**National Executive Committee, 24 January 2017**

**Ann Black’s report**

The NEC has settled back into its usual routine after last year’s turbulence, under Glenis Willmott’s calm and authoritative leadership. She had secured European committee positions for Labour MEPs despite our impending departure, and they were continuing to work on tax avoidance, air quality, zero-hours contracts and rail privatisation. She criticised Theresa May for putting immigration ahead of economic prosperity and confirmed that under the Maltese presidency the rules on freedom of movement could be revisited, to clarify that it is freedom to work which is fundamental. Labour MPs should seek to amend the article 50 bill, exploit Tory divisions at every stage of negotiations, and press for a vote on the final deal.

Ann Cryer, Chair of the national policy forum, said that the policy commissions would publish consultation documents in March, though this is exactly when local parties shift into election mode. All commissions had champions for equality and environmental sustainability, and members suggested that Brexit had a similar overarching importance. Wales and Scotland had representatives on every commission, reminding them that Welsh Labour was in government and Scottish Labour faced its own unique political landscape.

**Local Matters**

Councillor Nick Forbes emphasised that the crisis in the NHS was interlinked with the local government crisis in adult social care. Allowing small rises in council tax did not bridge the gap and would increase inequality: an extra 2% in Tory shires raised a lot more than 2% in Knowsley. Councillors asked for proper funding for the May elections, including mayoral contests, and hoped to speak with election co-ordinator Jon Trickett soon. All agreed on the need for unity and mutual support among councillors, MPs and trade unions, and that the blame for any cuts lay squarely with central government.

NEC members had received many emails from Newham about the ballot for their mayoral candidate. Their first concern was that officers of the local campaign forum, which oversaw the process, included councillors appointed to paid positions by the incumbent mayor. This could be perceived as a conflict of interest. The second related to affiliated organisations. As with parliamentary selections a union branch can affiliate to the local party for £6 with just one member in the constituency, and multiple affiliations by the same union are allowed. Each union branch has the same voting weight as a 500-strong party branch, and unions do not have to consult their local members. Councillor Alice Perry and I would visit Newham to talk with members, and though this result would not be overturned, there may be lessons for the future.

**Welcome Back**

Jonathan Ashworth MP, removed from the NEC last September, returned in his new role as shadow health secretary. He gave a devastating picture of the situation in the NHS, with soaring numbers waiting more than four hours in A&E, patients and paramedics stuck in ambulances in the car park, hospitals turning people away, and further cuts to come. Faced with the uncertainty caused by Brexit the 60,000 Europeans who worked in the NHS might leave. NEC members spoke of their own experiences, the damage to staff morale and the need for preventive work on diabetes and other conditions. Only Labour could be trusted: Paul Nuttall, UKIP’s leader and candidate in the Stoke by-election, wanted to privatise the NHS, and the SNP in Scotland presided over 12-month waits for cataract operations.

I passed on complaints about the NHS action day leaflets and asked what Labour’s plans were and how they would be paid for. Jonathan agreed that clear policies were needed and recalled that the last Labour government brought health spending close to the European average, assisted by a penny on national insurance. Jeremy Corbyn highlighted the 334 campaign events on 21 January, and urged everyone to join the national demonstration on 4 March. He said that blaming GPs was extraordinary and blaming local government was unfair. The NHS and adult social care needed more money urgently, and we had to come up with answers as to whether it would be raised from general taxation, national insurance, or elsewhere.

**A View from the Top**

Jeremy Corbyn’s report started with the court judgment that MPs should decide on triggering Article 50. Labour had to respect the will of the people, but that did not mean becoming a bargain basement tax haven off the coast of Europe. Two-thirds of Labour voters supported Remain while two-thirds of Labour MPs represented constituencies which voted Leave, and we must have something to say to all of them. Kezia Dugdale made clear that Labour could not vote with the Tories in the Scottish parliament. Others said that while accepting the referendum result, we did not have to accept the Tory definition of Brexit.

On other matters Clive Lewis and Chi Onwurah were leading on high-skill high-wage industrial strategies, and a series of economic conferences would spread Labour’s messages across the country. Meanwhile the Tories continued to attack trade unions through Chris Philp’s 10-minute rule bill limiting the right to strike and filibustering Melanie Onn’s private member’s bill protecting employment rights.

