



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

Putting Members First

Report of National Executive Committee meeting held on 20th March 2012

Our March NEC meeting was preceded the evening before with a meeting with the Parliamentary Labour Party where warm tributes were paid to Tony Lloyd MP at his last meeting as Chair of the PLP.

Change at HQ;

Iain McNicol reported on the successful regional conferences that had been taking place across the country in the past few weeks and the positive feedback that had been received from those who attended. He reported that the progress of the refurbishments at the party's new headquarters will allow those members of staff not working directly on the election campaigns to move in mid-April. Staff working on the election campaigns will move over asap after the elections. It was noted that USDAW have funded an organiser to spend some time working on the Glasgow campaign and, in response to a question from me, he confirmed that the Scottish Party would remain in their current HQ at least until the election.

Iain went on to brief us on the Management and Commercial review that had taken place within HQ. This is review proposed the appointment of 6 new Executive Directors to better focus the activity of senior staff. All 6 positions had been advertised and interviews were held for 5 of the positions. The 6th position – the Executive Director, Commercial – did not receive sufficient applications for the party to proceed with interviews and a recruitment consultant is working with the party on a pro bono arrangement to help progress that. Of the 5 interview sessions held 5 individuals have now been appointed and the details of the successful applicants can be found [here](#). An additional appointment has been made to this Management Board and that is the Executive Director for Strategy & Planning – this brings in an individual currently working in the Leaders office under the joint management of the General Secretary. It was noted that four of the Executive Directors will report directly to the General Secretary and three will have a dual report to the General Secretary and Tim Livesey, the Leader's Chief of Staff. It was also noted that all existing staff who had applied for any of the positions were informed whether or not they had been successful prior to any public announcements being made and that the creation of the Management Board in no impacts the role of the National Executive Committee.

Ed Miliband on the Budget and the NHS;

On the budget Ed talked about how the Chancellor could have opted for a 'steady as she goes' budget but has instead chosen to give those who have most a cut in tax whilst those who have least are shouldering the burden of the failures of his previous 2 budgets. He explained that it will be for Labour to outline how his handling of the economy has stalled growth, increased unemployment and increased the burden on the treasury. It will be for Labour to outline why his choices are the wrong choices at the wrong time. And it will be for Labour to compare and contrast how he treats those on middle and lower incomes with those on the highest and dispel the myth he built up that 'we're all in it together'.

On the NHS Ed outlined how the Coalition had railroaded the Health & Social Care Bill through parliament and the shocking way in which they prevented people from seeing the risk register before the final vote. He praised the work of Any Burnham in his relentless bid to get the government to drop the bill and the way in which he is even now still working to save the founding principles of the health service. Whilst realistic about the prospects for the debate that evening Ed stated that this was only the end of the beginning in the fight. Andy and the Shadow Health team will continue to fight to protect our Party's finest achievement.

I asked Ed to ensure that whilst our party rightly made the argument for more jobs that we are clear this is an argument for 'good jobs' bearing in mind that some employers will use the current economic climate to drive down wages and make the world of work more insecure, combined with the pressure on those who remain in work to deliver more for less at a time when their employment rights were being attacked and reduced. I'm pleased that he agreed with this. I also asked him to make sure that we are clear about what we mean when we say that we would repeal the Health and Social Care Bill if it is passed – it is the free market and competition aspects of the bill which will be repealed to restore the 'N' in NHS.

Harriet on Health and Shadow Cabinet leads;

Harriet also talked of the Health and Social Care Bill and pointed to an example in her own constituency which demonstrated that it is a false 'market' that is being created – GPs setting up private clinics that can be awarded public

sector contracts to and from themselves is not 'healthy competition' but a conflict of interests and the creation of a new oligarchy.

