

## Inevitable results and political myths?

Collinson, Marc

### Parliamentary History

DOI:

[10.1111/1750-0206.12632](https://doi.org/10.1111/1750-0206.12632)

Published: 02/06/2022

Peer reviewed version

[Cyswllt i'r cyhoeddiad / Link to publication](#)

*Dyfyniad o'r fersiwn a gyhoeddwyd / Citation for published version (APA):*

Collinson, M. (2022). Inevitable results and political myths? Ilford North's 1978 by-election. *Parliamentary History*, 41(2), 323-341. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1750-0206.12632>

#### **Hawliau Cyffredinol / General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal ?

#### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

## **Inevitable results and political myths? Ilford North's 1978 by-election\***

### **Abstract**

Reductive and teleological 'path to power' myths continue to underpin explanations of Margaret Thatcher's first general election success. The by-elections that eroded the Callaghan Government's majority in the late 1970s, such as that at Ilford North in 1978, continue to be discussed as stepping-stones to an inevitable victory, rather than acknowledged as examples of the fraught and uncertain realities of electoral politics. This article argues they should be considered as part of a complicated historical process and reflected concurrent socio-economic, cultural, and political change. Such contests deserve to be understood on their own terms, with awareness of their unique peculiarities. In full media glare and an often carnival atmosphere, small, often ignored, constituencies momentarily captured the political zeitgeist and determined the national debate. Consequently, earlier interpretations of the contest that advocated the importance of media-induced concerns over immigration and the National Front have distracted from the effectiveness of Conservative strategy that delivered a successful homecoming, rather than an overwhelming shock victory. By moving beyond contemporary political myths, it reconsiders the strength of Britain's political parties within a more historical context, which pointed to the depth of local Conservative support in Ilford North. Clear political strategy including well-articulated appeals to specific voter-groups and a well-managed media maelstrom, allowed Margaret Thatcher's party to re-establish its support among Ilford North's voters.

**Keywords:** By-election; electoral politics; political parties; political history; Margaret Thatcher; James Callaghan; Ilford; London politics; migration; ethnicity; locality.

### **Introduction**

Much has been made of Conservative by-election successes in Margaret Thatcher's 'path to

power' in the late 1970s, yet despite an assumed significance no contest has received an in-depth historical study.<sup>1</sup> Why contests like Ilford North can be considered a 'crucial by-election' has never been substantiated, and the significance of its voter's changing attitudes have never been clarified. Closer examination demonstrates that the composition of the local electorate and the direct and nuanced Conservative appeals to Ilford's largely self-employed Jewish community, many owner-drivers in London's taxi trade, who were increasingly attracted to Margaret Thatcher's reinterpretation of Conservatism in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> Later appeals at national elections, and their subsequent purchase by voters both across Essex and the rest of country, confirmed the effectiveness of Conservative strategy and how it reflected multiple local concerns.<sup>3</sup> Political historians must, as McCallum and Readman cautioned, never assume an election result is decided by a few 'decisive or dominant' issues.<sup>4</sup> A more disaggregated study is required, through a comprehensive analysis of Ilford North's political dynamics and engagement with national political debates.

The relationship between political actors and the electorate is representative, complex, and constantly renegotiated.<sup>5</sup> Through closer understanding of the subtle interplay of national and local factors, a more comprehensive, and interactive, history becomes feasible.<sup>6</sup> The significance of what David Thackeray and Richard Toye have termed the 'politics of promises' and the extent to which what was promised to voters was delivered relied as much on what was said and how voters interpreted it.<sup>7</sup> These demands for greater academic sophistication mean earlier interpretations can be found wanting. One traditional interpretation is heavily reliant on the victorious Conservative candidate's testimony.<sup>8</sup> 'Path to power' myths, propagated by the *Sun* and its contemporaries (and Thatcher in her own memoirs) inferred a change in national political allegiance that is contradicted by Ilford North's long history as a safe Conservative seat.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the significance of Margaret Thatcher's remarks, in a *World in Action* interview, which sympathised with those feeling

‘swamped’ by immigration, owed much to a contemporaneous academic and political assumptions regarding the National Front’s appeal.<sup>10</sup> This article seeks to reinterpret this by-election in the context of how post-war socio-economic change constrained the practice of electoral politics at the constituency level.<sup>11</sup>

Historically, some academic commentators have long prioritised the primacy the primacy of national politics and the significance of general elections.<sup>12</sup> Assumed links between class and voters’ choice often underpinned much academic analysis, and these presumptions of class voting obscured more subtle disaggregation of historic political loyalties, ethnicity, and the influence of national debates.<sup>13</sup> When Ilford North is more closely examined, the partial and conditional nature of Labour’s working-class support, and the post-war growth and sizable presence of self-employed voters demonstrated traditional assumptions regarding class, identity, and political allegiance require further consideration. Moving away from traditional interpretations, this article follows the ‘local’ turn in election history, pursued by scholars ranging from E.P. Thompson to adherents of the ‘New Political History’.<sup>14</sup> For example, Duncan Tanner argued that place and geographic subtleties, such as differing local traditions and political dynamics, constrained how both politicians and voters interpreted social and cultural problems, thereby shaping public opinion.<sup>15</sup> How a locality interpreted these national debates might even determine a contest’s result.

Furthermore, the potential drama of a by-election, with its transient national significance, has often aided the politicians, activists, and insurgent parties seeking legitimacy and office, or just reconnection with the electorate.<sup>16</sup> When detailed, good contemporary evidence is available, it is possible to appreciate how local and national factors and debates influenced the outcome.<sup>17</sup> Drawing on collections of parties, politicians, and the news media, this article re-evaluates the myriad political myths and narratives that

contemporaneous actors and commentators created to shape (and later explain) the result and its part in Thatcher's road to Downing Street.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, sources including draft speeches, press releases, and private correspondence are used to illuminate changing rhetoric on particular issues, concerns, and their presentation as the contest progressed, amending promises made in manifestos, addresses, and ephemera produced beforehand.<sup>19</sup> Initially discussing the result, the article then analyses three key campaign themes that influenced the result and considers whether the Ilford North by-election's place in Margaret Thatcher's much-mythologised 'path to power' was warranted.

### **The Ilford North result**

Although Millie Miller, Labour's MP for Ilford North from October 1974, was lauded as a committed humanitarian and socialist in life, after her death in 1978 she was primarily discussed in terms of parliamentary arithmetic and electoral politics.<sup>20</sup> Labour's recent 'confidence and supply' agreement with the Liberal party at Westminster (the so-called 'Lib-Lab Pact') had reinforced the Government's majority and secured it from defeat in key House of Commons votes.<sup>21</sup> Labour's parliamentary business managers moved the by-election writ, fixing the date of the contest, on Friday 10 February 1978 and ministers were encouraged to avoid contentious issues that the opposition or press could use to disrupt the contest.<sup>22</sup> That the Labour Government only delayed the contest until the new year suggested a general election, which would negate the need for a by-election, was unlikely. Politicians at the national level, often have some impact on local contests. Ilford North had been a close-run thing in 1974, with a Conservative hold in February and a Labour victory in October both being decided by hundreds, not thousands, of votes. The 1978 contest was different in several ways. Significantly, at the by-election both parties stood new candidates.

Labour's new candidate, Tessa Jowell, was later to enjoy a significant career in

Labour politics, contested her first national election at Ilford North by-election.<sup>23</sup> Although the Prime Minister's advisor, Bernard Donoughue, argued that she 'fought a terrific campaign', Jowell also needed events, the tabloid press, and public opinion on her side.<sup>24</sup> They were not. Meanwhile, the Conservative candidate, Vivian Bendall, benefited from a significant shift in support towards his party by 1978. A year earlier, in the Greater London Council (GLC) elections, two Conservatives had secured two gains in the Ilford North and South seats with large increases in the party's vote share.<sup>25</sup> Despite a notable showing by the National Front across London, a Conservative surge outstripped the impact of minor parties in the capital but was not clearly reported by commentators.<sup>26</sup> Clearly, the continued unpopularity of the Labour Government both locally and countrywide played a major role.<sup>27</sup> Concurrently, the Liberal party had performed poorly due to their pact with James Callaghan's government.<sup>28</sup> A local estate agent, the Conservative candidate reflected many of the changes in social and economic status that impacted his voters, and often couched his speeches from his practical experience as a small businessman.<sup>29</sup> Through a shrewd appeal to a variety of groups that constituted the local electorate, this Conservative candidate was able to secure a clear majority in the constituency.

