

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING

EDITORIAL STATEMENT:

Following pressure from the Exeter CLP 'Exeter Labour Briefing' has stopped publication. During an acrimonious exchange on the GMC it was stated by a leading opponent of ELB that the real objection was to the content and not to the name, as in the ECs recommendation for expulsion. This confirmed the claims of those who support the Briefing.

As regards the final issue the objection to the content may have gained some justification, although the process of attempting to expel the editors had been set in motion some months previously. This last issue was wrong in presenting an account of a ward meeting coloured, albeit understandably, by personal animosity.

We admit that we have made errors, but would wish to point out that ELB has in the past contained many well informed articles on a variety of themes, put forward in a spirit of constructive debate, within the Labour Party.

So what has happened in Exeter? The right wing have begun moves to keep the Left in check. We would still maintain that it is more than coincidental that this occurs at a time when the Labour Group on the Exeter City Council has entered into a 'working relationship' with the Liberals. So far the Labour Group has not compromised severely on the manifesto, although the fact that the Liberal and Labour manifestos are not dissimilar raises some very obvious questions.

In changing its name, the Briefing has avoided the illegal expulsion of its editors and the inevitable acrimony accompanying any appeal to the NEC. Thus no precedent can be claimed for moves against other area Briefings and the nationwide collection of forums for socialist debate of the broad left remains undamaged.

Devon Labour Briefing can therefore be launched with a spirit of optimism. Nobody has ever said it is easy being a socialist in Devon, but never has there been a more vital time for us to come together and build a mass campaigning Labour Party. There are many who are acutely aware of the depth of the crisis in Britain and the severity of attacks being made on the working people, the young, the poor, women, blacks, but who feel isolated and impotent. Hopefully Devon Labour Briefing will provide an opportunity for communication and discussion, and be a catalyst for action.

The Rag-bag Opposition

There is no effective opposition to Thatcherism in this country, only a 'rag-bag' consisting of protest movements, C.N.D., Womens' movements, TUC and a Labour Party trying to recreate itself.

Thatcher's government has forged ahead with its policies, dismantling the welfare state with ever increasing programmes of privatisation of services, cuts in benefits, selling off profitable parts of nationalised industries, the passage of a repressive Police and Criminal Evidence Bill which will legalise the illegal and often brutal measures taken by the police against the miners and the Greenham Women. Random stop and search road blocks will soon be seen in the streets of England as they are in Northern Ireland. The government, not content with 'rate-capping' to control local councils seeking to improve services remain determined to abolish Metropolitan Authorities; and having deliberately provoked the miners strike (no miner chooses the summer time in which to act) they continue daily to provoke and confront while the media revels in one-sided reports of violence. The divisions in the country between the jobless and the waged increase and we are all being made fearful of losing our jobs, of the nuclear threat, of the hoary old red menace.

As I see it the rag-bag has utterly failed to become a cohesive political force; it has found no authentic expression in the institutions of democracy. In the words of Beatrix Campbell 'we already know more about the rise of the new radical Right than we do about the demise of the old Left'. We have failed miserably to recruit the young unemployed and the mass of working people. Those who have suffered most, the clients of the D.H.S.S. and the (un)Employment Office see no point in protest. Their total lack of faith in our ability to achieve change and their despair are very worrying. We seem unable to give them answers. Anger would be better than apathy.

Parliamentary opposition seems to be lacking in will and in unity. With a few notable exceptions there are no strong voices and no clear leadership; few M.P.'s for example are seen at picket lines. We all seem to be too concerned about upsetting the middle ground. It seems to me that to be effective we have somehow to become much more involved with the other rags in the bag and much more supportive of each other. We can learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. Out of the rag-bag has to come a brand new party dress. So how about a big demo in Exeter in support of the miners for a start? with, of course, the banners of the party, C.N.D. and the Unions all being seen together.

