

Chingford and Woodford Green Constituency Labour Party AGM 2nd July 2018

Chair's Report

2017-2018 has been an extraordinary year for our CLP, something like a perfect storm, culminating in the local elections and the PPC selection.

Branch structure

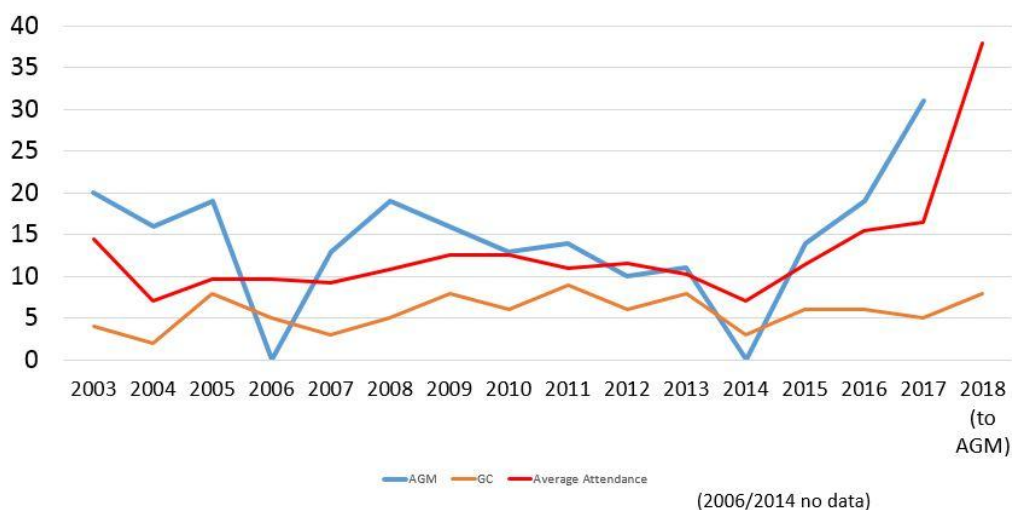
Reflecting the massive growth in membership over the past two years, we established two new branches shortly before the 2017 AGM, doubling our previous number. This year we have activated those branches. These new branches have required Officers, and GC delegates, and we thank everyone who has stepped up to the plate. We should never take for granted that these comrades are volunteers who give their time and talent freely.

GC Meetings: Attendance

I have undertaken a statistical analysis of GC attendance over the past 15 years (please see the chart). From 2003-2015, before the election of Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader, the average attendance at GC meetings was 10.6. This does not include the meetings that were inquorate. Average attendance in 2016 (15.5) and 2017 (16.5) was 16. The average attendance over the past 12 months is 37.9, representing a sudden and quite remarkable rise of 137%! This massive improvement is partly explained by the increase in membership and the consequent increase in ward delegate entitlement. But it also reflects the rising tide of hope, inclusion and empowerment, not just within our CLP but also within the Labour movement generally.

Due to the significant improvement in attendance over the past 12 months, we should give consideration to the venue, or venues, if only for reasons of health & safety, and disabled access.

Attendance 2003-2018



GC meetings: Conduct of

GC meetings have inevitably changed in character. Meetings of 10-12 people, discussing items submitted by just 2 branches, allowed everyone to speak, pretty much as long and often as they wished. We now have items, motions and reports reflecting the exponential growth in membership, branches, GC delegates, campaigning activity, representation within the wider Labour movement and the engagement of a new wave of activists. Meanwhile the number of GC meetings and the time allocated remains the same. Given that none of us wish to increase the regularity or length of GC meetings, the character of meetings had to change.

This has necessitated more formal chairing, in accordance with standing orders commonly deployed within the Labour movement. We have moved to democratise GC meetings, and make them more efficient, by ensuring that the agenda, minutes, reports and motions are circulated 7 days in advance, giving members the opportunity to read and cogitate in advance. This has created additional workload for our Secretary. We thank Aktar Beg for his diligence, and Simon Deville for taking on the role of Minutes Secretary. To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to familiarise themselves with customary standing orders we should consider running a training session every year for new GC delegates.

Guest speakers to GC meetings have included Bilal Mahmood, Sarah Freestone and Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union. In the coming year we should look to invite speakers, perhaps to alternate meetings, to lead on 30 minute political discussions.

