

CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

CLPD newsletter for CLPs and Labour Party Members
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THE WAY FORWARD FOR LABOUR WHAT'S LEFT FOR THE LEFT?

By Kelvin Hopkins MP

Democracy is about more than voting — not an original idea — but genuine democracy is about political power and where it lies. The right wing, across the world and not simply in the Labour Party, wants always to keep power in the hands of the moneyed, bureaucratic and military elites, with leaders, and to manipulate democratic forms and processes to that end. Labour's left and CLPD in particular has fought to democratise power so that voters, working people and their representatives at the grassroots have real power over leaders and not the other way round.

New Labour has centralised power to an astonishing degree, especially in government. Annual Conference has been rendered almost toothless, constituency parties have seen their power drained away and trade union influence in the Party has diminished. In government, the Cabinet has become a cipher, and Parliament increasingly marginalised. It is no surprise that Blair was so committed to the EU, an organisation run by a bureaucratic elite. Blair and his henchman Mandelson worked determinedly to transform Labour into a reflection of US political parties with almost no internal democratic politics and dependent for funding upon the corporate world. Harriet Harman said on her election as Deputy Leader that the Labour Party must not simply be a fan club for its leader — which is precisely what the Blairite wing of New Labour wanted.

CLPD has worked tirelessly for three decades to defend Labour's internal democracy. With the support of many Party members and trade unionists it has indeed kept alive the flame of democratic socialism during the darkest of times. Against us, New Labour has had the advantage of almost

total support in the media, from the tabloids to the broadsheets.

Vigorous debate on policy inside the Party and democratic votes at all levels have been opposed by New Labour as 'divisive'. New Labour alleged that policy decisions used to be taken secretly in smoke-filled rooms when in reality it was Conference which had ultimate power within the Party. That is why it was so important and interesting to the wider electorate as well as to Party members. The New Labour transformation of the Party meant that the real decisions on policy have been made more recently in one smoke-free room in Downing Street.

There is more than a hint of democratic centralism about New Labour, a democratic centralism which has promoted neo-liberalism and global capitalism rather than socialism. By contrast real power within the Labour Party used to be held by the membership, and especially the active membership, which is why its grassroots politics was so vibrant. Being elected to one's CLP General Committee, participating in democratic debate at constituency level, often vigorously fought elections each year to become one's Party delegate to Conference and the intense politics at Party Conference itself all were a demonstration that power within Labour was genuinely democratic and diffused.

Labour leaders have often found all this uncomfortable, but democratic constraints on leaders were not intended to be comfortable. The leadership's job was to represent a mass movement with a coherent philosophy for government, a philosophy designed to secure the interests of the mass of working people both at home and in the wider world. Labour's idealism has inspired millions over generations and it is this together with real grass roots power

(continued on p2)

Annual Conference Alert!

CLPD calls on CLPs and unions to extend conference democracy and sovereignty

In early July Gordon Brown issued a consultation document to CLPs and unions seeking their responses to a range of proposals for improving 'Partnership in Power' (PiP), policy making arrangements that have been in operation since 1997 Conference (closing date for responses to the consultation — 14 September). Entitled 'Extending and renewing party democracy', these latest proposals are, in part, a recognition by the new party leadership that PiP is facing a crisis of credibility. Most active members have a perception that the devolving of almost all responsibility for policy making to the National Policy Forum (NPF) has been used as a means of denying them a say over contentious policy issues. Before 1997 CLPs and affiliates could send policy resolutions to the NEC at any time and the Annual Conference agenda was almost wholly made up of motions and amendments from CLPs and unions. Many CLPs, unions, MPs and even several cabinet ministers have increasingly voiced their concerns at a situation that has generated increased alienation amongst the active membership. Unfortunately,

(continued on p2)

PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO OTHER COMRADES TO ENSURE A WIDE CIRCULATION.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR LABOUR WHAT'S LEFT FOR THE LEFT?

(continued from p1)

which has made Labour Party membership and activism meaningful for hundreds of thousands of members over a century and more of the Party's existence.

The centralisation of power within the Party has seen a mass haemorrhaging of members and the hollowing out of the Party's internal political activity. To see oceans of empty chairs at Conference, with visitors invited down from the gallery to fill up the gaps and listen to boring speeches prepared by Party apparatchiks (and delivered by carefully selected New Labour delegates being groomed for slotting into safe Labour parliamentary seats) illustrates the utter contempt with which the New Labour leadership regards the Party and its grassroots membership.

But despite the constant arm-twisting and control-freakery of New Labour, CLPD and the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance has had its successes, electing members to the National Executive Committee and helping to secure victories in votes at Conference.

