



Sean O'Grady: No boost to spending as Britons pay off the mortgage

Which of these women will be running the country?

Politics and public service

DON MACINTYRE/JOHN RENTOUL/COLIN BROWN/NICHOLAS TIMMINS

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MELINDA LIBBY,

prospective Conservative candidate

This highly engaging former special adviser to John Moore, currently a public relations executive at the NatWest Group, is a front-runner to be first to overcome the prejudice that has so far stopped any woman being picked for a winnable Tory seat this time round - she is a hopeful for Douglas Hurd's Witney seat. She was head girl at St Paul's - the alma mater of Shirley Williams and Harriet Harman, but not (so far) any Tory women MPs - then president of the Cambridge Union. She is not, as once described in the London Evening Standard, a "bouncing tinned fruit heiress" - she is only a distant relation. Libby, 37, is married to a journalist. Some stuffy constituency types think she should be at home looking after her one-year-old daughter, Genevieve. She points out that if Parliament is representative, it should represent, among others, the 52 per cent of women with children under five who actually go to work.

ANGELA EAGLE,

Labour MP for Wallasey

An uncompromising, intelligent and discreetly left-wing new Labour MP, elected for Wallasey in 1992, Angela Eagle, 34, is already chair of the Tribune Group and a member of the Employment Select Committee. She has resolutely

avoided criticising the leadership while retaining her radical credentials as chair of the Tribune Group, which has become more left-wing again, although hardly the force it once was. She recently starred in a television version of the select committee's visit to America to investigate workfare - schemes requiring the unemployed to work for their welfare benefit - and ran rings round the Conservative supporters of the idea. She joined the Labour Party at 17 in Crosby, went to Tony Blair's college, St John's, at Oxford University, and became an official of the health service union Cohse. All the many profiles of her mention that she plays chess and cricket and has an identical twin, Maria, who failed to be elected for Crosby in 1992.

ELEANOR LAING,

prospective Conservative candidate

She was special adviser to John MacGregor, former Secretary of State for Education, Leader of the House of Commons and Secretary of State for Transport. She just failed to become the Conservative candidate for the safe Tory seat of North Norfolk last weekend, being pipped at the post by David Prior, son of the wet ex-Cabinet minister Jim Prior, but is likely to secure another seat soon. Laing, 37, was president of the student union at Edinburgh University, where she read law, then was a solicitor in Edinburgh and the City of London. She fought Paisley North in the 1987 general election, and recently re-emerged as a smart-suited business woman, briefly working for the Institute of Directors before its sudden lurch to the left earlier this year. She is a centrist in Tory politics, and Conservative Central Office hopes she will be the first woman to be chosen for a winnable seat at the next election.

LYNN COLLINS,

industrial relations officer, Society of Radiographers

She has just turned 30 but has already earned a reputation as one of the trade union movement's few rising young stars. A senior figure in the Labour Party said of her: "She is a complete live wire, the brightest thing to hit the TUC for ages." Collins, who can boast five A-levels and an A/O-level in Pure Maths and Statistics, has always been slightly precocious. She became politically active at the age of 15 and joined a trade union two years later, displaying the commitment to sitting on committees, speaking in public and representing Britain at union conferences abroad that is vital to progression in the macho world of trade unions. Does she have a life? Barely, given her commitment to the 12,500-strong Society of Radiographers. "It is very difficult to find time for anything other than sleeping, eating, and ironing, but I try to keep in touch with the real world by switching on the television every now and again."

SIOBHAIN MCDONAGH,

prospective Labour candidate

Confidently expected to be third-time-lucky Labour candidate for Mitcham and Morden, Dame Angela Rumbold's south London seat. The seat went to the Conservatives when Bruce Douglas-Mann was the only principled defector to the SDP, standing down and fighting a by-election after he changed party in 1981. He lost. McDonagh, 35, achieved a huge eight-point rise in the Labour vote in 1992, and needs just a 1.7 per cent swing next time. She went to Essex University, and has been a member of the local council, called Merton (better known as Wimbledon), since the age of 22. She was chair of the housing committee, works for the Battersea Churches and Chelsea Housing Trust, and is an adviser for the Catholic Housing Advice Service. Roman Catholic, from a south London Irish family, she lives with her sister Margaret, who is Labour's key seats co-ordinator at party headquarters, responsible for repeating the party's success in achieving a higher swing in marginal constituencies in 1992.

