



Radical Options for Scotland and Europe

For public ownership and democratic control

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ASSESSING MANIFESTOS AGAINST ROSE'S OBJECTIVES: PUBLIC OWNERSHIP AND DEMOCRATIC CONTROL

Public Ownership

Rail transport

Both **the SNP and the Labour Party** are committed to an element of public ownership. Labour commits itself to take track and services fully into public ownership within five years. However, rolling stock would continue in private ownership (and be hired) and freight would also remain in private hands. The SNP position on rolling stock and freight is not specified but might (or might not) be included in the 'full public ownership' pledge.

Bus Transport

Labour would give Mayors in England powers to franchise local services. It will also end the Tory ban on municipal ownership.

The SNP promises funding to assist provision of zero emission buses. However, on ownership it does not appear to go beyond the existing position. This now enables local authorities to both franchise bus transport and take it into public ownership. However, local authorities have been given no budgets by which to do so and there are no proposals in the Manifesto for this to be supplied.

Energy

Labour promises a new enterprise: Great British Energy. This will 'partner' with industry and trade unions 'to deliver clean power by co-investing in leading technologies', help support 'capital-intensive projects' and deploy local energy to benefit communities. It will be headquartered in Scotland, secure £8.3B funding, build supply lines into every corner of the UK and cut fuel bills for British firms. While Labour seems to imply a much greater measure of government control, it is essentially 'partnership' with the existing private suppliers. In the North Sea Labour would halt further licensing of oil and gas exploration.

The SNP calls for the devolution of power over energy regulations, pricing and production. It demands a devolution of planning to give Scotland control over grid system and the development of supply networks that would enable Scotland to get more benefit from wind power. An SNP government would seek an equity stake in future energy projects. The SNP opposes Labour's proposal to halt further oil/gas exploration licensing. It calls instead for an 'evidence-based approach' to further licensing and for a 'just transition' in the north-east, demands support for Grangemouth and a ban on further development of nuclear energy.

Housing

Labour promises Combined and Mayoral authorities which will act strategically to develop New Towns providing affordable housing - where necessary by compulsory purchase. Nothing on council ownership. Or Scotland. The **SNP** has little to say reviving public sector or council ownership – only that funding made available to Scotland is inadequate.

More generally on ownership and control

Labour argues that government must secure a 'strategic partnership with business ... so that markets are shaped not served'. This is seen to involve 'public sector investment' to unlock private sector investment to 'create jobs' and 'provide a return for tax-payers' – noting that the country was 'too centralised'.

Implementation is posed in terms of ‘a New Industrial Strategy’ that will remove ‘barriers to growth’, and is responsible to an Economic Strategy Council representing all nations and regions, business and trade unions, ‘to drive economic growth’. Strategy will be taken forward by a ‘National Wealth Fund’ (£7.3B over five years providing two pounds of public funding for three of private): £1.8B to upgrade posts and shopping centres, £1.5B for a gigafactory for cars, £2.5B for Shetland, £1B for carbon capture and £0.5B for Green Hydrogen. Corporation Tax will be capped at 25 percent, ‘the lowest in G7’. A takeover of Royal Mail would be ‘scrutinised’.

The SNP, which describes itself as a ‘moderate left of centre party’, limits its description of any broader economic/industrial strategy to a) stressing the economic damage done by Brexit and the need to restore EU membership and b) that the legislative response of Westminster to Brexit, notably the Internal Market Act, had undermined the Sewell principle and thereby further robbed Scotland of powers over industrial policy. The programme calls for the NHS to be kept in the public sector but does not mention the private sector based National Care Service.

DEMOCRACY

Labour

pledges itself to maintain, at least implicitly, existing neo-liberal levers by which economic power is exercised centrally by those representing big business: the ‘independence’ of the Bank of England to control key levers of credit, interest rates and thereby employment levels. Linked to this the parallel independent role of the Office of Budget Responsibility is confirmed as controller of detailed government spending.

In terms of the structures of government Labour postpones any significant reform. Within its current five year term the House of Lords will be retained although hereditary peers will be removed and compulsory retirement at 80 introduced. The programme does, however, make a commitment to a future, next term, replacement of the House of Lords by a second chamber representative of regions and nations. Meantime consultation will take place on how far such structures can best serve the British public.

In terms of local/regional government Labour commits itself to carry forward existing structures of Mayoral and Combined Authorities though committing itself to ‘deepening’ them. However, it makes no reference to their current remits being determined in detail by the Home Office and their limited responsibility to any electorate. There is no reference to restoring any form of fiscal/democratic integrity to local councils and councillors or to the powers required for ‘community wealth building’.

In terms of Scotland it calls for a ‘strengthening’ of the Sewell convention and a ‘new memorandum of understanding’. Control of ‘structural funds will be restored to Scotland, Wales and NI – plus ‘additional funding’. There will be a new Council of Nations and Regions composed of First Ministers and Mayors of Combined Authorities.

The SNP

The SNP gives central place long-term to independence and to rejoining the EU as resolving the country’s economic and social problems [although it provides no figures on the consequences of the EU’s fiscal rules or the impact of independence on Scotland’s budget].

In terms of immediate demands it calls for the devolution of employment rights and the minimum wage and the introduction of a single status of ‘worker’. Under ‘democracy’ the Manifesto calls for votes at 16, scrapping voter ID, protecting existing LGBTI rights and giving asylum seekers the right to work and decent accommodation.

It cites the freezing of council tax as easing poverty but makes no reference to the consequent cuts in services. On local government more generally it is largely silent. It does stress the SNP’s actions to create a more progressive taxation system, and the need for a more equitable distribution of income at British level, but nothing on any reform of local/council tax structures or the Scottish government’s ability to restructure local government boundaries to create socially more balanced tax bases. Nor is there any reference to Scottish government plans for centralising social care (in partnership with the private sector) or the centralisation of other essential services (police and Fire and Rescue) with significantly reduced budgets.