LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p
No 81 OCT 13-27 1987

Victory in Tower Hamlets!



PHOTO: David Hoffmann

MILE END — NO END!

Health workers and community campaigners in Tower Hamlets took to the streets in early October to protest against a package of devastating cuts in their services and won an important victory.

By Andrea Campbell
ILEA rep, Tower Hamlets DHA

The Health Authority has been lurching from crisis to crisis for the past eighteen months, strangled by the Tories' determined efforts to wreck the NHS through the underfunding of vital services. Like many other inner London Health Authorities it was saved from making drastic cuts in the Spring by the £1 million handout given by the Tories just before the June general election.

Doctors, nurses and other staff were presented with a paper drawn up by the District General Manager outlining £1.5 million pounds worth of "temporary" cuts. Among the cuts proposed was the closure of the Accident and Emergency Department at Mile End Hospital which treats over 30,000 cases each year. Unlike the neighbouring Whitechapel Hospital, Mile End is seen as the "local hospital".

Opposition to the cuts package came from consultants, the Medical College, Physiotherapists, the CHC, workers, local residents. Even some Unit General Managers were quietly opposed to them.

We felt that management had deliberately held back publication of the paper until the last possible moment hoping that there would be no time to mobilise a coherent opposition. They were proved embarrassingly wrong.

Workers at Mile End immediately organised for a march and lobby to the Health Authority meeting on Thursday, October 8th. DHA members opposing the cuts lobbied as many other members as they could. London Health Emergency helped contact the press, television and radio. Tower Hamlets Health Campaign organised production and distribution of leaflets, placards and banners for the march. A joint strategy was worked out to try to get the DHA to reject the cuts package.

The march assembled at Mile End Hospital and with only two days notice. 1,000 people turned out — doctors, nurses, physios, clerical workers, cleaners, porters, medical students and people who live locally marched the mile to Whitechapel banging bedpans and chanting "Mile End — No End". A delegation of five people met the DHA Chair and the District General Manager (the architects of the cuts) before the meeting, with a list of objections to the cuts and a petition of 4,500 signatures opposing the cuts.

(Continued on back page)

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Local government round-up



PHOTO: Maureen White

Lobby outside Hackney Town Hall

Hackney

Leadership fails at first hurdle

An invasion by squatters, angry at "savings" already made by the Council at their expense, prevented the Annual Borough Conference from taking place on Saturday 26th September.

By Carol Young Secretary, Hackney North Women's Section (personal capacity)

The "savings" included such measures as arbitrary eviction of squatters and reducing housing rights of those in Bed & Breakfast; i.e. attacks on the most needy and vulnerable.

The Conference, reconvened two days later

Despite past creative accounting, and the cuts already made (e.g. vacancy freezes, housing, etc.). Hackney Council faces a £9m deficit this year and £43m next year.

The leadesrhip's response was to present a paper of political defeatism, amidst much nashing of teeth and beating of breasts with the following familiar concrete measures:

- Savings through improved efficiency measues to the tune of £20m.
- Greater "flexibility" of the workforce.
- Staff redeployment where necessary.

The leadership assured us that the unions supported their position. In fact, a NALGO Branch meeting had voted to oppose all cuts with industrial action if necessary, and the union delegates at the Borough Conference voted against the report.

The leadership promised *again* that despite this round of cuts they would fight — when the time came — selling off Council Housing, and privatisation.

The leadership report stated that they would consider other options, e.g. resigning or fighting back, if "as socialists we cannot remain in office without abandoning fundamental principles."

What fundamental socialist principles remain when we are going back on manifesto commitments, attacking the working class, and making the Tory cuts for them?

- PS: At Labour Group on Tuesday 6th October the Director of Finance put a paper saying the measures adopted by the ABC would not be sufficient to breach the deficit — this is only the beginning.

Brent

No leader, no strategy

Following weeks of protest at the £5m cuts involving a staff freeze, cuts of £2m in discretionary awards, closures of nurseries and old people's homes, and a host of reductions in services, Merle Amory has resigned as Leader of Brent Council.

Whilst right wingers scrabble for the leadership, seeking to outdo each other in promises of further cuts, a community, trade union and Labour Party campaign Brent Fight Back has been launched to create a permanent structure for strike action and other mobilisations against the cuts.

