

CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

CLPD

SPECIAL 40TH YEAR
ANNIVERSARY EDITION 2013
ISSUE NO 76

CLPD publication for CLPs and Labour Party Members www.clpd.org.uk (where this newsletter can be downloaded). For detailed and exclusive NEC and NPF reports, internal Party news and debates including *Shenanigans*, visit www.grassrootslabour.net and for lively debates where you can contribute, visit www.leftfutures.org or twitter.com/clpd_labour

PRODUCTION EDITOR: RAY DAVISON
EAST DEVON CLP AND
CLPD SW REGIONAL ORGANISER
All enquiries: R.Davison@exeter.ac.uk
Telephone 01395 277481
or email CLPD: info@clpd.org.uk

FORTY YEARS OF CLPD, A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

**BILLY HAYES,
GENERAL SECRETARY CWU**

**OPENS OUR
FORTIETH
ANNIVERSARY
EDITION.**



The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's fortieth anniversary is indeed cause for celebration.

Our campaign has registered a number of important successes in its existence. Yet surely its importance really lies in its future. For CLPD continues to offer socialists in the Party a route to effective politics.

CLPD understands that socialist policies are tied to the promotion of Party democracy. Membership activity and involvement in all areas of the Party produces better and more effective policies. That is a strategy and appreciation which has worked for these past decades, and will work for many years ahead.

CLPD has rejected any approach which involves presenting the membership with ultimatums. Instead, its approach has always been to offer solutions which are both practical and radical.

As a result it has, on occasion, led and articulated the desires of the majority of Party members. This was most notable in the achievement of the electoral college for leadership elections, and on the reselection of MPs. But there are other recent victories, such as the four/four balance in contemporary resolutions to Conference, and the use of OMOV for the constituency section of the National Policy Forum.

As we celebrate the successes we must acknowledge the outstanding contribution made by Vladimir and Vera Derer. In their less than friendly book *The Battle for the La-*

bour Party, David and Morris Kogan wrote of the Derers' home in Golders Green (page 45): "It is arguably the most important and best-known centre of left-wing activity in Britain".

Such an assessment was fair, given the impact of CLPD's successes. Today, we must continue their work by ensuring that CLPD remains a practical vehicle for progressive aims of Party members.

The need for alternatives to the Coalition government's austerity policies is widely shared amongst Labour Party members. More dialogue between membership and leadership is the best guarantee that an incoming Labour government in 2015 will implement an expansionary economic policy.

(cont. on p3)

CLPD AND THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK SELF- ORGANISATION WITHIN THE LABOUR PARTY

**BY DIANE ABBOTT MP FOR
HACKNEY NORTH**

It was, and still is, very hypocritical of people who have not been bothered about majority-white conferences, and even today, in some areas, all-white CLPs, to conclude that black sections are separatist. We have de facto separatism already.

(cont. on p2)

Content highlights

SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY EDITION 2013

- **Billy Hayes:** Forty Years of CLPD: A cause for celebration
- **Diane Abbott MP:** CLPD and the struggle for black self-organisation
- **Jim Mortimer:** The vital role of CLPD
- **Gavin Strang:** CLPD more needed than ever
- **Leo Panitch and Colin Leys:** Forty years of CLPD: our part in Labour's history
- **Chris Mullin:** His message to the anniversary AGM
- **Empowering women 1:** Vera Derer, Sandra Ernstoff and Rachel Lever: 'Women demand democracy too!'
- **Empowering women 2:** Loraine Monk: From 1970 to New Labour
- **Empowering women 3:** Christine Shawcroft: More than a tea party: Have the feminists won, or did Blairism see us off?
- **From the archive:** Vladimir Derer, extract from 'Blair must go'
- **Dominic Curran and Conrad Landin:** Young CLPD looking ahead to a more democratic Labour Party
- **Ray Davison:** Fighting fit at forty – Highlights from CLPD's anniversary AGM
- **CLPD TUC fringe and Labour conference meetings**
- **More Bitebacks**

PLEASE PASS THIS NEWSLETTER ON TO ENSURE A WIDE CIRCULATION.

CLPD AND THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK SELF-ORGANISATION WITHIN THE LABOUR PARTY

(cont. from p1)

The fight for a black section within the Labour Party was a long and hard fought one that began at the grassroots of the Party. When I was first selected as a Labour councillor in the then Paddington constituency, I



was very concerned about the lack of black people involved in my CLP. So I organised a black caucus of Party members and found that there were actually a lot of black Labour Party members. Organisation like this was happening all over the country and a national conversation had already begun through the National Black Caucus. This creation of black sections in constituencies helped channel black people into the mainstream of Labour Party activity. They came out of the closet so to speak and became active for the first time.

The aims of the black sections were to encourage black people to be confident in their involvement and activism. They provided a framework to discuss and form policy on issues of concern to black people. Finally they gave us a forum to organise for increased black representation in the form of black councillors, MPs, school governors and so on. Black sections maximised black people's contribution to the mainstream of politics from Parliament to all sections of civil society.

We found our natural allies in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Here the black sections were provided with a huge amount of support. Having spearheaded the campaign that led to formal women's representation within the Labour Party, CLPD's experience was invaluable in achieving our aim.

We have come a long way but there is a lot more work to be done. Despite having more black MPs and councillors than we have ever had in Britain, at the current rate it will still take 100 years before black representation in Parliament reflects our numbers in society. As long as inequality exists so will the need for self-organisation, because those who suffer from oppression are the best placed to lead the fight against it. We need to take the fight back to the grassroots, remembering that power is never given, and that we will have to unite and organise to take it.