ELIZABETH BUCHANAN,

political and media consultant

Regal but witty political and media consultant at Lowe Bell, Buchanan, 33, acts as media handler for Baroness Thatcher's tours. She likes to keep a low profile, but can be seen firmly keeping the hacks in their place: she is an expert horsewoman, a competition rider at dressage, where discipline is the thing. A committed Thatcherite with a sharp brain, she is a former political adviser to Paul Channon and Cecil Parkinson at the Department of Transport. After Cecil's departure, she became one of the founders with Cecil Parkinson of the Conservative Way Forward, now the focus for Portillo-supporters, keeping the torch of Thatcherism burning for the second coming.

JULIA MIDDLETON (main picture),

chief executive, Common Purpose

A communitarian before the word was invented: born in London, comes from Bolton, educated in France, lived in a string of European countries and New York as a child and took a BSc in Economics at the LSE. She is 37, married with four small children and reckons to speak better French than English. She started off in employee relations with the Industrial Society before moving to Petrofina, British Home Stores and back to the Industrial Society, where she launched the Head Start inner cities programme, training unemployed young people. In 1988, she founded Common Purpose, persuading Government and business to stump up pounds 500,000 for the launch of a project that links potential leaders and managers from a range of public and private sectors within cities, and now across cities, through educational training programmes. She has that rare talent to persuade the great and the good - from permanent secretaries to politicians and business managers - to contribute time and effort. Nominated Visionary of the Year in 1992. Frequently head-hunted by the private sector, but not willing to sacrifice her lifestyle and children for money. "What makes me burn is that my own generation must not just drop out of community life and assume that everyone will do it on their behalf," she says. Obvious next job: head of a major charity.

SARAH EBANJA,

assistant director of finance, Lewisham

Regarded as one of the most far-sighted and imaginative women at work in local government. A graduate of Common Purpose's leadership training courses, one of her course tutors remarked: "She is more able to think strategically about the future of the public sector and its relationship with the private sector than anyone I have come across." She does not fit the typical model of a local authority apparatchik. Born in 1956 in north London, after school she went to work for the Inland Revenue and various accountants before becoming a certified accountant. She is now assistant director of finance (education) at the London Borough of Lewisham and widely tipped for more senior jobs in the next decade. A single mother, she lives with her 15-year-old son.

JILL RUTTER,

head of Developing Countries Debt and External Finance, the Treasury

Her career - for now - is as a civil servant with a fiercely analytical, bright, policy-driven mind and a gently sardonic and self-dismissive sense of humour. Aged 38, single, Rutter was picked to head the Chief Secretary's office by John MacGregor - "because I was small" she tells friends - but then worked for John Major. He, when he became Prime Minister, took her to the Number 10 Policy Unit to advise on health, environment, local government, transport and women's issues; she has no obvious party political predisposition, despite those links. Rutter worked on the poll tax when it was a rather different animal to the one that emerged. She has an impressive network of friends and

contacts across the world, thanks to PPE at Oxford, a Harkness fellowship to Berkeley, and her love of travel - "collects passport stamps", her CV declares. She is a keen cricket fan, and a bad but enthusiastic tennis player. A potential permanent secretary - if the Civil Service provides the jobs needed to retain her interest.

RUTH EVANS,

director, the National Consumer Council

A tough, high-profile campaigner for the rights of consumers, Evans, 37, is distinguished by mental clarity and self-confidence, qualities that are evident in her fluent performance in radio and television interviews. She spent five years as co-ordinator of the Maternity Alliance, an organisation that works to improve rights and services for new parents and infants, then three years as deputy then acting director of Mind. She has been director of the National Consumer Council since 1992, a job that sometimes requires deft footwork, since the Council is funded by a government which could not be said to be ideologically enthusiastic about all of its activities. An able mix of campaigner and administrator, she will continue to be a mover and shaker in the public sector, particularly if a Labour government is elected.

