

Issue 82:  
General election  
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# theActivist

the bulletin of  members in *Usdaw*



**W**hile the week before, a You Gov poll pointed towards a 68-majority for the Tories, on 2 December an ICM poll put them on 42% and Labour on 35%, just seven points behind. The press talk now is of the possibility of a hung parliament. The most unpredictable election is still unpredictable.

The election has become polarised. The Lib-Dems are being squeezed to the benefit of Corbyn's Labour Party, whereas they had hoped to mop up remain voters. In the latest polls, nearly half of voters who voted remain are now voting Labour.

Very many young people voted remain from an anti-racist, internationalist viewpoint, a rejection of the racist right who led the leave campaign. Now, with the possibility looming of a Boris Johnson majority, backed by Nigel Farage, the same revulsion and fear can drive young people to vote for Corbyn.

What the 'left' around Corbyn misunderstood or forgot or ignored, was the millions of working-class people who felt betrayed by all the main parties; who have suffered under the blows of austerity for nearly ten years, losing pay, job security, benefits, homes and services, and who expressed this rage in the Brexit vote.

In 2017 Corbyn put on 3.5 million votes once the manifesto came out, a big surge in support but not enough to win the election. That could happen again. Of the nearly four million registrations, a majority were young people under the age of 35.

It is absolutely clear, but totally to be expected, that the entirety of the capitalist establishment, the press, the bosses, and the pro-capitalist politicians at the head of not just the Tories but the LibDems, the Scottish National Party (SNP), and of course the right-wing of the Labour Party itself, are all doing their damndest to attack Corbyn and prepare for his removal.

It has been clear to Socialist Party members,

campaigning hard for socialist policies on our street stalls, at universities and workplaces, that the manifesto is starting to get through. Issues like Corbyn's call to halt US trade talks till the NHS is off the table have an effect.

But the election didn't have to be on a knife edge like this. The big question is the way many working-class people fear Corbyn could betray them on Brexit and on other issues too. The 'red wall' of Labour 'heartlands' is not solid. The allegiance to Labour of past generations had a material base, when workers saw 'their' party build the NHS and council houses and create a social safety net.

Rather than saying he will be neutral in any referendum, Corbyn should have come out fighting for a Brexit in the interests of working-class people, as the Socialist party has argued. He should have laid out clearly that he will fight for a Brexit deal that rejects all the EU laws that demand privatisation, restrict state aid and enable low wages. It is a fight on the class politics that will make the difference - and you can't be neutral in that.

The Socialist Party has argued all along that once Corbyn was elected Labour leader there needed to be a fight - to kick out the Blairites and transform the Labour Party into a truly anti-austerity mass party, and to build a mass movement to fight for socialist policies.

Mobilising people to canvass in marginals or high-profile areas like the attempts to unseat Boris Johnson and Ian Duncan Smith is good, and the social media campaign is enthusing young people, but it is not the same as a mass party being really mobilised to fight for itself and its programme. It is not the same as meet-

ings of workers and an organised plan of attack in the workplace.

The Socialist Party is fighting hard for a Corbyn-led government with socialist policies. But we have to be prepared for any number of possible outcomes. Whatever happens, there will be no stability and a fight will be necessary.

If there is a hung parliament, exactly how things would play out would depend on which is the biggest party, whether Johnson resigns or whether there is a vote of no confidence, etc.

One thing is clear though, that if there is a Corbyn victory, even a majority in parliament for Labour would be a minority for Corbyn's programme. A key reason for the need to have fought to democratically remove the Blairite MPs, is because they will surround Corbyn after an election and be the first line of attack in the inevitable sabotage being prepared by big business against a Corbyn government.

This is the other reason why a mass movement is necessary, because there will be a fight to win the implementation of the policies people want.

In such circumstances, Corbyn should put his programme before parliament and before the working and middle classes. He should demand that it is supported in parliament, and if not, call another election, mobilising a mass movement around that programme.

It will be necessary to prepare to go further than the current plan to nationalise rail, mail, energy and broadband. When the bosses squeal that nationalisation hurts ordinary small shareholders and pension funds, that needs to be answered with pledges to protect pensions and provide compensation on the basis of proven need.

When sabotage is posed it would be necessary to enact capital controls, to nationalise the banks and major companies, and establish state

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control of foreign trade. That would enable the vast wealth to be democratically planned for the benefit of all.

