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COVENTRY LABOUR
BRIEFING

No.2 OCTOBER 1986

ADDING INSULT TO INJURY

By Cllr Fran Smith

At September's Council meeting Coventry tenants were dealt another blow by the city's ruling Labour Group. Rents are to be increased from November by 7½%, three times the rate of inflation. To add insult to injury, the city's leaders schemed to ensure that all debate on the issue was stifled. Tenants found themselves, as so often before, being mugged and gagged before being able to cry "stop thief"!

The Chair and Vice-Chair of Housing formally moved and seconded the Housing Minutes on rent reviews (though there was no mention of rents at all), and the Lord Mayor without pause asked for all those in favour. The entire 'debate' lasted less than 5 seconds. Tenants were denied any explanation, however preposterous, as to why they are now expected to pay from 60p to £2.50 more for increasingly poor housing. Whilst it has always been custom for Cllrs to introduce the more significant Minutes formally, I had not realised that raising council house rents fell into this category.

Later in the meeting George Lindfield and I tried to re-raise the issue under a Liberal motion on discrimination, arguing that council tenants had been discriminated against by being denied an explanation for their rents' rise. But before George was able to contribute, Peter Lister quoted Standing Order 32(a). Without further discussion a motion to prevent George from speaking was passed by Council. He was told he wouldn't be allowed to speak again for the rest of the meeting. His crime, like mine, was to suggest that the rent rise had been "sneaked through". Some leading 'left' Councillors thought this phrase unfair and offensive enough to vote with the Group to silence George altogether. Judge for yourself!

So what were the facts the Labour Group were so anxious to hide? Well, for a start, the Council has £11.3 million in reserves, £2.3m being in the special contingency reserve. There was simply no need to raise the rents. Only £2½ million were needed to freeze them for the coming year, and the Council would still have been able to maintain its central heating installation programme. The 7½% increase only aggravates an appalling set of statistics. In 1981 Coventry's rents stood at an average of £11.65, 30p below the West Midlands' average. Before the current increase, Coventry's average rent was £18.08, £1.60 above the WM average which itself has fast outstripped inflation. No wonder so much effort was put into avoiding a debate!

George and I also discovered - perhaps we shouldn't have been surprised - that the Council made a £2.8 million profit out of its own DLO last year. But rather than plough it back into housing, the money is now earning interest in the bank. All these facts and more have been concealed from those Councillors on the Labour Group who are not yet alligned with the hard right. The argument that the Group is the place to be to get information is just not credible. Coventry Labour Briefing will, I hope, be at the forefront in combatting the stream of disinformation now coming out of the Council's Labour Group.

Editorial

Where are the Left Councillors?

A number of Coventry Labour Councillors have made a conscious decision to avoid expulsion from the controlling Labour Group on the City Council. For a socialist that's no easy task. Few of us can doubt that an autocratic regime rules the roost in Earl Street.

Whatever views critics might have, the stated intention of these 'left' councillors is to influence and change Group policy and Council decisions. As such, their success is measurable in practical terms. Have their efforts succeeded in mitigating the effects of the Council's Tory policies on workers in the city? Briefing believes events in the last month alone provide a ready answer.



- Our front page article by Cllr Fran Smith exposes the clear anti-socialist thrust of the rent rise nodded through the September Council meeting. As Fran records, when George Lindfield tried to question the decision he was prevented from speaking. Where were the 'left' councillors on the Labour Group? Raising the issue themselves? No, they were too busy chiding George for missing the Minute!

- The deeply reactionary nature of the Council was exposed again in the debate on the Council's Equal Opportunities Policy at the same meeting. Liberal Rob Wheway moved an amendment to include a clause on discrimination against gays in the Policy, a move which socialists would surely welcome as an initial step to be given a further cutting edge. What did the Labour Group do? They hoped that nobody would second the amendment and it would fall! Their hopes were dashed when Fran and George rightly supported it. So they lined up with the Tories and voted against.

- Meanwhile across in Smithford Way the shoppers' playgroup is under serious threat. Not content with deciding to charge playgroups across the city for using Council premises, the City Council is pressing home a £15000 rates demand on the city centre group. The volunteers who run the Group have so far raised £4000, but there's an awful long way to go. A motion is being put to the next Council meeting on October 14th opposing the rates demand. Where will the 'left' councillors on the Group stand?

- Another major problem facing parents in the city at the moment is the lack of adequate lunchtime supervision in many schools. Our 'Viewpoint' article by Pauline Blood draws attention to the effects of this. The Council claims to be concerned. But at the September Education Committee it was the same old story - no money available. It will be discussed also at the October Council meeting. What will the 'left' Councillors have to say?

