

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING

LABOUR TO POWER ON A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME

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EDITORS: P. Bowing, M. Hingley, M Wilkinson.

Exeter Labour Briefing is not an official publication of Exeter Labour Party.

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 to 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 racism and sexism, 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.

Resolutions in support of Exeter Labour Briefing were passed by Exeter University Labour Group (35 to nil), Exeter Young Socialist (17 to nil), Rougemont/St. Leonards (10 to 2) and Pennsylvania/St. Davids (11 to 7). Every constituent element of Exeter Labour Party which has discussed the issue has backed the Briefing. Yet the GMC is unable to discuss the attempted ban because 'standing order 7' prevents the rescinding of a resolution within six months. Exeter Labour Briefing will continue to be published because the right of Labour Party members to communicate between themselves in writing will never be surrendered.

Finally, we would like to thank the producers of 'New Times' who allowed us to use their facilities, and thus made the publication of this issue possible.

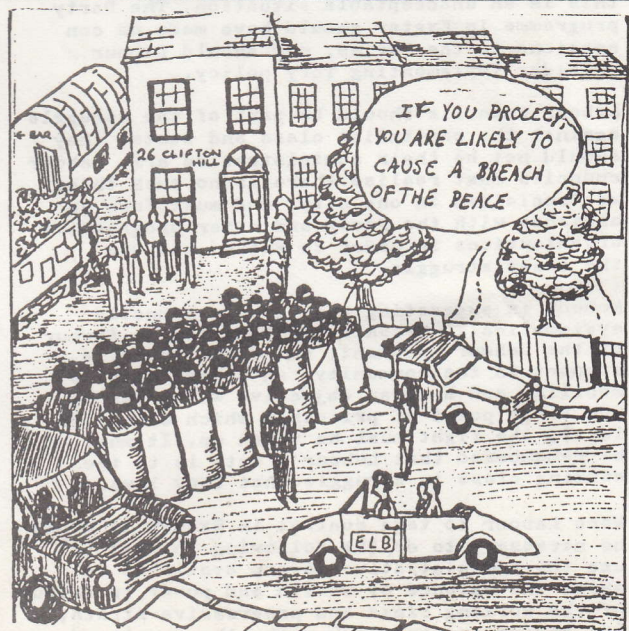
ELB SEEKS SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE CLP.

POLICE

Under the Thatcher government the economic and social crisis of British capitalist society is intensifying; over three million are unemployed; housing, education and health are being cut; the industrial fabric is collapsing. Thatcher knows that working people will fight back as the miners and Liverpool City Councillors are doing now. Increasingly, the only way in which the ruling class can secure their rule is by abolishing elections and massively increasing the powers of the police. The 1984 Police Bill has little to do with fighting genuine crime, but creates the legal framework for the extended repression of the working class and their organisations.

SOME OF THE NEW POWERS

- (1) The police will have the power to keep people in custody for four days without charge. Only people trained to stand up to interrogation will survive four days in police stations without confessing to any crime the police want them to.
- (2) The police will have the power to search people's homes even though they are not suspected of any offence. Trade Union offices and files kept in members' homes would be subject to raids.
- (3) The police will have the power to set up roadblocks which can be used in strikes to seal off areas around workplaces being picketed and to gather information on demonstrators.
- (4) The police will have the power to humiliate people by carrying out searches of the mouth, vagina and anus.



CONTACT ADDRESS

Peter Bowing, 42 Powderham Crescent, Exeter.
PHONE

Ian Clifford, Exeter 58692.

These are just some of the new powers which can be used against us. It is vital that every effort is made to defeat this bill, and to alert the Labour Movement to the danger.

What can be done in Exeter ?

- (1) Come to, support and publicise the public meeting which is to be held at 7.30, 24th April at the Central Library music room.
 - (2) Invite a speaker from the Exeter Campaign Against the Police Bill to your branch meeting.
 - (3) Send a delegate to the Labour Movement conference on the Bill, 12th May.
 - (4) Familiarise yourself and your friends with the contents of the Bill.
- For information and details contact 'Exeter Labour Briefing'.

