

## **Leader's Report**

Keir Starmer spoke about his summer traveling the country and speaking to voters as well as his TUC speech and the Tory failure on Afghanistan. I asked Starmer about the resignation of the shadow equalities minister, Marsha de Cordova. Reports in The Voice newspaper suggested that efforts to set up a Taskforce to formulate progressive race equality policy were sidelined by Starmer's office due to not wanting to offend 'red wall' voters. I asked if these reports were true and what steps Keir would take to reassure black Labour members and voters that racial equality will be at the heart of Labour's agenda for government. Starmer dismissed the reports as 'nonsense' but did not substantially answer my question on his plan for tackling racial inequality or how he would keep it at the heart of Labour's agenda for government. I will be writing to him directly to ask for a full and proper response.

Questions were also asked about Starmer's commitment to party unity (to no satisfactory response); Labour's position on ending vaccine poverty abroad; whether he would support the motion being brought to conference in support of a change in party policy in support of proportional representation for Westminster elections (which he also did not respond to) and about the scrapping of the Universal Credit uplift.

## **Rule Changes**

The main items on the agenda were the NEC Rule Changes, and a review of the Rule Changes submitted by CLPS. There were a large number of rule changes considered by the NEC. I and my fellow Grassroots Voice Five NEC representatives generally supported rule changes that would give more power to members and trade unionists and opposed bureaucratic power grabs by Keir Starmer and his Acting General Secretary David Evans.

### **NEC Rule Changes**

There were 85 pages of NEC rule changes originally submitted for NEC members to read over. Some of the rule changes voted on to be submitted to party conference are below:

- CLP Affiliations – a rule change was agreed requiring NEC approval for CLPs to affiliate to organisations
- Disciplinary processes – rule changes were agreed in relation to a new disciplinary process regarding protected characteristics
- Codifying STV into the rulebook as the voting system for the CLP section of the NEC
- Calling for a requirement for training to be eligible as candidate for public office or internal elections
- Giving the General Secretary increased power over who is allowed to join the party and who is blocked
- And more... Delegates to conference please check the daily CLPD Yellow Pages for up to date recommendations on rule changes. You can sign up to receive them digitally [here](#).

### **CLP Rule Changes**

There were 10 rule changes submitted to conference by CLPs, which the NEC considered. Despite the best efforts of the Grassroots Voice 5 and our trade union colleagues, the NEC party leadership will be opposing all of them at conference. Below are some of the rule changes that may be of interest to members.

#### *Making the Parliamentary Labour Party accountable to Labour Conference*

This is a rule change that would require the Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) to report to Labour Party conference on its work to carry out the Party's programme in parliament. Included in such a report would be a report by the chief whip of the PLP on any decisions they have made regarding

the political discipline of Labour MPs. The rule change is designed to be implemented at this year's conference, and the media are correctly reporting that such a rule change would give conference delegates the chance to return the Labour Party whip to Jeremy Corbyn MP.

There has been some misunderstanding about this rule change, mainly that it will prevent disciplinary actions on sexual harassment or racism for Labour MPs, or will lead to inappropriate matters such as these being discussed by party conference. This is not the case.

The amendment does not impact Party disciplinary matters because it is limited only to suspensions from the PLP whip. Other disciplinary allegations fall under the Party Rule book disciplinary rules, for example Chapters 1 and 6. Under Chapter 6, any PLP member can be suspended from Party membership, in the same manner as any ordinary Party member. If suspended from the Party, an MP is also automatically suspended from the PLP whip. The proposed rule change is limited to permitting Party Conference to confirm or void only a suspension of the whip made under the PLP standing Orders and would not authorise the reversal of a suspension imposed under the wider Party Rules.

If delegates to Labour conference want to return the whip to Jeremy Corbyn at this year's Labour conference, they should support the rule change to make the PLP accountable to Labour conference.

#### *Abolish the 'Three Year Rule'*

Currently the Three Year Rule means that any rule change debated at a party conference cannot be debated again for another three years. This proposed rule change would modify the outdated brake on member-led democracy to ensure that, if there is a groundswell of support for a particular rule change, it does not have to wait three years to be debated again.

The point was made that we cannot fill up the agenda with too many rule changes. However, this would not flood the constitutional debate with rule changes previously heard and rejected as it only pertains to rule changes that obtain a groundswell of support and which 5 or more CLPs had passed. A Rule Change is usually brought by just one or two CLPs.

I also found this argument frustrating as we had just reviewed the 85 pages of rule changes that the NEC is bringing to conference and are reviewing only 10 rule changes from CLPs to this year's conference. I don't think members exercising their democratic voice is the problem here.

#### *Single Transferable Vote for ALL sections of the NEC*

We discussed a motion to bring the elections for Councillor and PLP reps on the NEC in line with the new voting system for CLP representatives, which was brought in by the NEC just before the last set of elections for CLP representatives. The NEC is asking delegates to enshrine this system for CLP representatives in the rulebook at this upcoming conference. Having just a few minutes previously sat and listened to NEC members who do not represent CLPs arguing for STV for CLP representatives on the grounds of democracy then making a complete 180 degree turn to OPPOSE it for their own section was rank hypocrisy. There are arguments for and against STV generally, and I'm more than happy to have those discussions, but simply supporting STV for CLP reps in the rule book and opposing a move from members to bring other sections in line with this is gross hypocrisy and will rightly appear to members as a factional stitch up to rig the CLP seats against the grassroots candidates.

