

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

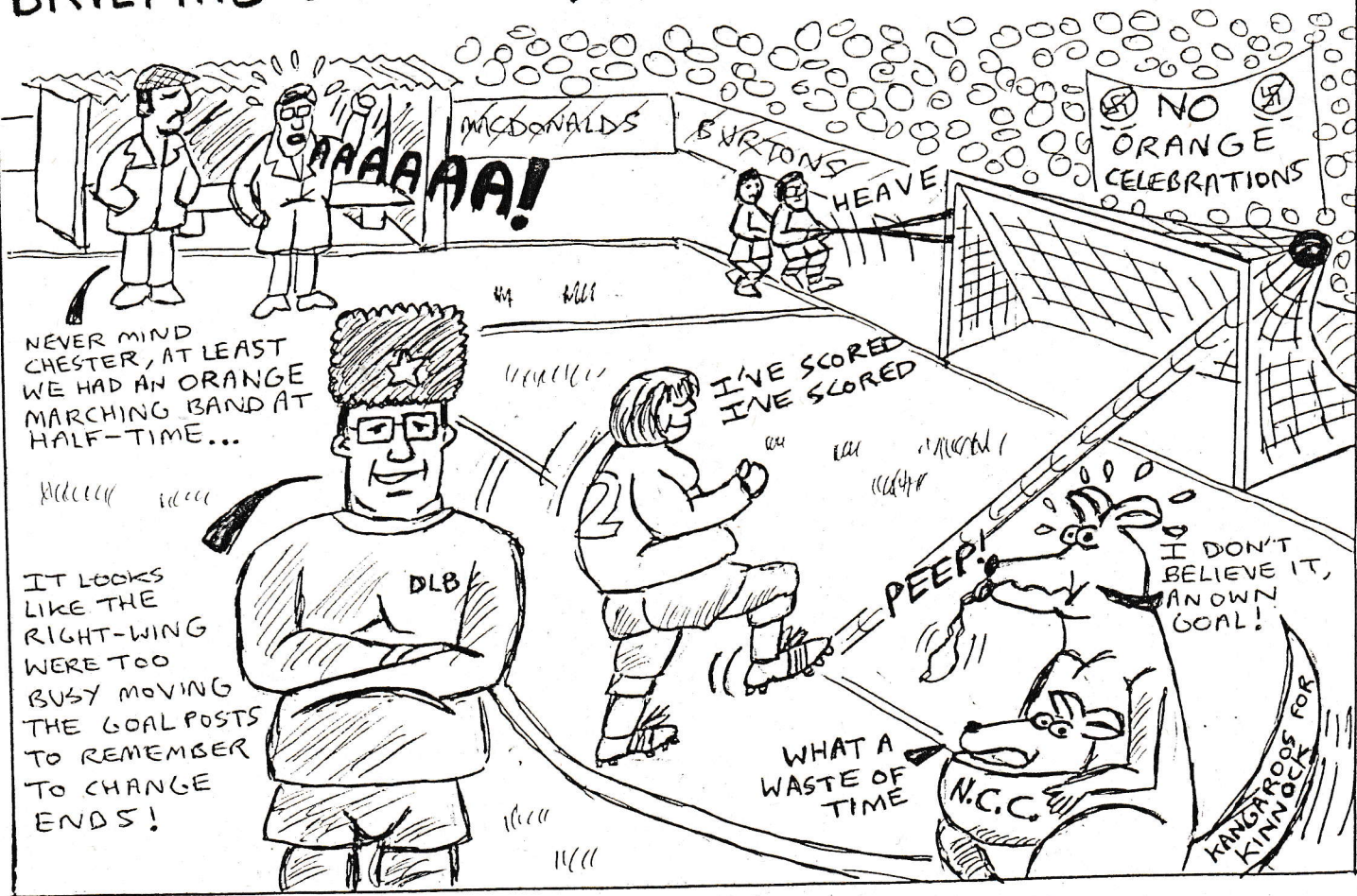
ISSUE 33

JANUARY 1989

20p

WE WIN

BRIEFING UNITED 3, WITCHHUNT WANDERERS 0.



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Witch hunters defeated

DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING COMMENTS ON THE RECENT OUTCOME OF EXETER CLP'S WITCHHUNT AGAINST PETER BOWING

Thursday November 24th saw Labour's travelling circus, its disciplinary national Constitutional Committee, descend on Exeter; it was here to try Peter Bowing, a socialist critic of Exeter CLP. Chester Long, Labour's City Council leader, had already made his views only too clear to the party's General Committee in Exeter saying that he would "sell his house to get Bowing out of the party". Twice before Mr. Long had tried to purge the party of those with whom he disagreed. Back in 1984, he failed after Tony Benn reminded the party that the NEC would never allow expulsions simply because the left published a paper "Exeter Labour Briefing". Not to be deterred, he tried again the following year through his Whipton/Pinhoe branch and got the party's Executive to recommend expulsion, but in the process all the rules of natural justice were broken, and those facing expulsion won a High Court injunction halting the proceedings.

In 1987, the expulsion bandwagon started rolling again; Long's union branch made a complaint against Peter Bowing on the grounds that he had written articles which the branch deemed detrimental to the party, i.e. views that Long disagreed with. Glasnost had clearly not arrived in Exeter. A committee of investigators charged Bowing with "writing articles which purport to describe meetings of Exeter CLP and comment on the conduct of party officers and the Labour Group on the Exeter City Council." Without the details or the evidence ever being given to the General Committee and with a ruling that no party branch discuss the affair, the charge was forwarded to the NCC.

