

# Labour Party National Policy Forum

Saturday 3 January 2007

Report from Socialist Societies Representatives: Jacky Peacock and Simon Wright

---

## Summary

Having a National Policy Forum lasting only for four hours (although it overran by an hour) was not a big incentive for members to travel from outside London and attendance was rather sparse. This was also the end of a week where it was announced that Tony Blair had been interviewed by police for a second time in the Cash-for-Honours investigation. However he gave a strong speech, theorising about leadership and the future. Simon Wright put to him that a strong agenda for the future of public transport would show real commitment to the environment and wrong-foot the Tories. This NPF was the link between the government's Policy Working Groups and the NPF's Policy Commissions although it was unclear whether NPF will really have much influence. Jacky attended the Environment & Energy session and Simon attended the Britain in the World. Access Year One discussion papers for Partnership in Power here: <http://www.labour.org.uk/351?id=3530> The Trident renewal debate saw a practised performance from Des Browne but it appeared not to convince the members and at times dismissed the NPF process; there was no vote.

## Opening Session

John Prescott kicked off saying that the forthcoming Deputy Leadership election should be a chance to debate direction for the next decade. We must not get divided and ignore the Tories rhetoric and remember their record. Also Warwick was an agreement for a whole parliament, whoever is leader will implement it.

Tony Blair said that, as they walked in, John Prescott had reminded him about the time he tried to get JP to stand down in favour of Roy Hattersley (not something I had ever heard about before). There will soon be a new website talking to people TB met during the 1997 election about the changes they have seen. He said that he had complete confidence in Labour's achievements, and, whilst there is a current storm, the next election will not be decided by it. It will be won by the Party which shows that it understands the modern world and has ideas for how to improve it. The Tories are trying to reconcile their major differences, rather than resolving them through strong leadership. Tory new document on the NHS says they will abolish Labour's targets but instead have "measurable outcomes". Their tax plans would mean a £16bn gap in this annual budget. We are not seeing a great body of ideas coming towards us from the Tories. Mid-point third term is the time to take difficult decisions and set new policies. Political parties have to change, we need to build a stakeholder party that builds alliances with people on the topics they care about. 10 years ago the debate was, can we have an NHS, now it is how to we improve it. Winning a fourth term is an immense task but I think we can do it if we keep the coalition together.

## Questions and answers

- Immigration – not a question we can win but we can lose it.
- Abolishing selection at 11 – means abolishing grammar schools which is not a battle worth fighting.
- Climate change – Tories have had to move on this but they will not take difficult

decisions; there is a mass of people (key to our electoral coalition) who understand that moving from 90% self-sufficient in gas to 90% imported is a problem. Tories will not make it a European issue or a UK-US issue so they are stuck.

- Transport (question asked by Simon Wright) – yes but will need new funding mechanisms to pay for it.

### **Closing remarks from Tony Blair**

Public look at the headlines but also who they trust to make decisions – this is how the Tories recovered to win 1987. Hard choices and leadership win respect. What changed with John Major was that they stopped governing, stopped moving forwards. From 1994-97 I was never put on the spot by the Tories and faced with a tough decision. Jon Cruddas's view is OK up to a point but if we follow it we will lose. We must define the problems facing Britain and decide our way forward. Caution is our enemy.

### **Presentation: Greg Cook**

Boundary changes have created new suburban and rural seats, to win at the next election we will have to gain seats in areas with no industrial or working-class heritage. Swings: 1.3% we lose majority; 4.7% Cons largest party; 5.2% Con majority (Swing to Labour in 1997 was just under 10%).

### **Presentation: Pat McFadden**

Detailed presentation of the thinking going into the Policy Working Groups set up by Tony Blair. Topics include Role of State, Public Services, Security Crime & Justice, Environment & Energy and Britain in the World.

### **Britain in the World**

This was a very general and bland session with Walter Wolfgang trying to pre-empt the Trident debate and everyone chucking in their favourite topics. Not much to report on it.