

A MANIFESTO

CHARTIST'S LONG TERM POLICY OBJECTIVES 2015

This is a revision of the Manifesto published by Chartist's Editorial Board in 2007. It should be considered as a working document not as a final statement.

PREAMBLE

Britain is on the verge of the most important general election in a generation. The Tory/LibDem coalition has presided over the longest recession in 100 years. A severe austerity programme has been the neo-liberal economic medicine served up to the British people with huge cuts in public spending and welfare, further privatisation, sustained unemployment and reductions in living standards for those in and out of work. Meanwhile the 1% have been getting richer at the expense of the many. Inequality has reached new heights while food banks, homelessness, insecurity and ill health mount correspondingly.

The 2014 referendum on Scottish independence showed the strength of opinion for an independent Scotland. We recognise this has major implications for the nature of the United Kingdom including the idea of independence for the Six Counties and a United Ireland and for greater devolution to Wales and English regions. We welcome the proposal for a constitutional or citizens convention to discuss the governance of the UK. This process should also be informed by local assemblies reviewing proposals for the modernisation and democratisation of the British state.

Power and wealth have been concentrated in private hands for too long. The Tories promise another five years of austerity which means tax cuts for the rich few while the many continue to pay the

price for the profits system. The election is a chance to call time on the Tory lie that we are all in it together. The only party capable of providing an alternative government to the Tories is Labour. We have campaigned long and hard for democratic socialist policies for Labour. We will continue to do so. As part of this process we are publishing our updated manifesto, a summary of key policies and perspectives to light a new course out of austerity based on socialist values of human solidarity, equality, liberty and democracy.

We are aware it is not fully comprehensive. The manifesto is published to generate debate. The EB welcomes comments from supporting subscribers and from other readers.

Socialism for the Twenty-First Century

1. Capitalism is still the dominant global economic system. Laissez faire capitalism only exists in text books. The biggest capitalist economies, the United States and Japan, practice high levels of state intervention and protection for native corporations. The European Union is caught between an open market philosophy and trade barriers. The long boom and growth for most western economies during the 1990s and 2000s predictably resulted in the 2008 crash and the longest recession since the 1930s. Credit bubbles will always burst eventually. The ‘bust’ was the result of a cyclical crisis of capitalism hastened by the deregulated, debt-fuelled economic policies pursued on both sides of the Atlantic.

2. Austerity has become the dominant feature of neo-liberal capitalism in Europe with its attendant privatisations, huge public spending cuts, unemployment and suppression of living standards. Greece has been the laboratory for testing the most ruthless aspects of the policy. The election of the anti-austerity Syriza government marks an historic shift against the dominant neo-liberal political narrative of the past 40 years. A new political wave is moving across Europe, particularly in Greece, Spain and Ireland, which could see the emergence of a progressive redistributionist economic policy combined with a democratised social Europe. Thanks to the expansion of globalisation, war, poverty and revolutions remain prominent features of the world landscape. Global warming and environmental degradation walk hand in hand with unregulated profiteering.

3. At any one time at least 20 military conflicts rage across the world with war in the Middle East being the paramount international flash point. While Chartist supports the right of national groups to a degree of political autonomy, the right to self determination, including for Palestine, Israel, the Kurds, Sunnis and Shias in Iraq, is conditional on respect for the rights of other national groups, especially where there is no clear territorial separation. We campaign for an international

socialism, and for structures for world governance and dispute arbitration as a goal for a humane, egalitarian and democratic world.

4. Chartist wants a proportional electoral system where every vote counts. We believe active, democratic political parties are a crucial vehicle for social and economic change but recognise they must be inextricably linked to extra-parliamentary movements to effect a fundamental redistribution of wealth and power. Economic and social justice is a prerequisite of a truly democratic society.

5. Chartist is an independent socialist journal. It is not affiliated to any political party. While some members of the editorial board are members of the Labour Party, others are not. This has enabled Chartist to be part of a broader political dialogue across the left. While we cannot ignore debates within the Labour Party and within government, Chartist has sought to have a wider focus. Chartist has therefore published articles on a range of issues from a range of political perspectives. Chartist has however been a persistent critic of new Labour and its continuing legacy, without being tied in any way to any specific faction within the Labour movement. Whilst Chartist welcomed the change of Labour Party leadership the party’s adherence to an ‘austerity lite’ approach is damaging its prospects and support. One of Chartist’s strengths has been its recognition of a range of socialist traditions. Chartist has often sought to remind its readers of the importance of socialist history and principles – an important role given we have a Labour Party which has been both unprincipled and ahistorical.

6. The basic position of Chartist is that it supports a socialist governance based on economic and political equality. In opposing authoritarian centralism both within government and political party structures, it supports economic and political power being operated at the most appropriate level. It therefore supports democratically elected and accountable forms of governance at international, national, regional and local level. Chartist recognises that the main role of government is to provide the social and economic infrastructure which cannot be

organised by individuals or groups of individuals and to provide a framework for the operation of 'civil society'. Chartist accepts that a central role of government is redistributive – to use the wealth of individuals and corporate bodies for the benefit of the population as a whole. Chartist recognises the diversity of both politics and culture and that governance is necessary in both protecting diversity and individual rights, while ensuring that rights cannot be exercised in a way that denies the rights of others.

