

DEVON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

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MAY 2nd:

ALL OUT FOR LABOUR

Steve Reicher
Exeter CLP

The announcement of 2,000 job losses at Devonport docks shows that no-one is safe from Thatcherism. Three years ago these workers were the toast of the Tories. Today they have been dumped on the dole queue. For there is no room for sentimentality in Thatcher's strategy - and day by day that strategy becomes clearer to all of us.

All the talk of 'restoring the competitiveness of British industry' actually means an attempt to drive down the living standards of ordinary working people in order to drive up the profits of big business. It means a redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. That means pushing wages down and dismantling our welfare state. Nothing is sacred as the Tories ruthlessly pursue this strategy. Four million people put on the dole, wage councils abolished, hospitals closed, educational standards pushed below the legal level...and while we suffer British Telecom is sold off to those who can afford the shares at half their true value: in effect a handout of over one billion pounds to those most affluent in our society.

But one thing stands in the way of this strategy. People around the country are rejecting these policies in increasing numbers. The local councils which represent them refuse to cut services, and so throw people out of work, as central government demands. Where this happens does this government listen to the people and accept our tradition of local democracy? That is not their way. Instead they try to destroy those who disagree with them. Just as Thatcher has tried to eliminate the Trades Unions who defend jobs and conditions, just as there have been attempts to imprison civil servants who revealed her ministers lying to parliament, so she tries to destroy those councils who defend local services. Despite the fact that all enquiries, including a Conservative enquiry in 1977, found that the Greater London Council is both more efficient and cheaper than any alternative, Thatcher is trying to abolish it. In this government we have a terrifying vision of the authoritarian state. A state that will accept no opinion but its own.

But it is not just London that is affected, it is also us here in Devon. Changes in Rate Support have meant the loss of over a million pounds in revenue. Services are inevitably reduced. Yet we could not increase services even if we wanted to. The Tory Rate-Capping laws mean that they tell us what we can spend. If we disagree they can send in their commissioners to take us over. The government in London actually presumes to tell us what services we need locally and takes away our right to choose.

The importance of the County Council elections is that they may be the last time our vote has any real meaning. In its drive to attack working people the Tories seek to concentrate all power in their hands and to destroy local autonomy. Thus the fight for jobs, the fight against the cuts and the fight for local democracy are all closely linked. The lesson from this is obvious. Thatcher has shown that if she manages to isolate groups of people she can defeat them. However if all the struggles are linked together success is possible. Increasing numbers of people now realise this. Those defending the Metropolitan Councils against abolition, workers in the public sector facing job losses, people facing cuts in education and health, people facing racial or sexual oppression, all know that in unity lies strength.

It is only the Labour Party, with its links with the Labour Movement, that can bring the struggles together. As we see Thatcher losing popularity, her government beginning to topple, there is a crucial challenge before the Party. Let us be a focus for a generalised fightback against Thatcherism. Just as she unashamedly promotes the interests of the rich let us be open in our defence of working and oppressed people. IT IS IN THIS SPIRIT THAT WE SAY, WHEREVER YOU ARE, VOTE LABOUR ON MAY 2nd.



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Editorial

There is often an attempt to portray the left as undemocratic. But more and more we see the right as the true enemies of democracy; the Tories who react to local electorates who vote against them by removing their right to vote; the right wing of the Labour Party who consistently campaigned against attempts to extend the right of our membership.

In fact, socialism has always meant an extension of democracy. We should not only be able to vote for Parliament, but to control every aspect of our lives, what happens at our work-place, how our hospitals and schools are run, how the police force operates. But it is essential that the principle of democracy does not stop at the doors of the Labour Party. Ours must be an open party in which the membership decides and its decisions are acted upon.

It is only by being open that we can attract in the millions of people, young and old, men and women, black and white who are forced into action by the ravages of Thatcherism. They must feel that they belong so that the Labour Party is transformed into the political voice of a people in action.

