



# Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

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## Putting Members First

### Report of NEC meeting held on 25th Jan 2011

#### Elections report;

Harriet Harman provided this report and paid tribute to Alan Johnson who she noted would be a loss to the front bench and politics more widely.

Harriet also paid tribute to everyone who had worked so hard to secure the party's success in the recent Oldham East & Saddleworth by-election including party staff, many of who gave up their holidays to do so. She noted the forthcoming by-election in Barnsley, which will need the same level of commitment

Harriet spoke of the importance of the elections being held on the 5<sup>th</sup> May when only Cornwall and London will not be at the polls. Our top priorities will be to win back the Scottish Parliament, win in Wales and increase both our number of councillors and vote share in England. London CLPs have already been twinned with CLPs outside of London who are having local elections to enable them to play a part in securing a success for the party there. There will be major shadow cabinet engagement in the campaign with Caroline Flint, Yvette Cooper, Andy Burnham and John Healey all having key roles. Regional Champions will also be appointed from the Shadow Cabinet to ensure there is dedicated resource to those areas of the country where the fight is toughest.

I asked Harriet to ensure that we learn the lessons of engaging our activists through online campaign techniques like, Manchester member Kevin Peel's, #tweekender to mobilise off line campaigning. Harriet acknowledged that online activity had merit and noted my own use of twitter as a campaigning tool – she suggested that NEC colleague, Tom Watson, and I work with Andy Burnham on this for the forthcoming election campaigns.

Harriet was asked about AV and admitted that whilst she is in favour the priority for the party must be securing victory in the forthcoming elections and there could be little opportunity for cross party working on that when we were fighting for every vote on the doorstep.

#### NEC Sub-Committees;

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

- We endorsed a recommendation to change the name of the Women, Race and Equalities committee to the Equalities Committee in recognition of the wide spectrum of equalities issues not covered by the existing title.
- There was some debate about ongoing issues in Tower Hamlets and it was noted that a full investigation into the issues would take place as had been previously agreed at a meeting of the previous committee.
- We agreed the selection procedures for the GLA elections which have now been sent to London CLP Secretaries.
- It was noted that this year's Annual BAME Conference would be held on the 12<sup>th</sup> March in Sandwell and that elections were taking place as previously advised.
- The committee agreed the selections procedure that would be used in the early selection of 26 non-Labour held seats which will be used as a pilot of new procedures to be rolled out nationally. This pilot procedure will see candidates self nominating, with a Selection Committee being appointed by the local CLP Executive Committee in consultation with the Regional Representative that will determine the long and short-lists. It shortens the selection timescale and restricts the amount of campaign material that can be produced by candidates to try to prevent individuals with larger resources being placed at an advantage. The final selection decision will remain with local members. It was noted that if rolled out nationally would see the national parliamentary panel disbanded. There was some discussion around this point and it was noted that no final decision had been made – there would be a full review of the pilot by the Organisation Sub-committee and candidates from affiliate panels would have this taken into consideration.

#### General Secretary's Report;

Ray Collins thanked all the members (over 1000 in the final weekend), NEC members, party staff and our trade union affiliates for the tremendous effort they put in to helping secure a victory in the recent Oldham East & Saddleworth by-election. He also reported on the selection timetable that had been agreed for Barnsley which should see a candidate in place by the 27<sup>th</sup> Jan.

I asked Ray about the concerns that had been raised with me regarding the elections to and delegations for Young Labour conference which is due to take place on the 12/13<sup>th</sup> February. Ray agreed to look in to these and I will report back to those members that raised the issues with me.

#### Leaders Report;

Ed Miliband also thanked everyone who played a part in securing success in the Oldham East & Saddleworth by-election. Ed also paid tribute to Alan Johnson and the enormous amount of work he had done for the party in his recent role. He

noted that the changes made to the shadow cabinet team, and the way in which the reshuffle took place, demonstrated the strength and breadth of the team we have.

