

# OPEN LABOUR

## IDEAS INTO ACTION: BUILDING THE OPEN LEFT

*OPEN LABOUR POSITION PAPER 2017-18*

# IDEAS INTO ACTION: BUILDING THE OPEN LEFT

This document outlines an initial set of political positions for Open Labour, building on our launch statement. It provides a mandate to our newly renamed National Committee (NC) to carry out a programme of action, to make public arguments on behalf of the organisation, and to adopt campaigns within the Labour Party which meet our strategic and policy priorities.

The document was proposed by our interim Management Committee to our Founding Conference in March 2017, which was attended by 230 people. It was adopted with the inclusion of a range of amendments.

Those seeking further information about the contents of the document can get in touch with us at [admin@openlabour.org](mailto:admin@openlabour.org).

The document also marks the end of the steering phase of Open Labour's development. As a statement of intent it is entitled '*Ideas into Action: Building the Open Left*'. This reflects our intention as an organisation not to resign to a polarised Labour Party where debate is curtailed and closed down, but to respond with ideas and action for something better. We will renew the realist strand of the Labour left as the 'open left', define and argue for this as a valid and independent tradition of thought and action, and campaign and organise to carry its objectives into being.

The newly elected National Committee would like to record our thanks to the Management Committee members who brought Open Labour through its first months.

## Interim Management Committee 2015-17

Tom Miller and Bev Craig (Co-chairs), Rose Grayston (Secretary), Alex Sobel (Treasurer), Jade Azim (Editor), Tom Williams (Membership), Ann Black, George Lindars-Hammond, Yue Ting Cheng, Andy Howell, Kaveh Azarhoosh, Joanne Rust, David Hamblin, Craig Dawson.

**Our extended thanks to:** Steve Yemm, Charlotte Nichols, Sara T'Rula, Alby Earley, Emma Burnell, Andy Flanagan, Jo Ingold, Matt Donoghue, James Stafford, Renewal Journal, NEON, Compass, Tribune group of MPs, Labour Together, Peter Hain, Kate Green MP, Lou Haigh MP, Ed Miliband MP, Lisa Nandy MP, Clive Lewis MP, Jon Trickett MP, Tom Watson MP, Jim McMahon MP, Chi Onwurah MP

Open Labour launched in November 2015 with an open letter to the Guardian. The aim was to bring together the so called 'soft left' of the Labour Party.

This part of our party represents a large number of members and supporters but has been poorly organised for some years. Its thinking draws on an older tradition on the Labour left, rooted in the heritage of Bevanism – a socialist tradition which is rooted in the labour movement, adaptable and serious about power.

We seek to bring organisation and discipline to this political tradition. In launching Open Labour we are also seeking to overcome reliance on the past, and to recast the soft left in a forward looking way around the ethos of openness – 'the open left'.

We have launched as a grassroots based movement outside Westminster to challenge reliance on the workings of the Westminster bubble and the politics of celebrity.

Open Labour will also challenge the traditional left of the party to become less orthodox and unyielding, more focussed on how the world and society is changing, and to make an understanding of power and trust building key to its creed. We must act on the urgent need to win over, not simply shout over, those who disagree with us.

Our immediate priority has been to begin a debate on what the Labour left can look like if it becomes more flexible, pluralist, and focussed on alliance building.

Early on we established a steering committee, a website and a mailing list. We have since run a series of regional meetings on Labour's policies and political strategy in Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham and Liverpool. We are planning further regional meetings in Cardiff, Bath and London for the year ahead. These will feed into a wider process outline in our aims for the year.

This year also saw our first Labour Party Conference event in Liverpool. Featuring Clive Lewis, Lou Haigh, Ed Miliband, Kate Green, Chi Onwurah and Jim McMahon, this event developed Open Labour's relationships with MPs and members.

Much of this year has been about getting off the ground – putting basic systems in place and bringing together the core support of the open left with around 1500 supporters identified. Alongside this, we have provided a rallying point for those who feel alienated by the intolerance and inflexibility which has emerged in too much of our party.

The accompanying statement of aims for the year ahead aims to build on this by turning ideas into action and building our organising power. It sets a path for us to develop policy to take into party debate. It outlines a plan for making our voice clearer in party debates, finding our allies, and most importantly, building on the ground. This process needs to be adequately funded, and it must be member led.

Our party and the democratic left across the western world is in crisis. We need energy and ideas to shape an optimistic future. *Action is the antidote to despair.*

## Political position 2017-18

It is crucial that the Labour Party offers a credible and popular alternative to austerity cuts and neoliberalism. These trends have represented the biggest transfer of wealth and power from poor and middle-income households to the rich elite in living memory.

