

**Are you committed to the direction on Labour’s 2017 and 2019 manifestos – are there any specific manifesto policies which you would want to change or amend?**

I have been proud to serve on Jeremy Corbyn’s front bench for the last 4 years.

As Shadow Education Secretary, I am proud too of the work we did across our movement, developing manifesto policies that would have changed the lives of millions of people. I fully support a direction for travel that delivers our Socialist policies in an ordinary, everyday way that people understand and engage with.

I will be honest: In 2019, I think we had many, many good policies but that we did not manage to make the case to the electorate for them as a package. We need to learn from that. I want us to have much more of an overarching narrative and real stories to tell about the policies we propose; people have to see and believe how something we’re talking about nationally would benefit them and their everyday lives. Too often if we’re honest, we’ve presented policies in an academic way that makes us seem out of touch. I’m a working class woman who has lived a real life – I know how to speak to the people we need to convince, and I can do it with honesty and authenticity because I’ve been there.

Fundamentally, I don’t think what we proposed in 2017 or 2019 was that radical at all; I believe in public services for the public good, stopping people being priced out of education, nationalising natural monopolies, building council housing and giving people dignity in old age. Our problem was the way we presented our policies; if we pitch it right, I know we can convince people. That’s one of the reasons I’m putting myself forward to be Deputy Leader, so I can be a common-sense voice right at the heart of the Shadow Cabinet table.

**Do you support the renationalisation of Royal Mail?**

Yes, absolutely. Public ownership means public accountability, together we can work to safeguard secure, well-paid jobs and we can look forward to a future where the Royal Mail has a long-lasting significance and a real future-proofed role in wider British logistics; too often at the moment our postal services are buffeted by the changing fortunes of international business and shareholder needs. Renationalisation allows profits to stay in improving and widening the service.

**Do you support the introduction of a publicly owned national post bank?**

Yes. I’ve been up and down the country, knocking on thousands of doors and so many people have talked to me about their local bank branch closing down. Putting post banks back at the heart of towns and larger villages up and down our country will be life-changing for so many people. Many people, especially older people, have told me that they are currently unable to access either the transport to their new nearest branch (now miles and miles away) and also are equally unable to access online banking options. The new post banks we proposed will also help regenerate our ailing high streets and the small business funding and advice facilities we have proposed to offer from these post banks means that local start-ups will know and interact face-to-face with their advisors and their funders, rather than rely (as so many people do now) on the anonymity, risk and inflated rates of online loans.

**What are your views on a Labour Party strategy to support our members in the telecoms and financial services industries, including the policy of universal broadband and renationalisation of relevant parts of BT?**

Labour has to be guided by CWU and your members in these sectors. That's exactly why our Party was founded – to be the political voice of workers; our strategy must rely on your real-life experiences and the priorities of CWU members. Renationalisation where there is a monopoly makes complete sense, because when profit is a motive something else has to give and it's not usually shareholder margins, it's the terms and conditions of workers and the price that customers have to pay.

From my point of view, universal broadband is common sense. I know of so many low-income homes in my community alone that can't access broadband; the social and economic impact of that restriction is huge; equality of access to high speed internet means equality of opportunity. In my role as Shadow Education Secretary, I have heard from teachers up and down the UK who have stressed for me how important access to broadband is for learning opportunities. Put simply, the world is now digital, those who cannot access digital resources quite frankly have few opportunities. Let's also not forget that the government requires online access to claim benefits like Universal Credit.

Labour's strategy should be to unite workers and consumers with a common-sense policy of fair pay, terms and conditions for the workforce and not forgetting a top quality, ethical and affordable service for customers.

**Are you committed to repealing the existing Trade Union Act and how would you support Trade Union organisation and values being reasserted across the world of work?**

100%. I'm not only committed to repealing the 2016 Trade Union Act and other existing anti-union legislation, but I also want to bring forward a new vision for workplace rights that's truly fit for the 21st century. Working together with the CWU and other unions, Labour can bring forward a positive new deal for our workforce which allows for real collective bargaining, meaning that our values are again promoted and championed in workplaces and communities up and down the UK. Again, we must present this offer to the public in a real and accessible way, using positive language that people connect with.

