



## **Democracy Review: Ideas from Grassroots Activists**

Party reform can appear daunting. However, Labour Party and Momentum activists and members have already been engaged in processes of generating ideas and proposals to rebalance the party in favour of the members for a number of years. This document covers a number of proposals, many of which have been submitted to party Conference, and can be used as the basis for debate and discussion amongst Momentum Groups, the Members' Council, the NCG, and individual members using the digital democracy platform to decide what Momentum's contributions to the Democracy Review should be.

**Track 1 Submissions (Bame Labour, Young Labour, Women's Conference, deadline 12th January 2018. Please note that because of the early deadline, submissions into the digital democracy platform will not inform Momentum's position on these themes, but party members and CLPs can still make submissions directly into the Review).**

### **The Role of Bame Labour**

Bame Labour has failed to adequately represent Bame parties members or fully harness their full potential in recent years. At present BAME party members do not automatically become members of BAME Labour, despite it being funded, resourced and run by the Labour Party. As a result, Bame Labour only has 731 members, even though it was supposed to have 2,500 in order to gain a seat on the NEC in the first place. The signup process is complicated, drawn out, and a number of Bame activists have expressed grave concerns about the inability of the institution to represent members

effectively. Submissions on Bame Labour might consider the following proposals to strengthen BAME organising in the party:

- a) Making all self-defining BAME members of the party automatically members of BAME Labour could allow for increased participation in the party by some of the most marginal and dispossessed communities in Britain.
- b) There is currently no constitutional requirement for the Labour Party to organise into Bame Forums, so requiring CLPs to organise BAME forums could strengthen Bame organising.

### **The Role of Young Labour**

Despite having more members than the Conservative Party, Young Labour only has one member of staff working for it on a part-time basis and no significant budget, limiting both its potential for growth and ability to reach out into working class communities to draw in the next generation of party activists and leaders. Submissions for Young Labour should focus on increasing the autonomy, financial sustainability, and infrastructure of Young Labour so that it can support younger members and supporters of the Labour Party to become committed grassroots activists. Activists might consider the following:

- a) At this year's Conference, Blackpool North and Cleveleys remitted a rule change for Young Labour to have its own Constitution and standing orders. Establishing the autonomy of Young Labour, with its own constitution and standing order, is a key prerequisite for any successful building up of youth politics in Labour;
- b) As with Bame forums, there is currently no constitutional requirement for the Labour Party to organise into youth forums. Again, requiring CLPs to organise youth forums could strengthen the organising of young members.

### **The Role of Labour Party Women's Conference**

This year, Women's Conference was returned policymaking powers for the first time in a number of years. However, Women's Conference still lacks adequate power to represent the demands of women in the Labour Party, and lacks clear procedures which would allow it to feed into Annual Conference. In Brighton, Teresa Clark and Jean Crocker were both

elected onto the Women's Conference Arrangements Committee on a mandate to ensure that Women's Conference becomes a meaningful forum for the development of policy and party activity by women delegates. This could be advanced through the following proposals:

- a) A clear process for CLPs to elect delegates to Women's Conference which is effectively communicated to all CLP Secretaries.
- b) If Women's Conference was a standalone Conference, potentially hosted in the spring, it would be far easier for it to feed into Annual Conference in a meaningful way.
- c) CLPs could be explicitly entitled to a minimum number of delegates to Women's Conference.

**Track 2 Submissions (Strengthening the involvement and participation of members, the governance of CLPs, the role of socialist societies, improving diversity and gender representation, recruiting members and harnessing the potential of social media, deadline 23rd March 2018)**

*Strengthening the involvement and participation of members*

Strengthening the involvement and participation of members in constituency parties requires having effective opportunities for party members to engage meaningfully, as well as accountability between members, elected representatives, and the party staff. In the last year, grassroots activists have passed the following rule changes through their CLPs, all of which seek to strengthen the involvement and participation of members.

- a) In 2011, Hyndburn CLP submitted a rule change calling for a Charter of Members' Rights clearly outlining the rights of members, as well as establishing an Ombudsman to whom members could make representations. A Charter of Members' Rights could be used to clarify and safeguard clear rights of members, including the right to determine the donations of the party, the right to participate fully in the selection of council and Parliamentary candidates on an equal opportunities basis, the right to transparency in policymaking processes, and the right not to be unfairly disciplined or expelled.

