

ORPINGTON CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTY

ANNUAL REPORT 2008

1 Although the Orpington CLP is a small body of members operating in a 'safe' Conservative parliamentary seat, 2008 saw many positive developments. Emphasis was placed upon reaching out to more members to encourage greater participation in CLP activities and focussing upon issues which should engage the attention of the people of Orpington.

2 The decision to open the regular monthly meetings to all members quickly proved very successful with attendance doubling. Subjects dealing with local, national and international matters were considered resulting in lively and interesting debates and where appropriate were followed up with press statements. Contrary to at least one local press report, the CLP deplored the internal attacks upon the leadership of Gordon Brown, believing they would further damage the standing of the Labour Party. The CLP believed the major responsibility for the financial crisis lay not with the Prime Minister but with right wing governments of the 1980s and 90s whose deregulatory policies facilitated the grossly irresponsible practices of many financial institutions around the world.

3 A very timely resolution was carried congratulating the British Government on taking bold measures to tackle the financial crisis and urging it to continue seeking international agreements to establish sensible rules to govern the operation of markets. The CLP also urged the Government to take advantage of the current consensus on the need for reform to seek a level playing field to ensure individuals and companies pay income and corporation taxes at the normal rates in the countries where the remuneration and profits were genuinely earned. The CLP also carried a resolution calling for increased investment in social housing for rent which would also assist in avoiding economic recession.

4 The CLP expressed concern over the apparently huge sums of money expended by candidates in the election for Deputy Leader of the Labour Party. The CLP believed if such moneys were 'available' they could be better spent in other areas and consequently consideration should be given to placing a limit on the amount candidates in such elections could spend.

5 At least 25 members actively engaged in campaigning for the Labour Candidate, Ken Livingstone, in the London Mayoral Election, mainly through the distribution of supporting literature to over 10,000 households mostly but not exclusively in the Cray Valley area.

6 The CLP bought into Labour's Contact Creator to lay the foundations for a more systematic and comprehensive system for campaigning with access to the electoral register. The PPC, Stephen Morgan, proposed a comprehensive Campaign Plan which was adopted at the 17 September CLP meeting. It will assist campaigning by the CLP in the forthcoming EU and Local Government elections and in the next general election. A systematic monthly programme of canvassing began on 15 November, concentrating on Cray Valley East.

7 The June meeting of the CLP was held in Biggin Hill with a view to facilitating easier access to supporters in that more 'distant' part of the Orpington Constituency. During the year CLP meetings were addressed by guest speakers from the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, the European Parliament, Liberation and the Christian Network Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

8 The well attended Ron Huzzard Memorial Lecture on Climate Change was delivered on 13 May by Michael Meacher, MP and a former Government Minister. The MP's speech was warmly received and followed by a well-informed and lively question and answer session.

9 As and when required editions of 'The Voice', edited by John Waterworth, were published and circulated to members at their home addresses or by email where possible. They provided information on CLP activities, including notification of meetings, and carried articles on various developments concerning local and national issues.

10 More emphasis was placed upon public relations. Following discussions on the role of the Press Officer a constant flow of statements was issued to the media by the PPC liaising with the Secretary which focussed upon issues relevant to the people of Orpington and London. These included welcoming the Government's decisions to retain the Post Office Card Accounts within the PO, the November Budget Statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and improved pensioners' benefits which fortunately included more help with heating costs. Other statements criticised the new London Mayor's decisions to freeze the GLA element of the Council Tax for 2009 but to raise TFL travel costs by far greater amounts thereby penalising the working Londoner. A CLP statement welcomed the 'U' turn by the new Mayor in reinstating subsidised travel for those in receipt of the Job Seekers' Allowance. Critical statements were issued on the poor record of the Bromley Council on providing new social accommodation for rent and the GLA's backward plans in the same area in favour of more private housing. Statements were also released calling for SE Trains to introduce oyster cards for travel within London and for the Government to use some of the overall surplus on the NHS budget (estimated at £1.7B) to alleviate the £101M debt accumulated by the Bromley Hospital Trusts.

11 The CLP established two working parties. One focussed on organisational matters following a meeting of the Cray Valley East Branch which had convened for the first time for several years. The second began operating to consider the Bromley Council Master Plan for Orpington Town Centre and subsequently adopted a wider remit to consider local issues more generally, including proposals concerning NHS provision in the area. The CLP supported a petition against the proposal to close the Surgical Unit at Orpington Hospital which eventually gained over 19,000 signatures and succeeded in securing a stay of execution at least until March 09. The CLP was represented at a demonstration against the proposed closure which took place outside the Hospital on 12 September.

12 The CLP submitted amendments to the Labour Party Document "Partnership in Power" for consideration at the Annual Conference. They covered four areas, Education and Skills, Britain in the World, Creating Sustainable Communities and Crime, Justice, Citizenship and Equalities.

13 Nathaniel Arthur of the Cray Valley East Branch was elected to represent the CLP at the 2008 Annual Conference of the Labour Party held in Manchester, 21-24 September. The CLP was represented at the London Labour Party Biennial Meeting, Canary Wharf in November, by Chris Taylor. Both delegates provided comprehensive and interesting reports which were well received respectively by the October and November meetings of the CLP.

14 The CLP was pleased to note that Honorary Alderman of Bromley was bestowed upon three members, former Mayors John Holbrook and Sue Polydorou together with Selwyn Ward, in recognition of their distinguished service as Councillors at a specially convened meeting of the Council on 23 June.

15 The CLP participated fully in the activities of the Bromley Local Government Committee and in the meetings with Labour Party Councillors which convened regularly to consider items on the Council Agendas and to suggest appropriate written questions that might be submitted to Portfolio Holders. A South Orpington Branch member, Jeannette Carter, personally addressed a question to the Bromley Council at its meeting on 21 April under the procedures allowed on the question of podiatry services. They were manifestly inadequate with long waiting lists and extended intervals between appointments if they could be secured in the first place, forcing many elderly residents of Bromley to go private or rely upon hard pressed voluntary providers.

Nigel de Gruchy
Orpington CLP Secretary
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