

EXETER LABOUR BRIEFING

LABOUR TO POWER ON A SOCIALIST PROGRAMME

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

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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.

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.

LB SEEKS SUPPORT FROM ALL SECTIONS OF THE CLP.

Council

The headlines of the 'Express and Echo' on Wednesday, 16th May read "Allies (Labour and Liberal !) seize city power". Mr. Long, leader of the Labour Group on council was more reserved 'we simply have a working arrangement with the Liberals on the policies on which we agree'. But as a result of an 'agreement' with the Liberals, a Lib/Lab pact majority controls all the committees backed up by a majority of one in the council chamber. The pact was consummated when Mr. Long, with Liberal backing, became leader of the council.

In the May issue of Exeter Labour Briefing I wrote '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 the 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.' This is just as true now, I believe, as it was a month ago.

The pact is not a single unconnected decision, but has involved, and will continue to involve, a whole series of estrangements from normal socialist practice. (1) The pact entailed the design of a manifesto which had to become a basis for a 'working arrangement' with the Liberals. Not only did this manifesto have to be justified a correct party policy to the activists, but also to the progressive organisations relying on the Labour Party. (2) The pact entailed a logical desire to see the Liberals beating the Tories at the expense of Labour in the Liberal/Tory marginals. (3) The pact encourages dealing between Labour and Liberal councillors without consultation with the Party. It follows further that Mr. Long, as leader of the council, will be advocating and implementing Liberal dominated policies which are at variance with the views of the Labour Party. (4) The pact entails a purge against the Left in the Party, such as this paper, which is seen to be endangering the 'working agreement' with the Liberals. (5) The pact prevents the Labour Party from taking up socialist campaigns in case they undermine the agreement. In consequence there is a flow of support away from Labour to ecologists, anarchists and other such groups. (6) The pact encourages extreme opportunism amongst right wing Labour councillors who can always explain their actions as being dictated by the Liberals and the pact.

There has already been one example of the overall problem. Dr. Shepherd, the Chairperson of Exeter Labour Party says there should be no back-treading on the manifesto, despite the fact that the Lib/Lab pact makes this impossible. Quite rightly Exeter Labour Party is strongly in support of CND with Dr. Shepherd playing a key role in that organisation. Thus it is impossible for the Party to jettison democratically measures such as the no-cooperation with the Thatcher government's nuclear plans, including the construction of nuclear bunkers. Yet Mr Long recognised the legal requirements to build the bunker, and said 'I am not going to break the law'. This pact serves not only to permit extreme opportunism on the part of a group of right wing councillors, but drives a wedge deep into the heart of the Labour Party. How then are CND activists going to vote in 1985? Here we can see and understand the Tory decision, totally right from their class standpoint, to reject a Liberal/Tory pact. Much more important for the Tories than to grab the council - Tory councillors have status anyway - is to destroy the Labour Party. The Exeter Lib/Lab pact contributes, just as the Callaghan/Steel pact did, towards this Tory goal.

The view constantly put by the right wing to justify the pact is that to share power with the Liberals is better than to have no power at all. If Labour did, through a pact with the Liberals, gain power for the working class vis-a-vis the bourgeoisie, there might be a case for the pact. Yet that is not the case. In pure 'council-control' logic the fact that the Liberals are 'between' the Tory and Labour parties means that the Labour Party is the victim of the (bourgeois) centre: exactly why the Tories and Liberals promoted the pact in the circumstances of no overall control. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the right wing are wrong to suggest that power lies in the council chamber; it does not; only a few limited administrative mechanisms do. Liverpool City Council has some power vis-a-vis the capitalist state and class,

because it mobilises working people at the workplace and on the streets to campaign, fight and struggle; likewise in London and Sheffield because council activity facilitates such struggle.

In Exeter, on the other hand, the Lib/Lab pact dampens and restricts struggle.

On 3rd May Labour increased its absolute vote by 5.2% after considerable effort by Party activists. Twelve days later Mr. Long, without direction from the sovereign body of Exeter Labour Party did the worst thing possible for Exeter Labour Party. How best to tackle this extreme opportunism is a matter for debate, and, more importantly, action.