#### **Forde Inquiry**

The NEC received yet another verbal report regarding the Forde Inquiry into the 'Labour Leaks' report (see NEC reports ad infinitum). The acting general secretary David Evans informed the NEC that he had had a meeting with Martin Forde QC to discuss the release of the report and that the report would now be released at the end of October / beginning of November. Given that we were told at the last meeting that we'd have it by now, this is not really reassuring. Part of the delay is due to the section on who released the report being subject to an ICO investigation. This section will still not be released. However, given that by far most of the people who have contacted me regarding

the report have wanted the truth about what happened with staff seemingly sitting on anti-semitism cases in order to cause factional harm, the abuse of Black MPs and sabotaging of the 2017 general election campaign are not under any investigation, I still cannot understand what the hold up has been on these sections for such a huge amount of time. We asked Forde to attend the November NEC meeting. If Forde is not present at the November meeting then we will have no option than to attempt to meet with him ourselves.

We were astonished to hear that the party had handed over even more money for the Forde report. It was asked why more money had been given when it had previously been agreed that the party would pay no more than a fixed sum, and particularly given the huge delays and expense there has already been with the report. We were told that as it is an Independent enquiry the party does not have control over the things it wished it had.

### **Acting General Secretary's Report**

The acting General Secretary David Evans reported to the NEC on his work.

#### *Staff Redundancies*

David reported that, despite the voluntary redundancy scheme, the party had still not made enough cuts. I asked what plans there were to bridge this perceived gap. He assured the meeting that he was confident we will not go near voluntary redundancies. Instead, they would be conducting a full financial review, reviewing all non-staff costs, and 'managing vacancy control'. He said they are constantly reviewing and doing things smarter and they are also looking to raise income (party conference may help with this). It was raised that many members of staff had not felt that the "voluntary redundancy" package was very voluntary when their roles had been deleted in the restructuring. My solidarity is with Labour staffers who have lost their jobs due to the political and financial mismanagement of our Party.

#### *Proscriptions*

We discussed the events that had unfolded since the proscription of 4 groups at the previous NEC meeting. There was significant disagreement in the room as to what we had even agreed to at the last meeting (!), with many, including some who had voted for the proscriptions, making the point that nowhere in the paper did it say expulsions would be retrospective and that none of the examples given in the paper that would equate to support of the proscribed groups had made any mention of liking their social media posts, for example, despite notices of expulsion being handed out for as little as 2 historic social media likes. Even though the room was not in agreement about what we had even passed at the last meeting, something called the 3-month NEC rule was put in place preventing the meeting from debating, changing or clarifying the new rules. Whilst I appreciate it may not be a sensible use of the NEC's time to re-debate a paper passed at the previous NEC, if the meeting clearly disagrees on what was passed and the staff are implementing the paper in a way that was not agreed by the meeting, then further discussion, debate and clarity is clearly needed.

#### *Jess Barnard and rogue Notice Office Investigations*

Young Labour chair Jess Barnard was recently sent a 'Notice of Investigation' by the party for tweeting her opposition to transphobia. At the meeting, Evans said he held his hand up, a mistake was made in issuing this NOI and, as acting General Secretary, he takes full responsibility. He said he was satisfied that the notice issued was the result of a one-off example of practises not being followed rather than a systemic problem. However, given the number of emails NEC members have received concerning rogue NOIs, and the recent reports of a false investigation into [Kate Osbourne](#) along with other [mistakes in the process](#), it is very difficult... nigh impossible... to believe. We called for an investigation into what is happening within the process and for these investigations to be halted and all recent NOIs revoked until such investigation had been completed and shared with NEC members. Shamefully, this proposal was not accepted.

## **Code of Conduct on Transphobia**

The need for the party to adopt a code of conduct on transphobia was restated, and the days following the NEC have only confirmed that pressing need. The NEC were informed that whilst the party was still committed to this, there were legal concerns, and the Code of Conduct would need to be legally accurate. As such, there is a delay in the work on this. However, they are looking at whether there is a form of guidance that could be put in place in the meantime.

Quite clearly, given the recent media reports, the party currently has a transphobia problem. It is imperative that the party rebuilds its relationship with trans members and distances itself from transphobic views. My solidarity to trans members feeling marginalised within, and those who've sadly left, the Labour party.

## **Labour Students and Disability Structures**

The meeting reviewed the work of the Labour Students and Disabled Members working groups, which have met to construct new democratic structures for each. Both were accepted unanimously. It was great to be part of the Labour Students working group and the outcomes are welcome. Both structures are a good step forward in party democracy and a welcome result of the democracy review.

## **Party Conference**

We received an update from the Chair of the Conference Arrangements Committee, Harry Donaldson, about the plans for party conference. Covid-19 safety was a key point of concern. Delegate packs will contain information about Covid precautions and it was agreed this would be added to the website. Masks are to be worn when not speaking.

If you are a delegate to Labour conference make sure to attend CLPD's essential online briefing event for annual conference which will give you all the information you need for the days ahead.

[Register here.](#)

And make sure you [sign up as a delegate to CLPD's conference delegate form](#), to receive up to date information about conference's twists and turns, and CLPD's famous 'Yellow Pages' delivered to your inbox every morning, with all of the day's conference events explained.

Despite everything, I'm really looking forward to Labour conference this year. It's been a long while since many of us have been able to sit in person and discuss our plans and ideas for a Labour government and a better, more prosperous, more equal country. To those of you who are coming down to Brighton, have a great time, stay safe, and come over for a chat if you see me!

**Gemma Bolton**

**Co-Chair / Campaign for Labour Party Democracy**

**CLP Representative / Labour National Executive Committee**

This report can also be found on CLPD's website [here](#).