THE VITAL ROLE OF CLPD

JIM MORTIMER, FORMER LABOUR PARTY GENERAL SECRETARY, LIFELONG TRADE UNIONIST AND LONG-SERVING CLPD MEMBER, ASSESSES CLPD'S ROLE. JIM AND HIS WIFE PAT HAVE ACTIVELY SUPPORTED CLPD FOR MANY YEARS

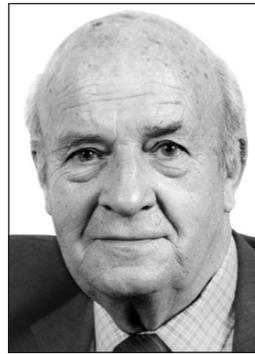
The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy plays a vital role in the Labour Party. In every large organisation there is the possibility of authoritarian decision-making, intolerance of internal criticism or curtailment of accountability. The Labour Party is not an exception to this possibility, even though its contribution to British political life has had many democratic attributes. Facilities for democratic discussion, decision-making and accountability have been part of Labour's tradition. This is not a statement of complacency, but recognition of the contribution made by Labour Party members and elected representatives extending over many years.

Problems, nevertheless, still arise. Constant vigilance is required. Democracy is essential at every level.

At the basic level it is important to persuade individual members and affiliated trade union representatives to attend and participate in discussion and decision-making. This is an essential part of the democratic process. So too is the selection of candidates for public office, including parliamentary and local government candidates.

The full-time officials of the Party have an important supportive role to play in the functioning of the Party at all levels. Their role should always be helpful rather than disciplinary, though it is right that the constitution of the Party should be upheld. The route to success is through discussion and persuasion.

The relationship with the trade union movement is very important for the functioning of the Party. Trade union delegates – the representatives of working people –



bring their daily experience of life and employment to the discussion of policy. Their voice and influence are essential ingredients for the policy of the Party.

CLPD has done much since its foundation to initiate democratic changes, to uphold democratic practices and to encourage the rank-and-file of the Party to be vigilant to ensure that their voice is heard.

Discussion and the consideration of options, with the expression of criticism, is essential for policy-making. This is why the British labour movement has never been attracted by ideas and proposals for "proletarian dictatorship". Dictatorship of any kind can lead to the abuse of power. It took many years of struggle to establish universal suffrage for ordinary citizens of both sexes. Accountability is an essential ingredient of democracy.

This does not imply that progressive governments challenged by military reaction should be denied the right to defend their measures and their democratic power. We remember the example of Spain, Chile and the experience of fascist oppression in Europe.

CLPD has a distinguished record and it deserves support. It is good to know that it is in a healthy state, is growing and, is attracting support from young members of the Labour Party. Let us ensure that it continues to do so.



BITEBACKS

'Take notice, That England is not a Free People, till the Poor that have no Land, have a free allowance to dig and Labour the Commons, and so live as Comfortably as the Landlords that live in their enclosures'.

The True Levellers Standard Advanced (April 1649).

'The Chancellor seems more afraid of admitting that his policies have failed than kick-starting the economy'.

Jim O'Neill, Chairman of Goldman Sachs Asset Management, *Tribune* (22/3/13).

'Studies show that the vast majority of new arrivals to the UK enhance and enrich our society, both economically and culturally. The true threats to our national wellbeing lie not with those who come to visit or make their lives here but with the increasing gap between the rich and poor among us'.

The Bishop of Dudley, David Walker, *Observer* (24/3/13).

FORTY YEARS OF CLPD, A CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

(cont. from p1)

CLPD's current priorities for Party reform and development are aimed at ensuring such dialogue can take place.

Hence, the importance of CLPD's proposed rule change to allow full involvement of Party branches and affiliated organisations in the selection of Westminster candidates. This chimes with Ed Miliband's commitment to give members a greater role and influence. It also demonstrates CLPD's continuing commitment to maintaining union involvement in all aspects of Party life.

Equally important is CLPD's proposal for Party Conference to be able to vote for NPF reports, and other reports, in parts. At present Conference delegates are faced with the invidious choice of "take it or leave it" for lengthy, complex documents. Such a method has weakened the internal policy-making process by removing Conference's power to change a policy through debate.

It is wrong to assume that debates at Conferences can damage the Party in the eyes of TV viewers. Live debate on current issues makes for enthralling and engaging viewing. Politics matters desperately, and it is not difficult to present a conference as an important event in the calendar.

"40 years since the founding of CLPD, we face a position where politicians are held in lower public esteem than in 1973"

40 years since the founding of CLPD, we face a position where politicians are held in lower public esteem than in 1973. A big part of this is because of the scandal of MPs' expenses.

But perhaps more damaging, has been the shift by some Labour leaders towards a consensus with the other parties on key policy issues. This failed the electorate, as was clear when the consensus of neo-liberalism resulted in the worst crash in the international economy since the 1920s.

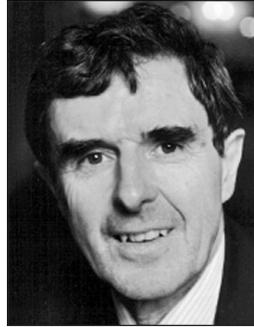
Now, in difficult circumstances, the Labour Party is clawing its way back to government. But we must learn the lessons of these past decades. The incoming Labour government must offer a real alternative to the Coalition's attack upon the poor and working class.

CLPD's continued campaigning means that we can ensure that there will be serious membership pressure for a radical Labour government in 2015. We must renew our contribution to building CLPD in this anniversary year.

CLPD MORE NEEDED THAN EVER

BY GAVIN STRANG, FORMER MP FOR EDINBURGH EAST CLP

We should take pride in what Labour has achieved over the years. The National Health Service when it was created led the world. The principle was simple: health care should be allocated according to need not ability to pay. The Open University was also set up by Labour.