Finally he praised the women and men who marched against Donald Trump’s racist, misogynist and generally disgraceful behaviour, and worried that Theresa May might open Britain to private US healthcare companies and dumping of American goods. Members were concerned about the growth of “alternative facts“ and fake news, and some wanted to see more of Jeremy Corbyn in the mainstream media.

NEC members poured cold water on the vogueish talk of progressive alliances. The SNP were not progressive, the Greens had cost Chris Williamson a seat in Derby, and Tim Farron had just said that the LibDems would stand in every constituency regardless.

**Finances and Forecasting**

General secretary Iain McNicol said that finances were in reasonable shape, though the trade union bill would reduce the income from affiliates and it was not known how many of the current 500,000 paying members would stay for the long haul. Of those joining in 2016, 45.5% were women, against 39% before the 2015 election, with 48% under 30, 24% from an ethnic minority background, and 16,000 declaring a disability. The average age was 47. In comparison the Conservatives were thought to have 100,000 members with an average age of 68. On the expenditure side by-elections were costly, but everyone recognised the importance of holding Copeland and Stoke. Campaign staff were co-ordinating work on the ground, but the political leadership was responsible for uniting the party and for messages on Brexit.

At the November meeting Iain McNicol promised to return the Euro-levy, at £300 per year, to local parties, but the electoral commission had asked parties to allow for Euro-elections in 2019 just in case. However I have been pushing for the amount per member going to CLPs to be raised from around £1.61 to perhaps £2.50, and I hope I will be able to confirm this in March.

**Conferences Past and Future**

Final figures showed that 822 constituency delegates from 536 constituencies attended the 2016 annual conference, the most for more than 15 years. In 2017 each CLP would also be able to send one woman as a voting delegate to the women’s conference on Saturday 23 September in Brighton. Visitors would still be welcome, and work continues on a framework which gives the conference decision-making powers but maintains an open and inclusive atmosphere for all women members. Further, the NEC would have to decide on whether future women’s conferences should be held as stand-alone events. Constituencies and unions say they would prefer this, but it would cost a six-figure sum and require extra staff resources.

**Committee Corner**

Recently the NEC has been plagued by wholesale leaks and misreporting. Among the “alternative facts” on social media were claims that the disputes panel, which I chair, had refused even to issue warnings to two members who had committed anti-semitic acts. The truth is that a full investigation did not substantiate charges of anti-semitism. The proposed warnings were for other misbehaviour, and the panel took the view that sufficient lessons had been learned. However the same meeting referred three other members to the national constitutional committee for statements on social media which compared Israel and its supporters to vampires, compared Israelis to Nazis, called Laura Kuenssberg a Zionist stooge and said that Zionists control the media. Labour is not soft on anti-semitism, and next time I will try to get the facts out there.

The organisation committee agreed revised guidance on quorums for branch and all-member meetings which recognises that 25% attendance is rarely or never achieved, and suggests a sensible number or percentage instead. The committee also received a report on 11 constituencies in special measures, gave back control to Leeds North East and noted pathways towards normal functioning for others.

The committee received 71 motions from CLPs, most referring to aspects of the leadership contest. Some of these were addressed in draft principles for amended disciplinary procedures. Rights associated with membership would be suspended only where necessary, and a range of penalties would allow a more proportionate response where allegations were upheld. I asked for appeal rights for people excluded for supporting other parties or organisations, and for local parties to be involved. Following many complaints about suspension or exclusion last summer, some CLPs are now objecting that the NEC has allowed people in against their wishes. Finally I would like to see standard rules for future leadership elections in two areas. First, registered supporters should either be removed or have their fee linked to membership subscriptions, perhaps at the reduced rate. Second, the cut-off date for participation, which I believe should be set at six months before the date when the timetable is agreed. I am open to other ideas, but the NEC cannot keep bouncing from one extreme to the other. Please let me know what you think.

**National Executive Committee 24 January 2017**

**Peter Willsman’s report**

For the second time running, we had a very tranquil NEC. This may be down to the fact that there was very little on the agenda that was controversial. The most noteworthy issues had arisen at the Disputes Panel and Organisation Committee held on the 17 January. I cover some of these issues below.

