

With progressive forces in retreat all over the world, Tribune asked:

How can the left defeat right-wing populism?

The left obviously has to provide hard solutions to the problem of populism and far-right influence when it is clear that austerity, stagnant wages, and the gap between rich and poor is increasing in the west following the crash of 2008. But I am a non-white immigrant to a Western country and like others I know enough history and demographics to understand that the dominant group in most Western countries can feel a sense of threat from immigration and the advance of non-white citizens.

Any populist racist like Donald Trump or a neo-fascist like Marine Le Pen can harness these fears and unleash their electoral power. If the left thinks this battle is just about the effects of globalisation and “the left behind”, they haven’t understood the power of racism as this tipping point is reached. The 20th century history of Europe should have taught us this.
Claude Moraes, Labour MEP, London

Whether it’s Britain, France, or America, there’s a clear pattern: whole communities have been shafted and abandoned, allowing the nastiest elements of the right to capitalise.

We need to deal with the root cause of people’s worries. That means the government boosting its migrant impact fund to shore up public services, investing in skills and education, and strengthening workers’ rights in the face of globalisation.
Frances O’Grady, General Secretary, TUC

In times of great change and uncertainty, it is vital that our schools are places that can offer stability and understanding to all pupils. For that we need a well-funded education system with strong local authority support services to ensure that all children and young people are provided the education they deserve.

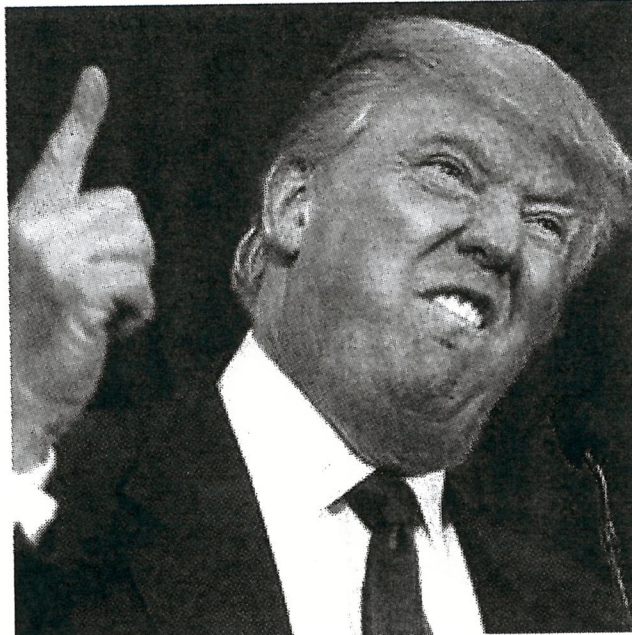
We also need the time and space in the curriculum for students to follow their own interests and aptitudes, develop critical thinking, problem solving and respect for others. Schools cannot change everything that is wrong with society but can play a vital role in ensuring that the next generation is equipped and encouraged to engage positively with the social and political community around them, working for a more equal, tolerant and inclusive society.
Amanda Brown, Assistant General Secretary, National Union of Teachers

Voters are angry – and who can wonder? Years of falling real incomes, fewer secure jobs, widening inequality and collapsing public services would make a saint uptight.

There is no future for a left that tells the voters they are foolish, that their concerns are misplaced and that globalisation is good for them.

For example, when workers say that from their own experience they know that free movement of labour means pressure on wages, don’t sneer at them. But point out that it is the elite and deregulation, not migrants, that are the problem.

Let’s set out our own vision for change. Let’s put “take back control” into action across all areas of life, from the railways to the labour market, from the economy to the NHS. A Brexit that works for working people, not the City. “Populism” is a movement of the people, after all – that is where the left should be.
Len McCluskey, General Secretary, Unite



Donald Trump: will fears become reality in 2017?

Progressives need to reassure voters who might feel left behind that Labour takes their fears seriously, alongside their needs and aspirations. For example, many of those with most to gain from a policy of investment in large-scale council house-building are cynical about the policy, not so much because they think a Labour government would not deliver on the pledge, but because they fear that they would not benefit from the policy due to immigration and being leap-frogged in the housing queue. These voters no longer just feel exploited as workers, but also as tax-payers when it comes to issues like welfare.

Labour also needs to take issues such as crime, defence and security seriously and not fall into the trap of forcing voters to choose between saving the NHS and defending the country.

But none of this means appealing to the lowest common denominator or pandering in tone to prejudices that far-right populists whip up.
Diana Johnson, Labour MP for Hull North and member of the Tribune Group of MPs

We need a Progressive Alliance of the anti-Tory and anti-UKIP parties, including Labour, Greens, Liberal Democrats, SNP and Plaid – based on a shared agreement to save the NHS, deprivatise the railways, build affordable homes, fund communities affected by immigration and so on.

