

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

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NO ORANGE FASCISM IN EXETER

The Labour-led Exeter City Council seems set to spend £60,000 on celebrations in 1988 to mark the 300th anniversary of the landing in Britain of William of Orange. The celebrations are intended to be part of Labour's strategy for promoting tourism in Exeter.

Devon Labour Briefing firmly takes the view that these celebrations are provocative and insensitive. William of Orange, leading an English army, defeated the Catholic Irish at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690; this led to Protestant domination and anti-Catholic laws, which were to last for centuries. Even today, William of Orange is a symbol and historical figurehead for British rule in the north of Ireland, for Protestant domination and for the fascist-like Orange Order which seeks to promote anti-Catholic discrimination. Though mostly concentrated in the north of Ireland, the Orange Order also has lodges in Britain.

The argument put forward by the Exeter Labour Party right wing that the celebrations have nothing to do with Ireland and are only about an important British and perhaps Dutch historical event ignore two things. First, it is an imperialist argument to say that the consequences of Labour Party actions on oppressed peoples of oppressed nations can be disregarded. Secondly, there is no reason why socialists should promote celebrations for the 1688 bourgeois revolution, when that revolution is almost unique amongst bourgeois revolutions in the sense that the working masses took no part in it: in other words, it was a revolution confined to ruling circles.

The Exeter Labour Party right wing appear impervious to the argument that the William of Orange celebrations have serious fascist and imperialist overtones. The Constituency Executive Committee refused to even reconsider the issue in the light of a letter written to the "Western Morning News" by the South-West organiser for the National Front saying that the Front has plans to bring its supporters from all over the country to support the celebrations.

Indeed, the National Front threat has to be taken seriously in the light of their violent participation in the "British Friends of Ulster" march held last autumn, in Bridgwater, Somerset, when fighting broke out with anti-fascist demonstrators. Indeed, the Exeter City Labour councillor, Celia Shepherd, fears that the Front could exploit outdoor events like firework displays.

continued over

contents

- P. Bowing: The William of Orange Celebrations.
- D. Perrin: Nicaragua and Exeter.
- J. Shaw: Political Education in the LP
- J. Salter: Fiddling unemployment figures
- D. Parks: Youth
- S. Reicher: Flowerpot.
- B. Holloway: AIDS
- P. Bowing: Can Labour win Exeter ?

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

The roll call against the celebrations is mounting. In November the policy-making committee of Exeter Labour Party came out firmly against the celebrations. The Party Chair, John Shepherd, has said publicly that he opposes the celebrations, but he believes that a public campaign against them provides a platform for the National Front. Two Alliance councillors are also opposing the celebrations. Exeter's Conservative MP, John Hannam, has expressed his fear that the celebrations will be exploited. A decision was taken before Christmas by the local Anti-Apartheid Group to write a letter to the City Councillors, pointing out the dangers and asking them to reconsider their decision.

Meanwhile, the campaign against the William of Orange celebrations is being stepped up in Exeter. On February 3rd, there will be a lobby of the City Council followed by a Public Meeting, with speakers from the "Labour Committee on Ireland", Anti-Fascist Action and Bridgewater Labour Councillors. Overall, the prospects for the campaign against the celebration look hopeful due to the breadth of the campaign, which has the support of non-socialist parties. It is a sad reflection that there is a small group of right-wing Labour people still to be convinced.

Peter Bowing (Exeter CLP)

BRIEFING

The immediate future is not looking all that good for socialism. Nationally, Mrs. Thatcher is looking like she might just get the third term she needs to complete the demoralisation of the working class. For whatever reason (personalities?) the watered down version of Labour's defence policy presented to the public has not found favour. Strong conventional defence does not seem to have caught the electorate's imagination. Labour also seems incapable of a dynamic and radical response to current challenges. Over the Zircon/New Statesman affair, Neil Kinnock has been competing with Margaret Thatcher to demonstrate that his commitment to patriotism (and The Official Secrets Acts, it would seem) is total.

