

# BRIEFING

with **NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT**  
**No. 14 FEBRUARY 1986**

"WHAT IS HAPPENING IN EXETER IS REALLY NOTHING TO DO WITH PEANUTS - IT HAS TO DO WITH A LABOUR PARTY STAYING IN COALITION WITH LIBERALS"

ken livingstone

## THE ISSUE IS DEMOCRACY

By Steve Reicher, Exeter CLP

For three months now, Exeter Labour Party has been in uproar. After two meetings of the GMC and no less than four EC's the Party is on the verge of expelling supporters of Devon Labour Briefing at the special GMC on February 7th. So why all this fuss? What is going on? What are the real issues underlying all this frenzied activity?

The more one listens to the various noises coming from the Party the more confused one is liable to become. When the December GMC decided to 'investigate' DLB it referred to 'breaches of confidentiality and attacks upon the Party' in the Briefing. The initial letters sent to 6 DLB supporters accused them of violating clause 4.2(a) of constituency Party rules which requires members to abide by the constitution principles and policy as well as the local rules of the Party. A subsequent letter enlarged upon this 'charge' by saying that the misdemeanour lay in being involved in the 'organisation and production' of Devon Labour Briefing. Finally, the EC investigation seemed set on discovering 'officers' for a Briefing organisation. So what is the real charge; is it organisation, breaches of confidentiality, or attacks on the Party?

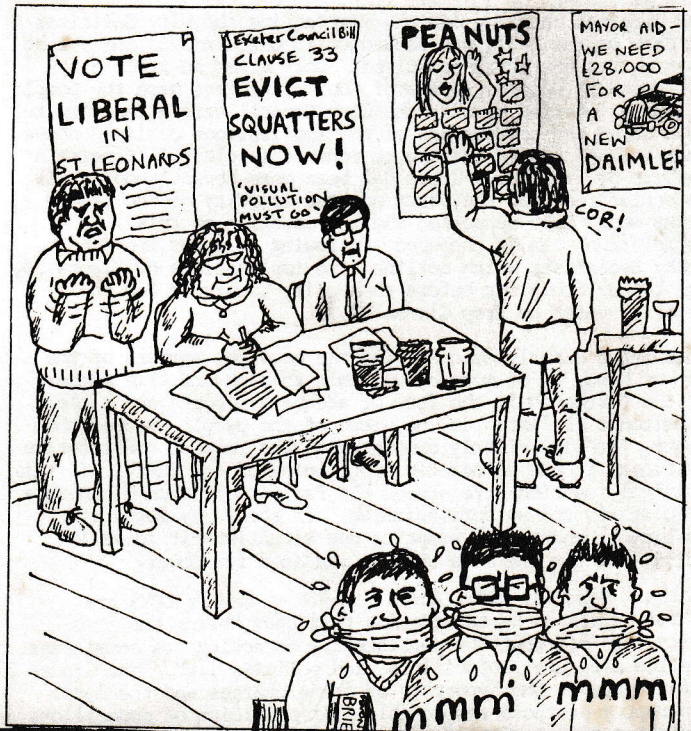
The organisation question is a pure red herring. It stems from the names on our bank account. Now of course there is a bank account; Briefing costs money to produce and we choose not to keep that money under our beds. Equally obvious, a bank account needs signatories. What the Party officers did was to entice our bank into showing them who those signatories were, and then claim that they had evidence of an organisation. In the first place this was, at best, a dubious practice. In the second place the evidence is meaningless, the signatories being for bank purposes only. But thirdly there is no crime in having some organisation, the only offence in the constitution relates to organisations with policies and program separate to that of the Labour Party. No-one has even suggested that that is so. If they did the charge would have related to clause 3 of the constitution. The fact that clause 3 was never mentioned is proof enough that organisational accusations are irrelevant and misleading.

Then there is the question of confidentiality. It is claimed that the Party is immobilised because it is no longer possible to discuss anything in confidence. Even the Party manifesto for the May elections cannot be finalised for fear that it may be leaked by the Briefing. Clearly if this were really the case something would have to be done about it and we acknowledge that there may be some genuine fears on this matter. Yet these fears are entirely misplaced. One lapse on a minor question has occurred. It will not happen again. Yet from this small incident a whole hysteria about confidentiality has been whipped up, one which has no justification in the facts. We would never reveal confidential material to do harm to the

Party. Moreover the EC knew this before it made its decision. It had signed documents showing that all those questioned would pledge themselves not to reveal the proceedings of confidential meetings and in particular not to reveal details of the manifesto. We repeat that pledge here and now.

