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DLB TALKS TO KEN

At a recent public meeting in Exmouth on the 22nd April Ken Livingstone MP agreed to give an interview to Devon Labour Briefing. Below we reproduce the interview in full.

DLB - As you will be aware from your speech and the questions asked this evening, Exeter City Council, which is Labour-led, is spending 60,000 pounds on celebrations to mark the Tercentenary of William of Orange.

For the last 18 months now some members of Exeter CLP, including Devon Labour Briefing, in conjunction with Exeter Anti-Fascist Action have been campaigning against the celebrations. We warned that long ago that the celebrations would bring fascists to Exeter - and that is precisely what is going to happen. For example, in September there will be an Orange march in Exeter and the Imperial Orange Council of the World will be holding a week-long conference in Devon. The NF have made public statements saying that they intend "to bring supporters from all over the country to Devon" to support the Orangemen and have regularly been sending threatening mail to prominent members of the campaign.

The response of the City Council to our campaign has basically been to say that we are out to make trouble where none existed before and have actually accused us of bringing the fascists to Devon! In fact in a recent edition of the New Statesman the leader of the City Council Chester Long referred to those who oppose the celebrations as "five stupid bastards". What would you say to those, such as Chester Long, who claim that celebrating William of Orange has nothing to do with Ireland?

Ken - "It is everything to do with Ireland. The reality of 1688 was a coup

within the ruling class between different factions of it which were allied to particular religions, so that was secondary. But what followed was no massive step forward for human rights or the working class. It was purely a struggle for power within the ruling class and therefore isn't a revolution and isn't anything that ordinary people should celebrate, it's a matter of some historical interest and that's it."

"The position then was that there was the most massive and violent suppression of the Catholic community in Ireland with tremendous loss of life, loss of rights, loss of land. It ranks as a major attempt to destroy the entire Nationalist community of Ireland and has been celebrated ever since by reactionary forces in Ireland which seek to try to prevent the development of a normal class based politics. Particularly the Orange Lodges which were formed nearly 200 years ago to enshrine that pattern of bigotry



LABOUR-TAKE THE POWER!

and discrimination. They are most probably, certainly according to Marxist historians such as T.E. Jackson, the first example on our planet of a fascist organisation; the longest surviving fascist organisation. I mean exactly analogous to the Ku-Klux-Klan in the deep south of America. I just find it inconceivable that we should be doing anything that can be twisted to provide a platform for Orange Lodge bigots or the National Front."

DLB - This of course takes us onto the wider issue of Ireland. What policy would you like to see the Labour Party adopt on Ireland?

Ken - "What I'd like to see is a policy of withdrawal. Ireland is a completely separate cultural entity from Britain. We have more in common with France or Germany, which share a Latin base and the origins of Roman Imperialism, than Ireland which completely escaped that and maintained a much more decentralised and a much more embryonic democratic structure than most of the Western European nations. So tremendous cultural differences go right back to the beginning."

"Britain has tried to impose its will on Ireland because it saw it as a potential military threat and a source of great profit. In doing so we have probably cost more Irish lives than in any other colony - the population of Ireland is still only half the size it was at its height just before the famine. A lot of lives lost, generation after generation of Irish forced to leave their country because of that British Imperialism and it remains an Imperial situation today. The fact that we no longer have a military threat from it and the fact that Ireland is no longer a source of great profit has to a degree changed that. We are now into a war of Thatcher's face. She can't be seen to be beaten by republicanism and she is prepared to allow the level of violence to continue rather than seek a political solution which people would interpret as a defeat for her."

"Sadly the Labour Party, which has always shared the Imperial heritage of Britain, takes broadly an Imperial position on Ireland - they're not prepared to accept that Britain has no role there. There has always been a strong pro-unionist element throughout the Party which is very much typified by the present Leader of the Party."

DLB - So what would you say to those who put forward the "bloodbath theory" on the withdrawal of British troops?

Ken - "No one can predict the future. There may well be a bloodbath. I think that on balance by a very wide margin there would most probably be a compromise and a massive shake up of Irish politics. But we already have a bloodbath - it's gone on for 20 years and there is no

prospect of it ending in another 200. We are steeped up to our elbows in the blood of Ireland so it's a bit late for the people who have turned a blind eye to that for so long to suddenly start saying 'we're worried about the violence'. And certainly we are a major perpetrator of the violence - through the security services and through the MI5 and MI6 illegal operations."

