

History Master at B.R.G.S. 1948 - 55

In 1959, there was no more marginal seat in the land than the constituency of South-East Derbyshire – where the Conservative majority was all of 12 votes – 25,374 for the Conservative F.L.J. Jackson to Labour's 25,362, with 4,980 voting for the Liberal candidate. A battle-hardened candidate had to be chosen the next time, so the constituency Labour Party picked Trevor Park.

Park had taken on Frederick Erroll in 1955 at Altrincham and Sale. In the 1960s Park told me that he had been to see Erroll, President of the Board of Trade, who had told him that he was the best Labour candidate who had ever contested a general election against him. In 1959 Park contested Darwin against Charles Fletcher-Cooke, who told me yesterday: "Park was a thoroughly good egg and the nicest of all the 10 opponents which I fought in general elections."

Partly because he was a candidate who had to be given publicity and partly because he was a considerable and formidably effective rostrum orator, Park was a regular at national conference, the TUC, and party gatherings.

In 1958, when barely 30 years of age, he made a commanding speech at Scarborough which can hardly have been to the taste of Hugh Gaitskell. As a young delegate I was sitting next to Christopher Price, later MP for Lewisham, and asked him, "Who's Trevor Park?" Price replied: "I know him through the Labour students. He's brilliant. And he'll be a hell of a problem for the Labour leadership." This was prescient. Park was an absolutely epicentral figure, in opposition to the Labour government's incomes policy, Barbara Castle's *In Place of Strife* and the Vietnam War.

Trevor Park was born near Bury, in Lancashire, and attended Bury Grammar School. His parents worked in the textile industry. After Manchester University, where he won a good Honours degree, he became a history master at Bacup and Rawtenstall Grammar school for seven years. It became clear that his heart was set on entering Parliament and after the 1955 election he parted company with the school, who were reluctant to give him promotion on the grounds that he would be up and away as soon as there was a by-election or a general election. He became a Workers' Educational Association tutor and organiser and then a lecturer in the Department of Extramural Studies at Sheffield University.

Park entered the House of Commons at the general election of 1964 with a majority of just under 1,000 on a poll that was over 85 per cent. In his maiden speech on 23 November 1964 he paid particular tribute to his predecessor, the Labour MP A.J. Champion, later Lord Champion, a government minister who had been defeated in

1959. But unlike most maiden speeches, which are full of little courtesies and descriptions of the constituency, Park's implemented Price's prediction and contained a powerful attack on Labour's attitude towards the nuclear deterrent and the Nassau Agreement. Park was always concerned with the very central issues of politics.

Dennis Skinner reflected to me yesterday that Park's most important service to the Labour movement as he saw it was that he led the opposition in Parliament to Labour's incomes policy in 1966. "I sat in the position under the Gallery" – as an interested visitor, Skinner was not yet a member of the House of Commons – "and Park told me that the Government could be defeated that day."

In Skinner's opinion Park was driven by a total and principled opposition to the centralising tendencies of the state, not just because it was the policy of Park's union, the Transport and General Workers, but on account of his long-standing views



Park: a 'shop steward' for the Labour back-benchers

of not allowing the corporate state to control wages.

Park in fact took up a whole host of causes, some of them of a minority nature. In spite of his wafer-thin majority in 1964-66 his colleagues noticed that he never flinched from siding with the unpopular or less than popular if he thought it was right. In the 1966 general election he was rewarded by the electorate of South-East Derbyshire with a majority of just under 6,000.

However, truth to tell, his colleagues were much less impressed in 1970 when, to our astonishment, Park said that he would not be a candidate at the general election. Not only did he surrender a hard-won Labour seat to the Conservative Peter Rost, with a 13.6 per cent swing against the Labour candidate John Ryman, he also provoked a particularly angry response from those who had been in government sweating it out to do as they thought best for the Labour Party and the country. Their anger centred on the fact that this man of principle who had made their lives such hell over the Vietnam War and *In Place of Strife* was not himself going to face the music at the polls.

A taste of what Park did to Labour ministers is well

summed up in an intervention: "Has the honourable gentleman noticed that the government is to exercise their power to order a ballot only when they think it will produce a result favourable to them? Also, if there is to be a ballot before a strike, does it not follow that it would be logical for trade-union members to ask that there should be a ballot before a strike finishes as well?"

It is easily comprehensible that this kind of embarrassing, pin-pricking question infuriated his senior colleagues at the despatch box. They would not have been so angry if he himself had been facing the electorate. The fact that he did not face the electorate in 1970 made it impossible for him to return – as he desperately wanted – to the House of Commons at a later stage.

He made a serious attempt to win the Goole constituency on Humberside when Dr Edmund Marshall was selected, Batley and Spen when Ken Woolmer was selected and Penistone when Allen McKay was selected. He made serious attempts at other constituencies in Yorkshire but had earned the ferocious antagonism of the local regional organiser of the Transport and General Workers Union who recollected only too well what he had done when Labour had power.

Like many other ex-MPs in 1970 Park found it difficult to get a job and landed up as a WEA tutor and organiser in Manchester. However the department of industrial relations at Leeds were rightly impressed by Park's skill as a lecturer. He worked at Leeds University and became a senior fellow 1983-86 in the Department of Adult Education and Extramural Studies.

He also occupied key positions on the Leeds City Council where he showed the same skill which he had displayed as a member of a select committee on nationalised industries under Ian Mikardo, in 1966-68, and on education and science 1968-70.

Derek Fatchett, now MP for Leeds Central, remembers Trevor Park as a key figure, who brought together a large and diverse group. "People trusted him," Fatchett said, "and he was a sort of shop steward for the back-benchers." This is exactly what he had been in the House of Commons.

Tam Dalyell

Trevor Park, politician: born Bury 12 December 1927; MP (Labour) for South-East Derbyshire 1964-70; Lecturer in Industrial Relations, Department of Adult Education and Extramural Studies, Leeds University 1972-83, Senior Fellow 1983-86; Member, Leeds City Council 1979-86, Chairman, Municipal Services Committee 1980-83, Chairman, Planning and Development Committee 1983-86; married 1953 Barbara Black; died Bury 6 April 1995.

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