By Rida Vaquas, Tamworth CLP

Three summers ago, Jeremy Corbyn was elected Labour leader off the back of a campaign that mobilised many thousands of activists, old and new, and encouraged tens of thousands more to see a future in the Labour Party.

Corbynism’s impact, more than anything else, has been to raise the stakes for the Labour left. It is difficult to overestimate the sheer extent of the demoralisation prevailing on the left prior to the 2015 leadership contest — inside Labour the prospects of even getting a left candidate on the ballot were slim, and outside a large section of campaign-oriented activists and socialists had given up on the possibilities of change within Labour altogether.

Corbyn’s campaign and victory represented a seismic shift. Now, the future of the left simply cannot be separated from the fight for the Labour Party. Corbynism has renewed aspirations within Labour for more democratic party structures and cultures, and there have been wide expectations that the new-model party will be truly member-led.

The appeal of Corbynism for the left outside the party was the value it placed on extra-parliamentary endeavours, from which most Labour MPs were aloof. Activists recognised Corbyn and McDonnell from their speeches at demonstrations and their presence on picket lines. They marked out a distinct path from the rest of the party’s concessions on austerity, on immigration policy and on welfare reforms. Corbynism therefore represented a chance to make the Labour Party not simply a party fixated on the ballot box: though as last Continued on page 3
ISSUE 18

This issue of The Clarion comes out for our third Labour Party conference — our first issue was for conference 2016. Following our success last year with a motion on the anti-union laws, we will be holding a fringe meeting on that issue in Liverpool this year. We have again produced model motions: on climate change, schools, benefits, council cuts and Europe (see bit.ly/2MyFsy). We will update on these in the bulletin we bring out just before conference.

Two other major focuses for us at conference 2018 will be the fight for Labour democracy, including for a fully open selection process and the amendment of the rule under which socialist activists have been purged; and, of course, Brexit. Those who know The Clarion will know that we are more committed than ever to building the left campaign to stop Brexit and we will be working with other left-wingers for this goal at conference.

Those who are new to The Clarion will see that we represent a distinctive voice on the Labour left. Read, subscribe, get involved.

ABOUT US

The Labour Party and the country are standing at a crossroads. Jeremy Corbyn’s election as Labour leader in 2015 and re-election in 2016 opened up a space for socialist politics to re-emerge into the British mainstream. The 2017 General Election result confirmed that there are millions of people in Britain who at least want to see an end to austerity, neo-liberalism and the worst miseries inflicted by the broken capitalist system. The socialist left of the labour movement has a historic opportunity – we must seize it now.

That means an open discussion on politics and principles; assisting the grassroots of the labour movement to develop our own policies for a Labour government to transform society, building on and critically engaging with policies proposed by the leader’s office, the unions, constituency parties and other parts of the movement.

It means democratising the Labour Party, preventing further coup attempts against the leadership, and preventing further unjust purges, suspensions, and expulsions. It means facilitating debate on Momentum’s purpose, problems and future.

The Clarion is a space for and a contribution to those debates. In addition to news and reports from the labour movement, our coverage will focus on:

• Debate and discussion on class and class struggle today, and how we go beyond ‘new politics’ and ‘progressive politics’ to revive working-class politics.

• How we make socialism’s task of building a new society based on common ownership and need not profit the basic, unifying goal of the left; how we fight for bold socialist policies in the here and now.

• Fighting nationalism; building working-class solidarity across borders, and between workers of different backgrounds and from different communities.

• Taking a serious and consistent approach to equality and liberation struggles.

• Standing up for rational debate and against the cultures of clickbait, conspiracy theory and instant denunciation which have unfortunately taken root among certain sections of the left.

We welcome involvement from comrades who are in broad agreement with these above points and aim to critically engage with ideas from across the left.

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Another Europe is still possible — if we’re ambitious enough

By Alena Ivanova, Tower Hamlets Labour and Another Europe is Possible

Brexit was never of the left or for the left, yet we find ourselves scrambling around to make the best of a catastrophe, instead of what should always come first — campaign for what is in the best interest of workers and social justice.

A lot of the criticism levied against the Stop Tory Brexit campaign focuses on the unscrupulous attempts by various factions on the right of the party at usurping the issue for their own political games. The attempt, however, to shut down any demand for a frank and detailed discussion on what our policy should be, given that Brexit is an issue likely to define Britain and its relationship to the world for many years, betrays a shocking lack of ambition for the Labour party that belongs to its membership.

What comrades fervently mobilising against Brexit finding its way to the priorities ballot this year blindly reject is the same greatest wisdom of the membership that delivered the Corbyn leadership in the first place.

The Labour party is strongest when it is at its most democratic, and it’s most effective when it genuinely believes in what it is trying to convince the general public of. It is through the strength of left-wing conviction and desire for change among the membership that we got Jeremy Corbyn elected not once but twice, so why are we so adamant to dismiss a genuine conversation among members now?

Instead of taking several pages of the right’s book and enthusiastically applying them in turn (triangulation, electoral strategy over principles, shutting down debate, vague decision-making structures, I could continue), conference this year gives us the chance to intervene at a crucial time for the country.

We could use such a general election campaign to attack head-on the xenophobia and hate that was not caused by the referendum but that was even more viciously unleashed in its aftermath. By presenting a convincing case for a socialist Britain leading the way for other European countries, we could start addressing in practical terms the global capitalist and social justice.

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Another Europe is Possible

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We could use such a general election campaign to attack head-on the xenophobia and hate that was not caused by the referendum but that was even more viciously unleashed in its aftermath. By presenting a convincing case for a socialist Britain leading the way for other European countries, we could start addressing in practical terms the global capitalist networks that oppress UK workers as much as their fellows across the continent and make inroads for collective pan-European organising, the likes of which we saw successfully win against TTIP, and which inspired hundreds of thousands to get involved with the Paris climate change talks for example.

A Labour party on a campaign footing, with its increased membership, its young activist base and most importantly its principles held high needn’t worry about merely trying to preserve to the best of its abilities some remnants of an arrangement it had with the EU previously.

A Labour party with such a vision and such a campaign will drown out the hollow ‘single market at all costs’ and ‘controls on immigration’ voices and instead put forward a case for rebuilding Europe and standing united against the far right.

- To contact Another Europe is Possible at Labour conference, ring or text 07565 161 800
“Open selections” and Labour democracy

Joe Bilsborough from Labour International CLP and the Open Selection campaign (openselection.org), spoke to The Clarion.

Things seem to be changing with Momentum. Stephen Bush, an astute commentator on these matters, wrote on 3 September that Momentum appears to be throwing its weight behind ‘a full reselection process as a matter of course’.

Momentum’s national coordinator, Laura Parker, has advocated something which sounded an awful lot like Open Selection: ‘This means, in all constituencies, local members and the sitting MP would be free to compete for the Labour party’s backing at the general election’.

And then on 4 September Momentum sent out an email implying support for Open Selections!

Back in 2017, Labour International, the CLP for all members living abroad, balloted members on what – if any – motion they should send to conference. A Rule Change motion, amending the section of the rulebook pertaining to the selection of candidates, was the winning motion, with 62% of the voting members backing it.

Our Open Selection campaign followed naturally from this.

The campaign is primarily run by members of Labour International, but many members are able to draw on contacts in CLPs and union branches back in the UK.

We’ve put together both a guide to Open Selection, and a short video introduction, both of which are useful resources which it would be great to get shared as much as possible leading up to conference.

At Conference itself, we’re holding a fringe event with Paul Mason, Chris Williamson MP, Huda Elmi, and Rachel Godfrey-Wood.

New Socialist ran a great piece recently looking at mandatory reselection from an outside perspective: ‘the debate within Labour around “mandatory reselection” looks decidedly odd. In the Scottish Greens we don’t call it that: we just call it “selection”, and to my knowledge no-one has ever suggested not doing it before each and every election.’