DLB - Perhaps we can turn now to another subject - the Leadership election. What do you think of the decision of Tony Benn and Eric Heffer to challenge Neil Kinnock for the Leadership of the Party?

Ken - "I went back to my Party and asked their views and my GC voted by 26 to 6 to back a challenge. I was opposed to the idea of a challenge at the time of the last Labour Party conference because I thought we would be severely smashed and damaged and it was too high a risk strategy and there still is that risk. But, unfortunately, the Leader of the Party just constantly pushes and pushes - so that in the end basically the person who has caused the Leadership election is the Leader of the Party. I mean it is a very unusual situation that the Leader's management of the Party is so divisive that people feel they have to contest the election. Therefore these people like David Blunkett who are now saying 'it's terrible, it's divisive' should actually ask themselves 'Who has caused the division in the Party?' - with expulsions, with the watering down of policy and the virulent personal attacks on opponents - it is actually the leader of the Party himself."

"David Blunkett's article in the 'Tribune' today I find very surprising because David Blunkett was hawking himself round the Left before the last election saying should he stand against Kinnock after the election. So there does seem to be a slight bit of hypocrisy there."

DLB - You mentioned the witch-hunt. Here in Exeter there is currently a witch-hunt against Peter Bowing who is now up for expulsion. His so called crime is that he has published articles critical of the Party Leadership, its policies and undemocratic practises. What is your view on the expulsion and the witch-hunt in general?

Ken - "I am opposed to expulsions. I mean if you found somebody who was a crook or somebody who was sexually harrasing women or who was racist - or somebody who stands against a Labour Party candidate then that's another matter. But there should never be a question of disciplinary action on a policy issue. How anyone can complain about somebody writing to the papers here when, as you mentioned, Chester Long has made a virulent personal attack on the so called 'five stupid bastards' - and I've just been told it's time to go and eat."

RIGHT TO REPLY

More than six months ago, Exeter Labour Party held an "open" General Management Committee meeting, to which all members of the party were invited to give their views on how the party should proceed in the light of the unprecedented Tory attacks on local government and democracy, the welfare state and the NHS and education.

One of the results of that meeting was the decision to institute a party newsletter for members. Since then, two issues of that newsletter have come out, and the initial intention of providing a forum for discussion within the party and acting as a means whereby those who do not come to meetings can have their voice heard has been diluted into a bureaucratic device whereby the party leadership informs the members about what they should do and how they should do it.

However, the most recent issue of March/April goes beyond the brief of informing the members. It contains also information on the disciplinary case against Peter Bowing and a statement from the party officers on "confidentiality and freedom of expression." The statement of the disciplinary case contains an unprecedented attack on a party member, for it presents the case in a one-sided manner, forgetting to mention that (a) Bowing has been given no opportunity to defend himself before the investigators, the EC or the GC and (b) outrageous efforts were made by the leaders of the party in the run-up to the expulsion recommendation to stifle all debate on the matter in the Branches. Right wing GC delegates walked out of a meeting of Pennsylvania/St. David's Branch which had decided to discuss (and subsequently opposed) Bowing's expulsion, on the grounds that discussing the issue in the Branch might prejudice their hearing of the case at the GC. Yet the GC was not allowed to hear the evidence against Bowing and based itself entirely on the supposition of the Investigators that a *prima facie* case exists. As the reader of Branching Out will be able to see, the GC resolution passed on March 4th contained no evidence of Bowing's alleged "sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the party."

The hypocrisy of the right wing, which can be seen from their refusal to discuss Bowing's expulsion at Branch level, is further confirmed by the so-called statement on confidentiality and freedom of expression. It claims that "true" freedom of expression can only be protected by maintaining the confidentiality of party meetings. It omits to mention that the so-called confidentiality rule is nowhere to be found in the party rulebook.

All those who believe in democracy within the Labour Party should insist on a

right to reply in Branching Out. The party machine should not be allowed to use a mechanism, paid for by party members and their efforts, to attack members of the party if they are to be given no right to defend themselves. Anybody who opposes this practice should write, as Briefing supporters already have done, to the party leaders and demand that their letter be published in Branching Out. That will put the bureaucracy on the spot.

