This version is in landscape view and columns, laid out as if for printing as A5 booklets. Although it wouldn't print both sides back-to-back correctly like this.

Talking With Voters

for progressive parties

The following small-group activity aims to help progressive parties to support members in promoting the party's politics, independently of conservative mass media, through the natural relationships they have with voters,

Members' everyday relationships with family, friends, neighbours, workmates, acquaintances are the best route for communicating with voters. Several hundred thousand members talking politics with people they have 'organic' relationships with, in everyday conversation, is more natural and substantive than the usual forms of communication and campaigning.

It will overcome the alienation of the campaigning relationship of 'we Labour, you voter' and replace it with many scenarios where members and the many voters they know discuss politics *as* fellow-voters, equals, all members of that majority who need progressive governments. It will help develop us as a society to where it becomes the norm for citizens to discuss politics together.

The present situations in the UK, the USA and many other countries show that we *must* talk politics to each other as fellow-citizens and voters. The accompanying paper 'How To Talk Politics With Each Other' explains how to do it.

The small-group activity is drawn from the writer's experience as a trade union tutor (now retired), where group methods were the norm, were effective, and greatly enjoyed by union reps and members.

Activity: Talking With Voters

v. 2025.17C

(Initially written offered to the Labour Party in the UK)

Aims: To exchange experience of talking about politics
To develop skills and confidence in talking with voters
To develop best practice

Setting Up Your Group:

A facilitator will organise you into small groups.
(See *Notes for Facilitators*, following)

<u>In your group</u> get someone to start and informally chair your discussion – like, keep it to one speaker at a time; indicate who that person is; allow everybody the chance to speak once before anybody speaks twice.

Choose someone else to take notes of key points, maybe on this sheet, on card provided by the facilitator, or on a smart device.

Group Task:

1. **Ask members in turn about discussions they've had, or have observed, about politics, voting and the party**.
(see *Notes for Facilitators1* ***** *overleaf*)

Ask:

Who was the discussion with? (no need for names)

Where? (tea break, party, across the garden wall etc?).

What was the political issue?

How did the discussion start?

What did they say? What did you say?

How did it develop?

Did it seem the other person's views
were influenced by the mass media?

What do they do for a living? (if you know)

How did it end?

2. **Finish the group work** by noting down **ideas on best practice** in talking with voters, or on the issues discussed, or just in general.

3. **Full-branch Report Back from each group**, and general discussion. Aim to take reports on one topic from each group in turn.

We may not get to every group but all will have had the benefit of their own group's work and will get the benefit of the whole report back.

A Resource document or takeaway for this activity titled ***How To Talk Politics With Each Other*** is provided here immediately after this activity (when printed for use in meetings) and is permanently available at www.uspoliticsandthesystem.org

See Notes for Facilitators2* overleaf *

Notes for Facilitators1*

... with neighbours, relatives, friends; workmates, fellow-union members; people met while campaigning or door-knocking; discussions seen or taken part in on social media, things read in 'the papers' or seen on TV, etc.

Some members might not be willing to talk with voters on their own, or not be in a position to. The activity is to support those who can, and all can contribute to that. Members (and senior officers of the party!) should be reassured that this is just about talking with voters as fellow-voters, not as official spokespersons of the party. And they need not feel they have to strenuously defend every party policy. The aim is simply to talk with people as fellow-voters but also as a Labour member; and for the party in this way to have grass-roots dialogue with voters, independently of the conservative-dominated media.

Notes for Facilitators2 *

Setting Up The Groups
The following points aim to help set up the small groups. They might seem complicated but are worth doing to avoid time-wasting confusion and to achieve good discussions.

1. **Have pieces of card** ready cut for numbering groups and for group note takers.

2. Ideally, set up groups mixed by experience of activism, age, life roles, gender, ethnicity etc. But for first, or early sessions with a particular gathering, or for just one session at a Branch meeting, just **mixing people up randomly**, as suggested below, is probably all that is achievable.

3. **The preferred scenario is to have tables laid out**, enough for groups of four (divide expected numbers attending by four).

   Place a number on each table. Groups as big as five or six might have to do, though people then tend to sub-divide into twos or threes.

4. **The 'at-the-door' method -** As members come in, explain that we are having discussion groups and are mixing people up so they can meet and discuss with those they don't know. At the door, allocate them to tables like this: first person to table 1, next to table 2, and so on.

5. **The 'moving people around' method** –
   If there are tables, but not numbered and people are sat at them already, go round and number the tables. Then explain, apologise and seek agreement for moving them and their coats and bags. (Good luck!) Then go to each table and allocate the members there to table 1, then 2, then 3 etc.

   This method is a bind, avoided by pre-numbering and allocation at the door as in method **4.** But still worth it.

