

# UK: Labour's election manifesto, ?For the many?

Jeremy Dewar, Red Flag 13, June 2017 Mon, 05/06/2017 - 10:51

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Labour's 2017 manifesto has been heralded as the most left wing since 1983. And so it is. That's a third of a century and therefore something most of the electorate, the younger and even middle-aged part, has never seen.

There is something there for every age group. From the cradle to the grave. As Jeremy Corbyn says, it is a manifesto for the 95 percent. And even some of the 5 percent would support it for its sense of social justice.

For young parents and toddlers, a Labour government would kickstart Sure Start by providing more subsidised hours childcare, extending maternity pay and extending provision to two- and, eventually, one-year olds.

As part of the same move towards the National Education Service, Labour will reverse the Tory schools funding cuts, which would hit schools in deprived parts of London particularly hard, and introduce free school meals for all primary pupils, paid for by forcing the Etons and Harrows to pay VAT.

The end of so-called ?free schools? is welcome as is the increased role for accountable local authorities over academies and more money for teachers and support staff.

Reintroducing the £30 a week EMA for 16-17 year olds, while hardly a living grant, is a meaningful reform when combined with the pledge to abolish university tuition fees. The huge numbers of young people who have registered to vote is undoubtedly down to Labour's clear break with the Tories on education.

At work, a sheaf of new policies, including the rescinding of the 2015 Trade Union Act; £10 a week minimum wage; abolition of zero-hours contracts and the right of the bogus ?self-employed? to be considered employees with rights like sick pay ? instead of having to pay up to £200 every day you are sick! The Trade Union Act demands that the bulk of the trade unions, in the service sector, will have to achieve a 50 percent turnout and 40 percent of all those entitled to vote being in favour before they can legally strike. A margin which would not only render all but a handful of MPs not elected, but also invalidate the Brexit vote.

A National Investment Bank would raise up to £250 billion to help create a million new jobs, many in high tech and green industries. The postal service and, in time, rail will be brought under public ownership, while local water boards will be established to ensure funds are reinvested into the infrastructure instead of lining shareholders' pockets.

Half a million new council and housing association homes to be built. £6 billion for the NHS with bursaries restored for student nurses, the Health & Social Care Act repealed and the cuts of the STPs halted.

Social care will come under a National Care Service umbrella and, after £4.6 billion of Tory cuts, will

receive an extra £3 billion every year. Pensioners will still have their state pension triple locked to rise with inflation, wages or 2.5%, whichever is higher ? and not have to worry about selling their home to qualify for care in their old age, as threatened by May's callous dementia tax.

And with a typically nasty twist of the knife, the Tories threaten to cut off winter fuel allowance for up to a million pensioners by introducing means testing, knowing that thousands will be too confused or proud to apply but at the same time softening up the public for this insidious method of undermining the universal nature of benefits and returning to the days of the 1930s.

To pay for this, a modest proposal: an extra 5p per pound on earnings over £80,000 and another 5p on wages above £125,000; corporation tax ? a tax on the profits we as a society generate to be lifted from 19 percent to 26 percent ? still only matching the US rate of tax, but scuppering Tory plans for a low-tax, lower-waged post-Brexit haven for the super-rich.

So is this a socialist manifesto? No. Far from it.

In two crucial areas in particular the left has given way to right wing Labour: immigration and defence.

The language may be weaselly and far from straight talking, but the phrases, ?Freedom of movement will end when we leave the EU? and ?We will need new migration management systems? can only mean even tougher immigration controls.

Worse, it appears the bosses will play a crucial role in deciding where there are labour and skills shortages, i.e. only those who are in economic demand will be allowed in. What happens when they no longer fit that bill?

Team Corbyn got themselves into this bind when they conceded that Brexit means Brexit ? no matter what the consequences. Instead of demanding that May reveal her plans for Brexit before going to the polls or a second referendum once the final deal is known, they have allowed May to call a snap election to get a mandate which they will use as a blank cheque for Brexit.

Defence is also a mess. Trident will stay. Labour will keep us in Nato and 2 percent of GDP will go on buying weapons and building up the armed forces.

Jeremy Corbyn and even Emily Thornberry have been keen to stress diplomacy first and the comprehensive defence review, but a sign of things to come was signalled by shadow defence secretary Nia Griffiths who told Newsnight that Trident would not be part of the defence review, that Labour would be prepared to launch a pre-emptive nuclear strike ? ?push the button first? ? and that being in Nato would mean going to war against Russia if Estonia were invaded.

But these aren't the only weaknesses. The anti-austerity measures ? which are all supportable and welcome ? are the minimum required in the current situation. In truth, we need to tear up all Thatcher's anti-union laws, to build twice as many council houses, to repeal the PFI deals and nationalise the pharmaceutical companies that are destroying the NHS.

More nationalisations are needed: in steel, construction, the digital economy ? the banks. Otherwise attempts to build a better Britain will be held to ransom by the monopoly capitalists, demanding their profits on top.

Yes, all Labour's plans have been costed ? unlike the Tories? ? but they have been costed against a forecast of a continually growing economy. But the economy is highly unlikely to continue to grow.

Especially after the chaos unleashed by Brexit ? rising inflation, shrinking trade, capital flight ? hits our shores.

What then? Will Labour take steps to make the bosses pay for the crisis? Or will they concede ground and put their plans for a fairer Britain on hold?

This is where the activists and socialists come in. We have been handed a fantastic opportunity with this manifesto ? for the first time in decades ? to gather a movement together to challenge the Tories? agenda and fight for a clear anti-austerity alternative.

Many on the right are trying to bury the manifesto under a pile of ?local? issues, effectively running independent campaigns on the MP?s personal record, rather than advocating Labour?s alternative for government. It is important that the left uses what remains of the election to campaign together, to draw in new members into campaigning for the left wing policies in the manifesto.

But we also have to look beyond the election. The manifesto has given Labour an 8 point boost in the polls ? up to 34 percent, compared with Miliband?s score of 30 percent in 2015. But with Ukip and the Lib Dems underperforming, the Tories are on 49 percent. And with first-past-the-post, it is a mountain to climb.

The danger of a Tory victory is very real; our aim in this campaign should be to prepare the ground to continue to fight for Labour?s manifesto pledges if we don?t win. The first fight will be in the party, at conference, as the right will certainly move to unseat Corbyn then, if not before.

The great weakness of Labour?s manifesto is that it only exists as long as Corbyn remains the leader. In order to finally break Labour?s addiction to neoliberalism and military intervention we need to secure a radical overhaul of the party?s democratic structures.

Barring a miraculous turnaround, on 9 June, the right wing in our party will be sharpening their knives for Corbyn. We need to be ready to come out immediately not only in defence of Corbyn but to take the offensive against the right who are the biggest obstacle to the democratic and policy renewal that the party needs to finally unlock the radical potential its members and supporters want and need.

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