

Issue 68:
ADM 2017 special

theActivist

the bulletin of  members in *Usdaw*

A BOLD SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN CAN KICK OUT THE TORIES

■ 8 June general election ■ Corbyn can win



“The dividing lines in this election could not be clearer”, declared Jeremy Corbyn as he launched Labour’s general election campaign. He went on: “It is the establishment that complains I don’t play by the rules: by which they mean their rules. I don’t play by their rules. And if a Labour government is elected on 8 June, then we won’t play by their rules either.”

Jeremy’s clear call for voters to elect a Labour Party that “is standing up for working people to improve the lives of all” was a good start to the election campaign. Only by clearly putting forward a radical anti-austerity programme will he be able to lead Labour to victory in this election against the Tories’ government of millionaires.

Theresa May has called a general election gambling, based on the opinion polls, that she will be able to increase the Tories’ currently puny majority. But hers is a very high-risk strategy. If Corbyn leads a fighting campaign there is every chance that May could end in June!

The most important factor in this election, however, is the real possibility that Jeremy Corbyn will be able to mobilise

popular support around a radical anti-austerity programme. Jeremy Corbyn rightly name-checked Sports Direct boss Mike Ashley and former BHS boss Philip Green - who have both been caught in particularly vicious acts of exploitation.

Corbyn and Labour need to shout out their demands from the rooftops - £10 an hour minimum wage, defence of the NHS, no cuts to public services, renationalising rail and the utilities, repeal of anti-union laws - demands passed at previous Usdaw ADMs.

It is clear to everyone that Jeremy Corbyn will not be able to rely on the media, or the some of his own party, to give unbiased reports of his programme. The election campaign cannot therefore, be fought only on this unfavourable ground. Trade unionists who support Corbyn, should vocally and energetically campaign for Corbyn. Mass rallies should be called in every town and city in the country.

2018 is a crucial year in the Usdaw calendar - both the executive council and the president are up for election and the general election fight should be combined with a Broad Left challenge in Usdaw to support Corbyn if elected and transform Usdaw into a fighting, left union either way.

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Fringe meeting: How can Usdaw members kick out the Tories?

Sunday night 6pm
at the Regency suite, Ruskin
Hotel, Albert Road, Blackpool.
Speakers include Amy
Murphy, Usdaw EC (personal
capacity)

■ What is the Activist?

The Activist is the bulletin produced by Socialist Party members in Usdaw.

All our articles are written by ordinary retail and distribution workers, members like you of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers, Usdaw. The Activist campaigns for a fighting leadership for Usdaw and against partnership agreements which force us to sit back and do nothing whilst the bosses tear-up our agreements. We need a leadership of our union that is prepared to organise action in defence of jobs, upto and including strikes.

The Activist, is a publication of Socialist Party members. We support every fight for the improvement of the living standards of working class people. However, we also believe that only by running society on an entirely different basis, one which extends democracy to the workplace and is run on the basis of meeting our needs rather than those of fat-cat shareholders can see genuine sustainable improvements in our living standards.

To find out more about the Activist:

- E-mail: usdawactivist@gmail.com
- Visit: usdawactivist.wordpress.com
- ‘Like’ ‘Usdaw Activist’ on facebook
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NSSF conference 2017

The 11th annual National Shop Stewards Network (NSSF) conference will be on Saturday 1 July 2017 from 11am in Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL. It is open to all trade union and anti-cuts campaigners. See shopstewards.net for more information and updates. The NSSF was initiated by transport union RMT in 2006. Nine national unions officially support our campaigning work, as well as many union branches, shop stewards’ committees and trades union councils.

Activist Guide to the 2017 ADM agenda

The interim agenda contains a whole number of very supportable propositions on vital issues facing Usdaw members.

Political debate

Propositions grouped in the political debate reflect the anger of members at last years attempted 'coup' by the Parliamentary Labour Party against the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. The most important of these are the two propositions calling for the introduction of mandatory reselection - that is allowing Constituency Labour Parties to be able to select their representatives who are put to the ballot. The latter of these propositions is somewhat confusing by calling on the union to lobby the "government of the day" rather than the structures of the Labour Party which would be able to implement this demand.

