

ORGANISE!

Labour's campaigning
revolution

Edited by Marcus Roberts

Foreword by Michael Dugher MP

*With Dom Collins, Matthew Fulton,
Ashwin Kumar, Lola McEvoy,
Lisa Mitchell and Claire Spencer*



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**FABIAN
SOCIETY**

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First published February 2014

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Acknowledgements

Anyone who has organised a campaign will testify that they owe their knowledge to those who trained them. From my teenage years onwards, I was lucky to have brilliant teachers like Eddie Lopez in Exeter, Matt Ross in Ohio and Ken Clarke in London.

But anyone who organises also knows that ultimately, victories belong to our volunteers. My inspiration for this pamphlet came from them, be they the block captains of Bethnal Green and Bow, the phone bankers of the long summer of 2010, or any of the host of other campaigns on which I have had the privilege to serve.

In assembling this collection, the Fabian staff, particularly the editorial team in the form of Sofie Jenkinson, Anya Pearson, Richard Speight and Ed Wallis, have been customarily brilliant.

I'd like to thank Michael Dugher and Patrick Heneghan, who both champion organising in the party, for their kind co-operation in this work.

This collection would not have been possible without the generous support of the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO) and Peter Carpenter: thank you.

Lastly, the authors here, Dom Collins, Matthew Fulton, Ashwin Kumar, Lola McEvoy, Lisa Mitchell and Claire Spencer deserve praise for their sound thinking, clear writing and CLP-useable recommendations. If their ideas were practised everywhere, all 106 target seats would be red in no time. Thank you all and good luck next year!

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FOREWORD

Michael Dugher MP

The forthcoming general election will be fought in a radically redefined political context from the last: the UK government is in coalition, Labour is determined to be a one-term opposition for the first time in 40 years and the post-war economic settlement, in which one generation does better than the last, is under threat. Campaigning itself is also being revolutionised: it is continuous, faster, online and more democratic.

But in 2014, it's game-on for Labour. The Conservatives' comparative advantages are dwindling. The rise of digital communications means the right wing-dominated print press is no longer the force it was and money doesn't bring the benefits it once did, even in 2010. Today, people-to-people engagement is more important than ever – especially the closer it gets to election day.

Our task, which this pamphlet brilliantly addresses, is to revolutionise our communications just as we did under Peter Mandelson the 1980s. Where we once had 'Excalibur', Labour's intelligence gathering machine that kept tabs on national and international news, we now prioritise rapid rebuttal online; where we once relied exclusively on expensive billboards, we can now use social media and community organising to engage and communicate with people.

In essence, the next election campaign – led by Douglas Alexander and Spencer Livermore – will be based on traditional campaigning through 21st century means.

Organisationally, we are taking digital seriously, with, for the first time, a standalone digital taskforce for the next election. Our website is tailored specific to users, our reach is being extended to millions and through audio and video we are communicating in new ways. Vitally, however, this is mutually supportive of our field operations, as demonstrated with our 'Cost of Cameron day' campaign where we campaigned in each of our 106 key seats and reached over one million people on Facebook alone.

Taking a lead from Obama campaigns over the last decade, a quiet revolution has begun in the way Labour is readying our communications to fight the next election. We don't plan to fight 106 different campaigns in our key seats, but more like 400,000 individual campaigns based on the approximate number of people that will determine the winner of those seats. Today we require more data and information, more understanding of what drives people to vote and a psychological move away from the simplistic ideas of the past where we send out mass mailings and leaflets with the same content across the country. We need to reach voters in ways that are in line with their values, aspirations and everyday lives.

Our response under Iain McNicol's leadership has been to empower our regions with more staff. Following evidence that seats in 2010 which had had a trained, paid organiser for 12 months before polling day experienced higher swings to Labour, we are investing earlier in organisers. There are

valuable ideas in this pamphlet that can support this, whether on recruiting volunteers, designing community-led campaigns, making the most of Contact Creator and Mosaic or developing skills within constituency Labour parties.

This is part of a necessary, wider modernisation of our politics. Ed Miliband is determined to reform the union link to open up our politics and strengthen our relationship with individual members. A primary for the London mayoralty will expand engagement. Better selections, with a code of conduct for candidates and spending limits, will enhance trust in politics, as will our commitment to preventing MPs from having second jobs.

As Miliband has said, the 2015 election will be a “change” election, just as was the case in 1979 or 1997, ushering in a new era of economic and political transformation, rewriting orthodoxies and resetting the national outlook. With Miliband’s vision of an economy that works for working people, Labour can define that change, but we will only be able to modernise the country if we continue to innovate internally. Labour will always seek new ways to deliver change locally and that must start with a more reciprocal and responsive politics led by our activists, which is why this pamphlet is so important.

1 INTRODUCTION

Marcus Roberts

This collection showcases cutting edge and innovative methods of campaign organising. It highlights case studies of campaigners embracing community organising techniques to win back voters' trust, build volunteer capacity and deliver tangible change on local issues.

