

REFOUNDING LABOUR

Serious Flaws in Proposals to NEC

Overall Comments

- The document is littered with sections supporting “clearer lines of accountability” and giving members a voice, but recommendations which frequently strengthen command and control.
- In spite of a number of positive references to working with trade unions, the proposals actively seek to reduce trade union influence at several levels, especially at conference (including the conference arrangements committee) and in leadership elections.
- References to submissions are unreferenced and unquantified, and therefore lack transparency and credibility; in some cases, recommendations don’t even claim a basis in submissions, or are justified by such phrases as “consultation has exposed...”
- The effect will be that, in spite of some positive changes, the exercise will utterly fail to convince members that they are being given a voice. Yet Ed Miliband’s key objective was to re-enthuse and motivate the grassroots to turn the party into a campaigning force at local level. That will not happen. The membership need carrots not yet more sticks.
- The key issues of Conference voting, NEC (& CAC) composition, and what exactly conference is permitted to vote on (the structure of NPF reports, motions) are deferred for further consultation

Local Parties

- New requirement for annual CLP development plans in an approved format to be submitted to regions. Regional Board members to be given responsibility over these. This smacks of more command and control.
- Replacement of local government committees and district/county parties with small “coordination forums” dominated by council leaders and agents which will concentrate on “local election campaign coordination, candidate recruitment and candidate selection” will reduce accountability, undermine campaigning potential across local government areas and undermine members’ right to choose their candidates.
- “Registered supporters” to be introduced, theoretically “not at the expense of the rights of members” but who could be given votes in leadership elections as if they were affiliated members. This would provide the same benefit as an affiliated member who pays a levy and, based on the turnout at the last leadership election, half the benefit of an individual member. This does devalue the rights of membership and, since registration could be done online and is without any payment, opens the door to widespread electoral malpractice.
- The requirement for any union “as a condition of affiliation to the Party” to provide CLPs with membership lists in their areas is draconian – it would be more comradely and probably more effective if communications with union members came via their unions.
- Defensive about Membersnet (“although widely used by 56,768 users it is clear members find Membersnet difficult to navigate and expect more from a party intranet system”) implies a lack of sympathy – lack of quantification of complaint notable here.

National Executive

- Serious extension of concentration of power in Leader enshrines the reduced status of the NEC in rulebook which developed informally under New Labour regime (see below under Leadership)
- No enhancement of CLP representation

Leadership

- Serious move to enshrine elective dictatorship in the rulebook by empowering the Leader with (i) “the right to attend any party meeting (or to appoint representatives to attend on his or her behalf)”; (ii) “uphold and enforce the constitution, rules and standing orders of the party” and (iii) “have overall responsibility for all elections and shall appoint a Campaign Co-ordinator and a Campaign Committee to ensure that all Labour Party election campaigns report to the Leader”. Although these are to be exercised “in conjunction with the NEC” [apart from (i)], since these functions were previously vested in the NEC of which the Leader was a member, it represents a formal shift in power from the NEC to the Leader.
- Provision for gender balance in the leadership is desirable in principle but the measures proposed much less so – they envisage a gender-balanced joint ticket in which the leader is elected with a running mate he or she has chosen. Although this idea comes from Harriet Harman, it could have effectively prevented her acting on as acting leader (a role which most agree she performed extremely well) or forced her to retire afterwards.
- No significant changes in the electoral college are proposed except for the restriction of multiple voting and the much more serious issue of giving registered supporters who pay nothing a vote in the affiliates section alongside people who do pay a levy to the party. As we say above, this does devalue the rights of membership and, since registration could be done online and is without any payment, opens the door to widespread electoral malpractice.

Selections

- Disappointing that there are no significant changes to selection procedures to protect members rights, or improve the accountability of elected representatives and we need to be cautious about “simplified” procedures currently being piloted in parliamentary selections, and proposed new streamlined arrangements for re-selecting council candidates who are narrowly defeated for the following year’s election.

Young Members

- Disappointing proposals which stop far short of creating a new autonomous youth section with local branches in the CLPs and does nothing to liberate it from the control of party officials, or from the disproportionate influence of Labour Students.

Conference & NPF

- Whilst CLPs are given duty to consult members and their communities (which is OK in principle though the enforcement of these duties could represent a further increase in “command & control”)
- Lipservice to “technological solutions” and feedback but no real commitment
- Whitewashing of current NPF/JPC processes [e.g. “Policy Commissions have been given an important role in taking forward contemporary issues from one Annual Conference to the next” and “succeeded in producing a policy programme around which all members can unite”] with **no real changes proposed** (except doing away with CLP amendments as at the last Warwick conference), no recognition that even most NPF members are excluded from most of what happens within the NPF and no reform of the undemocratic JPC

Other issues

- Beware emphasis on movement for change
- Beware Future candidate programme, and accompanying favouritism, mentoring etc