The introduction of a statutory minimum wage by Labour was a breakthrough. It made illegal the payment of poverty wages, not uncommon at the time in the private sector. It gave dignity to some of the lowest paid workers in our society.

Generally, but not always, Labour has advocated and or implemented a progressive foreign policy. Labour leader Hugh Gaitskill opposed the Conservative government over Suez. Similarly Prime Minister Harold Wilson resisted US pressure to send British troops to fight alongside the Americans in Vietnam.

This year is the tenth anniversary of the disastrous decision by the Labour government led by Tony Blair to take part in the US led invasion of Iraq in defiance of the UN Security Council. The more information that enters the public domain the more we learn how superficial and unreliable was the intelligence on which the British government claimed to base its decision. Writing in the *Sunday Telegraph*, Sir Christopher Meyer, our Ambassador in the US at the time claims that in the course of the run up to the invasion the Labour Prime Minister "became an honorary member of the Bush inner group of neo-conservative hawks while moderates such as US Secretary of State Colin Powell were relegated to the outer fringe".

On a visit to Edinburgh earlier this year Tony Blair made a speech attacking the case for breaking up the UK. The SNP response was to attack him and Labour over the invasion of Iraq.

It is vital that Scots vote decisively against Scotland becoming a separate state in the referendum to be held in September next year.

The Scottish Parliament, set up by Labour in 1998 has very substantial powers over Scottish affairs. Legislation already on

the statute book will give it more power. The remarkable Scottish election results achieved by the SNP in 2011 gave them total control over the Parliament.

Some on the left, including a small minority of Labour Party members, say they will vote "YES" to independence. The SNP has always opposed Trident and pledge that there will be no nuclear weapons in an independent Scotland.

The decision of the last Labour government to develop a full replacement for Trident was profoundly wrong. Trident is a first-strike nuclear weapon system designed to destroy the missiles of the former Soviet Union while they were still in their silos.

Scots are opposed to present Trident never mind its planned replacement. We need a government at Westminster which cancels Trident and becomes a credible opponent of nuclear weapons proliferation.

The result of the referendum is not a foregone conclusion. We need more leaders and activists in the trades unions in Scotland to come out against making England a foreign country and to work for a "NO" vote to independence.

"Labour has a great democratic history... We need to restore Party democracy"

Labour has a great democratic history. Major questions facing the UK have in the past been debated openly and honestly by Labour: issues such as German re-armament after the war, entry into the European Common Market, nuclear weapons.

We need to restore Party democracy. CLPD has been a force for progress over the years. To-day we need it more than ever.



BITEBACKS

'On BBC's *This Week*, Michael Portillo was asked whether he agreed with the plan to renew Trident. He said: 'No, I think it's completely past its sell-by date. It's neither independent, nor is it any kind of deterrent. It's a tremendous waste of money and is done entirely for reasons of national prestige. It's wasteful.'
Guardian (2/11/12).

FORTY YEARS OF CLPD: OUR PART IN LABOUR HISTORY: AN ASSESSMENT

BY LEO PANITCH AND COLIN LEYS ADAPTED FROM THEIR BOOK *THE END OF PARLIAMENTARY SOCIALISM FROM NEW LEFT TO NEW LABOUR, 1997*

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) – which for a while became the core organisation of perhaps the most powerful movement for radical intra-party reform ever to arise within western social democracy – was set up in June 1973.

The campaign itself involved building support through affiliations by constituency parties and trade union branches as well as through enlisting individual supporters; sending out model resolutions and convincing CLPs (each of which had the right to forward only one resolution to the Party's annual conference) to use them; and organising among trade unions to have their delegates mandated to support reforms to the Party's constitution.

At the 1979 Party conference, mandatory reselection was finally passed by 4 million to 3 million votes. It had taken five long and arduous years of dedicated organising to win just the first of the CLPD's constitutional reforms, entailing a change which, as one student of comparative parties would observe, was 'long

accepted as normal in most European social democratic parties... [and] extremely difficult to refute by any standards of democracy.'* In light of the determined opposition the CLPD faced in confronting deeply entrenched elitist aspects of the parliamentarist mode of representation in Britain, not to speak of the challenge it posed to the traditional arrangements between the industrial and political leaders in the Labour Party, it was certainly a remarkable victory for the Labour new left and the CLPD in particular.

Circumstances were now very different, thanks to the efforts of the new left activists over the course of the decade, as the formation of the Rank and File Mobilising Committee in May and June 1980 showed. The RFMC brought CLPD and LCC activists together with a broader range of left groups in the Party to conduct common campaigning – including twenty rallies at different sites around the country in the run-up to the 1980 Conference – for five key constitutional demands: defence of reselection; control of the Manifesto by the NEC; election of the leader and deputy leader by the whole party; defence of the NEC's structure; and accountable and open decision-making within the PLP.

At the 1981 Special Conference at Wembley the CLPD's tactical brilliance and the RFMC's organisational efforts did prevent the adoption of an electoral college still dominated by the PLP.

The CLPD's careful monitoring of what the various union delegations had been mandated to vote for led to a tactical decision to organise support for an option slightly weighted towards the unions (40-30-30)

Although the Wembley conference decision to leave the unions controlling 40% of the vote in the electoral college was a massive reduction from the 90% of the vote they accounted for at the Party Conference it was immediately presented by the social democrats and the media as a vote for the domination of the Party by "union bosses".

This completely drowned out the Labour new left's actual aim, which was not to adopt the ersatz plebiscitary democracy of an American-style primary system but to make MPs accountable to an informed and active local Party membership, and to politicise and democratise the unions' role in the Party, not jettison it.

The organisational changes pushed through by Kinnock, Smith and Blaire to disempower the activists paved the way for a policy accommodation with neo-liberalism. The modernisers confirmed in this way how correct the Labour new left, for their part, had been in seeing intra-party organisational change as a precondition for effective policy change.