Meanwhile the working class is suffering. The Telecom engineers are threatened with dire consequences if they go on strike. Where were they in the Miner's Strike? With full support in 1983/84 the Miners would have won and now they could have struck in support of their comrades in telecommunications. Now they too are a greatly weakened force. And the recent police brutality at Wapping shows the lengths to which the State will go to suppress the rights of the working class.

Nor is the picture too happy in Exeter. In particular, widespread anger has been caused by the Labour Group on City Council's refusal to back down over its support for the William of Orange celebrations in 1988. A protracted campaign is inevitable. The prospect of fascists in the streets of Exeter will, with luck, bring together a strong and broad-based anti-fascist alliance which will make its feelings abundantly clear to the City Council.

Elsewhere 100% commitment to electoralism carries all else before it. West of the Exe the Labour Party must work hard to demonstrate that it was right to push ahead with the Flowerpot development. In other parts of the City the Labour Party is looking to make crucial gains on the City Council with which to consolidate its position.

But at what cost is this achieved? There are times when it seems that in its commitment to the maintenance and development of a power base, Labour has lost all sight of its central commitment to socialism. That is when it becomes "loony" to support a suggestion that Exeter should "twin" with a community in Nicaragua. When it becomes disloyal to oppose the granting of a lease by the City Council to a company which many then believed was still involved in South Africa. And, above all, when it becomes "dishonest" to publicise the fact that the Labour Party, however passively, is acquiescing in the promotion of celebrations which are fundamentally anti-socialist in nature and which are leaving Exeter open to the invasion of hordes of violence-seeking Nazis and racists.

Any bright spots on the horizon? Well, of course, Red Wedge, the great hope of the Labour Party for youth and cultural democracy. So many hopes are pinned on this event. Let's just hope it really does turn out to be a new departure in youth and socialist politics, promising a future of real autonomy for youth in Britain.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua is short of everything; drugs, dollars, transport, spare parts, educational materials, even water, but there is no shortage of determination. For the past seven and a half years, the Nicaraguan people have been clinging on to their freedom which was bought at the cost of many lives and much suffering.

The destruction of this freedom and a return to US domination was at the top of Reagan's ambitions when he was elected in 1980 and remains so in 1987. But despite all his efforts, both legal and illegal, the Nicaraguans continue to

stand up against the world's most powerful country.

It is difficult to classify the politics of the FSLN, the majority party in Nicaragua. Reagan calls them Marxists, but a more accurate description would be pragmatic socialists. Their number one priority is to improve the lot of the poor working class, notably the peasants. They have already achieved tremendous improvements in education and health; trade unions are flourishing and women's rights are to the forefront of the party's aims, notwithstanding the problems with machismo. In response to demands from the peasants, agrarian reform seems to be accelerating.

Side by side with these socialist policies are pluralistic electoral and economic systems. In 1984 a broad spectrum of political parties, ranging from the Independent Liberals, who support the contras, on the right to the Communist and Marxist parties on the left participated in a general election which resulted in the FSLN receiving 64% of the vote. Private companies, both large and small, co-exist with state companies and the Catholic and other churches operate with minimal government interference.

The FSLN are the first to admit that mistakes have been made, but can anyone claim that capitalist countries are free from human imperfections? What is clear is that this tiny impoverished country is setting an example to the rest of the world, and, but for Reagan's efforts would be making even more dramatic gains.

Many people in Europe recognise the importance of demonstrating solidarity with the Nicaraguans and giving practical support. A local group of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign has been formed in Exeter and we are hoping to raise both awareness and funds.

It is vital that the lies and distortions that appear in our media and are spread by such organisations as the Federation of Young Conservatives are countered. Even such supposedly sympathetic newspapers such as the Guardian rarely report the situation in Nicaragua, but are full of lurid stories about the contras. We hope to bring a photographic exhibition to Exeter in the spring. Already, group members regularly staff a stall selling Nicaragua coffee and NSC material.

Many trade unions are already affiliated to the NSC but we are trying to persuade local branches to affiliate and to consider twinning Exeter with a community in Nicaragua. Sheffield, Manchester, Oxford, Liverpool, Leicester and Lambeth are already twinned and it would be a tremendous boost to the campaign if they were joined by a city in the South-West.

