

Statement

Regional Conference 2018

Well! It was a very dour Regional Conference I went to this year. Not many of our Regional MP's were there and was very conspicuous by their absence. So, what happened and where?

FRIDAY

Friday evening was the opening of Conference by Clive Lewis MP. Before that I registered and then saw Sandy Martin MP. I had met sandy before at National Conference When he was leader of the Labour Group of Suffolk County Council. He didn't seem interested in talking to me then, but boy had he changed. Very warm and welcoming we discussed many issues. Chris Vince had at this moment joined us (He was running for a seat on Regional Board) he told me he was a Councillor on Harlow Borough Council. And we chatted together for an hour. Then the opening of conference had started. Another person to whom I know Steve Sweeny (GMB) who is now the international editor of the morning star. Phil Smith on behalf of TULO and the person organising this year's conference apologised for the earlier arrangements as he had been ill and was not able to book anything for November. Then Clive Lewis took over. He spoke of the way the Tories are ruining this country and the hostile environment anyone on benefits will meet. He also said that when Phil Hammond presents his budget and says that austerity is over then don't be fooled. It won't be for those on the national minimum wage or on benefits. Austerity will only end for the richest 1%. Then he went on to present a Journalist who had been jailed in turkey by president erdyan (not exactly by him personally) and what is going on in that country and supported by our Government. Yes! The speech went on a bit and then at 8.15 free drinks where being given out, but I took my decision to leave for home.

SATURDAY

Got to Norwich ten minutes before the opening of the day's session. Vaughan West (GMB, Regional board member and Islington Councillor) opened the mornings proceedings. He explained the day and what may be in store. He also asked conference to meet in a respectful Manner and respect every bodies point of view. First up was Karen Davies. Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Norwich North. She gave a message that the day will come when this Tory Government will come to an end although we will have to clear the mess what the Tories have created. She also asked all of us when we are back

Statement

in our Constituencies to make sure that ALL active members are out on the streets being visible all year round NOT just at election time. She promised that she will be doing this to ensure that Chloe Smith is removed. Then came Hollie Ridley. Hollie is the new Regional Director after a turbulent year at Regional Headquarters Some people have resigned or just left. Hollie said that she was very proud to be the first East of England female Regional Director and will be making Labour East a very effective and efficient organisation to help in preparation for the next General Election whenever that may be. (she spoke that could be the next 6 months or next two years)

Then came Phil Smith. Phil again apologised that he had been long term ill and that conference had to be early this year due to everything that had to be organised. He also introduced some motions. These were not introduced in order, so we started with Resolution 6 (GMB) Solidarity with all our Communities. This is a resolution asking the meeting to unite in the face of racism and the fascist state. The movers were also motivated conference to ask everyone to unite so that the party could remove this Tory Government. The resolution was passed unanimously and then we were introduced to Resolution 7 Post Office Network. (Someone in this CLP circulated this but I cannot remember who) This CLP, Trades Union and branch notes with concern that 74 crown post offices across the UK will be franchised to WHSmith. Without doubt it is frightening that if this happens our whole network of sub post offices would be at risk as well. Of course, yours truly voted for the resolution which passed again unanimously.

Next up was Jenny Formby our new General Secretary. She also enforced the message that if the Labour party kept on back biting each other and did not unite then we will hand this country back to the Conservatives. She said to conference. She also said that we must also ensure that there is no racism within the Labour party as there is no room for it. And for those two things conference gave applause for and some (including myself gave a standing ovation. She then went on that we must ensure that we as a party are visible not just during elections but also other times of the year. And again, pointed out that if we let the Tories back in when the next general comes along we have only ourselves to blame. She explained the country is in a mess and after Brexit it will be on its knees. She explained to conference that we must now put our selves in a position to win back the trust of the nation and elect a Corbyn led Labour Government.

Statement

After this item there was the handing out of Merit awards. One to the Regional GMB for fighting a Campaign. And another one to The Hertfordshire FBU and a Labour Borough/County Councillor in saving the threatened fire service in Hertfordshire.

If YOU HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP READING THIS SO FAR YOU NEED TO WAKE UP NOW!

Next up was Gregg Cook, Head of political strategy and planning. THIS was worth the whole conference. He was talking how we fared in the EASTERN REGION during the last General election. We had the biggest increase of the vote since 1945. Even though Labour won a landslide in 1997 our vote share did not move that much. However, in 2017 the share and the amount went up dramatically. The three biggest areas that saw the biggest increases from a small base was 1: The Southwest 2: The Southeast and 3 Eastern Region. The vote share in the northern areas decreased. They think this is partly due to Brexit and the northern areas believing they would be better off outside the EU. This means our vote moved from the traditional north to the more affluent south. Then he came up with areas that saw a Labour MP elected. He pointed out that the vote in these areas did not need to move much to elect a labour MP. He pointed out though that the areas that did much better were those that surrounded those constituency wins. Although they re-elected a conservative they did suffer a big fall in their share. We in Southeast Cambridgeshire took an upward swing of 5.9% from a very low base and are 290th in the rankings. I saw they took around 500 other constituencies. Those that lost out and suffered falls where in the north although 3 were in Essex. Castle point, Braintree and Chelmsford (Can you not hold me to these as I may be wrong). Gregg pointed out that even the least likely Constituency can buck the trend and no General election should be counted a forgone conclusion. Then came the age groups and how they voted. In the 18-24 age group (Normally those that never vote) voted Labour mainly for the first time. Next the 25-45 age group again clearly voted labour. But the 45-55 age group mostly voted Conservative and then the 55 and over age group over whelming voted Conservative. The LibDems vote just disappeared from the map in all age groups. The worker groups that voted were senior white-collar management very strongly voted conservative where as the middle to lower management and professional working class opted to vote Labour But! The big surprise was

Statement

that those on low incomes voted Conservative believing they would be better off under them.

