CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

No 34, September 1987, 50p. sold with 'Campaign Group News' or 'Labour Briefing', 25p. sold separately.

Budget special:

LABOUR GROUP LOOKS FOR 7% CUTS!

A major underspending in this year's Council budget is on the cards after the 12 September meeting of the Labour Group.

Leader Dick Knowles has given the green light to committee chairs to find the maximum 'savings' in this year's accounts. The 'Budget Group', the semi-secret committee of key councillors that runs financial strategy, has instructed committees to propose 'savings' and ensure "there is no unnecessary expenditure. They must not call such 'savings' 'cuts'.

Although the left has no sympathisers on the Budget Group, an 'informed source' has, for reasons best understood in the light of the battle to succeed Knowles as leader, kept 'Campaign Briefing' abreast of developments. The principal budget objective is to keep next year's rate rise to single figures. The Chief Executive and Treasurer have been instructed to do a 'value for money' exercise in Social Services, Education and Housing. The Budget Group resolution also calls for the Policy Sub-Committee to deliver to the Budget Group by the end of September an analysis of priorities to enable 'savings' to be made.

Without 'savings' the present level of expenditure would require a substantial rate rise. To keep the rise to the single figure target means making 'savings' (for which, of course, one can really read 'cuts') of 7% in the spending otherwise needed to maintain current services. Most likely targets for savings are Education and Social Services, followed by Housing.

The villain of the piece is, of course, the Thatcher Government. But many Councillors, not all from the left, are increasingly angry about the spending priorities of the current leadership.

'Campaign Briefing' is not publishing the names of Councillors who spoke out against the leadership as the experience of the past year shows our current power brokers are so worried about their declining authority that any sustained critics are rapidly despatched to the back benches, deselected in backstreet coups or expelled from the group. Nevertheless one Councillor slammed the current priorities as "putting glitter before services". Another condemned the way the Economic Development Committee had handed out tens of thousands of pounds to a company already making annual profits in excess of one million, and to another company whose directors earn £28,000 a year. One grant had been deferred because the Tories had pointed out the company concerned could get the same help from a bank. A further Councillor drew attention to the ironic fact that £6,000 had been spent on a 'Times' advertisement saying 'Even JR would be at home in Birmingham', while the same paper carried a news item reporting Birmingham as bottom of the league for education. Yet another revealed Neighbourhood Offices were virtually the Treasurer's bottom priority despite having been a major vote winner in the 1983 Council Election victory.

The debate about priorities will continue. There must be a strong campaign from the left to put basic public services back at the top of the agenda for a socialist council.

PRESS WHIPS UP RACIST HYSTERIA ON 'RACISM AWARENESS TRAINING'

In response to a carefully planned press release by Jill Knight, Conservative MP for Edgbaston, the Evening Mail and Birmingham Post launched a front page assault at the end of August on the City Council's Racism Awareness Training. Calling for an end to the training programme, the papers reiterated claims by Knight that some Council workers attending the courses had later required psychiatric help.

Predictably, the issue was seized upon by a number of national papers. The Daily Mail excelled itself with a front page headline on 'Race Brainwashing' and sensationalised daily stories supposedly describing the course.

In the middle of this hysteria it was announced that an industrial tribunal had found Birmingham City Council guilty of racial discrimination against Margaret McKain (see article in this issue). The press, so outraged by the alleged treatment of white Council workers on the Racism Awareness Training (RAT) courses, could find no outrage at her treatment. Most papers did not even cover the story.

This lack of concern is not suprising as the aim of press attacks on RAT is to push back even further the last remnants of the Council's anti-racist policies. Already some papers have attacked a project to take anti-racist education into predominantly white schools. More attacks are to be expected.

The response of Dick Knowles to this press and Tory onslaught has been inadequate although it is a small mercy that he did not promise to immediately end the RAT courses. It is not enough to say Birmingham is a multi-racial city when it is clear the Tories are intending to use the racist card again and again in the run up to next year's local election. His response also rings hollow following the abolition of the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee, given the reported intention to scrap the Positive Action Unit in Social Services department and when he also states that the case of Ms. McKain was an isolated incident.

