**National Executive Committee at Conference, 22/27 September 2017**

**NEC Meeting, Friday 22 September 2017**

The NEC met on the eve of conference and looked forward to the week ahead. Of the delegates initially excluded by the cutoff date of 23 June, 43 of the 61 were able to attend. The floor space was packed, and many ex officio attenders including councillors and MPs were seated in the balcony.

The meeting considered a revised version of Jeremy Corbyn’s party democracy review which incorporated most of the changes suggested on the Tuesday. With a few more tweaks it was adopted and would go to conference in the name of the NEC. The paper can be found on membersnet under Conference Documents at <https://members.labour.org.uk/conference-documents> as the addendum to the NEC report. There is still no reference to the national policy forum, and it is now getting very late to organise a meeting before Christmas, so its future must be in doubt. The form of the consultation process is not yet known.

The NEC also made a further amendment to the criteria for the constituency section of the NEC. Candidates must be nominated by at least five constituency parties (CLPs), but no longer require the nomination of their own CLP. In previous years candidates from the left have been the target of cynical attempts to block them, most recently Rhea Wolfson who went on to attract more than 85,000 votes.

One NEC member asked for proposals on all-women shortlists to be reopened, to enable more men from ethnic minorities to stand. I was not happy with all the decisions, and have received representations from several CLPs where men came close to winning in June and are now barred, but I remember 2009 when Burnley was reconsidered and all selections ground to a halt. If we reopen one, we reopen all of them.

Procedures have now been circulated to regional offices. I’ve suggested some clarifications, and they should be finalised soon. Hopefully some candidates will be in place by Christmas. I’ve also asked for Scottish and Welsh procedures, targets and all-women shortlists. They run their own selections, but NEC members need the information, so we can answer questions from our electorate across the UK.

**Women in Transition**

The women’s conference was attended by 1,500 members. Dawn Butler, shadow minister for women and equalities, gave a rousing introduction, and had the entire hall chanting “we are phenomenal women”, the hook from a poem by Maya Angelou. Jeremy Corbyn – the only man to speak – was warmly welcomed, and again deplored racist and sexist abuse of Diane Abbott and anti-semitic attacks on Luciana Berger. Emily Thornberry praised the contributions of Labour women MPs, including Diana Johnson, Jess Phillips, Yvette Cooper, Stella Creasy, Liz McInnes, Angela Rayner, Barbara Keeley and Debbie Abrahams.

For the first time there was a formal session for delegates to speak on topics prioritised by affiliates and CLPs: NHS and social care, housing, economic and business policy, and Brexit. As Chair I found the atmosphere enjoyable and friendly, but will await feedback before the next steps. Delegates also elected Teresa Clark and Jean Crocker to the new women’s conference arrangements committee.

**The New Big Tent**

As annual conference opened on the Sunday we collected advice not only from the CLPD Yellow Pages and Labour First, but also from Labour Party Marxists and the Socialist Party, all telling delegates how to vote. Former doubters queued up to pledge allegiance to Jeremy, and the mood was exuberant and generally united. Although some delegates argued about whether Sadiq Khan should have been given a speaking slot, he was applauded by the whole conference when he took the stage.

The number of platform speakers was drastically pruned in favour of more time for ordinary delegates, a very positive change. Representatives from St Austell & Newquay and from Torridge & West Devon reported that Labour had moved from fourth to second place in June, and I hope the so-called progressive alliance will now ask Greens and LibDems to stand aside. However many delegates were disappointed, and requiring them to bounce up and down waving bizarre objects to catch the Chair’s eye looks increasingly ridiculous. Some have spotted that it’s hard to get to make a speech, but all points of order are taken and it’s possible to say quite a lot before being stopped by the Chair. So I expect even more “points of order” unless the system is redesigned. Conference Chairs were asked to refer to women not ladies, and then, recognising that gender is non-binary, to use neutral terms such as comrade or delegate.

**Moving with the Times**

Last year conference agreed to allow sections of documents to be referred back for further consideration. Contrary to dire warnings the sky did not fall in, and the power was used selectively and intelligently.

Delegates voted to ask for all Tory benefit cuts to be reversed; to demand that no private profit should be made from the NHS; and to find ways of restoring schools to local authority control. They voted against referring back the section on Brexit. Although motions on Brexit were not prioritised, the NEC statement was endorsed. I think Keir Starmer is walking a difficult line with some skill, and should be allowed the leeway to engage with both Remain and Leave voters, while continuing to hold the government to account.