6. **The 'chairs' method** –
   If there are no tables, with members just on chairs, this might seem a bind too but again, is worth it: have numbered cards for the number of groups (of four) you will get from the numbers you are expecting.
   So if you expect twenty, you'll need cards numbered 1 to 5.
   If there's more, scraps of paper, numbered, will do.

   Go along the chairs giving number 1 to the first person, 2 to the second, and so on up to 5. Then carry on along telling the next five people they are in group 1, 2,3, 4 or 5, then 1,2,3,4 or 5 again and so on round the room. Then get people to assemble in their groups around the person with their numbered card. The card holder for Group 1 might stay where they are, the one for Group 2 will need to move along, the other card holders will find a suitable spot, maybe Group 5 will be near the end of the seating. The person with the number is just an assembly point, not necessarily group chair.

How To Talk Politics With Each Other

This is written about politics in the UK but it applies to most countries because the basics of economics and politics, and people, are the same worldwide. It is about ordinary citizens talking to each other about politics, and about progressive parties such as the Labour party in the UK, and elsewhere, talking with voters.

People think politics is about politicians and what they do, but it's far more than that, it's about us running society together. And we need to talk to each other more about how we do it, as fellow-citizens. That we don't do it enough was shown by, in Britain, the referendum on Europe and the Brexit saga that followed; and by voters (as a whole) electing into government conservative parties that are hostile to most people's interests. Likewise in America with the support for Trump.

In Britain, the Labour Party (I am a member) only really talk to voters just before elections, going round the streets knocking on doors asking people who they intend to vote for. That's like approaching strangers and asking about their sex lives! And when the media, mostly owned by conservative business people, have been on at people every day, year in, year out, distracting and mis-directing them, talking to them at election time is too little, too late.

By-Pass Their Media

To overcome the conservative media's demonisation of progressive policies, parties and leaders, we need to by-pass them, by building our own independent communications. Running newspapers and mass broadcast media like they can afford to run – and take the trouble to run - seem to be beyond our current confidence and level of organisation. But no matter. ***Talking about politics is best, most naturally done, by people talking to fellow-citizens they have relationships with, in normal everyday conversation. Talking to each other 'organically'***. That can be our mass media. So let's look at how to do it.

(Social media is not addressed here, yet. But talking with people you have real, definite, maybe organisational relationships with, is far more useful than social media. There we just fling snappy opinions at each other, usually as strangers, and only in our role as voters who only act together, if you can call it that, at occasional elections. The thrust of all these writings is that we need to associate in definite social organisations in which we can act with real social and political power.)

How To Talk To Each Other About Politics

You can talk politics with people all the time. You don't have to push it. You probably shouldn't. No need for 'Let's talk politics.' Though maybe sometimes. 'Let's have a heated debate!' But things come up naturally in conversation, at work with fellow-workers; with friends, relatives, neighbours; in pubs and bars. Most people are actually keen to voice their political opinions.

You just have to develop the skill of noticing how people say things that have political meaning while often appearing to think they haven't, that open the possibility for political debate, and be prepared to broaden it into a proper political discussion. Like, 'Aren't these pavements bad' can lead into how Conservative governments slashed council funding; how they always want to do that anyway; but how from 2010 they used as cover for doing it what Labour had to spend to solve the financial crash of 2008; how that was caused by Labour having conceded too much to conservative free market ideas and allowed conservative bankers to cause the crisis; and how Labour took the blame - for being conservative!

You'll need to deal with '*Don't talk politics in the pub or club, or at family events'*. Get over that with 'Look, we're fellow-citizens. Look at the divisions in Britain over the EU referendum. Look at the election of Trump in the USA. Voting isn't just an individual act - politics and how we vote, or don't vote, affects us all together. How I vote affects you; how you vote affects me'. It's a collective decision. And as well as being fellow-citizens we are fellow-workers (mostly), maybe actual workmates, relatives, friends, neighbours. To be adult citizens, we *have* to be able to talk to each other about how the society we all live in works and what we do about it.'

It’s essential to lead discussions away from politics as being just about what each person *thinks*. What they think is, in the end, important, as it guides their actions. But what we think has to be based on the world outside our heads. Always base political discussion on the reality of *the system*, the economy, production, sales, work, jobs and wealth, and their place in it. It makes discussions much easier and more productive.

And the single most important, normally overlooked feature of politics and the system is that business people dominate it. We need to point out to each other how they are ‘the economy’, since they control production, sales, work and jobs; that they dominate politics for that reason; and they control of much of the media too. And to say that we need to see them as a class - the business class. And to see that Conservative parties represent them. In discussions you can move outwards from these central facts but keep referring back to them. Not all of the business class are hateful capitalists, some are alright (discuss) but, as a minimum to all agree on, we have to recognise the central role they play in society, talk about it, and include it any political discussions we have.

