



# Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

## Putting Members First

### Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2011

The NEC paid tribute to comrades, including David Cairns MP and Mayor of Southwark Cllr Tayo Situ, who had passed away since our last meeting. The NEC welcomed Rachel Maskell to her first meeting.

#### General Secretary's Report;

Ray Collins reported on the NEC Officers meeting with the PLP where they discussed procedures for selections after the boundary review. It is anticipated that selections amongst sitting MPs will be conducted on the basis of territorial interest, with reference to the movement of registered electors. However given the scale of the change being enacted on this occasion the NEC are consulting CLPs on some of the detailed issues concerning the procedures for selecting parliamentary candidates from amongst sitting MPS and your CLP Secretary should already have received this consultation questionnaire.

Ray also reported on the NEC Officers decision to instigate a root and branch review of the Scottish Labour Party following the disastrous election result there. I made the point that many members in Scotland had been disappointed with the way in which that review had been announced and stressed that members should be at the forefront of the review. The NEC agreed the Terms of Reference for the review which will see the review Co-Chaired by Sarah Boyack MSP & Jim Murphy MP. They will, with the Scottish Executive Committee (SEC), establish a number of working groups which will bring together all of the different stakeholders of the Party in Scotland. The SEC & the NEC will retain responsibility for any decisions within their remits and for implementing any changes arising from the review which should report this Autumn.

I would encourage all members to take part in the review. Review meetings have been set up around the country (more details here; <http://www.scottishlabour.org.uk/review>) or you can submit their views by e-mailing; [scottishreview@labour.org.uk](mailto:scottishreview@labour.org.uk).

#### National Policy Forum/Party Reform report;

Peter Hain provided a report of the work of the National Policy Forum (NPF), the Policy Review, Fresh Ideas, and Refounding Labour, the consultation on our policy-making process and our party structures. It was noted that;

- 12500 online, and numerous boxes of hard copy, submissions had been made to the Fresh Ideas consultation.
- 500 individuals had made on-line submissions to the Refounding Labour consultation.
- The Refounding Labour website, <http://www.refoundinglabour.org>, had been launched which asks members to say what they love about our party and what they'd like to change. It also allows members electronically to tag those sections of the consultation document that they 'like' or would like to 'change'.
- 66 member consultation events (6 in each region), chaired by a member of the Shadow Cabinet, have been scheduled around the country to discuss both reviews and members attending these events will be able to decide which they want to focus on.
- Every CLP Secretary has been sent a Summer Campaign Pack which, whilst also covering campaign activity and membership recruitment, outlines the consultation events happening near them, encourages their CLP to make a submission to the reviews.
- The National Policy Forum meeting on the 25<sup>th</sup> June in Wrexham will consider the responses to the Refounding Labour consultation and will also receive reports of the work of the Policy Commissions that have been set up under the Fresh Ideas consultation.

In case you haven't already seen them, or can't make any of the events in your own region but could make one somewhere else, I attach a copy of the full list of consultation events taking place across the country. I would urge all members to try to make one of these events or to press for your CLP to run its own consultation exercise. I fundamentally believe that the changes our party makes 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. 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 was asked if he thought that the debate around 'Blue' Labour or 'Purple' Labour would detract from the party's own consultation with its members. Peter was relaxed about this, noting that neither have actually made any contributions yet and that any they did make would have to come to the National Policy Forum for consideration. Peter stressed his commitment to enhancing the role of the NPF to ensure that it genuinely does become *the* policy making body of the party.

In response to concerns from trade union colleagues about their future role Peter stressed that the consultation was about expanding the party's reach, not excluding anyone.

#### Future Candidates Programme;

The NEC agreed a Future Candidates Programme, funded by the Lionel Cooke Memorial Fund, which will work to grow and support a more diverse pool of committed and talented candidates. The programme will be open to all party members, campaigners and leaders in local communities. The selection criteria will however ensure that successful applicants are

committed individuals from under-represented backgrounds who share Labour values and any non-members will be asked to join as part of the application process. Those who are successful will be able to attend a residential training school, be allocated a mentor, attend one-off training days covering key skills and have access to online distance learning support. Adverts will go live for applications on the 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2011. The closing date of applications will be 4<sup>th</sup> July 2011.