Briefing doesn't raise these criticisms merely to carp. Knocking 'left' councillors for the sake of it is useless and worse. We raise the issues and make the criticisms because decisions like these all directly and adversely affect the working class of our city. They constantly bring the Labour Council into disrepute. We've come to expect that of course from the current Group leadership. But what of those Councillors who claim to be beavering away influencing Group decisions? Quite simply, they are tarred with the same brush, inevitably and indelibly.

And what of us? Briefing is a campaigning socialist organisation. We don't wish simply to deride the Council's policies - we are campaigning to reverse them, and we invite all those who share our concerns to join us. Direct action - pickets, demonstrations, occupations - hold the key, backed up by debate and discussion in our movement.

LOBBY ON OCTOBER 14TH

The October Council meeting will prove another watershed in the Labour Group's continuing descent into political ignominy. A number of key issues will be discussed. Briefing urges all our readers to support the lobby being organised for the meeting on the 14th

- OPPOSE THE RATES DEMAND ON THE SHOPPERS' PLAYGROUP
- SUPPORT MORE FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS DINNERS SUPERVISORS
- DEMAND THE CITY COUNCIL ACTS OVER APARTHEID

Assemble 1.30pm
Council House

TUESDAY 14TH OCTOBER
(Council meeting starts 2pm)

"BERRY" THE BUSES.

Councillor Berry, chairperson of Transportation and Highways, has appealed to passengers to protest against bus cuts, (Coventry Evening Telegraph, 8th August, 1986). He begged them to write to him at the Council House and to the W.M.P.T.E. in Birmingham, in a last ditch effort to get subsidies to keep services running. "They don't seem to understand. We want the public to protest - to raise petitions!!"

I want to ask councillor Berry what he was doing when there was a chance to defeat the government on the 1986 Transport Act? All over the city local meetings were held to inform the public of the consequences of the Bill. Councillor Berry was not at any of the meetings I attended, and as far as I know, did not attend any of the others.

The West Midlands County Council, along with the campaign for the defence of local transport, distributed countless leaflets to every household in Coventry. Presumably Councillor Berry and his counterparts received a least one of these outlining the effects of the bill. Where was his voice then?

If Councillor Berry and his other colleagues really want to save the bus services in Coventry, they should act now and tell the W.M.P.T.E. that they will subsidise all bus services operating at present. But we know they will not, because that would mean defending working class people and defying government spending limits for local authorities.

I appeal to all comrades to save both time and effort on Councillor Berry's suggestions. The Act comes in force on October 26th 1986, and these protests at this late stage, would be a waste of energy.

All Councillor Berry is doing is playing at politics. He and Peter Lister don't know of any other way of challenging Tory policies, other than closing the stable door after the horse has well and truly bolted.

Rod Sweeney
TGWU
Coventry SW CLP

OTHERWISE

A new community newspaper has been launched in Coventry. OTHER*WISE* is a free monthly for local lesbians and gays. Its aim is to provide news, information and a platform for debate. Within a policy of being anti-racist and anti-sexist OTHER*WISE* will present all shades of opinion of its readership. The politics of the newspaper are those of allowing room for people to develop their consciousness and knowledge without the restraints of the hetero-sexism found in all the other local media.

To survive and maintain its circulation of 250 OTHER*WISE* requires support in three ways:

Support from readers in terms of information and writing letters and articles.

Advertisements from commercial and community organisations.

Fund raising.

The first two editions of the twelve page newspaper have been well received in the community. Copies are available in the local pubs and discos used by lesbians and gays, in the Wedge bookshop and in the Other Branch bookshop (Leamington) and can be read in the Coventry Central Library.



UNEMPLOYED ACTION

The Coventry Unemployed Action Group developed from a campaign course run by the Trades Council's Unemployed Workers Project. It is open to people of any political persuasion. After the course we discussed what issues we thought would be relevant to the unemployed locally. Jobs were obviously of prime importance. But we were realistic enough to know, without taking a defeatist view, that the obscenely-high unemployment figures weren't going to disappear overnight.

We decided therefore to campaign for concessions in travel, education and sports facilities. We agreed too that it was more logical on a local basis to fight for these things.

The main thrust of our campaign so far has been the request for "free transport for the unemployed". Unfortunately, despite intensive efforts over the last two years - public leaflets & meetings, lobbying City and West Midlands Councillors, petitions etc - the bodies that are in a position to grant transport concessions have still not produced a satisfactory scheme.