Peter Bowing

Police

At about midnight on Monday 30th April, plain clothed CID raided and searched the home of Ralph Cook, secretary of Hunt Saboteurs Association and secretary of Exeter Young Socialists, in connection with alleged offenses relating to animal rights. Ralph was arrested and taken to Heavitree police station. The police took from his room numerous documents and files for further examination, having first apprised themselves of the contents of each. It emerged later that the alleged offences concerned a raid by animal rights activists on a vivisection laboratory near Manchester on the previous day.

What is remarkable about the documents seized by the police is that almost none of them could have had any bearing on the incident in question. Among them were numerous papers pertinent to the HSA, such contact lists, completed membership forms, nomination for committee posts, and even quotations copied for reference from magazine articles. The detectives also removed copies of leaflets issued by the National Campaign Against the Police Bill, a 'Palastine Solidarity' diary (with nothing whatsoever written inside it), copies of the 'Miner' newspaper and South Wales Miners leaflets, and even copies of the Labour Briefing National Supplement.

Perhaps most disturbing of all, they also took a file containing all the important details of Exeter Young Socialist, including the membership list with addresses, minutes of meetings, contacts with other YS groups, contacts with the local and national police bill campaigns, and much more besides. This file was returned next afternoon to YS member Dave White following phone calls from Labour City Councillor, John Lloyd; but it was held in police possession for about fourteen hours, ample time to read and, if necessary, photocopy. The other papers have not yet been returned.

All of this information was clearly of interest to the police for reasons other than the fight against crime. The papers seized provided them with considerable amounts of information about perfectly legitimate, but politically undesirable groups. The incident serves to illustrate the growing trend in our society towards the systematic collection of information about innocent individuals and their legitimate political activities. It is part of a larger movement towards more open politicisation of the police. Stop and Search harassment on the streets of 'suspicious' persons (ie, persons belonging to 'suspicious' groups like the Young and Black community), massive overkill on picket lines and illegal roadblocks: these are infringements of civil liberties with direct political effects.

If the Police Bill were now law, as it soon will be, the homes of every individual mentioned in these seized documents would be at risk of violation and search by police: for although these people would be suspected of no offence,

their rooms might be suspected of containing evidence concerning someone who was. Thus they would be complicit in law for the collection of personal information about these quite innocent people.

Never has it been more apparent that the police are an arm of state power, used by government to monitor and repress dissent under the guise of 'law and order'. In the logic of capitalist society, they can never be anything else; but what we are seeing is a police force almost entirely untrammelled by democratic control, increasingly confident of strong government and media backing for their behaviour, and so able to exercise more openly their political function.

This seizure of Labour Party papers has disturbing implications, and shows that not only in the urban centres and on the coalfields, but even in the back-water of Exeter, the Left have deep cause to be worried about police behaviour. John Lloyd, member of the Devon and Cornwall Police Authority, is currently filing an official complaint about the affair. We await the outcome with interest.

Mark Wilkinson

Women

At the last meeting of the GMC, a motion calling on our councillors to confirm their full support to sexual equality, and to express this by working closely with a woman's committee to extend women's rights locally and within the Party was rejected. This is perhaps the wrong word, though, because although its meaning is correct, it will not appear in the minutes: this could cause future embarrassment. Instead, the right wing set into play a series of tactical manoeuvres which sent the proposals straight to the Executive Committee without debate and discussion. Their reaction was, of course, defensive - women's rights? we don't need to talk about that - its already in the manifesto - yes, it would be nice if women participated a little more - but, of course, we can't let the Women, who proposed the motion speak, because she is a YS delegate, and the motion comes from Pennsylvania/St. Davids - clever eh?