- b) This year, Worthing West, Brighton Hove, and Bristol West passed a rule change to allow other candidates to collect nominations as well as sitting candidates in Labour seats, thereby increasing accountability between members and local MPs.
- c) Strengthening the participation of members also requires positive, productive relationships with the party staff. This year, six CLPs passed a rule change to ensure that the General Secretary would be elected in an Omov ballot, in order to increase accountability between the party membership and the staff.
- d) Although there was a major expansion in the number of delegates at last year's Conference, a lot of CLPs still did not send any at all. The party currently has a Democracy Fund to guarantee that even the poorest CLPs are able to send at least one delegate, but there are clearly problems in its visibility and implementation, and members from those CLPs might want to think about ways the party can ensure that all members are represented at Conference.

**Track 3 (The method of electing the party leader, the composition of the NEC, regional structures, freeze dates, the policy process including CLP motions, local government, local and national links with trade unions, deadline June 29th)**

**Electing the party leader**

*Nominations thresholds*

Currently, candidates for leadership elections need to get nominations from 10% of the Parliamentary Labour Party in order to get on the ballot when there is a vacancy, and 20% when there is not. In the recent past, grassroots activists in CLPs have made the following proposals:

- a) In 2016, five CLPs submitted a rule change to reduce the threshold to 5%, and they later agreed to remit their proposal on the basis that it would be genuinely considered in the Democracy Review. A further three CLPs submitted the same rule change in 2017.
- b) This year, 20 CLPs submitted a rule change to extend nominations beyond MPs to CLPs and affiliated organisations, so that candidates could get onto the ballot by reaching the threshold in either of the three sections;

## *Registered Supporters*

Since the Collins Review, registered supporters have been able to vote in Labour Party leadership elections. The 2015 and 2016 elections saw large numbers of people signing up as registered supporters to vote, many of whom subsequently became party members. The concept of registered supporters has been criticised by some on the basis that it undermines the basis of membership, although it is also clear that many current members first got involved in the Labour Party by becoming registered supporters. Options for registered supporters might include the following:

- a) Maintaining the status of registered supporters who are able to vote in leadership elections at an affordable cost.
- b) Abolishing the status of registered supporters but with late freeze dates before leadership elections, thus allowing potential members to join the party and participate in key elections, and driving the party membership up even more;

## **The composition of the NEC**

Currently, the National Executive Committee is due to have nine places which are directly elected by the membership out of thirty nine NEC seats. While this is an improvement on the six places that were previously available, less than a quarter of seats being elected by the members is inadequate for a party with the largest membership in Western Europe. In addition, Bame people are only represented on the NEC by BAME Labour, which is an inadequate institution for representation. Meanwhile, it remains important to retain the representation of the trade union movement, as well as ensuring gender balance on the NEC. Options advanced by CLPs in recent history include the following:

- a) Increasing the numbers of places for CLP representatives. This year, 13 CLPs submitted rule changes to increase the number of members' places on the NEC beyond the 9 places currently available.
- b) BAME representatives could be elected by One Member One Vote (OMOV) rather than through BAME Labour. This year, Battersea Labour Party, Tower Hamlets, and North Warwickshire and Bedworth all passed rule changes calling for Bame representatives to be elected by OMOV.

- c) The same principle could also be applied to representatives of Young Labour, who could be elected through an Omov ballot. This year, Aylesbury and Liverpool Walton CLPs submitted a rule change to do exactly that.
- d) The role of Bame and Young trade unionists could be enhanced by having Bame trade unionist and Young Labour trade unionist representation on the NEC. Tower Hamlets, North Warwickshire and Bedworth, Aylesbury and Liverpool Walton all passed rule changes to that effect this year;
- e) Members in Wales and Scotland may consider submitting proposals which ensure that the representatives of Scottish Labour and Welsh Labour are elected by members, either by One Member One Vote, or by delegates at the respective party conferences, rather than appointed by party leaders. This year, Carmarthen East and Dinefr, Ceredigion, and Swansea East all passed a rule change asking for these places to be elected at the Scottish and Welsh Conference, and Swansea West passed a rule change asking for the Welsh representative to be elected via Omov.

