

REPORT TO THE AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL EXCHANGE COUNCIL

STUDY TOUR TO THE UNITED KINGDOM

JULY / AUGUST 2005

Luke Foley

Assistant General Secretary, Australian Labor Party (New South Wales Branch)

Introduction

My study tour to the United Kingdom afforded me fresh insights into contemporary British politics, gave me the opportunity to make valuable contacts in the Labour Party and wider British centre left and deepened my understanding of a range of public policy matters.

I include an itinerary of my study tour as well as a summary of the matters discussed at the meetings I arranged.

I extend my thanks to the Australian Political Exchange Council for approving this study tour, and to the Australian Labor Party for nominating me as a participant. Thankyou to Tania Fabbo from the APEC Secretariat for her assistance in organising my trip. I greatly appreciate her efforts.

Discussions with Senator the Hon. John Faulkner

Monday 18 July 2005

My initial plans were to spend the first week of the study visit in the company of the National Secretary of the Australian Labor Party, Tim Gartrell. Mr. Gartrell had liaised with colleagues in the British Labour Party in the preparation of an itinerary for the week that would see the two of us meeting with numerous political practitioners. Unfortunately, Mr. Gartrell was forced to cancel his trip to the United Kingdom at the last minute, indeed on Friday 15 July, and the majority of meetings planned for the week were cancelled as a consequence. As a result, I was forced to radically restructure my itinerary when I arrived in London.

Upon my arrival in London, I met with my colleague from the Australian Labor Party, Senator John Faulkner, who was in the United Kingdom on leave. Senator Faulkner briefed me on the study visit to the United Kingdom that he undertook in December of 2002 and January of 2003. He made various recommendations to me about matters I might pursue in the course of my study tour. He also advised me of a number of key contacts in the British Labour Party that I might wish to meet with.

Discussions with Mr. Jim Chalmers

Tuesday 19 July 2005

Mr. Chalmers was also engaged in an APEC study tour to the United Kingdom, as a nominee of the Australian Labor Party. He is employed as the Media Advisor to Wayne Swan MP, the Shadow Treasurer.

Mr. Chalmers' study tour had commenced on 30 June, and he was in a position to brief me on the meetings he had engaged in and the matters he had examined. He presented an overview of the current political environment in Britain, covering the 2005 British General Election results, the operations of New Labour, the Conservative Party's leadership contest, the forthcoming Labour Party Conference, and the relationship between Prime Minister Tony Blair and Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown.

He outlined the staffing and advisory structures in the Prime Minister's office. He recommended that I pursue discussions with the key political operatives in the Prime Minister's office; namely John McTernan, the Prime Minister's Political Secretary, and Matthew Taylor, the Prime Minister's Chief Advisor on Political Strategy.

Mr. Chalmers and I discussed the internal workings of the British Labour Party; in particular its staffing structure, the relationship between the Party and the Government, and the Party's policy development processes.

We agreed to jointly meet with a number of figures from the British Labour Party prior to the conclusion of his study tour.

Discussions with the Labour Friends of Iraq

Wednesday 20 July 2005

**Present: Mr. Gary Kent
Director, Labour Friends of Iraq**

**Ms. Jane Ashworth
Chair, Labour Friends of Iraq**

The Labour Friends of Iraq (“LFIQ”) is a ginger group operating in the Labour Party. It was launched in mid 2004 at meetings at the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party Conference.

Mr. Kent and Ms. Ashworth outlined the nature of the group and its key aims. LFIQ brings together Labour Party members who had supported and opposed the war in Iraq, but wish to move on to support the democrats and the fledgling labour movement struggling to build a new Iraq. The joint Presidents of LFIQ are Ann Clwyd, MP for Cynon Valley and the Prime Minister’s envoy on human rights in Iraq, who had opposed Saddam Hussein’s regime since the 1980s; and Harry Barnes, MP for North East Derbyshire, who had opposed the war in Iraq and marched against it.

LFIQ aims to build links between the emerging Iraqi labour movement and the British labour movement.

