



**SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING
CONFERENCE 2018**

Speakers include John McDonnell

**NEC
STATEMENT**

PREPARING FOR A LABOUR GOVERNMENT AND THE TASKS OF THE LABOUR LEFT

In October 2015 our Chair Matt Wrack wrote in our magazine Labour Briefing that the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party was “the chance of a lifetime”. In the same article he went on to declare that we should not just see ourselves as “cheerleaders for Jeremy” and that this opportunity would not last forever. We must grasp it while it lasts.

This is indeed the most favourable opportunity for socialists in our lifetime. In 2015 tens of thousands of young people in particular abandoned their understandable cynicism about professional politicians and mobilised behind Corbyn’s leadership challenge. They did the same in even greater numbers in the unnecessary 2016 challenge to Jeremy’s leadership.

In the 2017 election campaign Jeremy was widely derided as ‘unelectable’. A wipe-out of Labour was almost universally predicted. Instead Labour saw the biggest surge of support since the 1945 election. (Let us remember that the previous election that time was ten years before – in 1935 – and the Second World War had led to a massive radicalisation of British society.) During the course of the 2017 campaign and in the process of presenting our programme For the Many, not the Few millions of people, not just tens of thousands, began the process of becoming radicalised.

One and three quarter million young people were moved to register to vote for the first time, overwhelmingly to vote for Labour and for change. The Labour Party is now the biggest party in Europe. All the same these achievements are fragile. The Parliamentary Labour Party and the Party bureaucracy remain firmly in the hands of the right wing. They seem determined to rule or ruin. Dirty tricks, sabotage and witch-hunts are their stock in trade. Though Corbyn’s role as leader is untouchable for the time being on account of his 2017 electoral success, his position, and that of his supporters, remains precarious.

The position of those left formations which existed before the Corbyn surge is curious. They have not profited from the massive move to the left in British society. This includes the LRC. We and the others can preen ourselves that we ‘got it right’, that we foresaw the possibilities for socialists lying beneath the surface of the apparently conservative British political landscape, but is all this to no avail?

The fact is that the radicalisation that has taken place is hard to read and is still in its early stages. There is enormous enthusiasm and elan in the new movement but it is still quite raw. We must recall that since 1985 at the latest, with the defeat of the miners’ strike, radical traditions within the working class movement have been progressively eroded. Many of the new generation of activists, of course, were not born in 1985. In 1979 there were 13 million trade unionists. That number has since halved. The number of strikes is at a record low. These have been the conventional measures of militancy in years past. It is clear therefore that the new movement will not be a mechanical repetition of past events.

In contrast to the current awakening, there have been years of defeats, counter-reforms and declining participation in the labour movement. As a result there has been an inevitable loss of understanding of methods of struggle and awareness of socialism as the natural aim of our

movement, held in the past as a sort of common sense even among quite moderate-minded activists. These traditions need to be reclaimed, but they have to be presented in a fresh way to a new generation.

For us the new radicalisation is a breath of fresh air. What can the LRC offer this unprecedented vibrant new movement?

Momentum has successfully organised many of their number. Their mass mobilisation of activists undoubtedly played a part in Labour's success in 2017. There are 150 local Momentum groups. They are composed of intelligent, independent-minded and enthusiastic Corbynistas. This will be a major area where the activities and ideas of the LRC can have an effect. They have formidable electoral achievements under their belt. They are feared by the Tory enemy.

However, Momentum has a democratic deficit at a national level which makes it difficult to change it - with no regional organisation, no representation of the specially oppressed, and excluding those purged by the Labour Party. The LRC nonetheless encourages supporters to participate in local Momentum groups where appropriate.

The real problem will come in the case of a Corbyn-led Labour government. Jeremy, John McDonnell and a handful of stalwart supporters have shown enormous resilience in the face of all the pressures mounted against them over decades. They must be saluted for this. But this will all be as nothing when they mount a threat to the rule of capital in government. They will need the support of a mass movement or they will surely crack from the unbearable pressures, political and economic, launched against them.

We should not wait for the advent of a left Labour government. Our role is not just that of a campaigning organisation. One of our strengths is in the field of political education. We can develop independent-minded supporters of the Corbynist movement, which neither 'official' Momentum nor the CLPD are designed to do.

We are an integral part of the Corbynist movement. That does not mean we are uncritical of anything Jeremy or John say or do. We understand that, as leaders of a Party of which they are not in complete control, they may have to make concessions to the right wing on various political issues. We understand that, but we do not have to make the same concessions. Just as there are pressures from the right on Jeremy, so we must strive to act as part of a countervailing pressure from the left. To take just one example, we are generally supportive of all trade union struggles whatever the views of the present Labour leadership and whatever pressure they may come under from the Tory press.