That leaves the question of attacks on the Party. The problem lies in what one means by 'attacks'. If it means personal abuse then naturally it has no place in political debate. The fact that we take issue with the political positions of others does not mean that we think them out to do harm or to be 'bad' people. But we completely reserve the right to take issue with political decisions. We will continue to challenge sexism wherever we find it, we will continue to press the Party on the question of Nuclear arms, we will continue to expose legislation that limits the rights of the homeless and workers in occupation. How could it be otherwise? The whole essence of the Labour Party lies in our democracy and right to dissent; how can we attack a Tory Party which attacks civil liberties and abolishes those who disagree with it if our Party does the same? Once we go down the road of expulsions we allow the Tory media to portray our strength in discussion as a weakness of disunity.

Once you start blurring the lines by making it unclear as to what is legitimate difference and what is illegitimate attack you create a climate in which people start being afraid to voice their opinions. Let us not start off on a road which leads to a narrow Party and an authoritarian Party. Let us not go down the path of expulsions, for what is at stake is the very democracy of our Movement.



**LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!**





Devon Labour Briefing exists to further socialist debate in the Labour Party. For over a year supporters of Briefing have been involved in a number of campaigns to link the Labour Party with other progressive groups. The left is now under attack in Exeter and elsewhere, but, as this issue shows, the campaign for a socialist Labour Party continues and, indeed, grows. Devon Labour Briefing looks forward to a prosperous future; witchhunts and expulsions do not deter campaigning socialists. DLB's role in local politics is both established and forceful. Why not write an article and join in the debates that matter?

#### SUPPORT DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

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

Contact Devon Labour Briefing at 79, Pinhoe Road, Exeter.

## Clause 33 & Accountability

Clause 33 of the recent Exeter City Council Bill and the campaign to stop it raise some serious questions about the relationship between the Labour Group on the City Council and rank and file members of the Party.

If Clause 33 had become law it would have made both squatting and the unlawful occupation of premises into a criminal offence. Police would have been given the power to enter premises without a warrant and arrest occupiers. Apart from denying squatters their right to be heard in a Civil Court the new by-law could have been used by unscrupulous landlords to evict tenants living under licence agreements. It would also have given employers a weapon against people occupying their place of work as a form of protest. In brief Clause 33 represented an attack on civil liberties in Exeter and set a dangerous precedent for others to follow.

After a vigorous campaign which was supported by a wide range of groups and individuals including Exeter LPYS, Shelter, National Council for Civil Liberties, Exeter Trades Council, the Green Party, CND and, ironically, the Home Office, the Policy Committee of Exeter City Council dropped Clause 33. However, they only did so reluctantly and 'with regret'.

The original enabling motion, instructing the City Solicitor to draw up the Bill, was passed on 15 October 1985 and yet at no time was the Party consulted. Only after an article by Rob Davis in December issue of the Flying Post were the people of Exeter alerted to what the City Council were attempting to do. Given the seriousness of the implications outlined above the reason for this failure to consult is clear. If certain members of the Labour Group had been more honest about their intentions neither the Party nor the majority of the Labour Group would have supported the introduction of this legislation. As it happened, following a letter from the Young Socialists which outlined the implications of Clause 33, the Labour Group met before the Policy Committee and the majority voted to drop Clause 33.

This issue clearly demonstrates the need for members of the Labour Group to be more accountable to rank and file members of the Party both in the form of adequate reports and a clear commitment to listen to the views of the people who put them there. It also clearly demonstrates the role of constructive criticism in the democratic functioning of the Party. If this critical function were absent the Party would soon degenerate into stasis and authoritarianism. If the Party loses its ability to change and adapt to new situations it loses its ability to win the mass support required for power.

On the 7 February 1986, three members of Exeter LPYS are up for expulsion on the grounds that they "bring the Party into disrepute by persistently attacking its committees, elected officers, councillors, and policies ...". The Clause 33 affair exposes the hypocrisy of these charges and the moral bankruptcy of those responsible. If criticism of councillors for attempting to introduce repressive legislation is an expellable offence in Exeter then the Party has drifted towards authoritarianism. If the Party decides to overturn the EC recommendation for expulsion it will represent a victory for democracy and accountability.

Neil Todd, Exeter CLP

## Women and Local Govt.

In 1986, four years after the formation of Women's Committees within the GLC and a number of London Boroughs, the Women's Advisory Committee in Exeter is finally starting to get off the ground. 36 women representing 22 organisations attended a meeting in mid-December which discussed a variety of topics of relevance particularly to women and laid plans for 3 meetings in 1986 which will consider the topics of housing, health and environment (the latter to include social attitudes and pornography).