Supported by Brent NALGO, and by shop stewards in GMB, TGWU, AEU, and the NUT, the first aim of the campaign is to mobilise for a strike and rally on November 11th, the next Council meeting.

A series of public meetings has been organised to publicise the cuts, involving trade unionists in the Borough and to be addressed by Ken Livingstone MP and Martha Osamor from Haringey Fights Back!

Amongst the Labour Group, 12 Councillors are refusing to vote for any cuts in jobs or services. Brent *Briefing* meets as we go to press to decide a strategy for standing a leadership candidate who will oppose complying with Tory pressure to cut jobs and services.

Lambeth

Cuts! And now a witch-hunt!

Having forced through cuts in Lambeth, Council Leader Linda Bellos has launched a witch-hunt against those councillors who oppose her strategy.

Lambeth's Labour Group has agreed a package of cuts which include an immediate recruitment freeze aimed at doubling the vacancy level to over 2,000, a £2.50 a week increase in rent from next April and a major review of all Council services aimed at making "economies".

And now it is being proposed to remove from office all those Chairs and Group officers who oppose this strategy.

Lambeth's Borough Conference at the beginning of September overwhelmingly rejected the strategy of compliance with government demands put forward by Linda Bellos, and instead called for a fighting strategy of No Cuts.

Norwood GC agreed the fighting strategy with only four against. Streatham GC had only twenty people present and would have been inquorate had they not already suspended Standing Orders. It voted for a cuts package put forward by the LCC, which differed from Linda's. The third GC, Vauxhall, rejected an amendment on the lines of the LCC, but agreed by one vote the principle of setting a legal, balanced budget.

Whilst Vauxhall's vote was undoubtedly a defeat for the left, and represented a change of policy going back seven years, it could hardly be called a great endorsement of Linda's position. Across the borough it was clear that the majority of Party wards had endorsed a fighting strategy, with a handful of wards supporting the LCC, and Linda's strategy coming a poor third — just as had happened at the Borough Conference.

At this point no one had actually seen Linda's detailed proposals. They were presented to the Party's Local Government Committee and rejected.

It was clear that the proposals were drawn up in alliance with the LCC. As well as the recruitment freeze, always part of the Leadership proposals, for the first time they put a figure to a rent increase £2.50 a week) and instigated a major review of Council services, supposedly to "cut out the dead wood" — the key demand the right had been making.

The niceties of the Party consultation went over the head of Labour Group. Claiming that Streatham's "inquorate" GC and Vauxhall's "principle of a legal, balanced budget" were a clear mandate to do whatever was necessary, Group agreed Linda's proposals 25-13, even though, paradoxically, they still leave the Council £30 million short of a legal budget next year. It would appear that Group is praying for a miracle, or else further cuts will have to be made.

By Sharon Brown Lambeth Fightback

Carrying on the battle of the previous surcharged councillors is no longer on the ageanda — but as Cllr Joan Twelves told a packed rally called by the Council unions before the Group meeting, "every candidate said at their selection 'Yes, we are prepared to be surcharged.' If they didn't understand that then, they are not fit to run the Council now."

Of course, *Briefing* supporters have not been relying on Councillors sticking to their mandates. From the Borough Conference a "Lambeth Fightback Campaign" was launched which has been meeting on a weekly basis to plan the broadest possible opposition to Cuts.

We will be working in the Party to ensure that Labour Group has to pay the maximum price for dropping its commitment to our Manifesto. We will be fighting over every dot and comma the Leadership propose. We will also be organising the widespread public opposition to the Cuts.

The first expression of this twin fight was at Vauxhall GC. The GC unanimously agreed to call on Group not to implement the proposed cuts until the details have been the subject of proper consultation. Even those who had previously voted for a balanced budget were not prepared to accept the reality of Linda's actual proposals.

The next day saw the first real expression of the other side of our strategy. The Council's Policy and Resources Committee met to push through the proposed cuts.

Having refused the call from Vauxhall to postpone the meeting it took place under siege conditions. A large lobby organised through Lambeth Fightback packed the Council Chamber galleries and as the meeting got underway subjected the Councillors to the mass blowing of whistles. Nothing further could be heard.

However, at a prearranged signal Linda and the right moved the meeting to another room. This time the public were to be excluded. Doors were chained shut so that the protestors could not get in, and members of the committee were not allowed to get out — even when the fire alarms went off!

