

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING

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M Hingley.

The wages of the three staff at the Centre are paid by the Government's MSC (Manpower Services Commission) which will, of course, only fund with low wages 'non-political' social service work. However at the end of February 1984 the MSC grant ends, and the Management Committee voted to transfer the funding of staff to the Dartington Trust (a business group openly hostile to socialism). The unemployed at the Centre wanted to run the Centre themselves but were outvoted by the Tories and several local right-wing Labour politicians.

Editorial

Exeter Labour Briefing has been set up by members of the CLP to defend and advance socialist policies within the Party. There are many forces, both inside and outside the Party which are pressurising us to drop our socialist policies. These notions must be firmly resisted - their acceptance would mark a gross betrayal of our principles and responsibilities.

What we need to do now is BUILD on our socialist programme. We require a clear, credible and coherent set of policies and strategies which are capable of tackling the problems of our exploiting and crisis-ridden capitalist society. We must become IN REALITY the party which organises opposition to the Tory attacks on the weak and the sick, the young and the old, the party which is dedicated to eliminating sexism and racism, and to advancing the cause of working people. (These goals can only really be met by terminating capitalism in Britain)

We hope that this Briefing will be a useful information service to members of the Party. But more importantly we seek to stimulate active socialist debate in the constituency.

In this issue we have to announce the resignations for personal reasons of Geoff Carroll and Jeremy Clarke from the Editorial Board. It is our pleasure, though, to find that personal contributions have reached the splendid level of 71.35. We would also like to thank Exeter University Labour Group for its resolution of support.

Finally, ELB SEEKS SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE CLP.

It is assumed as a matter of course that students can use university facilities to engage in political activities ranging from discussion to planning action. Yet the unemployed in Exeter have no such basic right.

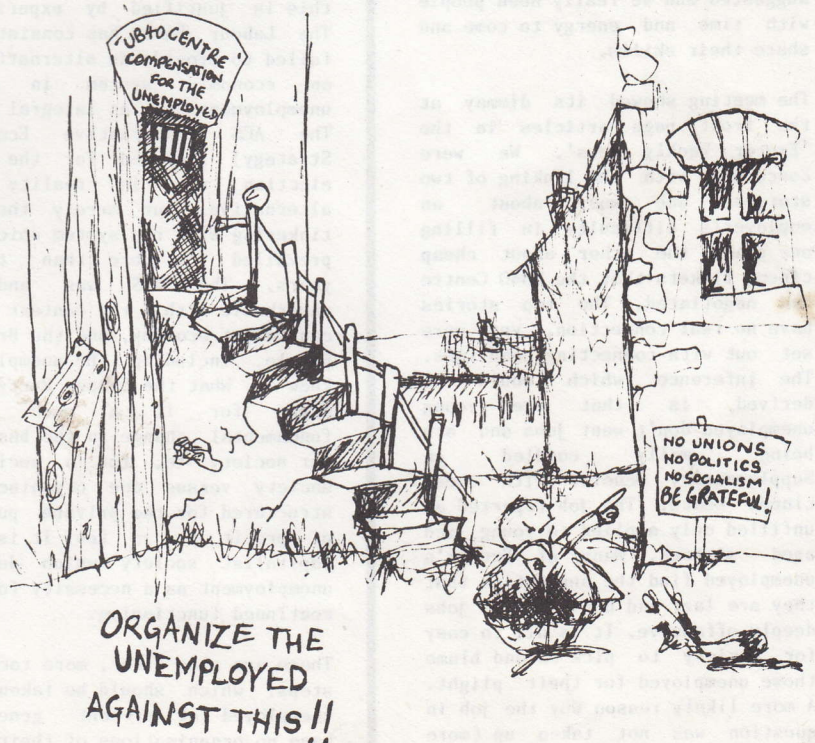
In Howell Road there is the so-called 'UB40 Centre' (a dilapidated warehouse) which is open weekdays during 'working hours' and provides a few meagre facilities such as a cheap computer. For the five thousand or so unemployed people in Exeter the disused warehouse is the only facility available.

The 'UB40 Centre' is run by a management committee of EXVOS (Exeter Voluntary Services). A condition or desire of many of those who fund the Centre is that no political activity takes place there. The ban on politics is a political decision.

Exeter City Council owns the warehouse and pays itself two thousand pounds rent per year which it calls a grant. In fact, the council gains the rates which the centre has to pay. Nobody is surprised that the Tory controlled Council will reconsider its support (don't laugh) for the 'UB40 Centre', if political activities occur there. The Tory position is quite logical, for the Tories are the political representatives of capitalism which has created mass unemployment; and the unemployed could only become employed by terminating capitalism which requires political class struggle.

The centre is also funded by the Trades Council and various religious organisations; the latter, at least, would rather the unemployed had faith in a non-existent God, than actually fought to change the situation.

