

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?

I fully back the 2017 and 2019 manifestos which continue to offer real solutions to the problems our communities face and which will deepen with five more years of Tory misrule.

We need to learn the lessons of the general election debate - but we should not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

I do not believe that we lost the election because of policies such as a £10 per hour minimum wage, the renationalisation of rail, mail and water, and the Green Industrial Revolution.

In fact these policies are part of how we rebuild support. For example our Green Industrial Revolution can help unite voters in small towns and big cities by both tackling the climate emergency and creating much-needed manufacturing jobs in communities that have been hit hard, first by deindustrialisation and then by austerity.

Great policies, however, aren't enough. As Deputy Leader, I'll overhaul our organisation, campaigning and messaging to focus on 10 key policies that are easily explainable on the doorstep and can be an organising focus for our members.

Do you support the renationalisation of Royal Mail?

Yes - 100%.

My strong view is that the Royal Mail is a public service that should be run by and for the public, not for corporate profits.

What's more, the public agrees with us. This is testimony to the excellent campaigning of the CWU and the leadership of Labour in recent years in pointing out the deep flaws of leaving everything to the market.

The renationalisation of Royal Mail is a policy that must be defended in opposition and then implemented by the next Labour government.

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

Yes - absolutely.

Inadequate access to local bank branches not only hurts our town centres and local businesses but has a great social cost especially on the elderly and most vulnerable.

Over the past three decades, well over half of bank branches have closed. Reversing this can't be left to the market. It requires an active state investment plan.

So, a decade after the financial crash, it is right to build a new, public banking system by turning local post offices into branches of a new, nationalised bank. By acting as the lender for regional development banks, the post offices can help create investment in left-behind areas and help small businesses.

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's election promise to create a publicly owned high-speed internet network by renationalising relevant parts of BT - though widely mocked in the media - was the correct policy.

Extremely poor internet connections undermine the economy and a growing digital divide deepens inequalities. Just as investing in the canals and railways of the past helped Britain become an industrial powerhouse, a full-fibre network can help stimulate new digital industries. By ensuring this is a national network this would especially help tackle the deindustrialization that continues to blight many areas outside of the South East.

It was also right to plan to fund this policy, in part, via taxes on internet giants like Amazon and Google which have long failed to pay their proper share of taxes.

The policy should be maintained by the next leader and the Party should work with the CWU and supportive business organisations - especially in the regions that have

the most to benefit - to create a communications strategy to make the case for this over the next period. We can win the argument on this just as has been done with mail renationalisation.

Of course, as with all such nationalisations, it is essential that workers affected have safeguards to ensure that guarantees on all terms and condition and their pensions and other rights are protected.

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?

The Trade Union Act must be repealed. The disgraceful barriers to organising and taking industrial action are an attack on basic workers' freedoms.

It is disgraceful that the CWU has been the latest victim of these draconian laws in its dispute with Royal Mail, despite the overwhelming mandate from members and high ballot turnout.

In a modern democracy, unions should not be shackled from being able to properly defend and advance the safety, pay and terms and conditions of their members.

Before being an MP, I was a trade union solicitor for a decade working with union reps in Employment Tribunals and in workplaces to defend their members' rights against bad bosses. I will always stand shoulder-to-shoulder with workers demanding their rights. I believe that workers' collective rights, as well as individual rights, need to be advanced as part of a fundamental and irreversible shift in wealth, power and control in favour of working people.

It is clear that we will not get better trade union rights under the Tory government and so our first job must be to head off the outrageous attack by Boris Johnson's new government on the right of transport workers to strike. As Labour's Shadow Justice Secretary I spoke out in favour of trade union rights for prison officers, who face incredibly restrictive practices including a bar on industrial action. I will fight to ensure that such practices are not being extended.

Regarding how we reassert trade union organisation and values across the world of work, I think we need to have a special focus on targeting younger workers and those at the sharp end of the “Americanisation” of our workplaces, with practices such as zero-hour contracts. I am delighted to have been nominated for Deputy Leader by the Bakers Union (BFAWU) which has played such a central role in organising the McDonald’s workers, which is a real example of how this can be done.

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

We have to stop Boris Johnson using the next period to hijack Brexit to push Thatcherism 2.0.

Brexit is happening and we need to fight the next battles - not continue arguments that divide the working class over whether they voted leave or remain. We need to unite all communities to stand up to the Tories’ attempt to use the cover of Brexit to push free-trade agreements with Trump - or anyone else - that would drive down wages, cut back protections for people and planet and try to replicate the free-market practices that are so common in the United States.

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

1. I will be a campaigning Deputy Leader focused on building a Party rooted in every community with powerful local campaigns that show, day after day, whose side Labour is on. This can help us reconnect with lost voters. I will ensure greater resources go into building local community campaigns and personally visit CLPs to help them with their local campaigning.
2. I will overhaul our campaigning and messaging to focus on 10 key policies easily understandable on the doorstep. (More detail below).
3. Winning the next general election means regaining the trust of voters we’ve lost. Any path to power requires us winning back the more than 50 Leave-

supporting seats we lost. As Deputy Leader, I'll chair a Special Commission on rebuilding all our lost support.

2. Media and Engagement

It is critical in our view that Labour develops a more robust communications and media strategy.

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

We need to communicate much more clearly what we stand for as a party. I believe the key to this is communicating more effectively across many different channels.

As Deputy Leader, I'll overhaul our campaign messaging to focus on 10 key policies that are easily explainable on the doorstep and can be an organising focus for our members to go out into their communities and win over lost voters.

