

DEVON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No 7 APRIL 1985

VIOLENT EVICTION OF JOBLESS

PETER BOWING (EXETER CLP)

11.30am, 18th March, 1985. A building had just been raided by ripping down a wall. Piles of chairs, mattresses and household goods lay strewn in the street. Grim faced police, their vans waiting round the corner, stood in groups as they watched the former occupiers rummage through the debris for their possessions. Two people passed me carrying an easy-chair. What was not being taken was being crushed in a refuse lorry.

Such was the scene at 62 Howell Road, Exeter at the end of a protracted battle. On one side had been the Lib/Lab council, Exeter Voluntary Services Committee, Police, bailiffs and the courts: on the other a group of young unemployed people. The issue was the right of the unemployed to run an unemployed centre by and for themselves.

It had been decided by the authorities (a complex network of jurisdictions involving the MSC, the City Council, Exeter Voluntary Services and others) to move the unemployed people's centre (called UB40 Centre) to new premises. This left the old premises, a dilapidated warehouse in Howell Road, vacant, which was subsequently occupied. It is recognised by everybody that the building is in a poor state of repair and, therefore, has little value.

Yet, the occupiers transformed the building through decoration and repairs. It became a mecca for Exeter's young unemployed; hundreds of people came to hear bands, and later it also became an attractive centre for homeless people.

One thing, however, united all the divisions within the authorities, ie, they could not stand the defiance of the unemployed. One Labour councillor, speaking on behalf of the Labour City Council Group, said 'They (the unemployed occupiers) want a centre run by and for the unemployed. We cannot accept that'

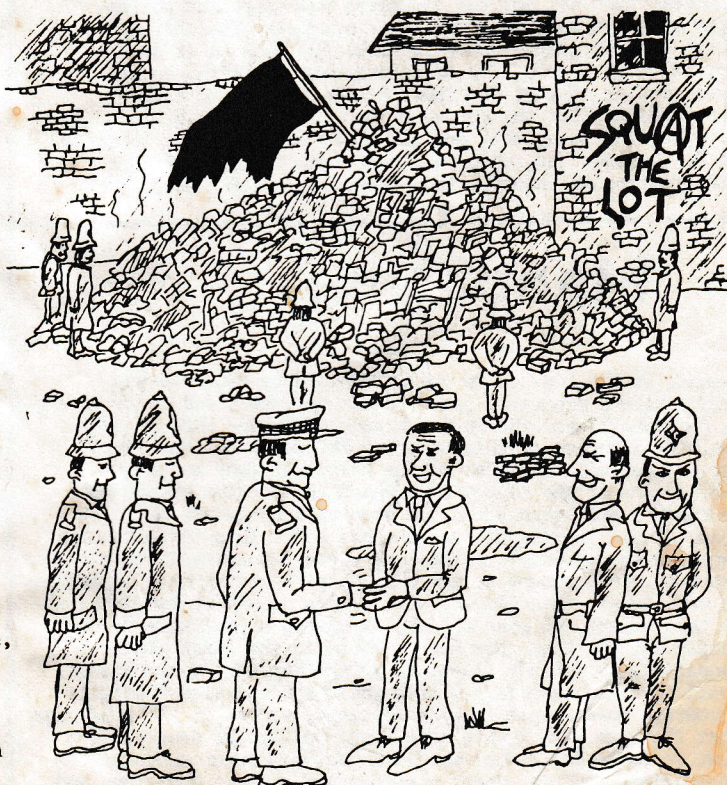
In their article 'Under Siege', 'Flying Post' No. 149, A. Cahill and B. Layng wrote 'So the council wanted the users out, and in the words of one of the MSC staff of the UB40 Centre, 'they didn't want a confrontation'. They wanted somebody else to do the dirty work of eviction. How they went about passing the buck is a complicated story.

The council owns the building at 62 Howell Road, but it had been leased to ExVos in October 1983, who then made various arrangements with the council, the Trades Council and the MSC in order to have it used for the UB40 Centre project. Although the UB40 project had moved by January 1985, the lease on the building

did not run out until the end of March. BINGO they could evade the responsibility and leave it up to ExVos and the UB40 Centre project to rid the city of this terrible nuisance. They just had to find a way of blackmailing them into taking court action against the users of Howell Road.

Although the new UB40 Centre was being decorated and used, the lease had not yet been signed on the building. So the council have refused to sign the lease on the new centre, thus preventing them from putting out publicity, and making the position of the

CONTINUED OVERLEAF



'THE COUNCIL WISHES TO CONGRATULATE YOU AND YOUR MEN ON A SMOOTH OPERATION.'