And yet, if you tell these stories to veterans of the Labour party in its pre-Harold Wilson days, let alone pre-Tony Blair, and you'll see nods of recognition and agreement. Being grounded in communities used to be what this party was all about. But from the 1960s onwards we've got ever more caught up with the politics of 'air war', culminating in the New Labour era in which activists were trusted to be no more than leaflet deliverers and voter ID hunters. In the wake of Militant, the party leadership decided to keep maximum control over message and minimised the role of organisers and the ground war. The ultimate expression of this could be found in the national party's decision to roll back paid party agents just a year in advance of the 2001 general election. A comparison to the party's paid press officer head-count at the time would doubtless be revealing.

Of course, you can't argue with the results: in what remains to my mind the most impressive election campaign of the post-war era, a second landslide was delivered in 2001 and the efficacy of air war was seemingly established.

But bad generals fight the last war and usually the point at which a tactic is perfected is also the point at which a tactic begins its descent. By 2005, amidst a far more sceptical press, air war was proving less successful and by 2010 a truly hostile media environment meant it was of limited value.

The 2010 campaign showed a greater emphasis on boots on the ground, with Douglas Alexander telling Labour party conference in September that year about the clear correlation between places where the party had organisers and where the party out-performed national swing rates. But in the overwhelming majority of Labour seats, a conventional approach using leaflets and obtaining voter IDs with too small a volunteer base was the order of the day. Large-scale volunteer building in constituencies like Birmingham Edgbaston, Oxford East and Mitchum & Morden, where 'get out the vote' capacity was greatly increased, were all too rare.

Yet where Labour did embrace campaigning innovation and respected, empowered and included a large number of activists (many of whom weren't party members) the party saw positive results in vote shares that beat national swings and saw Labour MPs returned. As party headquarters plots general election strategy for 2015 these lessons should be at the heart of decision making and spending choices.

For as this collection of essays - written by organisers themselves - proves, these ideas are not just abstract concepts. Rather, they are the nuts and bolts of how to put into practice data-driven politics and conduct field experiments to test campaign technique efficacies. Our writers have practised what they

preach up and down the country. From community organising for capacity building and connecting councillors with civil society to sharing strategy with your whole team, these writers show that when Labour embraces campaign change it can win the toughest of elections. Organising, in our communities and for elections, must be at the heart of the general election in 2015.

2 HERE AND NOW

Matthew Fulton

In tough economic times, it's better to achieve practical, community-driven change in local areas rather than relying helplessly on politics to change at an electoral level. In Norwich North, Labour party activists engaged with new voters while digging weeds and clearing alleyways in their community.

Often in our local parties we hear cries of 'we need more young people', only to thrust a handful of leaflets in their hand when they come along and tell them they have young legs so can deliver the most difficult set of flats in their ward. Why are we surprised when they don't remain active for very long?

At the same time we also hear a chorus of how we need more members in the community only to hear 'we've tried it all before' when we suggest a new idea. Sometimes you've just got to take a risk and do it.

In Norwich North we took the plunge and said: "This time next year... we'll have 100 supporters"! Well, we have now recruited over 100 supporters, 80 of whom have offered to deliver leaflets for us. We chose to build this capacity in the summer months following our county council elections, as historically no contacts are made in this period of the year.

We did it by using the machine politics of yesteryear (identifying our strong Labour supporters on Contact Creator, a password-protected online tool containing voter contact details, past voting behaviour and other information) but mixing it with contemporary community organising techniques. We spent time on the doorstep building a relationship with residents. We talked with them about their area and their interests before asking whether they would be prepared to deliver leaflets in their street.

Community organising is not a new concept, but it is fast becoming a proven way of re-engaging with voters who don't feel Labour is on their side. In Norwich North we are experimenting with Arnie Graf's pyramid model of mobilising volunteers around very local, community-defined campaigns.

For example, in one of our city council wards we identified that residents' main concerns were litter, fly tipping and dog mess. Given government cuts to the council budget, sending the street cleaning team to the area more regularly wasn't an option.

So instead we appealed to the community. Over five Sundays in August, we organised five community clear-up sessions along three roads and two alleyways. Before each session, we sent a leaflet to the surrounding areas informing residents what was happening and how they could join in, asking them to bring bin bags, gloves and their neighbours. We followed the leaflet drop with a door to door knock, asking whether residents would join us and taking their contact details. After our action we told the story of what we'd done the previous weekend with before and after pictures to convey a sense of momentum. As word began to spread about our success, we managed

to persuade supportive residents to deliver our leaflets about the upcoming clear-up for us.

To date we have a list of over 30 people who signed up to be part of the street clear-up team. We wrapped up our final clear-up with a visit from Arnie Graf which was covered by the local newspaper and now plan to ask those 30 residents to form their own regular community clear-up team.

We were pleased that a number of residents regularly joined us in our endeavours. What we did not expect was that people would see us in the street and spontaneously offer to help out. As you are helping them to dig weeds out of the cracks in the pavement outside their house you are able to build a relationship with voters at a deeper level than you could ever do on the doorstep.