One thing is clear; the unemployed in Exeter will not tolerate things



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as they are at present. They demand:

1. Total control over the dilapidated warehouse in Howell Road, which is a small and inadequate compensation for unemployment.

2. The right to act politically in the 'UB40 Centre'. This includes the right to establish a Claimants Union and to struggle for socialism.

3. Support from the Labour Party, Trades Union and other socialist organisations.

Peter Bowing

Claimants

On 16th February a meeting of the as yet embryonic Claimants Union took place at the UB40 centre in Howell Road. It was decided that membership should be open to all claimants, not just those on Supplementary or Unemployment Benefit. As a result links might grow with such organisations as Age Concern, etc.

Many interesting and ambitious ideas are coming forward. Wednesday afternoons are to be devoted to Welfare Rights, both for those with problems and those learning how to help people deal with them. On Thursdays at 2.30pm there is the main meeting of the Union. A creche will be provided at the next meeting, because women were in an embarrassing minority at the last one! Friday is Food Co-op day. There were lots of other ideas suggested and we really need people with time and energy to come and share their skills.

The meeting showed its dismay at the front page articles in the 'Exeter Weekly News'. We were concerned with the linking of two stories; one was about an employer's difficulty in filling one place, the other about cheap cinema tickets that the UB40 Centre had negotiated. The two stories have no real connection, yet were set out with connecting headlines. The inference which would be derived is that the young unemployed don't want jobs and are being molly coddled on Supplementary Benefit with cheap cinema seats. The job reported as unfilled only applied to young men aged sixteen. Many of Exeter's unemployed find the suggestion that they are lazy and don't want jobs deeply offensive. It is all too easy for society to pick on and blame those unemployed for their plight. A more likely reason why the job in question was not taken up (more likely than that all Exeter's sixteen year old jobless are at the

cinema), is the very justifiable suspicions that many have of training schemes with promises of 'real jobs at the end'. Whether the

employer who was featured on the front of the 'Exeter Weekly News' was genuine does not matter: it is without doubt that many school leavers are exploited by employers under such schemes as the Youth Training Scheme only to be made jobless at the end and replaced by another trainee. An article on this matter would have been more helpful than yet another article picking on the unemployed.

Therese Canning
(Chairperson, Exeter Claimants Union)

Party

One of the major failures of the Labour Party since the Tory government took power in 1979 has been its inability to obtain either the active or the passive support of the mass of the unemployed. Voting behaviour in the 1983 General Election confirms this.

There are a number of reasons why what should perhaps be a 'natural' constituency for the Labour Party in many ways is in reality far from being that. One is that the unemployed often have a pessimistic and cynical attitude towards politics and to politicians in general, regardless of which party they come from. In many respects this is justified by experience. The Labour Party has consistently failed to provide an alternative to an economic system in which unemployment is an integral part. The AES (Alternative Economic Strategy) produced for the last election was in reality no alternative, but merely the same tinkering with the system which has prevailed for more than thirty years. The AES was and is unworkable within the context of a capitalist economy, and the British people, including the unemployed, knew it. What the Labour Party must argue for is a much more fundamental change in the basis of our society ie, for a socialist society versus one organised and structured for the private pursuit of profit for a few. It is this capitalist society which demands unemployment as a necessity for its continued functioning.

There are also other, more tactical steps, which should be taken. The unemployed at present generally have no organisations of their own, no representation, they are unpolitical, and divided amongst

themselves by prejudice against black people and women. Socialists who are unemployed must take a leading role in the formation of organisations of the unemployed, and must develop in these organisations a strong political orientation which will lead to the unemployed becoming aware of why they are unemployed.

The Labour Party must build links with these organisations in the same way that it has done with trade unions. It must work closely with the organisations and with socialists in them in order to politicise the unemployed and to show them that socialism is the only realistic answer to their unemployment. In this way the unemployed will become a politically cohesive and effective force for socialism, and hopefully help to radicalise the Labour Party.

Mike Hingley

Theory

On the radio some mornings ago a careers officer was asked what advice he now gave to school leavers, given there was to be no return to full employment. Obviously, the interviewer, and his employer, the BBC, realise that British capitalism could no longer utilise all of its working people and that it was beyond the pale to think of the Labour Party as terminating capitalism in Britain. On the first point our interviewer friend is probably right, and perhaps he can be forgiven on the second point if we remember that Len Murray, General Secretary of the TUC, proposed more emphasis on 'the distribution of work and proper support for those outside employment'. Yet we must remember that Mr. Murray wants to negotiate with Mrs Thatcher and thus must surrender matters of principle, like full employment, and adopt matters of degree because that is what negotiating is about.