It is of course sad that the Women's Committee was denied 'Standing Committee' status and so lacks "teeth", but that should not detract from the value of such a forum for discussion for women within Exeter. It offers an opportunity to women throughout the city, from a wide variety of different backgrounds and perspectives, to express themselves in the knowledge that what they are saying as women will be taken seriously. Anxieties about safety at night will be judged according to women's perceived fears and needs, not some abstract male norm. Problems of convenience and accessibility posed by council housing or public transport will not be dismissed immediately by some male functionary who has never tried to push a pram through a council house or climb on to a minibus with two children under five, bags of shopping and a wet umbrella. In short, women's needs are at last being taken seriously.

But the problem remains in Exeter, as it does elsewhere, that a Women's Committee can simply become a sop to the consciences of the male-dominated central hierarchy. The temptation and possibility exists to marginalise the women, to listen to them only when they speak through the Women's Advisory Committee and to deny them other means of access to the local authority which they help to elect and the rates which they help to pay. A series of issues may be perceived as 'Women's Issues' and will be hived off to the Women's Advisory Committee never to appear elsewhere on the Council agenda. The wider sexual political dimension of every Council decision can be forgotten altogether. For the women remain 'advisory' and the men who form the majority of the elected representatives and the majority of the appointed Council officers remain the 'decision-makers'.

The setting up of the Women's Advisory Committee must be the beginning not the end of a power struggle, and it will be a struggle, for no ruling group has ever given up power without a fight. Women must unite and take the power. They must campaign for the effective implementation of equal opportunities and positive action strategies in local authorities and the provision of parental leave and child-care facilities for local authority employees. But above all we must strive for equal representation of women amongst elected representatives and to create a progressive structure which encourages the full participation of women. In the Labour Party we must begin at the bottom, bring in the women as party activists and then remove one by one the barriers to progression, the sexist attitudes, the unconscious bias towards white males, until eventually women will emerge in huge numbers as experienced well qualified candidates for office whose value will never be denigrated.

Jo Shaw, Exeter CLP.

## NFZ Challenge for Labour

On February 25th, the issue of making Devon a nuclear free zone is on the agenda of the County Council Policy Committee. It might be expected given the Labour Party's anti-nuclear defence policy and newly-adopted policy against nuclear power that the Labour Group on Devon County Council would be in the forefront of the campaign to get Devon to join the 160 plus local authorities that have gone nuclear free. Expectations it appears are to be quashed.

Mr David Knott, Deputy Leader of the group was quoted in the Western Morning News on the 27 January. "Our position is perfectly clear and we're not sitting on the fence. There is no possibility of us declaring a nuclear free zone in view of the industrial situation in Plymouth. How can you have a nuclear base at Devonport and declare the county a nuclear free zone?"

Mrs Saxon Spence, Leader of the Group said they had no commitment to a nuclear free declaration and she saw no mandate to go beyond their manifesto at this stage.

Exeter, along with Bideford and Cullompton has declared itself a nuclear free zone as a result of moves by the Labour Group. However, if the Labour Party is going to have any credibility at all as a peace and anti-nuclear party this decision by the Labour Group on Devon County Council must change. They are turning their back on the many thousands of CND supporters that voted for them in the last County Council elections. Between now and February 25th there is much work to be done.

Dave Parks, Exeter CLP



# LABOUR AGAINST THE PARTY WITCHHUNT



## STOP THE WITCHHUNT START THE DEBATE!

On 21st January, a meeting was held in County Hall, London, organised by Labour Left Coordination along with the Campaign Group of MP's, the London Labour Party and the CLPD. The meeting was addressed by Diane Abbott, Joan Maynard, Ken Livingstone and people with experience of the witchhunt from Exeter and Birmingham.

Three things came out of the meeting. The first was to show how widespread the witchhunt has become with members being expelled or facing expulsion in at least 27 constituencies from Fife in Scotland to the Isle of Wight. Secondly, the myth that the witchhunt is aimed solely at Militant can no longer be sustained. People are being expelled for their involvement in Black sections, for supporting the Labour Committee on Ireland and for simply taking issue with aspects of Party policy. As speaker after speaker emphasised, the entire left is under threat. The third point had to do with the political background to these attacks.