Sometimes we can't achieve the change we wish to see through the levers of conventional elected power. The money simply isn't there. But building a sense of responsibility and ownership of the situation gives our communities greater resilience and shows that we can achieve practical change in the here and now, rather than relying helplessly on politics to change at an electoral level.

Another example of community organising in action was Norwich Labour's shopping bonus card scheme. Many residents lamented the decline of their local high street, the identikit shops, and lack of community. Modern planning laws mean that opposing new shops opening and preventing the closure of loved older ones is not practicable, except sometimes through the council's planning committee. What we can do, however, is give people an incentive to use their local shops, supporting the local economy, helping the environment and creating a sense of community in turn.

We spoke to local shop owners and asked whether they would be willing to give residents in the local area a discount if they were to present a discount card which the Labour party would design and distribute. Once we had over 50 per cent of shop owners participating, we distributed to every household (around 5,000) a wallet sized discount card with a map of all the shops it could be used in. Anecdotally, shop managers said they saw a 20 per cent increase in custom after distributing the cards.

The Labour party's role is not to organise for the community but to organise the community. In so doing we increase our own capacity and help people to support each other. Socialism is not just about using power to change communities but about giving power to communities so they can achieve the change they wish to see. This is an important way we can redefine what it is to be Labour in an age of dwindling party membership and help to build a true grassroots movement that supports Labour's claim to a majority in 2015.

3 NUMBERS ARE YOUR FRIENDS

Ashwin Kumar

With the right skills and knowledge, local party organisers can stop relying on anecdotal evidence and start using hard data to win votes. From making the most of Contact Creator to basic market research tips, here are a few easy steps to reinvigorate a campaign.

Ideas versus numbers

Winning an election is not the same as winning an argument. To 'win' a debate, you need to set out some facts, add the logic of your reasoning, allow others to question your points, criticise your opponent's argument, and the strongest contention wins.

Elections rely not only on having the best ideas, but also having maximised the number of people who have heard your idea, felt its force, shared your view, and who are now motivated enough to put their cross on the paper next to your name and party.

The politics of ideas is important. A Labour government will have the ability to change lives so we need to be clear with the voters what the change is we are fighting for. But without organising for elections, we risk leaving to chance the number of people who find out about our ideas.

The point of this article is to give you a few ideas about how data-driven campaigns can help you use your resources to speak to the right people at the right time. In elections, numbers are your friend. Of course your values matter. Your policy ideas matter very much. And you need to think through your vision for the people you want to represent. But if you leave the electoral maths out of your plan, you can miss the target.

Why data?

If politics is about our values, polling day is the time that we pit Labour's progressive view against the other parties, and an election is simply a numeric test of our ideas.

So, assuming we've got the right ideas, how do we win elections? There are lots of theories out there. Some people say Labour never wins if it rains; others say that you should discount people who rarely vote. Some people say better turnout helps Labour; others say it doesn't. Some people think we should focus on 'core' voters who have always voted Labour; others think it is all about persuading the 'swing' voters.

These are anecdotes, and we all hear them regularly. They are even repeated by the Westminster journalist sent out to find stories at far-flung by-elections.

Sometimes elections can be lost because received wisdom is not challenged. In political parties it becomes folklore that a particular housing area, village or

town 'isn't Labour' or 'doesn't vote', and the key place is the other part of the ward or constituency. At its very worst, these assumptions reveal unspoken prejudice.

We should move on from anecdotes and received wisdom. We can do better than this by using the information we have, or can get, about the voters to drive our strategy in an election. This is the difference between relying on anecdotes and yarns, and listening to the evidence.

Better still, we can rigorously test our instincts and assumptions by asking ourselves questions about the information we receive back from the voters and then responding to the lessons the data tells us.

Who votes?

After every election, your local returning officer produces a copy of the electoral register where everyone who has voted has been crossed off. It's called the marked register and it's a very low-tech document: a photocopy of a list of names with lots of crossings out. But used in the right way, it gives you tremendous power to target your messages and activity.

For example, you could use marked register information to divide your population into those who haven't voted in any recent elections, those who have voted in all recent general elections, and those with intermittent voting records.

Once you have this sort of information, you can send more reminders to vote, or make more phone calls, to those with intermittent voting records than those whose turnout record is perfect. It's all about ensuring you tailor your efforts to where they're going to make the most impact, and get more return for your campaigning activity.

You can also look more accurately at turnout for local areas. If someone is telling you that a particular street 'never votes' and is not worth speaking to, there's no need to have an argument about it. Just look at the turnout from the marked register and your approach to targeting is already more informed.

Of course, the marked register doesn't translate itself automatically from a paper list into a targeted campaign. The crucial step is to make sure that the marked register for every election is entered into Contact Creator. If this hasn't been done in the past, start now. If you have local elections in your area before the next general election, intelligence on whether a person voted in that election should form part of your targeting plan.

