

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING

EDITORS P. Bowing, G. Carroll, J. Clarke, J. Hamm.

July 1983

10p



This publication is available to supporters of the Labour Party only.

Editorial

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING has been set up by members of the CLP who are particularly concerned 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 firmly be resisted - their acceptance would mark a gross betrayal of our principles and commitments. Imagine, for instance, a leader of the Tory party who, after losing an election, advises his/her colleagues to abandon capitalism as the basis of their party programme! No, we did not lose the election because our policies were too socialist, but because of other more complex reasons, as articles in this edition will show.

What we need to do now is BUILD on our socialist programme - as never before, we require a clear, credible and coherent set of policies which is capable of tackling the fundamental problems of our sick capitalist society. We must become IN REALITY the party which organises opposition to 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.

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.

If you would like to contribute to, sell, write to or otherwise support EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING, then contact Jeremy Clarke
11 Hillsborough Avenue
Exeter
tel. 56511

BACK

HEFFER and MEACHER

We must have a united leadership in tune with Party policy, if we are to win next time; only Eric Heffer and Michael Meacher can provide that leadership team. But why Heffer and not Kinnock?

- * Heffer, unlike Kinnock, did not join the Labour Front Bench after the election defeat in 1979, but fought for the socialist and democratic reforms which Exeter CLP supports.
- * Heffer, unlike Kinnock, voted for Tony Benn in the deputy leadership contest, as did Exeter CLP.
- * Heffer, unlike Kinnock, opposed Golding's disastrous campaign to expel supporters of Militant. Exeter CLP opposes expulsions.

VOTE FOR POLICIES NOT FOR A BEAUTY
CONTEST

by Peter Bowing

The Irish Verdict

If the results of the general election filled Labour party members with a sense of gloom, spare a thought for the supporters of the SDLP in Northern Ireland - not to mention their backers in the British and Irish establishments. From a position in the early seventies of being the clear electoral representatives of the nationalist population in the province, they now find themselves being hard pushed by Sinn Fein, the

political wing of the Republican movement. On June 9th Sinn Fein polled over 100,000 votes, 10,000 more than their target and only 20,000 less than the SDLP. They unseated Gerry Fitt in West Belfast and only narrowly lost in Mid Ulster. In several other seats their vote was higher than many losing Labour candidates on the mainland. Owen Carron received over 20,000 in Fermanagh-South Tyrone. These results were achieved in the face of continual harassment by the RUC and British Army, with candidates and canvassers repeatedly detained. Clearly the argument that the republican movement has no popular support has received a further set back.

For the last 14 years, since the present so-called "troubles" started in 1969, the Labour party, when not openly taking the side of the Unionist reactionaries has adopted a "wait and see" attitude, always hoping that some solution would miraculously appear. The idea of tackling the root causes of the problem - partition of Ireland and the continuing British presence - has received short shrift in the labour movement in general and inside the Labour party in particular. Current party policy whilst recognising that Ireland should be united, states "we respect and support the right of the Northern Ireland people to remain in the UK". It goes on to claim that this does not represent a veto over any political development. You may not call it a veto, but what it means is that if the Unionist minority in the northern six counties do not want a united Ireland there won't be one. Effectively it means maintaining the status quo along with an attempt to introduce a measure of devolution - a policy which singularly failed in the 1970s. Clearly a firm commitment to the reunification of Ireland and a British withdrawal is a long way off.

The two arguments most commonly used within the party for the maintenance of British rule are the defence of Unionists' democratic rights and the prevention of a "blood bath". The democratic rights of the artificially created Unionist majority in the North are defended at the expense of the democratic rights of the majority of Irish people. The Northern state was

created in 1921, after the overwhelming victory of Sinn Fein at the 1918 general election, and rapidly constructed a regime based on sectarianism and discrimination. It can be no more acceptable today because it has existed for sixty years. The reactionary consequences of the partition are still very much alive, and affect not only the nationalist population. The divisions within the working class in the six counties mean that both communities share, albeit unevenly, in some of the worst housing conditions, unemployment and social amenities in Western Europe.