Pam Penhale
Tiverton CLP

LABOUR STAND ALONE



Scratch a Liberal and underneath the glossy veneer you will find a Tory. Indeed, Marx himself felt that there would be room for only one major Capitalist Party, namely the Liberals - the Liberals, however, have become, due to historical circumstances, the Tory second eleven to be boosted by Capitalism when the Tories look like becoming unpopular. The Liberals have recently been joined by the traitors of the SDP, a Party set up by the rich to try and destroy the Labour Party - they have failed. What are the empiricists up to now? Like the myth of a crock of gold at the end of the rainbow - a mish-mash of opportunists in the form of Frank Field (Lab. Birkenhead), Lord Michael Young of Dartington (Chair, SDP Devon) and Eric Hobsbawm (erstwhile theoretician of the so-called Communist Party) are busy with their brushes painting the rainbow.

With these types, the hue looks blue, and may become increasingly so as they invite the wet nappies of the Tory Party (Pym, Prior et al.) to join them when the times ahead, Thatcher stumbles and falls.

Who are these coalitionists? Each would claim to be a gentleman of principle. Frank Field agrees with his GMC when it suits him. Lord Michael Young runs a paternalistic operation in Devon reminiscent of the nineteenth century; David Steel calls himself a democrat because he ignores his own annual conference; Dr. 'Death' Owen calls on the Tories to use the anti trade union laws against the miners; Eurocommunists like Hobsbawm, are in reality Liberals with their phrase 'let us unite all progressive forces'.

These would-be saviours of the nation believe they are having original thoughts. What they don't realise is that they are the mouthpieces of others who see the coming storms for the Tories and are busy cobbling together an alternative. The Rainbow Group need Capitalism to provide their expensive suits and the daily bloating of red wine and fine steaks. The fear of a left Labour government coming to power drives them together.

The Labour Party must reject outright advances made from without to water down the drive for a proper socialist programme, and must have no truck with those within - the Trojan horses who are trying to stem the leftward shift of Labour.

The rainbow is merely a transitional phenomenon. What we must ensure is that when it dissolves into the blue sky it is overcome by the red hot ball of the sun. Labour must stand alone!

Sean Brogan
Vice Chair Teignmouth Labour Party (personal capacity)

Greenham

Many people in Trafalgar Square on June 9th will have heard the Greenham speaker's passionate call for 10 million women to withdraw their labour and join the Greenham peace camp for ten days between September 20th and 30th. Since then, word has spread quickly, at least within the feminist and peace movements. Greater links - with women all over Britain, in workplaces, homes, unions etc. - will have to be worked for and cemented before anything near the ten million target can be reached. The problems involved in organising a women's strike are not, however, arguments for cynicism. They point to the very reasons why such a strike is necessary, and, if successful, why it will be the most revolutionary act against the forces and institutions of militarism, capitalism, and patriarchy in Britain that any of us will have ever witnessed.

A strike is a test and show of power, strength, and solidarity. It challenges an imbalance of power and attempts to redress this by withholding vital labour, making the point that this labour is of greater value than its economic and social status would suggest. However, since most of the work that women do is given no economic status or value at all - i.e. unpaid domestic labour - the imbalance of power is greater here than in any other area of work. In the way that most of our labour has been made invisible - care of children, elderly, male partners, maintenance of home and family, social and sexual reproduction - so our power, too, appears invisible until we start to use it. This is a crucial point because we will be told repeatedly between now and September that we cannot strike effectively when we have no industrial muscle, no traditional organisation, no status, no value, no power. This is the surface picture that patriarchal capitalism presents us with.

In reality, though, the power and the muscle is there, and if its value will only be recognised through strike action, through non-cooperation with employers and male middle class business interests which make female labour a low-paid ghetto, with the state war machine, with man made laws and hierarchies that require women to produce and service a labour force that faces lifelong exploitation on one hand and nuclear destruction on the other - then we must withdraw this labour to assert and prove its value. Our absence will be noticed if our presence is ignored.

