

DEVON LABOUR

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BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

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ANTI APARTHEID NATIONAL DEMO - leaflet enclosed

LABOUR KEY IN COUNTY ELECTIONS



BY GERALD TAYLOR, TAKEN FROM THE TEIGNMOUTH LABOUR PARTY NEWSLETTER

In the words of Saxon Spence, the new leader of the Labour Group on Devon County Council: "With the unexpected political situation on the County Council the Labour Group has been put in the position of holding the balance of power between the Tories and the Alliance." Even excepting the rather unlikely possibility of Labour forming an agreement with the Tories to keep the Alliance out this still affords Labour a power which they have seldom had before on Devon County Council, a power which the Somerset Labour Group have been quick to realise. This curious situation has arisen despite the loss of six of Labour's 16 seats on the previous council.

So what do these results mean for Labour? One thing is certain, due to the lack of a comprehensive results and analysis service from either of the TV channels most of the morning papers got it wrong. Subsequent analysis suggests that, despite their impressive seats tally, the SDP did not achieve a breakthrough; that Labour's results were good, but not that good, and that the Tories did even worse than first appeared.

The sweeping gains made by the SDP-Liberals were achieved against a background of a national percentage swing of no more than 3 or 4% compared with the 1983 General Election. The reason for their high seats tally is threefold. Firstly, the way the Tory vote crumbled was particularly helpful to them, or, to put it another way, they gained more from the collapse of the Tory vote in 1985 than they did from the Labour vote in 1983. Secondly, their improvement over the 1981 results reflects the improvement they made between 1981 and 1983, which they have maintained. Thirdly, the Alliance did far better in seats where they stood a chance of winning, that is to say that the Alliance vote was not evenly spread over the country but concentrated in certain areas.

Compared to 1981, which was a good year for Labour, the Labour vote held up reasonably well with most analysis showing that, on the basis of county elections, Labour would win outright control in a general election with the narrowest of majorities. However, these results exclude significant areas where Labour's support is running above the national average such as Scotland, London and the

Metropolitan counties. With these areas added in then Neil Kinnock's claim of an overall majority of 47 looks distinctly possible.

Importantly, Labour did particularly well in areas where there are marginal seats and gained a great deal of lost ground in the South of the country, to such an extent that one analyst said that Labour can once again claim to be a national party and not just a regional one. These figures show that Labour has maintained the recovery evident in last years Euro-elections, the challenge remains to build this base over the next three years.

In contrast the Conservatives' results were truly a disaster. The Tories lost ground all across the country and especially in the traditional Conservative areas, the South West being a case in point. Most significantly losses were evident not only compared to their landslide victory in 1983 but also compared to 1981, which is itself one of the biggest mid-term swings against a government ever recorded. Clearly this was no ordinary mid-term swing, equally clearly, the government are in desperate need of another Falklands War to regain their popularity. On present evidence this would seem rather a remote possibility.

One interesting aspect of the county election results was the differing fortunes of the two Alliance parties. An examination of the known Alliance 'target seats' showed that in a general election the Liberals would have gained nearly all of their targeted areas but the SDP would have gained very few. Indeed a number of SDP targets were not lost to the Tories but were gained by Labour! Significant results indeed given the present situation in Exeter and Plymouth.

But the real test of Alliance mettle will come now that they have gained some real power for the first time.

It will be interesting to see whether the Alliance can maintain its unity under the strain of administering some of the most important non-government spending in Britain. Similarly Labour Groups who align themselves with Alliance interests will have to keep a weather eye open to ensure that when, and if, a split comes they are not dragged into the Alliance's political black hole.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Editorial

This has been an important period. In the County elections Labour lost less ground than was predicted by the media while the Tories, if anything, more. Devon produced the ironic result that Labour having lost seats now holds the "balance of power". How useful this voice proves it is too early to tell. For example, it is not clear that temptations to compromise and coalition will not add to Labour's problems.

Meanwhile, as the local elections pass, nothing changes for the better in Thatcher's Britain where local democracy is held in contempt; Thatcher's rhetoric is exposed by the denial of local freedom while electoralism and state centralism are strengthened. Inevitably the assault on many sectors of society continues. For example, the teachers are under fire both nationwide and locally. As if they have not got enough on their plate with the wage dispute, their political integrity has been questioned over the badges issue. While the latter resulted in the humiliating climbdown by the Tories, the intransigence of Sir Keith and Co. seems more permanent.

