30p

BIRMINGHAM LABOUR

BRIEFING

INCORPORATING NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No.12 May 1985

THE GODFATHERS REIGN



BY PAUL SHARMA

In January this year the Black Activists Committee (BLAC,a left wing group within the Black Sections)called for the resignation of right wing male MPs in favour of black candidates.

Five of these social democrats, masquerading as socialists represent safe Midlands constituencies with large black electorates.

Birmingham,Small Heath ,Sparkbrook, Warley East,Coventry North East, and Wolverhampton South East are all made safe by the black electorate.

These constituencies are also some of the most economically and socially deprived parts of the Midlands.So it comes as no surprise they return Labour MPs.

What is surprising is thetype of Labour MPs representing these areas - right wing Gaitskellites.

CONTINUED BACK PAGE

Whose Finger Is On The Power ?

RACE LAW

On April 17 Muhammad Idrish, a Bengali, received notice from the Home Office that his appeal against the Adjudicators decision to deport him, had been rejected.

This was the latest and cruellest blow in a three year struggle to keep Muhammad in Britain.

Notice was given to the media that the fight will continue, until Muhammad and many other desperate people in a similar plight are given the right to stay and all racist laws are overturned.

Muhammad stated: "There are many people in a similar situation who do not even have a trade union to fight for them. If I can be put out what chance for them?

"There are divided families, widows and dependants - for many their only relatives are here. What can they go back to?

"The law is inhuman and racist. It must be smashed. I will fight on and I will not go voluntarily. They will have to come and take me."

Muhammad, aged 35, came to Britain in 1977, to study at Bristol University. While there he met and married a Scottish woman. After two years their relationship broke up but within weeks of it ending Muhammad was visited by police and questioned over his right to remain in Britain.

Muhammad had fallen foul of the Illegal Immigrant Intelligence Unit.

A soical worker and an active member of NALGO, he had been voluntarily helping the black and asian communities in the inner city - obviously an undesirable in Thatcher's Britain.

He has worked with youth at Dr Bernardo's Homes and now works at the Asian Resource Centre, in Handsworth, Birmingham

His linguistic and sociological skills make him an essential component of the unit.

The Home Office minister David Waddington has made it clear that Muhammad's deportation is a point of principle.

He is determined to carry out the racist tory policy ruthlessly to further his political ambitions.



BY BOB SMITH

No other defence campaign has received such wide spread trade union and labour party support. Hence one of the reasons the Tories are detemined to get Muhammad out.

A labour movement that assists the Black and Asian communities, takes up their problems and those of other minorities in Britain, could undermine Thatcher's project. A pity that Neil Kinnock and Norman Willis do not realise this fact, or are they frightened of the dynamic it would unleash ?

Muhammad has only a few weeks to prepare on appeal, and that could well be rejected; unless the labour movement makes the price too high for Waddington. Over 250 people a month are deported.

If you wish to assist, contribute, need a speaker or video for your meeting, contact: HARRY LOVEJOY
30 Antrobus Road
Handsworth B'HAM 21
Tel: 523 8923

BOB SMITH is Treasurer of the Muhammad Idrish Defence Campaigh

43%! - There was an Alternative

The leaders of our City Council have tried to convince us that they had no alternative but to put up the rates by 43%.

But there could have been an alternative. If only the leadership had summoned up the political will, the courage and the conviction to fight.

As this article shows, there is an alternative strategy of non-compliance which is practical, credible, and politically and electorally better for the party. Through Birmingham Labour Briefing, representing broad sections of the left of the Labour Party in Birmingham, ordinary party members are working and campaigning to persuade the leadership, in Scargill's words, to "get off their knees and fight!".

We believe that our Council leaders have simply ducked a golden opportunity to put the Tories in the dock. Instead they have opted for a policy of muddling through as best they can.

This will mean:

- that Labour will get it in the neck for a massive rate increase.

- workers who are getting only about £5 a week wage rises (before tax) will see almost all of this swallowed up.

