



Back to basics

The lessons of Wallasey's
election campaign

50p

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Introduction

With the TV lights blazing in his eyes and the cheers of ecstatic Labour supporters ringing in his ears, Lol Duffy rose to speak at Wallasey Town Hall at 3.12 a.m. on Friday 12 June. With a passion that silenced the Tories and Liberals, he spoke of Labour's enormous achievement in Wallasey. It is, very simply, this. If the Labour Party nationally had achieved what we achieved in Wallasey we would now have a Labour government. A Tory majority of 6,708 had been reduced to a mere 279. Labour's vote had increased by a staggering 39%. The 70th marginal on Labour's target list will, next time round, be number five.

As a haggard Lynda Chalker left the Town Hall she waved to the press — her strongest allies for the past four weeks. On closer inspection, though, she wasn't waving, she was drowning. Next time Wallasey will be won by a socialist MP. In 1987 Wallasey Labour Party ran a campaign which we believe is a model not just of an election campaign but of how to build a genuine mass party and turn that party out into the community to build real popular support. This is an account of how it was done.



The battleground

Wallasey had been held by the Conservatives since the seat was created in 1918. Local Tories see the seat as their birth-right. The inheritance was passed on in 1974 from the Rt. Hon. A.E. Marples, after 29 years of service to the Tory cause, to a Mrs Lynda Chalker. Chalker is Merseyside's very own Margaret Thatcher — rich and out of touch.

She was educated at the schools of the privileged, Roedean and Heidelberg. She is now married to Clive Hugh Alexander Landa who sits very happily on the board of directors of a mere seven companies and is managing director of the Pearl and Dean Group.

Marked out for great things, Chalker was appointed Under-secretary of State for Health and Social Security from 1979-82 and Under-secretary of State for Transport in 1982. Her recent move to the Foreign Office was no doubt helped along by her previous experience as assistant industrial advisor to Barclays Bank International.

So here she was standing on the threshold of the "glittering prizes" of office with only an "unelectable" Labour candidate to oppose her. What could be easier?

But Wallasey in 1987 was not the Wallasey known and ruled over by MP Sir Chadwick Burton (1922-31) or Lt. Col. Moore-Brabazon (1931-42) or even old Ernest Marples himself. Wallasey had been ransacked by eight years of Thatcherism.

*Unemployment in Wallasey in 1979 stood at 3,600. By 1987 it had doubled to 7,400 — an unemployment rate of 18.5%. Drug abuse is sweeping some estates bringing with it misery for working class youth.

*The Health Service had been decimated. Wallasey hospitals had been falling like nine-pins — Victoria Central Hospital, the Leasowe Hospital, the Women's Hospital and Maternity Hospital were all closed. The 3059 people waiting for hospital treatment in the Wirral in 1985 had gone up to 3130 waiting in line, in pain, in 1987.

Of the 361,311 beds lost from the NHS since 1981, Merseyside is the worst hit area. The only remaining unit in Wallasey provides an accident and emergency service from 9 to 5! Mrs. D. Ambrose, a nurse at the unit, was featured in a Labour Party leaflet in the final week of the campaign:

"I am a nurse at what is left of Victoria Central Hospital. Our

Wallasey Health Service has barely survived two Thatcher terms. It won't survive a third. We need Lol Duffy as our MP. is committed to a decent health service in Wallasey. It's up to all the people in Wallasey to act now. It is too far, and for many, too expensive, to go to another accident and emergency unit on the Wirral or Arrowe Park''.

And Chalker — this “battler for Wallasey” — was junior minister for health in the Tory government that closed the hospitals, from 1979-82.

*Education: Schools have been closed since 1979 and teachers sacked. The Tory local authority even opposed the remission of college fees for the unemployed.

*Transport: Rose Butler, a Wallasey pensioner, summed up the feelings of many when she wrote: “I am a pensioner. My life has been made a misery since bus deregulation. I rely on the buses, but the service has gone to the dogs. Labour is the only party really committed to improving the bus service. That's why I am voting for Lol Duffy on June 11.”

And Chalker — this “battler for Wallasey” — well she couldn't really deny that as junior minister for Transport from 1982 she had been an enthusiastic supporter of de-regulation of the bus services.

Moving about Wallasey the contrasts of wealth and want, of poverty and privilege, are sharply drawn. From the leafy lanes of Wallasey village to the run-down estates of Leasowe and Seacombe the reality behind the so-called ‘North-South Divide’ is clear to see: the age-old divide between rich and poor.

Wallasey is, in a sense, a 1980s version of Charles Dickens' ‘Tale of Two Cities’, of ‘the best of times and the worst of times’. This, then, was the decaying and divided Wallasey Lynda Chalker had to hold on to if she was to walk again in the corridors of power.

Labour sets out its stall

Labour's candidate was Lol Duffy, a Marxist and a working-class socialist who had been imprisoned for leading an occupation at Cammell Laird shipyard against job losses in 1984. Lol was clearly the candidate of the left, of those who wanted to resist the Tory attacks. Lol is a supporter of Socialist Organiser and this was itself made into

Photo: John Smith



an election issue.

Lol's selection was greeted with derision by the local media and the handful of right-wingers in the party. "Chalker will eat him for breakfast" they said. "Marxist to fight Chalker" was the headline, denouncing Lol's support for Socialist Organiser. Local right-wingers said his views would be a liability. 22,512 electors — Labour's highest ever vote in Wallasey — proved the fainthearts wrong. What they didn't understand was that for every one person confused by the 'Marxist' tag, another 10, 20, 30 people voted for the first time for Labour because here, at last, was a candidate and a party which fought for the interests of working people.

Kim Moroney argues: "We worked as a team because we had someone up there that we knew would work for us and that's why we thought it was worth doing everything we could do."

Eric Smith commented, "It was a brilliant campaign from the



outset. The core of it, the motivation of the people. It was a campaign that gained momentum taking people with it as it went along. To give a personal example, in the Leasowe area we started with about ten people and ended up with at least 100 people involved in one way or another. What more is there to say."

The Party laid out its stall as early as November 1986 when, on dark and rainy nights during one of the worst winters in memory, we leafleted the entire constituency to introduce our candidate and our policies.