There are some good-faith arguments about how Open Selection will cause drama and acrimony. I actually think the opposite is true. Every MP would go through this process – whether you’re Jeremy Corbyn or Chuka Umunna, it’s exactly the same. It becomes non-discriminatory and thus, simply part and parcel of what it means to be a parliamentary representative of the Labour movement.

Other arguments centre on it not being ‘the right time’. I don’t agree here. If it isn’t passed at this conference, Party rules mean it can’t even be discussed again for three years.

The response from members and activists has been overwhelmingly positive, nezeagerration. Sure, some members regard the proposal as ‘divisive’ or a ‘purge’, but most see it for what it is: a democratisation of the selection process to empower members regardless of faction.

Jeremy Dear, Deputy General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, has endorsed Open Selection in a personal capacity. The Fire Brigades Union this year unanimously endorsed mandatory reselection; Unite did the same in 2016. It goes without saying, but if you’re a member of an affiliated union, and support a chance to the selection process – get in touch with them and let them know!

The argument put forward by Laura Parker – that if Labour open its selection process, it could ‘find its own Ocasio-Cortezes’ – is a very compelling one. As she points out, ‘a new generation of Labour MPs are being shut out by Labour’s restrictive, outdated rulebook.’ Open Selection lets members the best candidate, democratically, every election.

Democratising the party is a necessary prerequisite for democratising the wider economy and country. There’s a fundamental paradox when the party putting forward proposals on democratising the economy has a less transparent selection procedure than the Conservative party. We need to democratise the Party – we have a great chance to do it at conference this year.

The Labour left needs democracy too

By Daniel W. Round, Dudley Momentum Chair

In the wake of the Willsman fiasco, around 500 committed but concerned Momentum members signed a letter asking for Momentum’s leadership to put in place a democratic selection process for future party elections (bit.ly/2wCrAl3). Signatories came from across the typical divisions on Labour’s left and include Matt Zarb-Cousin and Michael Chessum.

Issues of democratic deficit within Momentum go beyond the selection process for elections to Labour’s NEC and the NPF. In April’s Momentum NCG elections, the office faction’s regional slates picked up less than half the votes but won 10 of 12 elected spots in a system that perpetuates the dominance of an already dominant faction. A recent ‘national conference’ was little more than a glorified day-school, and there is not even a democratic link between hard-working local groups and the national organisation.

We on the left are rightly campaigning for democratisation of the party, but we also need a democratic movement of the left – democratic in both structure and culture – to drive this. We have seen how an undemocratic culture that developed within the disbanding Momentum Youth and Students has harmfully spilled into Young Labour (bit.ly/2F1ayM0). This type of paranoid politics is antithetical to the initial promise of the Corbyn movement and needs to be beaten back before it does further damage.

Momentum members are currently in the process of drawing up a Democracy Charter for local groups to discuss and sign. It will look at issues around democratising the NCG, bringing the office under control, empowering groups, re-establishing proper regional networks and encouraging greater participation.

The Clarion hopes this will help drive forward the conversation following conference about democracy within Momentum, and about the type of movement we need to build to transform the Labour Party, the labour movement and the country. For more information please email theclarionmag@gmail.com.
Digital communication should be used to distribute information about Labour Party activities, campaigns and events and Labour’s broad church and to remove a clause designed to target the left. The right to organise, within Labour’s rules, should be upheld across the entire Party, from its right-wing through the centre and on to the Party’s left-wing.

The principal condition of Party membership should be that of supporting the Labour Party and its candidates in elections. If that condition is fulfilled, then it should be the case that a member can support Progress, Momentum, Labour First, Workers’ Liberty, CLPD, Open Labour, Socialist Appeal or whatever. A Labour supporter who abides by Labour’s rules should not be excluded because they also support, associate with, or organise with such political currents or groups.

For the rule change see stopthelabourpurge.wordpress.com/2017/06/19/urgent

The limits of “digital democracy”

We republish extracts from an article by Maria Exall, Dulwich and West Norwood CLP and CWU activist — see bit.ly/2MKvgK. Maria was writing primarily about Momentum, but her arguments are applicable to the Labour Party too.

Digital communication should be used to distribute information about Momentum and Labour Party activities, campaigns and policies and encourage participation in Labour Party meetings and events.

The ability to express an opinion online is one thing. But being able to challenge opinions face to face of your opinion, or of having opinions being tested by actually going out to persuade people of them – that is quite another. The widespread assumption that digital decision and policy making is a good way to involve more and a wider diversity of people must be challenged for the following reasons.

We want to set up a process with power in local groups, not only nationally. That also implies a delegate based democratic structure where change happens from the bottom up.

Trade union involvement with Momentum: You cannot have a meaningful affiliate structure if decision-making happens solely through direct digital voting. It is not possible to respect the democracy of affiliated organisations and impose an OMOV form of digital democracy. The Unions have their own structure of decision making. The representative democracy in affiliated organisations means that we have a link to potentially hundreds of thousands, maybe millions of working people, not just the ones who join Momentum as individuals.

Educating activists, especially youth: The best way to do this is for young people to attend Momentum meetings, and Labour Party policy events and Conferences, and to go campaigning with and get to know other Momentum and Labour Party members. Then they can make informed decisions after discussion.

Digital voting infantilises policy debates: Plebiscites and referendums on policy are almost always a bad idea. They are just a snapshot of already existing views and do not allow for development through education, including face-to-face discussion and debate.

Using social media networking is not more ‘democratic’: It can reinforce the existing power relations as much as mainstream media. The same issues of ownership and control apply (to data ownership, to employment relations, to accountability for content etc).

Digital voting can lead to superficial engagement: The ability to network online becomes key rather than what people stand for and what work they are prepared to do with others. Many people do not have effective access to digital comms, a few through lack of internet access, many more through lack of ability to use comms effectively and just lack of time, articulacy, or information.

We need an annual Momentum conference. Decision making should be based on representation from local groups and affiliates, and that means delegates. Smaller elected bodies (a National Committee and a Executive Committee probably) should be given the mandate by the Conference to run the organisation.

You cannot respond as an organisation in any significant way to contemporary political events without some democratic structure at the centre.

By Mark Sandell (expelled Brighton Labour Party Chair) and Rosie Woods (expelled Harrow West CLP Vice Chair)

“Branches seek to dump MPs and accept hard-left activists and expelled members” was the subheading of a report by the Observer (2 September) on rule changes going forward to Labour conference this year.

There are indeed several rule changes submitted by branches to improve the democracy of MP selection and to reduce the time limit for readmission for expelled members – from five years to one. Given that some members were expelled for retweeting something from another party, five years seems a little excessive as a standard exclusion time.

There is also a rule change to remove the clause which socialists such as ourselves were expelled under. Labour rules currently prohibit members from joining or supporting any political organisation which is not an official Labour grouping. This stipulation theoretically covers everything from Momentum to Progress or Greenpeace.

That this rule could be used by the right to purge the left would come as no surprise. What is concerning is the growth in a witchhunting culture within the renewed left against socialist comrades in groupings that certain dominant cliques don’t like and have disagreement with.

The left now ostensibly have control of the party yet the de facto ban on certain socialists continues. In fact Labour has no list of prescribed organisations, but often it acts as if it does.

The proposed rule change is nothing more than a basic democratic demand to protect

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By Sacha Ismail, Lewisham

“I absolutely cannot control everything that is going on. Momentum is a very different kind of organisation, it’s much less hierarchical, horizontal, culturally very different. Our members want to do politics themselves, not just to take orders.” – Jon Lansman told the Financial Times in an interview published on 31 August.

