

# **THE COHEN REPORT**

## **NEWCASTLE CENTRAL GENERAL ELECTION 1983**

### **Newcastle Central CLP**

Newcastle Central Constituency Labour Party General Election Campaign 1983.

Introduction

On June 9th. the Campaign Headquarters grew more confident of a Labour victory as the day went on, culminating at 10pm in a forecast Labour majority of 2,000-4,000.

It is not the purpose of this report to explain what went wrong with that forecast, although this is covered, but to record the many successes of the campaign, comment on the weaknesses that became apparent during its course and make recommendations for the future.

Pre-election activity

In the twelve months running up to the election the Party increased both the quality and frequency of regular newsletters distributed to electors in the new constituency.

Following the selection of Nigel Todd as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for the old Newcastle North C.L.P., an arrangement was entered into with N.U.P.E. which enabled the three branches from the old constituency; namely Wingrove, Moorside and Jesmond to have a newsletter printed by N.U.P.E., approximately once every two months, for the cost of the paper alone.

After the 1982 local election in Blakelaw, which resulted in a Liberal victory, the ward Party put out an approximately bi-monthly newsletter, about half of which have been printed and the rest duplicated. Soon after selecting the local government candidate in the autumn of 1982 Kenton branch switched from delivering a duplicated newsletter to a printed one.

Towards the end of 1982 Fenham branch started to distribute a duplicated newsletter whilst in South Gosforth the Party continued to deliver the Gosforth Labour Party Newsletter. Thus by the beginning of 1983 all seven wards in the new constituency were distributing a regular newsletter, most of which were printed.

During the campaign for the County by-election in Wingrove on March 3rd. 1983 several new techniques were tried including the extensive use of day time canvassing and the delivery of a large number of single issue leaflets with only 200-250 words each. The success of these methods was seen, when just one week after the Bermondsey by-election, the local Party overhauled the Liberals, coming from a poor third place to very nearly win the seat for the first time ever.

These techniques, refined during the local elections, two months later, formed the basis of the General Election Campaign.

### Preparation

The old Newcastle North constituency was one of the most marginal in the country and had been designated by Trade Unions for a Labour Victory (T.U.L.V.) as one of the target constituencies for special help. In addition to the help from T.U.L.V. an arrangement with N.U.P.E. was entered into which, in addition to printing newsletters, included the loan of premises for the campaign and secondment of an officer to act as agent. With the redrawing of Parliamentary boundaries this arrangement as well as the candidacy were brought into question.

In the four days between the election being called and the new constituency's inaugural meeting the arrangements with N.U.P.E. were confirmed, quotes for printing obtained and preparations for an introductory leaflet to go to the printers on the Friday morning were made on the assumption that if the Party decided to have a full selection process, whoever was selected would be happy to accept these preparations.

In the event Nigel Todd was selected on the Thursday night, the copy for the leaflet was with the printer on the Friday morning and the Campaign Headquarters were operating fully by Friday afternoon.

### The Campaign Committee

Two early decisions were made. Firstly that it would be a very 'high profile' campaign using every method available to put the candidate's name before the public. Secondly to enable this it was necessary for the agent to have a readily accessible method of consulting the Party organisation and a reliable system of delegating work.

On the Saturday morning after the selection and every Saturday during the election a meeting was held with members from each ward to discuss both the organisation and political content of the campaign with the agent. At the same time he appointed several officers with whom specific issues could be discussed and work delegated to.

The value of the Saturday meetings can best be demonstrated by two examples. At the first meeting both Fenham and Blakelaw members expressed the desire to have two committee rooms, with each taking responsibility for part of their ward instead of dealing with them as single units. At the same time the agent was able to ensure there would be no problems for the Moorside committee room to look after the part of Wingrove on its side of the General Hospital rather than be bound by local government boundaries.

At the second Saturday meeting Party members were able to compare notes on the campaign for the first time and it was realised there was a general groundswell amongst the electorate against the Party's policy on defence as they understood it.

This led to a leaflet on defence being prepared, printed and distributed by the following weekend, two days after it became an issue in the election nationally. This early recognition of ~~a~~ feelings amongst the electorate and the prompt response to <sup>them</sup> was probably one of the more important factors in holding the Party's share of the vote against the national slide to the Alliance.

### Campaign Officers

During the election the agent appointed various campaign officers. These included a Candidate's Officer, Finance Officer, Canvassing Officer, Publicity Officer, Press Officer, Postal Votes Officer, Meetings Officer, Transport Officer, Student Organiser and Polling Officer. For the most part he discussed any issues that arose either from the Campaign Committee or more generally with the relevant officer and then delegated any necessary tasks. However towards the end of the campaign the agent also held a brief discussion on the points raised in the Campaign Committee with the candidate and two or three of the officers on either the Saturday or Sunday afternoon.