As ever, the young are also under attack. While being told to go out and look for work—where the jobs are of course(!)—legislation preventing mobility in every sense, reveals the government's hypocrisy. Again Thatcher proclaims individual freedoms and denies them on a massive scale.

Nor can we take for granted the provisions of the Welfare State. Benefits and services are being systematically eliminated: sold off to private contractors—the freedom to exploit!

To be sure we are entering the most dangerous stage yet. As the tide of public opinion turns against the Tories, authoritarian populism turns to plain authoritarian paranoia. Thus in the coming months we should be prepared for the onslaught on every front as the regime throws off all restraint.

Resolutions Matter

Peter Bowing Exeter CLP

Prominent right wingers in Exeter Labour Party are not content to attack socialism in the Party; they now challenge democracy itself. They regard the moving of resolutions in the branches as 'wasting time' and attempt to move 'next business' when they come before the Party's General Management Committee. In the face of this anti-democratic challenge it is necessary to state the rightful purpose of resolutions.

A serious socialist Party engages in struggle against the existing capitalist order. If this is to be done effectively the Party must have an analysis, strategy and goals which are understood by the wider membership. In a democratic socialist Party, direction flows from the rank and file upwards: resolutions are the manner in which this is done.

Most resolutions thus originate from the branches. They consist firstly, of information which the movers believe should be considered by those voting or acting upon the resolution. Under a second heading resolutions enumerate relevant policy objectives, which should similarly be considered; and finally instructions to those above on how the struggle should be conducted. Every part of a resolution, analysis, policy, etc, should be discussed throughout the Party.

Just as a resolution brings theoretical and practical clarity to Party policy and strategy, so it removes fudging and inconsistency. Those on the right who are theoretically inconsistent, who talk of socialism but practise reaction, have much to fear from well reasoned resolutions. Consequently, they whine about resolutions 'wasting time' or having been written by people who have been to British 'public schools' (which is a lie).

As the right wing lose credibility in the Labour Party, and CND and anti-apartheid for that matter, more resolutions are being discussed and acted upon. At the last meeting of a Labour Party branch a resolution calling upon the GMC not to move 'next business' against resolutions from the branches was overwhelmingly supported.

At the June GMC, despite right wing opposition, the following resolutions will be discussed;

RESOLUTION ON PEACE IN EXETER

This meeting notes;

1. Exeter CLPs support for and affiliation to CND.
2. Exeter CLP's view that Exeter City is a de facto NFZ.

This meeting believes;

1. That information about and awareness of a nuclear war and the means of avoiding it are of prime concern to the citizens of Exeter.

This meeting urges;

1. The Labour group on the City Council to consider the following proposals, and, on the basis of these proposals and any other suggestions which may be forthcoming to construct a report which is to be circulated to the Labour Party branches and Exeter CND,
 - a. to set up a NFZ advisory council committee consisting of six councillors and twelve persons appointed by local peace groups,
 - b. to appoint a NFZ council officer to coordinate NFZ policy,
 - c. to publish and distribute leaflets and pamphlets explaining NFZ policy,
 - d. to advertise Exeter's NFZ policy on street boards, etc,
 - e. to add the wording 'Nuclear Free Zone' beneath 'Exeter City Council' on all official publications, notice boards, etc,
 - f. to construct monuments and name or rename streets, parks, buildings, etc, in line with the struggle for peace,
 - g. to twin Exeter with a town in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union,
 - h. to campaign against civil defence and to open the council bunker to the public,
2. the Labour Group on the City Council to appoint one of its number to liaise with Exeter CND.

RESOLUTION ON MAYORAL CAR

This meeting

NOTES

1. Exeter City's Mayoral Car costing £28,000.
2. The record levels of unemployment and low wages in Devon.
3. Clause IV Section IV of the Labour Party Constitution

BELIEVES

1. The office of Mayor and all the paraphernalia associated with it are incompatible with socialism.
2. The abolition of the office of Mayor and the selling of the Mayoral car would bring the Labour led council nearer to the working people of Exeter.

URGES

1. The Labour Group on the City Council, in a gesture of solidarity with the working people of Exeter, to use what powers it can exert in order to ensure that;
 1. the office of Mayor is abolished to be replaced by a simple chairperson,
 2. the Mayoral car is sold, the proceeds of which are spent for the benefit of the working people of Exeter.

