

The Labour Party

# Refounding Labour

a party for the new generation

## **Foreword**

**Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Labour Party**

Last year the Labour Party was beaten badly, recording our lowest share of the popular vote since 1983 and losing dozens of excellent MPs.

The consequences are now being felt not only by the Party but by every community across the length and breadth of Britain.

The reason we did not suffer an even worse defeat - and why we prevented the Conservatives from winning the outright victory they craved - is because of the determination and organisation of Labour Party members and activists.

In the face of seemingly impossible odds and against much better-funded opponents, local Labour parties in key battles across Britain held the line and kept our rivals at bay.

Our task now is to ensure that same level of energy is replicated at every level of the Party.

We must repair, restore and reform our party to meet the challenges ahead. Our opponents threaten not only the values we cherish and the communities we serve but have made plain their desire to wreck our party too.

For instance, we have already seen through their cynical gerrymandering of Parliamentary constituencies how the Tory-led Government intends to use power for narrow political advantage.

It is essential that Labour is fit for this fight. I do not want to break the party up, but build it up. Already, 50,000 new members have joined since the last election. We must regard them as only the first wave of recruits.

We must look to our own traditions as a community-based grassroots party where the voices of individual members, trade unionists were always valued. But we must also widen our horizons to our supporters and the wider public. They must have their say in the future of our party too.

In 13 years of government, Labour achieved a great deal of which can be proud but we also lost touch with many of the people we were founded to represent. The process of reconnection over the next few years is both a means to regaining the trust of the people and an end in itself.

In November, I asked Peter Hain, Chair of the National Policy Forum, to write a consultation paper taking stock of situation and setting out some key questions on what we should do next as we embark on the long road back to regaining the trust of British people.

I believe this document is a frank assessment of our party's present condition and its future prospects. But it is only the beginning. We must listen to our members and look outward to the people whose support we seek at election time.

I hope you will be active in the coming election campaigns in Scotland, Wales and the English regions. Nothing should distract us from that now. But I also hope you will find time to read this paper and think about it.

After this round of elections are over, I want to hear from as many people as possible - in constituencies, in the unions, in the affiliated societies, from those holding elected public office and beyond - about the future shape of the Labour Party.

Please send us your views on the issues raised in Peter's paper and make your mark on Labour's future.

Our task is nothing less than the refoundation of the Labour Party: The People's party.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Miliband". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.



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## **Introduction**

**Peter Hain MP, Chair, Labour Party National Policy Forum**

Although we have bounced back after a terrible defeat in May 2010 with a rise in the polls, over 50,000 new members and by-election wins, fundamental changes in British politics mean Labour must change fundamentally if it is to lead progressive opinion and win again.

Despite a proud record of achievement during thirteen years in government, sometimes we lost our way: we lost hundreds of councillors, thousands of members and five million voters - and then we lost the general election. By May 2010 the party activist base had been seriously depleted and many members felt disillusioned.

Only tenacious or transformative campaigns, particularly in the key seats, and the abject lack of Conservative Party credibility, masked a 29.7 per cent share of the vote. At the same time - and defying the Ashcroft millions - many of our activists performed heroically. In Barking we trounced the BNP leader. In a dozen other constituencies our MPs were re-elected against all the odds.

But, meanwhile, the whole political culture of Britain was changing massively. Whilst the two major parties, Labour and Conservative, have declined in support and membership since the early 1950s, other parties have grown, mainly the Liberal Democrats (though they are now in crisis and contracting), but also the Greens, UKIP and the BNP. People are engaging in politics in entirely new ways from when I first became active in the anti-apartheid movement over forty years ago or joined the Labour Party over thirty years ago. Politics and political engagement is even radically different from what it was during our party's landslide wins in 1997 and 2001.

This is a pivotal moment for Labour - a moment of great opportunity, but also of massive challenge. The pieces of the political jigsaw puzzle have been shaken up and it is far from clear what pattern they may form as they settle. The Tory and Lib Dem leaderships plan a political realignment to the right that threatens Labour's ability to win again. If they fail, Labour could advance. But, to do so, it is imperative we use this period of Opposition to leapfrog the other parties by refounding our own, so that Labour emerges refreshed and reinvigorated.

And this is a much bigger task than simply amending clauses in our constitution. Reforming Clause 4 in 1994 was a hugely important political symbol that Labour was moving forward, not going backward. One member one vote reforms empowered the membership, but in some places the fundamental culture of the party was still not transformed: sometimes it still looks inward rather than outward, is stuck in its structures, and is not engaged with local communities or national civil society. Over time certain parts of our membership began to feel disengaged and disillusioned. Now is the time for this to change.

Maintaining enthusiasm whilst in government is difficult. There is no doubt three terms of office took their toll, and all parties have their ups and downs at the polls. By 2010, we were in a rut; we needed to change direction. We now need to cement that change by reaching out to new supporters, giving those we lost good reason to return and encouraging those who have stood by us to stay the course. Since the election, over 50,000 new members have joined, activists are feeling revitalised and we need to be on the front foot to capitalise on this momentum.

This change cannot be achieved from above. Yes, leadership is needed, but unless we all participate in the work of refounding our party it won't truly happen. This consultation paper is frank about weaknesses inherent in Labour's organisation, culture and outlook which amount to more than simple wear and tear that can be patched up by a bit of make do and mend. We need to put the party onto a new foundation by expanding its membership base and reaching out further to wider society for support. We need to tackle the stress fractures in some of its structural supports by easing the tension between rank and file members, affiliated organisations and elected representatives. We need to strengthening our long term relationships in the local community, not just to enhance our short term electioneering capacity, but to be a party more representative of the communities we seek to represent.

Labour's ambitions continue undimmed. Like pilgrims impatient to progress beyond the last blue mountain, we are still pursuing expanding horizons for the people we represent and seek to serve. Doing so successfully demands that we adapt to a society in which change is the only constant.

How do we equip ourselves as a party to meet the challenges of the new generation? This is your chance to have your say on how the party is run, how we organise and how we campaign. How must we change to better reflect the modern Britain we aspire to govern again?

The Labour Party is a great organisation but it is only by facing up to our flaws and responding to the new reality that we will resume our winning ways.