Amid pandemonium the cuts were put straight to the vote without any debate. As one reporter put it afterwards, "it was just like being at Westminster Council meetings — it's the sort of action we expect from the Tories."

Lambeth Fightback sees this as only the first skirmish in a long war. If the Labour Group wants to make cuts they will have to do it against the opposition of the Council workforce and the community.

In response to the P&R committee Norwood GC has instructed its councillors to call a special Council meeting to overturn the decision. That Council meeting will have to be within the next three weeks and it is not ruled out that tactical voting by the Tories may reverse the cuts, at least for the time being.

What is the response of the Labour Group to "Fightback"? At its latest meeting they debated an emergency motion from Linda Bellos to remove Councillors opposed to cuts from any office they hold.

She declined to answer questions as to why she wanted the Councillors removed and would not say which Standing Orders she thought they might have broken. It was left to her supporters from the right to explain. What they objected to was the Councillors organising opposition in the Party. Putting forward an alternative strategy would seem to be a crime.

It was left to Dave Morgan, the Deputy Leader (who only wanted to see *some* of the Fightback Councillors removed) to point out that what was being proposed was a witch-hunt. To the exasperation of the right wing this caused confusion among Linda's close supporters, who quickly had to caucus outside.

After much to-ing and fro-ing between the different camps and discussions about whether two, four or eight Councillors should be removed from office, Linda finally stood up and asked that the resolution lie on the table until the Party has had a chance to discuss the question.

Whilst it is sad to see comrades we trusted fall to such levels, the right are now furious that all their efforts to stitch up deals with Linda came to nothing. As one put it, "how can you trust her when she changes her mind every fifteen minutes?"

Whatever the machinations inside the Labour Group, "Lambeth Fightback" will be building its campaign against cuts. Events have shown that the Labour Group will go its own way, ignoring the Party if necessary. We will make them pay the price for that. But more importantly we will be building the biggest possible mobilisation of Party activists, Council workers, the broader labour and trade union movement and the community.

Haringey

The campaign grows

On September 22nd, Haringey Council finally agreed to implement a £15 million cut in this year's budget.

The new leadership of the Council — at present an interim steering committee (known locally as the Junta) — have begun pushing through the cuts with gusto.

The full extent of the destruction of services which this represents is now becoming clearer to more and more people in Haringey and the voice of horrified protest is growing louder and louder.

A £4 increase in Council rents, a complete vacancy freeze, the sacking of a majority of temporary staff, meals on wheels up from 50p to 70p, the closure of an old people's home and a day care centre for the physically disabled, a two thirds reduction in supply teachers in the next 18 months... the cuts list reads like a long horror story.

The lies of the new leadership are immediately exposed. Equal opportunities will be preserved — *70% of people on the temporary workers register are women or from black or other ethnic minorities...*

The poorest and most disadvantaged will be protected — *why then are the centres for the elderly and disabled being closed?*

By staying in office and making cuts now, we can protect services from Tory privatisation — *what better way to increase tenants' willingness to change their landlords than a £4 rent increase and a reduction in maintenance and repairs?*

Since September 22nd, Haringey Fights Back! has developed both in size and in organisation. Over 600 workers and service users beseiged the Civic Centre on the night of the cuts-making Council meeting.

The next day, at a NALGO branch meeting of over 1,000, total opposition to the cuts was reaffirmed and a borough-wide day of action agreed as the first step in the unions' campaign against the cuts.

Meanwhile the Social Services Department, with 100 temporary workers being made redundant, has already organised its own day of action, with a mass meeting and leafletting in the main centres.

Other unions are also taking up the fight. Haringey NUPE and Tottenham Technical College NATFHE are both to ballot on industrial action.

By Dave Palmer Haringey Labour Briefing

The links between workers, service users and residents are beginning to be forged. At a Social Services Committee meeting on October 12th, residents of the Clarence House Old People's Home and the Fairfax Day Centre joined with Social Service workers in an angry protest against closures and job losses.

The organisation needed to help develop a mass campaign is also developing. Haringey Fights Back! (the campaign against cuts in jobs and services launched in early September at a meeting of 200 people) now has weekly steering committee meetings to organise a wide range of activities, including leafletting of all Council workplaces in support of trade union action, street stalls across the Borough, flyposting, lobbies of all major Council meetings, and a series of neighbourhood meetings.