Private Wealth and Public Services

7. Chartist therefore supports the limitation of personal wealth and the operation of a progressive taxation system. The Government therefore should introduce higher rates of taxation for households on higher incomes and limit the accrual of personal and household wealth through both inheritance and the appreciation of land and property assets. The Government should focus on policies of wealth and income redistribution rather than incentivizing personal and household asset appreciation. The Government's focus on increasing the number of households who are homeowners through use of tax resources as incentives represents an unacceptable bias towards middle income households at the expense of the households on lowest incomes. It also makes the economic fortunes of even more households dependent on market forces outside their control. The Government has a short memory. One product of market cycles is negative equity and mortgage default repossession.

8. Chartist supports the provision of essential services and social infrastructure on a publicly accountable and publicly managed basis. Local government needs to be re-empowered and made more democratic. People will only re-engage in politics if local government, as well as regional government, is seen as both having a positive role in

relation to them and is seen as open to influence through appropriate democratic channels. Local councils should regain control of education and housing services. They should also have a degree of control over health, police and local transport services, which serve more than a single authority area. Regional bodies required to support cross regional services should also be directly elected. To ensure the required degree of democratic accountability and stability of governance, a system of annual but partial elections is advocated, with representatives serving three-year terms, with a third being elected each year. All forms of government should be operated on a committee structure, without Mayoral or executive structures, with all representatives being paid an equal salary and having equal rights within the organisational body.

9. All utilities, transport, water, gas and electricity should be provided through bodies under public control. Any services provided by private sector organisations should be on a contractual basis to the public body as client. Use of the private sector to provide public services should be limited to specific circumstances determined by the public sector body where the public sector does not itself have the specialist capacity. The profit motive is not a relevant matter in the provision of public services. Cost-efficiency can be assured by public control, audit and regulation. Chartist would therefore support the reintegration of private education, health services, **postal services and railways** within a framework of public control, accountability and equal access. QUANGOs should be replaced by accountable public bodies. Use of consultants and agencies should not be a way of avoiding pay and conditions applicable to directly employed staff, nor a mechanism for exaggerated salaries for managers.

10. The principles of accountability and individual rights also need to be central to the judicial and policing systems. The principles of trial by jury and strict limits to pre-trial detention should be operated without exemptions. There is no basis for using the justification of terrorist threats to weaken these essential safeguards. Accountable and

democratic governance, which is accepted by the vast majority of the population, continues to be the best defence against terrorism. Authoritarianism and secrecy are the terrorists' greatest recruiter.

11. It is recognised that economic power and wealth has to be shared between public and private sectors. It has also to be acknowledged that with the development of international corporate bodies, there are severe limitations on the ways in which a single government can regulate and control the operation of multinational capitalism. Maintaining a balance between supporting employment growth and limiting the growth in economic inequality requires a range of regulatory and taxation interventions at international as well as at local, regional and national level. The current position of strong economic growth leading to greater inequities in income and wealth is not however sustainable and has created a culture of envy and social marginalisation where the lottery and reality TV shows have replaced education as the main route a 'working class' person can achieve economic and social advancement.

A Socialist International Policy

12. In international policy, Chartist supports the central role of international governance, through the United Nations, its associated bodies and continental bodies such as the African Union and the European Union. While as a major economic power, the UK has international responsibilities, it is no longer a colonial power and any interventions in civil disputes or wars both between and within other sovereign states, should be as a contributor to a UN force and under UN authority. While the UN should be reformed to remove the veto powers of the Security Council and to ensure continental representation on its governing body, the UN remains the pre-eminent international body and its decisions should not be disregarded by any government, including the UK government.

13. The Government should terminate its 'special relationship' with the US Government, should not seek to categorise other countries as allies or enemies and should consider its relationship with other countries in terms of the merits of the individual case in question and within the frameworks established by the UN. The UK should cease the export of arms to any body other than to a UN controlled force. The UK defence forces should only operate in other countries where they are acting as part of a UN controlled military intervention. We would support a major programme of arms industry conversion and retraining. We support the full transfer of any residual governance responsibilities in Iraq and Afghanistan to local political control. The UK should focus on supporting international development through its aid programme rather than on military interventions. Where development cannot be achieved without political control and security, such interventions should be through the UN. Any intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state, for example in the case of threat of civil war or genocide should be through the United Nations rather than through unilateral action by individual states. This requires the UN to have a significant intervention force on standby available for immediate deployment.

14. An accountable, transparent, democratic European Union on a social democratic model, would provide the basis from which to develop these international goals with preferential trading relations being provided for developing nations and a foreign policy independent of the USA. Significant reforms are required to governance of the EU to increase its internal democracy and its accountability to the electorate of its member states. Powers should not be transferred from democratic nation states to undemocratic pan-national bodies. We stand for the free movement of all labour within the EU and a humane, non-racist immigration policy, with protection of employment rights of non-nationals as well as nationals. We should never close our doors to asylum seekers and refugees and recognise that immigration plays a

positive economic, social and cultural role in the development of British society.

