

## Black representation and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

13 January 2020

To Peter Willsman, Secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy and its Executive Committee

We write to put on record our opposition to the way the Campaign for Labour Democracy (CLPD), which was founded to promote Labour democracy, is perceived to have stitched up who it should support for vacant places on the party's ruling National Executive Committee (NEC).

CLPD played a key role helping the Labour Black Sections win on the fundamental issue of Black self-organisation and self-determination in the party in the early 1980s. Only organisations committed to these principles, on which positive action to achieve greater black representation should be based, can be considered to be genuinely left-wing and progressive.

We are disturbed that, at an unrepresentative meeting of CLPD's executive committee on Saturday 11 January, its secretary Peter Willsman proposed two candidates for the NEC, neither of whom turned up to take questions. Before doing so, Willsman, who is white, circulated a brief statement from one of them but not from at least one other prospective candidate who contacted him. Both candidates put forward by Willsman are his executive committee mates. No call was made to the CLPD membership to either nominate someone or themselves beforehand. In the event, just one other candidate hastily circulated a political CV, which those people present either did not get a copy of or had little time to read. She was supported by Grassroots Black Left (GBL). And, despite being a CLPD Vice-Chair, lost the vote to be nominated. An African Caribbean member, who is women's officer on the CLPD executive, was not considered, despite contacting Willsman before the meeting to let him know, in his capacity of secretary, she wanted to stand. The process therefore had the hallmarks of being pre-arranged by Willsman.

Normally around 50 executive members attend but, on this occasion, less than 30 were there, most of them white and male. Of the 20 people who voted for two Asian candidates put forward by Willsman, all of them were white. GBL, which is the only African Caribbean and Asian organisation affiliated to CLPD, was not consulted, despite the fact one of the NEC members who has stepped down is an African Caribbean woman. The position of GBL and Momentum Black Caucus is for an African Caribbean woman and Asian man to replace Claudia Webbe and Navendu Mishra, and that at least one of the new NEC members should be from outside London.

We:

- Do deplore godfather politics where one man makes such important decisions about political representation, particularly African Caribbean and Asian representation. The principle that black people must be free to choose their own representatives is at the heart of self-organisation and self-determination, which CLPD says it supports.
- We reject any undemocratic process that employs the colonial tactic of divide and rule.
- Call on the CLPD executive to as quickly as possible seek nominations from the CLPD membership for candidates to fill the vacant NEC seats and that those candidates should be an African Caribbean woman and Asian man, at least one of them from outside London.

Grassroots Black Left: **Shamsher Chohan**, East Midlands Organiser, and **Marc Wadsworth**, Head of Communications

Momentum Black Caucus: **Cecile Wright**, Chair, and **Kingsley Abrams**, General Secretary