

Conference 2021

Visitor Ana Davies (all views my own)

This year I attended as a visitor and am grateful that the Executive accepted my bursary application this covered my ticket to the conference. I hope my report encourages others to similarly apply next year. As it turned out, I managed to get a seat in the delegates' area as an 'enabler', supporting our main delegate, conference can be overwhelming and it's helpful to have friendly faces around.

It was disappointing that due to BBC funding Conference 21 was not televised, it was a very different conference atmosphere to the previous few I attended, no flag waving, no ubiquitous Momentum branding. I really felt the Party was talking to the electorate, a Party waiting to govern under the steady leadership of Keir Starmer, no longer a vehicle for one issue politics or lobbyists for marginal issues.

If you have not seen it yet, every session was recorded on [YouTube](#).

Most mornings I was up supporting the [Labour to Win](#) team leafletting as delegates came to the Hall, it was fun stuff with all sides of the party present and respectful, jostling for delegates' attention.

Conference Floor Highlights

Peter Kyle MP for Brighton and Hove opened. The return of Ruth Smeeth and Margaret Hodge, displayed on 20ft screens was electric topped with a later announcement that Louise Elman had re-joined the party.

The acceptance of the ECHR recommendations by over 70% of members - had this not passed the Party would be irrevocably damaged.

David Evans (the General Secretary), my boss as CLP Secretary was affirmed in post, he faced down detractors calling for a card vote that paid off, any Union members would appreciate that as an employee he would rightfully take the party to court had his appointment been rejected.

Wes Streeting, had a standing ovation after his recovery from cancer treatment.

Rachel Reeves our Green Chancellor talking about the everyday economy, taxing more fairly and overhauling business rates. Talking to businesses and workers. Proud that our local MP, my friend Abena Opong-Asare MP feeding into her brief.

The Chairing was ruthless, lots of points of orders that weren't points of orders were shut down, Margaret Beckett was impressively scary, Yasmine Dar lovely, Gurinder Singh Josan was no nonsense and Mark Ferguson has a future in stand-up comedy, all brilliant. Our Chair Donna Briant does well, but these guys had amazing endurance and patience!

The long awaited **leader's speech** was of course worth the wait, Keir Starmer talking to the nation answering the question Who is Keir Starmer? Where did he come from? He spoke of the things that ordinary working people care about, work, dignity, care, patriotism, national security, aspiration, a digital future. Refreshingly, focussing on what Labour achieved in power. It really felt like a leader in waiting. He spoke and looked like a leader. The Let's Make Brexit Work slogan sat well in a week where everyone is queuing for fuel.

Finally, I was so delighted that our delegate managed to get on the podium (in the Finance section), he pointed out that Labour should check with CLPs numbers of leaflets that need to be sent out, we have far too many that get recycled. This would be good for finances and good for the environment.

Conference Lowlights

OBS were sat next to Carol Vincent, Leyton and Wanstead, the Tottenham, Sutton and Cheam delegates, we deserve a medal really for drowning out the heckles by clapping over them. It took great strength of mind to desist from grabbing those red cards that were being waved, I don't think they realised that the Red Card bore our party colour too! We were grateful that Kat Fletcher and the London Region Team were taking their details. The instructions I'm told was not to push the last leader's whip issue but to keep shouting about the £15/hr minimum wage or £31k, this originated from a motion that Andy Macdonald was asked to oppose in a composite meeting, refused then resigned over a 'point of principle', not orchestrated to take the headlines away from our brilliant Shadow Green Chancellor! Of course, the previous manifesto had £10/hr, the £15/hour originates from the Jo Biden \$15/hr initiative. I guess no one realised there's a currency disparity that would break most businesses that are struggling as it is.

Throughout the leader's speech as covered in the press they heckled, I lost my voice from shouting 'shut up', they were terribly put out, accusing me of being rude! They couldn't even clap to references to NHS nurses and heroes. One delegate had previously stood up and talked passionately about Wales, 'be more like Wales', but when the leader thanked Mark Drakeford in Wales, she sat cross armed and glaring. I think in many ways they played into the Leader's hands, things have moved on and the public can see a clear divide between old and new management. A teeny tiny angry minority, but unfortunately sat next to us.