If that is the theme of this issue of Briefing, it is also the reason why Briefing exists. Our aim is to draw together this radical coalition and to provide the socialist analysis upon which it can be built. The paper is an open forum for all those on the left who want to exchange ideas and introduce a campaigning thrust to our Party. The power of Briefing lies in its diversity. That is why we are growing. It is why we are becoming a radical force in local Labour politics. Join us and accelerate the change.

Words as weapons: Why we need a socialist ideology

Jim Salter
Chair: Exmouth Trades Council

The Tories have a vision of the future. It is a vision communicated by Sir John Hoskins of the CBI when he talks of ending all employment protection legislation, of cutting taxes for the rich and benefits for the poor. It is communicated by Margaret Thatcher when she praises repressive dictators in the Far East while attacking workers in this country. But mostly it is communicated in actions: the abolition of wage councils, the proposal to dismantle a century of legislation for workers rights, the viscious anti-trade union laws. The vision is one of a servile over-worked and under-paid workforce and, growing fat on their labour, an ever-richer class of bosses. Little wonder Thatcher feels so at home with her Far Eastern hosts.

In this vision the victims are turned onto scapegoats. The problem, we are told, lies with the poor, with lazy workers, with the unions. We are bombarded not only with the sweatshops but with the values of the Victorian era. In 1945 we believed never again would any government manage to impose such conditions and espouse such ideas. Thatcher has managed it. She is pushing us back into the Nineteenth Century.

The question is how has she managed it? With such anti-democratic, plain unjust policies how come she was not only elected but re-elected with a substantial working class vote. The answer, in large part, must lie at the level of ideology. Not in the sense of a conspiratorial attempt to cover up reality, but rather as a deeper ingrained set of ideas that are rooted in our experience, past and present, which are reproduced in our education, our press, our very language and which prevents the expression of any alternative view.

In a phrase Margaret Thatcher has sought to cover her Victorian policies with a Victorian rhetoric of Imperialism

and nationalism. This is the real meaning of the 'Falklands factor'. While jingoistic fervour was whipped up so as to present Thatcher as Britannia representing the English nation the fact was ignored that she was actually dividing the nation. The fight of Britain against Argentina was a cover for the war of rich against poor. Ever since Thatcher has used the ideology of Nationality to conduct her battles against the working class. Even as the troops returned she tried to use the 'Falklands spirit' to attack the NUR who were portrayed as attacking the 'nation' by going on strike. More recently, she has been even bolder calling the miners the 'enemy within'.

The tragedy is that Labour never broke with this reactionary ideology. They meekly tailed Thatcher rather than coming out against Nationalist cant and defending the working class. As long as there is no coherent socialist ideology based on class we will never amount a substantive challenge to Thatcher, for while we may revile her we cannot deny that she has a consistent case. So, in the absence of an alternative, she will maintain appeal. That is why clear class analysis is not a luxury for those in ivory towers but a vital and urgent necessity.

Molesworth: the right to protest

RUSSEL SPEARS WHO ATTENDED THE RECENT CND DEMONSTRATION AT MOLESWORTH WRITES ON HOW THE THATCHER REGIME IS USING OPPRESSIVE LEGISLATION AND POLICE STATE TACTICS TO STIFLE DISSENT AND PROTEST

The CND Easter demonstration at Molesworth reaffirmed the active popular opposition to this government's nuclear policy, and the siting of American Cruise Missiles in particular. Three coaches from Exeter alone contributed to an escalated fifty-thousand demonstrators on Easter Monday.

This was an important event not least because it marked something of a test case concerning the right to legitimate protest. The latest tactics employed by the MoD to 'deter' CND began in February with the brutal eviction of peace protester, while Hesiltine presided over the erection of seven miles of galvanised steel fencing (a snip at seven million pounds to the tax payer) topped with the latest in barbed wire technology. All this in a place where missiles will not arrive until 1988, and US Congress have not yet even confirmed the need for a second base.

Having adroitly swung public sympathy behind CND, Hesiltine proceeded to force through by-laws criminalising trespassers, thus trying to put the lid on any form of protest. While local police appeared to be taking a more 'softly-softly' approach, the presence of fourteen different constabularies, including Greater Manchester and the Met, suggest once more that the government is not afraid to use the police as the long arm of the state.

