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Council tenants are ready to fight the Housing Act

How about some help from Labour Councils?



PHOTO: RLPC

Graffiti at Cherry Gardens, Docklands, indicates the real purpose of Tory housing policy.

All socialists should by now be aware that the 1988 Housing Act enables private landlords and Housing Associations to force local Councils to sell off tenants' homes.

The notorious tenant ballots, where non-voters are counted as voting yes, is also well known.

This novel departure from the democratic norm is nothing, however, compared with the Tories' proposals for administering these ballots.

The tellers who will distribute and count the voting papers are to be appointed, paid, and employed *by the potential new landlord.*

As they are in effect the landlord's agents, it is perhaps appropriate that they will also be asked to deliver copies of their employer's terms and conditions along with the voting papers.

This document will no doubt take the form of a glossy brochure, promising the tenant the earth, but committing the landlord to nothing. By the way, the Tory government, in the best traditions of Orwellian newspeak, calls these tellers "independent".

The voting paper itself is strange. Not only does it include the tenant's name and address, but the tenant is actually expected to sign and date the paper.

Despite the government's fine words about tenants' choice and "pick a landlord", the tenants are not to be given any information on the possible sale of their homes before they receive their ballot papers.

There are not even any provisions, in the government's proposals, to tell tenants the result of the vote.

Labour MPs should oppose these proposals, which parliament still has to approve. Even more important, Council tenants have a right to expect Labour Councils to help them reject the new landlords.

Tenants' fears of having a private landlord foisted on them is rapidly turning to anger against the Tories. This anger must be directed into the building of a united and strong tenants' movement.

BY SCOTT REEVE
South Hornsey Tenants Association

It is the duty of all socialists, inside and outside the Labour Party, fully to support tenants' struggles against Tory attacks, even when they are implemented by Labour Councils.

In Haringey, the Labour Council is so frightened of being seen as "political", which is now apparently unlawful, that it refuses to campaign against the Housing Act.

The Council says that it can only inform Council tenants of the implications of the Act. This information sometimes gives the impression that the Council is *in favour* of tenants choosing a new landlord!

The only Council leaflet on the Housing Bill which was circulated to all Council tenants appeared to be in favour of the privatisation of Council homes. With a headline like "Do you want a new Landlord?" what conclusion does the Council expect tenants to draw?

In Haringey, where tenants' organisations have traditionally been weak and their morale extremely low, the building of a Borough-wide campaign, led by Council tenants themselves, against the sale of Council homes is vital.

Unfortunately, Haringey Council has hindered rather than helped the establishment of such a campaign. However, a meeting of tenants representatives from all over the Borough has now been called to organise opposition to the new landlords.

If the Council really wants to keep its housing stock, it will assist the campaign by:

- publicly stating that they will not willingly sell any Council homes;
- guaranteeing that they will inform tenants of any moves by landlords wanting to buy their homes as soon as the Council hears about it — it will also be vital to inform all Tenants Associations;
- funding the new Borough-wide tenants organisation so that it can produce publicity material and organise tenants' meetings;
- making no more rent increases and no more cuts in the housing service;
- inviting tenants' representatives to all meetings that discuss Council Housing policies, including Labour Group meetings;
- funding existing and new tenants' associations.

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Camden

Housing Bill

Camden hit hard

In Camden, large public meetings against the Housing Act have drawn up to 300 people.

Tenants Associations have been informing tenants about the implications of the new law.

Mini-polls organised on some estates indicate an overwhelming preference for staying with the Council.

Camden has not received any Rate Support Grant from central government since 1981 and therefore has little money for the necessary rehabilitation of old and defective properties.

In 1988, the repairs situation deteriorated dramatically. All tenants, except the very poor and those on pensions, have to pay for most of their own repairs.

The service to the homeless is seriously inadequate. In fact, Camden was found to be breaking the law when it closed its Homeless Persons Unit to personal callers and accepted only telephone enquiries.

Despite this appalling situation, Council tenants want to stick with the Council because they know that private landlords will be worse: they will have no security, and rents will shoot up.

Unfortunately, Camden has done nothing to campaign against the Housing Act, apart from a small grant to the Camden Federation of Tenants.

