

# TONY BLAIR - MY PART IN HIS DOWNFALL

I know. It hasn't quite happened yet, but he'll go sooner or later, and when he does I'll know I helped in some small way; it will also be the start of a bright, new, just and peaceful political era... OK, maybe not, but it'll still be good. Why should we put up with having a Prime Minister who we all know is a lying, warmongering, mass-murdering criminal? Eh? I felt particularly strongly about this, especially with the election looming, and I reckoned that since New Labour wasn't about to ditch their dear leader, the best hope was to support efforts to get him voted out in his own constituency of Sedgefield. I arranged to stay for a weekend with my friend Brenda, who lives fairly close to the constituency and who had already made contact with a local group, Sedgefield Against War, which was planning public meetings and a Peace Camp as part of its pre-election anti-Blair campaign.

On the Thursday night, we went to a packed Sedgefield Against War public meeting in a local pub, with an audience made up largely of local people. I handed out my bag of "I vote Anti-War" badges; it seemed like a good cause. The speakers were human rights activist and independent journalist Jo Wilding, who talked eloquently and movingly about her recent experiences in Iraq during the invasion and under occupation, and Haifa Zangana, Iraqi-born novelist and former political prisoner in Iraq under Saddam. Haifa spoke of torture under Saddam's regime and how this has been continued in Iraq's prisons under the Coalition. Both speakers were excellent, but the ensuing debate was not, as two of the election hopefuls for Blair's Sedgefield seat - self-proclaimed well-heeled, upper middle-class socialist businessman Jonathan Cockburn and ex-Greenham campaigner Helen John - took it in turns to tell the audience why they shouldn't vote for the other one or for Reg Keys. My heart sank.

It seemed to me that someone like Reg Keys, the man from Llanuwchllyn near Bala who had lost his son in the Iraq war and who, with others, had founded *Military Families Against War*, probably had the best chance of taking votes away from Blair, but his success would depend on the other candidates standing down to make it a two-horse race. From their speeches that night, it was clear that neither of these candidates would persuade large numbers of punters to vote for them, and it was also clear that their egos would almost certainly stop them from doing the sensible thing and pulling out of the contest. There were loads of other candidates representing various comedy factions: the Official Monster Raving Loony Party, UKIP, Veritas and the Tories, for example. The whole thing was a mess.

We had a productive weekend though. When it was far too wet to go out leafleting on Friday, we stayed in and created a blog, a web-based diary which can include text, pictures and links to other web sites, at:

<http://blairditch.blogspot.com> to comment on the election in Sedgefield. I had no idea how easy it was to set up a blog until Brenda showed me how, and I'd recommend it to anyone. Blogs are free; you can say what you like; there are no printing or distribution costs and blogs offer real alternatives to all the lies and distortion we're fed through the mainstream media.

Once the BlairDitch blog was set up we called in at Reg Keys' Fishburn office, where we met the sterling Sylvia from Cambridge who had come to help Reg's campaign and to stay for the duration. Sylvia would have been an asset to any campaign, but she was trying to run the office with no telephone, no computer, no printer and rather more importantly no kettle, pan or tin opener. When the rain finally stopped, and having acquired a large pile of Reg's flyers, we toured Trimdon Village on Saturday and subjected our fingers to vicious assaults by letterboxes for several hours; then we collected Sylvia (dropping off essential items of kitchen equipment en route) and engaged in more finger masochism in Sedgefield all afternoon. The most notable thing about these places was the virtual absence of Labour posters (or any other posters for that matter) in every window except that of the Trimdon Labour Club, where there were enough for the whole constituency.