Anti-austerity has to include a credible plan to boost public services, such as a financial transaction tax and an end to pension tax relief on people earning £150,000-plus. In as many constituencies as possible there needs to be one PA candidate against the Tories and UKIP. Unity and solidarity is the only certain way to win in 2020.
Peter Tatchell, Human rights campaigner

We have to offer confidence and hope that we can make the world better, not just rage against it, and challenge both the way people are being exploited and the myths they are sold about who is to blame.
 Confidence comes from showing that collective activity

can change people’s lives. Look at wages, still lagging behind pre-crash levels and not set to rise any time soon.

Unions need to tackle this together as a step towards building a labour movement that has the capacity to change politics and show the left can deliver for them. We can’t afford to fail.
Mark Serwotka, General Secretary PCS

For 50 years, the late Ian Paisley and the DUP have successfully built right-wing populism in Northern Ireland. Throughout that time, their candidates have been given a free run in Northern Ireland elections by the Labour Party.

The National Executive Committee has consistently suppressed the running of Labour Party candidates in Northern Ireland. It has thus, so far, provided a masterclass in how not to fight right wing populism and facilitated the growth of sectarianism. The party must end this ban and stand Labour Party candidates in Northern Ireland to unite Catholics and Protestants against divisive populism from whatever quarter.
Boyd Black, Secretary, NI CLP

We unite, we organise, we pack in the navel-gazing and we fight the battles the country needs us to fight – on jobs, fairness and reform.

The hard right has a track record only of amplifying concerns, they’ve never been in the business of giving answers. At our best, the Labour Party properly develops and properly articulates the solutions to the country’s ills – we need to get back to that. The voters we’ve lost to UKIP and elsewhere must be given a fair hearing – and our response should be reasoned, and rooted in Labour values.
Carwyn Jones, Labour First Minister, Wales

Wherever the false promise of counter-factual right-wing populism can be directly challenged, by informed debate within our communities and our workplaces, the populist spectre has a tendency. Unfortunately, mobilising local voices to make the left’s argument is proving more difficult than it should be at this crucial time. The arrival of a Merseysider with added working-class apPaul Nuttall is no Nigel Farage. Nuttall is likely to focus on chasing the popular working-class vote and challenging all the left’s arguments.

Here on Merseyside, central government’s philosophies of divide and rule, while concentrating power in a small number of corporate hands, has combined with a policy of devolving austerity to willing local collaborators, to create an almost perfect storm.

Meanwhile, among the rank and file of the left on Merseyside, a rerun of the past is further complicating matters in the struggle against right-wing sentiments. Amazingly, we are once again suffering from the suspension of Labour Party structures and groups to “deal with the Militant threat and entryism”. The first time we went down this road, in the 1980s, the justification for a bitter intra-Labour witch-hunt which crippled the movement for years was highly spurious; in 2016, it is farcical.

We have to stop this internal wrangling and stop it quickly. Matters are much worse than many think. We really are facing a Weimar Republic moment, where extreme options and solutions if pedalled by the likes of Nuttall, will sound credible. Having constructed a credible alternative we need to “get out and fight” before it’s too late.
Steve Cook, Unison Officer, Merseytravel

Voters will become increasingly wary of politicians promising the undeliverable and dumping their pledges the day after polling day, whether on the right or left of politics – for example, the Brexiteers' £350 million for the NHS claim.

Labour has to put together a coherent and achievable plan for government that reaches out beyond our core supporters to win the next general election. A credible opposition has to look like a government in waiting if we are secure the trust of the electorate.

John Hannett, General Secretary, Usdaw

The Leave campaign's "Take back control" struck a chord. We recognise that. But we know too that current Tory policies will not give people real control in the areas that matter – well-paid jobs, housing and the NHS.

We have to talk about immigration, so we can get a hearing from Labour voters who backed Brexit. But if that's all we talk about we will fail. We have come up with a convincing programme for creating shared prosperity. We must be the voice of the next generation. That means convincing their parents and grandparents about challenges young people face.

Seema Malhotra Labour MP for Feltham and Heston

There shouldn't be any surprise at the anger and resentment felt by so many at present. Far too many are struggling to manage on incomes which continue to be squeezed, and a good number of them are already in poorly paid jobs, with little or no security.

Some understandably express surprise that those in acute economic hardship should turn to right wing figures instead of the left when it comes to voting. However, as we should have learnt from the last century, extreme right wing demagogues often made an impact when the left failed to do so.

As for Labour, let us be blunt about it: the party is often not seen now by large numbers of working-class and lower-middle-class people as voicing their concerns and grievances. Take immigration, for instance. If Labour ever pandered to racism, it would rightly discredit and disgrace itself. That is not to be confused, in my view, with an understanding of the impact of relatively large immigration into areas of deprivation and hardship.

