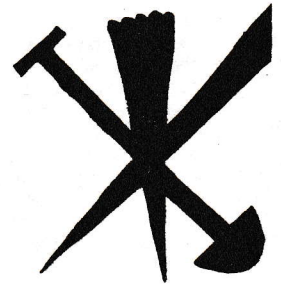


BRIEFING

with **NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT**

No 17 MAY 1986

MAY 8th - LABOUR TAKE THE POWER



Now is a vital time for Labour to do well in the local elections scheduled for May 8th. For the first time since 1979, the vast majority of the population is heavily against the Tory Party and the unconditional capitalistic and ultra-authoritarian project for Britain.

Most recently, the decision of the Thatcher government to link Britain with US imperialism and assist in the terrorist bombing of Libyan cities has turned the population against the Tories. Yet, this is one in a whole string of ruling class crises of legitimacy. We have seen the ugly picture of the naked iron fist of the capitalist state employed to crush the striking miners. We have seen the drive for monopoly profits leading the Thatcher government to destroy the meagre provisions of social welfare in Britain. We have seen state assets from telephones to aeroplanes handed over to the capitalist class. Yet, despite Tory hegemony in the media, the Tories have experienced increasing difficulty in justifying their 'programme for Britain' and have created in the population a large but passive opposition.

These elections are vital for Labour not because the unpopularity of Thatcherism is in doubt, but because Labour is in struggle to become the clear-cut opposition to the Tories. In other words, when Labour stresses its agenda it must address firstly its opposition to Thatcherism, but also - and just as important - the relevance of socialism (however defined) over the solutions proposed by the SDP/Liberal alliance.

In Exeter, in particular, these remarks are important. Labour must attempt to break free from the Alliance for two central reasons. Firstly, if people see Labour and the Alliance saying much of the same thing their most likely response is to vote for whichever of the two is most likely to beat the Tory. That is hardly the way to build a socialist campaign. Secondly, if Labour is in coalition with the Alliance in running the City Council for much longer with the Liberals 'modifying' the joint line, Labour will become, and be seen to become, merely the vehicle of Alliance politics; and for those who fight for radical policies, the Labour Party will be reduced to being part of the enemy.

Labour must fight hard to revitalise itself by setting out clearly its ideological territory and by deepening its support. Determined campaigning in the elections, which seeks to involve women, peace campaigners, gays & lesbians, and unemployed and working people generally, is a far more productive way to build the Labour opposition than merely to say what white, middle-aged Labour men will do for a passive population.

Even after the massive working class defeats of the miners' struggle and the Liverpool-led local government campaign, the ruling class remains far from invincible. There are opportunities for Labour to fight back; let's hope we take them.