The private sector's own dynamism is failing. Productivity is falling internationally, but especially in Britain where the course Theresa May has laid out will further concentrate wealth and opportunity in the South while neglecting every other part of our country.

Wealthy and powerful interests are now building a kind of 'tollbooth politics' built on rents, private debt, financial complexity and at times corrupt practices – we end up paying for nothing.

The spoils of this tollbooth go to the gatekeepers of the new stagnant economy, not to those creating value.

Social mobility and equal chances, values with huge support across the country, are being set back to the Victorian age. These are problems which a Tory Brexit will lock in, especially if the economy is not reshaped and rebalanced.

This stagnation process has predictably become cemented as a 'new normal' in public debate. Labour must take on the challenge of forging a compelling and credible alternative, capable of shifting mainstream opinion.

### ***Economic liberalism: a broken bargain***

Increasingly citizens feel like the bargain they have been offered by politicians for decades is being broken. Increasing wealth. Dignified jobs. Stability. The chance to get on in life. These things are no longer delivered by Britain's political consensus.

Changing this depends on gaining trust to govern, but unlike when the process of globalisation was in an earlier stage, Labour cannot avoid challenging the terms of debate. A new consensus is therefore required from the left around key shared values and principles. These include:

- Equality and human dignity
- Solidarity and community
- Autonomy and liberation
- Respect for the environment

Each of these ideas can form the basis of greater consensus on the left – but they can also win people over who are not yet supporters of the left or Labour. Our policies and campaigns must be framed in a way which is trusted and persuasive.

### ***A social alliance for Labour***

The party must retain the trust of core voters whilst regaining previously Labour support. In short, it must become trusted by workers from a range of social backgrounds to be the centre of a new social alliance, spanning traditional supporters in areas of industry and ex industry, upwardly mobile workers in the South East and progressive voters in large cities and university towns.

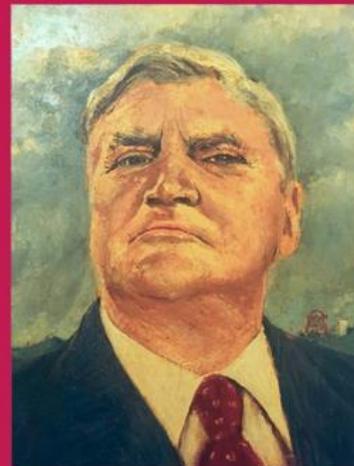
### ***Getting the basics right***

Building an alliance of support is no mean feat, but it is the only way forward and Labour must get in shape to deliver it.

We therefore call on the Labour Party to adopt some broad operating principles of its own. We believe that without these, no left leadership can be successful.

- Work out which voters are the people we want to add to our existing support, and which areas of public opinion we need to respond to. Have a political strategy. No tactic can be successful without being part of one.
- Give greater voice to those 'left behind' in modern Britain, whether white British coastal workers, coalfield communities, those trapped in the "gig" economy or EU immigrants paying tax here.

- Ruthlessly professionalise Labour's parliamentary and press operations, from the leadership down. Train and develop our membership.
- Organise at community level with far greater involvement from trade unions and cooperatives.
- Speak in a language that people understand using arguments which are well tested and have broad support or persuasive appeal. Make sure our ideas are clear and honest in how they seek to bring change.
- Identify and avoid marginal positions in favour of what we can win and also need to win.
- Concentrate on changing consensus on the most important areas of economic and social debate.



**"The language of priorities is the religion of Socialism"**

**Aneurin Bevan**

## **For working people, against hard Brexit**

The Labour Party is instinctively open and internationalist, and so is Open Labour. The public narrowly voted to leave the European Union following a campaign in which many 'out' proponents states that strong trade and economic ties with the EU would remain in place. In both ways, this is obviously not a mandate for hard Brexit – Labour must make this a political question. If Brexit is to take place, we believe that Labour should use all means available firstly to guarantee all workers living in the UK the same rights and entitlements as those remaining in the EU. Secondly, Labour must argue for partnerships with our neighbouring countries to tackle cross border challenges such as climate change and the refugee crisis.

Nevertheless, it is important that we as the Labour Party face up to the many reasons why people chose to do this. These are material, emotional, and policy based. They include living in areas with poor opportunities to get on and make a decent living, but also frustration at the impact of immigration. They include insecurity about identity in Britain. They include a feeling of a lack of control over life and politics, and neglect by the political establishment. Keeping our values firm does not mean we ignore these voices. To the contrary, it must embolden us to have a meaningful dialogue and offer solutions that challenge establishment narratives and which can move post-industrial areas in particular towards a more hopeful future.