What was at stake behind the scenes was clear. Bowing, falsely seen by Long as the leader of the left in Exeter, had argued that Exeter Labour Party was not as democratic as it could be, that the Labour Party City Council Group dominated by Long held the whip's hand over the party and worst of all, that the guiding logic of the City Council Labour Group was "municipal careerism". The legalistic niceties mattered not; Bowing had to go; first, because he had spoken out where it hurt most, and secondly, to set an example. But since the formation of the National Constitutional Committee, a body dominated by the right but designed to adhere formally to the rules of natural justice, the constituencies no longer had disciplinary powers to abuse. Thus it all hinged on a right wing but non-Exeter based body.

Long does not like Bowing. Nor did the NCC majority, but it was forced to act within the rules of the Labour Party. The constitution of the Labour Party gives its members a right to "hold and express views and opinions." Thus, in its judgment, the NCC proclaimed "that individual Labour Party members, whilst having the right to express and write personal opinions publically, Peter Bowing should not have made individual and personal attacks on other members of the party which can be used against and to the detriment of the Labour Party". It is worth noting that Exeter had never even alleged that any personal attack had been used to the detriment of the party, simply because no personal attacks had ever been made; yet of course Bowing had to be found guilty of something.

Much more interesting was the total defeat the Exeter party leadership suffered. They cried out for expulsion; Bowing was only "severely reprimanded". They wanted a judgement which blanketed all Labour Party meetings with confidentiality to protect the leadership from criticism; the judgement gave them nothing. The leadership have always sought in Exeter to answer criticism by expulsion threats, now at least for the time being this option is closed to them. They are now trial from the pens and mouths of socialists within their own organisation by means of a right granted by the very NCC which they hoped would suffocate all their local criticism.

ANTI-APARTHEID MOVES LEFT?

Delegates from Exeter AA to this year's AAM AGM, while still finding their views in a minority, nonetheless encountered a supportive atmosphere amongst left delegates who all shared a sense of amazement and outrage at the callous exclusion of representatives of liberation movement organisations such as SWANU and AZAPO from the conference hall. A growing body of feeling within the movement calls into question sacred cows of AAM policy such as the refusal to make links with all strands of the liberation movement, not just the Congress movement, SACTU, COSATU and SWAPO and a refusal to step up campaigning, within the trade union movement, for workers' sanctions.

It is important that Exeter activists are represented in discussions this spring on coordinating efforts to give ever stronger voice to these ideas at the 1989 and future AGMs.

LABOUR AFTER GOVAN

CHRIS CHURCHWARD GIVES HIS VIEW ON
'LABOUR AFTER GOVAN'

It may well be that Exeter Labour Party's Campaign leaflet no. 13 was prepared before the shock of the Govan by-election result hit them. Certainly "Campaign Leaflet no. 13" is unlucky for the people of Exeter for it totally fails to address the fundamental issues, preferring instead to promote the 'cult' of personality and project the image of a Labour County Councillor. For instance, the poll tax gets the mere mention of being included in a catalogue of Tory malpractices - that "within the law" line of opposition to the poll tax is just what lost Labour a so-called "safe" seat in Govan, that and taking the local electorate for granted and making it clear that Walworth Rd. had little liking for their candidate, who was regarded as too left wing.

As soon as the Govan result was known, Labour again started to talk a lot of nonsense - about it being a protest vote, about their confidence of regaining the seat at the next General Election. It is one thing for the Party of Government to talk about a protest vote in a by-election, quite another for the opposition party to do so, especially in Scotland where the Tory candidate was never in with a chance and only two parties really counted at Govan - Labour and the Scottish Nationalists.

Labour deliberately called a snap by-election, with the minimum period for the campaign and this was to stop the SNP from mounting an effective campaign, especially on the poll tax, which held up the Labour Party's "Feeble Fifty" (now reduced to 49) who have been so ineffecutal at Westminster under the disadvantage of Kinnock's leadership and the constraint imposed on them by the "Right".

Jim Sillars, the victorious SNP candidate, could generally be regarded as somewhat to the left of New Realism. Indeed, he had left the Labour Party some years ago to set up an Independent Labour Party in Scotland. When that did not succeed, he has sought to exploit Scottish Nationalist aspirations, based upon the knowledge that while Labour consistently votes in a substantial majority of Scottish MPs, they still get the rough edge of the English. Now Sillars seeks to avoid the accusation of "separatism" by advocating an Independent Scotland within the EEC. It is a clever, but opportunist idea, for he knows full well that the EEC is not interested in creating new, small nation

states. An independent Scotland would get no more out of the EEC than say Corsica, Brittany or the Basque country if any of them did a UDI.

There are many aspects of the Govan debacle that Labour now needs to confront. The people of Scotland are 85 per cent opposed to the poll tax and 32 per cent favour a non-payment policy, which is just what the SNP offers them. There is no reason to think that twelve months hence the people of Wales and England will be thinking, acting and voting any differently to what the people of Scotland are now doing. The latest opinion polls show the SNP on 30 per cent, up 10 per cent in a month and now only 9 per cent behind Labour. Here in Exeter, where Labour is not the largest Party represented on the City Council but exercises "control" by some kind of arrangement with the rag bag of Liberals and Democrats, there is absolutely no need for the Party to incur the odium which will attach to them for doing the Tory's dirty work. As Lambeth have done, Labour in Exeter should state quite frankly that they are not prepared to implement the poll tax, give up the leadership of the City Council and let the local Tories do Mrs. Thatcher's bidding.

