

Peter Willsman's News from the NEC



This is one of a regular series of report-backs from Peter Willsman, constituency representative on the Labour Party's NEC.

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Peter has represented CLPs and members on the Party's National Committees since 1981. National Conference Arrangements Committee (1981-1994); National Constitutional Committee (1995-1998); NEC (1998-1999 and 2005-2008); National Policy Forum (1998-1999 and 2002-2008). Please photocopy this report-back for other members. It can be downloaded at www.clpd.org.uk. For regular and full NEC reports go to www.scgn.org.uk.

Gordon turns to Hayden Phillips – Threat to Party's union link

In recent years there has been a major escalation of the 'arms race' in electoral spending. This has caused difficulties for all political parties. The Hayden Phillips enquiry was set up to address this problem, but its interim reports had major flaws. For example, it did not take proper account of the way Labour's union link functions and, not surprisingly, this was exploited by the Tories. Negotiations between the political parties broke down and the Hayden Phillips proposals were shelved.

It is generally accepted that union donations are fully transparent and beyond reproach. Yet it is the unions and

their link to Labour that is now having to bear the weight of the government's response to the donations crisis. Gordon Brown is recommending that ministers bring forward legislation based on the proposals in the last Hayden Phillips report. At the December NEC union reps expressed concerns. Hayden Phillips could open the door to a future Tory government demolishing our party's historic union link.

Jack Straw is now leading negotiations, internally with the unions, and externally with the other political parties, with a view to bringing forward legislation.

NEC Members' Questions

At the November NEC Peter Willsman referred to a recent Panorama programme and asked Gary Titley (leader of the Labour Group of MEPs) what sanctions the EU could take against Uzbekistan for its state-sponsored child labour in the cotton fields. Gary replied that the EU have pressed Uzbekistan via the ILO. He undertook to raise the matter formally with the Commission.

Willsman also submitted questions to Gordon Brown – stressing the urgent need for the government to reform council tax to make it less regressive and asking for details of the new arrangements under which local authorities will be able to build more homes.

CAC wears big boots

The evidence suggests that in the last couple of years the Party's Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) has been taking a much harder line in relation to submissions from CLPs. In 2005 some 190 Contemporary Motions (CMs) were submitted to Conference and, as in previous years, a significant majority (some 120) were accepted for the Priorities Ballot. But in 2006 it was a different story. Some 220 CMs were submitted, but only 102 were accepted. In addition in 2006 some 52 Emergency Resolutions were sent in but only 10 were deemed in order by the CAC.

In 2007, 153 CMs were submitted and 86 were accepted. Among the subjects rejected were Iraq, Asylum Rights, Trident, Guantanamo Bay and US rendition flights. Also, 10 out of 15 Emergency motions were ruled out, including all those covering the military threat to Iran. In addition the CAC ruled out the vast majority of rule changes submitted by CLPs, which is also out of line with previous practice.

There is, of course, no evidence that CLPs have suddenly forgotten how to word motions or to frame rule changes.

Conference rights for CLPs

In recent years every CLP has been obliged to choose a woman as its Annual Conference delegate at least every other year. This reform has led to a considerable improvement in the gender balance at our party's sovereign body. But a few CLPs have been unable to find female volunteers, even when every woman member has been approached. This has meant the CLP being debarred from Conference and thus disenfranchised.

Ann Black and Peter Willsman have raised this difficulty at the NEC. Ann is proposing a way forward at the next Organisation Sub Committee.

Black and Willsman have also raised concerns about the Annual Conference Record of Decisions booklet. This is issued to CLPs after each Conference, but it contains less and less information every year. The dynamic duo have drawn attention to the relevant requirements in the Rule Book and insisted that these be properly adhered to in future.

Stop Press – New General Secretary

The Party's next General Secretary is likely to be appointed at the full NEC in March.