I hope your efforts will be concentrated on the upcoming elections on 5 May, but I wanted everyone to have plenty of notice to set aside time and schedule meetings in May to discuss this paper. We are really keen to hear your views. The deadline for submissions is Friday 24 June.

**Proposals for change will be put to Labour's National Executive Committee with its recommendations going for decision to our Annual Conference in September.**





## **That was then: this is now**

In politics, being out of touch means being out of power. It is why Labour spent the 1980s in the political wilderness, sent into internal exile by the voters for putting our obsessions ahead of their concerns. We looked poised for victory in 1992 but lost for a fourth time, still mistrusted by the voters. Labour learned the hard way.

The British people only really began listening to us again in September 1992 after devaluation day, "Black Wednesday", when public confidence in Tory management of the economy collapsed and their support in the opinion polls sank like a stone. Labour grabbed its chance to develop a fresh dialogue with the voters and started to win again, at all levels. First in the 1994 European elections, then as new Labour in the 1995-96 local council elections and in our 1997 general election triumph, followed by further victories in 2001 and 2005 to achieve an historic three terms of Labour government.

However, we won in 2005 with four million fewer votes than in 1997 and with the lowest share of the vote (35 per cent) ever recorded for a winning party. From 2006 to 2009 we lost well over a thousand local council seats, suffered serious setbacks in elections to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly, lost the London Mayoral election, and were beaten by UKIP into third place in the European elections. Opinion polls told the same alarming story. Labour was looking into the abyss.

Although our dreadful general election defeat in 2010 was not the meltdown that many feared, we lost another million votes and won our second lowest share of the poll since 1922. We were only saved from an even heavier defeat because of justified doubt about whether the Tories had truly changed, a determined Labour fightback in constituencies across Britain - and fantastic campaigns in seats like Birmingham Edgbaston, Tooting, Gedling, Stirling, Oxford East, Morley and Outwood, Dagenham, Vale of Clwyd and Barking.

'One more heave' is not an option in response - serious change is required. The Tories made that mistake between 1997 and 2005 - changing their leaders but not changing their ways.

Today we need to be equally frank with one another about where and why Labour has been abandoned by people who used to support us. We need to be just as open about how poorly our party organisation sometimes measures up to the electoral battles we face, locally and nationally, and to the values we espouse. It's a mixed picture, from the marvellous to the mediocre and from socialism to cynicism.

## **Facing the facts**

If we look back at our period in power, we can see that between 1997 and 2010 Labour lost nearly five million voters and that our problems began to surface in the first term. Although the 2001 landside was another historic result we'd lost nearly three million Labour voters from 1997. Turnout dropped below 60 per cent and the effects were felt by all the major parties. In a way the landside result masked this problem, and it's only now looking back that we can begin to understand what happened throughout our period in office.

The 2005 election saw our majority in the House of Commons greatly reduced as we lost 47 seats with the vast majority of them going to the Conservatives. Yet despite this increase in seats for the Tories, the election was categorised by huge switching in actual votes from Labour to Liberal Democrat. On the back of a number of signature issues the Lib Dems took votes from Labour right across the country and in many cases allowed second place Tory candidates to win marginal constituencies.

As we headed into the 2010 General Election, many of our Labour/Conservative marginal seats had become vulnerable due to the effects of the Labour to Lib Dem swing in 2005 which had narrowed the gap for the second place Tories.

In the election last year, Labour lost votes across England and Wales to the Tories. In marginal constituencies we lost voters on middle incomes and we lost support in our working class or 'core' vote - many of whom just didn't bother voting.

With our party massively in debt, we only staved off an even heavier defeat with good party organisation, particularly focused on key seats where we were able to reduce the swing to the Tories to less than the rest of the country.

Fewer voters are wedded to one particular party these days. The disappearance of the traditional 'core voter' is reflected in volatile opinion polls. We can no longer rely on a solid group of core supporters who will always vote Labour providing the party can persuade them to go to the polling station. Past voting patterns count for less and less. People need a reason to place their cross against the Labour candidate's name. Although our party's current credibility and promise for the future are clearly vital, they are not sufficient.

There is another, increasingly important factor. Just as politics has become more global, it has also become more local. So what matters more than ever is how Labour engages with people in their neighbourhoods on local issues. The national swing that swept away so many excellent Labour MPs did not sweep away our MPs in Edgbaston or Oxford East or Tooting, for example. They and their parties did something quite different from those that lost.

Last year's general election defeat followed years of poor results:

- In local government elections between 2006 and 2009, Labour lost over 1,400 local council seats in England and Wales and 161 in Scotland. The Tories gained over 1,700 council seats and 69 councils. After the 2009 elections they held nearly half of all council seats with Labour holding less than a quarter.
- Almost certainly because they coincided with a higher turnout general election, Labour did better than expected in the 2010 local elections in England, making over 250 gains and winning back control of major cities like Liverpool and Coventry, plus London boroughs like Ealing and Enfield, as well as unseating all 12 BNP members of Barking and Dagenham council.
- But we are still left with some 4,500 Labour councillors in the UK facing well over 9,000 Tories. Losing council seats weakens our ability to keep in touch with communities, undermines our contact networks, and deprives us of a platform from which to promote

Labour's cause. Critically, it weakens local party organisation on which effective election campaigns depend.

- Over the past 20 years, Labour's share of the vote in European elections has gone from 43 per cent in 1994 to 26 per cent in 1999, 22 per cent in 2004 and only 16 per cent in 2009. This from a party that says it wants to be a leading partner in the European Union and which Bill Clinton once described as the most formidable political fighting force in Europe.

General elections used to be a two horse race. No longer. In the 1950s and 1960s Labour and the Tories regularly took 90 per cent of the poll - fully 97 per cent in 1951. That dropped to 75 per cent in the mid 1970s. And it has dropped at each of the past four general elections, reaching a new low last year of only 67 per cent. This is the lowest since 1922 when Labour first emerged as the main opposition to the Tories.

Fighting on one or two fronts has given way to kaleidoscopic contests where we take on Tories, Lib Dems, Welsh and Scottish nationalists and UKIP or the BNP, plus the Greens in a few places, and of course those 'Independents' in local government elections. Elections have become much more complicated affairs in which we have to work harder to win every vote. The worse we do in elections the weaker our party organisation becomes and the more daunting the next electoral challenge appears.