By Cllr Carolyne Holding

The new law and lack of money will put pressure on the Council to hand over properties to Housing Associations run by businessmen and unelected management committees or to property developers putting in bids for purchase.

At the moment, the Council is doing little to give confidence to its staff and tenants. Collective action to defend Council housing will therefore be more difficult.

But the large meetings of angry tenants indicate that the fight will go on — with or without the Labour Group.

Redundancies

Council prepares for CCT

Two measures are being pushed through by the Council which will lead to 310 jobs being lost.

The old Building and Works departments are being amalgamated, with the loss of 200 jobs. The new, quasi-independent department created will be able to tout for work outside the Council, thereby, it is hoped, withstanding Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT).

By *Briefing* supporters in NALGO and NUPE

This is a joke. The Housing Department is currently using private contractors on a large scale for all sorts of work, indicative of the lack of commitment to direct labour.

The amalgamation is really aimed at softening up Council departments for CCT on Tory terms, i.e. shedding jobs and attacking conditions.

The second measure confirms this suspicion. Seventy jobs on the dust and 40 in street sweeping are to go so that the Council's in-house tender has a chance to "win" the contracts for these services.

Obviously, the workers concerned will not win anything from this strategy but redundancies.

The irony of the situation is that NUPE, which represents the workers concerned, has not been informed of these job losses, despite a promise of consultation by the Labour Group after NUPE's co-operation with the cuts last year.

A NUPE mass meeting is being called to consider action in defence of jobs.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Camden Anti-cuts demo, December 1987

Poll Tax

Stop it!

In Camden the Poll Tax will be very high, largely because the government is also depriving the Borough of most of its business rate income.

No exact figures are yet available, but it seems likely that if the Tax is introduced in 1990, Camden residents will initially have to pay over £400 a year each, with this figure rising to over £600 when it is fully operational.

The Tax will leave over 90% of Camden people worse off.

The Camden Stop the Poll Tax Campaign — which brings together different community, political, tenants, and trade union organisations and is sponsored by the Mayor — believes that we have to unite to stop the Tories going ahead with the Tax.

The first step is to make it as hard as possible to compile the register. But that is only the first step. Over the next year we have to build up support for refusal to pay the Tax.

A major public rally to build our campaign and discuss the way forward with leading Camden political figures will be held on March 14th in the Council Chamber, Camden Town Hall, at 7.30pm.

If you would like to know more, contact David Grace, 13b Murray Street, NW1 9RE. The next campaign meeting will be on Tuesday February 14th at 8pm in the Camden Trade Union Support Unit, Ampthill Square, NW1.

Rent increase

Insult added to injury

Camden Council leadership's promised improvement in housing management is seen as a sick joke by tenants who have to pay for most of their repairs and have to fight their way through rubbish piling up on their estates.

Following last year's cuts, the Housing Department lost 40% of its staff and is now desperately overstretched.

The Labour Group will probably decide to raise the rents by an average of £1.95 per week, as required by the government. This is bad enough (it's twice the level of inflation). But Gareth Smyth, Chair of Housing, is considering adding *an extra £1*.

He claims that this is to allow for more repairs and maintenance. The real reason is to smooth the way for the future self-financing of the housing service, as required by the new Housing Bill, and to ensure that the Poll Tax is at a lower level than previously announced.

This is a kick in the teeth for tenants who have been going in their hundreds to meetings against the Housing Bill.

Demonstrate against fascist attacks

Camden Trades Council is organising a demonstration against racist and fascist violence in the Kings Cross Area.

In recent years there has been a rising tide of violence organised by fascist groups from their base in the Argyle Square area, Kings Cross.

Attacks have taken place against members of the ethnic communities, community centres, women's groups and synagogues.

In August 1988 Home Office Minister Douglas Hogg stated in parliament that the incidence of racially motivated attacks in London has nearly doubled since 1986. In 1986, 1,733 incidents were officially recorded. By 1988 the number had risen to 2,179.

The following incidents are a brief summary of events in the Kings Cross area:

1985: In separate incidents, 16 white males living in the areas were convicted of offences connected with firearms, armed robbery and rape.