To organise against the cuts within the Council those Councillors who voted against the cuts have formed a "Councillors Against the Cuts" group, and affiliated to Haringey Fights Back! Similarly, a Council workers Fight Back Group has been established by trade union activists within the borough, and meets weekly to organise resistance within the trade unions.

The need to build across London is also being tackled, both through participation in London Fights Back and London Bridge, and by sending speakers out across London to address meetings.

Everyone recognises that this is going to be a long, hard struggle, but the initial reaction both by the workforce and community, linked to a growing realisation of the full depth of the cuts, is beginning to make even some of those Labour Councillors who voted for cuts think again. There is now some confusion within the Labour Group, but as yet no recognition that only by fight-back not cut-back can a basis be laid for saving local government at all.

Spotlight on Westminster

Westminster Tories blaze the housing trail

Nine people were arrested and charged on September 22nd after a day of strike action in Westminster.

Over 900 NALGO members supported by Council tenants took part.

The action was taken in protest over the City Council's policy of "designated housing sales".

Workers were joined by more than 100 tenants in a mass lobby of Westminster City Hall in the evening, where the housing committee meeting was being held. It was at this meeting that the Tories called in the police to the public gallery and the arrests were made. When members of the Labour Group went to intervene they were arrested as well. Of those arrested, five Labour Councillors, three NUPE activists and one tenants group activist were charged.

It is no surprise that the people charged were local activists. The evidence clearly suggests that the Tories engineered the whole situation with the support of the police.

First, a forged leaflet, purporting to be from a tenants's action group, was distributed around one estate and the surrounding streets on the evening before the meeting. This leaflet ended by calling on tenants to "bring stones and bricks" to the meeting for a "riot"

By Tom Loucas
Westminster NALGO

Secondly, there was an action plan for the day which the Tories will not release. This meant a video camera was brought into the meeting for the first time — the video is now in the hands of the police; police were in City Hall without the consent of the Labour Group; two deliberately provocative speeches ended up with the police storming into the meeting and arresting people.

The whole debacle came after a successful day of action by NALGO, who had voted for a strike at a packed branch meeting only the day before.

The action closed District Housing Officers, four out of five social services Area Offices, eight libraries and the Housing Benefits Office. Other areas were also affected.

The most significant aspects of the action were firstly that unity between workers, the community and the Labour Party was achieved, which explains the Council's heavy-handed attempt to silence the opposition.

Secondly, the strike by NALGO was an overtly political one. Although the jobs and conditions of housing officers are threatened by the designated sales policy, on the picket lines strikers were talking about homelessness and the defence of public housing, and this was reflected in the union's publicity.

The Council's housing policy is an overt and outrageous attack on the poor and homeless in the borough, and this has generated a very strong response.

The policy states, quite explicitly, that there are many people who live in Westminster who are a "social problem", they are "marginal to the inner London economy", and for their own good these "problem" people are to be shipped out of London.

The Council intends to sell 40% of its 23,000 properties at a rate of 500 per year. This means that half the houses and flats which become vacant annually will not be re-let, but sold to those who can afford them.

Instead of housing the 10,000 people on the Council waiting list, public money will be given to private landlords and building contractors to create a housing market, whose prices will be above "fair rents" (about £69 per week) but below market rents (about £200 per week) for the borough.

The idea is that Tory voters will be drawn into this marginal borough, but the cost is an horrific escalation in the housing crisis.

This has national implications: what Westminster Tories are proposing today will be government policy tomorrow. Their plans for public housing have come down from Conservative Central Office, like the planned privatisation of thirteen Council services and withdrawal from ILEA.

Westminster represents the future face of the inner cities. The Housing policy is not just an issue for this borough — it is a fight for all of us opposed to the Tories' attempts at social engineering.

The September 22nd events showed the way to beat the Tories: united action between workers, communities and a Labour Party prepared to fight.

However, these are early days, the Council is powerful and committed and has the support of the Conservative Party nationally.

For those of us waging the fight, there is a real sense of isolation.

We are under a massive attack, the whole nature of local government is being threatened *now* in Westminster, and so our victory, which is central to defeating the Tories nationally depends on the active support of the fightback across London.

Cops run riot to bail out Tories

On September 22nd, a moderately boisterous meeting of the Westminster City Council Housing Committee was violently broken up by the police.

