LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
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KING'S CROSS VERDICT:

MANAGEMENT TO BLAME!

The publication of the King's Cross fire report, one year after the tube disaster which killed 31 people, coincides with an ever-deepening crisis on London's Underground.

In the year since the fire, the central cuts strategy of London Underground and its government paymasters has remained unchanged.

The appointment of Mr "Nice Guy" Sir Neil Shields to succeed Sir Keith Bright as London Regional Transport (LRT) Chair is a clear sign that the government plans to make sure London Underground Ltd breaks even by 1989/90 and reduces unit costs by at least 3.5% in the next few years.

The Fennell Report, with its painstaking approach to the circumstances of the fire, safety and evacuation precautions, and the Underground management structure is a rigorous investigation of a chaotic event.

However, its "liberal" sentiments are largely misplaced in the late 1980s, when old assumptions about safety, labour relations, and the role of public transport have gone by the board.

Up till the King's Cross fire, the underground had changed hands twice this decade, from Tory to Labour control under the GLC, and then to central government control after the 1984 LRT Act. Under both Tory and Labour GLC administrations it was run bureaucratically — with little vision or understanding of mass transport planning.

There is no doubt that the government's decision to remove London Transport from GLC control was based partly on the fear that the GLC could mobilise LT workers to fight abolition. After all, the Labour GLC's transport policies — though narrowly focused on the passenger side — did provide an alternative for the mass of London transport staff.

By DAVE WELCH

Over 3,000 jobs have been lost since 1984. As experienced staff were the main guarantee of safety on the Underground, it was inevitable that at some point safety would collapse.

The discounting of the safety factor was well underway by 1985. A Fire Brigade memo, dated November 6th 1985, revealed that "the Brigade has been conducting delicate negotiations with LRT since the (Oxford Circus) fire and have secured many improvements." Material relating to the 1984 Oxford Circus fire was considered to be "politically sensitive".

The new corporate management of London Underground set out to re-invent the company to sell the product, re-designing everything from stations to workers' everyday performance of duties.

Safety was not included in the endless cost efficiency exercises. Even after King's Cross, a consultants' design report, "Design Management at LRT", failed to mention safety issues.

One-Person Operation (OPO) now holds sway on over 60% of lines, with the Jubilee losing its guards in March 1988, four months after the King's Cross fire. This took place despite growing doubts over fire safety in tube tunnels.

The Underground ticketing system (UTS) (with its potentially lethal ticket barriers) will lose a further 1,200 jobs; with LU's self-styled "Action Stations!" programme meaning further cuts in station staffing right across the Underground.

Latest proposals from Tube bosses include a reduction in depot/track safety inspections and a £3 million saving on Picadilly line train equipment.

There has been no let-up in the attacks on staff since King's Cross, resulting in absenteeism and resignations rocketing in recent months. Even the award of the "OPO" rate of pay to drivers on the Central, Northern and Bakerloo lines will do little in the long run to stifle discontent.

The Fennel Report's failure to locate the fire within the wider political scene or to connect it with staff cuts or government policies is both a warning and a challenge.

It is a warning about the limitation of the whole business of government enquiries. It is a challenge to rail workers in London to start fighting the creeping cuts programme and to call a halt to OPO, the UTS system and cuts in all departments.

The whole fabric of the tube system is under greater stress than ever. How long before it breaks again?

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Collets strike

Support the picket line!

On October 28th, 15 members of staff at Collets Bookshop in Charing Cross Road, London, took part in an unofficial one day strike, in protest at the company's failure to adhere to the union/management procedure for handling disciplinary and collective disputes in regard to the dismissal of one employee.

The strikers were told by management that they would receive a written warning and lose a day's pay for taking unofficial action.

On November 2nd 14 of those 15 were dismissed, given two weeks pay and told to leave the premises immediately, regardless of length of service.

Management insisted that the 14 were dismissed for handing out a so-called "defamatory" strike leaflet, although the dismissal notices were for breach of contract by taking part in unofficial strike action.

Collets' only solution to the dispute was to offer selective reinstatement of two members of staff with more than two years of service, who had been invited to write a letter of apology disassociating themselves from the strike and a financial bribe to three others with more than two years' service. The rest were offered nothing.

While talks were taking place at ACAS, Collets management took the opportunity to break the USDAW/Collets Agreement once again by employing non unionised casual labour.

