**MANIFESTO FOR DEMOCRACY**

*England’s Standard Advanced*

 *For a New Parliament by the Agreement of the People*

 *A declaration by William Thompson and the oppressed people of this nation- 6 May 1649*

**Introduction**

A general election is a time when voters think about the country, their hopes and aspirations for the future and the priorities for the present. Politicians, parties and people engage in the ‘Westminster Game’. Westminster parties produce comprehensive manifestoes of the policies they promise to carry out. Very few believe them or trust them. Those who do are likely to end up disappointed.

This ‘Manifesto for Democracy’ is not about playing the ‘Westminster Game’. We are not putting forward a programme for government. We are addressing people about what we must do together after the election. If we are going to make a new democracy we need a new party committed to fight for democracy and social justice. If we are going to make a new democracy we need to build a mass democratic movement on the streets and in our workplaces.

Westminster is not fit for purpose. Playing the ‘Westminster Game’ perpetuates the illusion that we have a democracy. We do not. Politics in the UK is working for the rich but not for ordinary people. Therefore we need change. We need real democracy in government, in work, and in our local communities. Without it people will have no effective way of making decisions about their communities and their lives.

**1. Close it Down**

The Palace of Westminster is in danger of sinking into the Thames. It leaks when it is raining. It is a fire hazard and a danger when chunks of masonry fall from the roof. It is full of asbestos. The chamber of the Commons does not even have seats for 635 MPs. So on a busy day, when they discussing their future salaries and pensions, or watching the latest ritual public school jousting, known as Prime Minister’s Questions, it is standing room only.

On March 2nd the speaker, John Bercow, said it was “decaying faster than it is being repaired” (*Economist*). No Manifesto, except this one, has told you that after the election it will cost £3bn to prop it up and renovate it. Once they are safely in their £67,000 seats they will decide to spend your money without your permission. All the Westminster parties are aware of this expense and have decided not to mention it.

In the ‘Westminster Game’ elections are not a time to tell the electorate the truth. It is a time to promise many things MPs won’t deliver and hide future expenditures. Of course people would be willing to pay for a new building if it was an investment in a real and vibrant democracy. But in fact people will see £3billion as a massive waste of money, like some Trident nuclear weapon parked on the Thames, which brings them no tangible benefit whatsoever.

It is not just the building that is in danger of collapse. Westminster is not fit for purpose, not just as a building, but more importantly as a democratic institution. The UK’s ‘Gothic Democracy’ is sinking into the Thames under the weight of its own failures. As a ‘democracy’ Westminster is “useless and dangerous”. Like our mysterious and labyrinthine constitution it is well past its sell by date and the stench is becoming overwhelming.

This ‘Manifesto for Democracy’ is giving you the people of Bermondsey, and throughout the UK, some sensible options. It could be burned down under the supervision of the Fire Brigades Union. There could be a Guy Fawkes moment of controlled demolition. It could be sold to a multinational hotel chain as Thatcher did with County Hall when her government closed down the Greater London Council. [N.B. We oppose privatisation or Westminster handing public assets to multi-national corporations]

“Generation Rent” has a plan to turn it into 364 affordable flats. Alternatively it could be converted into a “Museum of Gothic Democracy” for tourists. In the latter case, unemployed actors could play a few MPs asking unanswered questions in an empty chamber. Two more could perform Punch & Judy pantomime politics in which Her Majesty’s Prime Minister confronts Her Majesty’s Leader of the Opposition in front of a jeering crowd of sheep and pigs.

A more serious note for us is the opportunity afforded by the decay of the palace to create a new alternative democracy and constitution. This is why we say “Close it Down” and start again. The campaign for closure is being launched in this 2015 election in Bermondsey. This is merely the first knock on the door. After the election our voices will need to become much louder.

