

Hastings Independent

Time for a New Left Party

HIP | July 16, 2025 | Features | 2 Comments

Why would we need a new left party in Hastings? Don't we already have Greens, Hastings Independents (no relation to this paper) and Labour? HIP Feature Editor BEN BRUGES asks those involved



Sonska Photography

A year after Labour's landslide election victory, it's clear that anger is building over the government 'balancing the books' by cutting winter fuel allowance to pensioners and benefits for disabled people. Promises to improve the NHS and tackle the cost of living crisis seem long forgotten while Labour are staying fully committed to their pledge not to raise taxes on the rich. Shamefully, rather than oppose the genocide in Gaza, they are actually continuing to supply Israel with weapons, intelligence and political support. This is not what they were elected for.

You may have heard that there's talk of a new national party to oppose Starmer's Labour from Zarah Sultana and Jeremy Corbyn.

What you may not know is that a group of people in Hastings have already been working on setting up a local branch of the 'new left party' for the past two months. A group describing themselves only as 'socialist activists' decided to get a head start on the national organisers, by putting out a call for like minded people to join them in creating a new left party locally. They immediately garnered over 60 supporters, and their founding meeting of over 30 people at the end of May has been followed by a flurry of sub-groups working on everything from film nights and outreach stalls, to educationals and mapping campaigns. This kind of local initiative, which is one of many taking place all over the country, is being encouraged by Jeremy Corbyn, who dropped in on one of the group's Zoom calls to wish them well. Jamie Driscoll, who is leading the 'majority movement' in Tyneside, has also been in touch to offer his support.

Rather than focus on policies or programmes at this stage, the group has chosen to focus instead on issues and activism, and they say they want to do a lot more listening and engaging—and recruiting—before declaring themselves the final article ready to stand in elections.

The second meeting of the group at the end of June included a training session on community organising, an educational discussion on economic alternatives to neoliberalism, and a planning meeting where members discussed the various campaigns they are already involved in, including the Communities V Developers Protestival aimed at tackling issues around housing and the environment, and a local Unite campaign for greater disabled access in the town.

I joined the group's lively WhatsApp chat and asked members to share their reasons for getting involved in this project which has clearly galvanised some very enthusiastic supporters.

Rachel Ray, a local teacher, parent and renter said: "I'm disillusioned and frustrated after throw-away messages, hollow intentions and many broken promises from the current powers. There's not enough time left to wait for systemic change; we have to provide that shift ourselves."

For Andrea Cowhig, it seems that it was the pressure of living with disabilities and poor housing that pushed her into politics: "I've been upset by recent changes in parliament that are very discriminatory to disabled people and not equal to all. Our housing also needs to be made accessible to everybody, and I helped set up the Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association because I think it's so important for tenants to have our own independent voice."

As with many other members, it seems to be the party's focus on activism that has attracted Andrea's support: "When I was younger I shied away from politics. I didn't really like politicians because they promise great things but they never really deliver. What I like about the new left party is that it's about campaigning, not just 'politics', and it's about community and it's honest. It's from the grassroots, from the people to the top, not the other way round."

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The new left party already has a sub-group for young people, and for Ted McIntosh, a college student who at 17 said he was "born under the shadow of New Labour" it's clear the mainstream parties are not an appealing option: "The extreme centrism of the modern Labour Party broadly falls in line with the Conservative status quo when it comes to doing nothing to address the real needs and conditions of vulnerable people. The two parties play bipartisan pass-the-parcel—defunding the NHS and public services, increasing tuition fees, turning a blind eye to Israel's genocide, and parroting anti-immigration rhetoric."

As well as newcomers to politics, the party also has some well-known local supporters, including Peter Chowney, former council leader, who wrote: "Trashing the Labour Party's socialist heritage has left a huge void in British politics. We need a new political movement, building progressive policies from the bottom up to sort out the problems that affect people's day-to-day lives."

Many lifelong Labour supporters feel that in moving so far to the right, it was the Labour Party who left them. One supporter Dee Howard explained how she fell foul of the outrageous witch-hunt within Labour by the party's Blairite wing, in alliance with the national media, when they used false claims of anti-semitism to undermine Corbyn and his supporters, "When I posted online about my Jewish late husband being suspended from the Labour Party for anti-Semitism, I was expelled myself!"

The bruising experience of the Corbyn years in Labour is clearly shaping how people feel about the new party they are creating. Documentary maker Archie Lauchlan is clear: "It's not called 'The Ruling Class' for nothing – the Establishment's political wing, in collusion with the various media outlets it controls, keeps itself perennially in power. Traditionally, it was just the Conservative Party doing its bidding, but what we're seeing now is pretty much a uniparty system, with the Tories, Reform, LibDems and Labour all working hard to maintain the rightwing status quo."