When talking about politics it would be best to agree some basics about how to conduct ourselves

- When getting onto political territory during an ordinary conversation, instead of spontaneously firing out a few random and contrary political opinions at each other then rapidly reverting to safer ground such as sport and consumer issues, agree to discuss politics properly for a few minutes.
- Agree that ‘OK, it often does get heated. But let’s agree to try to make an effort to keep calm!’
- Maybe agree early on, as a basic framework, that we all want society to be fair and we are discussing how to make it work fairly. That whatever different political opinions we have, we are talking as decent people, in favour of people treating each other decently. And possibly as humanitarians or liberals (people in favour of treating others properly).
- That, as well as being fellow-citizens, we are (mostly) each of us a worker, with common interests based on that.

Try for evenly balanced debate, allow each other to speak. (A tricky skill, this, judging when to interrupt in order to have your say, and when not to!) Don't let disagreements dominate - look for things you can agree on.

Finish with ‘Well, have we agreed on anything?’ And, since there will be some things you don’t agree on - there always are - ‘Can we go away agreeing to think about what we’ve each said?’ People - me and you included - do change their mind later that way.

If you are regularly too keen to open up political discussion, you might need to deal with 'There s/he goes again, on about politics'. Deal with that, again, with the *need* for us to do it, and how, if we don’t, we are not fully mature, adult citizens.

For any who say *'I’m not interested in politics'* say 'Well politics is interested in you. It affects your life hugely. Here’s how…..’

There's an attitude that denies political debate and agreement where people say *'Well you think that, I think this. Everybody has their own opinion.*' This is true, we do all have our own opinions. But we also all live and operate in the same system, the same society. Leaving it at everybody having their own opinion might be Ok for survivalists living in the woods. But probably not, even for them.

The whole point of democracy is to come to agreed decisions on how to run the society we share. We can't do this with every last detail - we have to leave a lot to legislators, governments, public service managers, judges and more. But in principle that’s what we aim to do.

And democratic politics requires us to combine our varying opinions into coherent public policy, on a wide range of issues. Human society is mostly run not by individuals but by those who organise together and organisations can't function with everybody pleasing themselves. You won’t do very well as a football team unless you agree on what is happening – agree the facts – and what to do together. At work, bosses don't say 'Yeah, just please yourselves what you do, whatever.' They more or less dictate facts and actions, from everything to do with the actual task to even how you dress. Do the military just let all their troops have their own view? Then there's the law - the whole point of the law is to

determine who is 'right' in how we behave towards each other.

Denying political discussion with ‘everybody has their own opinion’ doesn't *elevate* individual opinions, it downgrades them. Because if they are all left at being different, the opinion-holders actually lose their right to have a say. Because for opinions and votes to have effect, some significant number of people have to discuss, agree, and pool their views into coherent ideas. It’s what the conservative media does, raising some issues and downplaying others, setting the political agenda. It’s what the political parties do. And single-issue campaign groups. They devise proposals and policies, that the remaining people can vote on. So the effect of ‘everybody has their opinion’, if universal, would make it impossible even to draw up anything for us to vote on. Those saying 'Everybody has their own opinion' and ‘If I ruled the world’ makes them ineffectual followers of those who organise collective platforms, who realise that to have any real say you have to do the hard work of agreeing things with each other.

There *are* things that are pretty much people’s own business. But not work, politics and law. They are collaborative and collective. Most things in public life are done by some form of common purpose, by agreement on facts and actions, collectively. It may sometimes be imposed by autocrats, but preferably by various degrees of democracy.

It has been said here ‘Don’t let discussion be limited to what the person you are talking to thinks, or whatever political label they have attached to them’. Instead, raise the external actuality of their lives, their place in the system. Anchor the discussion on their actual role in it. Ask how they make their living. Most will be workers. This writer declines to be labelled as ‘left’, which bases things on my opinions. I identify by my role in the system, as a worker, on my being working class, a fact that comes before my attitudes and political opinions and actions.

Conservatives stress ‘the individual’. A lot of people go along with that and say ‘*I just look after No. 1’.* Some indeed can seem to get by OK like that. But they are inevitably affected by the overall state of the society they live in. And they usually have relatives, friends, neighbours and workmates. What about them?

And the majority can’t get by simply by ‘Looking after No. 1’. The main response to both points is ‘We live very inter-dependently. Much of society is collective. Especially work, which, with high-volume production of goods and service (industrialism) in big organisations, is *intensely* collective’. So ask also about theirs and their relatives, friends, neighbours and workmate’s place in the system. Ask how a particular political policy affects not just them but these other people close to them. And about how *they* vote or don’t vote affects *you*. Acknowledge that of course they are entitled to their opinions but couch discussion of voting intentions to also include ‘Well look, if you vote for or allow the conservatives in, you are doing harm to me, your relatives, friends, neighbours, workmates, and your fellow-citizens in general’.

Feelings Not Facts?

