

NORTH WEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE 2020

8 - 9 FEBRUARY, SOUTHPORT



Conference Report

Author Derek Maylor

The CWU NW delegation was Ian Moran (CAC), Carl Webb, Ian Tomlinson, Brian Kenny, Paul Braithwaite, Lenny Crook, Mark Walsh, Mike Yarwood, Derek Maylor, Angela Teeling, Bev Kenyon, Dan Wrigley, Alan Jones, Mark Holt, Emma Garner, Nadeem Khan, Tony Salt, Bruce Devenport, Mal Donoghue and a few friends and family as visitors.



 @NWCWU

 /NWCWU

WWW.CWUNORTHWEST.ORG

WWW.CWU.ORG

Nick Parnell, CAC Chair formally opened the weekend's conference with Liz Savage doing the mandatory "Welcome to Southport" bit; recommending the area for holidays even when the tide's out. The weekend's tone was set with putting the Brexit election behind us and moving on.



Andrew Gwynne MP talked about how Austerity has impacted on Local Communities and the work being done by Labour councillors looking after our communities whilst having to make Tory enforced cuts of 22% per household in the NW since 2010. Age UK say 74,000 people have died over last decade waiting for social care. The number of children in care has hit an all-time high whilst cuts are being made in funding. We need to make a statement on May 7th. in the local and Mayoral elections, it's not just about numbers, but about people. We lost a lot of good MPs at the election, a travesty but people trusted the Tories and already £300m will be lost from care. The ten most deprived areas in the country will see cuts of 13%. People must be told that Labour will speak for them, from our town halls to our Parliament; we have the values and the vision to make a better UK for all not the few.



Nav Mishra MP chaired a panel session on Local Government as the Foundation for *Labour in Power* with Dr Erica Lewis (Leader Lancaster), Matthew Brown (Leader Preston) and Alyson Barnes (Leader Rossendale). It covered topics such as transport and climate emergency and local action, where we need to take everyone with us, we cannot merely say "do the right thing". Communities must repeatedly be told that Labour councillors do not make cuts - the Tories are doing it.

A big welcome to the stage was expected, and received, for **John McDonnell MP**, Shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. Fighting Austerity and Rebuilding our Economy were the issues we fought the election on. Some in the party say we lost the election because of the Leader who faced the biggest ever smear campaign in the history of UK politics, helped by some on our own side. Some blamed the loss on the manifesto - but that was about socialism, justice through democracy. We will not apologise for promising to fully fund the NHS, for wanting to scrap tuition fees, to build a million new council homes, for a real living wage, for the return of trade union rights. The Green New Deal is inspirational and will transform lives. We are a party of peace and not pro war, but we will support our forces and fund them accordingly. The divisions of Brexit made people weary and we lost votes. We must not allow Brexit to be a permanent division, the real division is still class and those who use



it for their advantage. Don't feel sorry for ourselves, organise and go again. Capitalism has evolved again and now we have new corporations and data complex situations dominating society. We have to be a genuine social movement from the biggest political party in Western Europe. Priority is education, we can learn from every campaign we lead. We will join campaigns like Extinction Rebellion and those students have led the world debate. Austerity was choice not a necessity. People are living in poverty after a decade of cuts. We offer a social alternative for our workers, for our children and for communities.

Delegates spilt up and went to their choice of lunchtime fringe meetings on Stop the War, changing the election voting procedure to some form of proportional representation and on improvements to public transport.



Conference reconvened for three different National Policy Forums (NPF) consultations, *“Tackling the Housing Crisis”*, *“Home Affairs and Modern Slavery”* and *“Fighting for the NHS”* which was part of the Health & Social Care Forum. It covered privatisation, funding of social care, combating health inequalities and campaigning for the NHS. Many expressed concerns over the Americanisation of NHS by stealth. We need more integration of NHS and Local Authority social care systems to offer joined up services for people when they need them the most. Ambulances are queuing up outside hospitals unable to discharge their patients, people on trolleys outside A & E, cancer patients waiting months for treatment and so on – the NHS is ill itself and treatment is urgently needed.



The most interesting session is usually the motions, which was opened by Steve Rotheram, Liverpool Metro Mayor with a theme of “Rebuilding the Northwest”. No one should be left behind; society is broken when the world’s fifth richest economy has thousands of people living on the streets. Steve will offer a Young Person’s Charter to guarantee them a future - an end to bus deregulation so we can have a more reliable service with capped fares - there will be an integrated transport system with the new trains all having a guard on them - we will have locally owned track, rail and stations run for local people. We are already on the way to making a difference in green energy generation with the ever-closer Mersey Barrage, which will power up to a million homes.