Which party do they support?

Which party a person intends to vote for – voter ID data – is the bedrock of Contact Creator and extracting a list of Labour supporters to remind to vote as you approach polling day is the use that most of us are familiar with.

But there is much more that can be done with this information. You may well be familiar with Contact Creator's built-in statistics that tell you, for each constituency, ward, polling district and street, how many people have told us they support each party. With more than 20 columns of information, these can look a bit daunting. But with a little bit of effort, they start to tell an invaluable story about the politics of your constituency.

If you're in a two-way marginal, it's likely that anyone who is marked as

'against' or 'won't say' is supporting your principal opposition, so group them together. Also, what matters most are support rates – the proportion of those contacted who support each party. It's not too difficult to get support rates for Labour, Tory/against/won't say, LibDem and Other for each geographical area (ask for help if you experience any problems with this – there are lots of us who are willing to assist).

Four columns of information for each area start to make understanding what's going on a bit easier by revealing the pattern across your constituency. When you look at support rates for each of your wards and polling districts, it will hopefully tell you a story that you're familiar with. But the real benefit is when these numbers surprise you. Are there pockets of support that you weren't aware of? Is the received wisdom actually borne out by your conversations with voters?

Uncontacted Labour supporters

Once you've got this picture of how support rates for Labour vary across your patch, you have an incredibly powerful tool for making your campaigning sessions more effective in terms of finding Labour supporters. It's pretty obvious that an area with high support rates for Labour amongst those you've already spoken to, but lots still uncontacted, is pretty likely to have lots of Labour supporters out there, as yet uncontacted. So why not start your campaigning in these areas?

In fact you can make this even more scientific. Get the Labour support rate for each area (the percentage of those contacted who support Labour), and multiply it by the number of people as yet uncontacted in that area and you've got yourself a decent estimate of the number of uncontacted Labour supporters in that patch. Now rank all your areas by this number and simply start campaigning in the areas with the most.

By doing this, you're maximising the likelihood of meeting a Labour supporter when you go out campaigning and, once again, it's not anecdote or belief or prejudice that's guiding you but just the numbers. And this isn't just theory – I have personally run a number of successful campaigns in marginal areas by using exactly this rule: choosing the areas in which to campaign in descending order of uncontacted Labour voters.

It's worth noting for the statistical buffs amongst you that there are more sophisticated ways to calculate the number of uncontacted Labour voters in each area – usually involving taking into account what sort of people you have already spoken to. But the approach I've suggested is a pretty decent approximation and doesn't require too much statistical wizardry.

Who do they live with?

The evidence is that people who live with other Labour supporters are more likely than others to support us. And as we know, the more our supporters get a chance to speak to someone from the Labour party, the more likely they are to vote. Helpfully, Contact Creator already has a built-in selection for these people – 'Uncontacted in Labour household' – so you can identify these people and get talking.

As ever, it's fine if you're not sure you agree with this theory – just let the numbers do the talking. Use the 'Uncontacted in Labour household' selection

to print off some voter ID sheets and phone a hundred of these people. You'll soon find out if this is a furrow worth ploughing.

What do market research companies know about people?

Nothing beats your own voter ID information. But even the most active constituency parties still have thousands of people as yet uncontacted. So where it's missing, it's helpful to have something more targeted than closing your eyes and sticking a pin in a map. And this is where Mosaic comes into its own.

Market research companies have classified people into groups of people whom they regard as relatively similar, based on where they live and their purchasing habits. If you know that a particular group has a very high support rate for Labour, and you've got an area with lots of people in that group, it's a fair bet that this is a better area to target than the one down the road.

Where you don't have much voter ID data, this is a very good way of making your campaigning more targeted than a random approach. Let's be clear: these groupings are not perfect, or 100 per cent accurate. But they only have to be better than sticking a pin in a map and you've already got a head start.

A word of caution

Before I finish, it's worth saying that the political data we collect brings with it responsibilities as well as opportunities. The Data Protection Act requires us to take care with this data and only use it for the purposes for which we collect it. So take care not simply to bin old voter ID sheets but to shred them instead. Don't share your Contact Creator passwords so you can be confident that only those with a legitimate purpose can get access to your data. The Labour party has lots of advice on data protection so talk to them if you need any advice on this.

Conclusion

The key message to take away is that if you can make your campaigns less dependent on anecdote and received wisdom and based more on numbers for your targeting, your campaigning will be more effective. Often we waste time on political rows with each other about where and how to campaign when a little bit of statistical analysis will tell you what's right for your constituency.

Hopefully you'll have someone in your constituency who can calculate some of the statistics that I've mentioned, but if you need help, or you want to talk about how to use your data even further, do get in touch – I'm happy to do what I can to help. You can email me at mail@ashwinkumar.com or contact me via Twitter at @KumarAshwin.

4 ORGANISING TOGETHER

Claire Spencer

Forging healthy, mutual relationships between institutions, politicians and people is essential to effective community organising. Here are a few tips on how to deal with potential barriers to success.