**The Great Bankster Robbery**

In 2008 a slow down in the US economy triggered the ‘sub-prime’ banking crisis which spread from Wall Street to the City of London. The Labour government rescued the banks with an emergency package of bail-outs. Banks were supported by nationalising their debts. The economy was saved from collapse by government spending and more borrowing from the financial markets.

The financial disaster of 2008 was a highly significant moment. It was a reality check. The fantasy world of free market, deregulated capitalism blew up in our faces. You might imagine that after this we wouldn’t try it again. You’d be wrong. No sooner was it over, and the bills still being added up, than the great ‘free market’ rip-off began all over again. It makes a few people so ridiculously and obscenely rich that they can pay for parties and politicians to keep it going.

In 2010 Liam Byrne, Labour Treasury Minister, left a infamous note for his successor saying “There is no money left”. Of course as a politician he was lying. There is loads of money left. Some of it is stashed away in tax havens, courtesy of Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and whose task is to manufacture tax loop holes to replace those it has had to close down. There is always the Bank of England to print as much money as needed. These days it is called “Quantitative Easing”

So in 2010 I stood in the general election in Bermondsey. I wanted to warn voters of the plan being hatched by the City of London, the Bank of England and Her Majesty’s Treasury for a massive transfer of income and wealth from the people to the bankers and speculators. I called this plan the “Great Bankster Robbery” after the term first used in the US senate in the 1930s which combined ‘Bank’ with ‘Gangster’.

This plan would rob people of their incomes and threaten public assets such as land, houses, hospitals, and universities etc. The job of Westminster was to persuade us that this was in our interests because ‘we were all in it together’. If the Banksters had committed any crime, we could rest assured that politicians would track them down and bring them to justice. This spin was so far from the truth as to beggar belief.

I alleged that the House of Commons would be a partner in this crime. It would be a ‘House of Thieves’ not because of the dishonesty of some MPs caught out in ‘cash for questions’ or MPs’ expenses scandals. The problem was that the Commons was itself corrupted. The Commons is a façade not an effective democratic institution and acted as little more than a rubber stamp. But it is hugely important in persuading people to accept that government action is ‘legitimate’ because it is ‘democratic’.

Behind the Commons is the power of the Crown, and behind that the overwhelming influence of big money. The secret of the City’s past successes and future victories is not explained simply by financial power but by its political leverage. The City of London wields enormous influence over our political institutions. Its position was established over three hundred years ago when the present constitutional laws were first agreed. The political influence of the City remains at the heart of government today.

**The Coalition Agreement**

The 2010 general election was won by the City and the Banks. It made no real difference whether the Tories or Labour won the most seats or whether there would be a coalition. Negotiations for a new government took place under the watchful eye of the financial markets. The Liberal Democrats were told to drop their fake radicalism and their promises to students or there would be a catastrophe in the financial markets.

Cameron and Clegg presented the Agreement to the public as ‘New Politics’ with progressive intentions. An emergency budget was delivered in June. VAT was increased to twenty per cent. There would be unprecedented cuts. Challenged on Radio 4 to justify this, Nick Clegg pointed in the right direction, saying in despair “the Markets are knocking at our door”. Ministers assured us that vulnerable people would be ‘protected’.

Nobody should ever have illusions in the protection rackets of the Banksters or the promises of Ministers. The Coalition Agreement had no mandate. It was never put to the people in any election. There was no opportunity to vote on it. The deal was agreed behind closed doors and imposed. In a real democracy any such plan would be put to the people. The Liberal Democrats would have had the chance to explain why they reneged on their promise and the students an opportunity to change their minds about who to vote for.

In a democratic system, the electorate would have the power to sack any government trying to impose such a programme and not wait five years to suffer the damage. The right to recall MPs and parliaments is a very important safeguard. It should be in a new democratic constitution. The fact that we do not have that right confirms we live in an ‘elected dictatorship’ not a democracy.