I was briefed on the main activities engaged in by the group:

- LFIQ acts as a platform for the voices of Iraqi democrats to be heard, and as a forum for the democratic left in Britain to discuss Iraq.
- LFIQ has brought together British and Iraqi trade unionists. The Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) is the largest trade union organisation that has emerged in post-Saddam Iraq, with over 200 000 members. The British labour movement is providing urgently needed support and resources to the IFTU.
- LFIQ has organised solidarity campaigns, for example publicising and supporting the successful Baghdad Hotel Workers strike in early 2005.
- LFIQ supporting MPs have agitated in the House of Commons on issues of trade union and other democratic rights in the new Iraq.
- LFIQ provides speakers to Constituency Labour Party meetings and has organised fringe meetings at Labour Party Conferences.

I indicated to Mr. Kent and Ms. Ashworth that I would raise with the Australian Council of Trade Unions the possibility of ACTU support being lent to a future speaking tour of

Australia by Abdullah Muhsin, International Representative of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions.

Discussion ensued about the response of the western left to events in Iraq. I outlined the state of the debate in Australia, with particular reference to the “Troops out by Christmas” announcement by Mark Latham prior to the 2004 federal election.

We discussed at length the democratic left’s response to dictatorship, tyranny, and widespread human rights abuses. How does the world deal with mass murdering dictators who take over a nation state and brutalise their own people? The democratic left needs to develop new policies between the extremes of doing nothing and military invasion.

There is far more debate about these matters in the United Kingdom than in Australia. Since my discussions with the LFIQ representatives, I have researched the writings and commentaries of numerous voices on the British left who maintain the tradition of international solidarity, support for human rights and anti-fascist struggles; including David Aaronovitch, Nick Cohen, Ann Clwyd, Norman Geras, Christopher Hitchens and Peter Tatchell.

Labour Staff Network Function

Wednesday 20 July 2005

**Present: Mr. Will McDonald
Office of Rosie Winterton MP, Minister of State, Dept of Health,
and approximately 30 staff of Labour Members of Parliament.**

Jim Chalmers and I attended a social function held by the Labour Staff Network to mark the end of the parliamentary term. We met numerous staffers to Labour members of the House of Commons.

We discussed the staffing and other entitlements afforded British parliamentarians, the operations of the Constituency Labour Parties, the results of the 2005 General Election, the current standing of the UK Government and the Prime Minister, the Conservative Party's leadership contest and the experience of hosting the Olympic Games. Jim and I were also able to provide our views on the current state of Australian politics and the challenges facing the Australian Labor Party.

**Discussions with Ms. Sandy Pitcher, Head of Corporate and Parliamentary Affairs,
Commission for Racial Equality**

Thursday 21 July 2005

Ms. Pitcher briefed me on the work of the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE). The CRE, a government body, works to tackle racial discrimination and promote integration. The Commission holds certain statutory powers under the Race Relations Act.

The CRE engages in advocacy of policy proposals on racial equality to Government and parliamentarians. It monitors legislation and provides input into legislation, working closely with the Home Office. The CRE publishes regular Parliamentary Bulletins for Westminster MPs and members of the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly.

Ms. Pitcher and I discussed race relations in the United Kingdom in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in central London on 7 July and the attempted attack of that day.

Meeting of ALP Society of the UK

Thursday 21 July 2005

I addressed the ALP Society of the UK, a group of members and supporters of the ALP resident in London. This was followed by a discussion on political developments in Australia, particularly the 2004 Federal Election and events subsequent, and the state of the ALP.

We then discussed the work of the Society, focusing on their efforts in support of the ALP at federal and state elections. The members present briefed me on their campaign activity at last year's Australian election. 20 669 votes were cast at Australia House in London, making it the largest single polling booth in the election. The ALP Society placed advertisements in a number of publications that circulate among travelers and Australian expatriates in the UK, including *The Australian Times*, *TNT* and *The Metro*.

