

Report of NEC Meeting 6th July 2005

This is not an official or comprehensive report, but picks out issues that may be of particular interest to members in Health.

This report is written under guidelines for all NEC members on collective responsibility. Like other NEC members, I am now allowed to outline my own position in debates or votes only if I am specifically asked about my personal position.

I welcome questions on my personal position from members. Please feel free to contact me by phone: 020 7502 6905 (home) or by e-mail: gill@ghg.me.uk

Childcare Expenses

An NEC member raised the outstanding issue of childcare expenses. She said the issue had been running on for some months, there seemed to be a breakdown of communication between ourselves and the CPHVA, this was an important issue for our activists and particularly for women activists. Perhaps the issue could go straight to the General Purposes and Finance Committee to make recommendations, rather than delaying further. The Chair reported that the National Officer was working on recommendations that would be costed and brought back to the NEC; also the outstanding CPHVA correspondence would receive a reply.

Conference

The NEC did not – with one important item excepted - discuss Policy Conference and Rules Conference outcomes from May. The General Secretary reported that Head of Conference John Gibbins had prepared a report of decisions that required action. A special GPFC meeting had been called to consider this. The GPFC would make a detailed proposal to the NEC on where we were and what we would do. An NEC member asked if Conference outcomes could be publicised. Conference decisions were made available on the Amicus website later that day – and can be found at:

<http://www.amicustheunion.org/Default.aspx?page=2084>

Delegates who did not attend Conference have been contacted asking for a return of their expenses. The possibility could also be explored of adding the amount to their arrears if money is not returned.

Lucy Kelly

It was reported in the morning that a disciplinary investigation of Lucy Kelly (Deputy General Secretary) had been concluded, although it had not yet been possible to proceed with a formal disciplinary hearing. In the afternoon, the General Secretary reported that Lucy had emailed him that morning to request voluntary redundancy, and he had already approved this. He reported that Lucy might have a case for claiming sex discrimination if she was not given voluntary redundancy (as a male Full Time Officer was recently given voluntary redundancy in similar circumstances). Also she had made serious allegations against the union. There was a risk she could win on a technicality if this went to Tribunal or court. She had to be given voluntary redundancy. Several NEC members expressed considerable unease at this outcome, feeling that it sent out a wrong message.

A separate investigation into Assistant General Secretary Les Bayliss continues.

Outgoing AEEU Executive

A long running argument has taken place over the size of pensions paid to the previous Executive of the union (from the former AEEU section). A settlement has now been reached, with savings to Amicus arising from this. Amicus will release a formal statement on this. It is worth noting that members of the current Amicus NEC are NOT paid by the union, and do not receive pensions from the union.

Equal Pay Lobby

It was agreed that a lobby for equal pay for women would be organised to coincide with the Labour Party Conference. This is intended to involve other unions alongside Amicus. This was at the request of the Amicus National Women's Committee.

Rover

There was a discussion on a request for a £10,000 donation towards the hardship fund, following the closure of Rover and the loss of thousands of jobs. The Regional Council had already donated £10,000. The eventual view was that the donation would not solve the problems, and the NEC would write to the Regional Council sympathetically but exploring other ways of offering support. The General Secretary reported a conversation with the Prime Minister where Tony Blair had found it difficult to believe that those losing their jobs would find it hard to find new jobs, or would only pick up poorly paid temporary jobs. The comment from Tony Blair was, 'Is that really the case? I think we should investigate that'. Amicus will be carrying out its own investigation into the long term effects of Rover closing. The General Secretary pointed out that, a few years ago, the Government would have nationalised the plant.

Abortion Rights

The NEC agreed affiliation to Abortion Rights UK, at the request of the National Women's Committee. Abortion Rights UK is the new name for the National Abortion Campaign, following a recent merger with another abortion rights organisation.

Merger

Talks towards the proposed merger with the TGWU and the GMB are progressing, with negotiations being conducted by a small negotiating team from each union. It is envisaged that the new union will come into being in January 2007.

Election of Full Time Officers

Apologies to colleagues not interested in this – the relative length reflects the number of questions I have been asked about this issue.

The Rules Conference in May narrowly carried a rule amendment that stated, '*All future/new National Officials and regional Full Time Officials of the Union shall be elected by a ballot of all the members in the appropriate constituency who are eligible to vote*'. This was an NEC rule amendment – it had been passed by the NEC, and the NEC recommended support for it at Conference.