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Editorial

Devon Labour Briefing is produced by members of the Labour Party to promote the discussion of socialist ideas and issues. The debate covers national and local affairs, and aims to reveal the links between the two.

In a major article this month, Paul Giblin examines Labour policy on NATO, arguing strongly for withdrawal from a fundamentally imperialist and capitalist organisation dominated by the USA. In another major article Peter Bowing surveys the scene as the dust settles around the Exeter UB40 centre, after the forcible eviction of the occupiers campaigning for the right of the unemployed to run a centre for the unemployed without outside interference.

Devon Labour Briefing welcomes contributions from all Labour Party members on the above and other issues, whether in the form of an article or a letter. The fullest exchange of ideas and information is vital if the Labour Party is to arrive at a coherent socialist ideology, and DLB aims to play a full part in this process as it takes place in Devon.

Finally, as a result of increased sales and interest in DLB, we are pleased to be able to reduce the price from 40p to 30p. We hope that this better value Briefing will continue to provoke and publish comment on vital matters facing the Labour movement today.

eviction continued...

project in the new building precarious to say the least. The only way the UB40 Centre project could change the situation (apart from occupying the building too) was to get rid of the people from 62 Howell Road. For this reason, the Management Committee of the UB40 project advised ExVos to evict Howell Road.'

In the final days of the occupation the anarchist black flag was raised above 62 Howell Road. Had there been any support or sympathy for the Labour Party or socialism, the council had destroyed it. For the occupiers the anarchist philosophy weakened and distorted their struggle. The 'Flying Post' article quoted above lacks weight because it speaks for only two people. The occupiers were unwilling to canvass greater support for their occupation, or to take the arguments for the centre beyond the 'culture group'. At times the management and direction of the centre appeared to be lacking. Yet, when people are in struggle for just and progressive demands, they deserve socialist support.

Mandation

Whether ward delegates to the GMC should be mandated has always been a debatable issue, which has now risen to importance in the Pennsylvania/St Davids branch of Exeter CLP. An overwhelming majority of this branch's GMC delegates have been out of step with the rest of the branch at many meetings. Hence, many of the resolutions which this active branch puts to the GMC are often voted and even spoken against by this branch's own representatives on this body. This odd situation can also easily escalate into one where Pennsylvania resolutions are not even proposed at the GMC, despite having huge majorities at ward level. This demonstrates a clear need for mandating in this branch, to make the GMC delegates accountable to the people who put them onto the committee in the first place. Mandating, as already practised in the Whipton/Pinhoe branch, would increase democracy within the Party and also hopefully encourage more people to ward meetings, secure in the knowledge that they can make inputs into Party policy. Of course, it must be up to individual wards to decide whether mandating is appropriate, but the Party must recognise their decisions and encourage mandation where a ward membership desires it.

Paul Giblin, Exeter CLP.

The Strike:

PETER BOWING ANALYSES WHAT THE EXETER PARTY DID AND DID NOT DO FOR THE MINERS' STRIKE

The May meeting of the Exeter GMC unanimously supported a resolution from the Pennsylvania/St. Davids branch backing the miners' strike. The meeting recognised 'that the Thatcher government, in the interest of capital, is attempting to cripple irrevocably the organisations of the working class and their activities'. Delegates to the GMC went on to uphold the view 'that the outcome of the miners' strike is the most vital matter facing the Labour Movement. Victory could signal the collapse of authoritarian Thatcherism. Defeat would demoralise the working class, its organisations and others struggling against the Thatcher government'

The meeting also took action. It demanded that 'the CLP Secretary write to the Labour leadership demanding that it backs the demands and activities of the striking miners' (which did nothing, of course, to prevent the Kinnock and PLP 'sell out'). We also decided to 'adopt the miners of a strike bound pit'. We were subsequently allocated the Maerdy pit in the Rhonnda Valley. Further, we were to 'obtain assistance, financial and otherwise, for that pit'

Since the passing of the resolution the Party has raised approximately £3000 worth of food for Maerdy, and another £4000 from the 50p/week levy on Party members. LPYS members have taken part in street collections and picket duties at Exmouth and Teignmouth, and benefit concerts have been held for the miners at the Clifton Hill Labour Club.

This article does not deny that Exeter CLP supported the miners' struggle, but it does suggest that the importance accredited to the struggle by the May resolution was never realised. Too often the strike was seen as a side issue, rather than the event of the decade which it was. The May resolution stated 'the outcome of the miners' strike is the most vital matter facing the Labour Movement'; in other words, the open extra-parliamentary class struggle led by the miners, the most advanced section of the working class, is of more importance in changing the balance of class power in Britain than, say, a local election result.