But we also need to improve how we communicate internally. Too often the great work that affiliates, CLPs and regions are doing campaigning for the many gets lost in silos. I would like to see these experiences shared across our labour movement to encourage solidarity but also to inspire other areas to campaign. As Deputy leader I would send a monthly communication to Affiliates and CLPs sharing information on national as well as local campaigning, sharing victories and campaign tips across our organisation.

In addition I would want to see the party communicate our policies with an element of political education. We have the biggest political party in Europe and we do not communicate regularly with our members engaging them on the issues of the day, or indeed asking them all to join a union. We can and must develop ways to interact more with our mass membership.

This would give members the confidence to talk about our policies and our messaging, reiterating our 10 key policies - time after time - so that the public can easily understand how we are on their side- regardless of what they hear on the mainstream media.

How would you use the media to convince the electorate Labour is ready to govern at the next election? AND How would you increase our influence with the mainstream media?

I think that we need to use media opportunities to communicate our messages, despite the fact that there is clear and obvious media bias. We need to tackle this bias head on.

To deal with media bias, we need a much better rebuttal unit. Every single representation has to be challenged immediately. We cannot let a false picture be built up either on policies or over the leadership.

But we need to ensure that there is proper media training for every representative or spokesperson and refocus the party's briefings team so it better prepares representatives for hostile media.

I also think that we need to be prepared to directly challenge the media. I successfully sued The Sun for defamation when false claims were made about me, using the £30,000 compensation awarded to me in the High Court to create a local internship.

Too often we let the mainstream media dictate the terms of engagement. We need to recapture the fighting spirit from 2015 - we do not play by their rules and nor should we. Some of the mainstream media rules are designed to keep the status quo and protect the few - our priority should always be standing up for the many. To do that we should make our own demands for engagement - for example insisting on a balanced audience for BBC Question Time

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

Yes. I don't think our media grid should only be driven by being on the Sunday morning sofas or talking to political editors. These are important but not as influential as they used to be.

More people than ever get their news from social media, whilst this has issues we need to work on so that our messages break through people's individual social media bubbles. We need to use both our own social media networks and new

media channels (Novara, Tribune, Double Down News, etc), growing community-specific media platforms, podcasts, etc so that we reach hundreds of thousands of people.

We also need to look at the next wave of social media innovation - whilst Facebook is still hugely important, young people are now more likely to sign up to Instagram or snapchat. And more people are using podcasts than reading newspapers, so we need to develop our strategies here. By the next General Election I'm sure the way we use social media will have developed even more.

We also need to use more broadcasting apps - CWU are leading the way on WhatsApp use with broadcast lists, groups and chats for their members - radio stations use this in a hugely innovative way and as Deputy Leader I would seek to start using your example and in the party.

We also need to support the labour movement media outlets. So after the election, when I put forward my analysis of why we lost and what we needed to win again, I did this in Tribune, rejecting other requests, as I believe we need to build up an independent press that is willing to explore the real issues that face our communities. This is also why I write a monthly column in The Morning Star.

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

Yes. We should learn as well from innovative new ways of communicating, the CWU's Facebook live chats and the live content from the stall at Labour Party Conference is definitely something the party can learn from.

Similar to the response in the last question, growing our new media will rely on innovative use of social media.

I think one key step is to change the party's staffing and media resource to focus much more on social media as a central goal - not an add on. There needs to be dedicated social media resources.

For example, providing more video producers to get out key messages from our spokespeople. I have found the lack of social media support to shadow cabinet

members, meant that key interviews, speeches, announcements often didn't get promoted leaving the terrain to distortions in the mainstream media.

We also need to employ and learn from the best progressive social media communicators and strategists in the world, for example I have been very impressed with the Bernie Sanders campaign.

If we are serious about taking on media bias and building alternatives then we have to build networks with the best and learn from the good examples in our own movement like the examples I mentioned from the CWU.

3. The Party

What sort of internal strategy would you pursue regarding the democratisation of the Labour Party?

Our members and trade union affiliates ensure we're rooted in the realities of our communities.

I back a fully democratic system for members and trade unions to select their Labour candidates at each and every election. It is an honour to serve as a Labour representative - it should never be treated by anyone as a job for life.

As Deputy Leader, I will not just be a powerful voice for Labour members and trade unionists in the new Leader's top team, but I will also fight for greater powers for them to set our Party's campaigning agenda.

For example, the 10 key policies I mentioned previously should be determined by members - not just the shadow cabinet - to ensure that they reflect the demands of the communities we are here to serve.

I would listen to how CLPs and trade unions want to democratise the party and ensure your views were heard and acted on.

How would you make local CLP meetings more dynamic?

I think we could improve CLP meetings in a number of ways - political education, discussions on new ways of organising and even media training for local spokespeople.

However, while all member meetings have a vital role to play in many ways, I am deeply concerned about undermining the structural relationship with the trade unions which must always be defended.

How would you involve members and trade unions more?

I believe Labour members must not be treated as unpaid workers delivering leaflets but having little say on the policies that are on those leaflets. I'll fight for greater powers for Labour members to decide our Party's campaigning priorities.

What would your approach to the annual conference be?

As Deputy Leader, I will ensure policies passed at Annual Conference are not just words on a motion but are commitments that form the core of our manifesto pledges.

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

As someone who represents the working class constituency which I'm from and which my family have lived in and worked in for a hundred years ever since arriving as immigrants from Ireland looking for work, this is a subject close to my heart.

It is vital for the future of our movement that we have more working class, socialist candidates standing to represent their own communities in Parliament.

While training schemes, access programmes, and a more open selection process all have a critical role to play, the fundamental way that I believe we will succeed - in practice - is to continue to deepen the relationship at all levels of the party with trade unions so that more of their chosen representatives are selected as candidates.