LONDON LABOUR
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KICK OUT CUNNINGHAM!

BRIEFING calls for the removal of John Cunningham from his position as Shadow Environment Minister. We support a similar call which came from the National Labour Women's Conference held on the Isle of Bute earlier this year. We call for his removal from the front bench as he is incapable of articulating the views of the majority of members of the Labour Party and appears not to agree with much of current Labour policy.

Recent revelations concerning his role as an industrial consultant to a large company operating within his Copeland constituency serves to underline the extent to which Cunningham has wholeheartedly joined the bosses. If he has time to spare from his Parliamentary duties why not offer his expertise to a labour movement organisation without payment?

At Conference this year, Cunningham will rightly face criticism and denunciation for his advocacy of pro-nuclear military and energy policies. To many it seems as though Cunningham holds his present Environment portfolio precisely because he can be guaranteed not to support anti-nuclear positions under any circumstances.

People like Cunningham act as an essential line of defence within the ranks of the labour movement for the interests of Capital. Their understandings are struck on a Transatlantic basis and in the boardrooms of big companies such as British Nuclear Fuels.

Expertise

Briefing would like to see the position of Shadow Environment spokesperson occupied by a member of the PLP who enthusiastically embraces the political radicalism of much of recent local authority experience.

We would therefore wish to see this post occupied by someone who is keen to legislate for socialist reform of local and regional government with a view to increasing community control over the police, the local economy, public health, water authorities, emergency services, education, planning and transport amongst other things.

Presumably it is this range of services that Cunningham himself had in mind when he made a pledge on the 11th April, 1984 during the second reading of the 'Paving Bill' that "We shall create an elected authority for the people of London if the GLC is abolished."

Recently, John McDonnell of the London Region Executive, former Deputy Leader of the GLC, and currently a member of the Labour Parties Local Government Advisory Committee, wrote to Cunningham asking for details of progress that has been made towards making this pledge a reality. On going to print we understand that a reply is still awaited!

There is widespread agreement across the Labour Party on the need for a coherent political initiative from government on the linked areas of peace, energy, environment and local government.

Each of these has an impact upon our internationalism and sense of place within the wider world community. There is something faintly ridiculous about a politician on the one hand stating support for the Sandinistas whilst at the same time proping up support for American military policy in Western Europe.

Similarly fervent support for the long term future of the nuclear energy industry implies a downgrading of the interests of mining communities in Britain and elsewhere. The similarities with the general outlook of the Tories is not hard to see.

(CONTINUED OVER)

Nadine Finch, (Chair of the Policy Committee, Greater London Labour Party) Steve Cowan, (PPC Orpington, ILEA member for Westminster North) both in personal capacity.



LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Fighting the crisis of homelessness

One of the most shocking indictments of the Tories' housing policy is the explosion of homelessness. In London, the number of 'priority' homeless households has increased by 700% since 1970, resulting in a total of over 27,000 by the end of 1985. But as the squeeze on available temporary accommodation tightens, so do the definitions of homelessness. Many local authorities now only accept households as homeless if they have quite literally nowhere to go that night. Since councils generally have a very limited supply of temporary accommodation of their own, many of these households end up in Bed and Breakfast 'hotels'. A large majority of these are grossly substandard, quite frequently dangerous, and often miles from the home borough; London boroughs currently have some 4,000 households placed in B&B as far afield as Southend and Reading. All this puts a total of £30 million plus in the pockets of very rich hoteliers at the expense of the people of the very poorest boroughs.

So why use temporary housing at all? There are two reasons: Firstly, a household which is actually homeless needs somewhere to go while they consider offers of permanent accommodation. Secondly, there simply is not enough permanent housing to go round. Ideally, a local authority needs a small stock of short stay accommodation complemented by an adequate supply of permanent homes. Most inner London boroughs have neither and are increasingly using wholly inadequate temporary housing as a semi-permanent solution.

The lack of decent rented housing is clearly the key; a counter criticism often levelled at left wing authorities is the number of empty council homes. Hackney is fairly typical with 8% of its housing standing empty. Yet of these, some two-thirds are either awaiting improvements or, more often, in need of major repairs which the council cannot afford or is not allowed to carry out due to government restrictions. This still leaves over a thousand homes in Hackney empty through council inefficiency. This failure has to be admitted and addressed. Steps can, and are, being taken to bring these homes back into circulation more quickly. But all bureaucratic improvements become difficult when rate-capping has left absolutely nothing in the kitty.

How, then, should local authorities and Labour Parties be meeting this crisis? Individually, there is little any one borough can do. Even ambitious building programmes, leaving aside government restrictions and lack of capital resources, cannot offer much. Inner London boroughs have disturbingly few suitable sites for development. There is one overall solution: large scale local authority acquisitions into the private sector. Currently suspended by government legislation, a major programme of municipalisation of good-quality housing stock offers the only long term cure. A co-ordinated campaign between inner London boroughs of private sector acquisitions in defiance of government restrictions would have a huge impact in terms of providing desperately needed fair rented housing. Such a move would leave councillors open to charges of 'unreasonable' expenditure since acquisitions without DoE consent do not attract housing subsidy. But unreasonable in whose eyes? The ensuing propaganda battle would be very difficult for the government to win, even with Fleet Street's forces of darkness massed behind them.

Here is an issue which the left needs to take up in the constituency parties now. Not only is there a victory for solid left principles within our grasp, but there is the prospect of beginning to shift the whole perspective of property ownership back to public sector solutions to the housing crisis. Most of all, we can provide homes to those who desperately need them. The crisis is about to become a disaster. It may precipitate a battle we can really win.

Peter Chowney,
Chair, Housing Services Committee, London Borough of Hackney.



G. Livett/Frame

Four people made homeless by the Pullens Estate evictions, Southwark 10th June 1986

KICK OUT CUNNINGHAM!

(CONTINUED)

The failure of Cunningham to organise effective political support for victimised councillors, many of them in Lambeth, who were following conference policy will forever stain his standing within the wider movement. At a critical time in the history of socialist local authorities he either did nothing or stood aside.

The Tory attack against radical socialist councillors who were defending jobs and services provided a real focus for opposition to this government. The campaigns gained strength because they raised expectations workers had of local government.

The results of the borough elections in Lambeth are a good example of the way success can follow after a campaigning socialist council stands firmly with the community it serves.

All Cunningham could do was parrot on about not breaking the law. We want to see an Environment spokesperson who is prepared to lift the ban on all disqualified councillors and reimburse them from surcharge. The question of retrospective legislation in these instances is a smokescreen designed to conceal a basic hostility towards the actions of these councillors.

The popularity and effectiveness of the GLC and Metropolitan Authorities shows how a regional tier of government can succeed in socialist terms. Such a tier of government should also be the structure within which water boards, health authorities, the police and public transport are democratised.

This is also the level of government where Labour authorities have proved they can deliver equal opportunities and services that benefit women, the black community, lesbians and gay men and people with disabilities.

If Kinnock's "enabling state" is ever to be more than a speech writer's gimmick, these are issues that have to be central to local and regional government reform. Cunningham has had nothing to say on these matters. Indeed he once said to us that he was opposed to women's sections! We might point out to him that the organised women's movement was one of the essential constituents of the original Labour Party.

We call on Cunningham to relinquish all so-called 'consultancies' and other lucrative side earners. These are designed for right wing Labour MPs to give them a lifestyle which befits a prospective caretaker of the interests of the bosses.

The reason why popular causes such as local government reform and the abandonment of nuclear weapons appear not to be enthusiastically supported by the current electorally conscious party leadership is because they are radical socialist causes, too, which are looking to Government for basic changes in power relations within society.

