

DEVON LABOUR

40p

BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 3 NOVEMBER 1984

WHOM DO THEY REPRESENT ?

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The Behaviour of Neil Kinnock and other 'dream ticket' and 'new realist' Labour politicians towards the miners' struggle has given the bulk of the Party a cause to question the right wing call for unity. Today we ask: unity with whom to do what ?

Peter Bowing



In 1983 ninety-two percent of CLPs panicked and voted for Kinnock, when, if you remember, Benn was ineligible to stand for the Party Leadership. Today, a large majority of the CLPs reject Kinnockism by backing the miners, opposing the so-called 'one man one vote' proposals on the reselection of MPs and by voting for Benn in the NEC elections. In the space of one year we have been educated by the miners' struggle and Liverpool City Council to reject the opportunism of Neil Kinnock. Large sections of the Party are prepared to fight the class struggle; Kinnock, as it is plain to see, is not.

In the 1983 leadership contest Kinnock took the lion's share of the constituency vote; Eric Heffer, the undynamic but genuine left winger, took seven percent. The two far right wing candidate, Roy Hattersley and Peter Shore, took two percent and zero percent respectively. In other words they have no support in the Labour Party.

Yet we face a paradox. Eight of the fifteen members of the shadow cabinet elected this year from the PLP voted for either Hattersley or Shore, which means that a future Labour government would be totally out of line with about 98% of the Labour Party. The man whom the Party most trusts and whom it elects each year onto the constituency section of the NEC, Tony Benn, is not even in the shadow cabinet.

The Party voted heavily for Kinnock in 1983 because it thought he was a socialist or because he was the only candidate who could lead the Party. Today, thanks to events, we know better. Yet it is claimed by some that because Kinnock won 92% of the constituency vote that we owe him loyalty; a false, but more importantly an irrelevant argument.

When we talk of the Kinnock leadership, we are really talking of the shadow cabinet, a majority of whose members support the directly anti-socialist ideas of Hattersley and Shore. According to the 1983 election the shadow cabinet enjoys the backing of under two percent of the Labour Party. To support the leadership of Kinnock's 'shadow governmental team' is both undemocratic and treacherous to the working class.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Editorial

Devon Labour Briefing has been set up by members of the Labour Party in Devon to defend and advance socialist policies within the Party. There are many forces, both inside and outside the Party, which are pressurising us to drop our socialist policies. These notions must be firmly resisted - their acceptance would mark a gross betrayal of our principles and responsibilities. What we need to do now is to BUILD on socialist programme. We require a clear, credible and coherent set of policies and strategies which are capable of tackling the problems of our exploiting and crisis-ridden capitalist society. We must become IN REALITY the party which organises

What we need to do now is to BUILD on our socialist programme. We require a clear, credible and coherent set of policies and strategies which are capable of tackling the problems of our exploiting and crisis-ridden capitalist society. We must become IN REALITY the party which organises opposition to the Tory attacks on the weak and the sick, the young and the old, the party which is dedicated to eliminating racism and sexism, and to advancing the cause of working people. (These goals can only really be met by terminating capitalism in Britain)

We hope that this Briefing will be a useful information service to members of the Party. But more importantly we seek to stimulate active socialist debate and action in Devon.

BRIGHTON BOMBING

I find the bombing at the Conservative Party conference in Brighton abhorrent. The indiscriminate deaths of four people who happened to be staying at the same hotel as the Conservative Party prime minister. The adding of the staff at the Grand Hotel to our ever lengthening dole queues. These are just two reasons why all socialist must oppose such action. But there are more fundamental reasons.

The fact is that the only people successfully 'terrorised' by the Brighton bombing were the staff of the Grand Hotel and the people of Brighton. The bombing has not changed Mrs. Thatcher or the ruling class in this country one iota, nor could it have done.

It may, if, for example, Mrs Thatcher had been killed or seriously injured have served to change the balance of power within the Conservative Party, but to what end? so that the 'moderates' in the Conservative Party could gain power, half heartedly manage a slight reflation of the economy, reduce unemployment by, say, two hundred thousand and win an even greater landslide victory at the next election on a wave of sympathy votes? Thus rewarding Britain with another five years of incompetent management and inept economic theory. Would this really have been to the benefit of the working class in Britain?