Then Came Lunch

After Lunch there was the fringe meetings and I attended (Late) COULD A PEOPLES VOTE BE WON IN THE EAST OF ENGLAND. This was chaired by Alex.

As I was, and others were late I did not get to hear the start of the debate. But what I did hear of was that the East of England Labour Party could do this. However, we cannot and should not develop an aggressive attitude to the campaign because if we do, we could risk like the last referendum of splitting of the East of England into pro Europeans and anti-Europe. However, the campaign could reignite UKIP and that would be a real problem seeing that we could reverse Article 50 if the vote went our way. Then the panel took questions but was a bit rushed due to the time ticking away. Most of the panel thought that it was a possibility that a people's vote would go ahead if the Conservatives wanted one. But the panel agreed the Tories will not allow one to go ahead. Then Alex summed up very quickly and basically reinforced the message that coming out of Europe is the wrong thing to do. But as we are, we need a Brexit for jobs and the economy. The Tories she explained are only leaving Europe for their own gain. This is exactly my thoughts on the process.

Tracy Brabin MP

This was just a time filler as it was just encouraging us to go out there and campaign like there was a need. We know that we must do this, and we must not let the Tories. Although we missed some of the speech due to our fringe meeting going over time. Tracy just gave a speech and that was it no questions from the floor. To me this was a bit of a let down as questions could have been but due to time constraints this was not allowed.

Maria Pavlou.

This was again felt by me as a time filler. Tracy is the Senior Targeted Content Officer. That means she helps CLP's to use digital marketing and content to try and woo voters especially younger voters to vote Labour. She showed a slide of twenty-year olds around a table looking at their smart phones. She pointed out that the biggest market for Labour is of course Facebook. The second biggest way of encouraging the younger generation to vote for a Labour Campaign was Instagram. Other social Media platforms such as Twitter,

Statement

YouTube or snapchat did not reach the people we need to reach so was not worth the money to spend. We were told to start getting People to like our page now as when a General election campaign would it be too late to do this. On Facebook the maximum spend that any CLP should consider is £20.00. She said for this amount you would get the best out of your Facebook account. Secondly, she told us that content had to be fresh every week to keep people interested and to increase the amount of views that page received. Also try and populate the whole page. She gave us examples of the Conservatives page where it keeps on mentioning Conservatives. She pointed that the page should be headlined with Labour, but it should not be anywhere else in your content. She then showed a Facebook slide from the Liberal Democrats. She said poor old people it showed only half a page of content and no photos to explain the content. She then showed the slides from Sandy Martins Facebook page which had Sandy standing beside his Campaign literature and in the background Ipswich. And then showed us the page where he showed a bar chart. Then the running up to the General election. And then the General Election week itself with Sandy Saying vote Labour on Thursday. She pointed out that she had showed this to other regions as this was the sort of content that would win elections. She also pointed out to us that do not use Facebooks bar chart seeing how many saw the page as this would and is very misleading. She said that if you have used contact creator and to use this as a guide to contact your vote and ask them if they had seen the page.

Then it was time for Margret Greenwood MP.

Margret is the shadow secretary of state for work and pensions. Yes! Bingo. She started off by saying that the Conservatives were encouraging a Hostile world for those on Benefits. It was no surprise that many people were on the streets. All MP's on the Labour bench's had cases where many had wanted help with PIP but now wanted help from Universal Credit. She stated that this government was trying to starve those on Benefits into low paid work just to make the statistics into looking good. She pointed out that this will not be getting any better and in fact things will get even worse. Brexit, she pointed out will encourage the Government to cut back even more on Benefits. She then pointed out that when the Prime Minister comes back with an agreement from the EU the labour group will not be pressured into accepting a Conservative Brexit. The Conservatives must come back with an agreement that meets that front bench's six tests. She said that the agreement would be

Statement

unlikely to meet these tests and therefore do not be surprised that the Labour group votes down Theresa Mays agreement. Then Margret went into talking about going out and knocking on those doors now as part of an election Campaign so that when it comes, we would be the only political party to have done this. Then came question time. And yes, yours truly got to ask a question. I firstly pointed out that my wife had been moved from DLA to PIP and that we were in the process of fighting the DWP from taking our Motability car away from us and then proceeded to ask, "What do I tell my wife and other disabled voters how Labour would change the system in these difficult times". And the answer was that she understood the stress of what the DWP where doing but I had to put things in context as some disabled people were on their third appeal. Secondly If we won the next General Election the front benches would move everyone to a new Benefit and there would be no workplace assessments. This was music to my ears as if there were no workplace assessments there would be no way of telling how far a person could walk. Then most of the questions were on Universal Credit as most Councillors had around about 100 cases a week. Margret pointed out again that the Conservatives were trying to starve people into low paid work and that there was no way of stopping this. After this Margret left.

Local Government Report

This was a report from local Councillors and from the Association of Labour Councillors. It was a sharp and to the point report but nothing really to report on as it was about again Universal Credit and how to encourage activists to stand for election in our local elections we have. Then there was another Q & A.

And that is the end of my report. Unfortunately, my car developed a fault and was not able to attend the last three hours of Conference which had European parliamentary report and Parliament report.

Steven O'Dell

Regional Conference Delegate.

Statement