The present timing of the witchhunt is not accidental. It is tied to the possibility of a hung Parliament after the next election. To clear the way for a coalition government, the Labour leadership needs a compliant Party happy to drop its commitments in the search for office. Ken Livingstone pointed out that this is why Labour Parties in local coalitions are in the forefront of the witchhunt. And Joan Maynard related how Tony Benn explained the witchhunt as the prelude to coalitionism at the December NEC. "Neil Kinnock", she said, "nearly jumped two feet out of his seat. You can always tell when you have hit the nail on the head."

Steve Reicher, Exeter CLP.

## MEDIA MADNESS

By Russell Spears, Exeter CLP

There are many political reasons why witchhunts are wrong but perhaps the most important reason concerns the damage inflicted on the Labour Party by the Tory media.

Leaders of the different parties have not underestimated the power of the media. They well know that the presentation of themselves and their policies is of paramount importance for electoral success. The media form the vital bridge in the 'two-step flow' of communication between Parliament and people. Recent events aside, Thatcher has been expert in using this machinery to build her image and ensure support, even from those whose material interests she spurns. In particular, she has been able to use such channels to talk over the heads of government and state, to the masses, while actually consolidating her presidential power-base. Fortunately perhaps, this is a far less accessible route for Kinnock, simply because the media are a bourgeois institution that serve Tory interests, as the union-busting practices of the press barons clearly show. We should therefore view with grave suspicion any attempt by Kinnock to use the media in a similar way, since he is far more likely to disappear down their path than they down ours.

And yet the danger signs have already appeared. For example, at the Labour Party Conference Kinnock addressed himself, through TV, not to the delegates in the conference hall, but to the 'real people' out there (shades of Thatcher's presidential style?) But a far more sinister aspect of Kinnock's 'use' of the media (or their use of him), concerns his willingness to engage the popular prejudices of the Tory press in conducting a witchhunt against certain sections of his own Party - namely Militant. There is no contradiction here; it is precisely because of the hostility of the capitalist media that he judges the purge necessary. Pathologising Militant, enlisting the sympathy of the media and wooing public opinion are therefore all part of the same populist strategy. However, if the leadership thinks the Labour Party emerges honourably from all this, they are mistaken (and they should not be fooled by 'windfall' successes caused by default of Tory sins) In truth the public witchhunt has presented the media with a heaven-sent opportunity to depict the Labour Party as squabbling, divided, and as both 'extremist' and authoritarian at the same time. Thus while the media may serve the interests of a certain section of the Party for tactical reasons, they cannot be in the long-term interests of the Party as a whole. Already there are clear examples that the Tories have been able to capitalise; Tebbit, among others, has made more out of Militant since the shadow of expulsions was cast than was ever possible before.

Undermining the public image of the Party in this way inevitably lowers morale within. Conspiracy theories proliferate, open debate is hampered, and the Party becomes inward-looking and inert. People are rightly wary of becoming involved in an organisation that publically repudiates part of its own rank and file. Still others may believe the scaremongering. This is a poor advert for any democratic institution and one that is receiving full publicity.

But above all there is no room for discussion and promulgation of the Labour Party's policies while it is embarked on this course. Such proceedings make any attempt to communicate a manifesto and campaign on the issues almost superfluous. And for sure, all these arguments become the more exigent in those local constituencies actually involved in the witchhunt. The plight of Labour in the recent by-election in Liverpool provides a showcase of the electoral damage caused by the expulsion atmosphere (and our candidate was not even Militant!).

We cannot escape similar conclusions here in Exeter. As the threat of expulsions fast gathers momentum the press waits eagerly to pounce on every morsel of (mis)information, while the Tories and Liberals laugh all the way to the ballot box. Already news of expulsions in Exeter has been mysteriously leaked to the local press ("Five face the boot..."), and has even reached the columns of the Guardian. If the threat of expulsions is realised at the Special GC on Feb 7th, we can be sure there will be an explosion of bad publicity for the Labour Party. Moreover the furore is unlikely to die away and be forgotten overnight; an inevitable appeal to the NEC would drag the whole business out for several months - straight through the Council Elections in May (and what happens if local wards or groups don't recognise the expulsions?) Furthermore, prominent figures in the Campaign Group of MPs on the NEC have pledged their support for the accused and are bound to speak out again. All this adds up to an unwelcome spotlight on Exeter at a time when it should be heads down and campaign for electoral victory. Exeter would stand out as only the second Constituency which by taking the witchhunt beyond Militant, is actively undermining Kinnock's chosen strategy (cf. National Supplement), while alienating the hard and soft Left alike.

