

Peter Willsman reports from Labour's Executive - NEC Meeting January 29th 2018

- **Introduction**

The meeting was pretty low-key, there were no fireworks. Jeremy had to leave before the end of the meeting to return to the Brexit imbroglio in the House of Commons. The discussion on Brexit at the NEC was serious, well-informed and comradely. There was general agreement that Jeremy was playing a very difficult hand the best way possible in the circumstances.

- **Leader's Report**

Jeremy took the NEC through the rapidly evolving Brexit situation. He highlighted the fact that even if a deal is agreed it will be impossible to get all the necessary primary legislation through Parliament within the short time limit. For this reason, the front bench is prepared to accept an extension of the negotiation period in order to ensure that "no-deal" is off the table. And to press Theresa May to accept as much of Labour's progressive way forward as possible. In such circumstances, Jeremy was prepared to have detailed discussions with the Prime Minister.

Jeremy reported that he is making a key-note speech at the Conference of European Socialists (PES) in Portugal. He intends to stress that socialist parties, within and without the EU, must work closely together every step of the way. Jeremy drew attention to the serious and increasing threat of the Far Right across the whole of Europe and beyond. He highlighted the negative effects of neo-liberalism and austerity. This has exacerbated the anger in many communities who feel totally neglected and ignored.

Jeremy also took up an issue raised by several NEC members, namely the shortage of funding within the increasingly disjointed education system. He stressed that the way the government has put all emphasis on exam results means that an increasing number of children are being left by the wayside. Jeremy detailed the major conference that is being

organised on all of these serious issues in education. Yet again, Jeremy stressed that all that really matters is a Labour Government.

Jeremy then took the NEC through significant international issues. In particular, he drew attention to the very negative developments in Brazil and Venezuela. He stressed that it was vital that we strengthened our link with the Workers' Party in Brazil. In relation to Venezuela, he emphasised that the aggressive threats from Trump and Bolsonaro would only make a fraught situation much worse. As always, the way forward is through discussion and dialogue in order to avoid unnecessary bloodshed. As Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter states "All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state".

Jeremy reported that he had attended the very moving Presidential inauguration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) in Mexico. It was particularly noteworthy that AMLO had huge support from the indigenous community in Mexico.

In the discussion that followed, NEC members raised points that arose in Jeremy's report. The issue of moving forward more quickly in relation to a second referendum was raised. In response, I emphasised, that in my view, Jeremy's tactics and strategy are the best in the circumstances. I added that I had been studying the polls and other information and it is clear that if Labour hitched its whole way forward to the second referendum "bandwagon" this could be electorally damaging.

- **Deputy Leader's Report**

The Deputy Leader reported on the implications for future election spending etc of the legal judgement in the case of the South Thanet Tory MP. He also reported on his work with the party's health team and with those campaigning on the appalling effects of benefit cuts and calling for an immediate improvement to the welfare and benefits regime.

- **Local Government**

Our Local Government Conference will be taking place in Warwick on 8-9 February and will feature keynote speeches from Jeremy and Andrew Gwynne MP.

The Local Govt section of the Party website now houses a hub housing resource and guidance for Labour Groups facing a local by-election.

Led by Nick Forbes, the LGA launched the "Breaking Point" campaign towards the end of 2018, highlighting council budgets are now at breaking point and calling for a real end to the austerity of this Tory Govt. There will be a plenary session on this campaign at the Local Govt Conference.

- **EPLP Leader's Report**

Richard Corbett gave a very informative report, much of which covered the Brexit situation and the vital need to avoid a "no-deal" scenario.

Richard reported that the city of Brussels honoured the memory of our friend and comrade Jo Cox, naming a square in her honour. Labour MEP's joined Jeremy Corbyn, the Mayor of Brussels, Keir Starmer and many of Jo's friends and family in paying tribute to her and vowing to carry on her work.

The European Parliament voted by a two thirds majority to initiate procedures against Hungary's far-right government led by Viktor Orban. It follows criticisms of the government's violations of core EU values, including suppressing media, violating the rule of law, anti-immigration measures and attacks on minorities and religious groups. Labour MEP's proudly voted for the motion, but disgracefully most Tory MEP's voted against.

