

Save the Labour Party

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Save the Labour Party as an ethical, democratically-run, solvent, membership organisation

Website - <http://www.savethelabourparty.org>

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Can the Labour Party be saved?

In the wake of English county council, new unitary authorities and European Parliamentary election losses, this is a very grim moment in the Labour Party's history.

By the time this is published, a cabinet reshuffle is expected to have been announced.

Save the Labour Party was founded to focus on system and process, which it has done and will continue to do. But events cannot be ignored. The media is dwelling on the resignations of Jacqui Smith, Hazel Blears and, latterly, James Purnell as though their departure was undermining the Party Leader's authority. Journalists and editors seem to have conveniently forgotten the Parliamentary Allowances scandals, which has touched the majority of members of the Cabinet, and who knows how many members of the House of Commons of all political parties.

STLP issued a statement ahead of the NEC meeting on 19 May setting out its expectations about how the Labour Party should tackle the issues for its elected representatives in Westminster – present and future. It terms of what was resolved unanimously, a solid foundation was established. However, there were fears that the new NEC Endorsements Panel would be used by the Party Leadership to scapegoat backbenchers and protect the Party Leader's friends in government and in the Cabinet in particular. As soon as the Cabinet reshuffle is completed, we – party members – are at liberty to form a judgement about 'clearing out the crooks' - how seriously the Party Leader has been about the need to clear out the Cabinet, as well as demanding payback of extravagant and unjustifiable claims. At issue are those members of the government who are alleged to have brought the Party into disrepute as a result of their expenses and allowances claims. References of all those former Cabinet members affected to the NEC Endorsements Panel is now vital for the integrity of the process. CLPs of all sitting MPs seeking re-election have the right to refer concerns to the General Secretary for possible reference to the Panel.

Similarly, we – party members – have a right to reflect on the government's current policy stances. The Party is still encumbered with too many controversial policies that are seen as being at odds with Labour values – income and wealth inequalities, over-dependence on the private sector, infringements of civil liberties and tarnished green credentials.

Beyond the announcement of the election results is how we rebuild the Party. While the Leader can form a new Cabinet and whip the PLP, he cannot dictate whether we – party members, past present and future – agree. There are democratic mechanisms in place to help encourage and enable us as Party members to play our part in the General Election campaign whenever it comes in the next 12 months. They need to be activated.

The NEC is not due to meet until 21 July. Working out how to deal with these issues cannot wait. That's why STLP's committee is calling for an emergency meeting of the Labour Party's ruling body within the next two weeks.

Make sure your CLP contributes to the review of undemocratic policy making and Conference Arrangement

At Labour's 2007 Conference new arrangements for policy making were agreed. They were put forward by Gordon Brown and masqueraded under the name of "Extending and Renewing Party Democracy". They were steamrollered through Conference by the use of the threat of the impact of a defeat for the Leadership on the results of the phantom general election of November 2007. However they were agreed, subject to a review by the NEC, with a report back to Conference in 2009. All "stakeholder" organisations of the Labour Party are included in this review. The deadline for submissions by CLPs

and other Party organisations to the NEC is the end of June 2009.

The main problem with this policy making process is that it involved terminating debate and voting on policy resolutions at Conference. Most recently these motions were the unsatisfactory "contemporary resolutions" which only allowed for debate of issues that arose a few weeks before Conference. Now we have "contemporary issues" which can be discussed, but not voted on, except to decide whether the issue topic in general can be referred to the National Policy Forum and the Joint Policy Committees for their consideration. The contemporary issues process will be the particular focus for this review. There is a promise that it will be tested against the 2007 procedures and further amendments to rules can be

proposed. There is a real possibility for this undemocratic system to be reversed or changed at Conference 2009.

All Centre Left Grass Roots Alliance members of the NEC have indicated that they will support a return to voting on policy resolutions if that is what Party organisations want.

Persuade your CLP and BLP, however punch drunk they are after the EU/county elections, to meet before the end of June and to agree to feed back to the NEC that we want our voting on a wide range of policy resolutions restored.

In tandem with this consultation, there is another for Party organisations to give feedback to the NEC on a Party document "Winning the Fight for Britain's Future".



Leadership challenge – STLP offers Brown a 'litmus test'

In the wake of the Euro elections, STLP wrote an Open Letter to the Prime Minister and Party Leader Gordon Brown with a suggestion of how to prove his democratic credentials.

