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**What didn’t Emily Know? :**

**White Van Man Culture, Middle**

**Class Condescension, Moral**

**Panics: the importance of White**

**Van Man Drivers to the Economic**

**Recovery and defeating UKIP**

**By**

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**The World Cup and White Van Culture**

I first ran across the term White Van Culture in my role as Chief Data Officer for Business Link NorthWest, the Business Support arm of the North West Development Agency, in a Report released by Experian in June 2010 called “All to play for: Expert insight for World Cup 2010”. The aim of the Report was to reveal the UK’s World Cup geographical hotspots, that is those places where England’s progress would be most closely followed and where the greatest amount of drinking in City Centre Pubs would take place.Its analysis showed that, the suburbs around the UK’s Northern Cities, as well as small towns would be, “the natural habitats of the World Cup fan – home to hardworking lower middle class families” and what it dubbed “White Van Man”. White Van Man in this context was used as a Socio-Demographic Classification Tool - a proprietary Consumer Behaviour Typology designed by Experian to be used as a Behavioural Market Targetting Tool, (or TGI: Target Group Indicator), including for the purposes of Electioneering.

It would be, what it called in football parlance: a game of two halves: Northern grass roots supporters –versus- South London’s social scene. In the North of England, the Report described how it was going to be a predominantly grass roots World Cup – with fans, mainly lower middle and working class, bedecking homes and cars with St George’s flags and for whom football over the three weeks of the World Cup would be a major focus and part of their lives. Here, the Report concluded, it was to be all about the football and less about the social scene. It was an image which resonanated particularly strongly with the knowledgeable supporters of Northern Premier League Clubs, in particular one located on the Red Side of Manchester, which dominated our Ofice.

Certainly what Experian were saying in their Report was born out strongly by the large number of houses in the village where I live, Billington that hung the St. George Flag out of bedroom Windows, streets that were bedecked in Red & White Bunting and the huge volume of Cars and Vans displaying Flags, Bumper & Window Stickers. Even St. Leonard’s Church decided to run a St. George’s Flag up its Flagpole. Clearly some of this was born out of a sense of misplaced optimism about the likely progress of the National Football Team’s Tournament Campaign in the World Cup Campaign South Africa. A lot more, however, was bound up in an expression of patriotic pride of the military commitment to wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Personally, I felt an immense sense of pride in the vibrancy that such a colourfully effusive display of patriotic sentiment represented. As someone who has worked for a number of businesses who have made major Sales into both France and the U.S. such an open display of patriotism is the norm in these countries rather than the exception.

**Emily Thornberry**

On the day of the Rochester and Strood by-election, a Labour MP, Emily Thornberry, tweeted a picture of a house with England flags flying from the windows and a white van parked on the driveway. What I find difficult to countenance were Ms Thornberry’s comments originally aired in the Daily Mail Online and subsequently reported in the Daily Mirror Newspaper in which she said, “It was a house covered in British flags. I've never seen anything like it before. It had three huge flags covering the whole house. I thought it was remarkable. I've never seen a house completely covered in flags." I find this a completely disingenuous comment from an MP, incredibly naïve but entirely understandable given the cultural and physical remoteness of a large part of the Governing Elite from the Electorate.



It is, I would also argue, the juxtaposition, of a White Van in the driveway of a Working Class neighbourhood with such an open display of patriotism that Emily Thornberry found so deeply problematic. It suggested this man's patriotism and blue-collar profession meant that he was in some way bigoted, racist and narrow-minded.

There is a stereotype of White Van Drivers which exists in the Media of them being selfish, inconsiderate, or in some way naturally aggressive. According to this stereotype, the "white van man" is an independent tradesperson such as a plumber or locksmith, self-employed, or running a small business, using his White Van to store the tools of his trade in. The Oxford-based Social Issues Research Centre found that white van men are viewed with the hostility and opprobrium Britons previously reserved for the soccer hooligans. It is the narrow, uninformed view of an isolated academic community.

**White Van Man Stereotypes**

Dr Ian Walker of the University of Bath's Psychology Department states that there is stereotype of white van drivers as selfish and aggressive, what he describes as a stereotypical machismo of White Van Man based on a range of social or personality factors. The type of individual described by Walker wil typically be male, aged between 18 and 50, drives a white van, of course, is generally shirtless with a mate on the passenger seat and a rolled up copy of the Sun or Star tucked between dashboard and windscreen. He is still stereotypically envisioned as white, heterosexual, hard working and obsessed with earning as much money as they can. This is the self-confident member of the metropolitan working-class, a 1980s TV invention (Harry Enfield’s Loads-a-Money perhaps).

The stereotypical distaste and loathing felt for ear-ring wearing, heavily or visibly tattooed, individual who practice aggressive driving skills and suffer from road rage and use vulgarity and bad language in equal measure ignores one fundamental problem – white van man is just like you or me than we would care to admit. There are an estimated 2.5 million commercial vans driven every day around Britain, a country with the most congested roads in Europe – hardly surprising that they are so visible and difficult to ignore.

Dr. Walker poses an extremely pertinent question when he asks what is that predisposes us not to like White Van Men? Male White Van Drivers play an extremely important role in the economy. Ultimately we depend on them to deliver and supply a range of goods and services. Without White Van Man there would be no home renovation and repair services or for that matter the fitting out of shops or critically the delivery of parcels ordered increasingly via online shopping at home. He delivers catering supplies to restaurants and a wide variety of sandwich fastfood outlets that keep the UK workforce fed and watered. As Walker puts it, “If being semi-naked and surrounded by cigarette smoke and newsprint breasts helps him get through the day then who are we to object” White Van Drivers and their 2.5m vehicles are places of work, where Drivers can feel relaxed and confident.

**Folk Devils**

The answer to Dr. Walker’s question is that White Man Van has become what is known as a folk devil. Ever since the term "White Van Man" was coined in 1997, by Sarah Kennedy on Radio 2, van drivers have taken on the mantle of what sociologists refer to as 'folk devils'. Overtaking even the football hooligan in the league table of social undesirability, White Van Man is now most often viewed as a mobile thug.Images of this kind, however, are not always founded upon facts, and false stereotypes are not only unjust, they can be dangerous.

A folk devil is a person or group of people who are portrayed in the media as outsiders and deviants, and who are blamed for criminal activity or other sorts of social problems. The concept of the folk devil was introduced by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in his famous book “Folk Devils and Moral Panics” (1972) which analysed media controversies. According to Cohen the pursuit of folk devils frequently intensifies into what is called a moral panic. When a moral panic is in full swing, the folk devils are the subject of loosely organized but pervasive campaigns of hostility through gossip and the spreading of urban myth. An urban myth is a form of modern folklore consisting of stories or descriptive vignettes that may be believed by their tellers to be true, and often possess horror implications that are believable to their audience. Was one of the reasons why Ed Milliband so cross with Emily Thornberry because he believed she was perpetuating an urban myth which she could not substantiate?

**Moral Panics**

According to Cohen, “Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, a person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions… Sometimes the object of the panic is quite novel and at other times it is something which has been in existence long enough, but suddenly appears in the limelight.Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten…at other times it has more serious and longlasting

repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way the society conceives itself.”

A moral panic, as defined by Cohen can reach the status of an intense feeling expressed about an issue that appears to threaten the existing social order. The mass media sometimes get in on the act or attempt to create new folk devils in an effort to promote controversy. Sometimes the campaign against the folk devil influences a nation's politics. Cohen has examined sensationalist articles published in the media noting a pattern of distorted facts and misrepresentation, as well as a distinct, simplistic depiction of images. For Cohen one of the key aspects of the reporting of folk devils is what he dubs “symbolisation” with the appearance and overall identify of folk devils oversimplified so as to be easily recognizable.The media have long operated as agents of moral indignation, even when they are not consciously engaged in crusading or muckraking. Simply reporting the facts can be enough to generate concern, anxiety or panic

Moral panics have several distinct features. According to Erich Goode and Nachmann Ben-Yehuda, in their book “Moral Panics: The Social Construction of Deviance” moral panic consists of the following key characteristics:

* Concern – There must be belief that the behaviour of the group or category in question is likely to have a negative effect on society.
* Hostility – Hostility towards the group in question increases, and they become "folk devils". A clear division forms between "them" and "us".
* Consensus – A widespread acceptance that the group in question poses a very real threat to society.