- **International Report**

The Labour Party sent a large delegation to the 2018 PES Congress where Jeremy gave a key note speech. The main discussion areas at the Congress were Brexit and the European Elections.

We have also hosted fact-finding visits from our sister parties in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Japan. We are pleased that the Swedish Parliament has confirmed our sister party leader, Stefan Lofven, as new Prime Minister of Sweden.

- **General Secretary's Report**

a) Introduction

Jennie introduced this item, highlighting several pressing issues and took the NEC through the party's finance strategy (confidential). News had come through that Fiona Onasanya had been sentenced to 3 months in prison. This means, an immediate by-election has not been triggered. It is also likely that Fiona will appeal, thus it could be months before there is a Public Petition and by-election. Nevertheless, we are moving ahead with the selection of a PPC for Peterborough. Jennie added that in situations, such as short notice by-elections, the NEC panels will always have the addition of a representative from the appropriate CLP. It was also agreed that every effort should be made to have gender balance and BAME representation on the panels.

In relation to our finances, I stressed that we must always ensure that the proportion of money allocated to CLP's is always totally fair.

b) Selection Procedures: Police and Crime Commissioners, Metro Mayors and Greater London Assembly members

The NEC considered detailed papers on all of these 3 Selection Procedures. One of the main issues is to bring the Trigger Ballots into line with the new arrangements agreed for MP's at the 2018 Annual Conference.

It was pointed out that we cannot have all BAME shortlists due to legal reasons. But it was agreed that we can and should do more within the existing legislation.

Richard Leonard pointed out that in Scotland we seem to have had a plethora of different selection systems. He stressed that there must be more consistency.

c) Elections 2019

Local elections are taking place in 248 local authorities. 243 of these are existing local authorities and 5 are new, created from the amalgamation of 15 existing local authorities. Elections will be held in:

33 of the 36 Metropolitan Districts

168 District Councils

47 Non-Metropolitan Unitary Authorities

There are elections for mayoralities in:

Bedford, Copeland, Leicester, Mansfield and Middlesbrough and an election for the North of Tyne Metro-Mayor.

d) Annual Conference 2018 Review

There were 13,414 visitors registered for conference. The attendance numbers are consistent with the previous year. Overall, there were 1684 delegates, 965 female and 719 male. There were 1396 CLP delegates representing 579 CLP's, 832 female and 564 male. This is an increase of 126 CLP delegates from last year. There were 251 Trade Union delegates representing 12 trade unions, 115 female and 136 male. There were 37 Socialist Society delegates representing 22 organisations, 18 female and 19 male. (On this issue, we also need monitoring of BAME, disabled and LGBT delegate numbers).

Taking on board disability feedback from 2016, we continued to work closely with the venues in Liverpool to ensure that accessibility was a priority for all attendees to conference.

A creche service was once again provided by the Mobile Creche Company.

There were 438 fringe events, with organisations representing the private, public and voluntary sectors, including 160 Labour Party events.

Our exhibition in Liverpool in 2018 was full, with 165 stands, representing a wide and varied range including the third sector, leading businesses, unions and NGOs. We welcomed new

exhibitors that included The Royal British Legion, The Brain Tumour Charity, Bristol Energy, Eaton, Leonard Cheshire and the NFU.

Following a rule change in 2016, conference again had the right to "reference back" parts of policy documents. The Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) set out an amended process for how delegates could "reference back" sections from the policy documents to assist with timetabling. Across the week, eleven reference back votes were put to conference, of which ten were passed. These issues, relating to housing, education, the NHS and social care, will, following the decision of Conference, now pass back to the NPF for further consideration this year.

e) Women's Conference 2019 Telford 23-24 February (compositing February 22 in the evening)

At present, 980 people are registered for Women's Conference:

CLP Delegates 628, Affiliate Delegates 130, Visitor Day Pass 35, Visitor Weekend Pass 159, Ex-Officio 28

146 motions have been submitted to the conference from CLPs. Some 20 were on the issue of Universal Credit and 10 on Pensions. There is only 1 on Brexit - this defends national annual conference policy which is to go one step at a time, in other words, Jeremy's policy. The motion therefore defends and upholds Party policy (on the other hand, motions demanding immediate action on a second referendum misinterpret Party policy)