Five members of the public and six Labour Councillors were arrested during protests at Council plans to sell of 9,000 Council houses to private developers.

After a successful rally outside City Hall, tenants from all over Westminster and members of NALGO and NUPE lined up to attend the Housing Committee meeting.

Five members of the Paddington Conservative Association, led by ex-Councillor Greenway, were first in the queue.

The police were controlling the entrance to City Hall and trade unionists and tenants were announced when it was decided not to open the door where people had been waiting, but to force everyone to file past barriers where each person was individually checked into the building by the police. Having made sure that the Tories got past unhindered, the police were very provocative to everyone else.

By Steve Harris
Westminster NUPE and Westminster North CLP

Tenants with children were kept waiting for a long time while all this checking was done. At this poin" Lady Porter, Tory Leader of the Council, tried to sneak in through the back door — but she was spotted by NUPE and NALGO unionists. She refused to answer any questions and quickly retreated to her chauffeur driven car, not to be seen again for the rest of the evening.

When we got into the meeting we could see that there were only 30 chairs, although normally provision is made for at least 50 people with other facilities in an overflow room. As soon as all the seats had been filled, the doors to the public gallery were locked from the outside, causing considerable anxiety to the older people present.

The meeting started with Tory Councillor Hartley issuing a warning that there should be silence in the public gallery while the committee got on with its business. But after several short adjournments, Hartley put into practice what was later revealed to be his action plan.

The police were called in and Greenway and his cronies left. Chief Inspetor Holmes made some comments as to the noise level in the public gallery. The meeting was then reconvened and Councillor Dutt, Tory chair of the private sector review committee, went into a lengthy diatribe on the problems of housing in Westminster during which he said that if the Labour Party got its way there would be a massive public housebuilding programme.

This remark was greeted with thunderous applause from the public gallery. Hartley promptly ordered another adjournment and the police came storming into the gallery. They knew who they were looking for. Of the five members of the public arrested, four were NUPE shop stewards heavily involved in Westminster Workers Against the Cuts in its fight against privatisation.

I was sitting in a chair when two policemen came and grabbed my arms saying "We'll nick this one." They wrenched my arms behind my back and bustled me down the corridor, all the time trying to break my arm. They pushed me into the lift and rammed my head against the lift wall saying "You don't break up these meetings."

One of the police tried to dislocate my shoulder. While we were waiting in the police vans we were subjected to verbal abuse by the police calling us scum.

While we were being manhandled several of the Labour Group tried to intervene on our behalf and the police promptly arrested six of them — five women and one disabled man!

Nine of the eleven arrested were later charged with obstruction and assault.



Local democracy, still vs. Whitehall

Camden

"Caring cuts" are aimed at needy

Camden's Labour leadership has come clean and opted for a 20% cut.

Despite rhetoric about consultation, the abandonment of manifesto commitments to protect jobs and services has been pushed through local Labour Parties.

Opposition to the Council is growing, with Black and women's organisations clearly rejecting any cuts package.

In the Council chamber, the LCC-dominated right have gained important committee chair positions, notably those of Grants and Housing Management. The leadership is still under pressure from this group to impose further reductions in expenditure.

At a Race Committee last month, when cuts were pushed to the bottom of the agenda, a consultation meeting was demanded by Black and ethnic minority community representatives to discuss the impact of cuts. When finally convened, a motion was overwhelmingly passed opposing the Council's strategy, condemning the lack of consultation, and calling on the Chair to vote against the leadership in Labour Group and Council meetings. The Chair of the Women's Committee faced similar demands and similar condemnation for going along with reductions in services disproportionately affecting women.

Although the Council still clings to a notion of equal opportunities and claims of "tackling inequality", their real position is of divide and rule. The response to Camden's homelessness crisis (1,500 households in bed and breakfast) is a two stage attack on the service.

A one-offer only policy is already in operation, as part of an emergency programme to reduce the hotel bill. People are being told to move into a flat with only a matress and kettle, and stand little chance of getting repairs done other than "health and safety".

Camden's Irish comunity, and travellers in particular, are being scapegoated, with Leader Tony Dykes blaming travellers in the pages of the *Daily Mail*. Acceptances are being tightened up, with Gareth Smyth, Chair of Housing, openly accepting that legal challenges will follow. After all, this will be cheaper than attempting to house people to whom Camden has a legal responsibility.