Fylde CLP moved a motion on “Make Every Labour Voter Count” highlighting two fundamental matters arising as a result of the last general election. Firstly, we lost NW Labour MPs in Barrow and Furness, Blackpool South, Bolton, Burnley, Bury N, Bury S, Crewe and Nantwich, Heywood and Middleton, Hyndburn, Leigh, Warrington South and Workington - this included losses in previously considered ‘safe’ seats. Secondly the effect on our Party and its Leader of distortion, lies, smears and

character assassination, reached new heights. We need to reach all our Labour voters, and take none for granted, so that voters in both 'safe' and in supposedly 'unwinnable' NW seats are not taken in by the distortion, smearing, lying and character assassination. The aim must be to have an 'army' of Labour voters in all constituencies, who can help resist the onslaught against us. They said that the first past the post system drives the policy of concentrating in marginals backing it up with a list of statistics meaning if we want to win the next general election, we need a voting system where seats allocated reflect the votes cast and support a proportional representation voting system where every Labour voter counts. The motion was **Not Carried**

The second motion was from **Lancaster & Fleetwood CLP** who talked about devolution away from the major cities, for the towns, villages and rural communities. Centralisation has led to a dramatic imbalance in power between councils and central government. Central government often dictates what councils must do but does not have any requirement to fund those obligations it forces down. Responding to the climate emergency in local Green New Deal arrangements devolving power for key decisions is vital. Conference supported devolution plans that would see more areas in the North West secure devolution arrangements to support constitutional reforms that would rebalance the relationship between local and central government, based on partnership and the principles of shared responsibility. To redistribute resources and access to these resources which should not be dependent on local communities being able to raise these resources. We must use meaningful ways to increase the power and influence of local people and organisations and make democracy more inclusive to those groups who are traditionally under-represented or unrecognised for their leadership including women, young people, people with disabilities, people from BAME backgrounds, working class people and people with diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. This motion was **Carried**

Liverpool Walton CLP raised issue of the draconian cuts forced on local authorities and this being a contributory factor in Labour's election defeat where some voters blaming Labour for disintegrating local services and not seeing that the causational factor being national government. It was therefore agreed that local Labour parties and local authorities should mount campaigns involving local, regional and national meetings, rallies and demonstrations to place the responsibility for such cuts on the shoulders of the Tory government, whilst demanding that they are reversed. **Bev Kenyon** spoke in support.

This motion was **Carried**



Stalybridge & Hyde CLP raised concern over the bus services in the region which have been devastated by private interests, cutting of unprofitable routes that are vital to communities and the raising of fares to a rip-off level which. North West's bus services are not fit for purpose and do not meet the needs of the passengers who deserve a system in line with that of Greater London. Re-regulation of the buses across the North West would allow us to properly plan and expand the network, make buses easy and affordable, reliable and frequent. Re-regulation is only a start

and bringing bus services back into public ownership is the way to keep the running of community bus links away from the ruinous hands of profiteers in the first place, private firms who prioritise profit over people's needs, their environment, their clean air. Conference agreed to support any industrial action brought about by bus drivers and bus company staff in support of such aims. **Angela Teeling** spoke in support. This motion was **Carried**



In a similar vein **Tatton CLP** asked conference to campaign against the cuts in our region's bus services, highlighting that funding for buses is almost £400 million a year lower than it was ten years ago. There are consequences particularly for the most vulnerable experiencing isolation and social exclusion, hindered in their attempts to gain employment, education and training as they find it more and more difficult and costly to travel. We will build a campaign to highlight the cuts to local bus services in the North West and to link this with the need to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2030. We need adequate frequency, affordable fares and trialling free bus routes to encourage more people to use public transport.

