

Sentinel Interview

A MAN OF THE PEOPLE

NEIL KINNOCK TALKS TO THE SENTINEL ABOUT COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS, DAMPNES AND THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS ON JUNE THE 14th.



"...DAMPNESS... I KNOW THE PROBLEM, I'VE LIVED IN A DAMP HOUSE."

Interview by Colin Bartie

The Wester Hailes Sentinel is being increasingly talked of as "perhaps Scotland's top community newspaper". This is because it not only covers events and issues within the community - both serious and light hearted - but also because there is an awareness that Wester Hailes is part of a larger community, and that events in the wider world have a direct effect on our lives here.

Because we take larger issues seriously people with influence take the Wester Hailes Sentinel seriously. One such person is the Rt. Hon Neil Kinnock M.P., Leader of the Opposition. On a recent trip to Edinburgh, to deliver a major policy speech at the Eurofest Concert for peace and jobs, Neil took time out to talk to the people of Wester Hailes through the Sentinel.

BAD PRESS

Like coverage given to the Labour Party and the miners dispute, Wester Hailes often gets a lot of bad and distorted press from the national papers. There is an eagerness to cover negative aspects; whilst ignoring, or at the best, trivialising or playing down any good news. Did Neil think that community owned papers, like the Sentinel, had a role to play in redressing the apparent bias of the daily papers?

"Certainly I do. And that is because the people who own and produce the paper do so for their community, and are thus objective about the issues covered. They have to be; their credibility depends upon it.

On the other hand the big papers are owned by individuals or businesses, and tend to push a certain

political line. They are not accountable to the community."

AWARE

Neil, the son of a labourer and a nurse, clearly believes in the benefits of family and community life; and passionately advocates fair and equal opportunities for all our children. Although he is involved in politics at a national and international level he was aware of some of our problems in Wester Hailes.

"I believe you have a lot of trouble with dampness in Wester Hailes. I know the problem, I've lived in a damp house. There is the constant worry about health, especially if their are



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old folks or kiddies in the house. And then there is the damage to clothing and furnishing. Labour's answer to this problem is to reverse the Tory Party's policy of cut backs and neglect. More investment would solve two of Wester Hailes' problems at one go; dampness could be eradicated and unemployment reduced by employing people to do the necessary work."

ELECTIONS

The main reason for Neil being in Edinburgh was to



Pictures by Pat Bartie

launch the Labour Party's campaign for the European Elections on the 14th June. Many people are sceptical about the value of voting for candidates for the European Parliament. Would a vote for Labour make any tangible difference to the lives of people living in Wester Hailes?

"Not as tangible as a Labour victory in the House of Commons. But it would be very difficult for a Thatcher Government to neglect the obvious recovery of Labour's standing, especially as we stand on the Government's record, and the promotion of jobs."

serious political message, but what of the lighter side to his campaigning style: the video with Tracey Ullman, his appearance of the Tube, the song and dance with Bill Owen and Clive Dunn, and his dance for a group of pensioners? 'It was a lot of fun, no problem at all.'

GOOD TIMES

Many newspapers have tried to trivialise Labour's campaign by concentrating on these lighter moments to the exclusion of the serious issues that were discussed and put over to audiences of well over 2,000 people. We all know the old adage "all work and no play": well for a long time now some people haven't had much work either. To my mind Neil Kinnock's willingness to enjoy himself with the people contrasts favourably with Mrs Thatcher's stoney aloofness and dour determination to run this country down.

Haven't we had enough cut backs, enough doom and gloom, enough of Thatcher's medicine? Isn't it about time we were allowed to get back to work and earn enough money to have some good times?

EUROFEST

After our talk we accompanied Neil and his entourage down to the Eurofest Concert at the Playhouse where there was an extravaganza of music, theatre and politics.

There is much debate nowadays about popularising the arts (see page 14) Eurofest showed this in action. And it worked. In front of an audience of two and a half thousand people 104 performers (including 7:84 Scotland, Wildcat Theatre, Aly Bain, John Martyn) gave their services free because of their commitment to Socialism and Internationalism.

After Neil's speech the whole cast assembled for a grand finale with Neil leading the singing, in good Welsh style, on Avanti Popolo and The Internationale. Clearly relaxed and enjoying himself Neil shouted to the audience "just one more before we go, let's sing 'We Shall Overcome'". He improvised the second chorus into "We shall ban the bomb". After throwing red carnations into the audience Neil left us with these words 'We shall overcome, because we are the people'.



"IT WAS A LOT OF FUN, NO PROBLEM AT ALL..."

SERIOUS

This theme was further developed when Neil made his speech at the Playhouse later that night: 'On June 14th British voters can either endorse that record (of the Thatcher Government) of rundown and rip off and ask for more of it by voting Tory or they can show that they've had enough of that graveyard economics and vote for investment, for training, for growth and employment by voting Labour.'

That was Neil Kinnock's