

# BRIEFING

with NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

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## NO to Cuts YES to Fair Rents

By Dave Parks, Exeter CLP

There has been much interest in the proposals outlined in the October DLB article 'Unfair Rents'. These proposals are intended to make private tenants much better off, both by increasing their awareness of their rights and reducing rents. If put into practice they would directly contradict the present Tory Government's policies of 'saving' public money at the expense of the working class and the underprivileged. These proposals would actually save money at the expense of rich landlords whilst making tenants better off.

Housing Benefit 'rate-capping' proposals. There is a desperate need for Exeter City Council to pass this kind of case to the Rent Officer for consideration of a fair rent while giving full rebate until the Rent Officer's decision.

(contd. over)

### NO TO CUTS

The Tories are preparing to give huge handouts to the rich in the form of tax cuts. These handouts will be funded by the cuts in services already made and the proposed cuts in the Social Security system. The Tories have also used rate-capping to cut the building of council houses. At present, for instance Exeter City Council has money gained from the sale of council houses which cannot be used to build more council housing as this would lead to the Council losing government grants due to 'overspending'. (Only Liverpool Council has managed to keep up its much needed housing programme by confronting the rate-capping laws.)

The Tories are planning massive cuts in the Welfare State. The proposals put forward in the Fowler Social Security Green Paper would cut the Social Security budget by £1 billion per year. A large proportion of this cut will come from Housing Benefit which has already been cut on three separate occasions. A total of £500 million will be cut from Housing Benefit with 1.8 million families losing their Housing Benefit and another 5.2 million having their money cut. Changes to Housing Benefit proposed in the Green Paper will involve a 'back door' form of rate-capping. Local authorities will suffer a further cut in their central government grants if they do not keep Housing Benefit expenditure at a level which the government likes.

The present Housing Benefit system has already led to severe hardship for some tenants. Many Councils, such as Exeter, refuse to pay tenants full rebate on high priced rented accommodation. I recently heard of a case in Exeter where an unemployed couple with a child are only being given £40 a week rebate for their £55 a week one bedroomed flat. They are forced to make up the remaining £15 a week out of their dole money! Exeter has seen many cases of unemployed people moving into bedsits with rents of £30 to £40 a week only to find out that the Council will give them a mere £25 a week rebate. People are faced with a choice of amassing huge debts or becoming homeless. This kind of case may well become more frequent with the Fowler



**LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!**

## Editorial

Once again we are confronted by the antics of the undemocratic right wing, who now find themselves in alliance with the Tory gutter press over the issue of sexist advertising. We have seen the persecution of active and hard working socialists as in the case of Paul Giblin who was blocked by the right wing executive committee from becoming a candidate for the forthcoming City Council elections. At the same time an ex-member of the Council for Social Democracy was nodded through. We have seen active support for US Imperialism on the part of leading members of the Labour Party and CND who will go to any length to block debate on the NATO issue.

Devon Labour Briefing exists to further Socialist debate in the Party and to promote issues which the right wing would rather drop. We believe that only by establishing a radical Socialist programme rather than the now redundant welfare capitalist policies promulgated by the likes of Hattersley, Healey and Kinnock, can we hope to achieve Socialism in Britain. As a first step we must transform the Labour Party from an essentially social democratic party into one which is prepared to campaign on radical Socialist policies and support the working class and the progressive movements in their struggle against capitalism, racism and sexism. We welcome any articles or letters from all Labour Party members on any issue.



### YES TO FAIR RENTS - continued

The following proposals were put to the GMC by the Exeter LPYS:

1. That all new cases received by the Rebate Department of rents over a certain limit, such as £20 per week per claimant, be referred to the Rent Officer for consideration of a fair rent. And that this policy be clearly announced to discourage extortionate rents.
2. That leaflets detailing the rights of tenants and duties of landlords are periodically sent to all claimants. These should cover:
  - a) Security of tenure.
  - b) Registering fair rents.
  - c) Duties of landlords to carry out repairs.
  - d) Details of any powers possessed by the City Council which may be of help to tenants.

It should be pointed out that huge savings could be made by discouraging high rents. But, unlike Tory 'savings', these are not intended to help fund tax cuts and handouts to the rich, they are intended to reduce the burden of high rents on the low paid. At present, many landlords are charging £25 a week for rooms probably not worth more than £10 to £15 a week. For many houses this represents excess profit of up to £4000 a year, of which up to £3000 comes indirectly from the Council if the tenants are in receipt of rebate.

