

# DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

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## FIGHT TO BEAT POLL TAX STARTS IN EARNEST

Fewer people are now in blissful ignorance of the poll tax as the days of registration draw ever nearer. There is much opposition to the iniquitous tax, but those who should be leading the assault on it are mainly content to mouth their discontent.

The Exeter and East Devon Anti-Poll Tax Union is forming around those who feel that more concrete opposition provides at least an opportunity to defeat the

tax. The campaign is aiming to reach people directly rather than relying on fear frozen organisations of the working class. If the active opposition to the poll tax is as large as we suspect, then as the movement comes to life, the structures of the labour movement will be thawed and the momentum will carry the campaign forward to victory.

Whilst it is recognised that the campaign can only succeed by the co-ordination on anti-poll tax

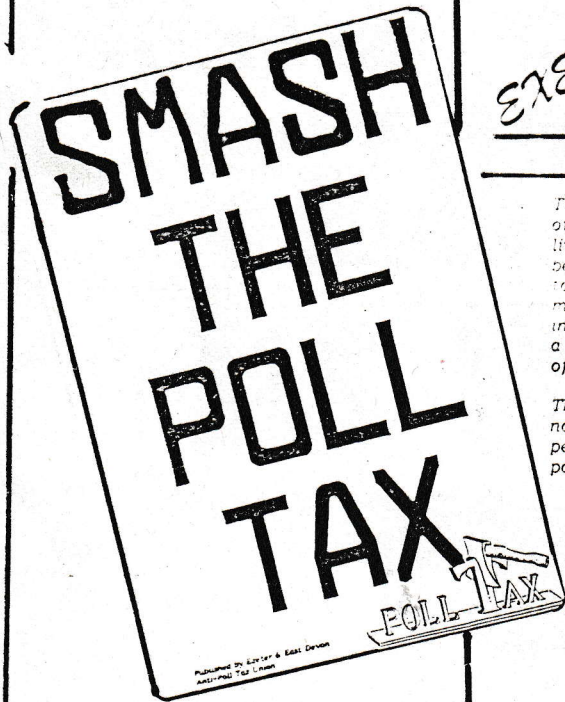
**LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!**

campaigns across the country, the important first stage has to be local.

The first step has been to set up a steering group to ensure that the campaign is launched.

The second step involves checking out the level of support for resistance among the people of Exeter. An area will be leafleted with a double sided leaflet. One side of the leaflet will contain information. The other will have a large slogan so that it can double up as a poster to be stuck in windows. A public meeting will be organised as near to the centre of the area as possible. Then there will be a follow up canvass of houses displaying the poster.

Of course, as highlighted above, the main plank of resistance in the first phase must be non-registration. This involves breaking the law, something which cannot be taken on lightly. The justification for this is that this law is, perhaps, one of the clearest and most penetrating pieces of class legislation that the Tories have perpetrated. It is a law that reaches directly into the pockets of all working class people. It has to be resisted, and people are likely to be willing to challenge it, not only because it marks the zenith of all the anti-working class legislation, but also because of its ubiquitousness. No one can deny that there comes a time when some



EXETER  
& EAST  
DEVON

ANTI-POLL TAX  
UNION

Box 200,  
Exeter Flying Post,  
1, Parliament Street,  
Exeter

The Tories are doing away with the rates system and replacing it with the community charge, otherwise known as the POLL TAX. Instead of paying rates on your house or flat, each person living in your household over the age of 18 will have to pay the poll tax. Some people will be better off under the new system - some people living alone and those wealthy enough to live in a big house, which currently means that they pay higher than average rates. Many more people will be worse off. For example the official figures show that the average rates in Exeter are £385 per year. The poll tax is likely to be £220 per person, meaning £440 in a household of 2 people. Once again it's a case of the Tories helping the rich at the expense of those who can ill afford it.

The poll tax has been through Parliament and is now law. Token gestures and petitions will not now stop it. But do not despair there are still things that can be done to stop it, if enough people are willing to take a stand. We are trying to unite those who want to defeat the poll tax. Consider the following:

- \* I/we are prepared to delay our registration to make it hard for them to compile the register, eg. does your dog/cat eat forms?
- \* I/we will refuse to register. (There is a danger of £50 fine and other penalties.)
- \* I/we are prepared to give money to a fund to help pay fines for those who are willing to fight but could do with some financial support.
- \* I/we are prepared to refuse to pay the tax, (this too could involve the courts.)
- \* I/we are prepared to help the campaign by canvassing, raising funds, delivering leaflets, stewarding meetings etc.

