resources, the inconsistencies between different authorities, and the long delays in decision making by Welsh Government.

The secondary impacts of this are also widely understood, such as the drain of skills over the bridge exacerbating existing skills shortages in Wales, the impossibility of meeting housebuilding targets, and the rising costs in a sector already struggling with input costs.

Weak enforcement puts all the stress on the approval process and pre-conditions when a more functioning planning system would have clear rules and rely on stricter enforcement. This shifts the burden onto those developers who breach rules, not the entire sector. The ingrained assumption that all developers are untrustworthy and guilty until they can jump through the hoops to prove otherwise is not something we see in any other sector of the economy.

Conditions such as affordable housing quotas reduce the economic viability of construction and actually constrain supply, making housing ultimately more unaffordable – the opposite of what’s intended. The best way to make housing more affordable in Wales would just be to scrap ‘affordable housing’ conditions and greatly increase overall supply in the places people want to live and work.

Legislation increasingly burdens new housebuilding while doing nothing to address the bigger issue of retrofitting and upgrading the existing housing stock. Design is overprioritised, meaning every development has to start from scratch and every design is scrutinised from scratch. This all adds to the cost. There is a reason that most housing in Wales built in the 19th and early 20th century follows the same basic blueprint, structure and layout – economies of scale and speed of construction.

The focus on Local Development Plans and no national strategy

undermines having a more coherent approach to how we can really grow the economy in Wales.

On environmental issues, particularly biodiversity and ecological degradation, we currently all stand around with the fire extinguishers ensuring that even the smallest new development doesn't have any risk while ignoring the huge ecological fire already burning. It is unlikely that enhanced planning rules have had any overall net positive impact on biodiversity in Wales in the past 20 years.

Perhaps the biggest issue is one of public value. Planning permission is a public asset and probably the most valuable asset that the government holds. Changing the mindset to see planning permission as an asset with a revenue stream that could raise new government income, money which could then be spent addressing the issues that the planning process tries to accommodate but largely fails, while at the same time spurring economic growth, should be a priority.

The planning process is widely agreed to be the biggest barrier to investment and growth in Wales. This extends beyond housebuilding. Many Welsh Companies are capital rich but the costs associated with the risks and uncertainty of the planning process are discouraging businesses from investing that capital in Wales. There is a win-win scenario here if the government takes reform seriously.

## **Education**

Education is the foundational platform for all social, economic and health policy. Social issues, economic issues, and health issues all correlate closely back to educational outcomes.

Educational policy for the past 20 years has focussed on standardisation of academic attainment and a focus on academic attainment as the only outcome measure.

**It needs to be recognised that this policy has failed in terms of every true measure of outcome success.** Social mobility has declined, economic participation has declined, young people's health, both physical and mental, has declined.

At the heart of this failed policy is a misunderstanding of causation versus correlation.

There is a correlation between educational attainment and career success. That does not mean there is strict causation. Children who are more likely to achieve academic success are more likely to achieve career and financial success. This correlates even more to socioeconomic background than it does educational attainment.

The concern is that the current education system has done two things

– narrowed the definitions and therefore the pathways to successful outcomes, and that this approach has succeeded to increasingly exclude more and more young people from those positive educational outcomes.

Academic attainment is prioritised from a young age even though we know that social development is far more important at a young age. Standardisation on academic attainment has become too rote, diminishing the freedom of schools to develop and deliver innovations that address broader educational issues.

There is a fundamental question as to whether current educational policy is exacerbating poor mental health amongst the young, instilling anxiety and feelings of exclusion.

The aim of education is to provide a platform for everyone to have a fulfilling and successful life, economically and otherwise. The measure of success must be what young people go on to achieve after they leave education, not just the piece of paper they leave with.

No young person should leave the education system without opportunity for a career and the opportunity to improve their circumstances. **This requires a greater number of educational pathways, greater pastoral and social support, greater innovation at the local level, and greater early years intervention.**

## **The Economy**

Economic prosperity is an outcome based on the following inputs:

- People and skills
- Capital
- Infrastructure and transport
- Energy
- Innovation

This can be viewed as a simple equation. Prosperity is based on the ability of the economy, businesses and individuals to generate excess capital.

The greater the productivity, the greater the excess capital. The greater the excess capital, the greater capacity to drive further economic activity.