Of course in 2010 the banks and financial markets did not want any more democracy. No new election took place. There was no financial crash or run on the pound. The stock exchange was happy. Only the people were left in the dark. They had, as yet, little idea of what was coming down the track. The Coalition began a series of broken promises beginning with VAT, student fees and NHS top down reorganisation.

**Reactionary Government**

The Coalition government was a reactionary government. Its policies would turn the clock back towards the social conditions of the 1930s. The working class and the poorest sections of society would be made to pay. Welfare support for the unemployed and disabled would be cut. The NHS would be dismantled. Market forces would reign supreme across the public sector. This was the modern equivalent of Ramsey McDonald’s 1931 national coalition government.

The ‘Great Bankster Robbery’ was carried out by a combination of Quantitative Easing (QE) and public sector cuts. The Bank of England gave the banks billions of ‘free cash’ to rebuild their balance sheets. The result, as planned by the Bank of England and the Treasury, was rising inflation. As wages in the public sector were frozen, there was a massive redistribution of income from the working class into corporate profits and Executive pay and bonuses.

When confronted with the Coalition Agreement, the House of Commons once again failed to defend the people. Without a democratic mandate the Commons should have blocked it. When the Coalition partners reneged on their promises the Commons should have called them to account. In practice the Whips exist to ensure that MPs vote for party advantage not for the needs of the people.

**2. Assessing the damage**

**Failing Economy**

The 2015 general election is a time to assess the state of the nation after five years of reactionary government. The UK is the sixth largest economy in the world producing £1.9 trillion. In 2014 the UK national debt owed to the banks and bondholders £1.4 trillion. The banks have assets of £6 trillion. The national debt, built up from three hundred years of wars, now costs £48bn in annual interest payments.

HM Treasury pledged to spend up to £1.2 trillion in bank bail-outs but in practice £850 billion was spent. One estimate is that £5bn of national debt interest is a result of the banking crisis. The wider impact of bank failure on the economy was a loss of 11-13% Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This is being paid for by the people by cuts in public services, pay freezes and benefit cuts and tax increases.

The first major long term problem for the UK economy is the domination of a bloated financial sector. The City of London provides the banks and insurance companies the freedom to speculate and profiteer. This has done untold damage to the economy, draining away investment. City interests define what is ‘sensible’, ‘moderate’ and ‘common sense’, and this is how the Coalition sold its programme to the people.

The second major problem is low productivity. This is the most important measure of the underlying strength of any capitalist economy. In the UK productivity is two per cent below the pre-crisis level. In the seven largest economies (G7) it is five per cent higher. (Economist 14 March 2014). French workers could take Friday off work and still produce more in four days than UK in a week. Italian workers are nine per cent more productive.

The third major problem is the mismanagement of the cycle of boom and bust. Coalition cuts halted the slow recovery and plunged the economy into an historic slump. Sacking workers is supposed to raise productivity. It failed. In 2012 Osborne switched from deflation and unemployment and began to inflate the economy. The damage was done. The UK had the slowest economic recovery since the South Sea Bubble in 1720.

The UK is now in a pre-election ‘boom’. In January, the *Economist* (3 January 2015) pointed to the rise in house prices. These have risen by seventeen per cent since 2012. In London prices are up by thirty per cent. The house price boom has raised debt levels. The debt-to-income ratio is now one hundred and seventy per cent. The Tory bubble is unsustainable in a low productivity economy and after the election taxes will be raised.

The Tory Coalition claims their austerity policies have gone some way to fixing the economy so damaged by the previous Labour government. This is a false claim. None of the fundamental problems have been fixed. Free market policies have made the problems worse and transferred the cost of failure onto working people in wage cuts, inflation and tax increases.

The Tory Coalition in alliance with City finance has done massive damage to the public sector especially in health and education. The NHS is one of the world’s most efficient health care systems. It has been under resourced. The Private Finance Initiative, the Coalition’s Health and Social Care Act and the forthcoming Trans Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) has done untold damage to the health and well being of the people.

