

DEVON LABOUR

30p

BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No 12 NOVEMBER 1985



DAY SCHOOL : building socialism in DEVON



After six years of Tory government there are those who claim that there has been a decisive shift to the right in British politics; that if Labour ever wishes to regain power it too must shift rightwards to pick up a lost central ground. But this argument ignores one fundamental fact. The success of the Tories lies not in their own appeal - in fact the Tory vote fell from 1979 to 1983 and has been in historical decline ever since the 1930's - rather it lies in the absence of a coherent alternative solution to the present crisis.

That is why the fudge and the muddle, abandoning radical policies and adopting compromise positions, the so-called 'new realism' far from being a vote winner, diminishes the ability of Labour to present that alternative. Each time Labour makes concessions to a Thatcherite consensus the result is to strengthen that consensus and revive Tory popularity. When Labour tried to gain 'nationalist' credibility by supporting the Falklands escapade the resultant unchallenged jingoism was immediately used against the railwaymen and to sweep Thatcher to a second term. When Labour tried to appease the 'Law and Order' lobby by accepting the focus on 'picket-line' violence, they helped obscure the real issue of an attack on working class living standards and organisations. The result was a divided Labour movement which failed to give the solidarity that would have ensured the miners victory. Now, today, as Labour leaders try to prove their constitutional respectability by attacking the resistance of Liverpool council to Tory laws, the headlines scream of 'defiance to the law' rather than how cutbacks destroy jobs and services.

In each case the Tories are let off the hook and the debate is conducted on their terms. So when Neil Kinnock attacks the left for being concerned with policies above gaining power, his bluster is an attempt to hide what is actually at stake. That is, what policies are most capable of gaining Labour credibility? The truth is that his policies play into the hands of our enemies. Why vote for a pale shadow of Thatcherism when you can have the real thing? A consistent left alternative would give the Labour party massive popularity.

That is why there is such an urgent need to elaborate that left alternative, not simply in terms of policies for a future Labour government but also in terms of action in the present. The best way to undermine the Tories is to show people that redundancies and cutbacks are not inevitable, that racism and sexism can be challenged, that the alternative is not merely a written manifesto but a living reality.

That is also why Devon Labour Briefing is holding a dayschool on November 23rd upstairs at Bart's Tavern. We see the dayschool as bringing together all those in the Labour Party who believe in socialism as well as those outside it involved in struggles against the consequences of Thatcherism; the unemployed, those in the womens movement, the anti-racist movement, the green movement and so on. We hope to begin a genuine dialogue, both on the level of ideas and practical experience. Our aim is to use our disparate experiences, such that together we can begin the practical struggle for the socialist alternative here in Exeter.

Steve Reicher, Exeter CLP.

DAY SCHOOL at the Barts Tavern on the 23 November

TICKETS - £1.50 waged, 75p unwaged.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Four workshops to be held in two sessions:

- 1.30 - 2.30pm 'Peace and Disarmament' and 'Sexual Politics'
- 2.30 - 3.30pm 'Racism and Imperialism' and 'Unemployment and the welfare state'
- 3.30pm REPORTS BACK from workshops leading to a final plenary: 'Building Socialism in Devon'.

6 - 8pm SPECIAL OFFER - Three course vegetarian meal at GAIA for only £3.00.

8pm BENEFIT GIG - bands and cabaret.

MORNING SESSION

10am Introduction

10.30am 'The current crisis in Britain' (Brian Griffiths, Brighton Labour Briefing)

11am 'The response of the Labour movement' (Graham Bash, National Labour Briefing)

12 noon Liverpool Councillor on Rate Capping.

12.30 LUNCH including Miner's Videos.

GAIA



GAIA

Vegetarian/Wholefood
Restaurant

31 New Bridge Street
Tel Exeter 74168

LABOUR-TAKE THE POWER!

Nazi Front!

The announcement in the Exeter Weekly News (11 October) that the National Front intend to put up a candidate for Exeter in the next general election is a matter of great concern. It cannot be ignored or treated as unproblematic on the basis that the National Front are unlikely to find significant local support. The violence of fascism can be perpetrated by a few to the detriment of the whole community at large and must be opposed forcefully and immediately.

