

DEVON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No 10 JULY 1985

WOMEN MUST BE HEARD

ALISON DAUN, OF EXETER CLP AND WOMEN'S COUNCIL, GIVES HER VIEWS ON THE RECENT WOMEN'S CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY EXETER CITY COUNCIL

A wide range of women's groups and organisations gathered at the Civic Centre last month for the long-awaited Exeter Women's Conference. This event was organised by Labour women Councillors and boycotted, to their later embarrassment, by the Tories.

At a time when women are experiencing the erosion of many hard fought - for rights, via Gillick, Powell and under the Fowler review; it is perhaps understandable that all those women present voted for one simple demand. That was for a full standing committee to represent women's issues on the City Council (a demand Devon Labour Briefing has been pushing for over a year). Furthermore, those present felt strongly that the Council should also appoint a Women's Officer to liaise with women's groups in the City and organise activities especially relevant to women's issues.

It is typical of the sexist and downright obstructive attitude of leading members of the Council that the Conference was squashed into an evening session at the Civic Centre. Labour Councillor Celia Shepherd was told she could hold the Conference as long as it "didn't cost the Council anything", it is in such high esteem that 52% of the voting population are held.

However, the success of the Conference shows Exeter women deserve much more than this. The three debates held at the Conference show that women's issues cannot simply be ignored in the hope that they will go away: The housing debate stressed the importance of inputs from women in both the design and planning of Council housing and also in the basic facilities required for women in a City such as Exeter. It was obvious that Council policy in this area had failed, many women, for example, did not even know of the existence of the Housing Advice Centre. The debate on leisure also highlighted problems particularly relevant to women, one of these being the lack of good public transport in the evenings. Similar problems were voiced in the environment debate, particularly that of inadequate street lighting.

All the women at the Conference felt that meetings of this kind must be held at regular intervals throughout the year, to keep up the pressure on the Council. As one of the women present expressed it: "We don't want to have these meetings and then nothing gets done."

What actually will get done remains to be seen. At the last meeting of Exeter Labour Women's Council, Councillor Shepherd said that the wishes of the Conference would be presented to the Labour Group on the City Council but was pessimistic that they would be supported. It is no secret that certain men in the Labour Group are hostile to the setting up of a women's committee.

Such a situation is absurd, the mixed representation at the Conference shows how important women's issues are in the Labour Party. It is also hypocritical, in the month that the Labour Party published its Women's Charter, that a Party which proclaims equality cannot even be relied upon to give women a voice in the running of their community.



WHY CAN'T WE GO BACK TO THE GOOD OLD DAYS WHEN WOMEN WERE SEEN BUT NOT HEARD?

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

WE ARE ONE!

Peter Bowing
Exeter CLP

A YEAR OF DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

Two years ago this month the first edition of Exeter Labour Briefing appeared, and exactly a year ago the publication expanded to become Devon Labour Briefing. At this point it might be useful to review the history and success of the publication.

REASONS FOR BRIEFING

The reduction of ruling class power as a result of the Second World War and the election of the first majority Labour government in 1945 led to the negotiation of the 'post war settlement' or 'consensus politics'. Labour's dominant right wing agreed not to challenge the essentials of capitalism at home and endorsed Britain's linkage with the USA through NATO abroad.

By the 1970's the inexorable Capitalist crisis had undermined the basis for the 'opportunities' consensus. Labour Governments presided over public expenditure cuts and mass unemployment: and helped pave the way for Thatcherism. In turn this led to the struggle in the Labour Party to reassert Socialism over the redundant social democracy, which has led to the current crisis of the Labour Party, a crisis which can only be resolved by the victory of socialist forces, which represent the only realistic alternative to Thatcherism.

In Exeter the Labour Party remained firmly on the right in the grip of a network of municipal careerists and middle-class liberals. In the absence of an active women's movement, black rights movement etc, which one finds in large cities, and in the absence of a socialist tradition based on a large organised working class, the right wing was unchallenged. A division of labour developed with the middle-class liberals running the Party, and the careerists controlling the Labour Group on the council. Consequently any Socialist move in the Party met with a united opposition.

The editorial in the first edition of Exeter Labour Briefing (July 1983) said, 'There are many forces both inside and outside the Party, which are pressurising us to drop our socialist policies. These notions must firmly be resisted - their acceptance would mark a gross betrayal of our principles and commitments ... We require clear credible and coherent set of policies which is capable of tackling the fundamental problems of our sick capitalist society. We must become in reality the Party which organises opposition to Tory attacks on the weak and the sick, the young and the old, the Party which is dedicated to eliminating sexism and racism, and to advancing the cause of working people.'