## **Building our base**

Since the 1950s membership of political parties has been in decline across Europe's established democracies. The UK now has one of the lowest rates of party membership of all. The 1.5 per cent of the electorate who belonged to parties in the UK in 2001 compares to nearly five per cent elsewhere in Europe in the late 1990s.

By 2005 only 1.3 per cent of UK voters were members of any of the three main political parties, down from nearly four per cent in 1983. Maybe the way parties defined membership in the past exaggerated their figures. Maybe higher subscription fees more recently have caused all parties to lose members. Or maybe more people find party political participation is simply not for them these days. We have to find new ways to reach out to supporters who might have joined in earlier times, perhaps by encouraging the development of a body of registered supporters who are not ready to join the party.

This widespread disengagement from party politics can partly be explained by the rise of the consumer society and competing pressures on people's time from work and study, obligations to friends and family, and other sport and leisure interests. People have also preferred to back non-party groups, with for instance the National Trust or Oxfam seeing substantial increases in membership and committed donors, and Mumsnet suddenly arising.

Labour is a federal party consisting of individual members of local constituency parties, trade unions and other affiliated groups like the Fabian Society and Labour Students. Declining individual and affiliated membership has narrowed the range of voices heard within the party's discussions and reduced the chances of a voter hearing the party's policies advocated in the course of everyday life.

## Individual members

We began 2010 with half as many individual members as we had twenty years ago and less than 40 per cent of our 1997 peak. That is over 300,000 in 1990, over 400,000 in 1997, but only just over 150,000 at the start of 2010. Since the General Election over 50,000 new recruits have joined. In the election of a new Labour leader, nearly 130,000 voted, over 70 per cent of our individual members. But we are still spread pretty thinly on the ground, and with a weak base from which to develop contacts in the community and build popular support. In too many constituencies where Labour's vote is small, our party barely functions. Moreover - and despite an influx of young people outraged at betrayal by Nick Clegg - we have had for some years an ageing membership, just like other traditional organisations in the UK.

Activism among Labour members has diminished as members spend less time on party activities. The proportion of members who canvass voters by phone and who donate money has risen slightly. But members nowadays get involved less often in canvassing on doorsteps, delivering leaflets, attending meetings, signing petitions, or even displaying election posters. As some Constituency Labour Parties have been able to demonstrate, much closer and organic links with local community groups can help provide valuable sources of many extra volunteers at election time - even hundreds extra, as in Edgbaston.

The Voter ID incentive scheme the party implemented for key seats in the 2010 General Election had dramatic results and throughout the 2010 campaign Labour recorded a 37 per cent increase in Voter ID compared to 2005. This incentive scheme is being offered to all CLPs this year, but should it be extended to include membership recruitment? Should the payment of a share of membership fees to CLPs be used as a means of promoting best practice and encouraging local recruitment? There may be a risk that nationally set targets for levels of membership activity or campaigning work as a condition for payment incentives might undermine the drive to encourage local parties to work more closely with the local community and develop robust local strategies. If there are to be payments related to performance, these might take the form of additional grants for those meeting clearly defined measurable targets.

There are also periodic questions about subscription levels. As part of the party's Finance Strategy, agreed by the NEC to maintain financial stability for our organisation, it was agreed to increase membership subscriptions on 1 January each year by inflation.

The current membership subscription rates for 2011 are £41 standard rate; £20.50 reduced rate, for unwaged, retired and political levy paying members; £82 parliamentarians' rate, for MPs, Peers, MEPs, MSPs and AMs; and £1 for members under 19 or in full-time education; and a £1 join rate for all new members who are under 27. The party also asks members to pay according to their income.

Should these rates be changed? Should there be a sliding scale - should the level increase progressively? Should the £1 rate be extended to recognised consultee groups or registered supporters? However any changes to the rates would need to acknowledge that the party in 2010 raised £7.3 million from membership subscriptions and rate related low-level giving from our members - vital at a time when donor funding has reduced.

## Affiliated members

Trade union membership has shrunk and changed shape, falling from over 12 million thirty years ago to about seven million today. Britain's unions have lost half their members and two thirds of their stewards. That has had significant implications for Labour.

- Today unions represent a quarter of people in employment - just 15 per cent in the private sector and 57 per cent in the public sector. In the mid 1990s just over half of all union members worked in the public sector. Today over 60 per cent do. If unions could rebuild their membership, especially in the private sector, they would speak with a stronger voice in society. Despite improved recognition rights under Labour, they have been unable to do so. Where they have done well is in recruiting half a million more women members. Most trade union members today are women.
- Our affiliated membership among unions linked to Labour has gone down too, from a peak of 6.5 million in 1979 to 4.6 million in 1992, and in 2010 just 2.7 million.
- Over the years union mergers have meant that those affiliated members belonging to unions linked to Labour have become concentrated in fewer organisations, with significant implications at the party conference and in the leadership election for what used traditionally to be a much more diverse sector, industrially and politically.

Before the global financial crisis, the rise in UK employment under Labour to record levels saw union membership stabilise but not recover. The number of union stewards had fallen from over 300,000 in 1980 to only 100,000 by 2004. With union activists under such pressure at work, small wonder that many rein back on their Labour Party involvement. Where once there were numerous union activists in almost all constituency parties, now they are few and far between.

Much of the potential for engagement and support from Labour's wider membership in affiliated unions is never realised yet unions still provide a link to working people that no other party has. But how can we re-create a much more organic link between the party and the trade union movement, so that we can spread Labour's influence throughout the community, especially in workplaces? How can our elected representatives and constituency parties better engage with local affiliated members whose names are not even known or accessible to constituency parties?

In addition to Trade Unions, we have a wide and diverse range of other affiliated organizations which do vital work and broaden Labour's reach into civil society. How can we improve the party's relationship with socialist societies?

## Organising to win

We come together in a political party in order to win elections and thereby gain what, on the day before he died, John Smith said was all that Labour asked: the chance to serve.