"Lol is standing for Parliament as a working-class socialist who will not accept the privileged wages and life-style that buys people off. He will only take the national average wage and use the rest for the benefit of the labour movement. The campaign of Wallasey Labour Party will be open and honest. We will be calling door to door to answer your questions about Lol's and Labour's policies."

The effect was remarkable. The party was reinvigorated and sustained a campaign over a period of some eight months.

Terry Hall, a community worker in the heart of the Leasowe estate is clear about the effects; "The campaign generally was brilliant. It was more than just a campaign for a general election. It was a process of mass education. You could see it from day one, getting stronger. People became aware of the issues. Lol was the kind of candidate people could identify with."

The Labour campaign

On 8 May, the day after the local elections, over 200 people came to Wallasey Town Hall to hear Dennis Skinner, Lol Duffy and speakers from Women Against Pit Closures and local disputes. Never had the Town Hall seen so many banners — Labour Parties, trades unions, women's sections, Vauxhall shop stewards, Wirral Trades Council, all were there. The meeting was held in expectation of Thatcher announcing the date of the election the following week, which she did.

It was a marvellous meeting. We laughed until we cried with Dennis Skinner who can prick Tory hypocrisy like no-one else.

We cheered the striker over from Moat House in Liverpool and gave to the collection. And, eventually, the meeting fell silent to hear an appeal from Lol Duffy for a crusade that would be not the end, but

the beginning of a fightback. Lol ended his speech saying:

"We prop up this system. *We* work for it, *we* make it go. But it is not *our* system, is it? It's theirs. And when it falls apart, like it is now, *we* take the cuts and the pain, *we* tighten our belts, *we* take the weight of it on our shoulders.

"I think it's about time we took control of it once and for all. Let's run it in *our* way for the benefit of the majority. That's what socialism is about — ordinary working people taking control over their own lives, working together to make a decent life.

"But I'll say this. There is no easy walk to freedom. Socialism isn't something that Dennis Skinner or even 300 Dennis Skinners can deliver to you wrapped up in a bow. It will be created by us, fighting together to create a new society. It won't be easy but what price not joining the fight? What price standing aside? Join the Labour Party. Make it your party. Join the campaign for a Labour victory in Wallasey. Join the fight for socialism."

The meeting set the tone for the campaign — a socialist campaign for a Labour victory. We knew there was only one way to counter the avalanche of lies and distortions from the local media. To meet and discuss with and explain to the people of Wallasey what we stood for and what we did not. We also had to be seen to be serious about fighting for what we talked about. We started to do this long before Thatcher named the day.

For months we had been carrying out a political survey of the constituency. By a door to door survey, asking for people's views on policies — Labour and Tory — we explained our policies, refuted the lies, and recruited to the party. We began to involve new people in the campaign.

When a struggle broke out we didn't run away from it, scared. We stood with the workers and gave active support. A strike on the Leasowe estate, of women shop workers, put the idea of a socialist campaign for a Labour victory to the test. The strike was against harassment of staff by hired bouncers and for union recognition.

The picket line was, at times, literally, a battlefield. The Labour Party played a role of leadership in the dispute, alongside the TGWU, supporting the picket line, helping to organise meetings of support and raising funds. The strike was successful. The union was recognised and the hired thugs left. But we didn't leave it there. We brought those strikers into the Labour Party.

'Make it your party', we said. Some joined and were the best fighters during the election campaign.

One of the central ideas of a socialist campaign for a Labour victory is to combine and integrate the political fight to unseat the Tories with the fight to strengthen workers' position in the workplace. So, in Wallasey, the pioneering work of the 688 Branch of the TGWU and of

Labour Party members in unionising and creating a stewards' structure on local Community Programme schemes was used as a strength to bring into the election campaign. Those young stewards were tireless in their work, seeing clearly that it was one movement and one fight and the need is to tie in the different fronts into one coherent struggle to replace the Tories with working class socialism.

The local DHSS was leafleted every day for three weeks to talk to every unemployed person in Wallasey. We argued that they should "Put Chalker on the Dole", and join the fight for decent benefits for all.

We talked to parents picking up their children from school, explaining what the Tories' plans for education would mean to them and their children.

We talked to pensioners in homes for the elderly. Many who had voted Tory all their lives were, this time, persuaded to vote Labour. Chalker's vote against free TV licenses and the cut in the value of the pension being more important to them than tradition.

We held street meeting after street meeting. A leaflet — 'Come and meet Lol Duffy at 5.30' — a car, a megaphone, and you have a political forum on a housing estate.

We organised a 'bed-push' from the site of a closed hospital to the only remaining unit in Wallasey. With coffins, hospital beds and uniforms and leaflets and speeches, we drew attention to the decimation of the health service in Wallasey. Lol Duffy met the nurses and staff of the hospital. He witnessed a young nurse straining to cope with over 30 geriatric patients with only two auxiliaries to help.

Some of the health workers were involved in the campaign. The Labour Party is now pledged to campaign alongside them for a 24-hour-a-day accident and emergency unit for Wallasey and decent staffing levels and conditions at Mill Lane.

We organised a cavalcade on the Saturday before polling with over 50 cars, hundreds of campaigners, mass leafleting, street theatre, speeches and music. It was possible to sense the mood in the town by this time. People began to dare to think: "Perhaps we could do it this time." Labour Party members in the shopping precincts would be asked by Labour voters with wide open eyes, "We *can* do it this time, can't we?"

More and more people joined the party and the campaign. John Reilly remembers: "I got involved because it was really well organised. It involved a lot of young people, people who wanted change, people looking for jobs."

Barbara Smith recalls: "I got involved with the campaign because Eric did, my husband, and all I was going to do was make tea. But by dinner time I was totally involved. I just wanted to do more."

School students, too, found a place. The Labour Party members

who had assisted them in the establishment of a school students' union now involved them in the election campaign. A school student from Mosslands Comprehensive remembers: "It was the first campaign I have been involved in. Everyone was dead friendly. I was a lot younger than them and they all helped me canvass, which I've never done before. I enjoyed everything in the campaign. I got involved to try and get the Tories out because if the Tories stay in I've got no future. I'm still at school and the future doesn't look too bright."

So the campaign was also about recruiting the next generation of socialists. The Labour Party in Wallasey is now launching a campaign around the government's slave labour schemes — YTS and JTS — with petitions, leaflets, lobbies and meetings. The anti-Tory crusade continues.