The consequences of Govan mean there are increased chances to alter Kinnock's policies as he becomes increasingly regarded as a failed leader, commanding little respect, unable to exercise authority without intimidatory threats and totally lacking credibility as a future Prime Minister. We must realise that without a contingent of fifty Scottish Labour MPs going to Westminster, it is unlikely there would be any future Labour Governments and that means it is in our interest to defend the Union (The Act of Union of the Scottish and English Parliaments 1707). That necessitates respecting the legitimate aspirations of the Scottish socialists and it probably involves devolution; certainly it demands tolerance of a degree which is lacking in those who manipulate Annual Conference, "steam roller" the left with the block vote and generally threaten and cajole.

Meanwhile, in this locality, the initiative in the fight against the hated and feared poll tax has passed to the Green Party and Labour stands accused.

issues

PETER BOWING EXPLAINS WHY HE THINKS THE LEFT SHOULD SUPPORT PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

If it were proposed that the outcome of British general elections were no longer to depend on voting but on a lottery, socialists would oppose the suggestion. Yet it might be that lottery would have been in Labour's best interest when one considers the outcome of the last three general elections.

The serious answer to such an absurd and hypothetical proposal is to assert that socialist strategy is based on winning popular support in the struggle for socialism, and winning votes for representation in parliament is part of that process. In as much as we are democrats as opposed to gamblers, we should seek to make our representation in parliament as proportionally equal to our votes as possible. Socialist ideology is not just an opposition to exploitation and oppression, but is also a system of rationality in which arbitrariness plays no role. Thus in so far as we use parliamentary representation in our present capitalist society or beyond we must campaign for parliamentary representation to be based on rational principles.

The lack of rationality of the simple majority system (SMS) is quite startling. Often the winning candidate in a seat has less than half the votes, so the defeated candidates in a seat have a majority. There is no guarantee that the party with the most seats has the most votes; indeed in the general elections of 1951 and February 1974 such a reversal occurred. Overall majorities in parliament are usually won with a minority of the national vote; the present Conservative government won less than 43% of the national vote in 1987. Large parties usually need fewer votes to win a seat than do smaller ones. Concentrated minority parties, such as the Ulster Unionists, do better than ones with a dispersed vote, such as the Green Party. Such an electoral system cannot be justified in its own terms.

This electoral system provides a field day for the capitalist mass media. When SMS involves a two horse race there is no room for tactical voting, but with three or more serious contestants tactical voting is inevitable; ie. if an

election is clearly a fight between A and B, support for C is bound to be squeezed. If the capitalist press believes that bourgeois party X is best placed to defeat Labour it is quite capable of producing a self fulfilling prophecy. What logic is there in socialists supporting a system in which positive voting is sometimes of less value than negative voting?

Socialist support for SMS is quite irrational in propaganda terms. Much is made of the Conservatives only having 24% of the vote and ten seats in Scotland, but the Thatcher government won less than 43% of the vote in Britain as a whole, and while the struggle for socialism is not primarily based on an illustration of electoral statistics, were Labour to abandon its support for SMS, the left could further undermine the legitimacy of the Thatcher government. The struggle outside parliament would be ideologically assisted by our stating that the Thatcher government was elected by a clear minority of the national vote.

PR (proportional representation) has mainly been opposed by much of the left because it would make the election of a majority Labour government considerably more difficult and would lead to coalition governments which are deemed undesirable. Let us deal with the first point first.

The chances of the election of a majority Labour government in the early 1990s are not affected by socialist support for PR, unless in the unlikely events that PR is won through struggle on the streets or the Tories are converted to it. So the next general election will be fought on SMS. Any future majority Labour government elected in the 1990s should strengthen the forces for socialism in society by measures like reforming the capitalist state, extending public ownership and strengthening the trades unions, not by gambling for another term of office on a lottery election system. The latter action suggests a far greater subservience to bourgeois parliamentarianism than does the former.

More probable perhaps than Labour winning an overall majority in the early 1990s is a hung parliament. In this case socialists should be utterly opp-

used to Labour forming any coalition with the centre parties as such a government would only administer a post Thatcherite capitalist Britain. In this circumstance PR would still be in our interest. First, it would prevent the reelection of a majority Conservative government and would shift the balance within the bourgeois parties, through the election of more Democrat and SDP MPs away from Thatcherism. Second, PR would allow the election of a forth force of Green and Nationalist MPs which would increase Labour's room for manoeuvre. The only eventuality which would seem to contradict this thesis is if in a hung parliament which followed the next general election Labour were the single largest party and was able to form a minority administration. Here Labour could prolong the minority government and extract legislative concessions from the centre parties in exchange for ensuring that the next election was fought under PR.

It is unlikely, though not impossible, that Labour support for PR could cost us a majority Labour government; nonetheless the heart of my case is that balancing all potential gains against possible losses, we should support PR. It should be pointed out, however, that one reason, though not the decisive reason, why past Labour governments have not been as effective as they might be precisely because the majority of seats in one chamber of parliament which sustained the Labour government did not represent a majority of voters. While this does not matter for a Conservative government which can rely on the state, the left should rely on popular support. Such a state of affairs made it easier for right wing Labour leaders to sell out on the implementation of socialist policies. None of this is to deny the positive advantage of having a majority Labour government over not having one, but merely to suggest that when Labour wins under SMS there is a cost.

