

Labour leadership - responses to the Communication Workers Union questions from Rebecca Long-Bailey



1. Policy

- *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?*

Yes, the 2017 and 2019 manifestos signalled a decisive shift for the party in changing the balance of forces in the economy and the world of work and we must not abandon this. On public ownership, public investment, trade union and employment rights, banking, the housing market and a state-led industrial strategy there has been a clear move away from the economic model of the past forty years and that should remain central to our agenda.

This is important for a simple reason. We face connected crises: in living standards, the climate, in faith in democracy and in people being able to access the basics in life. These won't be solved by tinkering around the edges. In particular, I believe it is crucial that we retain the plan for a Green Industrial Revolution (or Green New Deal) as a lever for driving this change and to deliver good unionised jobs and tackle the climate emergency.

While the 2019 manifesto should be our starting point, in the current campaign I am setting out new policy areas to build on it which have so far focused on a democratic revolution (replacing the House of Lords with an elected Senate; devolving real power to a regional and local level; working with Scottish and Welsh Labour to give more power to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly; and taking big money out of politics). I will be setting out other proposals during the course of the campaign.

At the same time, it is important that we reflect on where our campaign went wrong. We did not get our messaging right and we failed to pull together policies that were individually popular into a compelling narrative. This is just as important as the policy offer and I have been talking about the need to connect with people's aspirations for their own lives and be clear that the platform is about empowerment, rather than handouts.

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

Yes, I am 100% committed to the renationalisation of Royal Mail and re-uniting it with the Post Office in public ownership. This is not just about changing who owns the shares and it is not about returning to the old model of public ownership – it is about bringing in a new democratic model that means workers and those who rely on the service are at the heart of decision making.

Public ownership of Royal Mail is an opportunity to keep money in the service, invest in new products and services to expand the role of postal workers and to secure the future of the industry. Alongside this we need to tackle unfair competition in the postal sector – liberalisation and the way competition was pushed has been extremely damaging and this must also be addressed as part of a wider strategy for the sector as a whole. This should mean ending insecure employment as well as downstream access – and I don't believe we should be using this for any Labour Party mailings.

If I am elected as leader I would be committed to working with the CWU to develop these proposals in more detail.

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

Yes. A Post Bank was a key part of our manifesto in 2019 to change the banking sector, support local high-streets and secure the future of the Post Office network. Even in public ownership there have been hundreds of Crown office closures and thousands of postmasters are on poverty rates of pay. As set out in the report for Labour commissioned by the CWU, a Post Bank would bring hundreds of millions of pounds of profit into the Post Office and secure its future.

Alongside this, our manifesto pledged to make the Post Office a hub for small business and end the Crown office closure/franchising programme. In government we should also be looking at opportunities to re-open Crown offices that have been lost.

- *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?*

The policy to renationalise “broadband relevant” parts of BT was worked up with the CWU in the run-up to the general election and I believe it was the right policy in terms of upgrading our broadband infrastructure, driving investment in the service and providing good unionised jobs in the industry. Competition in the telecoms sector has not delivered for workers – putting downward pressure on terms and conditions – or the country as a whole, with the UK lagging behind others on broadband speeds.

Much of the work on the policy was done in a short space of time in the run-up to the election and if I become Labour leader I would want the party to work closely with the CWU to develop the proposal in greater detail. As part of the proposals, there were important commitments made to safeguard jobs and to protect or enhance terms and conditions for workers transferring across to a new public provider, which should be retained with the policy. As we did with the proposals for public ownership of water, I would want to work hand-in-hand with the union on this to ensure we get the detail right for jobs across the industry as a whole.

On providing fibre broadband for free, it became difficult to explain this during a short election campaign when people had lost faith in political promises, after three years of politicians failing to agree on a way to deliver the EU referendum result. We need to make the case for such policies over a much longer period of time – but it is important to remember why this policy was included: almost half of low-income homes have no broadband at all and there would be significant social and economic benefits from ensuring every family has a good internet connection, which is widely recognised as essential to a good standard of modern living.