In the following days, Labour accepted that Conservative appeal had increased. Conservative success at Ilford North created serious concerns among party committees, and encouraged Callaghan to bring forward a pending by-election at Lambeth Central.<sup>30</sup> In a later reflection, Labour candidate Tessa Jowell suggested that Labour's non-existent engagement with the aspiration of Ilford residents, that formed part of a wider trend of the party 'losing the country'.<sup>31</sup> However, such an interpretation reflected the 'New Labour' rhetoric of 'old Labour' failure that shaped party mythology from the 1980s onwards.<sup>32</sup> Contemporaneously, leading Cabinet ministers, including Callaghan, Rees, and Roy Hattersley, had delivered speeches that cautioned over-analysis of the Ilford result, and emphasised the ineffectiveness

of immigration control as party policy.<sup>33</sup> The result not only suggested problems with Labour campaign techniques, but reminded ministers that there were constituency-specific issues and problems that ensure that their appeals failed to reflect local concerns and past political affiliations.

To better understand the what key themes shaped the debates engaged at Ilford North, this article examines three central ones in turn. First, it considers the significance of the town's political culture and its voters' long-time support of the Conservative party in parliamentary contests. Labour's post-1974 incumbency was exceptional, and dependent on altered boundaries and national political issues. It then explores the significance of often-emphasised demographics, such as Ilford's Jewish community and self-employed voters, and how focused Conservative appeals to specific socio-economic and ethnic groups affected the election result. Finally, it considers the significance of immigration in the campaign. Margaret Thatcher's interview, Labour Home Secretary Merlyn Rees' response, and the subsequent media maelstrom over-emphasised the significance of this countrywide political issue, encouraging press and contemporaneous scholars to accord it greater significance to the by-election result.

### **Conservative heartland**

While inferred to be a bellwether of ongoing cultural-political change, Ilford North was predominantly composed of Conservative-leaning localities. Affluent working and middle class residents were drawn to its greenbelt cottage estates, many constructed between 1880 and 1914, increased its population seven-fold.<sup>34</sup> Between the wars, the construction nearby of London County Council's vast Becontree council estate at the time the largest in England, ensured Ilford developed as a service centre with upgraded facilities.<sup>35</sup> Further estates funded by the City of London and local council, while the Underground was extended to Ilford and

new roads were built, improving urban connectivity and attracting further amenities.<sup>36</sup> Even during the Great Depression, between 1931 and 1938, private housebuilding and low prices swelled Ilford's population from 131,061 to 166,900.<sup>37</sup> These vast building programmes transformed the demography of a still relatively rural Ilford of the mid-nineteenth century into a developed, well-serviced London suburb. Ilford's demographic make-up was influenced by these complicated, long-term processes, and this was reflected in its politics.

#### Parliamentary election results for Ilford North, 1945-1979<sup>38</sup>

<b>Election</b> B = by-election	<b>Conservative</b>	<b>Labour</b>	<b>Liberal</b>	<b>Majority</b>	<b>Winning Party</b>
<b>1945</b>	16,013 (36.4%)	18,833 (42.8%)	9,128 (20.8%)	2,820	Lab.
<b>1950</b>	22,950 (52.2%)	21,385 (37.3%)	6,009 (10.5%)	8,565	Con.
<b>1951</b>	31,905 (55.5%)	21,865 (38.0%)	3,709 (6.5%)	10,040	Con.
<b>1954 (B)</b>	18,354 (59.8%)	9,927 (32.3%)	2,430 (7.9%)	8,427	Con.
<b>1955</b>	28,749 (55.6%)	18,248 (35.3%)	4,702 (9.1%)	10,501	Con.
<b>1959</b>	29,609 (55.4%)	15,962 (29.8%)	7,915 (14.8%)	13,647	Con.
<b>1964</b>	24,096 (46.9%)	16,563 (32.3%)	10,692 (20.8%)	7,533	Con.
<b>1966</b>	23,736 (46.5%)	20,392 (39.9%)	6,953 (13.6%)	3,344	Con.
<b>1970</b>	25,142 (52.5%)	17,352 (36.2%)	5,425 (11.3%)	7,790	Con.
<b>1974 (Feb.)</b>	19,843 (38.6%)	19,558 (38.0%)	12,063 (23.4%)	285	Con.
<b>1974 (Oct.)</b>	19,843 (40.9%)	20,621 (42.5%)	8,080 (16.6%)	778	Lab.
<b>1978 (B)<sup>39</sup></b>	22,548 (50.3%)	17,051 (38.0%)	2,248 (5.0%)	5,497	Con.
<b>1979<sup>40</sup></b>	26,381 (51.3%)	19,186 (37.3%)	4,568 (8.9%)	7,195	Con.



Iford North was a safe long-held suburban, commuter-belt Conservative seat, with high levels of home ownership, which made it fertile ground for developing Conservative rhetoric around the merits of building a ‘property-owning democracy’.<sup>41</sup> The predecessor Iford constituency had a Conservative MP throughout the interwar period, while from 1945 to 1974 its boundaries remained unchanged and it returned a Conservative member from 1950 onwards.<sup>42</sup> As with the 1970s, extremist groups like the British Union of Fascists secured limited support.<sup>43</sup> Its long-term Conservative MP, Tom Iremonger, was first elected in a 1954 by-election, during the Conservative governments of 1951-1964 from which Iford continued to benefit and develop.<sup>44</sup> As with other 1960s urban redevelopments, the town centre was the focus of much transformation and the local authority developed major redevelopment plans that included a new shopping centre built from 1962.<sup>45</sup> Even during Labour’s 1966 election success, its only significant double-figure majority between 1945 and 1997, Iremonger held Iford North with reduced majority.

Election results show that Tom Iremonger was sufficiently popular, and demonstrated clear awareness of his voters’ concerns, to repeatedly secured re-election. A traditional Conservative interested in prison reform, young offenders, and law and order, he also retained a close interest in local developments, such as roads, slum clearance, construction, and the greenbelt, together with the effect of proposed local government reform on his constituency.<sup>46</sup> As a suburban MP, Iremonger was focused on important residential concerns that included waiting restrictions outside local schools, property rate valuations, and planning appeals.<sup>47</sup> However, from February 1974 onwards, increasing national Conservative unpopularity, alongside a volatile and unpredictable Liberal vote, ensured that by October Iford North was on the Conservative’s ‘critical seats’ list and too close to call. Therefore, any further political and geographic changes would necessitate a sharpening of Conservative strategy.

In the early 1970s, the very shape and composition of the constituency was transformed by recent parliamentary boundary changes. Despite discussions happening during the later 1960s to effect changes, they only came into force after the 1970 election. This reorganisation reflected wider changes in local government, with the new Greater London Council created in 1965, and an acceptance that constituency boundaries should reflect these as closely as possible.<sup>48</sup> The Boundary Commission transferred the Clayhall ward from Ilford North to Winston Churchill's former Wanstead and Woodford seat, and undertook 'some minor tidying up' that also accounted for significant population movement, which had long affected Ilford and the wider borough of Redbridge.<sup>49</sup> These minor changes had a major impact and affected the Conservative vote.

Although the Liberal result in the October election was less significant than in February, allowing Conservatives to hold ten more seats than expected, vote transfers had a different effect.<sup>50</sup> The Conservative vote remained the same, with Ironmonger attracting exactly 19,843 at both 1974 contests. While it is unlikely that these were exactly the same people at both contests, it illustrates the stagnation of Conservative support in an otherwise dynamic contest. At face-value, a decreased Liberal vote in Ilford North correlated with an increased Labour's share of the anti-Conservative vote. This interpretation went against national trends and assumptions, and in Ilford North Labour benefited. Clearly, Tom Ironmonger's political talents had long helped him remain competitive despite the national trend against his party. In October 1974, his luck ran out.

In this complicated political atmosphere, Liberal and Conservative underperformance in the February election had led to disappointment and their declining popularity, while Harold Wilson's new minority Labour Government confidently defused industrial discontent.<sup>51</sup> At this pivotal moment, Ironmonger's political nous deserted him. Together with

his noted support for the Heath administration, he gained tabloid notoriety when he referred to Labour as ‘friends of red Nazi oppressors’, using extreme rhetoric that offended some of his constituents.<sup>52</sup> When Wilson called a second in the October to secure a majority, Labour candidate Millie Miller’s managed to defeat Ironmonger. However, as election commentators David Butler and Dennis Kavanagh observed that this was not part of a systematic national swing but was reliant on local factors, including candidate personality, as much as poor national organisation and government unpopularity.<sup>53</sup> Ilford North’s popular long-term incumbent had lost his appeal in a constituency he had represented for twenty years.