What does the Left mean when it calls for full employment. It does not mean that unemployed workers should move from poverty to full time wage slavery, low pay, uncreative routine and loss of leisure time. No, a socialist version of 'full employment' can be subsumed under the principle that it is a right and a duty of every able person not engaged in education or retirement on account of age to engage in socially necessary work where there are minimum wages, maximum hours and socially agreed working conditions. Let us say why:

People have a RIGHT to work because men and women are, by nature, labouring animals upon whose labour the whole of human society is founded. To deny someone work is to deny a most basic need. Indeed, we have a right to work because even under socialism it is through work that we acquire access to many goods and services, which are the products of collective labour.

People have a DUTY to work because we have rights. That is, if we have a right to social services, public transport, etc, then there is a corresponding duty to provide them. Nobody on account of choice or whim can abrogate their duty to engage in socially necessary labour which is ultimately directed to the provision of these things.

I have stressed 'socially necessary work' throughout because it is possible for somebody to work and to make a living from pornography or begging; yet neither occupation could be deemed 'socially necessary'.

Full employment is so central to the goals of the Labour Movement that it could never be theoretically abandoned by the rank and file: yet how to give it practical reality? Mr Murray and Mrs Thatcher know that the new technology required by capitalism today does not provide enough jobs and though there is much need that three million or so unemployed could fill, no capitalist can realise an 'acceptable' rate of profit out of that work.

Here we have a compelling argument for socialism, ie, production and employment according to need not profit. Yet our central problem - and one we must confront - is that Mr Murray does not contemplate socialism.

What we must do is demand that no policy of the Labour Party deviates from a commitment to full employment. We must ensure, in order to give that commitment practical expression, that the Labour Party brings about a socialist transformation in Britain. In the meantime we must continue that long and difficult fight, in which Arthur Scargill has shown the way, to protect both our jobs and industry and to demand the largest possible wage level for working people.

Peter Bowing

Psychology & the Dole

There is much talk these days about 'helping the unemployed'. Certainly, part of what those on the left who are still in work feel about the unemployed is a sense of guilt, perhaps embarrassment, and a feeling that more should be done. First, however, we must establish what the 'problems' of the unemployed actually are, what causes these problems, and what might form the basis for solutions.

For many the immediate shock of redundancy is followed by a period of constructive adaptation to the situation. For many including those becoming unemployed immediately after higher education this is time for enjoying their enforced leisure, learning new skills and hobbies and setting about looking for work. Many projects for the unemployed concentrate on this aspect, helping people with their interview techniques, providing skills workshops and so on.

Why is it then that so many unemployed people move from this stage into a downward cycle of deterioration, boredom, declining self-respect, despair and fatalistic apathy? Research has tended to show strong links between rising unemployment and mental hospital admissions. One half of the unemployed in the UK are reckoned to be depressed and forty percent of suicides come from the ranks of the unemployed. Clearly these people, for whom unemployment no longer constitutes a pleasurable opportunity for leisure are coming up against the hard economic fact that there are more people unemployed than there are job vacancies. We could train all three million unemployed people until their techniques of self presentation were nothing short of brilliant but it would still make no difference; the hard fact is that in the present stage of crisis, under the present method of running the economy, it is simply not profitable to employ these people.

Most unemployed people however tend to be less than totally aware of this fact. They have been encouraged to take up their individual responsibility for the future and to see their success or failure on the job market as due to their own personal qualities or lack of them. Seeing unfortunate experiences as being caused by oneself, rather than by the real conditions of the

world, is in many ways what depression is about and is of course encouraged by ideas of getting on your bike, and a benefit system that insists that people are only entitled to benefit if they can prove they are spending most of their time searching for nonexistent jobs.

Many men see their primary source of identity in their occupation. For young people 'get a job' has a similar meaning to 'grow up', since taking a place in the social order of occupations is taken to be one of the main ways of doing so. Women, always poorly unionised and poorly paid are always the first to suffer in time of crisis, among the first to be made redundant and worst affected by the benefit system. This attack on women's financial independence pushes them as the super-exploited back into the home to do work which has never been recognised as such. Men experience enforced idleness in the home and become increasingly unsure of what being a man is supposed to mean. The contradictions within the family are brought to crisis point as they never have been before. The tendency of the past twenty years to identify with what we buy and consume rather than with what we produce is not of much help either; on twenty-six pounds a week keeping up with the trends and fashions of consumption encouraged by the media and advertising is clearly somewhat difficult. Unemployed people are 'non-people' in more ways than one.

The challenge to socialism is there. Socialism can explain the economic system which encourages people to expect and strive for certain things which are then denied them. It can explain the unhealthy ways in which individuals are encouraged to see themselves.

In addition it can bring unemployed people together to share their experiences and make contacts with people outside the nuclear family. It can unite individuals in activism towards creating a new kind of society where they can form a useful part.

Most unemployed youth stayed in bed on the last election day. They said 'the parties are all the same'. Chronic problems need radical solutions.

