

The Rip-Off Britain Election Manifesto

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(updated 1st May)

There seems little to choose between the three main Political Parties. All their manifestos lack any **radical changes** that could really launch Britain into the 21st century, cure the country's ills and promote a fairer society.

If Rip-Off Britain had candidates in the General Election on May 5th, this is what our manifesto would contain that we feel are on the minds of most people.

The British Economy

Compared with the rest of the World, and especially mainland Europe, the British economy appears to have done rather well. In fact, the U.K. economy, Europe's second biggest, has outpaced growth in the 12 nations sharing the euro every quarter since the start of 2001. Unemployment in the U.K. has fallen to 4.7 per cent, (the second lowest of the G7 economies), interest rates have averaged 4.8 per cent, and inflation remains low - at least until today, when it was announced that the annual rate of inflation had risen to 1.9% its highest level since May 1998.

Prices for transportation in the U.K. rose 0.7 percent in March 2005, 4% from March 2004, led by airfares and fuel costs. Fuels and lubricant prices rose 2.1 percent in the month and 6.7 percent in the year.

The cost of raw materials used by British producers rose at a record annual 11.4 percent pace in March, while the cost of goods leaving factories gained just 2.8 percent.

However, there are some significant underlying fiscal problems within the British economy that have yet to materialise. Government expenditure is expected to be around **£519 billion** in 2005/06, whilst Government receipts are set to net £487 billion. However, this gap has created an overall public sector net borrowing requirement of £34.4 billion for 2005/6.

The only conclusion that Rip-Off Britain can reach is, unless Government expenditure is reduced, taxes (in whatever form) will have to rise in 2006/7.

The only other alternative is for the Government to increase borrowing (that is already costs the taxpayer £26 billion per annum in debt interest!), which would undoubtedly initiate a rise in interest rates.

Rip-Off Britain proposes that the Government should substantially cut waste and bureaucracy at all levels.

By far the great expenditures (that we do not propose be cut) but in some cases, should be increased are:-

Education and skills **£68 billion**

Health (NHS) **£90 billion**

Public order & safety (Policing) **£31 billion**

Social protection (State pensions & other social security benefits) **£146 billion**

Here are a few of the Government Departments and their expenditures for 2007/08 that should be trimmed down:-

1. Office of the Deputy Prime Minister - **£9.9 billion**
2. Local Government **£51.3 billion**
3. Home Office **£14.3 billion**
4. Scottish Office **£24.1 billion**
5. Welsh Office **£12.8 billion**
6. Northern Ireland Executive **£8 billion**
7. Chancellor's Departments **£5.2 billion**
8. Cabinet Office **£2.1 billion**

Of course, the anomaly of the above proposal to cut expenditure, unless invoked by normal employee attrition such as early retirement, is that it could increase the unemployment rate and reduce tax revenues in the short term. However, by cutting waste, including Government employee numbers, we could then use that saving by employing more police, creating technical colleges and trade apprenticeship schemes to aid our ever growing under-skilled workforce in certain key areas such as the construction industry.

Accountability

We believe that Government, both nationally and locally, should be made accountable to every taxpayer to where each pound of tax is spent. For instance, Vehicle Excise Tax (Road tax) revenue should be allocated 100% to the Transport budget in the **County** from where it is paid, and not to H.M.Treasury in general. The same should apply to other taxes, many of which are no more than stealth taxes, and again end up in H.M.Treasury instead of being used for the progression of the regime that has been taxed. Another case in point is National Insurance contributions. They should NOT be deemed as 'general tax revenue' but should be used for the purpose it was devised for - especially in light of the looming 'pensions crisis'.

COUNCIL TAX

Council Tax has seen an average increase of 76 per cent in England since 1997. The average payment Band D council tax bill rose from £689 to £1,214 – up £525.

Notwithstanding the many families and single parents who have fallen into the Council Tax 'income trap', the people who have been most affected by these unprecedented increases are retired pensioners on a fixed income who have a modest amount of savings and who do not qualify for Council Tax relief.