At the same time as I became a community activist, I became a Labour activist. To me, they were completely complimentary roles – in fact, more than that – completely necessary to one another. I knew less about politics then (I'm a long way from being an expert now), but it made sense that politicians could only show leadership and make good decisions if they were in tune with the priorities of the people in their neighbourhood. Activists have an important role in helping politicians have that relationship, and it is absolutely key to being able to 'organise' locally.

This seemed logical and sensible to me, but the relationship I imagined was far less simple in reality – and while there were constructive relationships between institutions, politicians and people, there were also barriers that did not need to be there. This was partly down to issues of personality: impassable gatekeepers to community networks, the pride of (some) elected politicians who saw discussion and debate as a threat, and a general mutual mistrust. There are also institutional barriers: for example, Birmingham City Council often struggled to truly 'converse' with local people because of its size and the siloed, uniform structure of its services, and was generally unable to form equal partnerships with community networks.

While frustrating, all of these problems can be overcome. And although these things take time, here are a few things that I find useful to bear in mind when organising locally:

Do use your resources wisely

While not every service user wants to shape that service, using the potential of those that do makes better services. Our local In Bloom group has a brilliant relationship with the street cleaning service that doesn't require them to go through the councillors as an intermediary. So when the judging rolls around, the street cleaning service aligns with the relevant deadlines.

Do focus on people and places

The frustration that people feel at disjointed approaches to problems. Where I live in Moseley, people disliked street drinking and aggressive begging, but also wanted to ensure that those people received the support they needed. This

meant that a lot of people would rather not report incidents. Bringing together local people, drugs and alcohol agencies, the police and housing associations has helped to create a service that works.

Don't break the rules of conversation

Imagine how you'd react if someone walked away when you were mid-conversation with them. I'd wonder what I had done wrong, probably take offence, and would be fairly unlikely to talk to them again. It's exactly the same for conversations you have on the doorstep, or around projects that require local support: don't leave the conversation unfinished. A conclusion – even a disappointing one – is better than silence. It shows respect: respect for the time, consideration and insight that you benefited from. And it means that you can talk to them again.

Don't present a fait accompli

I am singularly disinterested in participating in tick-box consultations. It's one of the reasons I hate referendums: the knowledge that my view is only being sought because the people asking are sure of the outcome. So if you are consulting, make its boundaries absolutely clear – don't pretend that people can influence something if the point of influence has already passed. In my local branch, we give over every third branch meeting to a community conference – normally something that has come up on the doorstep – so that we can consult with looser boundaries, and listen according to agenda that local people have shaped.

Healthy, mutual relationships are at the heart of being organised – because if you're always listening, and always interacting, you have a fighting chance of being on the same page as the people you want inside.

5 FROM BOOTCAMP AND BEYOND

Lisa Mitchell

Years of campaigning have resulted in some hard-learned lessons: trust your team, right down to the last volunteer; form a strategy in which everyone shares ownership; and build a platform so voters can speak for themselves.

A few months ago I had the privilege to take part in the UK's first ever campaign bootcamp. Around 30 of us were invited to participate in an intensive crash course on the best practices and skills for digital campaigning. The core team of six of the leading campaigners in our field established the programme to widen opportunity in campaigning and make sure that in the run up to 2015, the Labour party was equipped with campaigners at the top of our game.

Many of us who hadn't yet had the opportunity or simply couldn't afford to take a six-month internship learnt more in the bootcamp than we could have done in any work placement. The bootcamp gave me a new lease of life for campaigning and organising, but more than that, it gave me the confidence to embark on a very open-minded learning journey.

The number one thing I have learnt from campaigning over the years, particularly when volunteering on Ed Miliband's leadership campaign was to trust your team, right down to the people who might just come in for an hour or two a week to make some phone calls. On Ed's campaign it was this trust in the whole team that really contributed to the development of the volunteers and made us flourish into a strong band who would sing and shout about Ed until our voices gave up.

Most of all, it gave us ownership of the campaign. We didn't feel like pawns being used; we were made to feel like members of the team and we all knew we contributed a piece of the puzzle to the overall win.

At bootcamp when we were put in teams to work on a simulated campaign to Save Fakefordshire's Bobbies (my favourite name so far), this trust was what allowed us to spread a workload equally without checking up on each other every two seconds and wasting time on making sure everyone was doing their bit.

Most campaigns are so fast paced you don't even see them coming until you are halfway through them so trust has to be forged fast. This brings me onto my second must-have in any campaign - a strong and shared strategy. Teams that stay together, strategise together and everyone should be brought in as soon as it's possible for them to do so. It's a lot easier to give trust to your team when each member knows where his or her actions fit within a wider framework. It allows them to take initiative instead of having to ask about every tiny detail of their action. Being precious about strategy and keeping it to yourself might lead to people getting disheartened because they just don't know why they're doing something or what to do next.