At the "open" GC proposals put forward by a significant proportion of those attending could not be discussed, except as abstract ideas. Only the EC was allowed to propose concrete ideas for action. The leafletting campaign mounted by Exeter CLP during the winter 1987/88 was undoubtedly a success, and probably contributed to Labour's success in the May Elections. Briefing supporters supported this campaign, but called on the GC to go further in sanctioning action against, for instance, the poll tax. Yet Labour's opposition to this evil measure in Exeter has been limited to coat-tailing the USDAW initiative and mounting a daily petition campaign, having seen the success of the Anti-Apartheid Sharpeville Six petitioning. Moreover, members of Exeter CLP who felt that the open GC did not sufficiently take into account their views have found it difficult to get discussions onto the agenda. Indeed, one member has even had his wrist slapped for suggesting that the party should operate more democratically. So long as the meetings of Branches and of the General Committee, and publications such as Branching Out as manipulated in such a way as to preclude open and democratic discussion, Exeter Labour Party must expect to find its policies called into question publicly.

Moreover, it is ridiculous to attempt to expel Bowing for his opinions on the grounds that expressing them publicly constitutes a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Labour Party when Chester Long remains unpunished for branding Labour Party opponents of the William of Orange celebrations "five stupid bastards". When has Bowing ever resorted to such coarse and insulting invective in support of his legitimate opinions?

And finally, what about the letter, written from a 26, Clifton Hill address to the Flying Post from a fictitious member of the Labour Party, called Bob Alexander, which entirely misrepresents the views of Briefing supporters, and mounts thinly veiled personal attacks. What efforts have been made to weed out this cancer within the Labour Party ranks? The Alexander letter is clearly written by someone who is so sure of his or her position that s/he feels that using the Labour Party address is legitimate.

Jo Shaw,
Exeter CLP.

That's the Ticket



Since the 1987 general election the rightwards drift of the Labour Party has accelerated. Under the guise of 'Labour listens', every single policy has been put up for grabs. With the new 'National Constitutional Committee' the witchhunt against the left has been broadened and deepened. But, perhaps most significantly, the new 'Aims and Values' document, put forward by the current leadership, seeks to imprison us within the confines of the capitalist market. It is a way of killing Clause 4 in all but name.



In conjunction with these internal changes, the Party has continued to distance itself from the major acts of resistance to Thatcherism. After the leadership kept the miners at arms length and repudiated the printers, it refused to back radical action by nurses, cautioned the teachers against striking before the election and even gave partial support for the notorious Clause 28 when it was first introduced. In policy and in practice the Party refuses to commit itself firmly on the side of the exploited and the oppressed. To put it slightly differently, the Party under Kinnock and Hattersly is a party of class collaboration. Moreover it is a Party that is increasingly intolerant to any opposition. Kinnock, like Thatcher, does not answer criticism, he bans it.

It is this aggressive drive to the right that has made a leadership contest inevitable. It is utterly hypocritical to condemn the contest as 'divisive' since Kinnock's changes have provoked it. It is equally unconvincing to argue that it is 'badly timed', since if we were to wait we would be faced with an American style Democratic Party that had lost any pretensions to a socialist future. The question that has been posed by all the recent changes and which is crystallised in the leadership election is extremely simple: are we a party of class politics or of class collaboration. Do we seek to come to terms with a drive towards greater profit and greater exploitation or do we seek to resist it?

WHY WE BACK BENN AND HEFFER

We support Benn and Heffer because they represent class politics within the Labour Party. Just as the leadership have consistently abandoned struggle so they have consistently championed it. Whether it be their positions on the miners, on Liverpool or on Ireland, they have refused to be cowed by press hysteria and personal attacks. They have been uncompromising in their defence of public services, workers rights and civil liberties. It is significant that both launched their

campaign by appearing at the picket line at Dover. It was the best way of showing that the contest is not about personal rivalry, but about how the Labour Party orientates to the social forces that surround it.

Just as the leadership question is simple, so it demands a simple answer. If we believe in a socialist society, based upon the self-activity of the broad masses of the population, then it is imperative to vote for the Benn-Heffer ticket against Kinnock and Hattersley. There is no room for compromise. A vote for Prescott is merely a distraction, an attempt to cloud an essential issue with an irrelevancy.