At the present time in Britain we are facing a conservative Party which is firmly in the grip of a dogmatic and entrenched right wing faction. This control is embodied in Mrs. Thatcher and the mindless economic policies she has pursued in the name of free enterprise. If that control were destroyed now and Mrs Thatcher were to lose power, without being thoroughly disgraced, and Conservative policies were changed wholesale, without them being thoroughly discredited, then this would only result of a reemergence of these policies in twenty or thirty years time with the right wing egged on by a new, stronger Thatcher.

In a society which has the power, literally, to destroy itself overnight, we can no longer afford Thatcherite policies. It is therefore vitally important that now, while we have the chance, the Labour Party finally destroys the policies which are presently being pursued. So far, much to our shame, we have not even managed a serious assault on Thatcherite dogma.

The post war rebuilding of society was based on liberal philosophies expoused by Liberals such as Keynes and Beveridge;; this time round we must ensure that socialist policies are used to rebuild Britain. The last time present policies were pursued, in the thirties, it took a world war finally to destroy them. This time we must ensure that it does not require a world war to replace what has gone before.

Terrorism, by its very nature, relies on fear to persuade people to a particular point of view. Capitalism, particularly Thatchers current brand, also relies on fear to control the population, wheter it be fear of unemployment or of the 'Russian threat'. As socialists it is our job to create a society which governs itself through reason and persuasion. We must replace the fear under which we presently suffer with reason. We cannot win if merely replace fear with another type of fear.

Gerald Taylor
Chair Teignbridge CLP

BLACK SECTIONS HERE TO STAY

Issues arising from the self-organisation of oppressed minorities do not normally get on to the Labour Party conference agenda after only a year or so of campaigning and discussion; yet at last month's conference we heard a major debate on the issue of black sections in the party. The level of attendance of black people at conference this year was the highest ever, stimulated by the black sections debate. Hearing some of the speeches made against the black sections motion, many of them may have felt that the Labour Party is no place for blacks to attempt to organise.

Nonetheless, although the vote was lost, there was evidence of substantial support among the constituencies, and half a million votes, including those of the NUM, were cast in favour. The EPTU wheeled out its first ever black speaker at conference, to speak against the motion. This very tactic served only to confirm a major plank of the argument for black sections: that black people themselves are best qualified to speak on black oppression, and that therefore some form of autonomous organisation, in which black party members can meet, discuss issues and organise campaigns, is essential.

26 constituency black sections already exist and it is certain that more will soon be springing up. Despite the leadership's refusal to tackle, or to give approval to blacks tackling, the sensitive and electorally unpopular issue of racism, grass roots pressure will ensure that black sections form themselves. Kinnock and the right on the NEC fear the power of black members of the Labour Party to campaign for greater black representation in Parliament, on Councils etc. They threaten the traditional white male domination of the party.

Most of the opposition from the platform centred around the word "divisive". Of course, black sections are divisive in the literal sense: they give blacks the opportunity to divide themselves temporarily from from the rest of their local party and discuss their special concerns. But in a far more important sense they are not divisive: they can provide the first step for us to move

Continued...

Black Sections...

forward to a party where blacks find a natural political home, and no longer feel, as many do today, that Labour is a 'white' party, uninterested in the most oppressed section of our society. Black sections are founded with a view to a future in which white comrades will be more widely aware of the special problems faced by the black working class in Britain, leaving black sections no longer necessary.

For now, as Diane Abbott said at conference: "We're accused of creating apartheid in the party. But the real apartheid that exists is an all-white Parliament, an all-white NEC, all-white councils, and a nearly all-white conference"

Mark Wilkinson
Exeter CLP

Greenham

You may have noticed that since Easter there has been hardly any news in the press about the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. This does not of course mean that there is no women's peace camp any more and nor does it mean that nothing is happening there. It just means that there is a press blackout, nevertheless, it makes it difficult for the public to maintain their support for the camp since many of us don't know what is going on there.