A clear lesson of this is that it is a disaster to backtrack on anti-racism; the Tory press will always bay for more. What is needed is a strong defence of the need for racial equality and a demonstration that the Council is striving to achieve this.

However, in conducting such a defence it would be wrong to be uncritical of RAT which has been criticised by many on the left for concentrating on changing individual attitudes instead of changing the material conditions faced by Black people and the actions of people in racist institutions. RAT has been seen as a panacea to racism by many Labour Council's and has diverted many Black activists from more fruitful anti-racist activities.

While these criticisms of RAT as a strategy are correct, there will still be a need for some form of race equality training for staff as part of any anti-racist strategy. Such training would need to involve setting race equality targets in each trainee's particular work area rather than just attempting to change attitudes and would need to avoid "guilt tripping". It is true that there will always be people who refuse to recognise the racism in their day-to-day work practices and who will react angrily to any suggestion that their actions are racist, but "guilt tripping" does not break down such resistance. What is needed is a commitment from the top, from a Council's political leadership and its senior officers, that race equality procedures and targets be adhered to even by staff who do not see their neccessity.

It is precisely such a commitment which is lacking in Birmingham as evidenced by the McKain case. The discrimination against McKain in the Department at the heart of the Council took place despite the existence of equal opportunity procedures and RAT courses. There is a clear need for more Black and anti-racist Councillors to take a stand on such issues.

In conclusion, it is neccesary to draw out the national context of the press hysteria on Birmingham's RAT courses. These attacks form part of a more general whipping up of racism by the media including the reporting on the Notting Hill Carnival, a front page attack by the Daily Express on Ealing Council for employing 1,400 new workers including "100 Equality Snoopers", the hounding of the Bristol Black activist, Kuomba Balugon and the coverage of the Dewsbury parents who are protesting against their children being sent to a school with a majority of Asian pupils.

This racism is preparing the ground for the Tories coming legislative package. The Local Government Bill and the Poll tax are necessary to prevent "loony-left" Councils from spending all your money on Black people. The Eduction Act is necessary to allow schools to opt out of local authority control and to allow parental choice so that your (white) kids don't have to go to schools dominated by Black kids. (This argument was outlined explicitly by Ray Honeyford in an article in the Daily Mail on 4th September.)

So when Dick Knowles and company refuse to confront racism, they are not only betraying Black people. They are also betraying white working class people as they have no answer to the ideological preparation for some of the worst Tory attacks yet.

Lal.

CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

SOCIAL

Saturday 10 October, 9 pm.
18 South Road, Erdington

TRADE UNION SANCTIONS AGAINST APARTHEID

The events of the South African National Union of Mineworkers strike provide socialists in Britain with a sharp reminder of the reasons why international solidarity is so crucial for the struggle in South Africa.

The NUM sustained a three wseek strike involving over 200,000 miners - an extraordinary achievement considering the conditions where the mine bosses sacked thousands of workers and tried to cut off the hostels to starve the miners into submission. The threat of further sackings and state intervention eventually persuaded the NUM leaders to call off the dispute. Many miners were killed and more injured by the mine owners own goon squads during the strike. The state security forces were eagerly waiting in the wings.

The Black working class in South Africa does have the power to overthrow apartheid as well as improve its own wages and conditions - but the bosses and the state have all the armed forces and the migrant labour system on their side. We can help to alter the balance of forces if we can deliver effective solidarity.

September provides a number of opportunities for activists to discuss what can be done. On 19 September, a local labour movement conference has been called by the Anti-Apartheid Movement locally. This was previewed in last month's 'Campaign Briefing.'

On the same day, for those interested in stopping South African coal imports the NUM's conference in Sheffield will provide a forum.

Then Saturday 26 September sees the second National Meeting of the Campaign for Trade Unions Sanctions Against Apartheid (CTUSAA). The 70 delegates at last year's meeting agreed that a specific organisation was needed to campaign for trade union boycotts of South African goods and services. It was felt the strategy of the Anti-Apartheid Movement (AAM) relied too heavily on persuading governments to impose sanctions when the real power lay with the working class. It was also agreed to work in the AAM to push these policies. The meeting will review progress discussing whether there is still need for such a campaign and allowing trade unionists to report on and debate achievements or setbacks in the workplace.

