



GRASSROOTS BLACK LEFT

Labour African, Caribbean and Asian Socialists

NEWS RELEASE

26 September 2018

Unions back campaign for a strong black voice in Labour

- Top trade unionists join forces with Grassroots Black Left to fight for reinstatement of leading activist

Trade unions are backing calls from black campaigners in the Labour movement to boost their representation in the Party and get expelled party activist Marc Wadsworth reinstated.

Leaders from the train drivers and postal and telephone workers unions gave their support for a strong black voice in the unions at a Labour conference fringe meeting organised by Grassroots Black Left (GBL) in Liverpool on 25 September.

Tosh Macdonald, president of the train union ASLEF and a Communication Workers Union leader Maria Exall, also backed the reinstatement into the Labour Party of the expelled veteran anti-racist campaigner Marc Wadsworth.

Tosh Macdonald told a 100-strong meeting: "I'm here with the blessing of the ASLEF general secretary and the executive committee. We were pleased to have Marc at our event last night and are pleased to stand with Marc.

"We have our own organisation for black members. We don't want to tell black people what to do. They come to us and tell us what they want."

Maria Exall said: The CWU is taking the issue of equality very seriously. I support GBL's black agenda objectives. We have an opportunity to rebuild the party and drive policy from below. Equality and diversity is about democracy and you cannot have democracy without equality and diversity."

Co-chair of GBL Deborah Hobson, a conference delegate, said her organisation is organising African, Asian and African-Caribbean campaigners in the unions and party to press for black representation at all levels.

This included more representatives on Labour's top decision making body, the national executive committee, an annual black policy-making conference and the replacement of BAME Labour, the party's current black representation organisation that has been much criticised because it no longer properly functions.

The Labour Party has examined how members are involved in its decision making through its Jeremy Corbyn-inspired 'Democracy Review'. GBL put forward its proposals to the review and discussed them with senior party officials.

At the fringe meeting, GBL's concerns about black under representation were backed by speakers, including MPs shadow treasury minister Clive Lewis and Chris Williamson.

GBL supporter, Clive Lewis said: "We need self-organisation for black people in the party. We should have a women's conference, an LGBT conference and a black members conference to ensure that our priorities are heard." He gave strong support for Wadsworth's reinstatement campaign.

Marc should be venerated

There was much support in the meeting for Wadsworth, a GBL co-founder. Wadsworth was subjected to a two-year long trial by media before in April being expelled for allegedly bringing the Labour Party into disrepute. At the launch of the Shami Chakrabarti report in 2016, he pointed out that Labour MP Ruth Smeeth, had been working with a right-wing Daily Telegraph journalist who was hostile to the party leader.

Chris Williamson said he had seen the much-publicised video recording of the incident and had since defended Wadsworth. He said: "Marc is someone who should be venerated for his lifelong anti-racist work and not castigated. We're not going to have a democracy unless everyone is allowed to participate. Marc did nothing wrong. For him to have been found guilty is beyond parody."

A speaker from Jewish Voice for Labour Jay Blackwood said he became more active in the party after feeling outrage at Wadsworth's expulsion. He said: "What we have seen at (Labour) conference is the privileging of anti-semitism over other forms of oppression. It's not the same as Windrush or Islamophobia and I'm ashamed that the Labour Party has acted as if there's a huge issue with anti-semitism, which there isn't."

Other speakers at the meeting included Kerry-Anne Mendoza, editor of The Canary, Ben Chako, editor of the Morning Star and Anyanna Ndukwe, GBL's Liverpool-based North-West organiser.

-ends-

Contact S. Hinds, Grassroots Black Left media officer: 07876 336807

Caption: Backing black self-organisation. L to R – Maria Exall, Marc Wadsworth, Tosh Macdonald, Deborah Hobson, Jay Blackwood, Kerry-Anne Mendoza, Chris Williamson
Credit: Sally Eason

NOTES

House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee report October 2016

Report: Antisemitism in the UK:

Despite significant press and public attention on the Labour Party, and a number of revelations regarding inappropriate social media content, there exists no reliable, empirical evidence to support the notion that there is a higher prevalence of antisemitic attitudes within the Labour Party than any other political party. We are unaware whether efforts to identify antisemitic social media content within the Labour Party were applied equally to members and activists from other political parties, and we are not aware of any polls exploring antisemitic attitudes among political party members, either within or outside the Labour Party. The current impression of a heightened prevalence of anti-Semitism.

(paragraph 120)

https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/136/13609.htm#_idTextAnchor055