Another attitude to challenge is *people going by feelings* instead of facts, policies and debate. Going by feelings is actually declining to exercise your right to have your say. You can’t have a credible opinion on most political issues without some consideration of facts and options. Going by feelings means handing that right over to some politician, many of whom deliberately only appeal to your feelings, with extravagant rhetoric assuring you they’ll look after you but with little real content, just invoking fear, hate, belonging, security, hope or change.

What should we say to fellow-voters who say they just go by feelings? Maybe this - ‘Well we do function with feelings, it can’t be all about facts and reasoning. But don’t you think the two should go together? Don’t use feelings as an excuse for not weighing things up properly. It just doesn’t make sense, if you really want to get what you want. But what are your feelings? Let's talk about them then.'

Values

Another approach might be to ask about their social values. *How caring should we be to others*? Do they agree we should aim for *fairness* in society? (That's not the same thing as *equality)*. What do they think we should expect from each other as citizens? How much should we be able to depend upon each other? What do they think

of the term 'solidarity'? What do they think of *'It's everybody for themselves'?*

And of 'People should be able to keep what they've earned'. The key response to this big conservative argument is to say 'Well let's look at how they get it.' Most of the rich's wealth is made from other people's work. From ours, in fact.

Who We Vote For

And we need to be open with each other about who we vote for. In the UK, voting originally needed to be by secret ballot because landlords would evict you or employers sack you if you didn't vote for their candidate. And it still does need to be by secret ballot, as far as employers and the state not knowing how you vote. But between ourselves, equal citizens who aren't going to intimidate each other, we should be more open with each other in conversation about how we vote, and why.

In summary - we need to talk to each other, and organise together, as citizens and as workers, and work towards mass, mature, involved citizenship.

It's Not About Leaders - It's About Parties

The media, and many ordinary people, treat politics as if it's all about the party leaders. Almost all media coverage of politics is about how leaders do or don't hold sway over their party; their prospects for winning elections; their qualities and shortcomings as possible or actual Prime Ministers. This is ridiculous. For party members and voters who place all their hopes in whoever is leader, it's 'Messiah' politics. It's immature. Messiah politics demeans those many who are active in their parties.

Leaders are important but their key qualities shouldn't be as one-person policy-makers and decision-makers. In a proper democracy, we all matter. On policy-making, parties have many members and activists, and policies are decided by thorough democratic processes. Major decisions that come up unexpectedly should be made by collective party leadership, not one person. The leader's key qualities are being able to bring together and hold together coalitions of views, in cabinets, in Parliaments and in the party membership as a whole.

Expecting so much from leaders is doomed to failure anyway. It's foolish to expect them to be all-wise. They can't be. So in talking to people about politics, argue against people just going on about the qualities and failings of potential prime ministers or presidents. Or just saying they 'like' one more than another. There's more to any party than the attributes of just one person. *Argue instead for supporting parties and policies rather than leaders.*

And the media and many people place on the leader all the responsibility for getting voters to vote for the party. But that's not only the leader's job - it's every member's job. And they can do it better than the leader. Whoever is leader doesn't know the relatives, friends, neighbours, workmates of several hundred thousand members. They do, and they are the best people to talk politics with them.

Taking Responsibility

One reason people pay so much attention to the leader is that they give up trying to make sense of politics themselves and take the easy option of 'Leave it to somebody else', i.e. one leader or another.

This is because we don't have a clear, commonly-held understanding of *the system*. Most importantly, of the fact that business people, the business class, dominate it, and how their overblown belief in their own qualities and rights is the root cause of most of our problems. It's not really difficult to understand and talk about politics when you locate discussion in terms of this central political issue – that business people, the business class, have the most power in society; that most people are workers, the worker class; that business people get power through being organised; that in response the rest need to organise too, mainly as workers (and are entitled to).

Us, Politics And The System, a free download from the website ***www.uspoliticsandthesystem.org*** is a resource for this.

As said, we do need leaders. But the over-emphasis on them is a condemnation of our democracy. We should work towards a thorough, involved democracy, with widespread involvement of mature, rational citizens, acting together all through society. I've seen it done in the trade union movement. Political meetings

needn't be boring if discussions are organised with small groups that allow everyone to speak. See the small group activity *Talking With Voters* that goes with this paper.

Persuading Fellow-citizens To Vote Effectively

People give reasons for how they vote or why they don't, that don't make sense. Here are the main ones, and some responses:

- '*I'm not voting for them because of (a single issue)'.*

Where people feel so strongly about one party on one issue that they don't want to vote for them, *prompt them to weigh up what the other parties are saying on that issue too.* Prime example – after Tony Blair's war on Iraq, many normally Labour voters stopped voting Labour. But that only, eventually, helped to allow the Conservatives into government. Yet they, and Parliament as a whole, had backed Blair on this war. And Blair and New Labour were, of course, infinitely better than the Conservatives on domestic issues.