Another matter likely to be discussed is the question of building direct links with fellow trade unionists in South Africa - an issue which has been controversial in the solidarity movement until now. But with a number of unions such as the NUR and NUM strengthening their links, with some branches involved in twinning, and with COSATU leader Jay Naidoo making clear on his last visit to Britain that COSATU wants to encourage more links and solidarity as long as there are 'no strings', this issue is increasingly important.

The CTUSAA Steering Committee looks forward to seeing you there. It is best to get delegated, but observers are welcome as is anyone volunteering to help with the creche.

Sue Thomas

SECOND CONFERENCE FOR TRADE UNION SANCTIONS AGAINST APARTHEID

SATURDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 1987

TRADE UNION SANCTIONS AGAINST APARTHEID

11.00 am - 5.15 pm Carrs Lane Church Centre Birmingham.
Delegates £3.00, Observers £1.50
Contact 17 Porden Road, London SW2 5SA 01- 274 7722 x 2975

SANCTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICAN COAL

Sat 19 September, 10.00 - 5.00
Sheffield City Town Hall
Details from Anti-Apartheid Movement

BIRMINGHAM ANTI-APARTHEID LABOUR MOVEMENT CONFERENCE

Saturday 19 September 9.30
Council House, Birmingham
with ANC SWAPO COSATU etc.

RESOLUTIONS FROM BIRMINGHAM TO NATIONAL LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE - WHAT THE PARTIES MADE THEIR PRIORITIES

This year's list of resolutions to Conference shows a widespread range of topics. No one issue dominates like nuclear power last year or nuclear disarmament in the past. This spread is reflected in the submissions from Birmingham parties.

As usual, there have been parties unwilling to take advantage of their right to a resolution. This year they are Yardley, Small Heath and Erdington. In the latter case a resolution was sent to the GC but was voted down. In the case of Yardley, no discussion was organised despite a resolution on Black Sections from Yardley Branch. A similar fate awaited Yardley's submission on 'One Member One Vote' (OMOV) .

Last year saw Birmingham as the only area besides Liverpool with a number of resolutions against the witch hunting of socialists. This year there are two: one from Ladywood on the suspension of Phil Murphy and a more general one from Perry Barr.

Res. No:	Constituency:	Resolution:
7	Perry Barr	More campaigning, more campaign materials, stop attacks on members.
40	Selly Oak	The need for Women's Committees in every local authority. Support for Women's Ministry.
85	Northfield	Support for OMOV
101	Edgbaston	One employed post only for MPs.
364	Sparkbrook	Equal treatment under the tax laws for women.
376	Hall Green	Child sex abuse.
450	Sutton Coldfield	UN force to defend Mozambique from South African aggression.
479	Hodge Hill	Safe toys.
486	Ladywood	Reinstatement of Phil Murphy to the Labour Group.
	Erdington	None
	Yardley	None
	Small Heath	None

Selly Oak prioritised the need for Women's Committees in every area over defending two of its members under attack. It also came out in favour of OMOV. This must be the first time for a long while that it has found common ground with Northfield whose conference resolution is on OMOV.

But we must record a breakthrough in Sparkbrook, where the party dipped its toe into the water of equal opportunities with support for the gender equality under the tax laws. Elsewhere we have left wing resolutions from Edgbaston, Hall Green and Sutton Coldfield, the latter despite supporting OMOV. Hodge Hill's resolution was on safe toys.

Once again we have no mention of Ireland. Remember the handwringing during the hungerstrikes about how we had neglected the Irish Question? It looks like we need another upheaval in the north before our memories are jogged again.

Bob Whitehead.

"WE ARE NOT CRIMINALS," SAY DETAINEES ON BOARD 'EARL WILLIAM'

"We are not criminals." That is the message from the detainees on board the 'Earl William', which is moored off Harwich Quay. This prison ship, chartered from Sealink Ltd., currently holds more than sixty men and women from Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Iran and other countries.

They have fled these countries and are seeking asylum in Britain. Instead of receiving asylum, however, they are held without trial in appalling conditions while their 'cases are reviewed'.

Altogether, hundreds of such detainees are held across Britain. Meanwhile more than sixty deportations of Black people take place each month.

All are victims of the racist immigration laws of this country which are to be even further tightened by the Tories later in the year.

