LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
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Photo: Barry Shapcott

The banner of struggle in Lambeth: is the struggle over now?

LAMBETH 8 SHOW THE WAY

On March 27th at the start of Lambeth Council's ratemaking meeting Linda Bellos unveiled the banner of the surcharged Lambeth 31, now in pride of place in the Council Chamber.

Just after midnight, the morning of March 28th, she brought down the curtain on their struggle when Lambeth Council set its budget.

In an ironic throwback to the days of the 31 the mayor had to use his casting vote in order to get the Labour Group budget

By Cllr Greg Tucker, Lambeth

through. This time, however, was because eight Labour Councillors were voting against a cuts budget proposed by Linda Bellos.

The budget flies in the face of the promises made only a year ago in Lambeth Labour's Manifesto of no cuts in service, whatever the obstacles placed in our way.

£3 million is to be cut across the board by such things as slowing down on repairs to council buildings, not purchasing equipment and by extending maintenance schedules (e.g. replacing something every six years instead of every five).

£10 million is assumed to be saved by slowing down on recruitment — this at a time when white collar vacancies in Social Services alone total over 500. And it makes a £250,000 cut in the housing repair budget.

This last cut was not even necessary as council officers had agreed a formula which would have found this money elsewhere. Purely out of spite the right in the Group voted down the proposal rather than see those opposed to cuts have even a minor victory. Linda Bellos abstained.

The task now is to

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The eight who voted against cuts were:
Steve French, *Chair of Construction Services*
Lesley Hammond
John Harrison, *District Housing Committee Chair, Vice Chair Health & Consumer Services*
Bill Houting
George Huish
Jonathan Oppenheimer, *District Housing Committee Chair, Vice Chair Health & Consumer Services*
Greg Tucker, *Chair Economic Activity & Employment, Chair of Group*
Rachel Webb, *DHC Chair, Group Secretary*
Three others indicated that they agreed with the 8 but felt bound by their GC mandate:
Alison Higgs, *Chair of Health & Consumer Services*
Julian Lewis, *Chair of Police, Vice Chair Construction Services, Deputy Whip*
Joan Twelves, *Chief Whip.*

Ted Knight, previous leader Lambeth Council — surcharged

I am confident that I speak on behalf of the 31 surcharged Councillors in Lambeth when I say that we fully support the 8 Labour members who voted against the cuts budget in Lambeth Town Hall.

It is ironic that the surcharged Councillors had to use the Mayor's casting vote to defeat cuts when the present administration uses the Mayor's casting vote to impose cuts.

The election in 1986 which brought this administration into office was won with an increased Labour majority on a manifesto committing the Labour Party to a policy of no cuts.

Sharon Atkin - surcharged Lambeth Councillor

The budget adopted in Lambeth shows a cynical disregard for the bold and correct policies adopted by the former administration.

Eight Councillors, who in the face of enormous pressure, maintained their manifesto commitments, should be applauded and defended against the present threat of expulsion from the Labour Group.

It is regrettable that the current leadership chose to divert attention away from the real issues of cuts to jobs and services by playing the card of alleging racism.

The split that occurred is not one of "white left v. black left" but one of the white right holding and maintaining a grip on the Black leader.

Linda Bellos has allowed herself to be manipulated by the very people she supposedly politically opposes.

Black and white socialists should unite to defend the Lambeth 8.

Larry Hyett, Lambeth printers & Fleet St support unit, personal capacity

The printworkers, give full support for the 8 Councillors in defending the manifesto position put before the Lambeth voters when first elected. We consider this to be the correct position taken and should now be built on within the trade unions in Lambeth to resist cuts in employment and services. The question of victimisation against the 8 councillors will have to be fought within the Labour Party and no forced resignations should follow.

Alan MacPherson, Secretary Lambeth Trades Council, personal capacity

We must support comrades who defend our manifesto commitment. There can be no victimisation. In the coming year we will have to build a real fight for jobs and services.

Lambeth Workers Joint Trade Union Committee Address to the Council meeting

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Council. The Joint unions realise a budget and rate must be set before April 1st. We recognise the courage of the surcharged councillors of Lambeth and their stand against cuts imposed from Westminster. We see the Tory government as the most divisive and destructive in modern British history and deplore the support given to Thatcherism by the opposition of Lambeth Council.

Continued on back page

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Spotlight on education

Morrell bows to Baker

Frances Morrell, leader of ILEA, ex assistant to Tony Benn and a leading figure in the Labour Women's Action Committee, has launched a vicious attack on teacher trade unionists in London.

At first glance many labour movement activists may feel that the redeployment proposals voted by a majority of the ILEA Labour Group to move "surplus" teachers out of secondary schools are quite reasonable.

A closer examination shows this view to be false. 1,300 teachers have been labelled "surplus to requirements", while the most optimistic forecasts suggest an absolute maximum of 400 vacancies.

Yet the exercise is a compulsory one; and it has even been suggested that teachers will be shoved out of schools to "support" projects of the Authority until such time as real jobs can be found.

The exercise has been described by the moderate NUT leaders as the "worst deployment exercise in the country". It is aimed at cutting jobs, cutting the curriculum, increasing class size and demoralising teachers who they hope will leave the profession without getting the full redundancy pay.

Many of the teachers designated as "surplus" are black and/or female, as they form the largest proportion of teachers on Scales 1 and 2.

