

### Manifesto week is underway

Monday saw the launch of Labour's 2015 manifesto which formalised the series of pledges made in recent weeks and emphasised their economic credibility to voters. The Conservatives followed with the release of their manifesto on Tuesday which sought to outline their offer to voters and articulate their pitch to 'working people'. This briefing covers the major issues outlined in the manifestos and where we think you should be reading between the lines. The smaller parties have also launched their manifestos this week and we will have a further briefing on that to come.

### Labour's pitch to the public

Labour's manifesto reflected an ambition to push for a fairer settlement for working people and presented a challenge to the vested interests of the powerful. Some have argued however that the 'triple lock', guaranteeing budget responsibility will hamstring efforts to substantially improve living standards, despite the greater flexibility of Labour's fiscal plan compared with Conservative proposals.

There were several pledges that aimed to ensure secure and better paid jobs as the main drivers for raising living standards. These included a commitment to raise the national minimum wage to £8 by 2019 and ban [90% of zero hour contracts](#). They follow pre-manifesto commitments that the rules surrounding the tax status of non-doms would be reformed and that tax raising measures to increase revenues from high earners would be introduced (including a 50p top rate of income tax).

[Some have argued that Labour's](#) pitch marks a departure from previous complacency over the concentration of wealth and power at the top, and the prevalence of low wage, precarious work for the rest. Pledges to fund a NHS Time to Care Fund with revenues from a Mansion Tax, a levy on tobacco firms and by tackling tax evasion and avoidance, along with a commitment to breaking up the supply and generation businesses of the Big Six, certainly seem to bear this out.

However, [as is pointed out by Prof. Andrew Cumbers in Class' series of manifesto responses](#) the Party is still

committed to a programme of austerity no matter the amount of 'wiggle room' it has allowed itself.

Labour has also declined to make any substantial pledges on public ownership of the railways, beyond allowing the public sector to compete in the private market. This is disappointing given Class polls have found that [2 in 3 Britons are in favour of a publicly-owned railway system](#).

In terms of housing, Labour's manifesto repeats an earlier commitment to introduce 3 year tenancies as the default tenancy in the private sector and to put a ceiling on 'excessive' rent rises. But the party must be clearer on what constitutes "excessive" and pledge to address rents that are already at excessive levels. In order to address the problem of housing supply, the Labour Party has pledged to build 200,000 affordable homes by 2020. This is very welcome, but the party needs to [do more to protect and expand social housing stock](#) to tackle the problem of soaring house prices and rising rents.

### Labour's other key pledges

- Raising the minimum wage to more than £8 by October 2019
- Repealing the Health and Social Care Act and instituting a mansion tax to raise funds for the NHS
- No raising of the basic or higher rates of income tax, National Insurance or VAT
- Protecting tax credits for working families
- Introducing a new National Primary Childcare Service
- Protecting working tax credits so they rise with inflation

## The Conservatives' pitch

The Conservatives launched their election pitch with a bid to claim territory from Labour as the party for 'working people,' despite outlining some severe attacks on trade unions and rights at work.

Conservative plans on industrial action ballots will make it [almost impossible for unions to call a legal strike](#) by introducing a 50% minimum turnout threshold on strike ballots. No democracy elsewhere in the world has this kind of restriction on industrial action.

Central to their aim to attract the votes of working people were three core pledges. The first was an extension of the controversial Right to Buy policy to cover housing associations as well as council properties, which sparked heated debate across the media. Some argued this was an [attempt to shift publicly-owned housing into private hands for good](#), we said [plans to extend Right-to-Buy to housing associations will intensify the housing crisis](#). You can read [our briefing on the Right to Buy](#) here for a round up of all the implications.

The second element of their pitch was an expansion of free childcare to 30 hours per week for 3 and 4 year olds. The third was to legislate to increase the Personal Tax Free Allowance up to the level of the minimum wage for people working 30 hours. While good on paper, the raise in the tax threshold isn't as progressive as it sounds. TUC General Secretary [Frances O'Grady said](#): "This is not a manifesto for minimum wage workers. Most already pay no income tax, but have been hit hard by higher VAT and tax credit cuts. And the Conservatives cannot meet their welfare cuts target without further huge cuts to support for low-paid workers. The big winners from the promised – but unfunded – Conservative tax cuts are set to be high earners and the rich."

It's also worth noting that, for all the Tories' rhetoric around being on the side of those who want to get on in life, under the Coalition, the majority of people classed as living in poverty [are already working](#). The economic recovery the Conservatives have engineered is based upon poorly-paid, insecure work which means people don't have enough money to live on. There is very little in their manifesto to tackle this—or even an admission that it is a reality.

## The Conservatives other key pledges

- Oppose increase in corporation tax – maintain the most competitive business tax regime in the G20.
- Scrap human rights act.
- Increase the inheritance tax threshold for married couple and civil partners of £1m
- Will increase the tax free personal allowance to £12,500 and increase the 40p income tax threshold to £50,000
- Will cut £12 from welfare savings
- 18-21 year-olds on jobseekers allowance will no longer have an automatic entitlement to housing benefit. Instead a Youth Allowance will encourage young people to take up community work, with claimants sanctioned if they are unable to find work after 6 months.
- Promised an additional £8bn by 2020 over and above inflation to fund and support the NHS.

## What has Class published?

**Blog:** *Labour and Conservatives: the manifestos* - April 2015 (<http://classonline.org.uk/blog/item/labour-and-conservatives-the-manifestos>)

**Election guide:** *What's at stake for housing* - February 2015 (<http://classonline.org.uk/pubs/item/whats-at-stake-for-housing>)

**Blog:** *Labour will abolish the non-dom rule* - Richard Murphy, April 2015 (<http://classonline.org.uk/blog/item/labour-will-abolish-the-non-dom-rule>)