

# Transform the Labour Party

Jeremy Corbyn says he wants to find ways to give more power to ordinary members and a conference that makes the final decision on policy. The democracy commission has now been agreed and will report next year. All this is very welcome. **James Marshall** presents a 13-point platform that will provide the basis for the submission by Labour Party Marxists

1. Mandatory reselection is crucial, though it terrifies the right. We read that this, “even more than nuclear disarmament and membership of the European Community, became the main catalyst for the launch of the breakaway Social Democratic Party” in March 1981. In that same treacherous spirit as the founders of the SDP, Progress - Lord David Sainsbury’s party within a party - furiously denounces mandatory reselection as “a weapon of fear and intimidation”. Yes, mandatory reselection is viewed as an affront by every rightwing wrecker, every hireling, every parliamentary careerist.

It is worth looking at the background. Interestingly, and with good foundation, we read on the Progress website that mandatory reselection carries “echoes of the Paris Commune, and of the Russian soviets, where delegates were subject to recall if they displeased their local citizenry. It rests on the idea that leaders will always be tempted to sell you out, once they get power.” Well, surely, that is what history actually shows.

For decades, sitting Labour MPs - certainly those with safe seats - enjoyed a job for life (or for as long as no better offer came along). They might have deigned to visit their constituency once or twice a year, deliver a speech to the AGM and write an occasional letter to the local newspaper. Meanwhile they lived a pampered, middle class life, frequented various London gentlemen’s clubs and spent their weekends in the home counties with Lord this and Lady that. Despite such evident moral corruption, they were automatically the candidate for the next election. Unless found guilty of an act of gross indecency or had the party whip withdrawn, they could do as they pleased.

With the insurgent rise of Bennism that totally unacceptable situation was called into question. The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, founded in 1973, committed itself to a range of rule changes - the mandatory reselection of MPs was finally agreed by the 1980 conference. What this saw, however, was

not a Labour Party equivalent of the Paris Commune or the Russian soviets. There was no right to instantly recall. Nevertheless, once in each parliament, our MPs had to secure the endorsement of their local General Management Committee. Note, GMCs were made up of delegates elected by local party and trade union branches. They were sizable bodies too, typically consisting of 80, 90, 100 or even more delegates.

At the prompting of the bourgeois media, Neil Kinnock, desperately seeking acceptability, sought to extract trade unions from the voting process altogether. He failed, but accepted a compromise. A local electoral college for the selection and reselection of candidates was introduced. Ordinary members were given a direct vote for the first time, leaving GMCs with the right to nominate and shortlist only. This electoral college system gave unions and affiliated organisations up to 40% of the vote, with ordinary members having some 60% (the actual balance was different in each seat, depending on party and union membership).

Trigger ballots were a product of the 1990s. Formally honouring conference’s “desire to maintain reselection”, they made it significantly “easier for MPs to defend their positions”. Trigger ballots allowed for a sitting MP to be subject to a full-scale ballot of the membership. But only if they lost a trigger ballot.

We say, all elected Labour representatives must, by rule, be subject to a one-member, one-vote mandatory reselection. MPs have to be brought under democratic control - from above, by the National Executive Committee; from below by Constituency Labour Parties.

2. We urgently need a sovereign conference once again. The cumbersome, undemocratic and oppressive structures, especially those put in place under the Blair supremacy, must be abolished. The joint policy committee, the national policy forums, etc, have to go.

3. We are against the idea of electing the general secretary through an all-member

ballot. The NEC should elect all national officers. Therefore the post of Labour leader should be replaced by the post of NEC chair. We favour annual elections with the right to recall at any time. As a matter of basic principle Marxists oppose all forms of Bonapartism.

4. In Scotland and Wales, their executive committees should likewise elect their own officers, including their representatives on the all-UK NEC. We are against a single individual in Scotland and Wales having the right to appoint themselves, or a trusted clone.

5. Scrap the hated compliance unit “and get back to the situation where people are automatically accepted for membership, unless there is a significant issue that comes up” (John McDonnell). The compliance unit operates in the murky shadows, routinely leaks to the capitalist media and makes rulings in a completely biased manner. We want to welcome into our ranks the bulk of those who have been barred from membership by the compliance unit. Many of them are good socialists with a proven record.

6. Those expelled from membership ought to have the right to reapply, not after five years, but just one year. All disciplinary procedures should be completed within three months. Endless delay violates natural justice.

7. The huge swing towards Labour in the June 2017 general election happened in no small part due to the enthusiasm of young voters. Yet Young Labour is creaking, uninviting, thoroughly bureaucratic construction. We need a one-member-one-vote organisation. That must include Young Labour’s National Committee. At present, two-thirds of votes are accounted for by appointees from affiliated organisations, eg, the Fabians and Co-op Party, and affiliated trade unions. Instead of the bi-annual policy and national committee elections, their must be an annual conference that can both decide on policy and elect a leadership. Young Labour has to have the right to decide on its own constitution and standing orders.