So what, in concrete terms, did Exeter CLP fail to do ?

In the May 1984 City Council election campaign, the Party ignored the miners' struggle. It could have taken the issue of the strike, jobs, communities, industrial growth, etc, (which are of prime concern to the working people of Exeter) to the people. The Party did nothing to combat the view that the strike concerned other people elsewhere.

For the Devon County Council elections in May 1985, the Party will organise a city-wide canvass. For the miners' strike the Party canvassed nobody, issued no leaflets, held no rallies, backed no demonstrations. Though they voted for it, the right wing leadership of Exeter Labour Party had no intention of carrying out the spirit or letter of the May resolution.

A similar picture emerges in the non-publicity field. No picketing at coal depots or at Exmouth or Teignmouth, where coal was flooding through, was organised. And perhaps most disturbing of all, in January the Party failed to urge the Labour group on the City Council to secure more licences for miners' street collections, lest it upset the Liberals with whom Labour is in coalition

The attitude of the leadership of Exeter Labour Party was amply demonstrated by its silence in the face of Kinnock's back-stabbing of the miners. Had the Party really been fighting alongside the miners, it would have wanted a gulf between itself and Kinnock and co.

It should not be obscured that many comrades amongst the rank and file gave what they could to the miners' struggle. Yet, the Party leadership, despite the May resolution, left us wanting; they upheld 'exclusive electoralism' and the separation between 'political' and 'industrial' struggles. They accept 'bureaucratic suffocation' (two months to get a resolution through) and 'passive radicalism' (support the miners and do very little). Yet, just as the miners' struggle has raised class consciousness in society, so it has sharpened political and theoretical questions inside the Labour Party. The strike has not unified the Party, it has created divisions of theory, policy and practice which must now be fought out.

Labour out of NATO

Paul Giblin,
Exeter CLP.

Although it is really good to see the Labour Party has finally adopted a policy of unilateral disarmament, the Party still advocates Britain's membership of NATO. This article aims to show how this policy is totally incompatible with the struggles for peace and socialism.

Links between the socialist and peace movements have never been stronger. To unilaterally disarm would make Britain out of step with her Western 'allies' and break one of our strongest links with the USA, the nuclear one. Hence the machinery of the bourgeoisie state has been mobilised against the peace movement, to preserve our precious US connections which help keep Britain firmly committed to the capitalist West. Nothing symbolises our position in the West more than our membership of NATO.

CND opposes membership of NATO mainly because it is a nuclear alliance, and has been quick to point out that it is an offensive one at that. Cruise, MX and Trident are all accurate weapons to be aimed at military targets and therefore have been designed for a 'first strike' while the Warsaw Pact's missiles and planes are still in place. If deterrence was NATO's only purpose then weapons development would have stopped when the Warsaw Pact could have been destroyed once over. CND also clearly points out the hypocrisy of abandoning nuclear weapons while sheltering under the umbrella of a nuclear alliance.

For socialists, however, the truth about NATO means that there are many strong and clear reasons why the Labour Party must be committed to a British withdrawal. A short history of NATO will make them apparent.

The creation of NATO is clearly linked with the US desire after the Second World War for a militarised West Germany to face the so-called Soviet threat to the free West. Only by forming an alliance with West Germany could the people of Europe have been convinced to allow rearmament in this area, contrary to the Potsdam Agreement at the end of the War. NATO was therefore set up in 1949 amidst claims that it was merely a defensive agreement, military alliances being forbidden by the Charter of the United Nations. The Soviet Union cited the Charter in their opposition to the alliance and, in a clever peace initiative, applied to join this purely defensive and open body. They were, of course, rejected, proving that NATO was, from its inception a military pact directed against them. It was, however, to be another 6 years before the formation of the Warsaw Pact, during which time the Soviet Union argued against West German rearmament, seeking to keep the agreed demilitarised central Europe.

The Soviet Union's efforts for peace treaties with Austria and West Germany clearly demonstrate the sincerity of this policy. Despite having the strength to set up a communist East Austria the Soviet Union agreed to a united and independent nation, politically allied to the West but militarily neutral. An equivalent treaty was offered to West Germany, but it was refused by the Western powers, dominated by the USA. The rejection of these peace initiatives was justified by a series of lies and distortions about the Soviet Union which would form the basis of NATO policy for the next three decades. At one point, in May 1955 the Soviet Union even accepted all of the West's disarmament proposals only to find that the USA suddenly had second thoughts about most of the basic propositions that they had been pressing for years! It is also important to note that the Soviet initiative was welcomed by the British and French delegates who were overridden by the Americans.