Candidate selection, and how that individual interpreted problems and interacted with voters, had a major influence on the development of local politics. The strength of Labour’s choice, Millie Miller, was that she was experienced and well-known, acceptable to voters, and not Tom Ironmonger. A long-time London councillor, she offered an experienced and relatively local alternative.<sup>54</sup> From her maiden speech onwards, she denoted a change of tone and approach in line with Labour policy, favouring the expansion of council housing (not their sale) and action on homelessness.<sup>55</sup> However, as a London, rather than suburban Essex, orientated politician Miller was interested in cross-capital issues of less interest to suburban Conservative voters. She campaigned against the decline of manufacturing, the growth of low-wage work in the inner city, and in impact of tourism on urban employment.<sup>56</sup> Her view on immigration was, notably more liberal than her predecessor, and focused on improved race relations, a fairer appeals process, and opposition to unfair detentions.<sup>57</sup> Arguably, Miller’s actions and interests as an MP shaped the outcome of the subsequent by-election as much as other issues.

That she was Ilford North’s first Labour MP since 1950 emphasised how much her election was an aberration. National factors, such as Labour’s effectiveness in office were

important. However, the reception to that government's policies by the self-employed workers who made up a large percentage of the local population was perhaps more so. Taken together with Tom Iremonger's weakened local brand, the impact of boundary change, and the impressive Liberal performances in the 1974 elections, these created a complicated and unpredictable three-party contest. An overconfident incumbent had foundered through a failed electoral strategy. However, when the opportunity to contest the seat arose in early 1978, changes in the Conservative party's political fortunes, leadership, and candidate allowed it to recalibrate its appeal to Ilford North's post-1974 electorate.

### **Targeted Conservative appeals**

In their 1978 by-election campaign, the Conservative party re-crafted appeals to specific groups of voters. To articulate their platform to Ilford's significant Jewish community, the party engaged the oratorical skills of Sir Keith Joseph. His economic rather than cultural appeal was an appeal to the community's interests as self-employed businessmen and cab drivers, as opposed to relying on Joseph and their shared ethnic background. However, while Joseph, a loyal, committed free-marketeer and proto-Thatcherite, was the natural choice he was a mercurial communicator. Through an ill-conceived 1974 speech prior to the 1975 Conservative leadership election, Joseph was reported as favouring eugenics after expressing concerns over the decline of Britain's 'stock'. This confirmed a great deal to colleagues about Joseph's temperament and political acumen and damaged his reputation.<sup>58</sup> To ensure success at Ilford, he sought advice on how to improve his image with critical news media.<sup>59</sup> Yet this appeal was hardly revolutionary, even in Ilford.

Previous Conservative MP Tom Iremonger had long cultivated support from among the town's Jewish voters. Leading East London Jewish politicians, such as Joe Emden, had joined him on the campaign trail.<sup>60</sup> Iremonger managed to balance this with clear opposition

to immigration throughout his tenure as MP for Ilford.<sup>61</sup> Therefore Joseph's speech argument that Jewish voters must, alongside all other 'electors of Ilford', agree that a limit on the 'number of cultures' Britain could digest was neither contradictory or unsurprising.<sup>62</sup> As Robert Philpot has argued, such an appeal's effectiveness rested in Labour candidate Tessa Jowell not being Jewish, whereas its successful 1974 candidate, Millie Miller, was an active member of the London Jewish community.<sup>63</sup> What became clear was that the by-election demonstrated the significance of Jewish voters.

Later Conservative strategy documents, drafted during the 1983 election campaign, demonstrated these voters had been targeted. In it, advisor Alfred Sherman wrote to Margaret Thatcher sharing a recent analysis by historian Geoffrey Alderman that 'vindicated' the intervention.<sup>64</sup> While Joseph's speech aimed at Jewish voters at Ilford elicited negative reactions from the *Jewish Chronicle*, it was clearly effective.<sup>65</sup> The Conservatives secured an overall swing of 6.9 per cent of the vote, but among the Jewish community they received the much higher 11.2 per cent.<sup>66</sup> This dramatic change reflected a wider change in the party's relationship with the local Jewish community. However, potential voter groups were not selected merely on ethnic difference and religious differences. Changing employment patterns in post-war Britain also played a part. As historian John Davis has observed, outside its traditional heartland the Labour party struggled in its engagement with working class voters not active within unionised, blue colour industry.<sup>67</sup> Deeper exploration of the geography and demography of the constituency evidences this.

With the exception of the ex-GLC estate of Hainault, it was (and remains) mostly composed of semi-detached housing and had become a favoured residential area for London taxi drivers.<sup>68</sup> As Barry Kosmin highlighted, there was a correlation between the large Jewish population in Ilford and the significant presence of taxi-drivers.<sup>69</sup> This was not just a solitary,

localised instance. One 1971 estimate suggested that 5,000 of 13,000 London cabbies were Jewish, many belonging to families long engaged in the trade.<sup>70</sup> The self-employed nature of the taxi trade reflected long-term employment preferences within the capital's Jewish community.<sup>71</sup> This further emphasised the significance of constituency demographics. The independent nature of the taxi trade was reflected in its self-employed owner-operator structure, where drivers joined the trade due to an aversion to the norms of industrial employment and were unwilling to unionise in a manner familiar to most blue collar workers.<sup>72</sup> Changes within their trade had created more independence among these voters, with the decline of London-based garages, changes in working and ownership patterns, and relocation to new suburbs in areas like Redbridge and Ilford.<sup>73</sup> Yet, this was not a recent development.

Even as the 1974 election approached, then-MP Tom Iremonger's parliamentary contributions were littered with questions related to the taxi trade of the three-day week and its effect on takings, and self-employed issues more generally.<sup>74</sup> The growing significance of these voters to the outcome of the election cannot be overstated. This grouping of voters were natural supporters for the Conservative party, that traditionally encouraged the activities of the self-employed working class. Given increased union militancy, perception was everything. Advisors close to Thatcher, including Alfred Sherman, suggested the party needed to 'open a path to our door for many disgusted at Labour'.<sup>75</sup> As both the *Right Approach* policy document and the later 1979 Conservative manifesto emphasised, self-employed workers were long neglected by the Labour Government, coming second to unionised workers.<sup>76</sup> Whether this was accurate or not was inconsequential, as the Conservatives were able to persuade voters this was the case. As often within electoral politics, success was determined by the art of perception management.

In February 1974, Tom Iremonger's final majority as Ilford North MP was notably

smaller than it had been during Labour's previous national election successes in 1964 and 1966. This therefore necessitated the Conservative party reshape their appeal to a modified coalition of voters. Developing this appeal and speaking to this group's concerns was not superficial and required a careful articulation of Conservative values that resonated with often self-employed, working class voters who lived along the Essex and Greater London border. In Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative party had a leader capable of articulating the right message to the appropriate parts of the electorate. In a 1976 speech to Ilford Conservative's she described the local self-employed as 'vital in the fight for a better future for Britain'.<sup>77</sup> Many towns within the county had been expanded with overspill estates, constructed to house those moved out of crowded, East End neighbourhoods by slum clearance and urban renewal.<sup>78</sup> As contributions to consecutive Conservative conferences made clear, home ownership was of clear interest to several local Conservative Associations, including neighbouring Ilford South.<sup>79</sup> This was further reflected in a sophisticated party marketing strategy.

Designed in collaboration with the marketing firm Saatchi and Saatchi, the Conservative's appeal focused on skilled working-class men and their families. It was underpinned by an aggressive campaign in tabloid newspapers, weekly magazines, and (later) party election broadcasts.<sup>80</sup> While the later electoral significance of the much-caricatured 'Essex man' was more myth than reality, the demographic from which the latter half-truth originated were undoubtedly a key component of securing a Conservative majority at the Ilford North by-election.<sup>81</sup> Fundamentally, the area then covered by the Ilford North constituency was natural Conservative territory and the wider demographics of this Essex town were certainly amenable to Margaret Thatcher's political appeal. New mediums to articulate this message also became available in the late 1970s.

