

UK Labour Party manifesto: A blueprint to save capitalism

By Robert Stevens
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Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn launched Labour's general election manifesto Thursday, "It's Time for Real Change."

The document was decried by the *Financial Times* as the "most left wing manifesto in a generation." The *Times* of Rupert Murdoch said it represented "the most expensive prospectus in British political history." The *Guardian* spoke of the "most radical Labour manifesto in decades."

Such has been the right-wing lurch in official politics—ongoing for over three decades—that politely putting forward the most limited reformist measures now qualifies as being dangerously "left-wing."

The media can only make such claims as the "generation" they reference covers the right-wing Tory governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, those of Labour's Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and then David Cameron and Boris Johnson—who collectively presided over an unprecedented transfer of wealth away from working people to the super-rich.

The manifesto contains the following proposals:

- * Building by the end of its first term in office, 100,000 council homes a year and 50,000 housing association properties
- * Bringing the privatised rail network, postal service, water and energy firms back into public ownership.
- * A "Real Living Wage of at least £10 per hour"
- * A pay rise of 5 percent for all public-sector workers—an average of £1,643—from April 2020.
- * Extra money for the National Health Service, social care ("increase expenditure across the health sector by an average 4.3% a year") and schools.
- * The scrapping of university tuition fees, free full-fibre broadband, free dental check-ups (not treatment), free bus travel for under-25s, and free TV licences for the over-75s

Corbyn declared, "The billionaires and the super-rich, the tax dodgers, the bad bosses and the big polluters—they own the Conservative Party. But they don't own us. They don't own the Labour Party. The people own the Labour Party. That's why the billionaires attack us."

Workers must look past such hyperbole.

The last four decades includes 13 years of Labour governments carrying out policies based on Thatcher's mantra that "there is no alternative" to capitalist "free markets". They

have witnessed an unrelenting assault on the social position of the working class and the destruction of gains built up in over a century of struggle.

Yet Corbyn's answer to this social counter-revolution is a handful of mild reforms. His palliatives have nothing to do with a genuine socialist programme, which requires the expropriation of the wealth of the corporations and banks and ending for good—through a workers' government—their stranglehold over society.

It is extraordinary that, under conditions where millions of young people are seeking a socialist alternative, neither Corbyn's foreword to the manifesto or the actual text of the 107-page document mentions the word "socialism". Its sole reference is as a lonely bullet point describing the National Health Service as "socialism in action."

All talk about opposing the billionaires and welcoming their hostility is so much hot air. The rebuttal of all claims of "radicalism" is in the manifesto itself. It declares, "Businesses are the heartbeat of our economy, creating jobs, wealth and innovations." Far from taking on the billionaires, it states in language that could have come from Blair himself, "Social justice also means levelling the playing field between small and big business."

If Corbyn were elected, Labour will pay for public services by "creating a fairer taxation system, asking for a *little more* from those with the broadest shoulders, and making sure that everyone pays what they owe."

"We will reverse *some* of the Tories' cuts to corporation tax while keeping rates lower than in 2010." This would take Corporation Tax to 26 percent—one of the lowest rates in Europe.

It continues, "We'll ask those who earn more than £80,000 a year to pay a *little more* income tax, while freezing National Insurance and income tax rates for everyone else." [our emphasis]

The right-wing media singled out one proposal—for a one-off tax, estimated at £11 billion, on UK-based North Sea oil and gas corporations—as if it were the equivalent to storming the Winter Palace. Yet companies would be consulted on what they could pay and have years to pay it off. The tax is a pittance compared to the vast tax breaks granted to them by previous

Labour and Tory governments. The FT cited a Labour official explaining, “Had the UK charged the same effective tax rate as the average rate charged by North Sea countries from 1992 to the present day, it would have collected an additional £117bn in taxes.”

There will be no sanctions against corporate executives receiving millions in pay in the private sector—despite CEOs of the largest listed 100 companies taking home an average of £3.5 million a year (117 times more than the average UK full-time worker). In the public sector, the manifesto promises to enforce a “maximum pay ratios of 20:1”—a policy first put forward by Tory prime minister David Cameron and on companies bidding for government contracts. Labour has reassured public sector bosses the policy would mean a worker could be paid just £16,000 a year under Labour’s “Real Living Wage,” while they rake in as much as £350,000 a year.

Everything in the manifesto is at one with the reassurances that Corbyn’s Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell made in 2017 that their mission is to “stabilise capitalism.” A few months after the election of Theresa May’s crisis-ridden Tory government in the 2017 general election, McDonnell said of his talks with big business and the City of London, “In some ways, it’s a bizarre situation. They are coming to us for reassurance against a government that is falling apart. So, Jeremy Corbyn and I are the stabilisers of capitalism.”

The manifesto is an offer of a trusted party of state to British imperialism that it will defend the interests of the ruling elite in turbulent times ahead.

Since his election as leader four years ago, Corbyn has done nothing but capitulate to the Blairite right-wing of his party. In Labour’s 2017 manifesto, they insisted that Corbyn and McDonnell drop any pretence of opposing NATO, the renewal of the UK’s Trident missile system and the defence industry.

The 2019 manifesto proudly asserts a militarist agenda, this time framed as part of the war drive of the western imperialist powers against Russia—implying that the Johnson government is in the pocket of Putin. It attacks Johnson for refusing to “publish the report into possible foreign interference by Russia in UK democracy.”

The manifesto declares a “Labour government will undertake a Strategic Defence and Security Review to assess the security challenges facing Britain, including new forms of hybrid, cyber and remote warfare.” It declares “Labour supports the renewal of the Trident nuclear deterrent.” It should be noted that the cost of renewing Trident is estimated £200 billion—a sum that dwarfs annual budget of the entire National Health Service.

Under the Tories, it decries a situation in which “Trained army personnel have been cut from 102,000 to just over 74,000.” Labour “will maintain our commitment to NATO and our close relationship with our European partners” and spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence, guaranteeing “that our armed forces are versatile and capable of fulfilling the full range of roles and obligations.” It warns, “The security

challenges we face know no borders. Labour will increase funding for UN peacekeeping operations to £100 million.”

The manifesto states that if Britain leaves the European Union, freedom of movement for EU citizens “will be subject to negotiations,” i.e., ended. Without defining it as a “points-based” immigration system, the manifesto states that all immigration will be based on the requirements of the economy: “Our work visa system must fill any skills or labour shortages that arise.”

Whereas socialism is the great unmentionable, pages of the manifesto are dedicated to beefing up “police and security”. The police get no less than 28 mentions. The manifesto complains that the “Conservatives took 21,000 police officers off our streets,” and pledges, “We will rebuild the whole police workforce, recruiting more police officers, police community support officers and police staff. We will re-establish neighbourhood policing and recruit 2,000 more frontline officers than have been planned for by the Conservatives.”

The manifesto is an exercise in rank duplicity. This is epitomised by its calls for “Strengthening protections for whistleblowers” in the workplace and backing “a legal right of public interest defence for journalists.” It fails to mention the decade-long arbitrary detention in the UK of WikiLeaks founder and journalist Julian Assange.

Assange is being held in solitary confinement and tortured in London’s Belmarsh maximum security prison, with the British state working to secure his extradition to the US to face 175 years in prison for exposing the war crimes of the imperialist powers.

The Socialist Equality Party alone is standing in the 2019 general election on a socialist programme representing the interests of working people. A central demand of our campaign is for the freedom of Julian Assange.

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