PETER BOWING, EXETER CLP



LOCAL ELECTIONS

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

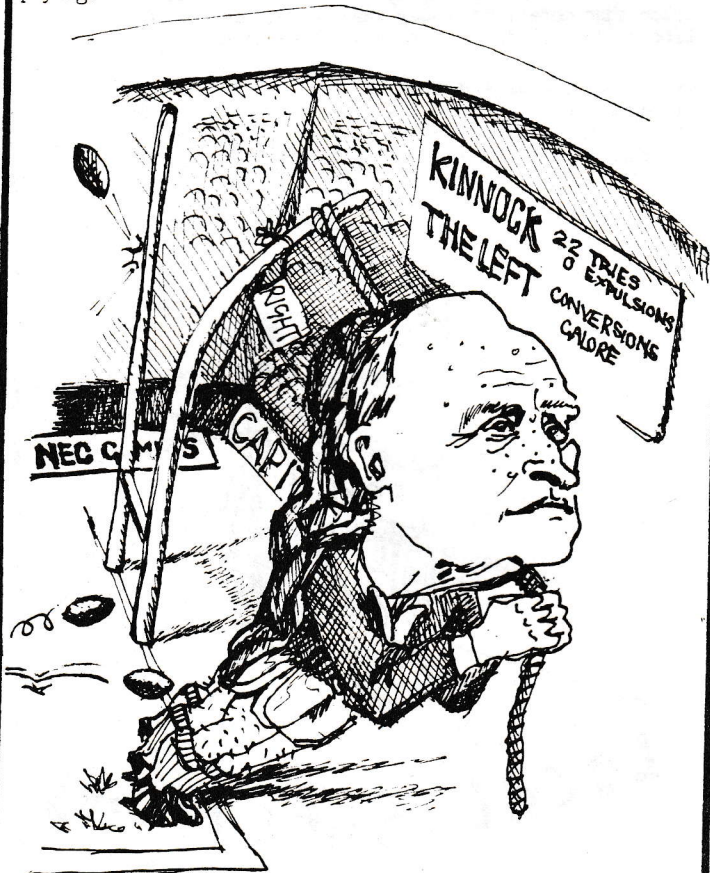
EXPULSION UPDATE

Avid readers of Devon Labour Briefing have probably been scouring the columns of this edition for the latest news on the proposed expulsions from Exeter Labour Party. They need look no further.

A special Exeter CLP was called on Tuesday 15th April to discuss whether or not the Party should defend the legal action brought by Peter Bowing, Paul Giblin and Neil Todd. The High Court injunction obtained by the three currently prevents the GMC considering the EC's recommendation to expel them from the Party. To the surprise and consternation of many of those present, John Shepherd, the Chair of Exeter CLP, announced that yet again the matter had been taken out of the hands of the GMC. This time it was the Party nationally which, on the advice of a QC, Sir Alexander Irvine, had decided to enter a defence on behalf of Exeter Labour Party. However, John Shepherd had no written or categorical statement about who was going to be paying the massive legal bills which will now build up. All he could say was that at this stage there was no written contract between himself or Peter Hill, the Secretary, and the lawyers. As far as he was concerned the national party was doing everything. On the other hand, he did add that at some stage the GMC might be called upon to make a decision. We must wait and see.

All of this raises some interesting questions. Whatever the national party do to defend the current legal action, they do it in the name of and on behalf of Exeter CLP and, in particular, John Shepherd and Peter Hill, its Chair and Secretary for the time being. To act on someone else's behalf one normally needs either a power of attorney, or a formal appointment of agent. In any case, a de facto relationship will develop between those on whose behalf the work is being done (Exeter CLP) and those who are actually doing it (ie: the lawyers) In the end the existence of a written agreement is not decisive when the question of liability for costs comes up.

Furthermore, it has already been mentioned in Devon Labour Briefing that senior administrative officers in Walworth Rd. have given categorical assurances to the Finance and General Purposes Sub-Committee of the NEC that no money on a national level has been set aside for local party legal costs. It now transpires that the minutes of this meeting, including the assurance, have passed through the NEC without any questions or doubts on their correctness being raised. So, who is paying?



... OK, SHOOT NOW LARRY!

One possible answer lies in a recent article in the Guardian penned by Martin Linton (25/4/86) on legal action taken against the Labour Party (mainly by the Militant). In conjunction with a new "judge-proof" disciplinary code, he suggests that Walworth Rd. are considering instituting a fund to indemnify CLPs and their Officers against legal costs which they may be landed with. This is in stark contrast to assurances previously given. It raises the spectre of "dirty doings at the crossroads", as one member of the NEC recently said to me. But it raises even more serious questions about who is making the decisions in what appears to be an increasingly hierarchical and opaque administrative structure at Walworth Rd. The crossroads, like the goalposts, seem to be constantly on the move.

To those of you who consider witch hunts to be a distraction compared to the major issue of getting Labour Councillors elected in Exeter, I can only say this. Witch hunts not only raise serious questions about the political direction of the Party in 1986-87, the year leading up to a General Election, but also, indirectly call into question the hard won democracy of the Labour Party. All the current witch hunts are proving is that the Labour Party's organisation is no less riddled than any other deceptions, inner cabals and hierarchical structures of power.