### Candidate's Officer

Although there was originally some doubt in the value of such an officer, when appointed the Candidate's officer proved to be invaluable not only in ensuring that the candidate was always where he should be but also to make sure that at no time did he appear to have been abandoned by the Party to get on with it himself. As well as this the candidate was never left to brood on any setback, real or imagined, without his officer being there to cheer him up.

### Finance Officer

Although the responsibility for election finance is ultimately the Agents, the appointment of a Finance Officer is to be recommended. Overstating election expenses is a recurrent nightmare for any agent and having someone maintaining a "running total" is very comforting.

### Canvassing Officer

Appointed part way through the campaign the Canvassing officer obtained daily returns of the canvassing from each committee room on forms P, Q and R from the National Party's campaign pack. Initially the task was seen mainly as one of ensuring that the figures were compiled on a regular basis, obtaining an aggregate for the constituency and indentifying those areas which were in need of help with canvassing. This latter part of the job was done particularly well.

It is true to say that there was never an occasion when the agent was unable to direct outside volunteers to a committee room in need of help. Also as the result of this monitoring the agent recognised the need for and was able to arrange the canvassing of one of the polling districts in South Gosforth by members from Jesmond.

Unfortunately partly as a result of the late appointment of the Canvassing officer, the fact that nobody had a detailed knowledge of the constituency as a

/as a whole

4.

whole, the intermittent submission of reports by some committee rooms and the unwillingness in some areas to canvass the most Tory areas first it was not realised until a very late stage in the campaign that a small but significant number of Labour supporters had not been contacted and literally thousands of Tory voters were not accounted for. The effect of these omissions and possible remedies are discussed later.

#### Publicity Officer

The Publicity Officer had two functions. Firstly the preparation of photo ready copy for routine leaflets such as those advertising meetings and 'Sorry you were out' slips as well as short run leaflets for the Women's movement and the Polytechnic Labour Club. These were then printed by N.U.P.E. on their offset duplicators. Secondly the Publicity officer was responsible with the candidate and agent for the political content of the main policy leaflets and then with the help of a sympathetic graphic designer for producing the art work for the printer.

The fact that the commercial printer on occasions worked round the clock whilst N.U.P.E. were prepared to make everything else wait whilst 5,000 or 10,000 leaflets were run off for the campaign went a long way to allow the Publicity officer to do the job efficiently, eventually producing the third of a million leaflets, letters and notices which were put out during the campaign.

#### Press Officer

The campaign was fortunate in having the services of a freelance journalist to act as Press Officer. Over the first weekend a letter was sent to the newsdesks of all the local newspapers, radio and television studios and the regional offices of the national newspapers, giving brief biographical details about the candidate, the address and telephone number of the Campaign Headquarters and inviting any interested journalists to contact the candidate who would always be at the headquarters on weekdays between 10am and 10.30am. Whilst this facility was not greatly used it also allowed the candidate and agent to get together at least once a day.

It would be invidious to attempt to describe the journalist's art but the Press officer missed no opportunity to issue a press release to all the above about the candidate. The most encouraging response came from the local newspaper. Indeed the days on which the candidate's name was in the Evening Chronicle far outweighed those when it wasn't and on one occasion thanks to the help of a local councillor the candidate was quoted in the front page lead article and got three separate mentions on the inside pages.



## Postal Votes Officer

Due to the late formation of the new Constituency Party there was no opportunity to co-ordinate any activity to increase the number of Labour postal voters before the campaign began. At ward level in addition to approaching all Labour voters who requested a postal vote late in the local election or wanted a car on polling day, committee rooms were particularly asked to canvass all sheltered accomadation and old peoples' bungalows to encourage all residents who were Labour voters to apply for a postal vote.

This selective approach was abandoned at only one level. A decision was taken centrally to attempt to get all the residents of Council homes postal votes. A calculated risk was taken on the basis that these homes are difficult to canvass, few of the residents would otherwise vote and there were likely to be more Labour voters than Tories in such homes.

In the few days available the entire list of the homes in the Constituency was drawn up, photocopies of the register for each home obtained and the supervisors in each approached with a request to complete an application form for each person on the register who was still resident and wanted to apply. In some cases this could be left to the supervisor, in others it had to be done by the Postal Vote officer or <sup>volunteer</sup> N.U.P.L. officers who had the advantage in most cases of representing the employees of the homes. The Postal Vote officer, who was also an S.R.N. then spent most of one night endorsing all these <sup>and</sup> any applications from the wards which they hadn't been able to get signed by the applicant's own doctor or another authorised person.

All this activity had the effect of increasing the number of Postal Votes in the constituency to a figure far larger than any of the other three constituencies in Newcastle. However this and the late arrival of the list of Postal Voters from the Returning Officer caused problems.