We have produced enough information to back up our case. But the best the West Midlands could produce (in their opinion) is the £2.60 off-peak fortnightly local ticket. On the surface it's okay, but in practice there are major problems:

- it can't be used before 9.30am, restricting people who sign on at 9am
- it only covers one member of a family, often leaving the woman and children in isolation
- at present levels of benefit £2.60 is still prohibitively expensive, and Fowler's cuts will aggravate this.



Over the past two years we have also been asking the City Council to introduce a Passport to Leisure for the unemployed and low-income families - to allow free or cheaper leisure facilities. We have had various meetings with members of the Leisure Services Committee and the appropriate Council officers. We have sent them information from Birmingham, Leicester, and Nuneaton & Bedworth, who all operate successful schemes which are economically sound. However, despite everything, they have only got as far as



producing a discussion document!

Now, we realise the problems that face local Councils with the Tories' policies. But we feel that if the right attitude was adopted then these are not insurmountable. A Labour Council must surely carry out their social responsibilities to allow the deprived in our community to overcome their isolation?

Over the past decade the industrial base in Coventry has been decimated. The city has changed from one of opportunity and prosperity to one of the poorest areas in Britain. 2/3 of the population are on some form of state benefit. Our Group feels that our campaigns for concessions are completely justified. We trust that the City Council will eventually agree with us.

John Norman
Chairperson
Coventry Unemployed Action Group

VIEWPOINT

SCHOOL MEALS SUPERVISION

I think more concern should be shown by the Labour Party on School meals and lunchtime supervision. My two sons go to Woodend School, one to the infants and the other to the juniors. My younger son is not affected. But my eldest son is expected to come home every other week with a packed lunch eg: Sandwich, small cake or crisps and a small carton of pop, because there aren't enough lunch supervisors. Most children in Woodend are on free school meals and therefore it is important that they get a hot meal especially in the winter.

If this is not bad enough the government are now trying to give parents 40p per day in their allowance to pay for a meal in school, this doing away with free school meals altogether. This should be stopped before it gets started and I would like to see the Labour Party doing its uppermost to see that it does.

ANTE-NATAL CAPERS

The Woodend Ante-natal Clinic is held every Tuesday afternoon. Recently a friend of mine had to make two visits to the clinic and on both occassions what she saw was comical.

On the first visit the nurse had already started to weigh people and take their blood pressure. When the midwife arrived she took over the nurse's room. So the nurse had to carry on her duties in the waiting room in full view of everyone! After a few moments the midwife started to re-call patients and go through the whole examination again.

During the fiasco the nurse condemned the midwife's work and the midwife condemned the nurse's.

On the second visit neither the nurse or the midwife could find my friends baby's heart beat. It was explained to her that it was a "difficult" case and that she would have to go immediately to Walsgrave to be examined. She arrived there at 3 pm. only to be told after being monitored, that everything was normal and that the Woodend Ante-natal clinic should have the necessary equipment. They went on to say that they couldn't understand why she had been sent at all! She arrived back home at 6 pm. exhausted.

Surely this ridiculous situation could have been avoided, especially in one of the socially deprived areas of Coventry?

By Pauline Blood



COVENTRY POLYTECHNIC

Priory Street, Coventry.

SATURDAY 25TH OCTOBER 1986

COVENTRY & WARKS MEDICAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST NUCLEAR WEAPONS

A R M S O R H E A L T H ?

A ONE DAY CONFERENCE

An impressive line-up of speakers will concentrate on the effects of the arms race in the absence of nuclear war

Further details and applications can be obtained from Dr. Madeliene Sharp,49,Baginton Road,Coventry. Tel: Coventry 414512. Everybody is welcome.

(See John Middleton's article in this month's national Briefing also for further details)

LABOUR WOMEN'S VOICE?

Jeannie Holmes, Women's Officer of Coventry N.E. Labour Party, critically examines the accessability of the Party for working class women. Further contributions on the issues raised are particularly welcome.

I have just finished reading an article in the New Socialist magazine. It was written by "socialist feminists", supposedly on how representative the Labour Party is for women politically.

It was boring and far from a true assessment of the basic needs for women who want to become political. Intellectual women are part of our fight towards justice as socialist women. But why are they always middle class? 51% of our population are women, mainly working class women. Why are they not with us in the Labour Party? What can the Labour Party offer women, indeed does it offer anything? More importantly, how representative is it?

So many times I have heard the call for creche facilities, baby sitting etc. Yes creche facilities are important but not at 8.00 pm. at night when children have school to attend the next day. Baby-sitting fees are a wonderful ides, if you have a baby-sitter. Many single parents have bled their supply of baby-sitters. People become tired of being asked. Narrow minded attitudes such as "you should be at home with your children" are constantly bandied around. These attitudes are always directed towards the women, not the men.

