

## National Labour Conference – Ahmad Brooke Delegate

Travelling to the conference and seeing all the sights and delights over the course of a couple of days were hard to condense. However, what can be put into this report are the big highlights throughout through the eyes of a newcomer and 1<sup>st</sup> time delegate in representing Old Bexley & Sidcup.

Going into the first day of the conference, what was interesting was how there were rapid changes in how people spoke, what was discussed in the speeches and how democracy was implanted inside a conference. To suffice it was a scary but enlightening experience, yet there were many different unspoken rules and social graces which had to be found through trial and error.

Regarding the NHS motion that Old Bexley and Sidcup put together opposing the NHS privatisation plans from the government and the dangers from potential lawsuits from the government, whilst the motion passed, I was unable to attend the composite meeting due to additional engagements and through 2<sup>nd</sup> hand information I found that the 15% increase was dropped due to issues related to feasibility of the wording around it.

Another interesting aspect that came up was how as a delegate, the number of votes were weighted. As an example of this, if a CLP had 4'000 members the number of delegates would be represented by having 1 per thousand. Whereas with smaller CLP's the delegate system worked in smaller numbers as to allow proper representation and have some fairness.

One of the highlights of the first day was the speech by Angela Raynor, to summarise speaking about the challenges of using Zoom for online meetings, talking about Marcus Rashford and his campaign to get food for hungry kids. Additionally, the focus on representing workers/managers and through a new green deal to change the landscape, with also ensuring that workers have flexible working hours and proper rights and banning zero-hour contracts. For me it was an inspiration speech that explained the past challenged over the lockdown of 2020/2021 and looking to an alternative government under the Labour party.

Humorously, when the general secretary David Evans spoke, he not only gained an applause but also gained audience participation through some parts of the audience mentioning the former leader. Despite that the speech he delivered in summary was about his past in working in Croydon and Bexley and how his experiences had shaped him to represent the party. His speech piqued my interest when he told us how he wanted to use digital technology to get to the Labour voters which shows forward thinking. When the vote for him to be fully put into the job came through, he was voted in 59% to 41% (my vote was for him ) but it shows some have issues with this.

The person that chaired the debate was Dame Margaret Beckett. She spoke throughout the day to some of the delegates and mentioned while having the right to speak to be civil and not factional which was interesting. Furthermore, she also had some great retorts for some of the more challenging delegates, but she did make it a fair and quaint with a sense of British wit and humour.

While there were many delegates that spoke at length about different issues the best one was a lady that spoke about the lack of BAME representation in the party. Whilst the party has done a lot to represent those people there was still a long way to go and she also explained her experiences in the past as an example of how far the party had come but how far it will go for equality.

As for myself I found that when I wanted to speak, I worked with others from my CLP to come up with the idea of speaking about something small but effective. Recycling and paper. Whilst most people would feel fear and trepidation when going to speak to so many and a very knowledgeable audience. My experience was less of those and more about if my message added to the conference. The response from the audience was well received but the response from the party was more about see what the region thinks.

Another part of the day was the speech about the budget around legal costs for the Labour party as in previous years it was at £200,000 per year whereas now the costs had gone upwards to £2 million. This was attributed to outcomes from the EHRC ruling, issues of ongoing cases by people and organisations putting legal cases against the party over a variety of issues.

Speaking about the motion for the support of women against violence, there were a few speakers that spoke about the problems that women faced when dealing with and reporting domestic violence. Also issues around police still needing to improve their response rates in dealing with these issues. I choose to support the motion as I have had to support friends and family who have been through those issues too.

Closing the first day of the conference, I found that the delegate speeches to be at times inspiring, divisive, thought provoking and most importantly of knowledge and substance no matter what they spoke on.

The second day of the conference was interesting as were a lot of speakers and voting done through voting cards and the old show of hands for support , an older style. Yet this is democracy in action inside a conference which surprised me but understandable.

