

Campaign Briefing

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To win Labour must protect public services

Within months Labour faces a difficult general election, taking place on the back of an economic crisis. With government tax revenues down and billions spent bailing out banks, the deficit has increased. Labour's response should be restoring economic growth so tax income rises again. This requires a programme of investment, which is only achievable through government action, because the banks continue to reduce their lending. The banks should not be returned to the private sector but, given the vast public shareholding, should be to fund investment. The Tories answer of cutting public services, can only prolong the recession and transfers the burden of paying for this crisis on to the poorest. Spending could well be eased in areas where there is real waste, such as on Trident renewal, the entire ID card programme and on a level of military spending that is beyond Britain's means.

Priority issue

The result of Sunday's Priorities Ballot shows the importance of Public Services to the party. The trade unions voted almost

unanimously to discuss it and amongst the CLPs it was the top issue prioritised. An election campaign in which the principal differentiation of Labour from the Tories is that our cuts will start later and be more "caring" would be doomed. As Dave Prentis of UNISON pointed out a cuts agenda plays into Conservative hands and is a recipe for defeat. It will not enthuse our activists nor regain the confidence of former supporters.

Modest proposals

The announcements of improvements, such as to elderly and child care, whilst welcome, are all modest. If these proposals remain situated within an overall policy framework of large public spending reductions they will be completely overshadowed by public service cuts and reduced wages. Whilst Conference currently is unable to express its view through a vote on such matters, the leadership would be wise to re-examine the framework. Delegates should raise this issue within their

CLPs and unions and insist that it is revisited at the National Policy Forum when it meets later this year.

Further concessions to the Blairite agenda must be resisted. Proposals of privatisation (as with the Royal Mail and health care) or that Britain backs the US in various disastrous wars, are not part of a progressive agenda. They have damaged Labour's electoral support.

Review policy process

The NEC has announced that there will be a review of the Party's policy making process. This be a serious review in which CLPs should have the opportunity participate.

Conference's decision to introduce OMOV for the NPF CLP section is a big step forward for party democracy, achieved by an alliance of CLPs and unions. The successful rule change sends a positive signal to members that their views are valued. This will motivate members for the difficult campaign ahead.

And if we adopt bold policies it is a campaign that can be won.

Support Emergency motion: East Coast Mainline

Labour's rail unions ASLEF and TSSA urge you to support today's emergency motion regarding the consortium bidding to take over National Express and the East Coast Mainline.

Our party's policy calls for a single rail franchise to be run on a not-for-profit basis, publicly accountable and publicly controlled.

The East Coast Mainline should be kept in the public sector, in the interests of passengers, taxpayers and the staff.

AV: a dangerous diversion

It is hard to see the attraction of the proposed referendum to be held early in the next parliament, on electing MPs by means of the Alternative Vote.

Why on earth should anyone advocate allowing the positive first preferences of many voters to be overturned by the second and lower preferences of other voters – whether liberal or racist?

The fundamental flaw of AV, as of other types of electoral reform, is that it would seriously reduce the prospects of our ever again achieving a Labour government in the future.

Definitely not the brightest of ideas.

Thank you

Gaye Johnston and Gary Heather would like to thank all those who voted for them in this week's elections to the Conference Arrangements Committee.

Campaign Briefing can be downloaded from our website. Go to www.clpd.org.uk/conference.htm

Co-operative success

In the Co-operative Party we have long known that we represent a viable radical strand of left-wing politics. Others on the left, more wedded to state socialism and grand nationalisation have disagreed but now is a good time for them to reassess.

Since the disastrous collapse of the banks (many of them demutualised building societies) people are rediscovering the benefits of co-operation and mutualism. Many will remember how building society directors bribed their members with a few hundred pounds (and pocketed millions themselves). None of those once-mutual societies survives as an independent bank. Co-operative MPs want to ensure that when these propped-up banks are ready to operate commercially, they do not return to the private sector but become mutual societies again.

Some may doubt if this can be done but significant achievements have been notched up some significant achievements, largely through Private Members' Bills. Trying to persuade MPs to desert their constituencies on a Friday to vote can be tricky. That is when the Co-operative clan comes into its own. My Bill on recycling was not high enough up the list, but Mark Lazarowicz's bill, extending tax benefits for those in employee share schemes got through, as did Gareth Thomas's Industrial and Provident Societies Bill.

Less popular on the left were Foundation Hospitals. Many co-operators thought they would be the way to ensure the public's voice is heard in the running of local hospitals and Primary Care Trusts and in a few cases they were right – in others, sadly, not.

So, while people are rightly suspicious of the greedy bank culture that got us into this unholy mess, I believe it is time for all, including Labour's left, to embrace the bottom-up co-operative model that gave us mutual building societies and credit unions.

Doug Naysmith, Labour/Co-operative MP for Bristol NW. He is a past member of the Co-operative Party NEC, past Chair of the Socialist Health Association and current member of the Health Select Committee at Westminster.

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