At first the Authority tried to suggest that such teachers should be given special consideration in line with equal opportunity commitments. But they soon realised that any positive discrimination would be illegal under present legislation and changed their argument to present these as "career opportunities" for those lucky enough to be chosen! Yet if this was really the case, why the need for compulsion?

In my own school several of the women teachers "lucky enough to be chosen" are single mothers. How are they to cope with the new travel and childcare arrangements to cross

By Valerie Coultas
Vauxhall CLP,
Lewisham NUT

London to a new school — even if they were to find new jobs? They will not be able to afford to move given the shortage of council housing and the cost of private houses. Why should teachers who have worked long and hard in a school just be shoved around like cattle?

But much more is at stake even than the rights of teacher trade unionists. The redeployment exercise is a signal to the Tory Education Chief, Kenneth Baker, that ILEA is willing to play ball and restore power to the heads in schools and retreat on progressive education.

The proposed cuts in staff in secondary schools will lead to a more restricted curriculum and options for GCSE will inevitably be cut. As support staff go and class sizes increase the content of education will deteriorate.

Already ILEA has begun to water down its stand on sex education, banning literature which challenges heterosexist assumptions. It also hesitated over the publication of a teaching pack on South Africa, until it received notice that it was to win an award.

The advice given to staff in a new ILEA publication on "Teaching Controversial Issues" is simple — *don't*.

This retreat on education policy coincides with a growing authoritarianism in staff/management relations. As protests mount in schools over the redeployment exercise, ILEA's response has not been to think again but to copy Baker's bullying tactics.

Teacher trade unionists have received a whole series of disciplinary threats — the latest of which threatens them with "serious misconduct" statements if they have encouraged pupils to take action to defend education.

All this comes from councillors that are supposedly accountable to the Labour Party and committed to defending comprehensive education. Yet only 9 out of 45 councillors had the courage to stand up to the ILEA officers.

How are these councillors going to defend ILEA as an Authority in the future if they are backtracking now? Kenneth Baker already has the power to determine staffing, capital expenditure and he can also intervene on curriculum issues in ILEA if he so chooses. Two City Technical Colleges are already planned.

The right wing are not short on innovative ideas for smashing ILEA up, but how can Morrell launch a defence of ILEA when she is implementing Tory policies herself?

It's high time every London Labour Party called these "soft left" councillors to order. They are not only riding roughshod over Greater London Labour Party policy of opposition to compulsory redeployment but they will not even talk to teacher trade unionists.

Frances Morrell has made a great deal of noise about giving more power to women in the labour movement. How about giving the teachers you employ — the majority of whom are women — more power over their lives, Frances?

Model resolution

Points 1 and 2 could be used as an emergency resolution to GLLP conference.

This CLP/trade union branch:
1. Condemns the ILEA Labour Group for proposing a system of compulsory transfer for teachers in London's schools. This decision runs directly counter to Labour Party policy.
2. Calls on ILEA to withdraw this proposal and to begin negotiations immediately with ILTA.
3. Urges all Labour Groups to:
a. campaign in defence of comprehensive education;
b. defend all steps forward made in equal opportunities;
c. fight for more resources for education against all cuts
d. refuse to implement the Baker Bill.
We further call on ILEA reps to:
a. oppose a return to cover for absent colleagues in London schools;
b. withdraw threats of disciplinary action to NUT members taking action to defend jobs and conditions;
c. support any lobby called by ILTA of the GLLP conference.

