

## **Report of NEC Meeting 24<sup>th</sup> May 2006**

*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.*

### **Finance**

The Union has a new Director of Finance, Christine Grant (formerly Deputy Director of Finance at Unison). She will begin work on 12<sup>th</sup> June. It was reported that both income and expenditure were below budget for the first quarter; at this stage no action was thought to be necessary. The overall objective of working within subscription income remains on target.

NEC members reported that standing orders had been stopped to encourage members to pay by direct debit. This had caused real problems, as it had not been communicated reliably to members, reps or officers. The General Secretary stressed the general intention to get members paying by direct debit, but for members to be prevented from paying their subscription by other methods was wrong and due to a misunderstanding.

### **Accreditation of Reps**

The NEC agreed recommendations from the General Purposes and Finance Committee on proceeding with a system for accrediting reps. New reps should notify the senior rep, or the FTO in the absence of a senior rep. The senior rep will notify the FTO. It was clarified that employers will be notified, not asked to confirm the status and scope of the rep. During the discussion, the point was that employers should not be contacted unless reps were happy for this to take place (due to the risks for reps in some workplaces without union recognition). There was also discussion about the role of regions in validating that biennial re-elections take place – some NEC members felt this was an issue for members, not for regions. A form of words was agreed that requires regions to consult with accredited reps to ensure that appropriate elections take place.

### **National Equality Award**

Amicus will run a competition open to branches, workplace groups or regional committees to demonstrate best practice in the promotion of equal opportunities. The launch will feature the union's campaigns on youth, anti-racism, equal pay, flexible working for parents and access to work for people with disabilities.

### **Recruitment and Organising Strategy**

At the end of last year, the NEC approved an organising strategy that aimed to create sustainable workplace organisation. This would include working with lay reps, and setting up regional training on organising. Assistant General Secretary Paul Talbot reported that pilot exercises had been completed in every region but one, more intensive work would be carried out with Regional Officers, and Regional Secretaries would be asked to report on targets identified at the start of the year.

### **Senior Management Team Changes**

The NEC went into closed session for this part of the meeting. Following a prolonged and sometimes heated debate, the NEC voted to appoint Graham Goddard as Deputy General Secretary, and Head of Health Gail Cartmail and Regional Secretary Jennie Bremner as Assistant General Secretaries. The General Secretary clarified that new responsibilities would be additional to current duties (so Gail Cartmail will continue as Head of Health).

Other Officer changes were reported by the General Secretary. Jennie Bremner will cover the South East, following the sad death of John Hellyer. Les Bayliss will cover the duties of Bob Pagan in the Construction Sector. Laurence Faircloth will take on the duties of Regional Secretary in the South

West region. Vernon Robson is the new National Officer in the GPM Sector, following the established selection process for this sector.

### **Car Plant Closures**

The NEC discussed the serious loss of jobs threatened at the Vauxhall Plant in Ellesmere Port and the Peugeot plant in Coventry. The General Secretary reported on some of the problems – Peugeot wanting to transfer production to Slovakia, with wages a fraction of UK rates. He felt that strikes, overtime bans and demonstrations would not work but a consumer boycott might. Even a 3 to 4% loss of market share would be very damaging to Peugeot. Also Amicus could cancel its contract with Vauxhall if the company carried on with threatened job cuts. An NEC member supported the consumer boycott but said we did not need to counterpoise this to industrial action – we should support industrial action if members voted for it. The Union was giving a lot of money to Labour – members in car plants and the NHS were asking if we were getting value for money. It was also important that we didn't end up with a narrow nationalist campaign. Another NEC member talked about 'the race to the bottom' – Ford, for example, used a tactic of playing off plants against one another, and putting the workforce under pressure to give up their rights. It was agreed to set aside £1 million to fund publicity for a consumer boycott.

### **Occupational Health**

The NEC reiterated its opposition to Occupational Health doctors becoming the first port of call for signing sick notes. The TUC is now taking this up as a campaigning issue.

### **Political Officer**

Scottish NEC member Allan Cameron has been appointed to a post as political officer with Amicus, working primarily in Scotland. Gordon Whitman replaces him as Vice Chair, and Alan Mercer replaces him on the GPFC. Margaret Lawson will replace him on the National Political Committee.