**Outsiders, Deviance & Moral Entrepreneurs**

Those who start panic when they fear a threat to prevailing cultural values were termed "moral entrepreneurs" in a book entitled “Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance” (1963) by the sociologist Howard S. Becker

Moral entrepreneurs are those who take the lead in labeling a particular behavior and spreading or popularizing this label throughout society. This can include attributing negative labels to behavior. Such individuals or groups also hold the power to generate moral panic. According to Becker moral panics are typically started and dominated by those in the upper social strata of society (Becker, 1963). They often include lawmakers and political stakeholders in a given field. A moral panic is usually the start of process of reform encapsulated in the form of a moral crusade usually based on an expressed definition of deviant behaviour. The question therefore is not what Emily Thornberry said but what she didn’t say or express.

Once moral entrepreneurs define the behaviors of individuals as deviant or a moral threat, according to Becker then the entire group may be seen by society as a deviant subculture. They or their behavior may be misunderstood as the roots of the next moral panic. This is often the goal of the moral entrepreneurs; to rally the support of society through the redefining of behaviors as deviant or problematic. Alternately, those individuals with social power, wealth, high status, or large public support bases are the most likely to assert this power acting moral entrepreneurs. The question that should really be asked therefore is are their sections of the Labour Party who intend to prescibe the displaying of flags in public places without permission as a form of anti-social behaviour?

**Typification**

Becker dubs the calling attention to issues in ways which dramatize them “typification”. Typification is when “moral entrepreneurs” attempt to characterize an issue by drawing attention to it from a particular perspective. Moral entrepreneurs are particularly successful at defining deviance when they can identify an entire group with a particular behavior and create fear that their behavior represents a danger to or is some way threatening to the rest of society. Through typification moral entrepreneurs aim to place the activities of a particular group on the public's agenda and label certain actions as social problems. One wonders just what it is that Emily Thornberry finds so threatening about the display of the St. George’s Flag on a residential property?

**Labelling Theory**

Becker’s work is what is known in sociology as labelling theory. Labelling theory is based on the idea that a social deviant is not an inherently deviant individual, rather they become deviant because they are labeled as such, typically by the media. In the first chapter of “Outsiders*”,* Becker explains "society creates deviance by making rules whose infraction creates devianc*e*, and by applying those roles to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by rules of behaviour and sanctions to an 'offender.' The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied; deviant behavior is behavior that people so label." Another important contribution of “Outsiders” is Becker’s concept of what he dubs "deviant careers”. Here Becker examines the consequences of an individual choosing an occupation that is located within a deviant group and how this in turn labels the actor choosing the career as deviant.

It is an entirely valid point therefore to question whether by demonising White Van Drivers as some kind of deviant sub culture that elite opinion formers are not only perpetuating a negative stereotype but by doing so they are also effectively undermining the basis on which the economic recovery is actually being built. At the start of the recession van sales plummeted by more than 25%., according to vehicle registration figures from 2009. According to figures from British Car Auctions, this year however, Auction prices for used vans in March were the second highest on record, showing that demand from the nation’s army of plumbers, plasterers and electricians is on the move again.

It is so absolutely typical of Senior Labour Politicians, firstly, not to identify with the situation that the working population found themselves following the economic downturn which they were the cause of but, secondly to fail to recognise, the roots of the recovery amongst self-employed business owners is a mark of the greatest contempt for those who do not rely on the state. The first thing Emily Thornberry should have asked Dan Ware, according to Ribble Valley MP Nigel Evans, was “not why are you flying those flags out of the window of your house but how’s business? Do you work for yourself? That’s the problem with Labour MPs the first thing they think about is: Is this person on benefits? Are they claiming everything they are entitled to from the State? It’s so stereotypical of the Labour Party to hold such a predetermined view of where people live and how they behave. ”

**Modernity and Moral Panics**

Such a view is upheld by Kenneth Thompson in his book “Moral Panics” (1998). For Thompson the nature of Moral Panics has changed because of the deep changes which have taken place in the structure of the economy. Outsourcing and increased Labour Market fleibility of which Zero Hours Contracts are only part are only two of many trends which are symptomatic of the internal impact of Globalisation on the UK and are having profoundly unsettling effects, according to Thompson, which are leaving people anxious and at risk. UKIP as a Movement is effectively capitalizing on this energy as popular anger is directed toward the political class on issues such as immigration and the rapid economic change that threatens peoples’ sense of belonging and security. There is often "bewilderment about the sheer velocity of change", which can quickly turn to "hostility, anger and resentment". Two key forces are currently driving politics – a sense of powerlessness emerging in a period of rapid globalised econonomic change and the loss of a sense of ‘belonging’, an identification with the national community as a whole. Is this why more socially conservative elements of the working class become so caught up in visible displays of national identity?

Thompson also identifies technological changes in communication technologies, such as computerized newspaper production, satellite broadcasting, cable, multi and social media and the Internet as having an impact. According to Thompson, these have increased competition between sources of information and entertainment, and make regulation of the media in particular more problematical. Thirdly, he identifies cultural changes: fragmentation of cultures, and conflicts over identity, lifestyles and morals. Furthermore, the cultural industries have become more central to economic and social life, so there is a constant drive, he believes, to promote cultural changes, which can provoke resistance and conflict. Not everyone as we have seen subscribes to a liberal progressive viewpoint , some maintain older more traditional value systems which rub up against those of the metropolitan elite because neither do they understand their endurance or for that matter their continued popularity Increased efforts at cultural and moral regulation meanwhile means that power (and with it political power) is now exercised via discursive forums outside of the control of the main owners of nass media through a vigilant mass consuming and critiquing a rolling feed of uncontrolled media in a shared space as never before. Emily Thornberry must be the first Senior Politician to be sacked for uploading a picture on Social Media with insufficient supporting narrative or comment. What is clear is that as a Party, Labour is insufficiently sensitive to the impact of these emerging trends. There is, Thompson recognises, mounting public concern about the collective impact of a confluence of large-scale, and unsettling social, economic, and cultural changes. It is not simply therefore that the Working Class has been abandoned by the Labour Party, it is what the Labour Party thought the Working Class stood for has changed beyond all recognition. If the Working Class does not behave as Emily Thornberry expects then it is unlikely she will be able to adjust her expectations to the structure of the New Economy of Britain that confronts her, which is changing daily, without further disappointment on both sides.

**Mind the Gap: Middle Class Condescension**

There is a much more fundamental issue at work here however and that is the cultural condescension towards the masses which is present among Britain’s Governing Elite which Ferdinand Mount, Head of the Policy Unit in 10 Downing Street between 1982–83 when Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister, identifies in his book “Mind the Gap: The New Class Divide in Britain” (2004). Such disgust, condescension and attribution of worthlessness to the working classes by those who see themselves as brighter, more mobile and innately superior is becoming all too common particularly by those who have escaped from such a background themselves.

Mount sees the working class, in particular, as subject to a crude and one-sided portrayal in contemporary social discourse and media representation. The division of society into classes or strata, has effectively formed a hierarchy of prestige which he describes as condescending to those whom we consider socially below us, especially by members of the newly emergent middle class. Through “weird loathing” and “vile caricatures” the working class has therefore been subjected to a sustained programme of social contempt which Mount charts. Even he however expresses surprise at, the ‘bad manners’ and vulgarity of the middle classes who now feel it is legitimate to display their hatred of the working class so blatantly

For Mount, it is part of a wider contempt that he perceives in society, that "the ultimate deprivation that the English working class has suffered…is the deprivation of respect". That is the gap which has become the key political chasm in British Politics today. It is the chasm down which Emily Thornberry fell only to land at the bottom of a media crevasse stared at in fascination by journalists in much the same way that Emily Thornberry stared at the abode of Dan Ware in Rochester.