**Growing poverty and social injustice**

Millions of working people and their families are living in poverty or just above the poverty line and face discrimination and social injustice. This is directly linked to the UK’s low pay. The *Economist* says “Britain’s workers are a bargain all the same, because their pay is so pitiful.” In the EU only Greece and Portugal have lower wages. The UK “has become an island of spectacularly cheap …….. workers”.

British workers may produce 20% less than France but are 33% cheaper. Low pay largely explains why capital remains profitable despite poor productivity. Employers face no pressure to invest in higher productivity. Trade union and working class organisations have been undermined by Anti-Union laws. Low wages are matched by high profits and high pay for corporate executives. This now stands at 162 times the average workers wage. The best paid executive of the top 100 corporations, Sir Martin Sorrell earned £30m a year.

Ninety three thousand children are homeless. Twenty percent of people or 13 million live below the poverty line including 3.5 million children. There is a major housing crisis because the market fails to deliver enough homes at low rents. In 2010 there were sixty six food banks and now it is over four hundred. Fuel poverty and zero hours contracts are a fact of life. The gap between rich and poor widens. More austerity will do considerable damage to everybody struggling to survive on low incomes. It will sink the National Health Service.

**Broken ‘Democracy’**

On 18 September 2014, forty five percent of the Scottish people voted ‘Yes’ in the Scottish referendum. Despite the massive campaign by the Unionist parties, corporate business and the British Establishment Scotland came close to rejecting Westminster by ending the 1707 Act of Union. The attitude of the working class in Glasgow and Dundee was a key factor in the Yes vote.

Westminster may have survived but it is now fatally weakened. The referendum has highlighted the crisis of democracy. People have lost confidence that Westminster can deliver. In England the alienation from Westminster politics and a recognition that ‘democracy’ is broken is seen in the rise in support for UKIP and the Greens, in the thirty five per cent who do not vote, in protest movements such as Occupy Democracy and the North-South divide.

The failure of Westminster to meet the needs of the people is reflected in growing divisions in the UK. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are divided internally. There is considerable resentment about the domination of London in the economic, financial, cultural and political life of the country. There is significant support, especially in the North, for Scotland’s parliament. Far from mending a broken democracy, the Scottish parliament have shown different policies are possible.

Westminster failed to adequately represent the widespread opposition to the Iraq war. It has failed to bring the Executive to account and uncover the truth about the war. It has taken over 25 years to find the truth about the Hillsborough disaster. It has taken 40 years to uncover child abuse and paedophile rings involving Establishment figures. Official secrecy and the manipulation of public opinion are central to the Westminster model. The problems have got worse not better.

In the last thirty years Westminster ‘democracy’ has been hollowed out. An empty shell looks the same on the outside, but has nothing inside. More and more decisions are taken by outside bodies. Private businesses, Quangoes, an independent Bank of England, the European Commission, the World Trade Organisation and the International Monetary Fund now affect or decide vital services such as housing, higher education, and care in older age.

Westminster has been under attack from the dismantling of the welfare state began under Thatcher. Democratic rights are undermined by privatisation, deregulation of the labour market, anti-union laws, restricting local government, cutting public expenditure, outsourcing public services to private business. Public services are increasingly provided under the concealment of commercial secrecy. Public accountability and parliamentary scrutiny are side-lined.

Russell Brand gave voice to the alienation of millions from Westminster politics. He says “Like most people I am utterly disenchanted by politics. Like most people I regard politicians as frauds and liars and the current political system as nothing more than a bureaucratic means for furthering the augmentation and advantages of economic elites”. He concludes, “I don’t vote because to me it seems like a tacit act of compliance.”

The big problem we have is apathy. The more Westminster fails the more reason to ignore it altogether. He says “Apathy is a rational reaction to a system that no longer represents, hears or addresses the vast majority of people. A system that is apathetic, in fact, to the needs of the people it was designed to serve”. He concludes as we must that “Along with the absolute, all-encompassing total corruption of our political agencies by big business, this apathy is the biggest obstacle to change”.