It had been intended to supply each committee room with a list of Postal voters for their area and enough copies of a letter from the candidate explaining that a representative would call in a few days to make sure they had received the Postal Vote and had no difficulty in posting it back to the Civic Centre. The late arrival of the lists probably meant most of these letters were delivered at the same time as the Postal Votes and it is unlikely that many known <sup>Labour</sup> voters were approached before they had returned their votes. However in the case of the Council homes a repeat performances of the earlier drive to obtain Postal Votes ensured that most were returned and it is gratifying to note that where known the majority of these were cast for Labour.

Finally the late arrival of the postal voters list also effected those voters who had moved. It is unlikely that <sup>most</sup> received their letters from the candidate through the free post before they had cast their votes.

### Meetings Officer

The Meetings Officer was responsible for arranging the venue of a meeting when outside speakers came to the constituency and co-ordinating publicity with the <sup>and Press</sup> Publicity/~~Officers~~. This task came down to being given a name and a date by the agent and an indication of the part of the constituency in which the meeting should be held. In consultation with the local committee room a meeting place was chosen and booked and the information passed to Publicity officer who produced the number of leaflets indicated by the local committee room while the Press Officer issued a press release.

In addition to the distribution of 3,000-5,000 leaflets for each meeting loud speakers toured the area on the day of the meeting in the afternoon and early evening. As a result all but one of the meetings were well attended by non-Party members.

### Transport Officer

The constituency was fortunate in that the T.U.L.V. co-ordinator had acted as Transport Officer in previous general elections and was willing to do so again.

A central list of all car calls requested before election day with the names, addresses and polling station together with an approximate time, obtained if necessary by calling back on the voter, was compiled and these were dealt with by cars organised centrally leaving local committee rooms with cars of their own to look after requests that arose through the day. In addition a central pool of cars was organised which ~~could be called on~~ <sup>for instance</sup> if no local cars were available or to take part in a concerted effort ~~with residents~~ of sheltered accommodation or in areas remote from the polling station.

### Student Organiser

With students' halls of residence at Castle Leazes and on the Polytechnic campus, student flats on Richardson Road, Leazes Terrace and in Jesmond and South Gosforth the constituency has more students living in organised accommodation than any other constituency in Britain. When those students living at home and in multi-occupied property, particularly in Wingrove, Moorside, Jesmond and South Gosforth are added they must make up more than 10% of the electorate as a whole.

Towards the end of the second week of the campaign the constituency was visited by John Mann, a full time organiser for the National Organisation of Labour Students. As a result of the organisation of the rest of the campaign and the significance of the student vote he decided to stay in Newcastle for the rest of the election and was appointed Student Organiser by the agent.

The major problem canvassing students in halls of residence is that whilst they live in identifiable rooms these are not included on the electoral register with all the residents being listed in alphabetical order. The first task therefore was to obtain the lists of students' rooms and then carry out a room by

room canvass transferring the information onto a matrix which also included the polling number. From this it was possible to type the 'Reading' slips. In polling district CA which covers a small number of <sup>Labour</sup> voters in central Newcastle and the Polytechnic halls of residence the students staffed the polling station and committee room and knocked up student voters at appropriate times which were different from other voters who were also contacted by the students. In other areas the 'Reading' system was run in the normal way but students in halls were approached by Labour Club members specifically organised for the task at different times from other voters.

The free post was used to send all students <sup>living in student accommodation</sup> a leaflet and a letter from the candidate while overseas students, in separate flats, were sent a letter addressed specifically to them. The election address was then delivered by hand to each room in the halls.

It is interesting to note the canvassing technique used on students. In addition to finding the Labour vote, Tory supporters were encouraged to vote by post in their home constituencies "because their vote couldn't make any difference here" whilst Labour supporters had the importance of voting in Newcastle for the very opposite reason stressed to them. It is perhaps fortunate that the election took place at exam time limiting their ability to take an active interest in the election.

Clearly students living outside organised accommodation had to be canvassed from the local committee rooms but a meeting, leafletting and poster campaigns were organised on both the University and Polytechnic campuses.

### Polling Officer

The final officer to be appointed was the Polling officer who was responsible for election day organisation. Whilst most of the detail is covered later the task included identification, in consultation with the local committee rooms, of those polling districts which needed to use the '6 sheet Reading' pads fortunately saved from the last general election and those which were to have no number taking on the day and to sort out a system of sub-committee rooms to look after a smaller number of polling districts each.

Had there been time before the election it would have been possible to organise detailed discussion of election day organisation with each sub-committee room organiser. As it was this couldn't be done and the Polling officer was reduced to sending letters of advice and following up on any obvious weaknesses on the day.

