IN DEFENCE OF CAMDEN

On Thursday 11th June the Conservatives won a massive electoral victory. The scale of the victory is even more impressive when judged against the two previous General Elections. In 1979 the Tories won largely as a result of the failure of the Callaghan government and the local government workers' pay strike, in 1983 the Tories were returned in the aftermath of war in the South Atlantic. In 1987 there were no such circumstances to favour a Conservative victory. The Labour Party campaign, unlike 1983, was efficient, well co-ordinated and professionally presented. The Tories won on the basis of their record, in particular, on their management of the economy. For the past fifteen months, monetarism has been largely abandoned in favour of releasing money into the economy, increasing wages (for those in work), and reducing direct taxation. The Tories sold their Manifesto on the basis on this short-term programme and in the South, and South East, the majority of the electorate bought it. Labour lost three seats in London - Battersea, Fulham and Walthamstow - and failed to make any gains from either the Tories or the Alliance. In effect, London's inner-city constituencies are now surrounded by an almost overwhelming blue tide.

THE RESULT IN CAMDEN

Holborn & St. Pancras

Dobson (Lab)	22,966
Luff (Con)	14,113
McGrath (Lib)	7,994
Gavan (Red Front)	300
Lab maj.	8,853

Swing 3.46% Lib to Lab

Hampstead & Highgate

Finsberg (Con)	19,236
Sofer (SDP)	8,744
Turner (Lab)	17,015
Weiss (Rainbow)	137
Ellis (Humanist)	134
Con maj.	2,221

Swing 4.70% SDP to Lab

However, the Labour victories in Scotland, Wales and the North of England, give some definition to the lines along which in battle will be fought in the coming months. The division between North and South, rich and poor, is probably more pronounced than at any other time this century. Similarily, the return of radical Labour candidates in London - most notably Diane Abbot, Bernie Grant, Paul Boetang and Ken Livingstone - give some hope for the future of the Labour Party in the South. It is not simply the future of the Labour Party that we are fighting for however, it is the future of the inner-cities and the millions of working class people who will be abandoned when the artificial tide of economic bouyancy retreats and the Tories begin their third assault on our community. This assault has already begun.

The rent increases and the various cuts in housing expenditure are simply the thin end of the wedge. The District Auditor is still investigating Camden, both as a result of the delayed rate-fixing in 1985, and as a consequence of the current financial crisis. It is highly likely that the Auditor will have few qualms about prosecuting Camden in the light of the Tory victory, and the pressure on Camden to 'balance the books' will be enormous. In practical terms, this will mean a complete abandonment of of socialist principles and a complete capitulation to the Tory Manifesto, including the future implementation of a poll tax.

The contents of that Manifesto are worth spelling out: privatisation of all Council services; the self-financing of Council housing; rent increases and the privatisation of Council estates; the privatisation of ILEA schools; repeal of the Rent Acts; cuts in jobs and services on a scale that has not even been imagined in the past.

The choice facing Camden is simple. It is one of resistance or capitulation. We either unite with other London Boroughs and begin the process of organising an effective resistance, or we surrender. This latter alternative is simply unthinkable The 'dented shield' policy of attempting to limit and mollify Tory excesses is no longer tenable.

The financial crisis of Camden is a social and economic crisis of terrifying proportions for our communities. It is not just Camden which is threatened by the consequences of the Tory victory, all Labour controlled local authorities face the same dilemma. Unless we can unite and confront the Tory government, we will be abandoning the inner-citi to four or five years of unrivalled despostism. We either fight or we go under, it's as straight forward as that.

Overleaf, we outline the strategy which is necessary for organising resistance and we urge all socialists to join with us in building this campaign.

IN DEFENCE OF CAMDEN (cont)

Labour controlled local authorities have been in the frontline of Tory assaults since 1979. It is no longer either possible or plausible to 'manage' the resources available to those authorities and to defend the working and living conditions of our communities.

Our first task must be to bring together, on a London wide-basis all of those who are now in the immediate frontline of the Tory Manifesto. We support the creation of an open forum across London to discuss and decide upon the way in which resistance and the fightback can be organised.

LONDON LABOUR BRIEFING IS HOLDING A CONFERENCE ON SATURDAY 27 JUNE AT CAMDEN TOWN HALL in order to begin this process. The Conference is open to all Briefing supporters and we would urge comrades in Camden to attend.

CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING IS HOLDING AN ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ON MONDAY 6 JULY AT CAMDEN TOWN HALL in order to determine the priorities for Briefing in Camden in the coming months. Again, we would urge all Briefing supporters to attend.

However, resistance in London must be organised on a much wider basis if we are to be successful in preventing the decimation of jobs, services and, in the case of Camden, our Council. All London local authorities, Councillors, trade unions and self-organised groups must begin the process of discussion and debate immediately if we are to prepare an effective resistance to the Tories. The entire business of local government must be turned outwards, away from the Council Chambers and into the workplaces and communities. In addition to organising across London, we must also organise throughout Camden. This must become the immediate priority of the local Labour Parties in Camden and of the Labour Group on the Council.

Since the local government elections in May 1986, the majority of Labour Councillors have been attempting to manage local resourcces in such as to survive until a Labour Government was elected. This is no longer an option, and it would be grossly irresponsible for us to abandon our workforce and our communities to the Tories, and yet this is the only alternative to organising a Fightback. As far as we are concerned, it is not an alternative which can be seriously contemplated.

RHETORIC AS REALITY • LABOUR'S CAMPAIGN

By general consent, the Labour Party fought an effective election campaign. The management of the agenda and the refusal to allow that agenda to be defined by Fleet Street was undoubtedly correct, but four weeks of campaigning do not make up for four years of silence. The political strength of the Labour Party has never been in the media, or Westminster, but in the communities that support Labour. The failure to galvanise these communities prior to the General Election campaign was a failure that probably cost us the General Election.

In terms of policies Labour's programme is both more attractive and more popular than the policies put foroward by the Tories. But in the context of a four week campaign it was impossible for Labour to fully explain and expand on the realities of that programme. A moral appeal is superficially attractive but elections are won and lost on the basis of the economy. Labour's economic strategy was neither fully explained nor fully costed, and it was this failu above all others which prevented Labour from making the breakthrough that was needed.

The problem with Labour's economic poli was not simply one of presentation. It was also one of realism. It is unrealis to adopt a Keynesian approach to the economy when that approach has manifest failed to deliver in the past. It is i this area above all others that Labour' programme needs to be developed and expanded. Popular socialism is a damn sight more attractive than popular capitalism, but it needs to be socialis and not the same old package of reflati dressed up in nicer words.

LABOUR BRIEFING • INTO THE FUTURE • JULY 87

'To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service.'

The Constitution of the Labour Party
Clause IV (4)

In the immediate aftermath of a Conservative victory it is difficult to comprehend the reality of another five years of Conservative government and what this will mean for the labour movement. The attacks which have been sustained over the last eight years will not only continue, they will be intensified with a vengeance.

However, the Conservative Manifesto is not aimed primarily at the Parliamentary Labour Party and its leadership. The assault is directed almost entirely at the heart of the labour movement - the trade unionists fighting to defend their jobs, wages and working conditions; the local communities attempting to defend their housing and living conditions, their environment and social services; the self-organised groups fighting to establish their place in society, their right to equality and their right to exist; the health and education workers attempting to defend their service, and the people who are dependent on that service; the peace groups and the environmentalists, the women's groups, the lesbian and gay organisations, the black and ethnic minority groups, who are fighting for their survival.

Labour Briefing was created within these campaigns and developed in response to the immediate demands of the working class, recognising the need for an open and democratic forum which aims to bring together the various groups, organisations and tendencies in the labour movement. The need for a united, democratic and socialist forum is more pronounced, at this moment, than it has ever been. The battles which will be joined in the coming months will not be fought in the debating chambers of Westminster, but on the ground - in the workplace, the community, and within the organisations which are most under threat from another period of Conservative government.

The challenge facing us is enormous, and in order to meet this challenge we must turn the Labour Party outwards, aligning ourselves with those who will be in the front line as the onslaught develops, and we need to do this on the basis of democratic socialist principles and practice.

As part of this process Camden Labour Briefing will be holding an Annual General Meeting on Monday 6 July 1987 beginning at 8.00 p.m. at the Town Hall in Euston Road.

The purpose of the AGM will be to discuss the way in which socialists can organise the fightback against the Tory government and for socialism in the labour movement. We need a new organisation of the left in order to begin this process - an organisation which, while rooted in the Labour Party, can reach across the entire spectrum of the movement.