These "Friends and relatives" were only withdrawn at the insistence of the union that normal practices prevail whilst members were suspended and talks took place.

Following Collets refusal to reinstate our members "under any circumstances", the members voted two to one in favour of indefinite strike action.

We ask for your assistance on the picket lines Monday to Friday 10-6.30 and on Saturdays 10-6 outside Collets International Bookshop, 129 Charing Cross Road and Collets Penguin Bookshop 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2.

We urge you to send letters of protest against the actions of management (send them via USDAW, Dilke House, Mallet Street, WC2 — we will forward them).

We ask you to contribute generously to the Collets Strike Fund, c/o USDAW.

For further information please phone the strike line on 587 0839.

ILEA VICTIMISATION

Justice for Tony Marriott!

***Briefing* readers will be aware of the disgraceful record of ILEA when it comes to trade union rights.**

Many *Briefing* comrades have campaigned for sacked teacher Dick North and Careers Adviser Tony Marriott.

What may not be so obvious is the implication of other Labour Boroughs in London in similar attacks on trade union rights.

Haringey Council is also gaining a widespread reputation for attacking trade union representatives. ILEA sacked Tony Marriott in February 1988 for his trade union activities. In September 1987, Haringey Council forced him out because he defends the trade union rights of part time workers.

Until his resignation, Tony worked as Careers Adviser in Haringey. He was also deputy convenor for NALGO in the Education Service.

Education Managers in Haringey Council at first agreed to let Tony have half time unpaid leave to follow a course. This permission was withdrawn, unless Tony agreed that part time workers elected as NALGO representatives were not entitled to time off to carry out trade union activities on behalf of their members.

This would have set a precedent, denying the rights of all part time workers in NALGO. It would have had major implications for equal opportunities, given that most part time workers are women or black people.

Tony left rather than break NALGO's hard won agreements, and joined ILEA.

We can but speculate on the role of Haringey's management in bringing Tony Marriott to the attention of managers in ILEA. How many other shop stewards have been sacked by ILEA (let alone after only five months) on the basis of a pack of lies about incompetence?

Pressure is mounting in Haringey for Tony's re-employment. Motions have been passed by the local Trades Council and NALGO's Education Service Committee.

After a meeting with NALGO representatives, Education Committee Chair Councillor Bob Harris agreed to push for this demand. As a member of ILTA, Cllr Harris has already been written to by his union reminding him of ILTA's own campaign for equal treatment for part time teachers.

Haringey's Labour Group will be discussing a motion to re-employ Tony at its December meeting *Briefing* supporters are asked to lobby Haringey Councillors in support of this resolution.

Further information from: Tracy (365 0977, 975 9700 x 3117); Glyn (885 1759, 975 9700 x 3162).

WALTHAM FOREST

Cuts, caucuses and chaos

By John Wray
Leyton CLP

Waltham Forest LGC recently held a conference to discuss options for the Council budget 1989/90.

Rate-capping has been removed after just one year and although no severe cuts were implemented virtually all service and employment expansion came to a halt.

It was decided earlier in the year to ditch the decentralisation programme. Rent increases above an average of £1.60 were only avoided after consultation produced widespread hostility.

Increased charges for Social Services were also narrowly avoided.

A voluntary redundancy scheme has reduced employment and service in many departments. Meanwhile, two by-elections have been lost to the SLD, reducing Labour's majority to one.

Setback after setback has led to a mood change in the Party. A no cuts line to put Labour back on the offensive was pushed through the Conference, albeit at a cost of a 20% rate increase.

The majority of Conference motions called for a standstill budget at least. Only one was outright pro-cuts and was massively defeated.

A Militant motion calling for no rent or rate increases, no cuts, etc., fell because the movers didn't turn up.

Those motions which were carried called either for no cuts and never mind the rate increase or no cuts but bear in mind the ratepayers might not like it too much.

An amendment to one no cuts motion calling for the Council to produce a report on social needs in the Borough and for this to be considered at a recall Conference to decide on either a rate increase or a deficit budget was narrowly defeated.

Agreement

Getting a no cuts policy through LGC and Group is one thing. Getting it through Council might be another.

Normally a majority of any number, even one, would be sufficient, but the Group and subsequently the Party has been split apart by rows over race issues that have led to five black Councillors walking out of the last full Council meeting, giving the Tories and SLD a temporary majority.