The General Secretary reported to the NEC on a financial shortfall arising from fewer applicants than anticipated for voluntary redundancy.

The Construction National Committee had expected an election to fill a vacant National Officer post. The General Secretary reported that he had attended the Construction NIC to explain that it was unrealistic to elect a new employee when we were trying to reduce the headcount. He told them there would be no election because it was contrary to any form of logic. He had assigned another National Officer to these duties. There was nothing in the rule that said we had to have an election – this was only if we decided to fill a post.

The May NEC had agreed that Amicus organisers could be regraded to full officer status where this would assist the voluntary redundancy programme. The General Secretary reported that some of them had already been told this by Regional Secretaries. This conflicted with the rule. The NEC had to investigate a rule change (i.e. changing the rule for the election of Full Time Officers).

In the course of the debate, the General Secretary outlined four options where vacancies arose. Posts could be left vacant. Posts could be covered by another officer redeployed into the position. The NEC could amend the rule (requiring a two thirds majority of the NEC to vote in favour). Finally - requiring only a simply majority of the NEC to approve it – the Rules Conference could be recalled, and a proposal for rule change could be put to this.

A member of the Construction NIC read a statement on behalf of that Committee. The Committee believed that the election of the National Officer was a matter for the sector to discuss and make recommendations. They supported election.

One NEC member said there were serious concerns. The NEC had suddenly been told of financial issues that had not been known about in May. There was a need for regular detailed written reports on finance to the NEC. The NEC had to have a handle on the financial affairs of the union. Also we should not be giving voluntary redundancy where this left posts to be filled. This would cost money not save it, and would cause organisational chaos. But the rule was clear. It was the NEC's rule in the first place. We had a duty to implement the rule book, and the union and the NEC would lose credibility if we did not. There was a fifth option. We should listen to members in construction, and elect the National Officer.

Other NEC members disagreed. One said that he welcomed idea of coming up with a form of change. We had to look at the financial situation. If we changed the rule, we could make the rule work effectively. We needed to discuss the constituency and equalities, and if we went ahead it would open up more problems. We had a responsibility to look at some form of workable means.

Another NEC member said the recalled rules conference was a preferred option, but we had to take into account the cost. We would be open to the accusation of spending members' money when the NEC could have decided. We had put ourselves in a difficult position. He was prepared to be persuaded financially of a rules change to defer but not overturn the election of full time officers. It was foolishness to put the finances of the union in jeopardy.

One NEC member wanted a time limit if we put off the election of full time officers for restructuring. There could be the same situation in five years time. The next merger was the big one, and the election of full time officers might not carry on after this.

Another wanted a full financial debate. NEC members needed a thorough examination of finance, and the ability to put in requests for information. The rule was the decision of Conference and should be upheld in principle, but we couldn't divorce this from the financial situation.

The General Secretary replied at length, raising the merger strategy and the proposal to build a super union.

The eventual outcome was that the NEC noted the General Secretary's report.

Health Sector Motions

The Health Sector National Committee had submitted motions on reps having access to membership records, affiliation to the Socialist Health association, calling for health sector branches to be retained in the forthcoming branch reorganisation, asking for up to five Regional Sector Committees per year, and asking for Regional Occupational Advisory Committees to be restored and allowed to meet up to five times a year. Colleagues will be aware of the importance of some of these issues to very many activists in the Health sector.

The first motion was noted with current practice to continue, affiliation to the Socialist Health association was agreed, and the motion on health specific branches was noted as part of consultation. The important motions on Regional Sector Committees and Regional Occupational Advisory Committees were **agreed** subject to there being an industrial need for these meetings. A question from an NEC member clarified that approval may be given by the NEC or the General Secretary or the National Officer for the Health Sector.

CPHVA

The General Secretary reported that Mark Jones of the CPHVA was leaving the employment of Amicus and returning to New Zealand. Karen Reay had been assigned as 'lead professional officer' for the CPHVA until 'a better solution could be found'.

Rolls Royce

Jerry Hicks (a convenor at Rolls Royce who is also an NEC member) had written to the General Secretary regarding a recent unofficial dispute where Amicus members had faced the sack. Amicus had repudiated the dispute without contacting members in the workplace, and Jerry was fiercely critical of this. He ended the letter by saying, 'P.S. We won'.

Gill George
11th July 2005