

# Socialist Societies Executive – Meeting with Ed Miliband MP

Monday 5 November 2007

Report from Jacky Peacock and Simon Wright

## *Notes of the Meeting*

The meeting was held the day before the Queen's Speech which meant that the minister could only be with us for the last half an hour of the meeting. However, Polly Billington, who is working with Ed Milliband on the manifesto, attended, and was well-briefed for the meeting.

Polly explained that the manifesto process runs alongside the NPF and offers lots of opportunities for Societies to feed in their views. A number of manifesto groups had been established to meet people and feed in policy. The idea is not to undermine the NPF but to augment it. Ed is travelling the country and wants to hear lots of views, and Labour Space is being set up to reach out to non-Labour organisations, campaigns and charities. A number of Party Stakeholder events are planned.

Local Policy Forums are another opportunity for Societies to take part/organise.

Societies pointed out that we need support from the Party to enable us to communicate and engage members. We asked for information about each of the Socialist Societies to be sent to all CLPs and Special Advisers. Each Society should have an Mpurl login to publicise itself and events. Polly offered to help try to arrange this. A speakers' database was also proposed.

We stressed our role in offering our own constituents a voice – for example, health service workers – people who should be voting Labour who we need to win back. Societies can act as a bridge between sectors (including academics) and the membership, such as campaigning for a policy then communicating the success back to contacts, (You asked for it – here it is...) sometimes with communities in marginal seats.

Societies pointed out the importance of policies being based on research. Also that Societies can float more risky ideas before the Party commits. Societies often end up having to react to policies created by civil servants when their expertise could have been used more effectively in developing ideas. It would be useful for Societies to have a dialogue with more MPs. We offer areas of expertise from within the Party.

The Manifesto inevitably focuses on the big ideas. The Party could make more use of Socialist Societies in filling in the detail.

There were calls for the manifesto to have a much stronger unifying theme and for space to talk about our values and vision – we should be confident about our progressive values and sense of history; little of this is visible in the NPF docs. Polly agreed with this – promising specific improvements is meaningless without this framework. We need to be reaching outwards to bring fresh ideas and people into the Party. People vote on more than one issue.

Hesitant messages about immigration or LGBT rights are doing harm – we need to celebrate these, and at the same time register new communities to vote in local and Euro elections.

Societies talked about the importance of questioning policies openly and having proper dialogue, including responding to suspicions about the Partnership in Power process and how issues are actually dealt with. Need more open feedback about

submissions. There was discussion about the process of policy forums, such as those at conference which have very limited engagement and perhaps electronic communications could be more in-depth.

Ed Miliband arrived as we moved on to talk about specific policies. Jacky reinforced our message to him that the Party's values need to come through clearly in the Manifesto, pointing to common themes from Societies on equalities and co-operative working, and the strength of Socialist Societies working together to promote these.

In the closing part of the meeting, each Society outlined some of the key points from their briefing documents circulated in advance.

Ed Milliband apologised for not having been able to attend the whole meeting and suggested that we have another meeting with him in the Spring.

### *Comments*

The meeting was the best attended of any of our Socialist Society Executive meetings to date, and many of those who do not attend our regular meetings saw the value of our dialogue and wanted to pursue this further.

Simon and Jacky would therefore like to propose that we continue the debate, in order to

- Further develop policies for the manifesto, particularly in areas of joint working
- Consider how we can jointly promote the values we share
- Look at ways in which Societies can provide support to each other to strengthen and expand our work
- Pursue the proposals made at the meeting, in particular the assistance we need from the Party to increase communication with the membership
- Maximise the opportunities to feed in our policies to the manifesto process
- Prepare for a further meeting with Ed Milliband in the Spring.

As a start, we will put these proposals to the next Executive meeting on 28 January 2008.