We staged events with stars from Red Wedge like Billy Bragg and the Housemartins, touring them around the constituency. They even managed some *a capella* singing outside the supermarket at Morton shopping centre!

Red Wedge bring with them their fame and a political message. The first gives a bigger audience for the second, and that's great. They also gave us some of the only good press coverage we had during the campaign.

All this campaigning activity was combined with a painstaking canvassing operation. Ward-level organisers met every morning at 8.30 a.m. with the central campaign team to discuss the day's programme of activity, press releases, leafleting, canvassing. Any problems were ironed out and responsibilities allocated.

A level of organisation — generated out of commitment — meant that three canvasses were carried out and Wallasey was, within one week of the declaration, covered in the red of "Duffy — Labour" posters, generating a mood in the crucial first days of the campaign. George Clarke, a former leader of Wirral Labour Group and still active in the party said during the campaign: "I've taken part in every election campaign since 1945 but never have I seen the party so well organised or so energetic in its campaigning."

Our campaign had concentrated on the real issues: unemployment, health, education, housing, pensions, the Tory record. We had set the agenda.

It quickly became obvious — to us and to them — that if the Tories and Alliance tried to fight us on this battleground we would have a Labour landslide on our hands. Their response was swift and predictable: smear Labour and whip up a red scare campaign. What wasn't predictable though was that the first blow would come from 'our own' side. We had the grotesque chaos of a Labour MP — yes, a *Labour* MP — scuttling around newspaper offices handing out poison pen letters about our own party!

The anti-Labour campaign

It was a classic example of a press stitch-up. You start with an anonymous "Wallasey resident". The resident, we are told, has written to Frank Field, right wing Labour MP for Birkenhead, to "seek the MP's comments on Mr Duffy". Field writes back on 5 May to say "Thank you very much for taking the trouble to write to me. I can tell you in the most definite terms that I shall not be supporting Duffy. I have refused to appear on any platforms with him and I hope Cammell Laird workers similarly will refuse to give him a hearing when he tries to gatecrash on our factory-gate meetings during the election campaign."

The next step was for Martin Horden, the editor of the local freesheet, the Wirral Globe, and a friend of both Field and Chalker, to be given the letter and then to wait his moment. One week into the campaign, on 21 May, he struck. "Marxist Lol slammed by Frank Field" said the front page. He reproduced the letter for all to read.

Frank Field is best known for his support for 'tactical voting' and for calling for votes against left-wing Labour candidates. Field supports council house sales, opposes unilateralism and is opposed to women's abortion rights. He treats his own constituency Labour Party with contempt. He was reselected as Labour candidate after threatening to stand as an independent. In Wallasey he was doing a job of work for Lynda Chalker, pure and simple.

The Labour Party should have demanded he state his support for Lol Duffy. Instead it stayed silent. Field has not been challenged to this day by Labour leaders for his actions. Imagine if a left-winger had suggested that voters should vote against Labour candidates. They would have been drummed out of the party and Walworth Road would have imposed a different candidate.

The Labour leaders stayed well clear of Wallasey for four weeks. Chalker now bleats about her dreadful result being due to Wallasey being "Labour's number one target seat". What rubbish! She knows that within days of the election being called Frank Dobson, Michael Meacher and Lord Murray all pulled out of planned visits. Kinnoek himself visited Mossley Hill and the neighbouring Ellesmere Port and

Neston, weaving a path around Wallasey. The sum of the front bench contribution to this 'key marginal' was John Prescott for two hours.

Chalker, meanwhile, had the support in Wallasey, of Michael Heseltine, Willie Whitelaw, Kenneth Baker, William Waldegrave and Geoffrey Howe, as well as the almost full-time assistance of David Hunt, Tory MP for Wirral West.

With the help of Dennis Skinner we held a lively street meeting and walkabout with Tony Benn and Terry Field on the Leasowe estate.

The Tories then began a calculated smear campaign against Labour. This is how the Tory dirty-tricks campaign worked. The Liverpool Echo would ring up Liz Williams, the Labour Party press officer: "We have just had a phone call from a pensioner who wouldn't leave her name. She says Labour Party members threatened to beat her up if she didn't vote Labour. Are you going to deny this?" No matter what Liz could say the Echo got the story it, and the Tories, wanted: "Labour deny intimidation charge."

Radio Merseyside would receive a call from 'an elderly woman' who insists she was physically assaulted by Labour Party members outside the Tory Headquarters. We ask for a reply and are told the issue is closed.

The morning the phone-calls and the stories began, was also the morning that "bully-boy" scare stories started to appear about Labour's campaign in Broad Green and Bermondsey. It was obviously being directed like a stage-play from Tory Headquarters in London.

It became clear that Peter Shipley, a grubby little ex-National Front supporter who now compiles 'blacklists' of socialists for employers, was working under Norman Tebbit in Tory HQ.

One of the most depressing aspects of all this would be the journalists who would ring up, after some Tory had sent in some lying press release, and say: "Look we know this is all rubbish, but what can you expect? You always have to wade through this shit at election time. We are Labour supporters, honest, but can you comment on the allegation anyway?"

That night the Liverpool Echo's 'report' was headed, "Screaming horde blitz offices". This was a non-story the Tories pushed for four weeks. Here's the story of the 'screaming hordes'.

For months the Labour Party had been organising lobbies of Lynda Chalker's Tory HQ in Wallasey. They had always been peaceful. We leafleted passers-by, made our protest, and then took the protest to the nearby shopping precinct to carry on leafleting and talking to people about the issues.

Very successful lobbies had been held on the abolition of the maternity grant and death grant, on unemployment and on the Tory record on women.

Once, Chalker even allowed a delegation in to quiz her about cuts in benefits. She turned out to be a remarkably ignorant woman. Debbie Williams, a full-time welfare rights advisor recalls: "I nearly fell off my chair at some of the rubbish she came out with. She just didn't know anything about the benefits system."

"She tried to tell us that people on government schemes can get special help with their mortgages! That's just not true. She even said the solution was for unemployed people to start saving. She seemed amazed when we said it was not possible to save and survive on the dole. It was like 'let them eat cake' all over again."