### **Election report;**

Harriet Harman and party officers reported on the recent election results, noting that;

- Local elections - The party fielded 12% more candidates than the Liberal Democrats. There had been an increase in the number of candidates Labour fielded in the SE of 18% and the SW of 16%. Labour's share of the vote had increased in every region in England, 770 net seats had been gained, 26 net councils had been gained and the Liberal Democrat vote had collapsed across the country but particularly in the cities. It was noted that the Local Government Association Labour Group would be working closely with new councillors and council leaders to provide the training & development they will need in their new role.
- In Scotland Labour suffered badly – the collapse in the Liberal Democrat went straight to the SNP, the SNP won by a landslide and there were many lessons to be learnt.
- In Wales Labour's share of the vote have increased 10%, there were some excellent results in Cardiff and there had been no surge to Plaid.
- In the Leicester south by-election there had been an 8.3% swing from the Liberal Democrats and Labour were returned with a comfortable majority.
- The party had spoken to more than 2.1million voters in the run up to the elections – this not only helped the party's performance but also increased membership. The number of people that have joined the party since January 2010 is 68,000.
- The twinning of London CLPs to marginal seats and having Shadow Cabinet leads in each of the regions had worked well and Harriet will be discussing with the regional strategy group how these could be continued.

I made the point that this had been the party's worst performance in Scotland for 80 years and that we urgently needed to learn the lessons of that campaign before we see a similar result in the Scottish council elections next year. I argued that the pitching the campaign as a way of sending a message to the Westminster coalition was never going to work. The party's campaign re-launch half way into the short campaign was recognition of that but came too late, didn't provide a counter to 'Alex' the brand and didn't come across as positive. We did have positive policies - our plan for jobs, the creation of a national care service for example - but the campaign either didn't headline them at all or left it too late in the day to do so. Voters saw us agreeing with the SNP in opposing to tuition fees and their freeze on council tax and thought they could give us a bash on the nose without feeling any pain. Whilst there were issues with the national campaign I cautioned against thinking there were no organisational issues to address.

### **Leaders Report;**

Ed Miliband also spoke of the recent election results and the dangers both of complacency and talking ourselves into gloom. He was encouraged by the number of progressive voters who had previously turned away from us who had returned in the local elections and felt that Tory voters were still giving their party a chance. He commended Peter and the party in Wales for their result and in Scotland he felt the biggest lesson was about having a vision.

Ed was upbeat about the party's current performance in opposition, stating that he felt the economic argument was starting to shift. He felt that the party has a lot to say about the Coalition's treatment of our next generation - these arguments will start to come out over the next few weeks – and he anticipates they will have a greater resonance as voters start to feel the effects of the government's cuts.

I stressed to Ed that the issue in Scotland was not about progressive voters but our core vote. I also asked Ed what his view was of the judicial review that had been launched by a number of trade unions to challenge the government's use of CPI rather than RPI for pension purposes. Ed stated that as a party we do not support the use of RPI and will continue to press for this.

### **Other issues;**

The NEC agreed a timetable for the recruitment of a new General Secretary. Adverts will be placed on the 25<sup>th</sup> May and the full NEC will meet to interview and appoint on the 19<sup>th</sup> July.

*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 **Lincoln CLP** and at the **Hackney Women's forum**. I focussed the rest of my activity on campaigning in the elections – I helped run the **Lane by-election** in Southwark, campaigned in the marginal seat of **Gravesham** and took 3 weeks annual leave to work in one of the most marginal constituencies in Scotland, **Cunninghame North**.

I'd like to congratulate all successful Labour candidates and send my thanks to all those candidates who stood and were not elected, particularly to those MSPs and councillors who served us so well in elected office.

*I'm always keen to talk, and provide verbal reports, to CLPs so if you'd like me to visit or help facilitate a discussion on any of the current consultations underway please don't hesitate in contacting me and I'll do my best to get there.*