**3. Crown, Parliament and People**

Today the UK government is popularly known as “Westminster” after the Palace where the Houses of Commons and Lords are located. The identification with Westminster is misleading. The UK is not governed by “Westminster” but through the “Crown-in-Parliament”. This is where sovereignty lies at the heart of the UK’s ‘unwritten’ (i.e. uncodified) constitution. If we are to penetrate the secrets of power we have to look behind the façade of Crown and Parliament.

The British constitution is founded on two fundamental principles embodied in the official name as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. First the UK is a protestant constitutional monarchy. The Church of England is the established church and the Bishops sit in the House of Lords. Second the UK is a multi-nation state formed through the Union of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

England is by far the dominant nation in terms of population and resources. The Acts of Union with Wales in 1536, with Scotland in 1707 and with Ireland in 1801 are part of the foundations of the UK state, until the latter was amended by the Government of Ireland Act 1920 and the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922. The UK is not a voluntary union. There is no right to self determination in the constitution.

The Crown, Parliament and the People are the three constituent parts of the constitution. The fact that sovereignty does not include the ‘People’ goes back to the formation of the state through the 1688 Glorious Revolution. It was a banker’s victory not a people’s revolution. James II was ousted by William of Orange. The Crown would be constrained by a parliament of landowners, merchants and bankers. The interests of the City of London were now embedded in the fabric of the new state.

The Crown-in-Parliament is better understood as ‘Whitehall and Westminster’. At the core of Whitehall is Her Majesty’s Treasury. Historically the Crown is associated with the Monarchy. The royal seal of approval is necessary. Yet this is part of the mystification. Whilst the monarchy is supposedly powerless, behind it is one of the most powerful corporate bodies in the world. The monarchy enables Whitehall to escape public scrutiny and accountability.

The Crown is not the Queen. It represents the state and the sum total of governmental powers. The monarch is head of state. But the business of government is conducted by Ministers of the Crown, Whitehall mandarins, chiefs of Her Majesty’s armed forces, heads of the security services, police, judiciary and prison service. The powers of the Crown are concentrated in Whitehall and make the UK one of the most centralised governments in Western Europe.

The culture and practice of secrecy is embedded in the state making many decisions and actions unaccountable. Her Majesty’s Treasury is stashed full of secrets. It stands as a giant among Ministries, controlling the ‘purse strings’ through taxation, spending and borrowing. Today the axis of the Treasury and the Bank of England are central to economic policy. The Crown represents the primacy of financial interests in domestic and international affairs. The City of London has maintained its dominant political influence at home and abroad since the Glorious Revolution.

**Liberal-imperialist**

The UK is a liberal imperialist state if we consider both its domestic and international aspects. The Iraq war was a classic example of a war, without democratic mandate, invading another country supposedly to advance liberal values. The UK is not a monarchy although we have a Queen and not a democracy although we have a parliament. It is an oligarchy in which power is in the hands of a small group of top Civil Servants, or Whitehall mandarins, security chiefs and senior politicians who act in the name of the Crown.

If the Prime Minister is the Crown’s chief executive for five years then the Queen is the chair of the Board for life. They meet weekly to ensure the conduct and stability of Her Majesty’s Government. The myth of ‘democracy’ is assiduously promoted. In reality this is top-down government. Parliament is largely ineffectual and unable to control the executive. Civil rights and liberties are not secure. There is a constant struggle to defend them against further encroachments.

The Cabinet and parliament are not the locus of political power. They are the transmission belt by which the key decision makers move their policies into the public domain and secure a ‘democratic’ seal of approval. In the 19th century the constitutional expert, Walter Bagehot, drew a distinction between those parts of the constitution which were decorative and those that were efficient. Today the art of decoration has spread more widely.