It is likely that the Homeless Persons Unit will be disbanded in December, its staff redeployed, and many homeless people forced to sleep in the streets.

Women, Bengali people, and Irish people will be the first in line for this "caring" cut.

In a cynical divide and (mis)rule ploy, the leadership say the alternative is a £13 a week rent rise per Council tenant. Homeless people, voluntary organisations and NALGO are uniting to oppose the proposals.

Within the Labour Parties, the leadership has had partial success. Holborn & St Pancras General Committee was allowed 20 minutes to discuss alternative strategies. Hampstead & Highgate refused to give a blank cheque, and demanded a list of conditions that flatly contradict the limited damage strategy, calling for a broad-based campaign of resistance to the government.

Despite this spoke in the wheel, the Labour Group is tied firmly to the rollercoaster of running down services. Voluntary organisations are being told that further funding is dependent on self-imposed cuts now. This will mean compulsory redundancies.

Within the Council itself, hope is being placed in unattractive voluntary redundancy and/or early retirement.

All staff are to be offered this, but it is unlikely enough will take it up. Redundancy notices are the logical consequence. Already, painters and decorators in the Building Department are threatened with lay off. Workers are constantly being intimidated by mangement, with threats of lock-out supplementing the reneging of all agreements with unions. The mood within NUPE — having previously voted for "critical co-operation" is moving towards opposition as attacks continue.

Workers in Mental Handicap and Recreation services have already taken strike action. Over 200 people joined a demonstration against closure of under-5s provision. Talk of "working to deflect and circumvent Tory legislation" (Tony Dykes) has replaced statements of intent to campaign.

The primary objective now is to build a campaign against this capitulation, embracing workers and users, aimed at defending both from cuts and Tory legislation.

By Padrig Jones
Camden Labour Briefing

FIGHTBACK!

As Council after Council goes down the cuts road, so an organised fightback is developing in each borough.

There are now broad based Fightback campaigns in Haringey, Brent, Lewisham, Southwark, Lambeth and Islington and anti-cuts campaigns in Camden comprising the voluntary sector and Council workers. There are plans to launch Fightback campaigns in Hackney and Hammersmith & Fulham in the near future.

London Fights Back was set up from the 200-strong London Conference against the cuts held last month. It comprises representatives from the Borough Fight Back groups, and delegates from trade unions, tenants organisations and self-organised and voluntary groups, as well as dissident councillors.

It aims to co-ordinate information about the cuts across London, develop solidarity between those opposing the cuts, and call London-wide initiatives against the cuts.

Already being planned are:

- A London Fight Back newsleter with information about the cuts;
- A lobby of the TUC called jointly with London Bridge shop stewards committee;
- A day of action in the New Year including a London demonstration against the cuts;
- A recall conference in the Spring to monitor the cuts proposed in next year's Council budgets
- Meetings with London MPs and trade unions to discuss the serious scale of cuts across London.

You can help!

- By affiliating to London Fights Back (£10 per organisation, £10 per 1,000 members if a large group) and by sending donations to help develop its work.
- By sending delegates to its next meeting on Wednesday 11th November at Camden Town Hall at 7pm.

London Fights Back can be contacted by writing to: Davy Jones, London Fights Back, c/o 23 Compton Terrace, London N1.

