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NHS: LONDON'S AUTUMN CRUNCH

NEW CASH CRISIS CLOSES LONDON BEDS

Hundreds of hospital beds in the capital are already closing; hundreds are to be kept closed, and hundreds more are at risk as London's 29 Health Districts face a "cash crunch".

The latest crisis is reminiscent of the disastrous autumn of 1987 which led to the closure of 1,000 beds across the capital and up to 5,000 closures throughout the country.

Many of these "temporarily" axed beds have never reopened — meaning that the present round of panic cutbacks and closures will have an even more severe effect on Health Authorities already functioning on overstretched and inadequate capacity.

Among the biggest cutbacks already announced:

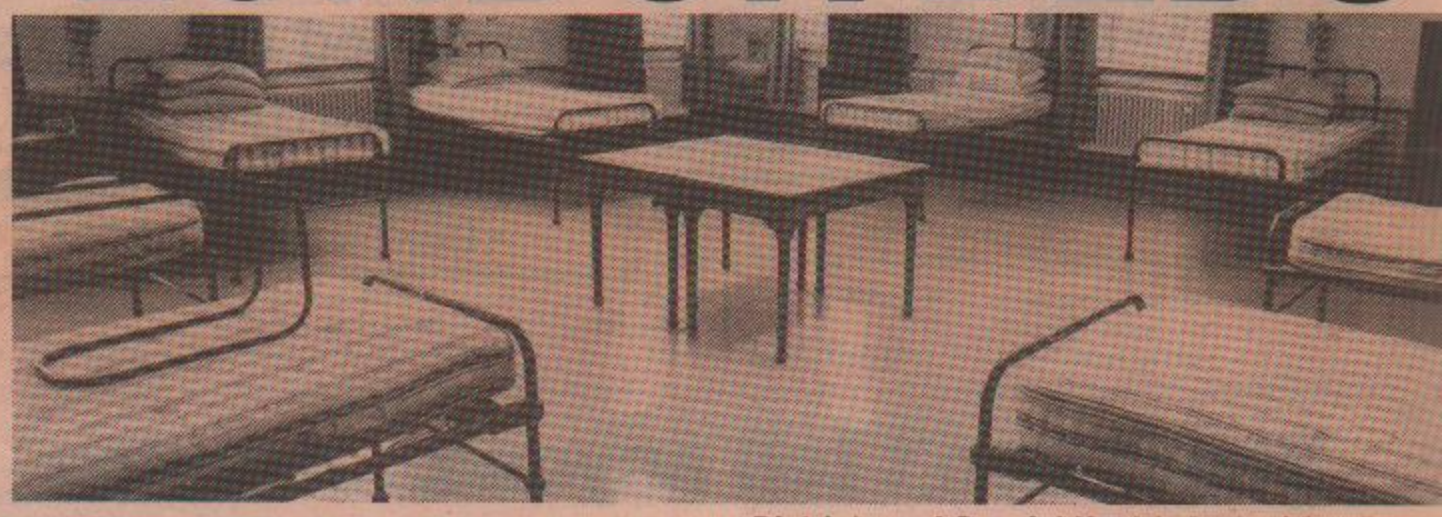
•ISLINGTON DHA is cutting 65 beds at the Whittington and Royal Northern Hospitals, along with 16% of outpatient clinics. Up to 50% of routine surgery will be cut to forestall a predicted overspend of £1.6 million.

•MERTON & SUTTON DHA is to close 87 beds, including the total closure of the Wilson Hospital and the casualty department and remaining surgical ward at the Nelson Hospital, to save £1 million.

•HAMMERSMITH & QUEEN CHARLOTTE'S Special Health Authority is closing 37 beds for 6-8 months and implementing across-the-board cutbacks in efforts to redress "the worst financial position since the inception of the SHA" — a projected overspend of £2 million.

•BEXLEY DHA has cancelled all waiting list admissions to Queen Mary's Hospital, Sidcup, for at least five weeks, on top of sweeping permanent cuts in community and other services totalling £440,000.

•PARKSIDE DHA, which had escaped some of the worst aspects of the crisis by use of AIDS funding and money from delayed developments last year, has closed a 20-bed ward and Grand Union paediatric ward.



•CITY & HACKNEY DHA has brought in a swingeing package of cuts including the closure of 75 beds at Barts Hospital, reductions in outpatient nursing staff, and cuts in ancillary services.