Economic policy needs to focus on these primary inputs:

- The availability of people and skills
- The Availability and cost of capital
- The availability and costs of infrastructure and transport
- The availability and cost of energy
- Support for innovation

Policy should start with recognition of current failure:

1. The education system is failing to deliver people and skills into the workforce.
2. Access to capital and the entrepreneurial ecosystem to support investment is underdeveloped in Wales.
3. Underinvestment paired with increasing costs of improving the economic infrastructure of Wales is a significant bottleneck to growth.
4. High cost of energy in the UK is a major cause of Wales' relative economic underperformance.
5. Wales' innovation capability in terms of research and development capacity is underutilised.

Policy should therefore focus on:

- **Education reform that creates a greater number of career pathways and shifts the focus of the education system to workforce outcomes** and increases support for on the job and in employment skills training.
- Government support to **improve the capital access ecosystem** and support for SME business investment.
- A **long term economic infrastructure investment plan** aimed at reducing the costs and barriers to local and national economic infrastructure investment, including transport.

The ultimate aim is to take advantage of Wales' renewable energy potential and **provide long term fixed cost renewable energy access to commercial users to create a global USP for businesses** to locate and invest in Wales.

Policy prioritising support for innovation and public and private partnership that maximise the economic impact of the research and development capacity of our universities and colleges.

## Transport

Transport is the one area of public policy with which every voter interacts regularly, if not daily. Transport, after housing, is the main cost of living issue over which the Welsh Government has some control.-A clear and long-term strategic transport policy is fundamental to garnering public support for public services and investment.

In addition, a lack of access to affordable and efficient public transport is likely to be a significant barrier to economic participation within deprived communities.

A comprehensive strategy should include:

- **Data driven analysis of Wales' transport needs.** Almost every journey in Wales is captured through phone location data, so any transport investment strategy should be driven by user needs. Welsh Government should develop public-private partnerships to develop a data driven assessment of transport needs.

- **Reducing freight transport costs.** Efficient cheap transport is a key part of attracting investment. We should prioritise looking at ways in which freight transport can be improved, including identifying locations and areas where investment can be prioritised (for example maximising the economic return on the Heads of the Valleys road completion).
- **Reducing short car journeys.** Increasing capacity and efficiency of short urban routes and therefore increasing their usage and economic viability. To subsidise less viable, longer and more rural public transport can only be achieved by first improving efficiency and returns on economically viable and high usage routes.
- **Investment in commuter services in Swansea, Neath, Port Talbot, and Llanelli.** Securing investment for the Swansea metro, along with expanding the concept to include the broader economic region.

Policy has to set out the long term aim of a cheap and reliable public transport system that is fully utilised. Technology will make this increasingly possible, electric motors reducing running and maintenance costs, data driven provision mapping, driverless services. Wales should aim to become a global leader in public transport innovation.

## The Environment

Environmental issues have been a growing concern for both the electorate and governments for 50 years. There was early momentum with issues such as lead in petrol, air quality, CFCs and pollution standards. Policy then largely stalled. Climate change action focussed on reduced energy production and usage as technology improved energy efficiency. Action against ecological depletion has been largely ineffective.

There needs to be greater progressive advocacy on the economic case for climate and ecological action. The economic benefits of climate inaction are highly concentrated, for example in the hands of the fossil fuel industry. The economic costs of climate inaction, in terms of responses to extreme weather events, infrastructure investment, and insurance premiums, will be borne by the wider public and the taxpayer. This is unacceptable. The costs of climate change will ultimately run into the trillions.

At the same time, policies to tackle climate change must also prioritise an economic return on investment. Climate change policies have the potential to generate economic returns that will enable future governments to increase future investment.

Current net zero policy is both environmentally and economically flawed. **Net zero targets have to be based on reducing the carbon footprint of everything we consume, not just everything we**

**produce.** Current targets exclude the global impact of goods produced globally but consumed in Wales. The reality is that the UK has offshored most of its highly polluting industries and CO2 emissions to lower regulatory standard jurisdictions. This creates a policy problem. Reducing the global environmental impact of everything we consume could decrease local CO2 emissions.

**Policy must prioritise renewable energy production and capacity for commercial uses.** There will need to be policy debate with Westminster on pricing and regulation to ensure that the Welsh economy can benefit from this investment. Wales is a net exporter of electricity, yet this drives few if any economic benefits.

There is intense global competition around renewable energy investment. From a policy perspective this competition is often focussed on supply chains. Governments are trying to compete for a bigger slice of supply chains. In Wales, this is holding up investment. Denmark benefited hugely from first mover advantage in its investment in wind turbines, that is hard if not impossible to replicate.

**Renewable energy policy in Wales should almost ignore supply chain competition and focus instead on build speed and generating energy for commercial use.** This can drive research and development and innovation. Focusing on making Wales a place where renewable infrastructure can be quickly built will make it a hub of innovation, and that in the long term is what will attract investment in supply chains. This is the model that Japan, China, Taiwan and South Korea followed in successfully building their industrial base. Taiwan's success in semi-conductors could be replicated in Wales for emerging industries such as hydrogen if properly understood in terms of policy support.