**Given the passing of the withdrawal agreement, how will you respond to the ongoing Brexit negotiations?**

Brexit is happening. Our narrative has to shift to forging a positive vision of our place in the world after we leave the EU, and we must put our energies into protecting the workers' rights and environmental protections that could be eroded by a Johnson government using Brexit as Trojan horse for their right wing agenda. We must be here to fight a potential cliff edge Brexit at the end of the transition arrangement and make sure that when the inevitable impact starts to bite, the British public know that each and every decision was the result of an out of touch Tory government that has broken its promises.

Labour must show the public that we accept the result and are not trying to undo it. We must be a strong, believable opposition voice, holding the Tories to account for every single decision they make. Our priorities must be to ensure continued peace in Northern Ireland, cross-border co-operation, environmental measures, and finally, that any trade deal struck preserves our rights, jobs and public services.

## **What would your top 3 priorities be if you were elected as Deputy Leader?**

As Deputy, I would firstly focus on the narrative behind our policy agenda, making sure we present everyday socialism in a way that's relevant to the people. Secondly, I want Labour to be embedded in every community, delivering actual change and building trust with the people we seek to represent, and I want all of that to be underpinned by a ruthless electoral machine. We also have to change how we organise as a Party, and to do that we have to look to the trade union movement. I have been an organiser for my entire working life, so I get it. From the thousands of members I speak to every year, it is crystal clear that no one joined Labour just to knock on doors and ask people how they're voting. We joined to make change happen. I want Labour to focus our resources on properly in communities, empowering activists to self-organise for change and to do that unashamedly as Labour. Labour has to be the Party people in their communities every day, not just on Election Day.

In a sense, I also see the role of Deputy as campaigner (cheerleader!) in chief. I will be there building bridges across different groups and societies in our party; I will reach out across the membership and the PLP. I will be there to show that we are one united force, ready to win.

If I had to pick three policy areas that would show we're serious about changing the country but also demonstrate how things can be different, I'd focus on:

### **1. A Post-Brexit Britain**

We have to have a positive vision for what the world looks like after Brexit. We need to talk about the sort of Britain we want to create – jobs in manufacturing, investment in our industries, a real green industrial strategy that actually creates jobs here in the UK while lowering our carbon emissions. People feel like that haven't been listened to, that no matter who is in power their lives don't change. We have to change that, it goes back to what I said about common-sense policies but also having a real story to tell about the future of our country.

### **2. Lifelong learning and support**

I want Labour to build on our manifesto to deliver an expanded SureStart offer to all communities. SureStart really was a game changer for me, it helped get me back into education and to learn how to look after my son after I became pregnant at 16. But also linked into my first point here, we need to show people where opportunities will come from in post-Brexit Britain so we need to invest in new skills. The Tories have slashed and burned in the further and higher education system – of course people are going to be frustrated with immigration if they see migrant worker nurses (doing a great job) in our NHS while nursing bursaries for their kids have been axed. As Shadow Education Secretary, I've spoken to education leaders about what they need, now, on the ground. I'm serious about making sure that where you grow up doesn't dictate your outcomes in life; the state – under a Labour government – must present free access to learning opportunities at any point in your life. I am so proud of the National Education Service that we proposed in our 2019 manifesto and will continue to propose that lifelong learning is a key component of future Labour policy.

### **3. Social care**

I worked in social care from the age of 16. It's where someone explained to me what a union was and why I should join one. I did and here I am. Our care workers are underpaid, undervalued and overworked. They deserve more than to be on minimum wage, and the people they care for deserve more than 15 minutes visits. A fully funded, public care system would touch the lives of every person in our country and any Labour government should make it a priority.

## **Media and engagement**

### **How would you improve the overall communications of the Labour Party?**

This question covers a lot of different areas and could be a 1,000 word essay on it's own. I'll try and break it down into some broad areas. I want to say that we do do some things really well, we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water, but look at what works and build on it.

#### Faces and voices

We need to increase the number and the diversity of faces and voices speaking for Labour in our communications. It can't be done centrally and top down. One of my key priorities is to increase the tools and training available for activists so that people have what they need to run and win innovative and exciting campaigns for Labour locally. Part of that is training people in how to properly use the media – and other communication channels – to get Labour's message out.