Going through the speakers the highlights were first Ed Miliband and speaking about being a former leader briefly followed by his speech about climate change and crisis with his 'only 5 minutes to midnight' which was an apt description. Going over the stakes at the conference in supporting the deal. Other aspects of the speech focused on speaking about policies linked to the Green new deal and challenges with climate ditherers, COP26 and long term infrastructure changes to push towards renewable energy. With a final point on supporting industries like steel with £3 billion pounds over the next ten years.

There were addition speakers from the Spanish prime minister, the head of the Norwegian and German Labour party equivalents. They all spoke on the common themes of climate change, encouraging the youth and workers towards supporting industry in sustainability towards new renewable technologies. Also putting tax breaks on the workers and making the rich pay their share of the tax burdens. With a final mention on Labour's sister parties working together to achieve a more socialistic world with equality and progress.

When it came to policy debate there were speeches on the nuclear industry, housing and issues around communication on how these could be achieved through different ideas and responses. Some of the information I listened to at times was very technical but understandable, but it required writing and listening which can take the toll over the course of a whole day.

One of the interesting things I learnt about that day was about reference backs which allow the delegate to get the relevant organisations within or associated with the party to look at policy documents. This seems to be used by some of the delegates to double check certain policy wording or to be used to show concern at policies going through that disapproved of.

Another thing was the EHRC report and the ruling around it, this was spoken about by some Jewish members. They also expressed concerns about the past and how they saw antisemitism within the party. This was backed up by some of the Muslim members who spoke about Islamophobia which they had seen as well. Combined together they pushed through a card vote to insure there was an independent complaint process that dealt with protected characteristics. This would pass later, and this was something I also backed.

The third day of the conference was very interesting as the highlights started with the TUC speaking about the contrast between rich and poor in terms of poverty. Mentioning levelling up according to the Conservatives. Explaining about taxes and the National Insurance contributions going up. We need to represent our workers and not go back to the past. Having a new working deal for people. Having wages raised to a liveable wage, ban fire and rehire. New deals to have union agreements. Public ownership being brought forward and large corporations paying fair taxes. Making sure that the next election fought on the issues that matter, with fair sharing and having the Labour political machine and industry working together. Overall, an interesting speech and the showing of the unions opinion on where they see the future going.

Lisa Nandy had a speech on her dad who came from India and talked about lifting people's heads up. Going on to the differing movements and how Labour backs them. Explaining about Hong Kong and what they needed, including the ongoing situation with Russia and the development of autonomous drones. Building walls is easy but bridges are harder, going over the Good Friday agreement and paving the way for it. Climate changes example and what was possible. Focusing on the climate change act. Compromise not cowardice. When we pulled out of Afghanistan it was labour and the party that helped to assist them whereas the conservatives did operation cold shoulder.

Her final part of her speech focused on being part of the world and also ending arms sales to countries like Saudi Arabia and also backing people that are oppressed in countries. Overall a good speech but a lot to take in and digest.

Another interesting speech from the Shadow defence secretary was on making sure that we are part of the NATO and work with our American and EU partners to have a safer world. However, also to have our armed forces have domestic arms production rather than outsource from abroad that takes jobs. This was an interesting speech that focus on the right points.

Finally there was another speaker that focused on the recent space travel by some of the wealthy space pioneers for spacecraft and threw this little statement which summed up the Labour party viewpoint. "If you can go to the moon then you can pay your taxes here on Earth".

For myself whilst I did not get much time to go to outside events as most of time was spent in the conference room. One thing that stood out, was the Ed Miliband speech which was sponsored by Natwest Bank. The summary of the speech focussed on how the UK could go on the path to being carbon neutral and the methodology and logistics involved to go there.

Throughout the speech there were times where Ed would turn from being the interviewee to the interviewer and he would question the Natwest representative on how they would bring in green incentives for business. Something that I have seen rarely in interviews but still a different type of dynamic.

The speech detailed on households large and small, potential Achilles' heel in decarbonisation and is it doable. Talking about a personal flower shop in his constituency and questions from that person on how it will help them. Some recovery from pandemic, debt and recovery. Having the right mechanisms to help businesses and needing infrastructure in place to have businesses to have good broadband.