The recent Deputy Leadership election suggests that New Labour is beginning to lose its iron grip. Blair had become so unpopular it was clear Labour could not win another election with him as leader. But New Labour control of Parliamentary selection processes since before 1997 has meant that the left in Parliament was not able to secure the required 45 MP nominations for John McDonnell to stand as an alternative candidate to Gordon Brown. However, the Deputy Leadership contest saw left candidate Jon Cruddas secure the most first preferences in the ballot and New Labour's über-Blairite, Hazel Blears, bottom of the poll and the first of the six candidates to be eliminated. With the support of women and left votes, Harriet Harman beat off the right-wing challenge of Alan Johnson and secured much support with her criticisms of the Iraq war and academics, and her opposition to Trident renewal.

It must be hoped that many disillusioned socialists will now rejoin the Party and help rebuild it on a democratic socialist basis. But re-recruiting disillusioned socialists back into the fold is only a first step. We have to continue to struggle at every level to reconstruct Labour's internal democracy. Democracy has to be layered to be meaningful and effective and real democratic structures, delegate structures, between the leadership and the mass membership are essential.

New Labour established Policy Forums to deflect the Party's policy focus away from Conference and hand effective power over

policy to the leadership. At the local level, the Policy Forum process has effectively died. When it functioned at all, it was a travesty of what democracy should be. Local Policy Forums were organised occasionally and erratically by Party officials who chose the subjects for debate, appointed Chairs and kept control.

CLPD has much still to do if the Party is to be revived and built once again into an effective force for democratic socialism. For my part, I would simply recreate Conference as a policy making body in its previous format. Policy forums might continue as weekend discussion groups, but the pretence that they make policy should be abandoned as the charades they are.

We have to recognise too that some of the changes made in the Party's rules have had unforeseen consequences. Robin Cook, before he so tragically died, pointed out that the election of the leader by electoral college and not just the PLP, now means that Party leaders do not have to include in their cabinets a broad range of opinion across the PLP. If today we had a government which included for example John McDonnell as well as Alan Johnson, and Diane Abbott as well as Tessa Jowell, it would be a quite different and much healthier democracy, not just inside the Party but in the country too. We would not be governed simply by a right wing neo-liberal fragment of the political spectrum but a genuinely representative group of politicians. The Party leader's approach would have to be collegiate and government policies would have to be fully debated at Cabinet to achieve a genuine consensus, not handed down spontaneously and arbitrarily by the unchallenged leader.

Re-democratising the Labour Party will also mean that it will in future be quite distinct from the Tories and Liberal Democrats, at the leadership level as well as the grassroots. Voters will then have a genuine choice of markedly different policy manifestos at election time. Academic research shows that low election turnouts and declining interest in national politics correlates most strongly with the diminishing differences between the party leaderships. Democracy without choice is a turn off for voters and no democracy at all. CLPD's role is now more vital than ever and the struggle for Party democracy must continue.

**KELVIN HOPKINS MP IS
A MEMBER OF CLPD AND
IS OUR PARLIAMENTARY
LIAISON OFFICER**

Annual Conference Alert

(continued from p1)

these concerns were largely ignored by the ancien régime.

In the July document, the new leadership accepts that PiP must be radically improved when it states — 'members want to be more involved in discussing long-term policy challenges, and to see the results of that involvement better reflected in policy outcomes ... There is still a feeling among some members that submissions just disappear into a 'black hole' and that the policy commissions do not provide enough feedback'. In the document there are some useful proposals for strengthening the NPF process — for example a regular work plan and meeting schedule; an open and constant dialogue with ministers and greater feedback to party members; decisions of Annual Conference would be automatically integrated into the NPF's work programme. This is a step forward.

Unfortunately, there is one proposal, not yet fully spelt out, which threatens to undermine and downgrade Annual Conference even further. This is the suggestion that existing Contemporary Issue Motions (CIMs) be replaced by vague and nebulous 'contemporary issues'. The current limited right of conference to debate and vote on policy proposals should not be further cut.

One of the motivations of the Blair leadership for introducing PiP in 1997 was to remove CLP and union motions from Annual Conference altogether, so Conference would become completely toothless and could never make a decision at odds with the Parliamentary leadership. But, due to intense pressure from unions and CLPs, a last minute and very limited concession was made that allowed CIMs to be submitted, and from them four subjects to be chosen for debate by a Priorities Ballot. Later, pressure from CLPs and unions eventually gained a further concession, namely that there would be four subjects chosen by the unions and four by CLPs. Unfortunately this fair and reasonable arrangement has not yet been allowed to function as was intended.

Once Conference began to carry government unfriendly motions (such as restoring the earnings link to pensions, opposition to NHS privatisation and support for Gate Gourmet workers) concerted efforts were made to rule out CIMs (in 2006 more were ruled

(continued on p5)

NEWS FROM THE NEC

A report of the July NEC by Peter Willsman, CLP representative on the NEC for the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance. A full version of this report is available on the CLPD website.