### Canvassing

In order to enable canvassers to be moved about the constituency a leaflet was produced which included what was hoped would be a standard method of recording  
/information



information <sup>coping with questions</sup> and dealing with doubtful voters. A similar more detailed leaflet was produced for Party and non-Party members alike who had never canvassed before. In addition to being asked to read both documents new canvassers were not sent out to canvass on their own until they felt confident to do so but were sent out with experienced canvassers who showed them the ropes.

### Daytime Canvassing

As mentioned earlier there was a definite attempt to canvass during the day as well as in the evening. All committee rooms were asked to make arrangements for daytime operation from the second weekend for both first time canvassing and second canvassing of those voters who were out on the first occasion in areas where the first canvass took place in the evening. Committee rooms were asked to mark canvass cards with the date of each canvass and an M, A or E depending on whether they were canvassed in the morning afternoon or evening and to ensure that second canvassing took place at a different time of the day.

In addition to this committee rooms were also asked from the second week to organise, in turn, an afternoons activity for the candidate which included visits to old peoples' homes, luncheon clubs, shopping areas and schools where parents regularly waited for children coming out of school.

### Maps

It had been hoped to produce enlarged maps of each committee room's area of operation. However due basically to the pressure of other matters it was not possible to do this until the final weekend of the campaign when the maps were produced <sup>in large numbers</sup> ~~for the areas~~ covered by sub-committee rooms on election day when more people from outside the constituency were coming in to help. It is hoped that this delay did not cause problems.

### Leaflets

In addition to <sup>the</sup> ~~an~~ introductory leaflet, election address and eve of poll leaflet it had been intended to deliver six separate leaflets on Sundays and mid week during the campaign. As a result of the limit on allowable expenses and difficulties some committee rooms were having with delivering the mid week leaflets this was reduced to four policy leaflets except for those people living in council houses who got a separate additional leaflet on the Party's housing policy.

### First time Voters

Early in the campaign a radio programme on first time voters not only <sup>indicated</sup> ~~a generally~~ more concerned attitude to the issues facing society and that they felt unemployment was the most important of them but also they were more alienated from what was seen as the 'bear garden' of politics. It was decided to send a letter to as many first time voters through the free post as it was possible to identify

/encouraging

9.  
encouraging them to take the election seriously.

Two of N.U.P.E.'s clerical staff spent a week at the Central Library going through all the registers since 1979 indentifying those voters who had come onto the register on a set date and then checking to see if they were still registered at the same address on the current register. As a result well over 2,000 first time voters were sent a letter from the candidate.

This task was not made any easier by the fact that since 1979 the constituency, ward and polling district boundaries had been changed. As there is no way checking the effectiveness of this exercise a method of identification must be found which does not include the work involved on this occasion.

### Nurses

With over a hundred nurses living in the nurses home at the R.V.I. a determined effort was made to canvass them. To be honest the response did not make the work involved getting permission for a sympathetic nurse to enter the home to carry out the canvass worthwhile and there would have been no way of knocking them up on the day.

### Ethnic Minorities

Members of the Community Relations Council held a meeting with the Labour candidates in Newcastle towards the end of the campaign. With the help of the National Party's leaflet and the N.U.P.E. print room leaflets in the five different languages were produced and distributed by members of the ethnic minorities to their own communities. Small meetings were also organised for the candidate in people's homes.

Fortunately the lateness of this activity did not effect its impact because the candidate had already built up a fund of goodwill as the prospective candidate for the old Newcastle North C.L.P. which covered those areas where the ethnic minorities tend to live in the new constituency.

### Trade Unions for a Labour Victory

As mentioned earlier the T.U.L.V. co-ordinator also acted as Transport officer. Whilst being able to channel union officers into the constituency the number of ordinary members brought in was dissapointing<sup>perhaps</sup> reflecting the Party's standing with Trades Uniononists nationally or the number of members who contacted the Campaign Headquarters directly.

The co-ordinator was able to set up several workplace visits but there was possibly an over reliance on him in that some suggestions which could well have been acted on earlier in the campaign were not made until the later stages of the campaign when they appeared as questions why visits and meetings had not been organised at particular locations.

9.  
encouraging them to take the election seriously.

Two of N.U.P.E.'s clerical staff spent a week at the Central Library going through all the registers since 1979 indentifying those voters who had come onto the register on a set date and then checking to see if they were still registered at the same address on the current register. As a result well over 2,000 first time voters were sent a letter from the candidate.

This task was not made any easier by the fact that since 1979 the constituency, ward and polling district boundaries had been changed. As there is no way checking the effectiveness of this exercise a method of identification must be found which does not include the work involved on this occasion.

### Nurses

With over a hundred nurses living in the nurses home at the R.V.I. a determined effort was made to canvass them. To be honest the response did not make the work involved getting permission for a sympathetic nurse to enter the home to carry out the canvass worthwhile and there would have been no way of knocking them up on the day.

