



Grassroots Black Left Demands All Black Shortlists for Labour

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We welcome the advances on Black representation made by the Labour Party at its 2019 annual conference. These include deciding to:

- Make sure “BAME” candidates are included on shortlists to redress the under-representation such members face.
- Giving a firm commitment to reform its BAME Labour organisation that has become moribund. All BAME Labour Party members are now automatically members of the organisation.
- Conduct the monitoring by race of Labour Party members demanded by Grassroots Black Left as part of our submissions to the party’s Democracy Review.

But more needs to be done to ensure the party has a diverse representation, which more accurately reflects modern Britain. We are pleased the Labour leadership recognise this but they must act to make it happen. They cannot win the next general election without the Black vote.

GBL Co-Chair Deborah Hobson said: “Grassroots Black Left calls on the party to act on its commitment to greater Black representation by bringing in voluntary all Black shortlists and all Black women shortlists in its selections for representatives to hold public office. We know the argument is used that mandatory all Black shortlists fall outside the law. But there have been voluntary ones that have resulted in a Black MP being elected.”

She added: “In the past, all women shortlists, which the law allows to be mandatory, have often worked against Black women because only a tiny number of them have been selected as a result.”

Hobson went on: “Often, though it has not necessarily been the intention, all women shortlists have been used in seats with a large African Caribbean and Asian population and resulted in a white middle-class woman being selected. We note African Caribbean men are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to political representation. Labour has only three male African Caribbean MPs, which is much less than the Conservatives.”

There is a gross lack of African Caribbean and Asian representatives at the local level of the party, at regional level, among party staff and special advisors in parliament.

The number of African Caribbean local councillors is believed to have dropped significantly while the number of Asian councillors has increased over the last year.

According to official figures released in 2018, there were 17,770 councillors in England, 373 of them Asian and 160 African Caribbean.

Sandrine Kasongo, Hampstead and Kilburn constituency Labour party's policy officer and a GBL activist, said: "Camden Council in north London, for example, despite covering one of the most diverse boroughs in the country, has 39 Labour Councillors, of whom 12 are from African Caribbean and Asian backgrounds and of those, only two are African Caribbean – one man and one woman."

This pattern is reflected nationwide. There are few African Caribbean and Asian council leaders, deputy leaders, elected mayors or Police and Crime Commissioners. Black councillors tend to be the town hall "medallion men and women", as ceremonial mayors rather than political decision-makers.

At the local level of the Labour Party, key officers' roles within the branches and constituency parties are often not held by African Caribbean and Asian members. In most cases, the only post they are sure to hold is "BAME Officer", many of whom have told us they feel isolated and ignored.

GBL Co-Chair Hassan Ahmed said: "This crisis of Black representation is extremely disappointing considering that African Caribbean and Asian communities have traditionally been Labour's most loyal voters. This was evident with the large numbers of them registering to vote and going to the polls at the last general election and in local elections."

He added: "Given that Britain is one of the most multiracial and multicultural societies in the world, it is imperative that local councillors, regional representatives and MPs should properly reflect their communities. Otherwise, there is a democracy deficit and Black people will find other means to raise their issues and voice grievances."

As we approach Black History Month, the contribution of African Caribbean and Asian people to making Britain great should be recognised and supported by politicians so that better and more informed decisions can be made to ensure all members of our communities are properly represented.

Grassroots Black Left will be publishing our "Blacklist of Parliamentary seats" later, where we have candidates we're supporting.

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