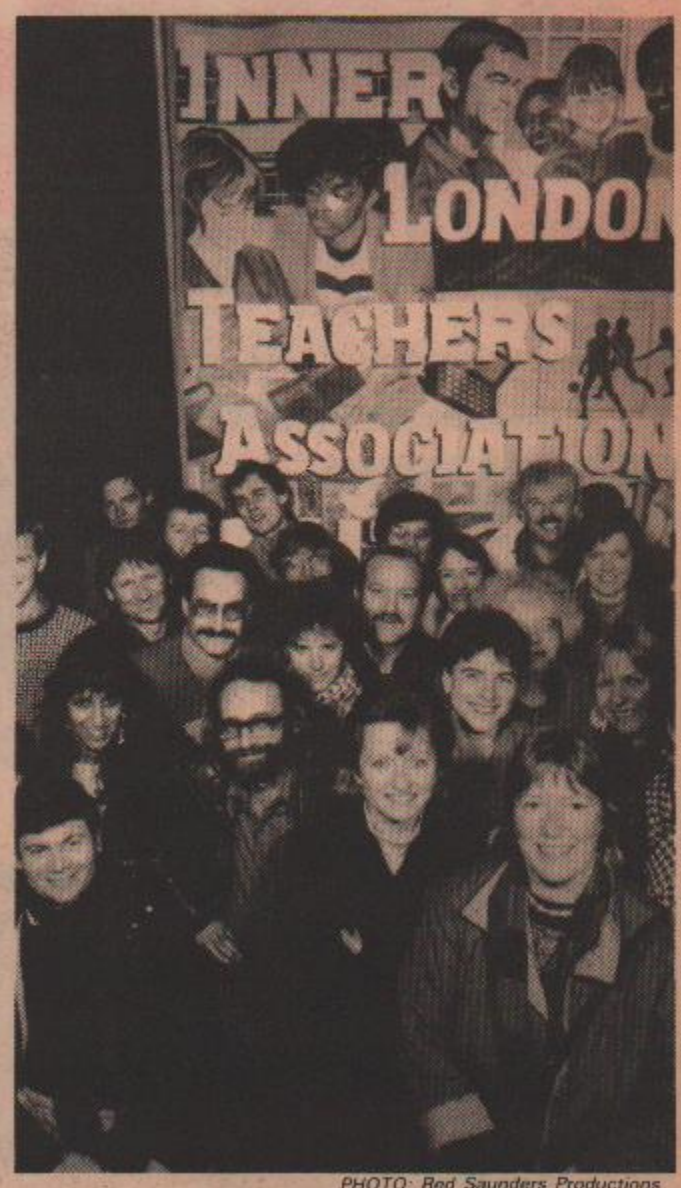


PHOTO: Red Saunders Productions

ILEA Deputy Leader censured

At its March General Committee, Hackney North & Stoke Newington Labour Party overwhelmingly passed (34-12) a motion of censure condemning its ILEA members, Bernard Wiltshire, the deputy leader, and Stephen Benn for supporting the compulsory redeployment of teachers.

Furthermore, the members were instructed to move an emergency motion at the next ILEA Labour Group to freeze the compulsory redeployment process and to reopen negotiations with the unions to improve staffing ratios in London's schools.

The strong feeling at the GC promoked an emotive debate with Bernard Wiltshire attempting to justify compulsory redeployment on the grounds that it improved the education system for school students and parents.

By Ian Millichap
Hackney North GC delegate

It was particularly important that Hackney North exerted its authority over its members on this issue as it was this constituency that promoted opposition to compulsory redeployment which led to the final adoption of the policy by the Greater London Labour Party.

All delegates to the GC were lobbied by a joint deputation of teachers and school students opposing compulsory redeployment.

Following the decisive vote on censure, Bernard Wiltshire was asked if he would implement the GC's instruction but he refused to reply. Stephen Benn unenthusiastically stated that a motion would appear on the agenda for the next Labour Group.

The Party will need to keep a close eye on how its proposal progresses and whether its members support it both in Labour Group and in ILEA council.

School students strike back!

When students in Stoke Newington school found out about the redeployment of teachers, there was a tremendous feeling of disbelief and anger.

Petitions were written and lunchtime lobbies were held at Hackney Divisional Office.

Then we organised a Hackney school students meeting for March 20th, and leafletted all the secondary schools affected by redeployment. We had a meeting of about 150 kids.

The School Students Union told us they were planning a London-wide demo at Country Hall on Thursday March 26th. It wa against redeployment, among other things. This was voted through the meeting unanimously and

By Saffron Burrows
Stoke Newington School

a press statement was written in full support of the teachers fighting redeployment.

Unfortunately, on the day of the demo, because of lack of contact and time, only students from Skinners School and Stoke Newington School represented Hackney. Even so, over 300 kids came from the two schools.

After walking out of our classes at 11am, we arrived at County hall at 12.30pm. We held a rally/lobby outside County Hall for over an hour. Then we marched to the Elephant and Castle, stopping off at the DES on our way back.

We joined Camden Teachers at County Hall and had another rally. There were over 1,500 kids and at least 7 London schools were represented. The day was very successful and we decided to come out again along with the teachers on April 2nd.

Labour Party news in brief

Lewisham Left Forum challenge for leadership

Lewisham Left Forum has issued the following call for support for the Council leadership election.

A democratic party holds elections to allow contests. It is therefore not an act of disloyalty to the Party or the council that the Left Forum is standing candidates for all the positions to be filled at the Labour Group Annual Meeting.

Uncontested elections would not allow the Party to make political choices. And our differences with the present leadership are political and not personal. We hope that all candidates will address the politics and not the personalities.

The Left Forum is committed to:

- A leadership which will see through the battle against central government to secure the resources to meet Lewisham's needs; a devastating financial crisis is imminent and we don't believe that we can afford to put all our faith in delivery from evil by a Labour government.
- An end to undemocratic and manipulative practices within the Labour Group — no kitchen cabinets.
- A council which builds trust and co-operation with its trade unions — an end to the heavy-handed managerial approach.
- A leadership which acts decisively to promote equal opportunities — don't let the Mercury put us to shame.
- A Labour Group accountable to the Party — not a leadership which denies the Party's right to express a view.

By Lewisham Left Forum

We are very conscious that women are under-represented on this slate. But to support women with whose policies we disagree, or to put pressure on women to stand would be tokenism of the worst kind. We believe that a Council leadership committed to resisting cuts and promoting childcare is the best for women in the borough. We therefore support:

Leader: Ron Stockbridge
Deputy Leader (Policy): Tim Barnett
Deputy Leader (Outside Bodies): Steve Padmore
Group Chair: Pat Waylett
Group Secretary: Jon Lansman
Chief Whip: Clifton Graham
Deputy Whips: Peggy Fitzsimmons, Jan Pedelty, Tony Link.

The left Forum is urging all branches and constituencies to hold "hustings" for the various posts, to have an open and informed election.

Briefing is pleased to give its support to the Left slate.

What went wrong?

Labour was expected to win the Merton Council by-election.

The Tories only had a majority of 29. If the Tories had lost, they would have lost control of Merton

By Dan Carter

Council; and the result would have affected the balance of power on many London-wide bodies where the Tories have a one vote majority.