The party has to be seen, day in and day out, as really championing the issues which deeply concern working people.

Promoting any kind of cult of personality, and large rallies of the faithful cheering on the party leader, are certainly not the way forward to electoral success and a Labour government advancing progressive policies.

David Winnick Labour MP for Walsall North

People are frustrated with business as usual because it simply is not work-ing. Insecure work is a boom industry in modern Britain with zero-hours contracts, agency work and fake self-employment increasing becoming the norm. Right-wing populists are ruthlessly exploiting people's insecurity, using it to foster division and further their own agenda.

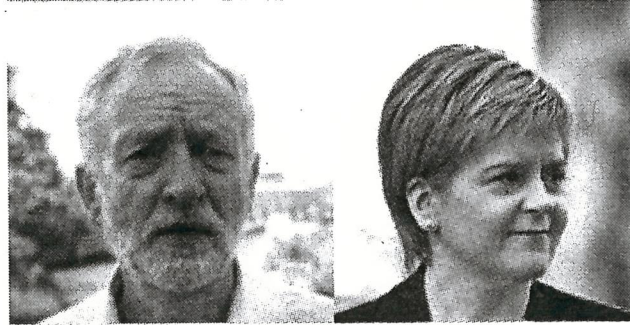
The left must put forward a bold alternative that makes sense to real life. It cannot be abstract. It cannot be removed from the workplace, from the foot-ball terrace or from the school gates. Real people are crying out for real change. That means an end to a labour market rigged by the 1 per cent for the 1 per cent; proper public services and a fair social security system that looks after everyone in their time of need.

But most of all, people want hope for themselves, their kids and their communities. They want jobs with skills, pride and purpose – that's what we have to fight for.

Tim Roache, General Secretary, GMB

As a London MP, I should be advocating full fiscal devolution but, being on the left, I'd halt populism by stopping being in thrall to the financiers of the City of London. We need to recognise that there is a nation beyond our capital city, in the regions that lie beyond it.

We should campaign on good old-fashioned policies like housebuilding. We need to reverse the desert facing our public services and long-term job security by investing in our commu-



Is a Progressive Alliance of non-Tory and UKIP parties the best way forward in the UK, as Peter Tatchell suggests?

nities with renewables and high-tech industry, to name but two. These will address voters' concerns, rather than allowing the market to let rip by itself and blaming immigrants for all our ills.

Rupa Huq, Labour MP for Central Ealing and Acton

The grassroots movement forming around Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell can defeat populism. It must call it on all those invested in a privatised NHS, including Labour's right wingers. Reg Race, the face of Saving Labour, made his millions on NHS contracts. Its candidate, Owen Smith, is a "friend" of Pfizer which overcharged our NHS 1,000 per cent.

Then there are the MPs Friends of Israel who tried to undermine Corbyn at the polls with spurious charges of anti-Semitism, camouflaging Israel's genocide of Palestinians. And behind them, Rupert Murdoch, who tells us which candidates and which war his empire will back, and hides our fury at the profiteers and billionaires in charge everywhere. But with a movement, the deadly lies directed at dividing us from our neighbours, lose the power to mislead us. Until then the lies

have it, the lies have it. This movement must be nurtured not plundered for personal careers or sectarian power. It is our hope against populism.

Seima James, Global Women's Strike

The left needs to focus on core issues that bring people together in the wake of the referendum. Insecurity at work, the housing crisis, a broken economic model and the funding crisis in the NHS and care are issues the right does not have the answers to.

But we need to put forward bold solutions and a simple message. At times it seems the right campaigns in primary colours while the left talks in statistics – so the Communication Workers' Union is calling for the labour movement to mobilise our members with a national demonstration on a New Deal for Workers in 2017.

Dave Ward, General Secretary, CWU

Too many answer in the negative when asked: "Will the next generation have it better than ours?" While anger at a system that brought the crash of 2008 and leaves millions poorer and more insecure has opened a space for the false promise of reactionaries.

Our answers must be bold. We must articulate a credible, ambitious vision that brings good secure jobs, solves the housing crisis, strengthens our NHS, and disrupts and reforms the system so it works for all. That's what we're trying to do in our part of West London where we always seek to demonstrate to the public how the change we chose is firmly on their side.

Stephen Cowan, Labour leader, Hammersmith and Fulham Council

Populism is sloganising and is wafer thin. It succeeds when people have lost faith in established politics because politicians are too lazy or removed to be trusted or relied on. In other words it fills a vacuum. There is no ready purgative. It is ousted by hard work on issues that matter to the quality of everyday life, whether those are national policies or local solutions.

Housing, health, education and jobs are what matter, but in order to be heard on these issues Labour has to have credible candidates and be seen as fit to govern.

Andy Slaughter, Labour MP for Hammersmith

Interviews: Cary Gee

GARY BARKER'S VIEW