Uniquely among Labour Party leaders, Jeremy regularly attends NEC sub-committees. Jeremy is almost always at the Organisation Committee. I have also noticed that most of our staff are ever more supportive of Jeremy. I have never seen the staff so determined to win two by-elections as they are in Copeland and Stoke-Central. I suspect most of the staff, like most party members, do not believe that an MP should be parachuted into a CLP one minute and then resign the next. Contrary to this, some of the writers in the dire Guardian have suggested that individual career prospects take precedence over loyalty to the party.

**Leader’s Report**

Jeremy came hot-foot from preparing Labour’s response to the Supreme Court decision against the Tory government. Jeremy took the NEC through all of the implications of this Judgement decision and of Labour’s response. He and Keir had made it clear that although Labour will respect the decision of the referendum, we will press firmly for all of our red-lines. Jeremy emphasised that Labour must speak to both sides of the referendum divide.

Jeremy drew attention to a Tory MP who that afternoon was moving a 10-minute Rule Bill on seeking to further restrict the rights of trade unions and trade unionists (it was defeated). Jeremy believes that this is an early move by the Tories to prepare the ground for a much more serious attack on the rights of workers.

Jeremy congratulated Jon Ashworth (Shadow Health Secretary) – who was present at the meeting – for all the work he had done building for Saturday’s Day of Action. Jeremy and Jon then outlined the serious crisis facing the NHS. The crisis has been building for years, since the Tories have been continually restricting funding. Indeed, next year and in 2019, the funding for the NHS will actually be reduced in real terms. This is at a time when the challenges facing the NHS are ever growing. For example, we are living longer, the major reductions in social care provisions are having a knock-on effect, there has been a major increase in the numbers of homeless people as a result of the government’s austerity policies, and there are always implications of the advances in medical science. Jeremy and Jon highlighted the particular crisis facing mental health provision. There has been a reduction of 600 nurses and a serious decline in the number of doctors as well. Jon drew attention to possible adverse implications from the trade treaty with the US that May is desperately trying to obtain. It would open the door to the avaricious and ruthless US health insurance companies that could accelerate the privatisation of the NHS.

Jeremy stressed that the NHS is the National Health Service for a reason. Part of its aim was to overcome inequalities between different regions, which was one of Nye Bevan’s main motivations. Jeremy also drew attention to the Defend the NHS demo on 4th March.

Jeremy took the NEC through the Copeland and Stoke-Central by-elections, which are due to be held on 23 February. Jeremy especially paid tribute to all of our staff who are working around the clock to make our campaigns as effective as possible. Many members are also responding to the party’s Call to Arms. Several NEC members (me included) will also be knocking on doors in Whitehaven and Stoke. Later, Margaret Beckett referred to the talk about a ‘progressive alliance’, which she said was somewhat rich given that it was only yesterday that the Liberals were in government with the Tories, where they carried out very reactionary policies. I added that the notion of such an alliance has been talked-up by the dire Guardian and groups like Compass, but has now been relegated to the history books – their beloved Tim Farron has categorically ruled-out any link-up with Labour. Presumably Farron wants to keep his options open so the Lib-Dems are free to jump back into bed with the Tories (in fact, Farron has said as much!).

In his Report, Jeremy also outlined our developing Industrial Strategy and its interrelation with our economic policy, e.g. a national investment bank with a regional focus, investment in infrastructure, and other key issues that had been raised at the NPF.

Jeremy rounded-up by commenting on Theresa May’s embrace of the new President of the US. He emphasised that the Prime Minister should challenge the dreadfully racist, sexist, and reactionary language of the President. Jeremy also paid tribute to the inspiring women’s marches that were held across the world following the Inauguration. Jeremy was in Copeland on Saturday, but his son had represented him at the London march.

In response to Jeremy’s report, Kezia Dugdale set-out the manipulative way the SNP are exploiting Brexit. Kezia emphasised that the response by the Scottish Labour Party will be based on the interests of the Scottish people. Alun Davies also briefly outlined the strategy of the Welsh Labour Party in response to Brexit.

Martin Mayer led a discussion on the setting-out of a clear definition of ‘free movement of labour’. It was accepted that this was a quite complex issue. Jeremy paid tribute to the trade unions for making extra efforts to recruit migrant workers in order to unite all groups against the exploitative bosses – who, as usual, are using the age-old ‘divide and rule’ strategy.

**Deputy Leader’s Report**

There was no report because the deputy leader was absent.