Remaining party members will appreciate the opportunity to have their say. You have a chance to confound your critics by demonstrating in a practical way that you are a democratic socialist and not just clinging onto power thanks to quirks in our British constitution.....

.....As the next step we hope you will agree these matters are ones for the Party as a whole, and not just the PLP. We hope you will support an extra NEC meeting now to review the election results, strategy and organisation and for you to share your agenda and discuss how we can better involve the wider party. In the meantime, you might consider announcing at the PLP tonight your readiness to face a challenge if your opponents can muster the necessary 71 signatures for an alternative candidate, and that you would be happy for CLPs, TUs and socialist societies to submit nominations for you continuing (or others contesting) as Leader and Harriet Harman as Deputy Leader. Provisions for this already exist under Rule 4.2.B.ii.

The letter was sent ahead of a crucial PLP meeting on Monday 8 June. There is nothing to prevent any party, TU or socialist society branch discussing the Labour Party Leadership and resolving to endorse the current Leadership, propose a debate or nominate a challenger.

The current crisis - A personal view from Gaye Johnston Vice Chair of STLP and Chair of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

My social work and organisational management background has taught me that, when individuals and organisations are in crisis then that is the time to work for, and achieve, necessary and lasting change. Because of the crisis currently engulfing the Labour Party we now have a chance to make major changes that will effectively restore it to health. The public and the Party members and affiliates are crying out for them. First we must ensure that the discredited, and ideology free New Labour Project is buried.

Many Blairite MPs clearly want to replace Gordon Brown with someone even more right wing in a vain attempt to try to salvage the Project. We must not collude with them.

Further, many Labour MPs in marginal seats are afraid of losing them and think that a different Leader would secure their tenure. However there is no opinion poll evidence to support that view at present. Those from amongst these MPs who have abused the expenses system are the last people that we should listen to! More of the gravy train passengers should be prevented from standing at the next

election when the full extent of their abuse has been uncovered by investigation.

During 40 years of activism, I have never encountered such verbal abuse and hostility on the doorsteps as when canvassing extensively in the recent campaign. This anger was focussed 99% on MP's expenses and scarcely at all on Gordon Brown's leadership. This view of the cause of our unpopularity was confirmed by the Party Chair Harriet Harman on BBC Radio4 To-day on 8/06/09.

When we do choose another leader it must be from a wide selection of candidates and undertaken by the whole Party (i.e. the Party electoral college). The election of the Deputy Leader in 2007 provided a viable model. The views and priorities of the is leader must be more representative of the Party as a whole than have Brown or Blair been. A proper election by our electoral college would ensure this.

I believe the way forward for our Party is to use Conference 2009 to develop a vision, and a related policy programme based on the Party's traditional values but still taking into account the needs and hopes of a modern European country. Particularly there must be policies to address the growing inequality in our society and to provide a decent and affordable home for all. Clearly attention must be given to developing an effective strategy to deal with the continuing recession and economic crisis. Study of past election campaigns shows that an appealing vision and an enlightened policy programme are the ways to ensure that Labour is in with a shout when the General election comes.

A big thank you from Gaye Johnston and Gary Heather for your CLP nominations for the Conference Arrangements Committee 2009

Many thanks from STLP members Gaye Johnston and Gary Heather to all of you who recently piloted nominations for us for the Conference Arrangements Committee through your CLP G.C. Nominations close later this week but it looks as though we have achieved enough to be able to stand.

In the next newsletter we will be seeking your help in organising support for our candidatures through your Conference delegates.

Thanks also to those who obtained nominations for Theresa Pearce for the National Constitutional Committee. She, Gary and Gaye are all supported by the Centre Left Grass Roots Alliance in which STLP is a partner. You will also be pleased to hear that Theresa has been selected as the Parliamentary Candidate in Erith and Thamesmead having seen off Georgia Gould and her gang who tried to skew the selection results by breaking the rules on postal votes.

Important rule changes are coming up at Conference in 2009

These cover such topics as having OMOV postal ballots for members of the National Policy Forum, Conference

Arrangements Committee and National Constitutional Committee. We already have OMOV ballots for our CLP NEC members. OMOV produces a much fairer result which really represents the spectrum of Party opinion than does the present system where Conference delegates are often pressurised by party staff and their agents at Conference. This current system has produced an NPF NONE of whose current members are to the left of New Labour.

2009 Conference will also debate rule changes which would give extra CLP representatives on the NEC representing Scotland and Wales. Another suggested rule change to establish a Charter of Rights for Labour Party members is a long term aim of STLP. More in our next newsletter.