**Peter Willsman reports from Labour’s Executive - NEC Meeting November 27th 2018**

This NEC was our annual “Away Day”. Many years ago we used to go to a posh country house owned by a union for a very in-depth examination of all the broad issues affecting our party. Gradually, we have moved the “Away Day” nearer and nearer to HQ. At this NEC we reached the denouement. The “Away Day” was at HQ. It was also our first meeting chaired by our new Chair, Wendy Nicholls, a feisty working-class Yorkshire woman. Wendy made it clear from the beginning that she intended to be very firm and she was looking at yours truly as she said it. A certain amount of banter ensued between us at various points during the meeting. At the close of the meeting, Wendy was still in good spirits, having chaired very effectively and she agreed that between the two of us it was a draw.

* **Leaders Report**

Jeremy took the meeting through the over 500 pages of the convoluted Brexit deal. He highlighted the obvious weaknesses and flaws and outlined Labour’s response on each of them. A major point which Jeremy made, which caused much merriment in the room was that many aspects of the deal are in direct opposition to the mantra of “Take Back Control”.

Jeremy also took the NEC through other issues that are being pursued in Parliament by our Front Bench. Jeremy highlighted the link between our campaigns in Parliament and our national campaigning priorities. He also outlined our campaign plans and priorities in each of the regions and in Scotland and Wales. Jeremy reeled off the usual enormous list of events which he had taken part in since our last NEC.

Finally, Jeremy went through the many international crises and problems that we have to address. He highlighted the terrible disaster in the Yemen and the way that some national leaders are downplaying the appalling Khashoggi tragedy. This sort of behaviour would have been heavily criticised in the Middle Ages let alone the 21st century. Jeremy also highlighted the political setbacks in Brazil and the way that even the legal system has been corrupted in relation to cases involving the Workers Party. Jeremy ended by highlighting the very good news from Mexico and the stupendous victory of AMLO. AMLO has spelt out a very progressive programme and if anyone can make progressive changes it is AMLO.

In the ensuing discussion of the points raised by Jeremy, Richard Corbett (MEP EPLP Leader) gave a very authoritative exposition of the various scenarios that could come into play once a “Deal” has been voted down in Parliament. Richard congratulated Jeremy on his effective demolition of the “Deal” in his debates with the Prime Minister.

Diana Holland pointed out that the Brexit Agricultural Document made no mention of the workforce and their rights. Jeremy emphasised that the front bench are pursuing this matter.

* **Front Bench Representation and Political Discussion**

At this Away Day, we had a detailed presentation by John McDonnell, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer.

John updated the NEC on the wide range of the work that our Treasury team is undertaking. All policy proposals for the next Labour Government are being rigorously costed. John also gave a summary of the excellent, professional reports that have been prepared for our Treasury team. Each of these made several excellent proposals and we are getting these worked up for presentation to the public.

In relation to our nationalisation proposals, we are going public a step at a time. At Annual Conference, we set out our proposals in relation to the Water Industry. Many of the ideas that are being worked on, involve co-operative initiatives and solutions. The Co-op Party are making a significant input to the work in progress.

In relation to our proposal for a National Investment Bank, John reported that the Team are firming up proposals following the consultation process.

In the discussion that followed, the dire funding situation facing local government was stressed. Many of our local services are now facing collapse for the first time since the introduction of the Welfare State by the 1945 Labour Government. I stressed the importance of getting our message across. What works at both local and national level is to promote clear promises that we repeat time and time again until the whole population are aware of them. Based on my experience on the doorstep I suggested the following possibilities:

We promise to abolish zero hours contracts (all ages are appalled at the way that young people are being treated in this respect)

We pledge (say) 30,000 more nurses in 3 years

We pledge (so many) extra thousands houses in 3 years – to BOTH rent and buy

We pledge no tax or national insurance to be paid below an annual income of (say) £15,000 per year

We pledge that our funding for these social gains will come from reducing the massive and increasing inequality between the rich and the poor, now back to Edwardian levels of Downton Abbey.

* **NEC Procedural Documents**
* **NEC Aims and Objectives**

Jennie presented a very detailed paper to the NEC setting out three key objectives:

* To organise – developing community organising and campaigning at all levels of the party and embedding an organising culture.
* To grow – to drive membership forward as well as to retain existing members and grow our party still further.
* To win – to ensure we have the strategy and structures in place to win elections at local, national and UK-wide level, including a snap General Election should one be called.
* **NEC Terms of Reference**

This 25 page document set out in detail the major aspects of NEC responsibilities and procedures. Your 9 CLP reps focused on making two improvements to this document.

NEC Delegated Powers

We proposed that “the General Secretary shall annually propose and the NEC shall approve a scheme of delegation which outlines (i) to whom powers are delegated (ie named persons or designated posts), the nature of those powers and what levels of discretion are involved; (ii) what are the reporting requirements, how those to whom powers are delegated shall record decisions taken using these delegated, and to whom do they report them”.

This was carried 17 votes to 12.