*And that was just one window...*

One enterprising pub in Sedgefield had created an "election-free zone" with dire warnings about what might happen to candidates who dared to enter! We spent that evening making a banner for Reg's campaign, and the following afternoon in Fishburn making a sign to go outside Sylvia's office, before I set off for home at teatime. And no, I didn't spend all morning in bed - we were out looking for fossils on Seaham beach, which had nothing at all to do with the election. u



*Our banner outside Reg Keys' Fishburn Office*

# ELECTION ACTION IN SEDGEFIELD AND WREXHAM

Four of us from WPJF went to Brize Norton the following weekend (see Tim's article on page 4). After that, Tony's oversized head and clothes were taken up to Sedgfield for the Mayday Ditch Blair Peace Festival, where Liz and I formed the Wrexham contingent. We called in on the way to see Sylvia, whose office had by that time been furnished with such state-of-the-art equipment as a telephone. With just a few days to go to the election, Reg and his team were campaigning hard. As we arrived, Brian Eno, Musician, supporter and main financial sponsor of Reg's campaign, was preparing to go out canvassing, along with Cheri BlairOut Gilham, who had defected from the Pensioners Party and was asking her supporters to vote for Reg Keys. You will have noticed Cheri if you watched the announcement of the Sedgfield election results - she was the one standing right next to Blair wearing a BLIAR hat. I liked her a lot.

Once at the Peace Camp, we contributed to the festivities by making a new body for Tony Blair from tree trunks and wood, and re-erecting him in the music barn, and by hanging our WPJF banners all over the place. Unfortunately, Mark Thomas, who was supposed to be appearing, had food poisoning and cancelled, but we were treated to a wonderful performance by the Rhythms of Resistance Samba Band, along with lots of other good, angry music. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves especially once the sun came out. Lots of people went out canvassing and leafleting by day and partied by night. The Big Red Bus which had been all the way to Iraq was there, newly adorned with "Do Labour a Favour - Vote Blair Out" decals, along with a similarly decorated white taxi and Brenda's car, all of which attracted a good deal of attention when driving around Sedgfield. In my opinion, all leafleting should be abandoned in favour of decorated cars, buses, taxis and bicycles and possibly people wearing sandwich boards. It's more fun and easier on the knuckles.



*The big red bus*

Mark Thomas was ill and so was I, with laryngitis, and I really wasn't up to much except lying in the sun, but I did go out to do some more leafleting and to talk to local people with Brenda on Sunday afternoon; this time we had Sedgfield Against War flyers which didn't recommend any particular candidate but asked people to vote anti-war and anti-Blair. Plenty of folk told us they were less than impressed with their MP for reasons ranging from his warmongering activities to never doing any constituency work for them.

Back in Wrexham, with two days to go until the election, Tim and I made "Vote Anti-War" posters to put up around town, with the names of civilians and soldiers killed in Iraq, and bunches of flowers attached below. One poster had the name of the most recent British soldier killed in Iraq at that time, Anthony Wakefield, and we attached this to the Army Recruitment Office steps under a sign that promised "Careers".



*Posters in town and at the Army Recruitment Office*

All the posters can be seen at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/25075914@N00/sets/300390/>.

Someone with a disgraceful lack of respect for the dead ripped most of these posters down, leaving the flowers dangling forlornly. Most likely a New Labourite anxious that people shouldn't think about the war too much, it could well have been Ian Lucas himself who had been up to no good in the local press the week before, lying about his "anti-war" credentials. I managed to get a reply printed in the next issue, but that wasn't until election day. Even so, everyone driving from Wrexham to Chester in the weeks before the election was reminded of the truth about New Labour: some reckless miscreant with a head for heights had painted the railway bridge over the A483 by-pass with the legend: LABOUR KILLS. LABOUR LIES.



So we didn't get Labour or Blair out, but there were a number of smaller victories. Reg Keys got a respectable 4,000+ votes, and had his moment on stage on election night when his heartfelt speech made Blair squirm in front of millions on national TV. Labour was returned with a much reduced majority and the lowest ever percentage support for a government, prompting calls for electoral reform. And here in Wrexham, the majorities of both Martyn Jones and Ian Lucas were down on last time. I have no faith in the ballot box ever delivering peace and justice to the world, but I do believe that campaigning visibly, noisily and creatively is worthwhile and does make people think. Let's all do it next time. ■