

Report of NEC Meeting 19th September 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.

I left this meeting slightly early in order to speak to a meeting of 500 pensioners in Catford on why we need to defend the NHS.

Around 19 NEC members sent their apologies, while the 'Voluntary and Not for Profit' NEC member was reported to have resigned. This was a small meeting. The meeting was scheduled to finish early, as some NEC members were attending a Joint Executive in the afternoon.

NHS Pay Award

The General Secretary reported that members in the Health Sector had accepted a staged pay increase amounting to around 1.9%. He reported that Gordon Brown had tried to use Agenda for Change to justify the below inflation award, and that Brown had claimed many health workers had received large pay increases. An NEC member commented that members had voted against industrial action, but it didn't follow from this that members felt that this was a satisfactory outcome. It was disappointing that Gordon Brown at the TUC had felt it was essential to cap pay for public sector workers for reasons of discipline and controlling inflation, but made no mention of the £14 billion bonuses awarded to City fat cats. It was puzzling that decent public sector pay was inflationary but huge bonuses for people who were already rich were not.

March with a Message

The Head of Communications reported on the 'March with a Message' planned for the Labour Party Conference the following week end. The Union was ready for 5000 people, but expected 1000 to 1500 to attend.

Political Matters and Contemporary Motions

The General Secretary gave a long report on political issues. He felt that many union-sponsored MPs were 'picking anyone' and we'd ended up with many MPs who didn't support our policies. There were 120 MPs who were Unite members, but only a small minority who were what you

would actually call trade unionists. For example, we had supported Jon Cruddas for Deputy Leader – but some of 'our' MPs not only didn't support him but placed him in last position. We might need someone full time to do political work on behalf of the Union, but this was difficult to do when our members want something done over wages. The T&G focused on organisation, but we had to map our political structure onto the new union. It was like eating an apple a day to keep the doctor away.

The report continued on the issue of 'contemporary motions' – the important motions that have allowed trade unions to challenge the Government at Labour Party Conference on issues where there are clear differences (for example, the NHS, pensions, corporate manslaughter).

I have reported this in some detail as it is one of the longest debates that has ever taken place on the NEC.

The General Secretary reported that over the last few months, Gordon Brown had spoken to every General Secretary in the movement, with a particular focus on the 'Big 4' unions. Brown had made proposals to him to get rid of contemporary motions, saying you go to conference, you beat the platform, Ministers won't do anything about it – why don't we have a better procedure – a discussion and a dialogue.

Gordon Brown – without the agreement of union leaders – had then said, 'You've agreed, I've issued it'. He had accused General Secretaries of backtracking and renegeing on the deal. Derek had said 'There's no agreement from me, I haven't renegeed' – but things had moved on.

Gordon Brown then said, 'I put it out there, I can't back down, I can't be seen to back down because there's a blood bath looming'. This had caused

problems. If issues just went into the national policy forum, and came back as a policy report, we couldn't defeat them. Voting 'No' would just lead to an endless loop in the policy process. So the unions had said, 'That's no good, we've got to be able to amend things'. Brown said, 'We're not having that'. He had also said, 'Trust me, I want to talk to the unions and have a dialogue – I'm not like Blair, let me do it my way'.

So it finished up looking like going to Conference to a blood bath. We advised Gordon, why have a fight now, and he chose to ignore us. So our alternative, he can have his constitutional changes, no contemporary motions, and in two years time at Conference we'll review it, and one of the options if we're not satisfied will be to have them back.

So there are two options: one is 'No change' and peace for two years; the other is 'Change the constitution and have a couple of years peace', but it'll be clearly tabled in a couple of years with the right to change it back, and the only risk is we won't win the vote.

If we didn't, we'd get press reports about union barons. Brown's made it clear that he wants to work with unions but if we challenge he kicks us in the goolies. This would be ratified by individual unions. We either had a nasty battle, or we let him have his changes safe in the knowledge that we could win things back in the future.

NEC members contributed to a lively debate about this. One said that things wouldn't change. We'd end up with our hands tied behind our backs. We couldn't trust politicians.

Another said we could talk about two years peace but our members couldn't afford two years peace – what about the attacks on the NHS, and the loss of jobs in finance and manufacturing? Once we'd given away the contemporary motions, we wouldn't get them back. Brown was anti-union – working with the CBI, not us. The sequence of events was that Brown had pretended to have got agreement on something when he hadn't and we had collapsed. Most of Warwick had never been implemented but at least we'd got something in writing last time – now we were sitting back and letting Brown set the agenda. Also press reports were that Labour's NEC had already approved the rule change with the support of trade unions – if Amicus representatives had already voted for this, why was it coming to us after the event?

The General Secretary responded that the rule change had gone to Labour's NEC, with trade union support. General Secretaries had indicated that the change would be lived with subject to ratification by individual unions.

Another NEC member felt it was no surprise that NEC members who were not Labour Party members did not support Gordon Brown. As the largest affiliate to Labour, we had to be very careful what we were doing. It wouldn't be wise to walk into battle with Brown and defeat him. Brown had put us in a difficult situation, and we needed a situation where we could all emerge as winners. We should trust the General Secretary and our parliamentary delegation to find a way through this. Contemporary resolutions didn't change policy but our relationship with the Government did.

Another NEC member agreed with this position. We had to be seen to work with people. If nobody liked the result, we weren't happy and Gordon wasn't happy. A third NEC member said Gordon Brown would support our views more than David Cameron, so we should support this.