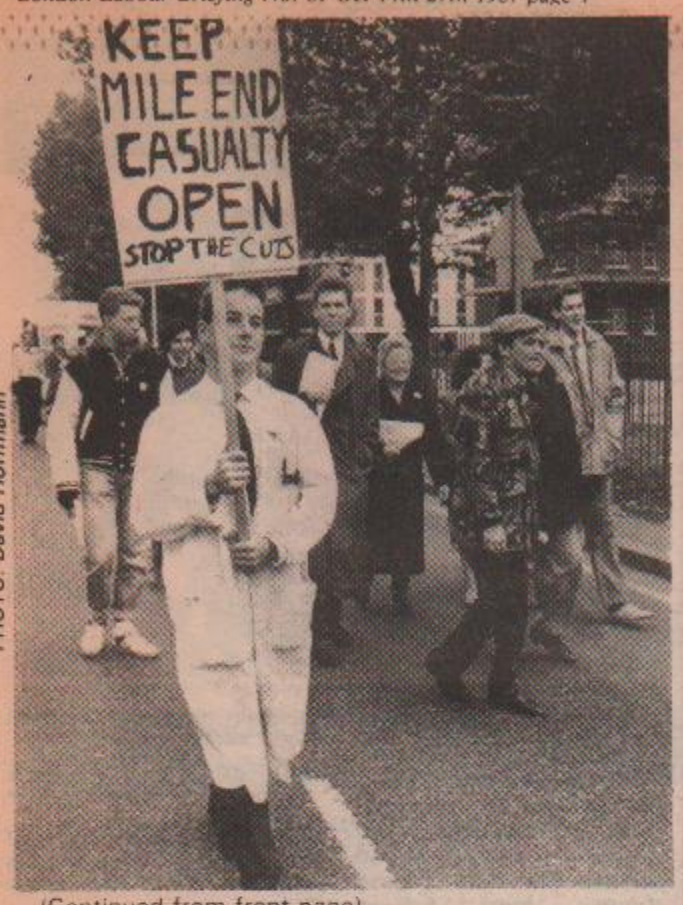


PHOTO: David Hoffmann

A white elephant for Bloomsbury

Propaganda coup of the week, upstaging even the Tory Conference and grabbing national media headlines, came from Bloomsbury health chiefs.

Their sudden announcement of plans for a new 900-bed £100m teaching hospital must win a prize for best diversionary tactic since Dr Goebbels gave up General Practice.

A closer look at the actual plans shows that they involve closure of almost every other hospital in the district, cutting 600 of the present 1,500 acute beds and merging the Middlesex and University College teaching hositals on a single site.

This massive 40% reduction in beds would be partly achived by cutting 25% of present admissions. This would mean refusing treatment to thousands of patients who live outside Bloomsbury's boundaries and come from all over Southern England for specialist medical treatment.

Needless to say, the plan does not deal with how replacement facilities are to be made available for these patients.

The whole scheme is so far in the distant future that an international architectural competition may be launched to design the building, which is unlikely to come into use for at least 10 years.

Meanwhile Bloomsbury boasts the longest waiting list in the country — almost 15,000 at the last count. Not one of the patients on the present waiting list would benefit from this scheme, which is part of a package designed to cut £14m from Bloomsbury's annual budget by 1994.

Indeed the initiative for the scheme came not from eager local managers seeking to improve services, but from regional general manager Terry Hunt, who refused to accept Bloomsbury's draft plans to cut back from 1,500 to 1,200 acute beds. Hunt demanded a much bigger cut in acute services, and suggested the 900 bed unit.

Hunt's proposal carries more than a hint that private sector cash could be involved in the project: and it remains open to question how many of the 900 beds — if they are ever built — would be allocated to private medicine. Last December Bloomsbury voted to spend £800,000 of special trust fund cash refurbishing the 40-bed private wing at University College Hospital.

By John Lister

To prevent any informed comment detracting from the impact of their announcement, and maximise their chances of bouncing it through a bemused authority meeting Bloomsbury management kept the scheme under wraps not only from the press but also from health authority members, the Community Health Council and local health unions.

General Manager Alastair Liddell claimed this was because of the "potential damage which could be caused by premature publicity." But if the news was really so good, what harm could be done?

In the event selected members of the "responsible" press were invited to a press conference only hours before the plan was put to the health authority. Most journalists and health authority members alike were completely taken in by Liddell's presentation: the scheme was waved through by 12 votes to 2, while radio and newspaper hacks rushed off to celebrate a "change from cuts" in London's NHS.

After this Lord Mayor's show will come the muck cart: though the 900-bed hospital may not see the light of day for 10 years, the run-down, closure and asset-stripping of Bloomsbury's other hospitals are certainly on the cards much sooner to meet cash limits.

One positive outcome of the Bloomsbury manoeuvre was that it produced a prompt response from NUPE and COHSE health workers.

Health unions, who mobilised a strong last minute protest lobby, must now link up with local campaigners in a real fight against the cuts package.

(Continued from front page)

The proposed cuts were described by the General Manager — who would not be affected by them as he lives outside Tower Hamlets — as "as balanced a package as possible."

In fact, there were ruthless. No vulnerable group would have been spared the axe.