To argue that the British presence is preventing a "blood bath" is to reduce the Irish people to the status of natives who are unable to manage their own affairs without assistance from the civilised British. Peacekeeping for the British has included selective assassination, saturation patrolling, intensive surveillance, torture and brutality. It might be better to call this repression! The much prophesied "blood bath" would presumably be perpetrated on the nationalists by Unionists. But the British have armed and trained the overwhelmingly Unionist RUC and UDR. A British withdrawal would need to be accompanied by the disarming and breakup of these forces. There can be no guarantee that there would be no violence, but British withdrawal would indicate to Unionists that Britain was no longer prepared to shore up the Orange state. They would be forced to come to terms with the new situation and take their place in a United Ireland whose form would be decided by all Irish people.

Some party members argue that such a perspective would condemn the Unionists to a position very similar to that of the nationalists in the North, but within a theocratic Irish Republic. But you don't have to be a supporter of the current policies of the South to see that there can be no equation between the two states. Protestants have never been systematically discriminated against politically, socially and economically. While many facets of life in the South, particularly laws on abortion, contraception and homosexuality, are unsatisfactory it must be remembered that British statutes on these matters do not cover the six counties. One thing which the two states currently share is a climate of moral repression.

Lastly, Marx's dictum that 'a nation which enslaves another can never itself be free' is clearly borne out by Britain's relationship with Ireland. The unity of the British ruling and working classes in maintaining Britain's hold over the six counties is part of the ideological baggage impeding moves towards socialism at home.

by J Clarke
J Carrell

Why Did Labour Lose ?

On June 9 1983, Mrs Thatcher won handsomely the twelfth general election since the war. With 397 seats she has a 188 majority over Labour; the largest such majority in forty years. Yet these figures should not disguise the fact that the Conservatives did not do well; in 1979 they obtained 43.9% of the poll; in 1983 they achieved only 43.5%, despite four years of Thatcherism saturating British society. 1983 did not give the Tories the share of the popular vote they achieved in the 1950's, nor, to make an international comparison, that of the German Christian Democrats. Overwhelmingly, the point is that in the two party system which is engrained into British electoral politics, the Conservative Party victory was ensured not by the persuasiveness of the Thatcherite world view over the working class, but by the utter weakness of the Labour opposition. Thus it is the inability of the Labour Party to mount an effective challenge to Thatcherism that requires explanation.

THE MYSTIFYING EXCUSES OF THE RIGHT

Labour's defeat at the polls is leading to a post mortem. Many of the excuses are either peripheral or incorrect.

It is argued that we lost because the media, particularly Fleet Street, was against us. This is a ridiculous excuse; the capitalist media has never supported Socialism and never will. To say that we lost because of the media is like a boxer claiming he lost a fight because he was punched. We must win the battle of ideas not blame our opponents for fighting.

It is argued, not perhaps in so many words, that we lost because British working people reject Socialism, and therefore we must change our programme and principles in order to win. It is assumed here, quite wrongly, that there is something to be gained from jettisoning the morality and practical coherence of Socialism, by removing the socialist alternative from British politics and by joining the Alliance and the Tories in support of capitalism, thus endorsing all the injustices which the Labour movement was created to eradicate. Indeed to follow this path would be to hand an even greater victory to the Tories than they won in 1983.

WHY LABOUR LOST

We lost in 1983 because the social democratic rather than socialist ideas that the Party followed after 1940 and which furnished our successes (1966?) were totally defunct. These ideas were based on two erroneous, but opportunistic, assumptions:

- (1) that Labour could manage capitalism so that the surplus generated could be used to benefit working people; thus there was no longer any need for Clause IV and a socialist economy;
- (2) that politics was about reaching agreement with business and the institutions of the state at the negotiating table backed up only by votes; thus there was no longer any need for a mass movement or for politics based on the class struggle.

But today capitalism fails to grow and Thatcher refuses to negotiate with Labour. The old politics is dead. The Keynesian/corporate strategy presented by Shore is rejected by working people because from at least 1966 it failed to deliver anything and because the strategy has been revealed to be absurd.

Yet life inside the Labour Party is not all black and the Right do not hold complete sway. Especially since the electoral defeat in 1979 the Left has attempted to correct the revisionist errors which contaminate British socialism. But the Left centred mainly outside of Parliament in the constituencies and trade union has not yet managed to change the leadership of the Party, but only to dump incomplete and "resolution oriented" left policies on a right-wing leadership. We cannot expect Hattersley and Shore to campaign for unilateral nuclear disarmament, withdrawal from the EEC and for a socialist version of the AES. Their substitution for the old line by their presentation of these policies caused such a muddle that even a child could have dismissed the Labour Party.