1987: A white male was convicted of assault on an Asian newsagent.

1987: A gang of ten white youths raided Drummond Street, stabbed and beat three Bengali youth with iron bars. The youth were treated for serious injuries in UCH Casualty Department.

1988: A white woman was convicted for serious assault on an Asian woman.

1988: A white male was convicted for throwing bricks through the windows of the Jewish synagogue in Fitzroy Street.

1988: Four white males were arrested for assault on gay men leaving a public house in Kings Cross.

1988: A white male was convicted for the murder of Abdus Sattar in 1987.

1988: A white youth stabbed an Asian pupil at William Collins School.

Camden Trades Council, supported by the Joint Trade Union Committee Bloomsbury Health District, appeal to the labour and trade union movement, ethnic and community groups to support the demonstration.

Camden Trades Council says...

NO to racist and fascist attacks

Demonstration:
Saturday February 18th
Assemble:
Camden Town Hall, Judd Street, 11.00am
March:
12 noon to Camden Town
Rally:
Arlington Road Council Depot
Invited speakers include:
Frank Dobson MP, Camden Trades Council, Bengali community
Sponsors include:
Bloomsbury Health District Joint Trade Union Committee; Camden Committee for Community Relations

Ken Hulme

Not a forger

Camden Council Leaders are investigating letters sent to the local press, typed on Council-headed paper, with the forged signatures of Cllrs Gill, Plummer, and Sumray.

The typewriter used appears to be one from an office regularly used by Councillors Ken Hulme and Gareth Smyth. Nobody has yet admitted any guilt in this sordid affair.

Unfortunately, a scurrilous and totally unfounded rumour is going around the Camden Labour Parties that Ken Hulme, Councillor and LGC Secretary, is responsible for the forgeries.

Whatever political differences we may have with Ken, we would certainly object to such attacks on his character and reputation, which are both beyond reproach.

By Fred Leplat
Somers Town Ward

In the past, Ken may have distributed "spoof" *Briefings*, and aggressively fought his way through picket lines of Council workers, but how could we possibly hold this against him?

A thorough investigation is needed to clear his name.

The real forger should do the honourable thing: own up and resign from the Council and the Party, should he or she happen to be a member of either.

Health

Scandal in Council estate

Since 1984 Camden Council has used Levita House South Court near Kings Cross for temporary accommodation for homeless families.

This was in response to spiralling costs of hotel accommodation.

Because of lack of funds to bring some 150 flats up to even basic standards, a Housing Association (London and Quadrant) were brought in to decorate, maintain, and manage the properties.

External repairs, caretaking, etc., remained the responsibility of the Council.

Levita House South Court is in an extremely dilapidated condition. In January 1988, Camden Environmental Health Department inspected seven flats at random and concluded: "For reasons of severe dampness, substantial disrepair, inadequate water supplies, poor internal arrangements, inadequate facilities for the storage and preparation of food, and inadequate/obsolete drainage systems, each flat was found to be so far defective as to be not reasonably suitable (unfit) for human habitation' as designated under Section 604 of the Housing Act 1985."

The report recommended that work be carried out "to leave each dwelling fit for human habitation."

This report appears to have been with the Director of Housing since March 1988. It certainly has never been implemented either in part or in full, other than a sporadically improved caretaking/refuse service.

By Cllr Carolyne Holding

In November 1988 the Environmental Health Department was contacted for an inspection of Levita House.

The Department stated that it had been concerned "for some time", pointed out that there had been referrals from health visitors, and that it had asked the Director of Housing to review the policy of allocating flats to families with small children.

Both the local neighbourhood advice centre and the Social Services worker at Levita House state emphatically that the number of children with severe chest problems is, in their experience, higher than the average rate of tenants with suitable homes.

Rehousing

The Director of Housing, however, stated that "because of the serious problems of rehousing the homeless it would not be possible to alter the placement policy for the time being."

The Director and Chair of Housing must explain to tenants and to the Labour Group why they have sat on this scandal for so long and what action they intend to take to relieve the crisis.