THE CURRENT SITUATION IS NOT OK

Antonia Berelson, NHS nurse and Royal College of Nursing steward is one of a number of trade union organisers supporting the party, and she wrote "As a working-class nurse and single mother, I want to join the new left party to seize the narrative from the establishment and fight for a more just and equal future. I reject Westminster career politicians and believe in grassroots power to challenge the systems that are failing us. Only by defending public services and empowering workers can we build a truly fair and compassionate society."

With so many grassroots activists involved, it's no surprise that a key focus for many is about having a community voice. Kay Green, a local activist and blogger wrote: "Most people are pretty clear by now that party politics is working mainly for national banks and global corporations. I'm interested in avoiding national-level corruption by making it possible for localities to vote for MPs they know and trust."

People may remember the controversy around the selection of Helena Dollimore as the Labour candidate for Hastings, when she was foisted on the local membership after local candidates were ruled out by the Labour head office. Her voting record shows why, as she continues to vote for every government attack on her working class constituents. Kay is hoping the new left party can put up a different kind of candidate "who would go to Westminster thinking things like 'how do we change the planning system so that residents' voices are more important than developers and housing associations?' or 'there are areas of my town where no-one can get to see an NHS dentist or doctor without a long, frustrating struggle. How do we change the system to work for them?'"

HOPE IS RADICAL AND MUCH NEEDED

Grace Lally is a local housing activist and one of the founders of Hastings Friends of Al Mawasi and, like many other supporters of the party, was involved in the Corbyn movement in the election of 2017. She wrote "Of course everyone knows we lost the election, but what many of us also know from that experience is that you can stand for a complete change in society and millions of people will rally to that cause. We learned that we can build a mass popular movement for justice, of us, the majority, against the rich and powerful, and that the establishment, including the Labour Party, are absolutely terrified by that and will do everything to destroy that hope."

Reflecting the sense of urgency behind this fledgling party, Grace wrote: "I wouldn't have believed back in 2017 how much more dangerous and unstable our world would become. In a time of genocide, climate crisis and radical discontent being channelled towards the far right, the victory we hoped for as a beautiful possibility back then, has become an absolute necessity now."

For Peter Chowney, rebuilding a sense of hope is vital: "People are deeply dissatisfied and in despair. They need renewed hope. I think that a new socialist political movement, built locally and coordinated nationally, is the way to achieve that." Maya Evans, Former Labour Deputy Leader of Hastings Council, currently Campaigns Organiser at Jeremy Corbyn Campaigns said: "For the sake of a healthy democracy and to demand the change people deserve, we need a proudly left wing party, from the grassroots, driven by communities, creating campaigns that will shape the agenda of our policies. There's lots of energy and excitement for a new left party, there's a huge appetite for change."

Leah Levane, who was also a local Labour Councillor and remains chair of Jewish Voice for Labour, wrote about her own sense of hope in this new type of politics: "Clearly Labour is not a party interested in actually changing things in the way that I would support and is, instead, tied into corporate and other powerful interests. I'm excited by the potential to link up with those in other parts of the country who share similar values."

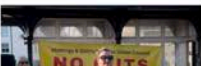
WHAT'S THE PLAN?

Archie Lauchlan describes the aim of the group: "We want to create a vibrant, bottom-up movement spearheaded by a campaigning, popular, electable party whose policies will be formed by, and for the benefit of, the people it'll represent – ie, the majority of us." Maya Evans, Former Labour Deputy Leader of Hastings Council, currently Campaigns Organiser at Jeremy Corbyn Campaigns agrees: "For the sake of a healthy democracy and to demand the change people deserve, we need a proudly left wing party, from the grassroots, driven by communities, creating campaigns that will shape the agenda of our policies. There's lots of energy and excitement for a new left party, there's a huge appetite for change."


Some people might agree with those sentiments but still feel worried by the warnings that a new left party would 'split the vote' or 'let in Farage'. The truth is, we don't know how the national party will develop and it's certainly ambitious to launch one here in Hastings on our own. But some people might also say that's exactly what makes this project special. And I'm with Andrea on this when she says: "You can't just sit back and assume someone else is going to sort it out for you."

Whether the new left party has an impact or not depends on what you do now. If you want to join me in signing up to the founding statement, go to linktr.ee/hastingsnewleftparty. Follow the QRcode for fuller versions of statements from all of these contributors and more on the website version of this article


Andrea Cowhig




I think there's so much going on in our world that needs looking at and we need to work together as a community to sort these things. The older I get I realise you can't just sit back and assume someone else is going to sort it out for you.