In the event, the Tories increased their majority to a massive 800. The Labour vote also went up, in an enormous turnout (62%), but it was of little consolation.

What went wrong? The now infamous Tory bribe of a £100,000 clean-up campaign in the ward during the by-election had some effect. The sight of paving stones being fixed and windows being painted as the voters went to the polling stations must have influenced some people.

The fact that the budget was just two days before was also relevant . And the Tories and the SDP had more people from outside the borough helping.

But in a working class ward of a privatisation-mad Tory Council, the level of defeat cannot be hidden. The Tories' appeal to the money in people's pockets — low rates, cash-in-hand budget — was seen as more relevant than the rather vague promises Labour is currently making. Something has to be done to harden up Labour's appeal — and fast.

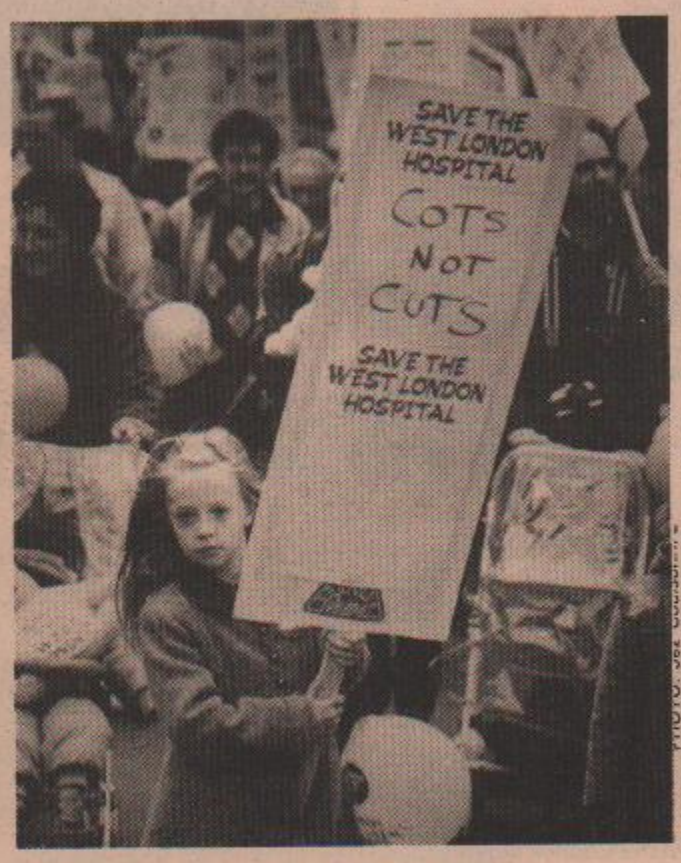
Spotlight on health

Beware Tory election gimmick!

A major — if temporary — victory has been won by the campaign to Save West London Hospital (SWEL).

Massive pressure from the community and staff campaign has forced the Riverside District Health Authority to defer the plans to close the popular local Hospital.

By Dan Carter



Demonstration to save the West London Hospital

But the additional £700,000 which Riverside Health Authority is to receive has been dismissed as an election gimmick by the Campaign.

A public meeting held in Hammersmith Town Hall heard that as a result of this injection of cash Riverside's managers would be seeking to withdraw their current proposal to close West London Hospital without any reprovision of its famed maternity unit — *in favour of an option to site all Riverside's maternity services at a brand new unit in St Stephen's Hospital in Fulham.*

Speakers at the public meeting, including MPs Clive Soley and Nick Raynsford, argued that the extra £700,000 was a trifling amount compared to the £4m cuts Riverside has to make each year up to 1994.

The meeting also heard that Riverside was currently *overspent* on this year's budget by almost £1m in spite of an underspend on nursing budgets of over £600,000. Speaker after speaker from the floor claimed that the £700,000 was only made available in order to defer an unpopular hospital closure decision until after the next election.

The meeting agreed to step up its campaign.

Ms Pat Tookey, chair of SWEL and a mother of a child born at the hospital, said:

"We have no interest in David Knowles' (General Manager of Riverside Health Authority, DAS) proposals for a new maternity unit at St Stephen's Hospital and we think his plan is an attempt to confuse and divide opinion about the future of maternity services in Riverside. St Stephen's Hospital is poorly served by public transport and is inacessible to many women who now use the West London Hospital. We want investment in the West London site so that it can be used by local people who need and deserve high quality National Health Service care."

Postscript: Even in election year, London Heath Emergency and Labour's health spokesperson Frank Dobson MP, have proved by a constant stream of facts and figures that no hospital in the capital is safe. Threats are now being made to the Westminster Hospital, the closest to the House of Commons.

Geoff Martin, of London Health Emergency, says: "The cuts have now reached the MPs' own doorstep. Let's see if the sort of campaign they will mount will have the same effect as the magnificent campaign to save the West London."

Save Peter Pan! Save St Charles!

Inner London, we are told, has too many health resources. Our services must therefore be drained away to other areas.

This is the upside-down accountants' logic that means private hospitals for the rich, employed, and privately insured, are flourishing and expanding; whilst our hospitals, serving the poor of the inner city, are being forced to cut services and close.

It is this process which is forcing health workers, the people of the local community and the local Labour Parties into a desperate and determined alliance to defend our health service and our local hospitals. This means campaigning, not only against the planned cuts, but to bring down the Tory government that stands behind them.