Time and time again we hear so may promises of how things will improve. where are the baby-sitting lists, the creches and the sitting fees? One ward in Coventry made it so difficult for women to obtain baby-sitting fees (despite a resolution) that the women stopped asking. Needless to say many have dropped out of the Labour Party.

Women have a worse enemy than any Tories, their own guilt. We politicised women in the Labour Party suffer constant feelings of guilt, and men reinforce it. Women cannot help but suffer society's taunts to be with their children 24 hours a day. Therefore when we do not conform and wait until our children are grown before entering politics, we are made to feel guilty. Our male comrades constantly remind us of their need of us in the Labour Party (or do they?). Women therefore also suffer guilt for non-attendance of meetings.

We oftern do not have the political experience (due to lack of time and education) of the men and therefore have a fear of public speaking. I was once taunted by a "left-wing" male comrade for not standing at the front during my Conference report. He should have been proud that his consituency had even found a woman who was willing to take on the task. To drag a woman down when she had given so much is unforgiveable. But this is what we are constantly up against.

Child facilities alone will not cure our problems. Male comrades must look to themselves and question what it is they do to help. How may state that their wives do not attend meetings because they are not interested in politics? This is utter rot! If a male and female have similar interests who is it that is more likely to succeed if it is difficult for both to take part? Right in one, the male! Once again the woman succumbs to society's guilt trip and the man reinforces it!

The Labour Party's problem is not just recruiting women, but also keeping them. So may women regularly drop out due to frustration, apathy, ignorance of just get plain sick of being overlooked. Take the bell Green Action Group. Of all the women who joined the Labour Party during the dispute only one (as I know of) is still active. These are women who fought a long hard battle with Coventry's excuse for a Council. These women also took part in the Miners Strike. They became highly politicised, angry and determined. But when the action died they disappeared. Why were we not able to keep such wonderful people?

We do need regular Womens Section meetings, supported by our male comrades, by means of encouragement and physical help, not presence.

In the North/East Women's Section our lack of knowledge and organisational skills have held us back. Before we can move forward guidance is needed from comrades who have experience to share. But so often women are given their organisation as a token gesture.

The answer is always "you have your own group, get on with it!"

That is not the answer. To work alongside our male comrades but to be recognised as needing our separate identities within our groupings is the answer. Women's groups will not cure the problems of women in the Labour party on their own.

Recruitment of women is also imperative. I have already suggested to one comrade that we should spend at least a month recruiting women <u>only</u> into the Labour Party. This is a positive move towards action speaking louder than words. We may not gain anyone for a long time, but we must be patient. A long history of women's subordination is what we are up against. One woman wrote after the Russian Revolution that even their women would not and could not attend meetings because they were constantly downtrodden by everyday drudgery. Have we changed so much today?

The authors of the "New Socialist" article make fine intellectual points. But those of us who are struggling to attend meetings find their arguments ironic. Working class women are still waiting to be recognised by the Labour Party

Women must be taken seriously in the Labour Party if socialism is to succeed. We have so much to give, why waste our talents?

Act Against Apartheid

picket Sainsbury's, Bell Green

From 10.30am - 1pm Saturday 18th October
Riley Square

Following our successful picket of the store on August 30th, Briefing is organising another on 18th Oct.

SUPPORTERS WELCOME FOR TWO HOURS OR JUST A FEW MINUTES

Support invited from local Labour Parties, Trade Unions and Coventry Anti-Apartheid

Davy Jones

I remember the first time I met Davy. It was in the first few days of the Miners' strike, and he was sitting in his living room discussing how to get the men at Keresley out and how to keep them out. I was struck then how someone retired and crippled with arthritis could be so active in the struggle.

In the months that followed I enjoyed my weekly visits to Davy and Irene to take the collections and listen to his cheerful encouragement and sharp comments on the latest events in the struggle.

More than any other person, Davy gave us inspiration and political leadership. I feel that it is a tribute to him that the majority struck at Keresley when the rest of the Warwickshire pits mainly scabbed.

At the end of the long strike around £½ million had passed through his house. This massive fund-raising effort was the second largest of any pit in the country. This would never have been achieved without Davy.

His house was open door throughout and in the months following the strike - to all supporters and strikers to bring their collections and discuss the progress of the struggle. Despite a long illness when the strike finished, Davy never gave up. When he became well enough he quietly began organising again in the struggle for socialism.

Davy changed my life and I feel I have a debt to him. I can only repay it by doing what he did - carry out the struggle for socialism as long as it is physically possible.

