

## **Report for the Momentum West Midlands Regional Committee (WMRC) on the Third Momentum National Committee (MNC) held in Birmingham on Saturday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>.**

Under certain circumstances in political life one vote can make all the difference and that was the case at the beginning of the MNC on December 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Readers of this report will be aware that there had been and still is growing disquiet in the ranks of Momentum about the recent activities of the National Steering Committee (NSC) that had been elected at the first MNC back on February 6<sup>th</sup> 2016.

Rather than the NSC enacting decisions of the MNC or proposing courses of action to the MNC for discussion and ratification or rejection, the NSC had been acting in an increasingly Bonapartist manner by raising itself above the MNC and acting as the sole decision maker. In doing so it had bypassed the MNC that had elected the NSC in the first place. What had been forgotten, either accidentally or deliberately, was that the NSC and its members were given political life by a vote of the elected delegates to the first MNC meeting.

Comrades in the West Midlands were aware of some of the actions of the NSC as discussions had taken place in local groups and at the WMRC meeting of October 20<sup>th</sup>. Those discussions revolved around the imposition by the NSC of the structure and voting method to be used at the national conference in February 2017. After a long discussion the WMRC rejected both the content and the process imposed undemocratically by the NSC.

At its meeting of October 20<sup>th</sup> the WMRC then decided to set up its own ad hoc SC the aim of which were to come to the WMRC meeting on November 29<sup>th</sup> with a set of proposals to take us forward. The ad hoc SC met on November 23<sup>rd</sup> and drew up 14 points for discussion at the next WMRC.

The first point on the list of 14 points was the call for the immediate disbanding of the NSC as it had lost all credibility by its actions over the previous 2 months including the unilateral cancelling of the November 5<sup>th</sup> MNC. However, after a long discussion on this issue the WMRC delegates decided by an overwhelming majority at its meeting on November 29<sup>th</sup> not to call for the abolition of the NSC as the issue would be resolved at the February conference and between now and then there had to be some kind of continuity.

**This decision was important as the West Midlands delegates to the MNC were therefore mandated NOT to support any demand for the NSC to be dissolved.**

At the start of the MNC meeting on December 3<sup>rd</sup> a delegate from the London region moved a change in the order of business so that points 2 and 3 of the London motion could be taken first and point 3 called for the MNC of December 3<sup>rd</sup> to “elect a new Steering Committee”. This could obviously only happen if the existing NSC had stood down or been stood down.

The MNC delegates voted 27 to 26 to change the order of business. The vote itself reflected the balance of delegates at the MNC. After a discussion on what the NSC had been doing and whether or not it should be replaced by new elections, a vote was held on the London proposal. The first was tied at 28 to 28. After a lot of wrangling on who should or should not be entitled to vote a recount was held and the outcome was 30 to 29 against the London proposal. The existing NSC would therefore stay until the February conference despite the fact that as stated above the NSC is

composed of MNC delegates who were elected at the first MNC meeting back in February and that now three of the NSC were no longer delegates to the MNC as they had been de-elected by their regions.

**Comrades are aware that my own political views convinced me that by its actions the NSC had lost all political and structural legitimacy and should therefore have been replaced. However, I was at the MNC as one of the delegates from the WMRC and was mandated to vote to keep the existing NSC.**

**I obeyed the mandate. If I had disobeyed the mandate and voted according to my political views, the vote would have been 30 to 29 to dissolve the existing NSC and elect a new one.**

After this vote the MNC descended into almost chaos as demands were made for delegates' credentials to be checked. It was stated, for example, that at the May MNC in Manchester a decision had been made to only allow voting delegates from affiliated organisations as well as regional groups. In addition, the MNC has been expanded by a unilateral decision of the NSC to increase the number of delegates from underrepresented groups and to hold OMOV e-ballots that had never been discussed or voted on.

An example of the type of, in my opinion attempted gerrymandering, was the fact that Compass had 2 delegates who did not agree with the aims of Momentum in supporting the LP as Compass had supported the Lib Dems in the Richmond by-election and did not support JC in the leadership election. In the same vein Open Labour had 2 delegates but only one at the MNC meeting yet in the leadership election they had supported Owen Smith and not JC. Why were they therefore in Momentum? During a later discussion a delegate from one of the Liberation groups claimed from the platform that it should be the Liberation groups themselves who should be able to decide how many delegates they sent to the MNC! So in theory if they decided to send 100 delegates, that would be acceptable to them.

