

Alfred Sherman 25/3/83

We meet in the wake of two headline-hogging by-elections. We must draw proper lessons from them. The by-elections displayed a new feature of the British electoral scene. But they also remind us that all the existing features remain.

The new feature is the multiplier effect generated by interaction between tactical voting and the frequent and sophisticated polls carried out for and published by the media. This has created a tendency for voters to consider switching their vote to the candidate who seems most likely to win against the candidate they most wish to lose. We must live with this development so we must consider all its implications. In so far as the electoral multiplier effect is a case of to him that hath, all the more reason for us to get off to a flying start, to do well in the first poll. In the nature of things a by-election could occur anywhere at any time. So we must be ready everywhere for it. Every constituency needs a candidate whose record says something to the wider public, and who is likely to confirm and reinforce that good impression in nursing the constituency and in the course of campaigning. We need up to date canvasses, to know where our vote is, and to locate waverers.

I know that in seats with a sitting MP of ours, new candidates have to be found at short notice for by-elections - though we have some say in their timing. But the association's work and regular canvasses are an insurance policy which should be taken out in all seats. And let me take this opportunity to

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express my appreciation/our appreciation, of the magnificent fight put up by our candidate at Darlington, Michael Fallon.

Here is a young man, who had not fought a seat before, had gone up after adoption to live there and nurse his constituency, suddenly catapulted into a crucial by-election under the eyes of the whole world.

The campaign began on the morrow of Bermondsey- so the media began by praising the Labour candidate at Darlington for not being Peter Tatchell. Some fell into the trap of hailing him as a moderate.

But how moderate is he? Is Michael Foot moderate? Is it enough to be less strident than Mr Benn to gain the accolade of moderation? Is it moderate to wish to give up our nuclear deterrent one-sidedly, to opt out of our defensive alliances against Soviet aggression? Is it moderate to want to nationalise healthy firms and deliver them to the dead hand of the state to burden on taxpayers? Is it moderate to want to print money to create a short-lived illusion of prosperity at the cost of inflation and economic hardship, as their fellow-socialists have done in France? But instead of asking themselves these questions, some of the media dubbed Mr O'Brien a moderate. And it stuck.

At the outset, too, the Social Democrat candidate was hailed as another potential Bermondsey winner. That left our candidate as the "unknown campaigner" to undergo the ordeal by media. Give a dog a bad name and

hang it. But he stood up to it magnificently, and won the media's respect. To give them their due, they changed their tune when they got to know him. Michael Fallon was thrown in at the deep end. But he learned to swim strongly in record time. And even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer. He nearly made it. If only we could have got over to a few more voters that the best way of keeping one socialist party out is not by putting another socialist party in; that replacing the man of the 'thirties by the men of the 'sixties is no way of facing the future. But we shall next time.

How do we get the message over? First, by bringing home to the public what labour really stands for, and why it won't work. Only then do we need to challenge the social democrats to show exactly where and how they have moved away from the disastrous policies and attitudes they supported right up to the time they left the Labour Party, or were pushed out. Proportional representation is no substitute. Nor is support for the EEC, particularly when it includes support for precisely those socialistic bureaucratic Brussels policies which create an anti-market backlash here. Are they genuinely repentant, or is it just a new wrapping? If they are genuinely repentant let them spell it out. Let people see that far from being extreme or retrograde, we were simply right. We could then work towards a two-party system with two rational, patriotic parties in place of Benn and Foot with Healey kow-towing to the Left. If not, if the Social Democratic leaders just want to go back to the 'sixties or 'seventies, and then go down the same dreary road again to Footism, anything for the sake of office, our voters will know where they stand. It is no use the alliance going on

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about ending party bickering; they bicker as much as anyone.

They are neither above party politics nor in the centre of party politics, they are just out on a limb, hoping to cash in on the protest vote. But if we bring home to voters what the Labour threat means, then they will understand that we alone can ward it off.

The threat is grounded in false ideas. Both Labour and Alliance are still trapped in neo-Keynesian dogmas, which believe that we can grow prosperous by wasting resources. They are bemused by monetary aggregates, which simply add up incompatibles together, and divert attention away from the real resource patterns which decide our economic success or failure. Both kinds of socialist are trapped in the post-war illusion that we can be prosperous by wasting, by giving away real resources, paying people to turn imported iron ore into ships to be given away to our competitors, by giving away goods on non-repayable credits and then calling them exports.

Both Labour parties favour locking up human resources by over-manning in industry and public services, as though provided someone receives a wage or salary, it is a matter of no importance whether or not he or she makes a real contribution to the economy. Both parties denounce as "savage cuts" any efforts to economise on human resources in order to achieve the efficiency socialism once promised but has visibly failed to deliver.

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Both Labour parties seem to be guided by the slogan "waste for victory". We must trust the people to understand our alternative view of social economics, based on resources balance. We must trust the people to accept our alternative concept of public service, in which any honest business, from the corner shop to the multi-national, is seen to be providing a public service, while any organisation that wastes resources, in the public or private sector, is regarded as a public dis-service.

We shall get nowhere by skulking in the shadows and trying to look like the Alliance. On the contrary, if we nail our colours to the mast and dare them to do the same, we shall win back Darlington, and a lot more besides.

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