And these are the very people who laugh when you show them the obstacles faced by women within (and outside) the Party, if they want to get anything done. Obstacles? No-one can deny (but they will) that women are under represented politically - both in terms of participating in power sharing and policy making, being a vast and invisible section of the community when policies are made and implemented. There is neither the channel for women to say 'we want this' nor the Party structure available to respond to it: coordination between the Labour Group on council and local women and women's groups could be greatly improved, but it is up to the Party, and supporters of sexual equality on the council, to take the initiative. If most feminists and activists outside the Party have little time for it, it is because they sensibly look to the structure and organisation of the Labour Party (and not its manifesto) to determine what the policy of 'sexual equality'

actually means. What does this structure look like, locally and nationally? Well, its not a pretty sight: predominately male, middle class, and bureaucratic. Where there is 'working class' representation, it is still predominately male, and 'traditionally' exclusive of women, who make up the majority of working class people. Why is the image of the 'worker' still a male one? Domestic Labour and responsibilities towards children and the elderly mean that women are still neither fully recognised as wage earners or unemployed. Ninety percent of part time work is done by women, and they make up seventy-five percent of the 'low paid'.

And yet their economic and political status is virtually invisible. It is not enough to say that women do not get involved in the mechanics of Party structure and organisation, because they don't want to, when meetings are designed to suit the traditional male time-tables, habits, and organisational methods. Creche facilities would be a start.

In London, the GLC women's committee has been instrumental both in encouraging active support and political participation from women, and in broadening the minds of many Party members, who had not realised that unemployment, safety, housing and other social services were just as much women's issues as they were men's. The GLC, as an 'equal opportunities' employer has taken the lead in reversing discrimination against women, working class people, and racial minorities, with job sharing, positive discrimination, and the provision of child care facilities. The women's committee has worked closely with women across the community, encouraging needs and complaints to be voiced, organised through campaigning and educating - women outside the Party political structures have mobilised through action.

On a national level, the Womens Action Committee (WAC) of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy has been working since 1980 to secure greater power and representation for women within the Labour Party. Although their emphasis is on organisation - and the need to build a women's structure within the existing patriarchal one - they have drawn up a list of demands which has gathered support, at least, from the Party's more socialist elements. In order to open up the Party's structure to women, and ensure that radical policies are paid more than lip-service, they demand; (1) Women's Conference, and not the male dominated Labour Party Conference to elect the Women's Section of the NEC. (2) The tabling of motions by the Women's Conference, direct to the annual conference agenda. (3) At least one women candidate to be included on every parliamentary shortlist. Their aims, too, may shed some light on the Exeter Labour Party's refusal to affiliate to the WAC: "We will not rest until we have rebuilt the confidence and power of Labour Women; and until we have built an organisation in which Labour Women will democratically exercise power, thereby advancing the interests of a majority of the working classes, who are women - and doubly oppressed by our social, economic, and political system. We will not rest until the ideal of feminism - the goal that women shall not be defined politically, socially, and economically by their sex or their role in reproduction - is central to the socialist project".

It is up to the EC and the councillors to decide whether to advance or go back on its Party's responsibilities. But we will not rest...

Pat Marshall

Apartheid

An anti-apartheid resolution proposed by the Labour Party Young Socialists was passed with overwhelming support at the May GMC meeting. LPYS voiced a general feeling that it is time for rhetoric to be matched by action, where apartheid and South Africa are concerned, and time for the CLP to take action on anti-apartheid policy.

The resolution passed instructs, firstly, Exeter Labour Party to support a policy of 'no contact' with South Africa; and, secondly, the Labour Party contingent on the council to 'press vigorously' for this demand. This is taken from the precedent set by Sheffield City Council, which pledged: "that the council will campaign to end all links between the City of Sheffield and the apartheid regime of South Africa, utilising all social, political

and economic measures that are at the disposal of the authority".

In pursuit of this policy Sheffield Council has undertaken to; (1) purchase no goods which originate from South Africa and pursue this policy within the purchasing authorities in which the council is involved. (2) Withdraw investments held by the council in companies with South African interests. (3) Ensure that the city council is not officially represented at any function attended by representatives of the South African government or trade missions. (4) Discourage all economic links with South Africa, promoting better relations with the developing economies of the Third World. (5) Encourage the positive teaching of the history culture and struggles for self-determination of the African people. (6) Press the city libraries and schools not to make South African government propaganda available. (7) Promote public understanding of the situation in South Africa. (8) Withhold use of recreational facilities from any sporting or cultural event involving South African participants.