Chalker had been completely embarrassed and was not going to let it happen again. Our next lobby — on the question of South Africa and the imprisoned union leader Moses Mayekiso — was ignored by her. Instead a die-hard Tory supporter from Wirral West snatched leaflets out of our hands and scratched at our placards, hurling abuse. The women present from the Labour Party told her to calm down.

Meanwhile some local youths, who had nothing to do with the picket, had stuck a few stickers on her car. Well, that was it. Over the next few weeks we watched as this incident was transformed from a few stickers on a car, to a case of verbal abuse, then of physical attack and, finally, two days before polling, to 'Screaming Hordes Attack Offices'.

The Tories also tried to make big play out of the presence in Wallasey of Labour Party members who came in from other constituencies to work in target marginals for a socialist campaign. These people were put up by local Labour Party members. They worked under the direction of the central campaign committee. They worked tirelessly for a Labour victory. But seeing another chance to smear and distort the truth the Tories pumped out the tale of an "imported dirty tricks brigade" attacking pensioners!

Chalker backed out of debate after debate. An NUT-organised 'Education Forum' drew over 500 people. Chalker never even replied to the NUT's invitation and didn't turn up on the evening.

The only debate she attended was organised by the Wallasey Council of Churches. A list of 16 written questions was known to Chalker and Richardson over a week in advance. We were told that such a list existed at 11 am on the morning of the meeting. Chalker and Richardson, sitting next to each other and exchanging frequent whispers droned out prepared answers to prepared questions. Lol — a lion in the Christians' den — spoke from the heart of poverty, unemployment, inequality and of the socialist alternative.

One of the church-goers was canvassed the next day. She said that the women had been discussing the previous night's meeting at their coffee morning and were voting for Lol. No wonder Chalker shied away from open debate!

Marxist to fight Chalker

BEFORE YOU VOTE CONSIDER

THE FACTS:
about **LABOUR IN WALLASEY**

FACT Labour support in Wallasey is at its lowest level since the 1979 election.

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**CONSIDERING THE FACTS, CAN YOU
REALLY SUPPORT THESE ALTERNATIVE**



**THE ALLIANCE CAN WIN...
LABOUR CANNOT**
RICHARDSON X

Marxist Lol slammed by Frank Field

Mr. Field said that the Labour Party's policy on the economy was a disaster and that the party's policy on the environment was a disaster.



Stay away
from my
patch.
Duffy is
told by
angry MP

FAMOUS SHIRTS

The opinion polls

Radio City — an independent radio station — broadcast an opinion poll for Wallasey in each week of the campaign. The polling agency was Williams and Associates in Liverpool. The first two polls showed Labour still in the doldrums and the Tories were riding high. Both polls were given publicity in the Liverpool Echo.

We couldn't understand it. Our canvass returns said different. Our campaigning said different. The whole mood in the town said different. If the polls were right why had the local bookies stopped taking bets on Lol over a fiver?

On Thursday 4th, Labour supporters were leafleting outside Wallasey Village railway station. We met students from Liverpool Polytechnic, employed by Williams and Associates to poll Wallasey for Radio City. They told us that they had been registering a massive swing to Labour since the first week of the campaign, and couldn't understand the poll 'results' broadcast by Radio City.

The next day a party worker rang up Radio City's 'Election Unit' to ask for an explanation for all this. "Er...ah...we...you can get a funny impression from one polling site and...er...anyway, they shouldn't be talking to political parties...this is very worrying...er...I'll have to look into this."

On Tuesday 9th, the final poll was broadcast. It showed Labour, all of a sudden, neck and neck with Chalker! The poll received no publicity at all in Liverpool. By this stage that didn't surprise anybody.

The Alliance

It was the way the Alliance campaign workers (all 5 of them) referred to her as "Lynda" and smiled, that made me suspicious. "Lynda is going to walk it," they'd say. "Lynda is very popular, you know".

The Alliance quickly got itself into tune with the shrill cries of 'intimidation' and 'Marxist' from the Tories. Jon Richardson, their candidate and a member of the SDP's national council, was a truly spineless individual. Face to face with Lol he would be all sweetness and light. Then he'd go away and write his poison-pen leaflets about Lol being an "unelectable" jail-bird and a "self-confessed Marxist" who had "turned many Labour supporters and all floating voters against him". He used Frank Field's shameful attack on Lol to the full.

Richardson tried to start a MacCarthy-style witch-hunt against Lol for his support for Socialist Organiser. The Alliance published a leaflet saying:

"He is a self-confessed Marxist who supports the Socialist Organiser faction. This group's aims include 'public ownership of the major enterprises and a planned economy under workers' control' and even more sinister, 'democracy much fuller than the present Westminster system — a workers' democracy with elected representatives recallable at any time.'"

One of the funnier sights of the campaign was the Alliance supporters trying to answer the questions of angry workers the next day. "What's so sinister about us controlling the economy then?" "Why should the bosses run it all — they always make a mess of it anyway?" And best of all, "What's wrong with being able to recall delegates? If we'd had that, you traitors wouldn't have been able to get elected on a Labour ticket and then keep your seats when you ran out on the party, would you?"

The Alliance lied to the people of Wallasey throughout the campaign. They knew and we knew that they were an irrelevance whose only contribution might be to let Chalker back in. Yet right up to polling day their leaflets pumped out the same message: "The Alliance can win, Labour cannot". "The Labour candidate cannot win in Wallasey". "This Labour candidate is unelectable".

Labour's campaign took about 2,000 voters away from

the Alliance — proof that you can win Alliance votes by providing a clear socialist alternative and a positive campaign, not by turning ourselves into an SDP Mark II.

But the Alliance did its job. It confused just enough people to inflict the Tories on Wallasey for five more years. Over the next five years the Labour Party should take the Alliance very seriously. From now on we go for the jugular.



June 11th

On the day itself the Labour Party ran like clockwork from 5 am to 10 pm. A central team in the Labour Party offices, ward-level organisers, four committee rooms for each ward, an organiser in each committee rooms — we turned out 78.5% of the Labour promises won during the campaign. Mick Cashman, Labour's agent, was the cool head in control of it all.

When the result came through the hundreds of Labour supporters assembled at a 'Victory Social' fell silent. To have come so far and to fall short by so little was a cruel blow. Hardened activists were seen to have a cry and why not!