The LRC is pluralist internally and we operate as a 'broad left' within the wider labour movement. We regard democratic discussion and debate within our ranks as the essential oxygen of our organisation. What all our contributors in past debates had in common was their perception that the interests of the working class were our principal concern. Debate within the LRC is not concerned to score points or make sectarian contributions against others. As long as we see ourselves contributing in a positive light to a movement going forward rather than carping at its inadequacies we can't go too far wrong.

The danger of differences between the statements of the present Labour leadership and our own positions can be exaggerated. We are not uncritical Corbynistas, but we are part of the movement urging them forward. We have to be positive in our approach and the vast majority of educational material will make further suggestions for policy, not criticise present leadership positions. Our wider task is to campaign for socialist policies and embed socialism in the Labour Party.

The SGM:

The SGM in February serves as a re-launch of the LRC. We remain a membership organisation. That means we should have a conference for members to decide our future. The SGM must consider a change to our constitution to make our annual meetings less unwieldy. The SGM should also submit a plan of suggested future activities for the year ahead.

Finance and Funding a Social Media Worker:

There is a spectacular cleavage between the opportunities open to us and our limited resources. We must try to bridge the gap. Employing a worker could be the key to transforming the situation we face. Employing a worker is not a solution on its own, though it can certainly help. A worker must be carefully directed and co-ordinated with the re-launch of the LRC. The comrade would partly function as a commissioning editor and web manager. It is clear that the worker would need active assistance from the NEC and other LRC members to function effectively.

Employing a worker requires a drive for funds. We must launch an appeal to the labour movement for assistance. We must draw up a business plan as well as a job description for the worker. We have actually built links with the trade union movement over decades. Like John and Jeremy, but unlike the CLPD and 'official' Momentum, we have actively supported industrial struggles and turned up on picket lines. We shall continue to do so. We also have important labour movement affiliates. This should give an appeal for funds some weight.

We really need to recruit someone to devote time to developing our social media coverage, which is the main weakness of our political campaigning. We must strive to raise funds with promise of a worker to help on social media coverage.

We effectively have two websites, that of the LRC and Labour Briefing. Neither work as effectively in spreading our ideas as they might. Websites should keep up a daily commentary on events as they occur. Ours carry statements which are often quite dated by the time they appear. Yet it is already the case that Facebook and other social media are more effective in multiplying the effect of our impact than the original statements on the websites. Clearly this is the way to go but it needs someone with the time and energy to do it. It is important that members of the NEC keep in regular touch with members and they with us so that we feel ourselves part of a common movement. More regular emails or a notice board on our website would also help.

Apart from the lack of time, we also lack the expertise to take maximum advantage of social media at present. A worker should be able to provide a cutting edge to our political intervention in the movement. Generally speaking we have been too slow to respond to events. Obviously a worker will not solve that problem on their own but, with the support of the experienced comrades in our ranks, the worker could function as an editor in mobilising responses to events as they unfold.

Labour Briefing:

Naturally political education will involve our magazine, Labour Briefing. Briefing has its own governance structure, its Editorial Board. All the same we believe we can co-ordinate the LRC and Briefing more closely to achieve a common end. We can strengthen LRC/Briefing links and use and commission articles to mutual advantage for instance regarding political education.

We have identified the role of political education as central in our future and the fact is that Briefing as a monthly magazine and with the space restrictions of printed media, cannot perform the tasks of political education alone. We need pamphlets as well, basic programmatic statements and background material. Whether this material is online or printed is something to be discussed.

Writing for Briefing:

We can use our Chair Matt Wrack of the FBU, Ian Hodson and Ronnie Draper of the Bakers' Union and other trade union leaders who are members and leaders of affiliated trade unions as well-known labour movement figures, as well as our President John McDonnell, in publicising the LRC. We should also approach the newer generation of left Labour MPs such as Laura Pidcock, Chris Williamson and others to write regularly for Labour Briefing and get them involved in meetings and activities of the LRC. This would be a small part of building a second line leadership, which is important in strengthening the position of John and Jeremy within the Party.

Political education:

This is an area where we can contribute much more despite our straitened resources. We have a huge bank of experienced propagandists in the LRC and of people writing for Briefing. Nobody else is providing the basic political education for the movement. That should be a central part of our role.

We should not see it as our task to set up local organisations to function as left caucuses (except where they don't exist at present). We should instead intervene in left caucuses we are already involved in (whether Momentum branches or longstanding LP and TU left caucuses), which usually do exist in most areas, in order to offer political discussion and comradely debate.

Hundreds of thousands of people are being drawn into active political involvement for the first time. This is potentially revolutionary for British politics. Many of these people with huge enthusiasm for the Corbyn project have little or no knowledge of the history and traditions of our movement and of basic arguments for socialism imbibed by previous generations of activists.

A Socialist Programme for Labour:

We don't have much suitable educational material at present. We are in the process of commissioning basic programme statements from experienced comrades. We intend to roll out a series of programmatic statements as part of a 'Socialist Programme for Labour' in coming months. These can be the basis for local discussion groups.