The problem is compounded, according to Mount, because of the lifestyle gap that now exists between the middle class and the working class. In the UK what has become known as “middle class flight” to suburbia (or in the Ribble Valley’s case to desireable rural locations), combined with the rise of vast council estates (projects) in the inner city, has led to a situation where, increasingly, never the twain shall meet. The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors has argued that “there are indications that the upper and lower ends of our society are diverging further than ever before.” According to Mount the perceptual gap has become reinforced by geographic separation. The problem for him is that the Political Elites in the UK can’t detach themselves from their North London attitude to what is going on in the rest of Society.

**Charles Murray – the Coming Apart Thesis**

A similar argument has been made by provocative libertarian conservative political scientist and W.H. Brady Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, Charles Murray in his book “[Coming Apart](http://www.ebay.co.uk/itm/Coming-Apart-The-State-of-White-America-1960-2010-Murray-Charles-Book-/141475238199?pt=Non_Fiction&hash=item20f094d137)” (2012). “The American nation is coming apart at the seams,” Murray warns — “not ethnic seams, but the seams of class.” In the book Murray discusses “A New Kind of Segregation,” new because it is not state-imposed but market-driven. A new upper class and a new lower class have diverged so far in core behaviors and values that they barely recognize eachother.The elite have flocked to “gated communities”/enclaves where they are unlikely to encounter the poorest. Murray describes several differences he sees forming between and causing two emerging classes—the New Upper Class and the New Lower class. The top and bottom of white America increasingly live in different cultures, Murray argues, with the powerful upper class living in enclaves surrounded by their own kind, ignorant about life in mainstream America. The American rich are living cloistered and isolated lives. Controversially, he argues that people overwhelmingly began living in areas surrounded largely by others in that same stratum, leading to not only an exacerbation of existing economic divides, but an unprecedented socio-cultural divide that had not existed before in America. Cocooned in the same neighborhoods, this new upper class has its own culture. Its members don’t watch game shows or go to bars with pool tables in them. The degree of class polarisation identified by Murray is hotly contested. He has been accused of building a vision of a dystopian reality not indistinct from a number of popular novels that have been published recently. Clearly, however, the evidence based conclusions that Murray drawing on a range of data offers an advanced warning of potential trends that might be occuring in Britain right now.

**Blue Labour and the Conservative Working Class**

The question that the Labour Party needs to ask itself urgently is whether cultural condescension is the exception rather than the rule amongst the Party Leadership. According to the current Philosopher in Chief, of the Labour PartyMaurice, now enobled in the House of Lords as Baron Glasman of Stoke Newington and of Stamford Hill in the London Borough of Hackney, Senior lecturer in Political Theory at London Metropolitan University the party has become too “middle class” – and blames this culture for UKIP’s current popularity. Glasman suggests that the loss of working class support is difficult to address particularly concerns about cultural condescension, “when the party is becoming, in many ways, very middle class”. For Glasman a large part of the problem stems from the fact that the Labour Party has been taken over by an increasingly detached liberal elite.

**Are Labour too middle class to appeal to the Working Man?**

In an interview with the Financial Times recently, Glasman warned the Labour Leader, Ed Milliband, that he was flirting with electoral disaster by being too “middle-class”. Labour is losing voters hand over fist to UKIP in its “heartlands”, he said. Labour voters who defected to UKIP may never return because the party is failing to address concerns on welfare and immigration. “That is the dilemma at the heart of the party’s strategy — is it possible to address these economic, political and cultural concerns when the party is becoming, in many ways, very middle-class?” The New Labour government, Glasman argues, became very sharply associated withwhat he dubs the liberal strand - a kind of strand which emphasized the importance of individual rights and entitlements and which tended, to be disdainful of the everyday practices of people as they lived their lives in different parts of the country. So disillusioned had he become that he expounded in one BBC Radio interview, “I don’t think that New Labour really like working-class people.”

For Glasman Labour is now so middle class it no longer appeals to working-class people. Glasman believes that by defining themselves as working class UKIP represent a major political threat to and has the potential to supplant the Labour Party if infact it is not already doing so. Glasman argues that the Labour middle-class vote held up [in 2010]. It was the working-class vote that died. “These are often people who are earning, who have jobs, but they don't see Labour as representing their interests," he says. According to Glasman many working class communities have a feeling of “dispossession and abandonment”. "There was possibly an assumption at first that [the rise of UKIP] would just work against the Tories," he said. "But there is a view that says that after the European and local elections are over, there could be a swing back to the Conservatives of UKIP voters. But will there be necessarily a swing back to Labour from the UKIP voters?"

**Labour supporters can’t talk about immigration**

Summarising Labour’s middle-class dilemma Glasman starkly points out that, “This is a long-term trend since 2001, in terms of the working-class vote just declining quite dramatically. The Labour middle-class vote held up [in 2010. It was the working-class vote that died. These are often people who are earning, who have jobs, but they don’t see Labour as representing their interests." One comment which Glasman made to Ed Milliband which was widely reported was that, “Working-class men can't really speak at Labour Party meetings about what causes them grief, concerns about their family, concerns about immigration, love of country, without being falsely stereotyped as sexist, racist, nationalist." It was the strongest recognition thus far by a Labour adviser of the gap between the Labour Party and the views and interests of many of its traditional supporters.The reality is that Labour is a more middle-class party now that it’s ever been. Partly this is a consequence of the middle class looking over their shoulder and asking themselves are they not working class after all? For some members of the middle class the Cost of Living Crisis that the Labour Party talks about resonate strongly with them – they have yet to feel the benefits of the Conservative’s Long-Term Economic Growth Plan as fully as some other parts of the middle classes. It is also the result of the hangover from Blair’s modernisation project, particularly for middle class Public Sector Employees whose jobs are under threat in the next round of Budget Efficiencies. It is also because a key Labour electoral strategy is to reach out to disaffected Liberal Democrat Voters who are middle class to their core.

**The fundamental conservatism of the Working Class**

Glasman has goaded Ed Milliband with accusations of Labour being too liberal and progressive in its sensibility. As a member of the Centre-Left who would theoretically like to engage with the working-class more fully he is all too aware of how terrified many middle class members of the Labour Party are of the impact that engagement would have on their own liberal sensitivities calling for the party to re-establish its connections with people across the country.Glasman argues that the Labour Party should embrace what he regards as the fundamental conservatism of the working class. These include the family, patriotism, faith and the work ethic. As such Blue Labour advocates, in Glasman's words, "a deeply conservative socialism". They argue that for a fundamentally conservative working class an ethics of community and solidarity implies a defence of traditional institutions and identities such as the family, patriotism and the nation, faith and the work ethic. The Blue Labour approach is often summarised with the slogan; ‘faith, family and flag’. They also argue that defence of traditional working class community values and identities specifically implies by definition a defence of British ‘white working class’ traditions and identities. They argue that ‘mass immigration’ and ‘multiculturalism’ has been hugely destructive in terms of community cohesion and so must be resisted.

**New Labour alienated the Working Classes**

Blue Labourites contend that New Labour’s metropolitan liberalism alienated socially conservative working class communities (hence the colour blue). Moreover, this has significantly contributed to the established view that Britain’s parliamentary elite is out of touch, especially on issues such as EU immigration. Appealing to working-class votes is sometimes dismissed as a “core vote” strategy.Glasman has been pilloried for arguing that Labour should “involve those people who support the EDL within the party”. It is important to place such a remark fully in the context in which it was argued. What he is not arguing, as he has been accused by those on the left of the Labour Party, is that, **‘**if we can’t beat the BNP, let’s become the BNP’! Instead what he is arguing is giving the working class more of a voice. He has pointedly argued that, "working-class men can't really speak at Labour party meetings about what causes them grief, concerns about their family, concerns about immigration, love of country, without being falsely stereotyped as sexist, racist, nationalist". This is an approach which appears fundamentally at odds with Emily Thornberry and large parts of the rest of the leadership of the Labour Party. Such an approach has been described as ugly. The Labour leadership have a hard time admitting that the working class want much tighter controls on immigration. It is they that confront the reality on a daily basis in a deregulated fee market economy of competition for employment opportunities from immigrants that come from right across the EU and not just South East and East CentralEurope. Pressures on housing, jobs and public services caused by an influx of migrants tend to be more keenly felt by working-class families. These voters are rarely racist. Their concern however is about security of employment, access to housing, quality of education and they see the metropolitan elite receiving all the positives from mass migration while they are only exposed to the downside. Working Class People neither resent nor show hostility to the new neighbours next door. They welcome them as fellow human beings. However they also say that it is their jobs, GP waiting times and council house applications which are affected and they resent being personally deprioritised. For them the Labour elite always find the top schools for their children. They find their way to the top restaurants. They live different lives to the voters whose support they need. But it is more than that. These voters are aspirational too. They want common sense and a fair deal.