Of course, to say that Benn and Heffer are on the right side of the crucial divide is not to say that we agree with everything that they believe in. Indeed we have a number of profound differences. But we are not afraid to address them. We do not believe that true support can be achieved by sweeping important issues under the carpet. For instance, we consider that Tony Benn seriously underestimates the resistance that would be generated by his radical project, and the need to mobilise





the masses of the population to defend them. Eric Heffer's position on women has been a target of much criticism. This must not be trivialised. Yet our vote for Benn and Heffer is not a vote for two men. It is a vote in support of miners and printworkers and nurses seafarers and women and gay people and black people. It is a vote to include those people who alone can devise the policies that apply to them.

This point is essential. Our stance on the leadership is not a simple matter of totting up the policies on one side and on the other and plumping for whichever comes out best. We vote for Benn and Heffer because of the social forces they represent. It is these social forces which have the potential for transforming the Party and our society rather than the individuals alone. And the reason for welcoming the leadership challenge is because it allows us to attract these forces back into the Party.

After all, if one approached young people, or workers under attack, or gay or black people or anyone at the sharp end, and if one called on them to join the Labour Party, then we have had little response in recent years when they respond: 'why should we?' 'When the Labour Party repudiates us and condemns us more vehemently than those who attack us, why should we embrace the Labour Party?' The Benn-Heffer challenge allows us a response. It allows the prospect of a Party that welcomes these people because it does not fear to support them. It allows us to argue that there is a place for them with Labour.

This is why the leadership battle can have important benefits even if it does not succeed. It begins to bring people into the Party who will be the basis of its future transformation. Our perspective must not be limited to this year's campaign. What happens in 1988 lays the groundwork for 1989 or 1990. It serves to bring together what may presently be a minority but, by that very fact, can grow to the majority.

There are three things to come out of this argument. The first is that we must organise support for Benn and Heffer as a major priority within the Party. The second is that these must be more than organisational structures internal to the Party. They should see their role as exemplifying in practice what the challenge means. As well as pushing the candidates they may organise support for the seafarers and others in struggle. They should involve anybody who backs a Party that backs such struggles. Finally the leadership challenge must not disappear the day after the election. It should see itself as a continuous and growing force. The day after the election is the day to prepare for the next election. Untill we win!

**Vote for a
socialist Leader**

**—
Vote Benn and
Heffer!**

Local Election Analysis

Our first reaction must be one of pleasure. In Exeter, the Labour share of the vote rose from 26.8% in 1984 (the last time the same 12 seats were contested) to 30.5%. At the same time we took back second place behind the Tories. We have also retained effective control of the City Council, despite the fact that we were fighting some of our most vulnerable seats. We gained one and lost one, ending up overall as we began - with 13 seats on the Council.

On a national level the Party had an overall gain of over 100 seats and our standing in the polls rose to 40% - level with the Tories. In total numbers of seats and in votes cast, Labour was clearly the main beneficiary of the elections.

However, both locally and nationally, we should not get carried away. While the results were a shift in the right direction, they were far from enough to indicate that Labour is in the ascendant and the Tories in decline. At first sight, the time would appear to be especially favourable to Labour. The Tories have just announced a spate of policies that clearly indicate a redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich: an unfair budget, a reactionary poll tax and miserly new social security regulations. Indeed some of these policies have been so crude that they have even impelled the servile Tory back-benchers to revolt. Simultaneously the old Alliance parties are in complete disarray: hopelessly split, without a profile, without any clear policies and, in the case of the SLD, without a leader. Despite all this, Labour is well behind the Tories locally. Nationally the Tories held firm and we only drew level with them.

How come? Why, despite the recent government performance, did Labour not dent the Tory vote - only benefitting from the 'Alliance' collapse? There are two possible answers. The first is that Tory policies are not really unpopular. People do not oppose the Poll Tax. They see systems where the rich benefit at the expense of the poor to be totally acceptable. I find that unconvincing, and favour a second explanation: however unpalatable the Tory policies, people see little alternative to them. Indeed one of Thatcher's most famous catch-phrases was 'there is no alternative'. The Labour Party may denounce the policies, Labour spokespeople may run round Tory ministers in parliament, but the Labour Party offers no real way of resisting the policy.

The Poll Tax is a fine example of this. We have clearly exposed the iniquity of this measure. Intellectually we have won the argument. We will continue to argue against it, we will obstruct it, delay it, but when it comes to the crunch we will pay it and

Labour Councils will administer it. And it will come to the crunch. When Labour administers such a tax and acts as a vehicle of oppression against local people, it is little consolation if we also weep crocodile tears and say 'but we were forced to do it'.