Ian Clifford

Education Cuts

Over 400 members of the National Union of Teachers took half-a-day strike action on February 14 in protest against Tory plans to chop 1.4 million from next years education budget. Several schools closed altogether and thousands of children had to be sent home. The strike was planned to coincide with a meeting of the County's Education Committee which was scheduled to discuss Cllr Pinney's proposal to shed 264 teaching jobs. Parents and teachers from all parts of Devon arrived at County Hall hoping to personally express their disgust and fears to the 'elected representatives'; in the event most went home disappointed. Education Chairman Pinney set the tone for the afternoon: despite previous statements to the Press that he was "always happy to talk to teachers", he rushed into the building with indecent haste and flatly refused to discuss matters with NUT representatives.

Education cuts are nothing new in Devon. The Tories have been hacking away at the service for many years to the extent that the County has fallen almost to the bottom of the national league for educational provision.

- * Only 8% of children receive nursery places
- * 59% start school in the term AFTER their 5th birthday
- * Devon already has one of the LOWEST expenditures per pupil and one of the highest pupil/teacher ratios.

The new round of cuts will have severe results.

- * In some primary schools class sizes will be 45+ and in secondary schools certain subjects will disappear altogether.
- * Plans to improve education for 16-19 year-old handicapped people will be shelved.
- * Prices of school meals and transport will go up once again.

An already tottering system is steadily being pushed towards collapse.

All public services are now at risk at the hands of this government and the Tory backwoodsmen of Devon (very few of whom use the state education system). Last Friday, Transport was nominated as the latest victim when the County announced plans to close the Exmouth bus depot with the loss of another 30 jobs.

The teachers' action last Tuesday was a modest but important step in the right direction. By taking action and attempting to win public support for the service they provide, they showed that it is possible to organise resistance. In Tiverton they were able to build a public meeting of 200 and in Teign and Dart of 300. Neither have they been alone: much of the publicity campaign in defence of education locally has been co-ordinated by the Trades Council's public sector unions and is being ACTIVELY supported by the Labour Party Wards.

Activists in the LP and the unions must encourage these developments towards a campaigning alliance which is prepared to use action to make its point. On January 24 of this year, socialists and trade unionists in London were able to organise the biggest weekday demonstration the capital has seen since the war and thousands were out on STRIKE. That was in defence of the GLC and the services it provides; we are starting from a lower base line in Exeter but we are part of a national struggle and the potential is there to defeat this government.

Geoff Carroll

On Thursday 16 February the Claimants Union held its first organising meeting at the UB40 Centre in Howell Road in defiance of the ban on politics. The meeting identified three main areas of activity; self-help, welfare rights and political struggle. Meetings are to be held every Thursday at 3pm.

The University 'rag week' (a time for middle class students to be indulgent and stupid) staged a 'beauty contest' on 17th February. A demonstration was made by socialist and feminist groups against the contest. Several socialist students were beaten, and police were called in.

STOP PRESS
LOBBIES OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL
THURS. 23 FEBRUARY 1.30pm
THURS. 15 MARCH 1.30pm
PROTEST AT TORY SPENDING CUTS!!

Exeter University Labour Group held a General Meeting on 6th February. The meeting voted by 25 to 1 to invite Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein to speak at the university. This invitation has been accepted and the arrangements are going ahead. Although questioning aspects of the military struggle to end British occupation of the six counties, the meeting wanted to hear Adam's views.

On Wednesday 15th February the inaugural meeting of Exeter CLP Young Socialists was held. The meeting stressed the need for a campaigning and active Labour Party and felt the YS had a key role to play. YS meetings are to be held on the third Wednesday of every month at 26 Clifton Hill at 8pm.

On Monday 20th February an emergency session of Exeter's Trades Council is to be held in order to discuss the future of the UB40 Centre. The main issue is to prevent the Dartington Trust business group from taking control of the Centre.

On Sunday 5th February the AGM of Exeter CND was held at St Georges Hall. The two hundred strong meeting threw out a resolution proposed by Dr Shepherd and seconded by Dr Seaford which would have prevented future AGMs discussing policy matters.

February's meeting of Pennsylvania-St Davids Branch Labour Party heard Mr M Rathfelder of Exeter Citizens Advice Bureau speak on Supplementary Benefits. The meeting concluded that proper benefits catering for need could not be met within the confines of the capitalist system.

When is the Labour Party going to get up off HIS arse and do something about sexism. Note, I don't say 'do something for women', I say 'do something about sexism'. I was told I would have to "stifle my annoyance for a few months yet" before the word chairman can be deleted from the agendas I get sent. I was annoyed at the agenda; I am livid at the response. A small example which many men will probably call petty, smug in their knowledge that they are right-on enough not to have to bother about trivia. Right-on, brothers.

Natty Leitner

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