**Jon Cruddas: the Conservative Politics of Earning and Belonging**

It is a view which has been echoed contraversially by Jon Cruddas, the Labour Party’s Policy Co-ordinator and MP for Dagenham and Rainham.Blue Labour, he argues, need to address the “loss of the working class that has economically disintegrated and culturally disintegrated” and create debates to tackle this otherwise there would be “no future with Labour”. For Cruddas, the fatal flaw of the Labour left was that it struggled to understand or to involve the people in whose name it wanted to act. If Labour moves away from bureaucratic, middle class radicalism, he believes, towards championing a more patriotic, English style of radicalism, which resonates with blue collar voters, that would be of real concern to Tories. One quite wonders what his view of the opinion of Emily Thornberry’s studied disbelief about the image of the house in Rochester she tweeted is?

Cruddasargues that Labour’s renewal and electoral victory is best rooted in a radical and conservative politics of earning and belonging.He has written thatLabour’s traditions are conservative in valuing relationships, work, family and community. At the heart of the Labour interest has been a deep conservative instinct for the preservation of society and people’s mutual dependence. Cruddas’ form of socialism is essentially quite conservative, about protecting working-class neighbourhoods from the worst excesses of globalism. He dubs the importance of community engagement, continuity and a sense of place as “conservative radicalism.”  He suggests that: “This politics is conservative, in that it values the continuity of the social goods which shape people's lives: home, family, relationships, good work, locality and communities of belonging."

At the same time Cruddas has sensed the insecurity at the heart of working class life and the subsequent disengagement from politics.He too believes there should be tighter regulation on immigration. He says: “When your community changes around you, it’s very uncomfortable. I think Labour should conserve things – families, relationships, communities.” According to Cruddas the Labour Party is the most Conservative Political Party in Britain because the notion of belonging to a community is a deeply Conservative idea. This assumes of course that the working class still support the Labour Party or that there is still a distinctive socio-demographic group which on can identify as being the working class.What is clear, and here I agree with Cruddas, is that there is an increasingly large group of Voters who wish to control the process of rapid political and economic change more effectively rather than simply being driven by it. Unfortunately for both the Conservative and Labour Parties it is UKIP with its message of thus far and no further that is becoming the prime beneficiaries of this group of working class voters. In a speech he gave in May this year which he’d delivered at the ACEVO Gathering of Social Leaders he said that,” UKIP is exploiting this mood in Labour’s English heartlands where traditional ways of life have been devastated. Often in places still suffering from the industrial and social changes of the 1980s.”

**The Revolt of the Left Behind: Revolt on the Right**

In their book “Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain” (2014) Robert Ford, Lecturer at the University of Manchester and Matthew Goodwin, Associate Professor at the University of Nottingham and Associate Fellow at Chatham House, point out that UKIP is now arguably Britain's most working-class party. Indeed when Labour were in Government under Tony Blair, and then Gordon Brown, UKIP picked up more support from Labour than from the Tories. Many UKIP supporters are former Labour voters who had steadily lost faith in the party over its long term of office, and who in the General Election of 2010, as floating Voters, switched to the Conservative Party under Cameron. UKIP supporters are not who we think they are. The stereotype of ruddy faced, middle-class, middle-aged golf club bores, who live in a suburban semi-detached house in the Home Counties, wear lots of tweed and bore their neighbours to death by droning on about the evil Eurocrats in Brussels is far from the truth. According to Ford and Goodwin UKIP's supporters look more like Old Labour than True Blue Tories. UKIP's supporters tend to be blue-collar, older, struggling economically, and often live in poorer, urban areas, with big pools of support in the Labour heartlands of the North. Goodwin says:  “UKIP are winning over the “Left Behind” groups in British society: old, working class, men, with very few educational qualifications. These are voters who hold a very different set of values to the professional, middle-class majority: they are far more nationalist, Eurosceptic, fiercely opposed to immigration and feel like they have no voice in politics. They look out at a country their neither recognize nor want to be a part of”.

**Are UKIP the most Working Class Party in Britain?**

In fact, UKIP are Britain’s most working-class party. UKIP is a “grey-haired, blue-collar revolt” and its electoral base is “old, male, working class, white and less educated,” according to Ford and Goodwin. Some 57 per cent of UKIP supporters are over the age of 54, while just over one in 10 are under 35. Some 55 per cent left school at 16 or earlier, while only 24 per cent went to University. Crunching 10 years' worth of data on 124,000 British voters (5,593 of whom intend to vote UKIP in 2015); they have found that Blue-collar workers are heavily over-represented in UKIP. On average UKIP Voters are lower down the social scale than supporters of any other political Party. They are the disaffected, the elderly and those hit by the hard economic times. UKIP support comes primarily from the disadvantaged and insecure — the victims of social and economic change, alienated from a meritocratic political establishment. This is a group who have been 'left behind' by the economic and social transformation of Britain in recent decades, and pushed to the margin as the main parties have converged on the centre ground. Such Voters are experiencing a visceral sense of lack of security, have a fear of change and ar mourning loss of identity/culture. Like other radical-right voters across the continent, UKIP supporters oppose the European Union, distrust mainstream politicians of all parties and are pessimistic about the future. These groups had initially turned their backs on politics, but UKIP has offered them an outlet and a voice for their concerns.They are the old traditional working class and those who feel their country is morphing into something unrecognizable from the one they grew up in. Foremost amongst their anti-establishment woes is mass immigration. Ford and Goodwin argue that a substantial disenchanted “left behind” blue collar vote that would previously have voted for Labour or even the BNP now vote for UKIP. Far from being a danger principally to the Conservatives coming second in the polls in Barnsley, Rotherham and South Shields suggest that UKIP is a bigger threat to Labour. This is why Labour has found itself in precarious situations in recent byelections. According to Ford & Goodwin, "During an economically rightwing administration that is pursuing an austerity agenda, the left-behind social groups who stand to lose the most show greater enthusiasm for UKIP's radical right insurgency than for the party traditionally associated with state support for the most vulnerable".

**The Ashcroft Poll**

Ford and Goodwin’s findings have been substantiated by Lord Ashcroft, who in 2012, polled 20,000 people and held focus groups with UKIP voters and found that ‘UKIP’s support was heavily concentrated in more disadvantaged and insecure groups in British society’. Ford and Goodwin’s own research supports Ashcroft’s conclusions: “Blue-collar UKIP voters outnumber their white-collar counterparts by a large margin: 42 per cent of these voters work in blue-collar jobs or do not work at all, while a smaller percentage of 30 per cent hold professional middle-class jobs. This picture is reversed in the main parties, where the middle classes dominate: 44 per cent of Conservative supporters are middle class, and 28 per cent are working class.”

**The Middle Class do not dominate UKIP**

Middle-class professionals in UKIP by comparison are scarce. “Middle-class suburbanites do not dominate UKIP,” according to Ford and Goodwin, “They shy away from it.” This is not the view of the UKIP Activist Community, which by comparison are angry middle-class, Southern and suburban former Tories who are obsessed by Europe and having a referendum. It is easy to see how the “UKIP = angry Tories + Euroscepticism” formula has taken hold. It is a mistake that many Conservative defectors are likely to rue, unless, like Douglas Carswell, they possess a large reservoir of support from economically marginalized and politically disengaged Voters – the fear and anger currently felt by former Labour and Liberal Democrat Voters. That is why public displays of patriotism in the form of hanging out of flags according to Cruddas is not therefore a sign of racism or intolerance merely an expression of belonging and the rootlessness that large parts of the population currently feel in certain areas of the country. For Cruddas the hanging out of flags emphasises the importance of being rooted in a “place”, a discussion that has been missing from much of politics, and most of left wing politics in recent decades.