At the count itself Lol Duffy delivered a blistering attack on Chalker for her campaign, on Frank Field for his treachery. He called for a celebration — "If Labour had done this well nationally we would have battered the Tories. Chalker has no mandate. She is on her way out." It was a victory in all but name.

Where now in Wallasey?

Socialist Organiser's headline on 13 June read "Don't Mourn, Fight Back". Right now, that's the beginning of all wisdom. In Wallasey people are already fighting back.

A packed meeting of almost 200 party members met to discuss the way forward. That meeting committed itself to carry out a recruitment drive to the party from Labour voters, to campaign alongside health workers for a 24-hour accident and emergency unit in Wallasey and for decent staffing levels and conditions at Mill Lane.

Alongside the party youth we have taken up the threat of JTS. Within a week or so of the election the YS went straight back onto the

streets with leaflets and megaphones, explaining the threat of the work-for-your-dole Job Training Scheme. A petition was used to get into conversation with over a thousand people, some of whom then participated in lobbies and occupations of the Job Centre.

The campaign reached a peak with a highly successful gig against JTS.

No longer do young people in Wallasey say LPY..what? Even if they do not agree with us, they certainly can't miss us. Whether it be in helping to form school students' unions, fighting against cheap labour or simply debating with the Tories, Wallasey YS is here to stay and fight.

The thirst for knowledge of those awakened politically by the campaign should be satisfied by regular open political forums organised by the constituencies and made up of debates, talks, videos, and entertainment. Creches are essential at all events.

Women on the Leasowe estate have set up their own Labour Party Women's Section as a direct result of the election campaign. Trisha Curtis explains why: "There has been much more enthusiasm in this campaign, and absolutely 100% belief in what we have been campaigning for. Everyone's been right behind Lol because he's an ordinary person, one of us. We organised the Women's Section to get the ordinary women from the estate involved. By activities here on the estate we will draw attention to the Labour Party among women".

Trish MacQuire said: "Women will fight for issues that men would leave out like lighting up access, more street lamps, nursery schools — better equipped ones with more creches. It is about time women showed that they don't sit at home and wait for the men but that they can also fight for what they believe in."

They are not going to be another talking shop, but an active group who will be working and campaigning to bring about improvements within the community. The women are not letting the grass grow under their feet, they have already started collecting signatures for their petition for the Mammogram campaign.

One of the two Mammogram machines on the Wirral is currently lying idle at Arrow Park Hospital for want of money. As the Leasowe women's section says:

"If the cost in pounds and pence is the only excuse, it is a feeble one compared with the price paid by the families of the 2,000 Wirral women that die of breast cancer each year.

"Through this campaign we hope to get the Merseyside Regional Health Authority to provide the staff and finance for the operation of the Mammogram at Arrow Park Hospital."

The lessons of Wallasey

The central lesson of the Wallasey campaign is that when socialists go out and campaign for socialist policies with vigour and imagination, it is possible to create and sustain mass popular support. When socialists do this they also build the Labour Party and labour movement itself — membership in Wallasey has virtually doubled.

The Labour Party is transformed in the process from an inward-looking, committee-dominated organisation obsessed with rules, regulations and resolutions into an outward-going open campaigning party; a natural forum for working class people to come together and discuss how to change the world and plan to go out and “do the business”.

The likes of Marxism Today, New Socialist and New Statesman and Frank Field are transfixed by Thatcherism, like a rabbit caught in a car's headlights. Their only answer to it is to move to the right. They tell us that Thatcher is a new phenomenon and that we are old-fashioned socialists. And they propose a return to the politics of the Lib-Lab pact of the 1970s as a solution! They cannot understand that socialism can be made a popular force, but only if it is a socialism which lives and breathes in time, which is present and lives in every factory, office and estate, which is a clear, working class socialist alternative to Thatcherism and not a ‘fuddled fiddle in the muddled middle’.

Only a socialism which preserves but moves *beyond* the decent, love-thy-neighbour caring alternative offered by Kinnock is capable of challenging Thatcher in the 1980s and 1990s.

The party leadership ran a positive, at times powerful, anti-Tory campaign. But, in truth, you cannot attack the left of your own party for four years and the Tories for four weeks and expect to win a general election. Imagine if all the passion of Kinnock's “Big Sister is conning you” speech, all the power of Gould's assaults on Tory privilege, all the aggression of Healey's attack on Thatcher's “love affair with the Bomb” had been made part of the staple diet of Labour politics for four years.

A powerful anti-Tory crusade could have been built that would have focused the movement on unseating the Tories and driven the

Alliance into the margins. Instead we have suffered four years of backtracking and fudging; of failure to support the victims of Tory policies such as the miners and the printers. Four years of Labour always chasing after a political agenda they allowed the Tories to set. Four years of attacks on the left of the party.

Supporters of Socialist Organiser have profound disagreements with the Militant Tendency — we find them sectarian and an obstacle to united left action — but we are not so arrogant as to want to expel them from the party, turning the party inwards rather than turn our fire on the Tory enemy.

Every Labour Party member now has a clear job of work. Carry on the anti-Tory crusade the leadership began for four weeks and will now almost certainly drop again in favour of attacks on the left. Labour Parties must turn themselves outwards and make themselves genuine campaigning bodies seen on every picket line, in every tenants' struggle, fighting every hospital closure, clearing out every DHSS snooper. Talk of kicking out Thatcher before five years is idle unless we organise a storm of protest from every corner of the British Isles against the Tories.

Socialists in the party need to combine their activity with a political rearming of the movement. We need to redefine our socialism. There can be no return to the Wilson or Callaghan days. We need to make our aspirations for a planned economy under democratic workers' control live in the movement as a power to inspire and direct.

We need to spell out socialist policies for health, education, workers' rights, civil liberties and bring into being a popular movement capable of fighting for such policies. For the idea that socialism can be delivered from above through Parliament, wrapped up in a bow, by 300-odd Labour MPs trooping down a division lobby in the House of Commons is a consoling nonsense for children. Parliament is, for sure, a central part of British political life, but in the grown-up world we know that the forces ranged against socialism will need to be met with a counter-force at precisely those points where they will concentrate: outside the hallowed walls of Westminster.