### Ethnic Minorities

Members of the Community Relations Council held a meeting with the Labour candidates in Newcastle towards the end of the campaign. With the help of the National Party's leaflet and the N.U.P.E. print room leaflets in the five different languages were produced and distributed by members of the ethnic minorities to their own communities. Small meetings were also organised for the candidate in people's homes.

Fortunately the lateness of this activity did not effect its impact because the candidate had already built up a fund of goodwill as the prospective candidate for the old Newcastle North C.L.P. which covered those areas where the ethnic minorities tend to live in the new constituency.

### Trade Unions for a Labour Victory

As mentioned earlier the T.U.L.V. co-ordinator also acted as Transport officer. Whilst being able to channel union officers into the constituency the number of ordinary members brought in was dissapointing/<sup>perhaps</sup> reflecting the Party's standing with Trades Uniononists nationally or the number of members who contacted the Campaign Headquarters directly.

The co-ordinator was able to set up several workplace visits but there was possibly an over reliance on him in that some suggestions which could well have been acted on earlier in the campaign were not made until the later stages of the campaign when they appeared as questions why visits and meetings had not been organised at particular locations.

## Street Meetings

Every Saturday morning South Gosforth Party members organised the distribution of leaflets on Gosforth High Street. Apart from this and the work organised by the wards in shopping areas street meetings were largely confined to walk-a-bouts with Dennis Healy and Roy Hattersly the latter accompanied by nurses <sup>in uniform</sup> giving out Health Service leaflets. Recognising that defence of the N.H.S. was an area of policy where Labour was ahead we organised street canvasses on successive Saturdays by doctors and nurses and health workers. This was very successful.

## Removals

A list of all those who had moved into a Council house, or transferred between Council houses, since the previous October giving their previous and present addresses was obtained. It was intended to identify the ward for the addresses of origin, check if they were on the register at the old address and send canvassers by car to the new address to encourage Labour voters to return, with the offer of a lift if necessary, to cast their vote.

Unfortunately due to <sup>an initial</sup> misunderstanding and a serious underestimate of the work identifying those tenants who used to live in the constituency this effort was not as effective as had been hoped.

## Posters

The back of the introductory leaflet formed an A4 poster which voters were requested on the front of the leaflet to display in their windows. From the start there was a drive to get as many posters displayed as possible in order to swamp any bandwagon that the Alliance might try to start by the same method.

There was an original print run of bright red and white posters of various sizes from small car stickers to A2 size. Everybody displaying the introductory leaflet, Party members and supporters amongst various groups such as the ethnic minorities and students and all those who displayed a poster in the local elections as well as all canvassed Labour voters were encouraged to display a poster first, then a larger one. By the end of the campaign

the constituency was a sea of red posters.

## Music

At the beginning of the campaign the 'Stumbling Band' a group of Socialist musicians offered their services to the Party. Apart from supplying music at the start of public meetings and as a background to street activity, on the Bank Holiday Monday and election day they toured the Labour areas of the constituency on the back of an open lorry covered in balloons and posters, bringing back, as one voter put it, the old spirit of election campaigns. Finally on the Eve of Poll a rally attended by nearly three hundred Party workers was organised to take place at 9pm after the delivery of the Eve of Poll leaflet. The Stumbling Band provided entertainment for 20-30 minutes before the agent and candidate made short speeches of encouragement for election day.



Election Address

As has already been mentioned the Free post was used for letters and leaflets beside the election address and had to be given to the Post Office <sup>before</sup> the day it was planned to give the art work for the Election Address to the printer.

It was therefore decided to deliver it by hand on the Monday before election day in the same way that all the other leaflets had been delivered. However in addition to one for each house and the students in halls of residence an election address was sent to voters in multi-occupied accommodation in individually addressed envelopes. As well as homes <sup>and</sup> legally defined multi-occupied property, envelopes were addressed to families living in houses which had been divided into flats but still had a common entrance <sup>and</sup> family homes with at least two other surnames received one for the family and another for each separate surname.

The envelopes for these were written and filled in advance of the general delivery and delivered by the same person doing the general delivery in order to avoid duplication.

Eve of Poll Leaflet

Experience in local elections and parliamentary by-elections had shown that the Alliance would attempt <sup>to</sup> organise a surge through the middle. From an early stage it was recognised there might have been a need to produce a leaflet specifically to prevent this. As the campaign progressed it was decided to incorporate it into the Eve of Poll Leaflet and press cuttings knocking the S.D.P.'s chances in Newcastle Central and boosting Labour hopes were saved which it was intended to use in a collage on the front of the leaflet. At this point it was thought that as many Tory supporters as Labour were likely to be wavering and it was decided to aim the delivery of the leaflet specifically at Labour and doubtful voters.