Alongside renewable energy production, the other environmental priority should be ecological restoration. Wales is one of the most ecologically depleted countries in the entire world.

Policy focus needs to switch from tick box prevention to focussed restoration. Policy has centred on planning as a preventative control on further ecological degradation, yet this has had very little if any impact on the ecological health of Wales. **Charging developers an environmental planning levy in return for a policy switch from preapproval to enforcement could generate funds to invest in ecological restoration projects.** In simple terms, replacing bat and other environmental surveys in industrial and urban development with a planning levy that can be used to restore and expand existing habitat in rural areas is going to have a far greater impact on reversing ecological decline. Forestry monoculture, farming practices, pesticides and nitrates are the dominant cause of ecological and environmental destruction, not urban development. Policy needs to rebalance prioritising the economic benefit of urban development against proactive environmental restoration in rural areas.

The policy aim should again be to ensure Wales is a global leader in ecological restoration and a centre for ecological and agricultural innovation.

## Health

Health policy in Wales is a complex area. The Welsh Government is in effect one of the largest NHS Boards in the UK. We are not going to try and address all the complexities of health policy here but set out some important objectives.

The Welsh government has an element of day-to-day operational responsibility for the NHS, as well as strategic responsibility, oversight responsibility, planning responsibility and funding responsibility. Policy needs to recognise and ensure some degree of separation between these responsibilities to ensure the NHS in Wales has an organisational structure that is fit for purpose.

Strategically, health policy needs to cover:

- **Accessibility:** Ensuring everyone in Wales can access the health provision they need.
- **Resourcing:** Staffing and resourcing health and social care is a major challenge. Policy should cover how to attract, train and retain staff in Wales to meet future needs.
- **Prevention:** Funding pressures mean that not enough is done to prioritise prevention, particularly in relation to obesity, ageing and mental health. Tough decisions need to be made to prioritise prevention against short term funding needs to break the existential challenge of long term declining health.
- **Innovation and Excellence:** Policy must encourage innovation and the system must both allow and reward innovation that improves processes and outcomes, including public-private partnerships. Wales can offer a unique advantage to life science innovation partnerships because of the access to a single universal health system and devolved powers.
- **Compounding Health Issues:** Government should not be afraid to prioritise investment that delivers wider economic and social returns. For example, prioritising treatment for those being prevented from working and taking into account the economic and social impact of a health issue. Someone who provides the main income for a family and suffers a treatable health issue should be a high priority. Likewise, circumstances such as a single mother with young children or those with care responsibilities should be taken into account. Although this creates an uncomfortable dilemma, policy must address the compound costs to individuals, the taxpayer and the economy of short term sickness turning into long term illness or inability to work and care for others.
- **Addiction:** In many communities in Wales, addiction is a primary driver of crime, economic inactivity, anti-social behaviour and premature death. Joined up local addiction strategies and services

are needed.

- **Mental Health:** The NHS is simply not structured or designed to deal with the growth in mental health related issues. Government, NHS, Schools, Universities, Employers, charities, all organisations that have people at their heart, need to work together to improve understanding, response, treatment and prevention of mental health issues.

## Principles & Delivery

The fundamental aim of democratic Government is to foster peace, health and prosperity for all. This is something every voter can hold as self-evident and true and should drive the core principles of progressive government.

Fostering greater peace, health and prosperity for all should be the principle under which all progressive values, actions and policies fall. Based on the ideological belief in collective endeavour, the fundamental aim of progressive government is to garner public support for collective endeavours that achieve a greater good and ensure that no one is excluded from the benefits of that greater good.

The principle is to foster collective endeavours to achieve a greater good and to do so with the support of the wider population. Progressive politics must advocate and exhort the benefit of collective endeavours but also the principle of winning the arguments and obtaining the support of the population before acting. At the heart of progressive politics is advocacy – establish principles and a narrative and then loudly and consistently advocate those principles in policy terms. Unlike right-wing populism, progressive democracy does not mean a government elected to just further the beliefs and agenda of the people who supported it for the benefit of the people who supported it.

Progressive government must make clear and prove in its actions that the fundamental principle of any democratic government is that it is elected to represent everybody, including those who voted against it.

Progressive governments must engage and compromise and be seen to engage and compromise. In Wales this, at a minimum, means that any progressive government must seek to go beyond simple parliamentary vote dynamics. Even if a single party has a majority in the Senedd, it should seek to engage in the priorities of other parties and garner as much cross-party support as possible.