Ten days of non-cooperation, though, will be ten days of positive action and political advance. Negative value and a sense of powerlessness can be redirected and channelled to make links that divide-and-rule government seeks to destroy: between millions of women who share economic and sexual exploitation, between the expansion of the nuclear war industry and the destruction of the coal industry, between the running down of the health and social serv-

ices and the encouragement given to women to remain in the home etc. It will be a strike like no other. Whether women decide to flood Greenham or establish a chain of local actions all over Britain - and hopefully numbers will allow for both - our effect will be explosive. Women in Exeter and the SW region have already started meeting and organising for the strike. Since many women will be unable to get to Greenham for ten days at a stretch, we must have strong chains of support and action in all areas and at all levels. This relies on energy and initiative - and support of course from men, eg child care facilities - and widespread publicity for maximum impact. There will be another regional meeting in Exeter on Saturday July 21st at 1 pm in the Victory Centre, Magdalen Rd. for women interested in organising local actions and publicity for Greenham. Exeter Women for Peace are having an open meeting on July 12th (see Flying Post dates list). We need as many women as possible to get together and plan for the months ahead: leaflets, public meetings, discussions, and publicity in both local and national media must be utilised if we are to get our message across. It is up to women in the Labour movement and all progressive groups to activate their members and resources to make these ten days a political success.

Contact Exeter Women for Peace, Devon Labour Briefing, Anne Cahill/Pat Marshall at Exeter 218384 for more details.

Local government

After the council elections most of the Labour Party seems content to leave the conduct of the council's business in the hands of the elected few. In their turn these 'municipal careerists' seem unlikely to change the operation of the City Council very noticeably. The scope for initiative is very narrow and most of the funds are already committed. Dependence on Liberals is a further inhibition to the development of radical policies.

I want to argue that the Labour Party can use its control of the District Council to make small but significant impacts on the daily lives of the population which may, taken as a whole, start to establish a new constituency, particularly among those who are at present so little attended to by politicians of all parties that they are unlikely to vote at all. We can learn considerably from the experience of local government in London and Sheffield, where unorthodox initiatives by local politicians have built up unprecedented support for Labour administrations which have been prepared to step out of the traditional bounds of council work and pay attention to the real needs of minority groups and the poor. We cannot expect our existing councillors to take such initiatives on their own, for the very reason that they have become used to the ways in which the council works, and because they are answerable to the traditional Labour supporters who voted for them. In Exeter it is important that the Party establishes that it is prepared to look to the needs of a wider constituency than the council estates where the solid Labour seats are. There are a number of different areas where it should be possible to take initiatives without

needing large sums of money. While the local manifesto is helpful in some areas there is a continued need to develop policy in the light of the Party's experience of governing.

(1) **Morality:** Much can be achieved at little expense by such gestures as the establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone, ensuring that City investments are withdrawn from South African firms, that the interests of animal rights campaigners are taken account of. Even such a simple gesture as permitting suitable political organisations to use City premises for meetings, fund raising events, etc, can do much to weaken the arguments of those who regard the Labour Party as too old fashioned to be worth supporting. There are a number of wards where Ecology or Liberal protest votes are potentially crucial.

(2) **Information:** Municipal administration in this area has a tradition of secrecy which is hard to break. If we are to establish any real participation in local government then electors must be given much more access to information. At present a lot of the councils business is not open to public debate, either because it is never reported to committee at all or because it is conducted in the private part of the meeting. If members of the public do manage to penetrate to the place where the committee is meeting (and more could be done to publicise the agenda and the venue) then they will be fortunate if they can follow the business. In the Guild Hall they will be lucky if they can hear what is going on. They certainly won't be permitted to participate at all in the meeting. Committees can include members who are not councillors, but in Exeter only the leisure committee has any non-council members. This would be a way in which different groups might be involved.

The City has never produced a proper Annual Report, as it is obliged to do under the terms of The Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980. Most councils produced their first report in 1981. Exeter has not even produced one yet. In general the City has not been very forthcoming with information. The explanation they send out to Housing Benefit applicants is a particularly bad example. Most applicants are pensioners, and many are likely to have problems reading. The explanation consists of four pages of small type which most people would find completely incomprehensible, even if they could read it. It is to be hoped that the new administration makes a start by improving the information that the council gives out to people who need its services.

(3) **Services:** Tories are not actually interested in the services which the council provides for the poor, so they left them to the officers to run as they saw fit. Some of them, particularly in Housing, which is the biggest of the services provided at District Council level, have been abominably run. Housing Benefit, the Homeless Persons Act, and the allocation of council houses have been used to manage and control the poor. They could be used creatively, but that would involve reclaiming them from the officers who manage them at the moment. Housing Benefit, for example, was devolved to the City Treasurer in April 1983, with the proviso that he reported back to the Housing Committee after six months. There is still no sign of any report.

