

Below is a report from a CWU supported MP of the most recent Labour NEC Meeting

## **National Executive Committee, 27 January 2009**

The meeting opened with a lively discussion of the National Policy Forum. The next Forum is on 28 February, followed by a review of the current cycle including the new right to submit amendments. Conference 2009 will also decide whether to restore contemporary resolutions or continue the two-year experiment in which contemporary issues are aired and referred to the policy commissions without a vote. Peter Kenyon and I argued that constituencies should be consulted immediately, as many will be concentrating on elections from April to June. We did not prevail, but would welcome comments on any aspect of Partnership in Power before the Forum meeting so that we can reflect members' views.

No further meetings are scheduled, though more discussion has been promised on contentious issues including Remploy and a windfall tax on energy companies. **But plans for partial privatisation of Royal Mail are already causing unrest, and there were heated exchanges between Pat McFadden, Chair of the Forum and minister for employment relations and postal services, and other NEC members. The Forum document, agreed by conference in 2008 and known as "Warwick II", states:**

**"We have set out a vision of a wholly publicly-owned, integrated Royal Mail Group in good health, providing customers with an excellent service and its employees with rewarding employment. The government has established the Hooper Review to look at how the Royal Mail can succeed in a world where electronic and other forms of communication provide increasingly attractive alternatives to the mail and where there is more competition in postal markets."**

The unions in particular were unhappy that Lord Mandelson had now announced, without consultation, that he would implement the Hooper Review in full, including a partial sell-off. They accepted the need for new technology and the inevitability of job losses, but believed that ditching a central part of the Warwick agreement undermined faith in the Forum process itself.

Dennis Skinner said that Hooper began work while privatisation was still a Good Thing, before the economy turned upside-down, and his assumptions no longer held. Others believed that taxpayers would rather support their postal service than a bunch of bankers. Pat McFadden replied that a joint venture would provide capacity to compete in Europe and expertise from more advanced companies. The government would retain a majority stake, so it was not privatisation. **And Hooper took precedence over the "vision", which simply described the current Royal Mail set-up and did not imply any commitment for the future.** This last argument is disturbing because the Warwick agreement also sets out visions for informal adult learning, for valuing carers, for voluntary activity, and for a fairer and more equal society. I hope that all these visions do not fall victim to similar sophistry.