

WHAT BRITAIN NEEDS

#classconf14

*Challenging inequalities
in wealth and power*

**Guide to sessions
and debates**

class
conference 2014



Class Conference 2014

What Britain Needs promises to be the one of the biggest gatherings of trade unionists and activists in the run-up to the next General Election.

This is your chance to debate a response to the crisis in living standards and the Government's attacks on the lives of ordinary people.

This booklet sets out information on what the sessions will aim to cover in the hope that debate in the run up to the conference, and in the breakout sessions on the day, can feed into the work Class produces ahead of the election in May.

Get involved!

Whether or not you are able to make it on the day—we want to hear from you. Ahead of the event you can send your questions for speakers to info@classonline.org.uk or on Twitter using the hashtag #Qclassconf14. We will try to make sure as many are asked as possible.

After conference—send us your thoughts on the debates that took place and where you think we should go from here. Email info@classonline.org.uk.

Main sessions:

THE STATE OF BRITAIN: CHALLENGING POWER AND INEQUALITY

Since the 2010 General Election, living standards have fallen for the vast majority. While the top 1%'s fortunes have increased, the 99% have been squeezed. The economic recovery has been unfairly distributed, and social inequality is on the rise. Speakers in this session will set the themes of the major discussions for the day – giving their analyses of where we are now and what they believe Britain needs if we are to turn this around from May 2015.

POLICY PITCH: FOR A WINNING MANIFESTO

In this session speakers will have 2 minutes to present their suggestions for policies that will challenge power and inequality. Delegates will then vote on the policy they would most like the next government to adopt.

WHAT BRITAIN NEEDS: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Closing the day's debates, speakers will discuss priorities for building a more equal and progressive country. This session will look at the issues at stake at the General Election, as well as outlining an overarching vision for our society.

6 morning and 6 afternoon breakout sessions will allow delegates to spend time focusing on the policy areas they are most interested in. More details on breakout sessions are included in the following pages.

STANDING UP FOR EDUCATION: FIGHTING FOR A FAIRER SYSTEM

Successive governments have passed the baton of responsibility for education from the state to the private sector, resulting in a fractured education system and selection processes that favour the privileged few. Returning education to communities under local control and out of the hands of the private sector is a must – but what policies are needed to ensure that all forms of education deliver for social justice?



This session will hope to debate:

- To what extent can education deliver in the face of growing inequalities of wealth, power and income in society?
- How can we mend our fractured education system and achieve a more holistic approach that ensures fairness across the board in schools, universities, technical colleges and adult learning centres.
- What lessons can we learn from other countries such as Finland's comprehensive school system or Germany's apprenticeships and technical education? And how can we value technical and vocational education and avoid the dangers of developing a two tier system?

Class publications to look at:

- The politics of curriculum in schools – *Terry Wrigley*
- Education, justice and democracy: The struggle over ignorance and opportunity – *Prof Stephen Ball*
- What would a socially just education system look like? – *Prof Diane Reay*

RENEWING OUR WELFARE STATE: STRONG, PROUD AND FAIR

Since the last election the founding principles of our welfare state have been systematically undermined. Scapegoating that demonises social security recipients has been accompanied by massive reductions in benefits leading to hardship and struggle. Real wages have fallen so far that now, for the first time, the majority of those living in poverty are in work. The rise of foodbanks in modern Britain is a shameful stain on the condition of our welfare state. This session will discuss the depth of the crisis facing our welfare state. Headline opposition to the Bedroom Tax and profound concern about food poverty are one thing – but how do we restore the principles of a just and caring welfare state and make sure our politicians are bold enough to stand up for it?

This session will discuss:

- What is the vision for a strong modern welfare state?
- How do we enshrine the principles of caring within our welfare state?
- How do we reverse the trend of demonising society's most vulnerable?