It will take a considerable effort before ordinary people feel that it makes some difference to them who controls the City council. Unless that effort is made it will become increasingly difficult to drag people to the polls, and this apathy will spread over to other elections.

Martin Rathfelder
Exeter CLP



Teachers' dispute

Devon's teachers have at last woken up ! After several years of humiliating and devastating cutbacks combined with a series of derisory pay offers, large numbers of teachers have decided that it is time to fight. Admittedly their most recent strike actions have been supported by full reimbursement of pay from their union's meagre funds, but at least they did something.

Things began in a small way with some token strikes against the recent cut of £1.4m in the Devon Education budget. Then the public utterances of Keith Joseph nationally and Ted Pinney locally infuriated and united teachers. But why has it taken teachers so long to decide to make a stand? Shirley Williams' "Great Education Debate" of the last Labour government began the demoralisation of teacher activists who had voted Labour. This was followed by repeated cuts in education budgets which lowered the quality of the service. In a spirit of naive altruism many teachers accepted the inevitability and increased work load of the cuts. They meekly accepted whatever pay increases Thatcher was prepared to offer. So total was the demoralisation of teachers that union meetings became sparsely attended and the will even to discuss the strategy for a fightback disappeared. During this time the greatest champions of education were not the Labour Party or the teacher unions but interested parents and organisations like the Campaign to Advance State Education.

Matters were made worse by the apparent reluctance of teacher trade union leaders to actually lead, in the mistaken belief that 'militancy' causes the mass resignation of members. Rules were passed to prevent NUT branches from taking action on local issues. In London there was a witch hunt of NUT members who took action which was considered "unofficial" by the NUT Executive.

In fact quite the reverse has been the case in Devon as the membership of the NUT has risen steadily with the increase in action. As people have seen a teacher union doing something positive they have joined it. A strong call for action from the NUT leadership has brought a good response from the membership. (Admittedly Devon's response was limited but nationally the response was solid). It is interesting to note the reason for this new thirst for leadership which has been acquired by the NUT exec-

utive. At the recent National Conference of the NUT, the executive resisted the grass roots movement towards a flat rate salary increase that would benefit the lower paid teachers. Time after time during the week the executive moved procedural points to delay a final vote. It was no coincidence that the 4½% pay offer was rejected soon after. The teachers' leaders had at last got the message and a deal with the rival NAS/UWT unified the action.

But this reurgence of activism by teachers may only be short lived. Far too often in the past teachers have fallen for the traditional employers' tactics. By appearing inflexible and then making a minor concession, the employers have managed to convince the unions that they have won a major victory. This was the case with the NUT's recent campaign against the cuts in Devon. Many claim that referral to arbitration represents another great victory. On the contrary our leadership may well have to accept an arbitration award which falls far short of teachers' expectations and this may lead to renewed demoralisation. Furthermore, Devon councillors Pinney and Sayers have promised us that hundreds of teaching jobs will be lost if the award is above 4½%. Devon County Council has a policy known as "The Pay Loss Factor" - the cost of every pay award will be made up by job losses.

For those Devon teachers involved in the recent battles against education cuts and the pay issue, the way forward seems clear. We must resist any job losses caused by Devon's "Pay loss factor" policy. We must continue to fight this year's cut of £1.4m in the education budget. We must persuade the right wing male headteacher dominated Executive of our union that a flat rate pay increase is the only way to improve the standard of living of the majority of teachers, ie women. To a head teacher a 4½% increase is a substantial pay rise, but to a teacher on the lowest salary scale it is an insult.

We must ensure that our pay award is not gained at the expense of other public sector workers or consumers. We must work with other public sector unions and mount a joint attack on the rate capping issue. Teachers and others must be persuaded that they are engaged in a permanent struggle against a government that does not care about the education of the children of ordinary working people.

Teachers work hard in the classroom to compensate for the inequalities in Britain today. They showed that they were prepared to work just as hard to improve their pay. Now if those same teachers were prepared to be just as hard working and militant in defence of the public sector as a whole, then we would be making some real progress.

Steve Leonard
Devon NUT and Labour
Party member