CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

HEADLESS CHICKEN WIELDS MACHETE IN BID TO SAVE SERVICES?

Since June of this year the leadership of Camden Council has embarked upon a financial strategy which is effectively tearing the Borough apart. If a more inept and undisiciplined approach to the crisis could have been devised it is beyond our imagining, and the effect of their strategy is almost guaranteed to undermine any attempt to develop a political strategy.

The leadership, without consultation and with the backing of a hard core of right wing Labour Councillors, has to date: frozen all temporary posts - 900 jobs and rising; cancelled all temporary contracts - 300 jobs and rising; halted the harmonisation of pay and conditions between staff in the Borough; cut overtime in front-line services such as housing and environmental health; effectively torn up existing agreements between the Council and the Unions; begun an exercise to force through cuts of 5% in the voluntary sector - in real terms this will at least double as the year progresses.

The purpose of this strategy is purely financial. It is an attempt to buy time. But just what 'time' is being bought for remains both unclear and ambiguous. The leadership have failed to indicate at any stage of the cuts process - and the process is likely to continue indefinitely - that they will be prepared to fight. Indeed, everything they have said and done indicates that they have no intention whatsoever of putting an end to the cuts and confronting the government.

The nine Councillors who opposed the cuts package have been removed from all Council Committees on which they held positions; workers have been refused workplace meetings in order to listen to those Councillors who oppose cuts; Trade Unionists have had their pay stopped for holding meetings; lock-outs have been threatened where workers have refused to cover for workers whose jobs have been wiped out; Voluntary Groups which have opposed the cuts package have been threatened with closure; the right-wing Councillors have resorted to smear tactics in an effort to discredit the left; the Town Hall has been turned into a fortress in order to prevent entry to groups opposing cuts.

In spite of these measures, and perhaps because of them, opposition to the cuts package has been increasing. As services collapse and more Tory legislation is promised, both Workers and Community Organisations have begun organising resistance against the Leadership - the Voluntary Sector, Women's Groups and Black Groups have all started to campaign to reverse the Council's decision. Tenants Organisations are becoming increasingly afraid that their rents will be raised to meet the crisis. Lesbian and Gay Organisations - which have been singled out for special attack by the right - are quite literally fighting for their survival. Over 150 representatives attended a Conference called by Camden Briefing in order to begin the process of resistance, and in addition to the groups mentioned above, many of the Trade Unionists who were at the forefront of Camden's campaign against rate-capping have pledged their support.

The immediate future in Camden is bleak, but it is only as hopeless as we allow it to become. Our first priority must be to unite Workers and the Community in defence of jobs and services, and to demand that the Leadership of the Council articulates a political strategy. Until such a strategy is forthcoming we can give neither our help, nor support, to the majority on the Group who are implementing cuts. Indeed, our support and our energies will be directed entirely towards those who are at the receiving end of the cuts. We believe that it is the duty of all socialists to join with us in this campaign and to force the Labour Group away from the suicidal path which they have chosen - suicidal not for themselves necessarily, but for the Workers and Communities who elected them on the basis of resistance.

Steve Taylor,
Hampstead & Highgate CLP
(in a personal capacity)

SOLIDARITY WITH THE MINERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Although the 360,000 Black Miners have accepted a compromise package offered by the employers, the strike by the NUM(SA) was the longest and most widespread industrial action in South Africa. The growth of the Unions in recent years, leading up to the foundation of COSATU, has given a new confidence to Black Workers to take on the capitalists.

It took one month for the mining employers to beat and tempt the Miners back to work. Nevertheless, the talks offered by the employers, and in particular Anglo-American, was a retreat from their earlier position of refusing to reconsider any aspect of their offer. The NUM(SA) has proved to be a much tougher proposition than the employers had bargained for.

Mining companies sacked their workers to force the strikers back to work, and the Botha Government openly tolerated the shooting and beating of strikers. It was a measure of their determination and strength

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c/o 24 Godwin Court, Crowndale Road, NW1.

that the Miners stayed out for a month despite this pressure and not having any strike pay as this is illegal in South Africa. The greatest threat to the Miners is a direct one from the Botha Government who may imprison Trade Unionists and ban Working Class organisations as the State of Emergency comes under threat from Organised Labour.

International solidarity is now more important than ever. Financial donations and boycotts will give confidence to the Miners to carry on their struggle and put the Botha and Tory Governments on the defensive. The British NUM is running a solidarity campaign for their South African comrades. Collections and messages of support should be sent to:

NUM(SA) Strike Appeal Fund,
Peter Heathfield,
NUM,
St. James House,
Vicar Lane,
Sheffield, S1 2EX.