(RESOLUTION ON NATO - SEE MAY DLB)

Fear on the Right !

Jan Ochsner, Exeter CLP.

"Fear is never the best standpoint from which to argue. It inhibits rational debate and exchanges of views and because of this promotes a dogmatic clinging on to ideas and ideals.

When some one or a group of people stand up and question the views that we hold then should we not look at their suggestions and strategies from every angle before making decisions? Would not a dialogue and an openness to fresh approaches be the best policy?

If some of the people who are standing up and questioning these firmly held beliefs are also young should we not foster their enthusiasm, recognising that an attitude of fear and hostility to their ideals is one sure-fire way of losing them forever from the Labour Party?"

This is, of course, a purely fictional account given by, let us say, a longstanding member of the Labour Party to a group of other longstanding members of the Labour Party expressing their fear of change.

"Look", they say, "we've always thought this or that, and now these people, many of them Young Socialists, are coming

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Teachers' Dispute !

Teacher's salaries have been reduced by 33% since 1974, they have fallen way behind the salaries of comparable professions, office managers, accountants, computer programmers, civil engineers etc. The average weekly wage for a teacher is now lower than that of a gas fitter, a crane driver or a printing machine minder.

In November 1984 the NUT presented a pay claim to the employers in an atmosphere charged by: 'the cumulative erosion of professional commitment' by teachers. The claim was that each teacher should receive a minimum increase of £1200 in April 1985. The frustration of the teachers at the employers' delay in discussing the issues until January 1985 was turned into anger when they heard the employers' first and final offer of 4%, when inflation is running at 6.1% and the average pay increase is 7%. The employers also offered arbitration, but after last years employers' manipulation, which resulted in disagreement between arbitrators and therefore a one-sided decision detrimental to teachers, arbitration is now an unacceptable procedure for teachers, reinforced by Keith Joseph's statement: "A reference to arbitration would not result in any additional resources being made available to local authorities."

The NUT have also refused to discuss the employers 'package' which they tried to use to split the teachers' opinions by dangling the carrot of 7½%, later Keith Joseph revealed that 7½% was 'out of reach'. This package, when examined closely, is an insult to teachers and totally ignores the needs of children. Assessment employers' style would change the atmosphere of schools to one of distrust and uncertainty, with the head teacher being seen as the inspector responsible for a teachers right to their next increment on the pay scale. This would allow no right of appeal, and all the implications that entails, including the possibility of dismissal, especially in the first three years of teaching. Assessment NUT style would, on the other hand, allow teachers to recognise their strengths and weaknesses enabling them to improve their classroom practise without fear of losing pay increments. The employers' package would eliminate almost any chance of promotion in primary schools and severely reduce it in secondary. Teachers would be expected to cover if their colleagues were absent - either doubling up classes or forgoing their free periods. Teachers would be expected to work an average of 6hrs 40mins per week for the head teacher, at any time on any day, on top of working for 25hrs in the classroom and in addition to preparing pupil profiles and reports. Teachers would be expected to supervise children for 2 lunchtimes a week, running a lunchtime club would not count towards this.

The employers would not be responsible for providing sufficient ancillary staff, and there would be no guaranteed maximum class size. All these conditions are on top of the extra expectations put on teachers during the last few years, especially those brought about by having to cover up for inadequate provisions by education authorities.

The teachers anger over the refusal to treat their claim seriously has necessitated them taking action. Starting with the NUT withdrawal of goodwill, followed by steadily increasing strike action, and the refusal to complete pupils records in teachers own time. Following recent council elections we are hoping that Devon will join the 26 other authorities that have already declared support for the NUT statement which includes six clauses in favour of the teachers pay claim. But a statement of support is not enough, we are looking for some effort towards achieving results if our action is not to be stepped up again.

Christine Duff,
Exeter CLP and NUT.

Many teachers have had to face harsh realities recently concerning pay and conditions and teachers in Devon are no exception.

The local issue about teachers' badges and stickers has caused much resentment and anger. It is difficult to tell if it has just been a local and inept attack on teachers rights and integrity or whether it is the start of a more widespread campaign. Devon has been used before as a testing ground for several novel Tory policies.