The current intentions of Cunningham have been noted by several political commentators. They have become the subject of frequent features in press and television. The following editorial from the Tory Times Educational Supplement (29 August) is typical of the tone and style. It says, after outlining recent Labour discussions and proposals for local government reform:

"Mr Jack Straw, the Party's local government spokesman, is known to be keen on a major re-organisation. His chief, Mr. Jack Cunningham, has no such radical yearnings. If he had his way Labour would not even restore the Greater London Council.

"Education Officers in the Shires can sleep easy in their beds. The election of a Labour government would be unlikely to involve them in too dramatic a change."

Editorials like these are not gleaned from the wind. They are the products of structured exchanges between the front bench spokespeople and the editors/proprietors, over lunch, in discreet surroundings. It is at these meetings that key attitudes and intentions are relayed which eventually appear in print as editorials.

We oppose any suggestion that Cunningham should be switched to another portfolio such as Education. Such suggestions reveal a cavalier attitude towards educational interests. The appointment of Radice to this post was sufficient to deflate any expectations educationalists might have had of real progress but to dump Cunningham upon them adds insult to injury.

The Tory editor of the Times Educational Supplement has written that ". . . the election of a Labour government would be unlikely to involve . . . too dramatic a shake-up". But many of us will not accept this and will organise against those in our ranks who would use government to attack the interests of the working class.

Purge at GLEB continues

London Labour boroughs are finally mobilising against the systematic dismantling of the GLC-established job creation agency, the Greater London Enterprise Board – first reported in the July issue of Briefing. Unfortunately the right wing leadership on the GLEB board and its newly appointed senior management has already achieved the redundancy of the majority of GLEB's own staff and have begun a systematic programme of plant closures in GLEB supported investments which is bound to lead to further job losses.

In the confusion and vacuum created by the GLC's abolition and the Tory government's refusal to free GLC money committed to GLEB, a right wing faction in the management and board pushed through radical changes in GLEB's policies and structure. These are designed to turn GLEB into a commercial "fund manager", investing only in commercially profitable projects with few if any of the original GLC/GLEB commitments to industrial democracy, socially useful production, equal opportunities and new encouragement for new forms of social ownership.

It is thought that the new style rump GLEB will be more acceptable to Roy Hattersley and the Labour right wing. Prominent left wingers associated with the GLC-run GLEB have been purged and the management is now in the hands of two joint chief executives who are on a £47,000 a year, three year contract.

The left on the GLEB board, led by Vella Pillay, Anti-Apartheid vice-president and Doreen Massey have been able to save some of GLEB's important activities notably the acclaimed Technology Networks, set up by former Lucas Aerospace shop steward Mike Cooley. But there has not so far been a majority to halt the redundancies at GLEB or the programme of disinvestment.

The management and board right wing led by Tony Millwood (Hackney) and John Wakeham (Camden) justify the liquidation of GLEB's portfolio – even though there will be significant job losses – because of the need to "accumulate a cash reserve" to reassure conservative financial institutions about GLEB's long term future and to launch a new "commercial" investment programme. This, it is accepted, means ignoring or downgrading the wider socialist strategic and social objectives which GLEB was given when it was launched.

At the last meeting of the GLEB board, however, London borough representatives on the GLEB board spoke angrily about the management's decision to decimate the organisation by offering redundancy to all who wanted it. Several Labour borough reps spoke of their concern that "GLEB is turning into something quite different to the GLEB of the GLC election manifesto" and the meeting refused to adopt the management's report on the staff redundancies.

This is a struggle which should receive the support of the entire London labour movement and all of those who believe that socialist local initiatives will become more and not less important in the period ahead.

The Broadwater Farm trials began at the Old Bailey on Monday September 15th. Some 75 individuals, allegedly involved in the uprising of October 6th, faced charges of 'affray' carrying possible eight year prison sentences. The only evidence against the defendants consists of 'confessions', extracted during police interrogation, under circumstances condemned by the recent Gifford independent inquiry.

The Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign mounted a picket of the Old Bailey to mark the beginning of the trials, and will be conducting a campaign to build support for defendants, to expose racism and combat repressive policing of the kind seen on Broadwater Farm in the last year.

ILEA declares war on teachers

Last July 7th I was sitting next to that firebrand of the left, Neil Fletcher, during an ILEA Labour Group meeting. For state education all over the country, it was a significant meeting, because the largest education authority in the country was in the process of nailing its colours to the Tories' mast and declaring war on its teaching force. My memory of the evening is still quite vivid, even through the haze of the summer holiday. Neil's comradely advice to me must have contributed to the clarity of the memory. "Are you a teacher?" he asked. "Yes," I said. "Fuck off," he said. I regret to say that I did not touch my forelock and humbly retire at that point but I did consider it, honest guv.

At the beginning of the meeting the Group heard a joint deputation from the London Teaching unions. The deputation was concerned with the proposals of the Policy Committee to make contractual for teachers:

1. The covering of absent colleagues;
2. The attendance at parents' meetings outside of school hours;
3. The attendance at staff meetings outside school hours relating to the administration of the school;
4. Setting, marking and/or invigilating examinations which extend outside the school day, outside school hours;
5. Preparing lessons and marking schoolwork outside school hours; and to deduct teachers' pay for non-compliance with these stipulations from 29 September.

The implementation date was removed by an amendment from leading Group members but the Labour Group voted by 30 to 11 to accept the policy recommendations. Fully aware of the damage that it would do to their already ragged labour relations, the Group took the decision hoping, I believe, to pre-empt and influence the decisions of the ACAS negotiations on teachers' pay and conditions of service.

Stridently hostile

The majority of the group was stridently hostile to the teachers' case. If anyone had come up with a way of running schools without any teachers whatsoever, they would have jumped at it without hesitation as a revolutionary step forward. One of the most amazing contributions came from the Deputy Leader, Bernard Wiltshire:

"Teachers are not honouring their contractual duties. Everybody has been talking about teachers – what about the interests of the children? Teachers are well placed within GCs and Labour Parties which frightens us into taking decisions. We must show firmness in the conduct of this authority – firmness and fairness. There is a surplus of teachers in schools [which is] very general to teachers. [There are] very generous arrangements for supply teachers. Let us not show weakness. We must send a signal to teachers that we intend to run our schools."

In fact his Party, (Hackney North) has instructed him and his fellow member Stephen Benn to try to reverse the decision of the Group. When asked if they would follow the Party's instruction, Stephen replied that he would and Bernard replied, "No comment".

The problem is that this attitude towards teachers was not confined to Bernard Wiltshire and Neil Fletcher. With 11 exceptions, it was shared by the whole Group. The London Labour Party Executive has described the decision as "provocative, irresponsible and calculated to damage industrial relations in schools to the detriment of the service and the children", and urged Group members, "to reverse it immediately" and is circulating a resolution for Parties to discuss.

Unfortunately, the damage has been done already. The ACAS talks are over and the ILEA's line has substantially prevailed. Conditions in education look like worsening considerably for the foreseeable future.

By Keith Lichman, (Hackney North CLP and GLLP Regional Executive).



John Chapman

Frances Morrell plays fairy godmother

Teachers: pull back the cover!

Nationally, education has just been through one of its most tumultuous periods in recent history with unprecedented teacher industrial action. This has been aimed at improving the decline in salary since the Houghton increase of the 1970s. At the same time teachers have become more politicised and have refused to accept conditions which only a few years ago they would have been ready to. They are moving to a position where they are not prepared to work after school and at weekends, not willing to cover the classes of absent colleagues.