Harriet also reported on preparations being made for the elections including confirming the Shadow Cabinet Regional Champions agreed at our previous meeting: Eastern – Ed Balls, East Midlands – Vernon Coaker, London – Tessa Jowell, North – Maria Eagle, North West – Ivan Lewis, South East – Caroline Flint, South West – Jan Royall, West Midlands – Liam Byrne, Yorkshire and Humber – Mary Creagh. The Shadow Cabinet leads for Scotland and Wales remain as Margaret Curran and Peter Hain respectively. Any feedback on the role and work of regional champions should be sent to Harriet's office.

Tom Watson's 14 week plan;

Tom note that the days when the party could co-ordinate everything from HQ alone were long gone so there will necessarily be greater emphasis on the work of the regional teams. Tom outlined the 14week plan those teams would be working to and, without going into the detail of the tactics and strategies discussed (I'm hardly going to give that gift to our opposition here!), it was clear there are many dividing lines the party would be emphasising to voters. Tom re-stated the stretching target of winning back 350 council seats in England, 100 seats in Wales and maintaining and improving our position in Scotland.

Giving members a say in Policy Making;

Peter Hain confirmed there would be a meeting of the NPF on the weekend of the 16/17th June (exact date/venue to be confirmed asap). Peter then introduced a discussion paper entitled 'Partnership Into Power: A reformed Process', the bones of which had been discussed at the Organisation Sub-committee last week. I didn't circulate or comment on that paper at the time because we were promised revisions to it in advance of the NEC. The paper outlines a number of reforms to the existing policy process which include;

- Moving to a 5 year policy-making cycle, rather than the 3 years we have currently
- Shortening policy documents so that they are more focused on key issues, drafted by the policy commissions following conference each year.
- Circulation of policy documents to party units for discussion & submission before the policy commissions produced a draft report in the spring/summer
- Debating those draft reports at a meeting of the National Policy Forum (NPF) meeting each summer. The NPF would then send the revised documents to Annual Conference for agreement.
- Party units being able to submit a limited number of amendments.
- Strengthening the 'duty to consult', with party units being asked to show that they have engaged stakeholders before putting an issue forward
- Rewarding party units who maximized engagement and built a broad community of support for initiatives before putting them forward
- Having Policy Commissions, as they do now, drawing up final year documents based on the policy documents agreed in previous years to put to conference (with those again being shorter and more focused than at present)
- Final year documents being agreed by the policy commissions, NPF, Joint Policy Committee (JPC) and Annual Conference and forming the Party's Policy Programme.
- Agreeing the manifesto at a Clause V meeting based on the Policy Programme as agreed through the NPF and Annual conference
- Strengthening the role of the Joint Policy Committee to oversee the amendments process and agreeing options papers to go to conference
- Strengthening the role of National Policy Forum reps and allowing all to attend a policy commission
- Giving greater support for Policy commissions including looking at topical issues through the use of conference calls
- Allowing Annual conference to decide on Alternative Positions
- Seeing greater use of new technology to facilitate discussion, feedback and create an on-line audit trail of submissions
- Increasing the level of support for party units to participate in the process

There is much to be welcomed in this paper. I know Peter understands the need for greater engagement and transparency. I am concerned though that we could be more ambitious with our plans and that many of the proposals are reliant on a number of unknowns. I asked Peter when the new technology would be in place, whether there would be any further amendments to the role of conference, whether conference would be able to vote on documents in sections rather than as a whole, whether he could provide further information on the strengthened role of NPF reps and what that would mean for members, what constituted a 'limited number of amendments', what status Alternative Positions would have and how, if the proposal is not to change the fundamental building blocks of the process, we could instill the cultural change needed to ensure members were engaged in the process.

Peter responded by saying that new technology would be in place as soon as possible and that the process of change in this area will be evolutionary – there will be no ‘big bang’. He also indicated he didn’t see it as realistic for conference to vote on documents in sections. The proposals will now be circulated to constituencies for consultation with a view to getting their views for consideration by the NEC over the summer to enable a paper and any consequential rule changes to go to Annual Conference this year. I would encourage you to participate in this consultation – I know it is something members are passionate about.

