



# Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

## Putting Members First

### Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2011

#### Refounding Labour

Refounding Labour has been the largest consultation exercise our party has ever conducted. The decisions made at today's meeting of our NEC were historic – if approved at conference they will constitute the biggest shake up of our party's rule book and organisation, ever.

Since last week's meeting of the Organisation Sub-committee further discussions have taken place on the Refounding Labour recommendations and the impact on our rules have been analysed. When Ed Miliband introduced the proposals to the NEC he stressed that this was about building a stronger party at grassroots level that had deeper connections with our trade union levy payers and roots in our communities, extending beyond the reach of our 200,000 members. He spoke of Saffron Walden CLP, who I visited on Saturday and discussed with him the previous evening, and how important it is that we help CLPs in similar areas overcome the obstacles to involvement. The key changes proposed are;

#### **For our members...**

- Changes to our membership rates which would see:
  - the standard rate staying at £41, rising with inflation, with the reduced rate at half the standard rate.
  - a new local joining rate of £15, which would also apply to trade union levy payers and registered supporters.
  - a new minimum joining age of 14, down from 15.
  - a new youth rate of £1 a year for ages 14 to 19, and £12 a year for ages 20 to 26.
  - new transitional arrangements which would ensure that members on low initial rates would move first to the reduced rate, and only in the following year to the full rate (if this was applicable).
  - clearer promotion of and encouragement to make higher payments according to income.
  - a new joining rate for former members of the Armed Forces of £1.
  - extension of the Parliamentary rate – which is double the standard rate and currently applies to MPs, Peers etc but not to elected Mayors or members of the GLA - to all elected representatives with the exception of Councillors.
- Greater involvement locally in selecting policy areas for discussion.
- A bigger say in our policy making process – reform of the National Policy forum, opening up the process so that it is more accountable and transparent. This will see all members of the policy forum assigned to a policy commission, the commissions taking evidence from members and external organisations, having clearer work programmes and responsibility in dealing with the policy submissions made by members. There will be a new tracking system set up to ensure there is an 'audit trail' of policy proposals submitted. The membership of the NPF will be opened up to include one representative of all of our socialist societies, plus a representative from LGBT Labour and our Disabled members, who would now be entitled to attend the NPF as ex-officios, without voting rights.
- Better technology – the investment in a new online platform to enable communication between members, with elected representatives and facilitate new methods of campaign organisation.
- Better training of members – the establishment of a Train the Trainer programme to help facilitate members helping each other, better provision of training for activists taking on responsibility for leading their CLPs and extension of the current webinar training programme. The Future Candidates programme would also become an annual training event with those who are part of the programme being allocated a mentor and fixed training from the Labour Party.
- Better recognition of the work members do for our party through better promotion of merit awards, long service awards, honorary membership and sharing best practise at conference.
- The ability to take part in selecting local and national candidates after six months' party membership in any area.

#### **For our local parties...**

- Greater flexibility around local organisation – CLPs will be able to organise themselves according to local circumstances, allowing for delegate-based structures, all-member meetings, or other options. However these should ensure there is a greater focus on involving local members, working jointly with local trade unions, political debate, engagement with the local community and on campaigning. The party will be able to give advice on the varying types of models adopted across the country.
- Greater flexibility around local structures – CLPs will be free to choose the number and type of officers that will best suit their needs but with the party ensuring the officer job descriptions are updated to give greater clarity on the roles and responsibilities of common officer posts.
- A new requirement to drawing up a CLP Development Plan to help focus activity on what it wants to achieve in the forthcoming year. This will be balanced with rewards for improving CLPs or those who are achieving success through local innovation and support for those who are struggling.
- Better support for CLP Officers who shoulder the responsibility for leading their local parties – e.g. Chairs, Secretaries, Treasurers and election agents - through better, more regular training and a mentoring system.
- Peer led training on Community Organising techniques.
- A change to AGM arrangements to ensure that no CLP AGMs are held in the run up to an election. Clarification has been requested on how the January/December accounting year would fit with moving annual general meetings to the autumn.

- The replacement of local government committees (LGCs) with local campaign forums (LCFs), which are envisaged to be a smaller functional body which focuses on campaign co-ordination, candidate recruitment and candidate selection. There will be flexibility for local CLPs and LCFs to agree the membership and structure of those new bodies to best suit their local requirements.