As well as the closure of the Accident and Emergency, there were plans to shut a children's ward. The paediatricians said this would mean admissions of children for any non-urgent condition would be virtually impossible and that Tower Hamlets children would live in constant ill health.

It would also severely affect the proposals for dealing sensitively with child abuse victims. In epidemics of chest illnesses it could mean children being refused admission and possibly dying at home.

Another proposal was the closing of an evening family planning clinic in the Spitalfields area of London which has the highest incidence of overcrowding, poor housing conditions and deprivation in the whole country. Most of the women affected would have been from the Bengali community who already receive a poor deal from the local health services.

No new patients would be admitted for kidney dialysis, only two more children would be eligible for bone marrow transplants and 108 acute beds would be shut. Consultants warned that the cuts would mean that people would die. We all knew that these "temporary" cuts would be permanent.

As the meeting started the atmosphere was tense. People who had not been able to get into the meeting, which was protected by police and security officers, stood outside the windows of the meeting room and kept chanting and singing, giving a boost to us inside.

As the District Manager tried to justify the cuts package the opposition grew. It was clear that he was totally out of touch with the feelings of almost all the District's employees. As the vote was put to reject the cuts package by local GP Tony Jewell only three members voted against it — a city accountant who had helped draw them up, a King's Fund administrator who described himself as a local resident (he lives in the Marina at St Katherines Dock!) and the diehard ex-tea merchant who chairs the Authority, Frances Cumberlege.

The boost which this victory has given us is tremendous. We still face a long hard battle against cuts in Tower Hamlets, but health workers and local people, along with sympathetic doctors have shown that it is important to keep fighting no matter how impossible the odds seem. Our victory has inspired us to keep the battle going and we hope it will give people struggling in other London Health Authorities a boost as well.

John Moore and the Tories will not find the dismantling of the welfare state as easy as they think.



Health decisions depend on double-entry book-keeping!

The streets and tower blocks of North Kensington are one of the most deprived areas in Britain.

The government itself acknowledges that unemployment here is high, housing problems acute and poverty widespread. Add to that the traffic and petrol fumes from the Westway, the busy elevated motorway which snakes through the area — and it's not a healthy place to live in!

For people who can't afford private health care, it's going to get a lot more unhealthy. Announcing a £9m shortfall in its current budget, the North West Thames Regional Health Authority has demanded £3m in savings from the Paddington and North Kensington area. To balance the region's books, the community stands to lose two hospitals, a number of newly built health clinics and all their local creches.

St Charles, a popular local hospital, is a prime target for cuts. Earlier *Briefing* articles have described the campaign to save the Peter Pan's Children's Ward there. Edwina Currie has recently confirmed its closure. Next on the list is the Accident and Emergency Department.

But as a recent controversial report reveals, the St Charles casualty department is essential to meet the needs of West London. When the Hammersmith causalty unit had to close recently for unexpected reasons, it was St Charles which was expected to cover the gap — with the need for more doctors, more nurses, more ancillary staff and more supplies.

By Paul Harrington and John Leadbetter
Kensington CLP

Any yet the Authority use the ensuing £100,000 overspend as one of the arguments for closing down the St Charles casualty department.

Meanwhile, down the road, the bulldozers are putting the finishing touches to the demolition of St Mary's (Harrow Road), an annex to the hospital in which Princess Di's children were born and which is now in the hands of property developers.

Throughout the area, primary health care for the people who actually live here is being removed. Empty hospitals are being sold and replaced by luxury flats. Emergency services are being withdrawn. Responsibility for care for the elderly is being pushed back upon women in the home. Health decisions are being made on the basis of the principles of double entry book-keeping.

Labour Party Conference has just finished. With the re-election of the Tories, Labour needs more than ever a clear, fighting response.

At the Conference debate on Health the composite resolutions deplored the cuts in the NHS. The NEC wrung their hands over the issue: they passed a resolution, made a statement and offered sympathy.

But where were the positive suggestions for resistance? Where were the plans to mobilise the workforce and community, or for occupations of the threatened hospitals? The construction of a fightback is not on the leadership's agenda.

Our own recent campaign to defend Peter Pan children's ward grew out of an alliance of health workers, Labour Party members, community workers and the local community itself.

But we restricted ourselves to petitions, public meetings and lobbying.

Now people are asking themselves whether the time for more direct action has not arrived.