The GMC did not take a decision on whether or not to take up the above proposals. Obviously many people did not fully understand this complex issue. As a result Councillor Sandra Golant organised a meeting on 10 November to discuss these proposals. It was a constructive meeting and many points were raised. The main worry expressed at the meeting about the proposals was that they might lead to tenants being intimidated by their landlords. This can be easily countered by the fact that the fair renting procedures would be such that it would be obvious to the landlord that the Council are responsible for initiating them and not the tenant. There should be no reason for landlords to blame the tenant. Also, since fair rents remain irrespective of changes of tenant, there would be nothing to gain by intimidating the tenant.

Another point raised was over whether tenants would lose rebate as a result of such a policy. It would, in fact, be illegal for the present Council or any future Tory Council to use this policy to allow tenants to lose rebate. The Council, on referring cases to the Rent Officer, would have to pay the full rebate entitled to claimants until the

Rent Officer reaches his decision. It must be pointed out that when such cases are passed to the Rent Officer for consideration, he will only register a rent if he considers the present rent to be too high.

Another possible problem that has been raised is connected with 'non-exclusive occupation licence' agreements. These have been used by landlords in the past to get around Rent Act protection of tenants, and hence prevent fair renting. However, in the House of Lords case: 'Street v. Mountford' it was upheld that these agreements were not valid. There are only tenancies with Rent Act protection or alternatively lodgers living in the same house as their landlord. So it would be fairly simple for the Council to determine which cases to pass to the Rent Office (ie those with non-resident landlords). If any of these cases should be 'licence' agreements they would be illegal and the tenant would soon find out that he/she does have protection.

Could these policies lead to discrimination against claimants by landlords? As nearly all the private sector market is made up of claimants, whether low paid, unemployed people or students, it would be very difficult for landlords to discriminate against them. They would be forced to reduce their rents instead!

Dave Parks, Exeter CLP.

## Socialist Councillors?

Activists on the left, outside the Labour Party, often ask why, if the socialist wing of the Party is so active, doesn't a single Labour councillor oppose, for example, the wasting of £28 000 on the mayoral car. The answer lies in the power of the anti-socialist bureaucracy in Exeter Labour Party. This article illustrates one such practical case.

The Polsloe/Stoke Hill branch of Exeter Labour Party had no clear idea whom it wanted as prospective candidate for the May 1986 City Council elections. After some discussion, the branch decided to nominate Paul Giblin, a regular attender at meetings and a hard worker. Paul is on the campaigning socialist wing of the Party.

But before he could become the Labour candidate, he had to be endorsed by the Exeter Party's Executive Committee, which was due to meet on 20th September. Paul's appearance before the committee was somewhat different from that of the other candidates. His application forms had been 'lost' for a start; and he was interrogated rather than interviewed. After he had left the room, the Chairperson, Dr. John Shepherd, began the discussion of his potential candidature by questioning his 'loyalty to the Party'. The 'evidence' against him was that he had written articles for Devon Labour Briefing!

Nobody was surprised that the 'do-nothing' majority on the Executive Committee rejected Paul's nomination. Yet, they felt free to approve the candidature of a defector to the Council of Social Democracy and of a man who could think of no reason why he wanted to be a councillor.

On 27th September Paul appealed to the Party's General Management Committee against the Executive decision. He spoke well and won the argument. It was due only to a misplaced loyalty to the Executive that Paul narrowly lost the vote. In the event, Paul showed respect for the honesty of the majority of GMC delegates, and did not appeal to the National Executive Committee.

The Labour candidate in Polsloe is not the locally nominated Paul Giblin, but the right-wing Party Chairperson, Dr. Shepherd. The fact that he is only there because of anti-democratic procedures in Labour's bureaucracy must not detract from the need for Labour to win Polsloe. Yet, one cannot help thinking that more Party democracy would strengthen the campaign, and lead to the election of socialist councillors.

In the long run the issue is simple; the election of socialist councillors in Exeter requires the elimination of a lethargic, careerist and rightwing bureaucracy inside the Party. Fighting these people with issues and analyses brings forth a vicious rightwing retaliation, which drives many people from the Party and the socialist cause. Yet, it is only by building a constructive and supportive socialist opposition that we lead the struggle for the working people of Exeter.

Peter Bowling Exeter CLP.



# WOMEN UNITE !



We, as women, feel it is time to explain our position in the struggle for Socialism.

