

Campaign Briefing

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No distractions: fight the Tories

By Peter Willsman, CLPD Secretary
and NEC member 1998-1999 & 2005-2010

This year's Conference has been good for the Party. There is a strong mood that we should intensify the opposition to the Tory-led government and the damage it is wreaking. Delegates have been feisty, challenging the cavalier procedures for handling Refounding Labour, supporting the union link within the Party and generally standing up for the rights of CLPs. This is all indicative of a positive morale.

The spirited atmosphere also responds to the more democratic culture that both Ed Miliband and Iain McNicol have encouraged. Conference has supported Ed and it was noteworthy that Iain received a standing ovation when he stressed his commitment to rebuilding trust within our party.

The economy is stagnating, unemployment rising and living standards falling. The public is looking to Labour to offer an alternative. This must be based on a strategy to revive growth, which in turn requires a plan to boost investment. Infrastructure projects and £2bn investment in affordable housing are part of the solution. Likewise the proposed VAT cuts and bank bonus tax would stimulate recovery.

The primary objective of Tory policy is neither recovery nor the deficit, it is ideological – to make sure it is not the rich that pays for the crisis. As many delegates stressed, Labour must robustly challenge the Tories' deeply reactionary agenda. We need to offer a way forward for

people that addresses their aspirations. Those, like Alistair Darling, who promote cuts and criticise the last government are wrong. Both the blue and purple recipes would take us backwards; being a re-hash of the neo-liberal agenda which, when implemented by the last government, saw living standards fall, accompanied by a progressive loss of 5 million Labour votes. As delegates have argued, Labour needs to be identified as the Party that will protect living standards, and the role played by public services. We need to continue to insist on equality with service allocation based on need, not recreating the framework of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' that would take us back to the 1834 Poor Law.

Labour has every reason to be optimistic. The Tories last year were unable to win sufficient votes to form a majority government and since then, with their policies, their popularity is falling. Since Ed Miliband became leader Labour has advanced significantly above the 29% vote share of the 2010 election. It would help if those still bitter over last year's Leadership election would stop briefing the press to the Party's disadvantage.

Refounding Labour has now been agreed. It would be a distraction to re-open discussion about how the unions maintain and participate in our Party. The 50:50 (CLPs to affiliates) division of Conference vote should not be tampered with.

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STV disaster in Scotland: Labour must return to FPTP

The introduction of the Single Transferable Vote (STV) for Scottish council elections in 2007 was a disaster for Labour. The SNP gained 182 seats while Labour lost 161. Our overall control of councils fell from 11 to 2.

STV involves new tactical decisions and complex mathematical formulae. Based on large multi-member wards, it raises real questions for Party democracy. How many candidates should the Party decide to put up for election? Put up too many and you split the Labour vote and let the opposition in; too few and you lose an opportunity to secure an additional councillor. So who decides how many candidates – local branch members, CLPs, the LGC or Regional officers?

Furthermore, should the Party advise the electorate in the ward to vote for our candidates in a particular order? Again, who decides that order? Bearing in mind that this process can create substantial local controversy as Labour candidate is pitted against fellow Labour candidate to secure the no. 1 slot. To avoid this, the mathematics of STV suggests the ward be divided into sectors in which voters are invited to cast their first, second, etc. preferences for Labour candidates differently in different sectors. This is the method that was favoured in Scotland in 2007, but it involves

Continued over

No distractions: fight the Tories continued

The Tories, worried about their electoral prospects, are desperate to weaken us organisationally, so in the coming months they will intensify their attacks on the Party's union base.

Conference has made it clear that winning London is a key to winning the next General Election. From now until the Spring it should be the Party's central focus.

STV in Scotland continued

producing different editions of election literature for the electorate in different parts of the same ward. Inevitably, the electorate becomes confused.

There is also, bizarrely, a distinct advantage in appearing higher up on the ballot paper than one's Labour comrades. This is because, even if advised differently, the electorate is likely to cast their first, second etc. preferences in the order that the names appear on the ballot paper. Potential candidates can therefore have an incentive to support the selection of running mates whose surname is alphabetically below their own rather than on the basis of politics or ability.

STV is an aberration. It is confusing and divisive and it seldom delivers for Labour. We need to ditch it and revert to First-Past-the-Post.

Cllr Jim Mackechnie, Scottish National Policy Forum Member



"After Ed Milliband's speech John Rentoul said Labour is moving left at the speed of light. This means we have already gained infinite mass".

Billy Hayes, CWU General Secretary speaking at CLPD's Conference Assessment meeting last night.

'Spring Revolt' hits Liverpool

Early yesterday morning in the debate on CLP Rule changes, the platform was rocked back on its heels as CLP delegate after CLP delegate stormed the rostrum to press for fairness and justice for CLPs. They demanded that democracy should begin at home and that our Party should be genuinely democratic. Most delegates were in the dark about this item of business, since it has hardly ever been properly timetabled in any Conference literature. Even some of those delegates moving the rule changes seem not to have been alerted by officials to be in the hall early. The following is a blow by blow account.

The rule changes from Castle Point CLP, South Ribble CLP and Winchester CLP were deemed to have fallen because their delegates were not in the hall. The Young Labour rule change from Rotherham CLP was 'remitted' by the delegate shouting up from his seat. But the

rule changes from Hyndburn, Dewsbury and Beverley and Holderness CLPs were expertly moved by their delegates. The Dewsbury delegate brought the house down when he exposed the farce that the NEC can put forward rule changes cobbled together the night before a vote, whereas CLPs and unions have to put them forward some 18 months in advance. The South Ribble and Winchester delegates then entered the hall. Carried away by the democratic mood that swept through Tahrir Square and now Liverpool's dockside, Angela Eagle, the excellent chair, restored the rule changes to the agenda and let them be moved. Angela, in an act of solidarity, then moved the Castle Point rule change herself, because the delegate had been taken ill. The debate was first-class. Only Maggie Cosin, from the NCC, spoke in favour of the old regime (Campaign Briefing understands, that Maggie is the joint secretary of the hard-right (and shadowy) organisation, Labour First). In the words of Angela Eagle summing up the debate: "who says rule changes are boring?"

More Shenanigans

Yesterday morning we were told by the platform that our Party officials are very trustworthy and would never depart from their conditions of employment. These lay down that paid officials must always act as impartial party servants. Almost at that very moment there was a vote to accept the CAC report. Of course only accredited delegates have the right to vote. But in at least one region the employed regional official sitting at the end of the row put his hand up to support the platform and vote in favour of the CAC Report.

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