The electoral laws pertaining to Overseas Voters were also the subject of discussion. Australians resident overseas, as opposed to temporary visitors offshore, must register with the Australian Electoral Commission as Overseas Voters within two years of leaving Australia; otherwise they are struck off the roll. Members of the ALP Society expressed their keen interest in promoting voter registration to eligible overseas voters. The Australian Electoral Commission's coordination and organisation of overseas voting was also canvassed.

Those present at the meeting raised with me their plans for the future work of the Society. We discussed media and advertising strategy, fundraising, online activity and liaison between the ALP in Australia and the ALP Society of the UK.

Discussions with Mr. James Crabtree

Friday 22 July 2005

James Crabtree currently works as a journalist with The Economist. He was formerly a visiting research fellow with the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), perhaps the most influential left of centre think tank in Britain today. He worked with the Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust to establish a democracy commission examining the future of British politics. He is a founder of Voxpolitics.com, an online think tank examining e-democracy; and an associate editor of Opendemocracy.net.

Our discussions covered:

- the work of numerous British think tanks concerned with influencing public policy, particularly IPPR and Demos;
- the opportunities for progressive think tanks in the current Australian political environment;
- comparisons between the political circumstances experienced by the British Labour Party and the ALP, currently and over the last two decades; and
- political engagement in Britain, Australia and the United States.

Discussions with Mr. John McTernan, Political Secretary to the Prime Minister

Friday 22 July 2005

John McTernan is the director of political operations in Number Ten. He heads a team of staff responsible for political functions, including liaison with the Labour Party and with the members of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Mr. McTernan talked to me about the work of the political office inside Number Ten. He covered the political environment faced by New Labour in its third term of government; with reference to this year's General Election and its aftermath, the leadership contest in the Conservative Party, and the varying enthusiasm for the New Labour project inside Labour's ranks.

Preparations are underway for the Progressive Governance Summit of heads of centre left governments to be held in South Africa in October 2005, hosted by President Thabo Mbeki. Tony Blair will attend.

Mr. McTernan also spoke about the G8 Leaders' Summit in Gleneagles, the London bombings, and the Government's efforts in overhauling the delivery of public services.

Mr. McTernan is familiar with Australian politics. We discussed the political challenges currently facing the Australian Labor Party.

Discussions with Mr. Michael Stephenson, Director, Hawker Britton (UK) Ltd

Monday 25 July 2005

Jim Chalmers and I attended this meeting.

Michael Stephenson heads the UK office of Hawker Britton, the well known Australian public affairs consultancy firm. He formerly worked as an advisor in the office of the Prime Minister, Tony Blair. He was chief of staff to Queensland Premier Wayne Goss.

He briefed me on the staffing and advisory structures inside Number Ten. He also spoke about his experiences of working for Labor governments in Queensland and the UK.

Jim Chalmers presented an overview of the meetings and discussions he had held to that date on his study trip.

Mr. Stephenson, Mr. Chalmers and I had a long discussion on the shared challenges facing modern western social democratic parties.

**A visit to Number Ten Downing Street, London
and
discussions with Mr. Matthew Taylor, Chief Advisor on Political Strategy, Prime
Minister's Office**

Monday 25 July 2005

Jim Chalmers and I attended this meeting, where we experienced a chance encounter with the Prime Minister inside Number Ten.

Matthew Taylor is a former Assistant General Secretary of the Labour Party, and was the Party's Director of Policy in the 1997 General Election campaign that brought an end to eighteen years of Conservative rule. He was Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) prior to working in Number Ten.

The majority of our meeting focused on the political challenges currently facing the ALP, and the parallels with those facing the British Labour Party in the 1980s and 1990s. Mr. Taylor's contribution covered questions of policy orientation, party organisation and leadership.

Mr. Taylor also spoke to us about the attempts of the Blair Government in its second term to introduce a form of regional government in England, the workings of the devolved assemblies in Scotland and in Wales, and the debate concerning reform of the House of Lords. He shared some thoughts regarding the prospects for the peace process in Northern Ireland. He also addressed the subject of the Government's dialogue with the Islamic community in Britain in the aftermath of the London bombings.