One year later the right wing in Exeter Labour Party sought to expel the people who expressed those views.

HISTORY

The origins of Briefing lay in 1982 in the Pennsylvania/St. Davids branch. Left wingers began to write articles for the local newsletter, until the right wing led by Dr. John Shepherd moved a resolution preventing any opposition being expressed. The young left wingers were taken by surprise.

In May the Falklands crisis blew up, and with the Exeter Party refusing to demand the recall of the 'Task Force' (in effect supporting the War), the left were resolved to take action.

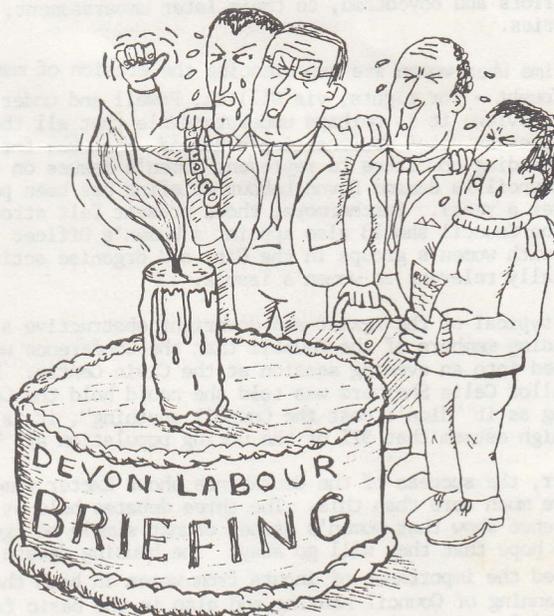
It was not until the following July that three socialist, Peter Bowing, Geoff Carol and Jeremy Clarke came together to edit the then Exeter Labour Briefing. Due to financial strain the next edition did not appear until December. The right wing headed by Shepherd, but operating through the Party secretary Roger Greenhough, attacked Briefing on the pretext that the title 'Exeter Labour Briefing', made the publication sound official. This pretext was to be clumsily thrown around by the right wing until it fell to pieces in the expulsion attempt a year later.

Angered by the refusal of Briefing to go away and encouraged by the departure from Exeter of Carol and Clarke, Shepherd decided to summon Bowing, along with a new editor Michael Hingley to the Executive Committee. The intimidation attempt failed.

By the summer the right wing were prepared for a show down. A contradictory, confused and badly worded resolution was moved in the Executive Committee, which sought to ban Briefing on the grounds that it could be mistaken for an official Labour Party publication. None of this made much sense as the right wing chorus perpetually claimed that Briefing had no other purpose than to attack the Party!

In May and June Briefings were published and the Executive Committee recommended the expulsion of the three editors, Bowing, Hingley and Wilkinson. Again there were summons to the Executive Committee, and again the situation was in deadlock.

By this time the left nationally was aware of the Exeter witch-hunt. Support was forthcoming from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Socialist Action, Labour Against the Witch-hunt and various individuals including Tony Benn. What saved the Briefing editors from being the victims of a tin-pot local tyranny was the growing awareness by the Party Chairperson, Shepherd, that the reasons for the resolution being used to expel the editors were seriously flawed, and that, as Tony Benn made quite clear, the NEC would be forced to overturn the expulsions. Shepherd also had a personal problem; for him the left was a nuisance, but his power base rested on a balancing act between left and right.



'THE RIGHT WING HUFFED AND IT PUFFED BUT IT COULD NOT BLOW THE FLAME OF SOCIALISM OUT'

The expulsion of Briefing's editors might turn into an anti-left rout in which he tumbled in the process; especially as the right wing had just been strengthened as a result of their increased power deriving from the Lib/Lab pact on the City Council. In this situation there was room for a deal.

On the evening of 15th June Peter Kenny, a Briefing supporter was engaged in negotiations with Shepherd. A deal was hammered out, Exeter Labour Briefing would become Devon Labour Briefing and the expulsion resolution would be 'ruled out of order' (a practice now often used against Briefing supported resolutions) That was what happened.

The right wing was furious. Never before had a General Management Committee been so turbulent or so well attended. Though the immediate danger was over, care had still to be taken. Formal editorship was abolished, and with the expulsion issue over more time could be spent on other issues.

