

DEVON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

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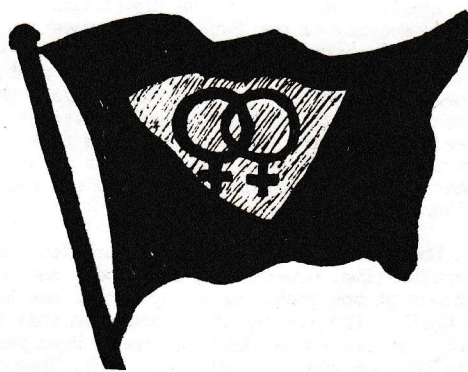
GAY RIGHTS - HERE TO STAY

A recent resolution on Lesbian and Gay rights was passed overwhelmingly at Exeter Labour Party's January GMC. It calls on the NEC "to draw up positive proposals for the next Labour Government and mandates to CLP Secretary to write to the NEC asking for information about initiatives currently being made by the Party in this area. This means that, following the lead of the Labour Party nationally, Exeter CLP has now declared its opposition to discrimination against homosexual and bisexual people, and pledged itself to fighting heterosexism in British society.

Heterosexism is like sexism and racism in that it perpetuates oppressive and discriminatory ideas. Britain still has the highest age of consent for Gays anywhere in the EEC (one which not even the NEC is in favour of lowering!). Gays and Lesbians are forced to hide their sexuality at work, which often results in stress and illness. Lesbians, unlike other women, are not automatically given custody of their children. There is ill-informed discrimination (particularly encouraged by gutter press hysteria) against AIDS victims, where people are being sacked even if there is only suspicion they have been exposed to the AIDS virus. One example of AIDS fear in the South West arose with the proposal to hold a nudist theatre production in Bideford. There was a public outcry, and local people demanded that plastic covers be put on the seats to prevent the possibility of the AIDS virus spreading!

The eradication of heterosexism in our society goes hand in hand with the fight against all forms of discrimination against oppressed groups, in particular Black people and women. It involves a perception of a society which rejects the nuclear family as the only "normal" unit for social reproduction, which rejects the belief that Lesbian/Gay sexuality is socially deviant or perverse, and which allows people to develop according to their own desires and needs. Gay Liberation cannot be seen in isolation, but is linked to race politics and all aspects of sexual politics. The solidarity of Lesbian and Gay groups with the miners and increasing Lesbian/Gay awareness in the trade unions of the oppression of Lesbian/Gays has also emphasised its link with class politics. Above all, like all aspects of the fight for social justice and Socialism, Gay Liberation does not consist alone of gaining declarations of support but of concrete moves towards equality.

A little research would probably reveal that nationally the Party has actually done very little to help Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals achieve this equality. Regular readers of Labour Briefing will have read the speech made by Sarah Roelofs when proposing composite 26 on Gay and Lesbian rights re-quoted in the November 1985 National Supplement; she pointed out the contrast between the attitude of the NEC which recommended



remittance of the motion and of the GLC which has long given financial support to Gay groups and which has now brought out a Charter on Lesbian and Gay rights.

The Charter is an extremely impressive document. It exposes many examples of discrimination against Lesbians and Gays, such as in religion (where atrocious discrimination is excused because it is "traditional"), police violence and discrimination in employment. It also contains a long list of recommendations for changing structures and attitudes, and for creating a new environment for Gay people, so that they can develop a "positive self-identity and be happy with and proud of their sexuality". Many are actions that only a Government could introduce - legislation on issues such as prisoners rights, the law and public order enforcement, health and social services and employment to name but a few. It gives concrete proposals for Local Authorities to use their powers in a number of domains, ranging from building, housing, and health to education and library provision.