Class publications to look at:

- In the public interest: The role of the modern state - *Yvonne Roberts*
- Boom-time for legal loan sharks: How deregulation, market failure and a crisis in wages has led to the rise of payday lenders - *Carl Packman*
- The Case for Universalism: Assessing the evidence - *Mike Danson, Paul Spicker, Robin McAlpine, Willie Sullivan*
- Exposing the Myths of Welfare - *Class-Red Pepper*
- Abolishing Want in a Social State - *Kate Bell*
- Achieving a Social State: What can we learn from Beveridge's Giant Evils? - *Zoe Williams*

MORE THAN BRICKS AND MORTAR: BUILDING HOMES AND COMMUNITIES

Housing is set to be one of the biggest issues at the General Election. While London and the South East are facing a housing crisis on an unprecedented scale, many other areas of the country are experiencing very different crises that often fail to get the national attention they deserve. Current policies have rightly concentrated on how we can build the homes we need as quickly as possible and much debate has focused on shifting public investment from benefits to capital funding for building houses. But a progressive housing policy needs to be about much more than just bricks and mortar – it needs to offer future generations hope for a secure future and the ability to build their lives within strengthened local communities.



This session will seek to debate:

- How do we get the new homes we need?
- What counts as affordable housing and how do we make the case for a big increase in social housing?
- What would a fairer homes policy look like and how do we build communities and not just houses?

Class publications to look at:

- Tackling the housing crisis: Alternatives to declining standards, displacement and dispossession – *Marjorie Mayo and Ines Newman*
- The role of local government in a modern state – *James Murray*
- In Land Revenue: The case for a Land Value Tax in the UK – *Andy Hull*
- Tackling Squalor: The pivotal role of social housing – *Duncan Bowie*
- Time to step in: Why it's no good being hands-off with housing – *James Murray*

INVESTING IN OUR SOCIETY: THE POTENTIAL FOR ARTS AND CULTURE

The debate on declining living standards has concentrated mainly on economic measures of poverty and inequality. A focus on our falling 'quality of life' has often been missing from this debate, but arts and culture has a huge impact on quality of life and standards of living.

While there has been much public criticism of library closures and other austerity-driven funding decisions concerning arts and culture, investment in the arts has not always been at the forefront of progressive policies. Investment in arts and culture is often debated in terms of its contribution to local economies and its role in regeneration. While creativity is more important than ever in modern economies, how can we ensure there is a focus on social value and emphasise the human impact of arts and culture alongside the economics?

This session intends to discuss:

- What place do arts and culture have in the Britain of the future?
- How do we quantify the human importance of the arts?
- How can we make the arts a political priority and what approaches should be at the centre of a progressive policy for arts and culture?
- How do we ensure access to the arts?

Class publications to look at:

- Raising our quality of life: The importance of investment in arts and culture – *Dr Abigail Gilmore*

*Released in November,
advance copies available
at conference*

BRITAIN NEEDS A PAYRISE: HOW TRADE UNIONS CAN DELIVER IT



Pay inequality and falling living standards will be defining challenges for the next government. With a record 5 million workers on low pay, this session will take an in-depth look at why living standards are falling, and will examine the role of trade unions in tackling economic inequality. We will examine the consequences of the shift in power between capital and labour and the enforced decline of collective bargaining and trade union membership. What is new about our economy that produces this crisis in living standards?

This session will debate:

- What policies are required to restore bargaining power at the workplace, and how can collective bargaining be strengthened?
- What impact will policies such as increasing the minimum wage, implementing the living wage, and enforcing pay ratios have on improving living standards?
- Can pay inequality be radically changed without rebalancing the UK economy, changing the balance of jobs and strengthening the power of trade unions?

Class publications to look at:

- Trade unions and economic inequality - *Prof Tonia Novitz & Dr Lydia Hayes*
- The Great British Rip Off: How to solve the cost of living crisis
- Securing a decent deal for workers: Employee representatives on boards - *Jim Sheridan MP*
- State intervention for wage-led development – *Prof Özlem Onaran*
- The importance of the labour movement in tackling inequality - *Prof Richard Wilkinson and Prof Kate Pickett*
- Reconstruction after the Crisis: A Manifesto for Collective Bargaining - *Prof Keith Ewing and John Henty QC*

STAND UP TO RACISM: CHALLENGING SCAPEGOATING AND THE FAR RIGHT



Our multicultural society is under threat. The relentless anti-immigration message of UKIP has been dangerously echoed by other political parties in a rush to outflank each other on the right. As Britain struggles to recover from recession, immigration has been singled out as a scapegoat for falling wages, housing scarcity, and cuts to public services.