In common with all third World countries Nicaragua is short of everything and fund raising is an important part of NSC activities. The Exeter group are staging a Nicaragua Benefit at Barts Tavern on March 6th and tickets will be on sale soon.

Any fit young socialist who wants to support the revolution in Nicaragua should consider joining one of the coffee or construction brigades. It will cost you about #800 and life with the peasants is extremely hard. The climate is equatorial and the diet is beans and rice three times a day and for seven days per week. Those with some knowledge of Spanish and particularly with skills such as electricians, mechanics, nurses, engineers, etc, are in great demand.

Anyone who doubts the importance of the events in Nicaragua should ask themselves why Reagan is risking so much to overthrow the revolution. As Oxfam has pointed out, he like every other US president since 1823, fears the threat of a good example. Nicaragua is proving to the rest of Latin America that starvation or US domination are not the only choices for those with courage and determination.

Den Perrin (Exeter CLP)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN 'PHONE DEN PERRIN OR MARGARET MIDGLEY ON EXETER 216359

Political Education

Political education is often cynically thought to be the means by which one political grouping imposes its views on others. The organisation of events, the introduction of outside speakers and the use of political materials is used all too often to indoctrinate those on the receiving end with established patterns of ideas. This is not education in its true sense; on the contrary, political education on this level soon degenerates into an almost messianical pursuit of converts to a particular doctrine.

Exeter Labour Party is pitifully weak on the side of political education. Over the years gallant attempts have been made to galvanise the members into action, by organising events of one kind or another. Almost without exception, these have not been successful, and the organisers, not surprisingly, have been discouraged and have not persisted with their efforts.

Is it the case, therefore, that the members of Exeter Labour Party need no political education? Surely not! No-one can be too well educated about socialism. There is masses we need to know about Labour's policies; about the alternatives which have been discarded in favour of those policies; about

political processes generally, both inside and outside the Labour Party.

But political education is not simply about the gathering of further information with which to stun the electorate when we go out canvassing, or with to browbeat our fellow comrades on the rare occasions when political discussions take place within the formal structures of the party. Too often, we see political education simply as an opportunity to demonstrate how right we are about one particular point, rather than trying to stimulate a learning environment where each of us helps the others. Unfortunately, the use of "expert" speakers, and aids such as videos and displays often serve to restrict rather than stimulate debate.

Instead of seeing political education as the one way passage of information, we should regard it as a process of political consciousness raising. It is about posing for ourselves new questions about political development rather than simply answering old ones with received information. About examining our own attitudes to the issues of gender, race, sexual orientation, class structure etc. etc. which influence our everyday lives. About coming to believe that what each of us has to say about politics is of value, but equally, of no greater intrinsic value than the opinions of our fellow comrades. About learning how to stimulate fruitful debate in place of the sterile arguments between the same old people. If that means abandoning entrenched positions, then so be it. But then, no truly valuable educational process will leave old citadels of certainty untouched.

Of course, many people would be tempted to dismiss this as trendy nonsense which they have no time for. That is their loss, and ours. I hope that they are simply the expression of an extremely straightforward socialist philosophy of education which promotes the equality and autonomy of the learners.

Moreover, I believe, that if Exeter Labour Party were committed to, and carried out, a dynamic programme of political (self-)education, it would be a better and more productive party. If it is true that the pursuit of electoral success leaves us no time for self-examination, then I would suggest that we may have got our priorities wrong.

Already last year, the GMC passed policy committing the Party to a political education campaign to highlight and eradicate sexist attitudes in the party, to be run in collaboration between the Women's Council and the Political Education Officer. That so far nothing has happened in such a campaign should not deter us from pursuing it in future. The acceptance that sexist (and racist and homophobic and other oppressive) attitudes exist in the party is the

first step towards understanding how they can be combatted. I don't think I am alone in hoping that the coming year will see new initiatives being taken in the field of political education and that these will receive support from people representing the whole spectrum of political views which have their natural home in the "broad church" of the Labour Party.

