



# The corridors of power?

**A**T the weekend one of the officers called me twice to let me know that the arrangements for the meeting this morning had been changed and explain why. No other officer would allay your suspicions about the changes like this. An effective member of the bureaucracy, it's a shame she's not on our side.

To BT Centre in Newgate Street for 'Pay and Personnel' meeting. The next move in the 'Pay and Grading' review of all BT non-management staff has been made: a letter from the head of Employee Relations outlining the company's line: 'flexibility' between the different BT divisions and an invitation to meet with one of the Business divisions to hammer out an agreement for the nitty-gritty of implementation. They have chosen the most 'cuddly' divisional management team for us to begin talks with. We in the Broad Left argue against meeting with them until a company-wide framework is agreed. This is a better tactic than going at BT's pace without any clear idea of the overall picture. Unity is strength in this context (and in all I know). We lose in the Committee.

Back to HQ for Broad Left caucus at 5pm. We report to the rest of the BL NEC members what happened at 'Pay and Personnel'. Decide it's really important to stop any divisional talks at the moment, and prepare to use whatever tactics necessary to stop the recommendation of the Committee due to be discussed tomorrow at the Telecoms Executive. Home at 10pm. Think, is their life outside trade unionism? Go to bed.

## Tuesday

TO be early for the meeting I leave two hours for the 90 minute tube journey from home to office. Can't be late, or I might miss something. At Telecoms Executive meeting we lose the vote by two and use a constitutional device called a constituency veto to block the recommendation — it is declared "not carried".

In the afternoon I sort through the expanding pile of papers from all the different committees. Adopt following filing policy: if it's important, someone else will have a copy, if it's not important, put it in the bin. Write memo to General Treasurer requesting some form of comms and arguing why I need to be in contact! I've been offered everything else as an NEC member: Impress account, Honorarium, travel warrants, etc. Sometimes you feel like you've joined an elite club. However, you

know the ticket is for one year only.

## Wednesday

EQUAL Opportunities Committee in the morning. Equalities monitoring comes up: the majority of people on the Committee look at me as if I'm mad when I suggest we include questions on sexuality. Their argument against is that it would alienate people from the monitoring process; I argue that you are alienated as a lesbian, gay or bisexual union member if something relevant to whether you get treated equally at work is not even mentioned on your union form!

Pub at lunchtime: a chance to meet people who don't work in your occupational area. Otherwise you only see some fellow NEC members once a month at the NEC meetings. I lose street cred by drinking sparkling water.

In the afternoon we have a Political Committee meeting with a special guest — Tom Sawyer, General Secretary of the

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Labour Party. He is here to tell us about 'Party Into Power' and why we have nothing to fear. Tom explains his trade union credentials and does his salesman pitch. Despite twisting and turning, even he cannot deny our union policy is incompatible with the proposals in 'Party Into Power'. He promises us things that are not in the document. At least two people at the meeting fall for it; with the three who were going to vote against union policy anyway (unreconstructed leadership clones) we are outnumbered.

Tom Sawyer sold them the devolution of policy-making to undemocratic Policy Forums and Policy Committees on the basis that:

1. Party structures aren't very democratic anyway (hey, let's get rid of the little democracy we've got then!);
  2. The new policy structures give the likes of us more chance to hob-nob with government ministers; and
  3. The leadership of the Party want it.
- And they fell for it. Deference is alive and well in the British labour movement.

## Thursday

STAY at home in the morning to write a response to the latest twist in the 'Party Into

Power' battle in preparation for Policy Committee meeting tomorrow. Get news that the BT Pay negotiations have ceased and we are left with a 4.3% offer. It's one of the quickest set of negotiations ever. It's obvious the company want pay out of the way in order to concentrate on other things. As usual, the "strings" attached to the deal are the ideological ones. We have to agree to "co-operate with change", and help the company be more competitive. This clause in the deal has been there for 10 years, and no-one on our side takes much notice of it except the General Secretary who is often caught lobbying on BT's behalf in the bourgeois media.

However, even in local negotiations, management use the threat of the union's 'disloyalty to the company' and often remind us that they pay our wages, give us union facility time, etc. As I begin epic tube journey, I ponder on the nature of company unionism. Decide to change on to the bus. Window-shop. I suppose I ought to wear smarter clothes now... No, I don't think so. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't afford to power-dress. However, part of the Executive allowances is meant for us horny-handed daughters of toil to buy a suit.

## Friday

IN early to find someone to type up my 'Party Into Power' paper for the meeting today. I'd do it myself, but they don't give you a word-processor here. Our union branch offices are better-resourced. A document is submitted to the Policy meeting in the name of the General Secretary by the Millbank mole who works in the General Secretary's office. I produce my paper. The chair expresses surprise. Apparently, it is not the done thing for Executive members to write papers. My document is taken as an amendment to the officer's proposals. We lose on the casting vote of the chair. Immediately start lobbying for the vote on the NEC that will be taken next week. I get depressed by the fact that only a small number of the NEC members are open to rational argument. Large sections are part of the leadership faction or owe their existence to keeping in with the leadership faction.

PS: We finally won on the executive on "Party Into Power". The proposals are contrary to CWU policy. It's official!

*Maria Exall was talking to Tom Rigby.*