You don't usually get a vote on one issue and you shouldn't vote according to only one issue. There are many issues and each party has differing policies on each of them. You normally have to vote for *packages* of policies*. You need to decide on the best or least bad package.*

Whatever you think of the parties, whatever their leaders or candidates have done or not done, *once you get to the vote, to the actual list of candidates, to the ballot paper, one must be the least bad* and you are surely better off with them in government than a worse one. So, in Britain, it means, even when Labour governments don't do as much as you'd like them too, Labour is always the best option for most people. Most citizens should never let the Conservatives in. The same applies in the US - the Democrats may not do enough but are the obvious better option for the majority than the Republicans.

- *Some will say they are voting for a minor party as a 'protest vote' against what progressive or social democratic parties have done or not done. Usually, it's because they've not been progressive enough.*

In the UK, protest voters see it as teaching Labour a lesson but they damage themselves as much as Labour. The minor party usually has no chance of winning so the protest vote just splits the progressive vote and allows the Conservatives – usually the worst option - to win the seat and get into government with, usually, less than 40% of the vote while the combined progressive vote is regularly in the 50% to 60% range.

Where people are committed to the small party and want to build it long term, it might make sense. But at any particular election, if their party has no chance of winning, all they often achieve is to allow the worst in. What the minority party should do is make tactical decisions about how supporters should vote in each election, to get the best or least-bad party or candidate in. But they are generally in too simplistically positive a mindset about their chances to do that. So then it's up to *voters themselves* to take a cool look at what is possible in any current election and vote for the party that is (a) actually able to win the seat and (b) is nearest to meeting their needs. If protest voters want to build the minor party in the long-term, throwing away their vote and letting the Conservatives in is not the way. They need to build that party in between elections, protest voting is an unlikely way to do it.

- *Many people say their vote makes no difference.* Well, yes, for everyone, it's rare for votes to be so tight that their vote appears to be a deciding vote. But they do add up, don't they?
- *Some don't vote at all, saying 'They're all the same' or 'They're all as bad as each other'.* In the UK, about 30% of those entitled to vote usually don't. And for all the fuss about elections for President in the USA, only about 50% vote. It's a serious problem for progressive parties. It's one of the reasons we usually have parties governing us who have the support of less than (a different) 30% of citizens.

Tell people who say this that the political parties are never all the same. They all disappoint in *some* way, that will be true, but they are never all the same. Saying that is just lazy.

It's a cop-out from doing any thinking. I've taken part in many union elections at all levels and it's easy to find enough difference between candidates to be able to decide on one rather than the

other. It's easier still with the political parties. There's too many issues and too many policies for the parties to be the same on all of them. Too much in each parties' package for them to really match up closely over the whole range, if you just actually think about it for a few minutes. More on the nature of the main parties shortly, but argue to people who say this that they should at least *vote*, and to at least make sure the least bad and not the worst gets in.

The Parties Aren't All The Same

'They're all the same' leads to people just talking of 'them' and 'them in Parliament', and Trump calling them 'the swamp'. The media reinforce this, presenting elected representatives as a single, homogonous group - 'politicians'. It happened with Brexit in the UK, where people railed against 'Them in Parliament' or 'Politicians' for not *'sorting it out'*. This is lazy thinking. It's pretty obvious that elected politicians have varying objectives, so you can't talk of them as a homogenous body that you can expect to 'just get on with it'. In his work *'Us, Politics And The System*' this writer shows how you can get a clear view of the differences in politics by basing it on our relationships in the system, at work, in business, in the economy. But even leaving that aside, just watching the nail-biting Brexit debates in Parliament, it was plain that the Conservatives are mostly an arrogant, entitled, unpleasant bunch, wealthy business people representing wealthy business people. There's a few with some human decency but not many. And it was plain that Labour MP's are mostly caring, well-intentioned people, even with internal disagreements about how to tackle the conservatives and the business class and the many voters under their influence.

Governing Is Not Just Managerial

In Britain the Labour Party loses votes and elections because the conservative 'newspapers' convince people that they are *not competent to manage the economy*. It's a myth – see *Labour Is Fit To Govern* at page 315 of *Us, Politics And The System*. *But we need to point out to people that there's more to governing than competence anyway (important though it is).*

One result of seeing choice of parties as being just about competence is people voting for a party simply because they are unhappy with the incumbent government. They do this because the present situation is unsatisfactory (it always will be, to some extent.) So they'll say '*Let's give the other lot a try*'. They'll vote just for *'change'*.

But few people *really* evaluate a government's competence, and certainly not those who just vote for change. They take the simplistic option to just try something different because they don't have a clear, holistic view of the system and the parties.