* David Hine in Patterson and Thomas eds., *The Future of Social Democracy*, Oxford 1986.



This is an historic photograph in CLPD's last forty years. It shows Vladimir and Vera Derer, Peter Willsman and other supporters demonstrating outside the labour rooms where Reg Prentice is in the process of being deselected.

CHRIS MULLIN'S MESSAGE TO OUR ANNIVERSARY AGM

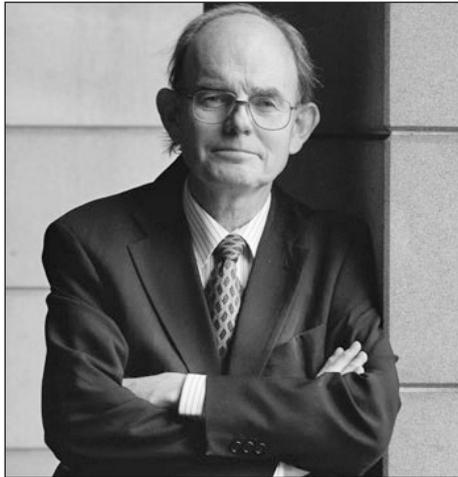
CHRIS MULLIN (FORMER MP FOR SUNDERLAND SOUTH, EDITOR OF TRIBUNE 1982-4 AND WELL KNOWN AUTHOR/JOURNALIST) AND CLPD EC MEMBER DURING THE STRUGGLE FOR MANDATORY RESELECTION, SENT THE FOLLOWING MESSAGE TO CLPD'S ANNIVERSARY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING.

Although I do not belong to that small but distinguished band who founded CLPD, I joined soon afterwards and have been a paid up member ever since. To this day I remain proud to have been a member. Contrary to what our critics sometimes alleged it was never our aim to get rid of sitting MPs. The aim was to change the relationship between Labour party members and their elected representatives in parliament and I believe that, by and large, we have succeeded.

One forgets that in the 1970s many Constituency Labour Parties in safe seats were virtually moribund. I lived at that time in Lambeth Vauxhall which had been represented by George Strauss for 55 years – from 1924 when he was first chosen as the Labour candidate to 1979 when he was reluctantly persuaded to retire.

When I came on the scene in the early '70s, the Vauxhall party was all but dead. Three people attended my first branch meeting, two councillors and a man of 82. The Party Secretary was also George Strauss' personal secretary, which meant that it was difficult to join. Strauss, a wealthy man, also owned the party offices, an elegant Georgian house on Kennington Road and he always made clear that, come the day of his retirement, he would be taking the offices with him. He was as good as his word.

Although Strauss could see his constituency from the terrace of the House of Commons his visits were infrequent. Election campaigns were almost non-existent. The turn out was one of the lowest in the country. By the time I came on the scene, he had more or less lost touch with both his constituency and his Party. The monthly meetings of the management committee were surreal. Strauss would arrive nodding vaguely in the direction of people he thought he recog-



nised. The chairman would say that George had urgent business back at the House and would we mind bringing forward the MP's report. Members would then shrug wearily. George would get up and give a surreal account of what he thought was going on in the world. The chairman would ask for questions. Members again shrugged wearily and George would totter out, nodding at people whose faces rang a vague bell. Incredibly, aged 79, he was intending to contest the 1979 election, until the Constituency Party put its foot down.

Although Vauxhall was an extreme case, it was by no means uncommon for long-serving MPs to have entirely lost touch with their Constituency Parties. The semi-

nal moment came in 1977 when the Newham North East Constituency attempted to de-select their MP Reg Prentice. Prentice immediately declared himself to be the victim of an extremist conspiracy and the entire Labour establishment, backed by an hysterical media campaign, attempted to come to his rescue. Whereupon Prentice announced that he was defecting to the Conservative Party adding, in a gratuitous swipe at his supporters, that he had been a Conservative for at least the two previous years. From that moment onwards CLPD's campaign was unstoppable. We owe a lot to Reg Prentice.

“The seminal moment came in 1977 when the Newham North East Constituency attempted to de-select their MP Reg Prentice”

Although mandatory re-selection was represented by many as an extremist cause, I think we were ahead of our time.

My best wishes to CLPD on its 40th anniversary. I take this opportunity to salute Vladimir and Vera Derer who more than anyone kept the show on the road in the early years. And to wish you all well in the years ahead.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

VERA DERER (CLPD LEADING MEMBER), SANDRA ERNSTOFF (NOLS) AND RACHEL LEVER (WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK) JOINED TOGETHER IN 1980 TO WRITE THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE: 'WOMEN DEMAND DEMOCRACY TOO!' (MOBILISE FOR LABOUR DEMOCRACY, MAGAZINE SUMMER 1980). WE REPRODUCE EXTRACTS HERE TO PAY TRIBUTE TO VERA AND HER CO-WRITERS.

There are only 11 women Labour MPs. There is no woman in the shadow cabinet and only 11% of Annual conference del-

egates are women... But must this under-representation continue? Isn't it time we looked at democratic reforms which would help women overcome the barriers to political activity?

Democratic reforms would encourage women to join and take an active part in Party life. Of course many of the barriers exist in society as a whole and are beyond the Party's immediate control. But we can take steps to ensure that such barriers existing in the Party are broken down. The existing women's organisation needs more power. The principle of positive discrimination should be adopted. The idea of women, hampered as they are by social conditioning and domestic obstacles, competing on equal terms with men expresses a false and abstract view of equality. The fact that it just doesn't work is borne out by the results.

