

This is a personal account of the meeting. This is not a comprehensive or official report, but highlights issues that may be of particular interest. Apologies for the lateness of this, but I have been on holiday.

Branch Funds

The September NEC discussed branch funds, and the proposed funding for branches of up to £200 a year for room bookings and up to £50 a year for miscellaneous postage. It had not been clear whether these guidelines had been agreed, so a formal vote was taken at the October meeting. The NEC voted overwhelmingly in favour of these amounts, with a handful of NEC members (including myself) feeling that these sums were inadequate and voting against.

A long discussion took place over a high level of unhappiness from branches over funding. It is clear that this continues to be a major issue for ex-MSF branches. Some branches (e.g. those who spent money last year but with cheques being cleared this year) have been allocated additional funds, but other requests have been rejected, and it remains unclear what has happened to a third group of requests. A meeting will take place with one branch secretary from each region (selected by Regional Secretaries) to discuss branch finance.

Women's NEC Seats

Sharon Allen (who held one of the Women's Seats) has resigned in order to take a job with ASLEF. The Amicus rulebook does not allow members to work for another union and to hold senior lay positions within our own union. There is already a vacancy for a Women's Seat arising from the death of Vi Huddart earlier this year.

The elections for these seats will be combined, and will take place early next year. The closing date for nominations is 7th January, with the ballot to take place 21st February to 14th March. The GPMU will participate in the election; UNIFI will not (for technical reasons to do with the wording of Transfer of Engagements documents).

Whitehall College

The September NEC had agreed the 'mothballing' of Whitehall College due to concerns around fire safety. The GPFC had subsequently met and recommended the closure and sale of the College, following the discovery of asbestos in areas of the building. Several of us expressed concern about this, and it was eventually agreed that no final decision will be taken before a full review of educational facilities.

General Purposes and Finance Committee

Sharon Allen's resignation left a vacancy on this key committee. It was agreed that Brian Pemberton would replace her. Jerry Hicks was removed from the GPFC and replaced with Tam Mitchell. Some NEC members were unhappy that Jerry had sometimes voted against decisions of the GPFC at a subsequent NEC meeting. Others felt that Jerry was

removed from the GPFC for political reasons, and that this would reduce debate and democracy. (I voted against Jerry being removed from the GPFC).

Wembley Stadium Dispute

The NEC discussed the dispute at the Wembley Stadium, and subsequent events at the TUC. This was a long discussion, which cannot be understood without some background information.

Colleagues may have heard of this important dispute, at the prestigious Wembley Stadium project, in which national conditions (the 'Blue Book' in Construction) were under threat. The dispute was successfully resolved last month, in a clear victory for members, following negotiations between Amicus and GMB officials and management. National conditions have been retained, and all the members involved will all return to work.

The background to the dispute is complex. Around 240 steel erectors – split between Amicus and the GMB – were put under pressure to work compulsory overtime (a 66 hour week with compulsory weekend working), and were told that the traditional 'last in first out' system for redundancies would be replaced by a points system. They refused to do this, negotiations broke down, and the workforce was dismissed. They then mounted a picket line outside the workplace, and also sought moral and financial support from across the trade union movement. Amicus repudiated the dispute following legal advice; the GMB did not. The September NEC meeting endorsed the repudiation of the dispute (with five members voting against, and two abstaining).

The members concerned lobbied the last NEC meeting, and also lobbied the TUC asking for support and distributing leaflets critical of Amicus. Two other leaflets critical of the role of Amicus were circulated at the TUC, although it is unclear whether these were distributed by Wembley members or by members of the delegation.

An Amicus delegation meeting was held at the start of the TUC. The General Secretary reported at this that the GMB wished to submit an emergency resolution on the Wembley dispute, but it could not be heard without the support of all unions on the TUC General Council. He reported that Amicus would not agree to this resolution being submitted, so it would not be discussed by the TUC. I argued at the delegation meeting that it was difficult for the delegation to agree this without seeing the text of the resolution, that the text of the resolution should be distributed to delegates, and that the delegation should take a collective view after this.

The GPFC subsequently met and was of the view that asking for the delegation to see the text of the emergency resolution was an attempt to overturn NEC decisions. This was discussed by the NEC, with some members agreeing with the GPFC position, and others disagreeing. My own view was that – since the emergency resolution had not existed at the time of the previous NEC meeting and its content was unknown – there was no NEC position on this, and asking for the text of the resolution and a collective decision on the resolution could not be an attempt to overturn an NEC decision.

The NEC agreed that the GPFC will draft recommendations on collective responsibility.

Finance and Membership

This was discussed briefly, with a fuller discussion to take place in December. There is a current shortfall in subscription income, at odds with reported membership figures of a 9000 increase. If income is as predicted there will be a small budget surplus at end of year; if income remains reduced we will be in a 'break even' position.

Work is continuing on integrating membership records, with the intention that Full Time Officers and Branch Secretaries will have access to information by the end of the year.

Information on the gender split of the union is now available, with 22% of the membership being female.

Other Reports

Tony Dubbins gave a long report on the 'Warwick Agreement' outlining the basis of policy agreements between the Government and the unions (especially the 'Big 4' unions of which Amicus is one). A brief report was given on the Labour Party Conference, where Derek Simpson had moved the motion on manufacturing.

The NEC did not discuss Agenda for Change (at odds with another report I have seen).

Correspondence

I am happy to answer any queries on this, but there are too many items to list individually. A motion was passed criticising the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Belmarsh Prison.

Gill George

16th November 2004