#### Innovation

CWU has done a fantastic job of showing what can be done when our people have the space and buy-in to innovate and try new things. How CWU is using digital is world leading for a union. We have to give our people space and the resources to try new things, accepting that sometimes things won't work but we learn from those experiences. I'd like to see more effort put into real digital organising, to much more proactive two-way engagement and to translating online action to offline activity.

#### Joining it up

One of the complaints of activists and some candidates at the election was that we weren't quick enough to join up national events or media with grassroots activity. If we're doing a big NHS press hit, that should be linked with local stories, local CLP activity and resources/literature. We need to link up across the national units – leader's office, shadow team and the wider party – and between local and regional units

### **How would you use the media to convince the electorate Labour is ready to govern at the next election?**

We should be disciplined, united and speak with one voice as a party. The briefing and infighting has to stop, no one believes a divided Party focussed on fighting itself is ready to govern. The campaign effectively starts the moment the new leadership of the party is announced.

The union movement has done so much to make sure we have a more diverse group of MPs than any other party than ever before; people want to look at politicians and know we speak for them and that we reflect them and their diverse experiences. We now have a PLP with 50% women, we have BAME and LGBT+ MPs – we look and sound like modern Britain and that is a huge plus. We are ready to govern because we more reflect the people we seek to govern.

When it comes to practicalities, as I said on policy, we need to make sure what we're saying relates to people's daily lives, it needs to be seen as credible without being timid. We have to raise people's expectations of government – starting now – because it's been decades since people could see real change because of political action. Where has been the equivalent of the National Minimum Wage?

Finally, something really basic, is that we should be making sure all of our MPs and spokespeople have media training. My training came through the trade union movement, not the Party. If we're asking people to take on big jobs – especially where the movement has worked very hard to get working class and trade union candidates into parliament – we have to make sure support is in place to succeed.

But it's worth saying that with a largely hostile media, we can't rely on it to get the job done, we need to be out on the ground organising and getting our own message across through social media.

### **How would you increase our influence with the mainstream media?**

Journalists want a story. If we give them good, accurate content that people will click on and read then we'll get column inches and time on broadcast. If we have a professional team of communications professionals, then that helps.

We should do more to support friendly media – like the Mirror, which has been staunchly on our side – but we have to be realistic that many of the print outlets especially, are owned by people who do not want a Labour government.

We need to be much more proactive in holding media to account when there is actual bias. That's not about ranting and raving on Twitter, it's about encouraging people to take practical and positive action when an outlet is so obviously biased against us – look at the boycott of the S\*n in Liverpool, collective action can work. And where a broadcaster should be showing impartiality, we need to hold them to account.

### **Would you work to grow a new media in the UK?**

There are some exciting and innovative new media in the UK which I believe we can learn a lot from. As this last election has shown, we need to identify new ways of getting our Labour message to voters directly. CWU is also leading the way in showing how it is possible to develop your own media which allows you to communicate directly with union members and get across a very clear message.

I would want to see the Labour party learning from the work the CWU has done on campaigns like the Royal Mail one and look at doing more of our own online broadcasts. We are a mass membership party and we need to develop more ways of reaching a mass audience, whether that is party members or the public more widely.

We should keep an open mind about what is possible given the changing nature of how people get their news. It seems daunting to think about setting up new media outlets, but look how far and wide the reach is of relatively new outlets that now appear in most people's Facebook feed at some point.

### **Would you implement a dynamic and engaging social media strategy and what steps would you take to achieve this?**

Absolutely. Social media is a vastly powerful tool that we have to harness not just for engagement but for organising. We can reach more people than ever before, but we have to do that with a purpose - to deliver change, to build capacity in communities, grow and join up activism and to let the electorate know our message when the mainstream media refuse to report it.

I want this sort of engagement to be running through everything we do as a Party, I want voters to feel like Labour is an ever present part of their lives in their communities and social media will be a powerful tool in achieving and reinforcing that. A few steps I would take:

- Figure out what works - that means looking at best practice elsewhere and in our movement but also trying new things, being innovative
- Training and capacity building - lots of our activists use social media but every few have had training, let's change that. As a tool, social media isn't set up to be top down, we have to embrace that.
- Rapid rebuttal - we need to build systems and networks to ensure we never let fake news control the agenda
- Utilising the skills in our movement - this doesn't just go for social media but for so many things within the Party (from making videos to designing leaflets and public speaking). We have masses of talent within our Party, I want to create a Labour community that shares our skills across the country. Social media will both help with that, and be a beneficiary of it.
- Online action linked to offline activity - let's use social media as an organising tool, not just to broadcast.

