

Labour Party Conference 2025 – Delegate's report by Rathí Guhadasan

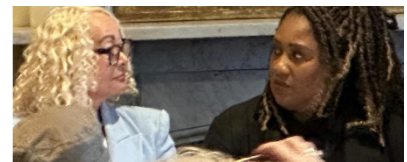
An emotional start



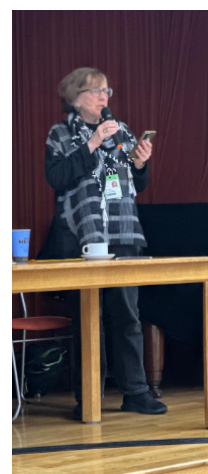
This year's conference opened with a speech from Charlotte Hennessey, whose father was killed at Hillsborough and who had reportedly declined Labour's invitations to speak in previous years. Following her speech, delegates stood to join activists and a Liverpool choir in a rendition of "You'll Never Walk Alone" – a fitting and moving start which brought some much-needed authenticity to a conference

where by corporate visitors seemed to outnumber delegates and members.

Emotions ran high on the eve of conference as well. At a packed Arise event, chaired by Jess Barnard and featuring a number of Socialist Campaign Group MPs and the Deputy Palestinian Ambassador, hecklers repeatedly brought proceedings to a standstill – a reminder that Labour's complicity in this genocide has implicated us all, even those who have opposed their position from the outset.



Prior to this meeting, I attended the national demonstration in support of Palestine. That same evening, we also attended the CLPD meeting – speakers below (+ Gemma Bolton):



The speakers did a great job of setting the scene – where we are as a party and particularly as left members, and where the country is, the threats and issues we are facing. Ruth Hayes also

addressed women's issues which was especially important to do in a year with no women's conference. The event was chaired by Rachel Garnham, another SHA member from our East of England branch. Bell – who spoke at the two events described here and at our first fringe meeting – seemed to be everywhere at conference and spoke well on a range of issues, underlining what a great deputy leader candidate we lost so early in the process. However, it was good to see her going from strength to strength, representing socialist views.

Defending maternity

Given that we were in Liverpool, it was important to support the Save Liverpool Women's Hospital march and rally, outside the conference zone at the Old Dock. Disappointingly, despite heavy promotion to left conference delegates, no other delegates attended.



Jamie (our admin / organiser) joined the march and I attended and [spoke](#) at the rally, alongside national and local activists. There was a good turnout and it was a great opportunity to speak with local activists, many of whom came up to me after the speech. This is an impressive grassroots movement, led by and for women and supported by all sectors of the community, so far gathering about 80,000 signatures. The proposed closure of LWH is a symptom of a national problem and a women's conference would have helped to get this issue onto the national agenda. There was also a rally at the start of the march, with local MPs.



Motions - the usual shenanigans

We did not have a contemporary health motion this year, as we have submitted a rule change on donations to ministers from corporate interests. However, we did submit an emergency motion on Gaza, as passed at the CC, along with many CLPs and unions.

Our motion was not immediately accepted – seemingly due to an administrative error – and required a lot of emailing, messaging, running around and negotiating (also initially being denied access to the CAC room), between Saturday and Sunday morning to get it included.

This motion was well coordinated between PSC and unions and I had to attend various briefings over the Sunday and Monday, which were very helpful ahead of compositing. Due to the late acceptance of our motion, and the fact that lead union delegates prepared a composite in advance, our health-specific wording was not included. However, it did allow for myself, Pat Quigley and Barb to attend the compositing meeting. It was important to have as many allies in

the room as possible and Pat and I were able to make a number of points during the debate with opposing delegates and Foreign Office minister Hamish Falconer.

The minister had come with aides and a prepared motion of his own and we argued strongly against the problematic parts of the government motion. The outcome was two separate motions which meant that we did not have to accept any of the problematic language proposed by the opposing delegates or government but did leave us with a fight still to win the following day – not just to win our motion but to defeat the other one.

Miracles do happen...thanks to the unions

As delegates, we had to stay in the conference hall for the duration of the session, to avoid being prevented from entering for the vote, and additional security was brought in for this debate and vote. Like all of the delegates supporting our motion, I [prepared to speak](#) in favour of it. However, apart from the mover and seconder for our motion, all of the speakers chosen spoke against our motion and for the first option. One delegate supporting our motion was called on by the chair to make a point of order on this but then blocked by security who was apparently qualified to decide whether her point of order was valid.

