



Johanna Baxter

National Executive Committee

A track record of Putting Members First

Report of Labour National Executive Committee meeting held on 21st July 2015

Harriet Harman's Report

Harriet noted that we are living in turbulent times for our party – the Conservative's majority has given them a confidence they didn't have after 2010 and it is clear their strategy is to consign the Labour movement to oblivion. Our challenge is to earn back the trust of the people by being an effective opposition that listens and has answers to their concerns.

Harriet talked about **the budget** and the impact of Osborne's £12bn of cuts, noting that 1 million working families will see their incomes drop by up to £1,300 as a result, even after the introduction of the higher minimum wage (it is certainly not a living wage). She noted that those receiving the £100 employment support allowance in the work-related activity group will see that reduced to £70, the same level as job seekers allowance. Whilst the government argue this will only apply to 'new claimants' people are classed as a 'new applicant' each time they fall out of work through ill health and have to re-apply for the allowance. She noted that abolishing maintenance grants would double student debt, disproportionately affecting poorer students and could result in fewer going to university.

Many of us raised concerns about the Party's stance on the **Welfare Reform Bill**. Harriet said that as interim leader she didn't want to set policy positions in advance of the new leader being elected and the Party's manifesto had supported an overall cap on benefits. However following discussion the Parliamentary Labour Party had voted AGAINST the Welfare Reform and Work Bill with a 'Reasoned Amendment'. She explained that the Tories had grouped together a number of issues in the Bill which the Party would support, and that they would love us to see us oppose, such as the commitment to 3 million apprenticeships, cuts to council and social housing rents and extra support for troubled families, along-with a number we certainly oppose like the abolition of child poverty targets and cuts to the support provided to the sick and disabled who cannot work. Additionally, she made clear that the Party will vote against the cuts to tax credits which will make 3 million low and middle income working families worse off. These measures were not in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill – they will be included within Statutory Instruments in the autumn, and Labour will oppose them.

Harriet reported on the fact that she, along with the Shadow Defence team, had been called to Downing Street for a Security Council Briefing on the situation in **Syria**. No proposition has yet been put nor has any indication been given as to what one might contain or when it might arrive. It was noted that without Freedom of Information legislation we might only have found out about British involvement if one of our pilots had been killed or captured. She stressed that the Freedom of Information Review Panel is not cross-party, Labour is not represented.

I urged Harriet to strongly oppose the 1% **public sector pay cap** – this is an unfair, ideological attack on public sector workers who have already suffered pay restraint for several years and it will result in recruitment problems. Additionally many public servants will not even see a 1% uplift to their base salary if their employing department decides to allocate some of that money to addressing structural issues within the pay system. I, and a number of other colleagues, also pressed Harriet to ensure a robust opposition to the **Trade Union Bill**. The draconian proposals contained within that Bill will curtail Trade Unions taking lawful industrial action and will make it

virtually impossible for unions to sign members up to their political funds (this will now have to be done in writing by post, adding an additional hurdle for any member joining online) or to use those funds for actual political campaigning.

I expressed concern about the number of unattributed briefings in the press and urged everyone to focus on the crucial role of opposition. It has certainly felt in recent months that whilst the Tories and the SNP have driven their tanks all over our lawn our side have all been scrapping in the mess tent. We need to be exposing the gaping hole that exists between the Tory rhetoric on One Nation and the reality of the impact of their proposals and we need to be holding the SNP to account for their mismanagement of government in Scotland.

This was Harriet's last NEC meeting after many years and she was given our heartfelt thanks for everything she has done as Deputy Leader and as Acting Leader.

Leadership election

The General Secretary gave an update on the progress of the Leadership election. Tuesday 1st September is the deadline for registering for the results conference taking place on the 12th – all CLP secretaries should have received information on this by now. Ballots will start getting dispatched on the 14th August (so will likely land a few days after this). The number of e-mails being sent by all the leadership/deputy leadership teams was discussed and it was noted that the number of members unsubscribing from all communication from the party as a result had increased. The General Secretary will remind all candidates of their obligations under the candidate code as the process moves to the next stage.

It was noted that 68,000 members had now joined the party since the election, along with 21,000 registered supporters and 28,500 affiliate supporters. The majority of these new members are younger – a third are under 30 years old – and are more likely to be women. Initial surveys have showed that new members are very responsive and keen to get involved so local Parties are encouraged to give them a personal welcome wherever possible.