The affair has been simmering for a while with some black Councillors feeling, sometimes justifiably, that equal opportunities policies have been ignored in senior Council positions.

The latest incident occurred when two all-white shortlists were drawn up for head teacher posts. Three of the black Councillors complained. The shortlists were suspended and then reinstated after a right wing backlash from the opposition and local and national press.

When the matter was brought to the LGC Executive it was clear that the Labour Group, unfortunately split between black and white, could not be reconciled.

A motion to readvertise the posts was tied and declared not carried by the chair. The Party couldn't resolve the issue either.

Condolences

Two weeks later, two other black Labour Councillors submitted a motion to the Council agenda, bypassing the Group. The motion expressed condolences to family and supporters of General Zia in the wake of his assassination. It was hardly surprising that it hadn't been put to the Group for discussion.

At the Council meeting only a handful of Labour Councillors supported it. The opposition voted for it and so now, thanks to a strange cross-party alliance, Waltham Forest Council thinks General Zia's death wasn't a potential end to tyranny but a regrettable tragedy.

Immediately after the vote five black Councillors walked out, leaving the opposition a free reign for the night. In the end, they were too surprised to exploit it fully.

Split

It also left the Labour Party in Waltham Forest hopelessly split between two groups, both totally uncompromising, and both unable to justify their attitudes and tactics.

Hamme

Unions stand

"Industrial relations are in crisis, deteriorating by the day. The leadership of the Council has made it clear that they are not prepared to negotiate with us, and are willing to force through cuts in jobs and services."
Tony Phelan, NALGO Branch Chair

"The Council is bypassing all local and national agreements. In particular, secondment in education and the block transfer of computer staff are going ahead without any consultation at all! The Council is lying when it says that negotiations are taking place. Despite a meeting with the Chief Executive to re-establish negotiating machinery, the Council have still not come back to us."
Juliet Thorpe, NALGO Assistant Branch Secretary

"We could understand this sort of behaviour from a right wing Tory government, but we expect a Council which calls itself left wing to behave differently. In fact we have been stabbed in the back."
Jimmy Shanley, UCATT Convenor

"First GCHQ — now Hammersmith Council attacks the unions!"

This headline on a leaflet convening an emergency meeting of Hammersmith Town Hall NALGO sums up the state of play in industrial relations in the local Council.

Is the right wing Council leadership taking a leaf out of Thatcher's book? Leader Mike Goodman (himself a NALGO member!) had taunted NALGO that they would never get their members out on strike, and therefore the Council need take no notice of the 1,800 NALGO members it employs.

On October 27th, at a mass meeting attended by hundreds of members, NALGO replied, with a call for a one-day strike on November 7th — to coincide with the TUC's national day of action for the GCHQ workers.

The crisis in industrial relations is a result of the intransigent attitude of the Goodman/Harrison leadership, which led to a complete breakdown at the Council/Staff Joint Negotiating Committee on September 17th.

Since then the leadership, although saying they are willing to talk to the unions, have referred all outstanding matters to the personnel Executive Committee (PEC). The effect of this is to completely by-pass normal negotiating machinery.

LEWISHA

How to extend yo when everyone el theirs

Lewisham's Labour Group finally forced through plans for a costly Town Hall extension last month.

They ignored the opposition of the three local Constituency Labour Parties and the Borough Local Government Committee.

Since June when several Labour Councillors combined with Tories to defeat the plan, the Labour leadership have been busy constructing a majority through persuasion and coercion.

In contrast to the hours spent in securing that majority, no energy was directed into consultation with the local Party or local people.

Only the three Hither Green ward Councillors stood by local Party policy and their principles, and voted against the proposal. Disciplinary action is now being taken against them.

Hither Green Labour Party completely supports the stand taken by our Councillors. We find it interesting that no disciplinary action was taken against Labour Councillors earlier this year when the Labour

Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign

Public Meeting

To discuss the forthcoming appeal hearings, mobilisation for the picket of Wormwood Scrubs on December 11th, and the continuing police victimisation of ex-defendants, their families, and the Broadwater Farm Community generally.

With Speakers:
Lord Anthony Gifford, QC
Chair of the Independent Inquiry
Ken Livingstone MP
Labour Party Campaign Group
Millard Scott
Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign
Relatives of the framed prisoners
The meeting will be chaired by Peter Chalk of Haringey Council

Your participation is essential to the success of this campaign. We must act to defend our hard-won democratic rights and freedoms. Come along and take part.