Gordon Brown's First NEC as Leader

Gordon Brown stressed the importance of rebuilding the Party and regaining lapsed members. In relation to getting more people involved, he said we can learn lessons from groups like Make Poverty History. He said a key job of every minister was to engage with the Party and keep members fully informed. In response to questions, the new leader made commitments concerning new powers for local government, top priority to affordable housing, greater efforts to end the two-tier workforce in the public sector and address the exploitation of workers in the private sector, including the plight of the vulnerable migrant workers. As to equal pay and women's rights, he promised that our new Deputy-Leader, Harriet Harman, would make a statement in Parliament that afternoon. He also stated that a much greater effort must be made on adult learning and that TU expertise could be enlisted here. He emphasised that the central focus of our government must always be the concerns of working people and their families. On private equity there is a review in progress. He undertook also

to get the troops out of Iraq, but said there cannot be an 'artificial timetable'. He made a commitment to working with the Unions and batted away a number of objections to Digby Jones; broadening the government's base is for him a sign of our strength, but he admitted that some of the newcomers may say things that are 'out of order'. Finally he stressed the importance of giving CLPs, unions and members a greater involvement in policy making and emphasised that this was the aim of his consultation document 'Extending and Renewing Party Democracy'. The document has been rushed because Brown wants more involvement for Warwick II, which is next July.

'Extending and renewing party democracy'

The NEC had its first discussion of the document. It was emphasised by several speakers that the outcome of this must be an improvement in the Partnership in Power arrangements and an opportunity, via Annual Conference, for a greater input into Party policy making by CLPs and unions. The closing date for responses to the consultation is September 14th. A final document will then be drawn up, together with any relevant rule change proposals, and these will be presented to Conference in Bournemouth for discussion and voting.

Annual Conference Major Change

This year there will be a change from previous years: the Leader's speech will be on Monday afternoon and not Tuesday. Late on Tuesday afternoon the important rule changes from CLPs will be tabled. Delegates must make sure they remain in their seats to vote on these rule amendments.

The benighted Policy Seminars are likely to be first thing on Tuesday morning and last thing on Monday and Wednesday afternoons.

Voting for the CAC could be Monday but more likely Tuesday. Voting for the NPF could be Tuesday but more likely Wednesday.

The six NPF documents will be presented to Conference as will the six Policy Commission Reports.

RED ALERT! KEY RULE CHANGES IN BOURNEMOUTH FROM CLPs

SUPPORT: HALIFAX, HAZEL GROVE, AND MONTGOMERYSHIRE ON CAC INDEPENDENCE

This rule change would debar ministers and shadow cabinet members from serving on the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC). The CAC must always be totally independent and is accountable to Conference for its decisions. Minister and Shadow Cabinet members are accountable to the Prime Minister or Party Leader and are thus placed in an invidious position when ruling on submissions that disagree with the government's/Shadow Cabinet's position. It is unrealistic to expect that they will be totally independent in such circumstances.

SUPPORT: BETHNAL GREEN AND BOW ON INCREASING CLP DELEGATES TO CONFERENCE

This rule change would reduce the requirement a CLP must meet in order to send an additional woman delegate to Annual Conference or an additional youth delegate (down from 400 women in membership to 100 women in membership, and down from 100 young people in membership to 30). Since 1997 Party membership has more than halved. To demand that a CLP must have 400 women members before it can have an additional woman delegate, or 100 youth before it can have an additional youth delegate, means in practice that there will be few, if any, extra women or extra youth delegates. The purpose of the original rule was to give more opportunities to women and youth. This rule is now effectively inoperative.

If a CLP could send an additional female delegate, the ordinary delegate could then be a male and there would be no need for the ordinary delegate to alternate between male and female.

NB: These rule changes will be timetabled for late Tuesday afternoon. Delegates must make sure they are in the hall to vote.

Examining that 2007 Deputy Leadership Turnout

SECTION 1
TURNOUT

MPs /MEPs
99%

SECTION 2
TURNOUT

CLPs
53%

SECTION 3
TURNOUT

AFFIL ORGS
8%

(some 3.4 million ballot papers issued)

CLPD Assistant Secretary Barry Gray analyses the political significance of the Deputy Leadership vote on the CLPD website

VOICE FROM THE PAST:

'Unacceptably expensive, economically wasteful, militarily unsound.'
— Gordon Brown on Trident 25 years ago

DEVOLVED VOICES

(full reports available on CLPD website)

THE SITUATION IN SCOTLAND

Election night in Scotland on 3rd May 2007 seems a long time ago. Problems with the electronic counting system and with the excessively high number of spoiled ballot papers meant that it was well into the next day before the results were clear.