It is hoped that a large number of people will respond to at least one of the courses of action suggested. For the campaign to be a success at this stage, a couple of hundred people must be prepared not to register and a group of people need to form an anti-poll tax union in the area. They and the steering group can then repeat the process in other areas. As more of the city and area around is covered the Exeter and East Devon Anti-poll tax union will need to become a delegate co-ordinating body.

law, no matter how 'democratically' arrived at, has to be taken on. No doubt in Germany in the 1930's there were those who came to bitterly rue conforming to the 'law' that led to the massive destruction of working class organisations and the annihilations of millions of people. The 'democratic' process whereby this poll tax was arrived at is, of course, spurious. Although many on the left take this as axiomatic, we normally work within the law because on the whole it is wiser to do so in a capitalist society which allows enough room to manoeuvre without

martyring ourselves and where there is mass consent to conform. This theme is dealt with elsewhere in this edition of Briefing.

The poll tax challenges that mass consent.

#### MAKING THE CAMPAIGN WORK

On a more pragmatic level, the issues of encouraging and actualisation of the breaking of that consent have to be taken on. Re-establishing solidarity is essential. The display of posters should help in this, by giving a visible signal that opposition is there. Where people are still in the process of making up their minds this signal could well become an important factor. The campaign also acknowledges the contributions that can be made by those, who for whatever reasons, are not actually prepared to break the law. Again there is optimism that those prepared to stall on registration may come to refuse later when they see the size of the campaign and have had further chances to talk through the issues. Even if they merely defer and do eventually register, the period of deferral will help by placing an extra burden on those compiling the register and therefore deflect some of their labours. Important in this and throughout is a recognition of the fact that there has to be hundreds of people prepared to resist and the material circumstance of the people involved. If there are only a couple of hundred in the while of the Exeter and East Devon area, who are willing to resist then non-registration will be merely an act of martyrdom. Individual non-registration will be a token gesture no more useful in the end than the hollow leaflet campaign of the Exeter Labour Party. Mass non-registration is likely to make the due process of the law unworkable. This in turn will reduce the potential for suffering of those refusing to register. If funds, whether in credit unions or some other form, are built up, those who do, in the event feel the sharp end of the law need not

suffer more than anyone else in the campaign.

The issue of the material circumstances of those fighting the poll tax must not be underestimated. However, it should also be recognised that many will be severely pressed to find the money to pay the tax. Avoidance of suffering in the short term by registering will not prevent suffering later when the tax has to be paid.

Other anti-poll tax campaigns are likely to spring up in Exeter. The TUC are expected to run one, but the requirement that the law should not be broken reflects either their deep and underlying pessimism about the possibility of a genuinely successful campaign or their eagerness to co-operate and collude with the ruling class for whatever motives. This does not mean that they should be ignored. Critical interventions have to be made. Platforms should be shared with such campaigns so that there can be public debates about the way forward. Also it would help avoidance of duplication which could have unnecessary financial implications for all involved. There is no harm in the collection of petitions or sophisticated publicity stunts or gathering of information, though the former 2 have limited value.

The first public meeting has been held. It was a modest success given the short time there was to organise it. Pat Wall pulled out the day before, which was a pity, but Lambeth Councillor, Greg Tucker proved a useful source of information and inspiration.

News of the campaign has not been well received by the right of the Labour Party. Ignoring the performance of one city councillor who was willing to abandon party policy on unilateralism, the party members in the poll tax union were vilified for refusing to adhere

to the party's policy of collusion with the Tory poll tax. The irony of naming the poll tax collection office after Wat Tyler must rebound on them - Tyler killed a poll tax collection officer! Are they advocating similar action? If so they are far more radical than we thought, and more radical than members of the poll tax union!!

The opportunity and the ways forward are clear.

\*FOR A MASS CAMPAIGN BASED ON GRASS ROOTS.

\*THE BUILDING OF THE EXETER AND EAST DEVON ANTI-POLL TAX UNION.

\*FOR SMASHING OF THE POLL TAX

Tim Price

Exeter and East Devon Anti-poll Tax union can be reached via Box 200, The Flying Post, 1, Parliament Street, Exeter.