Hence, it was only after the Soviet Union had twice openly called the USA's negotiating bluff that the Warsaw Pact was formed and since the birth of the two alliances peace initiatives have again come mainly from the East. In 1968 the Warsaw Pact instigated negotiations for the mutual dissolution of both alliances, yet in 1975 the NATO countries, under US guidance, only agreed to participate in an all European security conference at Hellsinki on condition that the alliances remained intact! Meanwhile the USA was desperately trying to get round the 1972 SALT arms limitations on ICBM's by developing the powered Cruise missile.

Even more disturbing than Cruise itself is the attitude of those who control it. The aggression and indifference to life shown by NATO reached a new height when NATO's American commanders rejected the Warsaw Pact's proposal to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons, as the Warsaw Pact has done. This position has been maintained for many years now up to the present day.

The basic history of NATO is therefore one of aggression and domination by the USA, whose Generals decide NATO policy and whose arms companies eagerly supply the instruments of destruction which perpetuate this nightmare situation. We only have to look at America's own foreign policy to see why NATO consistently rejects any peace proposals. The leading capitalist country is quick to support other oppressive and exploitative regimes and so keep the Third World locked in poverty for the gain of the West. NATO itself welcomed the membership of Turkey, a country with one of the world's worst human rights records. Meanwhile the CIA's activities in Chile, EL Salvador, Grenada and Nicaragua (to name but a few places) provide a continuing story of the USA's imperialist and anti-socialist world role. This should convince any socialist that Britain should not remain in the USA's European army, NATO.

However, there are still many Labour Party members, especially in the PLP, who cling to the policy of continued NATO membership, having lost the unilateral disarmament debate. Their defence of NATO membership comes in two basic parts.

Firstly, there is the argument that an anti-NATO policy will be seen as unpatriotic, pro-Russian and will lose precious votes. However, the same has been said for unilateral disarmament, which is now a very popular issue among Labour supporters and a growing movement. Change will never occur by ignoring issues because they are unpopular, the arguments must be taken to the people by a party willing to defend socialism in public. The public must be told the truth about NATO and the Labour Party is well equipped to do so. Most people are also able to see the obvious contradictions involved in disarming while staying under NATO's nuclear umbrella. All of the arguments about losing patriotic votes merely support the distorted view of the world on which capitalism thrives.

The second argument for staying in NATO is that by unilaterally disarming we will begin to change NATO from within and eventually create a non-nuclear alliance. This tactic is flawed in various ways. Having looked at the history of NATO the notion of Britain having any real influence on NATO policy is a ridiculous one. If left up to Britain and France, West Germany would never have re-armed in the first place and NATO would not exist! NATO policies have consistently matched US military strategies and have created a European 'theatre' in which the Americans can take on the Soviet Union. We have recently seen the Americans ignoring the cries of Thatcher, a firm US supporter, during the Grenada incident, so what chance would a socialist have of reasoning with them? Anyway, any Euro-American differences, such as those over the Siberian gasline deal, have always been resolved by governments and not within NATO. Meanwhile there is the very real danger that NATO will end up changing Britain's policies when a Labour government tries to go non nuclear, rather than Britain changing NATO. This danger would, of course, be best avoided by adopting a clear anti-NATO stance to ensure the important unilateral disarmament is achieved.

Finally I must come to the clearest and most incontrovertible argument against staying in NATO, for any reason. The imperialist and anti-socialist nature of the USA and NATO have been shown beyond any doubt. If we stay in NATO we will never be able to unmask the true nature of this body for the world to see, we will, instead be legitimising the activities of it's members. The comparison below makes an anti-NATO stance essential for any socialist:

CAMPAINING FOR NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT WHILE STAYING IN NATO IS THE SAME AS CAMPAINING AGAINST APARTHEID WHILE TRADING WITH SOUTH AFRICA.



SOCIALISM



PEACE



NO TO NATO

NATO - ACTION TAKEN

The struggle to spread the truth about NATO is a huge task, which involves questioning the propaganda which has formed the popular opinions of the British public since the War. This month's Briefing article has been accompanied by two mentions to the Exeter GMC which had massive support in the Pennsylvania and Polsloe wards and the LPYS. Meanwhile a resolution maintaining CND's opposition to Britain's NATO membership is being put before Exeter CND Council on April 1. It is hoped that the Labour Party and CND can transform their correct and commendable verbal criticisms of NATO into action to highlight this important issue.

Sticking Plaster Stuff !

JIM SALTER, CHAIR OF EXMOUTH AND EAST DEVON TRADES COUNCIL EVALUATES SOME OF THE TORY RESPONSES TO UNEMPLOYMENT.

