LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p
No 65 DECEMBER 1986



PHOTO: David Hoffman

DRIVE THE RACISTS OFF OUR STREETS!



PHOTO: David Hoffman

Firebound Halal Butcher Shop, West Ham

In May 1986 Mr Ali from Tower Hamlets and his three sons were attacked by a gang of twelve white youths, wielding iron bars. Mr Ali was repeatedly beaten but when the police came they arrested his sons and treated them as criminals.

Three black men were attacked in September when a gang of around 40 white youths ambushed them as they left a hall in Mitcham, South London. Ian Henry was put in intensive care with wounds to his chest and lungs,and another youth had to have 13 stitches to a slash across his face.

In September also, Iqbal Ullah was stabbed to death in a school playground in Manchester. The police immediately denied that the attack was racially motivated. A 13-year old white youth later appeared in court and was charged with murder.

In October '86 a mob of about 100 youths smashed the windows of the Islamic Centre in Whitechapel and beat up a worshipper as he came out to confront the mob. When the police came to the scene they proceeded to arrest three Asian men who were charged with threatening behaviour and one additionally charged with carrying an offensive weapon. This particular mosque has been the subject of repeated attack, yet the police insisted that they could do nothing about it. And following the recent murder of three Tamil men in Burges Road, East Ham, it has now been revealed that there have been four arson attacks on black families in Burges Road since July 1985, none of which the police cleared up.

By Unmesh Desai (Anti-Fascist Action and Newham Monitoring Project)

These attacks — all horrific in their nature — are only the tip of the racist iceburg. Arson attacks — like the attack in Ilford in July '85 that killed Mrs Kassam and her three children — are a regular occurrence. Many attacks are being co-ordinated by fascist thugs who are openly more violent. Groups like the National Front place a large emphasis on selective recruitment, training and the creation of "political soldiers".

The first task of Labour activists is to educate themselves about the extent of racism in their own partiuclar areas, link up with black organisations and defence campaigns, as well as supporting the activities of groups like anti-Fascist Action who seek to work at a grassroots level against racism and fascism.

But it is vitally important that the lessons learnt through grassroots campaigning are then taken back into the labour movement. There is a battle there to be won. With a General Election pending it is inevitable that "race" is going to be a key issue at the next election. We have already seen how racism has been whipped up via the press over the new visa schemes — "3,000 moor" (sic) was daubed on a Hackney newsagent after the most disgusting article in the *Sun* entitled "3,000 Asians flood Britain". Black people have little faith in the Labour Party nationally to break out of the framework set by the Tories, but it's important that we ensure that pressure is put on MPs and councillors to speak out against this complicity.

Important also is the struggle at a local authority level to ensure that racism is taken seriously. Housing is a key area. In the past council policy was that families subject to harassment were moved out — but this in fact resulted in penalising the victim, and families were often moved on only to be victimised again. Over the past few years this policy has been reversed so that white tenants guilty of persistent racial harassment are moved on. But as we can see in Camden at the moment, policies are constantly being undermined and this should not be allowed to happen.

The incidents outlined above all illustrate the complicity of the police who are not only guilty of subjecting the black communities to military-style policing but also criminalise black people who dare fight back in self-defence. It is the duty of all those in *Labour Briefing* to ensure that local authorities do not get sucked up into multi-agency policing — which in fact makes them complicit with the police surveillance of black communities — and thus perpetuating the problems black people face.

For more information about AFA please contact PO Box 273, Forest Gate, E7.

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Nosh-up in Newcastle: carve-up at LSPU!

"Just when the PM thought she had heard the last of the women's unit, EMU and Police Unit, they are back, funded by the boroughs and serving Londoners."

Thus said Margaret Hodge, Leader of Islington Council, and then chair of the London Strategic Policy Committee which established 344 jobs to carry on work of the GLC after abolition. What she neglected to tell staff was that just when they thought they had left the uncertainty and insecurity of abolition, that they would be abused, misled and lied to.

Over the last 7 months, by their own admission, 9 Labour London Borough leaders have been party to a disgraceful catalogue of poor employment practice worthy of the private sector and practices that would not be permitted in their own boroughs.

These have included:

- the permanent threat of withdrawal of funding and no job security;
- an inadequate level of office accommodation which has and still is in breach of Health and Safety regulations;
- poor management and political guidance;
- a general lack of interest in the organisation, its staff, its work and its development.