Changes in newspaper affiliation, a rare occurrence, was decisive here. The traditionally pro-Labour national newspaper, the *Sun*, publicly realigned towards Thatcher's Conservatives, a move that reflected the political inclinations of its proprietor, Rupert Murdoch.<sup>82</sup> During the by-election the paper, soon to be the leading working class daily, switched its support from Labour to the Conservatives.<sup>83</sup> Some have credited the change as a major factor in the increased support from skilled manual workers for Thatcher's party.<sup>84</sup> The extent to which the *Sun*'s change of affiliation affected the result is not easily quantifiable. While it reflected realities, it is unlikely that it determined the result, and its input must not be overstated in party-political terms. Ilford North was a not a safe Labour seat, but a recent and unusual success in a traditionally Conservative seat. Whether the by-election result influenced the Government's approach, or should have, was debatable. However, the paper provided a widely read medium through which any Conservative appeal could successfully transmitted.

Finally, in their selection of Vivian Bendall, the Conservatives had a candidate who exemplified their message in both experience and outlook. Now a marginal constituency, Ilford North was transformed by the pre-1974 boundary changes, which constrained the effectiveness of earlier Conservative appeals. Together with a more pro-Conservative national press and a tired Labour Government with an overcomplicated media message, this ensured an altered political dynamic in the constituency. However, more than anything, the focus and clarity of party strategy had an important influence on the outcome of the election. In a by-election contested under significant national media scrutiny, how the main parties and their candidates reacted to arising issues were as important as their initial promises made in initial election addresses.



## **Managing a media maelstrom**

Before and during any by-election, a war of words often took place as both government and opposition articulated visions to appeal to voters. Clarity of rhetoric was essential here. Overcomplicated political messaging was ineffective, while simplicity and repetition aid understanding and were likely to reassure and persuade voters.<sup>85</sup> Likewise, timing remained critical. At a Sunday Cabinet meeting during the by-election campaign, Callaghan expressed concern that Conservative politicians were dominating news headlines in the weekend papers, while government press releases and speeches were delivered during the week.<sup>86</sup> To succeed in the election, Labour ministers needed to increase their media presence and counter Conservative attacks on the Government's record. By 1978, it was not that key ministers had not tried to communicate, but rather that voters appeared to be no longer listening.

Some ministers including Labour's Home Secretary, Merlyn Rees, had tried untraditional methods to champion government policy, demonstrating their awareness that the media environment of the late 1970s was different. Against Home Office advice, Rees had publicly advocated the Government's policy since his appointment in autumn 1976.<sup>87</sup> At that year's annual party conference he decreed that 'beating racialsists by argument is a job for democrats'.<sup>88</sup> However, Rees realised his speeches and government policy had to reflect electoral realities.<sup>89</sup> The political presence of the far-right was linked to Labour's role in legislating anti-discrimination legislation and its commitment to improved community and race relations especially during the 1977 GLC Election.<sup>90</sup> However, Labour were in a difficult predicament.

While the party championed improved race relations, they were aware some of their voters disagreed with the prevalence placed on this policy. In a divisive electoral climate, Labour could not afford to ostracise long-time party supporters.<sup>91</sup> Throughout the late 1970s, all Home Office ministerial speeches had to translate a nuanced position, that Labour

opposed racialists, but not voters who favoured immigration control. Through a careful, measured strategy that the party explained and marketed its policy platform to the electorate through the news media. Ministers, such as Brynmor John, gave speeches to audiences sympathetic to the government's agenda, such as the Overseas Doctors' Association, defended Labour's new Race Relations Act and Labour's ambition for a multi-racial society. John, as race relations minister, spoke both in favour of integration and the potential review of the venerable Public Order Act (1936) as a more conservative, 'law and order' response to growing National Front violence.<sup>92</sup> Rather than 'beating racialists by argument', the government's strategy addressed sympathetic voters through targeted appeals, delivered at stage-managed events, to specific news-media audiences beyond.

This avoided the potential for confrontation and ensured that newspapers transmitted party rhetoric through the selective presentation of ideas sympathetic to their readers' political leanings. What the press reported depended on what they deemed significant, and though ministerial speeches outlined full Government positions, they relied on the press for their communication. With Merlyn Rees' 1976 Conference speech, messaging intended for middle-class liberal opinion was carried in the *Guardian*.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, the more conservative *Times* emphasised Labour's disunity over immigration control.<sup>94</sup> Details was less important than the transmission of the essence of Labour's stance that was then conveyed to its voters. What happened at Ilford North was made more problematic by the Labour Governments unpopularity among its own voters on issues including, but not limited to, immigration, integration, and race relations.

The confusion that Labour policy created was confounded by the impact of the ongoing Grunwick dispute in the north-west London suburb of Willesden. This two-year campaign to secure female migrant workers trade union recognition lasted for two years from August 1976 and has been much debated.<sup>95</sup> Despite relative institutional unity within the

Labour party, Grunwick damaged the party's relations with its traditional electorate. Home Secretary Merlyn Rees, who belonged to his party's union-affiliated right wing, described the 'curious situation' of nearby working man's club members being 'so 'anti' the people on the strike'.<sup>96</sup> The complexities of class solidarity and political allegiance were compounded by unusual scenes and a failed Labour media strategy.

Moderate unionists (and Cabinet ministers) Shirley Williams, Fred Mulley and Denis Howell joined the picket line to draw attention to the strike. However, this instigated negative news coverage with the intervention of right-wing activists from the National Association for Freedom.<sup>97</sup> Such activities suggested the Government an active partisan, rather than an independent arbiter. Even the Liberals, whose leader David Steel castigated Thatcher's stance on union membership, were associated to the policy by careful Conservative appeals that emphasised Steel's parliamentary support of the government through the Lib-Lab pact.<sup>98</sup> Opposition rhetoric, transmitted through the press, ensured this perception was reinforced following successive previous by-election defeats.<sup>99</sup> This also emphasised divisions among working-class voters in Greater London, and fed a myth that the Labour Government was a lame duck. This allowed the Conservatives to capitalise on Labour's presentational disorder and articulate an awareness of working-class concerns. Through an emotive appeal, the Leader of the Opposition entered the debate over immigration.

Margaret Thatcher's timed intervention, delivered in an interview with *World in Action* on 27 January 1978, cut through a complex, turgid debate with considerable clarity. Though initially castigated as a 'gaffe', Thatcher addressed discontented working-class voters. In language later echoed by Keith Joseph, she suggested the Conservative party understood those who felt 'rather swamped by people with a different culture'.<sup>100</sup> The Conservative leader blamed journalists for 'building the issue up', she had simply answered a question.<sup>101</sup> However, despite Thatcher's later claims that the comments were 'not planned'

and ‘mild’, they represented a calculated, clear, and controlled rhetorical assault on Labour’s policy towards immigration.<sup>102</sup> How the party would address immigration had long been discussed by party strategists.<sup>103</sup> The Conservative party had already published formal proposals, and Conservative Central Office researchers collected incriminating historic statements, including those from the recently published *Crossman Diaries*, and Thatcher’s shadow cabinet had strategized the intervention and how to parry Labour countermoves.<sup>104</sup> These tactics underpinned a pointed political strategy designed to elicit a rushed response, within the context the by-election, but predominantly they were designed to have a national, rather than local, effect.

Undoubtedly, Ilford North garnered significance among many through Thatcher’s 1978 interview with *World in Action*. Her intervention altered the contests political debate, shifting the by-elections focus to issues that favoured Conservative policy more broadly. Therefore, this contests importance was emblematic of the changing, post-war nature of political leadership, particularly how such leaders utilised news media interventions to gain media exposure to influence public opinion.<sup>105</sup> A year before the contest, Margaret Thatcher had received coaching on her ‘radio talk and interview-response technique...the basis of TV technique’, to aid the careful articulation of Conservative policy.<sup>106</sup> Together with walkabouts in target seats, this allowed the party to very effectively manage their message and image.<sup>107</sup> In many ways, Margaret Thatcher’s later electoral successes were built on these tactics and strategies.