Balls on the Budget;

Ed Balls presented to the NEC the proposals for responding to the budget the following day. Like Ed Miliband his focus was on how the budget would impact jobs and growth. He emphasised how ‘off-track’ the Coalition were in terms of their deficit reduction plan – despite their committed to wiping out the deficit in one term it is now higher and they are borrowing more to pay off the costs of their own failure. They promised a budget for growth but the economic situation is getting worse - regional growth funds have done little to help and unemployment continues to increase. Those with the least are paying the most - the change to tax credits will actually mean that some people are better off on benefits than in work and he predicted they would go further by cutting top rate of income tax for richest. Ed pointed out the Coalition’s way to incentivise the poorest is to make them poorer but they only way they believe they can incentivise the richest is to make them richer. Ed made clear that we hadn’t made a commitment on tax and couldn’t until the manifesto but to think that now is the best time to cut that top rate, to think that is the priority right now, is madness.

Ed’s view is that the prism of politics has changed - and it changed with the autumn statement - the debate has changed from being all about the past to now being about the future. And whilst a debate about the future will be difficult – there will be difficult choices to make – we’ll go into that debate with a plan that is fair, a plan that is credible, a plan for jobs and growth.

Other issues;

- Remember **you have until 5pm on Friday 30 March 2012 to make their nominations for the NEC and NPF.** CLP Secretaries can submit nominations online via Membersnet [here](#). If you need paper forms or a form in a Word format just email ballots@labour.org.uk or call 020 7783 1498. **You also have until the 29th June to make nominations for Merit Awards** for members who have given outstanding service to the Labour Party. CLP Secretaries or CLP Chairs may make nominations on behalf of their CLP via [Membersnet](#). You will need to provide some background information about your nominee and why they deserve an award.
- We have agreed the **timetable for selecting mayoral candidates** where referendums result in a “yes” vote (freeze date for members to have a vote is 5 May, short-listing by panels comprised of Regional Board and CLP reps will take place on 16 May, the OMOV ballot goes out on 25 May, hustings meetings will take place by 10 June, the ballot closes on 13 June and results declared on 15 June). NEC and NPF elections and the Police Commissioner selections ballots will go out in the same mailing for return within the same timeframe.
- The NEC has **agreed to trigger a further 14 early parliamentary selections** (all 3 seats in Brighton & Hove based on the anticipated new boundaries, Carlisle, Redcar, Crewe & Nantwich, Gillingham & Rainham, Milton Keynes N, Reading E, Bristol S, Gloucester, Cannock Chase, Stafford, Tamworth & Staffs).
- We have also **agreed guidelines for CLPs that will have to reorganise along new boundaries** in January 2013, that **Labour MPs selected as Mayoral or Police Commissioner candidates** will have to resign from the Commons and trigger by-elections and that the Labour Movement for Europe and Labour Finance & Industry Group are to become **new formal affiliates of the Party.**
- Following representations from members involved in Intern Aware I also asked Iain to confirm **the party’s policy on unpaid interns.** He confirmed that, whilst there were a number of members who volunteered for the party, none of the party’s offices employed unpaid interns.

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...

Since my last report I have been delighted to be able to visit and talk to members in **Braintree CLP, Witham CLP, North Norfolk CLP, Derbyshire Dales CLP, Enfield Southgate CLP, Harlow CLP, Bracknell CLP, Manchester Central CLP, Chester CLP, Denton & Reddich CLP, Westmoreland & Lonsdale CLP, Broxtowe CLP, Tooting CLP.** Those visits, added to the others I have undertaken, means I have now visited more than 10% of all CLPs in the last 15 months. If you’d like me to visit your constituency to provide an NEC report or facilitate a policy discussion please don’t hesitate to get in touch.

I’ve also been pleased to attend and support Val Shawcross’ GLA campaign launch, Ken Livingston’s manifesto consultation meeting, a Labour Values roundtable discussion on the priorities for our new Executive Directors, the Scottish Labour Party conference, a meeting of the Livesey BLP, the Save Our NHS rally at Westminster Central Hall and I chaired the recent Fabian/Compass discussion on the Scottish Independence Referendum in Parliament.