This list could be used as a starting point for Exeter City Council. The list certainly does not exhaust the possibilities for action under a policy of comprehensive sanctions against the racist regime. Consideration could and should for example, be given to the local connection with South African Rugby. An Exeter University Student (one of three students) has recently been selected for England's rugby tour of South Africa. The Rugby Football Union (RFU) has already turned its back on disapproval of the tour and the participants are willing to go. The local player told 'national Student' that the NUS campaign against student involvement in South African sport makes no difference, and that he is going 'to play rugby not politics'. Exeter University Guild of Students, the NUS Exeter Labour Party and Exeter City Council should all explain how apartheid introduces politics into sport. Undoubtedly it would be

argued that contact can achieve as much as boycott when it is quite clear that desegregation as there has been is the result of the boycott. There is also a special argument which applies to rugby, the last major sport in South Africa which has not been completely isolated: "It is an extremely important element in the preservation of the ethos of Afrikanerdom as every rugby player from abroad learns when he gets there. In short and without exaggeration, to maintain international contact in rugby ... is to serve the Afrikaner government respectability on a plate." The quote comes from Chris Laidlaw, who played rugby for New Zealand's multi-racial side in South Africa fourteen years ago. He now thinks he was wrong to go.

Exeter City Council must also support demonstrations against the proposed meeting between the South African Prime Minister, Mr Botha, and Mrs. Thatcher. The meeting is an attempt to reestablish South Africa's respectability in the West since its expulsion from the Commonwealth twenty-five years ago. Sanctions against South Africa must be applied comprehensively in order to be effective. Therefore, as well as boycotting the sporting arena and political meetings, economic investments must be withheld. The common argument against economic sanctions is that foreign investments supposedly advance African interests and improve wages and conditions. This is no more than a refined defence of slavery, which claims that slave owners provide food, shelter, and paternalism for the slaves and that abolition would make them economically worse off. When the white African income per capita is more than ten times the black income, however, the facts clearly disprove the proposition for investment.

Sanctions can only be successfully applied as part of the liberation struggle in its totality, which includes the armed struggle of the African National Congress. The ANC began to include the armed struggle in its strategy only after decades

of non-violent resistance, after it was declared an illegal organisation and after the Sharpeville massacre of 1960, when the regime made it clear that its own military strength would support its reign. The armed struggle must be supported. All our efforts will help reduce the conflict, save lives and reduce the regime's capacity to destroy. We must fight to eradicate apartheid: it will not disappear if we endorse it economically, politically, socially or culturally. Comprehensive sanctions must be the first step forward for Exeter City Council.

Kalbir Shukra

Following the general election of 1983 the Labour Party has begun to realise that it can no longer simply assume that it still has the 'youth vote' in its pocket. It has become increasingly obvious that vast numbers of young people have completely lost faith in the idea that any of the political parties, as they are presently constituted, could do much to change the grim realities of being young in Britain in the 1980s.

For this reason it can only be encouraging that the 1984 Labour Party Young Socialist Conference was the biggest ever with 369 delegates representing 322 branches. The clear feeling of the conference was that only a socialist Labour government could give hope to youth. Whilst there was fierce debate on many issues, particularly Ireland, Women's, Gay and Black rights, and NATO, the general feeling of the conference was perhaps summed up by a resolution on drug abuse which was passed without dissent.

Highlighting the high levels of heroin addiction among working class youth in areas like Glasgow and Merseyside, the resolution put forward a comprehensive plan to combat this problem; but in addition pointed out that 'only a socialist Labour government committed to ending inequality and poverty can rid this country of the evils of capitalism. In view of the dire situation facing working class youth, conference resolves to fight for the return of a socialist Labour government'. (IAN CLIFFORD)

The Pennsylvania/St. Davids branch meeting held on Thursday 10th May was more heavily attended than usual. Three matters caused dissention. The first was the election of new membership secretary after the departure from Exeter of a founding editor of Exeter Labour Briefing, Jeremy Clarke. John Shepherd, Exeter Party Chairperson, proposed Peter Perry, who had made his mark at the previous meeting by claiming that the miners' strike was unpopular, but then confused everybody by voting for the strike resolution. In his absence the little-known Peter Perry was elected by 14 to 13.