The interview ignited a heated exchange sparked by a robust response from the Home Secretary.<sup>108</sup> Even the Prime Minister was involved in the preparation of Merlyn Rees’ response to Thatcher that was coordinated by Roger Darlington, the Home Secretary’s special adviser.<sup>109</sup> The Prime Minister suggested a ‘law and order’ theme, exemplified by the phrase ‘Labour order vs. Tory chaos’ should underpin Labour’s message to best appeal to the Ilford

North electorate.<sup>110</sup> Labour also attempted to burnish its immigration control credentials. It promised to end existing system abuses and noted an above-expected reduction in immigration figures.<sup>111</sup> Ministers fell back on the law and order messaging and mirrored Conservative policy. However, civil liberties and existing legislation made this difficult, and while an opposition could suggest harsh measures without expectation of immediate delivery, governments are expected to deliver. So when minister's proposed a national ban on the National Front, they realised this was illegal. Instead, the Metropolitan Police Commissioner was directed to prohibit a National Front march planned on 25 February 1978, just before the election.<sup>112</sup> Despite being the weaker option, this did have useful political optics and appeared proportionate.

If implemented, news of it would likely lead the Thursday front page of the weekly local newspaper, the *Ilford Recorder* that was published before the by-election.<sup>113</sup> A two-month ban on public marches was announced by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner a week before polling day.<sup>114</sup> Labour would be tough on immigration abuses and on racialsists. During the by-election, both Labour's wider message and Merlyn Rees' by-election rhetoric concentrated on the effectiveness and successes of existing government policy. Speaking at both the Oxford University Labour Club, Merlyn Rees criticised the irresponsible nature of Thatcher's remarks, which undermined Government policy to reduce immigration figures and 'establish harmonious race relations'.<sup>115</sup> After the result, at Rothwell in Yorkshire, he further criticised Thatcher's 'vague and emotional appeal' to the Ilford electorate's 'basest fears on immigration and law and order', contrasted to Labour's reasoned and logical approach.<sup>116</sup> However, never-ending recitation of facts and figures failed to undo the damage.<sup>117</sup> Both Thatcher and her colleagues claimed they were being vilified and misrepresented, which increased the exposure of their underlying message.<sup>118</sup>

In effect, by revisiting the topic, Labour did the Conservative Press Offices job for them. They ensured the interview, together with the policy it advanced, received renewed attention among the press. Margaret Thatcher's clear and much-repeated message of concern then cut through the subsequent media maelstrom. It undermined the National Front's appeal and stood in stark contrast to Labour's policies on immigration and race relations. One Conservative MP observed that Rees' more complex argument and response had struggled to gain purchase among the popular press.<sup>119</sup> While the *Mirror* and *Guardian* concurred with Home Secretary, the once pro-Labour, working-class *Sun*, criticised Rees' remarks as 'sustained, ruthless and cold blooded' electioneering and even 'bullying'.<sup>120</sup> That Thatcher's assertion gained support from a newspaper formerly so attached to the Labour party belied an impending shift among some traditional Labour voters. The upcoming by-election focused the minds of ministers, all aware that any loss of by election may encourage a confidence vote in Parliament. This would ensure an election on Conservative, rather than Labour, terms.

Fundamentally, the Ilford victory confirmed several Conservative party assumptions. With the knowledge that three out of four Labour defectors voted for Vivian Bendall, Thatcher suggested to BBC News that their performance had staved off any planned election.<sup>121</sup> Margaret Thatcher considered immigration secondary to a variety of issues including the economy, law and order, and particularly education.<sup>122</sup> The Conservatives then presented Ilford North as a continuing party momentum that originated from victories at Stechford and Ashfield that demonstrated the public were tired of 'Socialist measures'.<sup>123</sup> This helped Thatcher argue that Ilford North was about much more than immigration.<sup>124</sup> A sizable Asian vote was recorded for the Conservatives in the contest.<sup>125</sup> Effectively, Merlyn Rees' outrage, as expressed to the *Guardian*, addressed the wrong electorate. Ilford voters were predominantly middle-aged, working and lower middle-class voters, and many were very amenable to more traditional, even Conservative, policies.

Immigration was not the decisive political issue at Ilford North, as Margaret Thatcher herself admitted.<sup>126</sup> However, the cacophony of noise its discussion created dominated popular perceptions of the contest and its result.<sup>127</sup> An emotive message from the Conservatives, that expressed understanding and respect for popular concern, was clearer than Labour's ever more complicated immigration and race relations policy.<sup>128</sup> Smaller parties had a limited impact on the result. As the Conservatives observed, the Front's vote count in 1977 GLC elections and 1978 by-election was limited and a 'disappointment to them'.<sup>129</sup> Despite Tessa Jowell's efforts, was unable to retain local support after 1974, likely shaped by its performance in government, while Conservative appeals reflected the concerns of Ilford North residents.

In short, both the Labour and Liberal parties' new voters from 1974 had either stayed at home or voted Conservative, guaranteeing a decisive defeat. Margaret Thatcher's effective intervention, through her *World in Action* interview, ensured ministers obsessed over promising 'vigorous action' against illegal migration.<sup>130</sup> This was both already prohibited and very limited due to the effectiveness of previous Conservative and Labour legislation, which had almost eradicated primary immigration.<sup>131</sup> Yet Merlyn Rees and the Labour party appeared more focused on their immigration policy and its 'commitment to a harmonious multi-racial society' than more pressing local concerns.<sup>132</sup> While police bans of National Front marches during the by-election emphasised the seriousness of far right activity for ministers, it distracted them from articulating a clearer, more comprehensive appeals to voters. In the battle over popular perception, Labour suffered a major defeat.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the continued appeal of the opposition, a dwindling majority, and an election due within 18 months, Labour never considered how it had lost Ilford's voters. Thatcher's

Conservatives did not propagate general rhetoric toward a ‘Jewish vote’, but effectively articulated a precise appeal to a socio-economic grouping of voters who happened to be Jewish. Economic ideas of greater deregulation and support for private enterprise, favoured by Ilford’s self-employed taxi drivers, underpinned the appeal. This shored up the Conservative vote. A clear, narrow, but public bid to alter local political dynamics, rather than attracted a new demographic of voters. Labour had benefited from an unusual correlation of transient political factors in October 1974. An exceptional Liberal performance in February, Labour competence in Government since then, Tom Iremonger’s declining political popularity, Millie Miller’s candidacy, and significant boundary changes ensured a minor shift in support, not a major political realignment. Similarly, Vivian Bendall’s 1978 success must be considered a homecoming, not some transformational victory. The result was a return to the pre-1974 norms of Ilford’s political culture. Any other interpretation relies on the continuing perpetuation of Conservative-articulated and often-anachronistic political myths of a cultural shift away from ‘post-war consensus’ politics to what followed.

Local circumstances played a major role, constraining the pertinence of appeals articulated by parties and politicians to address voters’ concerns. Despite its October 1974 success, Labour continued to ignore changing employment patterns, community demographics, and party affiliations that limited their political appeal in post-war Ilford. Subtle demographic shifts now became more apparent as the area developed more of a lower middle-class character than twenty years earlier, making it more competitive. These geographical, social, and economic factors helped determine the composition of the constituency’s electorate. In this context, carefully articulated political appeals needed to react to altered constituency boundaries and electorates to secure votes. In developing their appeal, the Conservatives needed to appeal to a changing electorate. Focus on immigration and the National Front was unwarranted, as these issues played a limited role in Labour’s



deteriorating popularity. Immigration was less significant than assumed, and assumptions regarding it were influenced by contemporaneous scholarly interest in the National Front and race as a political issue. Fundamentally, the Conservative's national political strategy required a decisive by-election victory that built upon recent successes, not an unnecessarily inflamed immigration debate.

To succeed, they required a clear-sighted and specific appeal, with a sophisticated multi-level media strategy. With a primarily economic focus, the Conservative appeal was economic and political, aimed at groups disadvantaged by a Labour government. Conservative strategists then deployed party spokesman to best reiterate their policy platform. Margaret Thatcher's 1978 *World in Action* interview was part of a nationally focused strategy to undermine the credibility of government policy, while ensuring immigration remained in the wider public consciousness. That it was delivered during the by-election was coincidental, and part of a countrywide media strategy to articulate the message that James Callaghan led a failing administration, heading for defeat. Conservative success at Ilford derived from the careful cultivation of a more secure electoral coalition that included homeowners and the self-employed, who had settled in suburban constituencies through exponential urban growth across the twentieth century. Fundamentally, it proved that on natural Conservative territory, Callaghan's party remained an unconvincing alternative, and were unlikely to be rescued by local electoral movements. While Labour's October 1974 success had been an aberration, the 1978 by-election reflected deeper and long-standing changes in Ilford. Furthermore, it demonstrated that national party-political strategies and media interventions interacted with localised factors to produce complicated electoral outcomes.