But There's Intentions Too

More importantly - the competence charge against Labour rests on the assumption that all the parties aim to govern for everyone. That there is a key task, managing the economy and that it is a neutral skill. So the choice is presented as just being about managerial ability. But although competence is obviously important, first ask people to look at *what are a party's intentions anyway?* What do they try to do, what are they for, who are they for?

When people say 'they're all the same' what they really mean is 'they're all a disappointment'. But to think 'they are all the same' you must believe they all intend to do right by everybody. As said, that's not true, and we need to make it clear in discussions with fellow-voters.

Conservatives claim they intend to do what's best for everybody. That they get away with that claim is quite an achievement. They don't. They aim to manage the country for the people they represent – business people - the business *class* - and rich people. And to do just enough for some of the rest – managers, some high-earning workers – to get enough votes to win elections.

But it's our fault they get away with this ridiculous pose, for not talking enough ourselves to all those people who get political news and opinions from conservative media, that present conservative parties as well-intentioned, effective managers and also set the agenda for broadcast comment and the media generally. They talk to voters day in and day out and influence them deeply, such as diverting enough of them into blaming outsiders for problems to take election-swinging votes away from progressive parties (who don't blame outsiders.) And they undermine Labour's and

progressive party's overall credibility with voters.

The Conservatives shouldn't ever be a *disappointment.* Why expect anything of them but policies largely hostile to the worker majority? They box clever with some policies that appeal to or benefit some workers. But their main aims are clear on the big issues – their fierce support for 'free markets' which essentially means 'freedom for the business class to get rich from everybody else's work', and their opposition to us matching up to their organised strength by ourselves organising together, in unions. And they oppose public services and support. Workers need public services because of how the business class mistreat and exploit them at work. But conservatives and their class – the business class - can afford to buy what they need themselves so don't want to pay taxes for public provision (except for the police and the military to defend their property and system, domestically and around the world.) They make a show of supporting public services because most of us *do* need and want them and they know they won't get into government without concealing their true attitudes. But look at what they do on public services, not at what they say.

You can observe how they go about looking after their interests and admire the effort they put into achieving dominance in society, and realise it's our own fault, the rest, most voters, for not matching up to them, for not talking to each other properly about politics, for not educating and organising each other enough to show them up.

Updating this piece in May 2025, ***Reform*** are the alternative conservative party, with the same basic objective, to represent business class interests, just even nastier.

The Labour party genuinely aims to do the best they can for the majority. More on that below. But to get that through to people we first need to get them to see the key features of society – that business people dominate it; that it's because, as businesses, they are most of the economy; that this gives them power in politics even before they are active in political parties; to get them seen as *a class.* Having done that we can show people that most of 'the press', who position themselves as unaffiliated commentators, are actually independent conservatives, business people, working to influence politics and voters in the interests of business people. Only by spreading that basic understanding can we can pull people out of the influence of the conservative media and show how, in various ways, they consciously divert people from blaming the business class and their free-market business system for our problems. Then we can put *our* case clearly.

The Labour Party *can disappoint* because of a persistent problem it has never, so far, resolved - how much to regulate and tax the wealthy and business people for the benefit of the worker majority. The left in the party wants to offer policies that require that, and to do it. But the centrists notice that not enough workers will vote for these policies. (That includes those who don't even vote.) So instead, they cobble together less ambitious policies that they hope enough centrist workers will vote for that Labour actually wins elections and gets into government. But then those policies eventually mean disappointing many workers, who don't vote Labour next time, maybe 'trying one of the others'.

The last time before this that we got a Labour government, it was after centrists led by Tony Blair took note of how, during 18 years of Conservative government, 1979 to 1997, many workers allowed or even assisted the Conservatives to win elections on pro-business, anti-worker, anti-union, anti-public services programmes. So to win votes from such workers and win elections the Blairites decided to become, as New Labour, another pro-business party. (That's what endorsing free markets really means). They hoped to still be able to improve public services and welfare, and did. The party as a whole went along with this, conceding to the business class and their media-propagated political arguments, in order to win the votes of better-off, conservative-minded workers and others who accepted their anti-union, and anti-public spending arguments.

It worked, to a degree, allowing New Labour to get elected and improve public services. But it failed in the end because the 'free market' policy left the economy to be steered by the most greedy, reckless, socially irresponsible members of the business class, the bankers, and they caused the crash of 2008. Labour let itself get blamed for that and lost the next election on grounds of incompetence and excessive public spending. As said earlier, all

Labour had done was concede to a core conservative economic policy, that seemed to be necessary to get the votes of better-off workers, and the excess public spending was just what they had to spend to rescue the economy from the mis-behaviour of the financial leaders of the business class. It was absurd, and a good example of how awful we are at communicating with voters, and the consequences. A similar accommodation to conservative-influenced voters is happening now, in 2025, with damaging consequences.