Let us briefly put the matter into historical perspective. In the 1951 general election Labour was the single largest party and came within a whisker of winning 50% of the popular vote but the absurdities of SMS gave the Tories a working overall majority and in the period since then there have only been four years, 1966-70, when Labour has enjoyed an overall working majority; this compares in the same time period with 26 years of overall Conservative majority. Coalitions are not axiomatically bad. Would a Conservative/Liberal coalition in the 1980s have been as efficient at defeating the forces of socialism in society? Would a continuation of the Callaghan/Liberal pact after 1979 not have helped the left in the party?

So far we have characterised SMS in terms of its lottery effect. But there is now strong reason to believe that this electoral system is increasingly discriminating against Labour. The Labour vote is ghettoised in Scotland, Wales, the North and the inner city. These areas do not add up to a majority of the constituencies in parliament and as the population drift is away from these areas each boundary alteration hurts Labour further. It does not matter what the Thatcher government does in Liverpool, Manchester or Glasgow for example for even if the Labour vote rises, as it is doing, the Conservatives cannot lose any more seats. The other side of the coin is that the number of marginal seats in Britain is declining making the election of a Labour government even less probable. If Labour is serious about winning power it must struggle for socialism everywhere but in much of Britain the positive effects of such a campaign cannot effectively realise themselves electorally. The present SMS electorally forces Labour to concentrate on marginal seats to the detriment of building more serious support in the Labour heartlands or breaking tactical voting for the centre parties in the Southern towns and countryside.

Any advocacy for PR immediately raises the question of which variety of PR should be supported. Socialists in my view should support the party list system over the single transferable vote method. The latter has a number of disadvantages: because it relies on small constituencies without a national pool of seats it does not provide accurate PR; it would also allow voters for other parties to select individual Labour candidates in so far as their vote has been unable to be used to support candidates in their party. Yet support for the principle of PR can be abstracted from discussions of individual systems of types of systems.

My argument then is that PR should be supported both in terms of socialist and democratic principle and in terms of socialist tactics. In terms of the next election there is nothing to lose and something to gain. Our advocacy of PR would win support in itself and allow us to practise it in our own organisations thus strengthening their democratic character without a charge of hypocrisy being made against us. Support for PR by the left could win in the Labour Party because for different reasons some of the Labour right support it; there is ground for an unholy coalition. Were it realised the hand of the Labour bureaucracy would be severely weakened, because the left would always have the option, though we hope we would never have to use it, of leaving the party and fighting elections independently without the left of centre suffering.

BENN INTERVIEWED

BEFORE THE SUCCESSFUL AND WELL-ATTENDED BENN-HEFFER RALLY IN EXETER ON SEPTEMBER 1ST 1988 ADDRESSED BY TONY BENN, DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING AND ANTI-FASCIST ACTION INTERVIEWED BENN...

TONY BENN ON THE WILLIAM OF ORANGE CELEBRATIONS

TB

When the City Council got involved in this business at the outset they probably saw it as a tourist affair and were quite unaware of the history and of course if you are going to dig up your history you've got to analyse its significance if you're going to make a proper event. I mean, if you had a discussion about 1649 or 1381 or the Chartist demonstrations or suffragettes, that's one thing, but to pick something of this order and make it into the occasion for tourist celebrations and then to pretend it's all about the birth of democracy is absurd. There's no question of that. I think it's more an indication of ignorance about our history and I think the Labour movement suffers most terribly from concentrating on tomorrow's headlines and attacking each other instead of really understanding the structures of the state and how they came to be formed. So from that point of view I think they made a great mistake.

The second thing to say, of course, is that the purpose of your campaign it seems to me, and tell me if I'm wrong, is not so much directed against the Labour Council in Exeter but directed against Fascism and all that it stands for.

(AFA - that's right)

And therefore your campaign is educational in importance. The very fact that you can be put on a par with the NF - "total impartiality" between fascists and anti-fascists - reminds you of the old story of the Mayor who said would steer a course between partiality on the one hand and impartiality on the other - it's an incredible thing to do. I think the impact of what you do will probably have to be measured over a longer period and presumably the council will not change their policy now, although I understand from talking to people that it's been shifted now to an Anglo-Dutch celebration as if it somehow was something that could be separated from William of Orange and King Billy and the Battle of the Boyne and all the Irish connections. Now of course if it's any comfort to you the only occasion since the last General Election when the Prime

Minister has spoken in the House apart from Question Time and the only occasion since the election when the Leader of the Opposition has spoken in the House has been on 1688. The Prime Minister moved the motion and the Leader of the Opposition seconded it and some of us voted and spoke against it and when the vote came although we were beaten whatever it was 250 to 29, when you analyse the Labour votes we had a majority of Labour votes against it. So we even got the Parliamentary Party taking that view.

TONY BENN ON THE LEADERSHIP CONTEST AND THE PROSPECTS FOR THE LEFT IN THE PARTY

DLB

Can we turn now to the leadership election. It's almost certain that you'll lose to Neil Kinnock; if you do, do you think the challenge will have been worthwhile?