EMPOWERING WOMEN 2: FROM 1970 TO NEW LABOUR

LORAIN MONK, FORMER NPF MEMBER FOR LONDON, CHAIR OF THE LONDON REGION WOMEN'S COMMITTEE FOR SIX YEARS AND LONDON REP ON THE NEC'S WOMEN'S COMMITTEE FOR FOUR, DESCRIBES THE RE-ENERGISING OF THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY SEVENTIES AS IT BUILDS ON THE MANY STRUGGLES FOR EMPOWERMENT OF EARLIER YEARS INCLUDING THE MATCHSTICK STRIKERS.

The first women's liberation conference in the UK was held at Ruskin College in 1970. It was a time when people in the UK believed that politics could change people's lives...



Women began to demand equal opportunities in education, to be involved in the treatment of their own bodies and to campaign for equal rights and opportunities to other than low paid, low status jobs. Women from ethnic minorities were forceful in their argument that they suffered double oppression.

In the eighties, Women of Greenham Common showed the world that women could act politically and establish a political agenda much wider than just their own political oppression. Women were also asserting their views and demonstrating their abilities in a range of trade union branches and campaigns.

Women in the Labour Party began to argue for their rights within the Party- women's sections began to reach beyond being Party tea makers and jumble sale organisers to establishing a political voice that demanded equal representation in the Party at all levels and to write policy that would force the Party, when in government, to create laws that would change women's lives. That also meant representing the Party.

The idea of a Ministry for women was

born. Democratically through meetings large and small, across the country, women members devised a plan for every aspect of Government, under a new Ministry for Women. The only way to change the make up of the Parliamentary Labour Party was to have women only short lists for safe Parliamentary seats. It was finally agreed in time for the 1997 selections.

New Labour's ascendancy meant the end of Labour's socialism, and with it any radical transformation of society.

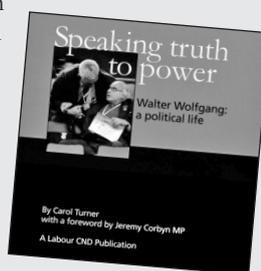
Labour policy no longer sought to effect social change, too often aping Tory policy and supporting the status quo. After Labour won the 1997 general election, the Ministry for women became a Minister without a Ministry.

After Jo Richardson, the role became shared – a minister without an office...

The first act of the new Labour government had been to cut benefits for single parents. Restructuring the Party resulted in abolishing the NEC Women's Committee and pushing in the Regions for the disbandment of regional Women's committees, effectively starving the women's sections of support.

Eventually progressive plans were forgotten: the fallback position if the Party wanted to display how good it was on "women's issues" was to relaunch the policy on domestic violence, again and again. In the 2010 general election, Labour returned only 81 Labour women MPs – 33% of the Parliamentary Party. By then it had lost significant numbers of the women members who had

For moments to inspire and recall with pain and pleasure, you must read Carol Turner's *Speaking truth to power – Walter Wolfgang: a political life*, with a foreword by Jeremy Corbyn MP, Labour CND, October 2012. Relive Walter's days of fame as he is ejected shamefully from Labour's 2005 Conference in Brighton with his 'nonsense' intervention to Jack Straw. The power of the single word rocketed him to stardom and to election to the NEC for the CLGA slate. A master stroke from Peter Willsman.



campaigning for women's rights in the previous three decades. They turned instead to other means of achieving change through non-governmental agencies, the law or their individual trade unions.

Women's position in British society has changed – it is better than it was, but women, most of all working class women, of all ethnicities still lack equal opportunity.

The argument for the Women's Ministry was that a women's agenda affected everyone – that is to say, concerns for justice, equality and education were universal. What we have at present is a government and opposition that argue about bankers and agree together that public expenditure needs cutting, while still spending on war and weapon building – a boys' club while throughout the world women suffer oppression, torture, rape and other violence.

The Labour Party missed a great opportunity to effect substantial change and with it the appeal to voters, both women and men who wanted real transformation.



BITEBACKS

'I used to think that Karl Marx's definition of banks in capitalist society as "institutions created for the systematic robbery of the people" was cheap polemic. Now I begin to see what he meant.'
Patrick Renshaw, Sheffield, *Guardian* (19/3/13).

'People think that the proportion of the welfare budget that goes on benefits to unemployed people is 41 per cent. The real figure is just 3 per cent. Failing to change the terms of this toxic, pernicious debate will not just have profound consequences for the poorest; it is central to efforts to create a better society and, as a result, a matter for all of us. So far the welfare debate has illustrated a politics based on despair and envy, which actively seeks to erode trust and solidarity.'
Lisa Nandy, 'Talk of strivers is pernicious', *Tribune* (8/2/13).

'Only 16% of students eligible for free school meals go on to university, as opposed to 96% of private school students.'
Observer (13/1/13).

MORE THAN A TEA PARTY: HAVE THE FEMINISTS WON, OR DID BLAIRISM SEE US OFF?

LABOUR NEC AND NPF MEMBER CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT LOOKS AT THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATION IN THE LABOUR PARTY

When I first tried setting up local women's organisations in the Labour Party, it was the late 70s and they were generally known as Ladies' Sections. You needed the agreement of



your (overwhelmingly male) GC, or General Management Committee (GMC) as it was then. We had to go cap in hand and plead with an uncomprehending GMC for permission to set up a women's section. They were absolutely mystified: why would a group of women want to meet? Who would they be making the tea for: each other?

When I moved to London in the early 80s, the story was slightly different. There were many more younger members, as the activism of the times seeped into the Party, and most of them considered themselves feminists. Naturally, they wanted to meet in women's groups – something they had been organising, in many cases, before they joined the Party. Unfortunately, the established women's groups met in the daytime. When new women members asked their GMCs for permission to set up Women's Sections, they were told to go to the ones which already existed. The young working women couldn't go to meetings held in the daytime, and the older established women were unwilling to go out at night.

