CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING JULY 1987

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

8.00
Monday 6 July
The Town Hall
Euston Road

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Additional Items for Agenda
3. Introduction
4. Policy
5. Strategy
6. Organisation
7. Any Other Business

Introduction

No one predicted the scale of the Conservative vicory. Most commentators believed that a majority of around 50 seats was the best that the Tories could achieve. In the event, their overall majority of 102 leaves them in an unassailable position in parliamentary terms. No matter how cogent or coherent Labour's parliamentary oppisition proves to be, the Tories are in a position to steam roller through any measures which are deemed necessary to furthur emasculate the working class, their organisations and their communities.

The proposals contained in the Conservative Manifesto are quite explicit. There will be a furthur reduction in trade union rights. The privatisation of state industries will continue. The privatisation of state provision will be accelerated. The denial of civil and social liberties will be intensified.

The Labour Party's response to the Conservative victory is already becoming apparent. In the absence of a policy of active resistance to a continuing Tory government, the leadership's priorities are to be an intensification of the assault of those sections in the Party who are prepared to organise such a resistance.

This is hardly surprising given the idealogical divisions which exist inside the Labour Party, and these divisions - which have been muted during the election campaign - are already becoming more pronounced.

In the absence of an alternative strategy, the leadership will be forced to become even more aggressive in defence of their centrist policies and this will lead to renewed attacks on the left. The left is certain to respond to these attacks with open criticism of the leadership and demand that the Party adopts a far more radical approach to both policy and strategy, especially in the context of organising effective opposition and resistance to the Tory programme.

The Trade Union movement will similarily be forced to assess the prospect of another five years of Tory government. The defensive process of negotiation and damage limitation will undoubtedly continue, but there will be vocal elements within the unions and amongst the rank and file who will be demanding a far more aggressive and confrontational approach to industrial relations.

Groups which are issue-based will be pushed away from a dialogue with the Parliamentary Labour Party and placed in a context which is more reliant on their own personnel and resources.

Communities which have been awaiting the arrival of a Labour Government will similarily be forced to concentrate their efforts on the practical defence of existing resources and focus their activities on organising this resistance.

The common element to this widespread process of revaluation will be an increasing polarisation between reformist and radical elements in the labour movement, exemplified in the choice between a political strategy which attempts to exist within the perimeters of parliamentary discussion and debate and one which attempts to move outside these boundaries and establish itself on a terrian which is more likely to offer an active means of resistance.

Briefing's role in this process can be either marginalised or at the epicentre of the movement. The decisions which are made over the next few weeks will largely determine which position we occupy.

Policy

The choice in front of us is stark and simple. We either surrender and collaborate with the Tory government, or we begin to organise resistance and opposition at every level of the labour movement.

In Camden, the reality of the District Auditor and the likely disqualification and surcharge of Labour Councillors, effectively destroys the first option as an effective means of mitigating against even the most outrageous Tory policies. Even without this reality, it would have meant bargaining with the Tories from a position of weakness. The destructinn of the Labour Group simply removes this option as a possibility. It is not just impracticable, it is suicidal.

Our immediat position must be to refuse to negotiate with either the Tories or the right wing of the Labour Party. We must begin the process of building up our strength on a platform which stands in open opposition to collusion - whether this is in terms of privatisation, poll tax, surcharge, the Council's present budget strategy, cuts in jobs and services, or whatever. We must identify ourselves openly as in total opposition to the Tory government, in favour of no collusion or cuts - even if this means bankruptcy - and in support of those groups and organisations which are already involved in campaigns against cuts in jobs and services.

Briefing must be developed into a forum for a variety of interests who find themselves in opposition to both central government and the collaboraters in local government, attempting to unite these interests and build a broad based campaign in defence of workers and communities.

In practical terms, this means aligning ourselves immediately with the unions in Camden against job losses and lowered standards, with Council tenants against rent increases and reductions in repairs and maintenance work, with community organisations against cuts and with self-organised groups and campaigns who are alread attempting to challenge the state at both

national and local levels.

In addition to adopting these policies within the context of Camden, we must build a bridge between Camden and the other local authorities who are in tyhe front line, creating a common forum in an attempt to develop common policies and strategies. London Labour M.P.s must be brought into this campaign and every attempt must b made to ensure that resistance in London is co-ordinated and able to cross Borough and constituency boundaries.

Strategy

It is this strategy of locally based organisations and resistance, placed in the context of a London wide forum and support system, that must form the strategic basis of our resistance.

In Camden, within the Labour Group, Briefing Councillors must put the case on behalf of Briefing, arguing consistently in favour of active resistance, against cuts in jobs and services, and using their Committee positions in order to support groups and organis ations who are already engaged in struggle - whether these are trade union or community based groups, and whether their campaign is directed against the cantral or local state. The Councillors must align themselves outward - towards the Joint Shop Stewards Committee, the District Management Committees, the Tenants groups, funded organisations, and self-organised groups - stating unequivocally that their primary allegiance is to the labour movement and not the Labour Group.

The Local Government Committee must become the Borough-wide forum for Party opposition to cuts and job losses, co-ordinating the Party's response to the District Auditor and the likelihood of by-elections, again forming alliances outside the Party - with the Unions and the wider community - but also building support for a left position in the parties. Information must be forced from the Group and disseminated throughout the Party, a regular LGC newsletter produced in addition to regular Agendas, Minutes, etc., and this newsletter should be opened to all Party members, Councillors, trade unionists and community organisations.

The General Committee must be involved directly in the debate around resistance, cuts and the demand for an effective campaign of opposition. Resolutions must be accurately time-tabled and explained, distributed and debated from Branch and Section level upwards, and the challenge to the Right and a policy of collaboration must be openly stated - they are either prepared for confrontation and wish to build the local movement on this premise, or they are in favour of cuts.

Briefing itself must formally broaden its support. Distribution must be efficiently co-ordinated at every Branch, Section, GC and LGC meeting, and we must be prepared to identify individuals within each of these fora who will be prepared to become more involved in Briefing. Similarily, Briefing must extend its links more efficiently into the unions and community organisations, accepting the active involvement of as wide a cross-section as possible, and actively encouraging the participation of self-organised groups and issue based organisations.

Organisation

In order to succeed in building an effective campaign inside the Party, which is capable of reaching outside the Party to draw in support, we must organise ourselves more tightly.

Meetings must be held on a regular monthly date, with a set venue, minutes and agenda. We should be prepared to organise speakers for these meetings and to co-ordinate Briefing activity at all levels of the Party. We should also aim to organise public-meetings and fund-raising events, bringing in support and ensuring that the political priorities agreed within Briefing are at the top of the Party's Agenda.

Additionally, we must formally adopt an Editoriak Board for Camden Briefing, again meeting monthly at a fixed time and place, and open to all Briefing supporters, but with a number of appointed individuals who represent a cross-section of supporters and who could meet inbetween regular meetings if an immediate response was required to specific political developments.