Recently, at a small informal dinner in Newcastle during the Association of Metropolitan Authorites conference, leaders from some of the 9 boroughs decided they were not happy with the organisation they had failed to get involved with. They immediately and autocratically decided to freeze 72 vacancies and call into question the future of the organisation. This group failed to inform the staff or our employers (Camden) of their action and the reasoning behind it.

By Phil Walker
Convenor LSPU NALGO

LSPU workers obtained an "intention" to continue the unit from a (lengthy) Labour Group meeting at County Hall, after 2 weeks intensive lobbying from staff working with local Labour Parties, branches and Labour groups. Staff who had given up their free time to extricate themselves from the mess their employers had put them into were not prepared for the hostility they received from the Labour leaders outraged that they could not decide the future of 344 jobs over dinner in Newcastle.

However the struggle continues, with a growing vacancy rate and demoralised workforce which recognises the hypocrisy of an organisation that talks about developing good practice while it holds open 100 jobs and treats the workforce as units of labour to be tossed around the boroughs as required. Many of those once heard singing the praises of LSPU were clearly in a "face-saving" exercise rather than a job-saving exercise.

As London Boroughs fix budgets for '87/'88 it will be interesting to see if they are prepared to pay for what they preach. Whatever the outcome it is clear that a coherent strategy for development of a strategic London body is required. One way of starting the planning of such a strategy would be to provide the workforce that will carry out this work to enjoy the same job security and terms and conditions of employment as any other borough employee.



PHOTO: John Chapman

Margaret Hodge: wondering what to have for dinner next.

Showdown at Cudham

On Friday October 24th, a major blow was dealt to the Scab EETPU, and Labour Party collaboration with the hard right of the labour movement.

The Greater London Labour Party had organised a weekend Training Course for prospective Parliamentary Candidates at Cudham Hall,the Electricians' Union's training college — apparently without the slightest apprehension or shame at using one of the EETPU's country mansions. I found out about the weekend at my October General Committee and, along with many others present, voiced my disgust at this most insensitive and anti-socialist of moves.

At very short notice, a couple of us set about contacting local printworkers to organise a demonstration/picket for the Friday evening when many of the PPCs were due to arrive. They encountered a rather different sort of welcome to the one they expected. Some of the PPCs did not, in fact, know that Cudham is a property of a scab union, and were infuriated when we told them about it.

This is the same Cudham Hall that was officially opened by Norman Tebbit, the EETPU's invited politician, a few years back; and where the Electrician's Union held a joint energy seminar with the so-called Union of Democratic Mineworkers — Eric Hammond sitting side by side with Roy Lynk in a display of anti-socialist solidarity.

Icy blasts of rain-soaked wind and even icier blasts of new realism reverberated around the courtyard. Six printworkers — Len Hall, Bill Penford, Ernie Dyer, Tony Long, Ian Blowfield and a comrade from Dartford stood with me, halting the incoming cars, and informing the gathering PPCs of exactly what sort of establishment they had been invited to. Most of the PPCs wound down their windows to hear what we had to say — that the Labour Party's use of Cudham Hall lent respectability to the scabs, and gave a strong sign of acceptance of the antics of the Electricians' Union in organising the wholesale theft of five and a half thousand workers' jobs.

When the General Secretary of the Regional Labour Party arrived, the printworkers told him of their anger at the decision to hold the seminar at that venue and asked WHY, in the middle of this brave and historic dispute, he had taken the decision to deal the most insulting and callous blow to the printworkers; WHY another venue had not been found and did he accept that the EETPU was responsible for organising scabbing at Wapping?

Terry Ashton made his position quite clear: "We need to keep these people in our movement" was his reply; "We couldn't get anywhere else" was another gem. I put it to him that, if he really could not find anywhere else in the Greater London area at which the weekend could be held, then surely rather than use Cudham Hall, it should have been organised along the lines of the Annual Meeting in March, when delegates have to travel to the meeting on the Saturday and Sunday and have no facilities for staying overnight.

By Debbie Fenn
Orpington CLP

In the totally incredible situation of there being no place at all in the whole of the London area at which the weekend could have taken place, *the course should not have been held anywhere, rather than hold it at Cudham Hall.*

After a while, John Braggins, CLLP regional Organiser, drove up with the Mitcham and Morden PPC Siobahn McDonough. In fact, he nearly swerved into us. When told that he had just stopped short of running us over he replied casually, 'Oh, I thought you were a bus queue." Mitcham and Morden had nothing to say.

