

# DEVON LABOUR 30p

# BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No 11 OCTOBER 1985

## UNFAIR RENTS !

By Dave Parks, Exeter CLP

Rents in Exeter being charged by private landlords are unacceptably high, especially when one remembers about the relatively low house prices in Exeter. They have been rising rapidly over the last few years and are in many cases now at least double an acceptable rent. This situation cannot be tolerated by socialists and action can and must be taken on this issue. There is a facility for both individual tenants and the Council to get a legal maximum rent or "fair rent" set on properties. The Council should use this facility and at the same time make sure that tenants whose cases are not taken up by the Council have full knowledge of their rights and the procedure for protecting their interests.

A "fair rent" is determined by the Rent Officer who acts independently of local and central government. It is determined on the basis of the "age, character, locality and state of repair of a dwelling" and the quantity and quality of any furniture provided whilst disregarding the value due to any local shortage of similar accommodation. It is assumed also that a landlord will make a "reasonable" profit charging a fair rent. Any tenant (or landlord) can ask for a fair rent to be "registered" by the Rent Officer. Such a process should take less than two months and once the fair rent has been registered it is binding, even if there is a change of tenant, for two years after which the landlord may ask for a new fair rent to be registered. The Local Council may also ask the Rent Officer to consider the rent being paid by any tenant and if s/he decides that the rent is too high s/he will determine a fair rent.

There was a case recently in Exeter where the tenants of a five-bedroomed house asked for a fair rent to be registered. The rent went down from £25 a week per room to £10.66 a week per room. This is a reduction of about £3700 a year for the house. This case shows the excessive profits being made by the landlord and how drastically the setting of a fair rent can improve the living standards of those in low paid jobs. It also shows that, assuming that all the occupants of the house are in receipt of rent rebate or allowance, the Government via the Council is wasting between £2000 and £3000 a year in cases like this if the Council fails to ask the Rent Officer to set a fair rent. Rich landlords are also effectively being given between £2000 and £3000 a year via the Council and the tenant. This kind of simultaneous exploitation of tenants and free handouts cannot be tolerated by Socialists. Besides the Tories are permanently complaining of having to "waste" money on welfare, hospitals etc., so surely even they cannot justify free handouts to landlords. Socialists must demand that only reasonable rents are charged. It is total hypocrisy for the Government to cut benefits and rebates to the low paid and unemployed, as the Fowler Social Security Green Paper recommends, when they are giving huge handouts to rich landlords. This shows how the Government defends the class interests of the rich.



'BUT I CAN'T AFFORD £25.00 A WEEK RENT  
- I ONLY EARN £60.00.'  
'DON'T WORRY, I BELIEVE THE COUNCIL WILL  
HELP ME... ER, I MEAN YOU!'

It may be asked: why should the Council ask for rents on behalf of dissatisfied tenants? A number of points should be made on this. Firstly, although in theory landlords "agree" a rent with their tenants, it is fairly obvious that in cases where accommodation is in short supply, prospective tenants are in no position to barter. Either you accept the high rent or remain/become homeless. Secondly, many tenants, having only other high rents to compare their rents with don't realise that they are being ripped off. Thirdly, even if they do realise that they are being ripped off, they often don't know of the existence of the fair rent procedures. Fourthly, they wrongly believe that if they do ask for a fair rent to be set they will be evicted. Fifthly, since the Tory Housing Act 1980 many tenants have Protected Shorthold Tenancies for the period of one year; in that case the landlord can evict them at the end of that period.

Generally, most tenants are either too unaware of their rights or do not have proper security of tenure (in the case of short-hold tenants) or just do not want to upset their good relations with landlords by having a fair rent set. It is quite common for landlords to threaten eviction or to withhold services or even to intimidate using physical violence when tenants ask for a fair rent to be set.

(contd. over)

## LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

## Editorial

The publication of this, the October Briefing, coincides with the start of both the political season and the academic year. Devon Labour Briefing has been in existence since July 1984 and has consistently stressed the need for a socialist analysis of British politics to be backed up with action. This Briefing in particular calls for action on a wide range of issues where it is not enough just to pass resolutions and then sit back.

