

Labour has got places to turn to for the ideas it needs...

Published: January 13, 2026, 4:32 am

Jackie Ashley has written this morning on the high pay issue, and has noted that the moment Ed Miliband created a good idea the Tories tried to steal it. [As she also noted](#), this has, however, also happened around Labour:

The centre-left thinktank [Compass](#) was agitating about excessive executive pay in the New Labour years but failed to persuade the Brown government to fund a proper investigation. The excellent Rowntree Trust, which has done so much to promote fairness, stepped in, resulting in the independent [High Pay Commission](#). And it is really that agenda that has seized the mood and moment at Westminster.

I should mention I too am funded in largest part by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. But as Jackie Ashley notes

There is another lesson that may be even more important: to embrace the value of "outrider" thinktanks and independent thinking. Miliband has had [a lot of stick for having too few policies](#). At this stage of the cycle, that's unfair. What's been lacking, however, is the bubbling creativity of centre-left thinking more generally. You might have expected more ideas about the future of manufacturing, education, the City and public services being proposed from non-official groups and thinkers, pushing Miliband and his colleagues. There are honourable exceptions, but this is hardly a time of intellectual ferment on the left.

That is odd because, as I argued last week, we are moving into a more defined left-right period as the years of austerity bite. People are remarkably ready to make sacrifices and rethink their expectations if they feel society is basically fair and the pain is being shared. The "New Labour" strategy of using the proceeds of boom to pay for better public services, while winking at the excesses the boom produced, now belongs to a lost age.

She's right. Look at many so called left of centre think tanks - many of which in my youth would have been considered centre-Tory - and all they put out is tales of 'fiscal conservatism' and the need for cuts above all else. That's not even thinking: that's

acceptance of defeat, the power of the City and subscription to the bankrupt economics of neoliberalism.

But there are honourable exceptions. Of course Compass is one. So is the Tax Justice Network. So is the Green New Deal. Another is Labour Left. And yes, I lob in my penn'orth too.

And it's here - not in the bastions of now discredited New Labour thinking that Labour will find the ideas it needs. It could even start with the last 75 pages of *The Courageous State*.