



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

Putting Members First

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 19th July 2011

General Secretary Selection;

What an incredible day Tuesday was, in so many respects. It might have been the day that the Murdoch's and Brooks appeared before our parliamentarians. But it was also the day when we, at the NEC appointed a new General Secretary for our Labour Party - a momentous decision which will arguably have more of an impact on our ability to win the next election than the outcome of Tuesday's select committee hearings.

From the minute you walked into Portcullis House on Tuesday you could feel the electricity in the air. Even the purchase of a double shot espresso felt like it was being analysed for any expression allegiance to one team or another rather than the necessary preparation for the long day ahead that it was.

The GS selection was first on our agenda. The NEC officers, together with Dave Sparks from the Local Government section and Ellie Reeves from the CLP section, had already long-listed candidates and then interviewed those to present the full committee with a shortlist. Our shortlisted candidates were Chris Lennie (the party's Deputy General Secretary and Head of Fundraising) + Iain McNicol (the National Political Officer for the GMB).

I have said [here](#) before, and to others that have asked me, that I would take my decision on the day on the basis of merit. I wanted that decision to be as fully informed as possible though. So throughout the process I have met those candidates who have wanted to tell me more about themselves and I took the opportunity to ask all candidates for their views on [my Refounding Labour submission](#), which was based on the feedback you have given me when I've been travelling round the country. I am very clear that our party needs to change – that's what you have told me and that's what my Refounding Labour submission called for. So I knew that whoever we chose as our next GS would need to be absolutely committed to implementing the change we agree through the Refounding Labour process.

Both candidates gave a presentation outlining their vision for the party with particular regard to how it would be structured, its campaigning and organisation and its funding. NEC members then had the opportunity to put questions to each of them under 5 key themes – their overall vision, implementation of that vision, party structure, campaigning/organisation and finance/funding.

I asked both candidates the same question – about how they would re-engage members and reinvigorate our party in a constituency (example given) where we had high levels of membership but low levels of activity, a challenging political environment and no culture of campaigning.

Iain responded by talking about the key value that will drive him in the role – trust. He spoke of the importance of rebuilding trust with our members by eradicating silos, egos, factions and empires, making it easy for people to be involved in the party and giving them the tools to do the job through reforming membersnet and creating a University for Labour. His answer and his presentation were persuasive. I coupled that with his strong organising, campaigning and trade union background and the work he had done to reach out to members during the process – answering questions on LabourList for example - and I was convinced that he had the drive and passion to do an excellent job. Iain therefore got my vote and I'm very pleased that he was selected as the NEC's choice for our next General Secretary. He has a lot of work to do and he knows that whilst I'm on the NEC I'll always remind him our members should be at the heart of it, though I'm sure I won't need to.

Leaders Report;

Ed Miliband spoke of the recent events surrounding News International and the News of the World. He expressed his concern to ensure that those in power in our country exercised that responsibly. Many on the NEC took the opportunity to thank him for the leadership he had shown on this issue.

Ed also spoke of our Refounding Labour consultation and stressed that if we were to address our internal democratic deficit we couldn't allow ourselves to succumb to conservatism and would have to address all aspects of our organisation.

Asked about the devastating impact the loss of Bombardier's contract would have Ed expressed his own concern with that and indicated his belief that the government still had time to do the right thing. Asked about our party's position on public sector pensions Ed was clear that the dividing line between us and the government is that we have never agreed a 3% increase in contributions as an addition to the other reforms that are proposed and that figure wasn't recommended in the Hutton report.

I told Ed of the success of this year's Durham Miners Gala that had taken place on the 9th July and the huge number of party members that would give him a warm welcome at it in future years. I also spoke to him about the excellent result in

the recent Inverclyde by-election and paid tribute to the many members and party staff who had helped in that. I did however stress to him that the party has a huge amount of work still to do in Scotland.

National Policy Forum/Party Reform report;

The NEC received an interim report on the work being done to progress Refounding Labour. It was noted that the consultation had received;

- 3,255 individual submissions
- 184 party submissions
- 36 submissions from groups or affiliates
- 20,354 hits on Refounding Labour websites
- 66 Regional events across the country led by our National and Region Offices

Although I would still have liked to have seen more CLP submissions this is a good response overall. Party staff have been working through these submissions, reading them, scanning them and collating participants contact details. I asked for copies of them all and I'm working through them as quickly as I possibly can. It's really humbling to see the time, effort and imagination (particularly that CLP who managed to sneak in a Bill Shankly quote!) that you have put in to contributing to this debate and I want to thank you for it.

The NEC's Organisation sub-committee, on which I sit, met to discuss Peter's interim report on the 5th July. At that meeting it was clear that whilst there was a lot of consensus on some issues others needed further work and discussion before the NEC could take a view on any consequential rule changes they might require. It was agreed therefore that the NEC note the progress to date, allow that work to progress and schedule another meeting of the Organisation sub-committee before September's NEC to review the position and agree any recommended rule changes that might be required. September's NEC will therefore receive the recommendations from that Organisation sub-committee and it will agree the recommendations that will be put to delegates at conference.

As I said in my submission, the point was made that Refounding Labour should be the start of a conversation with our members not the end in itself. Peter will therefore be considering how we can use the contributions that have been made to continue a dialogue with members and activists. I asked Peter whether, and when, we could publish submissions, where there was agreement of those who had made them. He stated that he agreed the principal of publication however he was exploring ways of doing this – contributions had been received in many different forms and there was still a job of work to be done to get them all online. He hopes to have this done before conference to give members the opportunity to evaluate them themselves before votes are taken on the recommendations.

Since our meeting Peter has circulated a [summary of his report](#) to all party stakeholders and consultation participants. I would stress that *this is very much a summary of our discussions to date – it is not the finalised document and it does not include all of the detail of every submission*. So if you don't see your own comments please don't worry. But if you are concerned about the direction of travel do get in touch.

Other issues;

- The NEC Officers presented a report into the events in Tower Hamlets. Apologies were made that this had not been concluded before now. The report recommended that the Disputes committee consider membership in that CLP and how it could be progressed out of special measures. The report was agreed.
- The NEC received a report on the party's finances and it was noted that the work currently underway should ensure that all debt is paid off before the next election.
- The committee discussed a draft timetable for conference.
- It was noted that over 1000 people had applied to the Future Candidates Programme – the initiative agreed at our previous meeting to provide specialist training to individuals from under-represented groups who would at some stage want to stand for elected office. The original programme was not designed to deal with such large numbers and the experience of applicants varied considerably. It was therefore agreed that a panel from the NEC would select successful applicants based on their applications and their existing experience. It was noted that approximately 130 people would be able to get the intensive training originally envisaged but that those with more experience could be offered a shorter higher level course, taking the total number of people trained to between 800-900.
- It was agreed that the General Secretary would investigate circumstances surrounding the Socialist Societies NEC nomination and provide a report back to the NEC officers.

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 **Carshalton & Wallington CLP, Bexleyheath & Crayford CLP, Hatfield CLP, Reading & District CLPs, Wyre Forest CLP, Brecon & Radnorshire CLP**, at the **Progress Annual Conference** and the **Summer Labour Tweet-up**. It was also a pleasure to head homeward to help in the **Inverclyde by-election**, to **present the first ever Fox in Parliament award** for Parliamentary Animal Advocate of the Year to Kerry McCarthy MP and to be invited to take a place on the platform at the **Durham Miners Gala**.

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.