Support for this view comes from Scotland. The most dramatic change in the whole elections was the renaissance of the Scottish National Party, which doubled its vote to nearly 21% (although it was contesting some 50% more seats). It is always dangerous to put global changes down to single issues, but the election in Scotland was dominated by the Poll Tax - with registration forms being handed out in conjunction with the campaign. And the SNP was the one party to push for a non-registration campaign, against the position of Labour. They seem to have reaped the reward.

Similar considerations apply locally. For all the difficulties of the Tories, and despite the huge antagonisms in the Alliance, the overall Labour gain, at under 4%, was modest. Had the Tory vote in Pinhoe not been split by the ex-conservative councillor, Jim Pollitt, standing as an independent, we would even have lost a seat. In other words Labour remains highly vulnerable. We cannot continue to rely on the ineptitude of our opponents.

The other main beneficiary of the Exeter elections were the Greens - another Party committed to non-payment. They totalled nearly 1000 votes and some 4% of the poll - rising to some 10% in the St. Davids ward. This remains fairly insignificant, but could easily become crucial in close three cornered fights. Therefore any sign of a splintering of Labour support must be examined closely. We must be particularly worried when Labour cannot harness dissatisfaction with the Tories, when we are not seen as the natural centre of any fight-back.

It is not enough to oppose the Tories in words but to counsel that people grin and bear it until a new election in five years time. Even worse, when Labour Councils carry out Tory policies, we cannot expect people to trust us as a real alternative. For all that ultimate responsibility lies with the Tories, if peoples experience of our councils is of services being cut, working conditions deteriorating, amenities deteriorating and rents going up, why should they believe us when we say it will all be different when Labour takes over at Westminster? People have memories. What if the IMF decides to replace the Tories as the villain of the piece?

We must show by our actions in the present that we represent an alternative. We must develop the policies and organise the campaigns that can mobilise mass discontent. That way we can oust the Tories. Otherwise, in a few months the Alliance will get a little smoother and the Tory propaganda machine will go into action and Labour will stay out in the cold.

UNEMPLOYMENT

We have seen high levels of unemployment for over 10 years now. The right attributes this to the uncontrollable forces of the market. The truth is that unemployment can be contained as some studies have shown, for example, in Austria. The drive in Britain, as in America, has been for greater profits for the capitalist class. High levels of unemployment are vital for this as the key to wealth is the wage bill; if that can be kept down then there are more profits for those who own the factories. Unemployment on its own, however, can only assist this in a very crude way. The Tory Government is aware of this and has introduced a series of ever hardening programmes to help make the working class more easily exploited.

There have been cries from the Left for full employment, but there has been little in the way of strategy to achieve this goal. Meanwhile the material and psychological conditions of many people on the dole have deteriorated.

Across the country there have been a number of responses designed make life on the dole less intolerable. In Exeter the UB40 Centre was created. The City council provided a run down building to house the project and running costs were obtained from the Manpower Services Commission (MSC). Had unemployment been a short-term state this might have been a reasonable response, but as it this is not the case and so this provision has proved inadequate.

The people behind this project were well meaning but there was no clarity about what exactly the project should be trying to achieve and what were the best means to go about it. The Trades Council and the Exeter Volunteer Services also lacked the ability to fund the project.

One assumes that the project would hope to provide for a large proportion of those out of work. However, the near derelict premises used were a recipe for deterring most people from crossing the threshold.

Its location was also less than ideal being too far away from the dole and benefit offices for the sort of convenience that is needed to encourage those doubtful of such a project to give it a try; would the job centre receive as many enquiries as it does if it had been located in Howell Road?

The next set of premises were somewhat better but by the time the move to the Forward Centre was made the lack of clarity about its aims and the curse of MSC funding had already sent it down a narrow back street.

In the event the Forward Centre premises proved to be short term as the Council decided to upgrade the public baths. The move to Belmont Park has, so far, proved to be a disaster. As yet the premises are still not ready. The Belmont fiasco, however, has had one useful effect; it has allowed the opening up of debate about the direction of the centre, its funding and management.

Indeed, the question of whether there needs to be a centre has been raised.