---

\* Thanks to Peter Shapely for encouraging the development of this article, to the two anonymous *Parliamentary History* reviewers for guidance on improving structure and argument, and to Alun Ephraim for thoughtful comments.

<sup>1</sup> The by-elections receive some treatment in Philip Begley, *The making of Thatcherism: The Conservative Party in opposition, 1974–79* (Manchester, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> John Davis, ‘The London Cabbie and the Rise of Essex Man’, in *Classes, Cultures, and Politics: Essays on British History for Ross McKibbin*, eds. Clare V.J. Griffiths, James J. Nott, and William Whyte (Oxford, 2011), 102-117.

<sup>3</sup> David Thackeray, ‘I Promise You This. I Won’t Make Empty Promises’. The Election Manifestos of Margaret Thatcher’ in *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918: The Politics of Promises*, eds. David Thackeray and Richard Toye (Cham, 2020), 185-205; Jon Lawrence, ‘Thatcherism, the SDP and Vernacular Politics on the Isle of Sheppey, c. 1978–83’ in *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918: The Politics of Promises*, eds. David Thackeray and Richard Toye (Cham, 2020), 231-248.

<sup>4</sup> R.B. McCallum and Alison Readman, *The British General Election of 1945* (1947), x-xi.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language, and Popular Politics in England, 1867-1914* (Cambridge, 1998), 61.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, 277,314-315; Malcolm Chase, ‘Twentieth-century labour histories’, in *New Directions in Local History Since Hoskins*, eds. Christopher Dyer, Andrew Hopper, Evelyn Lord, Nigel Tringham (Hatfield, 2011), 54-56.

<sup>7</sup> David Thackeray and Richard Toye, ‘Introduction’, in *Electoral Pledges in Britain Since 1918: The Politics of Promises*, eds. David Thackeray and Richard Toye (Cham, 2020), 1-16.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Rose, ‘The Wilson-Callaghan Governments of 1974-1979: By-elections (eventually) bring down a Government’ in *By-Elections in British Politics*, eds. Chris Cook and John Ramsden (1997), 222-224.

- 
- <sup>9</sup> James Thomas, *Popular Newspapers, the Labour Party and British Politics* (Abingdon, 2005), 76.
- <sup>10</sup> For discussion on its national significance, see Begley, *The making of Thatcherism*, 121-142. For historical discussion: Harry Taylor, ‘‘Rivers of Blood’ and Britain’s Far Right’, *The Political Quarterly* LXXXIX (2018), 390-391; Chris T. Husbands, *Racial Exclusionism and the City: The Urban Support of the National Front* (1983), 102-103; Stan Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (1982), 147,150. Taylor consistently refers to the contest as the ‘Ilford S (South) by-election’.
- <sup>11</sup> This article develops ideas raised in: Marc Collinson, ‘A ‘fertile ground for poisonous doctrines’? Understanding far-right electoral appeal in the south Pennine textile belt, c. 1967-1979’, *Contemporary British History* XXXIV (2020), 273-298.
- <sup>12</sup> David Butler, ‘By-Elections and Their Interpretation’, in *By-Elections in British Politics* eds. Chris Cook and John Ramsden (1997), 7.
- <sup>13</sup> David E. Butler, *The British General Election of 1955* (1955), 10; David E. Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (1960), 15-16; R.T. MacKenzie and Allen Silver, *Angels in Marble: working class Conservatives in urban England* (Chicago, 1968); Mark Abrams and Richard Rose with Rita Hinden, *Must Labour Lose?* (1960), 76.
- <sup>14</sup> E.P. Thompson, ‘Homage to Tom Maguire’, in *Essays in Labour History*, eds Asa Briggs and John Saville (1967), 276; David Howell, ‘Creativities in Contexts: E. P. Thompson’s ‘The Making of the English Working Class’’, *Contemporary British History* XXVIII (2014), 527; ‘New Political History’: Andrew Edwards, *Labour’s Crisis: Plaid Cymru, the Conservatives, and the Decline of the Labour Party in North-West Wales, 1960-1974* (Cardiff, 2011); Martin Pugh, *Speak for Britain! A new history of the Labour party* (2010); Andrew Thorpe, *Parties at War: Political organisation in Second World War Britain* (Oxford, 2009); Steven Fielding, *The Labour Governments 1964-1970, volume 1: Labour and Cultural Change* (Manchester, 2003); Jon Lawrence, *Speaking for the People: Party, Language and Popular Politics in England, 1867-*

---

1914 (Cambridge, 1998); Andrew Thorpe, *The British General Election of 1931* (Oxford, 1991); Duncan Tanner, *Political Change and the Labour Party, 1900-1918* (Cambridge, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Tanner, *Political Change*, 431.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas A.W. Stewart, 'By-Elections and Political Change in a Local Context: The Case of the 1973 Dundee East By-Election and the SNP', *Parliamentary History* XXXVIII (2019), 277.

<sup>17</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Public and private languages of 'class' in the Luton by-election of 1963', in *The Art of the Possible: Politics and governance in modern British history, 1885–1997: Essays in memory of Duncan Tanner*, eds. Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (Manchester, 2015), 188-206; Stewart, 'By-Elections and Political Change', 262-263.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Thorpe has argued for greater understanding of myth in historic political strategy, see Andrew Thorpe, 'Myth and counter-myth in Second World War British politics', in *The Art of the Possible: Politics and governance in modern British history*, eds. Chris Williams and Andrew Edwards (Manchester, 2015), 121-122, 137; Thorpe, *Parties at War*, 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> Luke Blaxill, *The War of Words: The Language of British Elections, 1880-1914* (2020), 132-133.

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 1 Nov. 1977.

<sup>21</sup> James Kirkup, *The Lib-Lab Pact: A Parliamentary Agreement, 1977-78* (Houndmills, 2016); Institute for Government report – 'Supplying confidence: How confidence and supply agreements between minority governments and smaller parties work' by Akash Paun and Ashley Hibben, <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/IfG%20Insight%20Confidence%20and%20Supply%20final.pdf> (accessed 11 Nov. 20).

<sup>22</sup> British Online Archives, British Labour Party papers 1968-1994, 'Minutes of a Party Meeting', 9 Feb. 1978, <https://microform.digital/boa/collections/2/british-labour-party-papers-1968-1994> (accessed 2 Jun. 2020).

- 
- <sup>23</sup> Melanie Phillips, *The Divided House: women at Westminster* (1980), 104-105.
- <sup>24</sup> Bernard Donoghue, *Downing Street Diary: With James Callaghan in No. 10* (2009), 296.
- <sup>25</sup> Davis, 'London Cabbie', 116.
- <sup>26</sup> *Labour Weekly*, 13 May 1977; *Economist*, 14 May 1977.
- <sup>27</sup> David Boothroyd, 'GLC Election Results Summaries', *United Kingdom Election Results website*, <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/> (accessed 22/04/20).
- <sup>28</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 31 Oct. 1977; *Sunday Mirror*, 26 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>29</sup> Peter Rose, 'The Wilson-Callaghan Governments of 1974-79: by-elections eventually bring down a government', in *By-Elections in British Politics*, Cook and Ramsden, 223.
- <sup>30</sup> Labour History Archive (LHA), National Executive Committee (NEC) minutes collection, 'Minutes', 26 Apr. 1978; The National Archives (TNA), Prime Minister's Office, PREM/16/1688, 'Note of a meeting between the Prime Minister and the Whips', 8 Mar. 1978.
- <sup>31</sup> Rosa Prince, *Standing Down: Interviews with Retiring MPs* (2015), [https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xTv4CAAAQBAJ&source=gbs\\_navlinks\\_s](https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=xTv4CAAAQBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s) (accessed 18 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>32</sup> Eric Shaw, 'Retrieving or re-Imagining the past? The case of 'Old Labour', 1979-94', in *Labour and the left in the 1980s*, eds Jonathan Davis and Rohan McWilliam (Manchester, 2017), 40-41
- <sup>33</sup> MTF, 'Remarks on Ilford North by-election victory', 3 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103488> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>34</sup> *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 20 Feb. 1885; *Essex Guardian*, 2 Mar. 1901; *Ilford Recorder*, 11 Mar. 1904; Anon, 'The borough of Ilford', in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 5*, ed. W.R. Powell (1966), 249-251 (British History Online (BHO) <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol5/pp249-266> 17 Jun. 2020).