### **Merger**

The merger between TGWU and Amicus is still on track, with the TGWU proposing a timescale of approximately 25 weeks to move to a ballot of members. The intention before has been for a start date for a new union of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007; the General Secretary reported that even if this was missed, we could still make the first quarter of 2007. The GMB position remains less clear, although the General Secretary reported that he and Tony Woodley were seeking a meeting with Paul Kenny (newly elected GMB General Secretary). ***Since the NEC met, it has been reported that the GMB has taken a decision to withdraw from the merger.***

### **Staff Disciplinary Matters**

Dismissed staff member Jimmy Warne has, as a member of Amicus, sought union funding for his tribunal case against the union. His case is that members have a right to legal representation. The General Secretary reported the GPFC recommendation that legal support was at the discretion of the NEC, that support should not be given to take action against Amicus, and that the case should also not be supported as it had no prospect of winning at tribunal. An NEC member said this was an exceptional case – that they would not normally support someone taking action against the union but this case had caused widespread unease, this was not a situation Jimmy Warne would have wanted to be in, and Jimmy was a long standing member who had worked very hard for the union. Another NEC member felt it was wrong to open this debate. A third argued that we should not withdraw support now, because it was a different set of circumstances in Jimmy Warne's case. The NEC had never taken a view on this – this wasn't just a staffing issue. The NEC endorsed the recommendation not to fund Jimmy Warne's case, with around 7 or 8 voting against, and a small number of abstentions.

### **Sector Conferences**

It was agreed that where delegates were accommodated in guest houses not providing an evening meal, they would receive an additional overnight allowance to cover the costs of eating out.

Conference Manager John Gibbins confirmed that conference paperwork would be sent out in advance of the conferences taking place.

The national Women's Conference is now scheduled to take place on 2<sup>nd</sup> November in Blackpool.

### **Equalities**

The NEC put forward Pauline Fraser as the Amicus nomination for the TUC Women's award. The General Secretary reported that Amicus now has 22% women members (with 23% women NEC members, 26% women TUC delegates, 19% women officers). We were therefore delivering on equalities. Part of our equalities strategy for the future would be to push for the recognition of equalities reps in the workplace.

### **Communications**

The April magazine featured a 4 page pull out on the new union. The e-activist bulletin has been well received. Media coverage has focused on jobs and pensions (especially campaign at Peugeot, Vauxhall and Prudential). A wide range deal of recruitment and campaign material has been developed by the Communications Department, some of this to be used at sector conferences in June. Amicus is sponsoring 'Kick Racism out of Football' (and distributing 100,000 posters of the England team).

### **Legal Report**

Important ongoing cases are around exposure to asbestos and toxic chemicals. The long-running dispute with the CMA appears to be progressing towards resolution, although taking longer than anticipated.

### **Political Report**

Deputy General Secretary Tony Dubbins submitted written and verbal reports. Amicus has grave concerns over the delivery of the Warwick agreement commitments. Amicus gave significant support to Labour in the local government elections, particularly in London – a survey and follow up letter to 13,454 members in 8 boroughs, and a letter and postal vote form to 7017 members in a further 4 boroughs.

The written report indicated that Patricia Hewitt is a member of the Amicus Parliamentary Group. (Perhaps we should let her know our policies on the NHS...)

An NEC member raised concerns about the continuing haemorrhaging of jobs in manufacturing and the print industry, and the deficits in the NHS. It was suggested that the NEC should be kept up to date with Amicus MPs who refused to support Amicus policies.

Another NEC member raised the absolute crisis in the NHS, with escalating job losses, cuts and privatisation, and a real risk that we would lose the NHS if we didn't fight for it.

Tony Dubbins agreed on the problems in the NHS. The 'choice' agenda was about false arguments that didn't stack up; what people wanted was good quality services provided locally. Amicus would continue to press this case.

### **Correspondence**

Very little correspondence came before the NEC. The NEC noted a motion on pensions and support for the National Pensioners Convention. It was agreed to donate £2000 to Defend Council Housing to support research on direct investment in council housing. A series of recommendations from the LGBT National Committee were discussed; most of these were rejected on the recommendation of the Head of Equality.

**Gill George**  
**17<sup>th</sup> June 2006**