



SIGNED, SEALED, DELIVERED

More than a year in the planning, the Young Fabians headed over the Atlantic late last

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A bit like watching James Cameron's *Titanic*, you already know the end to this story. Barack Obama was successfully elected the 44th President of the United States of America – to cries not of 'Yes we can' but of 'Yes we did'. But there is always a story within a story. Here's ours.

An incredible eighty Young Fabian and Labour Staff Network members joined our delegation to Columbus in the swing state of Ohio for the final week of one of the world's most closely watched campaigns of recent years.

Ohio is a microcosm of America, made up of a patchwork of very different and distinct communities - from rural areas where livelihoods focus on agriculture to the proud manufacturing cities now struggling in the global economy, and suburban Columbus with one of the highest shopping mall footage per capita rates in the country. The state is also home to some large 21st century corporations.

Electorally, it is a "bellwether" state. No Republican has ever been elected President without carrying Ohio, and the state has been won by the eventual winner of the presidential election in all but two

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contests since 1892.

So, Ohio matters.

It was the decisive state in re-electing President Bush in 2004 and as we were told by Jeremy Bird, Obama's field director for the state, in a briefing on our first morning: if Obama won Ohio, it wouldn't matter what happened elsewhere.

The key thing to know about this campaign is that it was all about people.

From the inspirational candidate, to people like Jeremy and his colleagues who'd helped introduce a new and effective way of organising campaigns, to grassroots volunteers and ordinary people excited by the campaign and keen to play their part.

And there were certainly people in Columbus talking about the British involvement – from the couple on the first night who insisted they didn't need foreigners meddling in their elections to the numerous people keen to chat, to take photos, to parade us in front of their ailing grannies and to understand why we'd travelled so far. One voter coming home with his family put it succinctly: "This campaign – it's an international phenomenon!"

We were briefed on the campaign mantra, 'respect, empower, include' and on the importance of relationship building. Stories were important. Obama's own remarkable story is of course well documented. But as part of the process of developing a relationship with voters on the doorstep, volunteers were told to tell their story about what brought them to this point, what inspired them to care so much about this election and this candidate to get involved and to then encourage voters to share their own stories.

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a top-down and bottom-up model of organisation, not just with the paid staff, but volunteers also, empowered to bring about change. People's talents were recognised and they were given appropriate roles, trusted with certain responsibilities and sent out to recruit their own team of volunteers to help them.