While the demonstration was officially described as "generally peaceful" some incidents belied this. At the main gate police were regularly using 'snatch squad' tactics and mounting spurious charges. In one incident an Exeter man, caught behind the blue cordon, was arrested for 'being held by a policeman' - otherwise known as obstruction. Since trying not to be held by a policeman is generally termed assault he took the easiest course. A familiar incident befell at least one other person from Exeter, no charges were brought and both were dumped outside the base at 11pm with no obvious means of transport. (This happened to at least thirty unchanged people) Since wasting protesters time and money are not yet recognised offenses, this all forms part of the cynical strategy of deterrence employed by the police.

In the end, for all his meddling with the pack, Hesiltine could not draw any comfort from this round of popular dissent. Even the police saw attempts to criminalise CND en masse as absurd. Attempts at marginalising support were also feeble (how many people would attempt a 'Peace Through NATO' rally? - we all know the likely outcome of a referendum on Cruise). While Molesworth was an obstacle course at many levels, the left should find solace in the fact that CND's prominent activity is winning over a majority of the public without support from any establishment quarters.

BUILD THE LABOUR PARTY

The most important question facing the Labour Party today is how to unite all those struggling against Thatcherism. How can we draw in those fighting to save their jobs, those fighting to save hospitals and schools, women and black people opposing discrimination, those resisting the threat of nuclear war, these and many more whose rights and living standards are under threat.

Two things are essential, if we are to fulfill this task. The first is on the level of policy. We must listen to those various groups; we must take their demands seriously. We can no longer make do with statements of mere sympathy or token gestures. The second has to do with democracy. If people are to come into our Party they must feel that their participation will achieve results; that must mean an open party; a party which is democratic at all levels. In 1981 we saw that how democratising the relationship

between MPs and constituencies brought people flooding into our ranks in the belief that they could influence how things are run.

We believe that this lesson must apply to the wards of the Labour Party, for it is in the wards that our membership is active and we cannot hope to attract activists unless they know that time spent at meetings is effective. Thus the question of democracy is not secondary. It is a condition for an active and growing Labour Party.

Below we publish two contributions which address these crucial questions. Both deal with the relationship between ward and GMC and the need for ward discussion to be reflected in the action of GMC delegates. We publish these pieces in order to introduce a debate on how to draw people into our Party and welcome contributions on any aspect of this debate.

Mandation

Peter Bowing ,
Exeter CLP

A couple of months ago a resolution was passed in a Labour Party branch, with which a senior Party officer did not agree. Failure to support even the discussion of the resolution by the branch's delegates at the GMC was noted at the following branch meeting. In reply, the senior Party officer smiled and commented that there was no reason why the branch's delegates at the GMC should support the branch's resolutions.

The question thus posed is, whom do the branch delegates represent? The view expressed by the Party officer is that the GMC delegates represent only themselves and what counts as 'individual judgement'. This argument is analogous to the one employed by the SDP, which says that MPs are accountable to themselves, rather than the political movement which put them there.

Indeed, the above theory of 'democracy' accords with the often stated right wing belief that the GMC is a secret and confidential body. If the branch delegates acted as proper delegates, though, they would have to report back to the branches and the wider membership, which would make secrecy impossible. Further, the idea that the GMC delegates are not mandated to support branch resolutions enhances the belief of senior Party officers in Exeter that those at the bottom are accountable to those at the top and not vice versa.

Mandating delegates to support the policy of the sponsoring organisation (in this case the Labour Party branches) is an axiom of democracy. The GMC delegates are not elected for their own benefit, but to represent the branch. When they cast their votes at the GMC, they should do so on behalf of the comrades in the branch, not on behalf of one person. Otherwise, ordinary Party members have no reason to attend branch meetings, if they can have no say.

Perhaps the most interesting example of mandation and democracy was the casting of the NUPE block vote for the deputy leadership election of the Labour Party in 1981. The then general secretary of NUPE, Alan Fisher, was a strong supporter of Tony Benn, but the Union's national executive backed Denis Healey. In the event, Fisher cast the block vote for Healey, but said that he felt as sick as a pig for having to do so.