In our area in Kensington, St Charles Hospital is threatened with gradual run-down and ultimate extinction as a local community service. First for the chop is the Peter Pan children's ward. Then will come the closure of casualty.

The reduction of the hospital's services to geriatric and psychiatric care will follow. And each step will be camouflaged with soft soap and untrustworthy assurances.

Fortunately, in Kensington there is already established a record of successful fightback against health cuts. This is not the first time planners have tried to begin the rundown of St Charles with the closure of the Peter Pan children's ward.

In 1984, the Save Peter Pan Action Group, led by Labour Party members, won categoric assurances from the District Health Authority (DHA) that the children's ward would remain at St Charles, with reduced beds, but improved facilities. The leafletting, petitioning and dedicated hard work of the Action Group campaigners roused real feeling in the local community. Now the battle has to be fought once again.



Ben Bousquet, Kensington's PPC, at a "Save St Charles" public meeting

By Paul Harrington
Chair, Kensington CLP
and Secretary, Save St Charles Campaign
David Holland
Secretary, Kensington CLP

Last year the merger of Paddington and North Kensignton DHA with Brent was approved in principle by the Regional Health Authority, giving the green light for a fresh round of cuts and closures in our area.

Immediately, local administrators began to renege on their pledges to the community, with proposals to shut the children's ward. Ultimately, it is feared, the prime site occupied by St Charles, will be put on the market for the property speculators to make a killing.

Kensington Labour Party has responded by sounding the alarm. The Save Peter Pan, Save St Charles Campaign has been relaunched with street stalls, petitions, mass leafletting and fly-posting. Our initial target is to match the 5,000 signatures gathered by the Peter Pan Action Group and to block the adoption of the local health service strategy document in May. We are collaborating closely with NUPE, and in particular, the NUPE nurses group in St Charles.

At a public meeting on March 31st, Ben Bousquet, the prospective Labour candidate in Kensington, appealed for an all out campaign to defend the health service, locally and nationally.

Kensington is a Tory marginal. There is therefore every possibility of winning concessions on health cuts, by making them a burning local issue in a pre-election period.

It is also worth noting that the issues of accountability and Party democracy, always championed by *Briefing*, have been bound up with this campaign from the outset. The planning document providing for health cuts in the area was actually moved on the DHA by a local Labour councillor. NUPE complained to the Party and demanded he be called to account. A healthy discussion on this issue prepared the ground for the present united campaign.

Now, Michael Meacher is refusing to give us a pledge that services at St Charles will be maintained by a Labour government. Is it a "loony left" view that we should not have to fight our own leaders, as well as the Tories, in an election year, on a vital issue like defending health care?

We call upon members of COHSE, Meacher's sponsoring union, and all who meet or correspond with Michael Meacher, to press him on St Charles at every opportunity, until this ridiculous situation is put right.

In the meantime, one thing is certain. Jenny Edwards, PPC for Westminser North, and Ben Bousquet will be leading a determined campaign to save St Charles. This campaign will continue whether the political colour of the next government is pink, blue or piebald!

Watchdogs claim credit for Fowler cash boost

Health watchdog body London Health Emergency has been quick to welcome the extra £13m funding announced for 19 of London's 30 health districts by Social Services Secretary Norman Fowler.

By Dan Carter
(with additional information from London Health Emergency)

But at the same time LHE argues that this concession comes as the result of the success of local campaigns in exposing the impact on London's NHS of repeated annual cuts in real spending.

In our opinion this money has only been released by Mr Fowler because with a General Election imminent he knows that literally millions of Londoners have been appalled by the decline in our health services," said LHE Information Officer John Lister.

"If organisations like ours, and local campaigns like the Save West London Hospital Campaign had not kept battering away, drawing public attention to the cuts taking place, there would have been no extra cash for London.

"As it is, Mr Fowler is trying to buy back popularity on the cheap: he makes a big deal out of handing out £13m extra — but only weeks ago the government announced cash limits that would leave London *£22m* short of the money needed to maintain services. Now you see it: now you don't!"

In the five years since 1982, London's NHS has fallen over £200m below the funding needed to keep pace with growing numbers of elderly. More than 7,000 hospital beds have been closed, ambulance services devastated, waiting lists go up year by year, and low-paid nursing and ancillary staff are forced to work under near-imposssible strain that is destroying morale and leaving whole departments short-staffed.

Against this picture of decline, and after successive years of actual cuts, Mr Fowler has announced one year of partial relief. But this is a long way short of the necessary U-turn on health spending.

John Lister adds: "The problems have been deferred, not solved. If the present policies remain unchanged, we can predict that soon after the votes are counted in the General Election, health authorities like Riverside, Hackney, Merton and Lewisham will once again be pushed by cash limits along the road of cuts and closures.

For further details, contact LHE, 335 Grays Inn Road, London WC1, 01-833 3020. London Health Emergency is a capital-wide watchdog body funded by a consortium of London boroughs: Camden, Ealing, Greenwich, Hammersmith & Fulham, Haringey, Hounslow, Islington, Lewisham, Newham, Southwark and Waltham Forest.

Cockroaches in Hammersmith & Fulham

Blatta orientalis is Tory favourite

Hammersmith Hospital now has the unenviable distinction of being the first hospital in Britain to have had a closure notice carried out following the lifting of Crown Immunity from hospital premises in February.