The proposal by the other Parties is to either maintain the Council tax in its current form, or call it by another name such as a 'local income tax', but this does not address the fundamental problem. By giving ALL pensioners at 65 years of age £200 towards their Council tax, regardless of their means or no matter how much they have in savings (capital), is clearly inequitable. One in five pensioners are deemed to be on a low-income, so those with a good income from a private

pension and/or savings would not require or need an additional £200 handout regardless.

Our proposal is to scrap the relationship between the **value** of a property and the **amount** Council tax that is paid by virtue of '**banding**', and replace it with a calculation of Council tax based on the **area** or liveable '**square metres**' of a property. We also believe that 'means testing' for Council Tax relief should continue. However, because many pensioners find their often modest savings exempt them from claiming Council tax relief, we propose that the current maximum 'eligible' capital (savings) limit of £16,000 should be increased to £50,000. This would remove many thousands of pensioners from paying, or drastically reducing their Council tax bill.

In addition, any person, pensioner or family with a gross income below £175.00 per week should also be exempt from paying any council tax whatsoever - and provide 'tapering' relief up to a maximum of £225.00 per week. This would take many thousands of low- income families out of the Council tax 'income trap', and greatly assist our pensioners who have paid their dues to society, thus letting them enjoy their retirement without financial burden.

Although eligible, over one million pensioners do not bother or understand they can claim Council Tax relief. We therefore propose, based on known 'eligible' capital limits, to make an annual completion of a Council Tax benefit form compulsory - and provide help to complete the forms where necessary.

FUEL DUTIES

During 2003/4 the Government collected a staggering **£22.8 billion** in fuel duties. It is projected that in 2005/6 that figure will have increased to **£24.6 billion**. On top of that Customs & Excise took another **£4 billion** in VAT, and another **£5 billion** in Vehicle excise duties (Road Tax).

For the motorist, who is effectively paying 350% in fuel tax alone every time they fill up their vehicle, it's bad news especially when the average annual fuel bill on the family car now exceeds £3,500 a year - and that's not including road tax, insurance and maintenance!

It's also bad news when we realise that fuel duties in the UK are one the highest in the World - and is now the biggest 'cash cow' for the British Government. Sadly, only a very small proportion of these duties actually goes back into the 'road-user' economy or into environmental programs. In actual fact, unlike the French, U.K. tax revenues from fuel and related duties goes straight into H.M.Treasury and disappears into a black hole! The projected Government expenditure for Transport will be a mere **£9.9 billion** in 2007/8 - a drop of £1 billion from the year before. However, every time petrol/diesel goes up by one penny a litre H.M.Treasury rakes in another **£400 million** in taxes and costs UK industry £145 million a year.

So how did we manage to get into this predicament?

A Brief History Lesson!

Petrol duty was first introduced in 1909 at a rate of 3d per gallon under the Finance Act 1908. By 1915 this had doubled to 6d, albeit with a 50 per cent rebate for commercial vehicles. However, it was abolished under the Finance Act

1919, which also introduced the tax disc and the taxation of vehicles according to their horsepower rating (the "Treasury Rating").

The price of fuel dropped dramatically in the following years, and the Government felt confident enough to reintroduce petrol duty at a rate of 4d per gallon in 1928. The current state of affairs with regard to road fuel duties has its origins in Norman Lamont's Budget of 1993. In this, the then Chancellor increased duties by 10 per cent and announced the "fuel duty escalator", under which they would increase annually by 3 per cent above inflation.

The oil industry tolerated this because at the same time the Chancellor reduced Petroleum Revenue Tax from 75 per cent to 50 per cent, and abolished it altogether for new fields developed after 1993. Indeed, the immediate effect of the Budget was a 6.4 per cent surge in BP's share price. In 1990, a litre of petrol had cost 41p - by 1995, this had risen to 59p. In November that year, the new Chancellor Kenneth Clarke announced that the escalator would be 5 per cent above inflation per year. This situation persisted until July 1997, when the new Labour Chancellor Gordon Brown increased the escalator rate to 6 per cent above inflation. By 2000, the average price of petrol was 82p per litre. From 1997 to 2001 Brown increased fuel duty by 37%.

Today, a litre of petrol in the U.K. averages 85.6p and diesel is even higher at 86.4p. With an unstable World oil market using 100 million barrels of oil a day, the price of fuel can only rise - along with the amount of tax we pay.