Jo Shaw,
Exeter CLP.

Reagan of Terror

The bombing of Libya has brought home the brutality and hypocrisy of American foreign policy in the starkest terms. Only a few weeks ago Reagan shouted to journalists: "I don't speak to people who kill young children". Presumably in the light of recent events he is not even talking to himself anymore!

The present outrage raises a number of issues that the left have been pushing for some time, and indeed this action serves to confirm our worst fears. Above all these concern the question of whose interests are served by NATO and the whole historical and political context of Palestine and the Middle-East. The NATO issue is one that has received extensive attention in Briefing and there is no need to retrace this ground in detail here. Suffice it to say that as long as we remain a part of it, the USA will feel able to use Britain as a base for waging its own wars and to protect and advance its own imperial interests. The attack on Libya has precious little to do with the stated functions of NATO, and yet it could not have occurred without our membership and complicity. Thus a so-called 'defensive alliance' threatens to drag us into full scale conflict.

The 'rationale' behind the bombing was crass in the extreme and cannot be seen as anything other than retributive. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic know from experience that meeting terror with terror is like trying to put a fire out with petrol. We should remember that the 'terrorism' in the Middle-East was itself spawned by the violence of dispossession. Palestinian refugees retaliated because they had no other recourse. And already we are witnessing the direct results of Reagan and Thatcher's 'iron fist diplomacy' as the reprisals sweep across Europe: hostages shot, businessmen assassinated, bombings, attempted bombings in planes and liners from this country - the list continues to grow. Moreover the US are already talking about further strikes, escalating the situation and threatening to force the hand of the Eastern Bloc in defending Libya. Either Thatcher believes that the American assault actually deters terrorists, in which case she is blind, stupid or both, or she believes that the murder of innocent civilians in Libya and all over Europe can be sacrificed to her love affair with Reagan. Either way, serious questions are raised about British sovereignty in such crises, and our potential role in facilitating nuclear conflicts. Presumably, the limited theatre nuclear war, the possibility of which Reagan is too audacious even to deny, would be started by a similar fait accompli on his part. It is indeed ironic that one viable peaceful source of pressure that could have been applied to Gadafy - namely economic sanctions - was effectively closed off to Britain lest it jeopardise Thatcher's financial backing of Apartheid in South Africa!

Meanwhile, it is the ordinary people who are left to count the cost: the mourning relatives of innocent civilians in Libya and British people abroad, and the interrupted lives as people are deported from both sides, caught up in someone else's conflict.



WE SURE STAMPED ON GADAFY THIS TIME ED!

In Exeter the local reaction to the present crisis was spontaneous in its condemnation of the American aggression and our government's hand in it. The Monday after, the Green Party organised a demonstration outside Conservative Party headquarters at which many groups (including the Labour Party) were represented, as well as numerous other individuals. The next day CND held a demonstration in Princesshay where over 100 people petitioned and leafleted. A spate of graffiti around Exeter testifies to the strength of feeling against the raid. Moreover, these are not just the views of a small minority. A phone-in poll conducted by Devon Air declared over 1,000 against the American action with fewer than 300 in favour. Similar polls nationwide also report around 70% opposed.

A well attended public meeting at Bart's Tavern raised these issues for fuller discussion. People recognised that alleged 'terrorism' could not be abstracted from the history of the Palestinian struggle, and how this has been created and treated by the USA and UK in particular.

Meanwhile Thatcher refuses to learn these lessons despite dissenters on her own benches and despite being deluged with protest. But while Reagan continues to manipulate public opinion, the British public are weary of post-Falklands hype and wary of pro-American jingoism. After attempting to sell off British assets to America, strengthening their economic imperialism, Thatcher has demonstrated in the clearest terms that certain military and political decisions have already been exported. This is not something she will recover from easily.

Russell Spears,
Exeter CLP.