Yet something else happened. The struggle for Briefing - the struggle for socialism and freedom of speech

inside the Party - greatly expanded the size of the publication's support. The new publication went beyond the three personalities of the old. From then on the ideas and support for Devon Labour Briefing have grown and are growing.

THE ISSUES

The nitty-gritty of all class struggle, whether against the ruling class directly, or reactionary elements in the Labour Party, is 'campaigns of action'. In the past year supporters of Devon Labour Briefing have taken up several socialist campaigns.

a) The Miners' Strike

Supporters of DLB were the first to move that the heroic struggle by the miners, who were fighting against Thatcherism and for themselves and their class, be supported. Though the right wing did support the miners (one right winger compared the NUM with a charity) the Party devoted less energy to the strike than it would to a by-election. The right wing clung to the reactionary standpoint that there was a division between so-called 'industrial' and 'political' issues.

Perhaps the worst aspect of this whole affair was when a motion which called upon the City Council to do what it could to prevent police harassment of people collecting for the miners on the streets. The right wing defeated the motion and the harassment continued unhindered! Yet, the miners' strike brought many new faces into the Party, and many of these supported the socialist campaigning of DLB. (For further info see - ELB May 1984, DLB Nos 1,2,3 & 7)

b) Peace

One of the policies of Exeter Labour Party was to establish Exeter as a Nuclear Free Zone. The Party, after the May 1984 City Council elections, went into coalition with the Liberals to administer the City. Consequently, because of Liberal opposition, the policy of the Party was changed and a motion, falling short of the clear NFZ demand was moved and passed in the City Council. To hide what they had done the right wing claimed that Exeter was a NFZ. DLB called for a clear campaigning commitment to NFZ policy from the Party.

To test the sincerity of the Party, supporters of DLB suggested a series of concrete measures which could be taken to make the people of Exeter aware of Nuclear War. Rather than oppose the motion outright, the right wing amended the motion out of existence.

(For further info see - DLB No 5)

c) Women

The right wing were hostile from the outset to the idea of the City Council setting up a Women's Committee. One Labour Councillor said he did not want "a committee of babbling women" interfering with Council business. Yet, surprisingly, the Party agreed to set up such a committee.

When after a year in office Labour had done nothing, motions demanding action came from the branches with the backing of DLB - naturally enough they were defeated by the right wing.

When finally, under much pressure, the women's conference designed to articulate ideas did take place, it was scheduled for a few hours in the evening. There was little time for discussion and it was organised at an hour when women found it least convenient to attend.

(For further info see this edition of DLB)

d) NATO

If the right wing are wedded to one thing it is to the USA and NATO. They do not envisage socialism, so they do not care about the contradiction between US imperialism and socialism. Thus, when motions have been moved calling for Labour Party policy to be oriented towards opposition to NATO, the right wing became hysterical. Yet Briefing's campaign on NATO led to a much greater understanding of the importance of this issue.

(For further info see - DLB No 7)

Finally, in this section it should be stated that socialists are often defeated because of the lack of democracy in the Party. Not only is democracy an end in itself, but it is also a powerful tool for the left.

(For further info see - DLB No 8)

This review ends with the following judgements: Firstly, that DLB grows stronger because those who support it are motivated by principle, not by careerism. Secondly, that DLB will play an increasingly leading role in the Party because the ideas of its' authors and supporters are those of today's real socialism, not the redundant and discredited social democracy of the right wing.

Back Issues

Below are listed the main articles which have appeared in previous editions of Exeter and Devon Labour Briefing. Back issues cost 30p.

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING: JULY 1983

Ireland: Election Results J. CLARKE, J. CAROL
Election Analysis 1983 P. BOWING
Leadership Elections 1983 G. CAROL
Future City Council Elections J. CLARKE

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING: DECEMBER 1983

Where Kinnock Stands P. BOWING
The Labour Party and Unilateralism J. CLARKE
Ideology and Elections M. HINGLEY
The Shadow Cabinet P. BOWING

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING: MARCH 1984

Politics and the UB40 Centre P. BOWING
Psychology and the Dole I. CLIFFORD
The Claimants Union T. CANNING
Education Cuts G. CAROL

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING: MAY 1984

Labour and Exeter City Council (pt. 1) P. BOWING
The Miners' Strike M. HINGLEY
Workers Against Racism K. SHUKRA
The Attempt to Expel Briefing Editors M. WILKINSON