For most environmentalists this is good news. Unfortunately, until we have an inexpensive form of public transport and a properly promoted future alternative energy source such as [bio-fuels](#) we'll be reliant upon the internal combustion engine for a few more years at least.

One short-term solution is to finally tax aircraft fuel (kerosene). International flights, whose fuel accounts for only 15% of their costs, have enjoyed tax-free fuel for too long. A 747 flying from London to New York uses 200 tonnes of fuel and creates massive pollution that is destroying the ozone layer and promoting global warming. We propose to apply a fuel tax levy of 30% and use that revenue towards subsidising public transport, and reducing carbon emissions. The cost to aircraft passengers by way of ticket prices (that are stupidly low regardless), would be nominal.

THE ENVIRONMENT

It appears the Environment is taking a back seat in the coming Election. Strangely, in both the Labour & Conservative manifestoes they neglect to mention the Environment and climate change. In fact, Global Warming isn't mentioned at all, but at least the Lib Dems mention 'Catastrophic climate change' just once. So why this apathy?

Regardless of Global Warming and other environmental issues, the main reason is that the 'Environment' is still not a hot topic with the general public - at least during a General Election.

Carbon Emissions

Despite the fact that Government recently admitted that they were not on track to meet their target of a 20% cut in carbon dioxide by 2010, since coming in to

power in 1997, Labour has also failed to deliver any reductions in carbon emissions. ([see article](#))

Although not every scientist agrees, emissions of carbon dioxide from the combustion of fossil fuels, mostly petroleum, natural gas and coal are considered to be a major factor in causing the onset of global warming. Unacceptable rises in temperature are leading to rising sea levels from the melting of polar ice and corresponding climate changes may effect plant and animal life in otherwise temperate zones.

Waste recycling

One of the easiest methods to help reduce carbon emissions is to have a good waste recycling policy. For instance, in 2002/03 the U.K. generated 25.8 million tonnes of household waste, and a total of 434 million tonnes from [all sectors](#), but only 3.37 million tonnes was recycled. ([Recycled Facts](#)) Compared with the [15 EU Countries](#) the U.K remains far behind. For instance, Austria recycles over 60 per cent of its municipal waste and Belgium and the Netherlands recycle almost half of theirs. In the U.K. we either bury or incinerate almost 90% of our waste.

Just this week, in my hometown of Hastings, we've just received a number of very small bags to deposit our cardboard, plastic bottles and cans. Unfortunately, the authorities have yet to build the conveyor belt and facility to handle the recycling! Too little - too late.

If elected, just as in Austria, we would make recycling **compulsory** and ensure adequate plant facilities were provided so up to 50% of waste was recycled.

Energy conservation

Conservation of energy is still very much neglected in the U.K. Regardless of the [Home Energy Conservation Act 1995](#) there is no coherent policy to substantially reduce the usage of electricity, gas and other fuels either in the home or by businesses. Any schemes that currently exist to help reduce energy are purely voluntary. The [Energy Savings Trust](#) tries to provide information and advice, but it woefully falls short when one tries to obtain information within its [Funding database](#) for grant funding such as home insulation. The process is complicated, fragmented and confusing.

We need a clear and coherent commitment to initiate energy conservation schemes in the U.K. If elected, we would use the current tax system to reward those who took significant steps to insulate their homes and businesses. We would provide understandable and easy to obtain grants for home insulation, solar panel and home wind power installations, including other energy conservation measures, and provide funds to increase research into other forms of energy saving devices.

Aircraft emissions

One of the major contributors to Global Warming is aircraft emissions. As mentioned in 'Fuel Duties' above, finally taxing aircraft fuel would focus the airlines on the importance of reducing emissions and provide valuable revenue that should be used to propagate environmental schemes.

Renewable Energy

As mounting evidence suggests that the era of cheap, abundant oil is rapidly coming to an end, many experts are now forecasting that global production could reach its all-time peak before the end of this decade, or soon after. We believe gas 'peak production' occurred in the U.K. **this** month. The clear implication is

that ever-diminishing supplies will lead to rising prices -- not only for oil itself, but for everything that depends on it. 'Peak Oil' will therefore be a critical turning point for the modern world, challenging our economic and social systems as never before.

