



**Bob Mellish MP: facing expulsion?**

The man who kept out Peter Tatchell endorses anti-Labour candidates, reports Duncan Campbell

## **Mellish in 'don't vote Labour' row**

BOB MELLISH, currently the Labour MP for Bermondsey, may face expulsion from the Labour Party for backing three opposition 'independent' candidates in next month's local government elections. This week, he began distributing a leaflet to electors in the Riverside ward of Bermondsey, which led to banner headlines in the local paper: 'Don't vote Labour says Mellish'. The leaflet follows an election address distributed by the independent candidates, in which Mellish said he had 'no hesitation in asking our people in Riverside to support Coral Newall' (a Labour councillor who was not selected to stand again) and gave 'equal support' to two other independents.

Mellish's final act in the continuing row over the Bermondsey Labour Party means that there is 'no doubt' that his own Labour Party (he in fact lives in West Lewisham) will ask for his expulsion early in May. Last October, he provoked the public row over the selection of Peter Tatchell as prospective parliamentary candidate for Bermondsey by threatening to resign as MP if Michael Foot did not publicly disavow Tatchell. That would have forced a difficult by-election against the SDP, in which Mellish would have campaigned against the official Labour candidate. Foot did disavow Tatchell, but Mellish is now campaigning against official Labour candidates.

Mellish met Foot on Monday this week and refused to withdraw his leaflet. He is understood to have said that he couldn't care less about expulsion from the Labour Party and the PLP. His action means that he will now be disowned by right-wing Southwark Labour Councillors, who had previously been his allies in the Bermondsey Labour Party.

Foot and others now consider that October's NEC decision to give in on Tatchell was a mistake; the risk of losing Bermondsey was probably less damaging than the havoc Mellish is now set on creating. In the not impossible event of an early General Election, Tatchell would now undoubtedly be quietly endorsed. It would be hard, too, to reject him for a by-election.

Mellish, who will be 70 next year, is still Deputy Chairman of the Docklands Development Corporation. He was the Minister of Public Buildings and Works in 1969, before being shifted to the position of Labour Chief Whip. His activities this month are widely seen as the 'final folly of a bitter old man.' □