In short, the practical situation today is that no longer is the British electorate to choose every five years or so, as it did in the fifties and sixties, between the "right" (Conservative) and "left" (Labour) version of consensus politics, but between a clear, business-oriented and populist Tory party on the right which will have no truck with organised labour and a muddled socialist part on the left which is divided into those are developing a coherent socialism for the 1980's and 1990's (eg Benn and Livingstone) and those dominating the leadership of the Party who are entrenched in a failed past (eg Hattersley, Shore and Golding).

LABOUR AND THE CONSENSUS 1940-79

In the period 1940-48 the Labour Party was progressively introduced as an alternative and legitimate government party. From the establishment's perspective Labour had proved it could govern without endangering British capitalism. Admittedly, the necessary involvement of Labour in the war-time coalition and the overwhelming endorsement of Labour in 1945 were not welcome to the Conservative Party, but given the war which mobilised the working class of the 1930's, the Tories had to make certain concessions; luckily they were able to do so, given Marshall aid, Keynesianism and war-torn competitors. It was the 1940's which laid the basis for consensus. Within an expanding capitalism, say between 1938 and 1955, the standard of living for working people appeared to be rising; Labour was proud of its

1945-51 record. But what underpinned the period from the the mid-forties to the seventies was an implicit deal between Labour and the Tories: if Labour upheld and worked within the processes of British capitalism and policed the trade unions and the working class, the Tories would not undermine the post-1945 reforms such as full employment and the NHS. Labour leaders and to a certain extent the Labour Party were integrated into the capitalist system. This was the underlying structure which shaped British politics until the rise of Thatcherism.

LABOUR IN GOVERNMENT AND THE COLLAPSE OF CONSENSUS

Between 1964-79 Labour was in government except for three and a half years during the Heath chaos. Wilson believed that 1951-64 had been the years of the "right" consensus politics; post 1964 was to be the "left's" turn. This complacent simplicity could not last though: British industry was being overtaken by her European competitors, the terms of trade were increasingly unfavourable to Britain and there was no coherent modernisation programme. A "right" programme could have weakened the working class, cut its consumption, increased profits and encouraged investment; a "left" programme could have maintained working class consumption and enforced investment through nationalisation and regulation. As neither was followed, the crisis of British capitalism deepened and became apparent by the later 1960's, but Wilson clung to the consensus deal, and so after eighteen months did Heath.

By the late 1970's the consensus in its old form could no longer be held together; industries were collapsing (eg steel); unemployment and inflation were rising. Ironically the first to break the consensus was the Labour government in favour of the "right" by introducing austerity measures, dictated by the International Monetary Fund, which ideologically enhanced Capital's case. Yet the Tories cried "too little, too late".

THATCHERISM

Just as important was the election of Thatcher as leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and the rise of the "new right", which because of the authoritarian nature of the Tories, very quickly became the new orthodoxy. Thatcherite economic ideology allows capital to save itself by allowing a rearrangement in order to increase the rate of profit regardless of the social costs; this rearrangement is portrayed as objectively necessary. Bureaucracy and consensual pragmatism (unadmirable and uninspiring as they are) are made the main scape-goats; in their place authoritarian populism, as we saw during the Falklands War, and individualism - proposals for strengthening the family group - are both promoted; Labourism is thus indicted.

In 1979 Thatcher was elected and began to implement the "right" version outlined above. Despite the industrial collapse, mass unemployment and creeping authoritarianism, Labour has proved unable to mount a serious

socialist alternative to Thatcherism, and in 1983 the Tories were re-elected, on a lower poll, with an increased Parliamentary majority.

LABOUR'S RUT

Labour, however, remains impotent:

- (1) The Labour leadership and party bureaucracy have lost their campaigning fervour, and are tied to consensus which the Tories, business and the Establishment reject;
- (2) In the present crisis the consensus politics are economically unviable and gain little enthusiasm from a population who has who has seen them tried and fail, ending only in bureaucracy and corporatism;
- (3) The left in the Labour Party, dominant in the constituencies, led by Benn, rightly want to end these myths, restore the necessity of politics based on class struggle and introduce a democratically planned society and economy, ie Socialism.

But the Labour right wing, like any dominant elite, will not yield and the consequent struggle for power and the contradictory policies that result confuses the working class. Matters are not helped by the Labour right wing, in addition to the Tories, slandering the left.

