ANTI-POLL TAX COUNCILLORS VINDICATED

At a special disciplinary hearing of the Camden Labour Group/ Local Government Committee Executive held on Monday 25 September, it was decided by 22 votes to 20 that no action be taken against Councillors Angie Birtill and Adrian States who had voted against the implementation of the Poll Tax on 17 July 1989.Over two hundred groups and organisations had written letters of support for Angie and Adrian. The meeting itself was lobbied by around a 100 local people.

In answer to the charges, Angie and Adrian said that they had acted in suppport of the Manifesto, and that they had done nothing more than keep to the promises they had made when they were voted into office in 1986. Both argued that the Poll Tax was an unacceptable attack on the working class and their communities, and that the duty of socialists was to support the campaign against the implementation of the Poll Tax. Ex-council leader Phil Turner, speaking in their defence, said that they were the only two councillors doing anything against the Poll Tax.

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LOCAL ANTI-POLL TAX CAMPAIGN SUCCESS

Nearly 20 000 people in Camden have not returned their Poll Tax registration forms. That is 20% of those expected to register. This high rate of non-registration must be attributed, to a large extent, to the high profile of the "Camden Stop the Poll Tax Campaign". Mass leafleting is followed by local meetings in wards and on estates which never fail to attract less than 50 people on average. Meetings of up to 120 local tenants have been held in King's Cross and West Hampstead.

The local tenants that attend the meetings are all determined not to pay the Poll Tax and all applaud the stand taken by Councillors Angie Birtill and Adrian States in voting in the Council against the implementation of the Tax.

The average household now pays £774 a year in rates. The Poll Tax will be about £600 per person! Mass non-payment is now a reality in Scotland. A third of those expected to pay the Tax in Glasgow have not yet done so, six month after the deadline. This will also happen in England and Wales. The campaign against the Poll Tax can bring the downfall of the Tory Government.

Holborn & St Pancras CLP and the Labour Group have both denounced the Poll Tax as being unfair and undemocratic. Yet they have done nothing to campaign against it. Now the GMC has disaffiliated from the local campaign without even suggesting an alternative activity for Party members. The Labour Group, despite promises of implementing the Tax fairly, has sent out Electoral Registration form at the same time as the Poll Tax forms and Tax canvassers have left notes to individuals that their Housing Benefits will be affected if they don't register for the Poll Tax. This is intimidation. Instead of refusing to co-operate with the Poll Tax and leaving it up to the Chief Executive to implement it, the Labour Group is acting as the bailiffs for the Tory Government.

Fred Leplat (Somers Town LP)

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SUPPORT THE BOILER WORKERS

The 40 Camden boiler woorkers came out on strike on Monday 2 in defence of their jobs and conditions. Everything points to the Council closing down the section and putting the work out to private contractrors. On August 25, the Council issued a 90 day notice terminating all agreements. The section then took strike action, but returned to work on the advice of NUPE officials. On the 29 September, the Council refused to discuss a union proposal to increase productivity and negotiations broke down.

Last year, the Council cut the Boiler Section from 81 to 40 people. Now, their proposals would mean a further cut down to 24 workers. The Boiler Section is beingm run down as suppliers of materials won't deliver as their bills are not paid, training is not provided, and no van was available during the summer.

The Council's demands for increased productivity is unrealistic and is being used to attack conditions. Their negotiating tactics (lies, 90 day notice) are designed to smash the union NUPE. Labour Party members should remember that during the massive cuts two years ago, the Labour Group had described NUPE as a responsible union as it was prepared to co-operate with the cuts. Now that the union has changed its mind because the cuts also hurt their own members, the labour Group no longer wishes to have privileged relations with NUPE. Instead an attack on all unions is the order of the day.

This dispute is likely to escalate as the council is preparing to break the strike by putting work out to private contractors. District Housing Officers (who have just gone back to work after a victorious 18 wek strike for extra staff) have refused to co-operate with the private contractors/strike breakers. The labour group should back off from its attack and negotiate a agreement which maintains staffing levels in order to improve the service to tenants.

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CAMDEN 1990 : A Socialist Response.

Camden 1990 believes in Efficiency. It's a big word for them. In their lexicon of meaning, Efficiency = socialism. But the fact of the matter is that it doesn't. Efficiency takes meaning from whatever it is that you want to do. Camden 1990 want to implement the Poll Tax. They want to implement the Housing Act. They want to defeat and demobilise the local Trade Union movement. They want to deflate and dispose of community based opposition. They want to cut, comrades. They want to cut anything and everything that does and could form the basis of working class and community opposition to a policy of capitulation to Conservativism.

Fundamentally, Camden 1990 is about surrender. It is acceptqance of the Thatcher dictat: There Is No Alternative. Camden 1990 is big on TINA. The record of the leading figures in Camden 1990 is one which embraces TINA like a long-lost friend. They have voted for successive rent increases, for successive job losses, for successive service charge increases, for successive attacks on trade unions and community organisations, and for successive cuts in services.

What they want to do, underneath the rhetoric, is to transform Camden Counci into Camden plc. Their political project is the destruction of socialism. If we let them, they'll probably do this very efficiently.

Steven Taylor
Chair, Hampstead & Highgate (in a personal capacity)

Next CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING meeting
Tuesday 31st October - 8pm Town Hall
After conference - what next for the left in the Party?