



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

Putting Members First

Report of NEC meeting held on 29th March 2011

NEC Sub-committees;

The NEC reviewed the work of its sub-committees. The main points arising were;

- The recent meeting of the Joint Policy Committee (JPC) was discussed at length. Concern had been raised at that meeting, and was raised again, about the involvement of Liberal Democrats in shaping Labour Party policy. It was agreed that the NEC officers would discuss this. The NEC requested again that the list, and detail, of who sits on the policy review groups that have been set up under Liam Byrne's Policy review.
- The NEC placed on record their thanks to Eric Wilson for his work with the Stoke Party over the past few years.
- The impact on local Constituency Labour Parties of the changes to constituency boundaries was raised and it was requested that the party look at how this change will be managed sooner rather than later.

General Secretary's Report;

Ray Collins reported on the difficulties experienced in the Birmingham Labour Party selecting their local council candidates and the effect that this had on one ward in particular. It was noted that, in the absence of being able to resolve those difficulties prior to the deadline for nomination of council candidates, the NEC Officers had taken the decision to select a candidate for the ward. An NEC panel, all of whom had no previous involvement in the issues relating to the local party, had been convened to interview members who had expressed an interest in standing in the ward and that a separate NEC panel would be convened to investigate issues in the local party after the local elections.

Ray thanked party staff and all members and volunteers who helped secure such a fantastic result in the recent Barnsley by-election. Dennis Skinner, Michael Dugher and local agent Paul Nicholson were also paid particular thanks for their contribution to the campaign.

Ray congratulated Jonathan Ashworth on his selection as the Party's candidate in Leicester South. It was noted that the party would run another vigorous campaign there, not least because of the possibility of confusion at the ballot box given the other elections taking place on the same date.

National Policy Forum/Party Reform report;

Peter Hain provided a report in the work of the National Policy Forum (NPF), the Policy Review and the consultations on the review of our policy-making process and our party structures. It was noted that;

- The next meeting of the NPF, to which all representatives have already been invited, will take place on the 25th June 2011 in Wrexham. The agenda for that meeting will be set by the JPC in advance.
- The Policy review headed up by Liam Byrne had convened over 80 listening events with members and non-members across the country. Over 65000 consultation booklets had already been issued and each CLP has been offered 150 free consultation booklets to help facilitate consultation with their own members. If your CLP hasn't got them yet here's [the link to place your order](#). Peter assured the NEC that all of the policy working groups convened by the Shadow Cabinet would link in to the NPF Policy Commissions and from there back to the NPF.
- In perhaps the most crucial discussion of the day Peter spoke of the consultation that is taking place on the review of the party's policy making process and internal structures. Peter spoke of the numerous consultation events that he and his team had lead over the past few months and the NEC received the Refounding Labour document that had been published that morning, which has a consultation deadline of 24th June 2011. (It was noted that the policy questions in that document are the same as those in the Partnership into Power consultation already circulated.) I, and many other colleagues, made the point that it would have been preferable for the NEC to have received a draft of the Refounding Labour consultation document prior to its publication. However Peter assured the NEC that no decisions would be taken as a result of the consultation without reference back to the NEC.

Having visited nearly 30 CLPs already this year I know, and pressed the point, that there is poor knowledge of the consultation amongst many, particularly in relation to how they contribute or the deadline for contributions. Many CLPs will already have suspended their local meetings for the duration of the election campaign and it's obviously important that these are our focus up to the 5th May. However if CLPs have not already contributed to the consultation they need to know they will have just over a month to do so after the elections. I urged the party to remind CLPs to discuss their response to the consultation at their May meeting.

It is very important that CLPs participate in this consultation process and we come out of the other end with something members feel they have genuinely been able to contribute to. The changes we make in how we operate as an organisation now will define our relationship with our activist base for many years to come. The only way to ensure there is no change, or that change is defined for us, is not to contribute to the debate. So **I would urge you to go back to your CLPs and press for a meeting on this if you haven't already done so. Here's the link to the [consultation document](#)**. If you need ideas on how to engage your membership in the review or you want a speaker to help facilitate the discussion please don't hesitate in getting in touch with me – I will be more than happy to help.

Peter also spoke of a team that had been convened to engage members in the consultation via new media and I asked that the details of this team are circulated.