- party members are confused and demoralised.

- local Tories are handed propaganda ammunition on a plate.

- we're in exactly the same mess again next year.

If instead, Labour Briefing's plans for a strategy of non-compliance had been implemented, we would have seen:

- the party and the unions fighting together in a united campaign to protect B'ham from the Tory attacks.

- courage and strength by the Labour Council that would have inspired confidence amongst the wider membership and general public.

- a chance of squeezing a few more pound notes out of Jenkin's tight fist.

- a chance to get the public on our side, as the Party protecting and defending the jobs, services and living standards of the people of this city from the Tory attacks.

- the opportunity to strengthen and assist the fight of the other labour local authorities who are in an even worse mess than we are.

All this could have been achieved without risking commissioners being sent in, without councillors being surcharged or disqualified, and even without (technically) breaking the law!

There are a number of possible strategies for non-compliance. For example, a strategy could have gone as follows.

STEP 1

A decision could have been made last autumn that, in principle it would be wrong for the people of Birmingham to suffer a rate increase much above the level of inflation. This principle could have formed the basis of a long campaign through the winter and spring, uniting Party, Council and Unions, calling on the government to restore the level of support to local government that was provided under the last Labour Government. At that time the Rate Support Grant was 61% - now it is down to 48%. This campaign would have shown up the Tories as being responsible for the present mess in local government.

STEP 2

In early spring the Council could have declared that it was not able to set a rate until the City got the kind of Rate Support Grant necessary to meet at least minimum

standard of services (defined by the Grant Related Expenditure Assessment - currently £420 million for Birmingham), at the same time keeping the rate rise in the vicinity of the inflation rate.

STEP 3

Wait for the government to threaten legal action before setting a rate. This would have been happening about the end of April.

STEP 4

If no further money was forthcoming from the government, a budget could have been agreed at a level of expenditure sufficient to allow growth in jobs and services. A rate could have been set at a level lower than that necessary to balance the budget, and the call could have been renewed to the government to come up with more money.

STEP 5

The Tories would have probably then declared the budget illegal. A decision could then have been made as to whether the Party and Council thought it best to defy the law. But even if the decision had been to step back into legality, and even if the fight had not squeezed a single penny of concessions from the Tories - a rate could have been set at a rise of 23% by using funds from the 'Convention Centre' reserves, as shown in our 'Alternative Budget' below.

So there could have been an alternative; in fact other alternatives different from this one could have been used.

Even under the worst circumstances, we could have ended out with a rate rise almost half of what has been decided. And-more importantly-we would have shown up the Tories as bullies, forcing us to raise rates and hit living standards, and would have been seen ourselves as a courageous political force fighting for the interests of our citizens, raising confidence and strength amongst our own supporters and throwing down a political challenge to the Tories.

AN ALTERNAT -IVE BUDGET...

The Labour Group opposed the sort of campaign we have outlined at the first special meeting of the District Party on 25th November 1984 and again at the meeting on 27th January 1985. Instead they argued for freedom to introduce a substantial rate increase while 'lobbying' Patrick Jenkins for concessions. The bankruptcy of this approach was clear by March. In his final report to the District Party Dick Knowles had to admit 'We are getting nowhere with government'. All that was left was to decide how high the rate increase would be.

The Labour Group went for 43%. To understand why and the alternative that did exist it is necessary to look at some of the figures.

THE LABOUR GROUP'S CHOICE

By January the City looked set to spend less than the Tory budget for 1984-85 of £373.6 million. A saving of £13.3 million was anticipated and this was used to create a 'Supply of Goods and Services Fund'. At the same time a provisional budget for 1985-86 was drawn up totalling £403.4 m.

By the time of the March District Party meeting the provisional budget had grown by £10.8 million to allow for '... uncertainties surrounding both interest rates and pay claims.'. The revised figure therefore was £414.2 million.