Look through any issue of the free magazine distributed to those who are unemployed and registered on the Professional and Executive Register at the Job Centre and you will see a proliferation of schemes, courses and training programmes addressed to those who are thinking of setting up in business - provided of course they have the necessary capital.

Some workers have been very attracted by the idea of setting themselves up in business and many of the miners who took redundancy and the payment that went with it have been doing so. A large number of them have already failed.

How viable is this so-called entrepreneurial hotch-potch of a variety of small businesses in providing the economic recovery which the government constantly claims is around the corner?

Few figures are available and yet money is being poured into a host of temporary MSC schemes for the encouragement of small businesses.

All over Devon - and presumably in other parts of the country as well - there are meetings being initiated by an organisation called the Third Age Project. This is a support group for providing an outlet for the selling of goods or services provided by a diverse collection of individuals. Often these are services which are no longer provided by local authorities because of restrictions on their finances. They are also not covered by current legislation and wage rates.

The trade unions are understandably very sceptical about their ability to provide what the government themselves call 'real' jobs - that is jobs that are capable of sustaining a family in secure and well paid employment.

Most capitalist economies would not work without a patchwork of hidden subsidies and cross subsidies, but the union movement is very wary about many of the schemes supported by the MSC. They have been used to provide cheap labour to some employers and thus undermine nationally negotiated union rates. They can be placed alongside the other legislation produced by the government: The abolition of wage councils, the cutting of staff in the Wages Inspectorate and the restriction on the obligation of employers to provide protection under the Health and Safety at Work Act.

This Third Age Project, like the Youth Training Scheme or the temporary employment subsidy, seems little more than a smoke-screen hiding the greater problem of increasing unemployment. The YTS intervenes often in the cause of lowering the wages of young people. The lower the wages paid, the bigger the employer's subsidy! It is all sticking plaster stuff! Sustained economic recovery will not happen without a huge increase in investment both in capital equipment and in human capital.

A national economic training programme must be related to a wider programme of recovery and also to the development of the consciousness of those workers involved beyond the old idea of a highly equipped automaton response or even that of highly skilled functionaries. The Third Age Project seems to lack an ideological base except that of merely an acceptance of the current economic orthodoxy. Most of the MSC schemes come into the same category.

EXETER CND SPRING FAIR - SATURDAY 20 APRIL

ST GEORGES HALL - 11am - 3pm

Empty your purse for PEACE!



SOUTH WEST REGIONAL CONFERENCE - 30 MARCH

(meeting postponed from 13 March - sorry!)

FRINGE MEETING

organised by the Campaign Group and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. Chaired by Jeremy Corbyn, MP. Speakers include Tony Banks, MP; Pam Tatlow (Women's Action Committee); and Simon Pollentine (Campaign for Labour Party Democracy).

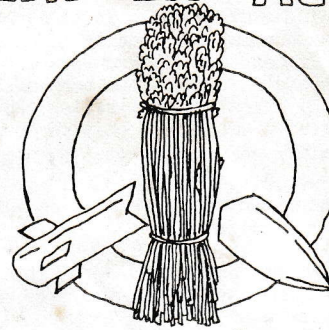
12.45 - 2.00 pm

White Hart Hotel - Board Room

South Street

EXETER

MOLESWORTH EASTER ACTION



APRIL
7 & 8

NO FLACKJACKET REQUIRED!

Coaches will be leaving Exeter on April 7 & 8. Tickets are £8.00 Waged and £6.00 Unwaged. Details from CND Shop.

WOMEN'S COUNCIL - NEXT MEETING APRIL 22

LPYS - NEXT MEETING APRIL 17

At the Labour Club, 26 Clifton Hill, 8pm.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL COMMISSION - WOMEN'S TRAINING ROADSHOW

On the 26th and 27th April this lively event will be coming to Plymouth, providing an insight into training and opportunities often closed to many women by a sexist society. For more details, write to Cllr. Saxon Spence, 5 Regents Park, Exeter.

FREE SOUTH AFRICA VIGIL

Anti-Apartheid campaigners held a vigil outside Barclays Bank in Exeter on Saturday 23 March. They were commemorating the deaths of over thirty mourners who were shot and beaten to death by the South African police during that same week. Incredibly, the thirty were shot while they were commemorating the Sharpeville killings - when 69 people were shot dead 25 years ago - by the bullets of the same police force. Not much has changed since then. The campaigners chose to spend the night outside Barclays because it is the main bank in South Africa, on whom Apartheid depends.

REMEMBER - BOYCOTT BARCLAYS - DON'T BANK WITH APARTHEID!

BRIEFING

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