We told Braggins that we wished to address those inside.

Bill Penfold made a passionate plea to his audience to boycott the weekend. As a long-standing activist in the Labour Party, he expressed his disgust with those who had planned the weekend. "Personally," he said, "I feel sick just standing on this scabby carpet!"

When it came to my turn to speak, Ashton refused to let me say my piece, and Braggins and Janice Muir shouted me down. Very sisterly, Janice. With some perseverence, I managed to get across my point. "Think what this building represents — it is for you and your consciences to decide whether you stay or go" was just about all I could get out

We left them to discuss the situation.

The rain continued to soak us as we watched them through a large window. Many good comrades like Ben Bosquet, PPC for Kensington, and Mildred Gordon, PPC for Bow and Poplar, voiced their opposition to the weekend being continued. Others quite clearly felt no sense of outrage at being expected to spend the next two days and nights in a place which is anathema to socialists. Ask your PPCs if they went and, if so, did they argue in favour of boycotting the weekend, or to stay there for a pleasant weekend amongst "colleagues" in the Kent countryside?

Finally, a vote was taken and the seminar was called off. The six printworkers with me were elated by this decision.

To the five and a half thousand sacked printworkers, the message is clear: socialists in the Labour Party will do everything they can to counter the appalling lack of solidarity, the flouting of fundamental socialist principles, and tacit acceptance of anti-trade union activities which some Party members and employees think they can get away with.

Bill Penford, *Sun* Machine Chapel Chair, and Committee member of the *Sunday Times* Machine Chapel of SOGAT '82, told a meeting of the *Sunday Times* Committee on Saturday 25th of what we had done on the Friday evening. They passed a motion, fully supporting our action; and agreed to write to the National Executive of the Labour Party.

Ernie Dyer, one of our pickets, said "Whenever we hear of any events in the future taking place at Cudham Hall, we will be there."

Victory to the printworkers!
No to Labour Party collaboration with scabs!

Waltham Forest: what price our manifesto?

Whilst it takes nothing more than an invoice to put a price on advertising in a Wednesday's *Guardian*, the price put on the manifesto is probably less than the total annual advertising bill of Waltham Forest council.

Three sections of the manifesto on which we fought May's elections have been sold to a financial consortium hoping to buy Spitalfields market to expand the City further into East London, and dump the leftover market near Hackney Marshes — on British Rail land at Temple Mills where the former workshops were closed a few years ago.

The Group rejected initial planning permission. Arguments for were that it would bring 1,000 jobs and little extra traffic; arguments against that it would create no extra jobs but would bring as much extra heavy traffic as a wholesale fruit 'n' veg market.

The Group's refusal did not even get to Planning Committee. Some combination of the leadership approached Spitalfields, and agreed to press the Labour Group to accept £350,000 to help re-equip a school due for closure as a training centre, and a promise to put secondary glazing in any front bedroom on just one side of just one of the many roads leading to the site.

The group buckled and accepted the bribe and in doing so sold off three parts of the manifesto:

- **Economic Development** — a pledge to sever all relations with companies involved with South African goods;
- **Planning** — a pledge to have public consultation on how people want their areas to develop.
- **Transport** — a pledge to prevent traffic in residential areas and to support lorry bans in such areas.

Spitalfields will bring tons of South African goods to the borough with no opposition from the Council. No consultation has taken place with local residents in an area where the GLC had a lorry ban which was lifted by the government immediately after abolition.

By John Wray
Leyton CLP

The culprits may well prefer the word "pragmatic" rather than "disgusting sell-out" and the reasons why are interesting.

Waltham Forest, through creative accounting by last year's Tory/Liberal council, will not be rate-capped next year, but certainly will be in 1988. So we have one budget in which rate rises are unrestricted. Rates are the same now as in 1982 but services have been reduced.

The school in the bribe is due to close as part of the previous council's reorganisation. Depending on the rate support grant and the political will of the Party, rates could go up by as much as 60 or 70 per cent and allow us to implement as much of the rest of the manifesto as is physically possible before we are finally rate-capped.

Fears of a public backlash are already growing. A joint LGC/Group conference is imminent as we go to press. There are only two alternatives proposed — a massive or a not-so-massive rise with council services benefitting respectively. But... enter the Spitalfields bribe! If we can get investment from elsewhere besides the rates we can improve services with less of a backlash.