If there is a Johnson victory, Vernon Bagdanor, professor of government at Kings College London, writing in the Guardian, makes the assertion that "The path is clear: Brexit by the end of January and five more years of Conservative government." Far from it!

Masses of people will be disappointed when Brexit is not 'sorted' so easily, when the mountain of trade deals pile up. When there's another economic crisis, and there's no jobs or pay rises or extra nurses or hospitals.

Inevitably, the rage will come out, but it will not be straightforward. It is incumbent on the workers' movement and socialists to campaign for that to be an organised form of class struggle. Having failed to win politically, workers could move to build on the already fairly widespread industrial action being taken or rumbling under the surface during the election campaign.

It will be essential to put forward a working-class oriented socialist programme to fight any potential rise of racism or scapegoating of migrants which could divide workers.

The crisis facing the British capitalist class is immense. There could be major splits in both parties. Out of this process a new anti-austerity, working-class party is possible. If there is a split in the Labour Party, a party with a smaller number of MPs, but with members fighting on socialist policies and with the support of trade unionists, it would have a greater impact than a bigger party compromising to keep its pro-capitalist wing on board.

We would argue for such a party to be opened up on a federal basis to all anti-austerity and socialist forces, including the Socialist Party. It would pose the question to trade unions about what kind of party they want to support and build. The left-led trade unions could ensure that in any new party the voice and weight of the organised working class in the trade unions was reflected.

This unpredictable time will not be over after the election. The fight then begins for a socialist programme that can take the wealth off the 1% and transform lives.

## Morrisons Pay Deal: ACAS sides with management - a missed opportunity to fight



In May Morrisons workers stunned management by rejecting their pay offer, with over two thirds of Usdaw members voting against, which would have given a 30p increase on the basic rate of pay to £9 an hour.

At the same time, Morrisons was also replacing the service bonus (commonly known as the Christmas bonus), which management claimed was separate but many members and reps saw as being traded away for a relatively meagre pay rise (still below Sainsbury's who are on £9.20 an hour).

At the time, Socialist Party members advocated a strategy to build a campaign amongst the membership to win more from management - including a meeting of lay reps to discuss a strategy and a national lobby of Morrisons headquarters. But instead of giving a lead, the Morrisons national reps instead mistakenly opted for binding arbitration through conciliation service Acas without any such campaign.

Undoubtedly, comparisons may be drawn the failure of the GMB union to successfully fight the imposition of 'Contract 6' in Asda. However, unlike in Morrisons, Asda workers at least had a campaign, including numerous store protests, and three national demonstrations outside Asda headquarters in Leeds.

Of course, in both situations the 50% turnout threshold for strike action under the latest Tory anti-union laws provides an obstacle, especially in sectors where strike ballots have been rare, let alone strike action. In the case of the GMB, Socialist Party members argued that one approach could have been to take targeted action in stores

with a higher union density or those that were more affected by the contract imposition, in order to build up momentum for a campaign. Given the lack of a fight - even to the extent that the GMB had in Asda - then demoralisation over the imposition of the pay deal will be felt even deeper among Usdaw members and reps in Morrisons.

While the Broad Left did win some important recent elections, including that of President when Socialist Party member Amy Murphy was elected, there is no left majority on the union's executive. The 'partnership' approach of John Hannett that led to a similar situation in Tesco, where national reps rejected a pay offer in 2014, only for the subsequent meeting to be presented with the same offer which Tesco was then allowed to impose.

As we commented at the time: "This is the reality of partnership - a dictatorship where Tesco says jump and Usdaw's leaders end up asking how high. The only way to have shifted Tesco would have been to have organised a campaign to force them to come back with a better offer." (Activist no52)

To help challenge this approach, the consolidation of the Broad Left throughout the union structures needs to take place - there has been an influx of increased support seen in increased attendance at the Broad Left annual general meetings, but this needs to be consolidated into networks of Broad Left supporters in the different companies Usdaw organise in order to campaign for a fighting strategy to be adopted in relation to future pay negotiations.

**Iain Dalton, Usdaw Broad Left chair**



## A day in the life of a warehouse worker

# INCOMPETENT BOSSES USE TECH TO BULLY US

## Now they're after our Christmas bonus too

**Connor O'Farrell, warehouse worker and Usdaw union member**

Management at my warehouse uses new technology to harass the workers - and has even proposed a new pay deal which includes scrapping Christmas bonuses for most of the shopfloor.