Discussions with Mr. Hom Paribag, Editor, *Society Today*

Monday 25 July 2005

Jim Chalmers and I met with Mr. Paribag, editor of a new 48 page monthly British magazine, *Society Today*. Mr. Paribag informed us that the publication aims “to promote the ideals of a free, tolerant, diverse and cohesive society”.

The magazine is targeted at policy and decision makers, and is distributed both by subscription and at newstands. Unlike in Australia, most print media outlets in the United Kingdom are open in parading their ideological biases. *Society Today* is a left of centre publication. The first edition focuses on Britain’s multi-ethnic society, and includes features on the Indian, Muslim, Sikh and Somali communities.

Mr. Paribag spoke to us about race relations in the United Kingdom, particularly in the light of the 7 July bombings in central London and the revelation that these had been perpetrated by British citizens from Asian backgrounds. He stressed his view that common values and behaviours are essential to the functioning of a shared society, irrespective of the particular cultural values and practices of each ethnic group.

Discussions with Mr. John Watts, Special Advisor – Events and Visits, Prime Minister’s Office

Tuesday 26 July 2005

Jim Chalmers and I met with Mr. Watts, who currently works as the chief “advancer” in Tony Blair’s office. He is a former official of the Labour Party, and has managed the staging of a number of Labour Party Conferences.

Mr. Watts briefed us on his responsibilities and the operations of the Prime Minister’s office. He outlined his work during this year’s General Election campaign.

We went on to discuss:

- the G8 Leaders’ Summit in Edinburgh held in early July;
- the response of the Prime Minister to the 7 July terrorist attacks on the London transport system;
- the successful London bid for the 2012 Olympic Games;
- speculation surrounding the political future of Tony Blair;
- the standing of New Labour since the May 2005 General Election; and
- the current state of Australian politics and the challenges facing the Australian Labor Party.

Discussions with Mr. Eric Lee, Editor, LabourStart

Wednesday 27 July 2005

LabourStart is an international online news service for the trade union movement, updated 24 hours a day, every day.

Mr. Lee described to me the history of LabourStart from its inception. LabourStart grew out of the website that was created in 1996 to accompany the publication of Mr. Lee's book, *The Labour Movement and the Internet: The New Internationalism*.

Today, news is collected by a network of nearly 300 volunteer correspondents in dozens of countries. LabourStart currently appears in 17 different language editions. Thousands of labour movement activists around the world rely on LabourStart to keep pace with labour news.

LabourStart has established the Labour Newswire, a free service that allows trade unions to show the most recent labour news headlines on their own websites. Over 500 unions currently use this service.

Mr. Lee informed me that LabourStart now has tens of thousands of individual email addresses on its global mailing list. This has become a key resource for the global union movement. LabourStart mobilises its readership to act in support of workers around the world. Unions often ask LabourStart to run online campaigns and these campaigns have resulted in numerous victories.

Mr. Lee went on to brief me on the current state of the British trade union movement. He gave me his insights into the dramatic split in the American labour movement that had occurred the previous week, when a number of key unions had walked out of the annual conference of the peak American union body, the AFL-CIO, and announced the formation of a new umbrella group, the Change To Win Coalition. We also discussed the challenges currently facing the labour movement in Australia.

A visit to Number Ten Downing Street, London
and
discussions with Mr. Nick Rowley, Senior Policy Advisor, Prime Minister's Office

Thursday 28 July 2005

Nick Rowley is a former policy advisor to NSW Premier Bob Carr, and is now a senior advisor in the Prime Minister's office. Mr. Rowley was kind enough to provide me with a tour inside Number Ten Downing Street. Built in the 17th century by Sir George Downing, Number Ten is both the residence and office of British Prime Ministers.

Mr. Rowley briefed me on the G8 Leaders' Summit held at Gleneagles in Scotland in early July, hosted by Tony Blair. The G8 countries are the UK, USA, Canada, Japan, Russia, Germany, Italy and France. The Summit focused on the issues of climate change and Africa.