Briefing has established itself as a forum for socialist debate and has campaigned tirelessly for issues which the Labour Party has taken up in word but not in deed. In fact, great pressure, in the form of articles and resolutions, has had to be put on Exeter Labour Party even to get socialist issues debated.

The resolutions passed by Exeter City Council regarding the Nuclear Free Zone and Anti Apartheid issues are two cases where practical measures must now replace empty rhetoric, as our articles clearly demonstrate. Similarly, the problem of high rents being subsidised by the government can only be solved by the Council using its power to limit extortionate rents and make tenants aware of their rights.

Finally, Devon Labour Briefing appeals to students who are not yet active in local politics to support this publication and add their weight to the struggle for socialism. The forthcoming Day School promises to provide a great opportunity to widen the debates covered by Briefing in the South West and should add up to an exciting meeting of the theoretical and the practical. A socialist analysis of today's problems must be presented at every possible opportunity by campaigning inside the Labour Party and forging links between the Labour Party and other progressive groups. Only a socialist transformation can halt the capitalist crisis. We must come to terms with the real nature of capitalist exploitation and be prepared to ditch any notions of reform and compromise in favour of real socialist policies.

### unfair rents CONTINUED

What can Exeter City Council do? It could refer all new cases received by the Rebate Department of rents over a certain limit, say £20, to the Rent Officer and publicly announce this so as to discourage rents over this limit. It could randomly select a fraction of claims over a certain lower limit. It could occasionally include a guide to tenants rights in cheques or correspondence sent out to claimants of rebates and allowances.

If such a campaign against high rents were to put too much additional work on the Council then perhaps it should employ more staff. If the Council can afford £20,000 for a new mayoral car then surely it can afford one or two more staff in the rebate department. I'm sure this would be welcomed by claimants in Exeter. If the Council cannot afford this then it should demand more money from central government for staff, pointing out that this will save the government money overall. It would only take 4 or 5 houses such as the one mentioned earlier to cover the cost of one extra employee.

Could a campaign affect the quantity and quality of rented accommodation? I think that landlords will continue to make large profits on rented housing and so the quantity and quality of accommodation would not significantly decrease.

## Is Exeter a Nuclear Free Zone ?

Following the passing of a resolution by Exeter City Council concerning the stationing of nuclear weapons in Exeter, there has been much debate on the question of whether Exeter can be regarded as a Nuclear Free Zone or not. Some recent letters from Exeter councillors have shed more light on this debate.

The basic argument for regarding Exeter as an NFZ is that the resolution passed (see below) was based on part of the Manchester model resolution. Therefore, if Manchester is an NFZ, then so is Exeter. On this the case is rested. This argument, so far as it goes, makes logical sense. But it runs into difficulties if we examine the differences between Manchester and Exeter.

Firstly, Exeter has not been publicly declared an NFZ. On this both Labour and Liberal councillors agree. In a letter to Ray Vail, Labour councillor Phil Bialyk writes:

'Exeter has not, as yet, been declared a 'Nuclear Free Zone' however a resolution was passed at the Council Meeting held on 16 October 1984 which read as follows:-

'That this Council notes the refusal of the Ministry of Defence to confirm or deny that Nuclear Weapons are to be stored at the Royal Navy Supply Depot at Countess Wear, and calls upon H.M. Government to refrain from permitting the positioning or manufacture of Nuclear Weapons of any kind within the boundaries of our City in peacetime and that this Council further declares that it will not make available for Civil Defence training for Nuclear War any City Council employee who objects to this on the grounds of conscience'.

Liberal councillor Mark Macnair, writing to Roy Anderson, goes further:

'If Mr. Churchward or yourself believes that Exeter has been declared a Nuclear Free Zone, then I am afraid you have been misled. We passed a motion requesting HMG not to store Nuclear weapons in Exeter, and exempting Council employees from civil defence training if they conscientiously objected. This modest motion is a far cry from a NFZ, and should not be interpreted as such.'