Dollimore on Israel and Palestine Action
August 27, 2025 - No Comment



Big Brother will be Watching
August 27, 2025 - No Comment



Badgers Blamed for Nuns' Exhumation
August 27, 2025 - 1 Comment

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Today

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Journeys Festival of Dance - FREE EVENT

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going to don't put it out for you.

In the last 15 years, I've been unlucky to have been unwell myself and had to deal with the DWP and I've been upset by recent changes in parliament that are very discriminatory to disabled people and not equal to all. Our housing also needs to be made accessible to everybody and I helped set up the Hastings Area Southern Housing Tenants Association because I think it's so important for tenants to have our own independent voice.

When I was younger I shied away from politics. I didn't really like politicians because they promise great things but they never really deliver. What I like about the new left party is that it's about campaigning, not 'politics', and it's about community and it's honest. It's from the grassroots, from the people to the top, not the other way round.

Antonia Berelson NHS nurse, RCN member



As a working-class nurse and single mother, I want to join the new left party to seize the narrative from the establishment and fight for a more just and equal future. I reject Westminster career politicians and believe in grassroots power to challenge the systems that are failing us. Only by defending public services and empowering workers can we build a truly fair and compassionate society.

I'm a nurse and a former labour councillor, but Labour no longer speaks to me, nor those I care for

I've seen poverty rising all around me—families choosing between heating and eating, patients stuck on endless waiting lists, and mental health services in crisis. Labour has turned its back while inequality grows

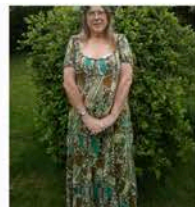
and the NHS is dismantled bit by bit. I've joined the new left party to be part of fighting to end poverty, rebuild our health service, and put care before profit

Archie Lauchlan – Documentary Filmmaker



It's not called 'The Ruling Class' for nothing – the Establishment's political wing, in collusion with the various media outlets it controls, keeps itself perennially in power. Traditionally it was just the Conservative Party doing its bidding but what we're seeing now is pretty much a uniparty system, with the Tories, Reform, LibDems and Labour all working hard to maintain the rightwing status quo. We want to turn that on its head by creating a vibrant, bottom-up movement spearheaded by a campaigning, popular, electable party whose policies will be formed by, and for the benefit of, the people it'll represent – ie, the majority of us.

Dee Howard, former Labour Party activist



When I posted online about my Jewish late husband being suspended from the Labour Party for anti-Semitism I was expelled myself. It was a relief in fact to be able to speak openly about Palestine as, if you were a member of the LP, you had no freedom of speech about anything. I joined the LP in 1971 as a loyal Young Socialist but now it no longer works for the working class but the bosses, and a foreign power, Israel.

Grace Lally, Housing Rebellion activist and one of the founders of Hastings Friends of Al Mawasi.



I am very cynical about elections. But I will never forget election day in 2017 and just how emotional and hopeful I felt when it seemed like one of our guys – someone who had been part of the anti-war movement, who stood with striking workers, who defended immigrants – could actually get into Downing Street. Of course everyone knows we lost the election but what many of us also know from that experience is that you can stand for a complete change in society and millions of people will rally to that cause. We learned that we can build a mass popular movement for justice, of us the majority against the rich and powerful, and that the establishment, including the Labour Party, are absolutely terrified by that and will do everything to destroy that hope. So this time round we know we need to build a party with deep roots in our communities and in our workplaces, that is part of mass social movements for change, and we can't rely on the

mainstream media or anyone else to spread our message. We won't be stuck working within the corrupted structures of the Labour Party so in many ways it should be much easier to have our own democratic, bottom-up, grassroots-led party. I wouldn't have believed back in 2017 how much more dangerous and unstable our world would become. In a time of genocide, climate crisis and radical discontent being channelled towards the far right, the victory we hoped for as a beautiful possibility back then, has become an absolute necessity now.

Kay Green, local activist and blogger



Most people are pretty clear by now that party politics is working mainly for national banks and global corporations. I'm interested in avoiding national-level corruption by making it possible for localities to vote for MPs they know and trust. People who would go to Westminster thinking things like 'how do we change the planning system so that residents' voices are more important than developers and housing associations?' or 'there are areas of my town where no-one can get to see an NHS dentist or doctor without a long, frustrating struggle. How do we change the system to work for them?'

I think a coalition of independent, locally formed parties would be the best way to make that happen.

