

DEVON LABOUR

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BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
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MINERS' STRIKE:

DEVON POLICE IN ACTION !

by John Lloyd:
Vice Chair
Exeter CLP:
Personal Capacity

The problem which Devon faces about the refusal of Derbyshire to pay for the deployment of 250 of its police in the miners' strike, neatly exposes the constitutional and operational cracks in the running of Britain's police.

The Devon (and Cornish) police were sent on the initiative of the Chief Constable under the mutual aid provision of the 1964 Police Act. When the three Labour members of the Police Authority objected, we were told it was no business of the Authority.

Police authorities consist of one third magistrates (all Tories in Devon and Cornwall) and two thirds elected members. It is unlikely that our authority would have objected to the Chief Constable's actions, but where police authorities have - as in Yorkshire, Merseyside and Derbyshire - they have been ignored by their chief constables.

The illegal, oppressive and expensive behaviour of the police in suppressing the miners' strike is thus outside any democratic control. The costs, though, will come back to the County Councils. We thus have expenditure without representation.

The Labour Movement over two decades must bear part of the responsibility for this. We have left the issue of law and order to the Tories. We even left the 1964 Act and its undemocratic provisions intact...



Alan Kenna

Continued over

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

It is central to socialism that it is ordered and rationally planned: in contrast, capitalism is essentially chaotic. The task of thinking through the system of justice and policing has not been undertaken by the British Labour Movement.

We know that a Home Office Unit has been planning the mass policing of the coal fields for ten years, since the police were humiliated by the miners in 1974. We now know that Chief Constables are beyond democratic control. We have seen police persistently breaking the law with impunity. We have seen magistrates willingly bend the rules for them. Devon policemen who have been in Derbyshire tell me that they are shocked and ashamed

at the behaviour of colleagues from Merseyside and the Met., that most of the violence has resulted from police provocation.

The daily experience which many young working class and black people have of the police in London and Merseyside is now plain for all to see.

Two Labour Party bodies have started to tackle the issue: the Labour Campaign for Criminal Justice and the GLC Police Committee Support Unit are producing papers and policy documents. There is still a big job to be done in this field and we shall be ready to present a coherent socialist approach to the police by the next election.

Miners in Exmouth

For over three months pickets from South Wales have been in action at the docks in Exmouth. Below, Ray Davison, Secretary of Exmouth Labour Party, writing in personal capacity, answers questions put by Devon Labour Briefing about developments in Exmouth.

DLB: What did you hope to achieve by bringing the pickets to Exmouth and how far have these hopes been fulfilled?

RD: The immediate aim was to stop the importation of coal from Gdansk and Rotterdam. Initially we managed to do this in both Teignmouth and Exmouth. The pickets did an excellent job with the dock workers who are non-registered casual labourers but unionised in the TGWU. The miners persuaded them to implement the TGWU directive to block the movement of coal. Unfortunately the dock manager and owner in Exmouth were astute and managed to persuade the NUM executive in South Wales to give a dispensation to their docks. This threw both the pickets, TGWU District Office and workers into confusion, and they have never recovered from this position. A new agreement was reached after a minor show of force, but only a blockade of the docks would have given the miners the upper hand again. The pickets certainly wanted such a blockade, but could not get backing from the Pontypridd Executive. So coal is coming in all along the Devon coast - even at docks where we placed picket lines - Teignmouth, Torbay, Plymouth, Bideford, etc,

DLB: Are you disappointed by these setbacks?

RD: We wanted to stop the coal and feel we could have done so if the pickets on the ground had been better supported by their Executive who did not know the situation so well. But we don't regret in any way that we called the pickets in. Their presence in Exmouth and elsewhere has been a great benefit to the Labour Party.

DLB: In what way?

RD: First, we have been able to focus the energies and drive of the local Party on a major industrial dispute and give members a sense of the importance of the miners' strike which I do not think they would have had if the miners had not come. Second, members have been able to witness at first hand the weaknesses of trade union organisation and political thinking in this area and to contrast this the level of trade union awareness enjoyed by NUM members. Our local trades council has shifted its position from one of weak adherence to the Murray line on the NGA to a much stronger commitment to resisting Tory anti-trade union legislation.

Under the gaze of the Miners, some conservative members of the Trades Council have had to concede ground to have any credibility at all. We have also been able to see how sectarian interests in the TUC weaken the labour movement and set workers against workers. Education to promote political awareness among workers and Trade Unionists is a clear priority to emerge from our experience.

DLB: How do the striking miners see the Labour Party?