Secondly, Manchester has produced leaflets, posters, T-shirts, postcards, signposts, exhibitions, and renamed streets etc. explaining issues such as the Civil Defence confidence trick and the nonsense of Nuclear Deterrence. Exeter has not done this. In other words, the difference between Manchester and Exeter is that the people of Manchester know that the resolution has been passed, the people of Exeter do not.

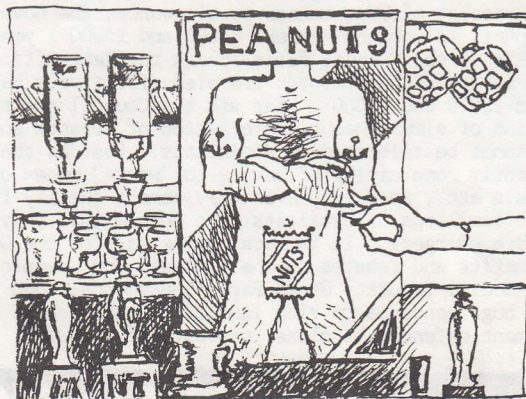
The passing of resolutions is meaningless unless acted upon. If only councillors and a few CND activists have knowledge of this resolution then it is not worth the paper it is written on. Until such time as the people of Exeter are made fully aware of NFZ issues, Exeter cannot be regarded, in any practical sense, as a NFZ.

Neil Todd,  
Exeter CLP

## PEANUTS ENVY?

It is astonishing that Exeter GMC has refused to request the Labour Club to remove sexist material from behind the bar. The alleged reason for this is that the Labour Club is independent of the Labour Party and that the GMC should not interfere with precisely the thing which encourages people to come to the Club at all. If this is true then it reflects a sad state of attitudes in Exeter CLP.

It is already the policy of both the CLP and the Club Committee not to use sexist material behind the bar for sale or display. If only they would stick to this policy. It is anomalous for the Club to sell peanuts which gradually reveal a woman's body whilst the Party campaigns for Women's Rights and Women's votes. It is ridiculous nowadays to expect people not to be offended by such material and not to be discouraged from coming to the bar. It is unfortunate that the Labour Party's policy on Women cannot be given effective expression in one of the most public places of the Party in Exeter by the exclusion of this material. Moreover its display only perpetuates the very sexist attitudes the Labour Party is supposed to be campaigning against. Bulldozing a motion requesting its removal from the bar out of the GMC will not stop the campaign to get rid of it.



# APARTHEID



THE APARTHEID SYSTEM TREATS ITS BLACK MAJORITY VIRTUALLY AS SLAVES, EVERY DAY THAT PASSES ANOTHER 1000 PEOPLE WILL BE NEEDLESSLY JAILED, ANOTHER 100 CHILDREN WILL NEEDLESSLY STARVE. WE CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO WAIT, WE MUST ACT NOW AGAINST APARTHEID. IN PARTICULAR WE MUST END THE SUPPORT THAT WE PROVIDE TO THAT REGIME.

## 1 ANALYSIS

With the intensification of the Freedom Struggle within South Africa and the tentative moves towards economic chastisement by a number of Pretoria's western collaborators, it is now more important than ever that we build on the successes of the recent Apartheid Free Zone campaign. The "enabling resolution", passed in July, in which the City Council resolved to "disengage from any possible support for Apartheid" provides the platform on which specific local action can and must be taken.

Britain's increasing isolation, in the face of a groundswell of world opinion that has persuaded even the architects of constructive engagement to impose severely limited sanctions, requires us to increase our efforts. Numerous local actions across the country, including county, borough and city councils, have intensified the call on the Thatcher regime to implement sanctions immediately, in line with America and the European and Commonwealth nations. More importantly, these local actions show positively our solidarity with those in struggle in South Africa. However, a condemnation of apartheid, without a definition of the action we intend to undertake, is not enough. The call for sanctions by the legitimate leaders of South Africa's overwhelming majority, and indeed by the people themselves (73% supported sanctions in a recent poll), must be answered with positive and constructive action.