A budget of this size would have attracted penalties of around £75 million and would need a 90% rate increase to fund! The Labour Group had no choice but to use money from the City's two special funds. The first of these we have already mentioned. The 'Supply of Goods and Services Fund' has an estimated £13.3 million in it. The second special fund is the 'Major Projects, Repairs and Renewals Fund'. This was established in 1983-84 by the Tories to meet the costs of proposed major projects such as the International Convention Centre. It amounts to £21.8 million!

What criteria did the Labour Group use when deciding how much of the £35.1 million in special funds to use ? Two things stand out.

Firstly, having rejected any idea of fighting the Tories they turned to the tried and tested manoeuvres of the past. The approach was to go for a large rate increase this year since there are no District Council elections in the hope of a substantially smaller increase next year when there are elections. This is what Dick Knowles called in his report to the January meeting '...good politics.'!

The second criteria was to protect the Group's pet project, the International Convention Centre, which the District Party remains firmly opposed to. Defence of the 'Major Projects, Repairs and Renewals Fund' was therefore paramount. The Labour Group consequently chose to use £19.3 million from the special funds consisting of all of the 'Supply of Goods and Services Fund' and £6 million from the Projects fund.

This additional £19.3 million reduced the overall budget to £394.9 million which exceeds the government target by 2% and therefore attracts penalties of £18.8 million. Funding a budget at this level requires an increase in the rates of 43%.

WAS THERE AN ALTERNATIVE

Given the rejection of our proposed campaign in November and January could the Labour Group have done anything else ? The simple answer is yes. Rather than increase the rates by 90% they chose to spend money from the special funds. But if instead of taking £19.3 million they had taken £27.1 million then they would have arrived at a budget in line with the government target of £387.1 million. That would have meant no penalties and would have cut the rate increase from 43% to 27%.

The Labour Group could have gone even further. There was no legal reason why they could not have spent up to £17 million out of the Projects fund along with the £13.3 million in the other fund. Increased expenditure from these funds would have further reduced the rate increase or it could have been used to introduce further growth in spending. After all, despite budgeting to spend some £64 million more this year than last, leaving aside special funds and savings, only £3.4 million of this is additional growth on last years budget.

Labour Briefing has never supported a rate increase above the rate of inflation but we always said that to achieve this the Labour Group would have to lead a militant campaign mobilising the Party and the people of Birmingham against the Tory cuts. The campaign for concessions was never anything more than a damage limitation exercise. With a rate increase of 43% it may even failed to do that.

ROB POCOCK & MICK ARCHER

CONVENTION CENTRE JUGGERNAUT ROLLS ON

Many members of the Labour Party will have breathed a sigh of relief on hearing that the District Party's mid-term policy conference voted to reaffirm its opposition to the International Convention Centre. More importantly it instructed the Labour Group and its officers to carry this policy out.

What a shock then when Briefing heard that the City Council had submitted Planning Application for the Centre and that promotional blurb plus a video were on display in the Planning Dept. Confident that it was all a terrible mistake we called into Edmund Street to see when the application had been received.

Monday April 15th, the day after the mid-term policy conference.

CLAIMANTS FIGHTBACK '85

Claimants Fightback has a social at the Mermaid Pub, Stratford Road, Sparkbrook on Saturday, May 18th. Entertainment provided by King Rat, The Bang Sisters and Mickey Golding. Tickets are £2 waged and £1 with UB40. There is a late bar.

AMNESTY FOR SACKED MINERS

Birmingham Trades Council Miners Support Group continue to meet every Wednesday at 7.30pm at Sparkbrook Labour Club.

This month they are taking two important initiatives in support of those miners sacked during or after the strike.

The first is a meeting at 7.30pm on Tues. May 21st at Dr. Johnson House, Bull St. (just next to Lewis's). Speakers include Emlyn Williams, President of South Wales NUM, miners from the Midlands & Kent, and Women Against Pit Closures.

The second is a demonstration in B'ham on Saturday, June 1st. Assemble Lancaster Circus at 11.00am and march to Chamberlain Square for a rally at 12.30pm. The main speakers will be Peter Heathfield, General Secretary NUM, Jack Collins, Secretary Kent NUM and Women Against Pit Closures.