Making immigrants the scapegoats for current economic conditions is a damaging diversion from formulating the policies that will address the real problems facing all British workers. It is time for the left to seize the debate on immigration and assert a counter narrative that is fact based, positive and progressive about multicultural Britain. This session will explore how we can turn the tide and win the arguments around immigration to ensure that anti-racism remains a core value for progressives and the drift towards UKIP's policies are halted.

This session will debate:

- How should the left respond to racism, Islamophobia and the scapegoating of migrants ahead of the General Election in May?
- How do we stand up for multiculturalism and the benefits of migration?
- How do we ensure that migrant communities, and especially newer communities, are at the heart of our movement?

Class publications to look at:

- Why immigration is good for all of us - Class-Red Pepper
- How can the European left deal with the threat posed by xenophobia? - *Glyn Ford*

TAX JUSTICE AT THE HEART OF A FAIR ECONOMY

If we are to achieve a fairer economy it is clear that progressive taxation is urgently needed. Big corporations are avoiding their civic duty to pay tax, and the millions of pounds they withhold could make a significant contribution to funding our public services. Yet the main concern of many politicians is to outbid their rivals with tax cuts for the rich and engage in a race to the bottom on corporation tax. How do we reverse this pattern and build a fair tax system that supports the many and not just a few at the top?



This session will debate:

- What concrete policies are needed at national and international level to ensure corporations and the 1% pay their dues?
- What would a new and more redistributive tax system look like? Is it realistic?
- How much can be achieved quickly?

Class publications to look at:

- Banking in the public interest: Progressive reform of the financial sector - *Professor Prem Sikka*
- In Land Revenue: The case for a Land Value Tax in the UK - *Andy Hull*
- Financing the Social State: Towards a full employment economy - *Richard Murphy, Howard Reed*
- The Case for Universalism: Assessing the evidence - *Mike Danson, Paul Spicker, Robin McAlpine, Willie Sullivan*
- Why Inequality Matters - *My Fair London*
- Towards a new tax consensus: Embracing progressive taxation - *Richard Murphy*

FEMINISM'S FUTURE: REALISING WOMEN'S EQUALITY

The past five years have seen a resurgence of feminist activity, now being hailed as feminism's fourth wave. But although fourth-wave feminism has initiated a massive shift in the dialogue around women's rights, this shift has been slow to translate to government policies. Austerity has disproportionately affected women and this year the gender pay gap widened again. Women still face barriers to representation and participation at every level.

Around the world, there have been policy shifts around women's rights: from the regressive, like abortion restrictions in Spain to the progressive, like the "yes means yes" law defining sexual consent in California. Other areas of women's rights have seen massive advances too, like low-paid female workers filing equal pay suits, and the possibility of domestic violence becoming a separate criminal offence.

This session will explore how we translate the gains of fourth wave feminism to concrete policies that will improve equality for women and how we can resist policies that drive back women's rights.

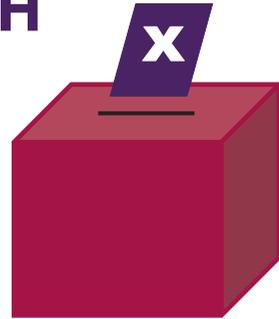
This session will debate:

- What are the barriers to women's equality?
- What policies should the government implement to safeguard women's rights?
- What next steps should be taken to keep up the momentum of fourth wave feminism?

Class publications to look at:

- *Why Inequality Matters - My Fair London*

WHY SHOULD I VOTE? HOW WE RECONNECT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE



Government policy has penalised the young more than the old, on the basis that older people are more likely to express their opinions at the ballot box. Millions of working class people have turned away from conventional politics, feeling abandoned by the three main political parties. This session will debate political engagement. How do we encourage people, and particularly young people, to get involved in politics? Can we forge a new type of people-focused politics? Until the incredible turnout at the Scottish Referendum there has been a tendency to blame young people for their lack of political engagement. But Scotland shows that this is far from the reality. This session will discuss what we can learn from the Scottish referendum in terms of reengagement and will look at the policies that can offer a real future for young people.