Our share of the 2010 general election poll fell by over six per cent to our second lowest share since 1922, worsened only by our awful 1983 result. We did badly almost across the

board. Our share of the poll fell furthest in the East of England, but the biggest increase in the Tory share of the vote was in the traditional Labour stronghold of Wales. The only silver lining was in Scotland where our share of the poll went up.

Some local parties did exceptionally well, with double digit percentage increases in Labour's share of the poll, for example Oxford East boosted their share of the vote by six per cent on the basis of a strong and active membership.

Following the general election, the Labour Party used all the data in the Contact Creator system to rank every constituency in terms of how much local voter ID activity they were engaged in during the period leading up to last year's election. This was then compared against the individual performance of Labour in each of these seats. The results were remarkable. The seats doing the most local work had results that defied the trend. The analysis showed for the first time a clear and direct correlation between local campaigning activity and electoral performance.

Despite the low profile given to women in the election campaign by a media that seemed more interested in leaders' wives, Labour emerged with 31 per cent of its MPs women, a reflection in part of our persistence with all women shortlists. Although we lost 17 Labour women MPs, Labour today has more women MPs than all the other parties added together.

Nearly 40 per cent of voters decided which way to vote during the four week election campaign, a proportion that has been steadily increasing over the years. We can draw two immediate conclusions from this:

- First, that most voters still make their mind up months, and sometimes years, before Polling Day. This is why we need to build relationships both with individual voters and a wide range of community organisations.
- Second, that an intensive effective campaign in the final few weeks can hold the key to victory, especially if it involves supporters in the community and in workplaces as well as local party volunteers. In today's cynical political climate, our policies and promises may command more credibility if they are promoted enthusiastically by volunteer party members on the doorstep, backed by a local network of Labour supporters with whom we have built a strong relationship, and endorsed by independent community activists who have worked closely with us on common campaigns. In some cases in 2010, people only voted for our Labour MPs because they identified with them through Labour's vibrant relationship with their local community.

Local campaigns make a tremendous difference to election results. Labour couldn't afford billboard posters or national or regional newspaper advertising last year. With money so short we employed only one third the number of staff that we had used in 2005 and focused our campaigning resources on local organisation, direct mail, phone banks, new media and party election broadcasts. The internet's key contribution came largely through our use of database management and email.

But none of these could substitute for bodies on the ground - maximising the Labour vote using techniques we developed in the 1990s, like voter identification through doorstep canvassing and get-out-the-vote work by volunteers, some or many of whom may not have been members. They made a decisive difference in 2010. Well-run campaigns by local

parties with deep roots in their local communities are as vital as national campaigns fought through the media.

In today's much more diffuse, individualist political culture, how can we maximise the potential for participation by 'Labour Supporters' - those who would not join the Party, but who could be mobilised to back and work for us? How do we manage this in a way that does not undermine the rights of 'full' members?

The Labour Party's basic structure is essentially that adopted in 1918. Members are organised into constituency parties. Most are still run by General Committees (GCs) comprising delegates from local members' branches covering electoral areas and delegates from trade union branches, other affiliates and the Co-op Party. This structure was originally intended to unite the two wings of the movement and keep members grounded in reality. Unions handled industrial matters whilst seeing the party as a means of securing progress on issues outside the workplace affecting their members. The party dealt with election organisation and policy issues while steering clear of the industrial agenda. Remember that trade unions set up the Labour Party to gain representation in Parliament.

Furthermore the delegate structure enabled two-way communication through physical report-back and feedback in an era where telephones hardly existed and transport was limited. Today's culture of mass car ownership, mobile phones, email, Facebook and Twitter, is a world away from when the party's structures were designed around delegates and their personal interaction to and fro with members.

Society has moved on since 1918, but Labour's institutions and practices haven't always kept up. Today's political landscape extends well beyond the world of work, but as numbers of union delegates have fallen, membership of GCs has narrowed. While the introduction of all-member meetings in place of GCs in some constituencies has increased attendance, it has not, on the whole, broadened the range of those attending constituency meetings.

The risk is also that GCs can become over-focused on short term vote-winning at the expense of forging closer links across their community that could enhance their electoral potency in the longer term. They can become bogged down in procedural detail instead of tackling the big issues or pressing local concerns that attract people to politics in the first place. This can frustrate party members and put off potential recruits, leading to poorly attended local parties. As membership participation falls off, chances to develop contacts with local community groups can be missed and the burden falls on the shoulders of ever fewer party activists. Too often members join up, pitch in and burn out.

It is mainly constituency activists who have kept the Labour Party alive during its difficult days. A more outward oriented party would allow them to practise politics in ways that draw on their experiences whilst deepening Labour's roots in the local community. In such a party their practical political skills should help them construct productive partnerships with local community groups. As with the unions, these partnerships would benefit both while respecting each other's different roles.

The last round of party reform gave constituency parties the option of moving to All Member Meetings instead of having a General Committee. The take-up has been patchy. Most constituency parties probably now have a General Committee to which all members are welcome as observers (with voting reserved to elected delegates), with a sizeable

minority moving to All Member Meetings. The distinction between the two options may be marginal given that the trend has been towards open discussions with all views being summarised and forwarded rather than voting on old style resolutions that come down firmly on one side of an issue.

## **Local parties: flexible or fatigued?**

Constituency Labour Parties should be more than just machines for fighting elections. They also exist to provide opportunities for members to help develop the aims and policies of the party and to take part in campaigns in the local community. Bringing members together and coordinating their activities is a substantial organisational task, one which is helped where colleagues share a common sense of purpose and respond to clear local leadership. Sadly, that may be where a deep-seated weakness has developed over the past two decades from which stem the more obvious signs of a party in trouble - lost members and lost elections.