TB

Oh, enormously worthwhile. I had doubts at the beginning as to whether this was the right thing to do but I'm totally persuaded that it was and I'll tell you why: First of all it's had an impact already: I mean I haven't seen a front bencher on a picket line in the miners' strike or at Wapping, but I did at Dover! I think the "double U-turn" on defence, second half of the double U-turn, was a product of the leadership election. Thirdly, the polls, for what they're worth (don't take much notice of them) but they did say that 7 million people in Britain supported the candidature which is more than David Owen and Paddy Ashdown rolled together. And I think the other thing about it is that it has enfranchised the Party. But I



think it has a very profound effect, changed the direction of the party by one or two degrees, and if you get on a supertanker and change the course of one degree then one later the ship's in a different position and a week later it's in a different ocean. So I actually do think it has been well worthwhile.

DLB

One of the most worrying things at the moment in the Labour Party is that despite Thatcher bringing all this repressive legislation, and the balance of payments crisis, Labour is still 10 points behind on the polls and Neil Kinnock is at his lowest apparently since becoming leader. Why do you think that is?

TB

I think that is the case for the contest in a way. You lose three elections and the left hasn't been in charge of any of them. So that it may be a case that if you're going to review everything you've got to review the leadership. I think the problem at the moment, not only on Ireland, but on a whole range of other things, is of bipartisanship. Bipartisanship on market forces; bipartisanship on American troops; bipartisanship on the House of Lords (the NEC voted to retain it); bipartisanship on trade union legislation. I think unless somebody does something quite soon, the choices which should be open in a democracy will be blanked off by coalition politics, at a time when the whole Thatcher era, I think, is coming to an end because the North Sea bubble has burst. And the economy is now in very deep trouble so I suppose that's why we're standing and I have a feeling that the impact of the campaign will be felt over quite a long period.

TONY BENN ON THE WITCHHUNT

DLB

It is often said that Neil Kinnock is one of the most authoritarian leaders that the party has had for quite some time and one symptom of that is the massive witchhunt that has been underway for the last few years. Here in Exeter we have had our share of the witchhunt and Peter Bowring is currently up for expulsion. His so-called crime is that he has criticised the Party leadership locally and nationally for the current direction which it has taken. What would you say to those who hold with these views?

TB

Well, I'm absolutely opposed to it, mind you when you get older you've seen everything happen before. My predecessor Stafford Cripps was expelled at the 1938 Conference on the motion of a

young moderate called George Brown if you remember him. I was in Parliament when they expelled Aneurin Bevan in 1955 after he'd set up the NHS. It is a sign of weakness when you use organisational methods to get rid of people with whom you disagree. It is saying "I cannot argue with you, I can't beat you in argument so I'll throw you out!" It's highly discriminatory too. I mean, nobody has ever done anything about Frank Chapple who sits in the House of Lords but won't take the Labour whip which is a breach of the constitution. Nobody has done anything about him. I'm sure with the EEU case coming up it'll be interesting to see whether Hammond gets the Hatton treatment or not, I know which way the NEC will go on that. So I think you have to keep your nerve and just go on warning people that this is really an attack on socialism and an attempt to extricate the Party from its historical links with socialism. But it won't work.

TONY BENN ON THE PROSPECTS FOR SOCIALISM IN THE SOUTHWEST

DLB

It is often noted that the South West is a conservative area. What way do you think the Labour Party should go forward in places like the South West?

TB

Well you say it's always been true-blue; that's true up to a point, but it's also had a good strong radical liberal tradition and people forget that David Steel, a very popular media figure for obvious reasons, destroyed the Liberal Party. He merged it with, in my opinion, the wrong end of the Labour Party. He made a deal with Owen and Owen is only interested in people dressed up in uniforms who salute him and they've had a bust up there and it's interesting that Owen and Ashdown are both West-country members. I would have thought that what the Labour Party should be doing would be opening up some of these real old radical questions in the South West and that the liberals in the South West have enough historical consciousness to respond. I have always regarded the South West as a development area for socialism, it so happens that it got stuck at the stage of radical liberalism, partly because industrialisation never came and the trade unions were never very strong, at least not as strong as they should be, but it's a potentially huge development area and the socialists in the South West who have kept the flag flying have never had much recognition and we should encourage them.

IRELAND 1988

RICHARD KNOTT DEVELOPS A TROTSKYITE ANALYSIS OF THE STRUGGLES INVOLVING THE BRITISH OCCUPATION OF THE NORTH OF IRELAND

"We have never really had a strategy or plan since. (1969) We have spent 20 years surviving. And we get credit for it. We have spent 20 years witnessing amongst young and old people an amount of courage that is unbelievable in the face of what human beings have suffered. But we are still not clear about where we are going. And I think we ought to be." (Bernadette McAliskey, extract from recent speech in Belfast, reprinted from *Troops Out*, October 1988).

In 1968, the six county statelet of Northern Ireland was rocked to the core by a series of demonstrations by its Nationalist community. On the surface, none of the demands of the civil rights movement were revolutionary, but the essence that the twenty year long struggle has posed is state-power; what it is and who wields it.

For twenty years, the Nationalist community has fought against the state of Northern Ireland, from which it was completely disenfranchised, whilst that state representing Protestant domination and backed up and maintained by British imperialism has hurled everything against the Nationalists.