- 
- <sup>35</sup> London County Council (LCC), *London Housing* (1937), 154,164,182; Andrzej Olechnowicz, *Working-class Housing in England Between the Wars: The Becontree Estate* (Oxford, 1997), 78,85,118-119.
- <sup>36</sup> LCC, *London Housing*, 182; *Essex Newsman*, 1 Sept. 1928; *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 20 Mar 1936; *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 10 Jul. 1936; *Essex Newsman*, 12 Dec. 1947; Hugh J. Gaylor, *Geographical Excursions in London* (Lanham, 1996), 110-112.
- <sup>37</sup> Anon., 'Metropolitan Essex since 1919: Suburban growth', in *A History of the County of Essex: Volume 5*, ed. W R Powell (1966), 63-74 (BHO <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/essex/vol5/pp63-74> 17 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>38</sup> Data collated from: 'General election results from 1918 to 2019', *House of Commons Library*, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8647/> (accessed 12 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>39</sup> Before 1978, only the three main parties contested. Further results in 1978 included: National Front – 2,126 (4.7%); Conservative Independent Democrat (Tom Iremonger) – 671 (1.5%); East London People's Front – 89 (0.2%); New Britain – 48 (0.1); Democratic Monarchist, Public Safety, White Resident – 38 (0.1).
- <sup>40</sup> Further 1979 results: National Front – 804 (1.6%); Independent Conservative (Tom Iremonger) – 452 (0.9%).
- <sup>41</sup> David Howell, 'The property-owning democracy: Prospects and policies', *Policy Studies IV* (1984), 14-21; Victor Rothwell, *Anthony Eden: A Political Biography, 1931-1957* (Manchester, 1992), 6,98.
- <sup>42</sup> F.W.S. Craig (ed), *British Electoral Facts* (1986), 151,279,355.
- <sup>43</sup> Thomas P. Linehan, *East London for Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-40* (1996), 114,122,135.
- <sup>44</sup> *Daily Herald*, 13 Jan. 1954; *Daily Herald*, 16 Jan. 1954.

- 
- <sup>45</sup> John R. Gold, *The Practice of Modernism: Modern Architects and Urban Transformation, 1954–1972* (Abingdon, 2007), 134-137; *Ilford Recorder*, 1 Mar. 1962; *Ilford Recorder*, 28 Jun. 1962.
- <sup>46</sup> *Independent*, 26 May 1998; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCXX, col. 125W: 30 Mar. 1960; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCII, col. 21-22W: 16 Nov. 1964; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCXXIII, col. 322-323W: 27 Feb. 1971; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCL, col. 445: 29 Nov. 1961; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCXXIII, col. 339W: 27 Oct. 1971.
- <sup>47</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCXXVI, col. 110W: 13 Jul. 1960; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCXCIX, col. 1218-1219: 28 Jul. 1964; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCLX, col. 359W: 24 Jul. 1973.
- <sup>48</sup> Boundary Commission for England, *Second Periodic Review of Westminster Constituencies* (1969), 1-2.
- <sup>49</sup> Boundary Commission, *Second Periodic Review*, 7,23.
- <sup>50</sup> Butler and Kavanagh, *Election of October 1974*, 276; Geoffrey Alderman, *British Elections: Myth and Reality* (1978), 30.
- <sup>51</sup> Mark Garnett, 'Edward Heath, 1965-70 and 1974-75', in *Leaders of the Opposition: From Churchill to Cameron*, ed. Tim Bale (Houndmills, 2012), 91-94; Frank Conley, *General Elections Today* (Manchester, 1994), 80-81.
- <sup>52</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 11 Oct. 1974.
- <sup>53</sup> David Butler and Denis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of October 1974* (1975), 227.
- <sup>54</sup> Robert Philpot, *Margaret Thatcher: The Honorary Jew* (2017), 135.
- <sup>55</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCLXXX, col. 143: 29 Oct. 1974; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCLXXX, col. 143: 29 Oct. 1974; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., DCCCLXXXII, col. 525W: 4. Dec. 1974; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser.,

- 
- DCCCLXXXIX, col. 166W: 26 Mar. 1975; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMXXVI, col. 916: 18 Feb. 1977; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMXXXIV, col. 1679: 8 Jul. 1977.
- <sup>56</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMXVI, col. 1933-7: 4 Aug. 1976; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMXXIII, col. 1843-1851: 14 Jan. 1977;
- <sup>57</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCXCII, col. 648W: 23 May 1975; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMXV, col. 636W: 23 Jul. 1976; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., CMVI, col. 4W: 23 Feb. 1976.
- <sup>58</sup> Churchill College Archives (CCA), Lord Hailsham papers, HLSM/1/1/9, 'Diary entry', 8 Nov. 1974 (Margaret Thatcher Foundation (MTF), <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111123> 10 Jun. 2020); Andrew Denham and Mark Garnett, *Keith Joseph* (2014), 277-279.
- <sup>59</sup> Royal Holloway Library (RHL), Alfred Sherman papers, Box 3, 'Memorandum: The Sun', 19 Dec. 1975 (MTF, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111923> 10 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>60</sup> Philpot, *Thatcher: Honorary Jew*, 136.
- <sup>61</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, *London Jewry and London Politics, 1889-1986* (Cambridge, 1989), 120; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DXXXII, col. 827-828: 5 Nov. 1954; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DLXVII, col. 781: 25 Mar. 1957; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCXXXIX, col. 231: 25 Apr. 1961; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCXXIX, col. 507-8W: 27 Jan. 1972.
- <sup>62</sup> David Childs, *Britain since 1939: Progress and Decline* (Houndmills, 1995), 188.
- <sup>63</sup> Philpot, *Thatcher: Honorary Jew*, 135-136; Alderman, *London Jewry*, 120; William D. Rubinstein, Michael A. Jolles, and Hillary L. Rubinstein (eds), *The Palgrave Dictionary of Anglo-Jewish History* (Houndmills, 2011), 676.
- <sup>64</sup> CCA, Margaret Thatcher papers, THCR/2/6/2/154, 'Sherman memo ("Ilford Re-Visited")', 28 Apr. 1983 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/131248> 10 Jun. 2020).



- 
- <sup>65</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, *Modern British Jewry* (Oxford, 1992), 349.
- <sup>66</sup> Geoffrey Alderman, 'Jewish Political Attitudes and Voting Patterns in England, 1945-1987', in *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World Since 1945*, ed. Robert Wistrich (1995), 255.
- <sup>67</sup> Davis, 'London Cabbie', 102.
- <sup>68</sup> Robert Waller and Byron Criddle, *The Almanac of British Politics: Eighth Edition* (Abingdon, 2007), 561.
- <sup>69</sup> Barry Kosmin, 'Exclusion and Opportunity: Traditions of Work amongst British Jews' in *Ethnicity at Work*, ed. Sandra Wallman (1979), 65-67.
- <sup>70</sup> Davis, 'London Cabbie', 104.
- <sup>71</sup> Stephen Brooke, *The Club: the Jews of modern Britain* (1996), 316; Kosmin, 'Exclusion', 67.
- <sup>72</sup> Davis, 'London Cabbie', 105, 111-112.
- <sup>73</sup> Davis, 'London Cabbie', 114.
- <sup>74</sup> Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCLXIII, col. 213W: 8 Nov. 1973; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCLXVI, col. 165W: 12 Dec. 1973; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCLXVII, col. 138-139W: 17 Jan. 1974; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCLXVII, col. 151-152W: 17 Jan. 1974; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5th ser., DCCCLXVII, col. 265W: 22 Jan. 1974.
- <sup>75</sup> RHL, Alfred Sherman papers, Box 8, 'Alfred Sherman letter to Margaret Thatcher', 25 Oct. 1977 (MTF, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111990> 10 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>76</sup> Conservative party, 'The Right Approach to the Economy', 1977, (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/112551> 10 Apr. 2020); Conservative party, 'Manifesto', Apr. 1979 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/110858> 20 Apr. 2020).
- <sup>77</sup> Margaret Thatcher, 'Speech to Ilford Conservatives', 10 Apr. 1976 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103004> 1 Jun. 2020).