- Many members have wondered what the point is of trying to influence policy-making through local to national Policy Forums and whether sending resolutions to the party is worthwhile either. This has left many CLPs holding discussion meetings intended to attract members and potential recruits but without any tangible link to actual policy-making in the eyes of the target audience. Some of the same CLPs have abandoned regular Executive Committee meetings or even Officers' meetings, leaving no institutional framework for organisational decisions or the formation of coherent development plans.
- In many Labour-held seats there has been a tendency to depend on the MP (and/or member of the Welsh Assembly or Scottish Parliament or MEP or councilor in Labour-held wards) for a wide variety of organisational tasks previously performed by volunteers.
- In many CLPs, the loosely-defined "Campaign Committee" has taken on much wider organisational responsibilities in order to fill the vacuum.
- In some CLPs admirably dedicated officers tend to occupy their posts for many years rather than welcome new recruits. How can we renew and refresh the pool of people who come forward?
- New members are rarely encouraged by being phoned, met individually or enthusiastically welcomed to meetings.
- Far too often, meetings decide to convene more meetings to decide on activity rather than just getting on with it.

Fundamental questions arise about what CLPs are for, how local members link in to national policy-making, how we rebuild CLP leadership structures to ensure that local parties are well organised, and how we reach out to a wide range of community groups.

However, we do face the bedrock problem of needing to organise on a geographical basis for elections (and the increasingly year-round campaigning between elections). That requires a core organisation based on wards and constituencies. We can reach out to



people across wide areas using new media, mobilise members and supporters for particular events, and link like-minded people together to share ideas, techniques and views. But we cannot substitute this for week-to-week work in a locality organised by branches and constituency parties. Formal structures are also important both to prevent abuses and to keep the party going through bad times and troughs in membership. The balance between constitutional structures and encouraging open participation requires careful assessment.

What is needed is an enabling culture that encourages CLPs to adapt and innovate according to their own local circumstances. Some have suggested the delegate system could be abolished except perhaps for election to a CLP Executive which managed the administration of the Party. That would leave as the main agency for policy-making and direction of campaigning the regular meeting for all individual members and affiliated members - with the option of adding in registered supporters, maybe also with recognised consultee groups invited to take part where appropriate.

## **New media and new technology**

The Labour Party is not alone in struggling to adapt to the pace and the pattern of change in today's electronic era, one in which events can ricochet around the world at the speed of light. Can we remodel the party nationally and locally to respond to the radical changes in the way people - especially young people - organise, communicate and participate in politics using new media?

Doing so without falling foul of the many potential pitfalls is no pipedream but it can be decidedly difficult. For instance, many of those engaged in blogging and posting comments on websites seem at least as remote from the concerns of everyday voters as the most rules-obsessed General Committee delegate. Also, many new media operate on a non-geographic basis. So someone forwarding an e-mail to everyone in their address book can send it all over the UK and beyond at the push of a button. How far can we reasonably hope to interact with the flow of people getting in touch?

In 2010 Labour made three times the number of contacts with voters that we did in 2005 by effective use of new technology, social networks and community organising techniques in local campaigns. These included house parties, virtual phone banks, texts, Twitter messages, YouTube videos, issue-specific websites, email lists and online fundraising. However, we achieved only an inconsistent link between online mobilisation and offline activity, and the main online election activity of Labour voters in 2010 was in accessing mainstream news sites. But the potential is clear. New technology and fresh techniques could also help to revive the party's internal democracy by closing the gap between the leaders and the led. Genuinely two way communication could ensure that the authentic voice of the grass roots is heard and cannot be ignored.

Online users confirm that the internet makes it easy to participate in civic and political affairs, such as by accessing websites, signing an e-petition or responding to a government e-consultation. Frustrations arise over email due to too much one-way communication and lack of responses from elected representatives. Citizens are looking for more than the traditional broadcast-only relationship with their MPs. On Mumsnet, for example, members have an online net configured to enable them to feed views upwards and to each other

onto 'message boards' where they get attention by the office leadership, especially if they get critical mass. What lessons should the Labour Party draw from such experiences?

## **Campaigning in the community**

Maybe half a million people are members of a political party, including most of the UK's 22,000 elected councillors. But millions make a massive contribution to civil society in other ways, like the 300,000 who volunteer as school governors, the 150,000 community service volunteers, the 200,000 women's institute members, the 100,000 trade union stewards, the 29,000 lay magistrates and the 1.4 million registered blood donors. None do so for financial reward. Energy is also harnessed by social enterprises and not-for-profit groups, usually in areas where market failure occurs, where markets don't or can't work well, if at all.

Millions of volunteers are independently doing lots of little things that make a big difference to society. They often do it initially to support their children and later for fun, or because somebody has got to do it or it won't get done. Like Labour Party activists they do it in all weathers and despite a dozen setbacks.

Local Labour Parties must work more closely with other civic activists and social entrepreneurs, building local alliances with community groups where we share a common sense of purpose. That means genuinely reaching out to them. They can spot an insincere initiative a mile off and can be quick to resent what they see as outside interference, even if it is well meant. However, to achieve their objectives almost always requires engaging with politics. We have plenty in common to talk about.

A few Labour Party veterans remember the days when they joined friends from across the community on cross country cycle rides. More are active members of local Labour Clubs that still provide excellent links for the party with the local community. But like most miners lodges, such traditional roots in the community have been eclipsed by the passage of time and by dramatic lifestyle changes away from collectivism towards individualism, away from socialising in the community to socialising at home, away from the cinema to the television. So constituency parties still structured for an age long gone are struggling to stay in touch with the very people we want to serve and whose support we solicit at election time.

It is said that even small differences in the beginning can make a big difference in the end. Local parties, especially Labour Groups on local councils, must find even modest ways to improve their contact networks among their communities and to strengthen their links with local groups. New technologies may already be generating opportunities here that we have yet fully to grasp. The extraordinary development of informal networks and campaigns opened up by technological advances may provide new ways of relating to people who prefer to engage by text, email and twitter rather than by routinely attending meetings.

Activism is thriving and mass movements still exist, mainly in support of single issue campaigns. Millions backed the Stop the War protests. Thousands turn out to show their support for Make Poverty History or Unite Against Fascism and Hope Not Hate or to

oppose increases in university tuition fees, the scrapping of education maintenance allowances or to save our forests and libraries.

Cooperating more closely with long term single issue campaigns and community groups poses different challenges from working with one-off insurgencies. Persuading members of the former to broaden their involvement in choices across the policy spectrum is one thing. They tend to have well established organisational structures with which Labour can pursue relationships, and the task is to extend their focus. The latter tend to be more informal networks or loosely linked associations that gain much of their energy and support from events. Building relationships with them needs a different approach.