The basic demands of the Nationalist have still not been met and cannot be, for Northern Ireland was set up on the basis of having more loyalists than nationalists. It is not just the laws that are discriminatory, but the existence of Northern Ireland itself, which discriminates against the majority of the Irish nation.

But there is more to it than this. The movement which will crush British imperialism and bring about a truly united independent and "free" (i.e. unoppressed) Ireland will be based on and dominated by the working class. The programme of such a movement will include the nationalisation under workers' control of all the major industries and banks. That is only achievable by the working class seizing power, i.e. by overthrowing and smashing the existing state forces both north and south.

This of course will create an immediate and massive crisis in Britain, which is why British governments whether Labour or Tory have been so desperate to hold on to Northern Ireland, building up repressive measures and increasing the size of the security forces.

In fact, as the level of repression is stepped up by Britain, the consequences of its defeat become more catastrophic.

The Irish bourgeoisie is no longer capable of leading Ireland to national emancipation. Its own economic interests are dominated by those of imperialists and multinationals abroad and its independent role is zero. Only a movement based on the working class can sever itself totally from the interests of capitalism and lead the national struggle, which is inseparable from the social struggle, to victory.

This year, a string of incidents has kept the Irish-British war in the news. The British government and its security forces have extended the counter-terror war against the republican movement. The Gibraltar three were gunned to their deaths in broad daylight whilst unarmed by the government's liquidation squad, the SAS. No "crimes" had been committed by these people, although they were IRA volunteers. As soon as the bogey word "terrorism" is evoked by the government and its media mouthpieces, it seems that no further justification is required for attacking the perpetrators of "terrorism". Any measures are acceptable, murder of "terrorists" is impossible, of course, since "terrorists" cannot have any rights and they are always about to commit murder themselves. What "terrorism" actually means remains open to speculation. However, even speculating about it is deemed undesirable, because that is being "soft on terrorism". Hence the SAS killers were allowed special rights at the coroner's inquest, namely remaining anonymous. This put them above the law before the court even met. The hysteria surrounding the trial was primarily to intimidate the jury, which even so did not give the looked for unanimous verdict. Two jurors held out against the intimidation but the verdict was still a majority for lawful killing.

Incidentally, the British state does not like juries as they sometimes do not give verdicts in line with the judge's summing-up, which is why they do not exist in Northern Ireland. I think it is highly likely that British juries will themselves come under attack from the government shortly.

The funeral of the Gibraltar three was attacked by a loyalist who threw grenades into the crowd at Milltown cemetery. The security forces were quite possibly in collusion with the attack because an RUC van which was parked on the motorway hard shoulder beforehand disappeared as the attack took place.

The funeral of those killed by the Milltown cemetery grenade attack was itself an attack by two plain clothes soldiers who were totally justifiably killed by the crowd/IRA.

August 20 saw the IRA's most successful operation against the British Army since 1979 when eight soldiers were blown up in a bus in county Tyrone. As an obvious reprisal, three IRA members were shot dead by an army ambush ten days later in the same county.

The "criminalisation" policy which was brought in by the last Labour government, means that the British government does not declare war on the IRA and then have to deal with the messy consequences of political status etc. This allows the security forces to act with an impunity which is unparalleled almost anywhere else in the world, including South Africa.

The sending down of the Winchester three in October for twenty five years apiece has to be the most outrageous piece of British "justice" ever. The evidence? 19 prominent names on five cigarette papers. The counts on which they were convicted? "Conspiracy to murder Tom King" and, can you believe it, "conspiracy with others unknown to murder persons unknown." There were no bombs found, nor even any bomb making equipment, no guns or weapons of any description, no hard evidence at all. The outcome of this case has virtually criminalised the entire Irish community. The British government is saying "we can have you for anything if you are Irish. We don't need evidence."

Tom King's remarks about ending the right to silence in the north of Ireland while the trial was on was blatantly prejudicial to the outcome. All three had exercised that right. Anyone else would have been prosecuted for contempt, but of course the legal system doesn't work like that; it is subordinate to its political masters.

Moving at a more sedate pace, Exeter had its own piece of excitement on September 17 when the Orange Order marched, intending to mark the 300th anniversary of the landing of William of Orange in the south west. Exeter and National AFA organised a partially successful counter-demo which kept the Orange march out of the centre, but the biggest police operation in the history of the south west kept the AFA march strictly to its own route well away from the city centre or the Orange parade.

The last few months has seen even more repressive legislation for Northern Ireland, with the banning of interviews with Sinn Fein, or at least political interviews with them, also the abolition

of the right to silence for suspects and the making permanent of the PTA or PTB as it will now be. All of these measures have the approval of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, which made a virtue of abstaining of the crucial Prevention of Terrorism Bill.

As Trotskyists, we have a position of total opposition to the British occupation of Ireland. Partition, a measure carried out in the interests of British imperialism in 1921-22 was a defeat for the Irish working class which was betrayed by the Sinn Fein leadership. The lessons of that defeat have still not been learned. The partition of Ireland did not create two separate states, one "free" (the south) and one "unfree" (the north). The British government was carrying out a desperate balancing act, using the Sinn Fein leadership (including Collins) to hold back the working class and make partition seem inevitable, or make it seem like a "stepping stone" to the republic. At the same time, having backed up the "carnival of reaction" in the north east, the British government had to be careful not to let the pogroms and murders by the loyalist gangs against the nationalists to go too far and to enrage the southern working class, which might jettison the pro-Treaty Sinn Fein leadership and move towards socialism.

