

The Labour Party Manifesto

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1 Overview

Labour leader Ed Miliband launched, 'Britain can be better', the party's [manifesto](#), today in Manchester, being first out of the blocks ahead of all the other parties during 'Manifesto Week'. Manchester was the scene of last year's party conference speech in which he forgot to mention the deficit, but tackling the deficit was front of centre of today's launch. This is, perhaps a risky strategy as the Conservatives have consistently polled strongly on this. At the same time, Labour believes that their manifesto will portray the party as ready to govern once again and show that they have learned the lessons from the days of Blair and Brown.

The manifesto launch was also a play on another area of Labour weakness - the image of their leader. Whilst Miliband has repeatedly sought to downplay his image and focus instead on his convictions, today and recent appearances have seen Miliband respond directly to accusations that he would be a weak Prime Minister. Miliband painted himself as somebody willing and ready to stand up for working people and fight against vested interests. The manifesto itself centres on the theme that 'Britain can do better' and Miliband's challenge is to convince voters that it will only do better if a Labour government is elected to carry out its vision for the country. The manifesto is underpinned by a number of key themes and messages which we have identified below, along with some sector specific commitments.



2 Key Messages

Today's launch confirms the battle lines that Labour will fight the remaining 24 days of the campaign on:

- that the recovery has been unbalanced and unfair favouring 'richer' parts of the population only ('the cost of living crisis');
- rescuing the NHS from creeping privatisation; and
- fighting for hardworking people against vested interests.

The need to tackle the deficit features throughout this manifesto but the Conservatives (who launch their manifesto tomorrow) and the Lib Dems (whose manifesto will be published on Wednesday) will still criticise Labour nonetheless and portray themselves as having cleared up the "mess" that the last Labour Government left.

2.1 Britain can do better

Labour has, throughout the election campaign sought to present the economic recovery as one that has benefited some, but not all parts of the country, especially 'working people' at the expense of the wealthy few. The Conservatives will, however, continue to paint Labour as a party that has not acknowledged the successes of the 'long-term economic plan' and has not learned the lessons from past profligacy. Labour has sought to combat this by presenting a positive vision of the country in which hardworking individuals are rewarded accordingly and new policy measures are portrayed as fully costed and require no further borrowing. So far, it is generally acknowledged that Labour's approach has been more effective in setting the agenda in the early stages of the campaign.

2.2 Fiscal responsibility

Keen to cut into the Conservative's lead on the economy and demonstrate fiscal responsibility, the budget deficit is mentioned in the first line of the first page of the manifesto and introduces Labour's 'Budget Responsibility Lock' which promises that:

- Every policy announced in the manifesto is fully costed and requires no additional borrowing.
- A Labour Government will cut the deficit every year
- A Labour Government will get national debt falling and a surplus on the current budget as soon as possible in the next Parliament - a 'red line' in any potential coalition negotiations.

With Labour committing that it will not raise VAT and National Insurance, and basing assumptions on a significant amount being raised by clamping down on tax avoidance, there is likely to be further debate between the parties on how commitments will be funded.



2.3 The NHS

With Labour polling strongly on the NHS amongst the electorate, the party has been constantly repeating their line that a Conservative Government risks undermining the NHS' future and this manifesto pledges to 'rescue' the NHS. The Conservatives have been accusing Labour of 'weaponising' the NHS during the campaign.

2.4 Fighting for hardworking Britons and against vested interests

New Labour made it a priority to keep business on side and garner endorsements ahead of general elections, but this manifesto takes an approach seen as pro consumer and critical of certain business practices. In doing so it is unlikely to be met with much optimism amongst the business community with its more interventionist policies.

The manifesto says that the Labour Party is renewing its tradition of being the 'Party of Work' and the measures announced certainly point to strengthening workers' rights and tackling vested interests amongst 'Big Business'. Labour will, as expected, ban zero-hours contracts; have pledged to raise the minimum wage; and want to cut and then freeze business rates for over 1.5 million smaller business properties. Perhaps an area where they may elicit support amongst the business community is their stance on the EU - Labour will not hold a referendum on EU membership as a Labour government's priorities are the NHS and tackling the cost-of-living crisis. A referendum will only take place if there is a transfer of powers from Britain to the EU.