The importance placed on the issue of global warming resulted in the leaders of Brazil, China, India, Mexico and South Africa joining the G8 leaders for their discussions on this topic. The G8 leaders issued a communiqué which, for the first time, recognised the role of human activity in global warming. Agreement was reached on the need for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. The G8 countries committed to a Climate Change Plan of Action; and established an ongoing Dialogue on Climate Change, Clean Energy and Sustainable Development between the G8 and other interested countries. The Dialogue will meet for the first time in November in the UK.

The leaders of seven African nations joined the G8 leaders for their discussions on Africa. Mr. Rowley stressed that the UK Government has worked relentlessly in recent years to place African development on the international agenda. Key agreements reached at Gleneagles included a doubling of aid to African countries by 2010 and action on debt relief. Extra resources will flow to those African countries committed to democracy with their own development plans in place.

Mr. Rowley informed me of the work of the "Sherpas", the teams of officials from each of the G8 nations who worked together in the weeks and months prior to the Gleneagles Summit to draft the wording of the communiqués.

Discussions also took place about this year's General Election in the United Kingdom, and about Australian federal and state politics.

A visit to the Palace of Westminster
and
discussions with members of the Parliamentary Labour Party MP Support Unit

Thursday 28 July 2005

Present: Mr. Hopi Sen
Communications Officer

Mr. Will Neal
Assistant Communications Officer

Mr. Wesley Ball
Constituency Advice Officer

The Labour Party has established a unit of staffers working at Westminster to underpin the campaigning effort of Labour MPs. I met with three members of the Unit to discuss political campaigning.

We held a long discussion, focusing on:

- the 2005 General Election campaign;
- modern campaigning and communication techniques;
- the Training Seminars run by the MP Support Unit;
- MP communications with constituents; and
- beating the Liberal Democrats.

I was provided with a large amount of material produced by the Unit.

Mr. Ball escorted me on a tour of the Palace of Westminster. Westminster Hall is more than 900 years old, built between 1097 and 1099. It was here that the trial of Charles I was held in 1649. At the time of my visit, Westminster Hall hosted an exhibition on the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, where Guy Fawkes and others plotted to blow up the House of Lords.

I entered the House of Commons Chamber, the House being in recess. The Commons Chamber was destroyed in World War Two. The new Chamber dates from 1950.

Discussions with Mr. Dan Leighton, Researcher, The Power Inquiry

Thursday 28 July 2005

Mr. Leighton briefed me on the work of the Power Inquiry, “an independent inquiry into Britain’s democracy”. The aim of the inquiry is to explore how political participation might be increased and deepened in Britain. The UK, like Australia, has experienced a decline in political engagement and participation in recent years. This inquiry resulted from the marked decline in voter turnout at the 2001 General Election.

The Power Inquiry was established in 2004 and is funded by The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The Trust was set up in 1904 by a Quaker businessman, the chocolate maker Joseph Rowntree.

The Inquiry has established a Commission of ten people from a variety of backgrounds, from the right, left and centre of the political spectrum (most have no party affiliation). The Commission will produce a report on the future of British democracy, with recommendations, in early 2006. A Citizens Commission of thirty randomly selected people has been set up to deliberate in parallel to the Commission and produce its own recommendations.

The Inquiry is undertaking extensive research and a comprehensive consultation with specialists and the public. The public consultation includes hearings with witnesses, witness interviews, public meetings across the country, nationwide “Democracy Dinners”. The Inquiry conducted a survey of 1000 non-voters immediately after this year’s General Election.

Mr. Leighton stated that it was too early to pre-empt the final report and recommendations of the Commission. However, all of the evidence points to a serious disconnection between the governed and the governors in Britain’s democracy. We discussed the prospects for reinvigorating democratic participation in the UK and Australia.