What did become clear as the meeting progressed was the ad hoc election of some of the delegates to the MNC. A document was issued on "OMOV elections and alterations to the composition of the National Committee". Under the section headed Liberation delegates it states that "For the first National Committee, liberation delegates were elected by small working groups and the two seats reserved for women's representatives were vacant". For that reason the NSC decided that an online OMOV ballot was the "most legitimate mechanism for electing liberation delegates to this 3<sup>rd</sup> NC" and only those who self-identified as belonging to one of the Liberation groups when joining Momentum could take part in the elections.

What was the outcome of the online OMOV ballot that had never been discussed or agreed on by the MNC? For the 2 places in the LGBT section there were 25 candidates and an electorate of 2040 of which 298 or 14.6% voted. For the two places for Women, 26 candidates stood in an electorate of 7646 of which 728 voted or 9.5%. The highest percentage participation rate was 16.6% for the extra seat for the West Midlands (53 voting out of an electorate of 319) and the lowest participation rate was the Women's section at 9.5%. The two Youth and Student delegates were not elected by the self-identified youth and students but by the Momentum Youth and Students national committee.

Compare those processes with how delegates from Regions are elected. I had to stand for election in my local group in Coventry. There were 4 candidates for the male delegate position in a meeting of 90 people. I was elected. I then had to come to a West Midlands regional meeting of delegates from local groups and stand and say why I thought I was suitable to be a MNC rep from our area. That is democracy and accountability in action. If only other processes were as rigorous!

These figures above indicate, in my opinion, that Momentum as a whole has a job on its hands to motivate and engage Momentum members to take part in Momentum local groups (and where they do not exist Momentum supporters should work to set them up) and to take part in election processes. I would have thought that by joining Momentum there is a wish and commitment to not only elect JC but also to change the LP politically and organisationally. I would have thought that Momentum members were therefore more politically aware and more active. The voting figures do not confirm my thoughts!

After what seemed to be an age of bureaucratic wrangling and points of order and information, after lunch we finally got to discuss motions.

However, the first issue after lunch was a challenge to the Chair's ruling on who could vote. The challenge was tied at 29 to 29 so the Chair's ruling stood that those who voted in the morning session could vote whether they were entitled to or not.

**Motion 1 concerned the purpose and powers of conference.** Option A from the NSC sought to limit the conference to discuss only what we stand for, how we behave and how we make decisions. Option B stated "The national annual conference is the sovereign, democratic body, representing members via local groups, with most time given over to formal decision making including motions, but also allowing political education, discussion and networking".

The choice was straight forward. Option A did not want political policy discussed and Option B did. The MNC voted by 29 votes to 28 to support Option B. I supported Option B on the basis that when Jon Lansman stated from the rostrum that Momentum should be a "an agent of change" in the LP, I then asked from the rostrum in what direction would that change take if we did not have any political ideas to take into the LP. I used the example of austerity. JC is against it yet the LP conference voted to penalise any councillor who opposed cuts and therefore did not implement austerity. Only if Momentum has a political position on issues like this, can we take ideas into the LP to initiate discussion on policy and try to win over Wards and CLPs to an anti-austerity position.

**Motion 2 on the timing of conference.** Option A called for February 25<sup>th</sup> but that turned out to clash with the Scottish LP conference. Option B was the West Midlands call for the conference in April. Given events since we decided that both Rachael and I withdrew our proposal. The NSC will now set the date in the hope that it does not clash with any major labour movement event.

**Motion 3 was on how proposals get to conference.** Jon Lansman moved that the process should be along the lines of those the NSC set out just before the aborted November MNC meeting, proposals that we had discussed and rejected at our October 20<sup>th</sup> WMRC. Option B called for 1 motion from each local group, 1 motion from Liberation groups, 1 motion from each affiliated unions, 1 from the MNC and 1 from each region, and that there should be an open e-forum where motions can be discussed, amended and composited. Option A got 27 votes and Option B 32 votes. I voted for B.

**Motion 4. Composition of Conference.** Option A on two delegates for every 100 members or part thereof was carried with 33 votes, a majority of delegates. The motion actually states “2 delegates for every 100 members” but verbal assurances were given that it actually also meant part thereof, for if it didn’t there would be many groups which would be disenfranchised as they would not have 100 members!