Yet the Labour left is the only alternative to Thatcherism; socialism is the only alternative to a decaying capitalism. Until the consensus is finally made redundant and the class struggle is re-introduced into our politics, and we will not win and Thatcherism will remain dominant.

by P. Bowing

The Leader

On the evening of June 12 when Clive Jenkins hastily broke the news of Michael Foot's resignation, there couldn't have been many Party members who didn't heave a quiet sigh of relief.

For three weeks up to June 9 we had to watch Foot stumble, bumble and bluster while Labour policy progressively and very publicly fell to pieces on every television screen in the country. He tried everything except an honest, full-blooded commitment to Labour policy and as a result will go down as one of the most humiliated opposition leaders of the twentieth century.

Foot's hasty departure might signal the end of Labour's dark ages and the beginning of political renewal; but only if we choose a leader who will take forward socialist policies and organise to defend those at risk under Thatcher's reign. Everything now depends on what the labour movement decides between now and October.

The stakes this time are high. The election of a leader will not be a choice of personalities or about deciding who looks best on "Question Time", it will fundamentally be a

choice about how the Party can be rebuilt and what sort of party it will be.

Consider the choices. Shore and Hattersley both stand firmly on the Right; if either were elected, his priorities would be clear: abandon Labour's nuclear policy; adopt an economic programme based on wage controls; tacitly accept monetarism and public expenditure cuts; in short resurrect all the measures which proved such a roaring success under Callaghan/ Healey and which the Party has been trying to shake off ever since. Even if elected, (does anyone really believe the working class wants a repeat of '74-'79) such a government would certainly come to the same ignominious end; the resulting working class demoralisation would open the road to an even more vicious Tory attack than last time.

Labour may not survive such an experience. But they know that they could not get that far easily; in order to effect such policy changes they would have to push through a vigorous witchhunt against the left, driving out the Bennites and emasculating the "soft" Left so that not a voice would be raised against them. Is that the kind of Party we wish to build? The result would be a shell bereft of internal life and with few attractions for working people seeking political solutions.

Kinnock is more attractive to many Party members because of his youth, a supposed ability to handle the press, his left-wing background and the pious hope that he can unite the Party. Of these many virtues the only one that cannot be challenged is the fact that he is younger than the other candidates for leader.

Whatever socialist credentials he possessed are now far behind: it was his failure to vote for Tony Benn in the Deputy Leadership contest which gave the post to Healey who did us so much good in the General Election; he was only a late convert to the idea of automatic reselection of MP's; it was his vote which denied the National Executive Committee control over the manifesto; like Foot, he came out against Peter Tatchell, thereby preparing the ground for the Bermondsey disaster; he has voted for every single expulsion from the Party.

His ability to handle the media is equally questionable; the truth is that no Labour politician or trade unionist or CND leader or feminist or anyone who opposes the principles on which this society is organised can expect fair treatment on the TV or honest reporting in the press; that is the lesson which Benn, Scargill and the women at Greenham Common have learned and the labour movement should not forget it. The fact that they can knock the stuffing out of Kinnock as well as they did out of Foot was graphically illustrated by the hysteria they whipped up after his remark about "guts" at Bluff Cove. What chance do we have to build socialism if our leader always has to toe a line drawn by a capitalist press?

As Foot's heir-apparent Kinnock's capacity to unite the Party must be in

doubt. Since peace was supposed to have broken out at Bishop's Stortford, the right has in fact continued to attack the left within the Party; they forced the isolation of Tatchell, established the register, brought about the expulsion of the Militant editors and sabotaged the left policies at the General Election; they will undoubtedly take up the battle with renewed vigour since they now hope to reverse many of the more radical conference policies and are prepared to be rough and dirty. Kinnoek has already declared that if elected the question of the Militant "will be speedily dealt with"- in other words instead of uniting the Party, he is prepared to see the right force more splits and divisions.

If Labour is to be rebuilt so that it can take up the fight against the Tories and their Alliance friends, we must continue the fight for socialist policies while at the same time turning the Party outwards into the communities and workplaces. Above all we must show trade unionists, women, peace campaigners, black people, youth, the unemployed, the elderly - in other words all those who the Tories have marked out as their victims - that Labour is prepared to organise to defend them. This time we need a leader who will stand four-square behind this fight.