The UK's consumption of oil is currently about 80 million tonnes per year. Oil production for the UK (North Sea) [peaked](#) in 1999. We apparently became net importers of oil during 2004 for a short time at least, just before the peak in global oil production, and will effectively run out by about 2020. This will clearly have a major effect on the UK's balance of payments, not to mention loss of income from North Sea oil, and a drop in oil-related jobs that has already begun. The cost of a barrel of oil may well reach \$80 to \$100 by the end of 2005 or early 2006 - if not earlier. Creating and using renewable energy sources has never been more important - and will become even more apparent within the next few years. But time is running out. ([see here](#))

Alternative Sources of Energy

So what should we be doing before our [gas and oilwells finally run dry](#)?

In the long pasture, not far from the farm buildings, there was a small knoll which was the highest point on the farm. After surveying the ground, Snowball declared that this was just the place for a windmill, which could be made to operate a dynamo and supply the farm with electrical power. This would light the stalls and warm them in winter, and would also run a circular saw, a chaff-cutter, a mangel-slicer, and an electric milking machine.....The whole farm was deeply divided on the subject of the windmill. Snowball did not deny that to build it would be a difficult business. Stone would have to be carried and built up into walls, then the sails would have to be made and after that there would be need for dynamos and cables. Extract from Chapter V. [Animal Farm](#), by George Orwell, first published in 1946.

Many people are now complaining about these new 'blots on the landscape', namely tall white windmills with large rotating blades (they don't seem to mind landfill sites and nuclear power stations!). Just like Snowball in *Animal Farm*, history will probably show these antagonists are misguided in opposing a clean method of producing energy. A modern wind turbine produces electricity 70-85% of the time, but it generates different outputs dependent on wind speed.

Apart from large wind farms, we propose that residential properties be encouraged to install [wind turbines](#) by offering an energy efficiency grant or tax rebate. A rotor diameter of 2 metres yields about 500 kWh of electricity per year, compared with an average annual household consumption of roughly 4,500 kWh. [see info here](#)

We are against any form of nuclear power that provides a terrible legacy of nuclear waste for future generations for hundreds of years to come.

We also propose to escalate the development of [solar power & heating](#), [tidal & wave power](#) and [geothermal energy](#) - all of which would provide limitless power. [Japan](#) currently are world leaders in many renewable energy projects, no doubt hastened because of their lack of natural resources.

CRIME

Britain has the worst record in Western Europe for killings, violence and burglary and its citizens face one of the highest risks in the industrialised world of becoming victims of crime.

Offences of violence in the UK have been running at three times the level of the next worst country in Western Europe, and burglaries at nearly twice the rate.

Britain has the highest level of homicides in western Europe and the totals for robberies and thefts of motor vehicles have also been close to the highest in the European Union, outstripped only by France, Home Office figures show. But the "victimisation risk" - showing the risk of suffering a crime - in England and Wales is higher for overall crime than anywhere else in Europe, and higher than in America. The same is true of falling victim to "contact" - violent - crime.

The Government has come to rely upon the British Crime Survey. This used to be conducted every two years (it is now annual) among a pool of about 20,000 people who give their personal experience of crime. It has a major flaw in that it excludes under-16s.

The Home Office was unhappy with the way the police recorded their statistics and so it introduced a new National Crime Recording Standard - a sort of statistical quality control.

In 2003/04 the total number of crimes in England and Wales was around 11,716,000. Total crime peaked in 1995, and has since fallen by 39%. In 2003/04 nearly 26% of the population were the victim of some type of crime. This has fallen from a high in 1995 of nearly 40% of the population.

Also, the figures do not cover certain types of crime, including:

- Crimes against businesses.
- Crimes where there is no direct victim (such as drug dealing).
- Crimes against victims younger than 16.
- Crimes that have involved deaths, like homicide (as the victims cannot be interviewed).

There are many causes of crime, some of which are complex and have culminated over the past 30 or 40 years. These include drugs and alcohol abuse, poverty and anti-social behaviour. The rise in single parent families, the lack of discipline and a poor diet has been directly associated with poor behaviour - that can eventually lead to crime.

What seems apparent is that the 'fear factor' and a lack of respect for both parents and society is no longer part of the social upbringing of our youngsters.