## **S**OUTH WEST **S**OCIALIST CONFERENCE

The Socialist Conference is a broad-based and open organisation bringing together activists inside and outside of the Labour Party. Since its launch at Chesterfield two years ago it has been developing alternative socialist policies through its own policy review groups. A strong regional network has now been established, following our launch in the South West with our successful conference in Taunton last October.

Our second South West Socialist Conference  
will be at:

FILWOOD SOCIAL CENTRE,  
Filwood Broadway,  
Filwood,  
Bristol  
on  
March 11th

10.30am - 5.00pm  
£3 Waged/£1 Unwaged

*Further details:*

Peggy Walker, 28 Whitmore Road, Taunton; 0823-286200  
Dave Chapple, 4 Gordon Terrace, Bridgewater; 0278-450562  
Pete Crack, 115a Birchwood Road, Bristol 4; 0272-772218

# CARING FOR PATIENTS Who are they kidding?

A RESPONSE TO THE GOVERNMENT  
WHITE PAPER 'WORKING FOR  
PATIENTS'.

The title of the Government white paper 'Working for patients' is misleading. A more accurate title would be 'accountants first', as the document is more pre-occupied with management and issues of financial accountability.

### SELF GOVERNMENT

The white paper proposes that individual hospitals would be able to apply for a new self-governing status as NHS hospital trusts. This means that while remaining in the NHS, they would be free to set their own rates of pay for their staff and, within limits, borrow money.

Hospital trusts do not represent privatisation but it would be easy, in a few years' time to convert some of the trusts into share holding.

The danger with the introduction of self-governing hospitals is a return to a two tier system with a group of elite hospitals governing themselves and setting their own priorities preoccupied with high tec medicine, while other hospitals are left to struggle on to serve their own community as best they can. This would be rather like the local authority hospital pre 1948.

### WHAT COULD HAPPEN AROUND EXETER

In the Exeter district, the district general hospital unit comprises the R.D. & E. Wonford,

Heavitree hospital, The Princess Elizabeth Orthopaedic hospital and the West of England Eye Infirmary. Would it become self-governing as an entity or would it be split up into units based on potential income generation? -An Orthopaedic hospital and an Eye Infirmary could both sell services to other districts.

Other hospitals - Wonford House, (mental health,) Redhills Hospital, (care of elderly,) and the former cottage hospitals ringing Exeter; Exmouth and Budleigh, Honiton, Axminster, Tiverton etc. are considered to be part of the community unit. Will 'opting' out result in an excellent centralised service in the Devon General Unit and a second class service at the periphery?

It is perhaps, significant that most of the beds designated for care of the elderly and also services for people with mental health problems and disabilities -physical or mental are in the community unit. The white paper ignores people with mental illness and mental handicap and fails to address the issue of care of the elderly.

the Regional Health Authority will be strengthened and they will have direct control of hospitals and family practitioners committees. The most serious consequences will probably be in the community. In the white paper community care is hardly mentioned!

Large GP practices will be able to apply for their own budgets for buying a range of services direct from hospitals. This will damage the primary health care teams if GPs become small businessmen/women rather than a member of a multi-disciplinary health care team.

What will this mean for rural areas? Will it mean that all GP services in the future will be centralised in health centres?

You cannot call this privatisation, but equally no one can honestly say the health service is safe for the future.

Tom Murray, member of the Royal College of Nursing, writing in a personal capacity.



### CHOICE

The white paper was supposed to provide more choice for patients. There is no evidence that this will be the case. Choices will be made by doctors and administrators. The role of



### UNILATERALISM ON THE WAY OUT?

All the signs are that there are increasing numbers of Labour Party members ready to ditch unilateralism. The left rallied around this issue at the conference last year, (having lost just about everything else.) What will there to be rally round after this year's conference?

# DOCKERS UNDER

# THREAT

There is a strong possibility of a national dock strike in the near future in defense of the National Dock Labour scheme, (NDLS,). It is essential that the labour movement mobilise support for the dockers now.

The Government and the port employers have been itching for the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme for some time. The Centre for Policy Studies, the right wing Tory think tank, held a conference in January to discuss the ending of the NDLS. Since then 129 Tory backbenchers, including 4 Devon M.P.s, have signed a Commons motion calling for its abolition. The ruling class are preparing for battle, so must we in the labour movement.

