Labour's Industrial Strategy and Harnessing Data for Public Good
https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Industrial-Strategy.pdf

Background
Labour's Industrial Strategy, published in 2022, is described as "a starting point for further conversations with business, from which more detailed policy plans will be developed."

The Strategy has four missions:
- delivering clean power by 2030
- harnessing data for the public good
- caring for the future;
- and building a more resilient economy.

Underpinning these is Labour's 'defining mission' to deliver growth that all will benefit from.

The report states that in the past, industrial strategy has been understood as a set of policies by which governments target selected sectors using investment and subsidies to drive growth. Labour's strategy claims to take a different approach, focusing more on "establishing a sustained collaboration between the public and private sectors". (p8)

To avoid the UK's industrial strategy being redefined by each successive government and therefore making it difficult for businesses to take long-term investment decisions, Labour proposes establishing an Industrial Strategy Council with a statutory footing, supported by leading figures in business, trades unions and academia.

Growth
The Strategy is inadequate in the assumptions it makes about 'growth'. For example, it draws on the work of PWC (a multinational that provides AI services) suggesting that growth as measured by the UK GDP could be up to 10.3% higher in 2030 due to AI and its benefits, namely greater consumer choice and increased spending as a result of product enhancement.[1] Similarly, with a nod to the climate crisis, the Strategy's mission to deliver clean power by 2030 relies on 'catalytic' public investment that "sends signals to the private sector and gives businesses the confidence and certainty to invest billions more". There is no recognition that the crisis is "rooted in an economic logic that exploits the earth and the people who inhabit it for profit."[2] [3]

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[1] (https://www.pwc.co.uk/services/economics/insights/the-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-the-uk-economy.html

[2] https://wbg.org.uk/blog/focusing-on-care-can-address-both-the-climate-and-the-cost-of-living-crises/

[3] The Women's Budget Group argued in 2020 that an economic stimulus focused on care rather than growth could produce 2.7 times as many jobs as investment in construction for example, with more costs recouped through income tax and national insurance contributions. It would also be a greener alternative: the impact in terms of greenhouse gas emissions is estimated as 30% less polluting than investing in the construction industry. https://wbg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Care-led-recovery-final.pdf

Harnessing data for public good
The Strategy believes that new capabilities in data analysis and AI can be harnessed for the public good, but does not enlarge on this in any detail. At the same time the transformation of data "has potential for significant economic overspills", providing there is public trust in these technologies.

There is no mention of whether the public can trust those who own and deploy these technologies or how public trust can be won. The single mention of data protection comes in a statement that "a Labour government will stand up for the democratic, privacy and security rights of UK citizens". At the same time, the Strategy calls for a 'pro-innovation regulatory regime' that allows the creation of new, more competitive markets and new services, echoing the current government's aim to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses and regulators at the expense of safeguards for citizens.

The Strategy's only explicit reference to healthcare data is that "thanks to our unified healthcare system, we have a large potential comparative advantage over other countries when it comes to 'big data' analytics of healthcare data".

There is a particular focus in the Strategy on AI. It points out that in 2020, the UK received more private investment into its AI companies than all other countries besides China and the USA, with DeepMind the most renowned of 1,300 AI companies in London alone. This is an unfortunate choice of example. Labour strategists seem unaware that Google DeepMind is notorious for signing a data sharing agreement with the Royal Free Hospital London that allowed the data of 1.6 million patients, including children, to be transferred to DeepMind for the commercial development of an app for monitoring kidney conditions. Despite gaining access to patients' fully identifiable, in-depth information, DeepMind only sought ethics approval for the use of anonymised data.[4]

The Strategy argues that data-based technologies, such as AI, developed in partnership with the private sector, can be actively shaped for the public good. It is not clear how Labour understands the public good, only that it can come from "using new capabilities in data analysis and artificial intelligence to deliver better public services and improve people's quality of life".

Overall
There is little detail about the Strategy's mission on harnessing data for the public good and little that sets this apart from the Government's aspiration to appropriate our data in the name of economic growth. There is scant regard for data protection, in contrast to a recurring acknowledgement of the need for a partnership with business and reduced regulation to allow the creation of new, more competitive markets and new services.

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[4] https://www.newscientist.com/article/2088056-did-googles-nhs-patient-data-deal-need-ethical-approval/