For guidance on how to achieve equality for Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals in Exeter the CLP could take the first step of affiliating to the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Many of the proposals in the GLC Charter could be implemented in Exeter with minimal expense. For example, Labour councils must amend their Equal Opportunities clauses to state they will not discriminate against Gays and people with AIDS in employment. Significant steps could be taken in educating and informing the public by supplying leaflets, books and posters to libraries and schools on Lesbian and Gay sexuality and AIDS. All that is required to implement these proposals is the will for men and women to challenge their own heterosexism and political will of Labour councillors to influence the Council.

Britt Holloway, Exeter CLP.

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

BRIEFING EDITORIAL

The events of 7th February were unprecedented in the history of Exeter Labour Party. Everybody arrived expecting an emergency GMC. They all congregated in the Labour Club ready to discuss the expulsion of Neil Todd, Paul Giblin and Peter Bowing. Andrea Lester rose to start the proceedings... only to read out the terms of a High Court injunction. The meeting could not go ahead, expulsions could not be discussed, confusion reigned.

In the first place what did the injunction mean? Why had it been granted? Some suggested that it signified nothing. Anyone with a grievance can get an injunction, they said. That is false. To get an interim injunction one has to prove that there is a case to answer. One has to provide evidence that the procedures were suspect.

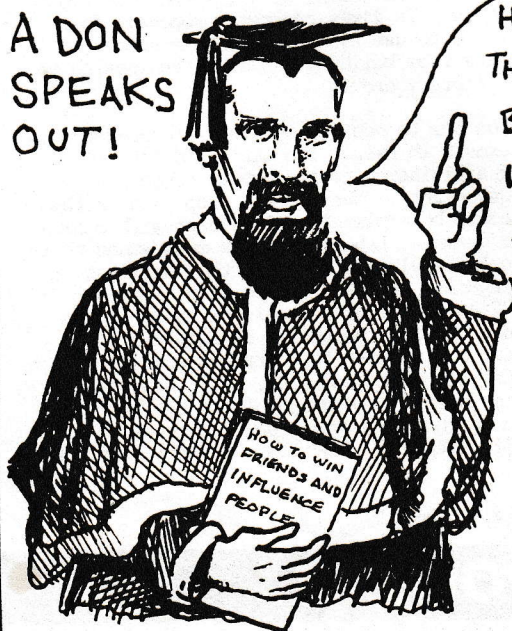
Secondly what was the scope of the injunction? What meetings did it cover? Again, some people said it meant that the Party was paralysed, that no GMC's, even no meetings could go ahead. Again, false. The injunction simply stops the Party proceeding on expulsions. Nothing else is touched.

Thirdly, and most seriously, some sought to turn confusion into anger as a means of avoiding the real issues. Many people were rightly dismayed that the High Court should rule that the democracy of our Party was in question. But there has been a concerted attempt to side step the question by screaming outrage at the very use of the courts. How dare Peter, Paul and Neil use the Tory judges, they argue? How can socialists employ bourgeois justice? Just look at these people seeing the courts, fresh from bashing the NUM, now using them to bash our Party. At first sight these arguments seem overwhelming - but take a closer look and they collapse into nothing.

We live in a bourgeois world and employ bourgeois institutions the entire time. Government, both local and national are institutions of bourgeois democracy. Do we see Neil Kinnock and Chester Long resign their seats on this basis? Of course not - we use these institutions as best we can as a forum to advance the interests of Labour. Then take education. There is no doubt that these are places in which the ideas and values of bourgeois society are reproduced - bourgeois state apparatus, education has been called. But we hardly refuse to send our children to school, to teach in those schools and Universities on this basis.

Now, some might argue that parliaments and schools differ from courts in a crucial way. Democracy and education were won through working class protest. They may retain some class bias but they clearly represent advances for ordinary people. True. But the same is also true of our legal system. Not only in its form - the jury system for instance - but also in terms of actual legislation the law of the land has been fundamentally changed through struggle.

A DON
SPEAKS
OUT!



HOW DARE
THEY EMPLOY
BOURGEOIS
INSTITUTIONS
AGAINST THE
PARTY!