NO POLICE STATE DIRECTED AGAINST THE LABOUR MOVEMENT

Elections

The Thatcher government is attempting to destroy the Labour Movement in Britain. There are the Tebbit and King proposals to mutilate Trade Unions, and the Trade Union/Labour Party link. There is 'rate-capping' and the proposals to scrap the metropolitan councils; all of which are currently Labour controlled. With all these provisions in force, there will be few means of fighting back, and the balance of power in the class struggle will have shifted dramatically away from labour to capital.

The attack on Labour is, of course, indirect rather than direct. A direct move would be to ban the Labour Party outright, but this is not realistic at present. Much more effective for the Tories is proscribe the Party's socialist activities. One example is to limit what elected Labour councils can do. For instance, rates cannot be raised to cover services because of rate-capping; council houses must be sold because of the law.

Unfortunately, the result is that Labour local manifestos drop certain legitimate principles and measures because under the new system they would be illegal or could not be paid for. In this situation there are two clear results. (1) Labour Party policy is being dictated by the Thatcher government. (2) The Labour Party itself is implementing the broad policy intentions of the Tory government. For all but the municipal careerists this is an unacceptable situation. The Party programme in Exeter should have made no concessions to the Tories, nor should Labour consider implementing Tory policy.

Labour councils should be part of the struggle against the capitalist class and state; they should not be their administrative arm. Labour councils must realise there is no such thing as 'socialism in one city' and must form an alliance with the Party and other progressive organisations in order to extend and win the class struggle.

Nobody is suggesting that Labour councils systematically break every Tory law in favour of the Labour Movement, but where there is support in the community, an opportunity to mobilise and a clear objective which can be won (or a point of principle which cannot be lost), the fight must be taken up. It must be remembered that Labour's duty is to the working class in struggle, not Tory laws.

Were Labour to take control in Exeter it would be necessary to do the following things; (1) use the administrative powers available to shift the balance of wealth and power in favour of the working class and progressive strata, (2) encourage, and work with, the propaganda

and general struggle against capitalism, (3) obstruct the capitalist state as far as possible. The realisation of these goals is no easy matter and requires a great deal of skill.

Yet the truth is that Labour is unlikely to gain control of the City Council in May. There is the suggestion that some sort of arrangement could be worked out with the Liberals.

If what is meant is that the Labour Party uses the Liberal's stance on certain issues to fight for socialist objectives, there can be no objection. But any pact or alliance must be ruled out firmly because Labour must be free at all times to wage the class struggle. There is much to lose from shackling the Labour Party to Liberals or SDP at local level simply because these 'bourgeois' parties are committed to the maintenance and administration of capitalism, and if Labour 'administered' with them, it would assist the consolidation of capitalism. In effect, Labour would be taking responsibility for that which it is, or should be, attacking.

Even more hideous is the suggestion that Labour makes no effort amongst working people in electoral wards, such as Alphington and St. Leonards, where the Liberals stand a chance of beating the Tories. (It is assumed that Labour voters will shift to the Liberals). The value of support and organisation amongst working people cannot be over-ridden by the Boundary Commission. What is suggested is that we step backwards in Alphington and St. Leonards in order to weaken the Party by an alliance with the Liberals and SDP on council. In terms of the realistic struggle for socialism, which is necessarily based on class struggle, such a policy is insane.

There must be no alliance with bourgeois parties. The electoral campaign is an aspect of the class struggle, but it is not the same thing as the class struggle. A Labour council is an achievement of the class struggle, but it is not the final goal of the class struggle.

Peter Bowing.

Miners

The issue of the miners strike has now been in the news headlines for many weeks, and from its course so far the Labour Movement has a great deal to learn.