LABOUR COMMITTEE ON IRELAND PUBLIC MEETING

The LCI have a meeting on 'Northern Ireland - Labour's Policy and British Withdrawal' on Monday, 3rd June at 7.30pm at St Mary & St Johns, Gravelly Hill, Erdington. Speakers include Christine Crawley MEP; Maire O'Shea, recent victim of the Prevention of Terrorism Act; and Godfrey Webster for the LCI. Robin Corbett, Erdington's MP,has been invited.

NORTHFIELD CLP

The issue of Race Relations and Equal Opp-ortunities is obviously of central concern to Northfield CLP. Of 15 amendments it submitted to the recent mid-term policy conference 11 of them were to the report of the Ethnic Minority Liaison C'ttee. The report aimed to give the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities C'ttee and Unit some teeth by providing it with a serious budget and adequate staff to implement its policies. Unfortunately the Northfield amendments didn't seem to go in the same direction. They focused on deleting all of the reports major practical proposals.

TACKLING RACISM

We publish without comment a statement that appears in the report of the Housing Policy Group under the heading 'Ethnic Records'.

"Housing Department statistics have shown that ethnic minority applicants and transfers only receive 65% of the lettings which they should receive based on their proportion on the waiting lists. After nine months the Housing Department are unable to account for this disparity. It is necessary for a strong initiative to be taken to eliminate this racial bias in the lettings."

CRYSTAL PALACE

Shaken by the assertion the International Convention Centre would provide first class facilities for all the people of B'ham we thought we would take a closer look at the proposed new 5 star hotel. To be built by Hyatt International it seems the promo-video refers to it as a 'crystal palace'. Besides the usual facilties it seems the the 1983 Feasibility Study included such provisions as a sauna, solarium, massage rooms, squash courts, cocktail bar and casino.

The only problem is that if all this wears you out the average room cost is likely to be £50-60 per night. Still the people of Birmingham will get a look in. Of the estimated total cost of £40 million a £10 million public sector contribution would be required to 'secure' private finance for the rest.

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'In Brief'

On the 21st January 1985, the Management Committee of Small Heath Community Law Centre decided that staff should implement proposals quadrupling the opening hours of the Centre. These proposals, hitherto unseen by staff, were to be implimented without any increases in staff exactely one week later.

The staff have resisted these demands, and have attempted to establish negotiations with the Committee. However, the staffs' contractual rights to be represented by their trade union, NUPE Social Services, has been totally denied them. In particular, Labour Councillors Bill Gray (Nechells), Paul Haymeraj (Acocks Green) and Jim Eames (Small Heath) have supported this position. Indeed, Paul Haymeraj has on occasions suggested going further than this, and has recommended sacking the staff.

This threat was taken up by the whole Management Committee on the 15th April when staff were told that they would be sacked unless they implemented the Management Committee's proposals. Councillor Bill Gray furthermore stated that he would have no hesitation in recommending the withdrawal of funding by the City Council unless the staff cooperated.

The staff therefore felt that they had no option but to agree to the extended opening hours for a 2 week trial period. This is currently being monitored. Staff have not been given any assurances that the threat of sackings will be lifted after this period.

NUPE Social Services, Birmingham Trades Council and Selly Oak CLP have pledged their support to staff in this dispute which threatens both the jobs of the staff, and the provision of legal services to the communities of Small Heath and Bordesley Green, since the establishment of the Law Centre in 1976.

Why did Labour leader Dick Knowles decide to spend his time at the May Day rally in the Town Hall boring everyone to death with his lame excuses about Birmingham's budget? After all May Day is meant to be a day for socialism.

Birmingham Labour Briefing has upset Councillor O'Keefe and the executive committee of Sparkbrook CLP by carrying an article in its April issue entitled "Witch-hunt."

According to O'Keefe the article is full of lies and is slanderous.