Two days later leading left-wing Labour Party activists in Leeds launched a statement demanding the reinstatement of the Leeds Momentum group, shut down, prevented from reconvening and then kept in limbo for three months.

Leeds is only the latest in a series of Momentum groups in some manner shut down or stitched up by the Momentum office and their local supporters. In April supporters of the office, led by people involved with the witch-hunting Stalinist-nationalist Red London Facebook page, engineered a split in Lewisham Momentum. The office immediately recognised the split group as Lewisham Momentum. Going on for five months later, it has had no meetings.

Leeds and Lewisham are two particularly dramatic examples, but there are others.

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Lansman, Leeds and Lewisham

By Sacha Ismail, Lewisham

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Leeds and Lewisham are two particularly dramatic examples, but there are others.
Failures of left in office boosted the far right

By Michael Elms

In 1981, a left government took power in France under a Socialist Party President, Francois Mitterrand. By the 1990s, almost everything built in the first years of the Mitterrand government had disappeared. The right governed (and from 1986 to 1988, had governed with Mitterrand), and the government’s nationalisations were almost all reversed (in some cases by Mitterrand).

And one of the long-term consequences of the 1981 government was to make the far-right Front National into a major player in French politics.

The old French ruling party around De Gaulle had been discredited since 1968. The revolutionary left, the Communist Party, and especially the previously-moribund Socialist Party (PS), grew. PS leader Mitterrand was able to leverage this growth to batter the PCF into uniting with him around a “common programme” in 1972.

In 1981, the new government abolished the death penalty; nationalised almost the whole financial sector, plus 12 big industrial firms; increased the minimum wage by over 10%; and hired an additional 200,000 civil servants. The retirement age was lowered to 60. In 1982, the government started work on reducing the working week from 40 to 35 hours, with an initial reduction to 39.

Soon the franc came under pressure in international financial markets.

The government opted for a “pause” in the reforms—a pause which would become permanent—and then for an actual reversal of many of them.

When PCF Health minister Jack Ralite imposed hospital charges for patients in 1983, the PCF defended his move ("when you’re at home, you pay for your own meals, don’t you?"). The PCF would finally sink out of government in mid-1984.

The left vote started to fall. Whereas the fascists Le Pen had polled 0.72% in 1974, in 1984 he matched the PCF’s vote, which by then was down to 11%.

The rise of the Front National was not the crisis. The demonstrations became more and more right wing and were led, especially in big cities, by the MBL movement, which is like the “Free Brazil” movement, a “neither-right-nor-left”, “new-politics” type of alliance. The decline of the PT also left a vacuum in communities which was often filled by communalism and/or by Evangelical Christians, who have grown a lot and become a really big political power. This is part of why the extreme right is now resurgent.

Left governments: learn from history

The PT was founded during the military dictatorship, in the conflict against the dictatorship of 1964-85.

It came out of the union movement, mostly in Sao Paolo, and the steelworkers’ union. Lula, the first PT Federal President, came from the steelworkers’ union.

It was a very radical party. In 1988 it said that the way to end Brazil’s external debt was to nationalise the banks and Brazil’s mineral wealth. It promised a big land reform.

Between the time the party started in the 1980s and when it first formed a government in 2003, it lost a lot of its basic politics. The ideology of the party became more and more washed-out, and when Lula was elected president, it was on the basis of a slogan like “Hope will defeat fear”.

By then people no longer expected socialism from the PT, but they expected land reform: the movement of landless workers was big. They expected an end to corruption and taxation of the rich to build a welfare state.

During the PT government about 20 million people came out of extreme poverty. Many workers previously “informal” gained formal employment status.

Lula expanded massively the Bolsa Familia, a benefits system which gives a certain amount of money to families depending on how much money they have, the only condition being that their children attend school.

Lula was more popular at the end of his administration, in 2011, than when he got in, which almost never happens. But resentments built up on the right. You hear people saying, “You can’t find the help any more” (about domestic servants).

The government was able to do what it did because of favourable economic conditions. It had money to spend on benefit systems, but also made deals with big landowners. The landless workers’ movement MST still protects the PT, but says that the PT government was not good for land reforms.

Inside the PT, the internal life is not great. An internal web-forum was set up to discuss the PT’s policy, and then there were fewer meetings. Activists are no longer responsible for political campaigning, which has been outsourced to private companies. The PT now only exists in industrial life, or industrial politics in the union movement. It is much less active on the streets.

The economic crisis from 2014, made it harder for the government to conciliate the ruling class with reforms. Yet the left is really disorganised.

In 2013 we had really big demonstrations in Brazil, which were politically braintless. They called for better education and better healthcare, but they lacked the organisation to make a programme, or to criticise the government, or hold them to account instead of trying to throw out. Those two things together made Dilma Rousseff’s popularity fall massively.

The crisis made it much more difficult for the government to conciliate the needs of the ruling class and the working class.

The massive unrest was not channelled by the left. The left was not organised to do that.

The demonstrations became more and more right wing and were led, especially in big cities, by the MBL movement, which is like the “Free Brazil” movement, a “neither-right-nor-left”, “new-politics” type of alliance. The decline of the PT also left a vacuum in communities which was often filled by communalism and/or by Evangelical Christians, who have grown a lot and become a really big political power. This is part of why the extreme right is now resurgent.

The lessons for Labour should be: don’t sell out your principles in order to get into government. It is better to take the “long route” of persuading people of ideas instead of abandoning them in order to get into government.

Secondly, to maintain the internal life and democracy of the party. Do that to maintain your principles and shape policy, and also to hold leaders to account once they are in government.

Lula, the first Workers’ Party President
Lessons from Labour 1974-9

Denis Healey, the Chancellor in that 1974 government, told the Labour conference in October 1973: “There are going to be howls of anguish from the rich”. He followed up a few days before polling with the promise to “squeeze property speculators until the pips squeak”.

The Labour manifesto summed up by proposing “a fundamental and irreversible shift in the balance of power and wealth in favour of working people and their families”.

Plenty were sceptical about whether Healey and the new prime minister, Harold Wilson, would deliver. Yet this was a Labour government brought to power on a wave of working-class militancy and radicalisation, a government of a Labour Party which had won an election called by the harassed Tories on the theme “who rules, government or unions?” by siding with the unions.

The Labour government reflected both the political inadequacies of the labour movement as it was then — and the strength, confidence, and political reach of that movement. We don’t think of the 1974-9 government as a “left government”, but it promised far more leftism than Labour does today.

The manifesto sided with the miners, whose industrial dispute with the government had spurred it to call the snap election. The Labour government quickly settled the dispute on the miners’ terms. It quickly repealed Tory anti-union laws, and laws which forced councils to raise council rents. It legislated protections for private tenants and the homeless. It introduced the Equal Pay Act, the Sex Discrimination Act, and the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Its undelivered promises included a Wealth Tax; sweeping nationalisations — North Sea oil and gas, shipbuilding, ship repair, ports, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, road haulage, construction, and machine tools — and “steps to make the management of existing nationalised industries more responsible to the workers in the industry”.

But world capitalism lurched deeper into its biggest crisis since World War 2. Economic output began to sag in 1973, slumped drastically in 1974, and kept falling until late in 1975. Inflation reached 24.2% per year in 1975. Unemployment rose from 2.6% in 1973 (then considered high) towards 5.7% in 1975.

The Labour government shifting sharply right, and then letting Thatcher in to bash a demoralised labour movement — resulted from the fact that both the Labour government and the broad labour movement lacked ideas to deal with this crisis.

They were scared. By June 1975, Jack Jones, the leftish leader of the strongest union, the TGWU (now part of Unite), was so convinced of the danger of a military coup against the Labour government that he persuaded the government to scrap its manifesto commitment against binding wage controls and introduce a flat-rate limit on pay rises of £6 per week (about £60 today: remember, inflation was 24pc).