As a consequence the Labour Movement and the Labour Party constantly use the courts - to challenge unfair dismissals, to challenge rate-capping, to resist education cuts, to save the ILEA... Did people get indignant when the Labour Party was involved in using the courts to defeat Fowler over his 'bed and breakfast' regulations?

At present various unions are using the courts in self-defence. The teachers in the NUT to maintain their 18 month struggle and even the NUM itself. The NUM is employing the law to stop the NCB closing Bates colliery despite a review recommending its survival. The NUM is represented by Louise Christian, the NCB by Conrad Dehn, QC.

The very same people are involved in the Exeter injunction - only Louise Christian is representing Briefing supporters and Conrad Dehn is representing the local Party. So much for the rhetoric about using the union-bashing courts!

The fact is that we felt forced to use the courts to stop what we saw as the local Party ignoring its own procedures and rules. We saw it as a means of ensuring that our democracy was upheld. People may agree, they may disagree - but there is a real question of democracy and it will only be answered when the smokescreen of 'using the courts' is removed.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS WE CAN THEN MOVE TOWARDS ADDRESSING THE REAL PROBLEM AND SETTLING IT INTERNALLY.

MEDIA MACHIAVELLIS

By Steve Reicher, Exeter CLP

The proposed expulsions from Exeter Labour Party have attracted considerable media attention. There have been reports in all the local press - including a front page feature in the Express & Echo - as well as radio and regional television coverage. There have even been articles in the Guardian newspaper.

These reports share two things in common. The first is that they are all inaccurate to some degree. In the worst cases, such as in the Guardian, they are completely garbled and therefore dangerously misleading. The Guardian has twice suggested that disagreements in Exeter stem from a leaflet put out by Briefing concerning the alliance on the County Council. Not only is this a false caricature of the disagreement but also no such leaflet has ever been produced. Such articles have two effects. Firstly they increase hostility within our Party by giving the impression that lies are being told. They therefore lessen the opportunity for an amicable settlement of our differences. Secondly they function as an attack upon the Party; they represent a negative portrayal of Labour to the general public. In some cases these may be incidental effects of the media coverage, but in others it looks like a deliberate attempt to cause trouble within and for the Labour Party. The article by Patrick Hennessey on the front page of the Express & Echo on February 14th is a case in point.

The remarkable thing about Hennessey's article is that it is almost devoid of news while at the same time being inaccurate in the few facts that it does present. He misunderstands the remit of and the reason for the injunction, he is wrong about the reason for a delay in the hearing, he can't even get the number of people interviewed by the EC correct! But what is more sinister about the article is the way in which Hennessey himself actively sought to produce discord in order to have something to report.

Patrick Hennessey makes great play of an article in the National Briefing written by myself and Russell Spears. He claims that this increased the hostility in the Party. What actually happened was that Hennessey phoned up John Shepherd about another article which appeared on the same page as ours but which was left unsigned. The article takes issue with certain actions of the Party officers. John Shepherd refused to comment. Hennessey then phoned up both Russell and I separately to ask if we had penned the article. We also refused to comment to the press. Hennessey, having failed in his attempt to draw the Party chairperson and Briefing supporters into conflict, obviously felt piqued. So he decided to go ahead with his 'hostility' story in any case, even in the absence of any evidence and citing a completely different article to that which had been the subject of his enquiries.



At the very best this is atrocious journalism. It looks very much as if the journalist wanted to see conflict and if he couldn't find it, well, write about it anyway. If the prominent public mention of conflict has the effect of actually producing conflict so much the better. Of course one can only speculate about the motivations of Hennessey in writing, and the Echo in publishing, such an article. But the fact is that this paper, and the Daily Mail group of which it is part, is not particularly well known as a friend of Labour.

There is a moral in all this. A hostile press will seek every means to attack our ideas and our Party. With glee it will leap upon any disagreement in order to represent us as a feuding rabble (while remaining silent about deep rifts in the other parties). That is why, however much we may disagree with certain Party decisions - however much we believe the proposed expulsions to be deeply undemocratic and wrong - there is no profit in going to the papers. That is also why Briefing exists. The Briefing provides a channel through which individuals may present socialist ideas to Party members without using the presses controlled by our enemies.