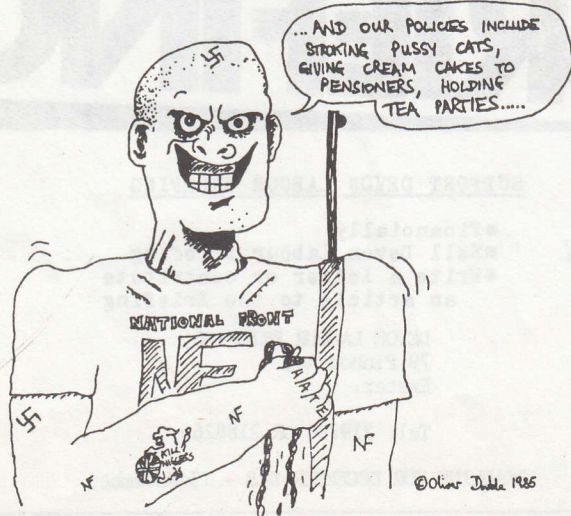
Put into this local context, the dangers of National Front mobilisation are all too apparent. Monthly NF branch meetings are already being held in Torquay and the fascists have begun a recruitment drive outside schools in the area. Anti - Fascist Students from Plymouth Poly who infiltrated a branch meeting were attacked (the police remained outside until the 'disturbance' subsided) and there has been an increase in the number of racially motivated attacks in the area. We must learn these lessons well in Exeter. The recruitment posturing of the NF organisers must be seen for the sham that it is: An inherently racist and anti - semitic leopard cannot change its' spots.

As Martin Goss of the Council for Christian Care has documented, the number of racial attacks in Exeter is on the increase. We should not delude ourselves that this is solely the work of the NF itself. We must address ourselves also to the racism inherent within society as a whole. Conservative Councillor Joan Richardson's remarks on the National Front in Exeter is symptomatic of the institutionalised and socially condoned racism that causes greater damage in the long term. To suggest as she does, that the NF will lack support due to the absence of "non - British" people in the area assumes that black people are not logically British citizens though they may well be born in this country; and, more dangerously, that if Exeter's black community was larger racial antagonism would be the obvious result.

In Exeter, besides the indigenous black population, we have a high proportion of overseas students studying at the collage, the language school and the University. If we allow the NF to organise, the abuse and discrimination that these community members suffer already will escalate into an increasing number of physical attacks. The fightback must be one that involves all anti - fascist groupings, from the trade unions and political parties to the anarchist collectives.

The recent power struggle within the fascist movement has seen the succession of the new Strasserite faction (backed by the Italian Nazis who escaped capture for terrorist offences in Italy) and they have begun a recruitment campaign centred around a sham 'political party' approach. The NF's declared interest in animal rights, ecology and economic recovery is nothing more than facade. The ideological fascist core remains. The NF are attempting to set up National Front trade union organisations and have attempted to infiltrate Miner's Support Campaigns in Walthamstow (Searchlight - October 1984). Vigilance must be maintained at all times.

It is vital, then, that an anti - fascist umbrella campaign is initiated immediately to combat this Nazi menace. The fascists must be fought at the workplace and on the streets. The community must mobilise to prevent the NF from organising at schools and selling their papers in the street. We cannot sit back and allow the National Front to make the first move. It is in the interest of the community at large that we organise now to stamp out this racist filth.



RACISM IN EXETER

The most recent Exeter Weekly News carries an astounding racist diatribe beginning: "I am a racistist...". However few should be surprised that this bile, which contains every example of classic National Front bigotry, is part of an advert for Trago Mills. The owner of this symbol of capitalism has never attempted to conceal his fascist views. Moreover, it confirms the EWN as a prominent forum giving publicity and credence to the views of the National Front (see across.)

Obviously it is important to challenge these views wherever they appear, especially when they are legitimised by the press (One cannot even choose to avoid this racist drivel as it is forced at us through our letterboxes).

The question now, for all people opposed to racism and fascism, is how do we respond to such explicit and provocative examples of this evil creed? On one level the view expressed is so ignorant and irrational that it ill-deserves response on its' own terms. However there is no excuse for inaction and we must be prepared to fight the onslaught of racism that now emerges as never before in Exeter - most explicitly in the Exeter Weekly News.

Apart from investigating the legality of this advert through the Advertising Standards Authority and the Commission for Racial Equality, concrete local action is also underway. Most immediately, a phone blockade of the Exeter Weekly News has been set up. People are ringing them up (ask for Don Adams, General Manager, or the Editor on Exeter 37131) on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays to complain. Remember, don't be fobbed off - these people are responsible for what they publish.

A picket of the Exeter Weekly News may also be organised and in the longer term, an Anti - Racist Alliance should be set up in Exeter.

NB. Due to the threat of National Front thuggery, the Labour Party members who wrote these articles wish to remain anonymous.

Personality Politics?

It is widely agreed, among socialists at least, that politics is about issues and not about 'personalities'. Socialism is an ideology firmly rooted in material issues and is not at the whim or dictate of 'charismatic' leaders. By contrast, for the Tories, the leader's authority is paramount, party conferences are stage-managed to reinforce this, and there is an absence of real discussion of the issues. Such "unity" is a high price to pay for democracy and debate since it reflects the unity of Thatcher's personality alone. In the world of authoritarian and undemocratic politics, then, it is relevant to talk of personalities because they are an issue. This is most obvious in the case of the dictator. In short, the relevance of 'personality politics' in parties at large, is inversely related to the democracy within these parties.

This is no less true at the local level of the Labour Party. So long as democratic principles and procedures prevail, and the grass roots have full voice, issues will be aired and socialism should prevail. However, as soon as politicians start to impose their personal will, personalities will become an issue in themselves because issues will tend to be obscured.