In the past you'd get a good smack or a clip around the ear by your parents or teacher if you did something wrong. At worst, usually at school, you could be caned for your misdeeds. Now, if you hit your child (and make a mark), you can be charged with assault! Teachers can't even 'breathe' on a child - and the children know this! We're not saying that hitting a child is right, but discipline metered out correctly has worked pretty well for the past few thousand years. Society has indeed gone soft on discipline and also on the criminal. The goal posts have moved so far apart that crime, and the fear of crime, is now out of control. Social values need to be instilled into the young and fear of punishment must be re-established.

The U.K. has the highest prison population in Europe with 75,550 prisoners in 139 U.K. prisons with 58% of prisoners reoffending within two years of release. Currently, England and Wales have space for 77,000 prisoners, a figure that has increased by 16,000 since 1997.

We believe that prison is not always the answer for many criminals - especially the young. Most prisoners sit around all day doing and learning nothing. Electronic tagging of prisoners allows non-dangerous and non-violent offenders to be released up to 135 days early. Sadly, tags are not properly monitored and in some cases are abused. These schemes are eroding public confidence in the criminal justice system, according to recent findings the home detention curfew (HDC), introduced by the home secretary, David Blunkett in 1999, has been shown to be grossly ineffective.

Firstly, we believe that prisoners need to be better categorised instead of a car thief being in the same cell or prison as a murderer or a rapist. It would be better to evolve our prisons into 'correctional and learning centres' that are devoted to minimising the criminal from reoffending.

Secondly, we believe that teenage criminals should spend their time in 'boot camps' run by ex-military personnel. This would instil self-discipline and respect into all 'recruits' better equipping them for life on the outside.

Thirdly, we believe that many criminals require better psychological counselling, and those with severe and potentially dangerous mental problems should not be allowed back into society, as happens under the current 'care in the community' with often disastrous consequences that appear to happen with alarming regularity.

Fourthly, we believe the homeowner should be allowed to 'use any force or means necessary' in order to protect themselves or repel an intruder.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration into the U.K. has been occurring for centuries. Those who have ended up in the U.K. have become part of our indigenous population. Many have fled from persecution, and many have come to our shores with a trade or skill that has enhanced our society for the better.

The arguments for curbing immigration are well known. A large-scale influx of any people can cause a strain on settled communities and exacerbate tension in strained communities. An influx of relatively poor people, or even wealthier and well-educated immigrants who need initial help and support, can strain the infrastructure (housing, education, social services), and invoke a sense of injustice because taxpayers' money is being spent on people who have not contributed. Moreover there is something deep in human nature which is suspicious of foreigners. Defenders of tight controls on immigration point to the numerous riots which have scarred post-war British history, many of which have been by or against immigrant populations. And beyond that, recent government plans to introduce citizenship tests similar to those in America strive to keep Britishness at the core of the issue in order to prevent antagonism and promote pride.

What has happened over the past several years is a vast influx of both 'legal' and 'illegal' economic migrants and asylum seekers have reached our shores. Some 34,000 sought asylum in the UK in 2004 compared with 49,000 in 2003. Since 1997 250,000 failed asylum seekers have remained in Britain and the rate of removals is below the rate of new applications.

In 2002, it estimated that a total of 513,000 'all migrants' came to live in the UK, the same number as a year before. Over the same period the number of UK residents who left to settle elsewhere increased from 359,000 in 2002 to a record 362,000 in 2003. Therefore the official figure for net immigration went down, although in reality the actual number settling in the UK stayed the same. The number of illegal immigrants is anyone's guess.

Our policy is to allow only those with specific skills and trades to work in the U.K. under a rigorous work Visa system. Non-skilled economic migrants would be excluded, and asylum seekers would not be allowed to enter the U.K. until their case was attested in the first country they arrived in. Just as is the case in Australia, airlines would be empowered to deny passengers who, in this instance, are non-British subjects unless they held a valid visitor or work Visa.

We live on a small island with 60 million in population. If we don't curb immigration our population will increase dramatically in the next 20 years. We should also be asking whether or not the UK can become a multi-ethnic society at ease with itself - or whether there is still a long road to be travelled? The debate will no doubt continue long after the election.

Paul Meyer
Editor - Rip-Off Britain

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