1992

SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING

No 1

No Witch-hunt! No expulsions!

The Labour Party should be poised to win the next general election by an overwhelming majority, elected on its most radical program ever. But the opinion polls show that the Tories who are actually putting into practice their most radical policies ever, are way out ahead, with Margaret Thatcher being considered a far more effective leader than Michael Foot.

The right wing in the Labour Party will tell you that Foot is unpopular because he is seen as a man of the left, and because he has refused to deal with 'infiltrators' in the party. Now that he is taking action against 'Militant', the argument goes, all will be well. This is but a smoke-screen for an extremely well-planned campaign, not only against the 'Militant', but against all the policy gains made by the left of the Labour Party over the last few years. It is the right that is threatening a Labour victory, by fudging policies which they oppose. The Healeyites in the party are very busy trying to persuade those who hold the purse strings that the next Labour government will pose no real threat to existing financial institutions, nor to traditional defence deals, particularly with the USA. In order to do this they have introduced the bureaucratic measure of the register, clearly one which paves the way for witch-hunts and expulsions. This attack, seemingly aimed at a small and sectarian section of the Labour Party, is in reality only the beginning of an attack on the left as a whole. The press are far more frightened of the broad-based militant left-wingers in the CLPs and the trade unions, who would probably call themselves Bennites, than they are of the 'Militant'. Unilateral nuclear disarmament and withdrawal from the EEC are the key issues, supported and fought for by the majority of activists - and these are the policies that would force a future Labour government to tread a very different path from those taken previously. To put it another way: Tony Benn's statements cause the Daily Express far greater apoplexy than Ted Grant's ut pian ramblings.

Despite the decisions taken at union conferences before September, against the witch-hunt, union leaders in the party still used the block vote, either naively or cynically, to ensure that Conference voted in favour of the register. What Conference did not vote for was a witch-hunt and expulsions. Speaker after speaker, in favour of the register, stressed that they were against witch-hunts. Southampton Labour Party reaffirmed our policy against expulsions and witch-hunts before Conference, and it is up to us, drawing on the support of rank and file trade unionists to make sure that expulsions do not take place here. If other constituencies do the same, any attempt at expulsions will fail. But we must base our fight on the premise that

pto

FORUM on the politics of Tony Benn

Speakers: John Denham, PPC for Southampton, Itchin
Alan Freeman, Author of "The Benn Heresy", and a Socialist Challenge supporter
Steve Jefferies, Socialist Workers Party

at the October Books Festival, Argyle Road F.E. Centre,
Sunday 14th November. Debate starts 4 pm.

1992

any witch-hunt is an attack on the left as a whole; our campaign must have broad-based support among the youth of the party, and in the unions. We should note the success of the Labour Movement conference against the witch-hunt organised on 30th October by Hackney CLP, and aim to link up with their initiatives. We should also back the regional conferences being organised by 'Militant', providing they are genuinely representative, and not simply 'Militant' rallies.

It is vital to see this fight as a political fight to defend hard-won policies, such as unilateral nuclear disarmament, against the attacks of the right wing, who are prepared to disrupt the Labour Party, rather than come to power on such policies. We must not be side-tracked into a simple 'defend Militant' line; we must fight expulsions all the way, and unity in action is our only hope of success.

Wyn Jeffery

...introducing Southampton Labour Briefing

This is the first issue of what we hope will be a regular monthly bulletin, produced by supporters of the weekly socialist newspaper "Socialist Challenge". "Socialist Challenge" provides a serious and systematic analysis of the major political, industrial and social issues in Britain and internationally. We campaign in the trade unions for the return of a Labour government firmly committed to carrying out the radical socialist policies adopted by the Labour Party over the last few years.

"Socialist Challenge" supporters organise monthly discussion meetings. Recent topics have included Poland, Ireland, Central America, Women's Liberation, and how socialists should work in the unions.

If you would like further information about our activities , we can be contacted on Southampton 39851.

Solidarity's struggle continues.....

As the left in the Labour party faces the wrath of the Foot leadership for supporting Tony Benn against Denis the menace, the left in Poland is suffering the persecution and banning of their trade union Solidarnosc.

Foot, frightened by the press campaign which threatens to rob him of a Labour victory in the election, is prepared to suffocate dissent. Jaruzelski, in the shadow of the Soviet Union and similarly afraid for his career, is determined to crush the Polish workers movement.

The imposition of state/party controlled unions (Jaruzelski's register) is meeting stubborn resistance however. The new unions are being boycotted everywhere. At the October Revolution printing plant in Warsaw, which employs several thousand workers, 11 joined. At the URSUS plant in Gorzow, out of 5,000 workers, 90 joined; at the FSC truck factory in Lublin, 33 out of nearly 10,000; at WSK in Swidnik, 20 out of 9,000; and at Nowa Huta, where the new 'union' has offices and controls the plant radio, 100 joined out of 40,000.

Now throughout the country, the preparations are going on for the next test of strength- the general strike called for November 10th.

The stakes are very large and they are far from confined to Poland. The struggle of the Polish workers for democratic rights, for trade-union rights, and for a self-managed republic based on the socialisation of the means production and their control by workers councils is a struggle for socialism. It is part of our struggle. Victory for the Polish workers would give a powerful impetus for other workers victories(and extra-parliamentary ones at that!). A defeat for them would be a defeat for us as well.

Incredibly, the right wing in this country, inside and outside the Labour Party, are able to get away with slandering the Bennite left as being some kind of new stalinist group. Our response can only be to redouble solidarity with Solidarity, to expose the Labour bureaucracy's reluctance to give active support to those resisting the Polish bureaucracy, and to demonstrate our commitment to all struggles for democratic workers control.

Ian Parker