Bagehot presented the monarchy and the Lords as decorative, existing as a means for mass distraction and as one of the many layers of camouflage. For him the real business of government was in the Cabinet and the Commons. Over a hundred and fifty years later the Cabinet and Commons have themselves been hollowed out and serve a largely decorative function by giving an impression of democracy without the reality.

We are still mesmerized by our Ancient constitution and politicians speak about it in hushed tones with great reverence. In the 1980’s the Tory peer, Lord Hailsham, described the political system as an ‘elected dictatorship’. There is some merit in this. Important freedoms and civil liberties exist. There is universal suffrage. People elect MPs to parliament. Yet elections are a fleeting moment before the central power resumes its domination of politics.

**Not a democracy**

The idea that the UK has a ‘democratic deficit’ has long been accepted by liberals. The existence of hereditary institutions such as the monarchy and the House of Lords were taken to symbolise the lack of democracy within the British constitution. Various organisations such as Charter 88 and Open Democracy have campaigned for democratic reform. The case for proportional representation and reform of the House of Lords is widely supported. Yet a conservative system is very adept at self preservation.

‘Not a Democracy UK’ has identified one thousand four hundred and thirty four people who are involved in the Westminster system. There are 650 MPs, 768 unelected Lords and 21 Royals. Of the MPs they estimated that 380 were in safe seats. Hence there are only two hundred and seventy seats facing real contested elections. The vast majority, one thousand one hundred and sixty four, face no prospect of election at all.

This is only half the story because it focuses on Westminster and not Whitehall. Republicanism goes beyond liberal arguments about a ‘democratic deficit’ which undoubtedly exists. We recognise the immense undemocratic power of the Crown. The monarchy is thus doubly important not because the Queen governs the country but rather because she enables government to function in the particular way that it does.

Democracy is about who has real power. There is a big difference between a democracy, or people power, and a participation scheme in which those with real power at the top consult with those they rule over. Westminster is not a democracy but a consultation scheme. It is more like the German business participation scheme in which private business is owned and controlled by shareholders who consult their workers.

**4. The Democratic Revolution**

England was one of the first countries to enter the modern world through a revolutionary period in the seventeenth century. It began in Scotland in 1639 and spread to England and Ireland. In 1649 England became a republic, the Commonwealth of England. The republic ended in defeat but in the next century it helped inspire the American and French democratic revolutions. In the twenty first century democratic revolutions continue to impact on the world.

Democratic revolutions are characterized by the ending or scrapping of the old constitutional laws and the creation of new constitutions. This differs from democratic reform limited to piecemeal improvements on the existing constitution. The British constitution has its origins in the period from 1688 to 1707. Over three hundred years it has become a Heath Robinson of constitutions with as about as many layers of reform as it can bear.

The Westminster system, based on the Crown-in-Parliament, is not democratic. More than this it is unreformable, not in the sense that reform is impossible, but that real reforms threaten to bring the whole rotten edifice crashing down. Powerful interests benefit from the present arrangements and will fight tooth and nail to prevent change.

The position of Ireland, the House of Lords, proportional representation, and the right to national self determination have proven intractable over decades. Now reform cannot save the constitution. It is merely a delaying tactic. ‘Solutions’ solve nothing. They eventually bring more instability and further degeneration. ‘No’ cannot stop the people on the move as the Scottish referendum is now showing us.

Westminster is incapable of reforming itself. Change has to come from outside parliament from the mobilisation of the people and the formation of a democratic movement. This movement must stand for the abolition of the old constitution and the mass democratic involvement of the people in creating a new one. Hence one defining characteristic of democratic revolution is the involvement of the people and the creation of a constituent assembly.

In Scotland this process has been underway and was given a major boost during the Scottish referendum. The struggle became a transformative moment in which millions of people became engaged in democratic discussions in cities, towns and villages across Scotland. Nothing like this has happened in England or Wales. Yet the possibility of the end of the Union has begun to shake up politics in England where the majority of people live.