The motion that first came out of the schools sub committee instructed teachers not to display badges and stickers or take part in any other action which in their opinion advertises adherence to any organisation which is thought to be associated with a political party.

What does this really mean to teachers? Their position is insecure enough already when they are expected to deal with major issues facing society, they are supposed to preparing children for the real world. Such statements emanating from County Hall amount to a vote of no-confidence in their judgement and integrity. Who is to decide what is party political or what amounts to advertising?

There was an immediate reaction from the teachers' unions and CND. Large numbers of previously apathetic teachers have been sporting CND and political badges for the first time. The timing of the ban coincided with the NUT Conference and the issue hit the national press in time for the union to show its' concern. The Devon teachers' delegates brought the conference to a standstill and a unanimous motion of support was passed, the Devon delegates speeches were given a standing ovation.

It is obvious that all this fuss seriously embarrassed the Devon Education Committee and Mr Ted Pinney, the Chairman of the committee, gave a very irate speech at the County Council meeting on April 25 where he changed the wording of the motion from 'instructs' to 'request'.

The County elections have now overtaken the badge fuss and the Labour Party is expected to help throw the whole business out.

However the Devon teachers badge ban and all the publicity it received may have contributed in a small way to the breaking of the Tory stranglehold in Devon.

W. C. Montague, NUT.

FEAR ON THE RIGHT continued...

along and questioning our ideas. They are bringing in new views which we don't know much about. These people and their ideas are suspicious and must be opposed. We're frightened, it was all so easy before. We don't want anyone upsetting the applecart. We don't want young people snapping at our heels telling us that they feel differently and causing us trouble. Why can't we go back to the good old days when we were safe in the Labour Party?"

The Party member to whom they have gone for advice then smiles kindly and gives them the little speech outlined at the beginning of this piece.

All fiction, of course, but wouldn't it be nice if we could dispel this hostile fear of change which makes those whose ideas are being questioned run scared. Is it not feasible for them to accept dissent, discussion and change as the only real ways for the Labour Party to grow. To grow strong and sure and to attract those who feel, as I do, that socialism is the only way to achieve change within society as a whole. To do this we need to avoid irrational opposition to new ideas, maintaining a dialogue is paramount.

We have a unity of purpose otherwise we would not be in the Labour Party and we should not forget this fact. In the end a pool of stagnant water kills all that is in it. So it will be within the Labour Party, have no doubt, if we allow ourselves the luxury of complacency.

Health Hypocrisy

GERALD TAYLOR LINKS THE IMPORTANT ISSUES OF ANIMAL EXPERIMENTS AND CONTINUING HEALTH CUTS

The Government's justification for not taking a much sterner line in protecting animals used in laboratory experiments is patently absurd. The claim is that animal experiments are a necessary contribution to the health of the nation when compared to the atmosphere of studied neglect which has been the unifying factor of other areas vital to the nation's health is perhaps one of the most callous examples of the hypocrisy of the present government.

The idea, carefully nurtured by the government, drug companies and the Health Service alike, that the nation's health can only be guaranteed by the discovery of some new wonderdrug must be dispelled. The nation's health service is, in reality, far more dependent on spending on basic services.

The health of the British people is at present under threat, not from lack of investment from the British Pharmaceutical Industry but rather from the continuing deterioration of our housing, sewerage and water systems. In the past year there have been at least three major outbreaks of dysentery in British towns due to collapsing sewers, some of which have involved deaths.

This combined with the reappearance in some areas of diseases associated with poverty and malnutrition, rickets for example, present a far more telling threat to the health of the nation. Even where illness which kills thousands can be prevented, as is the case with cervical cancer, the response has been slow and inadequate.

This is not to say that animal experiments are not important in research towards a cure for illnesses such as legionnaire's disease or AIDS, but rather that a sense of perspective is required. These diseases kill hundreds every year in Britain, but others like pneumonia or hypothermia kill thousands for no good reason, and in the past diseases such as typhoid and cholera have all taken their toll. In addition these more modern diseases by their nature are unlikely to reach epidemic proportions. Only a very small proportion of animal experiments are, in any case, directed at finding cures for such diseases.

How many lives could we save by introducing a comprehensive programme of health education. Detailing the importance of various elements of diet, regular exercise and the dangers of smoking, as well as giving a higher profile to the Health and Safety Executive, environmental health officers, the Health Education Council and other public health bodies.