The Baker's Union disaffiliation from Labour also took over valuable airtime, again over the £15/hour non-issue, the news won't tell you that their president is facing auto expulsion from the party or that their finances are so dire they are likely to be joining one of the larger Unions (perhaps Unite).

All the NEC proposals passed:

Now it will take more than 50% of a CLP members vote to trigger MP reselection. (previously a minority third could oust an MP).

The £3 registered supporters access removed, so only dedicated Labour members can make decisions on Labour's direction.

The selection of the Leader now to be made up by 20% of the vote resting with MPs.

The priority ballots being reduced from 20 to 12 topics, helps the Party focus on priority topic areas, so externally Labour's message is more focussed. The Israel and Palestine debate now likely to be seen outside Labour mainstream topic areas.

The humiliation that the Press were predicting simply did not happen, and Keir Starmer's calculated risk paid off.

If you'd like to know a little more [here's a lengthy interview I did with GB News](#) that explains why these changes were needed. I've never watched GB news before but thought we could be talking to an audience whose votes we want to harvest.

Fringes

As well as main conference the highlights are the fringes which are scattered across the main promenade hotels and bars. I did 65k steps in a 4 day period, our airbnb being in the Kemp Town area.

Disability Labour

Having constant Ableist Language is exhausting; dumb , imbecile, invalid. Psycho. These terms are in common usage even amongst the disabled. It is important to remember we are all only one incident from being disabled ourselves, as we get older we grow into disability, so it is important that we all engage with our disabled colleagues. Brighton as a venue, being an old venue is particularly difficult for delegates. Access is appalling. The party must start looking at everything through an 'How can we help you?' lens when selecting future meetings. On blue badges, the campaign to include Mental Health sufferers to access Blue Badges whilst welcome needs to be supported with an increase in infrastructure for more spaces.

I now have a contact, OBS, had tried to affiliate with Disability labour a few times but was unsuccessful, we can now try again. I noticed the event did not have any tea or coffee, I suggested once we affiliate we could look at sponsoring this at the next conference for them but will raise a motion to that effect and like our child minding support raise one around taxis to and from our meetings. I would also propose writing to Conference Arrangements to see if those years we don't do Brighton that disabled candidates are invited to attend more accessible Liverpool, not just in the all-encompassing category of BAME or disabled.

Labour First Rally

[Labour First](#) are the mainstream section of the party. The introductions acknowledging that a lot of people had joined the party enthusiastically, genuinely to see Labour in office and that it was important that we harness that energy to organise and form policy.

Ruth Smeeth, now back in the party asked that today was the day that members needed to decide what kind of Party they wanted to be in. Antisemitism or denial of it, renders the party with no moral authority to talk about any issue, let alone change things.

Angela Eagle, now back on the NEC, clarified the point that was raised on the Conference floor about the Sun having a stand at Conference. There was no stand, never was. Categorically not true.

The NEC members (Angela, Jo, Gurinder and Luke) were commended on their tenacity, NEC meeting averaging about 7 – 9 hours currently

Prior to the ECHR investigation the Labour Party incurred circa £200k, thanks to the failure to tackle or recognise the antisemitism issue, the party is spending £2m/year, an astonishing legacy that hard working staff are paying the price for with our own regional rep being made redundant at the end of September.

David Lammy MP – Shadow Justice Secretary , The Spectator in Conversation

He's certainly looking forward to holding Dominic Raab to account. Minority rights, children's rights are all to be defended, rights are only being asked to be shared, the Tories always frame as if rights are being taken away. The backlog of casework is more about the way we treat victims of crime,

particularly crimes of violence against women. Rape convictions low because of muddled views around consent, taking phones off women not tenable. Labour would look at eradicating sentences of less than 6 months or even up to a year, as rehabilitation is simply not invested in, be more like Norway, reoffending is nearer 20%, the UK is at 70%. Rehabilitation should be restored to the Department of Education, not the Department of Justice. Equality in the courts matters too with fewer BAME lawyers in the High or Crown Court, most limited to tribunals. On Boris Johnson, he wants to please everyone, so nothing is coherent. On party unity, Joe Biden's support notably coming from his opponent Bernie Sanders, not airing your infighting in public helps unite the party.

I did notice he referred to Sarah Everard by name but Sabina Nessa only as the recent South London victim. Along with his 'dinosaur' comment, I think David Lammy has gone some way to upsetting a lot of women at this conference, please read my 'Where's Rosie?' report that explains more.