Since 1688 the people have slowly fought their way into the system through struggles of, for example, the Chartists and the Suffragettes. But the people are not at the heart of the constitution. They are an add-on to a constitution weighed down by upgrades and set backs. Nobody understands dark corners and secret passages of our labyrinthine constitution. This is why the people should now take centre stage, scrap the whole thing, and design a new one with democratic ideas and principles for the 21st century.

**Scotland - breaking the mould**

In 1983 the Social Democratic Party was formed by a right wing split from the Labour Party. A great fanfare proclaimed this would break the mould of British politics and open up radical change. Then the SDP and the Liberals formed the Liberal Democrats. In 2010 the party went into coalition with the Tories. No mould was broken. Westminster proved far stronger. The Liberal Democrats parked their campaigning for PR in exchange for Ministerial office.

Events in Scotland will prove to be the real mould breaker. The Union is at the heart of the British constitution. As Mick Brown in the Telegraph stated so gratefully that the No majority “averted the biggest constitutional crisis in the nation’s history”. (Daily Telegraph 20 September 2014). But those who thought that the defeat of the Yes campaign would draw a line under the issue were sadly mistaken.

Once the process of democratic revolution is underway the genie cannot simply be put back in the bottle. “No” will not stop a growing movement. All it did was put Cameron in the driving seat and UKIP not far behind, appealing to English nationalism. The Tories called for ‘English votes for English laws’. This has raised other issues such as demands for an English parliament, regional assemblies and federalism.

The Act of Union (1707) is one of the pillars of the British constitution and its abolition would have major and unpredictable consequences for the rest of the UK. A majority of Scottish voters rejected this at least in part because of the promise of greater powers. This has heightened the imbalance in the UK constitution and the contradictions of having a semi-federal system as highlighted by the ‘West Lothian’ question in which Scottish MPs vote on matters which affect England and not Scotland (e.g. NHS).

The conservative wants to cling on to the past as long as possible. The revolutionary wants a clean break in the interests of democracy, which in this case means the immediate abolition of the Acts of Union. Now we live in dangerous times. The Union is ended, but cannot be ended. It is broken and cannot be mended. Inevitably resentment will build both sides of the border. In England, chauvinism is being promoted by opportunist politicians who demand Scotland stays, but claims they cannot be trusted. Scottish people will feel resentful about this.

The rebellion against Westminster, starting in Scotland, will not remain there. England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, are tied to each other by law, history and culture. The general election has put Scotland back on centre stage. Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish National Party, has taken the TV debate by storm. The shock waves of democratic revolution will shake the rest of the country. Scotland’s rebellion is England’s opportunity. This is why we have raised the slogan “Another England is possible”.

**Another England is Possible**

In Scotland the Radical Independence Campaign revived the Scottish left so damaged by the split in the Scottish Socialist Party. Part of the energy that grew around the referendum was around the idea that “Another Scotland is Possible”. This was far more than a political demand but connected to a cultural movement about redefining the kind of country that Scotland is now becoming at the beginning of the twenty first century.

Scotland has come to see itself as a European social democratic country. The national question is not confined to Scotland, Ireland or Wales. England has become a very different country too. It is undeniably more multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country than the old idea of the British-England. The message that “Another England is Possible” extends the idea not only that England needs a democratic revolution but a cultural revolution too.

Republican socialists in England have rejected the flag of St George which represents a royal, imperial crusader and Christian heritage which we renounce. A modern country needs to draw on its democratic and secular traditions and in particular to celebrate those who fought and in some case died in the struggle for democracy. We need a new flag to symbolise “Another England”. We have taken Green, Violet and Red as representing England’s struggle for democracy, starting with the Sea Green of the Levellers, the most radical and advanced democratic party of the English revolution. Whilst not forgetting Thomas Paine, we also identify the Red, White and Green of the Chartist movement, the first modern working class movement for democracy. Finally we pay tribute to the struggle of the Suffragettes whose Green, White and Violet flag stood for ‘Give Women Votes’.