We need to end the farce of Labour Party top-dogs hob-nobbing with police-state tyrants disguised as "Communist Party chiefs" or "trade unionists" in Eastern Europe. We need to make "Workers' Liberty — East and West" our byword — we must stand with the workers whether their oppressors are quoting Milton Friedman or Karl Marx.

If we want to democratise our own trade union movement and fight the Tory anti-union laws — and the two are inseparable — then that means taking seriously the building of powerful rank and file movements in every union.

We need a government prepared to fight for our class as hard as the

Tories fight for theirs, but we also need a movement capable of sustaining such a government in power. Such a movement is not brought into being in four weeks, with or without the help of Hugh Hudson, Brahms and stage-managed rallies. It will be built over a much longer period in the hurly-burly of resistance to the Tory attacks, in the patient explanation of what is, and what is not, socialism.

Photo: John Smith



IN AUGUST, a round-table discussion was organised with some of the people who had been most involved in the Labour campaign. Looking back, they assessed the campaign, its implications, and the way forward for the Labour Party in Wallasey.

The participants in this round table discussion were:

Lol Duffy, Labour Candidate in Wallasey.

Mick Cashman, Labour Agent in Wallasey.

Kim Moroney, community worker in Leasowe, and activist in Leasowe Women's Section of Wallasey Labour Party.

Richard Aplin, Wallasey Labour Party Young Socialists, Editorial Board member of Youth Fightback (the left in the LPYS).

Kenny Murphy, Senior Steward at Vauxhall, Ellesmere Port, member of Leasowe Ward Labour Party.

Eric Smith, Vauxhall worker, Leasowe Ward Labour Party.

Liz Williams, Secretary, Wirral Women's Council.

Alan Clarke, Secretary, Wallasey CLP.

John Bloxam, Socialist Organiser Editorial Board.

The discussion was chaired by *Alan Johnson*, Socialist Organiser's Merseyside co-ordinator, and member of Socialist Organiser Editorial Board.

One Campaign '87

Alan Johnson: Let's start with you, Lol. Looking back at the campaign, two months later, what are your recollections?

Lol Duffy: Well, it was the best campaign we ever had in Wallasey. It drew a hell of a lot of people into the Labour Party. When Party members came in from outside, they said our campaign was ten times better organised than other places.

We put our ideas across openly and in a way that people could understand. We put across the socialist message without any gobbledegook. People understood it and they voted for that.

Mick Cashman: I was agent in 1983 and 1987. I tried to get the same sort of people involved, but in 1983 no-one was interested because everyone knew that the candidate was interested in being an MP for the sake of being an MP. His politics were secondary — and they were bad enough, sort of Labour Co-ordinating Committee politics.

The enthusiasm was missing in 1983. First of all people didn't think we could win; and secondly they thought "even if we do win, what's he going to do for us?" Even party and trade union activists weren't interested in working.

The change in candidate was important. But the most important thing was the method and the politics behind it.

Kenny Murphy: I agree with what you are saying about the organisation behind the candidate making the difference. But without the candidate you haven't got the organisation, surely? One isn't more important than the other. This time around they complemented each other.

Alan Clarke: I remember in 1983 we were giving leaflets out at Seacombe Ferry and Chalker turned up to leaflet as well. And Chalker and our candidate were chatting to each other! People were walking past thinking, 'There's no bloody difference between them'.

Liz Williams: You have to have a candidate that a constituency is very committed to, and the organisation and campaign to back that up. I think that is where our role with Socialist Organiser comes in. You can't ignore it. Socialist Organiser was absolutely key. The style of organisation was important. It wasn't Militant's style where people are alienated from the campaign. People in the constituency respect Socialist Organiser.

I think the other difference was that this was a very enjoyable campaign: At times we were absolutely knackered, but we had some

good laughs!

It's important, because people see politics and campaigns as very flat. The 'stunts' were missing in 1983. They were important politically, as well as being fun.

This time there was constant mass canvassing and leafletting in the shopping areas. We had a massive presence. People knew the Labour Party was out on the streets. We made it enjoyable and made the Labour Party and socialism part of people's lives.

Richard Aplin: People felt that they were not voting for someone who would 'do the business for them', but someone who would remain part of the community, and be accountable to them."

Kim Moroney: In 1983 there wasn't any feeling that you could actually win. This time we really felt as though we could actually do something.

Kenny Murphy: We were like moonies this time!

Two Getting prepared

Alan Johnson: We didn't build up that mood overnight. The Wallasey campaign started a lot earlier than Thatcher's declaration of a general election. The canvassing and the door-to-door political survey started in November 1986. We did a door-to-door questionnaire on people's attitudes to privatisation, nuclear weapons, Labour Party policy and performance, etc.

Eric Smith: The political survey was good. It gave people who don't take an active involvement a chance to voice their opinion other than the 'X' on their ballot paper. They also know more about what we were about.

We were getting the message across the way it should be put across, and not the way you read it in the paper or on the TV. It does make a difference.

Mick Cashman: The survey certainly made a difference to my own attitude. Year after year the press tell you Labour loses elections because of the nuclear issue or because some other policy is unpopular. No matter who you are, no matter if you regard yourself as a Marxist and a socialist like I do, it sinks in after a bit. You start to believe that you can't win because people don't want to vote for unilateral nuclear disarmament. I was completely surprised during the survey.

Also, the number of people who joined the Labour Party after the survey was important. They were taken aback when somebody knock-

ed on the door — I started asking them what they think about all these issues — instead of just banging a leaflet through saying what we think.

The survey was essential in convincing the activists that we could win the seat.

Kim Moroney: We also had the Dillons strike at that time. There are girls who work there who are my friends. Before the strike, when I was out with them, I'd talk about Thatcher, and they'd say "Shut it, will you!" or "She's off again".

But during the strike they were talking politically to me and we were on the same level. They knew what I was talking about.

I think the role of Socialist Organiser and the Labour Party in that was good. The TGWU, as well.

You gave them an identity. They were actually saying to themselves, 'Yes, we *are* political. Everything that happens to us is political'. They suddenly clicked.

I think that's why an awful lot of women on the estate have suddenly got involved. I know no strike is 'good', but something good did actually come out of it.

Eric Smith: It did the Community a lot of good because if people hadn't respected that picket line you'd have still been stuck on that doorstep now".