Political education is not only about specific policy areas (such as NHS, housing, economy), but also about the fundamentals of our politics, such as 'what is socialism', and 'why the working class'.

The target date suggested for launching a rolling programme of political statements should be set as soon as the new LRC website is in operation. The very process of chasing up writers regarded as experts on particular subjects gives us the opportunity to draw up a speakers' list for the benefit of local groups.

These programmes should be published in the name of the individual writer, rather than attempting to draw up 'perfect' programmes on every subject under the sun. We will take some responsibility for their content. They should be circulated before publication to check for obvious inaccuracies and political mantraps. We could add cautionary notes on controversial issues with the approval of the author. Controversy is to be encouraged, not threatened. Most of the statements could just be offered online, though we need to find an effective way to alert LRC comrades to their existence.

Updating the LRC Website:

A closed FB page, where LRC members could debate and exchange ideas, would also be helpful.

The new LRC website should be up and running by the time of the SGM. It offers enhanced possibilities for political education, with links to other websites of interest to the labour movement.

Again this need not indicate unconditional approval, just to explain that it is useful background material. The more people co-operate in identifying such stuff, the more comprehensive and impressive our bank of educational material will appear. That must be our aim.

Mapping the Membership:

The NEC began this process previously. Region, gender, TU and CLP membership and positions and age, if eligible for Young Labour, plus whether they have subscription to Briefing are all details needed for all LRC members if we are to intervene effectively in the labour movement. We also need list of local LRCs with contact details and appeal for people to set up new groups on website. This is vital if we are to rebuild the network of local groups. We need urgently to actively recruit, but if we are recruiting, we have to offer something to new members.

Local Groups:

As we develop a bank of usable material we should encourage local groups to discuss them. We are very happy for informal groups to meet and discuss our material. The formation of local LRCs may hopefully follow as a result. Hopefully, as we generate educational material, local groups can use this for discussion groups which can grow into local LRC branches over time.

Trade Union Links:

The LRC's links with trade unions is not just a formal link. Unlike CLPD and Momentum, we actively support workers' struggles and do not confine our attentions to the Labour Party.

We are in the process of organising a UNITE LRC caucus. We hope this will be the first of trade union caucuses for all the major unions in the movement. 'Broad Lefts' already exist in most unions so an LRC TU meeting would have a different role. In some TUs 'Broad Lefts' are little more than a 'left' electoral machine, with little or no discussion on policy issues. Unlike the CLPD and Momentum nationally, LRC members are actively involved in the trade union movement, regarding it as a vital

arm of the broader labour movement. We need to organise within the unions, together with others in sympathy with us, for trade union democracy and socialist policies. We need to begin to develop the programmes of action and trade union democracy for the various unions in which we are involved and to organise to that effect in the unions where we are active. The strength of the LRC is that it has not only had the support of several national trade unions, but also of many union branches and other union bodies. We need to strive to restore those links.

Local Government and the Cuts:

We have also begun work in past years on organising left councillors campaigning against austerity in local government. It has been disappointing that so far there has been no mass resistance to the vicious cuts imposed on local councils. This will surely not continue for ever. At least the structures are in place for us to intervene. A statement on the prospects for work within the local authorities fighting against the cuts is the first step in a much-needed discussion in the Labour movement.

Other Issues:

A change of name will not be advantageous. We do not intend to end the role of the AGM as a policy-making conference, though there are proposals to make it less unwieldy.

Other proposals, such as less frequent NEC meetings, have not been discussed yet and can be left for the incoming NEC to decide. Our meetings at TUC and Labour Party conferences have been a proven and longstanding success. We need more public meetings in the name of the LRC. We must be aware that constitutional changes at the SGM on their own will not turn around the LRC.

The question has been raised as to whether we should encourage the creation of local LRC Facebook sites. This also raises the prospect of 'maverick' contributions that could be picked up by the press. The overlap between the existing and forthcoming printed material in Briefing and all the newly commissioned stuff for the LRC also needs clarification. These are minor problems which we can deal with as we develop.

Caution should not hold us back in these tasks. The proposals outlined represent an action plan for the LRC. The fact is that we have stagnated over the past period, a period in which it was very important for us to spread our message far and wide. Other organisations on the left have also stagnated. Though the present time seems so promising for socialists, connecting with the new movement has been tricky. The main problem has undoubtedly been the lack of human resources to take advantage of the situation. It's no good coming up with grandiose ideas if we don't have the people to carry them out. We have to focus on what is most important and abandon what we can't achieve. Let us go forward on that basis.

If the proposals in this resolution are accepted at the forthcoming SGM the immediate task of the incoming officers will be to work out a detailed plan for its implementation. Even before the SGM meets, preparatory discussions have been held as to how to carry it out.