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To: Friends of the Labour Party

From: Stanley Greenberg

### **The change Labour demands**

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It is good news that the government and Prime Minister Keir Starmer view this week's Caerphilly by-election as a *Hartlepool moment*. Patrick Maguire and Gabriel Pogrund wrote in *Get In: The Inside Story of Labour Under Starmer*, "6 May 2021 remains the most fateful day of Keir Starmer's leadership of the Labour Party. On that, all who lived with him now agree."

Like now, Labour lost a seat in the Red Wall that had not been won by the Tories since 1964. His team of advisors led by Morgan McSweeney fought him resigning and embraced that Labour had simply not changed enough. Starmer had surprisingly just taken the whip away from Jeremy Corbyn, but then voters gave their grim verdict in Hartlepool. Starmer would make clear his plans to change the party and soon embrace what McSweeney scrawled on a white board, "CHANGE LABOUR. CHANGE BRITAIN."

It is clear by now that Starmer had impressive plans to change Labour. He won a landslide majority in one parliament.

But we also know from his important speech at the Labour Conference, he does not have plans to change Britain.

And that is the main reason the conference produced no change in the Prime Minister's standing or Labour's vote or forestalled the result in Caerphilly. My polls showed two-thirds thought the country was headed in wrong direction.

Most of the media focused on the strategic decision by Labour to focus on Nigel Farage as an "existential threat" and his "sowing fear and discord across the county."

But the speech also offered a well-developed theory of the case for how Labour wins again.

First, it doubled down on the need for Labour to unveil even more restrictive policies to regain control on immigration. I agree on the need for Labour to regain credibility on the issue. But making immigration your highest priority after the local elections and in the reshuffle only raised the issue's importance and helped Reform UK.

Second, Starmer presented himself as a man of the centre offering modest, responsible changes and critically, he opposed to the extremes of the right and left. This government is making hard decisions to bring economic stability and renew the country, while "snake oil merchants on the right, on the left" talk only of the country's problems. Those politicians talk of "a miracle cure... tax cuts that magically pay for themselves... A wealth tax that solves every problem."

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He just mocked the tax proposal that has 62 percent support with Labour voters, 65 with Liberal Democrats and 75 with Greens. No wonder the Greens have their surge in membership.

He is emulating Jo Swinson as leader of the Liberal Democrats who lost disastrously with the same search for the centre ground. She opposed both Labour and Conservatives and that strategy left her party with only 11 seats. She lost her own and resigned.

Third, Starmer declared that despite the naysayers, “Britain is back” and “not broken.” Much of the speech is devoted to how this government has made so much unappreciated progress in just a year.

As an American, I can see Joe Biden trying to convince people he has done such a good job. He had to be pried from the White House.

Starmer catalogued the numerous areas the government has made a difference: 100,000 kids out of poverty; stripping bad regulation; building infrastructure, help for our steelworks, data-centres, and wind farms; investments in defence, including the Norwegian frigates; more apprenticeships and the new job guarantee; and making the NHS better with new technology that delivers countless appointments with patients in control.

Because Britain is “embracing the energy of the future,” the Prime Minister concludes, “It is why I just do not accept that Britain is broken.”

And fourth, he concludes that all this talk about what is wrong with the country is part of a malady where “those who tear down Britain” ally against the government. But a renewed sense of community belies it. Starmer in the speech points to Ukraine and volunteerism.

The yellow and blue flags... flying on churches and village halls ... the length and breadth of this country... Is that broken Britain, conference?

What about George who delivers food parcels in Telford with a smile... Isaac who scrubbed off that racist graffiti in York... Alex — who raised money to rebuild the library in this city...that was burned down by thugs last year...

“Is that Broken Britain, conference?” Starmer asks in conclusion.

The voters no doubt still think it is. The More in Common report, “Shattered Britain. Making Sense of what Britons want in a country that feels broken” circulated at conference found that 87 percent have “not very much” or “no trust” in politicians.

The Prime Minister’s speech tried to delegitimate the call for change and at the same time, to claim the modest changes being implemented are making major progress that has brought Britain back.

At the same time, the government is locked in an ideological strategy that believes there is a large audience for a moderate, responsible leader opposed to the populist politicians of the right and left.

However, there is no centre in a country increasingly polarized into two blocs of voters. One is comprised of conservatives and UK nationalists, led by Reform. The other includes liberal and left voters that can be led by a Labour Party demanding change.