This motion was **Carried**

Wallasey CLP backed up Tatton on taking busses back into public control because of the 3,000 lost bus routes across the country. Both Merseyside and Greater Manchester Northwest Transport Authorities has suffered repeated substantial reductions in the funding it receives from the Conservative government which allowed it to subsidise those services the private bus companies regarded as uneconomic, as a result many of these services have now been removed or withdrawn. These reductions in services disproportionately affect the most vulnerable in our communities, the unemployed, the elderly, the disabled and those who can't afford their own vehicle. It was agreed to call on the Metro Mayors of the Liverpool and Manchester City regions to re-regulate bus services within Merseyside and Greater Manchester on the model provided by Transport for London and to create a service based on public need rather than profit. This motion was **Carried**

The first union motion came from **Unison** who highlighted that public funding was propping up poverty pay; a decade of austerity has seen higher levels of people with some paid employment, but the emergence of 'in work poverty'. On average, wages remain lower in real terms than in 2006, before the financial crash. For many workers, insecure contracts; bogus self-employment; zero and low hours contracts; plus, reliance on two or three jobs means that earnings are uncertain and struggle to keep up with the rising cost of living. The growing need for food banks has convinced many workers they are lucky to have a job causing downward pressure on wages resulting in a race to the bottom. Public policy should actively seek to balance labour market conditions, to drive out exploitative bad practice and to help good employers benefit from delivering decent training, wages and conditions. This would also to ensure local people can afford to spend locally, boosting local economies. It was agreed for all North West Labour



Councils to accredit with the Living Wage Foundation, ensuring that the real Living Wage is paid not just to directly employed staff, but to all regular contractors too, as well as encouraging local businesses to accredit with the Foundation. The CWU have already support the adoption and development of Employment Charters in the Greater Manchester and Liverpool Mayoral City Regions and would like to see this model to spread out across the region. **Carl Webb** spoke in support. This motion was **Carried**

A motion from **Unite** raised concerns over the effects of automation and digitalisation in the workplace; we need to ensure the protection of hundreds of thousands of decent unionised jobs, which are now at risk from a significant and rapid rise in the use of new technologies across all sectors within the North West. Conference welcomed the introduction of new technology in areas such as the manufacture of green energy technology and the manufacture of electric vehicles and its necessary infrastructure. However, there are concerns that historically advances in technology have not proved positive for workers, or for our class. We need regional workplace technology agreements as part of an industrial strategy, addressing the challenges that automation and digitalisation bring to the workplace including social impact this will have on our communities by increasing inequality and hardship in areas already suffering from austerity, low paid precarious work and lack off direct investment here in the North West. To this the CWU would add that that the new industrial revolution of nanotechnology and artificial intelligence should lead to better jobs not less jobs, lead to more employment not scarcity of employment, and to new opportunities and not removal of our workers' futures. This motion was **Carried**

Usdaw understandably have issues with our shops and the high street where we see a crisis unfolding in the retail sector, 15% of shops stand empty across the North West, the second highest figure for any region in the UK. Thriving town and city centres are vital in providing employment and creating pride in our communities but over 85,000 jobs were lost in retail last year alone. Conference endorsed Labour's commitment to implementing a comprehensive strategy to save our shops and keep our high streets at the heart of our communities as an urgent priority. This motion was **Carried**

Homelessness across the UK is a national disgrace in 2020 and **Weaver Vale CLP** recognised that this has a political cause, a result of austerity, lack of support for military veterans, rising living costs and stagnating wages. A 117% increase in homelessness in the North West over the past three years is abhorrent as is the fact that a child becomes homeless in Britain every eight minutes and that rough sleepers are 17 times more likely to be the victim of violence compared to the general public. People experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping are not responsible for the crisis - the single biggest cause of homelessness are no-fault evictions in the private rental sector. More than 9,000 people in the North West have no home each night. Criminalisation and enforcement measures are not appropriate for dealing with the intensely vulnerable rough sleeping population, increase mistrust in official institutions inhibiting accessing support, and fail to reflect that rough sleepers are far more likely to be victims of violence and abuse than to be perpetrators. There is much hard work being done by local outreach services, charities, and volunteers to help those suffering in the homelessness crisis brought

about by austerity and is committed to oppose all criminalisation of homelessness and rough sleeping by urging our MP's and Councillors to push for the immediate repeal of the 1824 Vagrancy Act in line with the promises made by the Party in the 2019 Manifesto and the recommendations of the homeless charity Crisis and to campaign against criminalisation of homelessness and rough sleeping, including through the Vagrancy Act, PSPOs, CBOs, and dispersal orders targeting people experiencing homelessness.