BY JOHN LISTER
London Health Emergency

•LEWISHAM & N. SOUTHWARK DHA has been implementing closures for "financial shortages" as well as nursing shortages — totalling some 95 beds in July (35 for financial reasons, 60 because of nursing shortages).

Despite the boasts from Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke that there would be a "quite spectacular boost in health service spending" during this financial year, the financial problems that are forcing cuts in services arise from government underfunding of its own pay awards to NHS staff, cash limits inadequate to meet NHS price inflation, and increased need for health services.

Initial indicators suggest that London's Health Districts face an inflationary squeeze and pressure on services roughly equivalent to around 2% of their budgets.

With the NHS budget for the capital's 29 Districts and Special Health Authorities fixed at £2.3 billion, a 2% shortfall adds up to £47 million — posing major problems for many of the largest Authorities.

The bed reductions now in force have already brought a crop of "red alert" and crisis conditions,long before the start of winter cold weather admissions.

•EALING Hospital in June was forced to turn away all non- emergency patients and even some emergency cases, followed by a period of cancelling all further admissions. The DHA is now facing a £1 million overspend.

•WHIPPS CROSS Hospital in WALTHAM FOREST has just emerged from a 10-day "red alert" in which all non-emergency admissions were cancelled.

•HOUNSLOW'S WEST MIDDLESEX Hospital, functioning with 150-160 beds closed, is frequently diverting emergency cases to other hospitals, especially at night. One victim is RIVERSIDE'S CHARING CROSS Hospital, whose A&E new referrals leapt 35% between December 1988 and June 1989.

•The new cutbacks in MERTON & SUTTON have brought grave warnings from top surgeon Derek Parsons that "especially if there is a bad winter, St Helier Hospital might only be able to deal with emergencies and very urgent cases."

Continued on back page

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Local Government and

Lambeth

LGC shut down

In a move deliberately aimed to protect LCC Councillors, the NEC has suspended the Lambeth LGC.

Regional Party officials will now be sent in to run selection meetings and write the Lambeth manifesto.

The LGC "crime" was to interview sitting Councillors prior to finalising the panel.

Although all Councillors had been placed on the panel automatically, the mere fact of asking them to come and talk to LGC representatives on a voluntary basis has been described by national officials as a "serious breach of Party rules."

Which rule says the LGC can't talk to Councillors, they will not make clear.

The Manifesto has been taken over because of supposed "lack of consultation".

This is despite the fact that drafts have been openly under preparation for over a year, with circulation throughout the local Party on at least three different occasions.

The crime seems to be that the LGC has not circulated documents to every member of Labour Group or asked the Group to give its opinion in advance.

In a fine display of its sense of "natural justice", the NEC decision to suspend the LGC was taken on the basis of unsubstantiated complaints from LCC Councillors without informing the LGC, giving it no chance to put its side of the story.

Only now formally made known to the LGC, the suspension was decided three weeks previously at the NEC before Conference — slipped through, tacked on to the agenda under AOB.

What happens next is still not clear. The three CLPs have yet to be approached by Walworth Road.

By a special correspondent

But confidence is hardly inspired by the fact that the Regional Organiser being sent in to run the selections and write the manifesto was up till recently a fully paid up member of the Lambeth branch of the LCC.

National officials have already made it clear that they will impose their version of selection procedures rather than the ones used locally over many years.

In particular, the idea that shortlists have to be bigger than the number of places to be filled is anathema.

Where it is possible to stitch up shortlisting meetings, Walworth Road is to allow it so that right wing Councillors can be reselected without the fuss of having to answer questions at selection meetings.

Whatever tricks the right try, activists in the Borough will be aiming to mobilise the membership of the Party to ensure that open and democratic accountability is upheld.

CELEBRATION!

Benefit for the Guildford Four

November 5th, 8pm

Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road, London N4

Organised by Islington North CLP

Tickets/Info from Maggie Barker (272 6201)

GLLP Executive

Shhh! Don't tell anyone... London Labour backs lesbian and gay rights!

Life on the Greater London Labour Party Regional Executive has not been terribly exciting this year.

The GLLP is firmly under Kinnockite control and the sheer blandness of the meetings makes keeping awake rather difficult.

Membership figures show that London CLPs are getting smaller. For most members of the Executive "activism" is a dirty word. Sharp suits and pretty frocks are the order of the day.

One might be forgiven for thinking that the LCC project of "cleaning up" Labour in London was now complete and that all we have to do is just sit back and wait for the General Election.

