

## **“We the People” meeting of the Unlock Democracy Campaign**

held on 21st March 2016 from 6.30-8pm in Committee Room 10, House of Commons.

Chaired by campaign director Alex: <http://www.unlockdemocracy.org>

The first item was a short film recording of some of the 15 meetings held since July 2015? Beginning in Cambridge, including some prison visits (which were portrayed in the film by pencil sketches with quotations as balloons). The Panel included Graham Allen, MP for Nottingham North, and Caroline Lucas, Green Party MP for Brighton Pavilion and Alice Martin, researcher Researcher in Economy and Finance at NEF.

Graham Allen referred to Charter 88: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/ok-tags/charter-88>. He said we need to make sufficient progress before 2020 to have draft bills prepared ready for presentation to the new parliament. By then we will have millions of people involved to ensure that it's a national movement.

Caroline Lucas said noted that this campaign is making connections between what people are talking about in meetings and constitutional issues, eg Academy Schools take power away from Local Government, and the right to a clean environment is being eroded - fracking is being imposed from above by designating it a national infrastructure project! This campaign makes the connection between local campaigns and the issue of democracy.

Alice Martin said that wealth is being systematically redistributed upwards, and creating an imbalance of power. The main issue preventing democracy is housing and the increasing levels of debt. Organisations such as National Private Tenants Organisation - now Generation Rent - <http://www.generationrent.org> - and student debt campaigns, are firefighting. We need to listen to people, and make the connections to the structural issues.

### **Question and Discussion**

Peter McKay was concerned that we are not reaching people and asked about diversity - Alex said that many different groups came to 15 events including prisons, only five meetings were filmed. Some people are not aware of politics, and we need to start where people are at.

Stuart again referred to the fact that schools are being shifted into the private sector and that Local Government is a single issue uniting people, was astonished that this was not so far included in the Charter, and hoped that there will be a change in emphasis.

Someone else pointed out that the levers of power rest in hands of people who will be most threatened by changes - Caroline corroborated this and said that Local Councils are being made into service commissioners. So far ministers are complacent, but recent events around the budget have shown that things can unravel fast. With the Labour Party being in a different place, there is a chance for change.

Graham added that Local Government has to be a building block of democracy and now needs to devolve further. Why can't we build our own regions? When you see the benefit of co-operative working together forming alliances - the UK Government doesn't like it this, but . creating change by consensus is commonplace on other countries.

Fionnuala talked about mobilising particular groups whose rights are being abuse, eg disabled people are good at this (ref PIP campaign). The sharing of stories is a key factor that has made a difference - Caroline corroborated the importance of linking individual stories to the key issues. Graham says we are inarticulate about our rights. We need to feel we have some power to bring to bear.

Several people emphasised the importance of the secret TTIP negotiations which if agreed will enable companies to use their power over national governments, and completely shuts the door on democracy. Caroline said we also need to look a corporate lobbying, and felt that there are "straws in the wind", and we have the best chance ever of change, right now.

Graham Allen concluded that we need to separate out different issues to tackle them strategically, or we will be taking on too much too quickly. If we can set up a coalition convention in the next few months - they are aware of that Compass is planning to make constitutional reform the topic of its next conference: <http://www.compassonline.org.uk> - we can begin to make progress. We need to use simple language and button it down politically.

We need to work on tangible issues, like developing stakeholder banks. Someone mentioned the Rethinking Economics student group. <http://www.rethinkeconomics.org>

Stephen talked about how quickly people got interested in democracy in Scotland. There is an attack on local government. It's all being run by an oligarchy. We must bring ust be a social democracy in the broadest concept. Other felt that the system is unreformable, especially the House of Lords. Someone mentioned a forthcoming Demo for Democracy - watch this space.\*

In conclusion Graham Allen quoted Thomas Paine: "We have a world we can remake" - see: <http://oll.libertyfund.org/quote/381>

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\*Whilst searching for information about a forthcoming demo, I came across this website - <http://limn.it/demo-for-democracy/> which may be of interest.

In his first report from the ICUK working group on Spreading the Message, Brian Wills refers to a campaign for democracy within the European Union: <http://diem25.org/videos/>

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22nd March 2016