In practice, however, this means selling out three parts of the manifesto for less than one third of one per cent of the budget to implement a bit of another part. It also means that some people are already nervous about what they see as "unpopular" rate rises. But the decision to accept Spitalfields has not proved very popular either.

Of course, the money raised privately could go to advertising all the new jobs like all the trendy left inner-London boroughs, proving we're really principled all along. On the other hand a group of councillors so unprincipled and fearful of "excessive" rate rises inspire little hope of invigorating an under-staffed and under-resourced council.

At the next LGC there is a motion callng on the council to cease advertising in newspapers owned by firms with links with South Africa. Ho ho.

Next Editorial Board

The next *London Labour Briefing* Editorial Board is on Tuesday November 25th at 6.15pm at Lambeth Town Hall. These meetings are open to all *Briefing* supporters. Please ensure your *Briefing* group sends a representative.
We will be discussing nominations for the Regional Executive.

Two Views from Hammersmith

Four resign over manifesto strategy

By Jeremy Hale
Fulham CLP,
and Jane Sheehan,
Hammersmith CLP



Ian Coleman



Ian Harrison



Sally Powell



Andrew Slaughter

PHOTOS: Terry Austin-Smith)

Four left-wingers on Hammersmith and Fulham Council have resigned from all Group positions and all committees, while remaining in the Group and retaining the Whip. They are Iain Coleman, Chief Whip, Ian Harrison, Chair of Housing, Sally Powell, Group Secretary and member of the Housing and Women's Committees, and Andrew Slaughter, Vice-Chair of Public Services and Borough Construction.

The resignations follow a decision by the Group to limit new growth severely over the next 18 months in what one councillor has described as "the almost Quixotic hope of ducking rate-capping in 1988". In effect the Group has taken a decision to ratecap itself in the mad hope that the Government will not change the rules next year. Hounslow learnt the lesson the hard way but Hammersmith has ignored their experience.

The decision came after 5 months of bitter argument in the Group and the local Parties, which served the right's purpose by ruling out any real expansion this year. The left and the Hammersmith Party had argued against delaying Manifesto implementation while the right, backed by the Fulham Party, insisted on a "phased" programme in order to keep the 1987 rate increase below 50% and to avoid capitalising revenue spending — this in case we were ratecapped in later years!

No one denied that even a 50% rate rise was unacceptably high but the right ignored two things. First, because the Tories cut rates by 16% before the elections and raided the balances, rates would have to rise by 30% next year just to stand still based on the Tory cuts budget. Secondly, as we have always argued before, spending should be based on need, and, if the result of meeting need is a massive rate increase, then we should not shy away from that but should be loud and clear in our denunciation of the government which causes such increases by its vindictive policy of cutting block grant to inner city Labour Councils.

The left's argument that, instead of holding back on service improvements (with a 50% rate rise), we could achieve a great deal with a marginally higher rise backed by widespread capitalisation of revenue spending, was rejected on the grounds that capitalisation might be needed in later years as a defence against ratecapping. So we end up ratecapping ourselves in order to preserve our defences against ratecapping!

The Group has opted for a finance-led strategy, believing that low rates and not better services are the best way to get MPs Clive Soley and Nick Raynsford re-elected. This is entirely consistent with the Kinnock line that improvements have to be phased slowly over several years — the leader of the Group is Gordon Prentice, the Party's Local Government Officer, based at Walworth Road.

Against an estimated £26m needed for new growth to implement Manifesto commitments, only £12m will be released in the coming 12 months, with up to £6m more by January 1985.

Was the left asking for too much? Our demands and Manifesto commitments were very basic, after 8 years of Tory-Liberal cuts. We inherited a crisis in every sphere of local government service, with unemployment rising faster than in any other Borough, the second highest rate of homelessness in England and Wales, a Social Services department decimated and demoralised by sustained and vicious cuts, and with blatant discrimination against a women and black people both inside and outside the Town Hall. "No cuts" is a non-issue. Standing still means accepting a Tory cuts base-line and allowing standards and services to deteriorate as the crisis gets worse.

The Group has not even considered the policy implications of its budget decisions and it is partly this blatant disregard for policy commitments which has infuriated the left and provoked the resignations.

The councillors were right to resign and distance themselves from an Administration which is deliberately setting out to put the brakes on.

The comrades who have resigned have made it clear that they will, with the support of Party members and Trade Unionists, oppose all attempts to reverse policy decisions and to postpone the implementation of service improvements and Manifesto commitments.

