

**B&H Compass Coffee Morning – 23 May 2026**  
**Progressive Politics: What Comes Next?**

**Neal Lawson (Compass Director)**  
**Megan Kenyon (Political Correspondent, New Statesman)**

**Opening Remarks from the Chair, Mialee Jose**

*The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of many things.*

*Of politics, and PM woes, and Labour, Lib Dems and Greens.*

Brighton and Hove Compass is part of the wider national Compass network. Our aim is to help build what we call “the good society” — one based on democracy, equality, sustainability, and shared values. We practise cooperative, inclusive, non-tribal politics, and that is what makes Compass distinctive. This is a space where people from different political traditions are welcome to exchange ideas respectfully and openly. *Brighton and Hove Compass focuses on two main areas of activity:* Our Coffee Mornings create opportunities for deeper political discussion and for building solidarity and camaraderie among ourselves.

Secondly, campaigning work with Lewes Compass and neighbouring groups, looks ahead toward the mayoral elections in 2028. We hope to help develop a Sussex-wide progressive vision and, potentially, support a progressive mayoral candidate. As part of that work, we are building a repository of successful community projects and examples of constructive partnerships between local government and local communities. The aim is to counter the increasingly common narrative that “the system is broken beyond repair.”

At April’s coffee morning on social care, we distributed a survey from Dr Nick Martin, who is researching relations between civic groups and local government. The findings from the 21 completed surveys showed that Compass supporters are involved in a wide range of civic organisations — both local and international — but comparatively few identify as activists, and fewer still are involved in formal governance or political structures. The survey revealed broad civic engagement but relatively low levels of direct political participation. Nick observed this mirrors wider trends in Brighton’s civic and political culture that raise interesting questions for us as we think about future campaigning and organising.

**Megan Kenyon**

Megan’s first year as a political correspondent has been extraordinarily turbulent. She described *the May local election results as a major turning point for Starmer’s premiership*. The losses suffered by Labour, particularly in Wales, were politically and symbolically significant. Labour had governed Wales continuously since the creation of the Senedd in 1999, and Welsh Labour has historically been foundational to the party’s identity.

The aftermath of the local elections has been a period in which tensions within Labour rapidly escalated. Megan noted that emotions among Labour activists and councillors were running extremely high, especially among long-serving local politicians who had lost seats

and councils after years of service and Starmer's response failed to stabilise the situation, despite announcements around industrial policy and British Steel. This ultimately led to resignations, internal conflict, and growing speculation around possible successors.

*Andy Burnham's potential return to Westminster and the implications for Labour leadership politics.* Megan described Burnham's prospective candidacy in Macclesfield as politically extraordinary because it effectively positions him as a possible future Prime Minister, Burnham possesses several political advantages:

- a strong regional profile,
  - a record of delivery as Mayor of Greater Manchester,
  - credibility among both traditional Labour and some Reform-leaning voters,
- and a recognisable political identity distinct from Westminster politics.

Reform UK had selected a locally rooted candidate with strong community credentials, making the contest highly competitive. The by-election is nationally significant because it represents not only a local electoral battle but a broader struggle over Labour's future political direction. As for Wes Streeting's positioning within Labour leadership discussions, Megan noted his attempts to establish a distinct ideological platform, including arguments around Europe and taxation. However, polling among Labour members suggested Burnham remains substantially more popular within the party membership.

Megan concluded with *the rise of the Green Party*, and argued that much of the Green Party's recent success predates individual personalities and reflects broader political realignments, especially among younger progressive voters dissatisfied with Labour that has often focused too heavily on competing with Reform UK while neglecting threats emerging from its left flank. The Green Party has successfully positioned itself as a progressive alternative capable of attracting politically engaged younger voters. Their rapid growth creates organisational challenges for the Greens, including candidate vetting, media scrutiny, and professionalisation.

## **Neal Lawson**

British politics is entering a *period of profound transformation and instability*, driven by overlapping crises:

- economic inequality,
  - democratic decline,
  - climate change,
  - technological disruption,
- and social fragmentation.

Neal reflected on Compass's founding analysis: that traditional social democracy had become too centralised, tribal, and institutionally rigid to respond effectively to modern challenges. Compass, he argued, anticipated the fragmentation of the traditional two-party system and deliberately evolved into a broader progressive movement capable of bringing together Labour supporters, Greens, Liberal Democrats, and independents.

Neal criticised the current Labour leadership for narrowing the party's political coalition rather than broadening it. Labour's current crisis stems partly from factionalism and a lack of a compelling governing vision. At the same time, he stressed that the rise of Reform UK represents a genuine political threat that progressives must take seriously. He argued that Britain is increasingly moving toward a politics of competing blocs rather than a simple two-party system. In that environment, progressive cooperation becomes essential.

*Progressive Alliances* Neal repeatedly returned to the importance of relationships, humility, and cooperation across political traditions. Progressive parties and movements must learn to work together rather than compete destructively. Referring to East Sussex politics, where progressive vote-splitting had helped Reform gain power, he stressed the need for dialogue, trust-building, and local cooperation between Greens, Labour members, Liberal Democrats, and others. He described Compass's role as helping to facilitate these conversations and create a political culture based on openness rather than tribalism.

### *Constitutional Reform and Democracy*

Democratic reform — especially proportional representation and devolution — is central to addressing Britain's wider political and economic crises. Neal praised Burnham's focus on linking democratic reform to economic reform and regional empowerment. He also highlighted Compass campaigns around public ownership of water, fair taxation, media reform, and electoral reform. These campaigns, he said, are designed not simply as individual policy demands but as part of a broader structural vision for democratic renewal.

## **Questions and Discussion**

The discussion session covered a wide range of themes, including:

- the role of proportional representation,
- progressive cooperation,
- migration and Europe,
- social care,
- youth engagement in politics,
- journalism and media culture,
- how younger people engage with political movements today.

## **Closing Remarks**

Megan reflected on the challenges of being a younger left-leaning political journalist within a predominantly right-leaning Westminster media environment. She stressed the importance of building independent relationships and political understanding beyond Westminster "bubble" culture. Neal concluded by encouraging attendees to maintain hope and continue building long-term progressive alliances despite political uncertainty. He argued that meaningful change would require persistence, institutional organising, and broad cooperation across the progressive spectrum. Mialee closed with a bit of rhyme:

*The time has gone, the Walrus said. We talked of many things.  
Now act we must. Or we are bust. While hope eternal springs.*