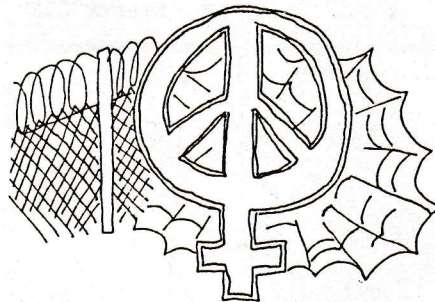
I have visited the camp twice recently, once at the end of September when there was a call for mass support at the camp (the 'women's strike') and once since then. During the ten days in September the camp was visited by thousands of women, who stayed for varying lengths of time. It was impossible to provide a true estimate of numbers, but in general the support was good. It is a measure of the success of the Greenham women that where before all seven gates of the base were busy with traffic, there are now only two gates fully operational as entrances and exits to the base. During the ten days women mounted several successful blockades of these two gates, providing continual hindrance to traffic entering and leaving the base. In addition to this the fence was pulled down in several places and many teams of women cut holes in the fence and went into the base. On the night that I went in for the first time there must have been at least a hundred women in the base at some time during the night. Women's entry into the base is now never reported in the press, presumably because the military would not like the public to realise how poor the security is.

Another strange event was that the press somehow got hold of the idea that there was to be a mass invasion of the silos on one particular day. This brought the U.S. military out in strength to stand in rows guarding the silos. The women, of course, left them to it! Thus, as a result of the women's presence and actions the running of the base was far from routine during the ten days.

My most recent visit to the camp was a couple of weeks ago, when I stayed at blue gate. This gate is to the north side of the base, where cruise convoys come out. Indeed one had come out the morning before I arrived. Because this gate is so sensitively placed it is suffering constant evictions by police and bailiffs with their rubbish munchers. This makes it difficult to maintain any routine to the camp, as every morning everything has to be packed up and hidden from the police and bailiffs. Nevertheless, morale is high and the women have no intention of being put off. The most heartening thing of all was that there were constant visits from members of the public bringing food, wood, money and goodwill. In spite of the press blackout the public still know that the camp is there and give their support. This is of course essential

as without public support things would be much more difficult to maintain. So if you are passing Newbury don't forget to drop by the camp and give the women something useful.

Anne Cahill
Exeter CLP



MAERDY:

A PERSONAL VIEW

Earlier this month I accompanied £500 worth of food to Maerdy in the Rhondda Valley in South Wales. I had never been to South Wales before and this visit brought the miners' strike and the class struggle, both of which seemed very much removed from Exeter, into sharp focus.

The journey to Maerdy took us along barren valleys, scarred by both man and nature. Tiny houses cling to the hillsides, stacked precariously in crooked rows; there are few landmarks or big buildings until you reach the sole reason for the settlement, the pit. There were once sixty-three working pits in the Rhondda; there is now only one, and the familiar profile of the disused pit is cruelly real.

But if slag heaps have disfigured the landscape, Tory cuts will carve even greater wounds in the community, and the people know it. In an alien environment I was touched by the warmth of the striking miners. The miners we met appreciated our solidarity with their struggle, and the phrase 'brother help brother' was a common one. We were heartily thanked for our contribution and later given a large meal by one of striking miners.

Discussions with the miners revealed a highly developed class consciousness. They rightly see themselves at the centre of the trade union movement, which Thatcher, via the NCB, is seeking to divide and destroy. Their solid militancy was mixed with mourning for the divisions between miners in other areas.

But what impressed me even more than the class solidarity of the miners was the way that the strike had helped them to extend their awareness to a number of more radical issues. The oppression of coloured immigrants was often cited as a problem the miners had been exposed to as the strike brought them into contact with other unions on a more personal basis. Their relationship to the nuclear industry has also raised a whole host of other issues. I was amazed to hear a fifty year old miner's wife showing enthusiasm for "stop the city", while the active role taken by women's strike support committees has earned great respect.

Hence, I left Maerdy with renewed vigour for the socialist struggle, having seen a working class community fighting for survival. The miner's strike is raising the class awareness of its participants every day, as they question the

system which would deprive them of a way of life.