NPF 1st December – report on progress of new policy-making procedures

All of the Contemporary Motions remitted at Annual Conference to the NPF have been discussed at the relevant Policy Commissions (i.e. Remploy, Manufacturing, Employment Rights, Fourth Option for Council Housing and Equalities and Equal Pay). Reports of these discussions were tabled at the NPF on 1 Dec. Peter Willsman pointed out that it had been promised that all organisations with relevant motions would be invited to Policy Commissions, not just movers and seconders. The platform confirmed that this is being considered. Ann Black asked again for better feedback from the NPF to CLPs and members.

Each of the contemporary subjects will be reported to the 2008 Annual Conference as separate annex reports to the main NPF Report. The unions are pressing for some provision within these annex reports for the expression of significant minority views. This would enable Conference, as the Party's sovereign body, to be the final arbiter.

It has been agreed that the new procedures will be fully reviewed in 2009. CLPs need to be considering suggestions for this review.

May/June 2008 –
CLPs can submit amendments
to the NPF

In early May draft final-stage policy documents will be sent to CLPs. Then, for the first time, CLPs will be able to submit textual amendments to the NPF for consideration (closing date 20 June). NPF members will be able to table amendments to the documents at the Warwick II NPF on 24/27 July. The revised documents will then go to Annual Conference and finally to an OMOV ballot of members.

At the November NEC, Walter Wolfgang and Peter Willsman stressed that the CLP amendments must be available to the whole NPF, so that an overall assessment can be made of the issues that are of greatest concern to CLPs. In the spring CLPs need to get drafting!

NEC elections 2008 – Support Peter Willsman

*Member of Erith and Thamesmead CLP. NEC and National Policy Forum member. Party member for 37 years. No A071448.
Phone: 020 8854 7326. Email: willsman@talk21.com*

Why I am standing again

My motivation for standing again is to help build an effective NEC that will return power to the party and its members and ensure that our parliamentary leadership is properly accountable.

Despite all the difficulties, the new Parliamentary leadership has made a start towards building for a fourth term. At the 2007 conference significant commitments were made, e.g. increased support for families, guaranteed paid public holidays for all and building more affordable homes.

The destruction of the Thatcher years can only be fully rectified by a Labour government with progressive policies informed by our socialist and co-operative principles – redistribution of wealth, reducing gender, race and class inequalities, universal welfare provision, extending employment rights, and public ownership, especially in transport and utilities. This is the most assured way to enthuse our members and defeat our political opponents.

Having served on our Party's national committees since 1981 I would like to thank members and CLPs for their support.

My commitment to members and CLPs

If elected I will

- Take up all issues of concern raised with me by CLPs and members (since 1981 I have taken up many local grievances and visited CLPs and events in every region).
- Report back on NEC and NPF meetings to all CLPs
- Each year send to CLPs my 12-page *Guide to Annual Conference*, as I have done for over 20 years.
- Press for recorded votes at NEC meetings and for the NEC minutes to be available to CLPs and affiliated organisations, as was the practise before 1995.
- Seek to ensure that Annual Conference remains the sovereign policy making body, e.g. by pressing for CLPs and unions to have the right to amend final-stage documents.
- Defend our Party's link to the unions
- Insist that all internal elections are conducted fairly in accordance with the Party's Code.

Your CLP can make six nominations

To increase the chances of being elected it is important to have widespread support. The most effective way of achieving this is by having CLP nominations from all regions.

Each CLP can make six nominations (**closing date 1st April**). I am therefore seeking a nomination from your CLP.

If necessary a further copy of the nomination form can be obtained by the CLP secretary from the Conference Unit at Head Office.

Vote for the Grassroots Alliance

The following candidates are supported by the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance

- **Mohammed Azam**
- **Fran Griffiths**
- **Christine Shawcroft**
- **Ann Black**
- **Peter Kenyon**
- **Peter Willsman**

These six have made common commitments on party democracy and accountability.

Nominations are important – but it's the vote that counts.

Ballot papers go out from early June (**ballot closes 4th July**). Please make sure you and all your comrades vote. Turnout is vital – please do all you can to help.