Proposal for Party Conference and Rules

Introduction

All changes proposed here are based on the understanding that Party conference is the sovereign institution that sets the control and directions of the Labour Party. Voting at Party conference is currently based on an equal balance of votes between members and affiliated trade unions, with each section holding 50% of the vote, and this parity should be upheld. The following changes aim to ensure that Party Conference is run in a manner which makes it genuinely accountable to these two groups, as well as allowing it to manage its own affairs and agenda more democratically and effectively.

Changes to Democratise Conference

- Each CLP and affiliated organisation should be able to submit a motion on a freely-chosen topic of either policy or organisation.
- Each CLP and affiliated organisation should subsequently be able to submit an amendment to such a motion.
- Each CLP and affiliated organisation should also be allowed to submit a constitutional Amendment to the Party's Rules.
- All constitutional amendments must be debated in the same year they are submitted.
- When the same constitutional amendments have been submitted by at least five CLPs or affiliated organisations, they shall earn a waiver to the 3 Year rule, meaning they will be on the agenda even if they have been debated in previous years.

Changes to the Timetable

- Conference motions and constitutional amendments should be submitted by the end of July.
- Such motions and constitutional amendments should be published and circulated by the last week in August.
- Any amendments to such motions should submitted by the middle of September.

Improving Conference Procedures

The following changes should be introduced to ensure that Conference procedures are as fair and democratic as possible:

- At least 50% of Conference's time should be allocated to debate involving elected Delegates.
- Adequate time should be set aside to debate constitutional amendments at Party conference.

- A space in the timetable of the 2018 Party Conference should be reserved for a motion submitted by the 2018 Women's Conference.
- The Labour Party should invest in a system to ensure that speakers are selected in a manner which is fair and transparent.
- Constitutional amendments should be debated and voted on separately, not bundled together in packages.
- The NEC should draw up standing orders for Party conference that outline procedures for: the conference timetable, procedure in debate, motions, composite motions, the future of composite motions when they are passed, emergency motions, withdrawal and remittance of motions, reference back, points of order, chair's ruling, suspension of standing orders, voting, including full procedures for card votes, ending debate and the role of the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC). These standing orders will be presented to the first session of each Party Conference in a CAC report for agreement by the conference.
- The CAC should explore a system of allowing delegates to advise in advance of their intentions to refer back reports or parts of them, in order to be able to explore potential solutions to their concerns in advance of conference, or alternatively to allow them to campaign publically for the position they are taking, as well as allowing the CAC to be able to factor them into their planning arrangements.
- The NEC should be required to report back to Conference on all of its key decisions, including those relating to policy, finances, campaigning, administration, and governance. Delegates should have the opportunity to scrutinise the NEC Report.

Improving the Rule Book

- All procedures, guidance notes, codes of conduct and appendices should be moved into the Party's rule book, so that they are amendable only at conference, unless the NEC makes a compelling argument that exemption be given to specific documents which need to be developed between conferences or which need to be kept outside of the rulebook.
- In cases where the NEC feels it is obliged to develop and implement new procedures, guidance notes, or codes of conduct, between conferences, or alternatively to keep procedural documents outside of the rule book, they should be required to outline these decisions in the NEC report, and have them scrutinised by Party conference.
- Any rules, procedures, or guidance notes, which are only regionally or locally applicable, and therefore inappropriate to be in the rule book, should be collated transparently and accessibly in the same place as the party rules, potentially on Membersnet.
- Efforts should be made to facilitate cross-referencing, annotations, and indexation of the rule book.

Supporting Argument

The Labour Party Conference needs to be democratised in order to enhance the role of members and affiliated trade unions. This should be done in a number of ways, in particular by giving delegates more influence over the agenda of Conference. In particular, the anachronistic '1968 Convention' requiring CLPs to wait a year for the rule changes they submit to be debated, should be abolished, and the 3 Year rule should be reformed to allow rule changes gaining over 5 submissions to secure a waiver. These rule changes would allow party members to overcome the institutional rigidities and hierarchies that stifle the transformation of the party.

Additional measures should also be taken to improve the transparency and functioning of Conference, including the development of standing orders by the NEC, clear procedures on issues such as references back, and transparent explainers of the fate of composited motions that get passed by Conference. In particular, delegates interested in moving reference back should be encouraged to give advance notice to the CAC, possibly by having their requests submitted by their CLPs following meetings, in order to allow for the resolution of any disagreements in advance of Conference where possible. This would allow for more delegates to understand the arguments behind references back and to consider whether to support them or not, leading to a higher quality of debate and a more manageable agenda, as well as making Conference discussions less dependent on the discretion of the chairs.

Finally, unless the NEC makes a compelling reason to the contrary, all existing procedures, guidelines, appendices, and Codes of Conduct, should be included within the rulebook, and should only be amendable at Party conference, thus improving accountability and limiting the possibility for discretionary changes to be made. Any exceptions to this should be reported by the NEC to Conference as part of an annual NEC Report, which delegates should be able to scrutinise. Additional rules which are only specific to particular areas, such as the standing orders for regional boards and CLPs, should be transparently collated in the same place as the rule book, potentially on Membersnet, so that all members have easy access to every rule, procedure, and guideline which affects their engagement with the party.