Gang of 4 shows wrong way forward

This summer saw Hammersmith and Fulham LGC impose limited spending on the borough.

The policy, engineered by Gordon Prentice (leader of the Council and full time Local Governmet Officer at Walworth Road) was achieved through the machine-like "right wing" of Fulham CLP crushing the organised disarray of "left wing" Hammersmith CLP, leading to the further polarisation of both Parties.

With their hands tied by this decision, and following 8 years of Tory cuts, a formidable section of the Group threatened resignation. A compromise, increasing spending, was accepted by the broad left Labour Group and implementation of the manifesto is going ahead. However, four councillors decided to resign positions of responsibility rather than working with the Group's decision.

Behind the financial debate of the past months another battle has been raging — for leadership of the Group. The resignations of the four — without consulting their CLPs, the LGC, or considering the unions — may be seen as defeatist, or an attempt to continue the leadership fight in another arena. Their actions have been rejected by the CLPs and the unions.

The end of the 1986 budget debate, and the resignations have left the Labour Group united. Gordon Prentice is now consolidating his position, and the Group has developed in terms of political maturity.

If the newly dubbed "gang of 4" have resigned for personal reasons and retire to the backbenches they will have the good wishes of all. However, they are likely to be a destructive force within the parties, attacking the Group and those members who continue to fight for resources from positions of strength.

**By Jacqueline Abbot
Hammersmith CLP,
and Alan Lenton
Fulham CLP**

This tactic is dangerous. It will tear the CLPs apart and can only further demoralise and disillusion both Council workers and the public — **with the Labour Party**. The only victors will be the Tories, from whom supporters of the "Gang of 4" now take their political analysis verbatim.

The "4" are warned that there is a strength of feeling within the Labour Gorup, and the CLPs, that will oppose this tactic. At the recent Group to elect their replacements, the marginality of the 4 was seen when their abstentions failed to influence the outcome of any of the votes.

The newly elected committee members will continue implementing the Labour programme, while bearing in mind the possibility of a Spring General Election.

The "4" have no monopoly on emotional socialism. However, they have displayed an arrogant ignorance of both local government and the CLPs. They do not understand the roles of councillors, officers or the Town Hall trade unions, Indeed, some of them have notions of political patronage that would make the Labour Party in local govenrment little different from the freemasons.

The current position within local government may change radically next year with the election of a Labour government. It is this issue the CLPs must now concentrate on. If we fail to win the General Election then the effects on local government will be catastrophic, as the Tories impose further financial restraints, and force through their privatisation proposals.

Finally, we understand that a fifth member has resigned — albeit from only selected committees — clearly illustrating the political impotency and confusion of this marginalised group. The "Famous Five" should wake up to political realities, their political thinking should not stagnate, otherwise they will remain encapsulated in their Enid Blyton fantasy.

Ring in your short reports
If you have a short report for *London Labour Briefing* (up to 100 words) please phone it through to Graham Bash at 985 8892 between 6 and 7pm or between 10.30 and 11pm.

Free Listings
From the next issue, *London Labour Briefing* will be operating a free listings service. Please ring in details of the meeting or event to *Briefing* on 733 7016.

Briefing Councillors Meeting

A meeting of *Briefing* councillors on Sunday November 2nd exchanged ideas and reports on the present state of affairs in the boroughs.

These meetings began in May and have proved very useful. It is important that comrades ensure that at least one *Briefing* councillor from their borough comes along so that news remains fresh and up to date.

Comrades from Hammersmith and Fulham explained the crisis around their new budget strategy — basically, ratecap yourself by setting a maximum rate limit months before any decisions need to be taken in an attempt to avoid the next round of Tory ratecapping.

A comrade from **Wandsworth** explained that the new Labour Group contained many new councillors and that there was virtually no information or assistance available on how to be an effective opposition. With no proper Labour pre-meetings it was impossible to devise tactics to attack the Tories at Committee meetings.

We discussed the effectiveness of the **Westminster** Labour Group, who have always been in opposition and have built up a very good strategy of obtaining and analysing information from the officers and campaigning against Tory policies.

We felt that the Labour Party and the Local Government Office at Walworth Road should provide more help and advice to Labour Groups. Comrades from Wandsworth picked up some invaluable advice on techniques of frustrating the Tories.

Lambeth comrades explained the move to aply for redetermination and the conflicting arguments against it. The left saw it as a bad move (as it acknowledged the powers of the Rate Act) compared with a campaign of defiance.