Despite these tactics, conference voted easily to pass our motion and the other motion fell. Delegates from all sides of the party supported our motion as well as all of the unions. This was a huge win, however we must note that the genocide continues to this day, despite the ceasefire, and the Labour government has taken no steps to implement the policy decided by conference.

This process brings huge learning points for SHA on how we work on motions and rule changes. The value of working with unions is clear and careful planning, organisation and coordination is needed. The key unions leading this were ASLEF, UNISON and TSSA. I spoke to Mick Whelan afterwards (it was helpful that we had previously met at TUC) on the possibility of working together on health issues in a similar way and plan to follow up. The perennial challenges in getting picked to speak needs to be addressed through the Socialist Societies.



The genocide in Gaza continued to overshadow the conference, with daily protests outside the conference zone and packed fringe meetings every night demonstrating the strength of feeling on this issue.

The union wins continued throughout conference, including motions on a wealth tax employment rights and industrial energy prices. UNISON declared a win on its motion on insourcing and subcos as Wes Streeting had announced before conference that NHSE should pause or change its approach on subcos.

In moving the motion on public spending, which called for a wealth tax among other things, Sharon Graham delivered a fiery condemnation of what she said was “*supposed to be a Labour government*”: “*workers pitted against pensioners, communities pitted against the disabled, different government same decisions!*” Her call to “Tax The Rich!” brought conference delegates to their feet amidst huge cheers.

Platform speeches focused on Reform

Many government ministers focused their talks around the rise of Reform and the far right. The Conservatives weren’t mentioned at all, except indirectly, through the regular



refrain of “we inherited...”. Labour seemed to be walking a tightrope – trying to strike a balance between calling out division and racism on one hand and appearing “tough” on migrants on the other. I had to return to work on the last morning of conference – a commitment that came up months after being nominated as delegate – but watching Wes Streeting’s speech online, the dominant theme was attacking Nigel Farage and I had to rewatch it for the health and social care content. The far right were also in attendance outside of the conference zone, although heavily guarded by the police.



Many ministers also paid tribute to Angela Raynor in their speeches, which was interesting given the nature of her departure from cabinet.

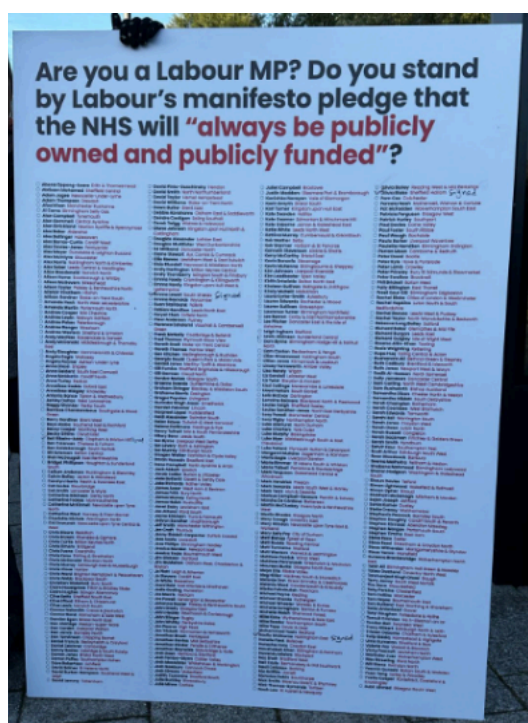
Outside the conference hall

Particularly as we had fewer volunteers this year, most of our time outside of conference activities was spent leafleting and promoting our own fringe events. Jamie attended some fringes and has reported back.



Aside from Palestine and CLPD meetings and our own, I attended a very busy fringe entitled, “How can a preventative approach to health strengthen the economy and NHS”, promoting a predictably corporate and individualistic approach to prevention. I spoke to one of the panellists afterwards, Jen Craft, who sits on the Health and Social Care Select Committee and will follow up with her.

Outside the conference zone, we attended We Own It’s brilliant anti-PFI stunt outside the conference zone, which targeted MPs to sign up their pledge (below).



We also joined the NEU who, along with some local primary school children, were collecting signatures for their Free School Meals campaign. It was quite disturbing to see the number of conference attendees who just walked past the children without even a smile or friendly word of encouragement. I made contact with a few of the NEU staff and representatives

SHA events and other outputs



Esther has reported back on the first fringe, “Restore Our NHS”, which she chaired. The second fringe event, on Child Poverty and Health, where Jatinder Hayre was one of the speakers, was poorly attended although the attendees and speakers all agreed that the convening of this particular group of speakers was exciting and together created a coherent and comprehensive narrative. We hope to continue to work together in the new year. The full list of speakers for the Child Poverty fringe was: Professor Ian Sinha, Respiratory Paediatrician, Jatinder Hayre, SHA, Elaine Boylan, British Dental Association and Jane Coles, Socialist Education Association.