We accept the verdict of the referendum and it is important that Labour is not seen to ignore democracy. But this does not mean that Labour can ignore the real risks presented by Theresa May's Brexit – democracy needs public opinion to be led as well as followed. Nor does it mean that the narrow majority for Brexit will always reflect the electorate. Therefore we agree with Labour Party Conference's decision in 2016 to remain open to a return to the EU, should majority public support for this start to become clear over time, and the terms favourable for British residents. We believe that with such a policy, Labour could lead a process of national healing. The lesson of Brexit and the election of Trump is that globalisation and its institutions are less stable and set in stone than some supposed. We recognise the need to research and develop policy for what may be more variable and flexible institutional arrangements the UK might fit into over the coming years.

There are immediate priorities to address; in particular, the current threat to our trading will hit jobs, pay and conditions in manufacturing and logistics. Labour must maintain favourable market and customs arrangements with the EU, an economic bloc on our doorstep with more power than the United States, as its first priority. We must agitate for a strategy which returns to manufacturing and trade, rather than the 'tollbooth' option of becoming a tax haven for global elites. An open approach to trade supported by an interventionist industrial strategy is essential if the country is to return to production and productivity.

The threat to the human rights of workers in Britain is also of particular concern. Britain should remain a member of the ECHR, and the Human Rights Act must be defended as part of UK law. We also give our unconditional support and solidarity to people working

here in accordance with the law. Labour must call for the immediate guarantee of permanent residency or citizenship status for these nationals, and press the government hard for guarantees.

### **Progressive alliance**

Open Labour takes a mature approach to working with people who disagree with us, and notes that Labour have delivered several very successful governments with parties in Scotland and Wales. Labour has also worked well in coalition in Councils across the country, and had a close relationship with colleagues from other parties in the London Assembly. Labour should remain open-minded towards coalitions and alliances where these are the best option, and should constantly draw in the best ideas wherever we find them.

However, we are more than just “not Tories”. The Labour Party has always itself been a progressive coalition, in which diverse groups come together around a common platform, becoming stronger and more compelling for it. If we are to offer a clear, radical and credible vision to the electorate, we cannot dilute our message by tying ourselves to parties who do not share our answers to the biggest economic and social challenges we face. It is clear that any proposed electoral alliance between a ‘left bloc’ of parties would still be far too small to defeat its counterparts on the right, but would be beholden to parties of a marginality which has meant that they have never challenged for government on their own (and in some cases would not value the prospect). The Tories and UKIP have together polled over 48% since 2013, secured 50% in the 2015 General Election and since Brexit have polled 54%. This is a significant hegemonic bloc on the right that has so far not gone away and even expanded recently.

An electoral deal involving the SNP whilst it embraces a hard nationalism (as opposed to a federal solution) for Scotland could only last until their goal would be achieved. It is also completely unclear that the Lib Dems possess the political credentials to be considered a progressive party in any sense. The Tory Government they placed in office and propped up oversaw a massive transfer of wealth to the rich and powerful. Their new leadership is on record as saying they would happily repeat such a deal, even given the cost to the country which the last one made clear. We do not believe that this indicates progressive politics – the record of the austerity coalition should not be forgotten quickly.

Finally, our electoral system does not allow for transferable voting, so any coalition would mean party elites restricting choice both for voters and for local activists, who surely deserve some level of democracy and respect from their political parties. Alliances between progressive parties should be based on open principles and common agendas - not dictating voting choices to the public, or foisting national deals on local activists without their consent.

For these reasons we believe that Labour should be open to offers of joint policy work, demonstrations or campaigns alongside other parties, and publicly ready to discuss coalitions with non-right wing parties after elections have passed. In particular, Labour

should take the initiative in convening cross-party talks with a view to identifying common ground on electoral and constitutional reform.

Further, we note that calling for support of other parties against Labour candidates remains a disciplinary offence in the party rule book, as democratically agreed. Our candidates are democratically selected by our members and deserve their support. If we are to concentrate on building alliances and blocs, it should be first and foremost between the ever more mutually distant sections of low and mid-earning voters, with Labour itself as the host venue.

### **Mass, democratic and plural - the party we need**

Open Labour resents the hollowing of the Labour Party and disenfranchisement of its membership during the New Labour years and welcome the huge influx of new members the party has seen since 2010 and especially 2015, especially where joiners are new to political participation. We are committed to integrating and supporting these new members.

We call for the return of policy making powers to member and affiliate-based structures, with conference as the final arbiter of both standing policy and election platforms. We believe that there is far greater space for unions and socialist societies to be given power as a stabilising influence in the centre of the party, and would favour their re-inclusion as part of an electoral college, as well as an enhanced role for affiliated members in local CLPs.