* **The Party’s Policy Making Process Should Be Totally Integrated Within The NEC**

We proposed that the following be added to the document: “The NEC is the custodian of the policy of the Labour Party. The Joint Policy Committee (JPC) is a properly constituted sub-committee of the NEC, sitting alongside other sub-committees. It comprises NEC members who wish to participate as members and additional representatives from the National Policy Forum as agreed by the NEC”.

Jennie stated that the whole issue of policy-making was still under review and that a report would be made to the NEC in November 2019. We took this on board and proposed that we simply vote on the principle that policy-making should be integrated within the NEC taking account of the results of the review. This vote on the basic principle was defeated by 20 votes to 11.

* **Preparation For Elections 2019, General Election and Policy Delivery (Reports from the Senior Staff)**
* **A New Fundraising Approach**

Rachel McCaffrey gave a detailed report and led discussion on this item. Among the points that Rachel made was that we are rebranding and refocusing the Thousand Club. In order to support a sustainable year-round fundraising programme, we will identify key campaign moments eg “NHS at 70” and focus fundraising, locally and nationally, around these campaign moments.

* **The Work of the Stakeholders**

Finn McGoldrick gave a detailed report and led discussion on this item. Finn covered a wide range of issues and drew attention to the important work of the Party’s Women, BAME, LGBT, and Disabled Structures. She also highlighted the extent to which our Socialist Societies act as a link between regional and national levels. In local government we are further improving our training and support for councillors, focusing on mental health and well-being. Finn also highlighted our training and development programme for young members. She also outlined the various policy round-table local initiatives, particularly in relation to community engagement. We are also seeking to identify and propagate best practice for CLP’s and PPC’s.

* **Community Organising**

Dan Firth gave a detailed report and led discussion on this item. We will soon have a team of around 40, with most of these working in the Regions. Activity has been focused on the, some, 100 marginals. In the last 3 months around 5,000 activists have become involved and some 1,000 trained in organising including youth and social media. The top tweet from a trainee had some 500,000 views. Dan highlighted the “barnstorms” initiatives with Jeremy and Ian Lavery. Jeremy stressed the success of these events which especially involved members of the public that are not party members.

During the discussion it was stressed that motions carried at Annual Conference, often highlight issues that should be a focus of our local campaigning (eg Safety in tower blocks, Citizens Rights in diverse communities and the dire situation facing the homeless).

* **Policy and National Policy Forum**

Andrew Fisher gave a detailed report and led discussion on this item. Andrew pointed out that the Women’s Conference will have much more of a policy role and that there will be many more motions submitted and timetabled at Annual Conference. Andrew argued that we need to see how the latter develops vis-à-vis the NPF. Andrew is also seeking to ensure that the Shadow Cabinet policy ideas are properly taken through the NPF process. It was accepted around the table that this was essential if the NPF is to be properly involved and effective. It was also stressed that the NPF must be much integrated into the Party’s local and regional structures. The wider issue of the need to improve the accountability of local NPF reps to the members was also stressed.

* **Strategy and Communications**

Karl Showburn gave a detailed report and led discussion on this item. Karl outlined the progressive narrative that our team are consistently putting across – especially highlighting the appalling effects of austerity and the huge and widening inequality gap between the very rich and everyone else. It was pointed out that we have a considerable poll lead on several key issues eg public services, fairness, support for the many not the few.

* **Democracy Review Implementation Schedule**

The following are some of the more key dates in the schedule:

Item Date Report to be given

Model standing orders for Regional Exec Ctte – January 2019

Young Labour Governance - January 2019

Standing orders for national annual conference - January 2019

NCC Procedural Guidelines January 2019

BAME Membership, structures & elections May 2019

Disabled membership, structures & elections May 2019

Charter of members’ rights July 2019

Outcomes from Local Govt review July 2019

Review of Policy Making November 2019

* **Key Points from NEC Sub-Committees**

\*At the Organisation Ctte it had been proposed that CLPs and unions could only submit motions to Annual Conference between early August and early September. Several of us pointed out that now the nonsense of “contemporary” motions has been abolished, CLPs and unions should have much more time to agree and submit their motions to conference. It was agreed that the staff will report back with proposals to give CLPs and unions considerably more time than simply August when very few have any meetings.

\*It has been proposed that the full Annual Conference 2019 in Brighton will, for the first time, begin on the Saturday ie Saturday 21st September.

* **Postcript**

**Quote: Unquote**

“Research from the Legatum Institute showed support among Conservative voters for nationalising rail, water, electricity and gas was between 65 and 76%”. (Investors Chronicle, 26 October)

“Suppliers to one in 10 British companies are failing to pay the minimum wage, from a survey of managers for the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply”. (Observer, 19 August)

“Water companies could have funded all their day-to-day running and their long-term investments out of the bills paid by customers. Instead, managers have lumbered the firms with £51bn of debt to pay for shareholders’ dividends, from a report from the University of Greenwich”. (Guardian, 17 October)

“Senior civil servants have revealed that the government’s decision to build a new generation of civil nuclear power stations, starting with Hinkley Point, is linked to maintaining enough skills to keep Britain’s nuclear “deterrent””. (David Hencke, Tribune)