The stepping stone idea has failed, just like the stalinist two-stage theory, and this is the lesson that has to be learned. Twenty years after the uprising in the north of Ireland began, nearly 70 since partition, but the Irish nation is still no nearer to socialism. The republican movement in N. Ireland, which has large working class support, has shown immense courage, resourcefulness and sacrifice and we unconditionally support all their activities against British imperialism. Unlike Militant and others (such as DR O'Connor-Lysaght from PD), we believe that the armed struggle is not only justified but actually raises the consciousness of the working-class in Ireland and Britain. Without that struggle, the cause of Ireland would probably be on the back-burner for the left.

The programme of the Republican movement is nationalist. The Sinn Fein leadership do not want socialism as Gerry Adams clearly pointed out recently ("Socialism is not on the agenda"). The Trotskyist tradition is weak in Ireland and there is much work to do, but the victory of the Irish working class, which can be the only guarantor of a truly independent Ireland, is bound up with the struggle for a revolutionary part of the Fourth International in Ireland, as in all other countries.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

OLE' FATHER TIME TIM PRICE'S REVIEW OF THE YEAR

Well done - you made it into 1989. Not a truly remarkable feat, you might think but it has been an enormously hazardous year.

You would have been safe travelling in February, May and June but the rest of the year was pretty dodgy. Particularly in March, July and December. Crossing the channel has not been easy in spite of the attempts to smash the magnificent action of the PGO Dover workers. However, holidaymakers in Greece probably wish they hadn't taken a ferry what with the early morning machine-gun call on the way to Poros and some dodgy driving by another captain just outside Piraeus.

There were a couple of moments when Neil Kinnock probably wished he hadn't gone to Africa when a group of Militant supporters posing as Zimbabwean border troops nearly did British socialists a favour.

Still he was relatively lucky, unlike President Zia who took to sky-diving with the help of a bomb. He wasn't the only person not to make a safe landing: Lockerbie was recently showered with a Pan Am Boeing 747 and some of Reagan's chappies mistook an Iranian Airbus for a clay pigeon in the Gulf.

British troops in Gibraltar also went in for a bit of sharpshooting as they mowed down three suspected I.R.A. members back in March. Even attending funerals has proved less than healthy as mourners of the three were to find out when a loyalist gunman hoiked in a few hand grenades. Three days later, two soldiers were set upon as they tried to gatecrash a funeral.

Back in March railmen struck over safety of brakes; in December, 34 died at Clapham Junction as trains smashed into each other.

There has also been the risk of being trampled under foot by people racing against time all over the world, by Ben Johnson overperforming due to an overdose of steroids or troops withdrawing from Afghanistan or Angola.

All in all it would seem that you have been better off staying in. Mind you, that can also be a tricky occupation. Back in May, a report stated that bean-sprouts and salami snacks were the main causes of salmonella; now Edwina can't even have a prairie oyster to get over her handovers as eggs prove to be lethal.

Edwina Currie, of course, gets the award for coming out with some good 'uns; central heating and fuel salespeople were up in arms when she suggested that old people should get knitting to prevent hypothermia. Then she suggested that women remain virgins or become nuns to avoid cervical cancer. Still, she can't be accused of not being clear about the importance of class: "I'm not a woman. I am a Conservative," she declared in August.

George Bush clearly is not going to take to the veil; in the run up to his election as U.S. President, among his many gaffs, he admitted having sex with Ronald Reagan, although he was quick to retract the claim saying that they had setbacks not sex.

Neil De Rostron, a delegate to the Tory Conference was less coy about one of his vices exclaiming, "I'm not lager lout. I've stuck to whiskey all day!"

Perhaps there may be a similar cause to Norman Willis' general bewilderment; "When I was 14 I used to have a plan for the next 1000 years," he told Kettering Trades Council. "Now I have enough trouble sorting out what I'm doing to be doing over the next three days let alone what's been going on for the last four days."

Arguably, it's been a fair year for trade unions in spite of ever greater Tory lawmaking to pooklerise them. The nurses are ever on the brink of really helping bash the Tories. Too late the E.E.T.P.U. have been shown the door for failing to understand what trade unionism is all about. The Ford workers and postal workers have shown Maggie that they have not larnt the lesson she handed out to the miners and the magnificent G.C.H.Q. loyalists.

Students tried horse wrestling outside Parliament as they protested about the Tories' plans for them. Student loans are definitely a good idea - they can help get rid of students as wily Norman Tebbit knows: "I wouldn't lend a penny to most of you", he told them.

Speaking of pennies, Blip Lawson just may be on the brink of joining the setting sun as rising interest rates throw away many of the gains that the better made at the last budget. The economy is about as well as the overdosed cancer patients in Exeter or the Cornish tee-totalers who had a temporary beefing up of their water supply. No doubt Workers' Press will be able to say as

they did last January, "as 1988 opens, world capitalism faces a crisis worse than anything it has known since the 1930's, the dimensions of which are impossible to gauge."

The breath-taking circumstances in which we live have not gone unnoticed by Marxism Today, who have declared that we live in 'New Times'. Their abandonment of Karl's notions may lead them to change the name of their glossy journal and Style"? "Post Fordism Today"? or simply "The New Times"?

Meanwhile Militant have led the call for glasnost for Trotsky, (what are sales figures for the Russian language version of their paper)?