In addition to this however, there is also a role for professional policy staff in a support capacity to this process, and a re-imagining is viable. Labour must take this path back towards being a democratic and participative party.

Everyone entitled to Labour membership must have the right and the ability to participate, or our democracy cannot sustain itself. Open Labour unreservedly condemns the recent trend among a minority of activists of calling for members on opposing wings of the party to leave. We also feel that new members are getting a raw deal - new members should receive induction and support from fellow members and expect those who are already part of Labour to make efforts to properly integrate them. We expect Labour's staff to facilitate this process. Members nowadays join for what are a mix of instrumental and expressive reasons with the balance varying depending whether they see the party as more of an offline 'gateway' to be inducted into party culture or more of an online 'platform' to express their views. Labour is currently not well designed to meet these differing needs and we need our Party to evolve to better meet different balances of expectations

The party as a whole is suffering from a deteriorating culture – in addition to greater support for new members it needs to investigate ideas such as a code of conduct for members and new formats of running meetings or making policy.

We feel that it is important that members are comfortable with the party as a whole, particularly with the idea of it being a wide formation which represents the whole of the

working class and its political allies. The left's efforts to win debates on policy and political strategy should not come at the cost of other traditions freely participating in the party's affairs. We stand for a pluralist left and for internal tolerance of our traditions. Without these, open debate is impossible - they are essential elements of and genuinely democratic left.

### **A new industrial settlement**

Social Democracy, in the ascendancy after the Second World War in the UK and Western Europe is in decline and inequality is growing. This is the backdrop to the convulsions of the Left in Western Europe in general and the UK Labour Party in particular. This was the case in 1997 but was masked by adopting the politics of globalization and using redistributive policies to mask its effects - such as Tax Credits and Sure Start - which undoubtedly helped those in work but struggling, especially with children. However, it did not change the political climate, and the Labour party since then has looked at different ways to achieve relevance in this changing world. Despite this it is continually failing to bring forward solutions to the crisis that is epitomized by continually falling pay and workers terms and conditions set against rising living costs.

The post-industrial society is based on a service sector which generates more wealth than the manufacturing sector of the economy. There has been a gradual loss of skilled jobs, loss of organised workplaces, balance of payments imbalances and the gradual erosion of credit worthiness. This is coupled with the future challenges of Brexit and automation. The need for an active Industrial Strategy is paramount - a strategy that isn't just about coordinating economic policies to achieve particular objectives around industrial growth, but one that puts rebalancing targets on employment, education, R&D, carbon emissions and quality of work at its centre.

There is a clear threat from the right with the creation of Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy which could create a masking of what a proper industrial strategy is by just utilising slogans which only promote more low paid jobs but this time in manufacturing as well as the service sector. Labour should counter not by mere opposition but by creating its own full scale industrial Strategy. This strategy should see manufacturing as a key engine of growth but keep sustainability as a central goal with a decarbonising of all industry as a core plank of the strategy. The strategy should also see the ascendancy of organised labour as the driver of a new industrial settlement.

Trade Unions should be a key part of the industrial strategy policy formulation. We should aim for a tripartite (industry, government, trade union) settlement on lifelong learning and upskilling of the workforce and a tripartite agreement on active labour market policies addressing the issue of re-employment of redundant workers to ensure we can reassert a full employment goal. Collective bargaining agreements to ensure that productivity improvements benefit those that contribute to them, thus raising wages and in turn contributing to industrial and social stability and reducing inequality. Alongside this we need an energy revolution consisting of opening up the energy market through reform of ownership of the grid - common, state and new forms of open ownership of energy companies; supporting renewables through use of guaranteed energy prices and fossil fuel penalties. This would be a catalyst for the UK

to be a world leader on green tech, bringing forward the conditions to create a 4th industrial revolution.

### **English renewal**

Open Labour notes the damage done to Labour at the 2015 election by the party's indecisive approach to the prospect of a coalition with the SNP, and the fear of swing voters in England that a deal must be done. Open Labour notes the introduction of 'English Votes for English Laws' passed by the Tories, who used the insecurity the proposal generated among English voters by the Independence Referendum to pass the law, which denies a UK level mandate to MPs elected to the UK Parliament, if they happen to be elected by non-English constituencies.