RD: Of the 100 or so who have stayed with us in Exmouth, only two were Labour Party members, although all were Labour voters. The vast majority were dissatisfied with the Labour Party establishment in their constituency (Merthyr Tydfil, M.P. Ted Rolands), accusing it of complacency and lack of political will. They were surprised and delighted by Devon Labour Party members who in all but a very few cases gave them unqualified support and threw themselves totally into the struggle. It does not seem to have occurred to them that they are free to join their CLPs to fight the complacency. Many said that they had been heartened by the Labour activists during the campaign and will join us. The miners' position has evolved considerably during the strike as we might expect. Certainly they are presenting the economic case against pit closures more and more forcefully as the strike progresses and refute totally the whole notion of 'profitability' and the closure of 'uneconomic' pits. Industrial action is the best form of political education.

DLB: Do you think they look to Neil Kinnock for leadership?

RD: Yes. I was surprised that so few of them appeared to support Kinnock as leader. I did not get the impression that this was exclusively because of his position on the ballot and his wavering commitment. They see Benn, Heffer and Skinner as their leaders.

DLB: Do you think the miners have lost you support in Exmouth?

RD: No, our support, such as it is, has not been affected; but I hope we have shown the people of Exmouth that the Labour Party exists in a form to be reckoned with. We have had to confront quite a bit of abuse, but I think that facing this abuse is very important and will encourage other Labour sympathisers to show their colours. I hope the miners strike and their present situation will strengthen our position. I'm sure it will.

SIGNS OF CRISIS

REFLECTIONS OF A UNION ACTIVIST FROM
THE TORY BACK WOODS

Budleigh Salterton has often been considered the outpost of Empire, the home of retired colonials and service officers, where the workers knew their place and supplied suitably deferential service to the gentry. The atmosphere in Exmouth is somewhat similar. Trade unionists are still somewhat suspect, as I have experienced while working as a dustman for the local authority.

The pressures on local government to save money are now at full blast and, as always, it is the manual staff who must provide the increased efficiency. Bonus values have been changed, two dustcarts have been taken off, a number of men made redundant, the pace quickened and, of course, there is always the possibility of privatisation if the employees protest too much. The last thing management want is a 'militant', ie, an efficient shop steward.

Thatcherism is based on the proposition that the only productive workers are those that produce surplus within the capitalist system. The ideological battle is taking place between politicians and academics but the harshness of the present regime is being felt on the shop floor and by the millions relying on meagre state benefits. The unions must be made ineffective and this means an atmosphere must be created so that union activists either lose their jobs or find it difficult to get them again if they do lose them.

By increasing unemployment, monetarism dampens workers' willingness and ability to resist heavier workloads making their collective organisations ineffective. At the same time there are drastic limitations on the right to picket, and severe restriction on the right to call sympathetic strikes, renewed attacks on the closed shop and blatant interference with the rights of unions to run their own affairs in accordance with their own rules.

The miners have felt the full force of the capitalist state apparatus in the behaviour of the police. But it has not really touched the leafy lanes of places like Budleigh Salterton or those whose income is well above average and quite assured. There are now two nations - the rich and the poor. The trouble will be confined to the inner cities, to the now declining industrial and mining areas and only reaches East Devon slowly. We did however get quite a surprise recently when Exmouth entertained what seemed like alien invaders to some - the groups of miners who were picketing Exmouth Docks.

Perhaps it is when the policies become so extreme and the crisis becomes so apparent that a change may come. The scale of unemployment and bankruptcies required may even be too much for some Tory supporters to stomach, but opposition to Tory policies can only effectively come from the workers themselves. This is why the present miners' strike is so vital to preserve both the validity and future of the trade union movement and also the Labour Party. We cannot rely on the disquiet that some Tories are now expressing. The 'wets' do not impress Mrs Thatcher. The miners' strike gives us some

grounds for hope and there is no doubt that the Labour Movement has become very actively involved in recent months. They have seen and felt the apparatus of the capitalist state in the form of the police, judiciary and the press and they may also have begun to rediscover a solidarity lost from the days of comparative full-employment.

Marx was undoubtedly right in pointing out the contradictions of capitalist society between the individual interests of capitalists and the collective interests of the working population. If the working class and their organisations merely accept a framework which already exists they do not challenge the structure of capitalism. The miners' dispute is not about money it is about preserving communities and the work which gives not just income but also identity. Arthur Scargill challenges the coal board on economic grounds but also the whole philosophy of monetarism, of capitalism, of the divisions between those in work and those who have no hope of finding work, of the divisions between North and South.