Due to cost, we advertised our first fringe only in the conference guide, online and in the book and app. We had initially applied for a venue within the conference centre but were unsuccessful. We hired Rada for 3 days to design a double-sided leaflet advertising both fringes and a graphic (not post) for social media, and we ordered and distributed 1000 leaflets. I posted multiple times on social media as well.

It seemed that there was a lot of interest, particularly in the second fringe, but feedback was that there were a lot of clashes and the venue (Quakers Meeting House) was a little distance away from the conference centre and waterfront. Exploring options to partner with a union, another organisation or something like the Morning Star might help to fund a closer venue and attract more support.



I participated in a [one-hour session on the NHS](#), for “Socialist Telly”, alongside an ex-SHA member. I prepared the session outline and talking points to be covered and agreed those with the other panel member and the moderator / presenter, Steve Walker from the Canary. Mark Howell has created short clips for display on the SHA website.

I also produced a piece for CLPD’s Yellow Pages – (see below, title not my own) - thanks to Rachel Garnham and Russell Cartwright, (both also SHA members), which was requested during the conference.



Text of CLPD Yellow Pages article: Health left off conference agenda as NHS faces massive job cuts

The NHS, which already has 100,000 unfilled health worker vacancies, looks set to lose another 100,000 jobs under the NHSE restructure. 20,000 resident doctors are facing unemployment while patients are left to be treated by cheaper, unsafe alternatives such as Physician Associates. The BMA calculated a NHS funding deficit of £423bn, against which the government has promised an additional £29bn for this Parliament - half of which will cover the cost of repairs needed across the estate right now - thus condemning essential services such as emergency care, oncology and maternity to continued decline. Private outsourcing of elective care is associated with increasing inequality and patient deaths.

While the new NHS 10-year plan promises more potential for the private sector to capture what’s left of the NHS at an accelerated rate, it offers little for staff or patients. No plan to fix the crisis in emergency care and end corridor care. No plan to stop health worker attrition from the NHS.

Meanwhile the population’s health continues to worsen, with falling life expectancy, declining child health and rising maternal mortality for the poorest.

We must come together as a movement to fight for our right to health for all and the reinstatement of a fully publicly owned, publicly funded and publicly provided national health service. If we don't act now, it will be too late.

I posted on social media throughout the conference.

Accessibility issues and accommodation

There were again accessibility issues at conference both at venues and with regards to the accommodation. Arise's pre-conference Palestine event was not wheelchair accessible, which we raised with the organiser immediately. Following last year's difficulties, we had investigated fully accessible hotel accommodation, close to the conference centre, but this was deemed unaffordable. Three of us therefore pooled our accommodation allowances – but despite Jamie's best efforts to check all amenities in advance, there were still issues. There was a secure off-street area to store Barb's chair but it was still outside, the central heating was not available (Jamie also had to spend additional time trying to chase the landlord to rectify this), and finding a taxi to take us (Liverpool public transport is not accessible) was also difficult and time-consuming – on one cold and wet night, night we were turned away by approximately 10+ taxis.

The conference team

- Delegates: Barb and Rathi
- Admin and general support: Jamie
- Esther attended for 1-2 days – chaired the first fringe meeting and helped leaflet for the second.
- Jatinder – spoke at the second fringe and helped to leaflet for it.
- Pat Quigley, SHAL – CLP delegate but enormous support throughout.
- Mark Howell – attended for the second fringe

Recommendations

1. 2 delegates and 1 admin staff should receive hotel accommodation close to the conference centre and per diems should be provided to cover food and (non-alcoholic) drinks.
2. Fringes: consider partnering with / getting sponsorship from a union and booking venues within or close to the conference zone. Advertising in conference programme is essential and liaising with allies to try to avoid clashes – although I did try to do this with CLPD and the SCG.
3. Ensure access to the democracy portal well in advance (issues with motion have been raised with SocSoc rep to NEC).
4. Set up a conferences / events committee to support preparations +/- local members to support – to start from Q1.
5. Women's conference? – if cancelled again, hold an event with Save LWH and child poverty allies.
6. Work with unions on motions and rule changes.
7. Stunt outside.
8. Request CC meeting to record a vote of thanks to Jamie Penquite-Green.