Julia Redman
ASTMS & Coventry SW CLP

Coventry Council's record on "contract compliance" is - so far - an unenviable one. Cllr George Lindfield's motion on links with South Africa will put the Labour Group's tarnished "socialist" pretensions once more to the test

NOTICE OF MOTION FOR COUNCIL MEETING, 14 OCTOBER 1986

In view of the deepening crisis in South Africa and the reluctance of President Reagan, Mrs Thatcher and Chancellor Kohl to take effective sanctions, coupled with the Tory party's implicit support for the South African regime, it is increasingly important for local authorities and trade unions to take direct action against South Africa. Consequently, this Council agrees:

1 to cease doing business with those companies which trade either directly or indirectly with South Africa;

2 to set up a fund under the auspices of the Lord Mayor to support the ANC and SWAPO's struggle for freedom and to provide facilities for the collection of such funds;

3 to invite representatives of the ANC and SWAPO to the opening of Mandela House;

4 to honour Nelson Mandela by granting him the freedom of the city of Coventry;

5 to demand that local government and other trade unions establish a campaign to introduce direct workers' sanctions.

Finance needed

Each edition of Coventry Labour Briefing costs almost £40 to print. Most of that we recoup from sales. But to continue we need a secure financial base. Money is unfortunately the name of the game, at least for the time-being.
Monthly Standing Order forms for 50p or £1 are available from Briefing supporters. If you like Briefing, then give us that little bit of extra support we need.

Briefing *MEETINGS*

Meetings open to all supporters and sympathisers are normally held on the 4th Monday of the month at Koco, Unit 15, the Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Cov.

Babysitting costs or a creche at the meeting are available, but please try and give us prior notice.

October Meeting

Monday 27th October 7.30pm
at Koco

Main discussion:

THE ROLE OF SOCIALIST COUNCILLORS

To be led by Cllr Fran Smith

WEST MIDLANDS CAMPAIGN AGAINST PLASTIC BULLETS



The West Midlands Campaign Against Plastic Bullets has been formed to demand a total ban on the use of and deployment of plastic bullets in the West Midlands. Its supporters include Trade Union Activists, community organisations and individuals. We work in conjunction with the national Campaign Against Plastic Bullets which is supported by the National Council for Civil Liberties.

YOUR SUPPORT FOR THE CAMPAIGN IS NEEDED NOW

CONTACT: 7, Frederick Street,
Birmingham B1 3HE.
tel (021) 236 3380
or Wolverhampton Polytechnic NUS 712701
Wolverhampton CRC 773589

EXPOSE THE COVER-UP!

● Twelve years have passed since four young people were arrested, framed and sentenced to life for the Guildford and Woolwich bombings. All four still maintain their innocence and claim that all statements were extracted only under duress: Paul Hill was severely beaten.

● The **Guildford Four** were framed: the police. the Home Office and all those involved know this. This was just one of a series of frame-ups of Irish people by the British state using the Prevention of Terrorism Act and conspiracy laws. Paul was the first person detained under the PTA when its reign of terror began in 1974. These laws have been used to intimidate the Irish community in Britain. They were recently used against Maire O'Shea. But this time, faced with a strong campaign led by Maire and backed by many organisations and the Irish community. this attempted frame-up was defeated in February 1986. Her victory gave renewed hope to forgotten prisoners and their relatives, who are faced with the British state's relentless campaign of intimidation.

● A strong campaign can win the release of the **Guildford Four.** Only a strong campaign will force the Home Office to release them or allow a retrial. Join the campaign now.

Hot on the heels of the Trades Council's Day-school on Ireland on 27th September comes the first meeting of the Coventry Guildford 4 Campaign on Monday 29th.
This is the initiative of the Irish in Britain Representation Group (IBRG) which can be contacted locally c/o 43 Aldermoor Lane, Coventry.
With the Public Meeting advertised below, and Whoberley Ward organising a meeting with Clair Short for the Labour Cttee on Ireland, there is a marked stepping up of Irish solidarity work in the city which Briefing urges readers to support.

BRIEFING

Briefing has an open editorial policy. Letters and contributions from readers are welcomed, though we reserve the right to edit for reasons of space or where the item is openly racist or sexist.

The local Editorial Committee is elected by and responsible to the Coventry Briefing Group.

Deadline for articles for next issue is October 20th. Please submit them to Mick Chilvers, 72 Stoke Green, Coventry.

Coventry N.E. Womens Section

EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

GUEST SPEAKER
WOMAN SINN FEIN
COUNCILLOR

Friday October 24th 8pm
Barras Green Social Club

ALL WOMEN WELCOME!

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