Wigan CLP said that there should be dialogue between all Labour Party members elected to positions of office and the wider Party membership and there is no conduit for such dialogue with the elected regional Mayors of Greater Manchester and Merseyside. The Regional Board will bring about the return of the Greater Manchester LCF and inaugurate a Merseyside LCF immediately following the Mayoral elections to ensure there is accountability and dialogue between the Mayoral teams and the Party members. This was against CWU policy. Angela rose again on this one. The motion was just **Carried**



The largest debate was caused by **Worsley & Eccles South CLP** who support HS2. They asked conference to give full support for High Speed 2 and for increased transport investment in the North of England. Saying that this is the only realistic way of improving our local rail services and eliminating old and crowded trains is to remove the fast inter-City services from the existing network, which is exactly what HS2 will do, and then improve the local commuter services with new and longer trains. It must be stressed that HS2 is about capacity on the rail network, not about speed - although reduced journey times will be welcomed by everyone. It didn't go down well and the motion was **Not Carried**

Mark Walsh went to the rostrum to move the CWU emergency motion on the dispute with Royal Mail. On the 15th October the CWU balloted our 110,000 Members working in Royal Mail for strike action over Royal Mail's proposal to break-up the company, scrap legal protections, threats to the USO and breach the Four Pillars agreement. 86,500 members took part in the ballot and a massive 97.1% rejected RMG's propaganda and voted with the CWU. RMG's response using the Tory Anti-Trade Union Laws to serve a shameful and unjust injunction on the grounds that the CWU intimidated their members into voting Yes was deplorable. We know that there was no evidence that members were intimidated by CWU officers and there was not one complaint made to the Independent Scrutineer. RMG say they will listen and talk to the CWU but they will still do what they want. Last month RMG announced that they would be taking Executive Action



and implementing changes with no agreement in workplaces in Preston, Warrington, Carlisle, Cornforth and Bolton. This is obviously the start of a race to the bottom in both our members terms and conditions and the service provided to our customers across the NW. The CWU served notice on the 4th February for a further national ballot for Industrial Action, whilst also supporting local ballot requests in the North West where management attempt to carry out their intended executive action. Conference overwhelmingly gave full support to the CWU and called on all North West CLPs, Affiliates, Labour Groups, Councilors and MPs to contact local CWU postal branches to express support for its members in the current dispute; mobilise support for future picket lines and to make clear statements in support of CWU members in Royal Mail on social media and other platforms. This motion was **Carried Unanimously**



The second CWU emergency motion was moved by **Brian Kenny** which noted the extraordinary contribution made by all North West Labour MEPs, both past and present, to achieving a better and fairer Society for all residents of the NW, as well as Great Britain and Europe. Regardless of the merits or otherwise of the Brexit agreement, we regret the fact that our MEPs are now no longer in position and unable to carry on with their vital work. Conference unanimously placed on record sincere thanks for everything that our past and present North West MEPs, as well as their staff, have achieved. In particular thanks to the most recent MEPs, Theresa Griffin and Julie Ward and their staff. They are welcomed home as champions of the Labour movement and progressive politics, and we look forward to them continuing to make a massive contribution towards the Labour Party. This motion was **Carried Unanimously**



UNITE put forward an emergency motion about the Liverpool City Region Fair Employment Charter noting the launch of the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter on 29th January and welcome the decision of the Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham to establish a Liverpool City Region Fair Employment Charter with the consultation on what the charter should cover and measure commencing 10th February. All eligible Party members to take part in the online consultation on the LCR Fair Employment Charter and in particular believe that the Charter should promote the Real Living Wage, with accreditation conditional on paying this to all direct employees and having definite plans in place to make payment a condition of

any future contracted services. It should positively address and tackle the rise of all forms of insecure work including the use of zero hours, short hours and temporary contracts; allow all workers the chance to join a trade union, and for unions to have fair access to workplaces to recruit and organise. We will promote inclusive workplaces that both comply and exceed the current legal requirements of the Equality Act 2010. This motion was **Carried**

Dan Carden MP, Shadow Minister for International Development, ended the first day saying democracy is not merely going and putting an x in a box every five years or



trying to get others to do it by knocking on doors with a leaflet. Change will not come by chance and we must organise outside of any elections, the Labour movement must be seen in the community, as an integral part of that community. It will not be an easy win, there's a mountain to climb and we will climb it and regain trust. There is no fast track to government and any Labour leader who gets an easy ride from the press isn't a leader worth having. We will stay true to our beliefs; the transformation agenda is still our ambition. It is 2020 and there should be no poverty, there should be no inequalities and we must reverse climate change or it will all be for nothing. The current economic

model is not fit for purpose, look at foodbanks across the UK. Look at the homeless. But our greatest achievement bar none, the NHS, was created by Labour government, but it was drawn up before Labour got into government. It was a dream and an aspiration for free health care for all including the poorest. It was delivered. So, now to today, we will start our campaigning and organising now; we will continue with our aspirations which we will, in the long term, achieve. Not only are we not going away, we're just getting started.