But let us finish by examining the rationale for the threatened expulsions and how this relates specifically to the issue of adverse publicity. It was suggested that disclosures in Devon Labour Briefing were being used by the press to publically rubbish the Party (although the 'charge' has now mysteriously transformed itself to one of belonging to the 'organisation' Devon Labour Briefing.) Well if this is the argument, those accused have personally pledged (to the EC) not to disclose any of the internal affairs of the Labour Party. This was a very significant concession from people who believe that the Labour Party should be open democratic, and have nothing to hide from its members or the public. But for its part, the Party is still embarked on the same path. And yet, if people are sincere in not wanting the Party to be lambasted in the pages of the press, this matter is surely best resolved without expulsions.

For more about Exeter witch-hunt see National Supplement.



Since Peter Bowing, Paul Giblin and Neil Todd received letters informing them of Exeter EC's recommendation to expel them support has flooded in from all over the country. On a local level anti witch-hunt resolutions have been passed in Penn. St. Davids, Rougemont St. Leonards and Countess Weir Topsham Wards, as well as by the Womens Council, the LPYS and the University Labour Group. In Polsloe Stoke Hill a similar resolution was only defeated by the chair's casting vote. The LPYS and Penn. St. Davids have also demonstrated their confidence in Peter Paul and Neil by electing them to the GMC. Support has also been forthcoming from members of the Party in Sheffield, Bristol, Cambridge, Leicester, Birmingham, Brighton, Southampton, Coventry, Stevenage, Berkshire, Nottingham, Oxford and from over 20 wards in London. Below we feature a few of the letters of support that we have received from more prominent members of the Labour Party.

From Joan Maynard MP  
  
 HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

9th December, 1985

Dr. S. D. Reicher  
 12 Springfield Rd  
 Exeter, Devon

Dear Dr. Reicher, I am  
 glad to hear that you are  
 not being expelled.

From: Dennis Skinner, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

17 December 1985

Mr. Russell Spears  
 12, Springfield Road  
 Exeter  
 Devon

Dear Russell,

Thank you for your letter and enclosures of the  
 13th of December.

You can be assured that I shall support your  
 case.

I suggest that you send all of the material to  
 Kevin O'Reilly of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy  
 who is monitoring the cases of "disciplinary action" etc.  
 His address is 36, Melbourne Road, London, E17.

From: Dennis Skinner, M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

5 December 1985

Dr. S. D. Reicher  
 Dr. R. Spears  
 12, Springfield Road

  
 HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA


23rd January, 1986

Dear Russell,

Just a brief note to thank you for your copy  
 letter to Larry Whitty. It is good of you to keep  
 me in touch with developments.

Kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

  
 Eric S. Heffer,  
 M.P. for Malton

Dr. R. Spears,  
 12, Springfield Road,  
 Exeter,  
 Devon.

From: Dennis Skinner, M.P.

  
 HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

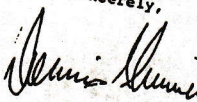
24 January 1986

Dr. R. Spears  
 12, Springfield Road  
 Exeter  
 Devon

Dear Russell,

Many thanks for your copy  
 letter of the 15th of January.  
 You have my support.

Yours sincerely,




PETITION TO EXETER LABOUR PARTY

"We the undersigned believe that the proposed expulsions from Exeter  
 Constituency Labour Party would discourage inner Party discussion and would be  
 damaging to the Labour Party. We therefore call for expulsions to be dropped  
 and for the Party to explore means for encouraging democratic debate"

Please return to Paul Giblin, 79 Pinhoe Road, Exeter, Devon before February 7th.

NAME	ORGANISATION
Joan Maynard	House of Commons, London S.W.1.
Joan Twelves	Vauxhall C.P.
Kan Lynton	Brent East P.P.C.
Ed. S. Heffer	Party

  
 HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 LONDON SW1A 0AA

Dr S D Reicher  
 12 Springfield Road  
 Exeter  
 Devon.

From Tony Benn MP  
 9 December 1985.

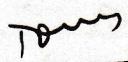
Dear Steve,

I am afraid the postal strike delayed  
 your letter beyond December 6th.

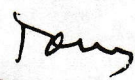
However, I hope you are successful  
 locally and Dennis Skinner is on the Appeal and  
 Mediation Committee and would be able to take up  
 your cause there - leaving the rest of us to  
 support you on the National Executive.

The witch-hunt is spreading widely now  
 and we have got to resist it.

Best wishes,



But keep at it!



other  
 that expul  
 Labour Party  
 I voted against the  
 in Attardcliffe at our  
 I can only hope that matters will  
 and that there will not be expulsions

fraternally  
 Joan Maynard

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