In the Scottish Parliament the SNP secured 47 seats (32.9% of votes cast), and Labour 46 (32.2% of votes cast). This placed Alex Salmond in the leadership of Scotland's first minority administration, and Labour moved into opposition. The Conservatives secured 17 seats and Liberal Democrats 16. The contest between the SNP and Labour squeezed the vote for the smaller parties in the Additional Member list vote, and the Green Party saw their representation fall from 7 seats (2003) to 2. No candidates from the far left were successful.

Whilst the Green Party signed up to some agreements with the SNP, the Liberal Democrats kept their distance from a coalition, no doubt with an eye on the next Westminster elections where their own vote will need to be distinct.

The SNP minority administration has been quick to find its feet, although so

far no budgets or financial priorities have been addressed, and Scottish Labour is adjusting to being in opposition. The policies on which the SNP Ministers have made announcements have been difficult to argue against, touching on issues which are popular with the electorate, such as establishing pilot schemes to extend school meal provisions for primary children, doubling the numbers of school nurses, removing Forth Road bridge tolls, opposing new nuclear power station developments in Scotland, and reversing some controversial hospital closure decisions taken under the previous administration.

There is no doubt that the consequences of the decision to go into Iraq in 2003 continued to be an electoral issue. Likewise the replacement of the Trident nuclear missile system remains unpopular in Scotland, reflected in March 2007 by the vote against its replacement by a majority of Scotland's MPs at Westminster, including a number of Labour MP backbenchers. Despite the Scottish Parliament having no direct responsibility on defence or international policy, there has been popular appeal in the SNP's statements of opposition on both these matters.

Voices within the Scottish Labour Party and the trade union movement have been

arguing on all these policies, both domestic and international, over the years, and the cautious stand taken by the Scottish Party and the Parliamentary Labour Group arguably weakened Labour's 2007 election campaign.

There is no evidence of majority support in Scotland for independence, a fact recognised by Alex Salmond and the SNP, and their election campaign allowed for an anti-Labour vote, or a vote for change, without committing to anything other than wider discussion on the constitution and moving towards a referendum on independence. In that context, a White Paper is likely to be published shortly.

Still adjusting to its first electoral defeat in 50 years, Scottish Labour now has to find a way of defining its political differences on wealth redistribution, on social policy, and on constitutional reform. How best to build Labour's profile in this new political landscape in Scotland is up for discussion, and it is too soon to say how it will evolve. However, the involvement of local Party members, and Party and trade union activists will be crucial, and building confidence in our own Party structures needs to be part of that process, as will the leadership election.

Ann Henderson is CLPD organiser for Scotland

THE SITUATION IN WALES

Welsh Labour's historic compromise

The appointment of Ieuan Wyn Jones, the leader of Plaid Cymru on 11 July as Deputy First Minister of the Welsh Senydd (Assembly) sealed a new era in Welsh politics. Here was the Labour Party forming a 'Red-Green' coalition government with its old adversary Plaid Cymru. This historic compromise came after eight weeks of machinations, uncertainties and incriminations. Electoral arithmetic dictated that the minority Labour government led by Rhodri Morgan would not have continued for long. After the May 3rd elections Labour emerged as the single largest party with 26 seats out of the 60 seat Assembly. Plaid had 15, the Tories 12, the Lib. Dems 6 and Independent 1. With 31% of the total vote this was Labour's worst election result in the principality for almost 80 years, its worst from the time it ended Liberal domination of Welsh politics, incidentally about the same year Plaid was founded.

By a margin of almost 4 to 1 Labour voted at a special party conference in Cardiff on 11 July to back the deal with Plaid to create the coalition

government. The unions and affiliates voted 19 to 1 in favour; the constituencies, county parties and other groups, where the greatest threat to the deal was anticipated, supported it by a 2 to 1 margin. Welsh parliamentarians, led by Lord (sic) Kinnock were especially hostile to the deal. Peter Hain has stated recently that PM Gordon Brown was opposed to a deal. The following day Plaid voted by an even bigger majority (92%) in favour. Three Plaid Assembly Members join the Coalition Cabinet holding the education and transport, rural affairs, and heritage portfolios, the latter including Welsh language.

In May it seemed probable that a three party 'rainbow coalition' of Plaid Cymru, Liberal Democrats and the Tories was poised to take power with Plaid's leader Ieuan Wyn Jones as First Minister. In the context of Welsh politics this would have been cataclysmic. The Tories, who have never in living memory won a majority of the popular vote in Wales and after being wiped off the map in 1997, would be in government with their hands on our public services. This proved too much for some in Plaid and four assembly members plainly stated their opposition to a deal with the Tories. Voices on the left of Plaid began to talk of a deal with Labour. The penny

dropped that realistically only the combined votes of Labour and Plaid could muster the two-thirds majority needed in the Assembly to secure Plaid's number one objective: a referendum on securing primary powers for the Assembly, possibly creating a Scottish-style Parliament in Wales. The hapless Lib Dems, effectively sidelined, proved their impotence, veering position from one day to the next.