The only case against 'block mandation' might be if the left/right balance among branch delegates was proportional to the average balance between left and right at branch meetings. Yet, this case does not hold for two reasons. Firstly, the 'winner takes all' system of election GMC delegates at branch meeting precludes such a balance, unless it is the wish of the majority faction (which is unlikely). Secondly, a proportional system is only viable if every branch in the CLP practises it. It should also be pointed out that if such a proportional system were considered it would raise questions about representation and factional accountability, which are, at present at least, outside the scope of discussion in Labour Party politics.

Debate

Neil Todd
Exeter CLP

At the last GMC the notion that individual members of the Labour Party can play an effective role in the formation of policy was made a complete nonsense. Similar resolutions were passed overwhelmingly in two branches, with only their last clause differing, but in the event neither was discussed. The first was legitimately ruled out of order because it called for the reaffirmation of apparently non-existent CLP policy. (see resolution below)

When it came to debating the second, however, a leading member of the right wing moved 'next business' on the grounds that discussing the resolution 'wasted time'. This move was given the patronage of the meeting's centre-right chairperson, who claimed that a CLP cannot oppose national policy. This is not the case as the majority of CLPs oppose national policy on this issue. 'Next business' was carried 18-14; no debate took place.

Is it 'wasting time' to debate an issue concerning the very existence of humanity? Perhaps it is - if you are an ostrich! The GMC is not the social club which some delegates seem to think it is. It is supposed to be a body of delegates representing individual members and trade unions, whose function is to produce policy on behalf of those individuals and trade unionists. Whether delegates agree or disagree with a resolution put to the GMC, it is their duty to debate that resolution.

It is clear in this case that the right wing feared debate because they had no arguments against - thus resorting to undemocratic practice.

If the Labour Party is serious about recruiting more people then potential new members must know that they can play an active role in the policy formation of the Party. They must know that their representatives on the GMC are accountable to them. Instead, they are presented with a picture of bureaucratic stagnation and political apathy on the part of the reactionary Party bosses, whose commitment to either socialism or democracy is highly questionable. No wonder then that many new members are driven off after their first meeting.

RESOLUTION ON NATO

NOTES

1. that NATO consists entirely of capitalist countries.
2. that NATO is dominated by the United States, which pursues anti-socialist and imperialist policies against progressive social movements in the Third World.
3. the NATO membership of Turkey which has tortured and killed socialist opponents to its regime.
4. CND's official slogan: "Britain out of NATO, NATO out of Britain"

BELIEVES

1. that NATO (created prior to the Warsaw Pact) serves to divide Europe and breeds hostility.
2. That a socialist Britain would not favour or support the United States or the capitalist countries of Europe in any hostilities with the Soviet Union.

INSTRUCTS

1. Exeter Constituency Labour Party to oppose Britain's membership of NATO, and to campaign with CND for British withdrawal from that organisation.

Democracy and accountability

Neil Todd
Exeter CLP

One of the central problems of the Labour Party is that many of its representatives in Parliament simply do not believe in the programme they were elected to implement. Others, while actually not opposed to the programme, do not feel sufficiently strongly in favour of it to resist attempts by Labour Cabinets to water down, neuter or reverse policies which the Party is supposed to be committed to.

The 1964 Labour government came to power with a National Plan designed to replace the traditional Tory reflation/deflation method of economic management (known as 'stop go') with a system based on planning. At the first sight of a sterling crisis, which traditionally accompanies the election of a Labour government, the Labour government abandoned the National Plan and reverted to stop-go. By the end Labour was supporting the Americans in Vietnam and attempting to legislate against the Trade Unions. The result was the defeat in the 1970 general election,

After the election defeat most Party members and MPs vowed that no Labour government would pursue such a course again. During the period of opposition a new industrial strategy was constructed based on planning agreements designed to give the workers a say in determining their wages, investment, production and other factors that affect their lives.