To make things worse, the Environmental Health Department was cut by 30% last year, and its officers have been instructed not to inspect Council housing! So much for the promise of the Labour Group that cuts would not affect health and safety.

BRENT

You ain't seen nothing yet!



PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

After last summer's devestating cuts, many Brent Councillors declared "the worst is over" and denounced anyone who disagreed as scaremongering.

Now the chickens are coming home to roost.

The Director of Finance is predicting a shortfall for next year's (1989/90) Council budget of £72 million (30% of net expenditure).

With a problem on this scale, it might be hoped that Labour Councillors would be attacking the government for "robbing Brent" and making the working class of the Borough aware of the situation.

Instead, Councillors have avoided any discussion of what strategy to adopt and any consultation with the Party and local government unions. The Labour Group even spent time denouncing whoever leaked the Director's briefing to the press and Party.

Councillors were not in the least concerned that they did not have the facts themselves. Right-wing Brent North CLP has even passed a resolution calling for a "high-level enquiry" into the origin of the leak.

However, now the facts are public, the Chair of Finance has himself issued a paper to the Party confirming the figures, something he probably would have preferred not to do at this stage.

Recent practice has been to spring such figures on Councillors and everyone else at the last minute and steamroller them through as "there is no alternative" to cuts.

Again, Brent is not rate-capped. The deficit arises from an accumulation of £17 million from the current year, £10 million bad debts, allowances for inflation, and a massive £28 million due to "special financing".

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

This is in effect the bill for past "creative accounting" measures, confirming that creative accounting only stored up problems for a later date. Any pretence that it was designed to win time to build a fight back against the government is long gone.

Exactly what the Labour Group leadership will now put forward is not yet clear, but it looks like being a combination of a large (20-30%) rate increase and cuts (£30-40 million). Some of the right, unwilling to stomach any more cuts, are arguing for rate rises to avoid further cuts (i.e.up to 56%).

Either level of rate rise (£3-£8 per week per household) is no more acceptable than £30 million cuts. There isn't even the excuse any longer that those on state benefits don't pay rates.

A *rent* increase is not seen as a viable option. Since they went up by £7 a week last summer, rent income has not in fact risen significantly. Either tenants have been unable to pay, or it is a result of the partial rent strike against the increase: we are not being told which.

Yet, miraculously, a high rate increase is expected to bring money flooding into the Council's coffers.

A rate rise would amount to a "surcharge" on every household in order to maintain the present (wholly inadequate) level of jobs and services. The chances of this being meekly accepted, especially after the massive cuts of last summer, are minimal.

Nor would opposition be restricted to tenants, users, and sections of the workforce. It would unleash an unsavoury alliance spearheaded by Tory "rate-payers".

The last year has already seen racism increase, with the Black leadership of the Council and leading Committees being identified with cuts. This would mutiply with right-wing opposition to a large rate rise.

Preparation for the cuts is already underway, with every Council Committee reviewing its budget. Many Labour Councillors have "passed the buck" by referring the issue to Policy and Resources Committee, although there is no doubt that most of them will knuckle under and vote for cuts when the crunch comes.

Public Works Committee has already voted (on February 2nd) to close half the Direct Labour Organisation, with the other half likely to go. The Chair of Education may have resigned, publicly stating that he cannot be part of the level of cuts and school closures required (though this hasn't held him back so far).

The last six months have seen repeated fights against much of Brent's cuts policy, with victories against the closure of libraries and Crawford Avenue respite centre, and successful action by sections of NALGO.

The latest to win were Housing Needs Unit workers, who obtained safety screens after 18 weeks on strike. With typical Brent "industrial relations", the manager suspended them on their first day back — though this was later withdrawn after protest.

However, major cuts have gone through either unopposed or with the unions unable or unwilling to fight them, such as the massive "voluntary" redundancy programme. There is a feeling that it cannot happen again, despite all the evidence to the contrary.

Brent Fightback, which still meets weekly and has played a key role in co-ordinating and supporting action against the cuts, has set itself the task of sounding the alarm over what is in store and organising to demand no cuts or rate rises in advance of budget-making.