A visit to Belfast
and
discussions with Mr. Joe Laughlin, Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise

Friday 29 July 2005

On 28 July 2005 the Irish Republican Army announced a complete cessation of its armed campaign and committed to putting its weapons beyond use. The British Prime Minister Tony Blair and the Irish Taoiseach Bertie Ahern greeted the statement as a historic turning point in the history of Northern Ireland. Reaction from unionist politicians in the province was far more sceptical. I visited Belfast the following day and was able to monitor first hand reaction to the IRA statement, accessing both British and Irish television and newspaper coverage. *The Irish Times*, circulating throughout the island of Ireland, and the major newspapers in Northern Ireland, the pro unionist *Belfast Telegraph* and the pro nationalist *Irish News*, all devoted the majority of their news pages to reportage and analysis of the IRA statement and its consequences for the peace process.

The stated aim of the UK and Irish governments is to restore the power sharing Assembly in Northern Ireland and all of the other institutions that formed part of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement.

The largest party representing the province's unionist population is now the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), led by the Reverend Ian Paisley. The DUP has overtaken the once dominant Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). The UK General Election reduced the UUP from six Westminster MPs to one; the DUP went from five seats to nine.

To date, the DUP refuses to enter a power sharing executive in the North with Sinn Fein because of that party's links to the IRA. Sinn Fein has itself supplanted the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) as the largest representative of the nationalist community, winning five Westminster seats to the SDLPs three.

The two governments hope that a complete disarmament of IRA weapons, to be verified by international monitors and both Catholic and Protestant clergymen, will create the conditions for a restoration of the local Assembly and Executive at Stormont, with power shared between the representatives of the two traditions in the province.

The positions of the four main political parties in the province, particularly on the issues of partition and the peace process, are well known to me. Rather than spend the day with party representatives, I arranged a meeting with Joe Laughlin, a youth worker in Belfast.

Mr. Laughlin works for the Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise (NICE), an organisation which aims to promote peace, reconciliation and mutual understanding between the communities in Northern Ireland. NICE began work in 1977, when it took groups of Catholic and Protestant children to America on holiday. Mr. Laughlin works

from the NICE offices in Australia House, in a neutral area of Belfast, named because of a sizeable grant from the Australia Ireland Fund.

Mr. Laughlin briefed me on the work of NICE. The organisation brings together children from the polarised areas of Belfast and provides them with an opportunity to develop mutual respect and understanding. A range of community relations programs are provided, with a focus on cultural awareness and conflict resolution.

Mr. Laughlin hosted a tour of the city of Belfast. That tour included a visit to the nationalist and loyalist heartlands of the city - respectively the Falls Road and Shankill Road. Symbols of identity are displayed almost everywhere. Flags dominate – the Irish tricolour in the nationalist areas, the Union Jack and Ulster flags in the loyalist neighbourhoods. The huge murals on display leave a lasting impression. Some honour martyrs on their side of the conflict, others commemorate historical events, others celebrate cultural identity. Some are deliberately confrontational, emphasising guns and balaclavas.

We also visited the Ardoyne area of the city, the venue for serious rioting two weeks previous on the Twelfth of July – Orangemans Day, the major day on the calendar of the Protestant “marching season”. The route of an Orange Order parade was the subject of serious disputation between those who insisted on marching and local Catholic residents who objected. A Parades Commission, made up of representatives from both traditions, is called on to arbitrate on scores of disputed parade routes each summer.

Violence and killing has greatly reduced since the initial IRA ceasefire of 1994. Yet Northern Ireland remains a deeply segregated society. The British and Irish governments will continue to goad the province’s political leaders into entering some form of self government, where power is shared between the political representatives of the two communities.

Discussions with Mr. Ryan Heath, Private Secretary to Ian Watmore, Head of e-Government, UK Government Chief Information Officer

Monday 1 August 2005

Ryan Heath is an Australian former political advisor now based in the UK and working in the civil service.

We discussed online campaigning in the 2005 General Election. Much of the hype concerning online campaigning is based on the US presidential election of 2004. Howard Dean in particular used the internet to build supporter networks and raise money.

May's General Election was the first election with internet access in a majority of UK households.

Overall the electorate took little part in the campaign by electronic means. Only a small percentage of voters used new technologies to engage with party campaigns. The internet is yet another platform for the delivery of party or candidate messages, via websites. There is nothing interactive about many of these sites.