The progressive principle of collective endeavour is just that. It does what it says on the tin: garner the support of the population for collective endeavours that foster greater peace, prosperity and health for all.

Argument between progressive parties should be an argument not

about principles, but an argument about prioritisation and resource allocation. There should always be the willingness and the mechanisms for an element of compromise and working together.

### **Fostering Greater Peace**

Progressive politics should clearly state its belief in upholding the international rule of law and standing up for all people who live under the threat of violence, oppression, terrorism, authoritarian government or political aggression.

Political or social oppression marks the greatest single threat to fostering peace, prosperity and health for all. Oppression never limits itself to one group, political oppression will always by nature expand its boundaries and broaden its definition, until that definition includes you. It is and always has been progressive politics that has defended everyone's right to political and societal inclusion.

Fostering greater peace does not just refer to global conflict, political oppression and war. In Wales, fostering a domestic national peace includes national harmony, peace in our communities and peace between our communities, pride in our culture, everyone's right to be represented and included, uniting people across all divides, countering political polarisation and fostering a common sense of purpose and wellbeing.

### **Fostering Greater Prosperity**

Greater prosperity for all is ultimately the principle on which progressive governments will be judged. Relative prosperity is the root cause of the ingrained social issues in Wales, and increased wealth and prosperity is the only way to solve them in the long term and sustainably. A lack of visible improvement in overall and relative prosperity and growing wealth inequality is the political failure of the 21st century.

Progressive politics must make and win the argument that poverty is an economic and social drain on everybody. Poverty does not only impact the impoverished, it impacts everyone in Wales. Ingrained poverty in Wales is the main drag on economic growth. Poverty blocks business growth, blocks economic activity and drains public resources. Poverty impacts everything that matters to the people of Wales, from high street decline, stretched public services, poor health outcomes, overwhelmed doctors and hospitals, rising taxes, wealth segregation, addiction, mental health decline, skills shortages, depopulation, brain drain, poor education outcomes, young people out of work, shoplifting, crime and anti-social behaviour, suicide and overdose deaths, and ultimately the break down of communities as wealth and health segregation becomes generational.

A progressive Welsh government must be brave in setting out the measures of prosperity on which it should be judged, and be relentless in attempts to improve them.

The immediate priority in Wales must be to improve social mobility and reduce economic inactivity.

A focus on broad average economic measures such as GDP, average earnings, productivity, and private sector investment, while important to understand, will not foster a mindset to fundamentally change the nature of prosperity and poverty.

Poverty is ingrained in Wales because the pathways out of poverty are overgrown and inaccessible.

Poverty will not be eradicated within the next Welsh Parliament. But poverty will be reduced and eventually eradicated if more young people from deprived areas have access to careers and opportunities which give them a route out of poverty. Social mobility has gone backwards for 20 years and every young person in Wales should leave education with a career path that gives them the opportunity to improve their life.

The reasons for high levels of economic activity amongst older people in Wales are more complex and varied. However, those reasons are almost never simply the right-wing narrative of the lazy scrounger. Success in reducing the amount of economic activity amongst older people can only be achieved by understanding the different root causes. For some it may simply be the rational economic decision that working is unaffordable, the costs of working outweigh any relative benefit. Addiction and mental health are a huge factor. Opportunity, particularly the older you are, is a local factor. Many have caring responsibilities. Benefit rules themselves are also a factor in trapping many people in jobless poverty. In most cases it is unlikely to be a simple reason with a simple answer. Many of these issues are compounding factors. Thinking there is a single fix is naïve. Any solution will require a deeper understanding of individual circumstances and a lot of effort including trial and error.

### **Fostering Greater Health**

This is where we really see how fostering greater peace, prosperity and health are interlinked. Health impacts prosperity and prosperity impacts health, and both health and prosperity harm the peace and unity of communities.

The right-wing narrative of individualism and the nanny state has held back countless initiatives to improve public health. These include, amongst other, obesity, food standards and diet, preventative initiatives based around lifestyle, occupational health support, drug and alcohol addiction, early start support for babies and toddlers, criminal

justice reform, public service and transport accessibility and more.

Fundamentally, the costs saved through the degradation of public services over the years and right-wing objections to anything that has a whiff of nanny state intervention, or prioritising rehabilitation over punishment, have almost certainly ended up costing taxpayers even more than any short-term savings by increasing the long term physical and mental health burdens placed on the NHS, police, courts, schools, housing, benefits and social services.

Progressive parties must be united and brave in setting out fundamental reforms that improve prevention, intervention and rehabilitation when it comes to public health.