On the Monday afternoon before the election an opinion poll <sup>was published</sup> for the constituency which showed Labour 42%, Tory 37% and S.D.P. 20%. Not only did this raise the moral of the campaign but it gave the collage for the front of the leaflet a lot more authority. The art work for the leaflet was completed on the Tuesday lunchtime and the leaflets <sup>were</sup> printed by N.U.P.E. in the afternoon.

On the Wednesday, following earlier plans Party workers were given lists of house numbers for each street where the canvass showed a Labour promise <sup>for</sup> a doubtful voter. To avoid this last and possibly most important leaflet being lost in the avalanche of paper which was by then surrounding voters deliverers were asked to knock on the door and deliver the leaflet <sup>to the voter</sup> with a reminder of the importance of voting the next day. Whilst not general in some areas this approach was resented and discontinued rapidly.



### 'Reading' System

As mentioned earlier the constituency was fortunate in having a small supply of 6 sheet 'Reading' pads left over from the 1979 election. As these were no longer obtainable from the Party which now only produces 4 sheet pads it was decided to use the 6 sheet pads in selected areas and to target them on polling districts where the number of votes cast in the local elections was less than 40%. Exceptions to this rule were made in Fenham, Jesmond and Moorside. In Fenham the small polling district WWF had a turnout in May of 26.7% due to polling station being some distance away. The surrounding area of polling district WKC which votes at the same polling station had a similar turnout which was masked by the rest of the polling district. It was decided to use 6 sheet pads for this area of WKC as well.

In Jesmond whilst 3 polling districts had less than a 40% turnout 6 sheet pads were not used in two of these because of the low percentage of the Labour promises and in the third a "Reading" system was not used at all. In Moorside and the polling district from Wingrove which they were looking after the turnout in all the polling districts was less than 40% in May. However three of these had large numbers of student voters living in halls which if discounted boosted the turnout to over 40%. In these areas 4 sheet pads were used.

In Jesmond and South Gosforth two and three polling districts respectively had less than a hundred promised Labour votes. To avoid wasted effort no number takers were used on these polling stations even though the 'reading' pads were written up for all but GC in South Gosforth. In Blakelaw a similar decision not to take numbers at the Tudor Grange polling station was taken locally on election day due to lack of number takers.

Only two wards needed help with writing up the 'Reading' sheets but this was provided by several of N.U.P.E.'s clerical staff on the Wednesday after the canvass cards had been marked with emphasising pens to indicate the Labour voters.

Finally comparisons of the canvass cards from the local elections and for the general election indicated that the Labour vote had held up well so committee rooms were asked to include promised Labour voters from May if they had not been found during the general election canvass.

### Election Day

Numbers were taken at 34 of the 40 polling stations from 7am. By 11am most of the 'Vote Today' slips were delivered to Labour voters from lists for each street giving the house numbers of all those on the 'Reading' system including those areas where numbers were not being taken. But the slips had been written up using the top sheet.

Sub-committee rooms were asked to approach all Labour supporters in sheltered accommodation and old peoples bungalows <sup>at approx 10 am</sup> to offer a lift to the polling station and fix times if accepted.

From noon the first knock up was started in the constituency and continued throughout the day. In those areas not taking numbers a knock up of all Labour prommisses was undertaken at 5pm only using the second sheet.

### Campaign Headquarters

Each sub-committee room was given a time at approximately three minute intervals to phone in information on the progress of the campaign to the direct line into the office of N.U.P.E.'s Regional Organiser. From 9am they were asked to phone at hourly intervals. to include in the first call the number of Labour prommisses on the 'Reading' pads for each polling district. From then on the hourly calls were to include the total number of votes cast for and against the Party and a progress report on the delivery of 'Vote Today' slips and each knock up as the day went on. Apart from any requests made at the time of the regular call committee rooms were asked to contact the Campaign Headquarters on the campaign number to avoid cluttering the special number and ensure that <sup>other</sup> sub-committee rooms were always able to get through on time.

The information phoned in on this direct line was taken by two N.U.P.E. secretaries with a separate sheet for each sub-committee room showing the time for their regular phone in, their phone number if they had one and the polling districts they were looking after. Each call was logged for the time it was made, and the information on votes cast and progress made for each polling district in turn <sup>and</sup> ending with any special messages or requests for help.

This information was then transferred onto seven A2 sheets showing for each ward the sub-committee rooms, the polling district each was responsible for, the number of electors in each polling district and whether a 4 or 6 sheet system or no 'Reading' system was being operated in each polling district.

From the number of Labour prommisses on the 'Reading' systems a target percentage of Labour votes was calculated for each polling district by dividing the prommisses by the total electorate. As each call was logged the percentage of the actual votes cast was calculated and checked with the target. Throughout the day and with the exception of one sub-committee room throughout the constituency Labour's share of the vote in those polling districts <sup>where</sup> ~~we~~ were taking numbers was higher than the target. In order to ensure that a false picture wasn't being given by a relatively higher turnout in Tory areas a constituency wide check was carried out at two hourly intervals which also showed a consistently higher proportion of the Labour vote turning out where we were monitoring than the target.