Monday December 5th
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The issues involved include recruitment procedures, sexual and racial harassment, and recruitment to jobs having access to children — all of them important issues. NALGO have been told that PEC will adopt management proposals, regardless of union objections!

The day of action was a resounding success, with several key departments closed down. A march from the Town Hall to Charing Cross Hospital was organised by NALGO, the Trades Council, and the Health Authority unions — whose jobs are threatened by the proposed closure of four local hospitals.

The march and rally also won support form many of the Council's manual workers.

NALGO Branch Secretary, Tony Phelan, said at the rally, "This will be the first of many days of industrial action. The Council leadership has been completely bypassing NALGO's negotiating machinery. The latest issue is on Education Transfer, where all national and local agreements on negotiation and implementation are being ignored."

The Council is also developing corporate strategies on industrial relations and contract compliance with no input at all from the unions. Both the blue and white collar unions are being ignored by the leadership, yet it is they who will face post-Xmas redundancies if the Council don't get it right on contract compliance.

The dismantling of negotiating machinery is seen by the unions as part of the preparations for implementing cuts measures. Feeling is running high against the Goodman/Harrison leadership.

John Fitzpatrick, Hammersmith NALGO president, said, "We are striking against a Labour Council in Hammersmith and Fulham, in protest against the cuts in jobs and conditions of service which it is imposing on its workforce, and on the people of Hammersmith and Fulham.

"We are also striking in solidarity with the trade unionists at GCHQ who have been sacked by this government. We are determined to resist the attempts of this government to smash the trade unions, and the attempts by its line managers in Labour and Tory Councils to pass on these attacks to working people."

The Harrison/Goodman leadership understand that if they wish to impose their cuts programme, they must deal with the unions. They have started with NALGO, which they clearly feel is the "weakest" link, before going for the blue collar unions.

The unity displayed on the day of action shows that they could be in for a few shocks.



NALGO Shop Steward on the day of action

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ur Town Hall se is cutting



Group was actually defeated in Council.

Cllr Pat Waylett, who voted against the plan with Hitehr Green colleagues Jan Pedelty and Terry Clayworth, argued that the Town Hall extension had to be opposed because:

"to finance it there'll be a lot of asset sales — if you're going to sell assets at a time when you're cutting services, that money should be used for the benefit of the people of Lewisham and to fulfil manifesto commitments such as a workplace creche and a Law Centre.

"Chief Officers are in fact running the Council. Chief Officers want a nice, large, centralised complex to preside over. The Group doesn't have the political strength and direction to stand up to Officers.

"Give the power of decision-making on key issues back to the ordinary Party member."

By Lesley Lee
Chair, Hither Green Branch Labour Party (personal capacity)

Terry Clayworth, elected in October, feels his action totally justified:

"My by-election proved local people were strongly opposed to the Town Hall extension. I feel I have a mandate to break the Labour whip from both the Branch Labour Party an d the electorate.

"The other two Hither Green Councillors have been recommended for a six month expulsion, until March 1989. The Labour Group has chosen to ignore all CLPs and BLGC. Their view of accountability is somewhat nebulous and hard to define — they hear what they want to hear and ignore the rest."

Accountability is an issue many of them conveniently forget once elected. Terry wants to:

Resources

He is also concerned at the prospects of more cuts next year:

"A £15 million gap is to be bridged, therefore Committees are trying to find cuts. It's a management budget rather than a budget based on people's needs."

Terry feels equal opportunities could be another victim:

"Whilst there is a residual commitments, resources are not forthcoming. Budget cuts will worsen the situation.

"On education, for instance, whilst there is to be one meeting specifically on sexuality and sex education, there seems to be only a limited understanding of the oppression and discrimination faced by lesbians and gay men.

"There is no clear framework for developing policies which will counter discrimination, and I doubt there will be any development of equal opportunities initiatives in the near future."

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HACKNEY

Police attack local community

By the Hackney 8 Defence Campaign

On Tuesday October 25th at 7am about 70police officers raided nine addresses in North Hackney and one in Tottenham.

Homes were ripped apart in one of their biggest operations in Hackney this year.