**A revised CLP funding model** - I have provided a number of updates throughout the summer in which I have given updates on the discussions we have had on CLP funding. In [my own submission to Refounding Labour](#) I stressed that *"There is no process at present for a smaller membership CLP to get any help at all and for its members to play a full role in our party. This is highly unfair... Funds should be donated to an internal democracy fund to be distributed to those CLPs with less who would not otherwise be able to send a delegate to conference because of the cost."* Prior to the payment of membership fees national deductions are taken for the European Election Levy and the Election Insurance payment – these two together cost every CLP currently £665 per year. When we looked further into this issue we found that:

- Following those deductions 116 CLPs get less than £445 in cash per year – which is less than enough to cover the cost of Contact Creator.
- Last year 25 CLPs received no cash payment at all because their payment was less than the £665 Euro levy and insurance charge. Instead they ended up in debt to Head Office and for many this means an annual accruing level of debt.
- Over 200 CLPs regularly do not purchase Contact Creator – a base requirement for all CLPs.
- There is a strong correlation between the amount of money a CLP has and their attendance at Annual Conference.
- 70 CLPs have not sent a delegate to conference in the last 3 years.

This is nothing short of scandalous. I am therefore delighted that the NEC has backed my proposal to introduce a new funding model for CLPs including the introduction of a Democracy Fund. We have explored a number of options in trying to find a system that was fairer to all. The proposal that the NEC agreed to recommend would see;

- All CLP debt to Party HQ incurred through the non-payment of the election insurance, the Euro levy or linked to past General Elections will be written off.
- All CLPs will be provided with a minimum package of support (totalling over £1,200) which will include;
  - the payment of their Election insurance,
  - the payment of their Euro levy,
  - provision of Contact Creator for free and
  - the provision of one free delegate pass to our Annual Conference
- The establishment of a Democracy Fund, to assist those CLPs who even after the changes face difficulties in participating in our democratic process, and a Campaigns Fund to help those CLPs who need it most to win and to fund innovative campaign techniques. There will be strict guidelines drawn up governing the administration of these funds.
- To be able to fund this all of this there will be a change to the current amount of the membership subscription given back to CLPs per head of member – all CLPs would now get £1.50 for each member. The biggest CLPs, including my own, will experience a drop in funding because of this. However I am confident from that given the feedback I have received that CLPs understand the reasons for this and know that it is for the benefit of the party as a whole.
- These changes will be phased in so those that will see a drop in their cash income will only drop by half in 2012 and then by the full amount only in 2013. Those who are set to gain from the proposal will benefit immediately.

Don't let anyone dismiss this proposal as an irrelevance or a tinkering at the edges - they could only do so if they had never felt the frustration of members who, day in day out, try to fly our flag when the odds are stacked against them. If you happen to be a Labour activist in a non-Labour constituency which has poor prospects of Labour success and even lower levels of membership life is tough. I am really proud of this proposal. It is our minimum wage for CLPs - not just the support they need to get by, but the means by which they will be able to flourish. It means more CLPs will be able to do doorstep campaigning, enabling greater voter engagement and ultimately more Labour seats – and if those are council seats to begin with that's fine, we can build from there. And they'll be able to participate in our democratic process – that is a good thing for our party.

#### **For our communities...**

A new Clause I is proposed which states that "The party shall bring together members and supporters who share its values to develop policies, make communities stronger through collective action and support and promote the election of Labour representatives at all levels of the democratic process."

It is proposed that the party allow individuals who do not want to join the party to register as Labour supporters and that these individuals can be recruited locally by CLPs and activists or that they can register online to the party's national database. It was stressed that those signed up locally would be held on a local list and would not have their details passed to the national party without their agreement. Registered supporters could be invited to local CLP social events or policy discussions etc.

#### **For our Representatives...**

- Those who want to represent our party will be given a clearer understanding of the party's expectations of them with introduction of candidate contracts.
- A new clause will be inserted into the rule book setting out the rights and duties of the Leader and Deputy Leader and our MPs.
- Whilst there was agreement in principle that there should be gender balance on the leadership team it was agreed that a working group should be set up to discuss this with any final decisions postponed to 2012

#### **For our Councillors...**

- Councillor ALC subscriptions will be replaced with the representative levy of 2%
- The ALC will gain the same rights as affiliate rights
- The party will work with the LGA and the ALC to agree a new package of support to councillors.