### **3. The Policy Process including CLP motions (Conference)**

Currently, party policy is theoretically developed by the National Policy Forum (NPF). However, the NPF as currently constituted does not produce outputs that develop on party policy in a meaningful way. This was revealed at this year's Party Conference, when sections of the NPF were found to be so meaningless and out of step with the current orientation of the party that they were referred back (rejected) by delegates on three occasions. In addition, CLPs' input into policymaking at Conference is curtailed via a number of mechanisms, including restrictive criteria which limits what motions CLPs can submit, and the lack of standing orders for Conference covering key areas. Some suggested options to improve policymaking and the running of Conference are as follows:

#### *National Policy Forum*

- a) One way to increase the representativeness of the NEC is to support CLP delegates to the NPF so that they are able to travel to CLPs and ensure that they are able to represent members adequately;
- b) Online consultation systems could be strengthened to allow members to feed into their CLP representatives on the NPF.

- c) The NEC could be returned direct powers to oversee policy making (as they did prior to 1997), which would increase democratic accountability provided members are adequately represented on the NEC.
- d) Meanwhile, other party members and activists have advocated abolishing the NPF altogether, and returning policy-making powers to the NEC and Conference.

### *Conference*

- a) At this year's Conference, Filton and Bradley Stoke and Newport West CLPs moved and then remitted a rule change to ensure that constitutional amendments from CLPs get debated in the same year that they are submitted, rather than having to wait until the following year's Conference before they are debated as is currently the case.
- b) At this year's Conference, Brighton Pavilion moved a rule change to remove the criteria for motions submitted by CLPs to be 'contemporary', and to allow CLPs to submit motions on campaigning and organisational issues. The rule change got 64% of the vote from the members' section.
- c) In 2016, Blackley and Broughton and Exeter CLPs submitted rule changes that would have allowed CLPs to submit both a rule change and a motion, rather than one or the other as is currently the case;
- e) This year, Islington North and South Derbyshire CLPs submitted a rule change calling for Standing Orders for Party Conference, outlining procedures for the Conference timetable, procedure in debate, motions, composite motions, emergency motions, withdrawal and remittance of motions, reference back, point of order, chair's ruling, suspension of Standing Orders, voting, including full procedures for card votes, ending debate and the role of the CAC. Establishing standing orders could massively increase the consistency with which rules and conventions are applied at Conference, making it fairer for all concerned.
- f) In a survey Momentum conducted of delegates after Conference, a significant proportion of respondents identified the way in which speakers are called at Conference as a key flaw in the way Party Conference is run, and many advocated the implementation of an automated system to select delegates randomly to speak at Conference in order to guarantee fairness in who gets called to speak, as well as an electronic voting system at Conference to avoid deliberations over card votes and hand votes. Both of these measures could make Conference fairer and more inclusive for delegates.

- g) In the past, Conference lasted longer than it did now, and was reduced to 4 days in 1997. Given that the party membership has expanded massively, and with it the delegations to Conference, there could be an argument for expanding the duration of Conference to allow more people to contribute.
- h) Many democracy campaigners in the past have come up against the three year rule, which has often been interpreted in ways which prevent legitimate debate. In 1979, the NEC temporarily waived and then abolished the three year rule in order to allow members to bring about substantial changes to the party. Given the massive transformations that will be necessary to equip the Labour Party to face the challenges of the 21st Century, party members may feel that the three year rule is an anachronism and should be abolished to allow for sustained changes to the Labour Party.

### **Developing the accountability of Labour local authority representatives**

Local Government faces massive challenges, including massive government cuts, a housing crisis, and chronic underfunding for key areas such as education and social care. Addressing these challenges requires the involvement of larger party circles, but local authorities are often dominated by small numbers of people who exercise large amounts of control over Groups, Cabinets, individual councillors, candidate panels and selection processes.

- a) At this year's Conference, Leyton and Wanstead and Enfield North CLPs both remitted a rule change to replace Local Campaign Forums with more representative Local Government Committees.
- b) The election of council leaders and deputy council leaders could be democratised, either through Omov, with TU branches and party units, or alternatively through GC meetings or All Member Meetings.