In addition to this continuous calculation the regular logging system described immediately showed up any problems as they arose. In <sup>the</sup> polling districts looked

/ after

after by the Lanercost Drive sub-committee room in Fenham for instance it became apparent by the late afternoon that this area alone was falling behind the target. A phone call to the committee room, extra workers drafted in by car and a couple of hours soon rectified the problem. Meanwhile in one part of Blakelaw a problem arose in one committee room looking after five polling districts with numbers being taken at three polling stations because there was no phone in the committee room or nearby and it was necessary to send a car to obtain the information at regular intervals.

### Campaign Successes

The B.B.C. and I.T.N. estimated that if the 1979 General Election had been fought on the new boundaries the Tories would have had a majority of 5,800 in Newcastle Central. The result of 9th June therefore represents a swing to Labour of 7%.

It must be recognised however that the B.B.C./I.T.N. figures were arrived at by comparing the local election results which took place on the same day as the General Election in 1979. It appears that in calculating the figures for Newcastle Central all those voting for the "Independent" in Jesmond were assumed to have voted Conservative in the General Election. Clearly this was not the case and a truer estimate of the majority would have been 4,500 reducing the swing to 5%.

This must be compared with an average swing against the Party of over 10% in the region and in Wallsend for instance of well over 30%. What were the reasons for this?

Clearly the intensity of the Campaign must have been the major factor. Not only was this a far more vigorous Campaign than that fought in the old Newcastle North which was far more marginal than the new constituency but the Campaign in the rest of the Constituency which had previously been parts of two very safe Labour seats bore no comparisons. The effects of this have been well known and demonstrated repeatedly in by-elections throughout the country. Newcastle Central was fortunate in that being surrounded by so many seats previously thought to be safe it was almost treated like a Constituency by-election with considerable help coming in from outside.

The major successes were the ability to use this help effectively and the impetus the outside help gave to encouraging Party members in the Constituency to work flat out for the four weeks of the Campaign. In particular apart from the large number of leaflets and posters and the use of music in the Campaign the work amongst the students, postal voters and the ethnic minorities must be singled out whilst the ability to draw in help from such disparate groups as the N.C.C.L., Anti-Nuclear lobby and animal rights activists and use them effectively has to be recognised.

All this activity would not have been possible had it not been for the organising ability of the various officers and committee room organisers throughout the Constituency who were able and willing to take on large amounts of work, at all hours for long periods. However, the role of N.U.P.E. and its regional office must not be forgotten, going far beyond the original offer of an agent and Campaign Headquarters.

Finally, for the future it should be noted that the final figures on election day showed Labours vote to be 41.3% in Fenham, 38.5% in Kenton and 38.9% in Wingrove of all the votes cast. The lesson would appear to be that with work Newcastle Central could soon have only two Tory wards.

#### What Went Wrong?

With all this effort and a large swing to Labour it could be considered churlish to ask what went wrong? But as stated at the beginning of this report a large Labour majority was being forecast by the end of election day. It would be too easy to dismiss this as voters changing their minds between the canvass and election day. There are however several factors which must be recognised if they are to be overcome in the next five years.

The most important was the fact mentioned earlier that there was an incomplete canvass in the more Tory areas of the constituency. In particular there was note in South Gosforth

All this activity would not have been possible had it not been for the organising ability of the various officers and committee room organisers throughout the Constituency who were able and willing to take on large amounts of work, at all hours for long periods. However, the role of N.U.P.E. and its regional office must not be forgotten, going far beyond the original offer of an agent and Campaign Headquarters.

Finally, for the future it should be noted that the final figures on election day showed Labours vote to be 41.3% in Fenham, 38.5% in Kenton and 38.9% in Wingrove of all the votes cast. The lesson would appear to be that with work Newcastle Central could soon have only two Tory wards.

#### What Went Wrong?

With all this effort and a large swing to Labour it could be considered churlish to ask what went wrong? But as stated at the beginning of this report a large Labour majority was being forecast by the end of election day. It would be too easy to dismiss this as voters changing their minds between the canvass and election day. There are however several factors which must be recognised if they are to be overcome in the next five years.

The most important was the fact mentioned earlier that there was an incomplete canvass in the more Tory areas of the constituency. In particular there was note in South Gosforth



a canvass of 1½ polling districts, in Kenton canvassing was not done in half of a polling district and part of three others and Blakelaw, <sup>were</sup> <sup>able</sup> to do very little in the Tudor Grange area whilst the canvass in the Slatyford area of Fenham was very slow. This was realised very late in the campaign when it was difficult to take any remedial action. However account was taken of this in calculating Labour and Tory support by attributing a similar proportion of Labour votes as those in other parts of the constituency with a similar social mix.