I would argue that there is a need for a properly resourced centre in the right location. On its own it cannot move mountains, but an identifiable base is important. There needs to be a place for the people who have most recently been identified with the Forward Centre. There continues to be a need for a base for the remnants of the UB40 squat, (a piece of community initiative which was wilfully squandered. But neither of these should necessarily be located in 'the' centre. The Centre needs to be located centrally, and, as near to either the benefit office or the dole office as possible. Proper funding is needed and one would naturally look to a Labour led council to try to respond to the needs of local people who are out of work. Staffing needs to have continuity.

The role of such a Centre needs to operate on 2 levels;

1. dealing with immediate needs; benefits advice, recreation, education etc.
2. to take on an organisational and campaigning aspect, particularly encouraging a claimants union and linking in with trade unions.

Finally it is worth noting that unemployment is interpreted in different ways. At the end of the day it is not so much about having a job as having a decent income. The Tory strategy with regard to unemployment has been largely successful because it has managed to isolate people. The labour movement has long been aware of the importance of combinations. A united movement of unemployed people has the potential to strike back at the exploitation that has been increasing over the last 14 years. Without centres for unemployed people the task is much greater.

Tim Price,
Exeter CLP

Coalitionism in Exeter

The 1988 City Council election left the Exeter City council hung as it has been since 1984. There seems no reason why the centre parties - mostly the Democrats - will not renew the coalition with Labour.

Nobody won and nobody lost the elections. The centre parties are in organisational disarray and are incapable of even challenging for second party place on the council. The Conservatives have lost sufficient support nationally to prevent them winning overall control. Thus Labour, the second party at local level, won a negative victory on May 5th.

Support for the parties of the centre - and here we are talking more about the Democrats - is based on three wards; Heavitree, Alphington and Pennsylvania (6 seats) although the SDP had an isolated win from Labour in Exwick in 1987. Labour support is only solid in three council estate dominated wards; Wonford, Whipton and Stoke Hill, and in the City Centre, Rougemont, ie. a total of 8 seats. Otherwise, Labour can win seats - depending on other factors - in Barton, Cowick, St. Thomas, Polsloe and Exwick (10 seats). Labour currently holds 4 of these seats. Thus in the absence of a sea change, Labour could win a theoretical maximum of 18 seats, still short of an overall majority. (It should be noted that Labour won a seat in Pinhoe this year due to the intervention of an independent Tory candidate)

For the Tories, by contrast, it is not inconceivable that they could win an overall majority with a theoretical maximum of all but 6 seats. Consequently, the Tories have shunned any prospect of a coalition with the centre parties. Thus the ruling coalition has been the centre and left. Moreover, the anti-Tory coalition of interest has been strengthened by the fact that the centre parties defend their seats against the Tories.

Yet why does Labour have so little political difficulty in retaining the coalition with the centre? To answer this we need to look at Exeter Labour Party.

The Labour Party very much plays second fiddle to the City Council Labour Group: a case of the tail wagging the dog. Chester Long, Labour Leader of the City Council, is the boss of Exeter's Labour machine and strives - usually successfully - to defeat democratic pressure from Labour's rank and file.

Inside the party, Long is the undisputed leader of what can be termed the narrow-minded machismo "lads" from whom the council leadership is drawn. Women's politics, peace, Ireland, etc. are for

them "peripheral" issues. The logic behind this right wing grouping is a "status careerism", through the holding of municipal office, which manifests itself in a parochial "power politics" devoid of principle and socialist strategy. Thus coalitionism at any cost is the natural option of the City Labour Group, who then find themselves backing measures such as the forthcoming William of Orange celebrations and the criminalisation of squatting. Equally, they demonstrate a complete inactivity on radical and socialist issues, e.g. peace, Ireland, democratic consultation, etc. The 1988 manifesto proposal for two new multi-storey car parks in the city centre - blocked by the Department of the Environment! - is a recent example of this rotten opportunism.

Increasingly, Long's "empire" - at one point there were up to three other members of his family on the council - is being eaten into, rather than challenged, by a middle class, middle of the road element. Some speculate as to when John Shepherd, university theoretical physics lecturer, will challenge Long. For the time being, at least, Shepherd - still in a minority in the Labour Group and holding an unsafe seat - is acting as the Group's chief apologist.

The uneven, but long term, tendency for Tory support to decline has meant fewer Tory as opposed to hung and Labour councils; Exeter is no exception. With little expected of the council - its powers are become fewer and fewer - the non Tory, but vacuous, coalition may endure.

Peter Bowling,
Exeter CLP

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