For a while there was an impasse, until some clever comrade pointed out there were no prescriptions on the boundaries for Women's Sections: the existing groups became Daytime Women's Sections, and working women could set up Evening Women's Sections. For a few years, it was common for women to stand up at Regional or Women's Conferences and introduce themselves as being from such and such Evening Women's Section.

Eventually Women's Sections meeting in the evening became the norm – and very active they became, too. By the mid-80s, there was a large network of Women's Sections across the country, and many CLPs set up Women's Councils, with delegates from Women's Sections (often branch rather than CLP based), locally affiliated trades unions and women's organisations to co-ordinate all this feminist activity.

Attendance at National Women's Conference more than doubled (not least after the Newcastle Conference in 1982, which we threatened to occupy if the crèche didn't stay open till the end of the conference session rather than closing at 5pm). Women debated and passed their own policy, usually more radical than that of Annual Conference. Feminism was thriving in the women's organisation, but how could we take it into the wider Party? A group of women delegates to Annual Conference occupied the MPs' seats – showing everyone how unusual it looked to lose the male domination.

Some women members of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) set up the Women's Action Committee (WAC) to take the campaign further.

WAC's main demands included:

- **Women's Conference should be able to send five resolutions to Annual Conference (there being no link whatsoever between the two),**

- **there should be one woman on every Parliamentary shortlist;**

- **that the five women's places on the National Executive Committee should be elected by national Women's Conference, instead of by male and female CLP members.**

These demands were overwhelmingly supported by women's organisations – but winning them in the Party was another matter. Eventually, Annual Conference agreed that there should be one woman on every shortlist “if a woman had been nominated”. Ending all-male shortlists was positive, but implementation of the policy revealed its shortcomings. This was no breakthrough allowing women to be seen as equally plausible parliamentary candidates: executives, still largely male, put a woman on their shortlists, but felt no need to add any more. Even if she didn't have “token woman” physically

tattooed on her forehead, selection meetings knew why she was there. Women formulated a new demand: for All-Women Shortlists in a number of seats, including safe ones. That was eventually agreed and has had a checkered history.

The Party is now very different and the huge tide of feminism which swept through it in the 80s and early 90s has ebbed. Partly this is due to the fact that all forms of activism have been choked off as Party managers have closed off democratic routes and stifled grassroots voices.

For this reason, some bright spark dreamed up quotas. The Women's Organisations never called for quotas. Our principle was always that women's representatives should be elected by, and accountable to, other women, otherwise they aren't women's representatives at all – they are representatives who happen to be women.

Reserved seats for women's organisations meant that women had to come to Women's Sections, win the support of women members, report back to them and face re-election a year later – the basic pattern of accountability for representatives. Under quotas, individual women looking for a career in the Party can make it clear to local Party hierarchies that they aren't going to threaten the status quo.

Quotas for all delegates and officers in the Party undermined the Women's Sections. When the NEC was re-organised in 1997 to try and keep left candidates out of the CLP section, the five women's seats were abolished in favour of introducing quotas in the new trade union and CLP sections. The Women's Conference was abolished because it was “too expensive”, although it had been making a profit for the Party.

The outcome of the quota system has ensured that although more women parliamentary candidates are being selected, they are almost exclusively non-threatening supporters of the leadership. The “Blair babes” may have benefited from two decades of feminist campaigning in the Labour Party, but they sure as hell didn't represent it.

The question of how we take the fight for equality forward, though, is very open.

Editor's note: This is a shortened version of the original article, which can be read in full in Original Labour Briefing Cooperative March/April 2013 or at www.left-futures.org

FIGHTING FIT AT FORTY

RAY DAVISON HIGHLIGHTS CLPD'S ANNIVERSARY AGM

CLPD's Anniversary AGM (Conway Hall, 23/2/13) was a cracking and dynamic gathering with the room 'plein comme un oeuf' (full) with a multicultural mix of young and not so young individuals extremely articulate and powerfully engaged with socialist advance. Our press officer Mike Loates has penned the official AGM report (available on our website): my task is to spotlight some of its greatest moments and, naturally, they were all great.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Kelvin Hopkins MP

Kelvin opened the anniversary meeting with the warmest of tributes: CLPD would go down in the annals of history as 'the soul of the Labour Party' fighting a sustained battle over forty years for Party democracy. With its Yellow Pages and briefing papers, its great rallies, the outstanding work of its NEC members, the wisdom and socialist fire of Peter Willsman, the strategic brilliance over decades of Vladimir and Vera Derer to whom he paid a special tribute, CLPD had championed the resistance to right-wing regressive control freaks. It had worked intelligently with the unions to secure many fine successes: reselection, the leadership college, advance of women's rights and black sections within the Party and OMOV for NPF elections. CLPD strategy had also almost certainly secured Ed's victory over the Blairites.

On the PLP front, there was good news also: Progress was in decline, Purnell had gone (much cheering), defence of PFI was waning, the unions were laying siege to New Labour economics and the new PLP looked more progressive or at least less regressive. Neo-liberalism had failed, he concluded, and it needed to be rejected. He suggested our 1945 manifesto should guide our policy pledges as we approach the next election.

Chris Mullin

Jon Lansman read out Chris Mullin's Message to the Anniversary AGM as Chris was unavailable. It was characteristically very witty and his use of anecdotes about long-sitting MP George Strauss

in Lambeth Vauxhall was hilarious. He too praised the Derers for their many contributions to CLPD, We reprint Chris' tribute on p.5 for your delectation.