Since its inception Briefing has been at the forefront of the fight for socialism in the Labour Party - the Campaign for a wider democracy in the Party and the accountability of elected representatives to the Party; the development of socialist policies in local government and the involvement of all levels of the movement in the decision making process; support for the Miners and the local Miners Support Groups; establishing links between the trade union movement and self-organised groups; support for the print workers and other trade unionists who have been at the sharp end of Tory legislation; the fightback in local government and the campaign against rate-capping; supporting those Councillors who were prepared to stand firm against Tory legislation; defending the right of trade unionists to picket and support other workers in struggle; fighting for the right of women's groups, lesbian and gay groups, and black groups to self-organisation both inside and outside the Labour Party; supporting local communities and workers against cuts whether these are attempted by Tory or Labour controlled local authorities; demanding the accountability of the police to the community, and joining the campaigns against collusion with the police by local authorities; standing firm against the witch hunts and defending the right of socialists to remain the the Labour Party; and being at the centre of the campaign to resist any attempts by the leadership of the Party and the trade unions to reduce the ability of the working class to defend itself.

It is a record of which we can proud, but we must be prepared to broaden the base of our campaign and to establish a forum which can unite all sections of the movement on

the principles of democratic socialism. Briefing is not a sectarian grouping, and we would encourage the active involvement and participation of all Party members who have broadly supported the campaigns listed overleaf, and who believe in the necessity of developing a socialist programme of principle and practice to confront both the Tory government and those in the movement who are not prepared to defend the working and living conditions of the working class and the oppressed.

CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

Camden is in the immediate frontline of the promised Tory assault. The Tory Manifesto contains a shopping list of measures that are to be taken against local authorities, their workers and the surrounding communities. In purely financial terms Camden is already at crisis point - the choice confronting Councillors is stark, it is either one of capitulation and cuts or a policy of active resistance. We believe in the absolute necessity of resistance and the need to organise a fightback at all levels of the movement. The financial crisis is simply the first wave of an assault which will increase in its intensity with each passing month, with each act of Tory sustained vandalism - the Poll tax, privatisation, the destruction of our health and education services, the reduction in trade union rights, the selling off of Council housing and estates. Unless we begin to organise the fightback immediately, we will find ourselves overwhelmed by a veritable tidal wave of oppression.

Over the past few years, Camden Labour Briefing has been at the forefront of the fight against the Tory government - not only in local authorities and the campaign against rate-capping, rent increases, privatisation, and so on; but also in supprting the miners, the print workers in Camden, the campaign against the police consultative group, and the defence of the rights of self-organised groups. Throughout this period it has been our stated intention to act as an open and democratic forum fot the left in Camden, building links between the Party and the trade unions, the trade unions and the community, and the community and the self-organised groups. It is only on the basis of such an alliance that there will be any prospect of organising effective resistance against another five years of Tory government.

We would urge all socialists who are committed to the principle of defending jobs of services, who are opposed to to Council rent increases and the Council's involvement in the Police Consultative Group, who believe that the Party should be involved at all levels of the decision-making process and that the campaign against cuts should include all sections of the labour movement, to join with us in building a united, democratic and socialist forum.

The only realistic basis for such a forum is if we include and involve broad cross-section of the labour movement. In order to create this alliance we must be prepared to align ourselves with those in the movement who will also find themselves at the sharp end of central government legislation, even if this legislation is enacted by a Labour controlled local authority.

The purpose of the Annual General Meetin in Camden is to discuss the policies, the strategy and the organisational means of creating such a forum. If you have broadly agreed with the initiatives that Camden Labour Briefing has taken in the past, and with the principle of a united, deomcratic and socialist forum in the labour movement, we would askthat you come to the meeting on the 6th of July, complete this slip and return it to the address at the bottom o this leaflet:

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I/We will be attending the AGM of Camden Labouring Briefing on 6 July 1987 at the Town Hall, Euston Road, NW1, beginni at 8.00 p.m.

NAME: .....

ADDRESS: .....
.....
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BRANCH: .....

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The Agenda of the AGM and other papers will be circulated prior to the meeting, so please let us know if you are going to attend as soon as possible.

p&p CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING, c/o 24 Godwin Court, Crowndale Road, NW1