**Englishness and the Olympic Effect**

Cruddas argues that the success of the London Olympics may prove to have changed the dynamic of the discussion, making national pride both more salient and perhaps more normal too. According to Cruddas, the Olympics suggested a Britain more confident in itself than many had anticipated. One wonders what Emily Thornberry thought? Danny Boyle’s Olympic opening ceremony, he argues, reached many across the liberal-left usually immune or allergic to any sentiments of national pride. He believes that some on the left however worry about this. He argues that, “Labour is no longer sure who it represents…It favours multiculturalism but suspects the symbols and iconography of Englishness…it presided over the leaching away of the common meanings that bind the English in society... in England something more fundamental has been lost, and that is a Labour language and culture which belongs to the society it grew out of and which enables its immersion in the ordinary everyday life of the people.” On the issue of an EU referendum, Cruddas supported an ‘in-out referendum’ in the recent parliamentary vote.  He said that, “this is about democracy. This is about respecting the people. Successive generations have not had a say on the European debate. That is not right and undermines trust in the political process.” Cruddas places huge emphasis upon the importance of Labour understanding the concept of England. It is clear that there is a world of difference between Jon Cruddas and Emily Thornberry.

**Politicians as Outsiders**

For Cruddas the reason Working Class Labour voters are deserting to UKIP is readily understandable. It is simply because they are sick of them. They're sick of the soundbites and unfulfilled promises. They're sick of the fight for the middle ground. They're sick of being told what they believe is wrong. But most of all, they want real change - because, politics is now boring. The problem is that politicians don't understand them. They have nothing in common. They have no shared experiences and they have nothing on which to build a relationship with them. If you met an MP in the pub then you would be unlikely to be friends, extemely unlikely indeed to be best friends. Quite simply you'd have nothing to talk about because you’d have no shared experiences to prompt a conversation. Politician are increasingly becoming outsiders as far as the Working Class are concerned. Until politicians realise this then the sooner they will start to asks themselves what is wrong with the Working Class and how they can help to address these problems. Ford and Goodwin concur: “UKIP voters, who are by some margin the most politically dissatisfied group in the electorate, have lost faith in the ability of traditional politics to solve their everyday problems and have instead turned their anger towards groups they feel are responsible for the decline in their standards of living and loss of control over their lives.” “They do not consider mainstream politicians to be people who can protect them from the effects of the financial crisis, but rather as part of the corrupt and distant class who inflicted this crisis upon them. This presents a serious problem for Labour going forward, as groups of voters who should be naturally sympathetic to the economic policies of the left no longer trust politicians to help them.“

**Northern Lights**

Cruddas is unsurprised that the working class has been "demonised" and served up as entertainment. From Shameless to Wife Swap, according to Cruddas, the working classes have become something to ridicule or fear as a "mob at the gate". Labour, he says, created a "global class apart at the top of society beyond the reach of national boundaries and tax law" and targeted a "mythical Middle England" for votes because "the assumption was the working class had nowhere else to go in terms of voting".He very much laments how Labour has allowed right-wingers to "reframe all of the debates around nationhood, the family” and the deficit. It is a very diferent viewpoint from Emily Thornberry. Cruddas bases much of his critique of the Blair years on, “its apparent indifference to ‘what really matters' that incited such rage and contempt amongst constituencies which had been traditional bastions of support.” This was starkly revealed in a Policy Exchange Report entitled “Northern Lights” (2013) which emphasised that politicians need to do more to connect with and appeal to blue collar voters. It showed that a staggering 88 per cent of skilled manual workers (who were the backbone of Blair and Thatcher’s electoral success) thought that politicians “didn’t understand the real world at all.”

**The Blue Collar Vote**

Regaining the blue collar vote is crucial for both parties. This must involve understanding the blue collar mindset and the desire for economic security. In 1964, when Harold Wilson was elected to power after 13 years in opposition, two-thirds of the electorate were working class, and one-third middle class. The working class was crucial for electoral success, and the Conservatives could win only by detaching a large portion of it from its allegiance to the Labour Party. But by 2010, just three-sevenths of the electorate were working class, while four-sevenths — a majority — were middle class.

The problem that we face therefore is that we are now very unsure as to precisely who the Working Class actually are. In 1964 almost half the British workforce did blue collar jobs, 40% were in unions and 70% had no formal educational qualifications. Now manual jobs represent less than 30% of the total, fewer than 20% of people are in unions, and voters with educational qualifications equal those without. The political battlefield is now dominated by a university-trained metropolitan elite. Hence the huge drop in the numbers voting in the Labour heartlands, not just in 2010, but also in 2005. It now appears that calling yourself working class is not quite as desirable, even if you are. Fewer people want to be working class than they once did. The change has been rapid. It is the case that now only 24 per cent of people in the UK now self define themselves as working class. In 2007, according the “British Social Attitudes Survey” conducted by the National Centre for Social Research, 57 per cent of those surveyed said they were working class. But by 2011, another survey, this time conducted by BritainThinks, reported that only 24 per cent said they were working class. For the Labour Party the problem is particularly critical. At the 2010 General Election Labour’s working class vote was actually smaller than its middle class vote for the first time.

**The Psephological Problematique**

The core psephological problematique in simple terms is there is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that UKIP's working class voters were, as a block, ever Labour's core voters. Indeed while the working class as a whole have historically exhibited strong partisan support for the Labour Party, this is not true of the Working Classes as a whole .It has never been the case that the entirety of the working class, however, has voted Labour.If that were the case one needs to ask why the Labour Party has not been continuously in government since 1918. In their book, “Angels in Marble: Working Class Conservatives in Urban England”published as long ago as 1968 Robert McKenzie and Alan Silver recognised that a sizeable faction of the working class vote for parties of the right. There may be factions of the working class who never voted for Labour, or were habitual floating voters, and it may be from these sections that UKIP draw their support. In order to understand this more it is necessary to understand the relationship between the changing class composition of Britain.

**The 2013 Great British Class Survey**

The BBC’s 2013 “Great British Class Survey”, conducted by BBC Lab UK in which more than 161,000 people took part, making it the largest study of class in the UK, shows how outdated conceptions of the working class are. The original survey contained more than 140 questions and covered wealth, recreation and social networks. BBC Lab UK worked with Professor Mike Savage of the London School of Economics and Professor Fiona Devine of the University of Manchester on the study. The findings were published in the Sociological Journal and presented at a conference of the British Sociological Association. Researchers asked a series of questions about income, house value, savings, cultural and leisure activities and the occupations of friends. They were able to determine a person's economic, social and cultural capital scores from the answers and analysed the scores to create its class system.

According to the Study people in the UK now fit into seven social classes. It says the traditional categories of working, middle and upper class are outdated; fitting 39% of people.It put forward a new model of seven social classes ranging from the elite at the top to a "precariat" - the poor, precarious proletariat - at the bottom. Class has traditionally been defined by occupation, wealth and education. But the Survey argues that this is too simplistic, suggesting that class has three dimensions - economic, social and cultural. The BBC Lab UK study measured economic capital - income, savings, house value - and social capital - the number and status of people someone knows. The study also measured cultural capital, defined as the extent and nature of cultural interests and activities.The new classes are defined as:

* **Elite** - the most privileged group in the UK, distinct from the other six classes through its wealth. This group has the highest levels of all three capitals
* **Established middle class** - the second wealthiest, scoring highly on all three capitals. The largest and most gregarious group, scoring second highest for cultural capital
* **Technical middle class** - a small, distinctive new class group which is prosperous but scores low for social and cultural capital. Distinguished by its social isolation and cultural apathy
* **New affluent workers** - a young class group which is socially and culturally active, with middling levels of economic capital
* **Traditional working class** - scores low on all forms of capital, but is not completely deprived. Its members have reasonably high house values, explained by this group having the oldest average age at 66
* **Emergent service workers** - a new, young, urban group which is relatively poor but has high social and cultural capital
* **Precariat, or precarious proletariat** - the poorest, most deprived class, scoring low for social and cultural capital

The precariat, the poorest and most deprived grouping, made up 15% of the population. The sociologists said these groups at the extremes of the class system had been missed in conventional approaches to class analysis, which have focused on the working class.