No cover action has become symbolic of the new found industrial strength and has been very effective, because it not only improves teachers' working conditions at a stroke but it also brings the issues to the forefront. Parents have had the realities of school brought clearly home to them with more and more children being sent home, as teachers refuse to cover for absent colleagues.

In London this struggle has been overlaid by the wider successful struggle to prevent the ILEA being broken up by the Tory government and the unsuccessful struggle against the abolition of the GLC. In this the NUS and the ILEA have been at one. It is unfortunate this unity has not been more manifest in the wider teacher struggle. ILEA, at a time when other LEAs are holding back, is in the forefront of those wishing to deduct pay for not covering.

This can only lead to a worsening of relations between teachers and the Labour ILEA. At a time when we should be uniting to fight the common enemy – the Tory government – the ILEA leadership seems determined to follow an anti-teacher union stance. Despite giving full support over the fight to preserve the ILEA, we are treated in a cavalier fashion over such issues as the budget, during the crucial period of rate-capping. The Deputy Leader also appears to attribute the lack of achievement of black children as due solely to white racist teachers.

In the recent elections a number of left-wingers were elected. They want to see a constructive and progressive alliance with the NUT and the teacher unions, but their voice at the moment is being submerged by the leadership who do not want this. There is another strong group among the Labour members recently elected at County Hall who can best be described as parental activists, interested in improving education. This is a laudable aim but their politics are close to the SDP and they appear unwilling to forge close links with the NUT.

At the time of writing the NUT leadership has just signed a cover agreement with the LEAs which takes their members back to the position before the recent industrial action. This agreement has been hatched up between the NUT leaders and the Labour-led authorities as a means of putting pressure on the government to provide more money. They want to be able to say that they have brought the peace and calm in our schools necessary to get them back to normal.

It is bad politics on the part of the LEAs because it is unlikely that the government will provide what is at least four times the amount of money that they want to spend. It is also bad union tactics because once the union has gone back on the no-cover action it will be difficult to retrieve the losses. For this reason the NUT in London will be sticking to cover only after the first day of absence in primary schools and absolute no-cover in secondary schools. The action we have seen in the past might be small compared with what we are likely to see in the future.

Mike Loosley, General Secretary, Inner London Teachers' Association, NUT and Labour Party member

Letter

Where is the significant point?

Dear Editor,

I would like to reply to Keith Lichman's report of the 23rd June ILEA Labour Group meeting, which appeared in the 'upside down' pilot issue of the London Labour Briefing.

Keith complains that education was hardly mentioned at the meeting and that no "starry-eyed idealists" among the new members showed any determination "to make London education different and better". In fact there was a resolution from Martin Garman, a noted 'starry-eyed idealist', on the agenda. This called for the setting-up of an Under Fives' Sub-Committee so that this crucial area of education could be given a high profile. At the Group meeting Martin's resolution was debated at length, but Keith would not know this since he had left the meeting by then.

Keith also complains that the trade union delegation was kept waiting. This is true and it was very regrettable. The delegation was not invited to address the Group at the start of the meeting because not all members of the Group had arrived, and it was felt that the trade union's case should be heard by the maximum number of Group members. Unfortunately a very contentious issue came up under 'matters arising' and this delayed the invitation to the Unions. Immediately the issue was completed the delegation was invited into the meeting.

The officers had prepared a Paper for the Group listing a series of cuts options, and the trade unions asked us to reject all these options. Later, when the Group considered the Paper, all of the options were unanimously thrown out. This is surely the significant point, but I could not find it in Keith's report.

Yours fraternally,
Pete Willsman



Ratecapping — year three

Ratecapping was seen as the ultimate Tory policy which would make or break local democracy. The policy in Year One of Refusal to Fix a Rate was seen by some as determined by the stark choice of either forcing the government to step down, or introducing cuts in jobs and services and increasing rents.

We have seen the fallout. Lambeth and Liverpool Councillors have been surcharged and disqualified. Lambeth accepted the decision of the High Court. Liverpool are taking their appeal from the Court of Appeal to the House of Lords. If they fail, further action by the District Auditor and Audit Commission is likely against other councils who delayed in fixing rates in 1985. The Audit Commission is seeking to appoint different auditors for Hackney and Islington so that Brian Skinner will not have the sole responsibility. Camden, Hackney, Islington and possibly Greenwich are likely to be first in the firing line. Further surcharges and disqualifications are possible.

Yet the rate capped authorities have survived. There have been no cuts in jobs and services. Some councils have frozen rents and have managed to introduce significant growth. Indeed, they have been protected from the traditional relationship of accountability to their electorate. Such growth would normally have led to large rate increases. It has not been possible to finance growth in this way. The unforseen consequence of ratecapping has therefore been to protect councillors from the unpopular consequences of their actions.

Hitlist

The 1987/8 hitlist has now been announced containing twenty councils and also the new joint boards. Nine London councils are on the list for the third year: Camden, Greenwich, Hackney, Haringey, Islington, Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and the ILEA. Liverpool drops off and Sheffield returns to the list. Gateshead, North Tyneside, Tower Hamlets (now under Alliance control), Brent, Hounslow, Middlesbrough, Brighton and Newham come onto the list for the first time.

In the past Briefing has discussed the options open to the ratecapped authorities. This year there will be one: the policy of survival. It has worked well for this year. It has been achieved by various techniques of creative accountancy.

In 1984 no-one would have predicted that ratecapped authorities could survive through a third year. The major element has been a combination of large loans coupled with deferred purchase agreements. Deferred purchase agreements have recently been made unlawful, but not before a number of councils had raised large loans (in some cases up to £100 million to be drawn on over a period of three years). The interest charges have been remarkably favourable. Only the surcharged councils have faced difficulties in raising finance, Liverpool recently having to turn to Japanese banks.

The crunch will only come after the next election. With the worst scenario of a further Tory victory, the ratecapped councils would face an impossible position.

Creative accountancy has only put off the day of reckoning, building up commitments for the years ahead. Yet had the ratecapped authorities abided by the normal rules of finance in Year One they would have faced unacceptable cuts of up to 10%.

The ratecapped authorities need to consider the scenario of a Labour victory. A combination of removal of the ratecapping legislation coupled with a refund of all rate support grant penalties which they have suffered, would enable them to survive with modest increases in rates to finance their current level of rates. Without this massive input of resources, councils could need to raise rates by up to 50 or 60%, to maintain the current level of services.

The final conflict over ratecapping has yet to be faced. The outcome is hard to predict.

Robert Latham, (Camden Council)



Massive anti-ratecapping demonstration, July 1985 Dave Stewart from "He was only the District Auditor, but..."

Hung in Hillingdon

The London Borough of Hillingdon is, apart from being one of the largest, and fastest growing boroughs, one of the most polarised in class terms. It stretches from the leafy suburbs of Ruislip and Northwood down to the old working class area of Hayes, the base for a number of major manufacturing enterprises like EMI and Nestles as well as Heathrow Airport.

Labour has not held control of the Local Authority since 1978 and even lost the formerly safe Parliamentary seat of Hayes and Harlington at the last election when SDP renegade Neville Sandelson split the anti-Tory vote allowing the infamous Terry Dicks to slip through the middle. What Dicks represents is clearly shown from his recent outburst about 'lazy West Indians' and his behaviour as Chair of Housing when he put a homeless Asian family in a taxi and had them dumped on the steps of the Home Office.