Information communication technologies may provide people with more information, but do not necessarily increase political engagement. The web is still an information source rather than a vehicle for political activity for most users.

The Labour Party did raise a significant, but not huge, amount of money for its campaign fund from an email appeal to Party members and known supporters.

There were a plethora of "tactical voting" websites, aiming to encourage voters to vote to defeat their least preferred candidate. For example, a Labour supporter in a seat winnable only by the Liberal Democrats or Conservatives could meet online a Liberal Democrat supporter in another constituency. They would agree to "swap" their votes. The Labour supporter would vote for the Liberal Democrat candidate to help defeat the Conservative candidate, in return for the Liberal Democrat supporter agreeing to vote Labour in the other constituency.

Weblogs were adopted by about 65 parliamentary candidates, in an attempt to interact with voters.

Mr. Heath and I discussed the potential of interactive technologies to increase political participation.

Discussions with Ms. Rachel Cowburn, International Manager, British Labour Party

Tuesday 2 August 2005

Ms. Cowburn is employed at the Labour Party's head office in Old Queen Street, London. She is responsible for liaison with all of the political parties that the Labour Party enjoys fraternal relations with, including the ALP. She is also responsible for the several hundred international guests who attend the annual Labour Party Conference.

We discussed:

- the Labour Party's relationship with other labour and social democratic parties around the world;
- the British Government's differences with the French and German Governments over the war in Iraq;
- the work of the Labour Friends of Iraq group in the British Labour Party;
- American politics, particularly the standing of the Democratic Party;
- the activities of the Socialist International, the worldwide organisation of social democratic and labour parties; and
- politics in Northern Ireland, and the current strength of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).

I was able to brief Ms. Cowburn on the current state of Australian politics.

A visit to Oxford
and
discussions with Professor Philip Clarke

Wednesday 3 August 2005

Philip Clarke is an Australian based professor at the Health Economics Research Centre at Oxford University's Institute of Health Sciences. He provided me with a tour of the city of Oxford, including the various colleges and schools of the Oxford University.

Professor Clarke is a specialist in the area of health inequalities. He has developed methods to value the benefits of improving access to health care. He spoke to me about health policy in the United Kingdom and in Australia. He provided me with a critical analysis of the Medicare Gold policy that the ALP took to the 2004 federal election.

Professor Clarke expressed interest in contributing to the ALP policy review process, in the area of health policy. I undertook to put him in contact with relevant ALP representatives.

A visit to the West Midlands Office of the British Labour Party

Discussions with Mr. Ian Reilly, Regional Director, British Labour Party and his staff

Thursday 4 & Friday 5 August 2005

The West Midlands Regional Office in West Bromwich is one of eleven Labour regional offices in Britain. The Office is responsible for an area that includes the cities and towns of Birmingham, West Bromwich, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Walsall and Stoke.

Mr. Reilly provided me with a comprehensive overview of the operations of the Regional Office, focusing on party management and the conduct of election campaigns.

We discussed the functioning of the Labour Party at the local level. There is a large Asian community in the West Midlands. In some areas the local Labour Party has come to be dominated by people from the one ethnic background. Mr. Reilly and I talked about the challenges that arise from such a situation.

Mr. Reilly talked to me about the functioning of the Constituency Labour Parties, and their relationship with the Regional Office. There are around 20 000 Labour Party members across the West Midlands.

The Regional Office is forced to campaign electorally on an ongoing basis. The Office is responsible for running campaigns for 59 Westminster constituencies, as well as a great number of councils, and for Members of the European Parliament.

Labour won 39 West Midlands seats at the May General Election. Mr. Reilly provided me with a comprehensive rundown on the Labour campaign throughout the region. He briefed me on the different strategies adopted to fight the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Reilly spoke with me about the use of campaign software designed to predict voter intention. The Conservative Party imported the Vote Vault software system that was used by the US Republicans in 2004 elections.

We also discussed the threat posed by the racist British National Party (BNP) in working class neighbourhoods.

I also spent time with regional organisers Keith Hanson and George Williamson and regional communications officer Caroline Badley, observing and talking with them about their duties.