There have been many campaigns through the year: Anti-Alton Bill, Anti-Clause, Scargill's election, Free Nelson Mandela, Ron Brown's campaign for a reshaped mace, Scottish anti-poll tax campaign and our own local anti-Orange Celebrations campaign. Much could be said about all of these.

Then we've had some fun elections; perhaps Tony should have consulted Ronald Reagan's astrologer before embarking on his challenge to Neil. Pinochet came out of the plebiscite with something of a bloody nose. Le Pen caused some panic in the French elections before things were more amicably settled.

Tony Benn called for a red-green alliance. Soon Margaret Thatcher gave up aerosols and became a friend of the seals. This was quickly followed by some remarkable East-West co-operation to save three whales. One didn't make it and is being raffled off by Greenpeace.

So much happened this year that I've packed in just a fraction of it all. It has not been a safe year, physically or politically. Perhaps we should be thankful that they did not manage to hang Peter Bowring and take succour from the fact that things may get better. We can hope that the tide will turn and that we will recognise that there is resistance in spite of the media's attempt to tell us otherwise. Perhaps the biggest clue to this was a slip by Brent Sadler on News at Ten, when relating events on the West Bank: "Soldiers occupied the streets with no signs of protest - except a general strike."

SOVIET EXAMPLE

Exeter City Council should follow the Soviet example. Recently all streets, institutes, etc. named after the discredited President and party secretary Brezhnev were changed. It's high time that Labour did something about all the streets in Exeter such as Pretoria Rd., Buller Rd etc. which are named after Britain's imperial past in South Africa. Renaming symbols of colonialism, racism and imperialism is even more important than suppressing the Brezhnev legacy. So perhaps those in Labour's city leadership who rightly support twining Exeter with a Soviet city should also wake up to the realities where they live.

SNIPPETS

THE ANNE FRANK EXHIBITION

Devon Labour Briefing welcomes the coming to Exeter of the Anne Frank exhibition which vividly illustrates the horrors of fascism and racism. The exhibition is at the Cathedral (Jan 12th to Feb 6th) and throughout this period a series of anti-fascist films and talks are taking place.

Readers will recall that the initial push to invite the exhibition to Exeter was made in Devon Labour Briefing and was not then supported by some of the right wing leadership of Exeter City Council's Labour Group. (One even went so far as to suggest that the Anne Frank Foundation was a Zionist front!)

Hopefully the holding of the exhibition in Exeter will help redress Exeter's image as Britain fascist-loving city which it earned after the City Labour Group helped promote William of Orange celebrations in the City last year.



ANNE FRANK
IN THE WORLD

EDITORIAL: THE POLL TAX

what we say

As the implementation of the Poll Tax gets nearer the opposition to it grows clearer. This is especially true in Scotland where the Govan by-election, if it showed anything, proved that total and principled opposition to the Poll Tax will not drive away popular support. Quite the opposite in fact! But in England also the opposition is beginning to get organised. In more and more cities Anti-Poll Tax Alliances are being formed. Local councils such as Lambeth have pledged themselves to non-cooperation with the Tax. Some local NALGO branches have come out against administering the tax. Nationally this opposition is coming together through initiatives such as the Newcastle Conference organised by the Socialist Society.

But the Labour leadership remain blind to all this. They repeat, against all evidence, that a campaign of non-cooperation would be disastrous. They insist that the tax, however unfair it is, must be paid and that Labour Councils must collect it. But this is playing directly into the Tories hands.

Some two thirds of the population lives in areas administered by Labour councils. For the majority of the population it will be Labour who impose the Poll Tax. For those who cannot pay, we will see Labour Councils sending in the bailiffs, Labour Councils deducting money from wage packets, possibly even from income support. So, when it comes to the next election these selfsame Councils may protest that the Tories initiated the Poll Tax, but for the less wealthy the reality will have been that the attacks were carried out by Labour.

This is the path Labour intends to follow in Exeter. Not only do they intend to set up a Poll Tax unit, to administer the tax

and to collect it, they are actively against any campaign of non-cooperation. Moreover they don't even intend to collect the tax under protest! Councillors have stated that they cannot officially voice protest against the Poll Tax. Is this seriously meant as the best way to build support for a Labour Council?

We in Briefing believe that our only choice is total non-cooperation with the Poll Tax. It is an unfair and reactionary measure that hits hardest at the weakest. Instead of Labour acting as the hand that wields the Tory axe, Exeter Labour Party should instruct its councillors to refuse to implement the Poll Tax, it should initiate contacts with NALGO in order to support union non-cooperation and it should mount a massive public campaign to get the Exeter people to disrupt the registration process and to refuse payment of the tax.

Of course such an undertaking will not be easily won. What is more, we should not be sectarian and see the fight against the Tax as limited to the Labour Party or the Labour movement. There are many others who, out of moral principle or political belief, refuse to accept this Tory Tax. Indeed many of them are ahead of us in organising opposition to the tax. We must unite with those on the left, within and without the Labour Party, with union activists, with the Greens and the Quakers and many more besides in order to build an Anti-Poll Tax Alliance in Exeter.

Building this Alliance must be our main priority in the coming months. While Thatcher has attacked many sections of the working class over the last decade, this measure attacks everybody at the same time. This presents an unparalleled opportunity for unity. If we can achieve such a unity then the Poll Tax can be defeated and Thatcherism can be toppled.

Get out and

ORGANISE!