

# Restore Democracy to Labour Conference

## CLPs & Unions should have the right to amend policy documents

Everyone in the labour movement agrees that the Labour Party needs to be made more democratic. This year's Conference will start a year-long review of Party structure, in which all the drastic changes of structure introduced by Tony Blair in 1997 ("Partnership in Power") should be up for review. That can't happen without a living, democratic Party Conference.

All the Labour leadership candidates promise to "restore" democracy in the party. But some of these promises are too vague – we need to be concrete about what we want!

We need to establish some basic benchmarks of what 'a democratic party' means: benchmarks that we can measure leaders' promises against.

We believe that the decisive question is to restore life to the Labour Party conference, so that it becomes a place where unions and local Labour Parties can debate and vote on the party's policy commitments.

### **No conference can be democratic if you can't make proposals and vote on them.**

Last year, the national executive promised an end at this conference to restricting 'debate' to contemporary issues with no motions, no votes, just empty references to the National Policy Forum. We need to make sure this promise is kept! The rulebook must be amended to consolidate the right of future conferences to debate and vote on motions.

Conference should also be able to amend National Policy Forum documents. In the present system, heavyweight reports on numerous policy areas are presented

on an all-or-nothing basis. They cannot be amended nor voted on in parts. Delegates with strong views about sections of the report, or about what is missing from the report, have no way of registering their views short of calling for the whole report to be voted down. That is not democratic.

Rule changes to allow CLPs and unions to submit motions - with wider scope than allowed by the current restriction to "contemporary" motions or issues, meaning ones relating to events in the August before conference - and to allow amendment of National Policy Forum reports, are not just technical adjustments. They would give Labour Party conference control over what it debates and votes on, and allow the wishes of party and union members to be reflected in policy decisions. In other words, they would make the conference a live democratic event, a true parliament of Labour.

### **Support the rule changes!**

Conference 2011 must be able to have a full debate, and make its own decisions, on the review of Party structure, not just the option of voting yes or no, without the right of amendment, to a package presented from the platform.

We must defend the right of CLPs and affiliates to submit rule changes and have them debated. It would also be desirable not to prevent CLPs and affiliates who submit rule changes from also submitting policy motions. There is a proposal submitted for consideration at this year's party conference to stop this unnecessary restriction — please support it!

Rule changes have also been submitted for consideration at this year's Labour Party conference, which would enable conference to vote in parts on NPF documents and to amend them — please support them too.

In the meantime, Conference should resist the move this year by Party officials, through the Conference Arrangements Committee, to declare almost all rule-change proposals out of order on the grounds that they affect "parts" of the rules which Conference has debated within the last three years.

In the past, "part" was interpreted narrowly so that you could not reopen a specific issue within three years. The new ruling interprets "part" very broadly, so that large sections of the rules, once amended cannot be amended again for three years even if there is no connection between the two proposals. If sustained, small drafting amendments proposed periodically by the Executive (which is not tied by the "three year rule") could render large parts of the rule book effectively unamendable.

**To be an effective campaigning party, Labour has to be a democratic party!**

Tens of thousands of new activists have joined the Labour Party since 6 May. They are asking how we can defeat this destructive Tory-led government; how we can change the Labour Party into an effective instrument for winning public support; and how we can get the next Labour government to reverse the damage the Tories will have done to working-class rights, trade union freedoms, public services, pay and benefits.

Central to all those concerns is restoring democracy to the Labour Party, making party conference a live parliament of Labour - a place to which party and union activists can bring their ideas, demands, and concerns, and those of their neighbours and fellow workers; to make democratic decisions; and to see those

decisions become effective political-party policy.

**What you can do:**

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has initiated a "Party Democracy Taskforce" (chaired by Michael Meacher MP) and invites the participation of organisations and individuals to campaign over the next year to create broad support across the unions and the Labour Party in support of a thorough review of the structures, an open debate about improvements, and the essential steps to make Labour Party conference into a live democratic event with real policy-making powers.

**We ask you to:**

- Support the cause of Party democracy at Conference 2010
- Contact the Taskforce. Get involved. Invite a speaker from the Taskforce to your GC, ward, or union branch.
- **Check our briefings at [www.grassrootslabour.net](http://www.grassrootslabour.net) and [www.leftfutures.org](http://www.leftfutures.org)**

**Take extra copies of this leaflet to circulate to fellow Labour Party members**

**get in touch:**

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