It is also important to trust your instincts. There will be times when a decision needs to be made, and you're going to want to sit and talk it through with your

team for hours and hours, but it's such an important decision and there are so many ways that it could be dealt with that no one really wants to make it without talking for another few hours. Phew. Sometimes it's better to take a step back and have someone make a snap decision. But don't worry - I'm not talking about plucking tactics out of mid air and just going with it. Your instinct will have been honed by the data you've seen, the conversations you've had and your experience of the campaign so far. It's just about trusting the knowledge in your head and letting your gut drive the decision.

My next campaign must-have is less of a concrete campaigning strategy and more of a cultural attitude, but it is something that has become increasingly important to me: don't accidentally take agency away from the people you're supposed to be empowering.

I think one of the most overused phrases that I get really frustrated with hearing (largely from people with good intentions) is 'we're here to give a voice to the voiceless'. Imagine waltzing into a community who know they have an issue with the amount of betting shops on the high street that are starting to target their teenagers, and saying: 'We're here to give you a voice'. I'd turn around and say: 'I've got a voice and I've been using it, haven't you been bloody listening?'

My point is that people have voices, they are using their voices, but the real issue is that there are uneven and non-existent platforms. As an organiser I don't think it's my job to act as someone's mouthpiece; it's my job to empower them to be able to shout louder. This is where campaigners and organisers can learn from online petition sites such as change.org and 38 Degrees who are saying: 'I've heard your voice, and I think we can help in building you a platform so other people will hear your voice too'. A truly successful and longlasting campaign has got to be centred on the platform building instead of the voice giving.

Last but definitely not least, I've learnt to always have an open mind. We all make mistakes, but it doesn't mean we're bad campaigners unless we refuse to learn from them. I've just lost a campaign, and it was a pretty important campaign to me and to the person I was campaigning for. Did I work my hardest? I hope I did. Did I do everything right? There's not even a chance that I did, but in the next couple of weeks I'm going to sit and think honestly about my mistakes, and share my thoughts with others, and hopefully by learning from past mistakes we make ourselves into even better campaigners and organisers.

6

QUESTION, TEST, INNOVATE

Dom Collins

If Labour wants to win in 2015, they cannot afford not to question, test and ultimately innovate their local campaigning strategy. There should be a culture of experimentation and analysis embedded into the electoral cycle, backed up by field experiments popularised by 'get out the vote' campaigners in the US.

As an organiser, one of the hardest questions to answer from activists can be 'Why'? Why do we need to canvass this Saturday? Why do we need to deliver these newsletters? Why do we need to stuff these envelopes?

Different people are motivated by different things and different organisers use different arguments. The simple response that usually works is 'because we will have a better chance of getting rid of that Tory/Lib Dem/UKIP councillor.' But do we really know why we do it? Do we really know whether the hours of talking to residents, warming numb fingers, running from dogs and nursing paper cuts translates into votes at the ballot box? Does it actually affect the result of an election or is it just what we've always done?

Every year thousands of activists give time and money to help the Labour party win elections. We ask people to give up their weekends and evenings, to buy raffle tickets and to attend endless fundraising events, so we owe it to them to invest that time and money as wisely as we can. This should provide ample cause to make ourselves more efficient, so that we can get the most from every hour or every pound people are willing to donate to us.

However, there is another more important reason that should drive us to constantly question ourselves and our methods: resources, or lack of them to be precise. None of us are blessed with all the resources we would like, whether activists or cash, and 'gut instinct' is not a sound basis for the deployment of these limited means. In order to use our resources most efficiently and get the best return possible on our investment, we need to properly test the impact of our campaign methods.

Field experiments as the source of data

Randomised field experiments with test and control groups give us the most accurate appraisal of how effective campaign tactics are. And the best news is they are neither difficult nor expensive to carry out. With just an Excel spreadsheet, Contact Creator and the marked register you can put together a basic field experiment. It's not something to be afraid of, though admittedly cross referencing voter ID with the marked register for weeks after an election can sometimes seem a form of torture.

The concept of field experiments in elections is nothing new, though the literature is dominated by research from the USA. The imaginatively titled 'Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout' by Donald Green and

Alan Gerber, is a great starting point for organisers and enthusiastic activists interested in the methods involved, and Green and Gerber's results give us data from experiments that can be easily repeated and compared.

With repetition and comparison come numbers that are there for all to see, countering the cloudy 'war stories' that are too often used to justify tired campaign techniques and election strategies. And just as there is nothing to fear about conducting experiments, there is nothing to fear from the data they give us. If the results don't match our previous assumptions, however long held, we can't be afraid to change our behaviour and our tactics.

Successful campaigns and efficient campaigns

I've been lucky enough to work with some of the best organisers in the Labour party and every organiser has different ways of working, but there are some fundamental basics which underpin any good campaigning CLP: year round canvassing that generates both voter ID and information on local issues that can form the basis of local campaigns, supplemented by regular contact with the electorate through newsletters, and followed by organised 'get out the vote' efforts during the short campaign.