In one house the occupant was racially abused by the police. Later on, the police arrested a man when he took some clothes to his friend in Hackney police station.

Altogether, the police arrested 12 people. Eight were charged, after being held for over 50 hours.

The charges are kidnapping, conspiracy to kidnap and administering a noxious substance. These charges come from the allegations of one man.

This man has a history of violence against his girlfriend and has allegedly raped her at least twice.

He claims that he was kidnapped. The police were only too eager to listen to him, as some of this man's former friends are activists in such groups as Hackney Housing Action Group, Hackney Anti-Fascist Action, and Hackney Seafarers Support Group.

The police are supplying this man with money and using him to harass the local community.

As for the complaints of rape, the police's reaction has been "it's your word against his."

One individual's word is enough to charge eight people with kidnapping — but an individual's word on rape is not enough.

The police see this as a good opportunity to round up activists in the local community. Whatever happened to "commuity policing"?

We demand that:

•all charges are immediately dismissed against the eight defendants;

•all defendants receive full compensation for wrongful arrest and false imprisonment;

•the alleged rapist is brought to justice.

For more information contact the Hackney 8 Defence Campaign, c/o Hackney Trade Union Support Unit, 489 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AU.

Irish Year of Action

A Hackney Irish Year of Action Group has been set up to initiate and co-ordinate activities to mark twenty years of British troops in the North of Ireland.

The Group will campaign for British withdrawal on a principled basis of self-determination for the Irish people as a whole. Withdrawal in itself does not provide a political solution — the British state could always send the troops back in.

The Hackney Group is keen to develop links with Irish and black and ethnic minority communities, the labour and trade union movement, and all others struggling against oppression and discrimination.

The Campaign has been launched as a joint initiative by the LCI, TOM and IBRG. It is vital for the Year of Action that, nationally as well as locally, the close co-operation of these forces be encouraged.

We hope to develop work in local trade union branches, organise a speaking tour of labour movement and community organisations, and participate in Hackney's Irish Festival.

We shall also liaise with the East London Irish Year of Action Committee.

By Jim Thain
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

Our ultimate aim is to help fuel the momentum for the mass national rally planned for August. This will be a major test of the left's ability to mobilise in solidarity with the oppressed people of Ireland.

Letters

Reply to vituperation over BUWC

Dear *London Briefing*,

There is an old adage which goes "If you've no case, abuse your opponent."

That's exactly what Labour County Councillor, Julie Larner, does in your issue of November 9th with reference to Brent Unemployed Centre closure and Brent Trades Council.

She worked for less than seven months at the Centre which was set up by the "Stalinist dominated Trades Council leadership... an irrelevant and virtually moribund body... destructive and sectarian tactics... sheer duplicity and attacks on unemployed centres." to repeat her words.

So now for truth, not vituperation. Brent Council ceased to fund the Centre from September 30th. The Management Committee was forced to end the employment of Larner and another staff member from that date.

On September 27th Larner submitted a letter to the Management Committee threatening legal action is she didn't receive £1,624.70 severance pay by the 30th.

The MC had no funds except the residue of some Council money which we had no permission to use.

CC Larner claimed that two Council officers had said that "there would be no problem over severance payment" from that money. There was no written confirmation and the Council officers statement has since been denied.

Trades Council members on the Management opposed payment pending consultation with a Council Committee due to meet nine days later. Against our wishes a majority agreed to payment by September 30th and sought to change signatories to cheques.

With cheques cleared on a forged authorisation form, Julie Larner drew £1,624.70 and her co-worker, who had served for three years, £4,229.25 on that date.

The bank and Local Authority have since decided to institute proceedings for fraud. The Trades Council favoured meeting the claims provided that proper procedures were complied with.

Should the money not be returned, and new severance pay negotiations succeed, MC members are open to claims for restoration of the money totalling £5,853.95.

It should therefore be recognised why Julie Larner has directed such venom against the Brent Trades Council on whose EC of 17 only four could be dubbed in any way as "stalinist".

County Councillor Larner is pursuing her vendetta of denigration and disinformation in other publications.

Yours, etc.,
Tom Durkin
Vice Chair of Trades Council and MC member BUWC

Art and class

Dear *London Briefing*,

With reference to recent comments in Briefing on the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith (which I found both totally lacking a socialist perspective as well as being depressingly visionless), I am surprised that any socialist can believe that any art or theatre is irrevocably "middle class".