SARA NATHAN,

editor, Channel 4 News

When Nathan, 39, was appointed editor of Channel 4 News last June, she became the first woman to edit a national network television news programme. And you thought the Oxford and Cambridge boys' club's attitude to gender was trapped somewhere between the medieval and Jurassic ... Although whispers about bowing to political correctness followed her appointment, Nathan's news and current affairs credentials are impeccable. She worked at the BBC for 15 years, including stints on Newsnight, the Money Programme and Breakfast Time. Last December, she launched Radio 5 Live's award-winning morning show, The Magazine. Early form at a re-energised Channel 4 News suggests a healthy preoccupation with the substance of news rather than the frills of its presentation.

CLAUDIA ROSENCRANTZ (left),

controller of ITV network entertainment

Despite recent improvements, ITV is under pressure from itchy advertisers to improve its audience returns against a resurgent BBC. As well as finding a fresh set of hit drama series to continue the success of such shows as London's Burning and Peak Practice, the network will have to rediscover the ratings heartland of entertainment. This is where Rosencrantz, 36, fits in. She was appointed controller of ITV network entertainment a fortnight ago to inject some youthful vigour and appeal into ITV's tiring output. Her main credits as a producer include the Dame Edna Experience, which earned a Bafta for originality, Dame Edna's Neighbourhood Watch and Don't Forget Your Toothbrush.

ANDREA CALDERWOOD,

head of television drama, BBC Scotland

Her appointment last year as head of television drama aged just 28, in place of the veteran Bill Bryden, provoked yelps of disapproval. Calderwood admitted that as an independent she had "not had a pristine track record and was relatively a new producer". She is rated highly by the ambitious head of BBC Scotland, Colin Cameron, and early concern about her appointment has given way to ringing endorsement as she has presided over continuing BBC

network success with Hamish Macbeth, Taking Over the Asylum and Cardiac Arrest. She is planning a new strand of local 30-minute plays on BBC 1, aimed at developing new dramatists. Calderwood, described by colleagues as determined and passionate, has pledged to foster home-grown Scottish production talent.

DAWN AIREY,

controller of arts and entertainment, Channel 4

Airey's career progress to date has been more explosive than an Apollo 13 oxygen tank. She is responsible for a budget of around pounds 90m and half of Channel 4's programme output. Her remit spans comedy, arts, youth programming and film purchasing, and caters for most tastes, from highbrow - Four Goes to Glyndebourne, Without Walls - to below the belt - The Word (deceased) and Big Breakfast. Airey, 34, moved to Channel 4 last year from the ITV Network Centre, where she was controller of children's and daytime programmes. Before that, she worked at Central Television, which she joined in 1985 from Cambridge as a management trainee. Airey is seen as fiercely ambitious, tough and clear-thinking, and while her way at Channel 4 is blocked by the well-entrenched chief executive, Michael Grade, and director of programmes, John Willis, she has made no secret of her desire to run her own TV station. An incurable workaholic.

TAMARA INGRAM,

joint chief executive, Saatchi & Saatchi Advertising

Ingram was nominated in 1990 by David Kershaw, the then chief executive of Saatchis, as a "Face to Watch". She now occupies his office. This year will go down as Saatchi & Saatchi's annus horribilis, which is saying something, given the recession years of the late Eighties. Maurice and Charles flounced out in January, taking with them many of the agency's senior management and high-profile accounts (British Airways, Gallaher) into a rival shop. Morale at the old agency plummeted and a large part of the unenviable task of holding the place together fell to 34-year-old Ingram, previously in charge of the multimillion-pound Procter & Gamble business. Account and staff losses have been shored up, and many sense a quiet confidence returning to Charlotte Street. Senior agency executives say Ingram has been crucial, her astonishing "terrier-like" energy, drive and catchphrase "Bloody maaarvellous" inspiring those around her.