Ed talked about the big arguments that he sees taking place over the course of 2011;

- The economy – which will be the judge and jury of this parliament. The latest GDP figures demonstrate a contraction in the economy, even accounting for the recent bad weather and the Coalition have no strategy for growth. Ed stated that it had been a conscious decision to take on the argument about the past – the Coalition could not get away with laying the blame at our door when the deficit and unemployment had increased so dramatically since the election, though he did think it was necessary to admit that the party should have done more to regulate the banks.
- The next generation – Ed talked about the unprecedented assault on the life chances of our next generation and the need for Labour to steal back the mantle for young people.
- New politics – the 39 broken promises of the Coalition belied their positioning as the New Politics and Ed stressed the importance of exposing their hypocrisy at every opportunity. This would be the year that Labour reformed and reconnected with the British people.

Ed stressed that he wanted to appeal to disaffected Liberals who were unhappy with their party's strategy but acknowledged that some of those would want to stay and fight it out internally. He would try to work with them to avoid a situation of the Coalition partners versus Labour at the next election.

I asked Ed, on behalf of Caerphilly CLP, when we would be joined at the NEC by the Leaders of the Welsh & Scottish Labour Parties. Ed stated that the composition of the NEC would be looked at in the review of our party structure and would come back to the Organisation Sub-committee for a final decision. I asked if Ed, on behalf of North Ayrshire & Arran CLP, if he would campaign in that, our most marginal seat in the Scottish Parliamentary elections and he committed to seeing if this was possible. I also raised with him the issue of the proposed closure to the Forensic Science Service and he took on board the importance of their work and the need to fight this.

#### **NPF/Party Reform report;**

Peter Hain reported that he had written to all NPF delegates with the notes of the policy discussions that took place at the last meeting of the NPF in Gillingham. He has also enabled functionality on membersnet for NPF reps to be able to hold confidential discussions on policy issues. Peter is taking whole process seriously and is planning for the next meeting of the NPF to take place in June - that meeting will consider reports from his review of the Partnership in Power process and Liam Byrne's policy review, Fresh Ideas.

On party reform – there will be an official launch of this consultation in March and we will block out specific time to deal with the issues it raises in future NEC agendas, with a special meeting in July to consider any possible rule changes that may be required.

Peter stated that he would be meeting with the General Secretary on a weekly basis from now on to take these issues forward. He stated that it was clear to him there had to be an audit trail in the policy making process and that nothing had been ruled in or out in relation to party reform to do send us your ideas! (Contact me on; johanna.baxter@btinternet.com)

Ann Black suggested an audit on the 'health' of local CLPs and urged for more of the business of the Joint Policy Committee to be dealt with by the NEC. These were agreed.

I thanked Peter for this – it was encouraging to see things starting to change and I again called for the party to enable CLP representatives on the NEC to be able to have some way of communicating with CLP Secretaries or members directly. Peter said that this would be picked up in his review where he was looking at the use of membersnet as a tool to facilitate communication between representatives and members.

#### **Other issues;**

- Elections 2011; we discussed the Incentive to Win programme that is being rolled out to CLPs across the country to drive up the voter contact rate and the use of organisers in key seats.
- Boundary review; Greg Cook reported on the work being done by the party to oppose the Constituencies Bill that is currently in the House of Lords.
- EPLP report; It was noted that Labour MEPs were amongst a small minority who voted against the proposals to increase the EU budget, that they had successfully blocked changes to EU law which would have seen the introduction of US-style prescription drug advertising and how they are working with politicians from across four political groups and six EU countries to build their campaign to resist an EU free trade agreement with Columbia unless there are concrete improvements in its human rights record.
- I checked we were liaising with our European counterparts to learn any lessons they could give us on policy making within their parties and it was confirmed that this would be picked up by Peter and by the Britain in the World policy commission.

*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 **Peckham, Oldham, Renfrew North & West, North Ayrshire & Arran, Caerphilly, Brandwood, Shrewsbury** and **Ealing & Acton**. 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.