The top layers of the ruling class were less panicky — confident that Labour would administer capitalism passably. But in 1974, according to later testimony by Michael Carver, then Chief of Defence Staff, “fairly senior officers were ill-advised enough to make suggestions that perhaps, if things got terribly bad, the army would have to do something…”

Jones’s authority, many workers’ bewilderment at the economic chaos, and the fact that for some workers £6 was the biggest weekly pay rise they’d ever had, combined to make this pay limit effective. Strikes declined sharply.

The parliamentary Labour left crumbled in demoralisation after June 1975, when withdrawal from the EU was rejected 67%-33% in a referendum. For the parliamentary left then, EU withdrawal was the politico-economic cure-all.

By 1976-8 the government was imposing heavy cuts on the NHS and other social spending under the terms of a deal it had had to do with the IMF, and opposition from the parliamentary Labour left had collapsed. In 1975-6 the mood on the “broad” grass-roots left could perhaps be described as unhappy but stunned. There were local anti-cuts committees. Industrial struggle revived bit by bit from early 1977, to culminate in large public-sector strikes in the “Winter of Discontent” of 1978-9.

By 1979, frustration had accumulated so that a big left surge developed in the Labour Party, around demands to democratise the party. But by then workers’ confidence in industrial class struggle had already declined. It was not extinguished. The miners would strike for a full year in 1984-5, and at points in that year come close to defeating the Tories. But rank-and-file organisation was already thinner, the cumulative impact of many years of mass unemployment already greater.

The ideological, political, and economic-class-struggle aspects of the left response, all across the 1970s, were chronically out of kilter with each other. If we do not use the “sunny” times — the periods when most things seem to be going the left’s way, and so demarcation and education seem like unnecessary bother — to clarify and organise, then we will not have the means to tackle the “storms” when, suddenly, the difficulties are visibly greater.

Will the British left learn the lessons of Syriza?
By Michael Chessum
bit.ly/2CjydXU

Lessons from Greece in 2015
By Theodora Polenta
bit.ly/2xuluwJ

Martin Thomas, Islington South CLP, was an active socialist and trade unionist in 1974, when Britain elected a Labour government seen at the time as left-wing.
By Mark Osborn, NEU rep at City of London Academy (Southwark)

The National Education Union at CoLA took three days of strike action in March. We took one day of action on the first week, two days the next week and the union told our Head we would be out for three days every week until our demands were met.

We were striking in support of a large number of staff who had failed performance management and had been denied pay progression, and others who had been put on performance improvement plans.

We won. That’s a testament to the long-term work that has gone on, over many years, to build a very strong, democratic union inside the Academy. And the determination of the two young women teachers who were our reps last year.

Nevertheless, at every turn, our school group was restricted by the anti-union laws. At the end of November 2017 over 60 teachers had voted to strike — almost unanimously — at our school meeting. But it took over three months to navigate the ridiculous postal balloting regulations and actually start our action.

When we started our action 45 teachers turned up, each day, to our picket line. It was a massive show of strength. Unfortunately the national NEU felt obliged to help management by restricting those members directly picketing to six (everyone else stood by the roadside and waved to parents and passers-by). The restriction on picketing is also part of the raft of anti-union laws passed by the Tories (and then maintained by New Labour) after 1980.

The anti-union laws prohibit solidarity action (miners striking for nurses) and political strikes (for example, action against Apartheid which took place in the 1980s would now be illegal).

Unions can be hit with massive fines if they break these laws.

The anti-union laws need repealing and replacing with a positive set of rights for workers: the right to join a union, organise and strike; the right to union representation and recognition; the right to take action when and where we need to; and the right to picket effectively.

Last year’s Labour Party conference passed policy to repeal all the anti-union laws. Unfortunately the Labour leadership seem set on only getting rid of the 2016 Trade Union Act. The Party needs to campaign this its policy and repeal all the anti-union legislation when it forms the next government. The unions need to demand this clearly and vocally.

Union members should raise the issue in their union and those who are in the Labour party can help by raising this inside the Party’s structures and with their Labour MP.

Fighting the anti-union laws — what you can do

- What Labour’s new policy (passed in 2015 and 2017 says): bit.ly/2ATm3jU
- Put this statement initiated by Lambeth Union to your union branch, etc: bit.ly/2IgQELv
- Put this motion to your Labour Party ward/CLP: bit.ly/2PuZic4
- Come to our fringe meeting at the 2018 conference, 7pm, Sunday 23 September @ The Liverpool, 14 James St. See back page for more
- For more ideas and a range of articles and resources: bit.ly/2G9GWwB
anti-union

“The balloting process is deliberately made long and difficult, to stop people from taking action. For people who’ve not been involved in organising before, that process can be scary. Just the fact that the employer has been given notice can make you nervous. What we’ve lost is the days when you were able to sit in a room with your friends from work and raise your hand and there was that moment of comradeship. Instead people are stuck at home with their ballot, on their own, and second guess and psyche themselves out. The ban on flying pickets is important too — we would have liked to own, and second guess and psych ourselves out. The ban to go other stores, to show them what we were doing and have that debate. We need to discuss how we get this into scary. Just the fact that the employer has been given notice can make you nervous. What we’ve lost is the days when you that. Our starting point has to be, we don’t support anti-
give their confidence a boost, but of course we couldn’t. These laws were put there to stop workers demanding their rights, so we absolutely need to fight them! While they remain, workers’ rights will continually be taken away and people will remain scared of fighting for them. The whole labour movement should campaign for them to be repealed, including the Labour Party. If they’re repealed we’ll have a much better chance of protecting ourselves and fighting to win.”

— Shen Batmaz, McStriker and Bakers’ Union organiser

“We need to say there is far too much state interference in the running of trade unions, and that should be completely rolled back. State interference in the voluntary organisations of workers — we should have a principled objection to that. Our starting point has to be, we don’t support anti-union laws — full stop. We want to discuss how we get rid of them. If other people have a different point of view, let’s have that debate. We need to discuss how we get this into the manifesto and how do we make sure we get a Parliamentary Labour Party that will all vote for it when it comes up. The unions have to be clear what the unions want. If we look at the Blair-Brown years, the question has to be asked why did Labour-affiliated unions allow 13 years of Labour government to go through and not see the repeal of those laws, because it’s put us in a much weaker position union movement.”

— Matt Wrack, Fire Brigades Union General Secretary

“Standing to represent working people”

Tina McKay, who was selected as Labour’s parliamentary candidate for Colchester in May, spoke to The Clarion. For a longer version of this interview touching on other issues, see bit.ly/2NMc1GV

You’ve made some very distinctive pledges about how you’ll operate if you’re elected to Parliament. Can you explain?

I’ve pledged to only take a worker’s wage, to submit myself to open reselection for every election and to always report to and consult my CLP.

For me it comes back to people not being able to identify with politicians. So many people in politics come from privileged backgrounds. There are very few working-class politicians in any party, even Labour, though we are better than the others. Politicians don’t understand the challenges people face on a day-to-day basis.

I want to show that I am serious about doing things differently. If you’re standing to represent working people your life needs to be at least partly representative of theirs. It’s very easy for Labour MPs to go and sit in Westminster and become so disconnected from the people they are supposed to be fighting for. I want to represent working people, and that means living like a working person — which is why I’ve said I’ll take only my current salary and use the rest to support local campaigns and community groups.

In terms of the argument that MPs have to work hard, so do nurses and firefighters and people in Argos stores. Everyone should be on a much higher wage but at the moment they’re not and Labour MPs need to reflect that.

Why do you think that stance is not more widespread, even on the left?