However, the last Regional Executive meeting was unusually interesting — and revealing.

A statement on lesbian and gay rights was produced, and, after minimal debate, adopted. Then the difficult question of what to do with it arose.

Send it out to LGCs to guide the manifesto process for 1990? An obvious course, you might think. But at this point a particularly sharp suited LCCer leapt to her feet to say what the rest of them were probably thinking.

If we send out such a statement unacccompanied by other statements on front-line services and particularly on dirty streets we would appear to give it disproportionate importance.

The message was unsubtle enough. In no time all sorts of people were piling in to support the new position: we must send out statements on everything or nothing at all.

GLLP General Secretary Terry Ashton capped the debate by saying that we certainly didn't want lesbian and gay rights "queering the pitch" for Labour. Even Assistant Regional Organiser Margaret McDonagh had to smirk at that.

By Morris Herbertson

The vote to send the paper out immediately was lost. We were told that similar broad guildelies on all issues would be drawn up over the next six weeks and all of them will be sent out together.

By whom? With what resources?

To what effect — since the same LCCer who raised the initial objection to sending out the statement has now been seconded part-time to Regional Office from her full-time job at Walworth Road to help run the 1990 local election campaign?

In Haringey a number of left candidates have been vetted and found "unsuitable" for the election panel.

In Lambeth the LGC has been suspended and control over the manifesto and selection process has been handed over to the national Party and the Lambeth Labour Group.

The power dressing and intellectual inanity would be amusing, the homophobic remarks would be pitiful, if it were not so clear what "cleaning up" the GLLP really means.

It's got nothing to do with rubbish in the streets and everything to do with closing down democratic procedures, centralising power, and promoting an ever more reactionary type of politics.

Still, the meeting wasn't completely boring, which made a change.

GLLP conference timetable

Greater London Labour Party (Regional Council) Twenty Third Annual General Meeting, Friday/Saturday 2nd/3rd March 1990.

Last date for receipt of:

•motions — 1st post Friday 17th November 1989;

•amendments to motions — 1st post Wednesday 10th January 1990;

•nomination for election of Officers, Executive Committee and Standing Orders Committee — 1st post Wednesday 10th January 1990;

•compositing — Saturday 27th January 1990

Last date for receipt of delegations — 1st post Wednesday 7th February 1990

"Triple Jeopard

LCC moves t exclude left

Eight left-wing Party members have been excluded from the panel of approved Council candidates by Haringey's Local Government Committee.

This follows a bizarre "triple jeopardy" procedure that makes the way Clause Four ran NOLS in the early 80s look a model of democracy.

In an attempt to streamline the old system where each and every potential candidate was interviewed by the full LGC, candidates were asked to fill in a new questionnaire.

This was then scrutinised by the LGC Executive Committee, with doubtful cases being referred to the full LGC.

What actually happened exposed numerous flaws inherent in the new procedure — and worse yet, the ease with which it could be manipulated by the witch hunting cabal which controls the LGC EC.

Fourteen would-be candidates were called to individual interviews by the EC — 13 of them because it was alleged that their answer to one particular question needed "clarification".

This question was whether there were any circumstances in which they would not follow Group Policy.

All 13 had already indicated their understanding of and willingness to sign Standing Orders. But they had also indicated that in all honesty there might at some time in the future be an occasion in which they would have to consider other factors.

Some mentioned defence of the Manifesto, some mentioned "bottom line" principles like compulsory redundancies or letting Council premises to known fascist groups.

By MIKE MARQUSEE

All were dragged before a full meeting of the LGC EC and grilled, in some cases for up to 40 minutes.

They were subjected to repititious questioning by various LGC EC members, who asked again and again what the candidates would do in this, that, or the other hypothetical situation.

In the course of this candidates were drawn into political debate on legality and statutory responsibilities, Poll Tax implementation, cuts, Irish issues, the relative weight of national v. local Party policy, of abstaining v. voting against the Group Whip.

This was all very interesting, but quite irrelevant to the question in hand.

They were asked again and again if they would abide by Group Policy and a number were accused of dishonesty or evasiveness.

In an atmosphere of palpable hostility and distrust, at times descending into rude disorder, this browbeating method gave the whole affair the menacing air of a political inquisition — which is exactly what it was.

This is proved beyond doubt by the wildly inconsistent decisions made by the EC.