For CWU members across the telecoms and financial services sectors, I would be committed to ending insecure employment, sectoral collective bargaining and measures to grow the trade union movement.

- *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?*

Yes. As the CWU has called for, we need a New Deal for Workers. The starting point for this is the repeal of the 2016 Trade Union Act and other anti-trade union legislation. At the same time, we need a positive agenda to grow trade union membership including sectoral collective bargaining, stronger access rights and removing restrictive recognition thresholds

– a lot of work was done on this with trade unions in the run-up to the election and this provides the starting point for the party going forward.

Beyond this, the link with trade unions is extremely important. As Labour leader I would actively promote trade union membership and would want to see rules on elected representatives being trade union members upheld. There are other things we can be doing now to support trade union organisation: Labour should support the cross-union New Deal for Workers campaign and activities around 8th May and we need to campaign against further restrictions on the right to strike that the government is now threatening for rail workers.

The 2017 and 2019 manifesto had a range of important new employment rights – from banning zero hours contracts and bogus self-employment to preventing agency workers being used as a form of cheap labour – that are also central to reasserting trade union values in the world of work. Finally, we also need to be supporting Labour councils to drive up employment standards, for instance through procurement and insourcing.

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

While there was logic in trying to unite Leave and Remain voters, our approach over the past three years failed. In the election passionate Leave supporters felt we were trying to walk away from the referendum and passionate Remain supporters felt we had not gone far enough. This was a major factor in the election defeat in 2019 and we got our approach wrong over a number of years.

We now need to move on and paint a positive picture of the UK's position outside of the EU and of our place in the world. But this is not to give the government a blank cheque. We need to have a close relationship with the EU for jobs, something the government is already putting at risk, and should seek to maintain the highest employment, consumer and environmental standards in the UK.

These are issues we must hold the government to account on, together with the pledges it has made on Brexit, but we cannot spend the next five years looking like we are waiting for the opportunity to tell voters they were wrong and it would be my role as leader to convince them of our vision for the future.

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

My three policy priorities would be: (1) the Green Industrial Revolution; (2) reversing the cuts since 2010 that have done huge damage to public services; and (3) scrapping Universal Credit. However, my ultimate priority is to get us back into a position where we can win power to deliver these things.

2. Media and Engagement

If I'm elected as leader of the Labour Party one of my priorities will be to improve our communications. It was clear that in the last election we did not cut through with our messaging and while we know that much of the media is hostile, this cannot be an excuse for not getting our message across. I would seek to work with organisations and voices from across our movement to create the most dynamic and innovative media operation of any political party in the UK.

If Labour is going to win an election in 2024 then it needs to observe the trends across the media landscape and have an analysis of which platforms are most likely to have significant engagement and influence people in four years' time. The task for us then is to optimise our reach on those digital channels.

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

We would ensure that attacks are rebutted vigorously and that the party was unified behind a positive message – we cannot continue to have briefings against the leadership in the rightwing press. There are clearly risks to engaging with the mainstream media, and there are sections which have no interest in giving the Labour Party a fair hearing – I will not give interviews to the Sun. We must build links with good journalists where we can but we also need to develop a more robust rebuttal operation. As leader I will not sit back and see open attacks on our Party or me personally left unanswered.

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

Creating shareable, viral content and having a dedicated creative digital comms unit within the party will enable us to reach the vast majority of people despite a hostile media environment, and even influence the broadcast media agenda. We will seek to engage constructively with the mainstream media but building up a means to communicate with voters that can bypass their channels will give us necessary leverage with conventional outlets

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

Yes, the past few years has seen a range of new left media organisations coming through, precisely because of the shift that has taken place in Labour, and as Labour leader I would want to work with them. In the past week I have done an interview with JOE, written for and been interviewed by Tribune and I am appearing on Novara Media next week. I also think it's important that while the press gets amplified by the BBC doing "paper reviews", other, new digital outlets should be given that publicity too.