However, the last few years have seen a gradual rebuilding of the local Labour Party beginning with the election of John McDonnell to the GLC and culminating in the recent Council elections when the Party increased its representation from 10 to 34, taking 23 seats off the Tories and one off the Liberals. Much of this success can be attributed to a new mood of optimism following the victorious ten week occupations of Hayes Cottage and Northwood and Pinner hospitals in 1983 and a major campaign to defend the schoolmeals service in 1985. The latter also saw the Local Authority trade unions undergoing varying degrees of change and regeneration, the end result of which has been the creation of a progressive and accountable Joint Shop Stewards Committee. Helped by a Tory Council of staggering incompetence which lurched from one crisis to another, the scene was set in May for major changes.

Chaos

On the day, however, Labour ended up one short of an overall majority. The Tories lost every seat in Hayes while the lone Liberal held on through a racist vote against the Labour candidate. Elsewhere in the borough Labour picked up seats while the Liberals also took six seats off the Tories. The result has been chaos! The Liberals immediately voted in a Tory Mayor as well as an unworkable system of rotating Committee Chairs which Labour refused to accept. Meetings were cancelled or ended in uproar. Now some of the Committees are actually chaired by trade union representatives. Meanwhile the Liberals initially voted against the reintroduction of the Taxi Card scheme, leaving Hillingdon as the only non-participating borough and have voted down funding for a Women's Refuge and the Women's Centre (which Liberal Leader Tony Little condemned as "sexual apartheid") as well as Labour's proposals on education and social services. In fact their attempts to curtail debate even led to Labour members seizing the Mace to prevent outstanding business from falling and the farcical scene of the Leader of the Labour Group, Peter Fagan, hurling a jug of water at the Tory Leader but missing and soaking the Labour Chief Whip.

The fact is that Labour has little chance of securing any real victories on the Council because of the Liberals. It has had a spin-off, however, of maintaining the Labour Group as a united force and postponing the development of the political differences which undoubtedly exist. Instead Labour has been forced to turn out to the public with the production of a quarterly newsletter which is distributed to 65,000 households and a high street profile around issues like South Africa.

Union struggles

Forthcoming trade union struggles, especially over the unionisation and grading of home helps, will also help to take the political battles out of the Council Chamber and into the workplaces, the estates and onto the streets. Already one of the Local Authority trade union branches have adopted a marginal ward and have managed to get almost 20 of the dust to distribute leaflets on a regular basis.

Meanwhile, many of the younger and more radical elements in the Party are beginning to work together in a co-ordinated fashion for the first time. The Briefing Group which is being established after Labour Party Conference will serve to link together Party members, trade unionists, CND activists, health campaigners and other interest groups to provide mutual support and education. For the first time for a number of years there is now a mood of optimism amongst the Left in Hillingdon. The real test of our success will be shown at the next General Election – but in the meantime the Party is moving forward on all fronts and making life very difficult for the Tory administration and their Liberal lapdogs.

Steve Clare, (Secretary, Hillingdon TUC)
Michael Walker, (Sec Labour Group) Both in personal capacity.



Philip Wolmuth

Hillingdon school meals workers march against new contracts, July 1985

BRIEFING COUNCILLORS' CAUCUS

Following the May elections, London Labour Briefing hosted a local government conference on 5th July attended by Councilliors and LGC members from a number of London boroughs.

At that conference there was general agreement that the left on most London Labour authorities has been weakened as a consequence of the capitulation by the "soft left" in the fight against ratecapping and GLC abolition last year. It was also recognised that the number of boroughs now led by the left is very small and it was felt that there was a need to regroup to share information and discuss strategy and tactics anew.

London Labour Briefing is, therefore, initiating a caucus of London councillors who support the aims of Briefing.

The caucus will share information on what is happening in each borough and on the London-wide bodies such as ALA and LSPC, take up campaigns against ratecapping, privatisation and cuts in jobs and services, and develop a socialist strategy for London local government.

The first meeting of the Briefing Councillors' Caucus took place on Sunday 14 September. What this space for further details.

Next London Briefing. Editorial Board at 6.30 p.m. on Monday September 22nd at Camden Town Hall.

East Lewisham:

Still supporting Black Sections

On 28th August East Lewisham CLP selected Black activist Russell Profitt as its Prospective Parliamentary Candidate – for the second time. The local party had decided, with reluctance, to go through a selection procedure without the participation of our Black Section delegates. The decision to do so had been passed, without a dissenting vote, at an earlier GC – the resolution had been drawn up and moved by our Black Section. It was made very clear that the Black Section were offering to withdraw as a purely tactical move – and many of us were determined to work for the selection of Russell Profitt, on a shortlist of one, so that this 'official' selection would be being held purely to legitimise the decision of our 'real' selection meeting, held 18 months ago with the full participation of our Black Section.



Russell Profitt after his original selection

But after 18 months of refusing to accept the NEC's refusal to endorse Russell; 18 months of vigorous campaigning in support of Black Sections which included Russell moving the Black Section resolution at Annual Conference; after selecting our ILEA candidates with the involvement of the Black Section (it's worth noting that our chosen candidates were then 'imposed' on us by the Greater London Labour Party) – why did East Lewisham decide now to hold a 'proper' selection?

I think there are a number of reasons – we are a highly marginal Tory held constituency, and we are determined to win the seat back. We are also very keen to see Russell Profitt join the small group of Black Labour MPs that will take their seats at the next General Election – and there is no doubt that worries over Russell's 'unofficial' status, and the rounds of meetings, discussions, correspondence, etc., that that involved could have diverted some of the energy and enthusiasm that we need to put into our political campaigning outside the party. Undoubtedly some people (though not many) were also starting to suffer from what has been called 'support fatigue' – the 'wasn't Black Sections last year's issue' syndrome. We also suffered from a growing feeling of isolation – other constituencies with Black Sections, while supporting our stand, decided to hold their own selections without the participation of Black Sections. Most other constituencies that did select with Black Section involvement had sitting MPs, that it would be fair to assume, the NEC would 'impose' at the end of the day.

In the end, I think it was the fact that our Black Section were prepared to argue for holding another selection that decided the issue. Many delegates took their lead from the Black Section – and the NEC and party leadership owe them a tremendous debt for ensuring that there will not now be a long drawn out dispute with a local Labour Party in a key marginal seat, and that the racist practices of the Labour Party (and of some of its leaders) will not now be exposed by their having to move against the selection of an able and well-known black activist, selected with the organised involvement of black people in the party. I wait to see how they repay this debt – Neil Kinnock could for instance consider withdrawing his inflammatory comparisons of the call for Black Sections with apartheid, and instead come to accepting that leading a socialist party does not mean him personally controlling each and every section within it – but I certainly won't hold my breath while I wait.

East Lewisham's position is clear – we are still 100% committed to Labour Party Black Sections. Head Office have been informed that our Black Section remains an integral party of our local party, taking part in all decision making not related to the Parliamentary Selection, with delegates to the GC. Although this line is, of course, unconstitutional, so far it has not caused us any problems. Presumably Black Section involvement in policy making and campaigning (and jumble sale running, and social organising, etc) are not so threatening as being involved in the selection of a possible abour MP. We will continue to support the fight for Black Sections in any way we can – and we urge all other party members to do the same. A good start would be to support the Black Section candidates for the NEC elections, Russell Profitt and Narendra Makanji at Labour Party conference.

Lesley Lee, Chair East Lewisham CLP (writing in a personal capacity).

Fighting deportations in Hackney

A woman with a young son appeals against her deportation and endures horrendous harassment from the authorities, such as long interrogations and having her home broken into and searched by the police.

A group of twelve low paid textile workers are arrested during a raid on a clothing factory. They are lined up against a wall, asked among other things what are their political affiliations, and arrested. They are not given the chance of legal representation and before anyone other than the police and immigration authorities know about it, three of them have been removed from Britain.