Jo Shaw (Exeter CLP)

Unemployment

In the Western Morning News of Friday November 7th, there was a report on the unemployed at the Teignmouth Benefit Office being confronted with a questionnaire asking a number of questions some of which seemed designed to frighten claimants from claiming. Questions like, "Would you be prepared to travel to find work and how far?". This would seem to be the first thrust of the government's plan to prevent certain categories of the newly unemployed from claiming. If the new plan eventually goes through people will be prevented from claiming if, for example, they are highly qualified but are not prepared to travel for work to other areas or if they refuse to work unsocial hours. Women in particular, will be hard hit if they register as only available during certain hours because they may have children or sick relatives to look after. There was a case recently where a claimant was disallowed benefit because she normally only worked nights because she had a small child, which restricted her hours to night work. There is the "full extent normal rule" which is applicable already to Supplementary Benefit claimants and that seems to have been evoked more often recently.

There is also, of course, the move to make young people more dependent on their families, many who have left home in the North to seek summer work in the South-West have found that they have been disallowed benefit and told to return home. The logical conclusion of the government's policies will be a return to the means test of the 1930s which made an unemployed father totally dependent on their working sons and daughters in the household.

All of this could be linked up with other moves made by this Government to induce what they like to call "labour flexibility". What does this actually mean for job seekers? There has been huge amounts of legislation controlling and inhibiting the function of trade unions and those outside the unionised sector have had any protection they once possessed removed. Wages Councils will soon go.

There are now a whole group of so-called "benefit advisors" - although their terms of reference, according to the Labour MP, Gordon Brown, - are to "sign off 30 people per year." These are more like bounty hunters whose aim would be to frighten the unemployed, often those genuinely seeking work when no work exists, into removing themselves from the register.

The new legislation will give benefit officers the right to suspend benefit to whom they think is not immediately available for work, or wants a job at a salary substantially higher he or she had before, is looking after relatives or children and will not move out of their home town.

At the moment, some Civil Servants who are being asked to impose these tests for newly unemployed claimants are seeming support for action from their national leadership. They argue that the Government's sole aim is to reduce the numbers claiming benefit, a move which is bound to leave center staff open to more violence and abuse from frustrated claimants.

It is perhaps just one more manifestation of this Government's complete lack of compassion for the victims of their own policies. They have presided over and indeed induced by their policies an unnecessarily steep rise in unemployment and now they are penalising the victims for not seeking jobs which simply are not there. No one supports paying permanent State benefits to those able or unwilling to work, but the work must be available at Trades Union rates of pay.

As John Prescott pointed out in the House of Commons last week when the measures were debated this has been the 18th fiddle of the unemployment figures by the present Government. The real purpose of the measures was not to save money as was claimed but to reduce by a process of intimidation and trick questions the number of people claiming benefit. "It is an attempt to get the jobless figures below three million in time for the General Election and is a further example of the vindictive nature of this Government.

Jim Salter (Exmouth Trades Council)

Youth

After seven years of misery due to Tory rule, it is essential that we as young people organise to get them out. Recent events have shown that young people organised and prepared to fight can force governments to back down and lose popularity.

The strikes and mass protests by French students in December last year forced

the right wing Chirac government to drop its plans to restrict entrance into universities and led to the resignation of the Education Minister. Ever since then the French government has been weakened and workers have been striking in demand of better conditions.

Similarly, strikes and mass demonstrations by school students in Spain against education cuts are seriously threatening the "Socialist" government's austerity programme. Also mass demonstrations by students in China have been sending shock waves through the Stalinist bureaucracy there. It is clear that when we as young people get organised, those who would attack our rights become worried.

But why fight for a Labour Government? The Labour Party at present does not have socialist policies which will eliminate mass unemployment and widespread poverty, but unlike the Tories it does not represent the bosses and the rich. The re-election of the Tories would simply be a disaster, especially for the 13 million people living below the poverty line and the 4 million on the dole.