## **Policy Delivery**

The Welsh Government has evolved into a body that is process-driven and not outcome- or delivery-focused. The Welsh Government is good at identifying and understanding the socioeconomic issues impacting Wales, however this has not translated into policy that delivers meaningful outcomes. Something gets lost in the process of government. The culture of Welsh Government is one of stakeholder participation, not delivery. There is a cultural focus on the importance of the consultation processes rather than the importance of the final outcomes and measurable impact. Outcomes and delivery are secondary considerations to the inclusiveness of the process. All stakeholders are treated equally, leading to confused and compromised outcomes, with decision-making and delivery structures being convoluted. Time and again this leads to unintended consequences that undermine and often outweigh any positive impacts and hinder economic progress.

The most visible result of the above is the perception that, since devolution, a cottage industry of publicly funded bodies and initiatives has grown around Cardiff and that most of the Welsh Government's discretionary funding is absorbed by this self-sustaining public sector ecosystem. As a result very little discretionary funding is seen as reaching its desired targets and outcomes are poor value for money. There is a lack of understanding, modelling or prioritisation in the Welsh Government of economic return on capital. Social and individual outcomes are prioritised while economic returns or the generation of excess economic capital is viewed as suspiciously capitalist. The social issues in Wales are, at root cause, economic issues. This failure to address and prioritise the economic return on capital of Government spending has led to poor outcomes and wasted opportunities. This feeds into a common failing of progressive Governments. A lack of knowledge and experience of managing large and complex organisations, or simply how to get things done.

The fundamental challenge of managing any organisation is the problem

of resource allocation, resource management and prioritisation. Managing government is a question of the prioritisation and allocation of scarce resources, whether they are financial, physical resources, human resources, time resources, technology resources, skill resources or knowledge resources. Government is also made almost impossible by the desire for perfect solutions.

Governments must first prioritise and set clear target outcomes, then ensure there is the organisational structure, roles and responsibilities, resources and governance in place to deliver the desired outcomes against that priority.

When faced with limited resources, the aim is always that the first outcomes you achieve make it easier and cheaper to achieve the second priority, which makes it easier to achieve the third, and so on.

The Welsh Government must establish a broader network of support with the experience, skills and expertise to help solve for and deliver their priorities.

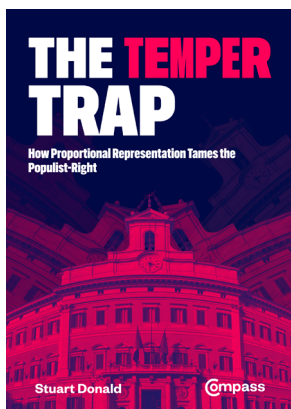
There are an incredible number of people and organisations in Wales doing incredible things, innovating and delivering change to solve problems for their communities. Part of the role of the Welsh Government should be to support and amplify these people and organisations and replicate their successes.

Progressive governments will succeed when they tap into those people and organisations already making a difference through their collective endeavours.

Where it is the responsibility of government, it is as important that progressive governments understand how to get things done as much as prioritise exactly what they want to do.

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### **The Temper Trap: How Proportional Representation Tames the Populist Right**

One of the longest-running arguments against proportional representation voting systems has been that they aid and abet ‘extremist’ parties into legitimate political voices. Yet, with only four MPs, Reform UK are dominating in opinion polls for the next UK election.

This paper, authored by Stuart Donald, provides comprehensive analysis of how PR systems actually do the exact opposite – acting as a balancing force to tame the Populist-Right.

### **From Whitehall to Townhall: What the English Devolution Bill Needs**

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill provides a once-in-a-generation chance to deliver the radical change to local government needed to bring about a system that truly works for people in their places. But the current emphasis on the creation of new ‘Strategic Authorities’ doesn’t do that.



This report brings together leading voices in local government reform – John Denham, Dr. Jessica Garland, Sarah Longlands, Sue Goss, and a foreword by North East Mayor Kim McGuinness – to advocate for what is really needed constitutionally, electorally and financially to make the English Devolution Bill the success it can be.

### **Reset: Winning A Decade of National Renewal**

A course correction is needed fast. If Labour doesn’t clarify what kind of society it aims to bring about and fails to seriously develop a programme that lights the way to it, the populist right’s version of change will prevail – change that divides and weakens rather than unites and empowers.



Compass believes that Labour must reckon with the fundamental questions and challenges contained within the paper if it is to craft an expansive, alliance-based programme capable of securing meaningful change and radical renewal. And in the process, defeat Reform by taking them on, not by mimicking them.

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