Before the War the dockers were employed on a casual piecework basis. They had to fight for work every day in the infamous 'pen' system. Conditions at work were atrocious with many fatal accidents. In 1944 the National Dock Labour Board, (NDLB,) was established and the NDLS was introduced under its control in 1947. Under the scheme employers paid 3% of their wage bill into the NDLB in order to provide a minimum wage to dockers when there was no work. This provided greatly increased security to the 80,000 dockers then covered by the scheme. Militant action during the 50's and 60's improved pay and working conditions but there were also challenges to the Scheme and a major rationalisation of the industry which remains a problem today.

After the 1964 election the Wilson Government was faced with a confrontation with dockers over pay. In response a commission of enquiry was set up under Lord Devlin which recommended a pay increase tied to a further

examination of the industry as a whole.

Devlin's first round of recommendations introduced in 1966 completed the decasualisation process and ended the piecework system of payments. The ending of the 'pen' system was tied to increased productivity.

The second part of the Devlin reforms published in 1969, included the introduction of containerisation, the establishment of huge container ports, and a vast increase in the use of inland and unregistered ports where work usually carried out by dockers was undertaken by unregistered labour.

After 1970 the introduction of the second phase of Devlin's report fell to Edward Heath who coupled it with the Industrial Relations Act.

There was immense hostility to these proposals and in April 1971 the National Port Stewards Committee declared "total war" on Devlin and began taking action against unregistered ports, despite opposition from Jack Jones and the TGWU leadership. In July 5 dockers, the 'Pentonville Five', were arrested under the Industrial Relations Act for picketing the gates of Midland Cold Storage, - a new unregistered port taking on work normally done by London dockers. The arrests quickly led to a national docks strike and the threat of a general strike by the T.U.C.. The 'five' were subsequently released but the dock strike continued.

Eventually, Jack Jones stitched up a deal to end the strike which involved a guarantee of no compulsory redundancies for

advance. (A minor problem is their severe lack of success in actually getting elected.) Those who say otherwise are evil revolutionaries according to the Hattock mode of thinking.

## Smash the State

By contrast with the present Labour "leaders" revolutionaries think that the transition to a new social system will be based on shattering the power of the old. This will require the working class to take state power from the old ruling class. Marxists take the view that the forces of the state will be used to try to stop the working class putting paid to capitalism. The revolutionary movement will have to prepare politically for this. Our thinking on this is based on long experience of the actions of the state in many countries throughout this century and before.

Between the tired old reformers and the revolutionaries sit a number of comrades who tell us that they are revolutionaries but of a special sort. Unlike the old crude Trotskyists they have subtle ways of bringing about the revolution. What is needed they tell us is some new way of raising consciousness.

Graham Bash and Bryn Griffiths join our own Peter Bowing in making a trio of such "revolutionaries". Peter has written in DLB for January 1989 a defence of proportional representation (PR) while Bash and Griffiths have attacked the same idea in the national Briefing of 11th January. Although they argue on different sides I am interested in the common basis of their arguments and the reformist thinking of both contributions to the debate.

Perhaps it is best to start at home. Peter runs through a standard set of attacks on the current first past the post method of election we have now. His skill in presenting the case should not prevent us from looking beyond the points he raises.

## Derelict Premises

The premise of the whole argument is that the first step to socialism is Labour winning office. In fact the whole article does not go any further than that step. It suggests that the

## PR- AN IRRELEVANCE?

Geoff Barr replies to Peter Bowing's article in the last DLB.

Socialism is a good idea, but how do we get to it? How many times have we had to answer questions like that?

The way that members of the labour movement answer that particular question tells us a lot about whether they are socialists or not. Those suffering from incurable doses of the Hattersleys or severe attacks of the Kinnocks will explain that Parliament is the key. In a democracy like ours getting elected is the only way to

forces for socialism should be strengthened by reforming the state, extending public ownership and strengthening the unions. I find all this about as useful as asking Chester Long to resist the poll tax. The last Labour Government fell after the "winter of discontent". During the 1978 - 79 winter the Labour Government (Tony Benn included) staked its life on its determination to hold down the pay of some of the poorest people in our society. The dogged determination it has never shown against the interests of the ruling class was all there when it came to hitting the poorest. In what way would the election of these people help advance socialism? I can only think of one. It will demonstrate to the declining numbers of workers who have faith in them that their confidence is misplaced.

The Bash and Griffiths article at least points out that behind the Tories in parliament stand the power of the city, the armed forces and civil service. Peter sadly does not seem to have noticed that the state is not led by the democratically elected MPs. Our MPs have a minor job, they must keep the punters distracted while the bosses pick our pockets.