The Tories would fund further tax cuts for the rich by cutting benefits even more, by further cutting back on education and the health service and by selling off any remaining public assets to their rich friends at knockdown prices. They would introduce compulsory slave labour job training schemes for youth and the long term unemployed. Housing, education and health care would effectively become available only to those rich enough to pay. More people would be thrown onto the dole and wages lowered to increase the profits of the bosses.

Our rights to demonstrate and protest would be severely restricted by more "public order" legislation. Our rights to organise in the work place and to strike in defence of our jobs and conditions would be met with an even more militarised police force armed with plastic bullets. If the Tories are re-elected more young people and working class people will be thrown onto the slag heap and they will find any attempts to resist crushed by state repression.

The Labour Party, in contrast to the Tories, has its base in the working class and oppressed sectors of society. A Labour Government will therefore go some of the way towards meeting the demands of these people. It would reduce unemployment by one million and introduce a minimum wage. It would strengthen the equal opportunity legislation to help tackle racism and sexism. It would set up a Ministry of Women. It would introduce lesbian and gay rights legislation. It would get rid of nuclear weapons; and introduce mandatory

economic sanctions against the racist South African regime. On environmental issues it would set up a Ministry of Environmental Protection to oversee the other effect which other government departments have on the environment. All of these policies, and many more, go part of the way towards meeting the concerns and demands of young people. But many young people feel that they do not go far enough, particularly on eliminating mass unemployment, racist and sexist oppressions and environmental issues. What we should do therefore is fight for the election of a Labour government and campaign within the Labour Party for stronger policies.

Youth get organised!

Dave Parks (Exeter CLP)

Flowerpot

Congratulations to the Labour Group on the City Council for pushing through the Flowerpot scheme. The issue was very simple: either build new council houses down by the river or build none at all in Exeter this year. Of course some did argue, and argue vociferously, that the scheme would block some views and use up land for building, but one needs to get one's priorities in order.

Housing is the great scandal of this country, both nationally and locally. The number of homeless in Britain runs into tens of thousands; in Exeter, too, there are people who have to sleep rough even in the snow and sub-zero temperatures. But this is insignificant compared to the number of people in over-crowded or sub-standard housing.

Go into many of the houses along Old Tiverton Road, houses which stink of urine, which are damp and have mould on the walls, which are cold and draughty even with the heating full on. Look at the households where married couples with children are still living cramped up with their parents because they can't find anywhere else to live. Visit the families forced to live in "Bed and Breakfast" hotels at a cost which is double that of building homes for them. A recent report has shown that Councils would actually save money by building housing to ease the homelessness problem.

In the face of all this misery and deprivation, those who have the luxury to dream about their landscaped parks should at least have the decency to keep quiet. But of course they didn't. And they were aided by a virulent press campaign in the local papers which sought to misrepresent and undermine the case for house-building. In the face of this campaign, the Labour Group stuck to its guns. Rather than bowing to the

demands of literate pressure groups they went ahead with a scheme that benefits the ordinary people of Exeter. They acted on principle, not to court short-term popularity.

If only such principle were applied more widely. If, instead of trying to woo the middle of the road voter, the Labour Party acted firmly in the interests of working class people. If, instead of attempting to disown its left wing, it turned on those who sought to make it compromise its commitment to real social change.

When the Tories were last elected Tebbit said that "we don't deserve to be re-elected if unemployment is over three million." They must be amazed that, despite the fact that unemployment is now over four million and industrial jobs are disappearing at the rate of 12,000 a month, they lead Labour in the polls. Neil Kinnock's turn to the soft grey image is patently not working. The message must be that a Labour Party which is hard in its commitment to oppressed and exploited is a Party that can win support and win elections.

Steve Reicher (Exeter CLP)

AIDS

There has recently been a wave of publicity on the spread of the disease AIDS. Much of this publicity has revealed an increasingly dangerous attitude to AIDS and AIDS victims held by certain "prominent" people and an continuing campaign of misinformation by the parts of the media.