Benn would have been the best candidate by far to organise Labour along these lines. In his absence it has fallen to Eric Heffer, and Michael Meacher in the Deputy contest, to campaign for this type of perspective.

It is unlikely that Heffer can win in October; nevertheless, since the election is by exhaustive ballot, Party members who agree with defending conference policy, opposing further expulsions, and turning the Party into a vigorous campaigning organisation should vote for Heffer in the first round to demonstrate to the press and the future leader that there is a sizable portion of the Party which has not turned its back on socialism. If Heffer does not succeed, the only alternative at this time is to vote for Kinnoek in order to prevent the right wing having a victory which could cripple the Party for many years to come.

by G. Carroll

It was the national leadership's lack of commitment and clear portrayal of Party policy which led to our electoral defeat; that was the consensus of Pennsylvania/St David's branch. Emphasis was placed on electing a leadership which was in tune with Party policy. In an open ballot for leader Neil Kinnoek received 10 votes, Eric Heffer 6 and Roy Hattersley 1. For deputy leader Michael Meacher won by a clear majority.

The branch also passed a resolution for Exeter CLP to hold a mass meeting of Party members to decide the leadership which would widen the franchise beyond the GMC. Calls for postal ballot were overwhelmingly defeated.

city elections



May 3rd 1984 might seem a long time ahead, but that's the day on which Labour can take control of Exeter City Council. If we are to achieve this aim we must begin to plan our campaign almost immediately. The local elections this year left Labour with ten seats, but of the twelve seats to be contested next year none are held by Labour councillors and five of them are extremely marginal. Less than two hundred votes in the right places would have guaranteed these seats in May. Next year we must win these seats and more.

However there is a major problem which the local party must resolve between now and next May - the question of our attitude to central government's controls over local councils. Most of us are aware of the vast range of measures adopted by the Tories over the last four years to restrict local authority spending. These vary from cuts in the rate support grant, controls over how specific funds can be spent, and penalties in terms of grant withdrawal from authorities who "overspend" on Government targets. All these controls have one thing in common - they are largely independent of the needs of the particular area a council has been elected to serve.

It is no coincidence that a number of Labour controlled authorities have come onto conflict with the Tory government over these controls. These authorities are mainly from the larger towns and cities but also extend to shire counties like Avon. Despite several attempts to organise a co-ordinated response to government legislation, most councils have adopted a strategy of increasing the rates to maintain a decent level of services and even extend them at a time when the recession has begun to bite.

Exeter Labour Party's manifesto for the May '83 election contained several points which would have proved difficult, if not impossible, to implement under current central government controls. This includes much of our policy on leisure, housing and employment. The tone of much of our public propaganda around the election assumed that a Labour Government would be returned shortly after our victory in Exeter, the controls would be relaxed, and we would carry out our manifesto commitments. The results of June 9th have changed this scenario out of all recognition.

Our manifesto for May 1984 must be drawn up on the assumption that there will be a Tory Government over most if not all of the period in which Labour controls Exeter City Council. Existing restraints on local government expenditure will remain and more will be introduced. In this situation we must decide whether we are to elect a council merely to carry out the dictates of the Tories, or whether we are to join with other Labour controlled authorities in organising a fightback against the government. To carry on as before will lead either to a falling away of our support at the polls as our supporters realise we cannot and will not fulfil our promises, or a period of bitter disillusion after the election when the voters see that we are not prepared to carry out our promises.

by J. Clarke

WELL DONE EXETER

Despite a disastrous campaign in which Hattersley, Shore and others attacked party policy, formulated by the trade unions and constituencies, Exeter did better than anywhere else in the South-West, and this was achieved with a candidate who wholeheartedly based his campaign on the manifesto.

Below is a list of the percentage vote attained by each CLP in the region.

Exeter	22.8%
Falmouth and Camborne	21.2%
Plymouth Devonport	21.0%
Plymouth Drake	20.3%
Taunton	17.9%
Bridgewater	17.7%
Plymouth Sutton	14.3%
Dorset West	11.4%
St. Ives	11.2%
Sumerton and Frome	9.8%
Wells	7.8%
Teignbridge	7.2%
Torbay	7.2%
South Hams	6.9%
Devon West and Torridge	6.6%
Tiverton	6.4%
Honiton	6.3%
Devon North	5.7%
Yeovil	5.6%
Cornwall South East	4.9%
Truro	4.5%
Cornwall North	3.9%