Dear DLB,

So Exeter CND thinks it has problems! - a 1,000 people have not (as at March) renewed their subscriptions for 1986. It is a sad, but realistic, assumption that a good many of that number never will do so, they have been lost to Exeter CND, which a year or two ago, proudly proclaimed (on the front page of every issue of the CND Newsletter) a membership in excess of 2,000. In last February's issue 'The Basic Case' article recorded we had about 1,700 members, even though 98 new members had joined, so the sad fact is we have lost 20% (one in five) of our old members.

That is something that should greatly concern us all, all of us should be asking how and why this has come to be and seeking to correct whatever it has failed to inspire (what could be as many as 800 people) into a continuing commitment to Exeter CND, the 300 or 400 who went in 1985 and the likely similar number who will fail to renew membership in 1986. It is, I am sure, a great personal disappointment to many who have held Office in our Group and who have worked long and hard. But, it is not a criticism but an observation and a pertinent one, there is little virtue in working hard if the conceived methods are ineffective and the chosen objectives have been mistaken.

Nor should any (implied) criticism be taken as being applicable only to those who have taken counsel for Exeter CND and conducted the Campaign in this locality. The loss of membership is not a local phenomenon for the membership of British CND is also in spiral fall - 20,000 members lost this year (and now down to 90,000) with the subscription renewal rate running at only 75%. In consequence, this years budget of the National body has been reduced by nearly 13%, hardly promising for the success of 'Basic Case' which is an extended, and expensive, undertaking.

There are those of us old enough to see, in the current situation, dangerous similarities with the past. Twenty years ago, after a period of mushrooming growth which is known as the 'First Wave' of the Campaign, people tired, membership fell away alarmingly and only a hard core of dedicated activists continued to make the protest. The rest thought that success had been achieved, the Labour Party had agreed at its National Conference, to adopt a non-nuclear defence policy for Britain and the Tories would not be in power (they came back into office in 1951) for ever and, sure enough, we saw Labour Governments in the 1960's and 1970's - but we did not see Britain abandon its 'independent' Nuclear deterrent. On the contrary, Labour Prime Ministers continued, covertly, to develop British nuclear weapons. So it was just as well that a few 'fanatics' kept CND in being and provided the base for the 'great leap forward' of the late 70's and early 80's.

With the failure of the 'Refuse Cruise' Campaign it is not surprising that disillusion and a degree of defeatism set in. For myself, I advocated a more radical approach. This would be based on the slogan 'Britain out of Nato, Nato out of Britain' as the only coherent and moral basis from which to oppose Nuclear weapons. As recent events show, only a refusal to ally with other Nuclear powers would have denied American's the right to occupy our territory from which to massacre innocent people and threaten the world with a Nuclear holocaust. Alas expediency overtook principle and the NATO issue was brushed aside as a long-term goal.

These points are not made to say 'I told you so' but in order to prevent us from repeating past mistakes. Moreover not all in the current situation is cause for gloom. Other organisations are successfully opposing the Nuclear Chain. In the case of Greenpeace they are experiencing considerable success, reflected in growing numbers. We must learn from their experience and try to understand why Greenpeace currently has an appeal that CND appears to lack.

Of course there are many differences; Greenpeace campaigns on a wide spectrum of environmental and conservationist issues and does so world-wide. However, I see particular significance in the fact that Greenpeace eschews any involvement in the Political Parties, no matter of what hue. Therein lies a lesson for CND which, rightly or wrongly, is identified in the public mind as being in tandem with the Labour Party. The idea of CND as being tied to the Labour Party is ludicrous. As the Nuclear Free Zone issue on Devon County Council has illustrated the unprincipled pragmatism of the politician can lead the Party to act as the enemy of CND.

