



General Election 2017

Labour Manifesto – 'For the many not the few'





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Overview

Launched at Bradford University in front of an audience containing many students, the Labour manifesto – ‘For the many not the few’ - confirmed what all but the most politically oblivious long knew – that Corbyn’s leadership and manifesto marks the biggest departure from Labour’s common ideological focus for the past two decades. Whether this has established a course for victory remains to be seen – Corbyn’s detractors are as scathing as his supporters are fervent.

The Labour manifesto is unashamedly Corbynite, and any expectations that the potential trappings of high office might cause the veteran left-winger to tone down his beliefs failed to materialise. As previously leaked, the manifesto committed Labour to a wave of nationalisations and increases in public spending, funded by rises to corporation tax and income tax on higher earners. The manifesto also focused on traditional areas where Labour has strong support, such as the NHS.



Key Announcements

The manifesto committed Labour to a set of clear, radical left-wing policies, with a focus on higher spending, tax rises and nationalisation. The key announcements were:

Higher taxes for the wealthy - Raising the income tax rate for those earning over £80,000 to 45p and 50p for those earning over £123,000.

Increases to Corporation Tax - The headline rate would increase from 19% currently to 21% from 2018-19, 24% from 2019-20 and £26% from 2020-21. Labour have estimated that this would raise £19.4bn.

Renewed focus on nationalisation – Including the rail network, water companies, parts of the energy sector and the Royal Mail. Commentators have flagged that none of these have been costed in Labour’s accompanying costings document.

Brexit – Opposition to leaving the EU with ‘no deal’ and offering an immediate guarantee on the status of EU nationals in the UK.

National Transformation Fund – Consisting of £250 billion of investment in upgrading the economy, with a sizeable chunk being spent on improving transport infrastructure.

The abolition of tuition fees – A move costed at £11.2 billion.

Scrapping the NHS pay cap and investing an additional £30 billion in NHS Services – In addition to halving the fees paid to NHS management consultants and increasing tax on private medical insurance.



Tech

Tech did not feature particularly prominently in the Labour manifesto, although there were broad references to the rapid pace of 'technological change' and the fact that we are living in a 'digital age' throughout the document. Labour did include some notable – although in cases somewhat vague – pledges on connectivity including:

- On broadband: Universal superfast broadband availability by 2022 and the commissioning of a report by the National Infrastructure Commission on how to roll out 'ultrafast' (300Mbps) broadband within the next decade.
- On mobile: Improving mobile internet and expanding free public wi-fi in city centres and on public transport; improving 4G coverage as well as committing to 5G coverage for all urban areas, major roads and railways.

On the issue of online safety, the manifesto included a commitment to ensure that tech companies 'are obliged to take measure that further protect children and tackle online abuse'. A commitment was also included to allow young people 'to easily remove any content they shared on the internet before they turned 18'.

Other key tech pledges included:

- Reform of the legislation governing taxi and private hire services, introducing national standards to guarantee safety and accessibility and updating regulations to maintain a level playing field.
- A commitment to 'growing the digital economy and ensuring that trade agreements do not impede cross-border data flows, whilst maintaining strong data protection rules to protect personal privacy'.
- A commitment to ensure the exercise of investigatory powers must always be both 'proportionate and necessary' and reintroducing effective judicial oversight over how and when they are used.



Health

The NHS, as suspected, featured heavily in the Labour manifesto with a chapter dedicated to the issue titled 'healthcare for all'. The most prominent pledge is to invest more than £30 billion in the NHS during the course of the next parliament. This will be done by increasing income tax for the top 5% earners, increased tax on private medical insurance and halving management consultants' fees. This announcement has received mixed reactions as it will still leave the NHS with a £7 billion shortfall by 2021.

In addition to this injection of money, Labour promise to guarantee access to treatment on the NHS within 18 weeks, which they calculate will take one million people off NHS waiting lists. Labour has also called for a halt to the 'Sustainability and Transformation Plans' (STPs), not to scrap the scheme as many had originally thought. Labour want to redraw the plans so that the focus of STPs is on 'patient need rather than available finances'.

A pledge that continues from the previous Labour manifesto in 2015 is a commitment to reverse NHS privatisation and repeal the Health and Social Care Act. As last time, there is no further information about what this means in practice.