An irregular patient at a psychiatric unit is found wandering the streets in a confused state and is arrested by the police. They inform the hospital who agree to accept the patient but they ring back later to say they are keeping the patient at the station that evening whilst they make enquiries about her immigration status.

What is the common link in these events? That all the people being arrested and harassed are members of black and ethnic communities. That they've been born in Britain or have come to find work or relatives, or to flee from tyranny. That they, like thousands of others living in Britain today, are consistently almost daily treated to a series of internal controls (in hospitals, banks, DHSS), questions about their personal life and background, and even if perfectly 'legitimate' citizens here, the threat of deportation simply because they are black. And that this continues to be accepted as the way towards better race relations by both the Tory and Labour Parties.

When the Hackney Anti-Deportation Campaign was formed in October 1984 by local black and ethnic community groups, its main intentions were to campaign for the repeal of the 1971 Immigration Act, to oppose deportations, and to remove all immigration controls. This is still its platform; and whilst local Labour wards have adopted it, the problems of getting it through to the leadership of the party is a reflection of the way immigration controls have become accepted in this century as a means of controlling the black and ethnic communities in Britain.

HADC is trying to obtain funding from Labour boroughs in North and East London for an immigration and nationality centre. There are thousands of people deported every year without sufficient legal aid, or guidance, or support; such a community-run centre could provide the practical help needed immediately, and also go some way to influence current thinking in the shadow cabinet.

The Labour Party, with its record of introducing racist laws (e.g. the current entry visa controls only strengthen what the Labour Party introduced in 1969) needs reminding now that controlling immigration is not the problem: how to challenge racism is.

Graham Sievers

Hackney Anti-Deportation Campaign, PO Box 39, 139 Kingsland High St., London E8. Phone: Alok, 254-4898 (day); Halya, 341-9383 (eve); Graham, 380-2594 (day).



Paul Mattson/Frame

Anti-deportation march, Manchester 1985

DON'T LET THEM CLOSE WEST LONDON HOSPITAL

WHEN managers at Riverside Health Authority chose to go in for public consultation over the closure of the West London Hospital in Hammersmith they couldn't have anticipated the size of the opposition both locally and elsewhere.

Almost immediately staff and users of the hospital began to write letters of protest, collect signatures for a petition opposing closure and organising a campaign for the defence of the hospital.

Riverside, facing a cut of £34 million (25% of its existing budget) by the year 1994, hopes to close the hospital by Novermber 1987. They argue that some of the services currently provided could be better located elsewhere: except that is for maternity services, which will not be re-provided, as Riverside believes, like NW Thames regional chiefs, that an "overprovision" of these services exists in this part of London. The basis for this assumption is a North West Thames Region "working party" report whose hurried "research" has led to serious critricisms from many quarters.

By Dave Shields

The main reason for the Health authority wishing to close the hospital is that it is on "prime development" land which, if sold off, could fetch North West Thames £10 million at today's rates.

None of this money would come back to Riverside to help improve and develop service in Hammersmith and Fulham, although some development money for re-providing services at West London will be made available "independent" of any devcision to close the hospital or not.

SWEL — the Campaign to Save West London Hospital — has been formed with the full backing of the newly elected Labour council and Hospital staff unions, and hopes to co-ordinate the various groups and individuals opposing closure plans. For instance parents of children born at the hospital have been vociferously opposing the decision to not reprovide the maternity services while local branches of Age Concern choose to campaign for improved services for the elderly.

The campaign clearly sees the need to have strong and close links with the staff woking at the hospital. Many of them who were previously not in a union have joined up and new stewards care coming forward. The hospital night staff — previously unorganised — are meeting with one another to discuss ways to defeat the closure plans.

At one stage there was an air of inevitability about closure amongst the hospital staff, but now, largely thanks to a determined group of women workers, this is being replaced with a mood of anger and resistance. Now even the hospital's top consultants have openly joined the fight to save the hospital.

Elsewhere in Riverside other unions have been rallying to the cause, and there is a marked up-surge in campaigning activity amongst shop stewards. The threatened closure of the West London symbolises the beginning of the wholesale destruction of the NHS in Riverside and active staff want to try and stop the Authority in its tracks.

The campaign argues for additional government resources for Riverside in order to avert the threat of closure, and to this extent the campaign is political.

As one suporter pointed out: "It is a political decision to close this hospital and if needs be we will have to use political mmethods to change the situation."

It is the intention of the campaign to visit every major party and union conference this autumn and the campaign is spreading outside of Labour Hammersmith and Fulham to Westminster, Ealing, Putney, Richmond and Chiswick.

To date 15,000 signatures have been collected and the campaign expects to reach a much higher target before handing them in to No. 10 Downing Street. Other plans include a lobby of the Health Minister at his own constituency headquarters, a march and rally through Hammersmith and Fulham, a series of public meetings in Western London and a mass lobby of the November 27 Health Authority meeting.

SWEL co-ordinator Dave Shields, who is also a member of London Health Emergency's steering committee, firmly believes that a combination of Community and hospital trade union action can bring sufficient pressure to bear on the Authorities to force them to climb down over closure, although he concedes that it will be a long and hard struggle.

Riverside's managers are clearly worried and have already risked an all out confrontation with the unions by refusing to allow NUPE to use its West London Hospital union office as a base for the campaign.

They have also prepared plans to exclude members of the public at future Health Authority meetings, contrary to the entire spirit if not the letter of the NHS Act. Correspondingly Riverside's unions are gaining in confidence after setbacks over privatisation of domestic services.

NUPE, COHSE, GMBATU and ASTMS are all co-operating and could be prepared to take action across Riverside following on from a successful day of protest on July 24.

Interestingly nurses and the other professions have come to play a more and more important role in the campaigns against cuts and closures. The Charing Cross Joint Shop Stewards Committee is becoming more relevant to the staff themselves and there are plans to develop a similar structure at St Stephen's Hospital.

Another interesting feature has been the involvement of the Medical School students union, who have been very much to the fore of the campaigning work.

Together with hospital workers, their unions, the local council, users and supporters of the hospital in the community and the wider Trade Union movement the students have shown just how wide the support for SWEL has become.

Mothers who have had their children at the hospital or who have had to use the hospital's life saving Special Care Baby Unit also promise to be amongst the most determined fighters to save what they see as their hospital. Equally determined are the borough's pensioners some of whom have been petitioning on the streets day in and day out.

Hammersmith and Fulham council alongside the local MPs have shown just how useful a campaigning attitude to NHS issues is to the community — especially when the NHS is one of the largest employers in one of London's more deprived regions. This combination of forces will determine how successful the campaign will be and there is every confidence of success given the public's attitude to government Health Service policies in the run up to a General Election.



Support COHSE's demonstration!

The years of massive underfunding of the NHS have resulted in a major crisis for the health service in London.

Since the introduction in 1976 of the notorious Resource Allocation Working Party (RAWP) formula, spending on London's health services has been cut and cut resulting in hospital closures, an increase in the length of waiting lists, major job losses and a substantial deterioration in the level of service provided.

Devastation

The abuse of the RAWP formula has meant that the devastation of London's health service has been "justified" in terms of subsidising health services in other under-funded health regions. In particular since 1982 the situation has become increasingly critical as the budget for London's NHS has shrunk further.

Figures compiled by London Health Emergency indicate that the resources lost in the last four years alone could cost a massive £210 million to restore.