But the concession to conservative policies is not only the party's fault. We voters obstruct Labour in what it can do for workers. Not enough of us vote for them on manifestos that would regulate business people and conservatives and govern for the majority. The party is limited in how radical a programme it can offer to workers when many are not as radical as even the centrists in the party.

Labour centrists feel, correctly, that they don't have the support to put forward policies that most members, left, centre and others, know are right, so they cast about for modest policies that might win elections. But when they do, these policies inevitably don't deliver enough for the mass of people.

But however disappointing some might find Labour governments, as a party they simply are better than the Conservatives. Unlike them, they aren't *intentionally* against 'ordinary working people' - workers – and public services. So the parties are *not* all the same.

To state this crucial point again – although there is a lack of conviction in the Labour party that causes bitter, ugly division between the left and the centrists and leads to policies and actions when in government that disappoint workers and voters generally, it is only a reflection of the politics of the whole electorate, including those who are workers. This, the politics of the electorate, needs tackling so that they can be offered, and will vote for, policies and government that won't disappoint them.

The left need to recognise that you can't just put up radical policies at election time: that you have to have thorough, constant dialogue with many millions of voters, through our own connections, to convince them of these policies.

The centrists need to recognise that devising a mish-mash of moderate policies hoping to get votes from voters who are doubtful about stronger policies means people saying they don't know what Labour stands for, not offering what you know is needed, and not doing enough in government to sustain support.

***The whole party has to campaign continually with voters and change those voters' minds**. Then, left and centre can share a measured assessment of how radical the party's programme can be, to win an election, based on how much constant campaigning has brought how many voters to more progressive views and voting intentions.*

***And this is not solely Labour's job**. It's up to us, the many millions of voters, to talk to each other more and persuade each other to vote Labour and commit to still doing so when they promise more determined policies and action – centrist voters. And even when they don't – left-wingers.*

And, again, we - ordinary people, voters, activists, and progressive parties – urgently need to by-pass the conservative mass media. It doesn't look likely we'll set up our own, progressive, mass media any time soon. *But we can talk to each other directly, consistently, thoroughly, every day, as fellow-citizens and (mostly) fellow-workers. The Labour Party particularly needs to talk to voters independently of the anti-Labour media. That's what the activity Talking With Voters is for, to provide encouragement and support for members doing that.*

The Lib Dems are a party of small business people, managers and professionals, with a rural base. They too are pro-business-class and don't intend to do anything for us as workers. They just claim to be able to run the country more effectively and campaign opportunistically on personal rights and single issues.

The Power Of The Business Class

All the main parties can seem the same because they all defer to the business class. As said, they own most of the economy. You could say, and they do, that through their enterprise they are 'the economy'. They are people with a strong sense of their own self-importance, confident and determined. They can and do make sure

that governments, of whatever party supposedly 'in power', give them most of what they demand. Progressive parties conceding to them is seen as deferring to the business *system* (free markets) but it's the business *class's* system. It's them who benefit from it far more than the majority. Its them who argue and fight for it, fiercely, determinedly. It is actually conceding to *them*.

One of their main promotional points is that 'free markets' allow individual freedom. That's a myth. The economy is actually, observably, hugely collective, particularly the businesses that they own and organise and we work for.

Conceding to the business class isn't a problem for the *Conservatives.* They *are* (the most politically-active members of) the business class, organised into a political party to represent them *as* a class. For *Labour* it is a problem. They have to either challenge the business class or work with them. How Labour governments handle them, try to get them to behave themselves, act more sociably, is the biggest policy issue they face.

So the parties are not, as some say, 'all the same' - the Conservatives are from the business class and represent their interests. Reform are an alternative, even nastier, business class party. Labour tries to do better for the masses but defers to the business class's power and are unwilling to challenge the business-class 'newspapers' influence on how people think and vote. The Lib Dems are small business and management class.

Again, we need to frame our evaluation of the parties, our attitudes to them, and our political discussions, in terms of the system. Whenever I talk to people about politics and the political parties and government, I declare early on that I am working class. (I'm moving to saying 'a worker' because people limit 'working class' to meaning just less qualified workers on lower incomes.) So why, despite Labour not achieving as much as workers might want, why would I or them vote instead for *anti*-worker parties? Any problems workers have with Labour letting them down or not doing enough aren't solved by turning to parties who are *enthusiastically* anti-worker. The thing to do with Labour is to vote them in as the best option - the least bad if you want - the nearest to being a party for workers, and then to support and influence them to do more.

Again, the bigger need is for all of us, *as ordinary citizens, workers and voters, to talk to each other more about politics and persuade each other to vote for parties genuinely on our side (Labour in the UK, the Democrats in the USA, and similar elsewhere.) And to talk to each other and develop ourselves as an electorate that will not, as at present, hold back those parties from presenting more progressive policies, but support them in doing that and vote them in as more progressive governments.*

And to defend ourselves and improve our conditions with more than just progressive governments but with thorough union organisation at work and in politics.