Leah Levane, retired community development worker, Chair of Jewish Voice for Labour



I rejoined the Labour Party to support Jeremy Corbyn's policies. I want our politics and economy to operate in the interests of the many and not just those who wield power. I became a Labour Councillor (for 3 years until 2021) but clearly Labour is not a Party interested in actually changing things in the way that I would support and are, instead, tied into corporate and other powerful interests. I am excited by the potential to link up with those in other parts of the country who share similar values. I hope that the next stages, to be led by Zarah Sultana and Jeremy Corbyn will move fairly swiftly and a democratic structure set up after which we can elect our leaders.

Nathan Parkin, member of Equity



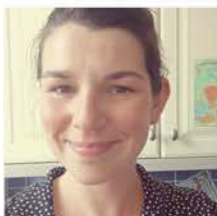
As a guy living in Hastings area for a while now, I have seen local services start to crumble and local politicians really struggle with an ever worsening housing crisis, among many other issues. To top it off, there is now a real possibility that Hastings Borough Council is to be abolished, which will only make things more difficult for local people. I was a bit surprised that even the Green Party are apparently okay with this! With one thing and another, I feel it's time now for a new political voice that can think outside the box and look for new solutions to tackle all these issues.

Peter Chowney, former council leader



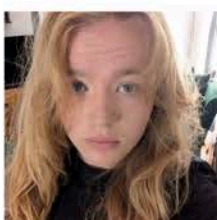
After 40 years as a member of the Labour Party, twenty years as a Hastings councillor, and five years as council leader, I left the party after Starmer became leader. I didn't want to be associated with the devastating shift to the right that followed. Trashing the Labour Party's socialist heritage has left a huge void in British politics. We need a new political movement, building progressive policies from the bottom up to sort out the problems that affect people's day to day lives. We need to end the unfairness and inequity of our economic and social system, the obscene imbalance of wealth and poverty, the lack of reward for all of us who put so much more into the system than we get back in return. People are deeply dissatisfied and in despair. They need renewed hope. I think that a new socialist political movement, built locally and co-ordinated nationally, is the way to achieve that.

Rachel Ray, 38. Teacher, parent, renter



I'm disillusioned and frustrated after throw-away messages, hollow intentions and many broken promises from the current powers. There's not enough time left to wait for systemic change; we have to provide that shift ourselves. [asked for change to this] And what a community Hastings is to draw from (I'm not even from Hastings originally, but the more you speak to people, the clearer this sentiment resounds). I believe that it's time to stand up for humanity, for compassion, and for the right to breathe.

Ted McIntosh, college student, age 17



As someone born under the shadow of New Labour, raised under the peak of austerity, and emerging into adulthood in a time of a nascent far right movement, it is clear to me that Britain needs a new left wing party.

The extreme centrism of the modern Labour Party broadly falls in line with the Conservative status quo when it comes to doing nothing to address the real needs and conditions of vulnerable people. This has led to the two parties playing bipartisan pass-the-parcel with defunding the NHS and public services, increasing tuition fees, turning a blind eye to Israel's genocide, and parroting anti-immigration rhetoric.

Starmer's weak governance and neglect of people in poverty has led to Reform, backed by billionaires who would be hardest hit by the change needed to help the most vulnerable, gaining traction by disseminating the same hackneyed lies about refugees from the Brexit era.

This is what a new left wing party, now on the cards with stalwarts of British democratic socialism such as [with Zarah Sultana and Jeremy Corbyn looking poised to lead it, must stand up to. No to poverty, no to defunding public services, and no to the anti-immigration lies. The billionaires already have Labour, Reform and Conservative fighting for them. We deserve one too.

Which brings me to the other threat which a new left wing party must defend against – Reform UK. Reform, which is in the pocket of the same billionaire oligarchs backing Trump in the US, has gained massive momentum since the General Election.

Anti-immigration rhetoric is based on lies and it is based on lies easy for politicians to spread with little cost. They can conveniently blame a vulnerable group without addressing the real causes of poverty: the billions of unpaid taxes still in the pockets of their billionaire backers.

Maya Evans, Former Labour Deputy Leader of Hastings Council, currently Campaigns Organiser at Jeremy Corbyn Campaigns



This country's two party first-past-the-post electoral system has led to a corrupt moribund unfair political landscape where decision makers are more influenced by profits of warfare rather than the wishes or the welfare of the people who put them there. Currently, the political landscape is veering dangerously to the



right, while the government needs serious opposition to resist cuts to essential benefits. For the sake of a healthy democracy and to demand the change people deserve, we need a proudly left wing party, from the grassroots, driven by communities, creating campaigns that will shape the agenda of our policies. There's lots of energy and excitement for a new left party, there's a huge appetite for change.

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