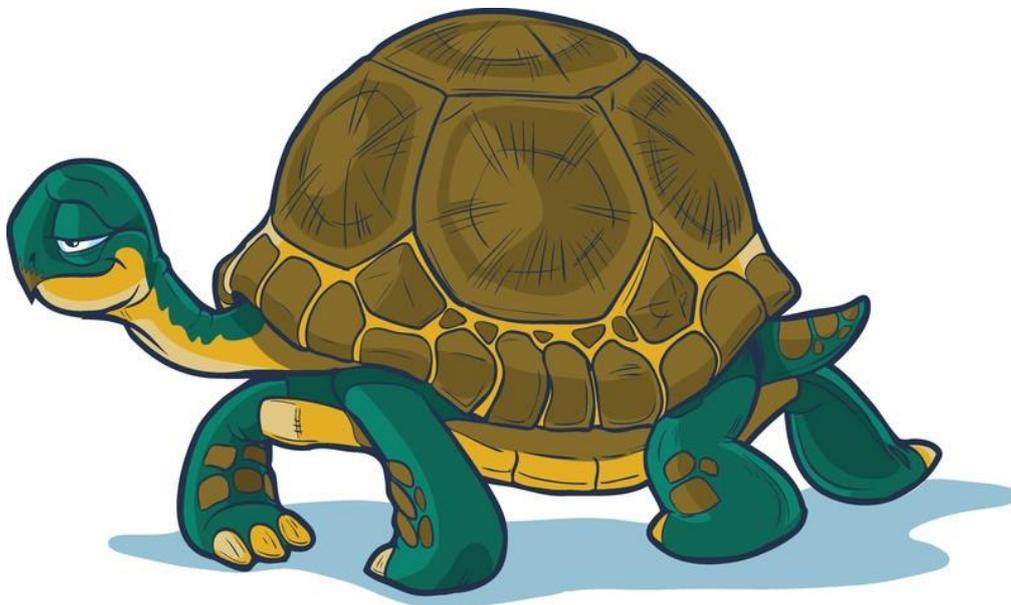


THE LONG, SLOW RACE TOWARDS GREATER BAME LABOUR REPRESENTATION



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BY NADINE GRANDISON-MILLS

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Have you felt the shift? I certainly have. Since the rise and rise of Jeremy Corbyn, Labour's ranks have swelled in numbers. Our party now boasts over half a million members (no small feat!) and is the largest political party in Western Europe. The sense of excitement is palpable. Active membership has increased, and even the younger generation (you know, that important group once considered as electorally unreliable) is finding their passion for politics. Overall, things seem truly wonderful!

So, viewing things with my BAME Labour tinted spectacles, am I naturally filled with the same sense of elation?

Err...well...

Not quite.

To be honest, my enthusiasm here is somewhat dented. At present there is no stunning vista to gaze at, though the optimist and activist in me still holds faith that one day there could be. Right now, rather, the view is misty and bleak with a faint ray of sunshine.

Progress towards full BAME representation at all levels of the Labour Party (although always welcome!) has been at a painfully plodding pace, a bit like the tortoise from the Hare and Tortoise at the beginning of the story. Only this poor unfortunate creature is facing a daunting obstacle course. Uphill.

Don't get me wrong, the tortoise has covered quite a distance since the starting gun was fired. We have come quite a way since the historic 1987 elections, where the struggle for Black representation succeeded with Diane Abbott, Paul Boateng, Keith Vaz and the late Bernie Grant becoming the first Black Labour MPs. Indeed,

2016 saw the successful election of a BAME Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, and a BAME Bristol Mayor, Marvin Rees. Our successes do not end there for the tortoise plods resolutely on. The Parliamentary Labour Party now has 32 BAME MPs, the numbers increased since the June 2017 Snap General Election with new names such as Eleanor Smith, Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, Marsha De Cordova and Preet Kaur Gill.

It was inspiring to see an increase in Labour's BAME voter turnout for the 2017 Snap General Election. It has also been encouraging to witness the BAME Labour community being proactive in their various constituency forums.

However, progress cannot continue much further if overwhelming obstacles continue to loom large for much longer. There is, for example, no mechanism in place for us to identify every member which is BAME, therefore seriously curtailing our ability to communicate with each other and effectively self-organise. The current representational setup (e.g. no adequate steps to ensure Ward and CLP officers as well as delegates reflect the ethnic makeup of their local area) is a far cry from the diverse and inclusive dream the Labour Party would like to achieve. The predicament we find ourselves in only serves in keeping BAME voices muted with some mistrusting that true transformation will ever be realised. For our Party to be truly successful, the BAME voice and interest must be retained. The upcoming BAME National Consultation on the Labour Party Democracy Review is a positive step in the right direction towards obliterating obstacles and seeking solutions along the journey to full and fair representation.

Will we eventually get there in the end, just like the tortoise at the end of the story?

I hope so. But one thing is for certain: there is work to be done.

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