

Issue 63

Labour leadership special

theActivist

the bulletin of  members in *Usdaw*

USDRAW LEADERSHIP OUT OF STEP WITH MEMBERS IN DECISION TO BACK OWEN SMITH

Usdaw's leadership have narrowly backed Owen Smith for Labour leader. That the vote by Executive Council (EC) members in a phone ballot for Smith was apparently quite close, shows the shift that is taking place within Usdaw. Just a few years ago the leadership would have overwhelmingly backed the right-wing candidate.

This is the result of a series of mistakes by the leadership, including backing a No vote in the Scottish independence referendum a few years ago, against the wishes of a substantial proportion of Scottish Usdaw members. Incidentally this decision was also made via a phone ballot of the EC.

But this also includes the failure to resist supermarket bosses attempts to hold down wages in the past, current attempts to make retail workers pay for the ongoing retail crisis and a failure to defend hard won terms and conditions which companies have removed at the same time as introducing the government's National Living Wage.

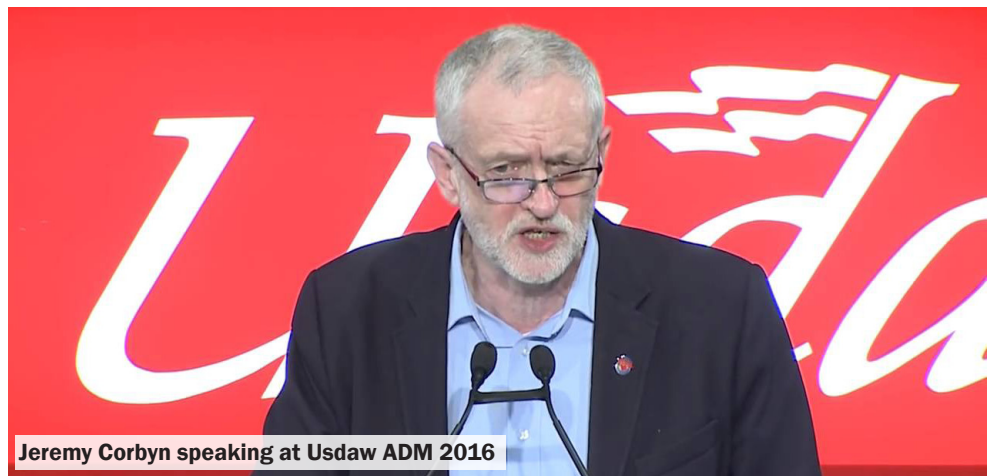
Increasing anger

That Hannett's majority on the EC is getting smaller is a reflection of this and the increasing anger from below.

Over the past few years, Usdaw's Annual Delegate Meeting (ADM) has passed policies that are currently being put forward by Corbyn - a £10 an hour minimum wage, repeal of the anti-union laws, renationalisation of the railways and a mass council house building programme to name but a few.

But this has so far failed to be transformed into any serious action by the union.

The Usdaw Broad Left, which Socialist Party members (supporters of the Activist) participate in has a key role to play in helping direct the anger of many Usdaw mem-



Jeremy Corbyn speaking at Usdaw ADM 2016

bers into transforming our union further.

First and foremost it has to organise to engage members in campaigning and building support for militant policies and socialist ideas. If Usdaw fails to act, then the Broad Left should link up with other unions, and bodies such as the National Shop Stewards Network, to campaign actively on these issues and pressure the union into acting officially.

Individual branches could initiate campaigns and link up with Trades Councils to do so, as Usdaw members did in Leeds over Sunday trading.

This must include organising the Broad Left on a divisional and where necessary a local basis. A short 'what the Broad Left stands for' statement should be drawn up and discussed among members to build confidence in the ideas necessary for a fighting union to put forward.

Linked to this needs to be an attempt to challenge more fundamentally the union's current leadership. The policies that members wish the union to carry out, but the leadership continually blocks must be debated at ADM. We saw with the Trident debate the lengths which Hannett is prepared to go to win, but such methods will

not continually wash with the majority of members.

Elections

It is also vitally necessary that the Broad Left organises itself to contest union elections in a more thorough-going manner. A glimpse of this was shown in the recent EC elections where a slate of Broad Left candidates stood, winning 45% in the presidential election, getting the highest EC vote and just 113 votes off winning in a division that has two Smith backers on the EC.

This should be built on, with the Broad Left standing candidates for Divisional Councils and the various conferences that Usdaw delegates members to, especially TUC and Labour Party conferences.