Affiliates and CLPs each have half the conference vote, but with 1,200 CLP delegates and only 300 from affiliates, shows of hands would clearly be dominated by CLPs. So hand votes were assessed separately within each section. Claudia Webbe, in the chair, wisely took a card vote on the conference arrangements committee report, a bone of much contention last year. This showed 63% of CLPs rejecting the report, but 89% of affiliates supporting it. In the 2000s the unions opposed government policy on pay, pensions and public services, while CLPs split two-thirds for the leadership. Then, Tony Blair claimed that CLPs were the authentic voice of ordinary members, so it was OK to ignore the overall vote. How times change …

Three rule changes proposed by the NEC were accepted. These added three CLP and one trade union place to the NEC (99% in favour, CLPs 98%, affiliates 100%); reducing the proportion of MPs / MEPs required to nominate leadership candidates to 10% (89% in favour, CLPs 80%, affiliates 98%); and an expanded clause on prejudicial conduct (96% in favour, CLPs 93%, affiliates 100%). With varying degrees of grace and reluctance all other amendments were remitted to the review of party democracy except for Brighton Pavilion. Their proposal to accept motions on any subject, not just those judged contemporary, was supported by 64% of CLPs but rejected by 97% of the affiliates. So it was lost, but I hope we can do it anyway. In elections to the national constitutional committee, Anna Dyer and Emina Ibrahim triumphed.

**Money Matters**

The treasurer’s report attracted some complaints about the meagre share of subscriptions returned to CLPs. This is not quite as it seems. In 2011 conference agreed *Refounding Labour*, which radically changed the basis of distribution.  Until then CLPs received nearly 25% of subscription income. However, from this they had to pay election insurance, a Euro-election levy and contact creator. For small CLPs this exceeded their entire income and took them deeper into debt.  The new system met these costs centrally, plus one conference pass, a package now worth £1,405 per CLP.  CLPs also received £1.50 per member, indexed to inflation from 2013 and raised to £2.50 per member in May 2017, both on my initiative.  The rest goes into NEC-administered funds, with CLPs able to bid for support for organisers or projects to enhance democracy and diversity.  If membership falls below 294,000 the fixed costs will not be fully covered. There may be a case for reviewing the whole approach, but it is too complicated just to pull out one element.

**NEC Meeting, Tuesday 26 September 2017: Goodbye and Hello**

The NEC welcomed new members Ian Murray from the FBU, Sarah Owen from the GMB and Mick Whelan from ASLEF, and thanked Jamie Bramwell and Martin Mayer for their contributions. Glenis Willmott would be stepping down not only from the NEC but as an MEP, and tributes were paid for her life of service to the party and the movement, and for steering the NEC through a challenging year. Vice-chair Andy Kerr was elected as Chair by the new NEC, with Jennie Formby elected as vice-chair, also unanimously. The Buggins turn principle, whereby the longest-serving member becomes vice-chair and then Chair, was broken in 2008 when Christine Shawcroft was wrongly denied. This time three more NEC members were passed over, some of whom would have been willing, and this may be another sign of changing times.

Finally the meeting agreed to fill the extra trade union place agreed by conference a few hours earlier, with nominations opening at 7 p.m. and closing at 9 p.m. and Joanne Cairns of USDAW elected unopposed. The three CLP places will take longer, with over half a million individual voters. A timetable is awaited, but CLPs should allow time for nominations at their next general committee or all-member meeting.

**Ending on a High**

Policy seminars on Tuesday morning were well-attended and open for the first time to all members, not just delegates. On Brexit, members with partners and children of other European nationalities spoke passionately of the impact on their families, jobs and lives, and they were not pacified by being told to go away and sell the party line. On work, pensions and equalities Diana Holland chaired brilliantly, with everyone who wished to contribute able to do so before shadow ministers came in.

The leader’s speech is always a rally, and this was a great one. Moving it to the final day was absolutely right. The last time I remember such exuberance was in Blackpool in 1996 where we were given union jacks to wave (cringe) while we sang “Things can only get better” over and over and over, and they did. We live in hope. But there are links with the past, and “for the many not the few” was repeated more often in Brighton during a single week than by Tony Blair, who coined the phrase, in his entire career. Far more unites us than divides us?

*Ann Black, 07956-637958,* *annblack50@btinternet.com**. Previous reports are at* [*www.annblack.co.uk*](http://www.annblack.co.uk)