### **What sort of internal strategy would you pursue regarding the democratisation of the Labour Party? Including;**

*How would you make local CLP meetings more dynamic?*

I come to this from the starting point of Labour being a movement, not a meeting. Let's start behaving like that when it comes to our structures.

We can't have any more reports of new members attending one meeting and then never going again because they find it too full of business or dull, arcane processes. We need to look seriously at our structures, shifting to a local and regional pattern of political education meetings that bring wider voices from the community in to talk to members about the issues on the ground in the areas they live in.

### **How would you involve members and trade unions more?**

As Deputy Leader of the party I would take personal responsibility for engaging members and trade unions more in our party. I would want to be out meeting voters, party members and union members as much as possible. It is what I enjoy the most.

I want to see our party structures opened up. We must have a programme of political education and events which allow members to discuss issues and to talk about how everyday socialism can transform people's lives. I want to see local, regional and the national party learning from some of the great work being done by voluntary sector organisations and unions on how we get members more involved. I want to see a movement solidarity where we work together much more closely - developing a movement culture - where Party members join us on picket lines, where trade unionists are out on the knocker and community organising with us. I know that does happen now, but I want it to happen in a

much more structured and consistent way rather than where a few good people decide to make it happen.

Our party has not taken advantage of the huge opportunity that comes from being able to engage our mass membership on digital platforms and social media. CWU have been very effective at getting their members to take action and post online about that action in an engaging way, we need to learn from this.

CWU have also made their officials and elected representatives more accessible to the membership by using webinars and facebook live. I would do more of this as deputy leader to ensure there is a direct dialogue between me and the party membership and union members.

As a former union rep myself I have prioritised meeting with and hearing from trade unionists on the frontline as an MP and shadow cabinet minister. I know that it is often workers who have the best ideas about how their workplaces or industries can be run better. Our link with the union movement is one of our party's biggest strengths and as deputy leader I would prioritise working with our unions on every aspect of my work.

But I would go further and say that the role shouldn't just be about involving party members and union members (as important as that is). I would also want to develop ways of involving local communities in our party. To win future elections we must be an open, outward looking party. There is great work going on around the country by local parties, councillors and MPs showing how Labour values work in practice and we need to spread this best practice.

*What would your approach to annual conference be?*

I fully recognise the sovereign nature of Labour Party conference and respect the very important role it plays in our democracy and policy making. However I also believe that it often isn't as accessible as it could be: many members can't attend because of cost and often delegates don't get a chance to speak or fully take part. This year I believe we ran out of creche space. We need to protect the important democratic processes of conference but there is still plenty of room for making it much more engaging, with more training and discussion sessions, more interactive online engagement for people who can't be there in person and more socials.

I have also been extremely concerned in recent years by some of the conflict between party members and trade union members on conference floor. I think we need some urgent political education which addresses this to ensure that all members of our party value the important role the constituent parts of our party play in our democracy.

*How would you encourage more working-class candidates rooted in their communities to stand for parliament?*

We need to offer support for candidates who literally cannot afford to stand. Plenty of candidates in the 2019 election quit jobs or went down to part-time just to give themselves enough time to campaign. Some are now signing on and desperately looking for work. Target seat candidates have told me that some of them are down to the last £100 in their bank account, some are still paying off debt from when they stood as candidates in 2017. This isn't right.

The selection processes within our party also advantages those with larger disposable incomes.

I think as a party we need to provide political education to encourage members and union members to stand for election and to build confidence and skills. We also need to think about innovative ways of helping people overcome barriers to standing for parliament whether that is help with childcare or other caring responsibilities or how we support disabled members to access the same opportunities.

I make no bones about the fact that I am an MP thanks to the trade union movement. I was educated, trained, supported through the selection process and then the election by trade union brothers and sisters - what an amazing achievement it would be for our movement to now support a former minimum wage care worker to be Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. I think that might help encourage a few people too - if I can do it, so can they.