



COMMUNIST PARTY

CLASS AND CULTURE

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO ACTION

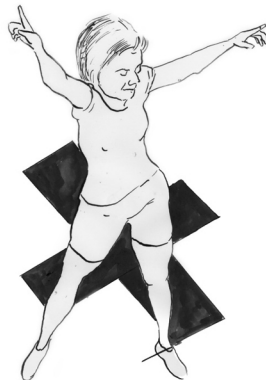


20 **CONFERENCE REPORT**
24 BY THE CULTURE COMMISSION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

REPORT AND GUIDE TO ACTION

The conference was held at the NUM Headquarters in Barnsley, and was focused on the following key questions:

- How can culture be a force for change?
- How can we build cultural democracy?
- How can we embed cultural work within the Communist Party and the wider labour movement?



Ruth Styles, Chair of the CPB, gave the keynote address, and made these points:

- Culture is important, it is a liberating force, and essential to human wellbeing. It unites people in common cause.
- It is no mistake that occupational and financial colonisers seek to destroy the culture of indigenous people they are oppressing. They do it to demoralise and undermine united resistance, and replace it with the sterile consumerism and an alien, capitalist culture.
- Cultural expression plays a huge role in enabling people to feel in their hearts the ideas they preach. Cultural expression, especially music, can communicate the history of our movement and unify us as a group, as a movement. It builds bonds of camaraderie and shared, collective values.
- Under capitalism, cultural activities are compromised and corrupted, everything has to turn a profit and all ideas, values and imaginative experiences have to conform with the dominant social and political order.
- Culture is a class issue and we need to liberate and promote working-class cultural activities as an everyday part of Party work and also in the wider labour movement – this is the cultural struggle, to accompany our economic and political struggles.

Three key kinds of problems are laid out in the Introduction to our Class and Culture booklet, which are clearly evidenced by academic research, ie:

- Issues around lack of access by working people to cultural experiences (eg money, geography, education) which means that a thin, better-off slice of the population benefit most from publicly-funded culture, despite taxation and Lottery funding coming mostly from working-class people.
- Issues around unfair and unequal access to jobs and careers as cultural workers for working-class people, and precarity and discrimination in those jobs.
- Issues around lack of recognition, respect and unfair representation of working-class lives, experiences, history and values in cultural experiences.



Speakers and participants at the conference focused on developing this analysis, and providing answers to the key questions of the conference.

The main recommendations for **action by all Party members** that emerged from the group discussions have been collated under the headings of education, trades councils, BDNs and broad-based work.

EDUCATION

- Schools are dominated by GCSE and knowledge-based curriculum and strict parameters of right and wrong answers. Repossessing the curriculum may only be possible if we empower parents to see culture as vital - not just economics. We should support the NEU's 'Arts and Minds' campaign: <https://theartsandmindscampaign.org.uk>, which puts creativity at the heart of the school curriculum.
- Campaign for more arts training in professional world – eg through apprenticeships.



TRADES COUNCILS

- Establish a sub-group that focuses on cultural issues.
- Influence local cultural strategies to build effective mechanisms for cultural democracy and working-class participation (eg. through working with/lobbying local authorities, cultural institutions, local businesses and strategic partnerships about culture – demand a seat at the table).
- Support/lead on cultural development in working-class communities, including by supporting/developing campaigns to save local community centres and libraries, which are potential cultural hubs for working people.
- Work with trade unions and other organisations to put on cultural events, including Fair Play Cabaret events: <https://www.equity.org.uk/get-involved/events/events/fair-play-cabaret>.
- Support progressive cinemas and theatre companies, such as 7:84 Theatre Group, Townsend Productions, Banner Theatre and Theatre Workshop.
- Bring up the idea of Trade Union scholarships for working-class creative people.