Two candidates who said quite clearly that there were occasions when they might vote against Group Policy and two others who stated categorically that there were issues (not traditional "conscience" issues) on which they would have to abstain were voted directly onto the panel.

However, others who said no more and no less were rejected.

One of those who was accepted said that he would abstain on group policies on housing and travellers — because "gypsies make themselves intentionally homeless" and "young black women get themselves pregnant" to get Council homes.

The Executive voted *unanimously* to let him onto the panel.

This same Executive voted with equal unaninimity to keep Mandy Mudd off the Panel.

This was even though she had shown herself in her interview to be a good deal more in tune with Party policy and more aware of the Party's democratic procedures than the aforementioned would-be Labour Councillor.

At at the full LGC on October 18th the candidates rejected by the Executive made clear their resentment at being, in effect, tried in advance for a crime they hadn't yet and might never commit.

They also made clear that they had signed the standing orders in good faith and that they intended to carry out Group Policy.

They were being penalised because of their honesty in refusing to give a blanket guarantee that on all occasions in the coming four years, in political circumstances as yet unknown, they would always be able

Gaps in

LESLEY LEE of Hither a critical eye over Lew Leader Steve Bullock' Councillors and the Lo Committee.

The report starts in a very electoral way — campaigning is seen only in the context of getting Councillors elected.

On the Poll Tax, it is simplistic. How can you argue to "place responsibility where it belongs — with the Tories" while committing yourself to "implementing the tax as efficiently as possible"?

Local people are bound to blame their "efficient" local Labour Council.

Indeed, Labour Councillors will be seen as acting as the

Labour Party round up

y" in Haringey

to wingers

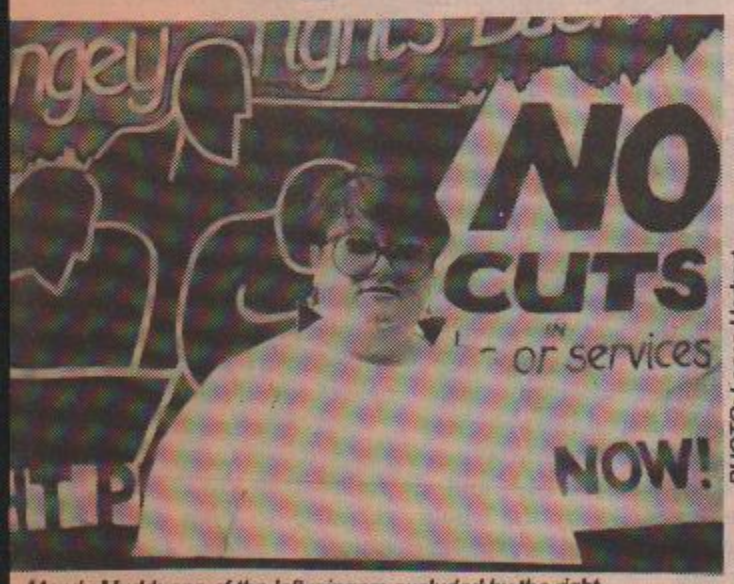


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandy Mudd: one of the left wingers excluded by the right.

to abide by the Group Whip.

They pointed out that this was equally true for all applicants to the Panel, that in fact over the past four years all but four of the sitting Labour Councillors (left and right) had broken the whip at one time or another.

They added that no-one could or should swear absolute unconditional indefinite loyalty to a policy as yet undetermined (the manifesto has yet to be discussed by the Party, no less agreed).

Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of the LGC voted to reject seven of the eight candidates who appeared before it: Seamus Carey, Dave Chanter, Jane Connor, Richard Heffernan, Mandy Mudd, Scott Reeve, and Peter Tomlinson.

These comrades will not be permitted to submit themselves to wards for selection, although everyone in Haringey knows that any and all of these candidates would be more competent, more committed Labour Councillors than a large proportion of the present Labour Group.

All will be appealing to the Regional Executive and a complaint about the procedure will be made to the National Executive Committee.

In this case, some applicants were clearly "more equal" than others.

Most were asked to do no more than fill in the questionnaire (and some of these simply left blank a number of questions). Fourteen were grilled by the Executive.

Eight were also grilled by the full LGC — who were given no opportunity to question any of the other applicants (including at least one former Councillor who had previously broken the Group Whip).

This "triple jeopardy" procedure was of course simply a means by which the LCC-dominated right-wing sought to keep the left off the next Labour Council.