Rather than every worker getting £100, five managers would draw lots for a bonus for one worker each! The managers themselves would all still get bonuses, of course. Our union, Usdaw, has rightly recommended we reject this 'deal'.

Meanwhile, Tesco management is increasing the use of wearable technology - arm-mounted computers - on warehouse workers. Bosses say this is for 'increased productivity'. Of course, that means tracking workers every minute we're on shift.

But management can also use the guided picking software to keep certain workers deemed 'trouble' away from new recruits - and for intimidation and bullying.

For example, in my workplace, there is heavier lifting involved with produce such as bananas or bread trays. The shift-planning and rotation software has an override function, so managers can have the same staff bear the brunt of this workload on every shift - in the non-chilled chamber of the warehouse.

Up until recently there wasn't even a water cooler in there. Management only put one in begrudgingly after a worker fainted.

And if 'productivity' is their only aim, why slow down the training of workers? Many workers, including myself, have been waiting almost a year since finishing contracted probation for training on other positions in the warehouse.

The selective memory - and often outright incompetence - of management has led to this not happening. They also find petty reasons to keep new workers in their probation period, meaning they have to work the same job for less money.

New Tesco contracts have workers doing seven days on, four days off. This rota bypasses the unsociable hours bonus won in previous contracts!

Why claim we are given 30-minute breaks when in reality it is 25? Why not pause our productivity measures on our registered lunch, toilet and smoke breaks? Why refuse to have label printers on each truck, instead forcing us to go back and forth between just one or two?

Workers regularly get told family illness and childcare problems are irrelevant to the Tesco budget.

### 'Productivity'

It's not about maximising our 'productivity'. It's about management keeping workers overworked, underpaid, and toeing the line - maximising profit productivity, not the efficiency of the job.

I was called in for a meeting regarding my

'productivity' - even though my performance was not the issue, my 'still time' was. After refusing to have the meeting without a union rep present multiple times, they gave up trying as they had nothing on my conduct or performance.

But I was unjustly fired in 2017 from my first precarious warehouse job at Tuffnells for arguing against being underpaid and ignored.

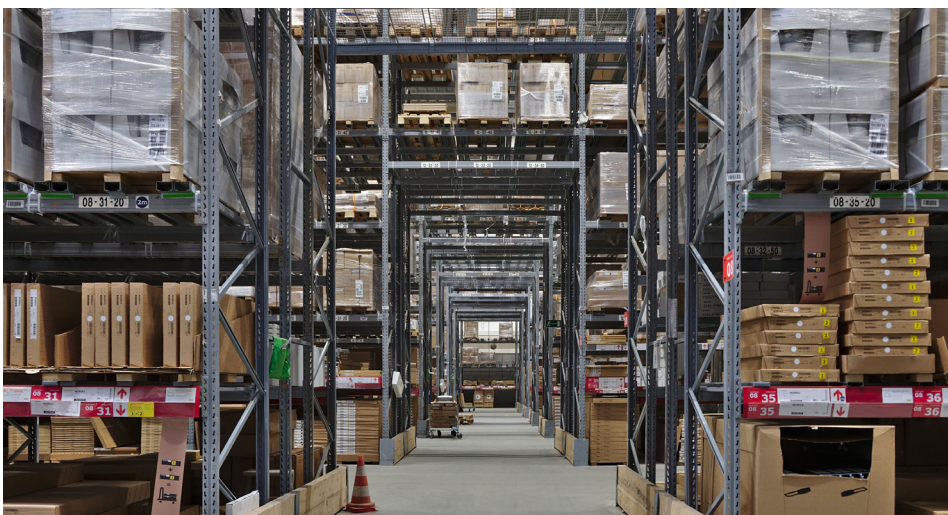
Ironically, during my 'still time' at the current workplace, I was engaged in discussion with an agency worker. She had not been paid her full wages, and at the moment Usdaw only seems to want to organise contracted staff.

So I had to put her in contact with the Independent Workers Union of Great Britain - and within a week and one meeting, her pay had been restored. A minor workplace victory that made my shift bearable!

Invasive management technology is becoming widespread across firms. Further attempts to stifle freedom of association in the workplace should be anticipated.

But while management seems clueless about how to run the workplace efficiently, relying on snooping and bullying, the expertise shown by workers on the job and together on strike begs the question: could we not run our workplaces ourselves?

This collective control is the basis of a real socialist society. We have both the labour power, and the knowhow. Currently we are only out-organised - not outnumbered!



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