John Ashworth MP (Leicester South)

John praised the work of CLPD over the years and revisited some of our great advances such as reselection, the leadership college, women members' representation within the Party and OMOV for NPF. He also recalled the significant and distinguished record in CLPD and CND of Frank Allaun, one of our former CLPD chairs. John made a strong and much appreciated call for more working class MPs in the House after the next election. He said this could only be achieved with union assistance. Media reform was an issue that, in his view, required urgent attention: we needed a fairer system of media ownership to create a more democratic press. Finally, again with much support from members present, he called for the bringing back as Labour policy the 10p tax rate.

Ann Pettifor

This was a speech to be savoured. Although Ann, by her own admission, was a late arrival in the ranks of CLPD, joining in 1980, she soon became involved in our campaign for women's rights and memorably suggested it was basically the same struggle she had championed in 35 countries over debt cancellation. What followed this was a quite brilliant analysis of the crisis of international capital. It was sophisticated and extremely wide ranging, sinking Hayek, Friedman and the bandits of Chicago but also the leaders of the Labour Party ('the leaders of the Labour Party do not understand finance')! Even Krugman suffered a minor rebuke. I began to think Ann should replace Balls as our Shadow Chancellor when she said we should focus our strategy on private not public debt and make finance a servant of production and labour. I cannot do justice to Ann's intricate arguments in this piece but, rest assured, I have invited Ann to contribute to our autumn edition.

OUR STRATEGIES FOR 2013

Peter Willsman in full flight

No CLPD meeting of any kind and least of all this anniversary AGM would be complete without the briefings and reports of Peter Willsman, our peerless secretary with a

peerless voice (he was once asked not to shout and famously replied very loudly: 'I like shouting')! Peter outlined with his usual thoroughness and force our model rule changes for the 2013 Conference and our target of challenging and changing the abuse of the 3 year rule (see Ken Loates for details). He spoke of the many positive features and successes at the 2012 Conference including the daily yellow pages (edited by Jon Lansman) and Campaign Briefing (edited by myself). He paid a very warm tribute to Andrew Fenyo for his lengthy editorship of the yellow pages. He also referred with evident excitement to CLPD's own executive rule changes creating two youth places.

Young CLPD

Both Dominic Curran and Conrad Landin spoke of their plans for an autonomous youth section in the Party and you can read about them on p9 of this anniversary issue.

Launch of CLPD's Charter for a Democratic Conference

Our Charter was launched with style and eloquence by Jon Lansman. Read our final page for a summary of the Charter's aims and visit leftfutures, grassroots labour and clpd websites for the full version.

Tried and Trusted

The usual fine reports were delivered by Christine Shawcroft (NEC/NPF), Ann Black (NEC and Org Sub, *cave* Cruddas), Russell Cartwright (Treasurer) and the Regional Key persons available. Resolutions defining our future objectives were debated crisply and quickly (well in the main!). Last, but not least, we all appreciated the great chairing of the meeting by our ever younger Audrey Gardner in the morning session and Lizzy Ali in the afternoon.

I can hardly wait for next year if it's anything like this year's Anniversary AGM.

CLPD
Campaign for
Labour Party
Democracy

FROM THE ARCHIVE

Here is an extract from our lead article in the 2006 Campaign Briefing 69 entitled 'Blair must go'. The article was written with characteristic insight by Vladimir Derer, our present active Political Secretary and former very long-standing CLPD secretary. Without Vladimir's indispensable role and skill, CLPD would not have made its unique and significant contribution to the Labour Party's history. You can read the full article on our website in the archive. The article is every bit as pertinent now as then and shows clearly how the right uses rule changes and constitutional amendments to control the Party, whilst simultaneously accusing of navel gazing and internal self-obsession those who seek to empower members, advance Party democracy and promote socialist policies.

When he became Prime Minister, Blair lost no time before introducing rule changes which prevent the kind of debate he is now calling for. The new rules denied CLPs any input into the conference agenda and restricted the unions to four subjects which "had not been substantively addressed in the reports of either

the National Policy Forum or the NEC, or had arisen since the publication of those reports". The rule changes were railroaded through conference during the euphoria which followed Labour's 1997 landslide. Delegates were swayed by the argument that, in the past, conference agendas, based primarily on resolutions from constituencies and unions, had led to disunity and harmful publicity. Horror stories as to what the party was like in the 70s and 80s, were spread by New Labourites and avidly taken up by the media. The new rules mean that annual conference has lost its function as Labour's supreme policy-making body and has become a transparently stage-managed event. The National Policy Forum which supposedly took over the function of formulating party policies, is an unrepresentative body strictly controlled by the government.

Does all this mean there is no way out for the Party? Not if members face up to two immediate problems.

One is that, for Labour's renewal to be credible, it must involve a break with policies which have lost the party so much support. In foreign affairs, it means that Britain must distance itself from policies which seek to



bring about regime changes by military intervention, as in Afghanistan, Iraq and now Lebanon. In domestic policies it means both ending the partial privatisation of the Welfare state and the state sector generally, and not accepting the introduction into them of methods which imitate market forces (e.g. league tables). Within the Labour Party, it means the renewal of internal party democracy to give more say to members in determining policies and in ensuring the accountability of the leadership.

(The CLPD website www.clpd.org.uk has an archive of materials dating from the 1970s).

LOOKING AHEAD TO A MORE DEMOCRATIC LABOUR PARTY

**DOMINIC CURRAN AND
CONRAD LANDIN, YOUNG CLPD**

The election of Ed Miliband marked a turning point for Labour. But, as Michael Meacher said at the time, "the importance was not so much in Ed winning, but David losing." The elder Miliband brother represented the Blairite continuity of eroding internal democracy in the Party, and adhering to right wing policies that had so alienated working-class people under New Labour.

CLPD advised a first preference for Diane Abbott and a second preference for Ed Miliband. Given that the margin of victory was less than one per cent, CLPD's support surely proved decisive.