Practical help for the miners (ie, by collecting food and money) results in valuable communication, and this food for thought is just as important as food itself if the left is to gain the support of the class which holds its destiny...

Paul Giblin
Exeter CLP



THEORETICAL BRIEFING. The first part of a two part article by Peter Bowing on 'What is Marxism?'

THE IMPACT OF THE TEACHINGS OF KARL MARX HAS BEEN IMMENSE. EVERY CONTINENT HAS BEEN STIRRED BY POLITICAL MOVEMENTS CLAIMING ALLEIGENCE TO HIS IDEAS. EVERY ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY HIS TEACHINGS. WHAT DID KARL MARX AND THE IDEAS HE BROUGHT INTO THE WORLD REVEAL TO MANKIND ?

THE PHILOSOPHY

In fact the basic (and revolutionary) philosophy is not hard to grasp. Human society is the 'on-going' product of men and women's operation on the natural world, eg, the provision of food, making machines. The manner in which this is done, politically and culturally as well as economically, defines and characterises society at a particular stage in its development. Put simply, how men and women produce in the widest sense, so they are. Men and women made society and the relations and structures exist in it, not God, not 'inevitable forces'. The man-made society is a collective product which through man-made institutions determines how and why particular men and women live.

It is true that ants socially make nests and bees socially make hives. Yet what distinguishes man from ants and bees is his capacity to reflect on his production and to develop it. Capitalist society with its industries, technology and division of labour is 'advancement' on the production of the primitive tribe.

Philosophically, Marxism is also a revolutionary liberating force; if men and women can make a society which is unjust, cruel and devalues human ability, then humanity could equally make a different and better society. The great fetter, though, is that while mankind makes history, the direction and comprehension of history lies beyond man's grasp. (In Marxist political theory the inability of man to control his environment is rectified by the organised political party, and the lack of comprehension is solved by the development of Marxist theory).

OUTLINE OF CAPITALIST SOCIETY

Marx's main concern was the type of society we live in today, capitalism, which grew progressively out of feudal society. In capitalist society

the vast majority of the means of production (factories etc) are privately owned by a small group of people, the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie. Production takes place so that the capitalist class may realise profits. But why, and in what ways is this so important ?

Material production (eg, food, houses, computers) is the foundation of any society. What is produced, why, where, how and by whom are clearly the most important questions - and the bland answer to all but the last of these questions is to realise profit.

People become who they are by virtue of their relation to the means of production. To receive an income all but the capitalists must sell their physical or mental capacities to the process of material production or its administration. This determines where people live, with whom they meet and share common identity, and their income and status. Their lives change according to the needs of profit. Although diverse, we classify these people as working class.

In capitalist society there is always a struggle between the bourgeoisie and the working class. It is the working class which makes all the goods and services; yet a disproportionate share goes via profit, to the capitalist and their managers who often do nothing. Even the machines and factories which the capitalists own are the products of previous working class labour. At times workers are unemployed and machines lie idle because no profit can be realised for the capitalist class.

Although the liberating potential of industry and technology is massive, the capitalist system works only towards the realisation of profit through the exploitation of the working class.

BRIEFING

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DLB, 79 Pinhoe Rd., Exeter.

UNREST OVER ST. LEONARDS

Condemnation of the decision to withdraw the Labour candidate from the September St. Leonards by-election is growing inside the Party. Four branches Pennsylvania/St. Davids, Polsloe/Stoke Hill, Rougemont/St. Leonards and the Young Socialists have all passed resolutions aimed at preventing a reoccurrence of such practices. The matter will be debated at the December GMC.

MINERS' VIDEOS

Tuesday, 27th November, 7.45pm, 26 Clifton Hill. The Polsloe/Stoke Hill branch of Exeter CLP will show videos of state violence directed against miners. All are welcome.

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Wednesday, 21st November, 8pm, 26 Clifton Hill. Exeter CLP Young Socialist will hold their monthly meeting. Mark Wilkinson will talk on "The Witchhunt Against Exeter Labour Briefing". All persons under twenty-five are welcome. Subsequent meetings will be held on the third wednesday of each month.