We also note that a key deciding factor in the referendum on EU membership was a growing feeling of economic and political decline in English towns, where there is a growing feeling of divide from cities, and in particular London. In both cases, it is clear within England that power must be democratised and dispersed. Non-metropolitan voters in the Midlands, North of England and the South West face the same political conditions and trends of those faced by Labour voters who 'went nationalist' in Scotland from 2007 to 2015. With new forms of nationalism ascendant, we must renew our commitment to empowering those voters and show that we are on their side. We also believe that it is incumbent on Labour to show the same patriotic commitment for democracy, civic life and economic wellbeing in England (and its politically diverse regions) as it has previously shown for Scotland and Wales.

We therefore:

- Call upon Labour to bring together a taskforce from across the party and the wider community to investigate ways of putting English Devolution to the people; for example as traditional counties or 'government office' type regions;
- Call upon Labour to pledge to repeal EVEL and replace it with a federal and democratic settlement for England with massive devolution of spending power and decision making, as previously proposed by Jon Trickett;
- Call upon Labour to pledge a measured return of funding and powers to local government, beginning with social care, and continuing with enhanced rights to build homes, generate income, and encourage local business in line with a wider industrial strategy;
- Call upon the Shadow Chancellor to announce a commission aimed at renewing private sector employment, green infrastructure and vocational & STEM education in 'left behind areas' as part of a wider strategy for returning the country to an export footing – a policy for returning dignity. In this case we believe that industrial capital shares some of the interests of local people in a way that finance does not. Exporters must become Labour's allies.

- Propose that Labour launches these measures as a St George's Day Bill, making it clear that the national wellbeing of England and the dignity of its people depend not on racism or nostalgia, but instead on social justice and traditions of generosity, tolerance and hard work.
- Call for the creation of an English Labour Party. 'Labour in England' should become a voice for a forward looking spirit of civic democracy, industrial renewal, and social cooperation.

## Statement of aims: 2017-18

This statement will shape and guide the new National Committee (NC) for the year ahead, ensuring that their priorities are membership led and accountable, making sure that the politics of the Open Labour translate into action.

### Aims

- Define and highlight the values and principles of the open left and promote them in the party
- Build Open Labour's organisational strength to a point where it can freely choose to fight, negotiate or compromise
- Win influence in the party and movement for our politics

Outcome	Targets
<i>Grow our base</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>· Increase supporters number to 5000 and paying members to 1000</li><li>· Produce and deliver a social media outreach strategy to increase awareness of Open Labour and drive membership</li><li>· Make contact with friendly MPs and start a regular mailing list</li><li>· Start a youth section, if deemed necessary by young members by the time of our policy conference</li><li>· Ensure we have members in every CLP across the UK and internationally, and that our members and that our NC reflects the UK's diversity.</li><li>· Build mailing lists for attendees of regional events, so that they can run events locally</li><li>· Identify key allies in other Labour and progressive organisations and initiate regular contact with them</li></ul>

<i>Secure resources</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· All funding to be clear, publicly available and transparent</li> <li>· Raise income including 1 medium grant</li> <li>· Gain a funded campaign arrangement from at least 1 TUC affiliated trade union</li> <li>· Transition to NationBuilder for our web offer and relationship management</li> <li>· Audit and consolidate our data (including a youth audit)</li> </ul>
<i>Get organised</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Choose a priority campaign by online ballot</li> <li>· Plan a joint campaign with a trade union on Brexit or EU workers</li> <li>· Organise at least 3 further regional meetings</li> <li>· Create mailing lists for all who have attended regional meetings</li> <li>· Run an annual party conference event</li> <li>· Scope internal elections readiness and begin negotiations with other stakeholders, where deemed appropriate by the NC</li> </ul>
<i>Ideas into Policy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Creation of Strategy Working Groups. These will engage members, politicians, academics and experts, and be chaired by Management Committee members or appropriate invitees. The groups will tackle the headline policy and political strategy challenges of the democratic left, and include among them a group aimed at creating a more collaborative and tolerant political culture in the party.</li> <li>· Present the findings of these working groups in accessible reports with dissemination plans</li> <li>· Hold an annual Policy Conference outside of London, in order to produce policy for our members to take through Labour's formal processes</li> <li>· Take motions to conference through CLPs where our membership is active.</li> <li>· Produce a short Open Labour 'book of ideas' by our next policy conference</li> </ul>
<i>Take action</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Organise campaign days across the country for key elections</li> <li>· Produce a guide to improving your CLP, for a national road show (6 CLPs min)</li> <li>· Produce policy papers from working groups and distribute widely</li> <li>· Have a national motion for CLPs on our priority campaign</li> <li>· Gain wider promotion of our work including press, TV, external blogs etc</li> <li>· Make a newsworthy intervention on at least 1 national issue</li> <li>· Promote allied organisations or those likely to share or amplify our voice on key issues</li> <li>· Support and take action for major labour movement demonstrations and industrial action</li> </ul>