These are exciting times comrades. If we find meetings frustrating, or our differences seem disproportionate, we need to remember that we are passionate advocates of the cause of labour, peace and socialism, and we sometimes disagree precisely because we care. We can still be comradely and respectful.

Policies and Resolutions

The General Committee has debated and submitted to the relevant bodies, resolutions on: Ethnic Cleansing of Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar; Expulsion of Moshe Machover; Crisis Facing the NHS in London; Consultation on Local government Policy; Anti-Semitism; London Labour Party Democracy; Picture House Strike; Improved Transport Links for Chingford Mount; Trade Union affiliations; Western Sahara; Joining Trade Unions; Ending Gaza Killings; Officer Reports. The breadth of issues and inclusion of so many GC members in moving and seconding these resolutions is impressive and reflects the range of political interests and expertise within the CLP.

Our debate of some of these issues was a little rushed due to time constraints and we must address this for the coming year. But we shouldn't underestimate the importance of our support for these resolutions in building local or national momentum for a particular issue, nor in raising the profile of our CLP within the Labour movement.

Re-established Forums

We have re-established our Women's and Ethnic Minorities Forums, under the guidance of Helen Watson and Sharon King. It was my honour to be the guest speaker at the re-launch of the Ethnic Minorities Forum. We should look to do similar with the Youth Forum in the coming months, providing we have the activists to make it happen.

Local Elections

We made steady progress this year. Within C&WG we increased the number of Labour Councillors: a clean sweep in Highams Park & Hale End with two additional councillors; a Councillor in Churchfields for the first time ever; and one in South Woodford. We lost one but gained one in Valley. We significantly increased our share of the vote elsewhere in the constituency. Huge congratulations to our new Councillors, Beverly Brewer, Rosa Gomez, Liz Baptiste, Ros Dore and Zia Rehman, and to all those who campaigned on their behalf. Special thanks to Sheila Dore for her commitment and organisation of the successful HPHE campaign. Commiserations to Aktar Beg who lost by a handful of votes, and a big thank you Aktar for all your efforts on behalf of the constituents of Valley ward. In the words of Arnold Schwarzenegger, “He’ll be back”, or Spartacus, “He’ll be back and he’ll be millions”.

Many excellent Labour candidates did not get across the line on this occasion, despite significantly increasing the vote share, and we should listen carefully to their critique of the campaign. Plainly, there are concerns about what is perceived as a lack of consultation, inclusion and support for their efforts from Waltham Forest Labour and a modus operandi that disempowered and excluded the CLP. I refer you to the papers from Hatch candidate Liz Fenton and experienced local campaigner John Burnell.

Campaigns, national

Across the year we have supported national campaigns, running stalls and leafleting in South Woodford and Highams Park. Norma Dudley has provided exceptional leadership and energy in our support for the Save Our NHS campaign. We have campaigned against government education cuts and our efforts will benefit from the establishment of the local Socialist Education Association. We have also contributed to the campaigns, Stand Up to Racism and Unite Against Fascism, again leafleting at HP station, organised by Nadia Amara. We brought Stand Up For Labour to Chingford, courtesy of our very own Mick Moore, for a political yet highly entertaining evening, which saw many new faces attending a Labour event. It was nice for me to meet up again with my old friend, comic celebrity, Arthur Smith.

Campaigns, municipal

Under the guidance of Hanna Chalmers and the Organisers’ Group, ably supported by Cllr Tony Bell, we saw the regeneration of municipal socialism in CWG. This included:

- The successful campaign to save and utilise Highams Park Library;
- The protest against Tesco corporate greed;
- Establishing the community café in Highams Park;
- International Women’s Day, celebrated at Hale End Library;
- Cake and Company mornings;
- The campaign to re-open Highams Park cinema;
- A second music service hub for the north of the borough at Hale End library;
- Local litter picks;
- Supporting Union industrial action for fair pay at Whipps Cross Hospital, where a number of us joined the early morning picket line and I made a donation of £20 on behalf of the CLP.

With Hanna being the first through the door of the Labour Party's newly formed Community Campaigns Unit, we can look forward to the continued rise and impact of community socialism in CWG.