There will also be a demonstration called by the AAM on Saturday 24th October.

CAMDEN WITCH-HUNT

The eight Councillors who voted against Camden Labour Groups's decision to implement 12 million pounds' worth of cuts, were subsequently removed from their positions as Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees by the Labour Group without any consultation with local parties and against the wishes of Hampstead & Highgate GMC. In addition to this Councillor Graham Shurety was removed as Chair of Grants, even though he had not been present at the Council meeting of 2nd July, because it was thought that he probably would have voted with the eight if he had been there.

These attempts to stifle any debate about the real political issues have continued. Tony Dykes, Leader of the Council, issued instructions saying that the workforce will be paid if they attend "consultation meetings" on the cuts, but only if the nine Councillors against the cuts are excluded.

Councillor Ken Hulme, a leading member of Camden's right wing caucus and Secretary of the Labour Co-ordinating Committee, has launched a scurrilous attack on Camden's newly formed Lesbian and Gay Unit. Hulme informed the local press of "left wing freemasonry" at the Town Hall. He alleges that the Unit's staff are all supporters of Briefing. "These allegations are totally unfounded," replies Councillor Sandra Plummer - one of the nine and now ex-Chair of the Lesbian and Gay Committee. "Ken Hulme opposed the setting up of the Unit from the beginning and is obviously using populist tactics to boost support for his own bankrupt politics."

Hulme's attack was swiftly followed by Councillor Bill Saunders, also a member of the right wing caucus. Saunders alleged in an interview with the local press that Cllr Plummer "jumped the housing queue". She was, in fact, transferrred on the grounds of sexual harassment, in line with Council policy. Councillor Plummer, a Briefing supporter, is also an "out" lesbian. The Leader of the Council, Tony Dykes, has been asked by Cllr Plummer to openly condemn the behaviour of Hulme and Saunders and she has demanded a public retraction from them both. She has so far received no response from him.

It is clear that these attacks are an attempt to silence any political opposition and if that fails they will try to discredit and smear individuals. These most recent tactics by the right wing, and, one can only assume by his silence, the tacit support of Tony Dykes, pander entirely to the homophobia one would expect from the Daily Mail or the Sun. Yet these people are members of the Labour Party. They not only discredit themselves but bring into disrepute the Labour Party's commitment to Equal Opportunities.

The only conclusion one can draw is that the leadership of the Labour Group and the right wing caucus are terrified of any open political debate and in line with national Kinnockite policy wish to dump any commitment, however minimal, to issues of Race, Disability or Lesbian & Gay Rights.

Diary

EVENTS

7th September
Lobby the Labour Group
Old Town Hall, Judd Street at 6.30pm.

17th September
NALGO Met District
Black Members AGM
Walworth Town Hall,
Walworth Road, SE17
London-wide Conference - morning session on how Black Workers can fight back against cuts - Black Community Organisations welcome to attend. Details from Paul Singh on 01-871 6069 or Azim Hajee on 278 4444 ext. 2200

20th September
London-wide Conference Against Cuts in Jobs and Services organised by Camden NALGO and London Bridge. Sunday 10.00am - 5.00pm at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1. Delegates and observers welcome - details Camden NALGO: 01-278 4444 ext.2431

24th September
Haringey Fights Back
Launch of campaign to defend jobs and services 8.00pm at Brabant Road, Trade Union Centre.

26th September
Under 5s must survive
Assemble Caversham Children's Centre, 33-43 Caversham Road, Kentish Town. 11am march to Town Hall.

REGULAR MEETINGS AND CAMPAIGNS

Camden Against The Cuts
c/o Camden Trades Council Support Unit
102 St. Pancras Way, NW1 9NE.
Campaign linking Trade Unionists, Community Groups, Tenants Organisations, individual Camden Residents and Councillors against the cuts.

Camden Workers Against The Cuts
Campaign to resist the Cuts in Jobs and Services. Meets Thursdays at 5.00pm Committee Room 1, Old Town Hall, Judd Street, NW1. Open to all workers employed/funded by Camden Council. Further information on 01-278 4444 ext. 2431

VOLCANO
Voluntary Sector Campaign for No Cuts
Meets on a Thursdays at 6.45pm in Canteen, 7th Floor Town Hall Extension
contact them c/o Camden Black Workers Group Office, Ground Floor, Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, NW1.
Tel: 01-278 4444 ext. 2200 or 387 1125 or 267 9421

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