### **For our young members...**

- There will be an Annual Youth Conference with a clearer programme of work developed in conjunction with Young Labour.
- Young Labour will acquire the same rights as an affiliate organisation in terms of being able to submit motions to conference and make nominations in the leadership. They won't have an additional vote in the affiliate section.

### **For our Scottish Party...**

- It was agreed to create for the first time an elected Leader of the Scottish Labour Party, with the Scottish Executive Committee having primary responsibility over the procedures for electing the Leader of the Scottish Party, where they intend to change the rules so as to widen the eligibility criteria to allow MPs & MEPs to contest the position.
- All other proposals arising from the Scottish Review will be considered at a special meeting of the Organisation Sub-Committee in October.

### **For Northern Ireland...**

The commitment to enter into discussions with our sister parties about the Northern Ireland CLP's wish to stand candidates for election in Northern Ireland.

### **But this is only the start...**

I specifically asked Ed and Peter if we could start thinking about how we would implement these proposals if they were agreed at conference. We all know that the devil is often in the detail and I want to ensure that we don't vote on high principles but then see a dip when it comes to delivery. I'm pleased therefore that it was agreed that an NEC working group would be established to progress the implementation of the proposals.

### **Next Steps...**

All delegates will now be sent a full copy of the Refounding Labour to Win document which outlines all of the proposals being put to conference as well as a full copy of the party's rule book with the highlighted changes that would arise from those proposals. Peter Hain has assured us that no delegate will turn up at conference without having had sight of these. This mailing to conference delegates will also be followed up by an all-member e-mail outlining the issues that will be put to conference on Sunday.

The NEC will meet again on Saturday evening to consider the few issues which are undergoing further discussion including specifically the balance of voting rights at conference and whether registered supporters should have a vote in the affiliate section in leadership elections. If you have any views on this please do get in touch.

### **My conclusion...**

Much has been made about the deficiencies of the Refounding Labour process. Has it been perfect? No. I have repeatedly expressed concern about the timescales involved, the level of communication to members and the publication of submissions. Have we been able to deliver absolutely everything on every member's wish-list? No. But the proposals should deal with the biggest issues raised by the majority of submissions. Crucially, does this give members a better deal than before and the building blocks to a stronger party? Absolutely, and I wouldn't support it if it didn't. I'm really excited by the opportunities this presents and I genuinely can't wait to meet those delegates to conference next year who will, if this goes through, be able to attend and give their CLPs a voice in our democratic process for the first time in years.

### **Other issues:**

- GS Report – Iain McNicol talked about the internal review of party structures that he, Ed Miliband and Ray Collins have established. He wants to ensure that all staff and the NEC are consulted in that review and Charles Allen has already started meeting people to discuss their thoughts about how the party is currently and could be better structured internally. I met Charles recently and found him to be knowledgeable and thorough in his questioning and analysis.
- Boundary Commission – the huge amount of work that was being put into consulting CLPs on the Boundary Commission proposals and our party's response was acknowledged. It was noted that the public hearings being set up by the Boundary Commission would commence on the 11<sup>th</sup> October so the party's national response must be agreed the week after our annual conference. As this was still being discussed with CLPS it was agreed that an NEC panel would review and agree the final proposed response in the week after conference before it was published. It was noted that there would be a session at conference on the Sunday for delegates who would like to make any last minute representations on this issue or find out more how their CLP would be affected by the proposals. It was noted that some of the early selecting seats have had to suspend their selections due to the unforeseen impact of the proposals on their constituencies but that this would be restarted as soon as there was further clarity on the make up their seats.
- Conference – much time was spent discussing the preparation for conference with the Chair of the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) Harry Donaldson. It was noted that 181 contemporary motions had been submitted and that an appeals process had been set up to deal with those that the CA had rejected. It was noted that the party were introducing a smartphone app for conference, in a first for any political party. The CAC's decision on this year's Merit Awards were noted. I was delighted to be selected by the NEC to introduce the Health debate at conference and hope those of you who are attending will be able to make it along for this session.

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

### **Keeping in touch...**

I made fewer CLP visits in the past month solely due to the fact that most CLPs take a bit of a break over the summer but I have been delighted to be able to visit and talk to members in **Leiston & District Labour Party, Maidstone & The Weald CLP** and **Saffron Walden 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.*