The main strength of these methods is that they can be picked up quickly by organisers and activists. However, while they are easy to pick up it's also easy to start repeating them unthinkingly. It is important to remember that – as counterintuitive as it may seem – a successful campaign (winning an election) is not necessarily an effective or efficient campaign. Winning an election does not tell you that the methods used were effective; there are so many variables that it is impossible to know, without carefully designed testing, which factors had the biggest impact on voting behaviour. Winning an election also doesn't tell you how efficient particular methods were, making it difficult to know whether resources were wasted securing unnecessary additional votes that could have made the difference in a neighbouring ward or constituency.

Unfortunately, good results during good times are too frequently used to justify particular methods without any interrogation of the data (intriguingly, bad results during bad times are usually blamed on national swings or other extenuating circumstances and the nature of the campaign is rarely questioned). We all know of candidates coming from third, fourth or even fifth to win seats without so much as a knock on a door - there will always be unexpected wins just as there will always be unforeseen losses. However, exceptions should not be used to prove a rule and if we want to improve the consistency of our results then we have to look more carefully at how each election was won (or lost) and whether our methods made a genuine and positive contribution to the result.

There are no silver bullets. All the literature surrounding campaigning shows that all the tactics we employ have marginal effects, but in close contests marginal gains of a few votes can be all the difference that's needed. Two per cent, five per cent or eight per cent differences in promise turnout rates are nothing to be sniffed at in local elections decided by tens of votes, or parliamentary seats won by only hundreds. In the good times these sorts of returns mean bigger wins, in the bad times they mean narrower losses, and in closely fought elections they can mean the difference between majority and opposition. When we have limited resources, it is even more important to know how to achieve these marginal gains.

Asking why, and then listening

Questioning what we do and why we do it should be fundamental to our campaigning. The more experiments and data we can generate as a party, the more efficient our campaigns will become. We have an opportunity every year to run multiple experiments across the country. The number of variables that can be tested is almost infinite but every experiment will add to our knowledge about voter behaviour and tell us how we can modify our campaigns to secure that prized electoral advantage. Key seat or not, in every campaigning CLP there should be a culture of experimentation and analysis embedded into the campaign cycle.

This represents a huge opportunity. It also represents a potential challenge to 'gut instinct' and long held assumptions. There is a risk that we could collect vast amounts of data but then choose to ignore the findings, making the exercise futile. There is no point in accumulating knowledge and not acting on it - we must have the courage to change.

However, I don't want to overstate this challenge. As a CLP organiser I have conducted a number of experiments aimed at measuring the impact of direct mails and canvassing and what I have found has not been revolutionary. Unsurprisingly, knocking on someone's door during the short campaign has a statistically significant effect on whether that person votes. While direct mails make a difference the impact is not as substantial. Many organisers and activists may quite justifiably feel they don't need a field experiment to tell them that, and it is precisely why I argue there is nothing to fear from experimenting, but we must always return to the question of limited resources.

In an ideal world the idea that if you do everything, you win still rings true, but none of us operate and run campaigns in an ideal world. We should use experiments to fine tune our campaigns to be the best and most efficient that they can be. If you have money to spend but few activists, then data and knowledge to help you maximise the impact of direct mails on people's propensity to vote will be invaluable. If you have plenty of canvassers but no money, knowledge about the varying impacts of different scripts on voters would be vital. We already do so many good things as a campaigning party, but if we want to win, we cannot afford not to question, test and ultimately innovate.

7 EDUCATE, AGITATE, ORGANISE

Lola McEvoy

Keir Hardie didn't have modern campaign technology at his disposal but he certainly knew the value of grassroots activism. By appealing to mutual interests, as well as the continual evaluation and development of community organising strategy, campaigners could make all the difference in marginal swing seats.

In 1900 Keir Hardie, working alongside countless others, activated, agitated, mobilised and organised grassroots communities from across the UK to form the Labour party. Community organisers in the Labour party today are using the same techniques Hardie used to reactivate our grassroots and to revitalise the party that he helped found over one hundred years ago.

The electoral and community organising models are not polarised; they are two sides of the same coin. For too long we have relied excessively on electoral organising in our party, and our current situation reflects that. While our membership, votes and overall turnout haemorrhaged, we continued delivering leaflets.

In marginal swing seats like Thurrock, the voters constantly ask the question: what is in it for me? We witness the corrosion of tribal voting at every community event or doorstep session.

The voters here are consumers. They want a uniquely tailored package and they know their votes are sought after, so the only way to win here is to organise them around an issue much more important to them than party political point scoring. They want something tangible, something in their own interest. That is where organising comes in; we are mobilising and developing leaders across Thurrock on a variety of local issues that really matter to them.