It has generally been a 'policy' of DLB to concentrate on the issues rather than attacking personalities. However, as we have indicated, the division between the two is not always clearcut.

Clearly personal criticism in the sense of 'name calling' is counterproductive. But criticism of people because they have constantly promoted reactionary views or because they have welched on a commitment to socialism, has everything to do with the issues and makes personal criticism inevitable. Charges of 'careerism' are not simply personal attacks, they are statements that people may put their own careers ahead of the issues. It would be dishonest and hypocritical

(contd. over)

PERSONALITY POLITICS? - continued

not to point the finger at such people; issues are promulgated by politicians and they should expect to answer for their behaviour. Such criticism is an attempt to halt the slide into personality politics and is wholly consistent with a full debate of the issues. If socialism is about issues and not personalities, then personal criticism is here to stay.



Furthermore, if socialism is truly based on an analysis of the issues, so called attacks on personalities cannot harm our movement - they should help it. Moreover, when such criticisms occur, accusations of disloyalty are perhaps the most profound way of marginalising and personalising true criticism concerning commitment to the issues. In this respect, Briefing supporters have long been the subject of some of the most 'personal' attacks within the Party.

To summarise then, criticism of politicians in DLB is invariably not an attempt to personalise politics, but precisely to expose those personalities who obscure or impede socialism. Were criticisms of Stalin purely personal and therefore proscribed? If anything such criticism was not vehement enough.

Second, accusations of disloyalty arising from criticism are personal, because they do not address the issues, and are a crude attempt to marginalise critics. Party unity should be genuine and not enforced. Above all, we should recall that the Labour Party lost the last election because certain personalities, such as Callaghan and Healey, were prepared to use their political muscle to fudge on important issues. We have a duty to challenge such people at all times.

Russell Spears, Exeter CLP.

SAFE IN HIS HANDS ?

Ex-Prime Minister Jim Callaghan has just put his seal of approval on Neil Kinnock's betrayal of the miners and those engaged in the struggle against rate capping at this years' Conference. At a press conference in Cardiff he stated: "I think he has grown greatly in stature. The Party is safe in his hands". That Callaghan should be pouring praise on Kinnock should come as no surprise when we consider that Kinnock has now decided to follow the same path as Callaghan. Before this years' conference Neil Kinnock proclaimed: "I am the leader of the Labour Party. It will be on my view of the manifesto that we will fight the next general election."

Those in Exeter who supported the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy reforms to make the leader more accountable to the rank and file following the disaster of the Wilson - Callaghan years should now be deeply worried. Under Callaghan the repressive Prevention of Terrorism Act was brought in; a secret Cabinet Committee authorised the buying of Trident; monetarism was introduced followed by massive cuts in jobs and services; and systematic torture took place in Northern Ireland. The Party is safe in his hands?

Neil Todd, Exeter CLP



AA MARCH

NATIONAL MARCH AGAINST APARTHEID

LONDON SAT. NOV 2nd

Help make this the biggest ever demonstration against apartheid in Britain!
Coaches leave bus station at 7.45 a.m. on Sat 2nd Nov
Tickets £6 waged/£4 unwaged available on the coach and from members of the committee of Exeter and District Anti-Apartheid Group. Contact secretary Jane Hoskins Exeter 51612 for further information.

CO OP SANCTIONS

The campaign for economic sanctions against South Africa is gaining ground. Nationally the Co-op has pledged not to stock South African goods. Locally this means that Leo's has become an Apartheid Free Zone.

As socialists opposing Apartheid we should follow this up by putting our money where our mouth is and campaigning for other shops to follow suit. Any significant drop in customers and the chain supermarkets would soon reconsider their buying policies....

PEANUTS ANGER

Support is still growing for the campaign to remove the sexist advertising material from the Exeter Labour Club Bar. Following the failure of the GMC to pass a resolution calling for the removal of the offending material a petition has been drawn up. The Secretary and Vice Chairperson of Exeter CLP and a leading City Councillor are among those who have signed the document, along with the treasurer of the Club Committee. Three branches have also written to the Club Committee stating their objection to the sexist material.

The extremely offensive pornographic calendar has been removed from the skittle-alley bar, but unfortunately the sexist peanuts advertisements remain in their prominent positions in the main bar. Keep up the pressure by complaining about this material every time you use the bar. The Labour Party is on show at the bar and such anti-socialist imagery cannot be allowed to remain on display. If the letters and the petition fail to have any effect then more dramatic action will have to be taken. This issue will not fade away, as the support rallied after the GMC clearly shows.

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 20 NOVEMBER 1985

LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS LPYS

BRIEFING

SUPPORT DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

- Financially
- Sell Devon Labour Briefing
- Write a letter or contribute an article to the Briefing

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING,
79 Pinhoe Rd,
Exeter.

Tel. 219796 OR 218826

DEADLINE FOR DECEMBER DLB - 15 November