The second issue was the vacant GMC post, created by Clarke's departure. Shepherd jumped in to nominate a habitual non-attender, Peter Butler, for the post. In his absence Butler was defeated, 15 to 14, by Mark Wilkinson; an editor of Exeter Labour Briefing who has been heavily engaged in the local election campaign and the miners' struggle.

Finally, a proposed conference resolution calling on Labour MPs to live on a skilled workers' salary, and give the remainder to Labour Party funds was proposed by Martin Cair and seconded by Sarah Liebert. Despite opposition to this socialist principle by Dr. Shepherd and his bloc, the resolution was passed by 15 to 11. (The lower anti-socialist vote is explained by the premature departure of four members of Shepher's 'packing team').

Clearly, the politics of Pennsylvania/St. Davids is determined by whether Dr. Shepherd can cram the meeting with his middle class professional associates who are intent on blocking every socialist principle in sight. Many of these people did nothing in the local election cam-

paign, and most have attended no meetings this year. Theirs is not a unity based on an alternative socialist analysis; it is based on the destruction and pacification of socialism.

The meeting concluded with a rallying call from South Wales miners struggling against the Thatcher government. Around this issue we have, and should have, the right sort of unity.

Peter Bowing

Undoubtedly the miners' struggle is the most vital issue facing the Labour movement and the working class at present. Even in Exeter, far away from the nearest coalfield, the Labour Party is beginning to stir itself to provide the kind of help which the miners need from around Britain.

At the May GMC meeting, a resolution from Pennsylvania/St. Davids, proposed by Peter Bowing and seconded by Pete Kenny, called for the adoption of a strike bound pit and resolved to render what assistance we could. It was overwhelmingly passed. The Maerdy pit, last in the Rhondda Valley, has been adopted. In Pennsylvania/St. Davids, food to the value of £267 has so far been collected, and taken up to Maerdy. Some families there are living off £11 a week, and so food is their major requirement. Branch secretaries around the CLP have been contacted, and we hope that the response from party members will be enthusiastic.

South Wales miners have been in Exeter addressing meetings, including Pennsylvania/St. Davids branch and a public meeting organised by the Trades Council. But the most important reason for their presence in the South West has been the influx of imported coal through Teignmouth and Exmouth. Picketlines have been established at these docksides; but during the editors' recent visits to them it was apparent that not enough local support has been forthcoming to mount a really effective picket line. We encourage all Labour Party members who have the opportunity to join the pickets, and demonstrate their solidarity with this most vital struggle.

A meeting of Exeter LPYS was held on Wednesday, 16th May. The meeting heard that the YS files had been illegally seized by police (see article inside). Ian Clifford aptly addressed the meeting on "The Police: The Repressive Arm of the Capitalist State". He stressed the link between the capitalist crisis and growing state power; power designed to crush working class resistance. The meeting also heard a report from YS National Conference which was the highest attended ever.

The year started with much doom and gloom within CND following the arrival of Cruise Missiles. In addition, those with a sense of history were fearful that the decline of CND in the sixties would be repeated with a split between those favouring the use of civil disobedience to back immediate radical demands and those preferring more 'respectable' watered down policies. Fortunately, due to a groundswell of pressure from grass roots activists, CND seems to have averted a crisis by backing a national demonstration and mass direct action on 9th June to coincide with Reagan's visit. Of particular interest to Labour Party members is the Labour CND conference held recently, where calls to direct attention to campaigning for a nuclear-free NATO coming from Labour's shadow defence secretary, Denzil Davis, and backed by a resolution from Birmingham were resoundingly defeated. This is a crucial time for CND. We need to fight within CND and the Labour Party for unilateralism and to insist that there is no fudge on the issue of NATO. In addition, we must mobilise people around the phrase 'US bases out of Europe' and ensure that there is a massive turn-out in London on 9th June. (IAN CLIFFORD)