On Monday March 30th Hammersmith & Fulham Council, via local health inspectors, won a battle in the courts to have the kitchens closed because of cockroach infestation.

By Les Aldridge
ASTMS (in a personal capacity)

This is not a vindictive ideological attack by a Labour Council on Mediclean, the cleaners at Hammersmith hospital. Environmental health officers have been calling for improvements at the DuCane Rd hospital since before the change in admin in May '86.

Now those of us who had observed similar problems at neighbouring Charing Cross Hospital are waiting to see who amongst the staff at Hammersmith will be chosen to take the blame for this enormous embarrassment to a world-famous teaching hospital. Where will the next notice be served?

Of course, the question remains of why it took so long to lift Crown Immunity. I think I have the answer. Our commonest species of cockroach, Blatta Orientalis, the oriental cockroach, is the intellectual of the insect world. Most insect behaviour is purely instinctive, but the cockroach is the ideal citizen in the eyes of many Tory MPs. It learns to respond to punishment and other negative influences and thereby is motivated to turn to the left or the right directionally.

London letter

Dear *Briefing*,

In reply to Linda Clarke, Craig Brewin and others who have atacked Hackney Council's ban on boxing, I find their arguments totally unconvincing.

There are lots of arguments against boxing, but as Craig points out (and then, amazingly, asserts that it is not a strong argument!), the main aim of boxing is to inflict damage on an opponent. That is what boxing is fundamentally about.

In this respect it is unique. It is the only "sport" which has this as its aim. Comparisons with football, cricket, crossing the road and anything else are therefore wrong, because injuries here are incidental to the activity.

In fact, the medical evidence that boxing does indeed cause (note the word *cause*) injuries to the brain especially is very strong. About a year ago, the London boxer Steve Watt collapsed and died following a bout with Rocky Kelly.

The inquest reported that his brain had been irreparably damaged, not just by what turned out to be his last bout, but by the cumulative effect of blows to the head over several years. I could give many more examples.

When Craig Brewin says "The medical evidence is inconclusive..." he is being disingenuous. When Linda Clarke says "...surely there are no more injuries in boxing than in many other sports...", she is missing the point. Someone who boxes for any length of time will sustain injuries which may not become manifest for many years.

The evidence for this damage is overwhelming. A British Medical Association spokesperson compared the brain to a blancmange in a box. The effect of repeated blows to the head would be the same as shaking the box containing the blancmange. About a year ago the Board of Science of the BMA produced a report on the effects of boxing. I will gladly lend anyone who wants to read it a copy.

Finally, before I am accused of "middle class morality", can I say that I used to box as a boy, my (working class) father and his brother were keen boxers in their youth. The argument that to oppose boxing is "middle class" is totally puerile.

You do not support or oppose something because it is a pastime of the working class, or you will find yourselves supporing all kinds of undesirable activities. It is you who are being moralistic with your ridiculous sentimentality.

The reason working class people in the East End and black youth have carved themselves a place in the sport is precisely because their options in other areas have been shut off. The socialist answer is to fight against class oppression and institutionalised racism in every field, but at the same time not attempt to deny truths that are staring us in the face.

Yours comradely,
David Robinson
Haringey Labour Briefing

Organise now!

On March 27th, 8 Labour Councillors in Lambeth voted against the cuts budget presented by the leadership of the Labour Group.

***Briefing* applauds the principled action of the "8", and demands their stand is defended and extended throughout the Labour movement.**

By Graham Topley
Streatham CLP

The budget proposed by Council leader Linda Bellos contained a package of cuts which should have been opposed by any Lambeth Councillor staying faithful to the manifesto on which they were elected. That manifesto boldly stated:

"If we are faced with a choice between Tory demands to cut our services for local people and sack workers, or stand with local people demanding better provision, we will stand with the people."

At the Council meeting only 8 Councillors stood with the people. The 8 have clearly shown the way to fight the Tories and those in their own ranks who want to sit back and wait for the election of a Kinnock-led government.

Lambeth Council should have been mobilising the trade unions, Party members and community organisations around a realistic policy of defence of jobs and services, not forcing these groups to oppose them.

How can Lambeth mobilise support for a strategy which is a direct attack on those very people? We should condemn the Tories and their vicious policy of ratecapping.

The Labour leadership has proved an obstacle rather than a help in this fight. But that is no excuse for battering down the hatches, making cuts and waiting for next year. Cuts this year (or any year) demobilise and demoralise the workforce – they weaken the fight against Tory legislation and privatisation.

Some comrades argue against illegality and surcharge – but whose legality are we talking about? What's so "legal" about cuts in housing repairs, savings in deferred expenditure and recruitment slippage?

Yes, we should organise *now* for next year – but clearly on the basis of the lead given by the Lambeth 8. They have shown the way.

● The debate on services must be taken out of smoke-filled rooms into the wider community. The trade unions, Labour Parties and community must be mobilised from the outset through full consultation and involvement in the decision-making process to establish the real level of social need. Labour councillors must have confidence in the community's desire and willingness to fight, not patronisingly impose cuts budgets on them in the name of "realism".

● We need greater co-ordination across the boroughs to map out a London wide (and national) response. There can be no "socialism in one borough" as a strategy.

● Labour Councillors must vote against cuts and act as a minority caucus. Such a stand, as that taken by the "Lambeth 8" is the only way to prepare the ground for any future confrontation with the government.



