**1: Low paid and insecure workers and pensioners – what we must do to win over the UKIP vote**

According to statistics produced by the House of Commons library, Northfield constituency has the most people on low pay of any constituency in the West Midlands – 53% of those in work (and 70% of women in work) earn less than the living wage of £7.85 per hour.

Why is this? And why does Northfield have more low pay than other parts of Birmingham? Partly it is a result of the closure of many manufacturing businesses and their suppliers which paid relatively good wages but left their former employees with few qualifications or transferable skills. But it is also a consequence of poor quality education and too many young people leaving education at 15 or 16. In the 1940s and afterwards children could leave school and go to work in a factory on good pay.

Most of the jobs available now for those without high level qualifications are low paid and often insecure (e.g. zero hours contracts) in retail, health or caring, security or cleaning or similar jobs mostly done by contractors which do not recognise or encourage unions, or in the transport sector. There is also a lot of self-employment, e.g. in construction or related activities – in which some do well but others struggle. Pensioners who grew up with this now see their children and grandchildren struggling, with no end in sight. Many in these groups feel that all the main political parties offer little or nothing for them – or their children and grandchildren. Many previously voted BNP. Many more voted UKIP in this election – over 7,000 in the General Election, more than 25% of those who voted in some parts of the constituency.

**How do we understand this situation?**

The jobs close to home with reasonably good pay for those without qualifications, have largely gone, but the culture and ways of thinking and behaviour remain e.g. thus some are reluctant to travel any great distance to work (though most would happily travel to Solihull or Castle Vale for a job with Jaguar/Land Rover). *The Sun* newspaper and other parts of the media feed on this long-gone culture and mentality – and Labour will not get far unless it understands this and can find ways of moving people on from a culture of despair to one of making people believe that something better can happen, and that people’s real and felt needs can be addressed.

It is not true that all young people in Northfield from working class backgrounds have no aspiration to improve themselves, or that none have succeeded in this. But it is not easy to succeed without support from both families and schools. It also needs role models and stories of successful achievement to counter the culture of despair.

Existing employers can help by taking on apprentices and ensuring that they get good quality skills and training. They should pay proper wages – Labour was right to campaign for a rise in the minimum wage and for employers to commit to paying the living wage wherever possible.

Labour was also right to a promise to help those on zero hours contracts for two years by giving them rights to a full contract. It also needs to promote the benefits of trade union membership, both to protect their rights but also to engage in constructive dialogue with employers whenever possible. UNITE has managed to increase its membership in the West Midlands from 1.2million to 1.5million in the last few years.

**What now?**

There is an urgent need to create and promote a wider vision of what is needed to meet this challenge. This is part of a wider commitment to social justice, which required the rich to play their parts (through taxation) in a welfare state which ensures that those with disadvantages of any sort are assisted and that people from less well-off backgrounds are not disadvantaged. This includes working, as a party, with schools, colleges, parents and the education authorities to bring out the potential of all our children and young people. It must also involve the creation of new jobs, in service sectors, in technology-driven businesses, and in some cases in factories, although there is no prospect that many very large factories employing large numbers of unskilled workers will return. The state has to be prepared to create the conditions under which this new vision can emerge – and to underwrite some of the investment that will be needed.