BCM Box 8932  
London WC1N 3XX  
office@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

8. We need a rule that commits the NEC to securing the affiliation of *all* trade unions to the Labour Party. The FBU has already reaffiliated. Excellent. But what about the RMT? Let us win RMT militants to finally drop their support for the thoroughly misconceived Tusc project. Instead reaffiliate to the Labour Party. And what about the NUT? This year's Cardiff conference saw the executive narrowly win an amendment, by 50.63% to 49.37%, which in effect ruled out considering affiliation ... at this moment. This can be changed ... if we campaign to win hearts and minds. Then there is PCS. Thankfully, Mark Serwotka, its leftwing general secretary, has at last come round to the idea. Yes, PCS affiliation will run up against the Trades Disputes and Trade Union Act (1927), introduced by a vengeful Tory government in the aftermath of the general strike. Civil service unions were barred from affiliating to the Labour Party and the TUC. The Civil and Public Services Association - predecessor of PCS - reaffiliated to the TUC in 1946. Now, however, surely, it is time for PCS to reaffiliate to the Labour Party. Force another change in the law.

9. There has to be a shift in the party, away from the HQ, regional officers, the leader's office, the Parliamentary Labour Party, etc. CLPs must be empowered. Towards that end there has to be proper financing. CLPs should be allocated 50% of the individual membership dues. That will help with producing publicity material, hiring rooms, paying for full-time officers, providing transport, setting up websites, etc. That way our CLPs can be made into vibrant centres of socialist organisation, education and action.

10. Our goal must be a Labour Party, that, in the words of Keir Hardie, can "organise the working class into a great, independent political power to fight for the coming of socialism". We therefore need rule changes to *once again* allow left, communist and revolutionary groups and parties to affiliate. As long as they do not stand against us in elections, this can only but strengthen Labour as a federal party. Nowadays affiliated organisations include the Fabians, Christians on the left, the Cooperative Party and, problematically, the Jewish Labour Movement and Labour Business. Encourage the Socialist Workers Party, Socialist Party in England and Wales, Communist Party of Great Britain, etc, to join our ranks.

11. Being an MP ought to be an honour, not a career ladder, not a way for university graduates to secure a lucrative living. A particularly potent weapon here would be a rule requiring all our elected representatives and officials to take only the average wage of a skilled worker - a principle upheld by the Paris Commune and the Bolshevik revolution. Our MPs are on a basic £67,060 annual salary. On top of that they get around £12,000 in expenses and allowances, putting them on £79,060 (yet at present Labour MPs are only obliged to pay the £82 parliamentarians' subscription rate).

Let them keep the average skilled workers' wage - say £40,000 (plus legitimate expenses). Then, however, they should hand the balance over to the party. Even without a rule change Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell, Dianne Abbott ought to take the lead here.

12. Relying on the favours of the capital-

ist press, radio and TV is a fools game. Yes, it worked splendidly for Tony Blair and Alistair Campbell. But, as Neil Kinnock, Gordon Brown and Ed Miliband found to their cost, to live by the mainstream media is to die by the mainstream media.

The NEC should, by rule, establish and maintain our own press, radio and TV. To state the obvious, tweeting and texting have severe limits. Brilliant mediums for transmitting simple, short and sharp messages to the already converted. But, when it comes to complex ideas, debating history and charting out political strategies they are worse than useless. We should provide time and space for controversy and the whole range of different opinions within the party. Without that our media will be dull, lifeless, pointless. We should also take full advantage of parliamentary immunity to circumvent the oppressive libel laws. Then we can say the unsayable. That would prove to be electric in terms of shaping and mobilising public opinion.

13. We should adopt a new clause four. Not a return to the old, 1918, version, but a commitment to working class rule and a society which aims for a stateless, classless, moneyless society, which embodies the principle, 'From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs'. That is what socialism is all about. Not a measly £10 per hour "living wage", shifting the tax balance and a state investment bank. No, re-establishing socialism in the mainstream of politics means committing the Labour Party to achieving a "democratic republic".

**John McDonnell has been the honorary chair of the anti-war/solidarity campaign Hands Off the people of Iran for many years.** He outlined its core principles in a speech to our 2011 conference:

"While opposing any imperialist attacks, we positioned ourselves in clear, active solidarity with the people of Iran who are fighting against their theocratic regime. That also led us to clearly oppose all sanctions on the country, because in our view that is just another form of imperialism attacking the people of Iran. I think we have successfully engaged others in that discussion."

**HOPI is now calling for solidarity with three prominent worker activists in Iran.** Please sign and circulate this statement and contact HOPI (details below) to receive more info on this important campaign:

Three prominent activists are on hunger strike in an Iranian prison. They are protesting against unjust sentences handed down to them by the Islamic courts. The comrades are in urgent need of solidarity, especially from trade unionists and democrats internationally. The three are:

- Reza Shahbi - a member of the coordinating committee of the syndicate of the Vahed Bus Company;

- Abbas Abdi - executive member of teachers' guild;
- Mahmoud Beheshti Langaroudi - former spokesperson of the teachers' guild.

Shahabi, Abdi and Langaroudi have had these sentences imposed as a result of their activities in defence of their fellow workers. Worryingly, the hunger strike is starting to have a serious effect on their health and is now endangering their lives. Reza Shahabi, for example, has refused food for more than six weeks.

We call on labour activists and defenders of the working class worldwide to do everything they can to save the lives of these leading activists and to build solidarity with them. We also express our grave concern for the lives of these labour activists and urge them to consider ending their hunger strike. The essential work they undertake in defence of thousands of workers in Iran is vital.

**To add your name, email [office@hopi.info](mailto:office@hopi.info).**