Lewisham

Anti-cuts Councillors reinstated

By DAN CARTER

Two Hither Green Ward Councillors, suspended from Lewisham Council's increasingly intolerant Labour Group, have been reinstated following an appeal to the Greater London Labour Party.

The Councillors, Jan Pedelty and Pat Waylett, were suspended for opposing the building of a multi-million pound Town Hall extension at the same time cuts of £15 million are being made and the Poll Tax is being introduced.

The result of the appeal with be a major embarrassment to Chief Whip Gavin Moore, who in his eagerness to wipe out opposition, broke many of his own disciplinary rules.

The two Councillors, who were acting in support of branch, CLP and LGC policy, as well as the by-election manifestos, are now back in the Group in time for votes on the budget-making process, when several more Councillors are expected to rebel against cuts in meals on wheels and old people's homes.

As the 1990 manifesto writing process gets underway, the Borough Local Government Committee is discussing its relationship with an increasingly distant Labour Group.

Reselection meetings in the Autumn may well produce a number of surprises.

Letter

Stop backing losers!

Dear *Labour Briefing*,

I've been reading *Labour Briefing* for a very long time and rarely have I read a more self-pitying and paranoid piece than *Camden — left wingers need not apply* (*LLB* no. 106).

It will presumably come as a considerable surprise to Gill Entwistle — a regular contributor to *Camden Briefing* — who was actually approved by the LGC to know that she is no longer regarded as a left winger.

The truth of the matter is that for the last three years Steve Taylor has devoted more time to attacking colleagues in the Labour Party than in any attacks on the Tories in Camden.

Mr Taylor is a master of the poison pen yet only chooses to use it against card carrying members of his own Party.

When the time came to consider candidates for any possible by-elections in Camden it can be hardly surprising that such disruptive behaviour was taken into account by the LGC in considering his suitability.

Steve Taylor well knows that it is within the power of the LGC to exclude candidates subject to a proper appeal — he tried it himself in 1986 against three candidates and even tried to stop them appealing to the Regional Party!

As for all the old cobblers about right wing plots the simple fact is that there are only two CLPs in Camden with an equal number of delegates to the Local Government Committee.

The reason that the decisions supported by Holborn & St Pancras CLP keep winning is that we believe in accountability to the General Committee (surely a principle that *Briefing* would support?) and that our delegates actually turn up to the meetings.

The fact that Steve Taylor's comrades up in leafy Hampstead prefer to attend wine and cheese evenings or whatever rather than Party meetings is not something that *Briefing* should applaud.

First Tony Benn; now Steve Taylor: come on, Briefing, make 1989 the year you stop backing losers!

Regards,
Paul Wheeler,
Agent/Secretary, Holborn & St Pancras Labour Party

Haringey

"Charter for victimisation"

Labour plans to sack 600

At a meeting on February 2nd, Haringey's ruling Labour Group voted by 15-14 (with one abstention) to sack *half* the workers in the Public Works Service.

Only those workers who can demonstrate "a commitment to the Public Works Service" will be retained.

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Bowing to draconian Tory restrictions on Local Authority Direct Labour Organisations, and panicked by a £5 million deficit in Public Works, right wing Group Leader Toby Harris pushed through a compulsory redundancy package, the likes of which the Borough has never seen.

The vote was preceded by a smug performance from Senior Officers (derided as "a bunch of suits" by angry anti-cuts Councillor Steve King) which clearly saw the financial disaster as a chance to punish old enemies in the workforce — the well organised craft unions and the militant Women and Black Workers Groups in PWS.

Again and again, anti-cuts Councillors and party members have asked: where's the bottom line? The vote to sack over 600 Council workers shows that for these people there is not, never has been, and never will be a bottom line — tactical, political, or moral.

Toby Harris's gang of cynical incompetents now sits complacently on top of the Council hierarchy, while senior management run amok, making a mockery of every socialist commitment ever undertaken by the local Labour Party or the Group itself.

Speaking against the sackings, Steve King compared Toby Harris and his crew to Ian MacGregor and the Tories and noted how the rhetoric of "economic pits" and "a productive workforce" had been transferred from the coalfields to the DLO.

"Once again, the workers, the people who do the dirtiest, most dangerous, and difficult jobs in the Borough, are being made to pay for the inadequacies of management an the refusal of the government to make the necessary funds available."