This session will discuss:

- How do we mobilise people to vote?
- How do reach out to young people?
- What can we learn from trade union engagement with young people - young workers and in the wider community?
- What does democracy look like?

Class publications to look at:

- The Great British Rip Off: How to solve the cost of living crisis - *Class, Trade Union Group of MPs and unionstogether*

BUILDING OUR FUTURE ECONOMY: INVESTING IN JOBS AND GREEN GROWTH

The need to move away from a financialised, unequal society and towards a stable economy has never been greater. But for all the talk of rebalancing the economy regionally, industrially and environmentally, the shape of the radical changes needed remain vague. The country is in a dual crisis of decent jobs and a changing climate. A transformed green and balanced economy is essential for the sustainability of the planet and will shape the job market of the future. What should our economy look like in 2020 and 2030 - and how can we get there?

This session will hope to debate:

- How can we achieve a fairer economy, with more equal distribution between capital and labour?
- How do we rebalance between finance and other sectors to ensure regional prosperity and what policies are required to kick-start investment?
- How do we ensure innovation, investment and research in our future green economy - and what role for the state?

Class publications to look at:

- State intervention for wage-led development - *Prof Özlem Onaran*
- Renewing Public Ownership: Constructing a Democratic Economy in the Twenty-First Century - *Prof Andrew Cumbers*
- State and finance in financialised capitalism - *Prof Costas Lapavistas*
- Think Big, Think Bold: Why the Left must aim for a radical Pan-European Green New Deal - *Yanis Varoufakis*
- Banking in the public interest: Progressive reform of the financial sector - *Prem Sikka*
- Austerity Illusions and Debt Delusions - *Class Mythbuster*

TACKLING THE FAILURE OF PRIVATISATION: THE CASE FOR PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

All countries have a state sector whatever the political nature of their governments and their economic and social systems. Enduring questions remain as to the limit of the state, and for what purposes it should be used. This session will look at how privatisation policies of successive governments have delivered the economy into the hands of a narrow set of vested corporate and financial interests. The consequences are clear - decision-making is geared towards short-term profit and rent-seeking, at the expense of longer-term thinking that promotes the common good.

The UK is seriously out of step with the rest of the world, where many countries are bringing key services back into public ownership. Does the UK need to rethink its approach to ownership and control of the economy? Would new forms of public and collective ownership be able to develop an economy to serve social needs and environmental concerns over private gain?

This session will discuss:

- What are the benefits of public ownership?
- How can we learn from the experience of other countries?
- Are there new forms of ownership that can be explored?

Class publications to look at:

- *Renewing Public Ownership: Constructing a Democratic Economy in the Twenty-First Century* - Prof Andrew Cumbers
- *Public services: The good, the bad, and the future* - Prof Roger Seifert
- *In the public interest: The role of the modern state* - Yvonne Roberts

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE OF THE NHS

Labour will repeal the Health and Social Care Act, increase spending on the NHS, and integrate social care. But does the rescue plan for our NHS measure up to need? Do we have a clear vision that will see our NHS deliver the very best health and social care? This session will explore what is required to ensure the NHS is a public service that is, in all senses, the envy of the world.

This session will look at how we can transform the NHS for the 21st Century to ensure we have long-term plans in place to address our ageing population in the face of an increasing funding gap. It will examine how the scourge of competition and private profit can be removed, PFI schemes terminated and how staff morale can be boosted. How do we ensure that the NHS can once again be an inspirational public service delivering the very best?

This session will discuss:

- How do we address the influence of private healthcare in the NHS?
- How do we restore the confidence of NHS staff following funding cuts?
- How do we deliver major improvements to the NHS without another damaging reorganisation?
- What are the implications of integrating health and social care?

Class publications to look at:

- In the public interest: The role of the modern state - *Yvonne Roberts*
- Public services: The good, the bad, and the future - *Prof Roger Seifert*
- In Place of Fear: Narrowing health inequalities - *Prof Danny Dorling*
- Duty to care: In defence of universal health care - *David Price and Prof Allyson Pollock*

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The Centre for Labour and Social Studies is a new trade-union based think tank established in 2012 to act as a centre for left debate and discussion. Originating in the labour movement, Class works with a broad coalition of supporters, academics and experts to develop and advance alternative policies for today.