

OF
A WINNING
CANDIDATE

Student women in conference

Saturday p.m.: compositing of motions for the National Union of Student's Women's Conference in the Claremont Hotel Blackpool. Already the left faced attempts at stalling from Labour Students. In the composite on Women and Education, Labour Student women refused to composite with Left Unity supporter Kate Buckell because the text from the colleges she represented contains the word 'debt'.

I took myself off to say hello to several people who had arrived that night but are not involved in the wrangling downstairs.

Monday, first day of conference: I woke up fresh as a daisy and raring to go. But first things first — breakfast, and then balloon-blowing, banner hanging, boxes to be unpacked, stalls to be set up — and a quick game of balloon football with my housemate Ben, aged 5: (he won!) Shortly after, people began arriving. It was all very hectic and exciting, meeting new women from all around the country.

Eventually, things settled down and the first policy debate, "Women and Work", began. Labour Student women got up to speak time and again to argue against scrapping the JSA, and for reforming it instead. The facts of the JSA, such as pushing people into low-paid, crap jobs or off their college courses didn't rate much in their arguments.

This line of non-reasoning was continued in a debate on the minimum wage. Although they wanted one they argued vehemently against setting any figure, using the arguments commonly paraded by Tories against having a minimum wage at all. Again, the vast majority of conference saw through the rhetoric to the logic and necessity of setting a figure. A decent minimum wage can only help women workers secure their other demands around harrasment, childcare, and so on.

At the end of the session a meeting was called advertised as being open to all women who wanted the Women's Campaign to be an open, democratic body. Well, that's me — although I think it *is* open. So, off I trotted to the meeting, only to find it was really a meeting open to everyone *except* me, and run by — yes, you've guessed it — Labour Students, who then proceeded to denounce me as spawn of the devil. Realising they had never intended to make any constructive links or even to let me defend myself against their shrill denouncements, I left.

Finally, it was Informal Hustings — an

hour and a half of questioning during which I had to answer questions on everything from how to make the Women's Campaign broader, the Labour Party (ha,ha), free education and increasing the involvement of Black and Asian LGB women. Finally, after a stirring rendition of 'I Will Survive' by yours truly and telling of an appalling joke, it was over.

Tuesday. Again, up at the crack of dawn. The morning of the election day was highly amusing. Labour Students did everything they could to undermine the democratic process, stalling the debates to prevent discussion of education funding by arguing that we discuss a budget that none of us had had a chance to read. Even more amusing was the attempt to discredit myself before the election by asking a question about my Committee Report — along the lines of why, as Lesbian Rep, only

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three of the things I had done in the last year related specifically to lesbian women.

Silly me! I thought that building for and taking part in a picket against the immigration and asylum laws did directly affect lesbian women. After all, thousands of lesbians spend their lives living under persecution and terror due to their sexual orientation. Many are killed. These women, like others suffering for their beliefs, politics, lifestyles, etc. deserve our support. Furthermore, what about equal partnership rights, what about linking with others in the fight for equality? Perhaps they ought to try telling Stonewall that immigration laws don't affect lesbian women.

Anyway, despite all the silliness, everyone I spoke to was in buoyant mood. It was good for me to find that so many women

from Further Education colleges, many of whom I had not met before the conference, were on the left. This, and the hard work and support of my comrades, and others in the Women's Campaign who were supporting me, put me in a good frame of mind for the election.

20 minutes later it was all over, and it was into the next debate and another outrageous statement from the right wing. Apparently we should not repeal or scrap all immigration and asylum laws, because this would let Nazi war criminals amongst others into the country. Now we all know that Nazi war criminals (amongst others) have been harboured by this country for decades, and that the real victims of Britain's racist immigration laws are the 5 million black people who are detained in appalling conditions, refused entry and sent 'back'. To hear such arguments used to continue this oppression made myself and others sick.

Next came the election results and the relief at winning — in the first round on first preferences, with 96 votes and by a margin of 42 votes (out of a total of 167) — was fantastic. I couldn't thank everyone enough for their help and support.

Back at the hotel we held a Left Unity fringe meeting on 'What Women want from the General Election'. It was really well attended and good contributions were made.

Then, at last, a beer and a chance to relax and catch up with a friend I haven't seen since June. But, alas, no — every time I sat down, someone would come and drag me off to meet a group of women who wanted to know if I would visit their college, help get a Women's Officer, etc. I was so tired I could hardly see, but I enjoyed it — especially a concerted grilling from Maite from Lambeth and Violet from Kingsway: it's good to know that so many women want to work hard in the campaign next year.

Wednesday. Final day of conference and the Education Funding debate. Yet again, Women's Conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of free education. I think the highlight of the conference for me was meeting so many women and getting a clearer picture of what is going on around the country. Best of all was when Lesley, a mature student from Salford College and first-time delegate, told me she had, "had the time of her life." Just wait for next year!

Anita Goldsmith,
NUS Women's Officer elect