Support for anti-deportation campaigns must continue to be won within the labour movement in order to challenge such laws. The local campaign of Metso Moncrieffe recently reached a successful conclusion when the Home Office granted him leave to stay. Many other campaigns continue, however.

Supporters of the Som Raj, Baba Bakhtaura, Lisa Huen and Parem Jit Defence Campaigns travelled from Birmingham to join other protesters on a picket of the 'Earl William' on Saturday 5 September.

Their aim was to provide support for the detainees and draw attention to the plight of those on board. It is hoped that the pickets will continue every Saturday until the Government frees the detainees either into the custody of friends and family or grants them permanent asylum.

Julie Frew.

'SUPERPRIX' - HOW THE LAW-ABIDING LABOUR COUNCIL BROKE THE LAW

In the past, Dick Knowles has often stressed the importance of a Labour Council staying within the law - not for him or the Labour Group the path of Liverpool or Lambeth Councils. It is surprising then to consider just how the Council broke the law with this year's Superprix Road Race - a priority for City spending over housing, sociaol services and education.

The Race itself is allowed only by a special Act of Parliament since racing is strictly prohibited on the mainland highway. But not all parts of this Act are observed.

For example, Section 9 (1) limits the erection of the circuit armco barriers and mesh catch fences to the 10 days prior to the race and requires their removal by the fifth day after. Any motorist will have noticed that work in fact starts two months before and goes on far longer than five days after.

Section 10 (1) puts the same limitations on building stands, footbridges etc. But the widely reported traffic jams in Bristol Street in particular were the result of such work being carried out without legal authority far longer than ten days before the race. Again, it was reported that one firm was going to erect footbridges in one day this year instead of the five weeks it took last year. Last year was therefore illegal. The report stated the time-saving was possible because foundations were left from last year. This too is probably illegal as there is no power to leave on the streets beyond the relevant period any structure other than devices for fixing barriers and catch fences into the ground.

As the Council is aware, expenditure may only be incurred if there is legal authority. Authority for the Superprix is the Act. Expenditure incurred for work carried out outside the time period allowed for in the Act is therefore unlawful.

There is another requirement the City has kept quiet about. Last year the City exhibited posters saying the organisers accepted no liability for injuries etc. But Section 20 (1) makes the City absolutely liable for any injury or damage caused by the race or preparations . This is another reason the City's ignoring of the legal time periods is worrying. It only has powers during those periods for most of the things it is doing outside that time. The absolute liability for damage is limited to 'exercise of the powers of this Act'. This could give rise to the interesting scenario of the City disclaiming liability for something because it was acting outside its powers in acting outside the terms of the Act.

The are just some examples of the way the law has been broken. There are many others, albeit less important. The question that arises is: who is responsible for ensuring the City obeys its own Act of Parliament? As an enforcer of laws, surely the City must have an obligation to be seen to be lawful itself. Why otherwise should anyone obey the City's law enforcement role with regard to Rates, Planning or the like?

COUNCIL FOUND GUILTY OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION BY INDUSTRIAL TRIBUNAL

Most Black people think equal opportunities policies are wool the white establishment uses to pull over their eyes. With Margaret McKain, Birmingham Council proved it. Her case shows the gulf between the image of concern for equal opportunities presented by the City and the reality underneath.

An Industrial Tribunal judged in favour of Ms McKain's charge of racial discrimination against the city after they failed to appont her Officer in Charge of Secretarial Services in the Chief Executive's Office. A less qualified white woman was appointed after Ms McKain had been marked down on subjectively assessed factors. This happened despite the City's proclaimed desire for racial equality.

It shows how pathological racism is when white officers used their power to define Ms McKain as inferior to whites despite evidence to the contrary. It shows how pathological racism is when they decided to reject the talent and contributions she could bring to the office because she is Black.

Isn't this contradictory in an authority which has declared it wants more Black people in City employment? No. No, because the message the leadership gives is contradictory because at the same time it victimises anti-racists like C'llr Phil Murphy. They want to get rid of discrimination they say; instead they get rid of the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee.

The mistake the Labour leaders make is that they believe racism is marginal to the way the Council and other white establishments operate. In fact it is central.