At our Organisation Sub-committee meeting we discussed and put in place the verification process for individuals applying to join as a member or supporter in advance of the vote – you can read more on that [here](#). In addition Jim Kennedy as Chair of the NEC, Ann Black as Chair of NEC Organisation Sub-committee and Alice Perry, as Local Government Rep will review all recommendations for acceptance/rejection of those seeking to join as members or supporters of the Party in advance of the deadline for registering to vote in the Leadership election. CLP Secretaries have been advised to check their local lists (available via membersnet) and flag in any concerns. Likewise if you are aware of anyone you believe is not a supporter of the Labour Party but is seeking to join to disrupt the vote, please email your evidence to leadership2015@labour.org.uk.

I have not commented on the Leadership election to date, because I want to see how each candidate performs through the course of the selection, but I will say this. People are not '[morons](#)' for holding different beliefs. [Laughing at the loss of one of our own](#) is not solidarity. Attacking each other in the press is not only unedifying but gives succor to those who wish to divide us. I have often been reminded in recent weeks of [Jimmy Reid's speech to Glasgow University in 1971](#) where he says "*there will be no hooliganism, there will be no vandalism, there will be no bevvy because the world is watching us, and it is our responsibility to conduct ourselves with responsibility, and with dignity, and with maturity*". The world may not be watching this leadership contest but all our opponents are and every slanging match played out in public is being uploaded to their attack file in preparation for the next general election. We are better than this. As members we hold in our votes the responsibility for our Party's future and with it the fate of the people we came into politics to help – our politics is for a purpose. We cannot change the world unless we acquire the means by which to do so.

Learning the Lessons Taskforce

Margaret Beckett gave an update on the work of the Learning the Lessons Taskforce. I want to thank those of you who responded to my last e-mail by sending me your views on what worked and what didn't. All of those will go forward, along with the responses that colleagues Ann Black and Alice Perry received, to the Taskforce for consideration. There has been discussion of a more

detailed membership survey which you should receive shortly. In the meantime feel free to continue to send me your views or send direct to the taskforce at lessonstaskforce@labour.org.uk.

Local Government Report

Jim McMahon reported on the implications of the budget on local government, particularly the announcement of cuts of £200m in public health funding to councils, the announcement of elected Mayors for Leeds, Liverpool & Sheffield and stressed that meaningful devolution is needed in all areas without strings attached. Jim also reported on the recent LGA conference and the recent LGA Labour Group elections (the full new committee is [here](#)). We discussed individual voter registration and the importance of Labour Councils tasking their electoral registration officers to do reports on areas of low registration.

EPLP Report

Glenis Willmott reported that our MEPs are calling on national leaders from across Europe to take action to boost economic growth and tackle the scourge of youth unemployment that is blighting so much of the continent. The European Parliament has voted for national governments to tackle precarious employment including zero-hour contracts. Our MEPs also voted to keep public services out of TTIP (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership), to ensure workers' rights and environmental standards are protected. Labour also voted against the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) clause which enables companies to sue governments through secret corporate courts. Though this did not get the support of the majority of MEPs the European Parliament voted to support an alternative to the ISDS clause, rather than the full abolition which Labour supported. The NEC was concerned to hear about the formation of a far-right group in the European Parliament, made possible in part, by the defection of a former UKIP MEP Janice Atkinson to Marine Le Pen's Front National. The creation of the group means they can now get access to more than 17million Euros over the next four years and gain representation on Parliamentary Committees. It was noted that Alan Johnson has been invited to a future NEC meeting so we can have a full debate about the European referendum campaign.

General Secretary's report

- Angela Eagle gave a report on the work of the National Policy Forum which concluded its work on Agenda 2015 in April. This should now become Agenda 2020 and Angela has asked for feedback on the 2010-2015 cycle so that we can develop this for the period up to 2020.
- The General Secretary gave a report of the Party finances/finances/staffing. The appointment of a substantive Director of London Region was noted and thanks passed to Alan Olive for the work he had done in that role.
- We noted the work of the nations and regions. I asked that the rule changes passed at the Scottish Executive Committee, which change how they will select Westminster candidates, be shared with the rest of the committee.
- We discussed the preparations for annual conference and agreed to propose a rule change restoring the right of our MEPs to make nominations in Leadership elections. We discussed the amendments ruled out by the Conference Arrangements Committee, in particular the application of the 3 year rule. The CAC is independent of the NEC but we asked that our concerns were fed back to them.
- We agreed the schedule of future NEC meetings and I repeated my request that we get out of London and meet in the Nations and Regions of the UK.

This is my personal account of this meeting & 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 of our May NEC I was pleased to visit Gloucester CLP, attend the Glasgow Leadership hustings and the Fabian Women's Network Summer reception. In addition to this I have been involved in the work of the Learning the Lessons Taskforce and, as CLP Secretary, organising the process by which we were able to make our nominations.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you'd like me to visit your CLP to give an NEC report, facilitate a policy discussion or join you on the #LabourDoorstep.