Dipp as Leroy and Daz Dean as Joseph in Bryan Oliver's ***Zulu Blood****. A black British musician arrives in South Africa hoping that the local music will provide the inspiration he needs to revive his flagging career, but finds things aren't that simple... A topical play, performed with vigour, certain to interest anyone concerned about the boycott issue. Tabard theatre, Chiswick till April 5th; Muswell Hill Centre April 8th & 11th; Duke of Cambridge, Kentish Town, April 14-19th; Jackson's Lane, April 24-25th. Further details 889 6225.*

Union statement

Continued from front page

The unions have considered the proposed budget for the Council. We are critical that it does not fully represent that needed to begin the building up of local authority services after years of imposed cuts. The unions will explain to Lambeth people why services are becoming worse, less resourced both in terms of staff and equipment.

There should be an emphasis as greed with this Council, on housing and social services. This should mean speeding up recruitment, higher pay to attract woreks and increases in establishment where necessary. The unions reject any "recruitment drag" as a way of saving money. This will only lead to further loss of services.

Services weakened by vacancies will be ripe for privatisation. The unions ask the Council to consider massive increases in the training budgets, particularly for full time courses and apprenticeships to improve services and make the maximum use of local labour. It is impossible to have an effective equal opportunities policy without good training schemes.

The unions do not want to see capitalisation used at the expense of house building.

The unions require a full explanation of the state of the superannuation fund and demand the agreement of the current "shopping list" including contributions paid for women on maternity leave. Any discrimination in the superannuation scheme must cease.

The unions wish to see further municipalisation of services and the work of many contractors and sub contractors coming into direct employment.

Lambeth's performance on housing reapirs has been debated this month; all necessary staff and financial resources should be immediately employed and deployed.

Specific cuts in this proposed budget come to mind: the delayed opening of the fostering shop in Brixton and delays in the opening of a children's home; the current dispute with the AEU has at its base the cutting of 3 posts, a tyre and body shop and five out stations. The unions support the AEU and request the dispute is brought to a satisfactory conclusion by the noon deadline on Monday.

In conclusion the unions do not believe that the budget before this meeting wil bring the growth mentioned in the Leader's March 19th letter to staff. In this year there must be both money and the will to give Lambeth the service it desperately needs.

This council must show by example that Labour is a Party worth voting for nationally. Only in this way will the fight against Thatcherism, of which the disqualification of the Ted Knight administration was one battle, can be won. The unions are showing by their continued financial support, that we can work together.

Lambeth 8 show the way

Continued from front page

rebuild the fight against attacks on council services. Despite appearances the 8 "rebels" are far from isolated. Lambeth NALGO had organised a lobby of the ratemaking meeting and are now planning action against the budget cuts. The Joint Trade Union Committee addressed the Council meeting and made it plain that they reject the budget.

Within the Group itself at least three others have indicated that they only supported the budget under protest because they felt bound by their GC mandate.

In the CLPs members are still mainly confused. Most chose to believe the promises they were given by the leadership that cuts were not being made. Even then Vauxhall GC had only a majority of two in favour of the budget. As it becomes plainer what the facts are Party members will be faced with some hard realities.

The first test will be to ensure that the 8 are defended. The Right are already talking of expelling us from Group. Second is the Group elections. The 8 have decided not to resign collectively from posts. Whilst we will not be directly challenging Linda Bellos for Leader, we will be fighting for positions in Group on a clear programme of opposition to the leadership's strategy.

At the same time the Right/LCC are going to insist on secret ballots so even if we win Party support there is little expectation that this will stop the right gaining ground. They are clearly going on the offensive and will aim to take control of the council, even if they leave Linda Bellos as Leader.

It is a sad reflection of the present reality that the LCC has succeeded in drawing Linda Bellos into its ranks and shifting the political profile of the Lambeth Council leadership. The consequence of this realignment is that Linda is prepared to ditch support for Joan Twelves, even though Joan has spent most of the last three weeks building support for Linda and voted for the budget (following her GC mandate) even though she personally disagreed with it.

Whatever the Group election results we are in for a stormy year. There are bound to be calls for further cuts. Building unity between those councillors prepared to fight, the council workforce at all levels, and the wider community will be our central aim.

NALGO takes on the Tories

Shirley Porter and her colleagues on Westminster City Council are currently mounting an unprecedented attack on jobs and services in the borough.

Regardless of the government's reteat on compulsory tendering they are continuing to pioneer Thatcherite policies; they have recently decided to put 13 major services out to tender in the next twelve months ranging from refuse collection to housing estate management.

By Chris Eades
Asst. Branch Secretary
Westminster NALGO
(personal capacity)

They have also taken Nicholas Ridley at his word on the question of pay bargaining and have been actively investigating the possibility of withdrawing from the national joint negotiating machinery for white collar staff.

Faced with such a huge scale attack NALGO are organising.

On the issue of privatisation, we are organising jointly with NUPE to fight the big sell-off and continue campaigning for the improvement and expansion of existing services rundown after years of Tory cuts.

The two unions have agreed to ask members not to comply with the Council's proposals; that means refusing to participate in "in-house" tendering and asking union members not to get involved in drawing up specifications for tender.

The Tories claim that competitive tendering is not a privatisation exercise; apparently it is simply a value for money exercise. In a recent letter to all staff Shirley Porter stated that she knew she could count on the staff to co-operate. NALGO and NUPE will be making every effort to ensure that members do not co-operate.