Birmingham Black Section makes these proposals;

* compensation for Ms McKain;
* suspension of the appointing officers pending investigation;
* the removal of the Personnel Officer concerned from that department;
* direct Black involvement in the recruiting process;
* a complaints procedure for Black people who fail to be appointed, with letters explaining why applicants were turned down;
* sanctions against officers found deliberately discriminating;
* anti-racist education formulated by Black people for City Council recruiters and staff.

The City must shift from its current position to anti-racism, an attack on racist ideology and practices. This must take place not just inside the Council but amongst the general public as well. It requires the reinstatement of the Race Committee with a substantial budget and Councillors, with officer support, who are committed to change.

Simon Hinds (Birmingham Labour Party Black Section)

E=Q=U=A=L OPPORTUNITIES

65%

RE-INSTATE THE RACE RELATIONS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE WOMEN'S COMMITTEES

The September meeting of the campaign planned a future public meeting with prominent speakers, to further the campaign's aim towards persuading the Labour Group on the City Council to follow Labour Party policy (as per the National Executive Advisory document, and supported by Neil Kinnock!) by re-convening the Women's Committee, and the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee

A lobby of the next Labour Group meeting was planned for the Council House at 1.30, p.m, on Saturday 12th September. Support for the campaign is being sought from M.P.s such as Jo Richardson, as Shadow Minister for Women. Jo Richardson, and other M.P.s, are to be lobbied by Constituency Labour Party Annual Conference delegates from Birmingham, at the Conference in Brighton at the end of September. Delegates are also asked to approach appropriate fringe meetings at Conference to ask if they can speak briefly, to rally wider support for the campaign. Edgbaston Constituency delegate to Conference, Pauline Purnell (tel ; 422-1366) is co-ordinating this. If you are going to be at Conference and wish to help please contact her.

The campaign still needs more sponsors, as administration is eating away at the funds. Sponsorship forms are available from Geraldine Egan, Trades Council, 7 Frederick Street, Birmingham B1 3HE (tel ; 236-8323).

The next meeting of the campaign is on Wednesday 7th October at 7.30, p.m, at the Summerfield Centre, with a speaker from a local authority with an active Women's Committee. Come to the meeting and help get Birmingham's re-instated, along with the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee.

Pauline Purnell.

SUMMERFIELD RESOLVES TO GO FORWARD ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT ISSUES

Recently, many comrades who have attended Summerfield meetings have complained the meetings have been bogged down in internal matters, and in discussing defensive responses to right wing attacks. To try to change this and to develop a strategy for the future direction of the group, (open to all Labour Party members) a meeting is to be held on Saturday 3rd. October at 11.00, a.m, at the Summerfield Centre.

Summerfield's focus is on local government issues, and specifically the way they affect the policy of Birmingham City Council, and in turn the relevance they have on people's everyday lives in Birmingham. An M.P. has been invited to speak at the meeting on 3rd. October on the further draconian Thatcher government legislation affecting local authorities, soon to be introduced in parliament. Comrades can then hear for themselves about some of the problems that are coming locally in Birmingham from this local government legislation. There will also be a local speaker on housing in Birmingham.

The main aim of the meeting, however, is to hear from you on these issues and about the way you think Summerfield should go forward. Contributions and participation will be encouraged at the meeting.

Help Summerfield go forward in a positive way in order to counter the Thatcher attack on local authorities and the people of Birmingham! Help counter the right-wing controlled Labour Group's arguments for cuts in vital services! Come to Summerfield on Saturday 3rd. October!

NEXT MEETING:

Saturday 3 October
11 am.

Summerfield Community Centre.

MP invited plus local speaker on housing.

CAMPAIGN BRIEFING

'Campaign Briefing' meets on the second Monday of every month. All Labour Party members are welcome to attend the meetings and take part in the discussions. Telephone (021-) 551 9174 for details of time and venue.

This month's 'Campaign is slightly later than usual to enable us to cover the recalled District Party AGM and the Labour Group meeting.

For reasons of space we have had to withold until next month's issue part 2 of 'Tales From The City Council - The Sandwell Saga' which deals with the Education Department.