Critical

Waiting lists in the capital have risen to a critical level in recent years. Even though London's hospitals are now pushing people in and out of hospital faster than ever, the huge cut in the number of hospital beds in London has meant a major increase in numbers on the waiting list — from 101,096 in September 1982 to 116,139 in September 1985, a staggering increase of nearly 15%!

The situation in the Inner London health districts is particularly serious — with an increase in numbers on the waiting list from 53,440 in September 1982 to 62,571 in September 1985.

Study

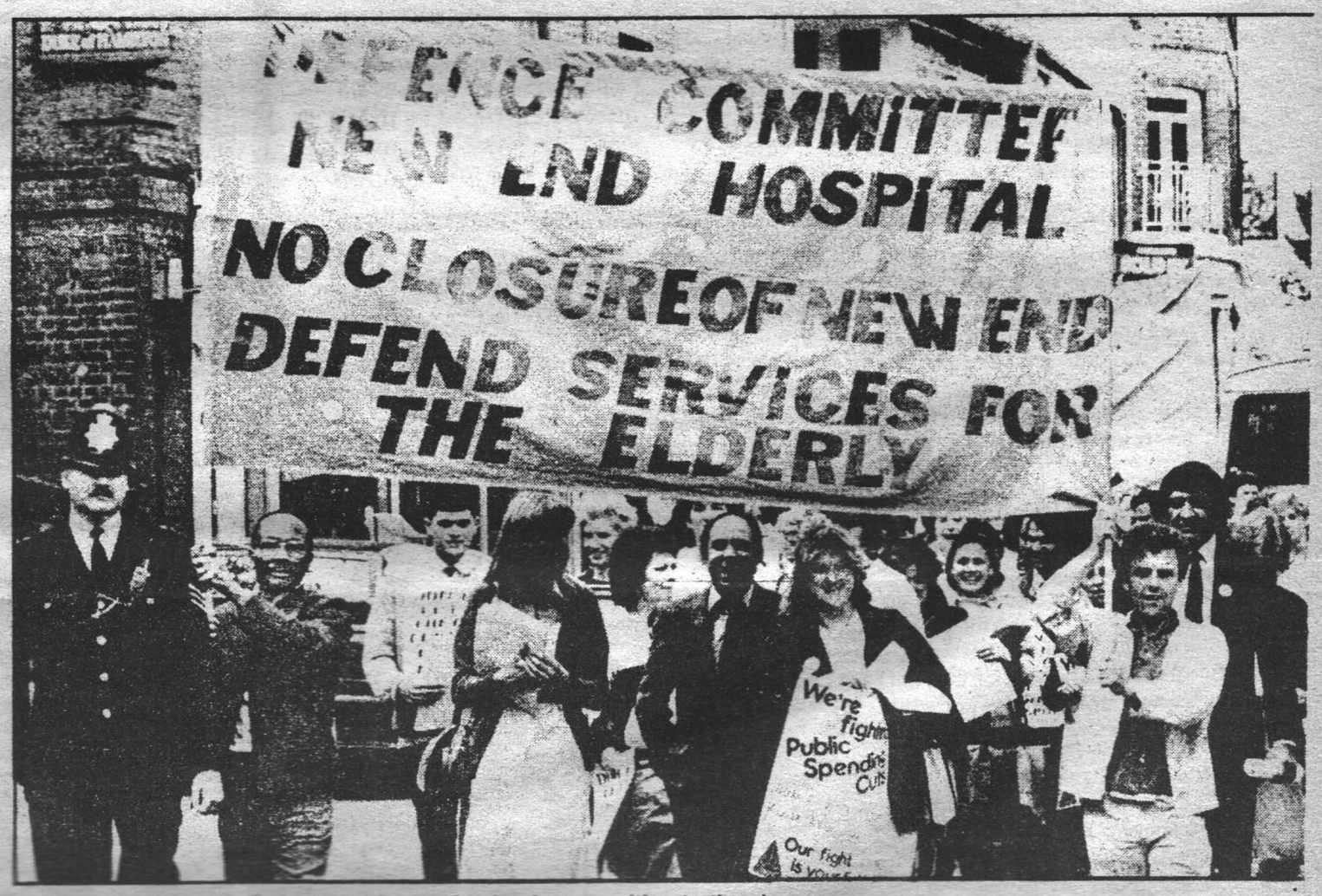
A recent study for the Association of London Authorities shows that since 1980, 15 acute hospitals have closed, with the loss of 10% of the capital's acute beds: in addition an incredible 3% of the beds mainly or partly for acute cases have also been axed.

In all the last six years show a loss of 7,767 hospital beds in London — nearly one fifth of the total in 1980.

This brutal attack on the rights of health service workers and users has lead to a major fight back from workers and users. Campaigns against closures at West London Hospital (Riverside), New End Hospital (Hampstead) and St James Hospital (Wandsworth) and campaigns against the cuts at Maudsley Hospital are fighting hard to resist the onslaught.

A major national demonstration, called by COHSE, is planned for November 10. The march will begin at the DHSS, Elephant and Castle, and rally at the Maudsley Hospital in South London.

By Rosie Newbigging (London Health Emergency)



● New End staff on their way to make a vain plea for opposition to the closure.

Rate-capping + Privatisation = CUTS



Two-thirds of all local authority expenditure in London is now under direct government control.

A combination of rate-capping and the abolition of the GLC has given the Tories effective control over the capital city. In Inner London, the only Labour-controlled borough not subject to ratecapping is Hammersmith & Fulham. Four Outer London boroughs are caught in the net. The ILEA and Fire & Civil Defence Authority are effectively rate-capped by the abolition legislation. London Regional Transport and the Police are now entirely controlled by central government.

If the Tories hadn't bent the rules to "save" it, even the City of London would have been rate-capped – with budgetted spending 191% over Grant Related Expenditure assessments it should have been subject to the "12½% over GRE" rule used against Labour authorities.

This means in most boroughs a £40 million "gap" between planned expenditure and income. The government will get back a massive £700 million in grant penalties – enough to pay for those tax cuts for the rich. The "extra" money given to Inner London last year "in recognition of their hard pressed needs" has gone back to the Tory shires. The Tories aren't bothered about winning votes in the slums of the inner city this year.

Lambeth councillors have been surcharged and disqualified. Liverpool councillors will soon go along that road, since the judges in the House of Lords are not going to cross class lines. The District Auditor may still come back to those boroughs which delayed setting a rate in 1985. The May election results – particularly for ILEA – showed that Labour had won the propaganda battle on GLC abolition and rate-capping. But that victory has to be placed in the context of power. The reality is that the Tories have successfully seized control of London's local government.

Off the agenda

Another reality is that rate-capping – and the fight against it – has slipped off the agenda. And not just the Annual Conference agenda, where "surcharged councillors" are set apart from "local government". The Lambeth 31 have become a charitable cause. The jobs, services and local democracy they were fighting to defend still have to be defended – and against a more vicious ratecap limit in London than ever before. This has been conveniently forgotten.

It's "heads down, make cuts, don't challenge the Tories because it'll cause ripples" year. Jack Cunningham will ride to the rescue on his nuclear-powered white stallion, restore the cuts, increase local government funding, recreate the GLC, give us back the stolen billions, build houses, create jobs . . . and shut down Sellafield.

"Not rocking the boat" is an insult to the thousands of people who depend on local authority services, who have to put up with rotten services, leaking roofs, uncollected rubbish. It's an insult to the thousands of people without a home; to local authority workers on low wages now threatened with redundancy; to women and black people who have had their expectations raised that at last someone was going to treat them as equals. It's selling out the councillors who did stand by Party policy, kept their promises and got disqualified. And it doesn't even win votes!