- **Democracy Review and Internal Procedural Matters**

a) Update re Democracy Review

Annual Conference 2018 gave the NEC powers to amend certain rules with immediate effect, in order to implement the recommendations of the Democracy Review. There are several areas in which the NEC is empowered to bring forward rule changes which will be immediately incorporated into rules. Some of these areas include the following:

Membership rates, Codification of Special Measures, Establishment of Young Labour and Equalities branches, Job Shares, Rules for multi-constituency CLPs and many more.

b) Standing orders for national annual conference

Standing orders for conference have been much needed for many years and Jennie has responded to grassroots pressure. The NEC subjected the document to rigorous scrutiny and it will be brought back for further discussion.

I pointed out that the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) organises the agenda. It does not have the power to put things on the agenda, that is the NEC's job.

I also pressed a point in relation to reference backs of the CAC report each day. I pointed out that each reference back should be taken in turn and voted on before moving to the next reference back. All too often, they are all lumped together, which, of course, greatly benefits the Platform.

c) Papers Covering Party Procedures and Codes of Conduct

This set of very detailed papers was moved by the Executive Director of Legal Affairs, the inestimable Gordon Nardell QC. Gordon led a very informed discussion and took on board the key points raised. The papers will be rewritten and published as soon as possible.

- Minutes of NEC Sub-Committees

Under this item, I referred to the discussions at the Organisation Committee. We were given a report of CLP motions submitted to the NEC. These covered issues such as the need for a Charter of Members' Rights, for a Party Ombudsperson, and for progress on recommendations in the Chakrabarti report.

There were also some 8 motions on the subject of Brexit. And yet, in the London Evening Standard, which a comrade had been reading, no less than the paper's Deputy Political Editor stated that "Labour chiefs are being flooded with demands for the party to move towards backing a second referendum". It seems that the new Editor of the Evening Standard is giving his staff carte blanche to play fast and loose with the facts. Pretty much the same as the Editor did himself when he was the Tory Chancellor of the Exchequer.

I am also a member of the "Economy, Business and Trade Policy Commission" of the National Policy Forum (NPF). Over the last 6 months we have received a total of some 100 submissions, each grappling with the economic implications and consequences of Brexit.

At the Economy, Business and Trade Policy Commission it was agreed that those Party members who make particularly noteworthy Submissions will be invited to come to the Policy Commission to take part in a discussion on their Submission.

- **Postscript**

Quote: Unquote

"The Labour leader is a waking nightmare for the super rich. The party's 2017 manifesto pledged the next Labour Government will put and end to the rigged economy that benefits only the super-rich. Many super-rich would prefer to wait out a Corbyn government rather than leave. Instead, some are taking evasive action such as cashing in pensions early to avoid a potential tax hit, or handing money to their children. Ultimately, however, the only way to shelter private functions entirely from a determined government is to quit the country."
Sunday Times, 20th January 2019

"Margaret Thatcher more than halved the top rate of income tax paid by high earners. She broke the trade unions. Over their 16 years in office, Thatcher and John Major flogged off more assets than France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Australia and Canada put together. If workers today got the same share of national income as in the 70s, a full-time employee now on the median salary would get a pay rise of £5471" Aditya Chakraborty, Guardian, 23rd January 2019

"Median household wealth for the top 10% richest in Britain has leapt from £752,900 to £1,039,400 while those in the bottom 10% have seen theirs slump from £54,900 to £31,900 since the Tories took power" Guardian, 17th December 2018

"Britain's employment rate remains below that of many other countries, including Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland"
Sunday Times, 20th January 2019

"Figures from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development show that it would take the average UK full-time worker on a salary of £28,000 (median full-time earnings) 160

years to earn what an average FTSE 100 chief executive is paid in just one year." Investors Chronicle 26th July 2019

"There is more than a suspicion that companies and their executives have enriched themselves at workers' and customers' expense for many years." Investors Chronicle 24th January 2019

"While 60% of Labour's "leave" voters are working class, 70% of its "remain" voters are middle class. Labour needs both of its electoral wings to be able to fly, so to speak." Cllr Nick Davies, Labour Briefing Coop, March 2017

"The most revolutionary thing one can do is always to proclaim loudly what is happening."
Rosa Luxemburg