In Exeter, the Anti-Apartheid Group is intensifying the campaign around a produce boycott. The focus of action will rest on a campaign to persuade traders not to stock South African produce, and consumers not to purchase these goods from stores who continue to deal in these products of apartheid. It is vital that Trade Union and Labour Party activists become involved in this action so that the campaign can be structured around a liaison of all the individuals and institutions concerned. Action must also be taken within the Labour-led City Council. The mounting of a campaign to rename the new Matford Link road, recently incorporated within the City's boundaries, after Nelson Mandela, would be a commendable first step, but economic action within the jurisdiction of the Council must also be taken. The Council must review its purchasing and contracting policies, so that it does not take up any new contracts with companies involved in South Africa and reconsiders those contracts presently established.

The positive effect of this review should not be underrated. An explicit Council expenditure policy, communicated to the Exeter store owners, combined with a produce boycott campaign, will increase the efficacy of our condemnation of apartheid. Indeed, the severing of Exeter's links with apartheid can be carried into the cultural and sporting fields as well. Positive resolutions to prohibit the use of Council facilities for South African sports teams or official delegates of any nature, will convey our abhorrence to the heart of the regime itself. The Council should also resolve to establish links with the liberation movements in South Africa and Namibia, so that we may continue positive action in tandem with those who strive for freedom and self-determination in Namibia.

An attack on the institutions that bolster apartheid combined with a boycott of South African produce, "the bricks in the wall of apartheid", will add to the international weight which the forces who will liberate South Africa have been calling for. We must take our resolve to the street campaigns and to GMC's in a concerted united action to make concrete the abhorrence we have all expressed.

Mark Levine,  
Exeter CLP

## 2 NEWS

A group of 20 to 30 demonstrators showed their anger at the continued refusal by the Tory Government to impose sanctions on Apartheid South Africa. It is interesting to note that 48% of corporate donations given to the Tory Party come from companies which have subsidiaries or investments in South Africa.

On Sept. 12th they occupied the Exeter High Street branch of Barclays bank. First, the demonstrators gave out leaflets on the High Street criticising the Tories for not imposing sanctions and calling on people to take their own sanctions by boycotting businesses that invest in South Africa. After about half an hour of leafletting the demonstrators moved into Barclays bank refusing to move until they were ejected by police after about an hour. This action totally disrupted business for Barclays bank that afternoon and drew the attention of a lot of people to the appalling situation in South Africa and the involvement of Barclays in that country. The action was reported in press, radio and television. This kind of direct action is not taken on by the official Anti-Apartheid Group, whose policy is to mobilise the widest possible forces in favour of the boycott. We consider such mass campaigning to play a crucial role and fully support the Anti-Apartheid movement. However, we believe that this work is complemented and strengthened by direct action which both gains publicity and conveys the strength of our revulsion against Apartheid. It should be recognised that direct action can and does play a part in all protest movements, and should be supported.

Dave Parks,  
Exeter CLP

## 3 ACTION

It is hoped that the following resolution will shortly be put to the GMC of Exeter Labour Party.

This GMC congratulates the Labour Group on the City Council on passing the resolution in which it agrees "to disengage from any possible support for apartheid", and further notes the motion passed by this GMC in which it resolves "to support the campaign for an apartheid-free Exeter".

This GMC therefore urges the Labour Group to consider the following proposals :

1.
  - a) to set up an advisory Council committee consisting of councillors and persons appointed by Exeter Anti-Apartheid Group
  - b) to publish and distribute leaflets and pamphlets explaining AA policy
  - c) to advertise AA policy on street hoardings, etc.
  - d) to name or rename streets, parks, buildings etc. after South African black leaders (e.g. the new Matford Link road could be named after Nelson Mandela)
  - e) to establish links with the liberation movement in South Africa
  - f) to review the purchasing and contract policy of the City Council so that it stops any new contracts with companies which have subsidiaries or investments in South Africa, and reconsider existing contracts.
2.
  - a) to appoint one of its members to liaise with Exeter Anti-Apartheid.