**The New Working Class: Emergent Service Workers**

Professor of Sociology at Manchester University, Fiona Devine, said "What it [the Survey] allows us is to understand is a more sophisticated, nuanced picture of what class is like now. "It shows us…we still have…the poor, with very little social and cultural engagement," she said. "It's what's in the middle which is really interesting and exciting, there's a much more fuzzy area between the traditional working class and traditional middle class."There's the emergent workers and the new affluent workers who are different groups of people who won't necessarily see themselves as working or middle class.The researchers also found the established middle class made up 25% of the population and was the largest of all the class groups, with the traditional working class now only making up 14% of the population. They say the emergent service workers appear to be the children of the "traditional working class," which they say has been fragmented by de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, immigration and the restructuring of urban space.But, it adds, “they are relatively old, with an average age of 65. To this extent, the traditional working class is fading from contemporary importance.”

The Survey concludes that, “The 'new affluent workers' and the 'emergent service workers' are an interesting focus. They seem, in many respects, to be the children of the 'traditional working class', and they might thus be said to exemplify the stark break in working-class culture which has been evident as a result of de-industrialisation, mass unemployment, immigration and the restructuring of urban space. They show high levels of engagement with 'emerging cultural capital' and have extensive social networks, so indicating that they are far from being disengaged in any conventional sense. To this extent, new social formations appear to be emerging out of the tendrils of the traditional working class.”

**Experian Mosaic**

That is why I value the socio-demographic approach adopted by Experian and believe that it has much to offer in better understanding the fine detail which constitutes the changing nature of the working class in the UK Experian’s Public Sector Mosaic offers a far more nuanced view of a far more enterprising and certainly optimistic and future oriented emergent service workers or should that be new working class than the bunker mentality and pessimistic and historically rooted version of the old working class that UKIP currently appeal to.

Experian’s Mosaic Clasification draws on over 440 separate pieces of compliant public and proprietary sourced information for each of the UK’s 48 million adults – a total of 21 billion individual data items to create a high definition picture of modern British society. The classification now incorporates 15 lifestyle groups, 67 lifestyle types and 141 person types, updated every six months.

Experian’s data was compiled using TGI survey data (Target Group Index) a continuous survey of consumer product usage, lifestyle, media exposure and attitudes across Great Britain and based on questions covering a wide range of behavioural aspects.These data respondents were then matched to their appropriate Mosaic type, enabling Experian to profile 141 different person types.

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In a previous paper on Blue Collar Conservatism I have characterised the kind of Emergent Service Workers that live and work in my own local village as Jacks of All Tradestypically responsible skilled manual workers many of whom are self-employed and who gain satisfaction as well as an income from providing various technical services to local residents.

**Enterprising Blue Collar Conservatives**

Experian has identified a much larger group of what it collectively defines as Blue Collar Enterprise comprising of people who, though not necessarily very well educated, are practical and enterprising in their orientation. Many of these people live in what were once council estates in the larger cities but where tenants have exercised their right to buy. They own their cars and provide a reliable source of labour to local employers whose central focus is providing comfort and value to family members.

Unlike the “left behind”: the disaffected: the disadvantaged and insecure, the alienated UKIP Voters the Blue Collar Enterprise group are people whose lifestyles have definitely improved in recent years. Blue Class Enterprise Group Members are Thatcher’s Children. The policy of selling council houses to tenants allowed them to acquire their own homes at very affordable prices.The growth of car ownership meanwhile has put them within commuting reach of jobs that they would previously have been unable to consider. Liberalisation of the economy has worked to their benefit. It is people in Blue Collar Enterprise in particular who have seen their incomes and their standards of living improve in recent time. Typically they are people who live in what might be called ‘better’ estates, often located in small pockets and/or in smaller and more prosperous communities. Neighbourhoods of Blue Collar Enterprise take the form of low density estates of similar semi-detached housing. Often the new owners have stamped their identity on their homes by having a new door and new windows fitted. The more ambitious will have added a brick porch or an extension or even a conservatory. The front driveway may have been reconstructed to allow cars or vans to be parked on the property rather than on the road. These planning modifications break up the previous architectural unity of what is known in planning parlance as the street scene to project a more individualistic culture in keeping with the changing attitudes of the residents. It is to be noted that such neighbourhoods have fewer single parents and fewer tenants. More people are in work, many more are likely to have access to one or more cars, including owning a White Van. Crime on such estates is low and the environment more pleasant.

The Blue Collar Enterprise Group tends to be found in medium sized towns rather than in large cities, and in the more prosperous South of England and the Midlands rather than in the North of England. However many Blue Collar Enterprise neighbourhoods are also to be found in Scotland. The highest concentrations occur around the M25 in areas like Rochester and Strood and along other important motorway routes.

Blue Collar Enterprise households are confident in their ability to manage their own affairs without support from the state. Their values lie in self-reliance, in persistence and responsibility at work, in taking advantage of opportunities, even where a certain level of risk may be involved, and in enjoyment through consumption. For Blue Collar Enterprise households it is the products that people own that confers status rather than setting in which the product is consumed. Members of the Blue Collar Enterprise Group focus heavily on price and reliability, rather than being influenced by lifestyle imagery. They are unlikely to be much influenced by issues such as social and environmental responsibility, ethics etc which can generate so much angst among areas of Urban Intelligencia. Emily Thornberry take note!

Blue Collar Enterprise families, according to the Mosaic Classification do not dress to impress but enjoy smart casual wear. Few people drive company cars, though a significant number make use of vans. These are areas where people know the price of petrol at local filling stations and adjust their purchasing accordingly. Many driveways will contain vans.

**H46: White Van Culture**

What Experian dubs as Type H46: White Van Culture forms an important sub-set of the Blue Enterprise Group. The White Van Culture demographic forms 3.17% the Total UK Population.White Van Culture is made up principally of young couples. They are found mostly around the M25. White Van Culture consists mostly of confident couples situated in outer London suburbs. Buoyant economies in these areas provide ideal conditions for enterprise. Neighbouring middle class dormitory towns provide an insatiable demand for tradesmen who can repair their central heating systems, service their cars and install new double glazed conservatories. Jobs are easy to come by, but in a new breed of service enterprises relying on quick and efficient service, flexibility and consumer focus. In White Van Culture neighbourhoods, people get married rather than merely live together and most relationships tend to last. There are relatively few single parents and even fewer are out of work or disabled. These are estates which teem more with White Vans than they do with children. Few residents have devoted efforts to gaining qualifications, certainly not degrees. In these economies that is not what local employers need.

Neighbourhoods of White Van Culture are particularly common in the new towns that were developed immediately after the war. The new towns were beacons of good design. The only current drawback of these areas is the lack of space for cars. Few of the houses have private garages and many councils have had to transfer space previously dedicated to recreational uses to accommodate the large numbers of households with two or more cars (or vans).

The economy of these neighbourhoods is no longer based on local manufacturing industry but on modern service industries and transport in particular. White Van Culture neighbourhoods provide labour for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted as well as for driving delivery vans. Census returns show a particular high proportion of the workforce employed in transport and distribution.

Compared with the lot of working class folk in other parts of the country, these people have quite good opportunities for local employment, in what is usually a vibrant economy. Some can earn decent money, even with elementary occupations requiring few qualifications, if any. Others may earn good money working in a supervisory capacity or as self-employed, skilled or semiskilled tradesmen. Employment in transport, storage and communication is very common. The bulk of these people have mainly manual skills.

**White Van Culture: A More Engaged and Better Informed Part of the Working Class**

Interestingly, according to Experian, White Van Culture has a notable tendency to be better informed about, and to be more engaged in the offerings of contemporary society. They are exposed to political messages and they learn from these messages, as well as by reference to their peer group. They are relatively sophisticated in this area. They are fairly likely to own a mobile phone. Similarly, they are very likely to have an Internet connection, which may be broadband, and to make use of the Internet for information.

White Van Culture as outlined in the Exoerian Study which was referenced at the beginning of this Paper have predictable inclinations for the use of their available leisure time and this includes football, TV, betting, and the pub. They are not TV addicts however. White Van Voters normally read the tabloids, but a fair proportion read the Daily Mail.