Peter is so busy looking at the puppets he has forgotten why they are there. All the points he makes assume that we should keep our eyes on the puppets and not seek out the real state hidden from view.

Bash and Griffiths, at first sight, seem closer to Marxism than does Peter Bowring. A second look reveals that there is really nothing in it. They are tied to the Labour Party body and soul. They see a future Labour Government as a great gain for the working class. They are as certain of the need for a united Labour movement as the Pope is convinced that a united Christianity is god given. Naturally we can all agree that a united labour movement is a "good thing". However, this is not a timeless truth. At times it is better to split the movement than to hang onto unity. Those who doubt this should reflect on whether Dr Owen should be a Labour Party member.

### A New Type of Party?

The Labour Party has proved to be a barrier to socialism. It has run

entrism. The Labour Party contains many people who deserve a better fate than being foot soldiers in Kinnock's army. Revolutionaries should be with them helping to open eyes to the nature of Labourism and to win them to a revolutionary movement. Kidding people that Labour unity is to be defended above all things hinders rather than helps this process.

### And Back to PR

I have not actually written much about PR itself. What I think follows from the argument presented above is that PR is a distraction. The key to opening the door marked socialism is the recognition by millions of people that the politics of Labour are useless and that a socialist revolution is needed. A Labour government may be a help here



(but only in demonstrating that Labour will never bring Socialism). The present electoral system offers a better chance of getting Kinnock into office than does PR. It will, therefore, help the whole movement see how useless the Labourites are.

Much more important, however, is the point that all this discussion about the reform of the rules of the Parliamentary game distracts from the need to convince workers to stop the game entirely.

In conclusion we revolutionaries say that only a direct democracy can meet the needs of the working class. An important part of any revolutionary's work is to continuously expose Parliamentary democracy and undermine support for it. Every distraction from that simple truth is an aid to reformism.

Geoff Barr  
Exeter WRP

# YOU'VE MISSED THE POINT

## A repost from Peter Bowling.

I very much welcome Geoff's contribution to the debate on parliamentary socialism and his criticisms of my article in the last Devon Labour Briefing. I would like to make 3 points in reply:

First, Geoff ridicules the idea that we should explore further the ideological field and 'look for some new way of raising consciousness'. If political power operates through the coercive, the economic, (sanction and reward,) and the ideological, then today's capitalism has shifted the balance in favour of the ideological. The state in the form of bodies of armed men is not the only barrier to the working class realising socialism; and it is precisely that fact which makes bourgeois democracy possible. From confusion here Geoff goes on to misunderstand the power of Parliament. Yes Parliament is largely a talking shop hardly able to call to account governments which are themselves captive, (and usually willing,) victims of the capitalist state. But Parliament is powerful in the sense that it legitimises capitalist rule. Socialists are not indifferent to the make up of Parliament, nor the government in office for these things have a direct effect on the balance of power in the class struggle. Also if you do not have enough support to win a popular majority in Parliament, you don't have enough to effect a revolution. Rest assured that it is not the left which needs to destroy democracy to advance its cause.

Second, 'The Labour Party has proved a barrier to socialism'.

THE WRP (WORKERS PRESS SECTION) PRESENTS

# Roger the RABBIT!

(PG)

"LACKIES OF IMPERIALISM AND BRIEFING REFORMIST SCUM BEWARE"  
(Trosky's Nephew)

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO MENTION-  
\* ELECTIONS \* MASS PARTIES  
\* ANIMAL RIGHTS \* VOTES  
HURRICANE ROGER HIT TOWN!

COMING SOON TO A MEETING NEAR YOU

This is about as sensible as saying that the British working class is a barrier to socialism. True, the British Labour Party is a product of economic trade unionism, liberal fabianism and an empty utopianism which have all been tinged with imperialist nationalism. Yet in being these things the Labour Party has addressed - admittedly in a conservative way - something of the culture of Britain. The inability of some marxists to analyse and intervene within that culture is not just the fault of stalinism but also of arid Trotskyism; Lenin might have posed the major political questions of the twentieth century, but he did not finalise all the answers.

Third, Geoff's idea that I believe that 'Labour unity is to be defended above all things' is untrue. We fight for socialism as Labour Party members because we share their struggle if not all their illusions. Loyalty is to socialist analysis and objectives not to an organisation; if that fight really requires Labour to split, so be it.

