

## **NEC Update, July 2022**

A week is indeed a long time in politics. When two NEC subcommittees met on 5 July we had no idea that within 48 hours Boris Johnson would be out, and I was already heading home when the implosions began. Otherwise the day would have been much more exciting than the notes below. However there is a full NEC meeting on 19 July when I hope we will show Labour as a united, competent and principled government-in-waiting and prepare for whatever might come next. Your thoughts are welcome.

### Complaints and Disciplinary Sub-Committee (aka Disputes Panel), 5 July 2022

The committee received the latest figures for complaints, membership appeals, investigations, exclusions, suspensions, and hearings by the national constitutional committee (NCC) and the new independent complaints board (ICB). Of cases determined by NEC panels, the new independent review board rejected one of the 55 decisions but confirmed all the others, suggesting that the system is working as intended.

An increase in expulsions for supporting another party was clearly linked to the local elections. I still believe the rules are over-harsh in imposing the same penalty of five years' exclusion for standing against a Labour candidate and for signing other candidates' nomination papers, where members may be innocently doing a favour for a neighbour, friend or relative. In the olden days local parties could decide whether to report them. However unless the rules change, all I can do is advise them to appeal and, if unsuccessful, to apply to rejoin after two years.

Otherwise patterns were broadly similar to previous reports. Around 80% of valid complaints related to social media, and three-quarters were made by third parties rather than the direct victim of the behaviour. Two-thirds of cases referred to NEC panels included allegations of anti-semitism. These must all be firmly dealt with, but I continue to be concerned that Islamophobia and other forms of racism and discrimination are under-reported. It was suggested that analysing the 20% which did not involve social media could provide a better picture, as these were likely to refer to personally witnessed behaviour rather than individuals searching online and lodging multiple complaints.

Four months ago I wrote:

*“On suspensions the proportion spending more than 18 months in limbo continues at one-third of the total, and around 80 members are currently affected. As suspended members cannot stand for internal positions or public office they are already being punished for years even if they are eventually cleared. We were assured that all suspensions were reviewed regularly to see if they needed to remain in place.”*

Sadly that was still the case. Forty-three of the 75 suspended for more than 18 months were under investigation and 32 were awaiting an NCC or ICB hearing. A new issue was that more than 40 members were now suspended for failing to undertake training required by an NEC panel. Where training has been explicitly refused the committee may consider further action rather than extending suspensions indefinitely.

### Organisation Committee, 5 July 2022

The committee welcomed Tony Woodhouse, who replaces Amy Jackson as a Unite representative on the NEC, thanked Diana Holland, who is standing down as treasurer in September, and congratulated Michael Payne and Ellen Morrison, elected unopposed as treasurer and NEC disabled members' representative respectively. Ballots for constituency representatives will go out from Monday 25 July.

## **Change is Coming**

The boundary commission will publish revised proposals for Westminster constituencies in October 2022. In previous reviews these have usually been close to the final version and the party therefore decided that work on reconstituting English CLPs along the new boundaries should begin in October and take effect from 1 January 2023. Interim officers would be appointed by regional directors until inaugural AGMs, to be held between January and March 2023 for areas without local elections and by the end of July 2023 for all CLPs. Finances would be shared out from the start of 2023 using membership figures at 31 December 2022 as a base, after which the constituency share of subscriptions would go to the new CLP. The NEC would resolve any contentious issues around transfers of assets or liabilities, and the committee hoped that all locally-employed staff would have opportunities to continue working within the new structure.

Scotland would be unaffected as Scottish CLPs are organised around Scottish parliamentary constituencies, and Welsh Labour had asked for final decisions to be deferred pending discussion of possible changes to the Senedd.

All this makes perfect sense except for two rather large problems. First, we do not have a functioning membership system, and the cyber-incident in October 2021 has delayed transition to its replacement. CLPs cannot produce membership lists at 31 December, or indeed at all. Organise, the mailing software, reaches 75% of members 75% of the time, and there can be delays in updating wards, branches and individual members. The new database will allocate members more accurately to wards and constituencies from August 2022, which is good news. However role-holders were informed at a recent briefing that CLPs and members would not have access until January / February 2023. So we would have to convene AGMs for new branches and CLPs without up to date membership lists, and during the Christmas holidays when party offices are closed.

I have been promised a full report on membership systems at the July NEC meeting. This week CLP officers received an informative update, and regular briefings for role-holders will be arranged. The informal secretaries Facebook group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/699152383520929> is a useful and non-partisan source of support for CLP secretaries on this and many other bureaucratic matters.