What some of our companions and critics in single issue campaigns sometimes overlook was summed up by an Edinburgh activist who told the BBC News website: 'Single issue groups are avoiding difficult decisions. If you only care about one thing then you don't have to worry about dealing with the impact of that on everything else.' Nye Bevan's declaration that, "the language of priorities' is the religion of socialism" still prevails. Politics and government are indispensable to the necessity for difficult choices and establishing priorities. Civil society groups need Labour just as we need them.

Especially with the limited reach into workplaces which our affiliated trade unions now offer Labour, and the growth of civil society groups both locally and nationally, we need to find new ways of engaging with wider society. Is there a way of granting 'recognised consultee' rights to groups who would not choose to affiliate to the party but who would value formal access and the opportunity to put their points of view? Further, could those of their members who chose to, register as Labour supporters and thereby participate in party decisions in a way that did not undermine or discourage fully fledged members?

## **Community organising**

Our most successful CLPs and elected representatives, electorally and politically, have been community organising in their ward and constituency for many years; but this best practice needs to become a commonplace activity in every seat. The Labour Party has under four years to build, equip, and train its membership and develop its structures for the next general election. It will likely face a Conservative Party or Coalition election ticket with equal or superior financial resources, in an unpredictable political climate. Labour cannot afford to depend on external circumstances or superior resources for victory, and must reform itself to become a more effective and competitive organisation.

Alongside the need to ensure that the party is ready to fight and win the next general election, we need to make the Labour Party, in the words of our leader Ed Miliband, 'a genuine community organising movement'. This represents a natural evolution for the Labour Party, embracing the party's progressive, egalitarian, and communitarian values and history. A worthy goal in itself, turning Labour into a force for community organising will also provide occasion and momentum for the party to rebuild CLPs in constituencies where it has had a light footprint in recent years, increasing the field of winnable seats and forcing the Conservatives to expend resources defending areas previously thought safe.

The success of the Labour Party's expansion into community organising (and any resulting political success) depends on its ability to support and explore the operation and

interaction between traditional political activism and community organising, and between local enterprises and national entities. Movement for Change, for example, is a national entity with an emphasis on community organising, while ThirdPlaceFirst is a locally-oriented initiative with a strictly political mandate; both are worthy endeavours, and both pursue the same end - an expanded local presence throughout the UK - via different means.

What can new organisations learn from Labour's experiences with community and political organising in places like Birmingham Edgbaston and Islington South and Finsbury where Labour candidates over-performed through new methods in community or political organising? How can the party utilise the individuals behind these successes to scale up their work for wider application while at the same time recognising the importance of local energy and knowledge, and what kind of mutual support can exist between these efforts and nationally-led programs?

The party must also explore how new organisations in community/political organising interact with non-political organisations. Local Labour members were but a part of the progressive alliance in Barking and Dagenham that drove out the BNP. What can 38 Degrees and London Citizens teach Labour about being a force for good? And, again, critically, how can our work with all of these entities help Labour reconnect with Britain (and how can that reconnection be translated into electoral success)?

How Labour handles the challenge of encouraging growth and co-ordination amongst new and existing actors in this space will determine the party's success in becoming a force for community organising and local good. Done right, this effort will lead to new enterprises, all Labour-affiliated or Labour-friendly, appearing all over Britain, supporting each other's work and bringing progressive values (and politics) to places previously thought of as impregnable bastions of conservatism. A party sometimes seen as being Westminster-centric and disconnected will engage with ordinary people not just as a national political entity, but as a neighbour and a friend.

## **Councillors and communities**

Councillors have long been undervalued by our party, yet they are our bedrock. Losing the last general election was preceded by haemorrhaging councillors across the country and we cannot win the next one without substantially advancing in local government.

But a successful renewal of Labour's base demands councillors who are community orientated, not committee orientated, facing out from the town hall into the community, not locked in the town hall, remote from the electorate.

That also requires breaking free of the large committee structures and rule-bound approach of Local Government Committees and large district or county borough parties - or even perhaps their abolition. We should be reaching out beyond our immediate membership to recruit good community activists as potential councillors and to support and train candidates and new councillors. Some of our party committee structures are too rigid and bureaucratic, acting as a hindrance rather than help in fulfilling these roles. Some of our rules - for instance effectively blocking the early selection of candidates through exhausting bureaucracy - disable our campaigning potential and our ability to win.

Above all, our renewal will depend upon our structure being led by purpose - by activity - not by tradition or ritual which thwarts community activity by layers and layers of meetings attended by the same people talking to each other. We need to recreate Labour as a grass roots, community- facing organisation that has the courage to let our goals shape our structure, rather than let our structure strangle our levels of activity and energy.

How do we encourage community activists to become Labour councillors and more Labour councillors to become community activists? What more could the party do nationally and locally to keep those talented people who often decide to stand down after a single term? How do we best add value to the leading role of constituency parties in campaigning, by integrating councillors into local Labour Action Teams and by creating forums for sharing campaigning lessons and experiences? How do we build a culture where MPs and parliamentary candidates, Labour councillors and "Labour action team" members where we do not have Labour councillors, support each other in shared activity with local Labour Groups? Do we need to take a fresh look at the party structures linking local Labour groups with Constituency Labour Parties? What is the appropriate level of subscription to the Association of Labour Councillors? And what should councillors expect from the Labour Party for their subscriptions? What more should Labour HQ be doing to mentor/encourage best practice amongst councillors? Should councillors be given more formal recognition in the structure of the Labour Party, including by being accepted as voting delegates at Annual Conference? Do we need greater local government representation on the party's governance and policy-formation bodies?

## **Labour representatives**

Although regular selection and re-selection procedures have improved the accountability of our representatives both locally and nationally, there is a strong case for looking afresh at their obligations to the party.

Our representatives are elected because they carry the Labour banner. There may be a case for adopting a code to which they must all adhere, requiring minimum levels of participation in Parliament or their Councils and engagement with local communities. Should Labour MPs, European MPs, Welsh Assembly Members, Scottish Parliamentarians and Councillors all operate under a similar code? Should there be a fresh look at the way Labour's frontbench and the wider PLP relate to the party and the public?