It is because comrades such as your correspondent have such a patronisingly low level of confidence in the capabilities and expectations of ordinary working people that the Labour Party (and particularly the left) has abandoned whole areas of the arts to the "middle class".

Our task as socialists (made immeasurably more difficult by the attitude of your correspondent) is to reclaim this ground for working people and that is what we in Hammersmith and Fulham have been doing with substantial success over the past two years in the case of the Lyric and other arts organisations in our Borough.

Yours in comradeship,
Ivan Gibbons
Chair, Leisure and Recreation Committee, Hammersmith & Fulham Council

BRENT



The occupation at Crawford Avenue: victorious!

Crawford Avenue victory!

Crawford Avenue Respite Centre for children with mental handicap, closed by Brent Council as part of its August cuts package has, won a reprieve.

Parents, with the support of Brent Fightback and anti-cuts activists, began an occupation on September 22nd, the day the centre was due to close.

At a hastily called (and secret) Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 4th November, Councillors voted to re-open on a five-day basis from December 1st to March 31st "while investigating alternative provision".

This was endorsed by the full Council meeting of November 7th. For the first time the Council leadership admitted that their retreat was due to the fight put up by their opponents rather than some claimed "re-assessment".

This is recognised by anti-cuts activists as a big victory, despite the limitations of what the Council has conceded — 5-day opening instead of seven, and only for a four month period.

However, the parents see the need to maintain their organisation and vigilance and not put any trust in the Council, preparing now for the fight that will be needed next year.

Strike-breakers defeated!

By Peter Firmin
Brent East CLP

After the victory over the closure of Crawford Avenue the focus of the fight against Brent Council's cuts shifted to the strikes in Social Services and the Housing Needs Unit.

The Council has now conceded the social workers' demands and looks likely to do the same with the housing workers as Briefing goes to press.

Sections of social workers and the Housing Needs Unit were on strike for over six weeks.

Expected to bear the brunt of frustration at the Council's cuts, Housing Needs Unit workers have been physically attacked and have demanded screens as protection. Initially they occupied their workplace, but were ejected by the police.

At the beginning of November the Council took on two scabs through the Job Centre and used the police to get them in to work through the picket line. Staff at the Job Centre have since withdrawn the adverts.

Social workers refused to work unsupervised on child abuse cases (not surprising after the Jasmine Beckford case) with one Area on strike and the others threatened with a lock-out.

On Wednesday, 9th, Social Services came out on all-out strike in response to the Council's upping of the stakes. On Thursday 17th the Council collapsed and gave in to the social workers' demands.

Clearly, it would have cost the Council very little to settle these disputes. They even kept a social work supervisor at home rather than make concessions. But they didn't want to see a union victory on one of the cuts.

Despite its weaknesses, the strikers union, NALGO, is seen as the clearest opponent of the Council who therefore needed to break the strikes.

The Council leadership was so determined that it threatened to take out an injunction preventing strikers from entering Council property, which would have debarred them from entering their own union offices. So much for free trade unionism.

The Council leadership clearly reckoned without the willingness of NALGO members to extend the action. Previous actions by individual sections have collapsed: this time they held out and have won an important victory, proving to other workers under attack that the Council can be beaten.

This victory can be built on in all the Council unions, showing just how wrong their leaderships to argue there is no alternative to accepting cuts.

The fight-back was further strengthened when NALGO members in the Housing Department agreed on November 17th not to process the rent increase and to support tenants on rent strike. They had been addressed by the Secretary of South Kilburn Tenant's Action Group (organising witholding the £7 a week rent increase on one of the largest estates).

While such resolutions are notoriously difficult to implement, it is the start of the kind of link that needs to be built between tenants and housing workers against the Council.

These developments, and where we go from here, will be discussed at the Brent Fightback Conference on December 11th. Anti-cuts organisations from elsewhere in London and nationally are invited to send delegations to show their support.

Cuts Councillors get vicious

On November 9th Brent Fightback organised a demonstration and lobby of the first Council meeting since Brent passed its £17m cuts package in August.

Three hundred people marched from Crawford Avenue Respite Centre to the Town Hall, with a similar number going direct to the lobby.

Originally we planned to march from Crawford Avenue because it was in occupation against closure. In fact, the march was now a victory celebration as the Council had decided to re-open the centre.