I also believe there is an opportunity for the party to bring together expertise from across the movement, including the CWU which has shown how dynamic and engaging content can mobilise and engage working people, to grow a new media and activist base.

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

I would completely reform the party's approach to comms. Labour is set up to fight an election in 2005, when journalists had a 5pm deadline and the challenge was to influence the news bulletins at 6 and 10pm. We have not yet caught up with the changes brought about by social and rolling news media, and our use of Facebook advertising is currently wasteful and must be optimised.

The party has to look at this from first principles: who are the people we need to convince, where do they get their information, where are they likely to get it in 2024, how do we optimise our reach on those channels and build resilient digital communities that can amplify a persuasive message. This will require a significant overhaul of communications in the Labour party, and that work has to start immediately if we are going to win the next general election.

We also need to ensure our messages hit home on the doorsteps. It is important that we make sure we support and improve campaigning at a grassroots level and think about how our social media complements this (for instance, by asking people to take an action such as speaking to a friend or someone in their workplace). If we can combine an effective social media operation with a mass membership we have a path to power.

3. The Party

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?*
- *How would you involve members and trade unions more?*
- *What would your approach to annual conference be?*
- *How would you encourage more working class candidates rooted in their communities to stand for parliament?*

Democratising the party is a key part of the agenda I am standing on. This week I have announced my support for:

(1) a system of open selection;

(2) overhauling and properly resourcing political education in the party, learning from new organisations like TWT and events like the New Economics Conferences the party has run;

(3) introducing a new participatory policy making process engaging members and affiliates at a local and regional level (this would operate alongside annual conference) through both CLP and other meetings;

(4) giving members and affiliates a say over local and not just national policy; and

(5) setting up a new BAME structure so BAME members can self-organise in the party.

There is a huge amount of talent in the movement and these changes are aimed at democratising the party and empowering members and trade unionists. If I am elected as leader, I would want to work with members and affiliated unions to develop and implement these.

On policy and education in particular I believe we can make the party much dynamic – members don't just want to change the minutes of the last meeting but learn about politics and economics and develop ideas for their own communities. Proposals to the party's Democracy Review last year included having regular policy focused meetings and there are a number of CLPs that have started to trying initiatives like this which we should encourage.

Alongside this, I believe we need to do several things to ensure we become a year-round campaigning organisation. We need to be more proactive in building links through community organising and local trade unions – but this will only happen if the party nationally supports CLPs, members and TULO officers to achieve this. This work needs to start now.

With trade unions, as I have set out above I would want to work closely with affiliates on developing policy proposals and using this as a way of engaging working people in Labour politics (for example working with unions to hold meetings with reps and members on how public ownership should operate for a given service). I also believe we can do this with local campaigns focused on concrete elements of our platform – for instance, we have specific proposals on investment in green industries, creating jobs in particular areas, which we should start to use in campaigning in particular constituencies now.

As leader of the party I would want to show leadership on the trade union link. I will stand shoulder to shoulder with affiliates in disputes – the CWU has my full support with the forthcoming Royal Mail ballot – and I want to encourage every Labour member to join a union and support them in disputes. We should also ensure the rule for elected representatives to be union members is upheld.

The relationship with trade unions in the party has become much stronger in recent years – I would be determined to build on this and it is incredibly important we do not turn back the clock after this leadership election.

In relation to working class candidates, I believe a system of open selections will allow more people to put themselves forward in the future. We also need to engage in political activities that bring us into contact with a broader range of people – with effective community organising and engagement with our affiliates – and encourage people to come forward to be councillors as well as MPs. And we should review the measures we currently have in place, like bursaries for working class members, to overcome barriers to working class people getting more involved (from access to childcare, to the cost of a selection campaign).

With the shift in policy in the past four years and a more open selection process in target seats we have seen more trade unionists and working class people coming forward and again it is important that we do not turn back the clock on this after this election.