

NEC report - November 2018

November's meeting of Labour's NEC which met last week is usually an "Awayday" and an opportunity for reflection on how the NEC operates, its terms of reference and objectives. Although there were some changes for the better last year, the constituency representatives were keen to make further progress at making the way the NEC works more democratic and transparent. Unfortunately, just as with the party's democracy review, we were to be disappointed at the speed and breadth of change. However, in the middle of the Government's latest Brexit kerfuffle (which led us to meet at rather than away from the party's HQ), there was also the desire to unite around the leadership over Brexit. And in the face of a possible general election.

As always now, following a series of leaks from meetings, we handed in our mobile phones and all other computer devices at the start of the meeting.

The Leader and General Secretary reports

The meeting started as usual with reports from the General Secretary and the Leader.

Jennie Formby talked about the hard work of party staff and about new staff in many senior positions preparing for a possible snap election, about new fundraising efforts, especially the encouragement of more smaller donors and more ethical giving, and work to retain and recruit new members. Jennie also talked about a planned work programme to address outstanding issues on the democracy review, and changes to the Governance and Legal Unit including the shift in investigations from regional offices to new staff at headquarters, freeing up regional organisers to focus on campaigning, which we especially welcomed.

Jeremy Corbyn's leader's report started with the UN report on Poverty in Britain by Prof Philip Alston which exposed the Government's responsibility for increasing extreme poverty, hunger and homelessness but also extensively covered the Government's current Brexit position which far from "taking back control" provided even less control. He went on to the desperate humanitarian crisis and cholera epidemic in Yemen and the need for the cessation of arms supplies to Saudi Arabia, plus the disastrous constitutional coup against the Brazilian Workers Party and the need for urgent solidarity work with them. On a more upbeat note, he welcomed the impending inauguration of AMLO in Mexico whose radical social policies are a fitting response to Trump's Wall.

The Policy Process

In the debate about the way the National Executive operates, we first discussed the policy process in the context of a paper from Rachel Garnham which was written following the rejection prior to conference by the NEC of a proposal simply to abolish the National Policy Forum. This was universally felt to be the wrong response to the extensive consultation amongst the party's affiliates and 600,000 members last year, and the consequence was a lack of progress on democratising the party's policy process apart from the opening of conference to motions without unnecessary restrictions and limitations.

This paper proposed bringing the Joint Policy Committee fully under the auspices of the NEC in order to improve accountability and transparency. This was seen only as an interim measure prior to a full review later on. Jennie Formby argued that we should await the full review which was not planned until November 2019 when it was proposed to bring proposals to the NEC. We pointed out that this would mean that changes could not be introduced until after party conference in 2020 - two years away. Unfortunately the vote on the principle of greater accountability and transparency to the NEC was lost by 20 votes to 11 with the support of 2 trade union as well as all CLP representatives (and some abstentions).

The topics for debate by policy commissions in 2019 which had not been discussed by either the commissions themselves or the JPC were agreed on the basis of a statement that this would not prevent the commissions also producing other statements. The 55 newly elected CLP representatives on the NPF (who will soon be allocated to the commissions they will serve upon which start meeting in January) will have to be vigilant to ensure this can happen.

Other Proposed Reforms to the NEC

Jon Lansman made a number of other proposals which the CLP representatives had discussed and agreed in principle. These were:

1. **NEC Officers:** Many important and urgent decisions are actually taken by the 10 NEC officers (Leader, Deputy, Treasurer and the committee chairs) which currently include 6 trade union reps but only 1 CLP rep to represent the interests of 600,000 members who also now provide a significant majority of the party's income. NEC members do not receive papers that go to officers but do receive minutes. Jon Lansman proposed that if there were not 3 CLP reps amongst the

10 officers, the CLPs should make up the number to 3 by proposing additional names. (Defeated by 22 - 9)