We are committed to organising a comprehensive campaign which involves direct action with the users of services as well as industrial action.

To this end we are currently mounting a major publicity and education campaign amongst both workers and users.

So far as withdrawal from the National Joint negotiating machinery is concerned, NALGO has refused to negotiate with the Council and has voted overwhelmingly to ballot on the question of all out strike action.

The implications of both these attacks are clearly linked. Not only is the government committed to cutting public expenditure and handing public services over to private contractors, it is also keen to see local authorities run like private companies without the apparent constraints of long established pay and service conditions bargaining machinery.

In Westminster we are only too well aware of this because as well as having to fight cuts and privatisation during recent years we have had to resist moves towards pay by performance and more recently we have seen the appointment of a new "Managing Director" to replace the former Assistant Chief Executive!

The message to us is clear; in the run-up to a crucial General Election Westminster will be seen by many as a testing ground for escalating Tory policies.

The key to success will be to organise with other workers and users of services to defeat the Council.

NALGO update

By Tom Luacs
Westminster NALGO,
Islington North CLP

On Wednesday March 19th' Westmister NALGO forced Lady Porter's Tory administration to guarantee redeployment to those pregnant women using VDUs who wanted it.

This successful conclusion to negotiations which had dragged on for nearly two years is no small matter!

This is the first dispute we have won for years, and our victory is even more significant as it was a direct result of VDU bans, telephone bans, non-co-operation and other forms of industrial action taken by a wide section of the membership.

The action was initiated by the branch executive, after an instruction from a branch meeting, when it was clear that negotiations at the Greater London Whitley Council were not moving the employer's opposition to guaranteed redeployment.

Within two weeks of starting the action the Council had acceded to the union's demand and were even claiming that the two years of their obstinacy were the result of a misunderstanding!

This attempt to reduce the impact of the branch's victory shows that the Council realise they have made a serious error in underestimating the combativity of the NALGO membership., They have handed victory to the branch, demonstrating the potential of industrial action. At the same time they are ready to confront the union with a massive programme of privatisation (see main article) and are threatening a unilateral withdrawal from the national negotiating machinery.

The council are pushing ahead to implement the policy even central government have postponed, because they share the objectives of central government: the intention to create a deunionised "flexible" workforce at the beck and call of private contractors, who will be invited to run local government services.

As such Westminster has become a test case, making the union's actions highly significant. So far the members have decided to adopt a position of no negotiation on withdrawal from the National Joint Council, and the branch executive are campaigning for non-compliance with any part of the tendering process amongst the membership.

On the basis of this policy, a joint campaign with all levels of the Westminster NUPE branch is being built. The recent victory can only strengthen the union's resolve in the coming struggle!

EVENTS

Send details of events in London to *Labour Briefing*, 26 Crofton Road, London SE5, or phone them in on 733 7016. Please include access details.

See *Building Briefing* (National page 8) for details of further events.

APR 7-13
★ **Daily picket** of Paul Simon, Albert Hall, SW7, 7pm, organised by Anti-Apartheid Movement in support of cultural boycott of South Africa. Details: Karen Talbot, 387 7966.

SAT APR 11
★ **Peckham CND Benefit**. Move Against the Missiles, with The Deltones & The Forest Hillbillies. 7.30, 42 Braganza St, SE17 (Kennington tube). £4 (£2 unwaged;. Wheelchair access & toilet.

THU APR 23
★ **Islington Labour Briefing** meeting, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N4, 8pm. Speakers from NALGO & ILTA discuss Labour Authority attacks on trade unions. All supporters/readers welcome.

SAT APR 25
★ **Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group & Lesgislation for Lesbians and Gay Rights Campaign** joint meeting on law & immigration. 2-5pm, Hampden Community Centre, 150 Ossulton St, London NW1. Nearest tube/BR Euston or King's ×/St Pancras. Disabled access. Contact LGIG, BM Welcome, London WC1N 3XX or LLGRC, Rm 221, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP.

★ **CND march**. March through Southwark to join National CND demo: meet Camberwell Green, 9.30am.

***Briefing* is asking all readers to ensure that their organisations place an advert in *Briefing* for London Region Labour Party Conference.**

Cost £5 per col. inch (minimum 2 col inches).

Send to Briefing, 26 Crofton Road, London SE5

MON APR 27
★ **Marxist Discussion Forum**. Women's liberation and socialism, speaker Leonora Lloyd. 7.30pm, Rising Sun, Harlesden Rd, NW10.
★ **Peckham CND**. "Radiation for beginners", at SCVS, above Times Furnishings, 135 Rye Lane.

TUE APR 28
★ **Black people & policing workshop**, organised by London Strategic Policy Unit. Details: 633 5944.

APR 29-30
★ **Policing & Civil Defence workshop**, organised by LSPU. Details as above.

TUE APR 28
★ **NALGO Met District Broad Left** meeting to discuss National Conference & pay claim. 6.30pm, County Hall.

WED APR 29
★ **Camden Labour Briefing** meeting. 8pm. Venue: contact Fred (387 1361) or Fran (431 0357).

MON MAY 11
★ **Peckham CND**, with Harriet Harman MP, at SCVS, above Times Furnishings, 135 Rye Lane.

THU MAY 28
★ **Islington Labour Briefing** meeting, Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N4. 8pm.