Even before the inevitable sterling crisis the 1974-9 Labour government jettisoned these policies. In 1976 the government surrendered to calls from the IMF for cuts in public spending and unemployment more than doubled. The commitment to achieve a radical change in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people was forgotten. By the end Labour was pursuing policies which can only be compared to those of the Thatcher regime. Journalists were tried under the Official Secrets Act; in Northern Ireland a Labour Minister presided over the systematic torture of prisoners; a secret Cabinet committee authorised expenditure on a new generation of nuclear weapons.

In the election campaign of 1979 Labour were the Party of the establishment and it was the Conservative Party, who were seen as the Party of radical change. As a result Labour were defeated.

In opposition the Labour frontbench have been largely ineffective because everytime a spokesperson attacks the Tories about spending cuts etc, the response is always the same: 'YOU DID IT TOO'

The plans of the Labour Party to increase public spending cut unemployment and abolish nuclear weapons are just so much hot air until our Parliamentary representatives are made accountable to the Party in whose name they hold office. The CLPD, set up in 1973, have made significant gains in this direction with the adoption of mandatory reselection in the Labour Party constitution. This means that in future all Labour MPs will have to come before their constituency parties to seek renomination once during the lifetime of each Parliament.

The purpose of mandatory reselection is to establish an open and honest relationship between the MP and his or her CLP in the hope that our representatives in Parliament are never again allowed to lose sight of the ideals of the movement which sent them there.

ANTI APARTHEID



Exeter Anti-Apartheid Group meet on the third Tuesday of the month at St. Stevens Church Hall at 8pm.

Next meeting - May 21.

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

WOMEN'S COUNCIL###WOMEN'S COUNCIL###WOMEN'S COUNCIL###

The next meeting of the women's council will be on Monday, 27th May 1985. There will be a speaker from the 'National Abortion Campaign' who will discuss the Gillick Judgement and the Powell Bill

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Open to all young people under twenty-five. The next meeting will be at 26 Clifton Hill on Wednesday, 15th May. Meet at 8pm in the bar.

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BRIEFING

THE FOLLOWING POLICY STATEMENT IS BEING DISCUSSED BY SUPPORTERS OF DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING. PLEASE SEND US YOUR VIEWS AND SO HELP STIMULATE SOCIALIST DEBATE.

Devon Labour Briefing represents a unique opportunity in Exeter and Devon to build a bridge between the Labour Party and progressive groups, such as the women's and peace movements. We believe in the construction of a non-dogmatic progressive alliance, which fights for the replacement of capitalism by socialism. For us, socialism is not a reformed capitalism, but a different political order.

To realise this objective, the Labour Party must be transformed from a predominantly social democratic party to a socialist one, which is willing and able to fight for its objectives in every social institution. The method of exclusive electoralism must be replaced by an organised struggle at all levels of society. In place of the theoretical vacuum of traditional Labourite politics, we must introduce a class-based analysis of society, because only by an understanding of society can we hope to change it.

Nowhere is the need to replace municipal careerism and inactivity by a party capable of fighting the class struggle more apparent than in Exeter. To achieve this is no easy task and we need all the support we can get.

We call on all progressive, who value the power of political organisation, to work through the Labour Party and in association with Devon Labour Briefing.

NATO CONTRADICTION

At the April meeting of CND council, Mr. Christopher Churchward moved a resolution which sought to emphasise CND's policy 'Britain out of NATO, NATO out of Britain' In the event, the motion was unopposed and was welcomed by all. Some members were puzzled by the fact that Dr. John Shepherd, the Chairperson of Exeter Labour Party, did not oppose the resolution, since he failed to back a similar resolution passed by his Labour Party branch. Dr. Shepherd is in a strange situation wanting CND to campaign for Britain's withdrawal from NATO, while wanting the Labour Party to do the exact opposite. Nevertheless, it is vital that the struggle against NATO is carried on by all progressive organisations, which includes the Labour Party as well as CND.

BRIEFING

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DEADLINE for the June Briefing is Friday, May 21st !!!