Representing Labour is a privilege, is now remunerated at all levels, and it surely cannot be acceptable to behave as if there are few if any obligations to the party at all levels.

It may also be that for the next general election run-up the party needs, especially for target and key seats, to have an agreement with each parliamentary candidate under which they and their CLPs are committed to certain levels of activity in return for which they will receive additional resource, whether direct mail, telephone canvassing or funding for newsletters and leaflets.

## **Equal opportunities**

Labour has made enormous progress in the last fifteen years to ensure women are properly represented in politics, mainly by all women shortlists, and we are proud of having led the way compared with other political parties. However there is a long way to go. How can we continue to make progress? Are there better ways we can achieve gender representation at all levels of the party, including at the top of the party?

The party has also made progress in ensuring better representation at local councillor level, in the Houses of Commons and Lords and most recently in the appointment of a record number of BAME members to Labour's front bench. What further steps can be taken to improve the greater representation of BAME members at every level of the party and in all elected bodies? How best can BAME members involve themselves in having an impact on policy issues?

Often neglected however are two other key groups. Especially with the decline of candidates coming up through the trade unions, how do we achieve better working class representation? Additionally, how do we ensure people with a disability have more opportunities?

## **Young members**

Young Labour and Labour Students are vital to the future of our party. How can we encourage young people of all occupations to join and take an active role in the Labour and Trade Union movement? How can we ensure our young members are better supported and encouraged by existing structures, both local and national? How can our young members be supported in their engagement with young voters? How could new technology assist with engaging and supporting young members? Should the joining rate for members under the age of 27 (£1 for the first year) remain, or do we retain the pilot 1p rate adopted for this cycle of elections? Should the voting system for the Young Labour National Committee, NEC youth representative and Young Labour Chair change? How regularly should the party hold a Youth Conference, and how can greater democratic participation be promoted? What role should Young Labour have in policy making and should it become an affiliated society? These are amongst the issues we need to resolve, to ensure a vibrant, campaigning youth movement organically linked at national, regional and local party levels.

## **Policy-making**

The fundamental aim of our policy making process should be to support the party in developing a policy programme which appeals to, and connects with, the electorate.

Constitutionally, Conference is the supreme decision making body of the party. But it has been undermined by the smaller number of constituency parties sending delegates, the increasing concentration of union votes, and a command and control culture which was sometimes seen at odds with dissent and diversity. Too often party members felt they had no influence on policy outcomes.

Where Conference was involved it sometimes showed foresight that the government did not match. For instance, in 2000 Conference voted to restore the earnings link for the basic state pension - a triumph led by Barbara Castle, Jack Jones and Rodney Bickerstaffe. But the government only backed restoring the earnings link some years later.

Yet significant issues have emerged:

- The number of constituency parties represented at Conference fell from 527 in 2002 to 444 in 2009 and only 412 in 2010, or under two thirds the total entitled to attend. Are too many local parties moribund? Is the reason the cost? Or does it go deeper, with local parties doubting the relevance of their attendance at Conference?
- Delegates from affiliated trade unions and other affiliated bodies (like the Socialist Health Association and SERA) account for 50 per cent of the votes on reports and resolutions at Annual Conference.

How might Labour's Annual Conference become buoyant and empowering - the place to be - without falling back into the bad old ways which led to near electoral oblivion? However it is reconfigured, the twin aims of aiming at a conference and not just rally and opening its doors to access by wider civil society are crucial to the party's regeneration.

Although the National Policy Forum has achieved a more deliberative and credible policy making model, from grass roots to national level, it is not without its problems. Our system allows party members to take part in deliberation and discussion throughout the Parliament. Those who take part usually enjoy doing so but too few members feel part of the process. Some members have reported that they have felt it has not been worthwhile attending local or regional policy forums. Others have called for a greater level of feedback on the outcome of their representations. In a party whose values are rooted in democracy, equal opportunity and inclusivity we must ensure that transparency and accountability are at the heart of our policy-making.

It is important that the original stated purpose of the Policy Forum Process is re-established, so that we can reinvigorate the party and tap in to the energy and enthusiasm of our members.

Some suggestions include:

- an 'audit trail' from local to the national and back again so that the outcome of constituency policy recommendations and views is known
- where there are major options or disagreements within the NPF, minority positions need to be routinely reported to annual conference for final decision
- NPF members to be able to communicate with each other online and to engage with the wider membership
- the voluminous policy documents of the past need to be replaced by more concise summaries with recommendations (or where appropriate options) capable of being amended
- the use of 'Green Papers' for the NPF to consider before firm proposals are put forward.

## **Leadership elections**

Questions have been raised about the system for electing our Leader and Deputy, including the imperative for the widest possible participation. There is a strong view that, at the very least, multiple votes by MPs in other sections of the electoral college should not be permitted.

More than 400,000 votes were cast in Labour's leadership election. While this included some individuals voting more than once as a result of Labour's federal structure, the total was double the 200,000 votes cast in the Conservative Party when David Cameron was elected in 2005 and was bigger than any other Western European political Party. The votes of trade union members broadened the range of people voting in Labour's election. The challenge now is to find ways of involving still more of our supporters in future elections because, although some three million people could have voted for Labour's new leader, not all of them did so.

How can we involve many more individual Labour members, affiliated members and even registered supporters?

## **National party structures**

Despite devolution to Wales and Scotland which Labour delivered, our Party structure has not adjusted. Is there a case for direct Welsh and Scots representation on the National Executive Committee? Are any other reforms needed in the NEC?

Since 2002 we have had a Party Chair appointed by the Leader but who has no constitutionally defined role or remit, alongside the National Executive Committee Chair, a position which rotates annually according to seniority. Is this the best arrangement for the future or can it be improved?

## **Political education and training**

At Annual Conference in 2010, following the General Election the Party launched its new Training Academy, open to every party member.

167 training events have been run since its launch across the country. Members now want training available to them as and when they need it and want to take it up. And the Training Academy gives them:

- Online training resources
- Modular approach to training - with manageable chunks of training designed to fit together, with nine courses and 50 modules.

