1983

SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING No 5

THE LESSONS OF BERMONDSEY

Despite what 'Sir Robin Day' and the well-paid scribes of the Tory press may say, Labour did not lose Bermondsey because its candidate was too left wing. However the defeat has shown the failures of Labour that must be reversed if the party is to win the next general election.

Labour's defeat in Bermondsey can be put down to a number of factors. Firstly a section of the party leadership did not want Peter Tatchell to win. Evidence of this was the pulping of his election leaflets, the cancelling of his first press conference, and the timing of the expulsion of the 'Militant' editorial board for the day before polling. These events during the campaign had been pre-figured by Michael Foot's disowning of Tatchell in parliament last year, and the attempts of the NEC to impose a candidate on the Bermondsey Party.

These 'own goals' by the NEC provided the Tory gutter press and the right wing candidates with the opportunity to carry out a political and personal smear campaign against Peter Tatchell. No Labour candidate should be ashamed of having refused to fight in the imperialist war in Vietnam, or of being Gay. That those who would have voted Labour before did not do so because of this, demonstrates the need for Labour to campaign for Gay Rights and against wars such as the one fought in Vietnam.

But the reasons for Labour's defeat go beyond what happened in Bermondsey itself. We have to accept that many Labour voters have been disillusioned by the last Labour government, and will only vote for us if they can see the Party putting forward a clear Socialist alternative to the Tories. It was in 1981 when Labour was organising massive marches and campaigns against unemployment that support for the Tories fell and that for the Labour Party increased. The Tories were only able to recover when Labour failed to oppose Thatcher's war in the Atlantic.

Victory in the general election will not be achieved by a retreat from the policies adopted by the last three conferences. What the right are aiming for is a fudging of the policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament, and a return to the policies of pay restraint and cuts. At the same time the right are trying to divide the party by expelling supporters of socialist policies. They are giving credibility to the SDP/Liberal Alliance by making Labour's policies indistinguishable from theirs. It means that instead of uniting with the water workers and CND to fight the Tories, our resources are being turned against our own membership. If they succeed we will be isolated from the hundreds of thousands of supporters of CND and Greenham Common, and from those trade unionists fighting unemployment and low pay. This would mean a massive abstention by working class voters.

We will only reverse the defeat of Bermondsey if we go into the election on the basis of a mass campaign for the socialist policies adopted over the last few years.- nuclear disarmament, a 35 hour week and no incomes policy. These policies are the road to a Labour victory.

Mike Tucker

SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING

Southampton Labour Briefing is produced monthly by a number of members of Southampton Labour Party. If you would like more information about our policies please contact us on Soton 39851.

MAY DAY 1983

There will be a festival and social organised by Southampton Trades Council involving exhibitions, stalls, films, games, and speakers, including Reg Race at 6.30, and the PPCs. In the evening there will be a live band and disco.

at Mountbatten Theatre

Sunday 1st May, 3pm - 11pm

Tickets £1.70, and £1 unwaged including food. Children free.

SLL/CLPD - which against the witch-hunt?

Prior to last year's LP conference the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) gave notice of its preference for a 'democratic' register, thereby signalling its unwillingness to organise an effective campaign against the expulsions which would logically follow from the NEC'c version.

At the end of January this year the AGM of the CLPD voted, by a narrow majority, to apply to the NEC for registration, thus laying the groundwork for the NEC to expel five members of the 'Militant' editorial board, on the eve of the Bermondsey by-election.

Members of Southampton Labour Left (SLL) attended the CLPD conference and voted for registration. This 'hard core' of SLL (no metaphors about rotten apples to be found here!) comprised individual members of CLPD, and were therefore under no obligation to represent SLP's outright opposition to registration and concomitant expulsions. However these comrades occupy important Labour Party positions and therefore reasons for their action and their opinions on the role of the CLPD should be sought.

* Is it SLL policy to support registration?

* It was SLL policy to oppose expulsions. Is this still the case, and by what means? Does the SLL support CLPs who refuse to implement expulsions?

* How do they reconcile their argument (SLL No.1) that CLPs should abide by LP conference on constitutional matters with the denial of access to the constitution of those expelled?

* Should this top down 'democratic' centralism apply to their activities as individual members?

*As representatives and prospective representatives of SLP's policies, how will they counter the suspicion that the alacrity with which they oppose the register and expulsions will be somewhat lacking in view of their personal beliefs as manifested by their CLPD voting?

* The ILP, precursor to the SLL, first proposed the idea of a register. Was this a means of attacking the nature and politics of the 'Militant' through 'exposing' its organisational structure?

* If so, can we therefore blame the SLL's sectarian mentality for the witch-hunt and its repercussions? If not, were the ILP/SLL ever so slightly naive in not anticipating the speed with which the right wing seized upon their jolly jape?

Questions are not necessarily rhetorical!

In accordance with the format of the SLL's 'sixth form review', a Red Star will be awarded to the first complete entry - possibly for own goals.

Gareth Narbed
"Bennite and infantile leftist"
(V.Derer, CLPD Exec.)

STOP THE WITCH-HUNT!

The witch-hunt has started. After months of deferred decisions and changing tactics the NEC voted on 23 Feb to to expel the five members of the Militant Editorial Board as members of an organisation ineligible to affiliate to the Party. The persistance with which the NEC have examined different ways of removing the Militant tendency is a clear sign of the political importance they attatch to it, and shows that it is not the supposed constitutional offences that have put their heads on the block.

Islington Central CLP have already announced that they do not intend to expel Peter Taffe, and the others involved, Hammersmith North and Norwood are expected to do the same. All CLPs, such as ours, that have a policy of opposing expulsions now have a duty to support these CLPs, who will come under great pressure from the NEC, and perhaps will be threatened with suspension.

The witch-hunt, if allowed to proceed will not stop at the Militant Editorial Board. It is an essential part of the right wing's efforts to roll back the gains of the left, and it will attempt to isolate and intimidate all who speak out for socialist policies.

It ill behoves anyone on the left to stand back while the Militant are expelled - they may be next.

Richard Correll