2. **Business Board:** This consists of the Officers plus one former NEC Chair, is chaired by the elected party Treasurer and deals with finance, property, staffing, membership and legal issues. Much of this is understandably of a confidential nature and currently NEC members do not receive agendas, papers or minutes though are supposed to receive 2 reports a year (though we have not received one for over a year. Jon proposed that NEC members should receive agenda headings and a digest of papers and minutes excluding necessarily confidential matters. (Defeated by 20 - 6)
3. **Delegated powers:** We proposed requiring the NEC to approve a scheme of delegation proposed by the General Secretary setting out what powers of the NEC are delegated and to whom, how much discretion they have, to whom they report their decisions and how NEC members can get more information about them. We are delighted that this was carried by 17 - 12.
4. **House of Lords nominations:** We proposed that nominations to the House of Lords be included in the responsibilities of the NEC Organisation Committee which is also responsible for internal elections & selections, conferences, the constitution, investigations and many other organisational matters. This was lost more narrowly with a number of abstentions (Defeated 10 - 16)

Democracy Review

The work plan on the outstanding items from the Democracy Review was presented to the NEC, and approved. The review of Local Government has its own working party including Cllr Yasmine Dar and Ann Henderson for the CLPs alongside Sarah Owen (GMB), Jim Kennedy (Unite), Cllr Wendy Nichols (Unison & Chair of NEC), Andi Fox (TSSA & Vice Chair of NEC), Cllrs Alice Perry & Nick Forbes, Jon Trickett MP, and Shabana Mahmood MP. All other issues are being dealt with by the General Secretary's Office. The programme includes:

- **January:** Young Labour governance and structures, regional conferences and executives, and standing orders for national conference.
- **March:** CLP issues including governance and equalities, NEC elections
- **May:** Structure of BAME and Disability structures, membership, branches and elections, review of membership fees, CLP Special measures (although good progress has been made with the lifting of special measures in Tower Hamlets and Slough, leaving only 2 CLPs left in special measures)
- **July:** Local Government review, Charter of Members' Rights, Review of Disciplinary Procedures (initiated based on a CLP resolution).

The NEC did also decide last week to centralise the handling of complaints on sexual and other forms of harassment, intimidation or bullying, hostility or prejudice based on race, religion, belief or other protected characteristic including misogyny, so CLPs will no longer be able to refer such cases to the NCC directly. And finally new guidelines were agreed on CLPs switching between all-member meetings and delegate structures (by a special all-member meeting convened when a party unit or affiliate requests it but not then again for at least 12 months), on job shares for CLP offices, and on waivers of normal requirements for standing for office in exceptional circumstances.

Finally, the timetable for conference was agreed for motions, rule changes and delegates. Since motions are no longer required to be "contemporary" - forcing CLPs to meet ridiculous criteria that were in reality designed to keep policy making entirely within the control of previous leaders - the NEC decided that motions could be submitted from January onwards alongside rule changes and delegates, though they still be submitted until mid September as they used to be.

Presentations

We received a number of presentations on the work of various departments: Rachel McCaffrey explained the party's new fundraising approach, based on extensive research amongst donors, focussing on committed repeat donors related to specific campaigns such as to assist community organising, local elections, support to help develop future BAME and women candidates, and with the "Rose network" replacing the 1000 Club that had historically focussed on wealthier donors. It also is intended to develop regional fundraising skills and capacity.

Finn McGoldrick introduced us to her work coordinating equalities work with women and BAME communities, Youth and Students, and Councillors. There were lots of concerns expressed about the under-representation of of BAME communities, the failure to select more BAME parliamentary candidates in marginal seats sand how we are planning to rectify that, and community engagement work in general.

Dan Firth, introduced us to the work of the community organising team, 29 staff so far recruited out of 40 planned and the most diverse team amongst the party staff (50% BAME) and now engaged in building neighbourhood teams in key marginals, training thousands of activists, preparing to win seats never won before and to re-gain "held-back" seats where Labour had lost trust.

Andrew Fisher, Director of Policy and principal author of the 2017 Manifesto, talked about the policy process, highlighting the extra opportunities for women to contribute through the women's conference, and CLPs and affiliates through the discussion of motions on 20 topics at annual conference instead of "contemporary" motions on no more than 8. Nevertheless, there was much discussion about the importance of developing an improved process through which elected representatives on the NPF could be directly involved in discussing and, where necessary, challenging or supplementing shadow cabinet proposals.

This is a collective report on behalf of all NEC CLP representatives