15. Chartist stands for the extension of rights and freedoms to the disadvantaged, exploited and oppressed. We support the UN Declaration of Human Rights and its incorporation into British law. We stand for the extension of active democracy in all spheres of society and politics including the workplace and in the social relations of the family. We support the abolition of the monarchy and replacement by a republican head of state. We support the replacement of the House of Lords with a predominantly elected second chamber. We have consistently campaigned for equality for women in economy and society to include equal pay for work of equal value, the right of women to control their own bodies, fertility, decisions about marriage and for equal representation in the corridors of power. **Specifically we support women's campaigns against domestic violence, rape, FGM and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation.**

A Tolerant and Diverse Democracy

16. Chartist supports the practical extension of equal rights to all those experiencing disadvantage and discrimination because of their gender, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability. The emancipation of women worldwide stands in parallel with the freedom of workers from exploitation and is integral to the creation of democratic socialism. We support freedom of religious belief. However we oppose any religion or religions in general being given any favoured position within the state. We therefore support separation of state and church. No religious group should be empowered by the state to impose its faith on others. The state must be neutral between faiths and therefore secular.

17. In promoting collectivism, we oppose selfish individualism, not human individuality. No individual should be disbarred from full participation in civil society and the political structure of the country, except where removed from society through imprisonment for conviction for crimes of violence against other persons which demonstrate that they are a significant threat to civil society. All individuals should be encouraged to actively participate in civil society. Effective citizenship involves responsibilities as well as rights.

18. A vibrant civil society, with a free press, broadcasting and internet media, the right to demonstrate and to free speech, except fascists who would deny these rights to others, is essential to a democratic polity.

19. Independent trade unions and the right to strike and picket is a fundamental feature of a society respecting civil rights. We recognise that trade unions were a major force in the formation of the Labour Party and should continue to have a strong voice in policy formation and elections. In the last 30 years Britain has seen a sharp decline in both trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage. In this same period economic inequality has exploded. We know that these two developments are inextricably linked. To tackle Britain's addiction to inequality, long hours, low pay, zero-hour contracts and insecure work the restoration of collective wage bargaining and a resurgence in trade union membership is vital. The phrase 'labour market reform' uttered by neo-liberals in both the Conservative and Labour parties needs to be turned on its head and replaced with a *real* labour market reform agenda with collective bargaining placed at its heart.

Chartist supports the *Manifesto for Collective Bargaining* published by the Institute for Employment Rights (IER) and the think tank Class. These proposals for the creation of industrial level collective bargaining, a prerequisite legal framework and an activist Ministry of

Labour will provide not just the institutional means to remedy the UK's inequality disease but also the basis to recreate genuine economic *democracy* in the British workplace. Labour have made some attempt, courtesy of its policy on zero hour contracts, to speak to the economic realities and problems of workers, but on this issue of collective bargaining it has been resolutely silent for over 30 years. Chartist works for a Labour commitment to repealing anti-union legislation, an independent trade union movement and a renewed collective bargaining structure.

We stand for worker's democracy, be it in the factory, office, school, supermarket or farm. Producers and providers should have a powerful voice in the decision-making process mediated by the needs of service consumers and stakeholders. A Freedom of Information Act should apply both to government, society and corporations which should no longer be able to hide behind the mask of company law to deny information to their employees.

20. Chartist also promotes the development of other forms of production and distribution particularly cooperatives. The 'third sector' of mutuals, coops and social enterprises has a vital role to play in providing alternative models to capitalist joint-stock companies and state enterprises while empowering members and fulfilling economic needs. We also support a reinvigorated Cooperative movement as a vital third component of the labour movement.

21. Chartist recognises the fundamental threat to all life posed by climate change and environmental degradation. We support the principle of the polluter pays, the extension of green taxes, investment in renewable energy sources, recycling and reuse of materials.

22. The 21st century should be an age when technology is harnessed to enhance the life of all people and enrich that which makes us human: art, science, culture, politics, and the pursuit of happiness. We

need to establish a new enlightened work-life balance. No one should have to work more than 35 hours or a five day week. We welcome flexible working arrangements, the extension of maternity and paternity leave, job sharing, sabbaticals, the extension of the minimum wage and the introduction of a maximum wage. We support the EU maximum 48 hour working time directive and call for all member states, including the UK, to implement this legislation.

Towards Socialism

23. The objectives and policies set out in this manifesto are neither extreme nor utopian. They would have been viewed as cautious, even reformist, by many socialists over the last hundred years. They are idealist but nevertheless still practical. They are based on the reassertion of the fundamental principles of socialism, while recognising the changed context in which they should be applied. While Chartist may have a relatively limited role within the UK left, never mind within the international socialist movement, we have an important role as an independent advocate of socialist ideas and can help to set the framework for the debate on a more socialist future, at least within our readership and networks. This restatement of Chartist's long term policy objectives could assist to broaden our influence, and to avoid misinterpretations or misattributions. We need to be a beacon of light in a context which is increasingly darkened by a failure of collective memory as well as abandonment of the collectivist principle. **Our objective should be not just ending austerity but towards Socialism.**