Fresh on our minds were also the Council attempts to break strikes in Social Services and Housing Needs, and the way Esmee Sergeant, Chair of Social Services, had called the police to eject protestors from her Press Conference on the matter.

At the Town Hall before the meeting, speakers from the different sections fighting the cuts emphasised the victories we have won (libraries, Crawford Avenue) and the importance of defeating the Council's attempts to break the strikes.

The security firm had pulled out that afternoon; so although the Council leadership wanted to restrict protestors to the gallery and committee rooms (with P.A.) we were able to take up our usual position at the back of the chamber.

Despite press claims of a "mob invasion", the protest was noisy but peaceful. Trouble came when right-wing Labour Councillors left the Chamber — unwilling to stay and listen to those who had elected them.

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

Anti-cuts protestors were physically attacked by people accompanying some of these Councillors, and one had to be taken to hospital.

The police, no doubt called by the right from their vans around the corner, arrived after this was over. They proceeded to clear protestors — with no resistance — not just out of the chamber and gallery but right out of the building to the Town Hall car park.

Dwindled

Eventually they allowed those speaking to petitions (there were 14 against different aspects of the cuts) back, but kept the rest outside, even when they had dwindled to small numbers.

Ken Livingstone, invited to address the lobby but held up by the three-line whip on the Housing Bill, arrived as we were being ejected from the Town Hall. He gave a strong speech in support of the strikers, of tenants on rent strike, and against exclusion from Council meetings.

Coalition

His commitment to attend the picket line at Housing Needs was carried out on November 14th (even if he was over an hour late!) and he must now help to build effective opposition to all the Council's cuts.

Inside the Town Hall, a new, more explicit coalition between pro-cuts Labour and the Tories appeared in opposition to an opportunist no-confidence motion from the Liberals.

Widening the struggle

A Community and Labour Movement Conference

Open to all who want to fight back against cuts

Sunday December 11th, 1.00-5.00 pm

Anson Primary School, Anson Road, NW2

Workshops on:

Building the fightback in the community, the unions, education, housing, Brent's Finance

Invited speakers include:

Ken Livingstone MP, Paul Boateng MP, Martha Osamor, Brent's Occupations and Strikes

Registration £5 organisations, £2 waged, 50p unwaged

For further information contact Brent Fightback, tel. 450 1436, c/o 64 Anson Road, NW2 6AD

All fightback groups across London welcome to attend and show solidarity

GLLP Housing Conference

The same old story

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

The purpose of this conference was to launch a new policy document entitled Housing Policies for London.

This, however, merely contained the usual tired stuff.

No amendments were allowed. The only chance CLPs will have to express a view will be as their one amendment to the entire set of AGM motions.

Unfortunately, the list of names of those responsible for the document includes left comrades on the GLLP Executive who ought to have known better than to get involved in this disgracefully undemocratic procedure.

The document itself has little to do with London specifically. As Claire Tanner from Labour Housing Group pointed out from the platform, it simply reiterates a collection of policies already published in LHG documents.

The tone was set by a demonstration outside, protesting at Islington Council's "billeting" policy, forcing single people in flat-shares to accept a total stranger into their homes.

One of the Conference speakers was Maurice Barnes — Chair of Islington's Housing Committee.

Barnes failed to address any of the oppressive policies currently being pursued against homeless people by Labour Councils right across London (with one or two honourable exceptions).

Instead, he spoke of how we needed "more yuppies in London... we must welcome them..."

Nick Raynsford told delegates "we can't allow an open door to anyone who wants to come here (to London)."

The message from the platform was clear: London's housing is for those who can afford it.

Paul Boateng gave the impression that he had just dropped in on his way to something more important and only just remembered to mention housing.

Speakers from the floor were almost universally opposed to the sentiments coming from the platform; but repeated calls for genuinely socialist housing policies went unheeded.

The rest of the day's proceedings were fairly standard: workshops, plenaries, summings up, condemnations of the evil Tory government. But nowhere were the real issues of how we are to achieve high quality housing for everyone addressed.

Where are the discussions on land ownership, building and training through direct labour, popular consultation on planning and design, comprehensive reforms of the construction industry?

Half-hearted policies tinkering with controls on estate agents, building societies and property developers are not going to solve the massive crisis of housing shortage and disrepair that will face the next Labour government. Debate must start on a genuinely socialist alternative.