Locally, the press have consistently pampered to Tory councillor Adrian Rodger's anti-gay, pro-nuclear family, moralistic values. He, and others like him, have called for extreme restrictions on the civil liberties of AIDS carriers and homosexuals, including the closing of all gay clubs and meeting places and the suppression of gay magazines.

On a national level, we have seen the right wing press enthusiastically take up Manchester Police Chief Anderton's bigoted comments about "homosexuals and prostitutes swirling around in a cesspit of their own making." Some remarks by the extreme right have even been frighteningly reminiscent of those made in Fascist Germany in the 1930s. Tory leader of South Staffordshire District Council, Mr. Brownhill, for example, advocates "putting 90% of homosexuals in the gas chamber" as a means of stopping AIDS.

The implications of such comments are abundantly clear. They show that AIDS is still widely considered to be a "gay disease". They show that AIDS has been

used to denounce gay sex as morally wrong, to harass the homosexual community and in some cases even to attempt to outlaw homosexuality altogether.

The first point, that AIDS is a disease of homosexuals is hardly correct. Although it is true that till now in the West there have been more gay than heterosexual victims, in Africa, where the disease originated, the opposite is true. It is obvious that any sexually transmitted disease will spread first within the sexual community where it started. Indeed, it would be an extremely odd disease if could distinguish between the sexual orientations of its prospective hosts!

Furthermore, those who have used AIDS to condemn gay sexuality and call AIDS a "gay plague" have ignored the fact that AIDS has not spread in the Lesbian community, but instead in the gay male community. If AIDS is a punishment to strike down the immoral, then by implication, Lesbianism must be extremely moral and should be promoted as a means for more than half the population of avoiding AIDS! Lesbians are the least likely to be affected by the AIDS virus. Therefore, AIDS is not a "divine punishment" for loving someone of the same sex.

To use the homosexual community as a scapegoat is irrational and horribly wrong.

Coupled with gay hatred in the gutter press, the extreme right have also used AIDS to reinforce the nuclear family and marriage by describing the disease as a result of "moral weakness". Adrian Rodgers believes in the intimidation of all those who disagree with his moral crusade. He advocates "enforced morality through fear". A spokesperson for the Catholic Church has attacked the Government anti-AIDS slogan "Play safe" as "encouraging promiscuity". The moral bigots would happily see us return to the Victorian era where the lack of freedom of sexual expression led not only to quite astonishing double standards in morality, but also to horrendous atrocities committed against many sections of society and to the virulent spread of venereal and other diseases.

The medical profession, who seem unable to agree on the extent of the risks, have also been quick to vocalise their moralistic views. The BMA has labelled anyone who has had 2 relationships in the last 4 years as promiscuous and unfit to give blood. (They later retracted this statement). Surely more people would die as a result of hospitals having no blood for transfusions than from the AIDS virus? Along with the reluctance to give blood comes the fear of giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Many people would let a person die in the street now rather than give mouth-to-mouth. All these are clear signs that reactions to AIDS are getting out of hand.

Meanwhile, the Government have taken only limited action to expel this sort of unnecessary fear from people's minds.

It was only the threat of the AIDS virus affecting the heterosexual community that caused them to react at all. The Government has spent only £20m on the anti-AIDS campaign compared to a staggering £100m on telling Sid! The leaflets and posters are too coy and are unclear on the various issues. (For example, they ignore Lesbianism).

Furthermore, the medical resources devoted to AIDS are pitifully inadequate. The North-West Thames regional health authority has only 25 beds for AIDS patients, and Norman Fowler has stated that he is not planning on any more for the near future. The Medical Research Council faces a £13m deficit by the end of this decade because of Government cuts in the funding of science research. This means that it will be impossible to put adequate funds into finding a cure for AIDS. The result? Most of the research into finding a cure for AIDS is being funded for the drug companies (including Glaxo which is funding a project here at the University in Exeter) and we all know where their interests lie....

So, what is being done by the Labour Party to combat these attacks on human rights? The Labour Party nationally has a policy of supporting gay rights, yet the Labour Party's response to bigots like Anderton has been one of almost total silence. It is now imperative that they take action and start a mass campaign for a policy on AIDS which will stop the spread of the disease. The campaign should include the distribution of information in prominent places such as libraries and schools to dispel the myths and put over the facts surrounding AIDS. More money must go to research into AIDS and ways of treating AIDS sufferers.