Kim Moroney: I know. It's like why no-one can understand why Leasowe isn't a good left-wing ward. Politically it wasn't, was it? It's never been a really good, strong ward.

But since the strike it has. We've got something to identify with. We've actually had a fight — a political fight — and we won it.

Lol Duffy: People think the Labour Party is so many councillors and so many MPs and it's nothing else. That was the difference here. The Labour Party was seen to be on the picket line, talking to people on the doorstep, out leafletting for the strike.

That's the difference — seeing the Labour Party as more than just an organisation of politicians.

Three Workplaces

Alan Johnson: Some socialists outside the Labour Party say: "You can either try to win votes, or you try to win strikes, but you can't do both. You either try to help people when they strike, and take that seriously, or you try to win elections. What is your choice?"

But we proved that it was possible to combine go^o work around strikes, so that the strikes were won, and good Labour Party work. Both were strengthened by the fact that they were going on at the same time.

Kim and other people have come from the experience of that strike into the party, and have been a breath of fresh air in Labour Party wards. The Labour Party itself was taken outwards to the workplace and the picket line. The whole movement gained a lot.

But the workplaces were uneven in the election campaign. Vauxhall was excellent — you could see all the people out canvassing. But in other workplaces you couldn't say that. Why didn't we have more workplace meetings and factory gate meetings?

Eric Smith: Trade unionists in a workplace can feel threatened when someone comes in from outside. If you've got a cosy little group of stewards and they are not geared up, then when you go and plant seeds in people's minds on the shop floor it makes life uncomfortable for them.

Kenny Murphy: Places like Cadbury's and Squibbs have quite large shop stewards' organisations, and we just didn't see them. There was no enthusiasm from them at all. They wanted Lol to win, they wanted a Labour MP. But they didn't want to work. They were not prepared. I don't know the reason.

Richard Aplin: I think it's partly to do with this: many trade union officials have grown up in the trade union movement and have become 'established' as trade union officials. They see their job and their position as important, and they think that the way to get things done is behind closed doors rather than involving the mass of people.

During the Dillons strike someone from the T&G said "We've got to get this strike over quickly because the election might be called". I remember saying "Everything that's happening here says exactly the opposite. It's the strike which is drawing in loads of people."

Lol Duffy: I think our problem was that, in some cases, we relied on full time officials to sort out the workplace and fix up a meeting.

We started at the very beginning of the election campaign asking to get into Cadbury's and Squibbs as the main workplaces in the area. I got into Squibbs the week before the election through the management inviting me! I got into Cadbury's the week before that and it was arranged badly. Hardly any people attended. No one knew we were coming in, no speakers were set up. And that was due to us relying on full-time officials.

I think it would have been different if we had just gone ahead and leafleted the places, calling on people to attend a factory gate meeting.

Mick Cashman It's not just a matter of who the official is in a particular workplace. The difference between Vauxhall and Cadbury's or Squibbs is that there is a good steward organisation in Vauxhall. The reason why Kenny Murphy and Eric Smith and Tony Woodley can bring people out of Vauxhall is that you had that kind of organisation in the plant.

I don't believe that the stewards' organisation in Cadbury's and Squibbs is capable of bringing people out. I believe that we could get people out if we could get in there and talk to them and convince them.

We should be building Labour Party workplace branches in places like Cadbury's and Squibbs. That is one way to put a bit of life into the shop stewards' committees and make sure the membership are involved.

Many stewards are good when it comes to wage negotiations and health and safety, but don't see the link between the political struggle outside the workplace in the Labour Party and the workplace itself. We need to build that link.

Four Tory campaign '87

Alan Johnson: I heard a tale about a Labour Euro-MP in Brussels, standing unseen next to two high-ranking Tories who had been working in Wallasey. The Tories were saying it had been the shock of their lives. They had never seen Labour so well organised, and they were really going to have to get their act together next time.

I think that will happen. But to look at the Tory campaign this time, you'd have to start off with Frank Field's intervention, wouldn't you?

Lol Duffy: Yes. Most regional TV commentators round here have raised the issue. A Labour MP, claiming to represent the Labour Party, stabbed another Labour candidate in the back, and tried to sabotage our campaign because he didn't agree with our politics.

I'm not sure that pushing a complaint through the apparatus is worthwhile, though. It would be wasted energy. We need to change Birkenhead CLP. We should be looking to give the left in Birkenhead a hand and to have an input for our ideas in Birkenhead itself.

It would be fairly easy to turn things around there. For example the ward in Bidston, one of the biggest working class areas, has seven members!"

Kenny Murphy: We should make some effort to encourage people to join Birkenhead. We should say "Don't moan about him. Join the party. Get in there. Get rid."

Alan Johnson: The weaknesses of the Labour campaign nationally hindered us. Chalker talked about the Tories being the party able "to afford to care"! Labour was presented as being without answers... "what will you do, tax everyone?" "What will stop all this investment leading to sky-high inflation?"

The Labour Party nationally didn't have the answers. Locally we were in a cleft stick. We could talk to people about how we felt the economy could be run on a different basis, but it was never part of the national campaign.

Lol Duffy: We did try to answer the question about "where is the wealth?" and we put our ideas about ownership in leaflets and in speeches. But as for the slanders about "violence", no question they'll run that again next time.

If the candidate is me, it will also be about Socialist Organiser, but we shouldn't get hung up on that.

The Tories are incapable of a campaign that links up to ordinary people. There is nothing they can say that we cannot counter.

After the third term they will not be able to convince working class people that they do anyone any good. Their record is enough. The way things have been cut to pieces. We just need to convince people that their vote makes the difference.

Our campaigning work over the next four years will put us in a position to overcome the slanders.

Five

Campaigning after the election

Kenny Murphy: I think next time is going to be a lot harder for two reasons. Basically it's not a game anymore. We will be taken seriously for the first time. They will be sitting in Churchill House (Tory HQ in Wallasey), having the same meetings as this one, saying "that was a close call. We were nearly signing on there!"

In the past it has been a game — a bit of a sortie in the shopping precinct, the majority under their belt, a nice and safe Labour Party in disarray. They walk it. This time we took it seriously.

On election night, as people were sobbing in each other's arms, we said "We'll start tomorrow". People really did feel that way — "OK, we got beat. So what? We'll get them next time". It's a long process, there's a lot of work to be done in the meantime.