The first point concerns the nature of the society in which we live. The strike, you will recall, began over the matter of pit closures by the NCB, closures which would cost 20 000 jobs in the short term alone with many more to follow. This course of action is contemplated with no regard to the communities it would destroy, the havoc it would cause, the human misery it would create. Closures are evaluated solely in terms of the profitability of the pits concerned. This applies also to the whole of our society which is organised on the basis of facilitating the pursuit of private profit with no regard whatever to the social good. The destruction of lives and communities resulting from mass unemployment is unacceptable in any humane society. Of course mines are eventually exhausted, but in a socialist Britain the miners involved would not be thrown on the scrap heap, but would be provided with other jobs, with no question of unemployment.

Secondly, there is the issue of nationalisation. The coal industry was nationalised in 1946, but this has not eliminated conflict of interest between management and workers. The same goes for steel, railways and shipbuilding. The

truth is that not until the workers are managers and they have control over their own work can this conflict of interest be ended. Nationalisation is but the first step towards common ownership.

Moving onto another point the roles of the police and the media with regard to the strike have been very interesting. The police have clearly emerged as a repressive arm of the state with their roadblocks, telephone-tappings and bullying tactics on the picket lines. Quite obviously they are acting in the interests of the ruling class. It is said that in the case of the Nottinghamshire miners that police have been protecting their right to work. I cannot remember police forcing the Lewis Merthyr pit to remain open when miners wanted to continue working there. They are quite selective in their protection of the right to work.

The media, needless to say, have been entirely biased in their presentation of the strike, the slanting of their questions which they ask in interviews, and the assumptions that they make which reflect how far the ideology of profit has permeated our society. Anyone who previously believed the media to be somehow objective and neutral must surely change his or her mind in the light of what has happened. This applies both to television and radio as well as newspapers.

Finally, we see how unity in the Labour Movement is essential. Workers must see that their common interest by far outweigh any differences between them. The response of other trades unions to the strike has generally been good. The present government is intent on hammering the working class and its organisations, and the time has come when the Labour Movement must stand and fight. The miners strike is in this way the strike not just of the miners but of working people in general. Unfortunately the support of the Labour Party leadership for the strike has not been forthcoming. There response has been as tepid as it was in the cases of the NGA at Warrington and the proposed Liverpool City Council budget. For far too long the Labour Leadership has considered politics to be confined to the electoral process and to end at the doors of the House of Commons. Be that as it may, the Labour Party nationally must rally to the support of the miners at this crucial time.

Mike Hingley

Race

At first glance any member of the Labour Party is likely to agree that racism is intolerable and should be fought wherever it is found. Superficially there appears to be a consensus of opinion deploring it. At a conference held by Workers Against Racism in Coventry last month highly stimulating debates raised important questions about left wing attitudes towards racism.

In the same way that feminists believe positive discrimination for women to be a concrete way forward to encourage female participation and counter sexism, positive discrimination for ethnic minorities is considered to be a means of combating racism. It permits representation of ethnic groups on committees, within the trade union movement; it helps some in the job market and others to acquire better housing than they would otherwise be allocated. Positive discrimination helps children facing

disadvantages within the education system. Yet it is agreed by all that 'positive discrimination', as presently applied, achieves very little,

Nevertheless, few blacks would actually argue that positive discrimination is wrong because it is divisive, or that it causes resentment amongst the white population. This, however, remains the argument proposed by WAR. Like blacks WAR believes that there should be unity between the working class of all races. Yet they use the right wing argument that simply because whites will resent blacks being given preference for jobs, housing and university places, it is a bad thing. Instead of explaining to white people why positive discrimination is necessary, they believe blacks should continue suffering. The logical result of no positive discrimination would be continued under-representation of ethnic minorities in all spheres of life.