Jim McMahon MP – Shadow Transport Secretary- The Rail Interview

As someone whose father and grandfather before him came from the heavy transport industry, he's frustrated that transport jobs are decent, well paid jobs that young people and the working classes have been limited by Tory lack of understanding of the opportunities in this sector. Only 1% of truck drivers are women because of working conditions. The Tories proposal to the current crisis is to encourage people to work longer and cut safety. Labour prioritises Future Technology in transport for public good, not private ambition and eradicating transport deserts in our communities,

On the Covid impact on rail, trains kept in sidings and Eurostar left in limbo, shows the Government have no plan, Labour's approach will not be based on ideology Public v Private, but will be evidence based, looking across the whole network on a case by case basis.

On ticketing the model should not be based on the immediate consequence of Covid, but a more innovative overall model. Accessibility, Affordability and timetables that work for the passenger. A devolution of train services might be the solution. Yellow trams, yellow buses, why not yellow trains?

Rail infrastructure investment is a generational activity, it is OK to start to build in office but deliver later. Labour would unlock the bottlenecks in some of these projects at local level, build with the support of a package that is attractive for pension fund investment. Revisit the Beeching line reopenings, the demographics might have changed. The North Eastern routes to be connected to HS2 in its entirety with work progressing from North to South sooner rather than work up the line only.

On free ports, trains should drive into ports, lose the connecting road haulage to keep green.

Amazon boom post Covid, government need to act on taxing re CO2 emissions, more use of clean air zones that put couriers into electric vans and offer tax breaks to those who serve isolated communities.

Build beautiful community settings to encourage more to walk, feel safe, leave the car behind, actively develop neighbourhoods.

Smart motorways, based on 2004 technology, we have the power of the mobile phones to track real time journeys. The main message being that he's keen to hear the input from the industry and is in listening mode.

Labour Friends of Israel

This was an evening reception, a packed meeting, welcoming Ruth Smeeth, Margaret Hodge and Louise Ellman back to their party. There's still much to be done in winning back trust, but it was great to be in the company of friends who were all waiting for this moment. There was a great whoop in the room when Netanyahu's loss was referenced. It was also my first time in a meeting hosted by Lisa Nandy, what a great shadow Foreign Secretary she is.

CLP Secretary meeting

This is an annual meeting at Conference, as secretaries we are invited to meet the General Secretary. I attended the last one with a photoshoot with Ian Lavery as Chair and this time we were treated to both the Chair (Annelise Dodds) and General Secretary (David Evans), they came to each table taking down notes on our feedback on technology issues and ways of streamlining process. They acknowledged that Conference would not be possible without our organising. David confirmed that there will be investment next year, a lot of issues could not immediately be addressed because of the financial pressures the party were facing (due to the legal costs).

I had a nice chat with Seema Chandwani who organises these events, she's had a tough time lately, and whilst we are poles apart in politics, there's always time for human empathy.

Social Gatherings

We had a great night at LGBTQ+ party dancing to cheesy disco, Claire, Ahmad and I were exhausted but so happy to be doing normal things, it was packed and I was rather nervous, double masking up but finding a spot in our own right, didn't spot Michael Gove though!

After visiting the Friends of Bangladesh social, we had dinner with Assembly Member Marina Ahmed.

On our last day after the leader's speech, I was helping Simon Jeal from Bromley collect MPs signatures in the Hilton Bar, sat next to Neil Coyle, Stephen Kinnock and Hilary Benn. I also had the pleasure of driving an exhausted Abena Oppong-Asare MP safely home.

Labour local friends, we caught up with Sam and Sammy from Bexleyheath and Crayford, Issy and Nav from Erith & Thamesmead, Josh, Kelly, Jonathan from Dartford, Simon, Dermot and Paulina from Bromley, Daniel Francis Bexley and Danny Thorpe leader of Greenwich.

Top Tips for Conference goers

Lunchtime best food freebies are at any Spectator event, saw in conversations with Jim McMahon, David Lammy and Andy Burnham.

Most Lavish offerings including drinks and proper buffet are all the Rail Industry events.

CWU freebies always great though they skimped on the quality of their notebook this year

Irish night, Jameson Whiskey on tap, though I had a clash.