

Report of NEC Meeting 31st January 2007

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.

Merger

The ballot for merger with the TGWU was due to commence on 7th February (and members should have received their ballot papers by now). The General Secretary reported that the TGWU had endorsed the draft Instrument of Amalgamation and Rule Book overwhelmingly at their special conference. In Amicus, officers and staff were expected to campaign in favour of the merger as the NEC decision was to support. The ballot result was expected to be known by 8th March. Every member had received the union magazine promoting the merger; 2 issues of e-activist had covered the merger, and a podcast of Derek speaking on the merger was available. There was some debate amongst NEC members as to whether enough was being done to promote the merger – it was felt that coverage was variable across different regions and sectors.

There was quite a long debate on the makeup of the Joint Executive Council, which will have 15 Amicus members and 15 TGWU members. One NEC member reported that the Amicus members on the JEC had already been decided, and was unhappy that his own region was not represented. Another NEC member agreed that names had been bandied around, and that it was a done deal and not very democratic. Three other NEC members said that the membership of the JEC had not been decided, that the region in question was a small one, and that there were other issues such as gender balance to be considered. The General Secretary reported that he was unaware of a list of 15 names, that it would be important that the JEC was representative, and it would only be in office for 12 months.

Equal Pay

Following a contested equal pay claim in the Education Department, consideration had been given to introducing a single pay system across the whole merged union, to cover all

employees. However, this would not be possible as the TGWU system did not match Amicus staff definitions.

PCS

The PCS was on strike on the day of the NEC meeting, against privatisation and redundancies. The attacks facing civil servants are similar in many respects to the threats faced by NHS workers. Gail Cartmail attended the PCS London rally on behalf of Amicus, with a message of support from the Union.

Foreign Language Material

A cross-departmental review had concluded that the benefits of introducing recruitment and other resources in languages other than English were not justified at this time as the benefits were not sufficient to justify the cost. This would be reviewed following the merger.

Heemskerk v Amicus

The Tribunal into this case had not yet reported (although it was beyond the recommended deadline). An NEC member asked the General Secretary if the claimant would be reinstated if his unfair dismissal case were upheld by the Tribunal. This would be in line with TUC policy. Another NEC member felt it would send the wrong message to employers if we did not do this. The General Secretary's view was that it would depend on the outcome and the basis on which the Tribunal took its decision, and the Union's action would not be relevant to employers unless the law changed to make re-employment mandatory. Another NEC member felt that this was a 'naughty question' because the outcome was not known, and the Tribunal might uphold the case but not order reinstatement.

Policy Conference

There had been consideration given to cancelling the conference, but the

recommendation from the General Secretary was that it should go ahead because the TGWU is proceeding with its own conference. The NEC agreed to cut the duration of the conference by one day, so it will last 2 ½ rather than 3 ½ days. This was partly in order to save money, and partly because it was felt that there were relatively few contentious issues coming before conference (so business could be completed quickly).

Regional Secretary Election, Yorkshire and Humberside Region

Some members had received a ballot paper in error – for example, members who worked for Corus where the payroll office was in the region even when the workplace is not. The ballot is therefore being re-run.

Legal Handbooks

Amicus will be purchasing £30,000 worth of LRD handbooks (more accessible than the Tolley's Employment Law Handbooks made available to reps in the past).

Equalities Awards

Five winning projects have been identified, with awards to be presented at Policy Conference.

Recruit a Friend Campaign

This will proceed initially on a trial basis, with members to be rewarded with £5 of iTunes credits if they recruit a new member.

Education Department

The General Secretary reported on plans to outsource the work of the Union's Education Department. He reported that 60% of training is done externally (e.g. by the TUC). There had been a view in the past that the TUC could give people basic reps training, but not give the detail about our own Union. The proposals now was to revert to TUC type training, retain control of education through a Head of Education, and redeploy the Union's Education Officers to other work (e.g. in the Research Department).

The proposal caused significant debate. One NEC member commented on the loss of a relationship between industrial sectors that might have worked with a specific Education Officer, and felt that course content could suffer. The issue should be referred back to

Sector Committees. Another felt that the NEC could support a feasibility study but not the recommendation from the General Purposes and Finance Committee. Another was worried that the Union would lose control over Education with outsourcing, that the NEC was being asked to take a decision without adequate information; and that the timing could lead to a damaging perception that this was linked to the equal pay claim from an Education Officer. Others raised questions about the need for a training facility in Northern England, and another asked about the future of Esher and Quorn Grange.

The General Secretary reported that Whitehall College remained mothballed, there were no plans for change at Quorn, and Esher was being refurbished. It had not been practical to buy a training facility in the North, although we continued to have a relationship with Wortley Hall. The timing was just the way it was, and if people wanted to draw an inference between reorganisation and the equal pay claim they would do it. Education Officers were under-utilised and worked from home a lot of the time. We should find them other things to do. An NEC member asked again that final proposals should come back before the NEC.

The proposal was approved by a large majority, with three NEC members voting against.

Political Report

The main issue reported on by Deputy General Secretary Tony Dubbins was that of Labour Party funding. Following the 'loans for honours' debacle, the Labour Party set up an enquiry into the future of party funding. The reports from the enquiry recommended extensive regulation of the funding of political parties by trade unions. Amicus and other unions have objected to this, as this would strongly weaken the link between the Labour Party and trade unions. Tony Dubbins reported that the debate is moving in the direction advocated by Amicus and other unions i.e. for continued TU funding of Labour.

One NEC member commented on the 'sea of sleaze and corruption engulfing No 10' on the question of Labour party funding and cash for honours.

Another NEC member reported on the successful TUC Speak Up for Public Services lobby, praising the resources produced by Amicus and the turnout of Amicus members particularly from Health and Local Government sectors. However, the meeting with Amicus sponsored MPs had been disappointing. Only one MP (Lindsay Hoyle) had seemed to understand the issues around privatisation and financial crisis in the NHS; the others had showed a profound lack of understanding. Although Amicus was doing a good job, the message was evidently not getting through to the Government or MPs.

Organisation

Assistant General Secretary Paul Talbot reported that the Union had recruited over 70,000 members in 2006 – slightly down on 2005, but towards the top end for UK unions. A third of new recruits were women. An NEC member in Finance reported on a successful recruitment campaign over an attack on pensions provision in Standard Life. The General Secretary commented on the difficulties maintaining overall membership

numbers, because of the crisis in manufacturing, off shoring in finance, and growing problems in the NHS and local government.

Finance

The NEC approved a budget for the year to 31st December 2007. This was based on a significant shortfall in gross membership income against budget, reported to the NEC in November last year.

Correspondence

Two motions were submitted by NEC members: one on support for a victimised member in Energy; the other on support for the joint CND and Stop the War coalition demonstration on 24th February. Both were noted by the NEC.

A motion opposing cuts in ESOL training was agreed. A motion on splitting branch honoraria was rejected as being against rule. The NEC agreed to affiliate to the Socialist Educational Association. A motion calling for the piloting of reps training on weekday evenings was noted.

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