In conclusion, Geoff's dichotomy between parliamentary and revolutionary socialism is about as useful as a sprinter arguing on which leg he should run.

# No to PR, pacts and coalitions!

Given the growing demoralisation about Labour's electoral prospects, it is not surprising that some sections of the Party have turned to Charter 88 and proportional representation as a means of combatting Thatcherism and its encroachment on our democratic rights.

The LCC, along with Robin Cook, Austin Mitchell, John Cunningham, Jeff Rooker and Anne Clwyd, has now taken up the call for PR.

MPs close to Kinnoch, such as Dr Reid and John Evans, have argued for an electoral pact with the centre parties.

This is the context in which Charter 88 was born.

The Charter has gained some support from people on the left. To those comrades we must patiently explain that Charter 88 is not a working-class based movement, and to support it is to abandon the strategy of a working-class united front in favour of a popular front that straddles and blurs class lines.

The Charter has bought the support of the likes of Lord Jenkins, Lord Scarman and Anne Sofer at a price. There is no mention of Irish self-determination or civil rights, nor of the demand of the Scottish people for an Assembly, nor any call for devolution.

The Charter suffers from a purely parliamentary focus, ignoring the extra-parliamentary struggles that are essential to any fight for democratic rights.

But its popular front, coalitionist basis is most clearly demonstrated by its support for PR, a demand that comes from the small centre parties and now espoused by the more defeatist elements on Labour's right-wing.

## Socialists

Why should socialists see PR as an enemy? After all, isn't the present electoral system blatantly unfair? And isn't it

By Graham Bash  
Hackney North  
CLP  
and Bryn Griffiths  
Tottenham CLP

right that the distribution of seats in Parliament should closely resemble the distribution of total votes?

Yes, the present system is unfair. It is unfair because the real power — the unelected and unaccountable extra-parliamentary power of the Tories and their friends — doesn't lie in Parliament, but in the City boardrooms, the military, the secret service, the civil service and the media.

Whichever party wins office, capitalism retains power. Despite the vital importance of the democratic rights we still possess, bourgeois democracy is a fraud. PR would only serve to perfect that fraud.

Not one of the five majority Labour governments received a vote of more than 50% of the electorate, not even in the 1945 landslide. With PR, not a single majority Labour Government would have been formed.

## Inadequate

Our view is that however inadequate, a Labour Government represents a gain for the working-class and vital experience on the road to real power. PR would deny us that experience for the foreseeable future.

In the name of greater democracy, we would end up with fewer options than ever. PR, by its very nature, produces hung parliaments and coalitions. The inevitable post-election deals would render election mandates — a central plank of parliamentary democracy — impossible.

Labour's right-wing would always have a perfect alibi for ditching radical parts of its programme. The bourgeoisie

would enjoy a constitutional guarantee against a Labour Government with an electoral mandate for anti-capitalist change.

With little electoral pressure to hold it together, the Labour Party could begin to disintegrate, and the trade union line could itself be threatened.

Such developments would be welcomed by some socialists, enticed by the idea of electing a dozen or so revolutionary MPs. For them, this process would be part of the necessary break-up of Labourism.

## Contrary

We take a contrary view. The creation of the Labour Party and its link with the trade unions is an historic conquest for the working-class.

However bureaucratized, whatever its political limitations, the very existence of a unitary structure for the labour movement provides a forum for united working class action.

Its break-up would be a massive defeat, which would strengthen, not weaken, reformism. The working class would thereby be less able to take the power into its own hands.

Our perspective offers no short-cut solutions. The ten years of Thatcherism have been the direct consequence of demoralisation after five years of fudging and betrayal by a right-wing Labour Government. Thatcherism is the price we have paid for our failure of take on and defeat the right-wing leaders of the Labour Party and the unions.

Our movement faces a deep crisis which requires profound solutions. In this context, Charter 88 will be seen as an ephemeral diversion.

Our task is to regenerate the base of the labour movement, rebuild our haemorrhaging class organisations and struggle to construct a revolutionary leadership within the Labour Party and the trade unions.

It is a lifetime's task. Unfortunately, there is no alternative.

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## WORKERS SAVED

Much whooping from Saxon Spence and co. about Devon Direct Services getting all 13 contracts for the cleaning of County Council buildings. However, it is not so much privatisation that was to be feared, but the effects of privatisation. Already hours are being cut and redundancies sought. How long before pay is cut?