Articles, letters, comments etc. are welcome. Publishing an article doesn't imply that 'Campaign Briefing' necessarily agrees with it entirely. Please send any articles or letters to; 48 Thornhill Road, Birmingham, B21 9BS.

CITY'S BID TO MANAGE 'WORK FOR DOLE' SCHEME

On Wednesday 29 June, the City Council's Continuing Education Sub-Committee held a special meeting to consider saying yes to the Manpower Services Commission (MSC) that Birmingham Council should become an agent for the Job Training Scheme (JTS). They agreed to compromise and investigate the viability of becoming an agent and to take a final decision on 10 September.

The JTS was launched by the MSC in ten pilot areas at the end of 1986. Before any evaluation had been undertaken on this new venture the scheme was launched nationally in April 1987. For those readers not familiar with constant MSC switches, this new initiative is, in reality 'Work for Dole'.

The scheme is aimed at 18 - 26 year olds who have been unemployed for more than six months. It is therefore the latest way of removing people from the unemployment statistics. The trainees who agree to the package of training and work based learning for a three to twelve month period receive the same amount of benefit as they did when registered unemployed. Conveniently, they are outside the protection of Health and Safety, Race Relations and Sex Discrimination legislation.

Studies in the pilot areas illustrate the diabolical nature of the scheme. For example;

- it is used as job substitution;
- no training leads to recognised vocational qualification;
- people entering JTS have been returned to the dole queues because the Managing Agent cannot find placements for the work experience (employers are expected to pay £15 to the Managing Agent for the privilege of exploiting the unfortunate trainees);
- Managing Agents are also dropping out due to financial difficulties in operating the scheme.

On that Wednesday, the Labour Council decided to examine the possibility of becoming a Managing Agent in the face of much opposition from the Labour and Trade Union movement.

Nationally, the TUC formally withdrew support for JTS in June. All regional TUCs have passed resolutions against JTS. NALGO, CPSA, TGWU, USDAW, ASTMS, TASS, NUPE, NATFHE and CSU have said no. Many local authorities have also rejected JTS.

Locally, NATFHE has asked its members in all colleges and they have said no. NALGO has written to the city stating that if it goes ahead "it is inevitable that NALGO branches must consider taking industrial action". The Trades Council has an active policy of opposition and an anti-JTS campaign. The Birmingham Public Service Committee which brings together all the unions working in local government is also opposed.

As the City had indicated it was consulting with interested bodies on this issue, the Trades Council and the Public Services Union Liaison Committee prepared a joint report on the proposals. This clear and comprehensive report outlines the main objections to JTS;

- it explains the background to the scheme;
- it shows JTS's connection with the USA's Workfare;
- it catalogues union and local authority opposition;
- it details the response of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities;
- it examines the evidence of studies in pilot areas;
- it explores the Birmingham scheme and its implications;
- it questions the financial realism of the City entering such a scheme.

Both bodies are very clear in their stance. They are opposed to JTS, they are against Birmingham becoming a Managing Agent and they are committed to supporting any union which refuses to co-operate with the scheme. Instead, they support quality training initiatives for the unemployed that provides skill / vocational training that leads to recognised qualifications and jobs.

Given the local position, the eyes of Labour Councillors are on the TUC Congress, given the slightly ambiguous position of the TUC General Council in August. This is why Trades Council calls on trade unionists to take a boycott position. It will strengthen the argument of trade unionists and Labour Party activists and add resolve to Councillors opposing the scheme.

If local authorities like Birmingham say no, it may sound the death knell for JTS. Thousands of long-term unemployed will not then be subjected to this "work for dole" scheme.

To help you can;

- buy a copy of the report, 50p from the Trades Council, 7 Frederick Street, telephone 236 1240;
- get your union and Labour Party branch to buy copies;
- get your councillors to oppose JTS;
- help make sure your union supports the boycott position at TUC Conference;
- support the Trades Council Anti-JTS Campaign - details from Centre for the Unemployed, 448 Stratford Road, B11, tel; 771 0871 and get your union and Labour Party branch affiliated.

The unemployed in this city deserve better than JTS from a Labour Council. Don't sell the unemployed short.

Geraldine Egan, President of Trades Council, observer to Public Service Union Liaison Committee (in a personal capacity).