We also discussed the future of **LSPU** and the forthcoming **ALA** meeting. There was already a good deal of anger from the staff about some ALA leaders, noticably Islington's, being quoted as saying that they would be unable to win the funding in their Labour Grups for next year.

We were unanimous that all 344 jobs must be protected and that any attempt to break them up should be very strongly resisted.

We should continue to meet monthly. The next meeting will be at Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, on December 7th, 2-4pm in Committee Room 5.

London Letter

Dear Comrade,

As Chair of the Hammersmith and Fulham Council Labour Group I have to inform you that your front page of *Briefing* No. 64 November 1986 contained factual inaccuracy.

You stated there that Sinn Fein Councillors would be officially received either by Full Council meetings or by the Labour Group in a number of boroughs including Hammersmith.

The Labour Group of Hammersmith and Fulham Council decided after an extremely informed debate not to invite Sinn Fein Councillors by a majority of 23 votes to 10.

Yours fraternally,
Cllr Bridget Prentice

New election system brings complications

The Executive of the Greater London Labour Party is to be elected on a new basis.

London boroughs will be "paired up", with each pair electing one representative.

The complications of this procedure, with varied numbers of constituencies and members in each borough, are obvious.

Nominations must be in by January 16th. First round voting will take place on the Saturday of the March AGM, with a run-off on the Sunday.

The problem of co-ordinating the left for these elections will be discussed by the *London Labour Briefing* Editorial Board at 6.15pm at Lambeth Town Hall. Local CLP reps are encouraged to attend.

Borough pairings are:
Hillingdon and Harrow; Barnet and Enfield; Kingston and Merton; Sutton and Croydon; Southwark and Lambeth; Ealing and Brent; Hounslow and Richmond; Wandsworth and Hammersmith; Bromley and Bexley; Lewisham and Greenwich; Kensington & Chelsea and the Cities of London & Westminster; Camden and Islington; Hackney and Tower Hamlets; Waltham Forest and Haringey; Redbridge and Newham; Barking and Havering.

The visitors — with no place to go...

On October 8th, in an unusual and unprecedented decision, Environment Secretary Nicholas Ridley moved in to block planning permission for 2 temporary travellers' sites in Brent.

Behind this blatant act of political interference lay the invisible hand of local MP Rhodes Boyson. In effect, the Tories had decided to wheel out the big guns in what has become an intense battle over travellers' rights in the borough.

Meanwhile, nearly 200 caravans — homes for some 600 Irish travelling people — are encamped on 2 "unauthorised" sites. The main group, in Fryent Country Park, is slap bang in Boyson's constituency. Another group of 37 vans have occupied one of the temporary sites, challenging Ridley's diktat. Many of the travellers, determined to stay no matter what, have literally nowhere else to go.

One of the few London boroughs still not providing any facilities, Brent's record on travellers is very poor. Throughout the 1970s successive Labour Councils evaded their responsibilities under the Caravan Sites Act. Attempts to identify sites were thwarted following campaigns by Labour Party wards.

Leaving aside statutory duties, Brent has a clear political and moral obligation to provide for travellers. Just as the area is home for many "settled" Irish people, so it has also attracted Irish travelling families throughout this century. In 1985 the number of caravans averaged 26 per day.

It is a misconception that most Irish travellers "pop over for the Summer". Many suffer the traditional fate of Irish immigrants: because of economic circumstances and national oppression, a short stay becomes a long one. The O'Learys are typical. An extended family group of about 40, they have been here for 25 years, the last 6 around Brent. Their children were born here, their work is here — this country and this part of London is their home.

Irish travellers face a double stigma both as travellers and Irish "tinkers". Some opponents of sites say they would be more sympathetic if they were "real gypsies". Of course the idea of "real" gypsies is a figment of a racist imagination — concealing a fear and hatred of anybody who lives a travelling life. As Brendan of the Ward family points out:

"There are Spanish gypsies. In England and Ireland we're travelling people. We've been on the road for 150 years. We were reared on the road, born on the road and we'll die on the road. We didn't come from outer space you know. E.T. got a better reception than us."

Britain's colonial domination of Ireland, with its mass evictions and famines, writes out the history of Irish travellers, and thus their traditions.

Even when sites are provided, they mainly go to Welsh and English travellers. Authorities tend to negotiate with the Gypsy Council — a body which many Irish travellers don't view as representing them. They feel excluded from even the minimal rights travellers have achieved. In this context, boroughs like Brent, with a strong Irish dimension, clearly have a duty to make provision.