LEAKS Sellafield

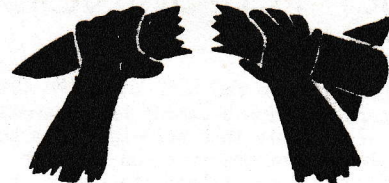
In the last 2 months there have been yet another 4 leaks at Sellafield (formerly Winscale) with workers being contaminated and much public concern. There have been about 200 accidents at Sellafield so far. There have been 11 fires which are particularly dangerous because spent fuel can burn and release fission products. There have been two explosions including the major accident in 1973 which shut down oxide fuel reprocessing (still not restarted after 13 years), at least 8 critical accidents narrowly avoided - and one not avoided in 1970. On top of this there has been at least 71 accidents involving plutonium, the most powerful lung cancer agent per curie of all the radioactive materials. Around Sellafield we have radioactive beaches, increases in cases of leukemia and yet we are still being told that nuclear energy is safe! So safe that even Tory County Councillors are opposed to dumping nuclear waste in their areas.

Meanwhile it has just been revealed that there is a high risk of a minor earth tremor causing the total destruction of the two plutonium producing Magnox reactors. In 1979 there was such an earth tremor centred 15 miles from the Solway Firth reactor.

It is quite clear that the nuclear industry is unsafe and also unpopular. It is being used to produce materials both for the production of nuclear weapons and for the destruction of the British coal mining industry. Labour Conference now has a reasonable Energy (Fuel) policy (Composite 70) passed at the 1985 Conference calling for the halting of the nuclear power programme and the phasing out of all existing nuclear plants. It is vital that we campaign for this to be in the election manifesto and make it clear that we are anti-nuclear to the public.

Dave Parks, Exeter CLP.

Nuclear Free Fiasco



On 25th February the Policy Committee of Devon County Council discussed a proposal to make Devon a Nuclear Free Zone. The County Council is in the hands of the so-called Alliance, relying on the support of the Labour Councillors. So, with both the Liberal and Labour Party proclaiming opposition to nuclear weapons peace campaigners expected at least some support for the NFZ policy.

Incredibly, the proposal received no support at all. A lesser motion opposing the dumping of nuclear waste in our beautiful county was instead passed. This policy even had the support of Tories who do not mind nuclear waste as long as it is not lying on their doorsteps!

Frankly those who are campaigning against nuclear weapons and power can expect very little sympathy from the Alliance. The Liberal's relatively new anti-nuclear policies are constantly attacked by the Social Democrats. We have seen Paddy Ashdown sell out while David Owen acts more like Thatcher every day. Owen has himself declared that "Devon will never become a Nuclear Free Zone" while casting greedy eyes over his Devonport constituency.

Labour, however, has led the NFZ campaign, with bold declarations from authorities all the way from Southampton to Scunthorpe. Yet the ten strong Devon Labour Group voted against this proposal. Some of these Councillors are also long-time members of CND which makes their position even more unbelievable. Any attempts to excuse their behaviour have not been helped by their own comments on this issue. The leader of the Labour Group, Saxon Spence, seemed to think that it was legitimate to reject the NFZ proposal just because it was not part of Labour's County Council manifesto! Does this attitude apply to all issues? Are Labour Councillors bound tightly to act only on local manifesto pledges while ignoring the behaviour of the rest of our movement? Of course not. The real reason for not wanting a Nuclear Free Devon has instead been expressed by the Group's Deputy Leader, David Knott: "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." Well at least he is honest, stating his firm belief in vote-catching rather than upholding the principles of peace and socialism. Meanwhile John Vincent, another leading Labour Councillor, actually managed to describe the NFZ proposal as doing a disservice to the peace movement! I cannot begin to imagine how he has arrived at this conclusion, and can only recommend that he visits Sheffield or Manchester and tries explain his position there.