One final word of advice; do not let the 'Basic Case' campaign develop into any exposition of an alternative (albeit non-Nuclear) national defence policy. Should that happen CND will be further diminished. The pacifists amongst us could have none of it, and how could CND claim a place in the Peace movement were it to advocate more efficient ways of waging war by 'conventional means'. What is more, we should never forget how arms expenditure leads to death and misery in the present. The Third World is 'hungry for change', the starving cry out for 'Bread not Bombs', the British working class demand 'Jobs not Bombs'. CND must stand alongside those who make these calls

CHRIS CHURCHWARD
Exeter CND
Ex-Services CND

MSC Rip Off!

The government is pouring money into the Community Programme. It is producing a series of stop gap, often part time and therefore poorly paid jobs many of which are undoubtedly of use to the community. The MSC appoint managing agents to initiate and oversee projects and in the South West two of the largest are the Co-Op and the Bridge Agency of Totnes, an offshoot of the Dartington Trust. Trade Unionists and Socialists are often divided in their response to these initiatives of the MSC. They see the whole raison d'etre of the Community Programme, along with such measures as the proposed abolition of Wages Councils and privatisation of local services, the dockyards, school cleaners etc, as one element in the government's aim to create a low wage economy.



The MSC and the other developments initiated since Lord Young took over the supremo role (now moved on of course) all seem part of a plan to lower wages. The MSC's emphasis on 'Life Skills' and the inculcation of proper attitudes is allied to the whole ideological movement in the educational spheres and yet I feel this cruelly distorts the reality of the situation created by the present economic policies. The implication is that if only people had proper 'attitudes' and a suitable deference they would find work. The Community Schemes pay an average wage of £63 per week, although not all staff work a full week. Nevertheless, the rates are marginally over benefit rates and therefore it is possible that the government see it as a bargain in that it dramatically reduces the unemployment figures even if only temporarily - perhaps until the next election.

Nevertheless, the Community Schemes do offer some temporary work for the long term unemployed and every scheme has to be approved by the relevant unions. The union movement should not accept the principal transformative thrust of the MSC without question and certainly the idea it has engendered that the major problem associated with unemployment has been 'unemployability'. The prime focus on job finding and job keeping re-inforces the idea that those with skills and inclination would find work if they really wished to do so. It sounds like a slightly more sophisticated version of 'On Yer Bike'. I believe it is all part of a plan to lower wages and the MSC is now carrying out the wishes of its political masters.

This is not to underestimate the value of many of the schemes and certainly the huge growth in community insulation projects is invaluable. This does utilise existing legislation permitting single grants for draught proofing of the houses of those of low incomes, the disabled or pensioners and it will undoubtedly prevent many of our senior citizens dying from hyperthermia next winter. The local authority can still supply grants for loft insulation at the moment. Under the proposed Social Fund of the Fowler reviews all these single payments may go. It seems as though one arm of the government does not know what the other arm is doing. I suppose it could be seen as a series of acts of desperation to somehow preserve their policy of cutting taxes and reducing the growing and appalling numbers of people out of work. It is all piece meal stuff of course.

Jim Salter
Chair Exmouth Trades Council
Secretary Devon Association of Trades Councils

SUPPORT THE PRINTERS

The fight to defend the 6,000 printworkers sacked by Rupert Murdoch is continuing here in Exeter and we need all the help that we can get. Over the next two weeks we will be leafleting in and around Exeter twice during the week and on Saturdays. Details of times and places are as follows:

TUES 29th April	8.00am	Perriams, Heavitree
THURS 1st May	8.00am	Perriams, Heavitree
SAT 3rd May	10.00am	Perriams, Heavitree
TUES 6th May	8.00am	NSS, Whipton Village
THURS 8th May	8.00am	NSS, Whipton Village
SAT 10th May	10.00am	NSS, Whipton Village

In addition there is a coach going to join the picket of Murdoch's print works at Wapping. This will now be going on Saturday, 17th May, leaving Paris St. Bus station at 4.30pm. Tickets cost £4.50. For tickets and further information about Exeter Printworkers Support Group contact Neil Todd, 91, Park Rd., Exeter. Tel: 219796 (home) or 264645 (work).

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