In 1985, the first year of rate-capping, the government went "softly, softly" because of the campaign of opposition. 1986 saw money diverted to the London boroughs – it was local election time. Creative accounting has got everyone off the hook this year. But now, as was predicted when rate-capping was introduced the Tories are tightening the screws – particularly in London.

The ratecap limits are harder and creative accounting devices, such as deferred purchase, are being made illegal. More capital controls are expected. It is clear that most of the leaders of the London Labour boroughs would prefer to follow the "don't rock the boat" strategy for the next year. In practice, this will mean they will want to comply with government legislation.

A number of boroughs, including ILEA, are already expected to apply for "re-determination" of their expenditure levels – which will allow Nicholas Ridley access to all their accounts and to demand any information he wants. Little consultation is taking place on whether boroughs should apply – most Party members will get no say in what is now seen as a "technical" matter.

But what happens next March when the "gap" hasn't been bridged and budgets have to be made? The choice is simple. Despite all the attempts to survive until the general election, cuts will be the order of the day unless rate-capping is put back on the agenda – by party branches, left caucuses, trade unions, the London Labour Party, the ALA – and the tactics for continuing the fight worked out.

Privatisation

Just on the agenda, still a "safe" issue as controntation has yet to come, is privatisation. The government has moved slowly in relation to privatising local services; they have concentrated on the nationalised industries and the health service. Direct labour organisations (DLOs) have been forced to compete on unfair terms, but as yet most privatisation has been on the basis of Tory authorities being allowed to rather than all authorities being forced to privatise.

Tory Wandsworth and Liberal Tower Hamlets are already selling whole housing estates to private firms, and new legislation will leave tenants with no security of tenure if their homes are sold. Further legislation is expected, which is likely to include the banning of contract compliance, essential if DLOs are to survive. Large quantities of local authority work is already carried out by private contractors. "Creeping" privatisation will happen if jobs are cut, vacancies not filled, and DLOs not protected. The combination of lack of finance and government pressure could force Labour authorities into a corner. And if a strong campaign of opposition hasn't been built up, the Tories will be in a position to force privatisation on Labour councils.

Rate-capping and privatisation are just long words for cuts. After ten long years of anti-cuts campaigns, it's not surprising we like changing names. But we have to forget the euphemisms if we are to continue to fight against cuts. London local councils have been a major battleground against the Tories. We lost the last round. The Tories are now coming back for more. We have to discuss what tactics are now needed, and start the slow process once more of mobilising trade unionists, party members and the local community.

The cuts in local authority services started under the last Labour government. More than ever before, a united campaign needs to be built to ensure that the fight against cuts is sustained – both against Tory rate-capping and privatisation laws and to ensure that Labour restores the cuts and gives local democracy back to London.

Joan Twelves,
(London Regional Executive).

National Demonstration

Stop the NHS cuts!
Monday November 10, 2pm
DHSS Elephant & Castle, London SE1

March to the Maudsley Hospital, Denmark Hill, SE5

Called by COHSE

Buy your *Briefing* at Lewisham Labour Booksales, second Saturday every month starting Oct 11, 12–3, Labour Club, Limes Grove, SE13.

"He was only the District Auditor, but..." is a collection of photos from one London Borough's rebellion against the Tory Government's ratecapping laws.

Between 1979 and 1985 central government grants to Lambeth were reduced year by year until finally local people would accept it no longer...

It was a fight that took place in one of the country's most deprived areas involving Councillors, trades unionists and community groups.

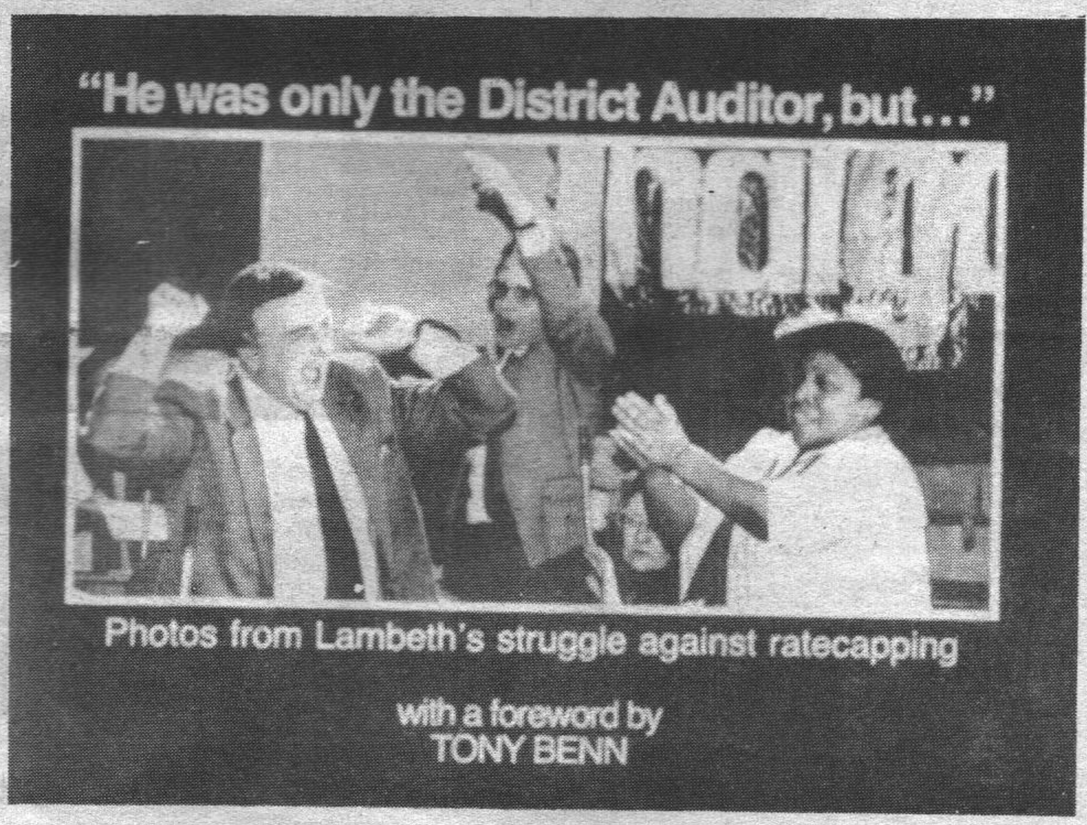
Initially it was a struggle with a national dimension involving many Councils and threatening to open a second front alongside the striking mining communities.

After a war of attrition Lambeth was isolated and left prey to Tory wolves in the form of the District Auditor and the High Court.

Disqualified and surcharged the Councillors remained unbowed. There were no cuts in Lambeth, not a single redundancy in 1985.

This is the story of a year in which despite the final sacrifice at least one authority stood up for local democracy.

The book is £3 plus 10 per cent postage and can be obtained by writing to Stephen Bubb, the Treasurer Lambeth Fighting Fund, 171 Clapham Road, London SW9 0QE, phone 274 5906 (home) or 388 6191 (work).



Local Government TUs — an asset or a liability?

The Labour Party, TUC and media are full of the 'transformation' of the relationship between the Labour Party and unions apparently heralded at this year's Congress.

Sure, the Labour Party will still accept the unions' enormous donations to keep the Party alive, but will no longer pay much attention to anything they say. The TUC seems to think this is a pretty good idea, too.

Personally, I can't see that Kinnock's line, 'I'll work with unions as long as they agree with everything I say and do', is that radically different from his predecessors, but that may be because I never bought the myth that the unions ran the country under the last Labour government.