The second day of the Conference started with formal reports from Steve Turner, NW NPF Representative; the Youth Report by Lotte Boumelha, Chair NW Young Labour and the Regional Director's Report by Anna Hutchinson.



Building Affordable Housing in the North West is a huge issue and **John Healey**



MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Housing, Jenny Wilkie West Lancs. Council, Maureen McLaughlin Warrington Council took part in a panel session including a Q&A chaired by newly elected MP for West Derby and foodbank champion Ian Byrne. Labour promises of removal of dangers cladding from high rise flats, for one million affordable quality homes, for the

end to the building of rabbit hutch houses were all correct and we stand by them. There are people sleeping rough in Westminster at the home of Parliament, this is just wrong when there are thousands of empty houses around the country. Affordable housing means different things to different people and all must be catered for. Council houses do not belong to the council but to the community, and public health alongside wellbeing can only improve when we have decent housing.

Labour often get accused by the media of ignoring business needs so the “Brexit and Austerity has impact on the Business Community” led by **Bill Esterson MP**, Shadow Minister for International Trade, will probably not get a mention anywhere in the press. Margaret Greenwood the Shadow Minister for Work and Pensions, and Theresa Griffin both spoke and took part in the Q&A chaired by Charlotte Nichols MP. We need a just transition to green energy, greener transport, energy efficient homes and trade unions are essential for all of this. We can not have a downward race in standards, either in work or in our communities when we reposition ourselves after Brexit, any trade deals must protect standard not devalue them to the likes of the big pharma. Around 14 million people in the UK are living in poverty and they need support, even the UN criticises the UK government for their unnecessary austerity measures. The government took us into the biggest risk for a generation without any economic risk assessment, and the lowest paid, or non-workers, are to be the hardest hit by an economic downturn. Things can get worse and even now some people already have to decide whether to heat their home or eat.



Women's committee, the Disabilities committee and the LGBT committee (all three of whom stood in at the last minute in the session chaired by **Kim Johnson MP**.

Since 2010 there has been a systematic intentional attack of the rights of the disabled, we now have a system that punishes people for being disabled. UN Rights of the Disabled should be enshrined in the UK, public transport should be made accessible for our disabled people, we need a government department for the disabled, we must strengthen the 2110 Equalities Act, and we should restore the Legal Aid system back to what it was and basically, offer fairness of opportunity.

The final panel session discussed how austerity has impacted under-represented groups and how Labour can tackle this. There was a Young Labour rep Sarah Doyle, Junaid Alvi the BAME rep. and representatives from the



The conference closing speech was by the excellent **Baroness Shami Chakrabarti** on “Austerity and The Fight for Human Rights”. The far-right Johnson led government is shortening lives and taking away life’s chances for millions of people. We must be the light that never goes out. The media has to answer for some of the abuse and misinformation it puts out when referring to Labour. The segregation of journalists at number 10 press briefing was appalling, weeding out those few who criticise the government. In the years ahead we have to defend institutions even of those who have been unfair to us. We must end the poverty wages that drive working people to foodbanks. A decent country keeps its people safe from starvation, it does not turn away people who desperate from benefit they need just to buy basic food. The right to reasonable health care is also basic and the NHS is sacrosanct, people should not be waiting on trolleys in hospital corridors. There is an emergency, but it is of this government’s own making. As a movement we will come together to improve lives and offer hope to people.



During conference the CWU’s North West No 1 branch political officer, Ian Moran, was successfully elected onto the Conference Arrangements Committee, whilst Regional Secretary, Carl Webb, and CWU member Sandra Walmsley, were elected onto the Regional Board.

It would be fair to say that the CWU had the busiest stand at Conference - with delegates queuing up for CWU-branded water bottles and conference bags stuffed with information on the CWU and our campaigns.

CWU delegates worked non-stop lobbying Labour MPs, councillors and the 800 rank and file party members in attendance on all the key issues that the union is currently addressing.

These included the Royal Mail dispute and the union’s ‘Our Hours’, ‘Save Our Post Office’ and ‘New Deal for Workers’ campaigns. We also highlighted the work of the region’s ‘Mental Health Network’.