The two things that define White Van Culture are their energy and optimism. They are what Experian has dubbed “opportunistic realists”. They have coped well with, and they have often succeeded through, the structural economic shifts of recent years. They are adaptable and respond fairly quickly to change although they are far from being opinion leaders. Once again Emily Thornberry take note – according to Experian White Van Man Voters possess no great complexity or aesthetic sense behind their value systems and behaviours, but they have great confidence in both. Their sense of self-worth comes from being able to demonstrate pragmatic results.

The dominant culture in these areas therefore is that of the fairly prosperous and informed working class.

**The White Van Man Driver**

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Further sociological background colour on the behaviour of White Van Culture has been provided by the Social Issues Research Centre. The Centre does not believe that White Van Man deserves the opprobrium which is routinely heaped upon him.

According to SIRC White Van Man Drivers ranged in age from 18 to 73 years. The average age was 37, and the majority were in their 30s or 40s. 96% were Male. Two thirds of drivers were married. Single White Van Man Drivers accounted for only 24%, and a further 10% were divorcees.

The majority (75%) live and work close to home. Most of their business is local and in urban environments. White Van Man, according to SIRC is really a 'townie', and he often knows the local roads and streets better than some taxi drivers. This gives him a sense of 'territory' – in traffic he is on his own 'turf'. And like other species of animal, he feels most confident in these conditions.

For the majority of drivers their van is their 'tool of the trade'. The typical driver may be a service engineer, a fishmonger, a roofer, an exhibitions erector, a picture framer or even a theatre director. Many are also self-employed (26%), and the van that they drive is one crucial element of their business.

White Van Man spends most of his time in his local area.The choice of radio programme that he listens to is his way of keeping in touch with his home turf. SIRC meanwhile confirms that his choice of newspaper is mostly one of the tabloids – perhaps because the broadsheets are less easy to cope with in the cab or at the table of a roadside café. Around 50% of drivers read one or more magazines regularly. These are sometimes related to their work

Many White Van Man Drivers actually play as well as watch football. He also goes to speedway or motor sport events. Rather suprisingly he also scuba dives, walks to keep fit, writes songs, and goes fishing. White Van Man is physically very active with his varied interests and hobbies providing a contrast to his often rather routine working week. He doesn't go to the pub very much but his weekend activities are usually social ones, again making a contrast with his often fairly solitary profession.

Over half (57%) have pets: ponies, Airedales, Siamese cats, Labradors, Cocker Spaniels, Golden Retrievers, parrots, rabbits and fish but incredibly rarely the stereotypical Rottweilers.

According to SIRC it comes as a big surprise to many people, but White Van Man Drivers are often quite gentle folk which fits in very much with their personality and lifestyle. They are anything but 'tribal' in a way that a St. George Flag Flying National Team Football Supporter would epect to be – a member of a distinct social grouping with its own rituals, codes of conduct and distinctive argot. The only thing which really unites White Van Man Drivers, according to SIRC, is the fact that they drive vans.

**The White Van – the Small Businessman’s Tools of the Trade**

For many White Van Man Drivers their White Van is simply a tool of work like a computer or an electric drill. You have to have one, and you need to keep it working. A small number are intimately connected with their White Vans expressing something close to affection when talking about their vans emphasising the merits of a particular brand, contrasting it favourably with its competitors, and are prone to the interior decoration and embellishment of their Vans. A very small number indeed are literally in love with their vans. They give them pet names and treat them like members of the family.

White Van Man generally holds quite a high opinion of himself. Most think that they are careful and courteous. White Van Man also tends to see himself as non-aggressive. At the same time, however, he is no passive wimp. Many deliberately reject the stereotype that is levelled against them in the media and by MPs alike. Many do however acknowledge the high visibility of White Vans. The problem is building unsupportable generalisations about White Van Man Drivers. Some have gone so far as to point out the need for some to have a 'scapegoat' on which to vent their anger. The 'uniform' nature of the white van, they believe, provides such an opportunity.Like his forebears, the Teddy Boys, Mods and Rockers, Skinheads, football hooligans and punks, Whte Van Man provides an easy way of confirming our own moral rectitude. If he didn't exist, we would have to invent him. In a sense, there really is no such social animal as White Van Man.

**The Local Area**

Don’t just take it from the academics. Have a look round your own local area and count the number of vans parked in driveways or, more likely, on the roadside as Small Business Owners pop into their houses for a bite to eat before popping out again on their next job. I did recently whilst I was on foot delivering the latest Newsletter from My MP, Nigel Evans. I was pleased to find that in Billington alone there were no less than 22 Van owners. Not all, I have to report, owned a White Van. The Vans came in all sots of brands, colours and sizes.Some had been white before they had been adorned in the livery of the business now proudly displayed on the side panels, bonnet and/or rear doors. What Small Business Owners in possession of a White Van have learned is the importance of Advertising with a Contact Name, Telephone or Mobile Number prominently displayed together with in some cases a web-site address – this is of course the digital age – although the irony of acquiring a web site address from a highly mobile source of advertising – particularly one with such a poor reputation amongst the literate (or should that be less than literate) political classes.

**Local Conservative White Van Drivers**

It got me thinking.How many of My Conservative Colleagues who were or still are Small Business Owners own or have owned a White Van in the past?

**Nigel Evans MP**

My MP Nigel Evans certainly has. As part owner of his family's newsagents and convenience store in Swansea he was intimately involved in the day to day running of the business. “Yes Ged that meant driving the Van.In a family business everyone has to pitch in. A local convenience store needs to be well stocked. If it isn’t you quickly find yourself losing business, particularly if your local custoners find that you haven’t got what they’re after. Using the Van to pick up all sorts of stuff from the Cash & Carry and Local Suppliers was a daily experience, probably more like twice or three times daily. You’re absolutely right, a Van.and Yes ours was a White one is pretty much a tool of the trade for a Newsagent or Convenince Store Owner. I’ll tell you what, even whlst I’ve been an MP and returned home visit my famly on more than a number of occasions I’ve been asked “I don’t suppose you can go and pick up such and such in the Van for me can you?” I’ve certainly never felt too proud to go and do that. More than once I’ve been spotted arriving in the Shop Van. Its part of being what a Small Business Owner is about. I’ve got genuine respect for LocalBusiness Owners who drive a Van. I know what it’s like because I’ve done it myself!”

**Kevin Horkin**

My friend, Council Colleague and Local Business Owner Kevin Horkin definitely has. “White Van’s Ged…I’ve still got one. I’ve been a White Van Owner for 30 years! I’ve had one since the days that I used to have a stall on Accrington Market. Market Traders will absolutely understand just how critical a White Van is to their Business. If you can’t get the product you're selling to the Market then you haven’t got a business. I realised pretty quickly that if I wanted to be a Market Trader then I needed to get from A to B or in my case Home where I lived to the Market it was absolutely essential- I couldn’t earning a living without one! And Yes I did park the Van outside My House - the safest place for it to be. I left pretty early in the morning and came back late at night. There is a lot of personal self satisfaction that goes with literally running a business out of the back of a Van. I’ve always had White Vans – it’s the best colour to advertise what your business is about – it stands out! That is why White Vans are still the most popular colour. Inact I’ve still got a White Van that I use to deliver supples to the shops that I have located in different parts of East Lancashire. I have to say though that the artwork on the Van looks a lot better than when I used to hand paint it on. That shows just how far mobile advertising on White Vans has come on since the days when I first started out in Business. Just look at what is on the side of a White Van when you are out and about.It’s really instructive - even now as Business Owner there are things that you can still learn!”



**Peter Anthony**

And last but no means least comes Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the Conservative Party for the Blackpool South Constituency, Peter Anthony. Peter is another Small Business Owner – part owner along with his Business Partner, Paul Lomax of a Café Bar callled Antons located in St Annes on Sea which opened its doors on 2007. “I’ve got a White van parked round the corner from the Café right now. Infact I had a White Van before this one and before that I have to admit I used to own a red one. The Van is critical to the Business. As a Café Bar Owner we use the Van to pick up Catering Supplies from the Wholesalers and Other Local Suppliers. Some of this stuff can be quite bulky so we need something big to pick it up in and unpack it at the other end at the Café.A lot of Local Business Owners located close to Anton’s have their own Van. A High Street Retail Business and White Van ownership are two things that go hand in hand. They’re pretty much indispensable.And yes I do take it home in the evening. You’ll know I’m in at home when the Van is parked on my drive. Infact My Daughter Elizabeth has just opened a Small Antiques Business and she uses the Van to transport items to and from her shop and customers in. I have to say the Van is also useful for Carrying Election Material in. Elizabeth who has just opened a local Conservative Future Branch finds it very useful to carry all sorts of gear to events.In that sense this White Van has a Political as well as a Business function.