In between attacking the lack of support from the Labour Party on the issue (NB the Pennsylvania/St. Davids proposal for Exeter CLP to affiliate to WAR was not endorsed at the last GMC meeting), WAR speakers mentioned the GLC and their trivialisation of racism. A recent memo issued by the GLC stated that coffee would no longer be referred to as 'black' or 'white' but as 'without milk' or 'with milk'. The GLC's argument would presumably be that such seemingly trivial changes raise questions of people's most deepseated linguistic assumptions.

The Trade Union Movement also came under a barrage of attack from WAR speakers. Many examples of Trade Union sell-outs of strikes by black workers were cited. These brought about the emergence of Indian Worker's Associations. Now, say WAR, Trades Unions have begun distributing leaflets about 'Racism at Work' and shop stewards are set on 'racism therapy courses. This, according to WAR, makes Trade Union racism more insidious: although Unions are officially anti-racist, they fail to take action. Trade Unions are not defending black workers because, say WAR, of their desire to what they see as being 'good for the country'. Leaders take it upon themselves to manage the workplace rather than defending the interests of the workers.

The source of this problem is cited as being nationalism: 'Buy British' is the great slogan of the age. But is this at the expense of the workers of other countries? Herein also lies the danger of supporting import controls, say WAR, like immigration controls, they are nationalistic, racist and therefore divide the international proletariat. The problem with today's Trade Unions is their basis of nationalistic sensibility.

WAR is totally opposed to all immigration controls. These controls are used only according to economic necessity. When wage-labour was short after the Second World War, Enoch Powell set up recruitment centres on the Indian sub-continent for nurses, doctors, etc, promising them jobs, housing, education and welfare in Britain. With Britain's economic decline, this cheap, imported labour is no longer required. Hence, for example, HNS workers are finding difficulties renewing their work permits. Hence, also, Enoch Powell's suggestion that the repatriation bribe of £1000 be raised to £5000, has been taken up by the government. It is in such instances that the exploitative nature of international capitalism comes to the fore. Capitalism depends upon immigration controls for a cheap pool of labour. Therefore, War does not believe that the Nationality Act can be reformed. They fight all immigration controls, which would be superfluous under international socialism.

Kalbir Shukra

At the Pennsylvania/St. Davids ward meeting on Thursday 8th March and at recent meetings of the Rougemont/st. Leonards branch, YS and the University Labour Group, resolutions were put forward and passed in support of continued publication of Exeter Labour Briefing. These resolutions were in reaction to the decision of the GMC to instruct the editors of the Briefing to cease publication. The editors were 'summoned' to Party HQ to defend their actions.

One reason only has been advanced for this instruction: that the contents of the Briefing could be mistaken by its readers to represent Party policy. This, it is suggested, might be brought about merely by the presence of the word 'LABOUR' in the title.

Yet the editorial of the paper makes this quite clear. It states that 'ELB has been set up by members of the CLP to defend and advance socialist policies within the Party', and furthermore that 'ELB SEEKS SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE CLP'. How could such statements emanate from the CLP itself? The idea is absurd. All readers will immediately recognise that the contents are not Party policy but the opinions of individuals. As for the title, this has been deliberately chosen to be in line with various Briefings around the country (Bristol, London, Strathclyde, South Wales, and others) with which the editors feel a common ground of opinion. None of these publications has been confused with Party policy: no more will that of the Exeter version. To demand that the title be changed, as the GMC has done, is unnecessary and undemocratic.

This matter raises important questions about Labour Party democracy. A party which does not permit free debate and discussion within its ranks is not the democratic organisation that its members would wish it to be. Free speech and a free press go hand in hand; if these things cannot flourish here where may we expect them to? It has been claimed that attempting to ban the Briefing has, in intent, nothing to do with censorship. Yet censorship must inevitably be the effect of such a measure, and I hope that the Labour Party would wish to dissociate itself from the practice of stifling opinion. The Briefing makes an important contribution to the political discussion of the broad left in Exeter.

Regardless of their personal opinion of its contents, all members of Exeter CLP must support wholeheartedly the right of the editors to continue publication as before, and their democratic right to express their views in print.

Mark Wilkinson.