Well to be fair there are probably MPs who do this in an more informal way, but I wanted to spell it out as a clear pledge that members can hold me to and that we can campaign around. Why isn’t it more common? I don’t know if candidates come under pressure not to do it. I’m not trying to shame anyone but I do think it’s the right thing to do and I do hope others will follow.

I’d also wanted to flag up the cost for an individual of running for Parliament. There’s research just come out that suggests the average amount an individual pays to win in a marginal for Labour is £19,000. To say nothing of the pressure it creates on your personal life and so on. Obviously individuals need to be committed and not doing it for the money, but why doesn’t the party pay for all candidates to go on the minimum wage so we can campaign full time? That would open it up to a wider range of people too.

And your other pledges?

I’m committed to open selections — I know it may come up at conference, but I can’t see why that isn’t the policy already. Why would you stand in an election with the Labour rosette if you don’t have the confidence of your CLP? Yes, you represent your constituents but you’re doing it under the Labour banner and having that support is essential to your legitimacy. If I win the next election and then my members decide to put someone else forward that’s fine — it’s about the movement and what we can do for people in Colchester, not about the individual getting elected.

Similarly with reporting back and consulting the CLP — it seems absolutely obvious. The members are the heart and soul of the party, the people who make it a living force. There are so many issues where MPs have ignored members’ views and members have understandably been very unhappy about it.

I can put forward my views and explain them, and we can have discussion and try to work out something everyone agrees on.
Is a new Anti-Nazi League what we need?

By Dan Katz, Lewisham East CLP

In August John McDonnell declared: “We can no longer ignore the rise of far-right politics in our society,” and concluded that, “it’s time for an Anti-Nazi League-type cultural and political campaign to resist”.

The ANL was founded in 1977 and existed as an effective organisation for just three or four years. An ANL Mark 2, in 1992, was much weaker and obviously an SWP-front group.

The original ANL was a broader affair, albeit one controlled by the SWP. It organised a series of carnivals, including two massive events in 1978. In October 1978 the SWP/ANL disgraced itself by holding a carnival in Brockwell Park, South London, while the NF marched against the Bengali community in Brick Lane, East London. Faced with a choice between mobilisation to oppose fascist violence, and the chance to recruit at an ANL carnival, the SWP went ahead with the carnival. Many on the far left went to Brick Lane and stood side-by-side with the Asian youth.

The original ANL did organise large demonstrations, but it was quite cautious and conservative. One leading ANL/SWPer boasted that if Winston Churchill were still alive he would have been welcome in the ANL! The SWP openly encouraged Liberal and Tory politicians to back the ANL – and obviously to keep the alliance together they had to tone down any radical solutions required to meet the fascist threat.

The ANL Mark 2 was weaker but with the same or more political problems. In September 1993 the British National Party (BNP) fascist, Derek Beackon, was elected in a council by-election in Millwall ward, on the Isle of Dogs.

Beackon was the first fascist councillor elected since 1976. He was beaten by Labour in the Council elections of 1994, with Labour running on a specially-constructed, more-left-wing manifesto pledging a large number of new council homes.

I remember turning up in Millwall, to campaign for Labour – and large numbers of anti-fascists and Labour members did the same, from all over London. The SWP/ANL turned up to meet our group of canvassers, handed out an ANL leaflet saying, “Don’t Vote Nazi”, then went away again. In other words: vote anyone but the BNP! Vote Tory – just don’t vote BNP!

We need better than the ANL/SWP brand of liberal, gimmick-led, PR anti-fascism. We need properly-stewardled, labour movement mobilisations to confront fascists on the streets, and a radical left-wing Labour Party that guarantees jobs and homes for all workers, to undercut the roots of pseudo-radical populist and fascist right-wingers.

John McDonnell is right about the urgent need to debate the issue, but I hope that doesn’t amount to a lash up with the SWP to form an ANL Mark 3. We can do better.

• For a longer version including analysis of recent Free Tommy Robinson demonstrations and the counter-protests, see bit.ly/2wEsOf

Questions on Labour’s immigration policy

By Simon Hannah, Tooting CLP

When the 2017 manifesto For the many not the few turns to the perpetual political football of immigration, it states that Labour will “replace income thresholds with a prohibition on recourse to public funds”.

Now clearly the income thresholds is an attack on the Tory policy of only allowing people to move to Britain if they are earning substantial incomes (currently £60,000), but is Labour’s alternative any humane?

What do Labour members think that a ‘prohibition on recourse to public funds’ means? Does it mean that immigrants that are in the UK will not have access (or have even less access) to welfare? What about health care or education for children? That the Tories are immoral because you have to earn over £35k to come here but Labour will make it so that if you are temporarily unemployed you starve to death?

The government has a website which outlines what ‘no recourse to public funds’ currently means—you can read it here. Is Labour planning on extending that policy further?

When it says Labour will work with businesses and trade unions to “identify skill shortages”—does that mean that only people who are useful to the economy can come here? Are people just cogs in a capitalist machine to benefit the British economy? Are we putting profit before people?

When it says “we will institute a new system which is based on our economic needs, balancing controls and existing entitlements. This may include employer sponsorship, work permits, visa regulations or a tailored mix of all these which works for the many, not the few”, are we saying that immigrants can come to the UK but be at the mercy of their bosses? What kind of impact will that have on people’s rights at work, their desire to join a trade union or lodge grievances if they know their immigration status relies on their bosses liking them?

The policy at the heart of the Labour left project and many of the newly inspired activists in Labour have far better anti racist policies than we presented in the 2017 manifesto. Do we have the courage to be truthful to our actual beliefs about the rights of immigrants and the benefits of immigration or will we triangulate to appeal to the racists and the nationalists?

That is a fundamental question—if we waive on this then what else will we sacrifice for power?

Progressive immigration policies would start from seeing immigrants as people, not a political problem to solve.

This means no more detention centres or deportations. It means fast routes to citizenship, free applications if you have been living in the UK and paying taxes. It means visas not being primarily linked to employment. It means allowing asylum seekers to work or claim benefits that they can live on.

Support the Labour Campaign for Free Movement:
• labourfreemovement.org
• facebook.com/labourfreemovement
• info@labourfreemovement.org

The campaign will be selling special t-shirts at Labour conference with the slogan “Build unions not borders”
We have just come to the end of one of the hottest summers in living memory. But it was no anomaly.

Since 1880 the global climate has warmed by an average 0.8°C. The year 2016 was the hottest on record, and 16 of the 17 warmest years on record have been since 2000.

Resulting from these undeniable signs of capitalist-driven climate change, there is increasing discussion in the scientific community about the danger of a ‘hothouse earth’ scenario (bit.ly/hot-h). A number of tipping points could amplify the greenhouse effect further, and quicker – for example the melting of Siberian permafrost which stores huge amounts of methane, CH4; the acidification and warming of the ocean, inhibiting its capacity to absorb carbon; a similar effect in the soil, transforming it from a carbon store to an emitter. A number of other factors, such as the loss of the Amazon, could be accelerated and triggered within a short period of time unless emissions are dramatically reduced.

Politically, it is only the socialist movement that can take the measures necessary to minimise the coming storm. International agreements have been a monumental failure: since the first UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report in 1990, CO2 emissions have risen by 60%; since the foundation of the IPCC in 1988, more than half of those emissions were made by just 25 corporates and state-owned entities, and over 70% were produced by the top 100 companies. As big a bulk of emissions was produced between the first IPCC report and 2016 as from 1751 to 1750.

The COP21 in Paris in 2015 committed to holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C, which would require vast decarbonisation by 2030. The agreement made no commitments about how this should be achieved, other than reassurances of flexibility and a restatement of faith in the emissions trading schemes — whose achievements to date in terms of reductions are negligible, if not negative — and wide adoption of Carbon Capture and Storage technologies which are largely untested on such a scale. Scientists have estimated that even if all the pledges of the Paris treaty are kept, global temperatures will rise to 2.7°C above pre-industrial levels. And since then, Trump has pulled the US out of the treaty.