**Consideration 2 – the representation of members not covered by local groups.**

Option A was carried by 35 votes. It states that “Members in areas without local groups to be represented at the same rate as members in groups, elected by OMOV ballots in regions.” In addition motions can be submitted from any 30 members in areas where there is no branch.

**Consideration 3 – the representation of equalities strands.** Option B from the London region was carried by 30 votes. It states that “Momentum Youth and Students and liberation groups may send a number of delegates to be agreed by the National Committee in consultation with these groups, subject to the verification of structures and election processes by the NC.” I can only hope that this option will remove any possible self-elected delegates so that members of these groups can be assured that their reps represent the members. Such a measure will go a long way from the state of affairs at the first NC mentioned above where liberation delegates to the first MNC meeting were elected by working groups.

**Motion 5. Who organises conference?** It was agreed that the MNC should elect by STV a conference arrangements committee. This was duly done with 14 candidates for 7 places. The result of the ballot was 4 on the “Left” and 3 on the “Right”. I use the terms Left and Right loosely!!

**Motion 6. How voting is done.** A number of Options were proposed but the vote boiled down to a choice between two of them.

Option A from Jon Lansman was a rehash of an earlier NSC proposal for online voting after live streaming, an option that the WMRC had already rejected. Option C from London was that the February conference should be a “delegate-based conference with decision-making by delegates voting at the conference”.

In the first round of voting A and C got 28 votes each. In the second round of voting after Options B and D had been eliminated, Option C got 31 votes with A on 28.

**Motion 7. How local groups elect delegates.** Straight choice between Option A with delegates elected “face to face in meetings open to all members in a local group” and Option B with elections “By electronic OMOV ballot”. Option A was adopted.

**Section 7. Motions from Regional networks, groups and sections.**

Finally in the agenda there was the possibility of discussing politics and policy.

Motion 1 on Housing called for Labour’s national house building programme to be based on eco council housing. Passed with 1 vote against.

Motion 2 on defend migrants, defend free movement. Passed after the word “privately” was deleted by an amendment when referring to writing to JC and JMCD to express the views of the MNC.

Time now ran out but the meeting agreed to formally vote on Motion 4 relating to suspensions and annulments of LP members, Wards and CLPs.

A letter to Momentum from a list of 9 members of the LP in Northern Ireland asking to be able to organise Momentum in NI was remitted to the NSC as it was a letter and not a motion.

All other business was left on the table with Motion 13 on Comradely Behaviour having been withdrawn by the movers, Momentum Youth and Students.

The NSC was left with the tasks of:

1. Carrying out a mapping exercise in conjunction with a point of contact in each regional committee (regional network).
2. Momentum members have the task of setting up as many local groups as possible to give members not covered by local groups a focal point.
3. The Treasurer's Report was left for the next MNC meeting.
4. Several rounds of applause for staff members and volunteers.

Final remarks.

When you walk from New Street Station to the MNC meeting venue you pass beggars on the streets and people sleeping in doorways. There is a crisis in housing and homelessness. Some 1.3m people, mainly young people, are on Zero Hours contracts. The NHS is falling apart and services in A&E and Maternity are closing under so-called STP plans. Despite the government having abandoned plans to balance the budget by 2020 the cuts in local authority spending will continue.

In all of this it is our people, working class people, who are being hit hardest. These are political issues that we need to develop policy on so that we can take our ideas with us as LP members into the LP. That should be the task of Momentum – to educate and train its members to be ambassadors for socialism in the LP, and through education and political development to give our people confidence that we can fight to change things.

As it was this meeting of the MNC spent 5 hours on organisation and structures and points of order, information and challenges to the Chair. Now that we have decided how our policy conference is to be organised and how decisions are to be made, let us move into the political arena, discuss our ideas in a fraternal/sororal manner so that when we have agreed policy, we go out into the LP, the trade unions and the various communities to champion our policies as we will, hopefully, have answers to the issues facing our people today.

With fraternal greetings,

Darrall Cozens

MNC delegate from the West Midlands

Coventry, December 5<sup>th</sup> 2016.

PS. Rachael Harris, MNC delegate from the West Midlands, is also adding her name to this report but will also write her own report for the next WMRC on December 12<sup>th</sup>.