Chair Steve Davison said we had turned inside out, but did we want to die in a ditch for contemporary motions? The process of returning the party we wanted wouldn't come with one bite. The task was to remodel the party, but the Blairites had captured it so it was difficult to recapture. It was complex. Brown would come back for more. This was the wrong fight. We should say to Brown, we know what you're playing at, you'll chuck your dummy out if you don't get what you want, but this is what we want – democratise the party.

Another NEC member disagreed. The concern expressed by the General Secretary and others was not that we would die in a ditch, but that we would win at Labour Party Conference, and would defeat Gordon Brown. Tons of people in the Labour Party as well as outside were unhappy. The danger was that we would be seen as backing up Gordon Brown.

A final NEC speaker felt it was about portrayal. It would make a difference to the perception of members if we stressed the difference to members' working lives, not the two year break from contemporary motions.

The General Secretary summed up, reiterating many of his earlier points. Brown hadn't won, it

looked like he'd won. The key for us was to return a Labour Government. It wasn't peace at any price but peace if we could get it. Brown would come back for more. We weren't rolling over but people would say we were, and the media would say Brown had a victory over the unions. Brown was playing to a business and City agenda, but we had to win the party back before we could change that. Avoid the fight, and contribute to the election of a Labour Government. What if Gordon Brown presented himself as a man who wanted to work with unions and we defeated him, and he turned to the media and the country and said 'Even me they kick' – if that was his strategy we would really be in trouble.

The NEC voted overwhelmingly to endorse this approach, with around four NEC members voting against.

Willis and Warne

NEC paperwork noted that the Willis and Warne case had been settled in a confidential compromise agreement. An NEC member asked colleagues to reflect on this case. We were responsible for the control and governance and management of the union. The outcome here was that three people had lost their jobs, with one of them proven at Tribunal to have been unfairly dismissed. The case had cost the Union hundreds of thousands of pounds on payouts to the dismissed staff and in legal fees – members' money that could have been spent on recruitment or organising or fighting for jobs. The money wasn't well spent. We should do better next time.

NEC Election Proposals

Proposals for the NEC elections were given out part way through the meeting. For most NEC members, this was the first time we had seen them. The breakdown of seats and the timetable for elections is attached. Forty Amicus NEC members will be elected, to serve with 40 TGWU NEC members, although the new Executive Council will serve as a single body.

There was a brief debate over rule changes required to implement the proposals. A small

number of NEC members felt it was wrong to agree rule changes without the support of 75% of its members required by rule. Others felt the meeting could agree, and the rule changes could be endorsed later.

The proposals themselves were discussed relatively briefly, with colleagues typically asking about their own sectors. The General Secretary reported that this was revised from an earlier version presented to the GPFC. Chair Steve Davison said it was an attempt to allocate seats in a way that was proportional to the size of sectors. He thought people would have a moan and a groan, but if they didn't agree, they should propose an alternative.

Three NEC members expressed concern that the proposals had not been circulated in advance. It was impossible for NEC members to consider them properly on this basis, or to consult with the members they represented. One said it made a mockery of the process; a second said it was insulting. One NEC member proposed that it would be better to hold a special NEC meeting in two weeks to consider the proposals properly. There were specific concerns – the GPM, Finance and Health were all under-represented. Health was the sector with the highest proportion of women, followed by Finance – if these sectors were under-represented, this had a disproportionate impact on the representation of women members of the union. This was against the principles of proportionality and gender balance in the Instrument of Amalgamation and associated rules. It wasn't right to propose an alternative – this needed proper consultation.

Questions were asked on the CMA and the FPA.

An NEC member who had earlier concerns over the allocation of JEC seats felt these proposals should be supported. Another felt said that there wasn't time to call another NEC to discuss this, and it had been carved up as fairly as possible.

A proposal to call a special NEC in two weeks was lost overwhelmingly. A subsequent motion to endorse the election proposals was carried overwhelmingly.

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1st October 2007

NEC Elections

Regional	Members	Seats
NE, Yorkshire and the Humber	123574	1
E Midlands	64035	1
Eastern, London	149530	1
S East	106652	1
S West	58721	1
W Midlands	78156	1
N West	136350	1
Scotland	85939	1
Ireland	50651	1
Wales	57756	1
Total	911628	10

Sector(s)	Members	Seats
Aerospace; Shipbuilding	66388	2
Chemicals and pharmaceuticals; Process	32514 + ?	1
Civil Air Transport; Railways, buses and ferries	24534 +?	1
Community and not for profit	27156 ?	1
Construction and Contracting	63947	2
Education; MOD and govt depts; CMA	15700 11108 <25762	1
Electrical engineering, electronics and IT	38081	1
Energy	26611	1
Finance and Business services	172069 3437	4
Food, drink and tobacco	22246	1
Foundry; Metals	6401 18894	1
General industries; Servicing	91829 8506	3
GPM	85501	2
Health	84739	2
Local authorities	17682	1
Motor components	36166	1
Motor vehicles	32357	1
Total	911628	26

The membership numbers are not necessarily accurate – these are deduced from information on existing sectors, and there are some changes to these.

Women's seats		4
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Timetable

W/c Oct 8 th 2007	Independent scrutineer to issue nomination forms to branches and forms available in union offices for reps
November/ December 2007	Nomination period for reps, branches and chapels
Jan 11 th 2008	Last date for receipt of nominations by independent scrutineer
Feb 1 st 2008	Last date for receipt of nomination and election addresses from candidates
W/c March 3 rd 2008	Ballot opens
March 28 th 2008	Close of ballot