At the last GMC new developments took place over the blocked transfer of Mark and Michelle France. The EC were to recommend that both be accepted into membership of the CLP. However when the item came up for the agenda a new problem cropped up.

Fresh evidence had come to light to "prove" that Mark France was a liar and had misled the EC. After a heated debate Mark's membership was referred back to the EC while Michelle's was accepted.

The new evidence cropped up courtesy of a Mr R. Murray. He had obtained a document which was written in 1982 concerning a take over of CND by left wingers.

At the time it led to an investigation inside CND but very little happened and it suggested that the scare was over whether the existing leadership had lost its grip.

It is alleged the document links Mark France with the events in CND. As far as we are concerned that is no reason to keep him out of the Labour Party. What is of concern is the extraordinary behaviour of certain members of the party in their efforts to smear other socialists in Brum.

Poor old Councillor Sardul Marwa seems to be on the way out. After his inspired bid to replace Clare Short as Ladywood MP he looks set to be bumped off himself as chair of the Race Relations Committee. And the terrible shame is his dear friends in the EEPTU are helpless to assist him.

BRIEFING

All articles and correspondence should be addressed to "Birmingham Labour Briefing" 8 Passey Road, Sparkhill, Birmingham 13. Or phone Maggie Robertson on 778-2169.

Supporters of the status quo school of politics. Their constituents live in the most appalling housing conditions, their children attend delapidated schools yet the MPs in these areas believe all would be well with minor adjustments and fine tuning Tory capitalism.

Labour Party members must have jumped for joy when reselection came to their rescue in the early 80s. For here was the mechanism which would allow them to choose a candidate who would fight for their class like the Tories have fought for the upper classes.

Thoses who did welcome reselection were mainly white (though by no means all of them) left wingers.

CONTRACT

But to other members in these constituencies the democratic process of reselection is viewed as an intrusion into a private contract between themselves and their MPs.

The latter type of Labour Party members are in the main middle aged, black businessmen - the self appointed community leaders.

Men who bring business morality and ethics to socialist politics. They sustain politically bankrupt MPs by delivering votes in return for patronage.

The godfathers recruit black people en masse, often paying the block membership fee by cheque themselves.

The party cards are handed out just before meetings like tickets for a revue, whenever there are party elections.

And it is only at these lightning raids that the new "recruits" are seen by other party members.

VOTES

With their "votes" the godfathers purchase patronage from their MPs. The price can be as low as being allowed to be seen around with the MP - this apparently enhances their status.

A few of these pirates have exacted a greater price, some have become councillors.

Politics plays very little part in these transactions. Occasionally when the godfathers have been pressed they become ventriloquists dummies of their right wing masters.

Obeying instructions from their masters, the godfathers oppose Black Sections. Independent Black Sections would of course damage their mutual interests.

Whenever white left wingers object to membership abuses or even question how the politics of inaction and omission can benefit the constituency they are accused of being racist.

It takes a very brave white party member to persist.

There is racism in the Labour Party but in my experience it is mainly the preserve of the right wing. Racism is a nasty evil cancer which must be cut out of our party and society. But the unwarranted accusation of racism has now become the first refuse of the black rogue.

By any measure the quality of life for black people is very low. This state of desperation of black people is a radicalising force. The natural allegiance of the black community is probable only just accomodated by the hard left of the Labour Party.

As for black youth I believe they are ready to storm the Bastille.

LOYALTY

What can black people possibly have in common with public school educated right wing MPs who could equally have been merchant bankers or stock brokers but chose Parliament for a career instead?

It is a travesty of loyalty for black people to support the right wing.

A travesty achieved by a cynical manipulation of a desparate community.

Sincere left wingers have been muted into a state of despair by false accusations of racism. Black left wing party members must therefore act. We must caallenge the godfathers and expose their corrupt dealings.

It is our duty to smash the cosy alliance between businessmen and Parliamentary careerists. We must return leftwing politics to a community who are dazed by being hoodwinked too long.

PAUL SHARMA is a member of Ladywood CLP and Black Sections