Those who thought that the miners dispute was something happening somewhere else might do well to think again. Last week saw 240 of 'our Devon and Cornwall Community Policemen' despatched for a spot of union-bashing in Derbyshire, on whose authority being somewhat unclear, over the weekend of 30th March/1st April, while our genial MP, John Hannam, was describing Arthur Scargill as a 'self-declared revolutionary' to the City's Conservative Association, members of the TGWU were busy unloading coal at Exmouth Docks. Members of Exmouth Labour Party alerted South Wales miners who arrived to reason with the men, sadly too late. The following Monday saw more coal coming in through Teignmouth. One again flying pickets arrived from South Wales having been tipped off by an unemployed comrade from the local Labour Party. Clearly there is much room for the sleepy Labour and Trade Union Movement in Devon to pull itself together and provide the sort of backing that the NUM deserves.

Ian Clifford.

The recently published statistics from the 1981 City census reveal disturbing trends in many of the City's wards. Male unemployment rates of greater than twenty percent (compared with the 1981 City average of 8.6%) were found in areas of Pennsylvania, Rougemont, Stoke Hill and Wonford. High rates of overcrowding were found in parts of Barton, Exwick, Pinhoe, Rougemont, and Stoke Hill, the old St Mathews ward and the West of Wonford. In addition the problems of the multi-occupation were highlighted, particularly in parts of Pennsylvania and Rougemont where high rates of unemployment, single person households and shared amenities suggest areas of bedsiterland poverty. Since these areas have undoubtedly worsened over the past three years we need to accept that Exeter has a deprived City Centre with surprisingly high proportions of young unemployed people living in poor conditions.

On Wednesday, 21st March, Exeter Young Socialists met at 26 Clifton Hill. A resolution of support for Exeter Labour Briefing was proposed and passed unanimously (17votes to nil). A resolution in favour of the establishment of Exeter as an 'Apartheid-free zone' was also passed unanimously. Comrade Pete Kenny addressed the meeting on the subject of Class Struggles Against the Heath Government. In an informative speech, he stressed the exemplary nature of successful industrial actions against the Heath Government, particularly the Salty Gate Picket, with regard to the present-day struggle against Thatcherism.

On 17th March Keith Dickinson of the Militant Editorial Board addressed a meeting at the University. Comrade Dickinson argued that the Militant expulsions could not be seen merely as a reaction to an 'undemocratic Party within the Party', but rather were part of a larger anti-socialist move in society. In carrying through these expulsions the Party leaders were aiding the ruling class and their Party, the Tories. (M. CAIR)

On 16th March Peter Bowing and Mike Hingley editors of the Briefing answered their 'summons' to appear before the Executive Committee of Exeter Labour Party to answer questions on ELB. This followed the EC resolution which 'instructed' the editors to 'cease publication'. After the editors made it abundantly clear that in no way could ELB be confused as a publication of Exeter Labour Party, further questions lacked any real depth.

Several months ago Rougemont/ST. Leonards branch decided to send a birthday card to all eighteen year olds asking them to vote Labour. The idea was that the card would portray the Labour slogan 'Unity is Strength'; however the design portrayed neither Unity nor Strength. Instead we had the image of a young girl in a long flowing dress draped around a muscular man. The card did little for socialism, but reinforced sexism. At the February meeting the card was rejected, those rightly opposing the design had left, the meeting reversed the decision. The issue lingers on. (D. WHITE)

Pennsylvania/St. Davids branch met at 26 Clifton Hill on 8th March. A resolution of support for Exeter Labour Briefing was proposed and passed by 11votes to 7. A resolution in support of a City Council Women's Committee in the event of Labour taking control of the City Council, and another in favour of Labour Party affiliation to the Women's Action Committee, were both passed. A resolution condemning the action of the PLP in not voting against the government over GCHQ and calling for the reinstatement of Max Madden and Frank Field (who were disciplined for refusing to abstain) was rejected by the meeting.