# What can students do ?

## CUTS

The last week has seen the Teachers' Unions refuse the latest Government pay offer. But this dispute involves far more than a pay struggle. The teachers realise that a decent wage is an important part of improving the status of their profession and so encouraging interest from more skilled applicants and improving the quality of teaching in our schools. Also, the Government's intransigence over the summer illustrates their increasing neglect of state funded education.

While small country schools are closed and their pupils shuttled into overcrowded city schools the employers envisage trimming the number of teachers in response to a falling child population. Instead they should maintain staff levels and reduce the number of pupils per class hence increasing the time spent with each child.

At the same time the Government helps to fund private schools through tax relief and expects the parents of children at Comprehensives to pay for exercise books and help decorate classrooms. So much for the right to an education regardless of one's class background. This biased and offensive attitude also extends to the realm of higher education. With often crippling cuts, especially in the arts, student numbers are forced down and so entry requirements are steadily increasing. This, once again, favours those applicants from private schools which are geared more exclusively to higher education than state schools and allow parents, if they have the money, to buy their children a grade or two at 'A' level.

If this situation is to be reversed and as good an education as possible be offered to everyone we must secure an electoral victory for a party with a truly socialist perspective on education. This involves not only electing a Labour Government but also creating a Labour Party dedicated to radical change in the states attitude to education. This must include the disbanding of the reactionary, racist and sexist old school tie network which still operates within the civil service.

Students are in an opportune position to help secure this change. It is vital that those studying at Plymouth Poly. and Exeter Uni., the county's main educational establishments, organise to fight the Tories and campaign for a truly socialist Labour Party.

Tony Parry  
Secretary, Exeter University Labour Group

## ACTION

How can university students play a constructive role in the struggle for socialism in Britain? That must be the question that all purchasers of this publication must be asking.

The first thing is to join the Labour Group at the university, because unless students are organised, they can exert little pressure anywhere. All members of the Labour Group should, in turn, join Exeter Constituency Labour Party.

Students are well placed to provide intellectual analysis for the Party. Much traditional Labour Party politics lacks direction and intelligence: this is especially true today with deepening capitalist crisis and the removal of reformism as a viable option.

At university, socialist students should, through the Labour Group, play a role in the Guild of Students. Here they have opportunities to affect Guild policy and activity, as well as influencing other students. The latter is particularly important as university students will, in later life, occupy key positions in business and administration.

Through university generally, students have an opportunity to participate in concrete campaigns. These include anti-sexism, anti-Apartheid and peace movements. These campaigns tend to be most successful when linked with progressive activities through the Labour Party. It should also be pointed out that students working and living arrangements enable them to engage easily in such campaigns.

Finally, what of Devon Labour Briefing? This publication exists to stimulate and co ordinate debate and action for socialist struggle in the area. It is always helpful for students to write for and sell Briefing.

Peter Bowing  
Ex-Secretary of Exeter University Labour Group

## BRIEFING

# DAY SCHOOL building socialism in DEVON

on Saturday 23 November

at The Barts Tavern

DAY SCHOOL 10am - 5pm  
BENEFIT GIG 8pm - Band & Cabaret

Admission - £1.00 waged, 50p unwaged

This all day event will feature two plenaries on:  
'The crisis in Britain and the Labour Party' and  
'Current tasks for Socialists'.

These will be followed by four workshops on:  
'Sexual politics',  
'Peace and disarmament',  
'Unemployment and attacks on the Welfare State',  
'Racism and Imperialism'.

For more details including keynote speakers  
see next Briefing.

COME ALONG AND JOIN IN THE DEBATES  
ON THE ISSUES THAT MATTER!

**OCT. 26**  
**SAVE IT!**



CND NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION, HYDE PARK LONDON.  
Coachs from Exeter. Tickets £6 waged, £4-50 unwaged  
available from the CND shop Bartholomew St. Exeter.

LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS

The Exeter LPYS meets on the third Wednesday of each month  
at 26 Clifton Hill. Meet at 8pm in the bar. All under-25's  
welcome.

NEXT MEETING 16th OCTOBER 1985

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# BRIEFING

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