**EPLP Report**

Glenis Willmott, EPLP Leader and our new effervescent Chair, had circulated a written report. Despite the major focus on Brexit, the important work of the European Parliament continues. In recent months Labour MEPs had welcomed European cooperation against aggressive tax avoidance. Labour MEPs voted against the compulsory opening up of railways contracts across Europe to private sector operators, because the new laws do not provide protection for rail workers’ terms and conditions. The Commission has made clear that workers employed on zero-hour contracts should have full employment rights as a result of EU law on part-time workers. Jeremy added that he had called together representatives of socialist parties in the EU and stressed the need to work together. He was pleased to report that following this meeting two of Labour’s MEPs were elected to important positions.

**Local Government Report**

Nick Forbes and Alice Perry had circulated a written report, and Nick took the NEC through it. The Annual Local Government Conference will take place in Warwick on 18 February. Over 200 councillors have already registered to attend. Jeremy is planning to address the conference.

In response, I highlighted a serious matter of concern that has been raised with me by many councillors and party members in relation to a matter of conflict of interest. This concerns the accountability of Labour councillors. This used to be ensured by Local Government Committees (LGCs), but with their replacement by Local Campaign Forums (LCFs), democratic processes and the accountability of councillors has diminished. In addition to this, there has been a development whereby directly elected mayors and council leaders can appoint councillors to major positions without any proper democratic processes. As I emphasised, this can create serious conflicts of interest, which, I said, must be addressed. The General Secretary nodded when I made this point, and therefore we can be hopeful that this unintended implication of the new LCF system will be addressed (indeed, at the 2017 Annual Conference in Brighton, there is a rule change to restore the separation of powers that existed under LGCs).

There was also a discussion of what, many of us saw, as the inadequacies of the recent Newham Trigger Ballot process. It was agreed that Ann Black and Alice Perry will visit Newham and report back to the NEC on possible improvements to the whole process.

**Minutes of NEC Meetings and Sub-Committee Meetings**

As I have already said, the most noteworthy were the Dispute Panel and Organisation Committee on 17 January. A report from officers was presented in relation to the allegations made against the Oxford University Labour Club. Our officers had carried out an investigation. Two students in particular had been singled out by those making the allegations. The investigation concluded that there was no case to answer in relation to anti-Semitism in relation to these two students. A separate accusation (unconnected to any question of anti-Semitism) had been raised regarding the two students and their general behaviour. The Disputes Panel discussed in detail whether a warning was appropriate in these two cases. It was agreed without dissent that no further action should be taken.

In relation to Wallasey, it was agreed that suspension would remain in place with a review at the March meeting of the Dispute Panel.

The Organisation Committee, considered 33 Contemporary Motions which the Conference Arrangements Committee had referred to the NEC. In addition, 38 motions submitted by CLPs to the NEC in relation to organisational matters were also considered. The main issue raised in the motions related to issues arising from the last leadership election. Many of the matters raised are already under consideration by Ann Black as chair of Disputes, Jim Kennedy as chair of Org, and senior officers, in order to learn the lessons and improve arrangements in the future. Each of the motions will be the subject of a substantive reply from the General Secretary. I congratulated our staff for bringing all of these motions to the NEC. This was always the practice before New Labour, but it had been allowed to fall by the wayside.

**General Secretary’s Report**

Iain took the NEC through the papers he had circulated on the major issues facing us. These included the series of local government elections taking place this year, the Richmond Park and Sleaford and West Hykeham by-elections, the forthcoming by-elections in Copeland and Stoke-Central, and an update on the party’s finance strategy. The General Secretary also presented a review of the Annual Conference arrangements etc. at Liverpool, and highlighted the lessons we learned that can benefit us at the 2017 Conference.

Iain and other senior officers presented a small booklet which analysed in detail the membership data. The membership at the 1 January was 543,645. This is the highest figure on Labour Party records. 70% of our current membership joined after 1 January 2015. Our membership is now younger, and comrades joining from BAME communities has increased. The gap between men and women has become considerably smaller. The biggest expansion of membership has been in the south, particularly the South West. The smallest increase was in Scotland. Five of our eleven regions/nations, have increased in size by more than 40%. In relation to people leaving, 77% of these joined after the general election 2015. Unfortunately, the (ever more) dire Guardian has moved into the ‘post-truth’ era. A recent editorial pronounced that the Labour Party is ‘disintegrating’. In fact, our party is now the largest political party in Western Europe