It's important to transform people into thinking that politics is not a game — that it actually means something to get someone into Parliament who represents them.

were getting the post-election leaflets out, and one of them said 'The election's over, isn't it? Is there another one?'

I said 'No'. He said, 'Well, what are you doing this for?' I said 'It's just to let you know that we don't just come looking for your votes every election. We are always here.'

So he said, 'Give us a couple of them'. That's got to be a good thing: that we are not just there for the vote. We're not just there once every four years, we're there all the time.

Mick Cashman: We should be looking at how to gear the party into a campaigning party that actually means something to the working class. It is important we win the seat, but the most important thing is that we group people in Wallasey around the Labour Party and that the Labour Party actually means something in terms of the campaigns of the community.

And the Labour Party will campaign not just because it wants votes but because it is important. You fight the issues for the sake of the issues. Socialism is not about just fighting elections. Socialism is about organising people and teaching people the strength of that organisation.

John Bloxam: A lot of local parties wouldn't have got involved in the Dillons strike, thinking 'This loses votes'. They would have said 'Don't have a left candidate — that loses votes'.

In truth some people were probably put off by the fact that Lol is a Marxist. But I'm convinced that for every person put off like that we got 100 or 200 extra voters because they saw a fighter.

Even during the election campaign there was the school students' battle. A lot of local parties would have said 'We'll have nothing to do with that'. We got stuck in.

Richard Aplin: It is important next time that we have schools for the first time canvassers, but it's more important to give them confidence to say what they actually want to say.

I don't think I was asked once a specific question about a specific Labour Party policy. The issue really was a fight over values. Whether you wanted to put profit before people or people before profit.

We have to equip people with arguments about that vision of society rather than just the ins and outs of the Labour Party policy.

We could have given someone a shool on Labour Party policy a month before the election, and it would have been irrelevant because the leadership simply changed the policies anyway.

I remember when the canvassing first started I went out with a new YS member. She didn't want to canvass at first. She was nervous.

After three houses she had a go, and after her second house I had to come back because I saw her in an argument. She was talking about 'this renegade and scab Frank Field'.

Lol Duffy: The point is to understand the policies you are putting across. Once you start talking openly and honestly about socialism, you can't go wrong.

Alan Clark: Something hasn't been mentioned yet...we are talking about the Tory Party locally and nationally being worried about Wallasey.

Well, Walworth Road are going to be doing the same. If we thought we had interference trying to get Lol selected last time, it's going to be nothing to what we are going to get next time.

The Left have got to be prepared for that and be resolute and make sure we get the candidate we want. There are going to be all kinds of carpet baggers coming up here trying to wangle their way up.

Six

Which way for the Left?

Alan Johnson: Let's look at developments in the Labour Party nationally. How do people see the left regrouping itself and resisting the onslaught from the right wing in the party?

Lol Duffy: I think the work that we are doing — the campaigning perspective — is the way to stop that. The type of Labour Party that they want is one without any structure, without a membership — like the American rallies.

The opposite of that is to have an active campaigning Labour Party. If the left can build in various areas and do the job that we are on our way to doing here, then the Right won't have the chance to reshape the party as they'd like.

Alan Johnson: I think there is going to be a drive over the next few years from parts of the party to have an electoral pact with the Liberals. A lot of people get paralysed when they look at Thatcherism and its record. They see Thatcherism as all-powerful. Now people are arguing that we have to adopt its attitudes.

A lot of people on the left — Blunkett, Sawyer, Meacher — are saying that what Thatcherism has done is to make the individual the key thing in politics — individual solutions to your problems and the problems and aspirations of your family.

It's true that what Thatcherism is discrediting is the collective solution — the principle of collective provision as it was practiced from the Second World War.

A lot of people are talking about the Labour politics of the 1940s and 1950s being dead. Now they are dead. But the thing is we never credited them with much power or grip anyway.

Take nationalisation. Everybody would agree that nationalisation

isn't what we want — the sort of nationalisation in coal or steel or in your industry, Lot, where a publicly-owned company attacks working class people and makes them redundant. *That* is dead. That vision of how to move forward is dead.

But the soft left are going on to say, well let's ditch this policy or ditch that policy.

Now the individual solution of privatisation and share ownership is popular. We need to say — alright, nationalisation wasn't the right way. We need to supplement that with an idea of workers' control — real self-control, not just people as a formless collective without any control over anything.

In a nationalised industry today you have no control over that industry. A tenant on a housing estate has little or no control over what happens to them. I think we need to think through as a left a lot more ideas about how to develop a form of collectivism within which people exercise a level of control.

That should not be hard for us, as Marxists, to accept. That idea — working class people getting together and liberating themselves by their own activity — is something that's always been a central part of our history. I think it's more the reformist left which has had an idea of everything coming from above.

I think we need to get back to working class socialist politics that stresses people organising together, from below, to transform their own society. And we need to embody that idea in forms of policy.

John Bloxam: Can you change the Labour Party? Yes. You just have to look at what's happened in Wallasey. If it's true that you can't change the Labour Party, then what happened in Wallasey shouldn't have happened.

The trouble is the people who sit back and say 'you can't change it' are making it more difficult for the people inside. They should be getting inside and helping the left.

The second point is about the Labour left. Part of the reason the right is strong is that the left is weak. One reason it's weak is that the left is far too often happy to go round in committees, stitch up deals in the background, and not to get out campaigning. A lot of left-wingers will sound off at meetings and pass good resolutions but not get out and support people, draw working class people into the party or anything like that.

I think the example in Wallasey — our campaigning, the ideas we argued for — is a powerful one in terms of answering the question what should the Left do now.

Hopefully the pamphlet is one way of getting that across to people that it's not just about stitching up deals between left-wingers on a national basis. It's about getting out and campaigning. It should be possible everywhere. There's nothing special about the people in Wallasey.

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"Supporters of Socialist Organiser played a central role in Wallasey's election campaign. They offered a clear socialist alternative to the Tories. They were able to work alongside the party activists to create a united campaign which impressed me. I'd been a reader of Militant but I've learned what Marxism is really about since then. I'm now a supporter of Socialist Organiser".

Marie Becall, YTS trainee.