There is currently much excitement over signs that signs that things may be beginning to shift in favour of renewable power. Renewable generation rose by 9% in 2016 and was source of just over half the new capacity added worldwide. As demand for renewables is rising, production costs fall, as seen in the decline in the cost of wind turbines by a third and solar panels by 80% since 2009. However this is but a glimpse of the bigger picture. Wind and solar power accounted for just 4.4% of global electricity in 2016. The real expansion of fossil fuel generation continues faster than that of renewables. The expansion in total energy consumption in 2015 and 2016 – which is of course predominantly fossil fuels — equalled the total 2016 renewable energy production. The expansion in fossil fuel production alone in the last four years is greater than the total 2016 wind and solar production. This means that while wind and solar are added energy to the total consumption pool, they are not really replacing any fossil fuels.

In the UK, as renewable capacity rises, there are new natural gas power facilities being planned, alongside Tory backed fracking projects to provide some of the fuel. Drax power station in North Yorkshire is proposing the largest ever UK gas units, and for huge government subsidies to finance it. In its own environmental impacts report on the project, Drax confesses that it will “represent a significant net increase in greenhouse gas emissions and have therefore negative climate impacts”. This project, and another new gas-fired power station in nearby Eggborough, is likely to increase our reliance on Russian-imported as well as unconventionally drilled (ie fracked) gas sources.

Against this urgent backdrop, what should Labour advocate? We have a historic responsibility to go further than the support for community renewables and partial nationalisation proposed in the 2017 manifesto. As the ‘hothouse earth’ paper (bit.ly/hot-h) says: “Incremental linear changes to the present socio-economic system are not enough to stabilise the Earth System. Widespread, rapid, and fundamental transformation will likely be required to reduce the risk of crossing the threshold and locking in the Hothouse Earth pathway”

The motion The Clarion has produced for Labour Party conference (bit.ly/2ChieJG) draws from the tradition of workers’ plans, from the Lucas Plan to the one million climate jobs pamphlet produced by the Campaign Against Climate Change trade union group just under a decade ago. We propose it as a serious policy perspective for Labour in power.

We also need to prepare positively for millions of climate-related migrants, not through increased border security but through house building and decent social provision.

**Luke Neal, an activist in various climate change and ecological campaigns and struggles, argues for urgency.**

**Nationalise the banks**

British banks can’t be trusted — let’s nationalise them, by Owen Jones: bit.ly/2oElYrW

Why we must fight to nationalise the banks, by Matt Wrack: theclarionmag.org/2017/02/26/bankswrack

For public ownership of banking and finance — sign this statement: bit.ly/2oDK9tV
A nationalist left is no answer to the right

By Ana Oppenheim, Hornsey and Wood Green CLP and Labour Campaign for Free Movement

A new movement is hoping to shake up German politics. At first sight, Aufstehen ("Stand Up") seems promising.

The rather vague but nevertheless enticing description on its website talks about fighting for decent jobs and pensions, good education, protecting the environment, promoting peace and building a true democracy, free from corporate interests. It cites Jeremy Corbyn and Bernie Sanders as inspiration.

However, there is a more troubling aspect that distinguishes Aufstehen from established German left parties: a tough stance on immigration. The organisation (which is not yet a party) was founded by Die Linke's Sahra Wagenknecht, who had caused controversy not only with her openly anti-capitalist politics but also with her opposition to immigration, including calling for a limit on accepting refugees. She explicitly appeals to supporters of the far-right Alternative fur Deutschland, combining redistributive policies with a call for stricter border controls.

Among prominent supporters of Aufstehen is also sociologist Wolfgang Streeck — known as a critic of financialisation but also of liberal immigration policies, who even took this approach to its logical conclusion by saying that women entering the workplace have pushed down wages.

Germany is not the only place where left economics and right-wing populism meet. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon is seen by many as the leading figure of the left. While promising large-scale investment in public services and taxing the rich, the leader of La France Insoumise has also adopted aggressively nationalist rhetoric, accused migrants of "stealing bread" from the French and toyed with the idea of a burka ban. Mélenchon will be one of the headline speakers of this year’s Momentum-backed festival The World Transformed. While there's nothing wrong with bringing together and debating figures from across the left, JLM is not a role model Corbyn should be learning from.

It would be unfair put Corbyn in one box with the likes of Mélenchon and Wagenknecht. Labour’s leader, as well as many of his close allies in Parliament, has long been an outspoken defender of migrants when mugs. Yet his complacency with Brexit and promise to end free movement with Europe could soon lead to the paradoxical situation where the left is not a role model he should learn from.

A “socialism” that actively seeks to exclude those born on the wrong side of the border is no socialism at all.

Labour must not remain silent over Idlib

By Mark Boothroyd, Syria Solidarity campaign

As delegates prepare for Labour Party Conference, the Assad regime war machine and its Russian backers are preparing a military assault on the last rebel enclave in Syria.

Idlib, a rural province in the north of Syria is home to over two million civilians, hundreds of thousands of them displaced from all over Syria by Assad’s war on the Syrian people.

They are being subject to daily shelling and aerial bombing by regime forces, and now face a ground assault from Assad’s sectarian death squads. And now there is nowhere for them to flee to, as Turkey has closed its border to Syrian refugees, and all other rebel areas have been reconquered by the regime.

That the regime and its backers are preparing a massacre is obvious to see; Assad has pledged to retake the entire country, and has been doing just that, conquering Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, then Daraa. Pro-regime media has been full of stories of how Idlib is run by “terrorists” and “al-Qaeda” linked armed groups. This narrative has even been repeated UN special envoy for Syria, Staffan De Mistura who has said there are “10,000 terrorists” in Idlib who “must be defeated”. This narrative is a grim echo of Israel’s propaganda about Gaza, where the presence of Islamic militants and “terrorists” is used as a pretext to attack civilians and ethnically cleanse them.

Corbyn has claimed to want peace in Syria, but has remained largely silent over Assad’s war and its human cost. 750,000 Syrian civilians were driven from their homes by the regime’s attack on Daraa. Twice as many could be displaced or made refugees by an assault on Idlib. The Labour leadership must speak out against the coming assault on Idlib, and demand serious action to protect Idlib from the murderous Assad regime.

If Idlib falls, the killing will not end there. Assad will turn his attention to the Kurdish areas of Syria and the Rojava project, crush the autonomy they have won, and the bloody massacres and ethnic cleansing will continue.

- Labour MPs: what’s left? Tom Harris tackles Frank Field, Barry Gardiner and, on Syria, Chris Williamson: bit.ly/2w1eSJr
Firefighters confront Labour fire authority

Following a determined campaign by the Fire Brigades Union, the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Services Authority has backed down on trying to bring forward the overnight closures of Wallasey and Liverpool City Centre fire stations. Liverpool Riverside CLP Secretary and Unite activist Cate Murphy highlights the significance.

Between 2010 and 2020 there will have been a 48pc cut in fire engines across Merseyside, from 42 to 22 of which only 14 engines will be available for 24-hour 7-days-a-week response. The number of firefighters will have been reduced by 37% during this period, from 927 to 580. Several Merseyside fire stations have been closed since 2010 plans to crew stations including Liverpool City Centre and Wallasey from 10am to 10pm only would mean a thirty minute recall from home before an engine is despatched. Fire engines are now crewed with four firefighters rather than five as previously. Already Liv-

Labour councillors, start fighting!

By Joshua Bennett Lovell, Hertfordshire County Councillor

Society is being throttled by democracy-weakened and cash-strapped councils. With the closure of vital Children's Centres, inability to deliver quality affordable homes for residents, negative changes to the benefits system, austerity has crippled our communities.

