

Britain: An Open Letter to Labour Party Conference delegates

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This year's conference is the third under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership but much of the legacy of the Blair and Brown years is still with us. Above all, this means that conference will play no real role in finalising policy on the most important issues facing the party; Brexit, the economic policy of a Labour government; foreign policy; the unaccountability of MPs and councillors, many of whom have openly tried to sabotage the leadership and its policies; democratic decision-making at all levels of the party and ending the witch hunts that have brought the party into disrepute.

The combination of a Left majority on the NEC, the great performance in the 2017 election and the divisions amongst the Tories meant that the disloyal majority of the PLP had to give up open attempts to remove Jeremy, but that has remained their aim. Their alternative strategy was to join forces with the Tory press and the Zionist organisations to launch an avalanche of bogus antisemitism charges. At the very least they hope to deflect the party from adopting the radical changes, both of policy and of organisation, necessary to achieve and then to sustain a Left wing Labour Government.

Already the possibility of an early election is being used to stifle debate and postpone the adoption of solid socialist policies which will be needed to survive Hurricane Brexit and the increasingly likely onset of another economic crisis.

Labour Democracy

Strengthening democracy and accountability within the party is the other major priority this year. We must do all we can to ensure major reforms in how conference works; the right of the membership to select MPs and councillors at every election and, in the light of the experience of the "antisemitism" campaign, a democratic disciplinary and appeal system.

New Economics?

Back in February, John McDonnell correctly criticised Labour's old, top-down management model of nationalisation, but what is the alternative? No details are yet available but it seems to be a combination of the so-called "Preston model" of local co-ops involving the trades unions and old recipes from the 1970's such as the Lucas Aerospace workers' plan and the industrial strategy of the Greater London Council.

Such a strategy will not even match up to the 26 percent of major industries that were nationalised in the 1940s, let alone take control of the "commanding heights" of the national economy. Yet that is what is essential before there can be any talk of refocussing that economy to meet the needs "of the many, not the few".

Stopping Brexit

On Brexit, Labour is plainly inching towards supporting a referendum whilst preferring a general election.

Keir Starmer's Six Tests for supporting any deal cannot be met because they include the requirement that all conditions must be at least as good as membership of the EU. Moreover, they include "fair management of migration in the interest of the economy?", which is a mealy mouthed endorsement of ending free movement of workers between Britain and Europe. Internationalist socialists reject this in principle and we believe Labour should never have backtracked from it.

Labour's policy on Brexit should start from the declaration that we were right to vote Remain in the referendum because leaving the EU would foment racism and cause economic chaos. It has, and it will, whether under Theresa May's strategy of delay and compromise or with the "no-deal" favoured by the Crash Out brigade.

To the small minority of Labour voters, in the "left behind" areas that voted Leave, we need to say; you were wrong to blame industrial decay and social problems on the EU when they were actually the product of the neo-liberal policies of both Tory and Labour governments. What we need is a huge regeneration programme in these areas but Brexit will not create the conditions for that. Think again. We can reverse these decisions democratically. Best of all in a general election in which the parties describe in concrete detail not only what they will do on Brexit but what their policies are on key issues such as housing, the NHS and education.

Labour needs to go to the working class with clear policies on these, not its current evasive uncertainty. These should be to abandon Brexit altogether and take an active role in creating a Europe-wide workers' movement to utterly transform the capitalist and neoliberal foundations of the EU. Obviously, this needs to include the right of workers' governments in the member states to preserve and extend public ownership and social welfare.

Such policies would mean taking economic power, in other words, ownership, out of the hands of the bankers and billionaires, socialising the transnational utilities like transport and power generation and running them under elected workers' management. They would mean developing the economically backward areas whilst preserving and restoring the environment; getting rid of Nato and nuclear weapons from the entire continent and allowing refugees into the EU with proper social housing, employment and citizenship rights.

Internationalism

This brings us to the question of Labour's international policies, which have been highlighted anyway by the "antisemitism" campaign against Corbyn and the Left. Both for British capital and the British state, a Corbyn led government represents a threat to Britain's imperialist role in the world. Certainly, his record of defence of Palestinian rights and opposition to every war fought since he entered parliament, marks him out as radically different from all past labour administrations.

We need to build on those positions to ensure a consistently internationalist foreign policy across the board, including withdrawal of British troops from all overseas bases and, indeed, Northern Ireland, breaking free from Nato, cancelling Trident and getting rid of all nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

Last, but not least, the Party should take the lead in convening a Europe-wide conference of all socialist parties and unions fighting austerity. At the same time, we should initiate a grassroots anti-war, anti-capitalist movement, building on the lessons of the European Social Forum as a step towards a new working class International to coordinate and lead workers' struggles around the world.

Of course, such policies will not be adopted in Liverpool, but that is not the end of the question. Unless Labour adopts solid socialist policies with the goal of ?transcending? capitalism; unless we have a democratic party in which they can be debated and decided; unless we can ensure that MPs and councillors loyally carry out party decisions, then a future Labour Government, even under Jeremy Corbyn, will be a huge disappointment, if not an outright fiasco.

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