Senior Labour figures responded positively to Plaid overtures in favour of a 'red-green' alliance and talks were held culminating in the 'One Wales' coalition document containing many progressive elements that socialists must applaud (ending both the NHS internal market and the use of private hospitals by the NHS; no PFI schemes in the NHS; a more open approach to NHS reconfiguration with more public consultation; the power to scrap the right to buy council houses in areas of social housing shortage; giving councils the right to insist on 100% affordable housing units in development schemes; grants for first time buyers; radical class-size reductions for three to seven year olds).

Here is some 'clear red water' between the government in Wales and Westminster.

John Ivor Lewis is CLPD organiser for Wales

OF 'BORDERED' DEMOCRACY AND TRACES OF BLAIRISM IN CHINA

CLPD EXECUTIVE MEMBER BERNIE MOSS DESCRIBES A RECENT VISIT

In April Tom Davidson and myself visited China as guests of the Bureau of Translation and Compilation, the gatekeeper for scholarly institutes attached to the Central Committee of the party. Its main task is to edit the Chinese edition of the complete works of Marx, Engels and Lenin. For that task they were seeking contacts in the West, especially Britain and the US.

I was invited because I had written on Marx as an activist in connection with my history of French labour and could also speak on the British Labour Party. I prepared for the trip with the help of a news service that provides dispatches from within and outside of China. Tom and I lectured to the bureau and to universities in Beijing and Shanghai, then took a two-week tour along a typical tourist route adding Mao's birthplace and a few factories.

Like most visitors we were astounded by the material wealth and sophistication, well-designed and built roads, factories, office buildings, and housing and well-dressed people who appeared even to my sceptic partner energetic and cheerful.

There was one big surprise, for which the Western press had not prepared us, which was the degree of free and critical discussion everywhere — in the universities, the official media and on the streets. This freedom is actually encouraged by the regime, which besides wanting to clean up its act for the Olympics is truly committed to the rule of law and a certain bordered democracy.

We spoke to students and professors in departments of Western Marxism studying everything from the New Left to Christianity. Some knew a lot about Blair and Western politics. We met some professors who were sympathetic and others hostile to the regime all with access to the most anti-Communist Western sources.

Official media were filled with criticism of government policies even in one instance with criticism of the principle of the one-party state. Millions have access to the Internet where critical discussion short of systemic and inflammatory attacks, which are censored, is encouraged. A new freedom of information act allows anybody to obtain official records

so long as it does not threaten 'state security'. People we met felt free to complain about local corruption and the cost of education and health, which is scandalous, and about the restriction on political pluralism though polls show very little concern about this and much more about health, education and welfare.

We knew that this freedom of expression was, along with the marketisation of the economy, one of the contradictions of the regime, which remains that of a dictatorship of workers and peasants, essentially a one-party state. Governmental elections are held at every level though rarely contested and never by anti-Communist candidates or parties.

The Communist Party itself is like the Labour Party of Tony Blair's dreams. The direction of party and government policy is decided at the very top by the party leader and political bureau. The job of the scholars and theorists we met is essentially to justify the current line. In the debate on my lecture, which was about Marx as activist, successively democratic socialist and Leninist during the early stages of capitalism, they argued that this was the immature Marx who soon discovered the need for economic and social development under capitalism, thus justifying the party's relative passivity toward the social contradictions in China and the capitalist world.

The party's 70 million members do not discuss and fix policy but explain and justify it to people in village, neighbourhood and enterprise committees. The leadership seeks to achieve a balance between economic efficiency understood mainly in market terms and equity, which currently means improving education and health for peasants and migrant workers.

This all sounds like Blairism except that the government is not controlled by capitalists and disposes of much greater actual and potential powers of market intervention — all property is theoretically socially owned — than any advanced welfare state. I could talk about many other contradictions in China but for the moment let me define the political system as one of 'bordered' democracy.

Annual Conference Alert

(continued from p2)

out than were ruled in) and to flood the Priorities Ballot with government-friendly CIMs.

This control freakery has seriously undermined Annual Conference. It is in danger of becoming a glorified photo opportunity, the Party's sovereign body in name only. This is a negation of our Rule Book — since 1918 the Party's Parliamentary leadership has always been ultimately accountable to Annual Conference. This is the only basis on which a federal political party can democratically operate.