Less than half a per cent of Britains' health budget is spent on prevention, yet greater awareness of our own health and how to prevent illness would surely ease the burden on our over stretched health resources. Attitudes and expenditure within the NHS must be regeared to encourage a nation with a healthier outlook.

If experimentation on animals is to continue then it must be restricted to those small number of illnesses for which the only possible hope of relief is through drugs. For the rest the government must face up to its responsibility for providing a healthy environment in which we can live.

This means providing adequate resources to maintain our housing stock, to ensure a safe supply of water and a safe sewerage system. Encouraging an educated nation who are aware of possible dangers to their health and are equipped with the facilities to look after themselves. But above all it means ensuring that the safety of individuals in their homes and working environments is not sacrificed to economic expediency.

MINERS' BENEFIT
BARTS TAVERN
JULY 1st, 8.00pm.

FAT CITY FOUR ,BANDS & CABARET

"TROOPS OUT"
UNIVERSITY
JUNE 10th, 7.30pm.

SINN FEIN SPEAKER INVITED

BRIEFING

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING,
79 Pinhoe Rd,
Exeter.

Tel. 219796 OR 218826

DEADLINE for July Briefing is Friday 21 June!

women s conference

On Tuesday 11th of June, 5.30, Councillor Celia Shepherd has organised the long-awaited Exeter Women's Conference to take place in the Executive Suite of the Civic Centre Dix's Fields. As many delegates as possible from women's organisations and interest groups are welcome, as well as observers. The event will take the form of discussion, workshops around issues of particular importance to women in Exeter.

It is regrettable, however, that the conference is being held in the evening when few women will find it convenient to attend, the conference being limited to a couple of hours. It is also unfortunate that the meeting will take place in the Executive Suite; an environment not to make working class women feel at home.

Have women been waiting a year under the "Labour led" City Council for this. What a disappointment.

stonehenge

Police Brutality

This year the government decided to ban the annual Stonehenge Free Festival, as part of a wave of repression directed at various opponents of the system. Many people, however, collectively known as the Peace Convoy, decided that the annual gathering should take place.

The action taken by the State to stop them has been the most serious use of police brutality since Orgreave, part of which was captured by ITN cameras.

On Saturday 1 June I turned on the television to see the police dragging unarmed men, women and children from vehicles and beating them before making them lay on the ground trembling with fear. Windows of vans and coaches, homes to the convoy people, were smashed by baton-wielding police, glass was showered over the occupants, often children. The news reporter tried to cover up for the State by saying how unlit petrol bombs (none of which had been shown) had been thrown at the police, and even mentioned the convoy inconveniencing tourists! But the cameras were unable to lie and the police brutality was revealed for all to see, the 'live' dialogue also then showed the real attitude of the police: One woman from the convoy cowered in the front of her coach, surrounded by police who were taunting her and smashing her windows. She desperately tried to reason with them, explaining that there were 3 children in the coach. Their response was to smash her windscreen and drag her out. Cries of "scum!" came frequently from police mouths, as they beat and kicked people laying on the ground. The treatment of the Peace Convoy by the British police was identical to the treatment of Jews by Hitler's S.S.

Half an hour later the official BBC news reported the same event, and the well-known propaganda service was shown to have lost all subtlety. We were told how 'hippies' had attacked the police, and shown their so-called weapons, one axe and one chain saw, common implements for anyone who spends their summer camping. No one could fail to notice the difference between the ITN and BBC reports, but what happened in the cells, where there were no cameras?

Events at Stonehenge cannot be divorced from any of the other cases of police brutality and victimisation. The State aims to crush all opposition, whether from the miners, the peace movement, or anyone else. Civil liberties are further eroded every day, as more and more people become the victims of Thatcher's repressive regime. The ruling class needs to defend itself against anyone who does not conform to its' systematic exploitation; Orgreave, Molesworth and Stonehenge are all parts of the same story.

It is up to socialists to connect these events, and publicise them, we must show that modern capitalist Britain IS an authoritarian, repressive regime, which must be overthrown to protect individual liberty. The power of the State has been mobilised against both the alternative and working class movements. It is time for a coordinated struggle against this oppression, with no sell outs and no compromises, I didn't see the police compromising at Stonehenge.

Paul Giblin, Exeter CLP