Proportional representation would be a more democratic election system. We favour the original proposition as opposed to the Brighton amendment which would retain first past the post seats.

Brexit

Brexit is of course a key issue on the

agenda. In general, however, there is a failure running through the propositions to understand a key feature of the leave vote in the declining living standards of and anti-establishment anger of many working people.

That said the thrust of the propositions is to protect living standards which we fully support however, the call to give "full support, in whatever way possible, to the official British negotiating committee" in the proposition from St Merryn Cornwall is far too loose to be supportable.

Rule changes

Every three years branches have the opportunity to amend the union's rulebook. Unlike 2014 when every single change was ruled out of order, this year a number of changes will be debated.

The most crucial we believe is S4 by Nursing Industrial and Sussex No.1 which proposes lowering the number of nominations needed to stand for General Secretary. This particular rule was brought in after the last election when the late EC member Robbie Segal won 40% of the vote, a situation that John Hannett and co didn't want to see happen again. If a lay member is to have the opportunity to

stand once Hannett retires, which is likely to be imminent, then a lower nominations threshold will be vital.

Others worthy of support

Propositions on arresting the decline in number and quality of workplace canteens, the retirement age for women amongst others are all worthy of support. Other vital issues are taking up including the demand to bring academy schools back under local democratic control. The Leeds amendment to the proposition on high speed rail maintains support for the principle but takes into account the popular anger at the current proposals which will create a railway for the elite at the expense of ordinary communities along the route.

Reject

There are some propositions that we hope delegates will reject. The Pembrokeshire proposition that argues unemployment should be solved by National Service, rather than a fight for decent jobs is one as is another by the same branch on Licensing Fees which in effect argues for the BBC to be in effect privatised!

Usdaw and the Living Wage

95% of Usdaw members believe improvements to the National Living Wage should be a key campaigning issue for Usdaw (73% of those 'strongly agree'). This is the most important thing to take away from the results of an e-mail survey conducted by Usdaw reported in the 'The National Living Wage' executive council statement to ADM.

Despite the response rate being just 1% there are some other particularly striking answers such as the 87% support for the Living Wage threshold being limited to 18 (there seems to be no question based around scrapping the age thresholds altogether) or 98% support for taking into account the cost of living for low paid workers in setting a living wage - precisely what the TUC and Usdaw backed demand of £10 an hour does.

In the last few weeks it has been a boost for the campaign for Jeremy Corbyn to raise this as his own demand and for a

£10 an hour minimum wage to become Labour policy. To have our own movement clearly fight for this is vital.

This is an issue of vital importance to Usdaw members a third of members had their pay raised by the introduction of the Tory £7.20 'living wage'. A slightly larger amount of food manufacturing workers had their pay raised, a section of workers who in theory should have more industrial muscle to win better pay.

Also of note in the report is that there was little change in the hours of work available - putting a clear answer to the lie that employers would be forced to cut hours to pay for wage increases.

But nowhere in the document is a clear strategy outlined of how a £10 an hour minimum wage can be won, despite welcome repeated statements confirming support for that demand. It is somewhat disappointing that the case for £10 an hour isn't clearly raised in the submission

to the Low Pay Commission, and worrying that it is referred to as "an ambitious goal, and the current uncertainty in the economy makes it even more of a challenge." Towards the end of 2016 Usdaw was an important part of a campaign in Sheffield behind this demand, called 'Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise'.

As well as campaigning efforts in the city, this culminated in a demonstration that was addressed by Usdaw's divisional officer. The Usdaw leadership should be encouraging members in every town and city to link up with other trade unionists, through local Trades Councils where they exist, to build similar campaigns up and down the country.

This will not only create pressure on employers, the government and the low paid commission, but help bring into the trade union movement the millions of workers in low paid casualised work currently outside of our movement.