The anger is there to shift Usdaw further to the left, but it will take a serious approach to these questions to carry it further which would have a huge effect on the lives not only of retail and distribution workers, but the whole TUC and working class.



#KEEPCORBYN: STAND FIRM FOR SOCIALISM

Hull, Leeds, Liverpool, Bristol, Merthyr Tydfil. Across Britain the biggest left rallies in a generation are taking place in defence of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership of the Labour Party. The Blairites' attempted coup has mobilised a second wave of support for Corbyn, bigger even than the first one that thrust him into the Labour leadership eleven months ago.

Opposing and attempting to defeat the movement behind Jeremy are all the forces of the capitalist establishment, within Labour and without. Nonetheless, so far each attempt by the right to try and gerrymander the election has been met with defiance by the movement and has, at least partially, been thwarted.

When the Labour National Executive Committee (NEC) demanded that supporters - and members who had joined after 12 January - pay a hefty £25 in just 48 hours in order to be able to vote in the leadership election, an incredible 187,000 people did so. It has been reported, however, that 40,000-50,000 were to be ruled out, in a further desperate attempt to fix the election.

Anyone, for example, who has dared to accurately describe as 'traitors' the 172 MPs who passed a vote of no confidence in Corbyn was to be excluded. However, the High Court's decision that the 130,000 Labour Party members who have joined since 12 January should be allowed to vote, provided it stands at appeal, will partially negate this latest attempt at exclusion and could swing the election decisively in Jeremy Corbyn's favour.

The capitalist media is doing all it can to promote the previously unknown Owen Smith, brushing his past as a lobbyist for pharmaceutical company Pfizer under the carpet, and allowing him to falsely pose as a 'socialist'. Smith hopes that this, combined with attempting to appeal to Remain voters by calling for a second referendum and claiming, on no grounds whatsoever, to be more electable than Corbyn, could convince a more passive layer of voters in the leadership contest to support him.

The best answer is for Corbyn to appeal to potential voters on a clear anti-austerity platform - with his programme of last year as a starting point. Some of his recent an-

nouncements, including pledging to build 500,000 council homes in his first term, to introduce rent controls, and to end privatisation of the health service, are welcome and have the potential to be enormously popular. Unfortunately, however, there have also been some retreats from the pledges he made in his initial leadership campaign, undoubtedly in the hope of pacifying the right.

Nationalising the energy companies is supported by a majority of the population, yet this has been dropped from this year's election platform. It is also unacceptable that his previous promise of free education - abolishing tuition fees and introducing a living grant - seems now to have been diluted to 'cutting' student fees by an unspecified amount.

Huge support

The huge support for Jeremy is because he is seen as representing a break with the pro-capitalist, pro-austerity, pro-war politicians that have dominated parliament for the last 20 years. Far from retreating from his initial programme, he would gain more support by building on it. He should, for example, call unequivocally for nationalising the steel industry. A call on Labour councils not to implement any more cuts to public services, the position agreed at the Unite and GMB conferences, would also be very popular.

These issues are important, not only for the leadership contest, but for beyond it. Even in the best, most likely scenario of Jeremy again winning with a large majority, it will not resolve the issues. The civil war, now it is out in the open, cannot be simply called off. There is no possibility of the Labour right accepting Jeremy Corbyn as leader, as they themselves have made very plain.

While the right are in disarray, the tasks of the left are clear. The NEC results show clearly their increased strength within the Labour Party. The slate recommended by the Jeremy Corbyn supporting organisation, Momentum, won all the

constituency seats with a much increased electorate. They received an average of around three times as many votes as in 2014, in an important step forward.

The worst response to Jeremy's re-election would be to attempt to make peace with the Blairites. Instead a serious campaign is required to consolidate the victory and to transform the Labour Party into a genuinely anti-austerity, socialist party. The national structures of the Labour Party would also need to be opened out and democratised.

To mobilise the maximum possible support, there should be a return to the founding structures of the Labour Party which involved separate socialist political parties coalescing with the trade unions and social movements like women's suffrage campaigners and the co-operative movement. That federal approach applied to today would mean allowing political parties that were prepared to sign up to a clear anti-austerity programme to affiliate to Labour as the Co-op Party still does.

A fight should be launched for the immediate introduction of mandatory re-selection which would allow local parties to replace their MPs at the next general election. Unite conference passed a motion calling for this, moved by a Socialist Party member, and Unite should now fight for this at the upcoming Labour Party conference.

The movement in support of Corbyn opens up a very important opportunity for working class people in Britain. It creates the possibility of the formation of a new radical workers' party, able to attract all those workers and youth wanting to fight back against capitalism.