National Labour Party Conference

Our CLP was magnificently represented at the National Annual Labour Party Conference with Naomi Wimborne Idrissi receiving a standing ovation for her contribution defending the NEC's position on Palestine, as well as chairing a fringe meeting that was so well attended I had to stand outside in the overflow meeting! Helen Watson and myself were our other two delegates. We both helped raise the profile of CWG CLP by networking and contributing at fringe meetings.

London Labour Party Conference

Our delegation to the London Labour Party Conference played a decisive role. Norma Dudley eloquently moved our CLP's resolution on the crisis facing the NHS in London, which was passed unanimously. Brian Lester spoke from the floor of conference to argue that our CLP's resolution on Party Democracy be debated and voted upon, as a result of which conference overturned the platform's decision not to hear our motion. Brian subsequently moved the motion, which was carried overwhelmingly, with Jim Kelly also making a persuasive contribution.

Selection Committee

We are in the midst of selecting the next PPC for CWG CLP. I was elected onto the CLP Selection Committee, which in turn elected me to chair the SC. The responsibility is awesome. It is arguably the most important political responsibility I have undertaken, second only to being the General Secretary of CND for 4 years. We have to get it right, which means not only selecting the best candidate to defeat IDS and pull off an historic victory for Labour in the land of Churchill and Tebbit. It also means managing and energising a process that is inclusive, that empowers and inspires our members and, beyond them, the electorate of CWG. Moreover, we should be cognisant that the sympathetic eyes of the Labour movement are upon us, as is the hostile gaze of the Tory establishment.

As a member of the SC, I am obliged to impartiality with regard to specific candidates. But in defining selection criteria, I stand by the platform on which I stood for election to the SC. I promised then to fight for a BME woman socialist who fully supports the Labour leadership and unreservedly supports the policies detailed in the Labour Party Manifesto, "For The Many, Not The Few". I stand by that promise.

Unseat IDS Festival

We have postponed the Festival until September 15/16 because it didn't make sense to proceed once the PPC Selection commenced. It will now provide us with an opportunity, not only to canvass intensively across the constituency, and to fundraise on an unprecedented scale, but also to launch the profile of our newly elected PPC candidate, and make her a household name and face in Chingford and Woodford Green. Many thanks to Owen Jones, leader of the national Unseat campaign, for accommodating our change of schedule.

Premises

A big shout out to Betty Hales and the Premises team for the facelift and reorganisation at Hatch Office. The posters and paintings are an inspirational reminder of our past, and our transformational future. Thanks to Betty's persistence it looks like we are finally going to have a resolution to the interminable ceiling leak! Thanks to Dennean Cooper's vision and drive, we should soon have Internet access at the office.

CWG CLP Website.

We should also thank Dennean for the fantastic cutting edge website design. We are not yet making the most of this facility but in a world where radical politics is increasingly promoted through interactive media, our CLP is well placed to engage with our constituents, especially the youth of CWG.

Voice

Roger Gilham has successfully maintained and produced *Voice* for many years as an invaluable source of information to members. He has now been joined by Helen Watson whose technical, design and editorial expertise as the Editor of a national trade union journal, *The Teacher*, has facilitated a modernisation of *Voice* which can hopefully appeal to a wider, younger audience.

Branch Visits

It was my privilege to be invited to speak at a Churchfields and Monkams branch meeting. The welcome was very warm and the discussion was mutually informative. We may wish to consider CLP Chair visits to each of the branches in the coming year.

Strategic Development Planning

I have drafted a Strategic Development Plan for the CLP. It will benefit from a Saturday or Sunday morning conference whereby the GC or EC can discuss, amend and re-write the plan. In preparation, I met with Seumas Milne, Labour Party Director of Strategy and Communications, his then Deputy, Steve Howell, and Corbyn's Head of International Policy, Jennifer Larbie, who is a member of our CLP. We focused on the changing demography of CWG, and what lessons could be learned and applied from the 2017 General Election campaign. It was an intensive couple of hours which was as much about what I didn't know as it was about what I did! Many of the lessons contained in Howell's book, "Game Changer: Eight Weeks That Transformed British Politics", are relevant to us. I thoroughly recommend it to all serious Labour activists. I was proud to be invited by Steve and Accent Press to write a review of the book, which you can find on Goodreads.

Gary Lefley

Chair

Chingford & Woodford Green Constituency Labour Party