ANNE KOCH,

editor of BBC Radio 4's World Tonight

Serious, considered, straight-dealing - absolutely the attributes you would expect of somebody in charge of one of British broadcasting's more august institutions. Born in Canada the daughter of a Dutch father and Hungarian mother, Anne Koch, 37, studied at universities in Montreal, Amsterdam and Birmingham. Despite having no previous British media experience, she impressed the BBC as a producer on World at One and PM. She beat off strong competition to become deputy editor of The World This Weekend when pregnant. As editor of the World Tonight, Koch has successfully purged the programme of its fustiness while still maintaining its pedigree. Although able on BBC committees, she is not by instinct a politician. Supporters tip her as a future editor of the Today programme - and supporters include Tony Hall, head of BBC news and current affairs.

DENISE O'DONOGHUE,

managing director, Hat Trick Productions

O'Donoghue is hardly a name for the future - she is already well established as the head of one Britain's most prolific and successful independent production companies. She founded Hat Trick nine years ago, in partnership with the comic writers Jimmy Mulville and Rory McGrath and the producer Geoffrey Perkins. The company's roll call of programmes reads like a Friday night schedule - Have I Got News For You, Whose Line Is It Anyway?, Drop the Dead Donkey, Harry Enfield's Television Programme and so on. Although listed as an executive producer on the end credits, O'Donoghue's input is chiefly on the business side, where her performance can be formidable and, some say, intimidating. Last year, she was shortlisted for the Veuve Clicquot Business Woman of the Year award. Hat Trick's recent output includes Game On, Room 101 and A Very Open Prison.

KIRSTY WARK,

television presenter

Wark, 40, is a Newsnight anchor, regular arts presenter and all-round darling of the media convention circuit. She is direct in approach and quickly cuts through the platitudes of politicians, but, unlike at least one of her colleagues, she does not give the impression she is out to kebab the interviewee. Although her grounding is primarily in news and current affairs, she is one of the few presenters to make the smooth transition into other subject areas, most notably the arts - she more than held her own on the now defunct Late Show, and annually pops up to front the BBC's daily round of the Edinburgh Festival in Edinburgh Nights. Wark joined BBC Scotland in 1976, and worked as a producer, presenter and director in news and current affairs before becoming its main presenter on all political programmes and election specials.

LESLEY RIDDOCH,

assistant editor, the Scotsman

Competition in the Scottish morning newspaper market is tough and getting tougher. Useful, then, for the Scotsman to have a blustering, outspoken, domineering type such as Riddoch, 35, on the inside kicking out rather than the other way round. That must have been the thinking behind the decision last October of the then editor, Andrew Jaspán, to draft in a woman whose credits to date had included shock jock shows on Radio Scotland, such as Speaking Out and Head On, and founding an attitude-laden feminist mag called Harpies and Quines. Noses at the 180-year-old paper quickly went askew as Riddoch ripped into what she saw as a male-dominated news agenda. Her biggest coup, picked up around the globe, came earlier this year when on International Women's Day the Scotsman became the Scotswoman. Can also be seen on Channel 4's People's Parliament show, which returns at the end of the month, and heard on Radio Scotland's Newsweek every Saturday morning.

JAN HALL,

European chief executive, Gold Greenlees Trott

After training in marketing with ICI, Hall, 38, moved to Coley Porter Bell, a small design agency, which as chairwoman and chief executive she helped to transform from a pounds 99,000 company into one of Europe's leading corporate and brand identity consultancies. In 1989, she led her partners in the sale of the company to Martin Sorrell's global marketing empire, WPP. On the completion of the five-year deal last year, she took over as European chief executive for the marketing services group Gold Greenlees Trott, a company which numbers Cadbury's, United Biscuits and Thomson among its major clients. She was the first representative of the advertising industry to appear on BBC1's Question Time, and is another runner-up in the Business Woman of the Year Award. She is closely involved with the independent think-tank Demos.

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