Such comments from Labour Councillors are an absolute disgrace and they serve to highlight one of the most fundamental contradictions in our movement. Many senior Labour politicians actually bitterly regret the Party's newfound anti-nuclear stance while many more are keen to campaign for peace only when votes can be won. The behaviour of the Devon Labour Group comes hot on the heels of the Exeter Nuclear Zone fiasco where the City Council's NFZ resolution has been backed up with no publicity whatsoever. We were promised an extensive NFZ exhibition in the Civic Centre for January or February. It is now March and nothing has happened.

If Labour politicians think they are being clever by ignoring the peace issue in favour of more 'popular' policies they are sadly mistaken. All they are doing is adding fuel to the common view that all the major political parties are the same. There was no difference between the statements made by David Knott and David Owen and in Devon the agreements Labour has made with the Alliance serve to blur the differences between the parties even more.

The nuclear issue should be at the centre of Labour's election campaign, not an embarrassing policy to be ignored at will. We should be proud to be the only major political party genuinely campaigning for peace. The pragmatism, expediency and naked careerism of the Alliance must be exposed wherever possible, unless Mr Kinnock is thinking of forming an alliance of his own.....

Paul Giblin, Exeter CLP.

NO TO KINNOCKISM

It is often said on the left that when the bourgeoisie press start praising a Labour leader something must be wrong. If we apply this principle to a recent spate of articles in the Observer and Guardian which praise Neil Kinnock's 'new realism' following the witch-hunt in Liverpool, then we have reason for alarm. The articles refer to Kinnock's electoral strategy and indicate that this is now coming to fruition. This so called 'new realist' strategy can be seen to consist of three parts. It is useful to examine them in detail.

Firstly, Kinnock and the right need to consolidate their control over the Party machine. This is an absolute precondition for the successful implementation of 'new realism' or 'Kinnockism'. Unless the Shadow Cabinet can control policy making they would be comprised by Conference which votes for policies which the right consider to be electoral liabilities, ie opposing the 'new realist' direction. Neil Kinnock has made his position very clear, at the 1985 Conference he said: "I am the leader of the Labour Party and it will be on the basis of my view that the next manifesto will be formed." So much for the CLPD reforms to make the leadership more accountable. Since then the Shadow Cabinet have shown their contempt for Conference by making unilateral decisions on policy on nearly every issue from nationalisation to the nuclear issues.

Secondly, any policies which might be an electoral liability must be jettisoned. Following the defeats of 1979 and 1983 the right believe that socialism is unattainable in Britain. They therefore believe that any policy which is likely to upset capitalism must be thrown out. Groups and individuals within the Party such as Tribune, LCC and David Blunkett who previously may have opposed this strategy have been whipped into line by the fear created by the defeat of the miners. The right have seized on this opportunity and we have now witnessed policy after policy falling by the wayside.

Up to 1983 Labour was committed to providing full employment but now we are told by Neil Kinnock that this is "impossibilist". Kinnock has even said that the re-nationalisation of industries privatised by Thatcher is now off the agenda. Instead, the way forward will be public investment in private industry. Adam Rapael of the Observer commented recently: "...The Alternative Economic Strategy has been replaced by a modified brand of Reaganomics..." Until recently Labour was also committed to repealing Thatcher's anti-union laws such as those which enabled the sequestration of the NUM's funds. Now we are told by John Prescott (Industry Spokesperson) that we cannot expect a future Labour government to remove this legislation. At the 1985 Conference a motion was passed which committed a future Labour government to abandoning nuclear power. During a report on a BBC programme John Cunningham actually criticised a Tory minister for not investing enough in nuclear power! Even Labour commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament is being revised behind the scenes - Denis Healey has publicly warned that there is "a serious danger that the US would reduce its conventional contribution to defence." The list goes on and no doubt it will be extended by the time of the next election.