On reflection the evidence against this ~~exercise~~ <sup>adjusted</sup> was already apparent before election day but was ignored because the ~~figures~~ <sup>adjusted</sup> looked remarkably similar to the constituency ~~opinion poll~~. In Kenton having canvassed a polling district of semi-detached private housing the number of Labour promises was approximately 20% and the local Party decided from then on to concentrate on the council housing. However after it was realised centrally that this was the case it was agreed to carry out a small canvass in another area of semi-detached housing less than a week before the election. This yielded virtually no <sup>Labour</sup> promises at all! The implication is that if the Party was seen to be active in an area <sup>it</sup> helped to hold the vote against the slide to the Alliance.

Confirmation of this was found on election day itself when very few of those being knocked up said they weren't going to vote Labour except in the Slatyford area of Fenham where several voters were reported to have added that they hadn't even been canvassed by the Party. ~~Clearly~~ <sup>canvass</sup> these must have been those voters carried over from the local election, <sup>to be</sup> included on the 'Reading' slips. If these attributed Labour votes are removed the forecast majority is <sup>more than</sup> wiped out.

There may be arguments as to whether Tory areas should be ignored in favour of more Labour areas based on the time available. In this election however help was always found when requested. A more interesting degree of speculation could be opened by a debate on whether Labour voters in council housing would be more likely to desert the Party because they weren't canvassed until later. Such an exercise would be fruitless. The importance is that the effect should be noted, and action taken to avoid it in future.

The second factor was probably the differential crumbling of the Alliance vote back to Labour and the Tories. Presumably prior to the distribution of both the Labour and Tory Eve of Poll leaflets this effect was roughly equal following the publication of the opinion poll by Tyne Tees. However as the Labour leaflet was confined to known Labour supporters <sup>and doubtfuls</sup> it couldn't get to our normal supporters who hadn't been contacted either because they were out when canvassed or not contacted at all. The Tory leaflet on the other hand went to all voters and therefore must have reached all usually Tory voters who were thinking of voting S.D.P. In hindsight it would have been better following the poll to deliver the leaflet to

every voter. However, had this been thought desirable at the time it would not have been possible for N.U.P.E. to produce that number in the time available and it was too late to go to the commercial printer.

Taking these factors together and making a guestimate of the effect of a full canvass throughout the constituency contacting 80% of the electorate, which clearly was not possible in the 4 weeks available and delivering the Eve of Poll leaflet to every house it is unlikely that the Tory majority would have been reduced below 700.

This is not a council of despair however. The Party has five years to overturn it.

### Recommendations

1. A small sub-committee should be set up consisting of the Canvassing Officer and two or three other members to examine the percentage poll in May and June together with the canvassing returns and polling day figures on a polling district by polling district basis with the ward organisers to make recommendations on future activity and future polling day organisation and in particular to identify winnable Labour seats.
2. The continued production of printed newsletters should be encouraged to be delivered to all houses. Comparisons of layout of the various newsletters should be encouraged not to find the "best" but to look for new ideas. In case any wards have difficulty delivering newsletters there should be pairing of branches to help with the delivery of each others newsletter.
3. There should be constituency wide campaigns to increase Labour Party membership, particularly amongst ethnic communities, and Labour postal voters' and systematic canvassing for problems so that the Party cannot be accused of only "coming round" at election time.
4. The student vote must never be ignored again, as it was in 1979. This must involve a more active role for the Party with the Labour clubs and possibly the appointment of a student officer who would be there from year to year. Clearly a student could have difficulties fulfilling such a role. If a future election takes place after summer vacation it is likely that all students on registers will have changed address. An approach must be made to the Returning Officer to ensure adequate safeguards are taken to prevent personation.

5. Marked registers should in future carry forward the date of voters 18th birthdays to enable first time voters to be sent a specific letter in five years time.
6. A copy of this report should be retained for consideration before the next election.
7. An edited version of the report with copies of the leaflets should be sent to the N.E.C. and any C.L.P. requesting information on our campaign.
8. Immediate pressure should be put on the N.E.C. to re-introduce 6 sheet "Reading" pads.
9. As mentioned Blakelaw had difficulty taking numbers at all the Polling Stations. For what should be a safe Labour seat this is regrettable but not surprising. There are nine Polling Districts and eight Polling Stations. A similar situation has arisen throughout the City due to changes in ward and constituency boundaries. Clearly this is a nonsense and whilst it had been intended to delay a reform until the new county boundaries come into effect in 1985 all other districts in Tyne and Wear have already redrawn theirs. In the new situation the review could now take place. However the Party must sort it out before the Council is involved.
10. Pressure must be put on the Electoral Registration Office to improve the quality of Electoral Registers.
11. There needs to be a programme of actual training for canvassers.