

## News from the NEC

(A report by Peter Willsman of some of the main issues at recent NEC meetings. Peter is a CLP rep on the NEC (supported by the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance) and is CLPD's Secretary)

### **Parliamentarian's expenses Scandal**

At all of the NEC's debates on this issue I have argued that the key consideration for any action should be the criteria set out in the Party's Rule Book, in particular 'bringing the Party into disrepute'. This is what applies to rank and file members when they are deemed to have transgressed even in quite minor ways. Unfortunately this key consideration has been somewhat lost sight of, with the result that the process has been far from a level playing field and in my view unfair. The NEC set up a 3 person panel to consider all appropriate cases but only the General Secretary and the Chief Whip had the power to refer individuals to the panel. We then saw the backbencher, Ian Gibson, referred to the panel, but not those cases that in my view were considerably worse (many involving senior MPs). Not to mention those Labour Lords who have also been exposed for very serious expenses' abuses. I voted against the recommendations in relation to Ian Gibson.

At the July NEC it was agreed to revisit the arrangements for referring cases to the panel. In future this decision will not be left to the General Secretary and Chief Whip, but will be widened out to include senior NEC and PLP members. And former MPs, who are now endorsed PPCs, will be subject to the same process as sitting MPs.

But the decisions in relation to future referrals will, it seems, be largely based on the findings of the official non-party inquiry being carried out by Sir Thomas Legg (due to report in the Autumn). But, as I have said, the key consideration for all cases should not be Legg, but should be the Rule Book's criteria of 'bringing the Party into disrepute'. Some of the cases, both in the Commons and in the Lords, are sufficiently serious for the Party to commence disciplinary action within the procedures laid down in the Rule Book.

### **Afghanistan**

At the July NEC I raised the military action with Gordon Brown. I suggested that what is happening seems to be more of a civil war between the Pashtuns in the South and the Tajiks and Uzbeks in the North. We are propping up the latter and our actions are making the situation worse. In reply Gordon said there cannot be a military solution, rather the aim was to create the conditions for stable government. He argued that over half of international terrorism can be traced to the Pakistan/Afghan border area.

### **Winning the next election**

At all recent NECs Gordon Brown has forcibly argued that the Party must unite and fight around a clear strategy. Namely, that there is a stark dividing line between us and the Tories. We are investing to protect jobs and services. The Tories are reverting to the policy that they always adopt at times of economic crisis, which is looking after the rich and making the poor pay. As under Thatcher, a Tory government would adopt policies that would deepen the recession, increasing unemployment and adversely affecting millions of people. Gordon stressed that at all levels of the Party we must get this message across. If we do the voters will respond.