**Close It Down - useless and dangerous**

On 6th February 1649 the Commons resolved that the House of Lords was “useless and dangerous” and ought to be abolished. Next day the monarchy was condemned in the same way, to be abolished for the same reason. Bills were drafted and passed in March 1649. Over three hundred and fifty years later the House of Commons should be added to the list of “useless and dangerous” institutions.

Of course the House of Commons has a use and purpose. It is part of the pretence of democracy and a means to disguise the real source of power in the UK. But from the point of view of the exercise of popular sovereignty, the embodiment of the will of the people, or as a means of holding the Crown toaccount it is more or less useless and certainly a danger to the health and welfare of the people.

The House of Commons is useless because it does not serve the people. It is dangerous because it pretends to be democratic and is used to legitimise and legalise all the acts of the Crown. Clearing it out of the way will enable people to see reality and the true state of affairs. Fantasy football may be fun but those playing it are not managing an actual team. The ‘Westminster Game’ is fantasy democracy when we need real democracy.

In the 19th century the old republicanism saw itself as ending the reign of Queen Victoria and what we now call the Windsor dynasty. Buckingham Palace is the focal point for this kind of republicanism. Today the new republicanism is focused on a different Palace by the Thames. Our programme is about the concentration of political power in the hands of an oligarchy which acts in the name of the Crown.

The end of the Windsor dynasty is no more than a signal that the country is ready for something new. The best way to achieve that is by means of a republican party. In England there is no serious republican party which tells us that people do not yet want or are not yet ready for such a step. The monarchy is a sign that England is still clinging to its past.

Westminster will have to be closed down before it falls down. ‘Close it Down’ is not about ending democracy but calling for a democratic revolution. We should take the opportunity to set up a New Parliament and a new democratic constitution or “Agreement of the People”. It should be founded on the sovereignty of the people elected by Proportional Representation with MPs accountable and subject to recall and paid no more than the average wage.

Many people in Ireland, Scotland and Wales are suspicious of those who rule England, with good reason. The progressive democratic and internationalist part of England has to settle that problem once and for all. We must end the Acts of Union forthwith and do so from the English side of the border. We should not be waiting around or hesitating. Ending the Acts of Union does not mean ending a close relationship with our friends and fellow citizens. On the contrary it will bring us closer by ending the lie that ordinary people of England have any designs on their resources or their culture or the way of life they choose to lead.

England is itself deeply divided between the North and South or between London and the rest of the country. A new parliament should be located in the centre of England. It is an opportunity to finally rid ourselves of the burden of Commons, Lords and Monarchy which blights our national attitudes of class and deference. No more will we be ‘Commoners’ in a land once ruled by Noble Lords and inherited by their children.

**Commonwealth of England**

On 4 January 1649 the Commonwealth was declared. In March1649 the Commons abolished the House of Lords and the Monarchy. The “Commonwealth” has a dual meaning. First it meant a republic and secondly stands as a reference to the common good or the welfare of the people. The ideal of the Commonwealth is what we might now call a Social Republic.

A Social Republic is not a liberal capitalist republic like the USA. It is a republic in which public ownership is an important and valued part of the economy and where democracy exists in the workplace but and not just in politics. In 1991 Tony Benn produced a ‘Commonwealth of Britain Bill’ which he presented to parliament. Whilst we should not simply copy this bill, it provides us with a useful marker to improve upon.

Let us end where we started with the words of a brave soldier trying with his comrades to defend a true Commonwealth of England. Faced with Cromwell’s suppression of the Levellers, William Thompson wrote an appeal in *England’s Standard Advanced.* He points out how their hopes of freedom have been dashed and they have been deceived. He calls on the “oppressed people of this nation” to rise up “For a New Parliament by the Agreement of the People”. It was dated on 6 May 1649. It is a call to action which speaks to us today.

**May 1st 2015**