However, the Labour Party clearly believes this to be true and is doing everything it can to prevent the recurrence of anything so scandalous as allowing the organised working class an undue influence on Labour Party policy.

Certainly in local government, the old idea of councillors, workers and the local Party working together to defeat Tory attacks on public sector jobs and services has shifted to the attitude that the unions are an electoral liability and should be marginalised as much as possible.

During the rate-capping struggle many new links were made between councillors, trade unionists and party activists and we met frequently (some would say incessantly). But instead of salvaging these links from the wreckage of rate-capping, the Labour Party has allowed them to be eroded by neglect or even snapped them deliberately.

Perhaps a symptom of this change is that last year the Camden unions met the Leader all the time to discuss strategies, day-to-day policy, financial matters and other aspects of Group policy that affected the workforce. This year it took us over two months to get a meeting with the newly-elected Leader.

Similarly, the Council has set up officer groups to combat privatisation, but not yet organised the long-promised Council-trade unions meeting to develop policy, nor responded to union demands for control of the contractors and consultants who infest Council services. Is a management-led campaign against privatisation which excludes the workers and fails to challenge existing use of private contractors really going to strike terror into Nicholas Ridley?

The point is that workers and unions are assets not liabilities; our experience has value and talking to us can lead to improvements in policy and services.

Moreover failure to do so can only weaken the Labour Party, as its policy-making becomes detached from the details of implementation. It is much easier for councillors to have good ideas in theory and then blame the unions when they don't work in practice, than to think their policies through in detail.

Instead of working with the unions we are cast as reactionaries who will hold up whatever progressive and wonderfully socialist policy our employers are currently developing.

Eventually, rumour and press reports of Council plans feed workers' natural suspicions that change equals threat and we dig our heels in until reassured that the policy won't mean cuts – or until industrial action makes sure that there are no cuts. This then is taken as proving the point that there's no sense in talking to us.

As consultation with workers goes out of fashion, the number of minor industrial disputes scattered throughout Labour authorities is on the increase. If this is the path that the Labour Party insists on following at local and national level, they may need grappling irons before long.

Johanna Fawkes,
Chair, Camden NALGO,
Acting Co-chair,
London Bridge
(in a personal capacity).



Dave Stewart from "He was only the District Auditor, but..."

Racism in Holborn & St Pancras

Dave Mathieson has been Vice-Chair of Holborn and St. Pancras CLP since February 1986 and works for NHS Unlimited, a campaign sponsored by Holborn and St. Pancras MP Frank Dobson. During the rise to his current position, he has been quite open with a few individuals about his former membership of the National Front but it was never discussed as a Party issue.

When he forwarded his name to the panel of candidates for local council elections at the end of 1985 he was either asked to withdraw or stood down voluntarily from the panel. This raises the question of whether it was in case his former NF membership became exposed. It is not clear which option was chosen or why.

By Camden Labour Briefing

At the May 1986 Executive Committee (EC) meeting, after the overwhelming Labour victory in Camden at the May elections, Mathieson decided that he would tell the truth to the General Committee (GC), although the issue was not included on the agenda for fear of leaks to the press.

A statement was read out at the May GC saying that at the age of 16, Mathieson had seen the NF as a credible working class organisation and had spent three years in it, during which time he had been press and publicity officer. Delegates attempted to ask questions about current associations with the NF and question his commitment to the Labour Party, but they were ridiculed by sections of the GC. Further debate was prevented when an emergency motion of confidence in Mathieson was moved by George Wagner (Bloomsbury Ward) and carried by the GC. Wagner dismissed Mathieson's association with the NF as a small blot on his copy book.

There was concern in the branches and especially in the Women's and Black Sections, that ex-fascists should hold such high positions in the Party before they had proved themselves by working with ethnic minorities over a given time span. This concern led to the submission of a motion which recognised that Mathieson had changed his political viewpoint, but challenged the vote of confidence passed by a predominantly white GC and called on Mathieson to resign as Vice-Chair.

In a limited debate on this motion at the July GC, concern was expressed about the future image of the Labour Party if it was not seen to be tackling racism seriously. However the debate was marred by those who tried to make it a personal rather than a political issue.

They argued that it was simply an unfair personal attack on Dave Mathieson rather than a general question of how the Labour Party vets ex-fascists who want to join it. Pat Denny even said that 'he wished there were more ex-NF members in the Labour Party' – presumably at the expense of black people, women, lesbians and gays and people with disabilities.

The motion was defeated by 20 votes to 43. Perhaps the most worrying aspect of the whole 'debate' was the conduct of certain delegates. The St. Pancras delegate was jeered as she moved the motion.

The right wing caucus have thus created a dangerous precedent which would actually invite involvement in the Labour Party by fascists, racists and fellow-travellers and which could have appalling consequences on the active participation of members of the oppressed groups who have fought long and hard to gain recognition from what has been a white, male, middle-class dominated Labour Party.

The strategy of the right wing in Holborn and St. Pancrass is to centralise power by marginalising the Women's and Black Sections. A recent example came from Councillor Gareth Smythe at Camden's July Borough Conference when he opposed an amendment about 'women, race and the disabled' as 'a Liberal shopping list'.

Racism and sexism are issues that need to be tackled and confronted seriously in the Labour Party as an integral part of our class politics.

The CLP disputes the facts and will reply in the next issue.

England's last rotten borough

The City of London is the last rotten borough in England. Its archaic and undemocratic system of local government has survived untouched for centuries because the corporation protects itself by making it extremely difficult for outsiders to break in.

The City is divided into 25 wards, which elect the Common Council, the first tier of the City's local government. The ward boundaries are medieval in origin and bear no relation to the present population. Ten wards, with fewer than 125 electors, return four councillors each, while Candlewick ward has only 25 voters in all.



Paul Mattsson/Frame

Stop the City demonstration, outside the Bank of England

In 21 of the wards the majority of voters are non-resident, since in the City anyone can qualify for the franchise by paying rates on property with a rateable value of £10 – a qualification that has not changed since 1867. Any company owning freehold property in the City can secure a vote for its employees by giving them a nominal tenancy agreement to a few square feet of the office or the car park. By such means over 100 managers for British Petroleum appear on the register of Cripplegate ward. Thus, although the big incorporated companies have no vote as such, they can control the electorate through the ownership of freehold property.

In order to stand for the Common Council a candidate must be a freeman of the City of London. This can only be obtained with the support either of sitting councilmen or members of a livery company. These livery companies are another archaic survival. Once they were genuine guilds or associations of people engaged in the same trade, but the shoe makers and butchers have long since left the City and the companies are now largely clubs for wealthy businessmen, who thus control not only who can vote, but who can stand for election.

The second tier of local government is the Court of Aldermen. Each ward elects one member, who then sits until the age of 70 and, if the court does not like any successful candidate, it can overrule the election and appoint its own nominee.

It could be argued that none of this matters much. The City is a small area and comparatively few people live there. But, apart from the fact that as socialists we believe that everyone is entitled to a democratic say in their own local government, the Corporation of London not only controls great wealth and property in the City itself, but also in other parts of London. Tracts of Covent Garden, for instance, and, possibly even more significant, large areas of Northern Ireland, are owned either by the City Corporation or the Livery Companies.

It has long been the official policy of the Labour Party to abolish the separate status of the City and incorporate it into the neighbouring boroughs, but Labour governments have come and gone and nothing has been done. The new City branch of the Westminster South Labour Party intends to put up three official Labour candidates in the elections in December. Our aim is to expose the undemocratic nature of the City's institutions and to uncover what we suspect is its malevolent influence in other areas. Already the fat cats are stirring.

Paula Watson,
(Westminster S. CLP)