Do they seriously think the Poll Tax and the new Housing and Finance legislation will disappear because dissident voices are silenced within the Labour Group?

Martha Osamor fights smears

Questions pile up for Toby Harris

"Kangaroo court" is the only word for the joint LGC EC/Labour Group EC which met on October 16th at Haringey Civic Centre.

The meeting was to consider the Council's interim audit report on Martha Osamor's alleged role in four local voluntary groups.

As readers of *London Labour Briefing* No. 119 know, Martha has been the victim of a smear campaign initially launched by discredited Broadwater Farm dictator Dolly Kiffin and sustained by Council Leader Toby Harris and local LCC hacks.

Martha attended the meeting on October 16th accompanied by a barrister, who was not allowed to speak.

Toby Harris reiterated his version of events at length and claimed that the problem was simply Martha's refusal to "co-operate" with the investigation mounted by the Council's Head of Internal Audit.

He made no secret of the fact that the Council had made repeated and unsuccessful efforts to get the Fraud Squad or the District Auditor to take some action over Kiffin's ludicrous allegations.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey and Wood Geen CLP

It became apparent in the course of Martha's thorough reply and through the points raised by the minority of left Councillors present that it is Toby Harris who should be "in the dock" answering questions — and not to a small, self-enclosed cabal but before the entire Labour Group and Party.

•Why was there no written brief to the Head of Internal Audit concerning the investigation he was asked to conduct? What were the implied parameters of that investigation?

•Why have the allegations against Martha never been listed on paper? Why has Martha never been given a list of the allegations, despite her repeated requests?

•Why did the Head of Internal Audit fail to contact directly any of the four voluntary groups in question at any time during his investigation?

Why did he only write to them at the conclusion of his investigation — to urge them to make complaints against Martha to the Fraud Squad?

•Why did the Head of Internal Audit fail to investigate the role of Council officers who vetted and approved the allegedly unsatisfactory accounts of the four groups over a period of four years?

•Why did the Head of Internal Audit fail to question in any way the role of or evidence given by Dolly Kiffin, who was herself the co-signatory on all the cheques involved in the allegedly "unaccounted for" expenditure?

•Why did the joint LGC EC/Group EC refuse to invite the Head of Internal Audit to answer questions from Councillors and Party members about his report?

•Why did Toby Harris authorise the use of Council resources to pursue for over a year an investigation based solely on the allegations made by a single member of the public — and one with an obvious self-interest in the matter — when not a single complaint had ever been made by the management committees, workers, or clients of any of the four voluntary groups?

•Why did Toby Harris fail to acknowledge the petition sent to him by over 300 Broadwater Farm residents making four complaints about Dolly Kiffin?

•Why has there never been any investigation into the attempt by Dolly Kiffin to sack six workers from a grant-aided voluntary project, despite promises to the Labour Group that the whole matter would be looked into?

•Why is Martha Osamor still being pressed to "answer" (unspecified) questions about these allegations when Dolly Kiffin, from whom they all derive, has left the country, following her conviction in court on charges of obstructing the course of justice and the attack on her by Broadwater Farm residents denouncing her as an "informer" to police?

At the meeting on Octber 16th, Martha said:

"The reason for this hearing is that the Council Leader and Dolly Kiffin have failed in their attempt to get me locked up.

"Even the Fraud Squad refused to help them... What's needed is a serious political discussion of all the issues raised by this affair, not just the ones singled out by the Head of Internal Audit."

Former Council Leader Steve King strongly criticised the manner in which the report was compiled.

"You have allowed uncorroborated allegations against one of our comrades to float around for over a year. You never even provided her with a list of the allegations.

You made no effort to even tell the voluntary groups that they were under investigation.

The fact that Martha as a black woman and a well-known civil rights activist feels she would get a fairer deal from the police and the courts than from the Group leadership tells us a great deal about the present set-up in Haringey."

Cllr. King proposed that the whole matter be referrd to the full Labour Group. This was defeated.

Instead, the two ECs voted to call on Martha to "co-operate" with the Head of Internal Audit within three weeks. If she fails to do so, a reconvened meeting of the two ECs will "consider action".

Watch this space...

THE GREAT DEBATE
SOCIALISTS AND THE STALINIST STATES

A debate between *Socialist Outlook* and *Socialist Organiser* about the nature of the Socialist States.

Monday 6th November, 7pm
Institute of Education Student Union, Bedford Way, London WC1.

