CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

THE LOCAL ELECTIONS

The selection process for Council candidates in Camden has commenced with the adoption of Roy Shaw and Terry Comerford in Grafton. It will continue through all Branches until March. It would seem likely that the hard right will be in a majority of those finally selected. Around half existing Councillors are standing down, many of them on the basis of a Manifesto which is virtually the same as that adopted by the Alliance Parties in 1986.

The Manifesto must rank as the most anodyne and reactionary document ever presented to the workers and communities of Camden for endorsement. It is riddled with defeatism and does not even allow for the possibility of a Labour victory at the General Elections.

The Poll Tax, the Housing Act, continuing privatisation, and surrender form the core of the incoming Labour Group's agenda. Specific commitments to campaigning work, equal opportunities, and resistance, have been removed, and it is impossible to even imagine the Group moving away from their adopted role as agents and managers for central government.

That Labour in Camden should adopt such policies at the height of Tory unpopularity, in the middle of increased and increasing industrial action, and at a time when social need is at an all-time high, defies both logic and principle.

AMBULANCE WORKERS ALL-OUT JANUARY 30:

Camden Labour Briefing would urge all socialists to campaign for maximum action in support of the Ambulance Workers on Tuesday, 30th January. The TUC is supporting a 15 minute 'conscience-strike' at noon, but we would urge all socialists to demand for maximum action within their trade unions and workplaces.

Rallies are being organised in Camden Town and at Kings Cross, and we must give our total support.

Fight for an all-out strike on the 30th

A Victory for the Ambulance Workers is

A Victory for the entire Labour Movement

THE LEFT IN CAMDEN

1989 has been difficult for the Left in the Labour Party. The increasing centralisation of power, the imposition of policy from above, and the continuing rightward shift of both the National and local leadership, have each contributed to both the demobilisation of socialists and an general demoralisation of Party members who would argue for a specifically socialist programme and agenda.

However, the strength of the right in the Party is certainly not mirrored in the wider Labour Movement.

1989 has seen a major increase in industrial action. The economic crisis has created political conditions which will inevitably radicalise an entire cross-section of the working class. The current Ambulance workers dispute, the engineering workers strike, the action taken by car workers at Fords and elsewhere. Each of these are a response to the Conservative agenda and not only weaken the political strength of central government, but also undermine the case put forward by the National Labour leadership for collaboration.

Additionally, the failure of the National (and local) leadership to build mass support on the back of Tory unpopularity will inevitably lead to a reassessment. It is not enough that Labour should oppose the Tory government, opposition must be focused by putting forward specific policies which actually meet the needs and aspirations of those who are bearing the brunt of Conservatism.

In order to be successful, in order to win elections, it is never enough that workers and communities should be in opposition to the Tories. It is also necessary that alternative policies are developed which mobilise active support for Labour.

It is the responsibility of socialists to begin this process now.

The Socialist Movement, which was established in Chesterfield and has held a number of highly successful conferences over the last twelve months, is the beginning of this process. It is the basis of a principle, democratic and non-sectarian intervention into the Party which can act as a forum for the discussion and development of socialist policies and alternatives.

Just as the Socialist Movement has become a national focus for socialism, so we must develop a parallel and supportive local forum.

We would urge all Party members who believe it the necessity of building a socialiast alternative to work alongside us over the next twelve months.

CAMDEN LABOUR BRIEFING

A SOCIALIST ASSESSMENT o CAMDEN 1986-1990

The 1986 local election victories were the most comprehensive that Labour in Camden have ever scored over the Tories. The campaign was fought in the wake of the Miners Strike, the Abolition of the GLC, and the Borough-wide resistance to Rate-capping. The Manifesto on which all Labour Councillors were selected and elected gave specific commitments on jobs and services, on rents and service charges, on privatisation, on equal opportunities and community care, and there was a direct promise that Labour in Camden would not accept Conservative legislation which was contrary to the interests of the Borough's workers and communities.

Within days of the election results, a majority of Labour Councillors had begun the process of dismantling and over-riding these commitments and promises. A leadership was imposed on the Labour Group which blatently contradicted the recommendations of the Party, and a bunker mentality had effectively replaced the campaigning profile which had characterised not only the Group, but the local Parties, immediately prior to the election.

Since 1986, the retreat on policy and commitments has become a rout.

Jobs and services have been decimated, rents and service charges have increased, privatisation has been implemented, equal opportunities and community care have been effectively discarded. The promise to refuse and refute Tory legislation has been transformed into the mute acceptance of everything that central government has demanded. Indeed, the only areas where service provision has been increased has been over Council house sales, Poll Tax implementation, and rent arrears!

The relationship between the Labour Group and the workforce, between the Labour Group and the communities, and between the Labour Group and the Party, has been dismantled and replaced by policies of confrontation and non-consultation. There has been no attempt to explain or discuss policy changes. There has been no attempt to campaign against Tory legislation. And there has been no attempt to defend even the concept of democratic local government against the tide of authoritarianism which has characterised central government.

Indeed, a majority of the Labour Group has spent more time attacking trade unionists, left Councillors, and communities, than they have in building opposition to the Tory government. The political victories of 1986 have been translated into a series of chaotic surrenders on every major area of policy.

WITCH-HUNT #1

Councillors Horan, Holding, Plummer and Shurety were referred to the National Party by Holborn & St.Pancras GMC. There crime was voting against rent increases and then abstaining on a budget that included those rent increases and cuts. It was clearly the intention of the Holborn & St.Pancras Right that these Councillors should, at the very least, be prevented from standing in the 1990 local elections. Their failure to secure sanctions against these Councillors must be regarded as a success for socialists in the Party, but the process of referral served the purpose of effectively demobilising the Four and opening the way for the Hard Right to increase their influence over the Labour Group and the Party.

WITCH-HUNT #2

Steven Taylor, the Chair of Hampstead & Highgate CLP, has lost his Appeal against the decision of the Local Government Committee to be allowed onto the Panel of Candidates for the 1990 local elections. The Appeal was supported by Kilburn and South Branches, by Hampstead & Highgate CLP (unanimously), by APEX and SGAT, by members of the LGC Executive, and by a majority of sitting Labour Councilllors. The evidence against him comprised 5 press cuutings - including a petition, an article that had been censored, and a report that was refuted by letter - and former Housing Chair Gareth Smyth. At the time of writing, no grounds have given for why the Appeal was lost, and the decision of the Regional Party shows a genuinely Stalinist approach towards left candidates who are put forward for consideration in local government.

CAMDEN STOP THE POLL TAX CAMPAIGN

Camden Stop The Poll Tax Campaign meets on the 1st Tuesday of every month at:

Trade Union Support Unit
213 Eversholt Street
NW1

8.00 p.m.

For more information contact: Grace Livingstone
Tel: 485 3830