

Extending and renewing Party democracy

CLPD's suggestions for CLPs to consider when making their responses to this consultation document (closing date for responses – 14 September)

Gordon Brown's proposals, set out in this consultation document, are, in part, recognition that Partnership in Power (PiP) is facing a crisis of credibility. Most active members have a perception that the devolving of almost all responsibility for policy making to the National Policy Forum (NPF) has been used as a means of denying them a say over contentious policy issues. CLPD strongly believes that Annual Conference, the Party's sovereign body, must always be able to give a clear policy direction to our Parliamentary representatives on major issues of concern to the Party's federal membership. The suggestions that we are making seek to guarantee this fundamental role for Conference and to move the debate forward.

In his consultation document Gordon Brown accepts that PiP must be radically improved when he states – "members want to be more involved in discussing long-term policy challenges, and to see the results of that involvement better reflected in policy outcomes... There is still a feeling among some members that submissions just disappear into a 'black hole' and that the policy commissions do not provide enough feedback".

In order to give CLPs and unions a greater input into Party policy-making, CLPD has put together the following suggestions, many of which have considerable support within the unions. CLPs are invited to consider these suggestions for inclusion in their own responses to Gordon Brown's document. This consultation gives CLPs and unions an opportunity to press the new leadership for a greater say on policy-making, but this will not happen unless a large number of CLPs make this demand.

- The artificial criteria of 'contemporary' should be dropped. Organisations should be able to make any submission to conference that they think is pressing.
- The spirit of the 4 and 4 rule for the Priorities Ballot should be honoured at every Conference – 4 subjects from the unions and 4 separate subjects from the CLPs.
- The small number of CLPs who submit rule changes should not be debarred from making a submission for the Priorities Ballot.
- Clear criteria must be laid down for what is a legitimate submission, in order to prevent subjects being ruled out. For example, "withdrawal of all troops from Iraq by spring 2008" would be a legitimate submission, as would "detailed legislation for agency/temporary workers for parity in pay from Day 1". Also, detailed guidance must be laid down for how the submissions are to be grouped in the Priorities Ballot. In other words, we should have broad and inclusive subject groups and not the old manoeuvre of dividing a broad subject up into lots of smaller and separate groups (for example, instead of a broad "PFI in NHS", there is "PFI in Scotland", "PFI in Wales", "PFI in England").
- The 8 subject groupings that have been agreed should be properly timetabled during Conference week and, subject to the vote of Conference, ie a second vote (in addition to the priorities ballot) where policy proposals can be agreed by Conference and become Party policy. The 8 subject groups would then be fully integrated into the work programme for the final NPF stage (Warwick II) and regular reports made by the Policy Commissions/Ministers on the progress being made to ensure that the 8 subjects are properly taken into account at the final Warwick II stage. The whole way the Policy Commissions work needs to be

reviewed. There is often a problem of poor attendance, key issues aren't always properly addressed and insufficient attention is given to submissions from CLPs, members etc.

- All organisations involved with the 8 subject groupings should be entitled to attend the Policy Commissions/Policy Comm. Sub groups to further ensure that the policies are properly taken into account at the final NPF stage (Warwick II).
- The 12 NPF representatives to be elected by the whole of Conference should be regarded as the custodians of Conference decisions and should be responsible to Conference for ensuring that the 8 subject groupings are fully progressed.
- Emergency Resolutions – these should remain as before, in order that last minute issues of major concern can be raised at Conference.
- It would undermine the sovereignty of Conference, be expensive and divisive to subject the Party's programme to an OMOV ballot on a take-it-or-leave-it basis, with no opportunity for amendments and no say for the party's millions of affiliated members.
- The threshold for Alternative Positions should be lowered to 15% of those attending the NPF meeting where the vote is taken. Forum members need to be given more time to prepare their amendments. And those involved with the Alternative Positions should be able to redraft them at the NPF to take account of discussions at the NPF.
- There should be votes at NPF plenary sessions on key issues when requested by 15% of those present – this would be a way of showing the strength of feeling on an issue.
- At Annual Conference there should be provision for voting in parts on NPF documents, instead of the current take-it-or-leave-it basis.
- The Party needs to investigate ways to increase the ethnic minority representation at the NPF.
- Government Green and White Papers should be submitted to the NPF for debate and possible amendment.
- Those sections of the NPF that are subject to election should be elected annually, to maintain accountability.
- At the final stage of the process, alongside any Alternative Positions from the NPF, Annual Conference should also be able to consider amendments to the NPF documents submitted directly from CLPs and affiliated organisations. These amendments would be composited by the CAC and those composites with significant weight would be timetabled. The Party needs to encourage a culture where differences of opinion are welcomed, replacing the narrow control and command culture of recent years.