- 
- <sup>78</sup> Caitlin Zaloom, *Out of the Pits: Traders and Technology from Chicago to London* (Chicago, 2006), 77.
- <sup>79</sup> Daniel Anthony Cowdrill, 'The Conservative Party and Thatcherism, 1970-1979: A Grass-Roots Perspective' (unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2009), 78-79.
- <sup>80</sup> David Haigron, 'Targeting "Essex Man" and "C2 Wives": The representation of the working-class electorate in the Conservative Party-political broadcasts', in *The Representation of Working People in Britain and France: New Perspectives*, ed. Antoine Capet (Newcastle, 2009), 137-156.
- <sup>81</sup> Zaloom, *Out of the Pits*, 77-78; Anthony F. Heath, Roger Jowell, and John Curtice, *The Rise of New Labour: Party Policies and Voter Choices* (Oxford, 2001), 128-132.
- <sup>82</sup> Lance Price, *Where Power Lies: Prime Ministers V the Media* (2010), 228; Thomas, *Popular Newspapers*, 76.
- <sup>83</sup> Thomas, *Popular Newspapers*, 76.
- <sup>84</sup> John Shepherd, *Crisis? What Crisis? The Callaghan government and the British 'winter of discontent'* (Manchester, 2016), 112; Thomas, *Popular Newspapers*, 75-76.
- <sup>85</sup> Frederik Wesslau, *The Political Advisor's Handbook* (Stockholm, 2013), 98.
- <sup>86</sup> TNA, Cabinet Office papers, CAB/129/63/6, 'Cabinet Conclusions', 19 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>87</sup> London School of Economics Archive (LSEA), The Seventies/5, LSE Archive, 'Interview with Merlyn Rees', n.d.
- <sup>88</sup> Ron Hayward (ed.), *Report of the Seventy-fifth Annual Labour Party Conference, 1976* (1977), 218.
- <sup>89</sup> Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, 'The myth of sovereignty: British immigration control in policy and practice in the nineteen-seventies', *Historical Research* LXXXVII (2014), 359.
- <sup>90</sup> Nigel Fielding, *The National Front* (Abingdon, 1981), 29.
- <sup>91</sup> Hayward, *Annual Conference*, 219.

- 
- <sup>92</sup> National Library of Wales (NLW), Brynmor-John/39, ‘Speech to the Overseas Doctors Association’, 1977; NLW, Brynmor-John/39, ‘untitled speech’, 1977.
- <sup>93</sup> Hayward, *Annual Conference*, 219; *The Guardian*, 30 Sept. 1976.
- <sup>94</sup> *The Times*, 30 Sept. 1976.
- <sup>95</sup> For a detailed discussion, see: Jack McGowan, ‘“Dispute”, ‘Battle’, ‘Siege’, ‘Farce’? Grunwick 30 Years On’, *Contemporary British History* XXII (2008), 383-406; Ann Rossiter, ‘Risking Gossip and Disgrace: Asian women strike’, *Spare Rib* LIV, 1977, 18; Margaret Thatcher, *The Path to Power* (1995), 397-403.
- <sup>96</sup> LSEA, The Seventies’ interview script collection, The Seventies/5, ‘Interview with Merlyn Rees’, n.d.
- <sup>97</sup> Shirley Williams, *Climbing the Bookshelves* (2009), 237.
- <sup>98</sup> CCA, Margaret Thatcher papers, TCHR/2/1/1/38, ‘Sir Keith Joseph statement on Grunwick’, 4 Sept. 1977 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111268> 10 Jun. 2020); Margaret Thatcher Complete Public Statements 1945-90 , 77/270, ‘Speech to Conservative party conference’, 14 Oct. 1977 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103443> 16 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>99</sup> *Sunday Express*, 27 Mar. 1977; *Daily Telegraph*, 30 Apr. 1977; *Sunday Telegraph*, 15 May 1977.
- <sup>100</sup> Margaret Thatcher, ‘TV Interview for Granada World in Action ("rather swamped")’, 27 Jan. 1978 (MTF <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485> 06 Aug. 2019).
- <sup>101</sup> MTF, ‘Radio Interview for IRN visiting Ilford (by-election)’, 21 Feb. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103620> (accessed 01 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>102</sup> Thatcher, *Path to Power*, 407-409; Bodleian Library (Bodl.), LCC/76/90, Conservative party papers, ‘Leaders Consultative Committee minutes’, 6 Jan. 1976; Conservative Party, ‘The Right Approach to the Economy’, 1977 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/112551> 10

---

Apr. 2020); Bodl., Conservative party papers, LSC/78/64, 'The control of immigration', 10 Feb. 1978.

<sup>103</sup> RHL, Alfred Sherman papers, Box 3, 'Sherman memorandum to Keith Joseph', 9 Feb. 1976  
(Accessed through MTF, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111924> 10 June 2020).

<sup>104</sup> CCA, Margaret Thatcher papers, MT/2/6/1/233, 'Leaders Steering Committee minutes', 13 Feb. 1978 (MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/109834> 10 Nov. 2017); Bodl., Conservative party papers, LCC/78/191, 'Leaders Consultative Committee minutes', 27 Feb. 1978.

<sup>105</sup> Richard Toye, 'The Rhetorical Premiership: A New Perspective on Prime Ministerial Power Since 1945', *Parliamentary History* XXX (2011), 177, 191.

<sup>106</sup> RHL, Alfred Sherman papers, Box 3, Sherman memorandum to Sir Keith Joseph, 28 Feb. 1978  
(MTF <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/111978> 10 Jun. 2020).

<sup>107</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), 220-222.

<sup>108</sup> *The Times*, 21 Feb. 1978.

<sup>109</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'Speech at Ilford: Memo from Roger Darlington to Merlyn Rees', 21 Feb. 1978.

<sup>110</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'Speech at Ilford: Memo from Roger Darlington to Merlyn Rees', 21 Feb. 1978.

<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 16 Feb. 1978.

<sup>112</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 1 Apr. 1978.

<sup>113</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'Speech at Ilford: Memo from Roger Darlington to Merlyn Rees', 21 Feb. 1978.

<sup>114</sup> *The Times*, 23 Feb. 1978.

- 
- <sup>115</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/9, 'Speech by the Home Secretary to the Oxford University Labour Club', 20 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>116</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'The Home Secretary to the opening of Rothwell Labour Club', 3 Mar. 1978.
- <sup>117</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/9, 'Speech by the Home Secretary to the Oxford University Labour Club', 20 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>118</sup> *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1978; *The Times*, 22 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>119</sup> *Illustrated London News*, 1 Apr. 1978.
- <sup>120</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 21 Feb. 1978; *Guardian*, 21 Feb. 1978; *Sun*, 2 Mar. 1978; *Sun*, 22 Feb. 1978.
- <sup>121</sup> Sandbrook, *Seasons*, 595; MTF, 'TV Interview for BBC (Ilford by-election victory)', 3 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103630> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>122</sup> MTF, 'Radio Interview for IRN (Ilford by-election victory)', 3 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103633> (accessed 2 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>123</sup> MTF, 'Speech to Conservative Central Council', 8 Apr. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103651> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020); MTF, 'Speech to Finchley Conservatives (Association AGM)', 13 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103641> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020); MTF, 'Speech to Conservative Trade Unionists Conference', 11 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103640> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>124</sup> MTF, 'Radio Interview for BBC (Ilford by-election victory)', 3 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103631> (2 Jun. 2020).
- <sup>125</sup> Muhammad Anwar, *Race and Politics: Ethnic minorities and the British political system* (Oxford, 1986), 102.
- <sup>126</sup> MTF, 'Remarks on Ilford North by-election victory', 3 Mar. 1978, <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103488> (accessed 3 Jun. 2020).

---

<sup>127</sup> *Daily Mirror*, 3 Mar. 1978.

<sup>128</sup> Marc Collinson, 'Commonwealth immigration, policymaking, and the Labour party, c.1960-1980', (unpublished PhD thesis, Bangor University, 2018).

<sup>129</sup> Conservative Party, *The Campaign Guide: Supplement 1978* (1978), 270.

<sup>130</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'Speech to the Standing Conference of Asian Organisations', 23 May 1978; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., CMXLVII, col. 646-60: 6 Apr. 1978.

<sup>131</sup> Primary immigrants were head of households moving to Britain to seek work and were candidates for work permits created by the Immigration Act (1971). Secondary immigrants were their dependents, who migrated with them, but not for the primary reason of seeking employment: Hansard, *Commons Debates*, 5<sup>th</sup> ser., CMXLVII, col. 646-60: 6 Apr. 1978.

<sup>132</sup> LSEA, Merlyn-Rees papers, MERLYN-REES/2/7, 'Speech to the Standing Conference of Asian Organisations', 23 May 1978.