Lewisham

the Leader's report

Green Branch casts isham Council s October report to cal Government

Sheriff of Nottingham to Maggie Thatcher's Prince John.

Steve's pledge to do "our utmost to protect the most vulnerable groups" is vague, insulting, and worthless. You just can't do that at the same time as hunting down every last potential Poll Tax payer and fining people for not registering.

The leader's report is weak on Party/Group links.

Steve talks about a Labour renaissance and of unseating Moynihan and Maples at the General Election but doesn't address the fact that in East Lewisham at least the Party organisation is crumbling and several Labour Councillors now represent wards in which the Party never meets.

How are all these wonderful new policies going to get delivered on the doorstep without an active Party membership?

Clearly this isn't just the responsibility of Councillors. Practical dialogue and co-ordination with the Party outside the Town Hall is just as important as the manifesto process.

Some Labour Councillors seem to be slightly complacent about representing what are in a sense "rotten Boroughs".

Could it be that representing a ward that never meets is more comfortable? After all, there are now awkward demands for accountability.

The section on democracy and electoral reform is interesting and deserves wider discussion.

It does however veer close to arguing for PR which is, of course, not official Labour Party policy. Watch out, Steve, people can get expelled for that kind of thing (or at least suspended from the Labour Group).

On housing the report glosses over what what will be the main practical effect of the new housing revenue budget — a massive rent increase (£10 per week according to our mole).

Remember, we are supposed to be protecting the most vulnerable, not bankrupting them.

There are encouraging sections of the report on environment, equalities, and opening up the Council — but such good words will have to be judged on results, not on promises printed on green paper (a nice touch).

Finally, one refreshing aspect is the absence of personal attacks, something which was once a regular feature of Leader's reports.

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NEW CASH CRISIS CLOSES LONDON BEDS

Continued from front page

•HAMPSTEAD DHA has restricted overspending by the continued closure of 121 acute beds axed following the closure of New End Hospital three years ago.

•HARINGEY DHA has kept 125 beds "temporarily" closed, supplemented by another 108 beds closed for the summer holiday.

•WEST LAMBETH has still not reopened 137 beds at St Thomas's Hospital closed "temporarily" in 1987.

•And, almost unnoticed, ENFIELD DHA has been running on the basis of continual rounds of temporary closures, reaching over 160 beds during the summer, but now averaging 100 beds.

Meanwhile some of the biggest cutbacks have yet to be decided: the districts facing almost impossible shortfalls this year — BLOOMSBURY (£7 million) and RIVERSIDE (£5 million) — have yet to announce plans to deal with the situation. TOWER HAMLETS DHA has rejected a cuts package drawn up by management to meet a projected £2 million shortfall.

A survey of Health Authorities across the capital shows again and again the common causes of the current cash crisis:

•This year's pay awards to all grades of NHS staff have exceeded the amounts allowed for, leaving Health Authorities to pick up the tab.

On top of this, the underfunded implementation of last year's clinical grading of nurses' pay is now working through as a full-year cost to Health Authorities.

•Price inflation, as usual led by the drug industry, continues to run well in excess of the arbitrary 5% allowed for in NHS cash limits.

A conservative estimate of 7% actual price inflation saddles the NHS nationally with an unfunded £260 bill; amounting to approximately £25-30 million in London's Health Authorities alone.

•Nursing shortages and shortages of other support staff, both chronic and severe in many London Health Districts, help sap morale of NHS staff, increasing turnover, and also increasing reliance on more expensive agency cover,resulting in heavy overspend figures, especially in acute nursing.

•With hundreds of *private beds* lying empty in both commercial and NHS hospitals, district after district is reporting a "shortfall" in private patient income, notably Camberwell (£200,000), Lewisham & N. Southwark (£200,000) and most catastrophically Bloomsbury (£750,000).

•Frantic efforts to reduce or contain hospital caseloads have run up against a continual increase in demand for services, resulting in more and more Districts treating more patients than they can afford under existing cash limits.

All this even before the White Paper is implemented. What will happen when "market forces" are unleashed on London's health service and any capacity for capital-wide planning and distribution of resources is undermined?

*Taken from *London's Autumn Crunch*, by London Health Emergency, available from LHE, 446 Uxbridge Road, London W12 0NS for £4 (including post and packing).