However we need to do more to encourage training across the organisation. How do we make training an integral part of every CLP activity programme? Do we make training compulsory for some party roles? How do we make sure we are training the right members



in our seats that will make the difference? Within the Training Academy should there be more modules and courses that cover political education for new, and especially young members, covering the history of socialist ideas and the labour movement, our values, and new campaigning tactics and techniques?

We urgently and rapidly need to establish training members and local campaigners in the new methods and politics pioneered in those constituencies where Labour out-performed in the 2010 general election preventing otherwise certain defeat.

Should the party also consider with the help of groups like the Fabians, Compass and Progress, to stage an annual summer weekend 'Festival' (probably using a University campus in vacation time)? Given autonomy but with official blessing, done properly and with flair, this could be a great opportunity to invite thousands of people into a vibrant of political debate and culture, with progressive outside groups and non-party members positively encouraged to participate.

## **THE BIG QUESTIONS**

### **1. An outward-looking party**

Labour's future success is dependent on our members being active and engaged in their local communities. How do we better encourage their participation in campaigning

Are Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs) hamstrung by too much procedure and process from concentrating on political debate and campaigning? If so how should CLPs and local branches be reorganised? Should party rules be more 'enabling' so CLPs can adapt to fit their members' wishes better rather than be hidebound by a bureaucratic template?

How do we better engage affiliated trade union members with Labour locally and improve their relationship with Labour MPs, councillors and candidates?

Our most successful CLPs, MPs, councillors and candidates are closely involved with local community groups which may contain many Labour supporters: how can these groups and supporters be better linked with the party and our representatives locally?

Our councillors and council candidates are in so many places the bedrock of local parties. How can we better acknowledge the important role they play? How can we better define their political responsibilities to the party? How relevant today are County Borough Parties and Local Government Committees or could councillors and members instead priorities campaigning and community organising rather than meetings?

## 2. A voice for members

Labour's future success is also dependent on our members feeling involved and listened to. How can we strengthen the voice of members?

How can we increase our membership and how can we give our members more say and with that more responsibility?

How can we use the new social media and opportunities for online access to give members more direct ways having their say?

Most of our MPs are experiencing life on the opposition benches for the first time. How has their role changed? What do we expect from them in Opposition? Should they be playing a more active role in party organisation and policy?

Conference is the supreme decision-making body of the party. How do we make it more exciting and relevant, more responsible, less corporate? Who should attend Conference and who should vote? Do we need to change the voting process and system? Should Conference have more debate and take more decisions on policy? How can we improve the member/delegate experience of Conference?

Many who are not joiners are nevertheless Labour supporters: should we extend our party's reach by giving them a voice, and if so how?

What do we expect from our policy-making process? What constitutes a successful policy making system for our party?

How do we best involve our members in policy-making?

What can we do to support our members and local parties in debating policy?

How do we best do justice to the involvement of activists in policy making? How do we best communicate the work of PiP and feedback to those who get involved?

How can we reach out to and involve the public? How do we ensure the issues raised by members of the public with Labour canvassers are reflected in our policy making process?

How can we best engage with external organisations, businesses and other groups on a local and national level?

Is the current three year cycle of policy development correct? What do you think of our current system of circulating policy documents for amendment - is it the best way of engaging people or is there a better method? Is there an alternative to the current system which focused on one large scale 'Warwick-style' NPF meeting at the end of the third year?

How do we decide which policy issues to focus on? How do we deal with current and urgent issues in our policy making process? How do we ensure that the system is flexible enough to allow for speedy decisions where needed?

Is the National Policy Forum the correct focal point for our policy discussions? What do you think of the NPF? How could it be improved? What should be the role of NPF representatives?

How aware are you of the policy commissions and their role? How successful are they - could they be improved?

Does the Joint Policy Committee work effectively? What should its role be?

What should be Annual Conference's role in deciding policy? What is the best way for Conference to debate policy and how can we ensure debates are topical and relevant?

How do we support policy discussion at regional and local level?

With limited resources now and in the future a reality, what should be our priorities?

How can we best use technology to support our policy-making?

Do you have any other thoughts, comments or ideas not covered in the above?

### **3. Renewing our party**

A lot has changed in Britain since the last time the Labour Party fundamentally reviewed its structures and processes. How does the party need to change to better reflect modern Britain?

As party membership has declined, so has our activist base. How do we reach out to the country, engage our voters and supporters, so we can once again truly be called the people's party?

How can we engage more people in Labour decision making? How can we widen participation in Labour elections?

Thanks to our relationship with the trade unions, three million people are affiliated to the Labour Party, giving us far greater reach than any other party, so it's vital that the link is preserved, but how can the party better reach out into workplace life, to involve individual affiliated members more directly?

How can we build stronger links with organisations/pressure groups with which we may have much in common but which would not sign up to Labour? How can we involve them in policy-making?

How can Labour embrace new methods of community organising and activism? How do we reach out to the new generation?

Labour has made enormous progress in the last fifteen years to ensure women are properly represented in politics. However there is a long way to go. How do we achieve gender representation at all levels of the party?

#### **4. Winning back power**

The next General Election is our biggest challenge and our biggest priority. How do we need to change the way we campaign to win in 2015?

We had some great results in 2010, and deprived the Tories of an overall majority, against all the odds. What can we learn from new methods of community or political organising in places like Edgbaston, Gedling, Barking and Morely & Outwood, where Labour candidates over-performed compared with the national swing against us?

How can the Party utilise the individuals and experiences behind these successes, while at the same time recognising the importance of local energy and knowledge, and what kind of mutual support can exist between these efforts and nationally-led programs?

How can the candidate selection process be improved? What do you expect of your local Parliamentary, Assembly, MEP or council candidate? Should candidates have to sign a contract with the Party, committing them to levels of local campaigning, community engagement and voter contact?

## **How to submit your response**

This document triggers a formal consultation which ends on Friday 24 June.

Please make your submission online at [members.labour.org.uk/RefoundingLabour](https://members.labour.org.uk/RefoundingLabour)

or send it to:

**Peter Hain MP**  
**Refounding Labour**  
**39 Victoria Street**  
**London**  
**SW1A 0HA**

or go to [refoundinglabour.org](https://refoundinglabour.org)