A year ago we conducted a listening campaign. This is the first step to community organising in any local area. The results of this not only provided us with a great insight into voters' opinions but also provided us with an authentic script on the doorstep. We were then able to legitimately chat to residents without becoming defensive or dismissive. The listening campaign is also a useful myth busting tool for any new organiser as it provides tangible not anecdotal evidence to support or counteract the constituency Labour party (CLP) members' existing narratives. It is a much more effective way to gather information than leaflets with surveys, because even with a freepost address the latter are usually only returned by voters who are not typical of the constituents. Finally, the listening campaign gives multiple press stories for the candidate, as well as giving campaigners the chance to introduce themselves on the doorstep: 'I'm not here to ask for your vote, I'm here to ask for your views', 'When I spoke to your neighbours they said that too', and so on.

Local institutions also play a vital role in community organising, and by engaging with these institutions as a political party, we have made inroads into our communities and have a better understanding of our constituency. These institutions come in all shapes and sizes. Religious institutions,

although non-partisan, are especially fruitful ground for community organising. Their self-interest is to fulfil the institutions' 'missions', and often to raise their profile in the community. They can turn out large numbers of voters, already have existing channels of communication and are respected members of the community. In Thurrock we have gathered support for the Thurrock living wage campaign from religious institutions.

Schools are another example of institutions that lend themselves to the community organising model. When Polly Billington, our local prospective parliamentary candidate, recently visited a school in Thurrock some of the sixth form students complained about a lack of productive work experience placements in the constituency. After having a number of one-to-one relational meetings, we gave them each a programme designed to give them a two week taster of political community organising. They each gave up the rest of their summer holiday to volunteer with us. They joined the party and mobilised 30 of their friends to help run a campaign, chosen by them, about bus fares to and from college (they currently have to pay full adult prices although still in education). Their parents aren't party members, but they are very supportive of the campaign and now the party, as a subsidised bus route would reduce their monthly outgoings dramatically. They are also very pleased to see their teenagers gaining work experience and developing a unique skill set. Alongside this, the young people have formed an electoral campaign team that worked the phones and knocked on doors during our recent by-election.

The community organising model can also be used to activate or re-activate the CLP. In Thurrock I have had over a hundred one-to-one meetings with CLP members, leaders within the CLP and unitary authority structures. I have developed relationships and focused on our mutual self interest; usually the CLP's upcoming elections. Through this process the CLP members and leaders developed as activists, I developed my understanding of our members and activists, and together we came up with a strong strategy to use in the Stifford Clays by-election. In our recent by-election, we had an 80 per cent contact rate, held over 50 campaign sessions, turned out 36 per cent of our promise, and won by just 76 votes - four per cent of the total votes cast. If I had not been able to mobilise the support for our campaign sessions, we would certainly have lost.

The Labour group have all agreed that they have never had so many activists for a by-election in Thurrock, nor have they witnessed such an organised campaign. The relationships I have made with the activists over the last year and the clarity I have of their motivations, strengths and weaknesses, were only discovered over a variety of structured one-to-one meetings. Without this relational power providing the numbers for the ground game, we would have lost the seat, lost the control of the council, not to mention a considerable amount of the funding for my position as organiser.

The last two organising techniques that I've adopted in Thurrock that really have produced tangible wins and upped the productivity of the CLP are evaluation and development. The community organising model strongly encourages that all events, actions, wins and losses are properly and brutally evaluated. This process is uncomfortable at first, but the results become apparent very quickly. When people realise their contribution will be publicly evaluated, they naturally work harder.

During the byelection I circulated a weekly email with the attendance record of every activist and their running total. This quickly drove up turnout

to the sessions. The other benefit in evaluation is that it allows people to voice their opinions in a controlled and constructive manner. This neutralises any undercurrents of resentment as the whole process must be evaluated by everyone, regardless of status. Evaluation also leads to development of activists, as community organising stresses that the development of leaders outside of traditional leadership structures creates a healthy, democratic society.

We must do more to develop our activists in the Labour party, as not everyone (in fact, hardly anyone) wants to be CLP chair or secretary. We must develop the roles in line with the skills of our members and be less rigid with responsibilities, creating new roles for people who are keen to help. Community organising helps the Labour party be open to all and be embedded in the communities we seek to represent. This is the model we need to adopt to gain a Labour majority in 2015.

ORGANISE! |

LABOUR'S CAMPAIGNING REVOLUTION

Marcus Roberts

When Labour embraces campaign change it can win in even the toughest of seats. In 2010 the party beat national swings in the constituencies where campaigners put greater emphasis on boots on the ground rather than leaflets through the letterbox. And as the general election strategy for 2015 is plotted in party headquarters, the principle of community organising should be at the very heart of decision making.

Half organising pamphlet, half a call to arms for Labour party activists up and down the country, this collection showcases the experiences of community organisers. It combines inspiring case studies with innovative advice on how to reinvigorate a local campaign, spurring on Labour's drive to win back voters' trust, build volunteer capacity and deliver tangible change on local issues.

"Labour will always seek new ways to deliver change locally and that must start with a more reciprocal and responsive politics led by our activists, which is why this pamphlet is so important"

Michael Dugher MP