REGIONAL PARTY APPALLED AT SCRAPPING WOMEN'S COMMITTEE

Dick Knowles will have known at the time that it was a political blunder to scrap the Women's Committee and dump three popular women as committee chairs. He will have further grounds for his fears following the last meeting of the Regional Executive Committee (REC).

The REC, traditionally dominated by the region's right wing trade union machine has condemned the Council's action. At the 11 July meeting, the REC carried a resolution stating: "We are appalled at the action of the Birmingham Labour Group, only days before the General Election, to abolish the Women's Committee and to remove three women chairs of committees. We believe this made the task of winning the women's vote in the West Midlands extremely difficult ... We call on the Labour Group to immediately re-instate both the Women's Committee and the Race Relations Committee.

The resolution, passed virtually without dissent will be sent to the Labour Group. The REC are also demanding an explanation from the Group as to why national party policy on the matter has been openly defied and overturned.

The REC move will intensify pressure on the Council leadership to re-think its position. A compromise is already widely canvassed based on re-establishing sub-committees for Women and Race Relations. But the real dilemma for the hardliners who bounced Knowles into his ill-advised purge is, do they wipe the egg off their faces and back off or do they grimly battle on in the teeth of mounting hostility and increasing isolation, even from the party's traditional establishment? Either way, it looks more and more like Catch 22.

It is often said that it is Governments which lose power, not oppositions which win it. This latest fiasco seems to suggest the same is true of fading Council leaderships.

350 NALGO CLERKS TAKE ACTION ON LOW PAY

350 NALGO members, clerks in the City Housing Department, are taking industrial action over low pay. They have refused a divisive and derisory offer from management and are standing up for their right to a decent wage.

Their action is giving a courageous lead to other low-paid workers. It is particularly important because they are responding to a barrage of propaganda from management about the need to lie low because of Tory threats of privatisation and the like. But the Housing Department's strategy for fighting privatisation consists of paying low wages and issuing instructions about workers' clothing - 'smart dress'!

Worse still, Labour Councillors are refusing to meet NALGO. Support is needed to pressurise the council and support the workers who are showing the right way to fight back.

RIGHT WIN KEY POSITIONS AT DISTRICT PARTY AGM

Right-wing candidates won key positions on District Labour Party at the reconvened AGM on Wednesday 9 September.

Ray Brittan won the chair, with 85 votes to Karen McCarthy's 73. Betty Wilson was elected vice-chair and Roger Murray secretary, both by similar margins.

Ray Jones, supported by the left, was, however, re-elected treasurer and Keith Hanson re-elected Trade Union Liaison officer. Both had narrow victories over right-wing opponents.

This is a setback for the left in the party, indeed for the centre of the party. Even Council leader, Dick Knowles, was heard to remark that he would be on the left of the new District Labour Party Executive Committee.

The point must be made, as 'Campaign Briefing' has consistently argued, that the right has won its victory only by manouevring and intimidation; only by closing down wards which had elected left wing delegates and replacing them with right wing nominees - as in Small Heath and Sparkbrook; only by ignoring custom and practice and not allowing the nominations of wards to go through - as in Yardley.

Understandably, however, in the aftermath of the meeting, there was some gloom and despondency amongst the left. It is vital now, however, that demoralisation does not set in, that comrades do not adopt defeatist attitudes.

The left has not won the election for chair in the past and yet has still won progressive policies at meetings and policy conferences. Indeed, the battle will now be for policy. The right wing will not settle for winning a few elections. They will want to reverse key elements of party policy.

Most particularly, we can now expect attacks on the party's equal opportunities policies which have already been rejected by the group. But we must remember that they remain party policies until they are reversed. Our task now is to re-organise and regroup to defend these policies.

This is not an impossible task. The right does not have a natural majority at District Party. We can hold on to policy gains and even make further advances. Demoralisation will only hinder the fight but it is a fight we must win.

Comrades will be sorry to hear of the death of Rashid Naz, who was a member of Small Heath Ward Labour Party. He was highly respected within the local community and a member of the Management Committee of Small Heath Law Centre. An ally of the left, he was selected for the May local elections as a ward candidate. He opposed with integrity the imposition of a candidate by the constituency. Rashid will be well remembered for his work with Neighbourhood Councils.