London NALGO Round Up

Fighting victimisation and cuts

At the time of going to press Tower Hamlets Nalgo's 2500 members are still on all-out strike against the victimisation of Branch Secretary Derek Relph.

But the fate of the strike now hangs in the balance after Nalgo's National Emergency Committee voted by 7-1 on Tuesday, October 24th to withdraw financial support on the grounds that the branch had exhausted all the Council's procedures and that no more could be gained.

The Branch Executive, however, disagrees.

They will be putting a motion calling for the continuation of the strike to a mass membership meeting to be held on Friday, October 27th.

A motion calling for a return to work will also be on the agenda.

On October 19th a Council panel upheld the earlier decision to issue a "final written warning" to Derek Relph because of an alleged incident during the national pay strike earlier this year.

The Branch Executive feel this is an unacceptable decision. Nonetheless, the loss of national financial support and general weariness after a four week strike make the result of the mass meeting unpredictable.

In neighbouring Newham, Social Services NALGO members are still on unofficial strike to protest at the suspension of Dominic Williams, their Stewards Committee Convenor.

The rest of the branch staged an effective one-day strike on Wednesdsay, October 18th, the day of the Labour Group meeting.

Unfortunately, a ballot for all-out strike action by NALGO Social Services members produced a tied result. Since then some members have returned to work. But the Branch is organising another one-day strike on Wednesday, November 1st.

Islington's 170 nursery workers are still on official all-out strike against the Council's attempt to cut posts and increase the intake of children.

Only two NALGO members are scabbing and ten other staff are crosssing picket lines. Lobbies of up to 200 angry parents have taken place at various Council Committee and Group meetings.

A successful one-day stoppage by Social Services and Neighbourhood Offices was held on October 24th and a one-day strike by the whole branch is planned for November 2nd.

Unfortunately the Council still refuses to make any concessions in its negotiations with the union and is still disregarding arguments advanced by both parents and union members about children's safety.

Nursery workers in Hammersmith and Fulham are also preparing to take strike action. They are being balloted now for an all-out indefinite strike over pay. "Generous" Hammersmith has offered them a small increase — if they cut their own sickness levels.

These NALGO branches are taking action to stop Labour and "Liberal Democrat" Councils clawing back improved conditions gained over recent years.

The "new model" Labour Councils, obssessed with implementing cuts, are often refusing to even deal with unions, backing Chief Officers in concerted attacks on union rights and members.

These strikes can win, especially as they enjoy strong support from other unions and from the community. But many of them will be long and drawn out; financial and practical support is therefore vital.

Islington

NALGO strikers going strong

One hundred and forty NALGO members in Islington's nurseries are now in their third week of strike action after a lock-out by the Council.

On Tuesday 23rd October, Social Services Department and the Neighbourhood Offices took solidarity action for the day, closing many offices and day centres across the Borough.

As we go to press, the branch AGM on October 26th was due to debate a motion calling for a one day strike across the Council on November 2nd, with activists hopeful that it would be passed.

Essentially Islington Council is trying to force through a worsening of working conditions in the nurseries after reducing staffing levels by 25% over the last year.

The Council are particularly concerned to attack this group of workers which has a history of militancy going back to a four month strike four years ago which wrung concessions on staffing levels and pay from the Council with which they were extremely unhappy.

Workers have been clear that they are not prepared to co-operate with this latest attack.

This is not only because it is an attack on working conditions but also because the numbers of children that the Council is expecting them to care for could not be looked after safely by so few staff.

By Terry Conway
Islington North CLP

Parents have been extremely supportive of this fight — which has somewhat surprised the Council.

Parents have participated in a very vocal manner in lobbies and pickets.

They held up traffic on the main road outside the Town Hall before the last Labour Group and together with child care workers held up the start of full Council for over an hour and a half.

The strike itself has been extremely solid, with only one NALGO member going in to work, despite the fact that the union nationally has refused to pay the workers full strike pay.

There have been a number of negotiating meetings with the Council which have seen some movement on their side.

It is always difficult to tell exactly what Islington's Councillors are up to as they seem determined to speak in riddles, but certainly none of the packages that have so far been suggested are in no way acceptable to the strikers.

The action of the strikers is a clear demonstration of how cuts can and must be fought — in Islington, across London and nationally.

Under pressure from the weight of New Realism, some forces within Islington NALGO who have traditionally backed the branch's "No Cuts" position are begining to waver.

Such retreats must be opposed, and the confidence that this dispute can give built on.

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