Prostitution should be legalised (bearing in mind that it is a consequence of poverty and sexual oppression) as a means of providing prostitutes with basic rights to adequate health care, regular check-ups and so on.

Locally, the Labour Group on the City Council could take a number of steps to tackle AIDS and the present attacks on the rights of AIDS carriers, gays and Lesbians. The City Council could appoint an AIDS officer to liaise with the health authority in order to mount a publicity campaign to remove public fear and misunderstanding, and to promote safer sexual practices such as the use of condoms. Posters on AIDS in public places are vital, pointing out that the disease is not as infectious as, say, measles, and cannot be caught through casual contact. Regular health education advertisements could be put in local papers advising people about safer sex.

Leaflets issued by the Terence Higgins Trust could be delivered through every door on AIDS. Information should be available in schools so that it reaches teenagers. A public information Help-line service like the one in Somerset could be set up. This provides secondary school children with education and information.

Exeter City Council should also declare itself an Equal Opportunities Employer as regards Lesbians and gay men and people with AIDS or AIDS virus if they are to combat the discrimination (sacking, physical and verbal abuse, isolation) which they suffer at the hands of many sections of the community.

It is especially important to remember that AIDS is already with us, and that it can only be curbed if we confront it quickly, directly and effectively, in a mass campaign. The plight of hundreds of sufferers and thousands of virus carriers is being ignored when so much could be done to help them.

Britt Holloway (Exeter CLP)

1987/8

There is much talk inside Exeter Labour Party of the constituency being marginal and a necessary win, if Labour is to succeed at the 1987/8 general election with an overall majority. Unfortunately, the facts do not look that convincing.

In the last general election of July 1983, the result for the Exeter Constituency for the three major parties was:

Conservative	26,660 (46.6%)
SDP	16,780 (29.3%)
Labour	13,088 (22.8%)
CON MAJ	9,880

Labour needs to take over 6,500 votes from the Tories or over 13,500 from elsewhere to win. Even assuming an even split between the Tories and the Alliance, Labour needs over 6,000 votes to win.

Putting this arithmetic on one side, we must compare the situation in Exeter with that nationally. In the 1983 general election, the Tories won 42.4% of the popular vote, Labour 27.6% and the Alliance 25.4%. Juxtaposing the two sets of figures, the Exeter Conservative vote was 9.67% above the national average, the Alliance vote was 15.35% above and the Labour vote was 17.39% below. (Labour's 17.39% shortfall in Exeter on the national Labour average was Labour's best result in the South-West outside Bristol)

The next step is to take the current national opinion polls of which the most extensive carried out recently was the Marplan poll conducted in the autumn of 1986 employing 9000 respondents. Nationally, the findings for the three major parties were, Conservative 41%, Labour 37.5% and Alliance 19%. If these findings are then converted using the figures above into a result for Exeter for the three main parties, we get:

Conservative	25,768
Labour	17,753
Alliance	12,144
CON MAJ	8,015

Labour could take pride in having moved back into second place and having cut the Tory majority, but the Labour candidate is still far from winning the seat.

Even if Labour achieved parity with the Tories at say 40% nationally, the Conservative majority would still be over 6,000. Indeed, keeping the Alliance and others at say 20%, Labour would need a national lead of 12% to win a majority of under 500 votes in Exeter constituency.

To put the argument yet another way, the average lead the Tories had over Labour in the 1983 general election was 7,194 per constituency. In Exeter the lead was 13,572 votes, that is more than the Labour vote. The purpose of this article is not to spread gloom in the ranks of Exeter Labour Party, but merely, as is the current fashion, to expound "realism". Labour should be warned in Exeter about putting all its political eggs into an electoralist basket.

Peter Bowing (Exeter CLP)

Briefing

**CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE
ORANGE CELEBRATIONS:
SAY NO TO NAZIS**