At Bournemouth CLPs and unions need to defend and extend their influence at Conference and press the new leadership to spell out fully its intentions. If the leadership is serious about breaking from control freakery and wants an inclusive, active and enthusiastic membership, it has to be prepared to take the rough with the smooth. An active and involved membership is not always going to say things the leadership wants to hear. The Party's sovereign body must always be able to give a clear policy direction to our Parliamentary representatives on major issues that are of concern to the Party's federal membership. Every CLP and union must be able to make a submission to Conference on any matter they consider to be a major concern (and, unlike at present, they should be able to do this irrespective of whether or not they have also submitted a rule change). The artificial and restrictive requirement of 'contemporary' should be dropped. And the submission from each CLP/union must be permitted to be specific and detailed (eg 'fourth option for council housing' not merely 'housing'). In addition CLPs should always be able to choose four subjects in the Priorities Ballot that are additional and separate from the four chosen by the unions, in accordance with the spirit of the existing rule. Decisions of Conference should then be automatically integrated into the NPF work programme and regular report backs made. Representatives from the CLPs/unions that are successful in the Priorities Ballot should have the right to attend the Policy Commissions/Policy Commission sub groups, so that they can argue their case directly with ministers/shadow ministers.

In order to give CLPs and unions a greater input into Party policy making,

(continued on p7)

BUILDING THE NETWORK

JOHN WHITWORTH REPORTS ON THE PROGRESS SO FAR OF CLPD'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT GROUP

The Local Government Grassroots network was set up at this year's AGM of the CLPD and a number of councillors, former councillors and local government activists have since agreed to take part. The establishment of this group was triggered by the government's Local Government White Paper with its threat to local democracy and the position of councillors in local government.

The initiative has been led so far by Gordon Nardell, councillor for the London Borough of Southwark, Tom Davison, formerly councillor in the L.B. of Haringey, and two former councillors of the L.B. of Newham, John Saunders and John Whitworth. Notwithstanding its London origins, the network aspires to be truly nationwide across England with close contacts in the other home countries.

It is envisaged that the network will function mainly by email at first to enable members to pool information, give support and exchange opinions, advice and news of campaigns and other activities. As well as lobbying MPs and ministers to moderate the government's plans to introduce directly-elected Mayors, two other areas of particular interest have come to the fore. Firstly, the government's introduction of trust schools and academies reduces the authority of councils and further exposes state education to the influence of the private sector. Secondly, its reappraisal of the value of council housing in the light of the housing crisis may open up opportunities for local authorities to reassert ownership and control of their housing stock.

Those without email access are equally welcome to join and will be kept informed by post. A national conference is envisaged for the future. If you are interested in joining Local Government Grassroots, please contact Gordon Nardell (gordon.nardell@39essex.com) or John Whitworth (jhnwhitworth@yahoo.co.uk).

A VOICE FROM THE UNIONS

JOHN CRYER FROM CLPD'S TRADE UNION LIAISON GROUP OUTLINES THE WAY FORWARD

Without any doubt, the success the new prime minister has enjoyed in his first weeks in power has been far greater than most of us had imagined.

Labour is now consistently ahead in the polls by a decent margin. The Conservatives are starting to look distinctly shaky and Cameron now appears both superficial and mildly clueless, although he remains the most devoted class warrior we have faced since the days of Margaret Thatcher (as evidenced by his loudly repeated determination to remove trade unions from British politics).

Which brings us neatly to policy issues. Gordon Brown's pronouncements on social housing have been very welcome and the green paper is moving the government toward, hopefully, some form of re-emergence of council housing.

Similarly, the reversal of policy on super-casinos has been largely welcomed in Labour and trade union ranks. In the sphere of education there has been a distinct shift away from the Blairite mantra of 'choice and diversity' and toward what most sensible people want: good local comprehensive schools.

The government paper on constitutional reform, *The Governance of Britain*, although little noted by the press, indicates the possibility that for the first time in perhaps 30 years a British government is looking at moving some powers from Whitehall to Parliament. Thatcher, Major, Blair and other prime ministers have frequently done their best to shift power in the opposite direction.

To give but one example, the idea that Members of Parliament should have the final veto over going to war would be an important removal of a crown prerogative from the prime minister's grasp.

However, there are some serious industrial issues which are of deep concern to trade unions and which, thus far, have not been addressed.

The appalling treatment of tens of thousands of agency workers really is something that must change. Trade unions were at the forefront of supporting the Temporary Agency Workers' Bill which was brought to Parliament by Paul Farrelly MP in March.

The fact that it was talked out by a government minister — admittedly before the new administration took office — gave many of us one of our less comfortable moments in the Labour movement.

Of course, paying agency workers badly and denying them the same terms and conditions as permanent, tenured employees has other implications: undercutting leads to resentment and bitterness, often directed against migrant workers.

The Conservative legislation on balloting procedures remains intact and is so prescriptive it is arguably all but impossible to conduct a legal ballot — and employers have six years after a dispute to find some technicality which would allow them to sue a union.

The recent Corporate Manslaughter Bill, which is about to receive royal assent, is welcome but lacks any provision for holding individual directors responsible for deaths due to negligence. This may well render the Act toothless and we are pressing for directors' duties to be included elsewhere on the statute book, perhaps an amendment to the 1975 Health and Safety at Work Act.