There are two major sources of the £7.3 million deficit in this year's budget (which has led to the issuing of a Section 114 Notice and a freeze on all "non-contractual" spending): overspends in the DLO (due to Tory-imposed accountancy rules and inept management) and an uncontrollable escalation in homelessness, with attendant bed and breakfast costs.

On the one hand, the Council says it can do little or nothing for the thousands of homeless people in the Borough, and the thousands more stuck in unsuitable accommodation.

On the other, it wants to make 600 building workers redundant. This is the Alice in Wonderland state of Labour politics in Haringey. No wonder we lose by-elections.

Cllr Kevin Hargreaves, moving a left resolution which called on the Council to save the entire DLO while restructuring its management, described the compulsory redundancy proposals as "a betrayal of the workforce, a betrayal of the community, and a betrayal of the clear manifesto commitments on which we all were elected in 1986."

Cllr Craig Brewin called the compulsory redundancy scheme "a charter for victimisation, snoopers, and grasses." He asked: "Who will decide which workers have demonstrated a commitment to PWS — and on what grounds?"

He also warned that left Councillors would not support the proposals in full Council on February 13th and would once again defy the Labour Whip.

Voting for 600 redundancies:

Clarke, Dewar, Fenwick, Gardner, Garwood, Toby Harris, Jones, Kane, Layne, Lister, McGinley, Neuner, Tonge, Wilmore, Zissimos.

Voting against:

Blanchard, Brewin, Chalk, Cooper, Crossan, Doble, Gavron, Gillespie, Hargreaves, Roger Harris, Steve King, Lawrence, Moore, Osamor.

Abstention:

Cllr Andreas Mikkides (a UCATT member!)

Cllrs Diana Minns and Bob Harris chose to go home early, thus avoiding another stressful test of conscience.

By-election

Crazed Tories on rampage

A by-election in Woodside ward in Haringey has brought out the worst in local Tories.

So far, the Tories have produced two leaflets, both masterpieces of mindless right wing propaganda.

By Mike Marqusee Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Under the ringing rubric of "Fighting for Freedom in Haringey", the Tories denounce:

"1. Terrorist flags flying on the Civic Centre flagpole on the Queen's birthday. (African National Congress... ANC and South West African People's Orgnaisation... SWAPO).

"2. Homosexual and extremist exhibitions in public libraries.

"3. Positive images of homosexuality in schools.

"4. Vast sums of ratepayers money being wasted on fringe organisations by this Labour controlled Council."

A subsequent leaflet launched a verbal assault on Reading Matters Bookshop, which has already seen off a vicious attack led last year by the Tory election agent, Malcolm Glyn.

Woodside Tories are notorious in Haringey for their virulent bigotry and obsessional hatred of the left (which for them begins with Edward Heath).

The by-election has been caused by the resignation of sitting Tory Councillor Bernard Dehnel. His interventions at Council meetings have included:

- attacks on unemployed people;
- on lesbians and gay men (denouncing one gay Labour Councillor for having the temerity to condemn the effects of Thatcher's policies on families);
- and an amazing performance in which he banged a shoe on a bench and screamed "murderers" throughout an address by a Sinn Fein Councillor invited by the majority Labour Group.

His would-be replacement is a thuggish ignoramous by the name of Jim Buckley, a frequenter of the public gallery in Council meetings, whose memorable outbursts include such gems as "Fuck off, you commie pooftas!"

Buckley's close colleague Neil Rostron featured in billious colour on the front page of *The Mirror* during last year's Tory Conference. Rostron was depicted in a drunken stupor, a familiar enough sight in Haringey.

The excellent Labour candidate is Jobaidur Rahman, a local resident and opponent of cuts in jobs and services.

The seat has always been marginal. With an out of date electoral register, a mid-winter polling day, cuts in Council services, repeated rent rises, and little help from local right wing Labour Party officers, the odds are stacked against Jobaidur.

But hard-working local lefties are keeping up their hopes. The by-election takes place just after we go to press, on February 9th.