With Labour's May landslide victory in Brent producing a new Council with a firm anti-racist commitment, conditions were created to raise the issue of the travellers. The manifesto had promised to equip a site for 20 families (with little thought to how this could be achieved, and envisaging a period of "full consultation"). In fact, it was the travellers who began to force the pace.

The travelling life is very hard especially for the women, children and the elderly. The continuous harsh evictions by police and bailiffs prevent them obtaining access to the normal services that "settled" residents take for granted.

Mary O'Leary says that things have deteriorated in the past few years. With redevelopment the number of hard ground sites has declined and finding a place to pull-on is more difficult:

"People wasn't overcrowded the way they are now. People was left staying. Now we're going under pressure and getting harassed."

GLC abolition has taken its toll. On GLC sites they had a longer stay and were brought water and toilets. A school bus picked up the kids. *"Since the GLC went out it's all finished with. The push is coming soon."*

Some travellers now believe that the old life is on the way out. There is a greater determination to find official sites — whether permanent, or pull-on sites to maintain mobility. Among the Wards, Mongans and O'Leary's there is a new mood, and it's in Brent that they've decided to make their stand.

In early June their group — about 50 vans — moved onto British Rail land next to Tescos' "Supastore". Egged on by Tescos and Datapoint, BR quickly moved to evict them.

What made things different this time was they made contact with Cllr Colum Moloney. Unlike most councillors who run a mile when travellers enter their ward, Colum stuck to his principles and agreed to represent them. He spoke up for them in the High Court, and although the eviction was upheld the Council agreed to find temporary sites until a permanent site was established.

One persistent problem has been that the Council bureaucracy isn't particularly sensitive to the aspirations of

By Frank Hansen
Brent Councillor

travellers. Had the Council made a real issue of the court case, the matter may have been resolved there and then. Nor has it ever used compulsory purchase.

Another problem is the attitude of the Labour Party. Several potential sites were identified and put to the Local Government Committee, with Fryent Country Park and a Works depot carpark at Alperton the most promising. The LGC "rallied" behind the travellers, but declared Fryent and Alperton "unsuitable".

The most obtuse arguments were employed to justify this declaration of apartheid for travellers in the borough. "Alperton is Labour and we nearly won Fryent", (i.e. travellers are a special punishment for voting Tory). "Some of the travellers are racist and will disrupt racial harmony" (pseudo "anti-racism" as the last refuge of the racist).

Not familiar with the finer points of LGC mandation and finding Fryent Way relatively "suitable" the travellers occupied the site the next day.

Had the Party not taken this racist stand, the situation could have been managed and the numbers controlled. The Council was reticent to provide facilities or impose site supervision in case the LGC viewed this as legitimising a temporary site — storing up problems for the future.

Meanwhile officers found two alternative sites: one at Vale Farm Sports Centre, in the very heartland of Tory Brent North, the other near the N. Circular. At the same time local Tories, headed by Boyson, began to mobilise the "residents" against the travellers on Fryent and the Vale Farm suggestion.

This has turned into the most vicious and violent campaign the borough has ever seen. The most base racist hatred and fear has oozed out of every pore of "respectable", white, middle class society in the north of the borough. (Although many Asian people live in the area it is significant that few have been drawn into this campaign).



Harrow and Brent Leaders

Travellers' children in Fryent Way

Every week since the beginning of September the *Wembley Observer* has carried a front page scare story about travellers. Tory Councillors using the most vile racist language have whipped up mobs of "ratepayers" to smash up Council committee meetings and verbally and physically abuse Labour Councillors. Vigilante groups have "policed" the Vale Farm site at night to stop the travellers' "invasion". On 3 occasions the empty site hsas been seriously vandalised.

Witnesses of these irrational mobs, their faces distorted with hatred, can perhaps better comprehend the emotions and bigotry which enabled the Nazis to murder 300,000 gypsies. At one meeting a young travelling woman with a child was surrounded by a group of "residents" who screamed that her baby was dirty and should be burned...

To some extent this type of redneck reaction is predictable, although the force and obscenity of it all came as a shock to many Labour members. Ironically, seeing it helped to mobilise the labour movement in defence of the travellers.

The travellers have seen it all before. According to Mary O'Leary, *"Every site we've moved into we get this. We've often had our windows smashed. You have that anywhere — it makes no difference."* They are determind not to be intimidated out of their rights.

