

Campaign Briefing

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Social Housing - a priority

Following yesterday's decision of Conference to prioritise the topic of housing for debate this week, Lynne Jones MP sets out some of the key issues.

The Tories left us with a shocking legacy including a £19 billion repairs backlog in social homes, a huge rise in rough sleeping and run-down city centres. No one could dispute that the Government has put in more money but this has been mainly targeted at achieving the decent homes standard and tackling rough sleeping with far less attention being given to the supply of affordable homes. As a consequence housing waiting lists have risen by 50% to one and a half million, higher than at any time in the last 20 years since comparable figures were collected.

The continuing inequality between those who have adequate housing and those who do not is creating great resentment. We are seeing how extremist political parties are tapping into the search for scapegoats.

It has certainly lifted my spirits to see affordable housing now being prioritised by Gordon Brown and I hope that he will use his Leader's speech today to give more detail of what's in store for housing in the forthcoming spending review. There will need to be a substantial increase in housing investment if the plans for increasing the social housing supply are to be as ambitious as we have been led to believe they will be.

It would be even better if that investment could include direct investment in council housing - the "Fourth Option", as already sup-

ported by Conference. After all local authorities can borrow more cheaply and this would also be popular with tenants!

Lynne Jones MP

4+4=5?

Yet again the confusing Priorities Ballot system frustrated the chance of debating 8 topics - 4 chosen by CLPs and 4 chosen by Unions and societies. Three of the four topics coming top in the CLPs' ballot were already guaranteed debate by the unions. So CLPs only added Housing to the Union's own priorities. The CAC should change its interpretation of the 4 + 4 rule so that the CLPs' topics are 4 different ones to those of the Unions. Party staff have been known to lean on CLP delegates to vote for union priorities thus ensuring the CLP votes are wasted, and minimising the chances of 8 different topics being debated.

See overleaf for Grassroots Alliance supported candidates for the National Policy Forum

NEC U-turn

Yesterday we reported that last Tuesday, in a flush of democratic enthusiasm, the NEC had overturned the staff's recommendation and agreed to support the rule change that would debar members of the Government/Shadow Cabinet from serving on the Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) - see *Delegates' Report* p9. Unfortunately, no sooner had *Campaign Briefing* hit the streets than the NEC was having second thoughts.

The NEC was informed that, following strong representations, it was now being recommended that the proposal in Gordon Brown's consultation paper to increase the size of the CAC from 7 to 11 members should not be proceeded with, since "wider debate" was needed. As a *quid pro quo*, the NEC was asked to rescind its support for the rule change, agreed last Tuesday, and instead to seek remit of that rule change. It was then pointed out - by Dennis Skinner and others - that the NEC's own standing orders state that decisions by the NEC cannot be changed until three months have elapsed. In response to this procedural point it was argued that in exceptional circumstances the standing orders could be treated "flexibly". The NEC chair then gave a ruling to this effect and on being put to the vote it was carried with only five against.

The rule change (from Halifax, Hazel Grove, Islington North and Montgomeryshire CLPs) is now time-tabled for Wednesday morning. In the meantime readers should lobby constituency and union delegates to support this important democratic reform. The CAC must be fully independent. It is difficult, if not impossible, for ministers to wear two hats.

Contempt for CLPs

First thing yesterday afternoon CLP delegates were given an early taste of democracy New Labour style. Delegates went to the rostrum with legitimate grievances about the CAC's rulings, only to be brushed aside. Those from Kilburn and Islington North challenged the ruling out of their Emergency Motion covering the threat of military action against Iran and argued that they had precisely followed the CAC's advice set out in its own booklet – *How Conference Works*. Their motion had quoted a bellicose statement by the French foreign minister made only a few days ago. If this is not an Emergency nothing is. But the delegates were unable to properly make their case since the mic was promptly turned off. In reply the CAC Chair asked the two delegates to seek an audience with her committee.

Another CLP delegate tried to challenge the CAC's ruling in relation to her Contemporary Motion - the CAC having decided that it was not 'contemporary'. This was also brushed aside. Conference was told that these decisions cannot be challenged. Thus the CAC is not properly accountable to its own conference.

At this point the Conference Chair berated delegates for taking up crucial conference time. It will be interesting to see if the Chair issues a similar warning later in the week when platform speakers continually overrun their time. The last CLP delegate, from Middlesbrough, asked in vain that the forthcoming debate on the Gordon Brown proposals be a balanced one. He clearly had an inkling of what was to come.

Iran Saga – Chapter one

The Kilburn and Islington delegates dutifully sought to exercise their right to make representations to a full meeting of the CAC. They later reported to *Campaign Briefing* that it was like waiting in a doctor's surgery. In fact they got a similar result. After a long wait an official

told them to come back tomorrow. Make sure you get Campaign Briefing for the next episode in this saga.

Equalities – Improve the Green Paper

During today's discussions on equalities, delegates should press the government to improve its proposals in the recent Green Paper. Anti-discrimination law must be strengthened with robust mechanisms to ensure proper enforcement. It remains legal to discriminate in many areas: if you are old and want travel insurance; a carer trying to juggle paid work. Race discrimination in immigration is legal. The law on harassment protects some people and not others; on religion, anti-Muslim harassment can be legal. The gender pay gap is wider in the private sector, yet there is no duty to carry out equal pay reviews. Positive action to make workforces more representative is largely unlawful.

The Green Paper proposes few improvements and its proposals undermine recent laws which place duties on public authorities to promote equality and identify institutional discrimination. Age Concern are urging closure of the legal loopholes that permit widespread age discrimination. Spokespeople of the Commission for Racial Equality and the Disability Rights Commission have criticised the Green Paper's proposals.

Unison is calling for the duties to promote race, gender and disability equality that now apply to public bodies to be extended to cover age, sexual orientation and religion. It is also seeking real measures to close the gender pay gap, including mandatory pay audits and adequate public sector funds.

Support the Unison motion

FRINGE MEETINGS

Venezuela: democracy and social progress 12:45pm Punshon Methodist Church

Unite Against Fascism: 17:45pm Punshon Methodist Church

CND/Labour CND/LAP: No to Trident and NMD 7pm Whitehall Hotel

Socialist Campaign Group/Briefing/CfS: Extending Party Democracy... or exterminating it? 7pm Royal Exeter Hotel

Elections to the National Policy Forum

Scotland: Gordon McKay

Wales: Nick Davies, Fran Griffiths and Darren Williams

East Midlands: Roy Mayhew

Eastern: Daniel Blaney and Lorna Trollope

London: Laura Bruni, Lorraine Monk, Francis Prideaux

North: Mathew Teale

North West: Warren Flood, Kath Fry, Gaye Johnston and Cat Smith (youth section)

South East: Joy Hurcombe

South West: Simon Crew, Ray Davison and Veronica Kelly

Yorkshire & Humberside: Martha Hanson, George McManus and Alex Sobel

[voting 9am - 4pm today; results announced Tuesday morning]

Unbalanced debate

Those who had hoped that the ruthless stage management of the *ancien régime* would become a thing of the past were soon disabused. In the debate on the Gordon Brown proposals it was the same old story. Delegate after delegate read out platform-friendly speeches that sought to portray the somewhat uninspiring document that we had before us as akin to a political Kama Sutra. Only three delegates were allowed to speak against the proposals. Michael Meacher's 'storming of the Winter Palace' speech was particularly noteworthy. Another reminder of the bad old days was the way that candidates for today's NPF elections were allowed to speak. At least seven of these were called up. Without exception they were on the 'establishment' slate.