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING: JUNE 1984

Labour and Exeter City Council (pt. 2) P. BOWING
Women and the Labour Party P. MARSHALL
Exeter and Apartheid K. SHUKRA
Police Seize LPYS Files M. WILKINSON

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.1 JULY 1984

Devon Police and the Miner's Strike J. LLOYD
Miners in Exmouth R. DAVISON
Confusion in the anti-Thatcher Opposition P. PENHALE
No Coalitions S. BROGAN
Greenham Common P. MARSHALL
Exeter City Council M. RATHFELDER
Teacher's Dispute S. LEONARD
Letter on Exeter Expulsions T. BENN

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.2 OCTOBER 1984

Miners Strike in Devon G. TAYLOR
St. Leonard's By-Election P. BOWING
The Need for an Ideology J. SALTER
Coal and Nuclear Power R. GILES
The Council's Women's Committee P. MARSHALL

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no. 3, NOVEMBER 1984

The Labour Party Leadership P. BOWING
Exeter Women to Greenham A. CAHILL
Maerdy: A Mining Village in Wales P. GIBLIN

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.4, DECEMBER 1984

Defending Job Centres G. TAYLOR
Women in Exeter P. MARSHALL

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.5, FEBRUARY 1985

The Tory Mayor's Job Scheme N. TODD
Nuclear Free Zones P. GIBLIN
The Churchward Affair Z. SUKTHANKA
Secrecy in the Labour Party M. RATHFELDER

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.6, MARCH 1985

Child Labour in Brixham J. SALTER
City Council Reorganisation G. TAYLOR
Exeter Anti-Apartheid Campaign S. REICHER
Briefing Policy EDITORIAL/G. TAYLOR

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.7, APRIL 1985

UB40 Centre Evictions P. BOWING
What Exeter CLP did for the Miners P. BOWING
Labour Out Of NATO P. GIBLIN
Unemployment J. SALTER

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.8, MAY 1985

Campaigning for Labour - County Elections S. REICHER
Molesworth - the Right to Protest R. SPEARS
Democracy and Accountability N. TODD

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING: no.9, JUNE 1985

Labour Holds County Election Balance G. TAYLOR
The importance of Resolutions P. BOWING
Teachers' Dispute C. DUFF
Victimisation of Teachers W. MONTAGUE

Male Aggression

to live up to society's stereotypes of manhood and living in a world which has the literal power to destroy itself, perhaps it is time men took another look at what it means to be a 'man'.

Gerald Taylor, Teignmouth L.P.

The Brussels tragedy was the highlight of the year for the British macho man on the football terraces. Football has long been a breeding ground for right wing factions. Five years ago, when I lived in London, West Ham and Spurs shirts were freely available outside grounds with club badges replaced by National Front symbols. Chelsea's fans had already become legendary and racist barracking of coloured players was as common from other players on the field as it was from fans off it. The clubs turned a blind eye.

Brussels was merely a culmination of several years work for the macho man football fan. The desire to proclaim their presence with nationalistic regalia, some complete with offensive slogans, to occupy foreign territory and to drive out the 'I-ties' was plain.

The Heysel Stadium was not adequate to cope with battle scarred football fans who had cut their teeth on the lines of the Metropolitan and Mersyside police forces. The Brussels police were clearly not well versed in crowd control, or at least not the 'control' of English football 'fans'. Incidentally, what happened to all those pundits who said that what they needed was a sharp dose of foreign riot police?

But the macho men are not restricted to football grounds, or indeed to the far right. Much of the machismo expressed in Brussels was no more than an echo of the sentiments portrayed so vividly by our 'balanced' and 'liberal' media in the Falklands War period. Indeed, as the Italian fans were sent scurrying across the terraces to their tragic destination the word 'gotcha' or something similar must have been in several hundred British minds.

The 'gung-ho' mentality of the macho men, which undoubtedly reached its summit during the Falklands War, and its nadir at Brussels, is becoming an increasing part of the British way of life. The Falklands set the scene. Thatcher played the ultimate matriarch, a sovereign in a very real sense, protecting our boys from afar, and while the lads were bashing the 'Argies' the women were left at home to keep their fears to themselves until the time came to bare their breasts in welcome to the homecoming men. Yes, in more ways than one the macho men grew up during the Falklands War, or at least those who stayed at home.

