

NEC report - January 2019

This is a collective report on behalf of all NEC CLP reps: Yasmine Dar, Huda Elmi, Rachel Garnham, Ann Henderson, Jon Lansman, Navendu Mishra, Claudia Webbe, Darren Williams and Peter Willsman.

Labour's national executive committee (NEC) in January focused on readiness for a general election, including parliamentary selections, plus a number of very important democracy review items and lots of discussion of Brexit.

Parliamentary selections

At the Organisation Committee meeting on 22nd January, we were very disappointed by an analysis of the first tranche of selections in marginal seats. Out of 75 seats, two-thirds (50) were women, 43 of whom were selected on all-women shortlists. So far, so good. However, the proportion of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) candidates selected was extremely low at just 4 out of 75 (5%), although BAME applicants made up 37% of the total number. At the Equalities Committee, we reviewed the Bernie Grant Leadership Programme, a scheme that we hope will turn around this extremely poor record in selecting BAME candidates for local councils as well as for parliament. We hope it will do so by identifying and training potential leaders in relevant knowledge and skills, preparing them for panel interviews and selection processes and providing a support network.

We also discussed the equality monitoring aspect of the democracy review, where progress is being made with equalities questionnaires being sent out in the coming months. However, it was agreed that this would be only the start of gathering the data that we need to help strengthen the party's equalities structures.

The NEC agreed that all-women shortlists (AWS) would be implemented in 23 of 44 of the next selections in seats not held by the Labour Party. The details

of this are listed at the end of the article. When making these decisions, feedback from constituency labour parties (CLPs) was carefully considered alongside current regional balance of representation and the need to improve the representation of women in parliament.

A selection process will also take place in Bury South after an AWS consultation, and a report will be brought to the March NEC on commencing trigger ballots in Labour held seats. The NEC has also asked for a timetable to be put in place for selections in all seats where they have not yet taken place. News of Fiona Onasanya's trial came through during the NEC meeting. The general secretary made it clear that Peterborough CLP members will get to pick the next parliamentary candidate to represent them with a selection timetable signed off by the NEC Officers group.

Elections for Committee Chairs take place in January and we were pleased to elect Ann Henderson as the new Chair of Equalities, as well as to reelect Claudia Webbe as Chair of the Disputes Panel and Jim Kennedy as Chair of the Organisation Committee.

Other selections

One of the main items at the NEC were reforms to selection procedures for metro mayors, police & crime commissioners and London Assembly members. Three substantial papers were tabled and thoroughly discussed. The intention was to bring the procedure in line with the new trigger process passed at annual conference requiring the support of just a third of party units or affiliates for a full selection. These reforms were challenged in a number of votes but carried by majorities between 7 and 14.

Representation for women and especially BAME people was discussed. Unfortunately, the party is limited on what can be done on all BAME shortlists due to current legislation.

It was suggested that Labour should use electronic voting in order to have higher turnouts for candidate selections.

One of the trade union reps raised the point regarding the need for Labour PCCs to support Labour policy in light of recent moves by two PCCs to move Fire Services into their remit.

General secretary's report

General secretary Jennie Formby provided an update on the local election campaign strategy. Many local authority and mayoral elections are taking place across England and regional officers are working flat out, as are members, to get us the best result.

Women's conference will take place this month in Telford with almost 1,000 registered to attend including 628 CLP and 130 affiliate delegates, and 146 motions across 31 subject areas have been received. A meeting of the NEC women's sub-committee will take place to discuss the agenda.

The discussion on the membership and financial reports was positive, focussing on strategies for membership retention and growth, and support for the treasurer's commitment to the financial strategy that has seen the party become debt-free.

Although the detailed financial update the NEC received is confidential, we were assured by the general secretary that membership remains over half a million, and healthy numbers of new members are joining our party. Several misleading and incorrect media reports have nevertheless appeared.

Leader's report

Jeremy delivered the leader's report with updates on campaigning across the country, Brexit and international visits including Mexico & Portugal. The situation in Brazil with the election of a far-right politician makes it much harder for minority groups and progressive political activists, thus the need for Labour to build stronger ties with Brazil's Workers Party is urgent.

We heard about the dire state of affairs in Venezuela and the threats from Trump and his allies. Jeremy mentioned that he attended the Mexican presidential inauguration as well as the Conference of European Socialists (PES) in Portugal. He made it clear that all left-wing parties, in or out of the EU, must work collaboratively to combat the rise of the far right, austerity and neoliberal economic policies across the continent.

On domestic policies, Jeremy talked about Labour's plans for the bus network and the vision for the National Education Service. On Brexit, Jeremy talked about the lack of time to put legislation through parliament even in case of an agreement on a deal. Labour is working hard to avoid the catastrophe of a 'no deal' Brexit and ensure that parliament has a meaningful vote on the final deal. Labour also continues to push for a general election as soon as possible in light of the current government with little mandate.

Other reports

Deputy leader Tom Watson updated us on the implications of the verdict in the court case about election expenses involving the Conservative MP for South Thanet that has an impact on our party and may require Labour to bring in new legislation when in power.

He also talked about the threat of artificial intelligence and automation, which will impact millions of jobs in our nation over the next decade. An important point was made about the need for democratic oversight of the tech oligarchs. Labour will be defending the free TV licence for over 75-year-olds as the Conservatives may scrap this. The deputy leader encouraged members to get behind "fizz-free February" as part of his work with the party's health team.

Democracy review update

As well as the developments reported above, we had an initial debate on revised rules for Young Labour, based on local branches with a democratic

conference, national and regional/Scottish/Welsh committees; and for English regional executives and conferences.

Revised versions of these based on our discussion will be brought to a later meeting. A draft set of conference standing orders was also discussed. These are based on current procedures and CLP reps raised the need for longstanding practices such as being able to refer back parts of the conference.

Arrangements Committee report to be included, and for these to be amendable by conference based on proposals from CLPs or affiliates. These will also be revised and brought to a later meeting.

Procedures

The NEC reviewed our safeguarding policy and procedures. The NEC also received a detailed update from the Procedures Working Group on its progress, which included detailed proposals to update sexual harassment procedures designed to gain confidence from those using them, including introducing an independent investigative element at the start of the process. These were agreed.

The Procedures Working Group is tasked with reviewing the party's disciplinary rules and procedures and updated on its work in relation to CLP disciplinary investigations and clarification of sanctions available to the disputes panel.

Its report set out its future work programme including a review of guidance relating to administrative suspension of members in disciplinary cases, and exploring a possible mechanism for appeal or review following a disciplinary decision of the National Constitutional Committee (NCC) resulting in suspension or expulsion.

This was one of the recommendations of the Chakrabarti Report. Numerous CLPs have submitted resolutions asking the party to progress its implementation; and NEC CLP reps are keen to take this forward.

This is a collective report on behalf of all NEC CLP reps: Yasmine Dar, Huda Elmi, Rachel Garnham, Ann Henderson, Jon Lansman, Navendu Mishra, Claudia Webbe, Darren Williams and Peter Willsman.