Haringey and Hampstead

Anger at Health Authority merger

On January 23rd the North East Thames Regional Health Authority voted by eight votes to seven (with one abstention) to support a merger of Haringey and Hampstead District Health Authorities.

This decision is now referred to the Secretary of State, who will make a final judgement.

By Roger Harris Haringey DHA member

The closeness of the vote surprised many, including those of us who have been campaigning against the merger.

The Regional Health Authority is one of the most undemocratic bodies around. Its 16 members are *all* appointed by the Secretary of State and the majority live out in leafy Essex.

They have little idea of what is going on in North London and have repeatedly shown a total lack of understanding of any of the vital issues.

Of the responses to the merger document, over 50 opposed the merger and only 14 supported it. Some of the 14 had only narrowly backed the merger. Haringey District Health Authority voted by eight to six, and Hampstead by nine to six.

There were also some 20 responses which were described as "neutral", even though quite a number of these were clearly against. This is not the first time officers of the Region have lied to get their own way.

This massive rejection came from a wide variety of sources — GPs, CHCs, Local Authorities, and all the trade unions.

However, when the Chair of the Haringey Health Authority made his speech he said that the majority of those who deal directly with patients supported it. *What he meant was that the consultants supported it!*

The merger is being ruthlessly pursued by a handful of NHS officers and powerful consultants. It is an attempt to create a prestigious, mega-teaching district where patients can offer more teaching "material" for their students.

It will also offer scope for more cuts and increase the likelihood of privatisation, as larger scale services will become more attractive to private firms. It will also mean considerable job losses as "duplicated" services will be "rationalised".

Campaigners are determined to fight on, heartened by the close vote and the overwhelming opposition to the merger. This issue must be raised at every opportunity.

Every worker in the Health Authority and every patient who uses its services must be made aware of the consequences of the merger. Pressure must be put on MPs.

The whole issue must be linked with the government's White Paper to show the Tories' ever-widening attack on the principles upon which the NHS was founded.

Newham

Canteen victory

Last summer Newham Council, which is solidly Labour, closed the two college canteens in the Borough.

By Carolyn Sikorski Chair, Newham NALGO (personal capacity)

In a cowardly manoeuvre they waited until the end of term, and the majority of canteen workers only discovered the fact through the local paper.

Just after Christmas, Council staff and canteen workers again discovered through the Tory *Newham Recorder* that the two Council-funded staff canteens were to have their subsidy withdrawn — an action equivalent to closing them.

Management's cynical implication was the the cash saved by closing the canteens could be used to fund a staff nursery — as if staff shouldn't be entitled to both services!

Newham NALGO and the canteen workers themselves lobbied and petitioned in defence of the threatened canteens. The campaign was successful, with the Council's Labour Group voting to retain the service.

However, unions fear that management will run the service down by not filling vacancies and will use compulsory competitive tendering to make it unviable.

More positively, the unions which represent the Council's workforce have reinvigorated the Newham Joint Trade Union Committee to oppose threats of privatisation, service reviews and possible cuts and closures.

Councillors with a record of principled opposition to austerity policies spoke at the mass meeting of stewards organised by the Newham JTUC.

EALING

STOP PRESS: Ealing Fightback and Labour Party activists have been pressing for a Borough Congress to discuss the Labour Group's 1989/90 budget proposals — £12.5 million cuts and a 35% rate rise.

In the absence of a congress, Ealing Southall CLP held its own conference on Saturday February 4th.

The Conference passed a resolution to oppose spending cuts and the rate rise, urging instead that a local needs budget be drawn up, understanding that this may lead to a deficit budget.

London Health Emergency

Stop the NHS White Paper! Hands off our hospitals!

Urgent meeting to discuss the full implications of the government's NHS White Paper and the possibilities of a united campaign to defeat it.
Representatives and individuals from all interested bodies welcome.

Speakers:

Frank Dobson MP; Judith Carter (COHSE national officer); Cllr Annette Barrett (Chair, Greenwich Health Sub-Committee)

Wednesday 15th February, 7pm

Camden Town Hall, Judd St, London WC1, (Kings Cross tube)

Details: LHE, 335, Grays Inn Road, London WC1, 01-833 3020.