 

So the question is, if Emergent Service Workers and White Van Owners play such an important role in the Small Business economy how do we, as a Party, take advantage of this trend?

**White Van Conservatism**

The answer is a form of Conservatism which appeals specifically to White Van Man Voters: White Van Man Conservatism. The phrase was invented by Robert Halfon, the MP for Harlow. According to Halfon, in his October 2012 Conservative Party Conference Speech in Birmingham, “the Conservatives are the true Workers' Party now.” For Halfon this is about retaking the battleground of aspiration. “White Van Conservatism,” he believes has, “triumphed over metropolitan intellectualism.” Being modern isn’t necessarily about having metropolitan values. He wants the Tory leadership to work much harder to win the support of aspirational, hard-working people.

Halfon believes that what White Van Conservatives – Emergent Service Workers - want are strong policies — such as lower taxes, lower immigration and more incentives for those who work — but that are compassionate too. They want support for public services, especially the NHS; a more sympathetic ear to nurses and teachers; and a safety net for those who fall off the ladder.

Halfon is very much on the side of Emergent Service Workers He acknowledges that work has become much more individualized, as more and more people become self employed (currently around 4.1 million) with micro and small businesses becoming the mainstay of the economy. This is very much a return to a small business conservatism. Halfon has especially emphasized tax cuts for smaller and micro businesses.

Halfon puts it across in what some have described as catchphrase which David Cameron has picked up on: “If you want to work hard, save hard, do the right thing, then the Tories will provide a ladder of opportunity.” Halfon has focused his vision on a relentless campaign for a halt to and cuts in fuel duty for White Van Man Drivers. Not being afraid to attack vested interests, such as big uncompetitive corporates like the oil companies.

**Fuel Duty**

Halfon has focused on the way that White Van Man Drivers in particular are being ripped off by the big Oil Companies. Halfon believes that despite the current government reversing the Fuel Duty Escalator, which was put in place by the previous Labour government, motorists are still facing fuel poverty. Figures
show average motorists spend £1700 per year on fuel – a tenth of their income. Fuel duty and VAT together make up more than 60% of pump prices.
He argues that the inconvenient truth is that oil companies are keeping the price of fuel up by the selling practices of supermarket retail chains forcing the closure of independent petrol filling stations; failing to pass on falls in the price of wholesale to motorists; and profiteering caused by price manipulation

Halfon believes that the Conservative Party should not be shy of attacking croney capitalism. He argues that the Party has a responsibility to ensure fair competition, transparency, and genuinely free markets. If it is true that oil prices have been manipulated, then government should use the full force of the criminal law to deal with it. Controversially he proposes that the Government should consider a windfall
tax on the oil industry where the proceeds raised are passed back to the
consumer through lower fuel duty. Halfon says the move would “put the wheels of white van conservatism in motion”, while fuel duty is “still a brake on economic growth and a disincentive to employment”.

**Tax Cuts**

The White Van Conservatism vision has also focused on tax cuts for the
low-paid, such as the restoration of the 10 pence tax rate. Halfon believes it is incumbent upon the Conservatives to demonstrate a moral mission for
lower taxes — and the best, boldest, and most symbolic way of doing this would be would be to restore the starting ten pence band of income-tax, which Gordon Brown scrapped in 2008. Again this a very pro-Small Business focused measure

He believes that the creation of new progressive bands of income tax would be a noble goal for Conservatives, for example, a 10p band introduced above the current personal allowance (say between £9,440 and £12,000) would hand back more than £250 a year to a worker on minimum wage, and would help them to earn much closer to a Living Wage in cash-terms.

The problem for Halfon with the current approach to taxation is that it is placing too much of a burden on Emergent Service Workers. Tax Cuts for the left behind are increasingly being paid for by consumption taxes, like fuel duty, which can be deeply
regressive. There is another bigger more fundamental problem and that is that tax cuts for the p**recariat, or precarious proletariat** leaves us with a larger and
larger constituency of people in this country who, quite frankly, will not care if income tax is increased, simply because they do not pay it. This is the problem right now because the left behind have become inoculated against the rate of tax which should be levied because they have no appreciation of the impact that such taxes have upon those that currently pay them or are envisioned as paying them in the future through “wealth taxes” or the top 50p rate of income tax. Most families do not pay such taxes, and expect never to pay them. Hence, they have little
reason to oppose them, whatever the economic evidence is. By advocating a
system where we take more and more people out of income tax, Halfon argues, you risk accelerating this trend. It is a difficult argument to get your head round but it is critically important particularly for Emergent Service Workers. It is about the rate at which we tax a productive part of the Small Business Economy and which is currently underpinning Growth against the rate at which we tax a, dare we say it, unproductive part of the economy which is being left behind anyway. These are lifestyle and moral questions. For many in the Conservative Party, however, much as we applaud raising the starting rate at which people pay tax there is a suggestion this had more to do with the dynamics of coalition politics than it did focusing on giving tax incentives for an entrepreneurial part of the Working Class that is currently delivering vital growth but could deliver more were it not held back by still punitive rates of taxation and penalizing consumption taxes.

Conservatives for Halfon are building a hand-back society, rather than
a hand-out society. Halfon is a very strong believer in a Tory approach which moves away from the client state, handing back people their own money through tax cuts.

**Boris Johnson**

It is a view echoed by Boris Johnson. Boris, in serious mode, put the point for me extremely powerfully in the Daily Telegraph on Monday 24th November. What he said was, “When Emily Thornberry looks at a white van, she ought to see the people who make this economy go, the grafters and the entrepreneurs who comprise a huge proportion of the GDP of the South East. These are the people any government should want to help and support – by cutting their taxes, for instance, or helping them with a diesel scrappage scheme so that they can buy less polluting vehicles.”

He went on, “If you own a white van, you have worked to buy a vital asset; you are more likely to be helping others into employment; and yet Thornberry looks at a white van and sees only an enemy – a cultural enemy.”

According to Boris, “She doesn’t care much about small businesses and their problems, and in her experience too many white van men have unacceptably Right-wing views. And what does she see in those England flags? She should see an innocent symbol of patriotism, and love of our country – its language and history and institutions, its Royal family and its countryside, pubs, Shakespeare, football, fish and chips, you name it.”

It was a point echoed well by Nadhim Zadhawi at PMQs two days later

Johnson went on,”But that is not what Emily sees. She sees the dreaded flag of pot-bellied, immigrant-bashing lager louts. She sees the kind of flag that Labour councils have tried in the past to ban from public buildings; she sees a symbol of deplorable nationalism and jingo.”

“As for the house itself,” Johnson asked “what does Emily see?” “She should see,” he pointed out, “a tribute to the efforts of the homeowner, someone who has worked not just to own the place but also to ensure that its architectural features somehow reflect his or her personality.” “Of course,” according to Johnson, “she sees no such thing – only a reminder of the achievement of her bête noire, Mrs Thatcher, who mobilised people to buy their own home.”

Johnson concludes that, “Mrs Thornberry’s tweet was superbly eloquent of everything that is wrong with the modern Labour Party – a party that is all too obviously full of middle-class lawyers like her, who secretly disdain hard‑working, George Cross-waving white van men.”

It is an is an extremely eloquant deconstruction of one of the more unusual events that have taken place in British Politics during the course of this Parliament and perhaps one of the first in that have taken place in the Social Media Age that have had consequences at such a Senior level. It is an eloquence I couldn’t hope to match – not from the Mayor of London who speaks with such an authoritative voice.

I hope however that this Paper has gone some way to explain in more depth and detail those made in such an erudite way by Boris Johnson.

**Cllr Ged Mirfin**

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