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SOUTHAMPTON LABOUR BRIEFING

No 2

THE WAGES OF UNITY IS EXPULSION

Last Wednesday the NEC had a choice: to make a Labour government safe for capitalism, or not. Their preference is now clear, as is their means. The means can perhaps be construed as the ultimate aim for party democracy - that the policies of the rank and file and those of the parliamentary leadership match exactly. The catch, however is thatthose members whose views don't at present reflect those of the PLP and the shadow cabinet will have to sacrifice their membership in order for this interesting form of "democratic centalism" to work. A Labour Party committed to socialist policies is being driven over a cliff by the atrociously pure "Lemmingist" dogma of the right wing. Since the CLPs persistently refuse to be reduced to a Conservative-style supporters' club, the creation of a narrowly right wing party requires the silencing of all who oppose the class-collaborationist policies of the right wing, namely the advocates of socialism.

Last Wednesday's NEC marks a new move in the pogrom of the left. The basis on which the expulsion of "Militant" is to take place has been changed. The original NEC document, outlining the case for a register, named "Militant" as being ineligible to register, without offering them the opportunity to apply. Having received legal advice that this might be contrary to natural justice, the NEC set about another test to which "Militant" could be put - one they felt confident it could not meet. This shows very clearly the motives of the NEC: this is not an organisational move, but a political one aiming to remove the influence of the "Militant", and eventually other tendencies that fight for the adoption of socialist policies.

In a move away from the idea of a register, and towards the proscribed list, and a witch-hunt, the NEC will shortly consider whether "Militant" is eligible to affiliate to the Labour Party as an organisation, despite the fact that no such application has been submitted. It is probable that the NEC will deem anyone in any way sympathetic to "Militant" to be a member, and therefore liable to be expelled. This could rapidly lead to a situation in which it would be impossible for any party member to sell or even be seen reading a copy of "Militant" and prepare for the discrediting of anyone proposing a motion including such policies as nationalisation. The new NEC proposals therefore go much further than the old, and present a far greater danger to the left of the party, preparing the ground for the intimidation or expulsion of a very wide layer of activists, notably all those who publish their own newspapers and magazines.

In order to ensure that the leadership controls the membership and not vice versa, the right wing need to undermine party democracy. Announcing that the removal of "Militant" was 'not a one-off job' Golding is preparing to reverse all the gains of the last two years, and indeed of long-established democratic rights, starting with the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy. It is, vital that all constituencies and affiliated trade unions fight back. In Bermondsey the local Party are asserting their right to choose their own candidate, and resisting the

attempts of the NEC to impose a candidate or shortlist. In Hornsey the Party has voted to accept Tariq Ali as a member, and demanded to know the basis on which the NEC wish to remove him, despite a threat of disbandent if they do not comply. The disbanding of Hornsey Labour Party can only damage Labour's prospects in the coming general election, despite the NEC's assertions that it is acting solely in the electoral interests of the Party. All those who are fighting for a Labour government committed to socialist policies should defend the CLPs under attack, and be prepared to follow them if necessary. On no account should be the NEC be allowed to isolate the CLPs that are in the front line.

The Labour Against the Witch-hunt (LAW) campaign, formed out of a conference called by Hackney CLP, is attempting to organise for the defence of parties such as Hornsey, and thereby the whole left, on the widest possible basis. It is unfortunate that the "Militant" dominated Labour Steering Committee against the Witch-hunt have declined to fully co-operate with LAW.

Southampton Labour Party should continue to support the campaigns of LAW and the Labour Steering Committee, in carrying out its declared policy of fighting witch-hunts and expulsions.

Gareth Narbed
Richard Correll

DEFEND ABORTION RIGHTS

Lord Robertson of Oakbridge, a 52 year old merchant banker, has introduced a new anti-abortion bill into the House of Lords. The bill aims to greatly restrict the grounds for abortion by slightly altering the wording of the 1967 Abortion Act. Section one of the Act would then read: "that the risk of pregnancy would involve serious risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or if injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or any existing family is substantially greater than if pregnancy were terminated." (Amendments shown underlined.)

Normally a bill from the Lords would have little chance of becoming law without being given government time. But the bill coincides with the ballot for private member's bills. Heading the ballot were well-known anti-abortionists such as John Corrie, Norman St.John Stevas, and Ray Witney. If one of them was to take on Lord Robertson's bill, it would shorten the parliamentary procedure considerably.

If this happens Southampton Labour Party, in co-operation with the Women's Centre, the LPYS, Trades Council, and local trade unions, must mount a campaign to defend a woman's right to choose. As an immediate first step all members should be informed of the very real threat that the 1967 Act now faces. Abortion rights have been under attack before, from the Benyon, White and Corrie bills, and from the changes made in the documentation required by government. On each occasion they have been defended, but we must not be complacent. If necessary we must mobilise the whole Labour Movement to support a woman's right to choose.

Mike Tucker

ABOUT THIS BULLETIN

This is the second issue of a monthly bulletin produced by Southampton supporters of the weekly socialist newspaper "Socialist Challenge". We intend the bulletin to cover the most important issues facing the Labour movement locally and nationally. For further information on our policy and local activities, phone Southampton 39851.