Since then a rather myopic view of masculinity has pervaded our culture. A view which has reinforced the common stereotype of homosexuals as unreliable at best and traitors at worst. Wigan Council's ban on homosexuals and the handling of the Norman Trestrail affair were typical of the application of this attitude, as are more recent cases. But whether homosexuals would be so vulnerable to blackmail if they knew that admitting their own sexuality would not ruin their careers or leave them socially isolated must be open to doubt.

In some areas, however, masculine based stereotypes have been challenged. Perhaps the most significant example has been the women's peace camp at Greenham. These women almost single handedly transformed CND from being a 'Newsnight' item to a higher profile of '6 O'Clock newsworthiness', upon which most of CND's subsequent success has been based.

One of the most important factors in this transformation was the fact that women at Greenham, being women, did not retaliate to the treatment they received at the hands of the police and others. Perhaps with no male ego to defend they did not find it imperative to 'stand up for themselves'. Whatever the reason, the consequence was that night after night Greenham women appeared on our TV screens with violence being done to them and not by them.

In marked contrast those on miner's picket lines last year who were determined not to be 'pushed around' by police allowed the media the opportunity to show their violence without showing the provocation that had brought it about.

Meanwhile, in America, President Reagan has been relying heavily on macho rhetoric, particularly with regard to America standing up to terrorism and protecting Americans abroad. But his own helplessness and the jingoistic reaction of the American nation when his bluff is called has made it clear that if such rhetoric is applied then the President could end up leading the most powerful country in the world into a conflict which would make the War of Jenkins' Ear look like a highly principled crusade.

These are just a few of the ways in which masculinist viewpoints have distorted our image of the world in which we live. With many psychiatrists claiming that one of the major causes of mental breakdown amongst adolescent boys is their inability

The Face of Violence

Violence is on the increase everywhere in our society and the article in the April Devon Labour Briefing on the 'Violent Eviction of Jobless' was just one manifestation of events which are occurring everywhere, the most terrible being the recent horror in Brussels. Of course, the immediate response of the New Right is that the young lack discipline. This is obviously a naive and reactionary view. Human life must always be placed above sectarian issues and yet we find ourselves disciplining one human being to kill another in what we call a 'just war'. Discipline must also serve some purpose and be referred to some ideal. Sometimes it seems that the only ideal of the present government is to limit inflation, regardless of the kind of society that it is creating. Without some humane vision more than the primitive struggle for weapons, power and money, then discipline can only be a fiercely imposed one, backed up by a strengthening of the Army, the Police and the other agencies who are then called in to contain the problems which have been primarily created by politicians.

Capitalism itself defines all the violence which has arisen from those robbed of purpose and function and hope as the failings of flawed individuals. The appeal of Thatcherism is to a kind of individualism which enables her to cut across class lines, which enables her to condemn some people as 'work shy' when there is no work and condemns miners as the 'enemy within' when they attempt to defend their communities. Her ideology is by definition fragmenting and by implication socially harsh for it lacks the cement required for holding the nation together by stable government. It lacks concern.

When the Tory Party took office, Mrs Thatcher promised reconciliation where there had been discord, now their appeal is to the basest and lowest instincts of aggression and selfishness. Bearing one another's burdens is just for the weak or simple-minded. Capitalist ideology bites corrosively and deeply into all of our lives. All that the authorities can think about is containment. Nothing else will be done, for that would require more understanding than anyone at present responsible for our country is at present capable of.

According to Bill Jordan, Reader in Social Policy at Exeter University, the new proposals for the payment of benefits are all part of a plan to increase the moral surveillance of the poor. There will be a de-regulation of discretionary payments, and the provision for exceptional needs, drafted in 1980 by this very government, will be abandoned, claimants being assessed according to their ability to specify medical and personal stress. Remedies will include budgeting advice and referral to other social work agencies. The poor will be divided into the deserving and the undeserving as they were in the last century.

The government's strategy can continue only so long as it can convince the working class that their interests are different to those of the unemployed and that social services should only really be services for the very poor. The roots of this kind of thinking are based on the resurrected idea of a 'property owning democracy' which implies that those who have no property or can never hope to accumulate any are not full citizens.

Many of those without hope for the future or the ability to sustain their present will have nowhere to turn but to violence, sometimes against themselves but sometimes against others. We know there is an alternative and we must continue to struggle for socialism with all of our hearts!

Jim Salter,
Chair, Exmouth and East Devon Trades Council

BRIEFING

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DEADLINE FOR AUGUST BRIEFING JULY 22nd !