

Britain: For a Labour victory on June 8 general election

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Labour's General election manifesto launch has boosted Corbyn's campaign, which has been drawing thousands to rallies across the country. Debate has shifted to a new level, replacing endless ridicule of the Labour leader with a serious discussion on an alternative policy; not to only to end austerity but seeking to reverse it – for the many, not the few.

The manifesto which calls for the renationalisation of rail, the Royal Mail and water, is the most radical since 1983. And those pledges took place before the defeat of the miners at one of the high points of struggle, industrial and political, of the 20th century.

For the first time after many years of crypto-Tory policies, there is a real alternative on offer in this election to the politics of austerity, welfare cuts, low wages, job insecurity, zero-hour contracts, and food banks. It is a unique opportunity for the left. It is a manifesto that can cut through the shadow of Brexit that May is using in an attempt to win a Tory majority.

It does not contain everything we wanted, but it is a radical departure from the politics served up by Labour leaderships since Kinnock and then Blair in their embracing of 'new realism' i.e. neo-liberalism.

There are only a few short weeks to change the dynamic and elect a Labour led government on June 8 on the basis of this manifesto. Polls are starting to show an increase in support for Labour, as well as widespread enthusiasm for the policies they are promoting. We are calling on our supporters to pull out the stops, get fully involved, and strain every nerve to bring to bring a about Labour victory.

It is not an easy task. Ukip has collapsed into a Ukipised Tory Party and May is appealing to 17 million Brexit voters to vote for her if they want the referendum decision fully carried through. But with a social crisis created by 7 years of Tory austerity there is everything to play for.

A Tory victory would be a disaster. It would mean full speed ahead with Tory austerity policies for the next five years and a hard-line anti-working class Brexit with all that means for political and social conditions in Britain for a very long time. As Corbyn says, it is the politics of fear rather than those of hope.

The message is clear: if you want your wages to remain frozen, if you want the NHS to be destroyed, and if you want to continue to have zero rights at work, if you want a hard Brexit—vote Tory.

The Labour right haven't given up trying to sabotage Corbyn. Blair, Mandelson, and Hattersley have been doing their best but have been roundly slapped down by John Prescott, in the Sunday Mirror, who called for unity behind Corbyn and told them to 'put up or shut up'. He argued that a united campaign will put Labour in the lead as the popularity of their policies take hold. Since then MPs such as Ben Bradshaw are refusing to recognise the Labour manifesto.

A huge battle is taking place in the Labour Party to defend the Corbyn leadership against the right-wing saboteurs. It is a battle that is likely to continue with even greater intensity whichever way the

election goes— either with Labour in office or facing defeat—and we urge every activist who possibly can to get involved in it.

Radical proposals

As well as re-nationalising rail, Royal Mail, water, and parts of the energy industry, the manifesto proposes a major reversal of Tory welfare cuts including scraping the bedroom tax and the Work Capability Test, an increase in the carers' allowance of 17% and following the social model of disability.

On the economy: reversing the Tory's £72 billion tax cuts, higher taxes on the rich including an income tax rise to 45p for those earning over £80,000 a year and a new 50p rate for those earning over £123,000. A Robin Hood tax on financial transactions for the NHS. A one third increase in corporation tax and a 'fat cat' tax on companies paying fat cat wages. Taking advantage of low interest rates Labour would invest £250 billion over ten years to ensure a transport, energy and digital infrastructure fit for the 21st Century.

On workers' rights: a £10 minimum wage, repeal the Trade Union Act, end zero-hour contracts, end the public sector pay freeze, full employment rights from day one, the right to trade union representation, end sacking of pregnant women, force companies to publish gender pay differentials, the abolition of fees for industrial tribunals, pay for interns, guarantee trade union access to workplaces and maximum pay ratios of 20:1 in the public sector and those bidding for government contracts.

On the NHS: Repeal the Health and Social Care Act, over £6 billion extra in annual funding through increased income tax on the highest 5% of earners, increased tax on private medical insurance, boost capital spending and ending privatisation, halt all current A&E closure proposals, reintroduce NHS bursaries

On social care: an additional £8 billion during the next Parliament, including £1 billion in the first year, end 15-minute care visits and ensure care workers are paid travel time.

On education: reverse Tory education cuts, reduce class sizes, no more free schools or new grammar schools, free school meals, abolish tuition fees and reintroduce maintenance grants. 30 hours free childcare for 2-4 year olds.

On housing: build a million houses over 5 years, half social housing, action against rogue landlords to ensure rented accommodation is fit for human habitation, limit rent increases, reverse housing benefit cut for 18-21 year olds.

On the environment: full support for the Paris agreement, an end to fracking, a new clean air act, and Blue Belts in the sea around Britain, and a ban on neonicotinoids. Labour will insulate 4 million homes, start to decentralise energy supply by taking the national grid into public ownership. There will be at least one publicly owned energy company in every region; that is a locally run, democratically accountable, working to tackle fuel poverty and return profits to customers via reduced tariffs.

On Brexit: a unilateral declaration that EU nationals living here will be allowed to stay; opposition to a hard Brexit; a meaningful vote in the Commons at the end of the process; seeking to stay in the customs unions; tariff-free access to the single market, by way of a trade deal, freedom of movement for those with a job offer, ditch the Great Repeal Bill and replace it with a positive bill ensuring that Brexit doesn't result in a loss of rights.

The response of the Tories and the media has been to vilify Corbyn again, saying that whatever policies Labour has its leadership is incapable of implementing them or knowing how to pay for them.

There are certainly things that are regrettable in the manifesto; the Fiscal Credibility rule and support for nuclear energy, the promotion of the unworkable carbon capture technology, airport expansion, the continuation of HS2 and an extension to it. There is also the retention of Trident—a battle the left hadn't managed to win since Corbyn became leader – meaning that the wording here is as good as was possible.

It is a big mistake not to include PR for Westminster in the proposals for a constitutional convention and an elected House of Lords. Such a commitment would not only attract a lot of votes to Labour from many desperate to see a grossly undemocratic system changed, but given the changes that are taking place in the political structure of the country, first-past-the-post is getting more and more undemocratic.

The overall package, however, is a serious challenge to the austerity agenda and a good basis on which to start to rebuild left-wing politics in this country—particularly when it comes at a time when the overall political situation is moving to the right under the impact of Brexit.

An anti-austerity alliance

Given that Labour is continuing to defend a unionist position in Scotland, and is opposing a Yes vote in a second independence referendum, its electoral position is not going to change—in fact it might well get worse. This means that a Labour overall majority in the Commons is extremely difficult so a Labour 'win' effectively means Labour being the biggest single party governing with the support of other anti-austerity parties: i.e. the SNP, Plaid, and the Greens. Corbyn's current hostility to this makes no sense and needs to change. If Labour does become the biggest party after the election, the only other choice would be to invite the Tories to form a Government—which does not make sense

But whether it is cooperation before the election or afterwards with Labour as the biggest party, we are talking about an anti-austerity alliance and not the ambiguous concept of a 'progressive alliance' as defined by and campaigned for by Compass for example. Unfortunately that's also what the Green Party are pushing too—an alliance which includes the Lib Dems—the same Lib Dems who propped up the Tories for 5 years enabling them to force through their austerity programme the hard end of which is currently being implemented.

That's not the message that will galvanise the hundreds of thousands that have stayed at home in recent elections, feeling that there is no difference between politicians of any hue – who can be most effectively mobilised around a clear anti-austerity message.

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P.S.

* <http://socialistresistance.org/for-a-labour-victory-on-june-8/10082>