The fact that nobody in Britain can legally take any form of sympathy action, and the compulsion on trade unions to repudiate workers doing so, is an outrage in any democratic society.

And, of course, the government continues to lack any form of coherent manufacturing strategy, hence the loss of a million jobs across widely different manufacturing sectors such as textiles, car-making and even aerospace.

A POST-BLAIR VOICE

'On issues from peace to inequality, Labour's supporters want the post-Blair agenda to be a non-Blair agenda, with our party starting to rediscover its values and roots.'

— Tony Woodley, General Secretary
TGWU, *Guardian* 5 March 2007

A MENDICANT VOICE

'The idea of going to big business with a begging bowl is the direct result of Tony Blair's obsession with cutting the ties that bind Labour to the unions.'

— Roy Hattersley, *Guardian* 18/12/06

DEFENDING PARTY DEMOCRACY MEANS BINNING 'THE PROJECT' AND THE 'MODERNISERS'

'The project', the long-term aim of the so-called 'modernisers' in our party, has always been to change the Labour Party into one modelled on the US democrats. This requires major changes. It requires the historic link with the unions to be ended altogether or severely weakened. Thus 'moderniser' Alan Johnson has called for the union vote at conference to be reduced from the present 50% to around 15%. 'Modernisers' want state funding to replace union funding and they are looking to Hayden Phillips to help them here. 'Modernisers' also seek to abolish the party's internal democratic structures and replace members by registered supporters. Thus 'moderniser' Stephen Byers has called for our next leaders to be elected by a US-style primary of registered supporters instead of by party members. Within the party 'modernisers' have concentrated their fire on constituency general committees (GCs), which they want scrapped and replaced by powerless all-member meetings. Yet if members are deprived of regular meetings

with power and purpose, the CLP loses its organisational hub and focus, and the unions lose their formal link with the CLP. In the past the 'modernisers' praised Enfield Southgate CLP for abolishing their GC and branches. But they don't mention Southgate any more. Predictably, after an initial flurry of interest in something new, organised activity declined and in 2005 the seat was lost, with one of the largest swings against in the country and this despite having a very high profile 'moderniser' as its MP! All-member meetings can be useful but not as a substitute for the representative and authoritative GC. GCs can be opened to all members as participant observers. Where GCs are struggling with attendance, one solution is to unite two adjacent CLPs to have joint GCs. This arrangement has proved its worth in Norwich and Southampton. The NEC has made it clear that it has no predisposition against GCs. Any paid party official who suggests otherwise is flying their own kite and should be reported to NEC members.

Annual Conference Alert

(continued from p5)

CLPD has put together a Draft Response to Gordon Brown's document. Our Draft Response, encompassing the proposals above, has considerable support within the unions. CLPs are invited to consider CLPD's proposals when drafting their own responses to the Consultation Document. This consultation has given CLPs and unions an opportunity to press the new leadership for a greater say on policy making. But this will not happen unless a large number of CLPs make this demand.*

In late September the leadership will present a final document to Annual Conference responding to the consultation process, together with any relevant rule change proposals. Provided these proposals meet the grassroots demand to genuinely increase the input from CLPs and unions into Party policy making they should be supported. But if they fail to do so they should be opposed.

*For a copy of CLPD's draft response, phone Peter Willsman 020 8854 7326 or visit www.clpd.org.uk

A VOICE FROM THE FORUM

(A report of July 14/15 NPF meeting is available on the CLPD website)

The July NPF considered the six second stage documents which had been drafted by the six Policy commissions (PCs), or rather by the officials servicing the PCs since few PCs are functioning as they should. There are many policy gaps in the documents and at the NPF the unions drew attention to these (for example, there is no commitment to parity in pay from day one for agency/

temporary workers, no commitment to evaluate PFI despite Annual Conference's decision that this should be done, no reference to information and consultation rights for unions (over plant closures for example), no balanced debate over ID cards). However, there is a commitment that 'local authorities should play a key role in strategies for delivering affordable housing. We should support the building of council homes as well as housing association homes where it is good value for money'.

A VOICE IN THE KNOW!

'The regional officers were continually badgering about how we were going to vote; not in a lobbying manner, they wanted to know that we would vote the way of the NEC and not on behalf of the CLP'.

— Extract from a report to her GC by a CLP delegate to 2006 annual conference.