CP BRANCHES, DISTRICTS AND NATIONS

- Have a Cultural Officer in each Branch and ensure culture is on the agenda at every meeting, to help take forward the cultural struggle locally.
- Ensure every branch has at least one meeting on the party's Class and Culture pamphlet.
- Promote the Culture Matters website and publications, eg through its Facebook page and Instagram account.
- Party members could set up their own cultural groups of writers, drama etc and showcase work online.

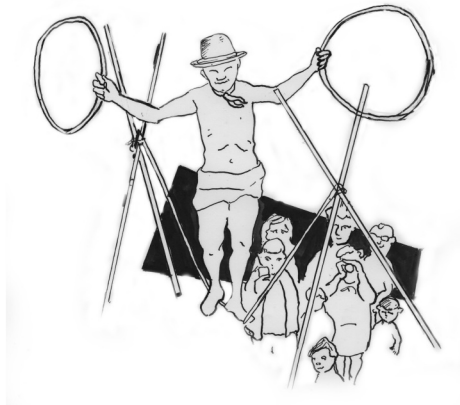
- Put on an independent cultural event as the Party/YCL.
- Districts/nations organise a regional cultural festival.
- Organise a film screening with discussion, eg. London Recruits.
- Organise a film club (not just openly political films).
- Organise a trip – something exciting and different.
- Host a sports/martial arts event or group activity such as an organised walk for socialists/campaigners, eg. 'Walk the Tyne for Palestine'
- Help young members/YCL to focus on cultural university societies.
- Party presence in cultural venues.
- Have Branch meetings at a place of culture.
- Recognise and promote individual artists used by party.
- Develop an effective social media strategy for your B/D/N (including TikTok, Rednote, Instagram, X, Bluesky and Facebook).



BROAD-BASED CAMPAIGNING

- Develop/support a campaign to save a public library locally and become part of the Library Campaign: <https://librarycampaign.com>.
- Organise fundraising in the community for cultural activities.
- Support/develop campaigns for cheaper football tickets and supporter ownerships (Football Supporters' Association?).
- Organise a cultural event as part of the United Front campaign.
- Identify a cultural issue for your local People's Assembly to mobilise around.

- Establish a cultural platform for your local Morning Star Readers' and Supporters' Group.
- Organise/support a Palestine / Cuba Solidarity event with a strong cultural dimension (film festival, food, music).
- Engage with culture that is already present and what people (including young people) are interested in and care about.
- Support Black community events.
- Fundraise for and commission a cultural project such as a progressive film or documentary.
- Find an issue that people will identify with, e.g. "Cathy Come Home" led to setting up of Shelter.
- May Day – have cultural dimension and get Class and Culture on agenda.
- Edinburgh fringe (open-ended suggestion).
- Support Workers' Music Association.
- Street choirs, socialist choirs – join / promote / support.
- Engage with the gaming community and promote progressive video games e.g. 'This war of mine'.
- Use graphic novels, folk art, satire, street art, T-shirts, bite size information (TikTok) to get message across.
- Organise cultural exchanges - visiting socialist countries.



The conference was organized by members of the Culture Commission. Thank you to all those who attended the conference. Special thanks to the staff at NUM Headquarters and to all the speakers, performers and event organisers:

Ruth Styles (Chair, Communist Party of Britain)

John Pateman (Doctoral Researcher and Event Organiser, Culture Commission)

Ed Harlow (NEU National Executive)

Kevin McCann (Poet and Teacher)

Daisy-Mae Stewart (Playwright and Theatre Practitioner)

Heather Wood (National Women Against Pit Closures)

Betty Cook (National Women Against Pit Closures)

Ron Brown (Event Organiser and co-convenor, Culture Commission)

Laura Miller (Event Organiser, Culture Commission)

Mike Quille (Chief Editor, Culture Matters and co-convenor, Culture Commission)

Dinnington Colliery Band

Joe Solo (Singer/song writer and activist)

Ben Lunn (Musician, composer and Event Organiser, Culture Commission)