CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

JANUARY 1988

MURDOCH TACTICS!

For months, the Labour leadership has promised to avoid compulsory redundancies. Labour Group on 23rd January, however, decided that redundancy notices will be sent out in mid-February.

Members of NALGO have been asked to sign away their rights and accept compulsory redeployment. Councillors and senior management have refused to negotiate a new agreement with the union. Despite threats, intimidation and dis-information - less than 5% of NALGO's membership have indicated a willing-ness to be shifted from pillar to post. John Wakeham, Chair of Staff, has decided on one more try - sign or you're fired. Neither him nor the Group leadership give a toss about trade union rights.

Tony Dykes frequently pontif-icates about Liverpool sending out redundancy notices in taxis (the result, he suggests, of opposition to the Tories).Workers in Camden, however are being asked by a Labour council - sign away their trade union rights or be sacked . This is a council making Tory cuts with a Tory approach to industrial relations.

"COUNCILLORS AGAINST THE CUTS" : A group of more than 100 coun-llors with a real plan to win !

IN THE 1986 Council elections Labour fought a cam-paign to improve services to the community but the problems facing Londoners have never been worse.

During Thatcher's third term the screw will be tightened. The Housing and Finance Bill, Poll Tax Bill and the Education Bill will reduce public services and put them in the hands of profiteers. What has been the response of Labour Councils to these attacks.

Across London, Labour Councils are now making substan-tial cuts; £400 million off budgets between this year and next. Councillors who support these cuts are betraying their election pledges to people who voted Labour on the basis that we would defend them against further Tory onslaughts — not implement Tory policies.

The Cuts mean forced repatriation of Irish people; large in-creases in Council rents, fewer repairs, cuts in education, poorer social services with cuts in under fives forcing women back into the home. The voluntary sector already in a precarious position will be dramatically weakened.

The principle of equal opportunities will be revoked. There is no difference between a Tory and a Labour cut. Thousands of jobs will by lost by means of voluntary and compulsory redundancies. *What is the alternative.*

We are told that there is no alternative to cuts. But this will mean defeat for the working class and Labour movement.

The alternative is to fight. We must go on the offensive to demand the money to meet the needs of the working class in our communities. The government has the money; we intend to force it out of them by:

- Setting budgets based on need.
- Mobilising a united fightback against the cuts and for the services we need.

This is a strategy of political confrontation but we have no choice if we are to defend jobs and services and keep alive the fight for socialism.

The Tories will not give in easily but they are not invincible. We must not give in before the struggle has started. Cuts simply prepare the ground for the proposed legislation on housing, privatisation, poll tax, education. Unless we develop a strategy of resistance with the community and workforce there will be nothing left to defend in three years time.

We are told that no one will fight with us against the Government. But across London, trade unions, black people, women, lesbians and gays, people with disabilities, tenants, voluntary and community groups, youth, single parents are organising resistance to the cuts.

We call on the Labour Party and all Labour Councillors to fight the government, not give in to it and pledge that we will work with all those prepared to fight against cuts in jobs and services.

LATEST ON REPATRIATION POLICY

Camden Law Centre has won the right to take Camden to judicial review over its failure to provide a service for the homeless. The skeleton telephone service remains inaccessible to the majority of homeless people.

The number of people approaching Camden as homeless has dropped by about 2/3 since the adoption of new harsher assessment procedures in September '87. However, staff still have to written guidance on the implementation of the new criteria and the section has been without management since the end of December. All decisions continue to be made by the Assistant Director of Housing.

The Chair of Housing still has still has three cases passed to him for political guidance in November. Will he declare Bengali families 'intentionally homeless', thus mirroring Tower Hamlets' racist ruling? If not why has he not yet reached a decision on these cases?

Instructions to staff remain that travel warrants should be issued to anyone approaching from outside the UK where accomodation can be arranged. Although this was the case prior to September '87, only those people from Eire with their own council tenancies or houses would be returned. The new policy extends this abus of the Homeless Persons legis-lattion, resulting in people being returned to homelessness in Ireland.

The Chair of Housing cites the fall in the number of new approaches as a triump of his new policy. In fact it is a serious indictment of a so-called socialist authority's wilful failure to provide a service to the homeless.

THE TITANIC AS LEADER - HAS NEIL KINNOCK SUNK?

IT IS NOW eight months since the General Election defeat and at a national level, the Labour Party has been most conspicuous by its silence. Despite the unveiling of the most reactionary legislative measures since Thatcher was first elected in 1979, the Labour Party leadership has been both unable and unwilling to mount any sustained challenge to the policies being advocated by the Tories.

In each instance, whether it is the proposals in the Education Bill, the Housing Bill, the Local Government Bill , the cuts in the NHS, the attacks on the civil rights of lesbians and gay men , the Alton Bill or even the Tory-inspired amendments to the Official Secrets Act, the performance of the parliamentary leadership has beeb abysmal . Indeed, it was the refusal to put a Whip on the 'secrets' Bill which actually allowed it to be defeated in the House of Commons. And it is possible that a similar refusal on the Alton Bill lead to a similar defeat for the Party's policy and , more importantly, could allow a direct attack on women's rights to become law.

The dream ticket of Kinnock-Hattersley has become a nightmare, and it is a nightmare not only for the party, but for the entire working class and their communities.

How else are we to interpret the refusal of Kinnock to endorse strike action by the nurses? How else are we to interpret the refusal of Kinnock to endorse strike action by the teachers, or local government workers? How else are we to interpret Kinnock's refusal to even defend the rights of women , gay men and lesbians?

THE REALITY of the Labour Party at present, is that more and more power is being concentrated in the hands of Kinnock and his cronies, and less and less is being done to either defend or support the communities which elected them. The entire impetus behind the 'Labour Listens' fiasco assumes that the Party under Kinnock has become terminally deaf. The working class and their communities have been telling Kinnock what they want since before he was ever born and it is the refusal of the party to listen to the that has led to three successive election defeats.

We cannot afford a fourth defeat.

Unless we are prepared to become the party of the filofax and the Porsche, the five-star hotel and share ownership, we must begin to challenge the assumptions which underlie the inactivity which has characterised the Party since June.

And this means challenging the current leadership. It means challenging the leadership on the basis of socialism. We each have a duty to put socialism back on the agenda, and socialism means collective organisation and collective action against the Tories while Labour is in opposition. Why should the working class, their organisations and their communities, support the Party at elections if we are not prepared to support them as they attempt to defend themselves against Thatcher? We will only win people back to the Party if the Party is prepared to adopt a position which is based on the needs and aspirations of the working class. Labour will not and cannot win by becoming either wet Tories or a watered down version of the Social Democrats. We can only win by putting forward policies which relate directly to people's experiences after nine years of Thatcherism.

In order to do that we need a leadership that is prepared to fight alongside the working class and not against them.

SUPPORT THE MARCH 9 DAY OF ACTION

The strike and demonstration against attacks on local government is gaining strength. Its initial backing from London Bridge and London Fights Back has grown to include the Inner London Teachers Association, Southwark UCATT and NALGO branches in Islington, Haringey and ILEA. Trade union and Labour Party activists, voluntary organisations, tenants and community groups must start building for it in Camden NOW!