RED ALERT: KEY VOTES FOR DELEGATES

National constitutional committee

Vote for Peter Kenyon

Conference arrangements committee

Vote for Lynne Jones and George McManus

National policy forum

Scotland

Vote for Gordon McKay

Wales

Vote for Nick Davies and Fran Griffiths and Darren Williams

East Midlands

Vote for Roy Mayhew

Eastern

Vote for Daniel Blaney and Lorna Trollope

London

Vote for Laura Bruni, Lorraine Monk, Francis Prideaux and Haley Fletcher (youth section)

North

Vote for Mathew Teale

North West

Vote for Warren Flood, Kath Fry, Gaye Johnston and Cat Smith (youth section)

South East

Vote for Joy Hurcombe

South West

Vote for Simon Crew, Ray Davison and Veronica Kelly Wallace

TWO PRESCRIPTIONS FOR LABOUR'S ILLS

Ray Davison reviews Jon Cruddas' and John Harris' *Fit for Purpose* — a programme for Labour Party renewal. *Compass*, 2006 pp. 1–34 and *Renewal* — a two-way process for the 21st century, an Interim Report 2007 from LabOUR, an independent commission on Accountability, Party and Parliamentary Democracy, LabOUR Commission, 2007, pp. (ii)-59.

Those who metaphorically donate their organs and life-blood in the service of the Party, its historic vision and values, will find significant interest in these two pamphlets seeking the prescriptions of renewal and revival for a Labour Party not in the best of health. The symptoms are there for all to see: dramatic haemorrhaging of its membership, down by over 50% since 1997, widespread inertia and atrophy of its vital limbs — its branches and GMCs — chronic abulia, disaffection and alienation of its once active and engaged body of members and supporters. Both documents examine the ailing organs with acuity, pointing out the areas of degeneration and failure like Rembrandt's *Anatomist*. *Fit for Purpose* ranges freely over the Party's history as an organisation born to fight for the industrial working class and uses a compelling blend of sociology, philosophy and general cultural perspectives to identify the challenges facing Labour policy makers in a post-industrial social order with a much more fluid class base and where politics is centred on a terrain much wider than the workplace.

LabOUR's *Renewal* constructs its not dissimilar arguments in a more down to earth language, making really good use of what it calls 'an evidenced based approach' information gleaned from focus groups supervised by Professor Stuart Weir of the Democratic Audit, University of Essex and commissioned LabOUR/You Gov polls of members and lapsed members. Both pamphlets emphasise the negative and morale-breaking effects of New Labour's top-down authoritarian model of policy-making and control freakery; both dwell on the imperfection and sometimes inanities of *Partnership in Power*; both, of

course, have a lot to say about the Party's financial management and our government's relationship with money.

Finding the antidotes to our Party's multitude of afflictions is the pivotal aim of these contributions but there is not going to be an easy answer and certainly no systemic *viagra* to revitalise, re-engage, renew and even resuscitate. Both works want to retain the federal structure of the Party and keep Conference as its sovereign body; both want to reform the NPF and have its CLP delegates elected by OMOV regionally; both want to empower members and end the era of imposed, monological policy formulation (LabOUR even advances the idea of a Charter of Members' Rights to enhance and give a quasi-statutory authority to the voice of members); both, crucially, recognise the determining role of egalitarianism, redistribution and democratic procedure in the motivation and political aspirations of members of the Party.

It is to be noted that both these documents pre-date the Brown Coronation and the launch of the new Leader's own initiative, the so-called consultation 'Extending and Renewing Party Democracy'. The words of the Brown invitation make one wish for an additional section to each contribution, although LabOUR's report is only interim, so a supplement will come. *Timeo Gordonum et dona ferentem!* Like a cunning Dr Finlay with a casebook, Gordon sends us a welcome chance to get better but like that other equine structure, we must beware the swollen underbelly, potentially full of bowmen with their arrows pointed at Labour's primary organ, its heart.

GETTING IN THE KNOW: READ THE WILLSMAN GUIDE TO CONFERENCE 2007 EDITION

The indispensable handbook for all delegates and anyone else who wants to understand what is really going on at Conference (available free of charge from 10 Park Drive, London, NW11 7SH or download from clpd.org.uk).

Annual conference highlights

Saturday 22 September 5.00pm

Bournemouth International Hotel

Reception for delegates, food and drink provided. Here delegates can meet each other, meet members of the NEC, TU general secretaries and MPs. Free for delegates (£5.00 others).

Sunday 23 September 10.00am

Bournemouth International Hotel

CLPD rally and delegates' briefing with Mohammed Azam, Tony Benn, Ann Black, Diana Holland, Kelvin Hopkins, Lynne Jones, Peter Kenyon, George McManus, Christine Shawcroft, Gavin Strang, Walter Wolfgang, Peter Willsman (special briefing for delegates). Entry £2 (conc: 50p).

Thursday 27 September 1.00pm

(when conference ends)

Bournemouth International Hotel

Conference assessment and the next step, with Mohammed Azam (chair), Ann Black, Billy Hayes, Gaye Johnston, Christine Shawcroft, Peter Willsman and Walter Wolfgang. Entry £1.00 (conc: 50p).

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