Local government grants will have virtually disappeared by 2020, meaning that the worst – without a change in policy or direction – is yet to come. Funding for councils must be restored, as a minimum, to at least pre-2010 levels by the next Labour Government.

The erosion of democracy in local Labour Groups and lessened coordination with our communities and trade union branches has allowed many of the attacks on local government services over the last decade to succeed. Instead of taking radical direct action when faced with injustice, Labour Groups have instead moved towards a politics that predominately leans on existing power structures in the hope of concessions.

Whilst I wouldn’t argue for the rejection of this avenue, our politics must also reach into and help advance the struggles in our workplaces and community groups to fight cuts, service closures and outsourcing. Labour Groups should be providing the space for these people to come together and build the alternatives we could implement in power – but also help to win more significant concessions whilst not in government. Too often failure in passing a motion in a council chamber (at best) has been the death knoll to fledgling community resistance efforts. Too many Labour representatives have let such defeats absorb them of their duty, when they could have provided the rallying call to fight back.

Accountability, a lively democratic culture, and the willingness to fight in all arenas are central to reversing the declines of our class over the last decades. There are many battles right now which local Labour Councillors should be throwing their weight behind, and our movement should be demanding this from our representatives.

In practice this means local Councillors supporting and calling for determined strike action, and vociferously campaigning for the reversal of anti-trade union legislation and against the stripping of local government grants. Such a determined struggle could reverse many of the cuts implemented by councils across the UK.

Without being radical at all levels of government and society, we will never deliver a democratic socialist vision.

FBU and Labour campaigners running a street stall in Wallasey

Left councillors organise

By Councillor Jumbo Chan, Brent

Despite the current trajectory of the Corbyn-led Labour Party, with a transformative agenda which goes against decades’ worth of neoliberal thinking, as well as its Bennite emphasis on empowering local grassroots members, there is still a massive gap between such ambitions and Labour at local governmental level.

An informal community of like-minded Labour councillors, Inspire, believe that this rift must be closed. To this effect, we have so far signalling our support for giving members more of a say in local government (bit.ly/2Ng0LWl) and have led a solidarity campaign supporting striking migrant workers from the United Voices of the World union (bit.ly/2oFGHPk). Though these are only small, tentative steps, we are going against a tide of conservatism and lack of enterprise.

If you either know or are a Labour councillor who supports the current positive direction of the Labour Party, please drop me a message on Twitter via @JumboChan.

I look forward to helping bring together and working with other left Labour councillors who understand that fundamentally all that power we have we owe to our members.

Labour’s NHS stance still needs transforming

By Nicholas Csergo, Holborn & St Pancras CLP, Momentum NHS

Following years of Labour activists coming up against pig-headed commitment to marketisation, Corbyn finally entered as the first leader opposed to making healthcare about profit – a core feature of his leadership campaigns.

A responsibility remains for activists to ensure the leadership is aware of the issues and is confident in pushing on them. Corbyn has continued saying the right things in some of his own statements, but the party message remains less than clear, with the particularly misleading narrative that “underfunding” basically explains everything. Diane Abbott, when she was Shadow Health Secretary, began to oppose the actual policies attacking the NHS, but that quietened when she left.

Discursively, campaigners have shifted Jonathan Ashworth quite far, which doesn’t necessarily equate to a change in thinking or policy. In the small print, policymakers have shown scant will to break with the Establishment consensus, forged by private healthcare interests. That consensus includes scrapping the comprehensive nature of public healthcare, opening increasing areas to the market. Simon Stevens, a United Health CEO and private healthcare lobbyist, leads the unaccountable quango behind the policies shaping the NHS. He was an adviser to Blair and wingers, including Corbyn, have echoed this disproportionate focus too.

In a system burdened by decades of policies by and for profitiers, overturning the Health and Social Care Act alone is not enough. The whole value and purpose of public service need to be recovered.

Delegates have used new powers to “reference back” National Policy Forum report sections, telling party policymakers to scrap the private providers’ market and profit in the NHS — which both report and manifesto had subtly pledged to keep. This year’s report, deadpan, acknowledges “the specific wording is no longer the agreed position and won’t be used again.

Left-wing activists, including from Momentum NHS, have succeeded in getting motions submitted by many CLPs and then pushed through, in 2012, 2016 and 2017. Over the last year there’s been more noise, for instance from the NPF, about implementing 2017 conference policy, but this hasn’t profoundly reshaped the party’s policy or perspective. Ashworth has become somewhat more open to meeting and discussing with NHS activists. But in line with last year’s composite 8, Labour would be setting out an NHS renationalisation policy “as per the NHS Bill” promoted by campaigners. Instead, there is talk of a consultation on the subject. It’s unclear how this relates to the policymaking process.

This year, left-wing NHS activists, including people who have been involved in Momentum NHS, have produced two conference motions. One concerns technology as a vehicle for downgrading and privatising the NHS, like second rate, private ‘GP apps’ that destabilise GP surgeries. It calls for Labour’s technology policies to differentiate themselves from this approach. The second concerns the deliberate reduction in NHS provision in order to expand private provision.

We’d also love to see more referencing back this year. It’s needed!

Social care: only public will do

By Rohan Fernando, Penistone and Stocksbridge CLP

Reading brand new Labour NEC member Navendu Mishra’s LabourList article on social care (bit.ly/2oFbZ8T) reminded me of my experiences with a Union organiser trying to encourage other care workers to join the union.

Talking to colleagues about improving pay and conditions was an uphill struggle. The entirety of the time spent on a 12 hour shift you’re either travelling to visit a service user or in that service user’s house. That leaves little time for face to face discussions. On the few occasions that you might be paired up with another care worker, having a proper discussion, for example about what to organise around (pay, rotas, travel time, bullying – pick your poison) can’t really be done when you want to be focussed on operating a hoist safely!

After leaving that care agency (which I have been told has since changed hands) my next job was in the NHS as a community support worker doing much the same thing. But the difference in working conditions and quality of care is stark. Here I have the flexibility to spend as much time as is needed with my patients in supporting them with daily activities; the emphasis is on promoting independence and patient safety. I have the time to supervise a patient making their breakfast, where previously preparing it for them would have been more ‘time efficient’.

If I feel the patient needs additional support I have access to a team of nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists who can either advise me when I’m with the patient, or if they feel this is what is needed, visit the patient on the same day.

Would it not be so much better to extend such NHS services to replace the already failing privatised model?

More often that not, our experience with private care providers has been that they aren’t willing to work with us in the interests of the patient. If we find that a patient needs more care input, the agency can’t or won’t cater for that increase, and we end up providing the care in their place.

Mishra is right to call for unionisation and workers’ rights, but just arguing for more money in the system doesn’t address the systemic failure of markets. Yes, there is not enough money in the system, but look at where a vast chunk of that money is going. A recent investigation by Corporate Watch into the biggest five home care companies found huge payouts made to their owners and shareholders.

At its worst the idea might mean putting more public money into private companies, that have demonstrated already their disregard for the needs of their service users, their families and the staff that care for them. We need a publicly owned, provided and funded system instead.
Untangling the antisemitism row

The controversy around antisemitism in Labour has escalated exponentially. Gary Spedding, Tynemouth CLP, campaigner against antisemitism, spoke to Rosie Woods.

The main thing is I think that the process of Labour dealing with antisemitism has started far too late. We should have been doing what Jeremy Corbyn is trying to do now two years ago, when this issue started getting a lot of traction. I believe that Jeremy Corbyn has been given poor advice over the past few years from those who don’t view antisemitism as a serious issue.

I first raised antisemitism in the Labour Party back in 2013 which is long before Jeremy Corbyn became leader. I raised it with the chief whips’ office, run then by Rosie Winterton, and they completely ignored the issues I was trying to raise.