The team provided me with a large amount of electoral and other Party material to take away.

Discussions with Councillor Sir Albert Bore, Leader of the Labour Group, Birmingham City Council

Thursday 4 August 2005

Sir Albert Bore is the leader of the Labour Group of Councillors on the Birmingham City Council. He has served on the Council continuously since 1980.

Sir Albert briefed me on the political make up and operations of the council. Birmingham City Council is the largest local authority in the United Kingdom, with 120 councillors representing one million people. There are 40 wards each electing three councillors. Labour has the largest representation of the parties, with 47 councillors at present. However, a coalition of Conservatives (39 councillors) and Liberal Democrats (31 councillors) currently govern the City.

Sir Albert outlined the reforms of 2000 to the *Local Government Act* in the United Kingdom. Large councils have adopted a system of Cabinet Government. The Leader of the Council, Cabinet members with portfolio responsibility and Committee Chairs are elected by and from the councillors. In Birmingham, all of these posts are currently held by Conservatives and Liberal Democrats due to their coalition agreement.

The post of Lord Mayor, by contrast, is ceremonial in nature, and is rotated among the three parties, with a new Lord Mayor elected annually.

Sir Albert provided me with a tour of the Birmingham Town Hall and the Council House. The honour board listing the names of all Lord Mayors of the city includes a former Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. He and his father, Joseph, both served as Lord Mayor of Birmingham.

We also observed a British Citizenship Ceremony, presided over by the Lord Mayor.

Sir Albert and Mr. Reilly also afforded me a lively overview of the internal life of the Labour Party in Birmingham.

Discussions with Mr. Paul Smith, Chair of Campaign Committee, Islington South & Finsbury Constituency Labour Party

Monday 8 August 2005

I met with Paul Smith to review the conduct of a local Labour campaign at this year's General Election.

Labour won the inner city constituency of Islington South & Finsbury with a majority of 484, making it the second most marginal seat in London. The seat was number one on the Liberal Democrats' list of targeted seats in London. The popular former MP Chris Smith retired at the election, and Labour presented a new candidate, Emily Thornberry.

The new Labour candidate was attractive to many previously inactive Party members. 24 000 households were doorknocked by the Labour campaign. 150 000 pieces of literature were distributed. 300 volunteers were mobilised on polling day to maximize the Labour turnout.

Mr. Smith briefed me on the Labour campaign's techniques used to target those citizens most likely to vote Labour. He told me that if polling booths had have shut at 6.00pm, rather than 10.00pm, the seat would definitely have been lost by Labour. The Labour campaign mobilised to bring traditional Labour voters out to vote after they returned home from work. Labour put a large proportion of its resources into campaigning in the local housing estates.

Mr. Smith emphasised that the inner city seat was almost lost because of voter opposition to Britain's involvement in the war in Iraq. The Liberal Democrat campaign highlighted their opposition to the war. Middle class voters came out strongly to vote for the Lib Dem candidate.

Robin Cook MP, who had resigned from the Cabinet in opposition to the war in Iraq, spoke at a public meeting in the constituency. He urged anti-war voters to support Labour because of the Party's other achievements in government. Mr. Cook was used by the Labour Party in many constituencies throughout Britain in this way.

Discussions with Mr. Luke Bruce, Assistant General Secretary, Labour Party

Tuesday 9 August 2005

Luke Bruce's primary responsibility is as director of the Labour Party's Policy Unit. He was able to detail to me the policy making and consultative processes that exist in the Party. He outlined the operations of the National Policy Forum and briefed me on "The Big Conversation" program of activity that the Party had embarked on in 2004. We compared the policy development processes in our respective parties.

Mr. Bruce also filled me in on preparations for the Labour Party Conference to be held in the last week of September in Brighton. We discussed the dynamics of managing a large group of delegates to a Labour Party conference, in addition to the demands of the attendant media, business and foreign observers.

Mr. Bruce and I also discussed American politics. He had recently returned from a trip to the United States where he met with a range of Democrat figures.