Finally, having gained control of the Party machinery and began the process of 'moderation' Kinnock needs to silence any criticism by vilifying and attempting to discredit the left. Thus, the left are painted as 'extremists' who are 'out to destroy the Party' and 'not interested in winning power'. An atmosphere of hysteria is whipped up, creating the conditions for a large scale witch-hunt.

Hugo Young of the Guardian asks: "But can they seriously be expected to swallow the caring capitalism that Mr Kinnock has in store for them? Will they keep him in power, whatever the price in Tory laws unrepealed and American bases unexpelled?" The left have an answer for Hugo Young and Neil Kinnock and it is a very simple one. No! We will not drop our commitment to socialism and we will continue to campaign for full nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from NATO, restoration of full employment, reversal of all anti-union laws and the re-nationalisation of industries. In short, we will continue to struggle for an irreversible transformation from capitalism to socialism in Britain.

Neil Todd, Exeter CLP.

INTERNATIONAL ♀♀ DAY

Saturday March 8th is International Women's Day. This is, of course, not a party political event, but it is a political day. It is a day when all women can celebrate the unity of Sisterhood and also put another nail in the coffin of patriarchy.

Unfortunately, as ever, progress in 1985 and the early part of 1986, has been slow. The Ideology of Thatcherism has been consolidating its belief that a woman's "natural" place is in the home. Issues such as welfare benefit cuts especially affect women, be they single, with a partner or pensioners. In particular, cutting the real value of child benefit and channelling it through the male pay packet is a vicious chop at women's fragile economic independence from men. Then there are the cuts in wider public spending: health care, housing, education, social services etc. Instead of society providing the support for individuals and families, the burden of caring shifts back to women.

Cuts in meals on wheels, home-helps and subsidising of placements in residential homes; all of these force women back into the position of carers for elderly relatives. Inadequate support from community care for the handicapped again means that women have to provide the missing links. Women are being recruited in droves to do the voluntary social work that used to be done by paid workers.

Health cuts also threaten women. Screening for cervical cancer is a national shambles and reports indicate that the situation could deteriorate. "Woman-oriented" maternity care is under attack, as are reproductive rights, especially for young women.

"Individual freedom" in Thatcher's Britain means the "freedom" to exploit women by pushing them back into the kitchen, while the pool of unemployed labour ensures that they stay there. "Family privacy" now means that women provide the support network and only the rich get choices. Attacks on the working class are attacks on women.

What has the Labour Party been doing to counteract this trend? Again progress has been slow. Although a growing number of women (including, at last, some Black women) are being selected as Prospective Parliamentary candidates for the Party; this is offset by the continued refusal of the Labour Party Conference to allow the Labour Women's Conference to elect the women's section of the NEC. This year the male stranglehold on Conference is being challenged by the Labour Women's Action Committee which is organising shadow elections to ensure that the only slate for the women's places on the NEC is the slate the women want.

Concerted interventions by women in Labour Politics need to be channeled through one body in order to have maximum effectiveness - in the coming year it is vital that women campaigning for feminism in the Party should link up within the forum provided by LWAC in order to build their power.

March 8th is therefore important for socialists. As an expression of the solidarity of women it sets up feminism as a focus for opposition to Thatcherism. For feminism links together the struggles of all oppressed groups and is at the core of all effective socialist campaigning. So long as women refuse to become invisible, refuse to accept the agenda of Thatcherism, they are furthering the cause of an international socialist sisterhood.

Alison Daun and Jo Shaw, Exeter CLP.

Exeter Labour Women's Council will be celebrating International Women's Day by holding a stall in the High St. on Saturday March 8th. The Stall will display literature, focussing on what the Labour Party can offer women in their fight for power and self-determination. This is just one event in a day in celebration of Women. At luncheon, the Exeter Women's Centre (94, Sidwell St.) is holding a party to which all women and children are welcome.

The City Council Women's Advisory Committee will be meeting again in March; there will be a meeting on Tuesday 25th March at 6.30 pm in the Civic Centre to discuss Housing and related issues.

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