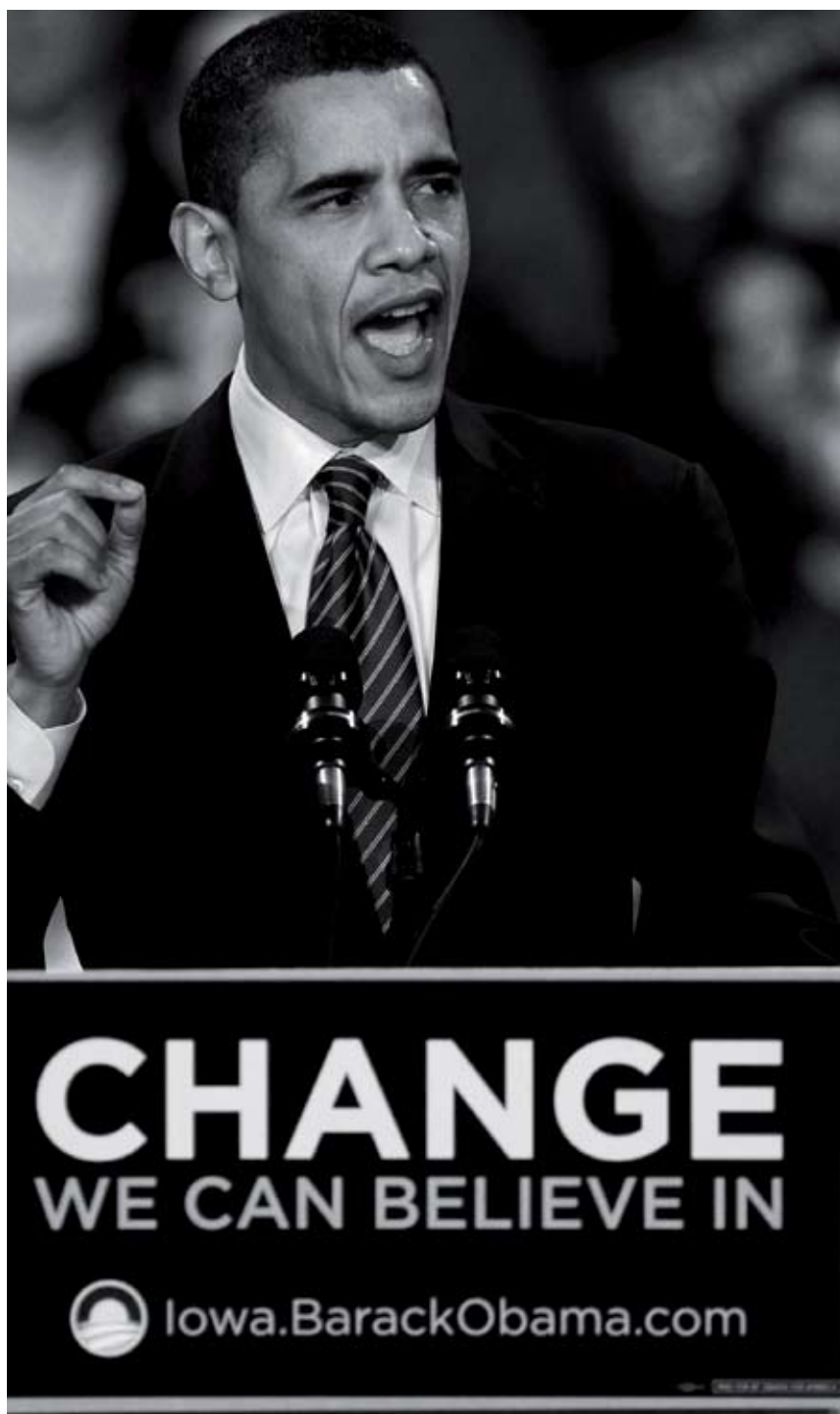
A motivator? Then, come and run canvassing teams. Great organisational skills? You can coordinate which volunteers come in when and who will cook the food to feed them between shifts. They were made accountable by nightly reporting of results against targets – be it doors knocked or new volunteers recruited.

Every supporter found was asked to come and join the campaign – and this worked, as volunteers were still signing up for shifts in the final couple of days. One woman even insisted upon calling her daughter and son-in-law, handing me the phone and telling me to get them along too!

Some characters were met along the road to victory. Cecil, the retired colonel from Texas, and his wife Marsha who'd temporarily moved to Ohio to play their part. Charlie, the industrial robotics salesman, who'd converted his classic Mercedes into an 'Obamamobile'. And his cat Dieter, found without a home four years earlier on the day John Kerry lost to Bush, who ran the roost in their home-cum-campaign centre.

Much of the week was spent knocking on doors and hanging door hangers telling Democrat supporters where to vote. We knocked on around 12,000 doors, speaking to 4,000 voters and used in the region of 14,000 door hangers in the final days of the campaign. We reached a remarkable 8,000 voters

October for one of our biggest, most ambitious and successful trips ever



on Election Day itself.

Yes We Did

Aside from this, perhaps two highlights stand out. First, just two days before the election when Obama came to town for a remarkable rally outside the Ohio Statehouse. After hours of waiting and numerous plays of the campaign theme tune, Stevie Wonder's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered*, a lucky few Young Fabians managed to get close enough to shake hands with Barack and Michelle and many more had the unique opportunity to see him speak up close.

Secondly, election night at the Ohio Democrats election party in a central Columbus hotel and that moment oh-so early in the evening when Ohio was called for Obama and victory no longer looked doubtful. Tears were shed and celebrations continued long into the night.

As with *Titanic*, a lot of money was spent on getting Barack Obama elected. Not just by the campaign itself but by the countless volunteers who gave up their holiday time and paid to travel to various locations in crucial states and stay there to help ensure victory. Not many will have travelled further than the Young Fabian members who made it, but all had a part to play.

The challenge now is to replicate the success of the left in America and ensure the enthusiasm, the energy and ideas and a new way of organising campaigns happens here up and down the country to get Labour candidates elected and a Labour government returned.

Young Fabians have already begun the follow-up work. But the ball is very much in all of our courts.