Sexism permeates our lives in every sphere and within the Labour Party we often feel the mere tools of Socialist men. They work for a future in which the basic sexual status quo will still remain. The Socialist man's answer to everything is that if women want to get involved, why don't they just do it.- Why not reach out and grab equality, it's there for the taking. - Is it?

Women still continue to be underrepresented in the Labour Party as a whole. In Exeter, for example, the Labour Group on the City Council has 2 Women Councillors to the 12 men. The situation is just as bad at County Council level. Women do not appear actively to seek office and one would argue that this is the case in all political groupings.

As Women Supporters of Devon Labour Briefing, we put this down to the capitalist society and deep-rooted sexist attitudes and behaviour which show themselves in social action and interaction. Socialist men can agree to work for equality while in fact doing nothing. The constant blocking by the trade unions of the basic demand that Labour Women's Conference should elect the Women's division of the National Executive Committee is an evergreen example. We can understand why the men are defending their own right wing interests. This situation will continue while the majority of women are ineligible to join a Union because of their status as "home workers".

It is often no better in Constituency Labour Parties. Here women find themselves caught in a paradoxical situation. A recent case to illustrate being the Exeter Labour Club Bar's display of pornographic material. Official Labour Party policy proclaims equality for women while the institutions of the Party continue to propagate sexist practices. Many women compromise themselves for Labour men to such an extent that they can no longer assert themselves on women's issues at all. In fact, they are the minions of those in power - the men. They are conned in the same way as the Working Class are conned by Capitalism.

We must, at a basic level, challenge the theory that Women can get equality if they just work for it. Women simply do not have the necessary political confidence to do this; thousands of years of oppression have seen to this, as has inadequate access to political knowledge. One woman in a political grouping of men has a battle to assert herself in the face of men's manipulation of the social tools and an extensive training in "rational" thought.

Women also have to feel they have a personal and equal stake in the Socialist Struggle. We have to know we can achieve an equal share of the power at the end of the road. We are not just working for THE (male) revolution but for a completely different society. More work has to be done to cement the twin demands of class and sexual struggle.

It is here that autonomous caucus groups of women can be instrumental for social change.

## The Case for Caucusing

Caucuses have an essential function for women who lack confidence, either because they have not in the past felt able to vocalise opinions, or because they have simply not had sufficient access to political theory and knowledge. They provide a place for exchange of useful information and advice, and therefore generally increase political awareness. Learning collectively is not only more fun, it also encourages a feeling of unity and reassurance, which, for most women, is totally lacking in their daily and political lives.

Caucusing prior to other meetings to discuss all the issues on the agenda (not purely the ones deemed to be primarily the concern of women) is even more relevant to the confidence building process. Ideas are then fresh in the minds of the participants, thus helping them to be more self-assertive on all the issues raised. This enables women to keep going through the constant interruptions from self-opinionated, domineering and sexist men! Points on the agenda which have ignored our needs can also be tackled.

Women's caucuses have to put pressure on men on the left to put their verbal commitment to equality into practice. This has to start at grass roots level and also demands an active commitment from men. They must challenge their attitudes and actions.

Certain mechanisms can help with this, enabling women to gain confidence in political meetings. Strict chairing, ensuring women can put forward their views and censorship of sexist practices has to take place. Intimidation by leering, booing men at General Management Committee meetings can, in particular, be mentioned, but subtler sexist practices take place in all political meetings.

It is always vital to remember that feminist issues were not taken up seriously until recently and that for this reason, feminist women are generally still quite "young" politically. This is why, although women must organise independently, there is just as much need for men to involve themselves in women's issues and give constructive criticism, encouragement and help. This is how we can stop the marginalisation of sexual politics. There is all too frequently a male attitude of "You women go and discuss your issues and we'll get on with the 'real politics' ". Women must be encouraged to write and talk on all aspects of Socialism and not feel restricted.

Therefore, merely to work for Socialism will not enable equality to spring up as a matter of course. Women have to exert pressure now and men have to examine their beliefs and support women in their fight. It cannot be a one-sided battle. Men HAVE to support women actively at all times. The Left must grasp this chance to prove their commitment to equality in the wake of new advances made by women this year. All of us, women and men, have to build on the political education gained during the Miner's Strike and disillusionment with Thatcher's Britain.

To gain in stature the Left must live by, not just talk about, positive policies for sexual equality. Only in this way can women take power over their future.

Alison Daun  
Britt Holloway  
Vered Kahani  
Jo Shaw  
Exeter CLP.