Energy

The manifesto saves perhaps the most radical policy announcements for the energy sector. In keeping with the overarching message, Labour argue that privatisation has “failed to deliver” for people, businesses and environment, setting out plans for public ownership of Britain’s energy industry. Key announcements include:

- **Public ownership of the energy and water industry** - Taking energy back into public ownership in the following stages:
 - Altering operator license conditions to regaining control of energy supply networks.
 - Supporting the creation of “publicly owned, locally accountable” energy companies and co-operatives, with at least one in every region.
 - Legislating to allow publicly owned local companies to purchase the regional grid infrastructure, and bringing national and regional grid infrastructure into public ownership over time.
- Replacing the water system with a network of regional publicly-owned water companies.
- **An energy bill price cap** - An immediate emergency price cap to ensure that the average dual-fuel household energy bill remains below £1,000 per year, whilst the transition to a ‘fairer’ system takes place

Other energy-related commitments included:

- Aim of 60% of energy from zero-carbon or renewable sources by 2030.
- Support for emerging tech such as carbon capture and storage.
- Commitment to renewable energy projects, including tidal lagoons, and support for nuclear.
- A ban on fracking.
- Prioritising access to the internal energy market as part of Brexit negotiations.
- Insulation of 4 million homes as an ‘infrastructure priority’.
- Interest-free loans for homeowners to improve their property.



Transport

Corbyn's first official policy promise in September 2015 was to renationalise the UK's railway service. It therefore comes as no surprise that the renationalisation of the rail through repeal of the Railways Act of 1993 is a pivotal part of Labour's manifesto. Renationalisation is a popular policy, although eyebrows have been raised over how exactly this would be done. The manifesto promises rail expansion and electrification, as well as improved staff safety levels and fare caps.

The manifesto also sets its sites on transport more broadly with the following:

- Reform of taxi and 'private hire services' legislation to ensure "a level playing field between operators."
- Pledging to support municipally-run bus companies and protect bus routes of community value.

A range of policies with a tight focus on sustainability and clean energy were also included – from promising that The National Infrastructure Commission will be invited to recommend the next steps of the National Cycle Network, to pledging to meet European standards of air safety in polluted areas. Other policies included:

- Retrofitting thousands of diesel buses in areas with the most severe air quality problems to Euro 6 standards.
- Positioning the UK at the forefront of the development, manufacture and use of ultra-low emission vehicles.
- Requiring that any airport expansion adheres to tests that require noise issues to be addressed, air quality to be protected and climate change obligations to be met. Notably, no mention is made of plans to expand Heathrow.



Political and Media Reaction

Left-wing press

Unsurprisingly, the manifesto received a warm response from left wing commentators. The Guardian's Polly Toynbee praised it as a "treasure trove... of all that is urgently needed", whilst the Mirror declared "Corbyn's little red manifesto... is the most exciting programme for decades... stuffed with smart ideas". The New Statesman's George Eaton also remarked on the popularity of many of the policies including the nationalisations. He commented "don't be surprised if it enjoys something of an afterlife... the Conservatives have already shown themselves adept at magpie politics", citing the energy price cap and higher minimum wage as examples

Right-wing press

However, the right-wing press took relish in comparing the manifesto to Foot's disastrously unsuccessful offering in 1983, deemed "the longest suicide note in history". The Telegraph condemned Corbyn's manifesto as a bid to "take Britain back to the Seventies", whilst the Spectator declared that the "Labour Manifesto adds up... to economic ruin".

Political reaction

In terms of political reaction, the day after the manifesto launch the Conservatives highlighted that they had uncovered a £58 billion 'black hole' in Labour's spending plans and launched a 17-page dossier setting out their analysis. The Liberal Democrats meanwhile criticised Labour's position on Brexit and accused the party of 'failing to stand up for our membership of the single market'.

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Conclusion

The manifesto boasted policies that ranged from the far-left to the relatively centrist. It has been widely noted that many of the policies, such as the costly abolishment of tuition fees, and the triple lock on pensions, would largely benefit the middle classes, and were potentially included at the expense of further anti-austerity measures. However, there is still a substantial amount in there to appeal to the new influx of Corbyn supporters; whether it will appeal to moderate centrists remains to be seen.

While many of the policies, such as renationalising the rail industry score very well with the general public according to opinion polls, they may be overshadowed by Corbyn's continued poor personal ratings. Only time will tell whether the manifesto will enable Labour to close the Conservative's dominant opinion poll lead.

In a period which has seen commentators and pollsters shocked by surprise election results, it remains to be seen whether Labour's radical manifesto can cause the greatest shock yet and prove that elections are not always won from the centre ground.