There is hope in the present situation. There is nothing which so concentrates the mind as actively being involved in industrial action. There are alternatives. Socialism does not spontaneously explode within the working class and it is often when they are in a crisis situation that workers realise how they have been conned over the years. It was that common sharing of experience of all classes in the war which created the consciousness which completely shook the Tories under Churchill. The more the working class get involved in the present dispute the more they will realise how desperate this government is to preserve the capitalist structure. Of course in their desperation they will certainly use the police, the media and possibly even the army in the last resort. People are now beginning to realise that there are alternatives and not the compromises usually offered whenever a 'socialist' government has taken power in the past.

Jim Salter (Honiton CLP)
Chair Exmouth Trades Council
(personal capacity)

BURY THE Tories NOT THE MINERS!





Women Work Together

On 16th and 17th June 'Housewives and Dialogue' held a GLC funded conference which coincided with the eighth anniversary of the Soweto uprising. The conference addressed itself to women's work all over the world: women do two thirds of the world's work, receive only five percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's assets. While women in the more affluent often work harder than men for less money, the vast bulk of the unpaid, uncounted female labour in the world is done by women in Third World countries. Socialists, who claim to be anti-imperialist must take account of the disproportionate exploitation of black people, and black women in particular. It is appropriate therefore to structure a conference on women's work internationally, around the demands of black immigrant women.

Much of the discussion centred around 'invisible' work which women do (housework, emotional care and support for husbands, parents, etc,) and the economic dependence of women on men. While the oppression of women may not be entirely explicable on the an economic basis economic dependence on men is something that the vast majority of women have in common, and it is a significant factor in determining women's lives. It is something that unifies women, and therefore campaigning behind a slogan such as 'wages for housework' is a good basis for a broad, grass roots women's movement.

On the subject of how women from different backgrounds, different sexual orientations, different colour, etc, can cooperate, and how women can cooperate with men, the conference favoured autonomous organisation. Autonomy is NOT the same as separatism, and implies that different groups can organise and discuss issues independently, with the final aim of coming together with a better understanding of their own individual positions. Speakers included Pragna Patel from Southall Black Sisters, a woman from SWAPO, a Greenham Woman, and Wilmet Brown. In Britain, the Peace Movement is oriented towards preventing war, but imperialism is placing much of the world in a state of war now. While we are working towards the same ends, we adopt vastly different means depending on our situation. Cooperation thus requires a great deal of respect for the decisions made by others, which was illustrated by women on the panel. One woman from Greenham, for instance, came from a tradition of non-violent direct action against the nuclear industry, whereas the SWAPO women is fighting the same economic interests, but is involved in armed struggle. Yet they had such obvious respect for each other's campaigning work that the unity of purpose was highlighted rather than the differences between them. The unity of purpose also applies to the Labour Movement and its relation to the Women's Movement and the struggle of black and Third World People.

Another central point is accessibility; organisations, campaigns, meetings and literature must be equally accessible to all, which is illustrated by the writing produced by some of the women who help organise the conference, such as Sex, Race and Class by Selma James, Black Women: Bringing it all Back Home by M. Prescod-Richards and Norma Steele, The Rapist who Pays the Rent by R. Hall, S. James and J. Kertesz, Black Women and the Peace Movement by W. Brown. These are published by Falling Wall Press, in Bristol, and I recommend them to you.

FROM TONY BENN

Dear Mark:

4th June 1984

I was concerned to hear that the Executive of the Exeter Labour Party are recommending to the GMC, on June 15th, that you and your two colleagues be expelled from the party for editing Exeter Labour Briefing.

As you know various editions of Labour Briefing are published in different parts of the country, and are widely welcomed because they help to broaden the discussion of problems facing the Party.

Nowhere has it been argued that the name Labour belongs in any legal sense to the party as such - hence Labour Herald. There are many groups inside the party which use the word Labour in their title, even when some of them support policies that are at variance with Conference policies...

If by chance the GMC were to expel you, and your colleagues, from the Party on these grounds; it would be open to you all to appeal to the NEC.

Were you to appeal I am almost sure that the NEC, on the basis of recent decisions, would disallow your expulsion and reinstate you all. But of course the best thing that could happen would be for the GMC not to proceed with the motion to expel, when it meets on June 15th.

With the Party now working together so well, we really do not want to damage our prospects of victory in the next election by starting a series of expulsions.

You can, of course, quote this letter and I am sending a copy of it to John Shepherd, as a courtesy to him and the officers of the Exeter Party, many of whom I have had the privilege of knowing, and working with, over the years. I am also sending a copy to the National Agent and the Regional Organiser, in the hope that they may be able to help avert this problem before it arises.

Yours fraternally,
Tony Benn

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