The second difficulty, entirely beyond our control, is a possible general election before autumn 2023, with a new Conservative leader perhaps seeking their own mandate. That election would be fought on current constituency boundaries, though the new boundaries would still come into effect for the following election. There would be obvious complications for candidates and campaigns, though these would affect all parties.

### **Provisional Membership**

The cyber-incident has also made it difficult for CLPs to check new recruits. The committee agreed that while members joining from 1 January 2022 would continue to acquire full rights after eight weeks, CLPs should be able to raise concerns through to 31 December 2022. This was described as extending provisional status to a year, but I suggested looking for a less negative word than “provisional” from eight weeks onward. It would also be helpful to have ways of identifying members moving in from other CLPs.

### **Westminster Selections**

There will be a review of procedures used in the first batch of selections at the NEC meeting on 19 July, and I welcome comments on all aspects, especially from constituencies, candidates and interviewers who have been involved so far.

The committee also received a list of trigger ballot results, with most of the rest scheduled to complete by the end of July. Particular concerns were raised about one constituency. The NEC had agreed that MPs would not face a trigger ballot when they are pregnant, on paternity or maternity leave, or for 12 months after returning from parental leave. I think that members were sympathetic to extending this to MPs who become ill before or during their trigger process, and this could be done through amending the NEC guidelines as exemptions are not defined in the rulebook. However it is not appropriate for all 39 NEC members to examine and discuss an individual’s sick notes, disability status and private and personal history, and few of us were aware of all communications between the MP and the party.

Parliamentary NEC members confirmed that trigger ballots were stressful and destabilising, and all MPs deserved and needed party support. However the process now had a higher threshold following rule changes in 2021. In 2019 an open selection could be triggered by just two out of six party branches, even if every affiliate supported the MP, and the then NEC prioritised trigger ballots over selecting new candidates for the general election, with the result that the NEC imposed dozens of candidates at the last minute for the second time in three years. Some speakers noted that those now expressing concern had previously supported making deselection much easier. But there is clearly scope for further improvement.

### **Special Measures**

Six CLPs remain in special measures, some dating back to 2017, and little progress had been made since March because of council elections, by-elections and parliamentary selections. Members were concerned that these were dragging on. It was suggested that a special backlog team could be brought in to speed up membership audits, along the lines of the team which cleared the complaints backlog.

## Messages from the Grassroots

The committee noted a number of motions from CLPs. Bolton North East asked the NEC to review the scheme for CLP funding and allocation of membership subscriptions introduced in 2011. This was agreed by conference in 2018 but has made little headway despite my best efforts. The advantage of being an independent-minded representative is being able to work constructively with all "sides". The disadvantage is being unable to make progress on issues where no group or faction is particularly interested. But I will keep trying.

Leicester South proposed allowing students to hold dual membership in their home CLP and their termtime CLP. This would have benefits for CLPs and students themselves, enabling them to participate actively all year round, and I support the principle. However until the new membership system is bedded in and every member is correctly allocated to at least one CLP it will be difficult to take this forward. Something to follow up in future.

## Women Going Forward

Because there didn't seem to be anywhere else to raise it, members asked if there was a timetable for a national women's conference, expected in spring 2023. The national women's committee on 7 June was concerned about delays and called for a fully hybrid event to maximise participation. Unfortunately the inclusion of online balloting makes hybrid conferences much more expensive than those held entirely in-person or entirely online. The women's conference arrangements committee meets on 20 July and we may find out more there. I was involved in reviving a standalone women's conference, and would be sad if its renaissance proved to be brief. However the great democracy review in 2018 also agreed annual BAME, disabled, Young Labour and LGBT+ conferences, and it may be sensible to consider all of these together.

## NEC Elections

And finally, the ballots for NEC constituency representatives and other national and regional positions will open from Monday 25 July and close on Friday 19 August 2022. I'm grateful to Open Labour for supporting me again alongside Katherine Foy for two of the nine CLP places and Jermain Jackman for the NEC BAME seat. If you'd like to ask me anything about anything, please use the form at <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfQhgK0zTVeh3VjuATiDb5fbYXm0qbbsvtB4MbS-ASa88CvA/viewform>

*As usual please feel free to circulate and/or post online, and contact me at [annblack50@btinternet.com](mailto:annblack50@btinternet.com) / 07956-637958. Previous reports are at [www.annblack.co.uk](http://www.annblack.co.uk)*