## Neil Hogg Replies



The knee-jerk reaction from the right-wing and the hysteria whipped up in the Tory gutter press over the issue of sexist advertising is what we have come to expect and is indicative of the fact that sexist attitudes are still widespread in the Labour Party, even though it has anti-sexist policy both nationally and locally. It demonstrates institutionalised sexism is deeply entrenched in the establishment and promulgated by the media.

It is clear that there is a need for some kind of education programme on sexism and the way in which women are exploited in the home, in low paid jobs and generally in society. It also requires men to start being more aware of their behaviour and attitudes. The dispute will continue until such time as the sexist and pornographic material is removed from the Club Bar.

Neil Hogg  
Labour Loony Left.

# CND: Labour's Dilemma



The items, or rather the absence of certain items, on the agenda for this year's CND Conference raise some very serious questions about the direction in which CND is now heading.

The agenda is divided into four sections: international, internal, campaigning and constitutional. In the Interim Agenda, as laid out in Campaign, September 1985, there were ten Composite Motions in the International section, four of which were concerned with NATO. However, of the three selected for the Final Agenda none were concerned with NATO. In other words, although 40% of the International Composites were concerned with NATO the National Council of CND deemed NATO not to be important issue.

CND activists and those members of the Labour Party who are committed to a socialist alternative must ask themselves why this discrepancy exists between the wishes of the rank and file, as expressed in terms of the number of motions submitted on NATO, and the wishes of the National Council. The answer lies, of course, in the relationship between CND, the Labour Party and the Labour Party's contradictory defence policy.

The Labour Party's defence policy is based on the notion that somehow by staying in NATO it can transform NATO policy. It is argued that "Labour will work within NATO to return the Alliance to the goals set out in its Treaty and to allow NATO to fulfil its objectives by political and military means rather than nuclear means." (NEC Statement, 1984).

Even a cursory glance at the history of NATO shows that those "lofty" statements made in its Treaty were merely a facade to disguise its real aims which were to provide a platform for the USA to oppose socialism worldwide and maintain US hegemony in Europe, just as its other "defence" pacts do. Further, NATO is not an alliance of equals - the interests of the other members of totally subordinate to the USA. Whilst Britain remains a member it will lack control of economic, industrial and social policies and independence of international policy. The USA is not content with controlling the alliance, it requires Europe to serve its people by being a frontline for war.

Membership of NATO means that we are in an alliance which threatens any other country trying to liberate itself from US imperialism. Note US support for military dictatorships; death squads in El Salvador; the invasion of Grenada; intervention in Nicaragua; finance for apartheid in South Africa; fascist governments in Turkey and Chile. There is no distinction between US foreign policy and the policy of NATO.

Although, the Labour Party is committed to unilateral nuclear disarmament and the removal of nuclear bases, it also believes: "A large proportion of the US bases and facilities in Britain have an important role in the conventional defence of Europe including the reinforcement and supply of the Central Front". (NEC statement 1984).

In this statement they are overtly supporting US imperialism. Even if the US promise not to deploy nuclear weapons in Britain they would in practice defy any regulations which forbade this. They did so in Japan, using that country for the sea and air transport of nuclear weapons, and they have done so in Norway. The 'Joint Logistic Plan', secretly drawn up by Thatcher and Reagan, which gives US military requirements priority in times of crisis, is just another example. Anyway, the Americans could rely on the co-operation of British service chiefs (the military wing of the British ruling class).

So, in the light of these facts we can at best view Labour's 'defence' policy as naive and at worst an imperialist conspiracy. This attempt to sweep the NATO issue under the carpet at this year's CND Conference is a symptom of this conspiracy on the part of the Labour leadership, and certain leading members of CND who are also members of the Labour Party. Their aim is to bring CND into line with the Labour Party's support of NATO. Their motivation for doing this is that they view CND's policy of withdrawal from NATO as an electoral liability because they are too afraid to challenge the Tory agenda. They are afraid to challenge the power of the British ruling class. They are afraid to take the steps necessary to counter any attempt by the USA to subvert and de-stabilise a Britain engaged in nuclear disarmament.

The genuine left of the Labour Party have a message. It is one of hope for the rank and file CND activists and it is a warning to the pro-NATO lobby. The left in the Labour Party have won the argument for unilateral disarmament as a first step towards world disarmament. In the same way, by returning year after year to the Labour Conference, we will win the argument for British withdrawal from NATO, as a first step towards the destruction of world imperialism.

Neil Todd, Exeter CLP.

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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 18 December 1985

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# BRIEFING

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