Lots of no regret policies, energy efficiencies. What businesses need for finances to be energy efficient. Household report about if we got households up to band C then we can save households up to 25% on bills.

Public and private investment, having good supply chains. Government needs to invest for the medium to long term to achieve the needs for decarbonisation and green business. Having wind and solar invested in to give business the chance to work together.

Another event that I went to, was the Sadiq Khan speech, how he talked about his issues around what he has done throughout the pandemic and about how he has tried to stay approachable to the public but also aware of having security to protect himself. Understanding about problems the city faces and finally trying to keep London competitive, open, and friendly to the world. Additionally, after his finished his speech I asked a question privately about the Outer London Tax and he answered that it would be withdrawn in the future.

The fourth day of the conference had a lot of speakers which went over a lot of subjects which I mention in brief. Starting was Wes Streeting saying about Labour being part of my family and how they supported him throughout his kidney cancer and how the NHS got him cancer free. Talking about his past and seeing poverty and debt, how the current Conservative party slashed help and benefits and now 200,000 people pushed into poverty and has increased child poverty. With a final note that Labour is the party that can win. A very inspiring and hard-hitting speech.

There was the Unison speaker speaking on university debt and how during the pandemic all the staff were home delivering remote education. Staff in Dundee having staff pension cuts, going on strike with action to help them. Delivery of education needs to respect all educational staff. We need to reverse privatisation of education and we need to thank Labour for the support they have provided.

The Unite speaker talked about apprentices and providing a comprehensive education program. Apprenticeships can help green manufacturing and construction. My work is in aerospace and my union have helped women come into the sector.

Counsellor Beverly also spoke about the Conservatives cutting funding for education. Times reports that catch up funding is being cut by the chancellor. During pandemic the Wolverhampton council provided 1 million free meals. Additionally, delivered digital devices to help. Education and the right of equality and not to go hungry.

The final speaker Lia Webster spoke about her disabled children. How she retrained in SEN (Special educational needs) law to get access. 2014 family law was supposed to cover funding. 7 years and funding is still not there. Support is not fit for purpose. SEN tribunals are all on the increase. More funding is needed for SEND. When we win, we want to show the conservative party how we can work on inclusion.

The final day of the conference was Keir Starmer's speech on the party and what he wanted for the party. Through his speech he touched on aspects about education and special education needs funding. His past around being the legal profession and how we wanted to have a united party that could be electable and not have the spectres of Anti-Semitism in the past.

Whilst this was well received by most of the party delegates, there were a few people that booed him through out it and I had the displeasure of having to be next to a delegate who was very disruptive with her associates, and this caused me a lot of problems. Thankfully beforehand the management of the conference enacted a plan to stop this from happening. Additionally, the disruptive people had a secondary plan to play the Darth Vader tune to negatively impact the conference, but this was stopped by a few delegates and party secretaries.

Two other events that I almost forgot to mention was firstly going to the Friends of Israel and secondly Ana's interview to GB news about the Labour Party. Firstly focusing on going to the Friends of Israel event, the interesting part was all the people there agreed on the two state solution and when I asked about the changing situation on the ground I was told by the group leader that we must hope for a better tomorrow and never to lose hope.

During that event there were speech by Keir Starmer who spoke about supporting the Jewish people in the party and fighting against Anti-Semitism with a future of having a party that accepts all characteristics of religion, creed or race. This was followed by Lisa Nandy who chaired the Friends of Palestine and she reiterated her support for a two state solution and also show her support for the Friends of Israel. Finally the leader of the event spoke and he explained about Israel Labour supported the two state solution and was happy to see the UK Labour come in a more positive solution. All this combined made a very friendly atmosphere , most of the people by the end of the event were either full of food or drink.

The second event was helping prepare Ana for the GB news interview which was about the state of the party and the current direction it was going in. Whilst some of the questions were challenging, Ana was able handle them well and represent the Labour party in a positive light.

Overall, the conference was a sight of many events and twist and turns. The shibboleth of the conference for me was learning how to understand and work with others to bring better outcomes for the people that I represented. Also a thankyou to everyone who helped me through this and also to the people I represented.