3 Technology

Labour pledges to "build on" the country's strengths as a "leader in digital technology". Specifically, the manifesto says that Labour will:

- Further develop a digital government and share data between services (as part of wider efforts to get the cost of Government down) and continue to back the principle of 'open data by default';
- Ensure high speed broadband reaches all parts of the country by the end of the Parliament and work to reduce mobile 'not spots';
- Update the country's investigative laws to adapt to changing technology and strengthen the powers available and safeguards protecting people's privacy
- Introduce a new long-term funding policy framework for science and innovation.



4 Energy

Undoubtedly the sector in which Labour wish to intervene the most, Labour, as expected, have reiterated their pledge to freeze energy bills until 2017 and give the regulator powers to cut bills this winter. The manifesto announces that Labour will:

- Reform the energy market during the freeze - including by separating the generation and supply businesses of the 'Big Six', create a new energy watchdog and simplify energy tariffs;
- Create an Energy Security Board to plan and deliver the energy mix needed for UK energy security;
- Establish a legal target to remove carbon from the UK's electricity supply by 2030;
- Give the Green Investment Bank given additional powers to invest in green businesses and technology
- Establish an environmental and regulatory regime before the extraction of unconventional oil and gas (e.g. shale gas) can take place;
- Create a million additional 'green' jobs;

5 Health

As expected, NHS and health features heavily in this manifesto. An emotive topic for Labour, the manifesto pledges to:

- Protect the health budget;
- Repeal the Health and Social Care Act and establish a new commissioning framework in its place
- Invest in 20,000 more nurses, 8,000 more GPs and 3,000 more midwives paid for by a Mansion Tax on properties worth over £2 million, a levy on tobacco firms and by tackling tax avoidance;
- Guarantee a GP appointment within 48 hours;
- Create a Cancer Treatments Fund - offering access to the latest drugs, surgery and radiotherapy;
- Give mental health the same priority as physical health;
- Set maximum permitted levels of sugar, salt and fat in foods marketed substantially to children;
- End time-limited 15-minute care visits to the elderly and recruit 5,000 new home-care workers.

6 Transport

The Shadow Transport Secretary Michael Dugher MP has been keen to reframe the transport policy debate to focus on motorists but this appears not to have transferred to the manifesto with much of the focus on rail policy. A Labour Government will:

- Review the franchising process and legislate so that a public sector operator is allowed to take on lines and challenge the private train operating companies on a level playing field;



- Create a new national body to oversee and plan for the railways and give rail users a greater say in operation;
- Freeze rail fares for next year and introduce a cap on fare rises;
- Expand rail links across the North;
- Support long-term investment in strategic roads and address the 'neglect' of local roads;
- Make a 'swift' decision on expanding airport capacity in London and the South East following the outcome of the Davies Review.

Political Intelligence

The 2015 general election is the most unpredictable election in over a generation. The Political Intelligence team will be following developments closely both on the campaign trail and following the outcome of the 7th May. Given the current unlikelihood of an outright majority for any party, it will be important for all organisations who engage with Government to be up to speed on the new developments as soon as possible and to consider how a new coalition (potentially of more than two parties) may impact their sectors.

We will be helping clients both new and old to:

- Identify key influencers of relevance to their businesses across all political parties;
- Analyse the policy priorities within the first Queen's speech of the new Parliament;
- Develop a proposed public affairs engagement strategy for the initial 6/12 months of the new Parliament;
- Develop the necessary messaging and briefing collateral to resonate most effectively among key audiences.

If you would like to consider an initial strategy workshop to discuss your current plans post-election or would like discuss ways in which Political Intelligence could support your organisation in your public affairs activity, please do not hesitate to contact us on 020 3397 3300 or contact our Group Managing Director [Nicholas Lansman](#) for further information.