There's another mis-conception about parties that we need to clear up with voters. After Labour lost the December 2019 election to the Conservatives the media, commentators and even Labour leaders themselves accused Labour of letting voters down and even demanded Labour apologise to voters. This is treating the parties as if they are public services or businesses that other people can make demands on. But, unless actually in government, they are not public services. And they are not businesses that people, as consumers, have given money to and can make demands on about quality of goods and services.

We are voters too. We are a voluntary association of those several hundred thousand voters who care enough about the conditions in their own lives and those of other voters to organise and put forward policies and candidates to improve them. They are Labour members like me, and active trade unionists, and others affiliated to the party. We join the party, pay money in, go to meetings, committees and conferences, discuss and vote on the policies we think best for ourselves and the many, and who from amongst us we should put forward as leaders, and as candidates for elections.

Most of our fellow-voters don't take the trouble to do all this. They leave us to do the graft of knocking our heads together to work out policy, with a lot of dissatisfaction buried in compromise on the way, then expect us to meet their every little individual whim and

concern. Now although we do need, for our own good and, we think, theirs, to convince them that the policies, candidates and leaders we choose are the best on offer, it is not a *duty* we owe them. It's more that *they,* as fellow-citizens, owe us a duty to get involved, maybe join the party and do what we do - compromise with each other on many issues to put together the best political offer we can, and the best available, and offer it to the electorate.

But sometimes members are so fervent about their own views that they ignore what other voters will make of it. In the 2019 election campaign, you (and I) might have thought a re-run of the Brexit Referendum was appropriate. But there were maybe four million other probable-Labour voters who'd voted for Brexit and for whom it was the biggest issue and a real vote-swinger. So unless you could go out and convince them you were just inviting defeat.

But these things are for members to discuss with each other. We owe no duty to non-members. Although we do need to communicate with them, and them with us, day in, day out. Not as a service supplier though, but as fellow-citizens and fellow-voters.

We let the media embarrass us when we lose elections by asking if we think voters are wrong and would we prefer to choose another electorate? First though, reject the media's simplistic question - there is no homogonous 'the electorate.' An awful lot of people vote Labour. The problem is with a minority, who are mostly workers, who are disillusioned and don't vote; another minority who would be better off with us but are taken in by conservative arguments, especially like the one that the EU was the main problem, when in fact it is the conservatives themselves who are. Add to those minorities the business class minority who really do benefit from conservative government and you get a conservative win.

So do we think those voters are wrong who vote for the conservatives or allow them to win? Of course we do. Because, do we think we are better for them than the conservatives? Of course we do. We need to convince the non-business class majority of this and that means communicating with them much much better to, indeed, change them. Although it would be a dialogue, a mutual process. This writer is urging the party to format branch meetings around exchanging experience and developing best practise on members getting across to voters they know, and has provided an activity for branches to use to do this.

Citizens' Assemblies?

This paper has been about the usual main political act, the vote. And occasionally there's referendums too. But they too suffer from the same problems as how we vote for representatives in Parliament, Congress and other democratic assemblies - there's not enough properly organised discussion between citizens, and no opportunity to have a say on individual policies. People's or Citizen's Assemblies may be a way forward. They are temporary gatherings of citizens selected randomly, maybe with proportions by age, gender, ethnicity and so on, who meet over a cycle of weekend conferences and suchlike, with presentations by political parties, councillors, council officials, MP's, lobbying groups, people with expert knowledge etc, and come up with recommendations for the rest of us on a particular policy issue. This writer's best knowledge of it is a book that calls it *'Sortition'*, the book being *Against Elections: The Case for Democracy by David Van Reybrouck.*

A final note to clarify what people should expect from politics - people talk about politics and the political system as if everything about society *starts* from there. As if we, whether politicians or all of us, started from a blank sheet and made society what it is. And as if politics decides everything that goes on.

That's not how it is. Lots of things go on in society, far more than government can reach. And most are governed by customs and rules developed over centuries, often without political action, just 'what is done' or has come to be done. Some of it will have been set down in law and in political statute but much won't have been.

The crucial example, the central subject of this whole set of writings, is how high-volume, large-workforce production gives an organised minority – the business class - unfair power over the majority when they are just individual, atomised, unorganised workers, which we never decided in politics as the way to allocate what people need to make their living, and wealth.

It's best to see politics is as a way of potentially altering what already *happens* in society. To see *the system* and the basic activities and duties and rights and penalties as pre-existing, and politics as the main, officially-offered way of changing the broadest-ranging of them.

This may be a useful book on talking to each other
https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/16/how-to-have-better-arguments-social-media-politics-conflict

More papers like this, covering all the basic organisational political issues, are at ***www.uspoliticsandthesystem.org***