We both encountered CLPD properly for the first time in 2011 – some thirty years after the battles over mandatory reselection and the electoral college for which CLPD is probably best known. But what we discovered was not a jaded clique of elderly die-hards – which cannot be said for many left-wing groupings in the twenty-first century – but an effective and tight organisation full of passionate activists looking to get down to business.

Ed's election as leader marked the beginning of the tide being turned back in our Party. The economic crisis had proved that we could no longer simply go on with Thatcherite economics as Blair had done. The trade unions' decisive support for Ed Miliband showed a renewed impetus on their part to make sure the Labour Party represented the interests and aspirations of working people. Those who hold to the discredited politics represented by his New York-bound brother have been on the retreat in the party ever since.

The record attendances at the CLPD Conference fringe events last September demonstrate the huge potential offered by this sea-change in the Party. Undemocratic shenanigans from Party staff (supposedly impartial staff) have been cracked down upon by Miliband and new general secretary Iain McNicol, himself backed by CLPD NEC members and the trade unions against Chris Lennie, the choice of Blairite hacks.

But last year's Conference also saw some of the worst abuses of the Party's standing orders, as Conference votes to reject the Arrangements Committee reports – and thus the Conference agenda – were ignored by

the chair three days running. The much-feted "Refounding Labour" project did not come anywhere near to the handing back of power to members that is necessary to rebuild and democratise our Party.

Most Party members out there want to see a modern, democratic grassroots movement and not a cheerleading and leafletting club. But years of New Labour blunting have taken its toll on Party structures – and so many members find it hard to see the way out.

So now CLPD is needed more than ever – to co-ordinate the disenfranchised to achieve a Party managed by its national executive – a no-brainer in most organisations – and Party policies decided by Conference. We cannot have faith in the Party bureaucracy to deliver this – as demonstrated by Refounding Labour. But with CLP activists demanding a living, breathing party, and affiliated trade unions more active than ever – we stand a good chance of democratic reforms, in the form of rule changes, being supported by Labour Conference.

Only a Party that listens to its members will gain the support of the "new generation" that Ed Miliband appealed to in his first Conference speech.

CLPD'S CHARTER FOR A DEMOCRATIC CONFERENCE

At least 50% of conference time should be reserved for contributions in policy debates by delegates

The criteria for motions should be flexible and fair

Conference should choose the right policies, not rubber stamp them

Conference decisions and all papers should be available online to party members

The structure of conference therefore needs a review by the Conference Arrangements Committee

RED ALERT CLPD MEETINGS NOT TO BE MISSED IN 2013

CLPD LUNCHTIME FRINGE MEETING AT TUC CONFERENCE
IN BOURNEMOUTH HERMITAGE HOTEL (OPPOSITE CONFERENCE CENTRE)
Tuesday September 10 from 12.30 onwards



CLPD MEETINGS AT LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE IN BRIGHTON

CLPD Conference briefing, Royal Albion Hotel (very near pier) Saturday 21st September 6.0pm

CLPD REVIEW OF THE WEEK

Royal Albion Hotel (very near pier) Tuesday 24th September 6.0pm

ABOUT CLPD AND ITS GAINS FOR PARTY DEMOCRACY

CLPD was formed in 1973 by a group of rank-and-file activists with support from about ten Labour MPs. The first President was Frank Allaun. The main motivation for the Campaign was the record of the Labour governments in the sixties and the way that Annual Conference decisions were continually ignored on key domestic and international issues. The immediate cause was Harold Wilson's imperious and undemocratic rejection in 1973 of any decision by Annual Conference to adopt an alternative economic policy involving the possible public ownership of some 25 strategic companies.

CLPD's first demand was, therefore, for mandatory reselection of MPs so that they would be under pressure to carry out Conference policies and be accountable to Party members. This demand was achieved in 1979/80 through the overwhelming support of CLPs and several major unions, especially those unions where the demand for reselection was won at their own annual conferences (eg. TGWU, AUEW, NUPE).

CLPD also sought to make the leader accountable through election by an electoral college involving MPs, CLPs and TUs. Previously Labour leaders were elected by MPs alone. This demand was achieved in January 1981 and was an advance for Party democracy, although some MPs saw it as a reason to defect and form the SDP, eventually to get fewer votes than Lord Sutch's Party.

CLPD additionally promoted a range of reforms to give Labour women and black

members greater representation within the Party. The main demand for a woman on every parliamentary shortlist was achieved over the period 1986-88.

CLPD will sometimes promote seemingly non-democracy issues such as the significant extension of public ownership, defending the welfare state and the first-past-the-post electoral system (PR would mean no majority Labour Governments). All such policies derive from our commitment to socialist values and socialist advance.

The major focus of CLPD's work in recent years has been to win back the power for ordinary rank-and-file Party members, which has been surreptitiously transferred to the centre under the pretext of 'modernisation' and, ironically, 'extending Party democ-

cracy'. For example, recently CLPD campaigned for, and achieved, OMOV for the CLP section of the National Policy Forum.

■ To find out more about CLPD, visit our website at www.clpd.org.uk. CLPD can usually provide speakers for meetings, especially if requests are made well in advance. To arrange this, ring Francis Prideaux on 0208 9607460 and leave a message for him if you get the machine and not the man himself.

Campaign Briefing no.76 Special 40th Anniversary edition is sponsored by:



To join the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy please fill in the form below and return with a cheque payable to CLPD to: CLPD Treasurer, 157 North Street, Luton, LU2 7QH.

I/we enclose £..... subscriptions/renewal/donation

Name

Address

.....

Post Code

Phone Email

CLP Region

TU Date

Annual rates: £20 individuals; £5 unwaged and low waged (under £8,000); £25 couples (£6 unwaged and low waged); £25 national & regional organisations; £15 CLPs, TUs and Co-op Parties; £5 CLP branches.