It’s become a major issue because people have had enough. But the topic has become so polarised between right and left that people don’t want to recognise there is a legitimate concern.

There is a wonderful educational programme written by April Rosenblum in 2007 which argues that the left’s problem with antisemitism isn’t because the left is full of antisemites but because we have failed to properly educate ourselves and understand how antisemitism presents itself in society.

Antisemitism operates in a way that presents Jews as simultaneously inferior and weak, and part of the elite and the ruling class. That mix is very popular both among right wing and left wing circles. It appeals to people with all sorts of conspiratorial ideas in their heads and to people looking for explanations from polar opposite starting points as to why things are happening.

The IHRA definition itself is quite weak. For instance, it says that antisemitism is a ‘certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred towards Jews.’ This wording, saying it might be antisemitic to hate Jews, is not the same as someone saying it definitively is antisemitic.

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That is why there is such a controversy over their adoption. I personally find the code of conduct the NEC has so far drafted to be stronger than the IHRA definition and far more instructive in terms of tackling cases of antisemitism. Having said this, I believe that the moment for having a nuanced debate over this issue has long passed. Labour is now in an impossible position. It is important to include both Jewish and Palestinian voices in the process. Right now I think Labour hasn’t got a choice but to adopt the IHRA definition in full, despite my criticisms of two of the appended examples regarding Israel.

Call outs such as the lobby of the NEC on 4 September by Camden Momentum are extremely unhelpful and problematic. It’s important to acknowledge the emotions, fears and anxieties in the Jewish community and do all we can to make Labour a safe and secure space for our Jewish compatriots and comrades.

The idea that those of us who wish to extinguish antisemitism from within our ranks are working toward a right-wing plot or agenda is offensive and crass.

Being true to Labour Party values and principles, we should adopt an emancipatory and radical anti-oppression politics which puts our opposition to racist oppression at the very heart of our movement. There are those with political interests that are jumping on the issue. Exploiting the very real and serious situation surrounding anti-Jewish oppression for short term political gain is offensive and problematic. However, this does not mean we on the left can just dismiss the very real concerns and experiences of Jewish people, especially those who have been victims of anti-semitic abuse.

We tackle this issue by getting our act together. Educating ourselves on antisemitism and reading materials such as April Rosenblum’s pamphlet and the Jews for Racial and Economic Justice resources.

If we develop a consistent, non-conspiratorial line on antisemitism then it strengthens our credibility when we call out false allegations. Dismissing these issues or being defensive about those who have said some offensive and anti-semitic things isn’t a good look and it most certainly isn’t progressive.

Zionism is a very broad term that includes those from different schools of thought and background. Similarly, anti-Zionism is just as diverse with regard to those who subscribe to opposition to Zionism and what has unfolded in Palestine in the last 100 years.

I am an anti-Zionist myself. But there is an important distinction. The State of Israel has been built upon exclusionary and racist ideas, with policies of various governments enshrining racism in a number of ways. But the existence of the state in and of itself is not necessarily racist. There are Zionists that are very racist. But there are many who are not.

Those who are stuck in a particular line of anti-imperialist and far-left ideology are incapable of seeing antisemitism because they don’t believe it is real any more. That is extremely dangerous and is the type of nonchalant approach that is allowing antisemitism and vile conspiracy theories the space to grow in our movement.

• A range of Clarion articles on antisemitism at bit.ly/2Q7d1

Labour members organise for trans rights

By Kate Harris, Hornsey and Wood Green CLP LGBT+ Co-Officer

Trans people are facing increasing attacks in society and a backlash from the right and some parts of the left.

This row has spilled over into the Labour Party. The party currently supports women self-identifying for the purposes of All Women Shortlists. It supports changes to the Gender Recognition Act which would make it simpler and cheaper for individuals to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate. Some anti-trans activists have resigned in protest.

A motion recently passed by Tottenham CLP’s General Committee is against self-identification and for segregating trans women from women-only spaces.

Some of us in Haringey are very concerned by the motion and are seeking to convince our comrades to change their minds on these questions. We have got organised locally to do that. I would encourage people in other areas to do similar work, and to get in touch if they want to ask anything or get help.

• Full report at bit.ly/2wFWp0y

For more information, contact Kate at misskeharris@gmail.com
Make Labour conference sovereign!

By Michael Chessum, Streatham Hill Labour secretary

This year, conference will be dominated by two things: Brexit and party democracy.

They are, of course, linked. The left cannot go into a debate on democratic selection of MPs if it then tries to block members from having a binding say on the most important issue of the day. And, like Brexit, the Democracy Review is a superficially boring issue which provides a window onto a fundamental debate about the soul of the Labour Party.

The Democracy Review goes some way to institutionalising the Corbyn surge and fixing the worst aspects of our broken internal democracy. Standardising CLP processes will go some way to ending the fiefdoms of Labour’s local tin-pot dictators. Most significant will be its changes to conference itself: re-establishing it, or perhaps really establishing it for the first time, as the sovereign policy making body and introducing a proper motions process. Under the current “Contemporary Motions” process, members face a labyrinth of bureaucracy and hoop-jumping and local parties can only submit text on a single topic or a rule change.

Beyond structural changes, we must insist that Labour frontbenchers and representatives carry out the policies conference rather than largely ignoring it and making up policy themselves as at present.

The Review’s recommendations are not new but a reversal of the legacy of New Labour. This year’s debates about democracy are the latest iteration of a much deeper division over the soul and purpose of Labour, a division that dates back to its earliest days. Is the parliamentary Labour party the party of a movement, accountable its members, or is it a set of professional politicians with some supporters tacked on?

Unless we go beyond the Democracy Review to more radical reforms, all we will achieve is a shift back in time to before the Blair leadership – and this does not solve the fundamental issue of the accountability of Labour’s parliamentary party. Harold Wilson and James Callaghan often flouted the will of party conference, sometimes pre-announcing that they would refuse to abide by its decisions or presenting it with fait accomplis in the form of IMF loans.

For the New Labour modernisers, stripping back the power of members and elected officers to make policy was about managing the party and staying close to the political centre as the path to power. The Labour right is in crisis because this narrative is clearly obsolete, even on its own terms, in the world of 2018. The policies of common ownership, taxing the rich and combating austerity are extremely popular with voters. In contrast, the electorate is deeply mistrustful of the controlled, managerial politics that promised so much in 1997 but in practice delivered a continuation of Thatcher’s legacy and rising inequality.

To really fix Labour’s democratic deficit, we must confront the idea that being an elected representative puts you above democratic control from the grassroots of the movement. The election of council leaders and local government policy-setting by party members could be a crucial step. And, whatever it is called, members must have the right to choose their parliamentary candidates before each election.

Reforms to Labour’s internal structures must be consciously linked to its intentions in government. From Tsipras in Greece to Macron in France, the left’s experience of power has shown the pressures of being in government lead to unhealthy compromises. The only real protection against this is the existence of a mass movement, in which members have the formal power to instruct their MPs and ministers.

Above all, Labour Party conference must become sovereign.

• More on Labour — and Momentum! — democracy: pages 4-5

Repeal the anti-union laws! Clarion Labour conference fringe meeting

7pm, Sunday 23 September
The Liverpool, 14 James Street, L2 7PQ

Speakers: Matt Wrack, FBU General Secretary / Lauren McCourt, McStriker and Bakers’ Union executive / Kelly Rogers, sacked Picturehouse rep / Ana Oppenheim, Clarion editorial board / Jenn Forbes, Truro and Falmouth PPC

Chair: Cate Murphy, Liverpool Riverside CLP secretary and Unite 522 chair
The meeting will also hear a video message from Clive Lewis MP

Facebook event bit.ly/2wICkGV. Email theclarionmag@gmail.com