

# ***Labour activists - for the many, not the few***

**A Campaign for Labour Party Democracy briefing  
How Labour Party activists can organise in their  
CLP in pursuit of a radical agenda**



## Take Back Control!

### Introduction: the conditions that produced the Corbyn surge have not fundamentally changed

*By Mike Phipps, Brent Central CLP*

These are hard times for grassroots activists in the Labour Party – the lack of action on the Forde Report, the suspension and expulsion of long-standing Party activists, the removal from parliamentary selection lists of strong candidates who have already proved their worth as local councillors and the overturning of rules that give the grassroots more of a say over Party matters – including, crucially, selections.

But there are positives – the election of a sizeable cohort of socialist councillors last May, the development of new strategies for local government, the success in getting popular policies, for example on the environment, passed at Party Conference and the influx of new members in recent months.

For activists who do not hold public office, there are still many spaces in which to organise: some of the mutual aid groups that sprang up during the pandemic are now reconstituting as social aid groups. The rising cost of living crisis and the growing fightback against it present opportunities for those who want to do politics differently. With picket lines springing up across a range of workplaces, it has rarely been easier to forge links between local unions and CLPs.

For those focused on activity inside the Party, there is a huge job to be done in organising programmes of education for new members, including on how the Party works and how it can be changed it from within. Further opportunities are provided by Labour Students and Young Labour which are firmly in the hands of the grassroots.

Officerships in CLPs, such Trade Union Liaison, Political Education, LGBTQ+, Youth and Women's posts, create a degree of political space to organise radical activities. Members should take the approach that they can proceed until stopped, rather than assuming they can't do anything.

Some of this may look a bit business-as-usual compared to the exciting opportunities that opened up in the Corbyn years. But it's important to recognise that the conditions that produced the Corbyn surge have not fundamentally changed: if anything, they have intensified. The present hard times will pass.

## Politics as Pleasure

*By Mark Perryman, Political Education Officer, Lewes CLP*

I'm the 'political education officer' of Lewes Constituency Labour Party.

In a broad social-democratic party, and in Labour's case where different 'wings' of the Party have an inbuilt unwillingness to listen and learn from one another, I see my role as precisely to provide, nurture and develop a listening-to-each-other space. A space that is almost entirely absent in this most conservative of organisational cultures.

This was the starting point of the Lewes Labour festival of ideas events which began in 2018. 'Building Blocs: A day of ideas to dismantle the Blue Wall' was our latest. It was modelled on a literary festival style, showcasing thinking and debate, to enable us all to learn through difference and dialogue.

It was organised by, and accountable to, the local Labour Party, Lewes, yet was also open to members of other opposition parties, or none. How did we do? Our participants' survey suggests pretty well. 90% of respondents judged the day "great value for money". 88% considered the content "brilliant".

The core of all this is politics as pleasure. If it is simply a 'duty', politics becomes for the few, not the many. And this is just part of this project. We run a November 'ideas festival' and in July a 'day of participative discussion' using small groups and much increased participation to foster learning together around a single theme. We are looking at other formats to develop too.

## **An antidote to despair and despondency**

*By Carmen Williams, Mid-Bedfordshire CLP Women's Officer*

At a time when we are witnessing a ruthless attack by the Party leadership against the socialist principles that have always been at the core of Labour, it is understandably difficult for thousands of members to remain motivated to stay and remain active.

Years ago, I resigned from the Party as the then leader Kinnock accelerated his own crusade against the left, reformed the Party's policies and eased the way for Blair's New Labour, in his (failed) attempt to gain power.

This time around, however, I am determined to stay and do whatever I can to contribute to the fight for socialist values and policies from within the Party. I have found my role as CLP Women's Officer to be a good antidote to despair and despondency, a great springboard for opportunities to get actively involved on various fronts and an opportunity to maintain a left-leaning agenda not only in our Women's Group activities but also in full CLP meetings.

We have passed excellent motions in support of industrial disputes. Women members have played an important role organising trips to picket lines where our CLP banner has proudly supported local Royal Mail workers and RMT members on strike.

As Women's Officer I have organised informal get-togethers in the park every summer. The main focus of last summer was to organise support for one of our members, as she prepared to undertake a 79-mile circular walk to raise funds for Luton Food Bank and awareness about food poverty in Central Bedfordshire.

We make sure our Women's Group brings motions and nominations to the CLP to ensure we are actively involved in the Annual Women's Conference. In recent years we tabled successful motions on women and Covid, Palestinian women, and the UCU dispute on pay and working conditions.

I was very pleased to work with sisters in the unions and other CLPs to put together composites, and then speak on motions that went on to become the policy of Labour's women's organisation. I also consider an important part of my WO role to support the National Women's Committee, their drive to facilitate the creation of Women's Branches and their efforts to regain the stand-alone National Women's Conference that women Party members need.

## **The CLP should become the first port of call for solidarity**

*By George Binette, Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP Trade Union Liaison Officer, in a personal capacity*

In theory, a CLP's trade union liaison officer (TULO) has the potential to help bridge the historic divide between the labour movement's industrial and political wings. In practice, TULO elections are all too often an afterthought.

But the dramatic upsurge in strikes, often involving members of Labour-affiliated unions, highlights the role's importance, especially when Labour's leadership distances itself from industrial action with Keir Starmer's edict to his front bench to steer clear of picket lines.

I first won election in 2017 as Hackney North & Stoke Newington's TULO, standing on a platform that declared the CLP should become "the first port of call for solidarity with workers in struggle". Since then, we have revitalised relationships with unions, regardless of affiliation status.

In 2019 the CLP organised fundraising and picket line visits to support striking PCS members employed on outsourced contracts at the Department of Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, making a small contribution to their eventual victory. After the 2019 election defeat, the CLP campaigned to bring ancillary staff at Homerton hospital back into NHS employment.

There are regular union updates in the CLP's monthly e-newsletter and since October I've introduced a weekly email to dozens of members, highlighting upcoming strikes and ballots. In addition, the Hackney Gazette now carries a monthly column from me as TULO.

Our CLP banner regularly features on picket lines and union-initiated rallies. RMT and UNISON speakers have addressed local branch meetings. We've forged strong links with CWU members at the Royal Mail delivery office in Stoke Newington. An early December benefit gig, organised by Hackney North CLP, attracted well over 100 people and raised more than £1,350 for the CWU hardship fund. In addition to Diane Abbott, the borough's directly elected mayor and several councillors have visited the picket line.

Of course, having a supportive majority on the CLP's executive and Diane Abbott as MP have helped, but our experience has highlighted what can still be achieved despite the Party's current internal regime.

## **The Work of a Disability Officer**

*By Barry Rodin, Disability Officer, Orpington CLP*

My key objectives are to encourage greater engagement among disabled members in the Labour Party. Moreover, meetings and events need to be accessible to them.

It's important to ensure that all officers and members are aware of the 2010 Equality Act and comply with its objectives. An active and supportive disabled members forum is helpful in encouraging people to share their experiences and frustrations. This is particularly relevant for members with hidden disabilities. In Orpington we organise bi-monthly informal social meetings for disabled members.

I am a member of Disability Labour and CLP delegate to the local Unite Community branch, enabling collaboration in campaigns such as the fight against local health and care services cuts and their impact on disabled people.

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) has provides a means to promote policies to support disabled people, circulating motions to CLPs on greater protection for disabled people from Covid-19, better support for unpaid carers and improvements to the ways claims for disability benefits are assessed.