Election report;

Harriet Harman gave a report on the work she was doing on the forthcoming elections. She reiterated the key objectives are to: win back the Scottish Parliament; maintain our position in Wales; increase the number of Labour councillors; increase the number of Labour held councils; and increase our share of the vote in the local elections. Whilst polling data was looking good the party would not be taking anything for granted.

It was noted that the number of council seats the party is contesting across England had increased since the 2007 elections. Particular mention was made of the excellent work both Ed Balls and Jan Royall, as regional champions for the Eastern and South West respectively, had put in encouraging people to stand.

Leaders Report;

Ed Miliband was thanked by the NEC for his participation in the TUC's March for the Alternative. Ed's clear view was that the media's attempt to undermine that demonstration and to make illegitimate our arguments that day are because they are working – it is a distraction we must push back on.

Ed thanked Harriet Harman for the work she was doing on the forthcoming elections and noted that the local election campaign would be launched on Thursday 31st March.

Ed spoke of the party he wanted to see after the party reform consultation – one in which members feel they have more of a voice, one which genuinely looks outward to local communities and which is genuinely a community organisation. Ed was clear that "membership has to mean more than it does at the moment and...being a supporter can never be the same as being a member".

It was noted that after the local elections there would be some consolidation of the consultation work that has been done on the review of our policies and the process of finding a replacement for our General Secretary, Ray Collins, would commence. The NEC placed on record their thanks to Ray for all his work for the party to date.

On behalf of Broxtowe CLP I asked Ed what his views were of the party's membership rates and whether anything could be done to make membership more affordable to those on lower incomes. Ed acknowledged that membership rates would have to be looked at and will be under Pater Hain's review of party structures – he favours a more progressive form of subscription but this has will have to be balanced with ensuring the party maintained a strong financial footing. It was also noted that many young members do not have debit/credit cards to enable them to pay online.

Callum Munro asked Ed to ensure that Labour MPs paid their interns at least the national minimum wage, if not the living wage.

Report from Shadow Chancellor Ed Balls;

Ed Balls was warmly welcomed to his first meeting of the NEC. Ed provided an analysis of the current state of the economy and stated that the recent budget had been a non-event with the Chancellor sticking to the damaging deficit reduction plan set out last year. Ed stressed that when the party left office the economy had been strengthening, unemployment was going down and inflation was low. On all of these tests the Chancellor's plan is not working – the economy has ground to a halt, unemployment is rising and is likely to continue to do so and inflation is up. It was noted that the Tories had accused Labour of being too tough with the banks prior to the global downturn and people should be reminded of that.

I asked Ed what could be done about the government's move of pension indexing and benefit increases from RPI to CPI given the hugely detrimental impact this would have on those with lower incomes. Ed stated that we would strongly oppose this move – it hit lower income women with small pensions hardest, completely wiped out the uplift in the personal allowance and the fact it was a permanent move demonstrated that this was an ideological, rather than deficit reduction, measure.

Other issues;

- It was noted that the new office in Newcastle will result in a considerable cost saving to the party. It was also noted that the lease on Victoria Street would come to an end in May 2012, as does the lease of all other tenants in the building. The party will carry out a study to scope the options for the best HQ location and report back to the NEC.
- Rachel Maskell of Unite was co-opted to the trade union division of the NEC to replace Diana Holland who was elected Party treasurer in September 2010.

This is my personal account of this meeting and should not be taken as the official record but please do pass on to Labour members who may be interested.

Keeping in touch...

Since my last report I have been delighted to be able to visit and talk to members in **NE Bedfordshire CLP, Washington & Sunderland CLP, Northern Ireland CLP, Gateshead CLP, Kensington & Chelsea CLP, Northampton North CLP, Epping Forrest CLP AGM, Stroud CLP AGM, Forest of Dean CLP, Thurrock CLP campaigning & evening fundraiser, Hitchin CLP, Westminster CLP, Gloucester CLP, Ipswich CLP.** I have also attended the **Labour North Gala Dinner, London Labour Party Fundraising Dinner, the Young Labour Conf, the International Women's Day Conference and the Scottish Labour in London fundraiser.** I have campaigned in **Glasgow Kelvin, the Brunswick Park by-election in Southwark, for the Barnsley by-election and I was very proud to join the TUC's March for the Alternative with my local CLP.** I'm always keen to talk, and provide verbal reports, to CLPs so if you'd like me to visit please yours please don't hesitate in contacting me and I'll do my best to get there.