The Travellers Support Group aimed to build support for the travellers, but to avoid any direct confrontation between the travellers and the "residents". "Building support", however, has been easier said than done. "Progressive forces" who normally rally around civil liberties and human rights issues have tended to stay away. The Greens have been more concerned about the insect life and fauna on Fryent Way than the human beings denied somewhere to live. Those who parade with "Protect Our Children" (i.e. from the travellers) banners, show no concern for the travellers' children who face very real dangers. As Mary says:

"Protect the children! We'd help any child in danger — even the Queen's. There's never been a case of travellers molesting children. It's people in houses who do that."

One of Mary's own sons was killed, aged 15, by an overhead electric cable while living on a dangerous site in Manchester. Such dangers, and the obvious health risks from insanitary conditions, contribute to an infant mortality rate comparable with the Third World. Yet pressure groups concerned with children at risk usually show little interest in the travellers' cause.

Even the Chair of Brent Community Relations Council has opposed travellers being placed next to a football pitch used by a local black team as a threat to racial harmony. His statement has been denounced by leading black councillors, including Leader Merle Amory. Nevertheless, it is indicative of the deep level of prejudice which exists.

At the same time the black community have been more supportive than most, as Brendan points out:

"Black people are very good people. They understand it themselves, they've been through the same thing themselves."

While Irish people have been active in the support group, the travellers have been particularly offended by the prominence of some Irish people in the opposition: *"They're worse than any, some of the Irish. They're only immigrants, only travellers like ourselves."*

The key factor, of course, is that the Labour Group holds to its commitment to provide sites. Experience suggests that public prejudice can only be effectively challenged once sites have been established.

At present the Group's position is that we will not consider eviction from anywhere in Brent until sites are provided. This principled stand has been assisted by a recent legal judgement (the Glamorgan case), that local authorities who do not provide sites cannot evict travellers from their land. Even those with little sympathy for the travellers are not prepared to risk surcharge by taking legal action for eviction when Counsel has advised us that it will fail!

Thus Brent politics is caught in a catch 22 situation. The Tories want the travellers out of Boyson's consitutency but can't force the Council to evict them. The Council wants to provide sites but have to wait for a Government-imposed public inquiry.

Meanwhile, as usual, it's the travellers who suffer. Stuck on unsuitable marshy ground with winter coming, their only consolation is that the police and bailiffs won't be kicking on their doors at 4am.

Brent's budget crisis: Go for growth!

Almost buried in the hostile media barrage about travellers' sites and the McGoldrick case is the fact that Brent Council is overspending.

The projected deficit by the end of March '87 is about £22 million, resulting almost totally from the Tory-Liberal budget set last April at the end of their period of control of the Council.

The deficit comes as no surpise. Labour's manifesto for the elections stated the problem boldly — **"Labour will also inherit a Tory-Liberal cuts budget and will encounter fierce opposition from the Conservative government to betray the interests of those who elected us."** However, the manifesto then gave a commitment to defending jobs and services, and indeed to go beyond that to expand and improve services.

Without reference to the Party, the Labour Group voted (by a large majority) on September 24th, to request Chairs and Directors to review their budgets, investigating creative accounting and "efficiency savings". The leadership make the point that because of the nature of block grants, a reduction in expenditure of only £6m is required to balance the books.*

Although this situation has been known for several months, the Labour Group leadership have been quite happy for there to be no Party

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

discussion. They claim they have not ruled out any option, including deficit budgeting. In fact the longer their "holding position" of no growth goes unreversed the more likely it is to continue through until next year's budget.

It was not until October, under pressure from branch resolutions, that the CLPs discussed the situation, and although 2 of the 3 CLPs have taken a position opposing the leadership's options the Local Government Committee has yet to schedule a discussion.

At issue is not just whether Brent Council "runs on the spot" this year, always assuming it could avoid ovespending without cuts in jobs and services. Brent, one of the most deprived inner-city areas with a chronic housing crisis, is on the government's list of rate-capped authorities for 1987. A refusal to stand firm this year will be a clear indication of backing down against rate-capping next year.

There can be no better preparation for a determined resistance to future government restraints than a refusal to back down now on the commitment to providing the services needed in the borough coupled with a campaign to win the support of the community and council workforce in defence of the Council.

**Note: the figures quoted do not take into account any changes which may arise from Ridley and Lawson's recent announcements.*